

Krisztina RÁCZ*Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory,
Belgrade, Serbia*

krisztina.racz@instifdt.bg.ac.rs

Fortress under Siege: Narratives of Ethnic Conflict and Discrimination among Hungarian Youth in Vojvodina

Abstract: This paper analyzes narratives of ethnic conflict among Hungarian and Serbian youth in Vojvodina. These experiences are narrated by Hungarian young people from Mali Idoš in the Central Bačka region in the interviews with the author of the paper, and the excerpts of the transcripts are analyzed according to the Labovian socio-linguistic scheme. It argues that narrative structure varies according to the interlocutor's gender; however, all narratives demonstrate similarity in terms of positioning the protagonists of such events as committing subjects and suffering objects. In addition, the narratives are highly script-like, which suggests a lack of diversity in the available discursive frames for narrating the experience of conflicts perceived as ethnically motivated. The most common script, which the interlocutors of this research use as well, constructs and justifies ethnic groups as simultaneously in confrontation with and isolated from each other, linguistically, culturally and geographically, and articulates interethnic experiences as a threat.

Keywords: narrative; ethnicity; ethnic conflict; minority; Vojvodina; Hungarians

Introduction: Understanding interethnic encounters through narratives

The amount of work on ethnicity, ethnic identities and nationalism is extremely vast; ethnic identification has been looked at through the prism of sociology, political theory, international relations, social psychology and other disciplines. Many works dealing with ethnicity take a top-down path of analysis, focusing on public, institutional environments in which ethnic identification and/or communication between members of different ethnic groups happen. Without questioning the necessity and the validity of these approaches, I am interested in the other side of the coin in my case study: How are ethnicity and thereby multiculturalism constructed from below, i.e. how they are lived, experienced and discursively referred to and how are they influenced by the public discourses of multiculturalism and interethnic relations?

I understand ethnic identity as

A cultural construct of collective belonging realised and legitimated through institutional and discursive practices; and as a site for material and symbolic struggles over the definition of national inclusion and exclusion (Fox/Miller-Idriss 2008, 536).

When we speak about identity formation, especially identity formation of young people in an environment such as Vojvodina that is understood as a “shifting space in which two *cultures* encounter one another” (Krupat 1992, 5), one would expect to find multiple, fragmented and strategic ethnic identification; yet, what it often encountered on the ground is that ethnic identification of minority young people is still relatively solid and ethnic homogeneity is salient (Badis 2008).

The notion of multiculturalism in Vojvodina is generally taken for granted and perpetuated without questioning the concept, often posited as an ideal to be strived for. Rather than portraying it descriptively or normatively, I focus on the relationship between individual experiences and the social discourses of multiculturalism. In this sense, in Geertz’s (1973) words, what I look for is the system of conceptions expressed via discourse and action by which my interlocutors construct their own and others’ ethnic identities. In particular, I explore the narrative constructions of ethnically motivated conflicts that play a crucial role in the process of experiencing ethnicity among young Hungarian people in Vojvodina.

Narratives are broadly understood as stories; their composition is similar to that of a fable (Ricoeur 1992). Given that, the concept of a story exists universally in the human mind and that “telling stories is one of the significant ways individuals construct and express meaning” (Mishler 1986, 67), the main function of narratives is to provide unity and coherence to human experience. In a socio-linguistic definition of the personal experience narratives (PEN), developed by Labov (Labov 1976; 1999; Labov and Waletzky 2003), narratives are understood as “one method of recapitulating past experience by matching a verbal sequence of clauses to the sequence of events which (it is inferred) actually occurred” (Labov 1999, 225). The two main features of narratives of personal experience are hence their orientation towards the past and their temporal order. They contain at least two narrative clauses that describe the complicating action (that answer the question “then what happened?”). However, narratives may contain other elements too: an abstract, an orientation, an evaluation, a resolution and a coda. They answer the questions “what was this about?”, “who, when, what, where?”, “so what?” and “what finally happened” respectively, while the purpose of the coda is “signaling that the narrative is finished” (Labov 1999, 229). In other words, the abstract is a summary of the story to be elaborated in the complicating action, the orientation identifies the time, the place, the actors and their activities in the story, the evaluation is “used by the narrator to indicate the point of the narrative, it’s *raison d’être*: why it was told, and what the narra-

tor is getting at” (Labov 1999, 231), and finally the result is the marking of the termination of the series of events.

Labov developed his understanding of narratives by conducting sociolinguistic interviews. Thus his conceptualization of narratives has been criticized mainly for providing a highly idealized understanding of the interview situation where the researcher does the asking and the interlocutor does the talking, without taking into account the interactive nature of this communication (Polanyi 1979; Schegloff 2003). While I see this criticism as well-grounded in most cases, I argue that the type of narratives analyzed in this paper is in its structure close to the “ideal type” of personal experience narratives that may occur in interviews, which actually require prompting by the researcher and reacting to these prompts within the context of the interview situation. I have conducted around 30 semi-structured interviews with Hungarian male and female young people aged between 15 and 18 in Mali Idoš, in public places such as cafes or at interlocutors’ homes. I was living in the village for a year in 2013 and 2014, thus the interviews conducted were complemented with and based on broader ethnographic data that I collected through participant observation and informal conversations. All interviews were conducted in Hungarian, the interlocutors’ native language, transcribed and translated to English. The excerpts used in this article are taken from the English translation of the transcripts, following the logic that clarity of the arguments is best achieved if the quotes and their analysis are in the same language. While the context and the position of both the interlocutors and me as the researcher naturally have an effect on the interpretation, I have attempted to interfere as little as possible with their flow. The narratives elicited for the purposes of the research do not have a pretense of natural everyday speech; they are part of a semi-private discourse (Wodak et al. 2009) an interview situation entails, and they are interpreted as such.

Reporting on ethnic conflicts

The identification with an ethnic community is not only from within; its construction is also outward looking, defined by the ways its members interact with members of other communities: “my own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others” (Taylor 1992, 4; see also Bakhtin 1981; Feischmidt 1997; Lindstrom 2003). In this paper, I single out one particular type of encounters and their discursive construction: that of conflicts with members of the majority ethnic group that are seen as ethnically grounded by interlocutors aged between 15 and 18 from Mali Idoš/Kishegyes¹, a village in Central

¹ I use both the Serbian and the Hungarian name of the village in the paper. As with other place-names such as Subotica/Szabadka or Feketić/Bácsfeketehegy, I use the Serbian name in the text and the Hungarian name when quoting interlocutors.

