

From Memory Conflicts to the Demarcation of Cultural Memory: Teschen Silesia One Hundred Years After Division

Abstract

The aim of the paper is to analyse a specific case of transformation of communicative memories into cultural memories under the influence of state institutions in Teschen Silesia [Cieszyn Silesia; Těšín Silesia]. In 1920, the multi-ethnic territory of the former Duchy of Teschen was divided between Poland and Czechoslovakia. The author focuses on the state of local social memories after one hundred years since the division and raises the question, what kind of social memories are supported by the Polish and Czech local administrations and what kind of social memories are ignored or suppressed by them. Both sides of the Polish-Czech state border have at least one common feature today, namely the colonization of the past by the national states present here, in that the history of the Polish part of Teschen Silesia is commonly seen here as the history of Poland, and the history of the Czech part of this area as the history of the Czech Republic. It is an unconscious – and thus unreflective – conceptual structure that affects local national identities. The author calls this cognitive structure “demarcation logic”.

Keywords: borderland, Cieszyn Silesia, Teschen Silesia, Těšín Silesia, demarcation, social memory, imagined communities, local community

In 2020, Teschen Silesia [Cieszyn Silesia; Těšín Silesia] remembered the centenary of its division between Poland and Czechoslovakia. Until the end of the First World War this region was integral component of the Habsburg monarchy. The part of the region which proclaimed its accession to Poland and found itself in 1918 under the jurisdiction of the National Council for the Duchy of Teschen [Rada Narodowa dla Księstwa Cieszyńskiego] was also subject of the division in 1920. Its fragment incorporated in the Czechoslovakia was since then called Zaolzie.

In terms of national composition and national politics, there was no symmetry between the Polish and Czech parts of Teschen Silesia. In the fragment that fell to Poland after 1920, the Czech minority was too small in number to organise itself and establish its own educational institutions, unlike the much more numerous German-speaking population.¹ On the Czechoslovak side of the border, in the municipalities that after 1918 claimed accession to Poland, the speakers of Teschen Silesian Dialect which identified themselves with the Polish written language were in absolute majority. The annexation of Zaolzie to Poland in 1938, which in the local Polish discourse was called *return to the Motherland*, had been for decades referred to as *Polish year* [*polský rok*] in Czech social memories and evoked trauma. As far as Germans and Schlonsaks² affiliated with written German language are concerned, as a result of displacements after World War II and policies based on collective guilt as well as migration, this populations were marginalised on both sides of the Polish-Czechoslovak border after 1945.

Concerning the part of the region which proclaimed its accession to Poland in 1918 (under the rule of the National Council for the Duchy of Teschen) and was divided between Poland and the Czechoslovakia in 1920 at the moment the border was established the local speakers of Teschen Silesian dialect who found themselves on the Polish side of the border did not differ from the people who found themselves on the Czech side. Presently, on the Polish side, the population is predominately Polish-speaking and convinced of their Polish origin, while on the Czech side the people are mostly Czech-speaking and convinced of their own Czech origin. My question is how local Polish and Czech state institutions handle former memory conflicts related to the border one hundred years after the division.

This question is less about the past itself but more about how the narrative and symbolic images of the past function in the local present. This paper focuses on the circumstances and conditions of the production of images of the past. Firstly, one can understand such conditions as different power relations that are inherent in every social life and determine more or less the production of images of the past. Power relations can be seen in diverse social and political institutions such as families, schools, scientific institutions, museums, churches, sports clubs, courts, municipal offices, police stations, etc., with some institutions usually representing

¹ Apart from Cieszyn [Teschen, Těšín] and Bobrek, where, according to the 1910 census, there was a Czech-speaking population of 6.7% and 4%, only in Skoczów [Skotschau, Skočov] this population slightly exceeded 1%. In the other municipalities the Czech-speaking population was less than 1% and in some, such as Zamarski [Zamarsk, Zámorsk], there were none Czech-speaking people at all (see Patryn 1912).