Bačka. The municipality is comprised of Mali Idoš, with a majority Hungarian population; Lovćenac, inhabited by mainly Montenegrins; and Feketić, with an ethnically mixed population.² Interethnic encounters in Mali Idoš are thus often limited to communication with non-Hungarians outside the village, in the municipality, in Bačka Topola and Subotica, where most young people attend secondary school. In the village, communication with non-Hungarians mostly happens on the rare occasion of interacting with Serbs, most of whom or whose parents settled as refugees and IDPs in the 1990s from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Roma and Egyptians, who moved to the village in the recent years from Kosovo. Starting secondary school and moving to Subotica (students who go to school to Bačka Topola commute there on a daily basis and their interethnic experiences are mainly restricted to the school), attending events such as theatre performances, concerts, going out to bars and cafes, etc. in an ethnically more varied and larger town,³ are important milestones in the ethnic experience of young adults from Mali Idoš, as these are the places where they are first confronted with a multiethnic environment and the need to communicate with members of the majority ethnic group. Adolescence is also the period in which interethnic conflicts most often occur.

In the period of 2003 and 2004 the Committee for Interethnic Relations of the Vojvodina Assembly reported 178 ethnic incidents, and in 82 of these Hungarians were the victims. In 2004 and 2005, on the other hand, Vojvodina Hungarian politicians claimed that there were 600 ethnic incidents suffered by Hungarians. After 2005, when due to international pressure a committee was set up to investigate such incidents in Serbia and Montenegro, their number fell drastically. However, incidents based on ethnic grievances have continued to happen in Vojvodina. Collecting data on them is a difficult task, given that many instances of conflict that are perceived as having an ethnic dimension remain unreported and because the difficulties in defining the ethnic nature of the conflicts. For this reason, an investigation of the actual experiences and their narration is crucial for understanding interethnic relations in Vojvodina.

Incidents with an ethnic dimension among Serbs and Hungarians have been a frequent subject in the media, especially during the early-2000s – the period when the interlocutors were in their early teens. The Hungarian media in Vojvodina, especially the daily *Magyar Szó*, was more prone to report on such

² In 2011 the municipality of Mali Idoš had 28,287 inhabitants, of which 19,117 were Serbs, 7,460 Hungarians and 1,956 Montenegrins (Stanovništvo prema nacionalnoj pripadnosti i polu, po opštinama i gradovima 2012).

³ The population of the Subotica administrative area, including the city of Subotica and suburban settlements, according to the 2011 census is composed of 50,469 (35.65%) Hungarians, 38,254 (27.02%) Serbs, 14,151 (10.00%) Croats, 13,553 (9.57%) Bunjevci and 3,202 (2.26%) Yugoslavs (Stanovništvo prema nacionalnoj pripadnosti i polu, po opštinama i gradovima 2012).

events than Serbian media. There are articles on the issue in Serbian as well, but most of them quote state or provincial officials who portray the ethnic nature of the incidents as exaggerations and/or the construction as such by Hungarian political elites, and go onto deny bad interethnic relations in Vojvodina (Jevtić 2004) or question the ethnic nature of the incidents (B.M. 2013). Hungarian news reporting, on the other hand, emphasizes the ethnic character of the incidents, characterizing them as “Hungarian bashing” (*magyarverés*), and decrying the lack of adequate measures taken by the police and other responsible authorities (Diósi 2008; Szojánovity 2009; 2013; Góbor 2010; Fehér 2013). A common element of both Serbian and Hungarian media reporting of this type of event has been the emphasis on the fact that the responsible subjects originated from elsewhere, not Vojvodina, suggesting that it is their upbringing and lack of experience in a multicultural environment that has led to such behavior.

Though the media makes a clear distinction between autochthonous Serbs and Serbs who (or whose parents or grandparents) arrived to Vojvodina some time in recent memory (after World War II, during the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina or during the conflicts in Kosovo), this differentiation is present in scholarly literature as well. In their quantitative study on interethnic difference, Radivojević and Vučević (2008) also differentiate Serbs based on their length of residence in Vojvodina and find that the length of the family’s stay in Vojvodina correlates with the positive attitude towards interculturalism. Vékás (Vékás 2008) and Gábrity Molnár (Molnár 2008) also claim that enhanced re-settlement of Serbs from other parts of the country to Vojvodina has led to sharpened conflicts between Vojvodinians, especially minorities and those who or whose parents grew up elsewhere, an explanation based on different familial and political socialization of the two ethnic communities (Krek 2016).

Temerin, a town some 20 km from Novi Sad, occupies a special place in narratives of Serbian-Hungarian conflict. The “ethnic hierarchy” (Nagy and Tátrai 2013) of the place has changed dramatically in the 1990s with the arrival of refugees and IDPs from Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁴ Academic literature on ethnic conflicts in Vojvodina therefore often focus on Temerin (see Ilić and Keveždi 2012; Marković 2013; Nagy and Tátrai 2013; Ristić, Nagy and Kicošev 2013; 2013a) and explain ethnic conflicts with various demographic, historical-political and socio-economic factors. However, interlocutors of these studies are quoted as attributing ethnic conflict to youth being influenced by alcohol and drug use rather than nationalism (Ilić and Keveždi 2012), which

⁴ While in 1991 the percentage of Serbs and Hungarians in the municipality Temerin, comprising of Temerin, Sirig and Bački Jarak (the latter two having had a Serbian majority population for decades) were 52.7% and 38.7% respectively, according to the 2011 census this ratio changed to 67.6% and 26.4% (Stanovništvo prema nacionalnoj pripadnosti i polu, po opštinama i gradovima 2012; Marković 2013; Nagy and Tátrai 2013).

is a normalization employed by interlocutors of both Serbian and Hungarian origin (Marković 2013). This type of mitigation is common in the narratives of similar incidents among young people from Mali Idoš as well, especially female narrators. In general, parallel with Hungarian news reporting on ethnic incidents more bleakly than Serbian media, Hungarian youth evaluate interethnic relations to be worse than their Serbian peers (Krek 2016). Empirical studies among members of the Hungarian community in Temerin portray a sense of being in a disadvantaged position (Ilić and Keveždi 2012) and the blaming of ethnic incidents on ethnic Others in an “us vs. them” framework developed on principles of ethnic and linguistic difference (Marković 2013; Krek 2016). This kind of differentiation is also crucial in the narratives of Hungarian youth from Mali Idoš when they speak about their experience of ethnic incidents.

Narratives of ethnic conflict

Talking about ethnic conflict or discrimination rarely happened spontaneously; any reference to this sensitive topic was usually introduced through my question asking if interlocutors had ever experienced discrimination that they perceived as related to their ethnicity. When asked this question, many informants told stories about conflicts with Serbian youth, whether their own encounters or those that had been recounted to them. In the following, I analyze two narratives, which I term the “square incident” and the “mass fight”. Both these narratives were told to me by two discrete interlocutors, as it happened that I spontaneously interviewed two close friends who recounted these events to me, but on separate occasions.

Interlocutor (I): There are Serbs who make problems,⁵ and it has happened to us in Szabadka / that we were merely sitting outside in the square / and they picked on us, / and they even took out a knife, / so there are horrible things . . . There was this case / that we were simply walking / and a Serbian guy with his girlfriend walked past us... / or overtook us, / and they were clapping, fooling around / and my friend just clapped after them once or twice, / and that one said something very rude back to her in Serbian, / OK, we didn't give it any significance, / we sat down there in the square.

Researcher (R): Was this at night?

I: No, it was during the day, in the afternoon. / And we sat at the Heroes' Square⁶, / that's where we usually sit, / and after some thirty minutes he came back, / he brought two or three friends. / They weren't very dangerously looking, / but

⁵ I use a dash (/) to divide clauses. I understand a clause as an organizational unit containing its basic elements: the subject and the predicate.

⁶ I have heard the Square of the Victims of Fascism in Subotica referred to as the Heroes' Square by other Hungarian young people as well.

they had a knife, / they took it out at once... / one of them took the knife out at once, / they really didn't want to let us go. /

R: Was he showing the knife? /

I: He was showing the knife, / I had a lighter in my hand, / and I also had a cigarette in my hand, / and he also commented on why I had the lighter, / then his friend calmed him down / [saying] that "OK, you see, he has a cigarette too, / he doesn't want to cause trouble with it", / but I was very nervous, / I didn't know what to [incomprehensible] / I was very angry / because we haven't done anything, / we didn't want any trouble, / we kept telling them that we have no problems, / [the Serbian group kept asking] "what's your problem, what's your problem?", / this is very typical. / And they didn't hurt us / because there were many people in the square, / it was daytime, / so obviously they didn't want trouble that much, / but for instance one of them kicked me / and they took my friend's cap and such things. / Well, my friend had his girlfriend there, / so as there was a girl, / they obviously didn't want to hit a girl / and they didn't want trouble that much, / so they walked away after a while, but... /

R: Just like that?

I: Well, we stopped them, / and the girls also tried to stop them / [saying] that "still, we are here, / don't make trouble", / and those who spoke Serbian better... / because we actually don't know Serbian either, / we were just telling them that "we have no problems, we have no problems", / but we couldn't talk to them normally. / And then we were talking in the square with the other young people, / [asking]"what do you usually do in such cases?" / and they said that [they do] nothing really / because there are some among them who are policemen's kids / and they ignore it, / so... and there are some among them who are crazy, / who are pronounced guilty / but they walk freely / and nothing can be done with them, so . . . / What's more, it happened that we were there / and there was a mass fight or I don't know what it's called, / but it was like the Serbs actually blasted the square / and ran into the Hungarians / and threw pebbles at them, / so it was very rough, so... / We just watched it from the far, / this was already evening, one of the evenings. / But it's the thing here as well that the Serbs are much more in solidarity with one another / and the Hungarians rather run away in these cases / because they don't help each other, / so in these cases usually they [the Serbs] always win. / So from that square the Hungarians have actually been chased away.

There are two chained personal experience narratives in the excerpt above. The interlocutor experienced the square incident as a participant, while in the mass fight he was an eyewitness. As an orientation of the narrative about the square incident, he specifies that it took place in Subotica, in the Heroes' Square, during the daytime, with the narrator, his group of friends and a group of Serbian youth as the main characters in the narrative. The narrator evaluates the events with the clause "so there are horrible things". The chain of clauses starts with "We were simply walking / and a Serbian guy with his girlfriend walked past us," and the adverb "simply" conveys evaluation and emphasizes that the narrator and his friends were not provoking violence. Apart from "simply", there are many other evaluative devices: "my friend *just* clapped", mitigating the action

that might be conceived as a provocation, “that one said something *very* rude back”, emphasizing the offensive behavior of the member of the other group, “I was *very* nervous”, “I was *very* angry”, “we haven’t done *anything*”, “we didn’t want *any* trouble”, “we kept telling them that we have *no* problems”, “this is *very* typical, emphasizing the narrator’s emotive reactions of fear, anger and frustration. The time of the day (afternoon) is emphasized to portray the group of Serbian youth as troublemakers who would have caused even more trouble if the environment was more desolate and dark. The part of the complicating action, in which the interlocutor highlights that they kept repeating that they wanted no trouble, is both an orientation that is an attempt to inform the listener about the protagonists, and an evaluation: by referring to his group’s lack of the knowledge of Serbian, the narrator gestures towards Hungarians’ marginalized and powerless position in Serbia in general. This instance of indirect speech also serves to put the blame for the violence on the other group. The resolution of the sequence of events that produced the conflict starts with the clause “And then we were talking in the square with the other young people...”, in which the members of the narrator’s group and the other Hungarians, who were witnesses of the event, are presented as jointly evaluating that specific conflict and ethnic conflicts in general. When referring to what members of the eyewitness group said, the interlocutor uses indirect speech. He conveys his general assessment of interethnic relationships and about the characteristics of the ethnic groups in questions by claiming that “the Serbs are much more in solidarity with one another / and the Hungarians rather run away in this cases / because they don’t help each other, / so in these cases usually they always win.” With this, he also legitimizes avoidance of conflict as a social strategy, and implicitly criticizes his Hungarian peers for not being more unified and in solidarity with each other.