² Schlonsaks were the voters of the Silesian People' Party [Śląska Partia Ludowa – Schlesische Volkspartei – Slezská lidová strana] founded and led by Josef Koźdoń, who promoted the concept of territorial identity. He did not oppose the use of Polish or Czech in public life and at the same time proclaimed the primacy of the German language and culture, which he identified with liberalism and civilizational progress. After the dissolution of the Habsburg monarchy, the Silesian People's Party argued against the incorporation of Teschen Silesia into Poland (see Jerczyński 2011).

the supreme authority of the state (Anderson 2006). Secondly, when one speaks about the conditionality of the emergence of images of the past, one can also understand the general rules of cognitive processing and the conceptualization of reality.

Any discourse is shaped in such a manner that certain texts – including narrations related to the past – are established and spread within the framework of a communication community under certain conditions, which also include power relations, due to their repeatability or the repeatability of their symbolic structures. Thus such texts can take on the function of invisible social glasses in proportion to their degree of habituation, enabling the diverse and changing reality to be as simple and stable as possible as a matter of course. Narratives which construct and legitimize national identities have the function of separating the “own” from the “foreign” and giving this difference a timeless shape as if this difference was already present in all past events and would have existed in the present. The local identity-forming narratives in Teschen Silesia separate the “own” from the “foreign” and naturalize (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 106–109; cf. Barthes 1991: 128–130) and perpetuate this difference: they transfer it to the phenomenologically understood, experience-related beginning. Such narratives take this difference for granted, thereby legitimizing the currently valid collective identities.

Before going into concrete examples from which one can see that the current construction of identities is based on the narrative and symbolic reference to the past, the concept of categorization, which is important in the cognitive approach, should be briefly explained. “Categorization” is the name given to the process of linguistic processing of reality, in which only a few of the infinitely many aspects of being are noted, marked, or reproduced by terms and texts. This process, therefore, consists of the simplification and fixation of diversity, so that man can orientate himself in the world (cf. Kajfosz 2021: 45–52). This kind of cognitive processing of reality veils some aspects of being and emphasizes or creates others. Concrete examples of such cognitive processing include memory understood as text, in which some aspects of the past are exaggerated or invented, while others are superseded or forgotten (Ricoeur 2006).

The theory of categorization is compatible with Pierre Nora’s conception of places of memory. The currently valid places of remembrance are always surrounded by places that have been forgotten or are to be forgotten (Nora 1996); a similar composition characterizes the repetitive narrative that simplifies and stabilizes both present and past reality. The following rule applies here: The less certain and experience-saturated reality is, the more it is subject to the power of ideas or images that are socio-politically conditioned and associated with commonly reproduced symbols and concepts, judgments, and narratives (cf. Kajfosz 2021: 73–81).

Accordingly, language, culture, and social conditions more or less shape the representations of the past. In this way, the representations of the past are adapted

to the current social and political needs. Thus a narrative related to the past follows currently valid codes and socio-political conditions of the human mind as past phenomena that it has to represent or believes it represents. Such creative filtering of the images of the past occurs with varying degrees of intensity. In this way the past is more or less simplified, generalized, or even reshaped, whereby such conceptualization processes are based on more or less recognizable motives and interests of their subjects (Halbwachs 1992).

Social memory can be understood in such a way that discontinuities of past historical situations, mentalities, and identities as well as their spatially understood diversity are ignored. Depicting the past as a continuum stretching from the beginning of history to the present is illusory. But such an illusion seems inevitable, particularly because of the constructive function of historical narratives, which is that such narratives serve as models of the differences that have “always” existed between the “own” and the “foreign”, thereby making these differences be justified.

The more past-related narratives follow a social impulse, construct identities, and legitimize socio-political institutions, the more striking the impression of their continuity becomes. An example of such a constructed or even fictitious continuum would be any ‘imagined community’ as mentioned by Benedict Anderson (2006). He understands this term as a “trans-historical we”. Only by adapting the identities of actors from different historical constellations - who we regard as our ancestors - to our current identities, does it become possible, for example, to talk about wars that “we” won or lost centuries ago. The illusion of the continuity of history can express itself in the fact that the currently accepted difference between the “own” and the “foreign” is projected onto historical situations in which the difference could have taken a completely different form. Ignoring the fact that the differences between what is “one’s own” and what is “foreign” were shaped differently in different historical situations become a prerequisite for such an imagined community. A good example of this are territories like Teschen Silesia, where political relationships and affiliations changed as a result of demarcations and border changes.