The narrative about the mass fight has a similar result and the same evaluation as that of the square incident narrative. The clause “we were there and there was a mass fight or I don’t know what it’s called” can be seen as both as abstract of the course of the mass fight and an orientation to the event in which the actors and the time are specified: the time is stated to be “evening, one of the evenings”, while the location is the same as in the first narrative. The actors are “Serbians” and “Hungarians”, two groups of young people. As in the square incident, referring to the actors as parts of ethnically defined groups throughout the narrative serves to unify them within the groups and apply dissimilation between the two groups. Conflict is constructed as an ethnic clash; the ethnic dimension is emphasized in various points of the narrative with ethnonyms (“Serbian” and “Hungarian”): “a Serbian guy”, “the Serbs actually blasted the square and ran into the Hungarians”, “the Serbs are much more in solidarity with one another and the Hungarians rather run away” and “the Hungarians have actually been chased away”. The ethnicity of the participants of the conflict is not only

foregrounded but it is, at least in the case of Serbs, equated with the language they speak. While the participants could have theoretically been Serbs, Croats, Bunjevac, Roma, Hungarians or of any ethnic belonging, the fact that they spoke Serbian among each other and to the group of Hungarian youth, including the interlocutor, is taken as a marker of their Serbian ethnicity.

In the square incident narrative, Serbs and Hungarians happened to be in the same location, whereas in the narrative about the mass fight, Hungarians are perceived as being in a public space that was suddenly raided by Serbs. The latter group is presented in the narrative as extremely violent, explicitly targeting the Hungarians who were present. In the square incident narrative, the events are narrated in terms of “us vs. them”, while in the narrative about the mass fight, the interlocutor refers to the actors of the story in the third person plural, as “they” or by their ethnonym: “the Serbs” and “the Hungarians”. This difference in positioning is prompted by the interlocutor’s level of participation in the narrated events: while he was a participant in the first, he was an observer in the second: “it happened that we [he and his group of friends] were there”. However, regardless of whether he was an active participant or a passive observer of the course of events, the interlocutor uses the narrative, particularly its evaluative devices, to draw more general conclusions about the nature of the relationship of Hungarians, and Serbs and about the “mentality” of the two ethnic groups as well as the level of solidarity among their members. The vocabulary throughout the narrative is used not only to differentiate between “us” and “them” but also to position the two groups as opposing each other: the choice of words resembles clashes, violence, conflict and opposing sides clearly marked in ethnic terms.

At the end of the narrative about the square incident, the interlocutor cites the group of Hungarians asking another group of Hungarian youngsters “What do you usually do in such cases?” The reported answer is that “nothing can be done with them” and an explanation as to why. By connecting members of the opposing group to the police, claiming some of them to be diagnosed mental patients and convicted criminals who “walk freely”, the interlocutor assigns them an “untouchable” status. In the evaluative devices, the group of Hungarian youth are situated as innocent and incidental victims who were “*simply walking*” by, the interlocutor’s “friend *just* clapped after them once or twice,” they “didn’t give it *any* significance”, they “haven’t done *anything*”, they “didn’t want *any* trouble”, they “were *just* telling them that we [they] have *no* problems, we [they] have *no* problems” or, in the case of the second narrated event, they “*just* watched it from the far”. By using adverbs that mitigate the actions and words of Hungarian actors, the interlocutor is ascribing a low level of agency to the in-group, members of which have few opportunities to assert their interests because “nothing can be done” against the other group. The power relations of the two parties are by no means equal, there is the party that “always win[s]” and

the one that “run[s] away”. Thereby, majority-minority relations are constructed as immanent, unchangeable and constraining for the minority. At the same time, victimization as a social strategy of the Hungarian group is used by the narrator, exemplified in describing them as passive subjects of the incident and with the final clause “Hungarians have actually been chased away.”

The same two events, the square incident and the mass fight, are narrated by another male interlocutor, the friend of the previous narrator.

In spring there was another [incident], / I was there. / There were around thirty of us, / some fifty Serbs came, in the square. / There was everything. / Bricks were falling all around, / they were beating the girls, everything, / there was everything . . . / We were in a square, the Square of the Victims of Fascism, / it's there where my circle of friends from Subotica gather. / There are quite a lot of us, usually fifteen to twenty. / We were just coming out of a store, to the square, / and there was a Serbian guy behind me, in a Serbian T-shirt . . . / He had a blue-white, or blue-red, I am not sure, Serbian flag on his T-shirt... / He was coming behind us / and started clapping. / There are three of us, / we take up almost the entire sidewalk, / but he's going / and he doesn't have space next to us. / I moved away a bit so that he gets by / but he is clapping, clapping. / And he almost pushed me aside with his shoulder, / he pushed me. / So I clapped at him back, that “it's nice of you”. / In ten or fifteen minutes we got on the square, / we sat there, / waited for ten minutes, / I have already forgotten the whole thing / then the guy with the Serbian T-shirt comes with his two friends, / the girl wasn't there anymore, / and asks what I wanted. / Well, the end was very interesting... / They picked on Szabolcs⁷ / only because he was holding a lighter in his hand, / because one can hit harder with a lighter, / there isn't such resistance and all, / eventually there was a lot of bullshit, / a pocket knife was taken out too, / and when he took off the cap from my head, / then I got really angry [incomprehensible] / He took off the cap from my head, / I already stood up, / I think I hit one of them / and the other was almost just about to stab with his pocket knife, / it was very interesting. / Then he stole my cap / and they ran away. / The other Hungarians were sitting there / and watching what I was doing and... and... / They weren't actually [my] close friends, just one group of friends. / And then they said: / “Does a cap mean that much to you?”

This interlocutor's first narrative is the one about the mass fight, in which a group of Serbs attacked his group of Hungarian friends. “In spring there was another incident” is the abstract of this narrative, “I was there. / There were around thirty of us” orients the listener to the location and protagonists, while the rest of the narrative is comprised of the complicating action. The repeated phrase “there was everything” serves as an evaluation to emphasize the large amount of violence and chaos caused by the group defined as the Serbs.