From “contamination” to clarity

Regarding the centenary of the division of Teschen Silesia between Poland and Czechoslovakia, the event, which in the jubilee year 2020 was reflected in the public space with significant echo, was the unveiling of the border post monument in front of the building of the Muzeum Těšínska in Český Těšín which is since 1920 the Czech part of the former city of Teschen (Cieszyn, Těšín). As reported at that time by, among others, *Dziennik Zachodni*, a monument was built to commemorate the centenary of the delimitation of the state borders of Czechoslovakia in

Teschen Silesia, Orava and Spiš and the creation of the city of Český Těšín (Drost 2020). Without penetrating the controversy caused by the unveiling of the monument resembling the division of the city of Teschen (Cieszyn, Těšín) between two countries, the event can be read as a kind of “sign of the time”, which indicates what changes have occurred in memory policies in the Teschen Silesia over the past hundred years.

The ceremony was attended by two mayors of the divided city – Gabriela Hřebáčková, representing the city of Český Těšín (on the Czech side of the border), and Gabriela Staszkiwicz from Cieszyn (on the Polish side of the border). The mayors played the role of representatives of two nations and nation states, which, in a gesture of consent, extend their hands to each other. Only the fact that could be of some concern is that under the guise of slogans related to European integration, the politicians (probably unconsciously) created an image of reality, which Roman Dmowski, the Polish politician of the interwar period, who advocated the construction of national monoliths through the forced assimilation of all those who are suitable for this purpose and the elimination of those from whom homogeneous national tissue cannot be created, himself would not be ashamed of. If we forget for a moment the political labels of the mayors or the programmes of the political groups represented by them and focus only on gestures and statements in the context of the ceremony referred to here, one could get the impression that the local governments of twin cities are dominated by extreme nationalists. The gestures of the mayors indicated that they had in their hearts the good of the two national communities delimited by Olza river (Czechs and Poles), which clearly took precedence over the specific inhabitants of the two-city, who did not fully fit into the two national and territorial options, sanctioned by the border adored in the form of the monument.

In response to the critical voices caused by the participation of the Polish authorities of the city at the highest level in a commemorative venture, from one of the town halls – which at the time of the ceremony played the role of informal ministries of foreign affairs – there was a serious argument that “united we stand, divided we fall” (Lindert-Kuligowska 2020). Obviously. However, it was not specified **who to whom and in what respect the town halls of twin cities call for consent**. Should the indigenous people or the immigrant populations, less burdened with local injuries and incidents, reconcile? What about the youth, who usually do not understand completely, what would be the reconciliation full of pathos? What role would members of nationally mixed families play in the international gesture of reconciliation, which, especially in the Czech part of Teschen Silesia, are a standard rather than an exception? Not only the historical Teschen Silesia, but in general for the entire Upper Silesia, the thesis refers to the fact that the affiliations and obligations between specific people have and predominantly had priority here – even in times of tensions related to the planned and implemented plebiscites after the First World War – over national affiliations.

The “integration” promoted by two town halls, which would consist in treating an individual (e.g., a family member, a neighbor, a friend) as an exemplification of a personified nation, is completely wrong. In a gesture of reconciliation between nations, it is impossible to transfer the consciences of individuals to the revised communities – to Poles and Czechs. A similar transfer would be tantamount to dehumanization of the individual. Treating an individual as an exemplification of a personified nation deprives it of any peculiarity in such a way that it transfers the personality of the figure to the imagined collective, which is tantamount to the dehumanization of the individual. In this approach, a person is considered to be an interchangeable pawn determined by the alleged personality of the community. The individual appears to be irrelevant here because it could just as easily be replaced by another representative of the “collective person”.

Reconciliation based on a form of thinking characteristic of a nationalist-socialist ideology, where the nation is confused with a person, brings more harm than benefits, if one notices that both the Czech and Polish states refer to the western system of values based on the idea of basic human rights, and not the basic rights of a personalized communities. Regarding the tendency to treat the community as individuals, the philosopher Karl Jaspers, who after the Second World War considered the question of whether the community could be blamed for war crimes, writes that confusing the nation with a person is

[...] a form of thinking that has continued for centuries as a means of mutual hatred of peoples and human groups. This form of thinking, unfortunately natural and obvious for the majority, was used by national socialists in the worst way by driving it into the heads through their propaganda. It was as if there were no people, only communities. [...] A nation cannot be made an individual. The nation cannot die heroically, it cannot be a criminal, it cannot act morally or immorally as opposed to the individuals functioning within it (Jaspers 1946: 39).

Where there are no injuries, an incomprehensible gesture of reconciliation – which places national communities above the individual – can create them. The gestures of reconciliation, the subject of which are two nations (Czechs and Poles), serve primarily the social reproduction of the nationalisms of the 20th century, which, at least in some social environments in Teschen Silesia, after 100 years since its division between the two countries, has lost its obviousness. The point is that where the ultimate ceasefire is sought not by people, but by nations – represented by two mayors – a particular person performs at most the function of a pawn determined by the supposed will of the community to which he has been assigned. The individual is irrelevant in a similar game because it may well be replaced by another representative of the imagined collective agent (cf. Kajfosz 2020: 6–10). This is the biggest problem of nationalism – both in its conscious and unconscious form – that only communities, not individuals, matter.

As part of the quasi-reconciliation narrative imposed by both town halls, the agents of present and future cooperation in the spirit of European identity are to be not specific people, but antropomorphized and personalized communities –

Poles and Czechs. If the people of flesh and blood took precedence over the reified imaginary communities – if the term by Benedict Anderson was used – the Euroenthusiastic mayors would understand that in the cities they represent, there are rifts between political affiliation (state citizenship) and self-identification, which is an expression of the will to identify with the community (i.e., nationality in the Central European sense of the word). If politicians were aware of the possibility of similar dissonances – which are remembered not only by the constitutions of both countries, but also by the European Union – they would not allow themselves to be maneuvered into a questionable reconciliation gesture of someone who is mentally stuck in the world of nationalisms of the first half of the 20th century. To this day, Poles live on the Czech side of the border, not only that, but they also enter into relations of kinship and affinity with the Czechs. In the light of this phenomenon, the pathetic reconciliation of two nations assigned to territories divided by Olza river takes the form of absurdity.

It was difficult to understand the point of the unveiled monument. At the same time, it should be noted that exaggerated symbolic gestures easily verge on caricature in Czech society. The Polish minority received the monument with confusion and disappointment. The Czech majority was also confused to some extent. At least a part of the local Czech population perceived the border post replica with indifference or distance than with delight. The same can be said of local Czech institutions, some of which distanced themselves from the monument by emphasising that it was purely an initiative of the Muzeum Těšínska, with which they had nothing to do (Havlík 2020).

In response to the wave of surprise and astonishment with the political assistance of the Polish mayor in the solemn glorification of the administrative division, which – which should be emphasized three times – is not disputed today by a serious person, two town halls sent their voters a logically incoherent message, which can be summarized in the following words: *Together we celebrate the unveiling of the monument to the border, the creation of which was tragic and to this day is a taboo subject preventing us from full integration.* In the light of recent research on communicative memories which merge after 3 generations with cultural memory (Assmann 2008: 109–118), it can be said that this is nonsense, because there is no taboo. The boundary set a hundred years ago has become so natural over time that imagining the past, in which it did not exist, today requires quite a hermeneutic effort (Gadamer 1975: 8–12). A taboo that doesn't exist can only be produced if it pays politically.

Contrary to the quasi-reconciliation obsessions revealed here by the commemorative act, the national conflict in Teschen Silesia was replaced by another conflict a hundred years after the creation of the border, namely, a dispute between the supporters of a “stronger” national state, which through its own institutions (municipal offices, museums, schools, etc.) can unscrupulously interfere with someone's memory and identity, and the supporters of a “weaker” national state, which prefers to stay away from individual memories and

conscience of its citizens. If we look at the demarcation and incorporation drive of some local administrations, the difference between the competitive visions of the state's presence in the Teschen Silesian borderland is not a matter of conscious political preferences or choices. Rather, it is a matter of collective unawareness in the form of unapparent policies of memory.