In the second excerpt, the narrative about the square incident, the actors and the place are given. Introducing one of the members of the opposing group as a

⁷ The name has been changed to a pseudonym.

person with a Serbian flag on his T-shirt is part of the orientation of the narrative, but also an important detail for the interlocutor that serves to evaluate this person as a Serbian nationalist. Similarly to reiterating the phrase “there was everything”, repeating that he was being pushed serves to stress who is to be blamed for the conflict. The evaluative elements of the narrative are: “Well, the end was very interesting” and “it was very interesting”, both uttered in ironic tone, while the last part of the excerpt starting with “The other Hungarians were sitting...” is both his evaluation and the resolution of the narrative.

Even though in the narrative it is the Serbs who eventually run away, the Hungarians are not presented as the winners. The narrative is packed with expressions referring to anger, violence, conflict and bullying from the side of the Serbian group. The last sentences of the excerpt in which a group of Hungarians who did not participate in the fight are sitting, watching and making ironic statements about the worth of the interlocutor’s cap corresponds to the first interlocutor’s characterization of Hungarians: “the Hungarians rather run away in these cases because they don’t help each other, so in these cases usually they [the Serbian group] always win”. The in-group is constructed by both as innocent victims who are inevitably getting into such conflicts; the fact that made the group of Serbian youngsters leave is attributed to mere luck rather than some sort of joint action or defense of their interests.

Comparing the narrative about the square incident retold by the two interlocutors, the second interlocutor’s version has slightly escalated, and some of its elements have changed. The first part of his version of this narrative explores the reason for the fight in much more detail than the first interlocutor’s story. In the second narrator’s story the course of events is seen as a consequence of what was believed to be a provocation by the other group. The conflict around the first interlocutor’s lighter was singled out by both interlocutors as an event that was considered a provocation by the other group. In both narratives, their group’s intent to get into a conflict is denied: according to the second interlocutor, clapping was an ironic way of saying “it’s nice of you” for pushing him, while his friend’s holding a lighter in his hand was falsely interpreted as an object with which he was planning to hit. The conflict escalates in the second interlocutor’s narrative with one of the members of the Serbian group taking his cap, which he took as a personal insult, and according to him at that point the incident almost developed into a fight. Eventually, this did not happen, but unlike the first interlocutor, he claims that he probably “hit one of them” and “the other was almost just about to stab with his pocket knife”. There are no clear winners and losers in neither of the two versions of the narrative: according to the second interlocutor, he was humiliated when his cap was taken from him, but he “think[s] he hit one of them” and eventually “they [the group of Serbs] ran away”. The resolution of his narrative is the cited ironic statement about

the worth of his cap being for him the evidence of the weakness of and lack of solidarity among Hungarian youth in such conflicts.

Similarly to the first portrayal, the second interlocutor does not question the ethnic belonging of the opposing group; in his version it is not only the language that is foregrounded as the signifier of ethnicity but also the way of dressing: a T-shirt with a Serbian flag on it worn by the member of the group who initiated the conflict, which suggests the ethnicity of that group. His narrative is more focused on certain individuals than on the group, with more clauses containing personal pronouns in first or third person singular (“he”, “I”, “Serbian guy”, and “guy with a Serbian T-shirt” and “the other”) than the first interlocutor’s. This way, the conflict, which the first interlocutor marked as a “very typical” course of events, is personalized and it is attributed a meaning that positions the narrator and his group of friend as the victims of the other group.

A third male interlocutor also characterized his narrative of ethnic conflict, which also took place in Subotica, as “very typical”:

We were in a cinema in Szabadka, I mean in a theatre, in Lifka, with people from Palics / and we were waiting for the bus to come. / And it was coming in half an hour or so. / So we bought beer / and we sat on the square to drink beer. / So we were there, / and then suddenly a group of some five... immigrants showed up, / and they were dancing up and down, / and one could see that they are a bit stoned or how to put it. / And then they were there and... / The square is circular, / you know it, don’t you? / And there are benches around. / And a fountain in the middle, or something like... a tap. / Whatever. / And we were sitting there, / there were three of us, on one of the benches, / and they were sitting across from us. / And then some four of them showed up, Serbians too, / and they sat there as well. / They sat already closer to us. / Then two more people came, / it was visible that they are a bit more radical... / They sat closer and closer to us, / asked for a cigarette, / we didn’t have. / They were visibly getting ready to attack, / but they left eventually.

The orientation is the first four clauses of the excerpt, in which the interlocutor explains the layout of the square where the event took place and the actors of the event, while the time remains unspecified with it being inferred that the event took place in the evening. The interlocutor’s evaluative devices “it was visible that they are a both more radical” and “[t]hey were visibly getting ready to attack” provide us with his perspective on the events. The clause “but they left eventually” is the resolution.

The clauses can actually be grouped into describing three separate events, i.e. the group of Hungarian youth’s encounter with three separate groups of Serbian youngsters. The part “suddenly a group of some five... immigrants showed up, and they were dancing up and down, and one could see that they are a bit stoned or how to put it” refers to the first group, “then some four of them showed up, Serbians too, and they sat there as well” to the second, and “two more people came . . .

They sat closer and closer to us, asked for a cigarette, we didn't have. They were visibly getting ready to attack, but they left eventually" to the third. However, it is the ethnicity of the members of all three groups that homogenizes them such that they are thought of as one homogenous category. Similarly to the previous narratives thus, the "Serbianness" of the other group(s) is taken for granted, and in the evaluation the narrator frames these events as ethnic conflict and violence by making lexical choices and using words such as "radical" and "attack".

Unlike the previous two interlocutors, there is a new way of naming the members of the group the narrator is confronted with: "immigrants" (*bevándorlók*), who, eventually in his narrative become "Serbians too" – the discursive homogenizing is thus even stronger. It is unclear who are the referents of the word "immigrant", whether the refugees of the 1990s from Croatia or Bosnia and Herzegovina, or those who settled in Serbia from Kosovo, or people from other towns in villages who reside in Subotica, and it is also unknown how the interlocutor determined their "immigrant" origin. The word might point to the distinction used in media and in the general public to differentiate between autochthonous and "new-comer" Serbs in Vojvodina discussed above.