A similar unconsciousness comes to the so-called banal nationalism, by which it can be understood not so much making choices in the sense of speaking out on the side of any identity options, but **an unconscious conceptual structure** (i.e., a cognitive habitus formed in the historical process), which defines ways of spontaneously experiencing and interpreting the world, talking about the world and making choices in it. The effect of a similar structure is national-territorial labeling, which gives the impression of an eternal and natural order of the world (Billig 2010: 174–177).

Another version of the same structure may be the current form of the “Three Brothers Festival” [Święto Trzech Braci; Svátek tří bratří] – temporary suspended during the pandemic. The annual cross-border feta concretes here the tradition of suggesting to the inhabitants of Cieszyn and Český Těšín that the two neighboring national cultures assigned to the two edges of Olza river – because no other culture here is likely to have a voice – are best not to be mixed with each other. The natural state of the local border world is constantly confirmed by the unwritten principle that both nations celebrate together, however, each “at home”, on its own territory, with the participation of its own national language (Marcol 2018: 43–44).

People from both sides of the border in the light of the unconscious conceptual structure analyzed here are nothing more than representatives of their own nations and countries, more or less like Jacek from the song of Jaromír Nohavica, who stands for *Pole* and who lives “on the other side of the Olza river” [*na druhém břehu řeky Olše*]. From the point of view of **demarcation logic**, Jacek, who would live on the Czech side of the river, would be an element of the stain on the body of the exemplary Teschen Silesian Euroregion [Euroregion Śląsk Cieszyński; Euroregion Těšínské Slezsko], would be a case of the **contamination ruining the word** (Douglas 2001: 54). Even if it meets the eye that Polish Jacek lives on both sides of the river, this truth must be dismissed from the social imagination of the inhabitants of Teschen Silesia, cover with a conspiracy of silence in the name of locally understood Euroregional cooperation, conditioned by the alliance of the throne and *proper* language and a sense of identity on the *proper* side of the border.

Local governments in Teschen Silesia turn out to be extremely ingenious in inventing increasingly newer demarcation acts in relation to local memories of the past. Euroregional cooperation implemented by local authorities consists in excluding anything that does not fit the demarcation order of things.

Among local government officials from the Polish side of the border, there is a relative consensus that the condition for successful Polish-Czech cooperation is the expulsion of everything that would go beyond the consistently applied

demarcation logic. The example should be the Village Museum in Gródek [Czech Hrádek] in the Czech part of Teschen Silesia, created as a part of an EU project in cooperation with the Municipal Office in Skoczów. The parties cooperating together – Polish and Czech – strangely “overlooked” the fact that in the museum of folk culture of the historically Polish-speaking commune, in which a significant percentage of Poles live to this day, Czech-Polish bilingualism would be indicated (Schönwald 2021). It was introduced only additionally, after the opposition voices raised by representatives of the Polish minority. It seems that the Poles from Zaolzie (on the Czech side of the Olza river) are slowly taking on the role of an unpleasant burden on efficient cross-border cooperation. If representations of the past were to depend solely on regional policy – fortunately, this is not the case – folk culture from the area of *Skoczów* (Polish border side) on local media of cultural memory would be presented as strictly Polish, while folk culture from the area of *Gródek* (Czech border side) as completely Czech. Ordering the past in the spirit of demarcation logic pays off politically.

In short: Teschen Silesian cross-border cooperation generates privileges for those who have the *proper* identity on the *proper* side of the border, marginalizing all those who for various reasons do not want or cannot fit into the theory of collections understood in this way. The fear expressed years ago by Zygmunt Stopa (former president of the Polish Cultural and Educational Union in the Czech Republic) that Poles from *Zaolzie* would not find themselves under the bridge, instead of being a bridge of Polish-Czech cooperation, is beginning to materialize (Wolf 2011). Most importantly, nowadays not primarily the institutions of the Czech state which increasingly takes into account their Polish-speaking citizens in Teschen Silesia are pushing them into the role of the outsiders of the Teschen Silesian version of European integration. Contemporary local institutions from the Polish side of the border start function as their unconscious oppressors. This is an absolute novelty that no one could have imagined a few decades ago.