The similarity between the above narrative and another ethnically framed conflict reported in the daily *Magyar Szó* is obvious. In the excerpt of the report below the victim of the conflict tells what happened to him:

A larger group arrived to the nearby bench, girls and boys, mixed, there could have been some ten, twelve of them, then they came here, took the Coke from my hand. When I asked them not to drink it all, one of them said that everything is allowed in Serbia, then they left and they came back again. It was obvious that they wanted to provoke us. We were just thinking that unless we wanted to get into trouble we should be leaving, when we heard them speaking about who would beat whom, and then one of them asked if all of us were Hungarians, and when we said yes, one of them ran and hit a friend of mine so strong that they took me off my legs, then they started scoffing and of course fighting broke out⁸ (Sztójánovity 2009).

The internalization of these interdiscursive references found in the public and in the media, and the script-like narratives of ethnic conflicts point to the fact that such incidents do not have many discursive repertoires with which to be expressed. Narratives of "Hungarian-bashing" (*magyarverés*), the most common way ethnic conflicts have been conceptualized in the media, is actually the only possible means of framing such fights, and these incidents almost always follow the same pattern: a smaller group of Hungarian youngsters are suddenly surrounded by a bigger group of Serbian-speaking youth, who start provoking them for no obvious reason other than their ethnic identity, inferred by the language they speak. There is rarely any communication between the two groups

⁸ Translation from Hungarian by the author.

other than the Serbian group insulting the Hungarian group, who in turn tries to avoid the escalation of the incident into a physical one. The conflict usually ends with the group of Serbian youngsters leaving without the verbal incidents becoming a physical one, even though those events that are reported by the media often have an ending of physical violence.

The typical scenario of these conflicts is characteristically narrated by young men. Female protagonists, if present in these narratives, play marginal roles. If recounted by female interlocutors, narratives about ethnic incidents are primarily told in the third person plural, are often shorter and have a less developed structure than those narrated by their male peers. They are about two groups defined by their ethnicity (again, most probably inferred by the language spoken by the members of the group) but instead of the “us vs. them” tone, they are rather impersonally told from “the Serbs vs. the Hungarians” perspective. This can be explained by the lack of active participation in the incident, which allows for a more detached view.

Such is the following narrative:

And just then on the bus there were the Hungarians and Serbs again... / They didn't understand each other, or I don't know what. / There was an argument in the back / and they broke the window of the bus / and the police came, / and what happened again? / The Hungarians and the Serbs got into a fight again.

The frequency and the habitual nature of the events retold in this narrative are marked by the adverb “again”, pointing to the fact that such events are not single instances. In the narrative, the interlocutor takes a position of looking at the events from the perspective of an outsider and summarizing her view of the events. In this way she partly distances herself from both the Serbian and Hungarian protagonists.

Another narrative by a female interlocutor also tells the events in third person plural:

And they had a fight over something / because they were playing football, the Serbs against the Hungarians. / Well, it turned out as a big problem again / because one was shouting at the other that “you are so clumsy”/ and the other was shouting back that “you are clumsy”/ and then they had a fight because of this, / and in the brake the two boys hit each other.

The first sentence of the excerpt introduces the actors (“the Serbs against the Hungarians”) and the activity they were doing (“playing football”). The word “against” constructs the two parties as one opposed to another. Yet, in this narrative, too the female narrator takes an impartial stance and speaks about the two groups in an equally neutral tone. Both the previous and this narrative retell the conflicts the interlocutors were witnessing in a much more detached tone than those by male interlocutors and they blame both parties for the incident.

The third excerpt of an interview with a female interlocutor is a narrative about her friends and herself being verbally insulted for being Hungarian.

I was walking in the street with Hungarian friends / and someone told them „stupid Hungarians, go to...” in Serbian. / I didn't know how to react to this atrocity. / My mother said that it was good that I didn't say anything back, / or that at most I can politely retort in this kind of situations / so that the person knows that I speak Serbian / and that they are not in a superior position.

In this narrative even though the interlocutor is telling a story about herself and her friends walking in the street together, she sees her friends as the objects of the insult but not herself (“someone told *them*”). The rest of the narrative is the narrator's evaluation in which she accepts the advice of her mother, perceived as a figure of authority, on how to react in such situations. She uses indirect speech to refer to her mother's words. She not only constructs herself as a passive subject in her narrative, but also assumes the position of an invisible narrator. Notably, the knowledge of Serbian in her narrative is presented as a means of acquiring an equal position with members of the majority (“so that the person knows that I speak Serbian / and that they are not in a superior position”); language therefore becomes the most important means of social positioning.

The fourth narrative of a female interlocutor is about a conflict her girlfriend was involved in. Compared to the previous conflicts mainly between male protagonists narrated by female interlocutors, in this narrative the female person who got into a conflict with a Serbian boy has more agency in standing up for herself against ethnically defined insults.

And last year there was some problem / because the girls, my classmates, were walking in the corridors / and the Serbian boys were sitting on the bench / and they stuck their legs out, / and the girls were so involved in talking about shoes and other stupid things / that they didn't pay attention and they tripped. / And this was a very quick-tempered girl / and she turned there / and was already raising her hand. / She didn't want to hit them, / she just raised her hand / and started to yell, so... / in Hungarian she swore at him, but really. / And then this guy started yelling at her/ because, well, he didn't understand what we were telling him, / and then something came out of this... / Well, Hungarians... Serbians can only swear at the Hungarians in Hungarian, / and, well, the Hungarians can only swear in Serbian, nothing else, just this. / We were laughing at this, / but then what happened was that the guy stood up / and hit the girl. / And then from this... The girl immediately went to the school psychologist / and then she announced that this and this had happened, / and demanded that they do something about it. / And then later I think on the bus there was... they got into a fight.

As in the male interlocutors' narratives, provocation from the side of the in-group is denied in the above narrative (“She didn't want to hit them, / she just raised her hand”), however, swearing at each other and offensive verbal exchanges between Serbs and Hungarian are perceived as normal, even amusing,

which can be interpreted in the interlocutor's mitigation: describing a typically occurring conflict in humorous and casual tone. Yet, the occurrence of physical violence is evaluated as unacceptable and reported to the school psychologist, asking for the violent actors to be punished. Thus in this interlocutor's narrative, although both are grounded in ethnicity, verbal insults are normalized, while physical violence is seen as a form of conflict that is considered unacceptable.

Conclusions

I have discussed interethnic conflicts and the experience of discrimination with a critical discourse analytical method, relying on Labov's definition of narratives (1976). The above narratives can be seen as strategies for expressing and constructing a common content, that of conflicts perceived to happen on ethnic grounds. I have pointed out and interpreted the elements of the narratives, exploring the ways in which the experience of such events is constructed and retold. In all the narratives the identification of the conflict as ethnic as well as the delineation of the ethnicity of the members of the in-group and the out-group are seen as essentially stable and determinable based on self-identification (in case of Hungarians) and on language and outer characteristics connected to ethnicity (in case of Serbs).

In most of the above narratives, minority status is experienced as a social stigma, an attribute that is discredited and rejected in society, leaving a lasting negative effect on the identity of the stigmatized person (Goffman 1963). In response to this stigma, social experiences are constructed along the lines of what Bauman describes as a metaphor of a fortress under siege in need of defense:

[p]rofound or trifling, salient or hardly noticeable cultural differences are used as building materials in the frenzied construction of defensive walls and missile launching pads. 'Culture' becomes a synonym for a besieged fortress, and in fortresses under siege the inhabitants are required to manifest their unswerving loyalty daily and to abstain from any hob-nobbing with outsiders. 'Defence of the community' must take precedence over all other commitments. Sitting at the same table with 'the aliens', rubbing shoulders while visiting the same places, not to mention falling in love and marrying across the community's borders, are signs of treachery and reasons for ostracism and banishment. Communities so constructed become expedients aimed principally at the perpetuation of division, separation, isolation and estrangement (Bauman 2011, 141–142).

Time, space and social relations are ethnically defined, and the Other is seen as a threat. It is the minority status makes ethnic identity marked (Brubaker et al. 2006) and therefore more salient than other components of personal identities. In general, minority youth in South-East Europe are facing a "triple transition": what Tomanović (Tomanović 2012) calls the "double transition" to adulthood as

a generational experience for all youth worldwide, and the consequences of the socio-economic transition of their respective countries, such as precarity, poverty, few job opportunities, scarce housing, inadequate social security, are even heightened by the additional factor that minority status triggers and become a triple transition.

In the quoted narratives, the incidents mentioned happen in public spaces: in the street, on the square, on the bus, in the school hallway, etc. Interlocutors perceive these spaces as localities that are seemingly ethnically neutral, but which are dominated by the Serbian ethnic majority in terms of language and culture. Conversely, they see themselves and their group as sufferers of an unequal power structure with limited agency. Such experiences and narratives of them contribute to Hungarian language and culture being withdrawn into the private sphere, into the “safe spaces” of the family, the group of Hungarian friends, the classroom of the Hungarian stream at school and the dominantly Hungarian villages and small-towns of Vojvodina. This in turn leads to the confinement to the “Hungarian world” (Brubaker et al. 2006) and the limited opportunities it offers.

In the above narratives, there is a clear gender-based differentiation: while narratives by male construct conflicts as “Hungarian-bashing” that (almost) took place, female narrators depict incidents in more neutral tone. Regardless of whether the narratives are told by male or female interlocutors, in first person singular or plural by one of their actors, or in third person plural by someone witnessing the conflict, they follow a similar script in which the Serbian group is portrayed as perpetrators and the Hungarian group as innocent victims. This is the main discursive frame in which ethnic conflicts are discussed in the media and in official discourses and in turn the most available to refer to when narrating the experience of conflicts perceived as ethnically based. Conversely, the omnipresent narrative of “Hungarian-bashing” and threat serves to justify the (self-)segregation and self-victimization of the minority group. Finally, I argue that these script-like narratives are symptomatic of the community’s understanding of not only ethnic conflicts but also multiculturalism in Vojvodina in general: a construction of interethnic relations that centers around conflict and its avoidance.

References

- Badis, Róbert. 2008. “A vajdasági magyarság identitásstratégiái”. In *Bennünk élő múltjaink. Történelmi tudat — kulturális emlékezet*, eds. Richárd Papp and László Szarka, 319–327. Zenta: Vajdasági Magyar Művelődési Intézet.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1981. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 2011. *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- B.M. 2013. Incidenti u Bečeju: Međuetnički incidenti ili tuča? *Bečejske novine* 8 February.
- Brubaker, Rogers et al. 2006. *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Diósi, Árpád. 2008. Újabb magyarverés Szabadkán. *Magyar Szó* 28 October.
- Fehér, Rózsa. 2013. Verekedés volt Óbecsén (is). *Magyar Szó* 4 February.
- Feischmidt, Margit. 1997. "Multikulturalizmus. Kultúra, identitás és politika új diskurzusa". In *Multikulturalizmus*, ed. Margit Feischmidt, 6–28. Budapest: Ozirisz Kiadó; Láthatatlan Kollégium.
- Fox, Jon E. and Cynthia Miller-Idriss. 2008. Everyday Nationhood. *Ethnicities* 8 (4): 536–563.
- Gábrity Molnár, Irén. 2008. "A délvidéki identitástudat nyomában". In *Bennünk élő múltjaink. Történelmi tudat — kulturális emlékezet*, eds. Richárd Papp and László Szarka, 307–318. Zenta: Vajdasági Magyar Művelődési Intézet.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Góbor, Béla. 2010. Méltó büntetést a gyűlöletszítóknak! *Magyar Szó* 28 January.
- Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Ilić Vladimir and Miroslav Keveždi. 2012. *Temerin – sadašnjost ili budućnost Vojvodine*. Zrenjanin: Centar za razvoj civilnog društva.
- Jevtić, Željka. 2004. Koriste slabost Srbije. *Blic* 23 August.
- Krek, Maja. 2016. Nacionalizam mladih Mađara i Srba u Temerinu u uporednom kontekstu – poređenje sa dosadašnjim istraživanjima nacionalizma kod srpske i mađarske omladine u Srbiji. *Antropologija* 16 (1): 9–32.
- Krupat, Arnold. 1992. *Ethnocriticism: Ethnography, History, Literature*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Labov, William. 1976. *Language in the Inner City. Studies in the Black English Vernacular*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Labov, William. 1999. "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative". In *The Discourse Reader*, eds. Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland, 221–235. London; New York: Routledge.
- Labov, William and Joshua Waletzky. 2003. "Narrative Analysis: Oral Versions of Personal Experience." In *Sociolinguistics: The Essential Readings*, eds. Christina Bratt Paulson and Richard Tucker, 74–104. Malden: Blackwell.
- Lindstrom, Nicole. 2003. Between Europe and the Balkans: Mapping Slovenia and Croatia's „Return to Europe“ in the 1990s. *Dialectical Anthology* 27 (3–4): 1–17.
- Marković, Aleksandra. 2013. Socijalni aspekti etničkih sukoba u Temerinu. *Sociologija* 55 (1): 69–90.
- Mishler, Elliot G. 1986. *Research Interviewing: Context and Narrative*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Nagy, Imre and Patrik Tátrai. 2013. A migráció hatása Temerin népességnövekedésére és etnikai szerkezetének átalakulására. *Tér és Társadalom* 27 (2): 134–146.
- Polanyi, Livia. 1979. So What's The Point? *Semiotica* 25 (3–4): 207–241.
- Radivojević, Radoš and Tijana Vučević. 2008. Međuetnički odnosi u školama Vojvodine. *Sociološki godišnjak* 3: 207–229.

- Ricoeur, Paul. 1992. *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Ristić, Dušan, Imre Nagy and Saša Kicošev. 2013. Szerb menekültek Temerinben: identitás és integráció. *Tér és Társadalom* 27 (2): 147–158.
- Ristić, Dušan, Imre Nagy and Saša Kicošev. 2013a. “Hely” és identitás. Egy temerini középiskolások körében végzett vizsgálat tanulságai. *Tér és Társadalom* 27 (2): 159–170.
- Schegloff, Emanuel A. 2003. „Narrative Analysis“ Thirty Years Later“. In: *Sociolinguistics. The Essential Readings*, eds. Christine Bratt Paulston and G. Richard Tucker, 105–113. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Stanovništvo prema nacionalnoj pripadnosti i polu, po opštinama i gradovima*. 2012. Republika Srbija – Republički zavod za statistiku. Available at: http://popis2011.stat.rs/?page_id=2162 (Accessed June 14, 2017).f
- Sztojánovity, Lívia. 2009. Szerbiában mindent szabad! *Magyar Szó* 14 September.
- Sztojánovity, Lívia. 2012. Megverték egy magyar fiatalembert Szabadkán. *Magyar Szó* 23 December.
- Taylor, Charles. 1992. *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Tomanović, Smiljka. 2012. “Young People in Serbia: A Review of Two Decades”. In *1989 — Young People and Social Change After the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, eds. Carmen Leccardi, Carles Feixa, Siyka Kovacheva, Herwig Reiter and Tatjana Sekulić. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.
- Vékás, János. 2008. “A vajdaság mint emlék és modell — Jugoszlávia nélkül?” In *Bennünk élő múltjaink. Történelmi tudat — kulturális emlékezet*, eds. Richárd Papp and László Szarka, 225–249. Zenta: Vajdasági Magyar Művelődési Intézet.
- Wodak, Ruth, Rudolf de Cillia, Martin Reisigl and Karin Liebhart. 2009. *The Discursive Construction of National Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Krisztina Rác

Institut za filozofiju i društvenu teoriju, Beograd

Tvrđava pod opsadom: narativi o etničkim sukobima i diskriminaciji među mađarskom omladinom u Vojvodini

Ovaj članak analizira narative o etničkim sukobima među mađarskom i srpskom omladinom u Vojvodini. Ova iskustva su saopštena od strane mladih Mađara iz Malog Idoša u oblasti Centralne Bačke u intervjuima sa autorom ovog članka i izvodi iz transkripta su analizirani u skaldu sa labovskom sociolingvističkom šemom. U njoj se tvrdi da narativne strukture variraju prema polu sagovornika; međutim, svi narativi pokazuju sličnost kada je reč o pozicioniranju protagonista takvih događaja kao počinioaca i predmeta stradanja. Takođe, narativi su veoma nalik scenariju, što sugeriše manjak raznolikosti u dostupnim diskurzivnim okvirima za saopštavanje iskustva konflikta koji su percipirani

kao etnički motivisani. Najzastupljeniji scenario, koji sagovornici u ovom istraživanju takođe koriste, konstruiše i opravdava etničke grupe kao istovremeno sukobljene i izolovane jedna od druge, lingvistički, kulturno i geografski i artikuliše međuetničko iskustvo kao pretnju.

Ključne reči: narativ, etnicitet, etnički konflikt, manjina, vojvodanski Mađari

Forteresse sous siège: Récits sur les conflits ethniques et la discrimination chez les jeunes Hongrois en Voïvodine

Cet article analyse les récits sur les conflits ethniques entre les jeunes Hongrois et les jeunes Serbes en Voïvodine. Ces expériences sont racontées par des jeunes Hongrois de Mali Idoš dans la région centrale de Bačka dans des interviews recueillies par l'auteur de ce texte, et les extraits des transcripts sont analysés selon le schème sociolinguistique de Labov. Ils démontrent que la structure du récit varie en fonction du sexe de l'interlocuteur; cependant, tous les récits rendent compte d'une analogie en termes de présentation des protagonistes de ce genre d'événements comme d'une part des sujets engagés et d'autre part des objets qui subissent. En outre, les scénarios des récits se ressemblent énormément, ce qui indique un manque de diversité des cadres discursifs disponibles pour relater l'expérience des conflits perçus comme ethniquement motivés. Le scénario le plus fréquent utilisé par les interlocuteurs de cette étude, construit et présente également les groupes ethniques comme étant simultanément en confrontation les uns avec les autres et isolés les uns des autres, linguistiquement, culturellement et géographiquement, et il articule les expériences interethniques comme une menace.

Mots clés: récit, ethnicité, conflit ethnique, minorité, Voïvodine, Hongrois

Primljeno / Received: 8. 7. 2017.

Prihvaćeno / Accepted: 17.10.2017