While the central authorities of the Polish state (the Chancellery of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Poland, the Consulate General of the Republic of Poland in Ostrava, the Foundation “Helping Poles in the East”) support Poles in the Czech part of Teschen Silesia rather efficiently, pragmatic local governments on the Polish side of Teschen Silesia are beginning to treat the Poles from the neighbor state as a potential political and economic threat or as a phenomenon irrelevant in the face of lucrative cross-border projects.

So far, the state of social reflection does not allow local self-governments from both sides of the border to understand that since the division of Teschen Silesia in 1920, the world has changed dramatically. The weight of human capital increases and the weight of other resources decreases, e.g. hard coal, which was fought for in Silesia after the First World War – with a classic weapon and pen, through the creation of various national mythologies. At least in the west of Europe, the accents have shifted over time from “territory” to human capital, which is now

an essential guarantee of the quality of life in the country. Within the Western civilization, territorial claims ceased to be a threat to states, and phenomena such as *headhunting* or *brain drain* began. So far, local governments in the Polish and Czech parts of Teschen Silesia are not alarmed by the idea that a too tight corset of two national and territorial options could negatively affect the ability of this cross-border region to attract human capital.

One hundred years after the creation of the border, the central institutions of the Czech state have a greater understanding for the Polish minority than local government institutions operating on the Polish side of the border. Let us go to just one example of a fundamental transformation that took place on the Czech side of the border. We have at our disposal historiographic works that document the important role played by the Czechoslovak State Railways [*Československé státní dráhy*] in the process of eradicating Polish national consciousness in the Czech part of Teschen Silesia in the interwar period (1920–1938) (Gašior 2016: 171–181). However, if we look at the contemporary practices of the Czech Railways [*České dráhy*], we face a completely different reality. Not only are there Czech-Polish names of railway stations on the Czech side of the border if relevant town has statutory percentage of Polish minority. Their Polish names also appear on tickets (paper and electronic), regardless of where they would be purchased in the country. The Czech-Polish names of the stations are also included in the online search engine provided by the company. The radical change in the situation of Poles in the Czech part of Teschen Silesia – 100 years after the division of the area – is evidenced by a number of other phenomena, such as financial support for Polish-language publications on the Czech side of the border by various levels of state administration – from the Council of Ministers and the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic, through the authorities of the Moravian-Silesian country to individual municipalities. Thus contemporary politics of memory in Teschen Silesia cannot be read from the perspective of the past from a hundred or even fifty years ago.

The local governments on the Polish side of the border, which used to support Poles from the Czech side of the border, are going in the opposite direction. Demarcation logic requires them to avoid Czech-Polish bilingualism if it is to refer to the town beyond the state border. This type of political correctness is erroneous only because it cannot be considered as “improper” use of the name in the language version, which in the named place is official and legal. Ignorance supports misunderstood political correctness. Polish names cannot be used by someone who has no idea about their existence. Demarcators on the Polish side of the border are supported by some local journalists who share either the same logic or ignorance regarding the realities on the opposite side of the border. As an example, let us use the article of the information service *ox.pl*, in which it is mentioned that *Pogwizdów and Louky in Karwina will be joined by a footbridge* (Kładka 2021) (not *Łąki*, as one would expect in the Polish text – author’s note).

Gazetacodzienna.pl recently reported on the promising course of cross-border cooperation in an article entitled *Cycling Adventures from Skoczów to Hrádek* (Rowerowe 2021). We are talking about the already mentioned *Gródek*, whose Polish name appears in various places of the commune, including the railway station. Nevertheless, in *Skoczów* (on the Polish side of the border) – it seems – they have never heard of any *Gródek*. They follow the assumption that villages and towns on the Czech side of the border should have only Czech names. Google Maps breaks out of the conspiracy of silence – or a community of ignorance, which in its effects turns out to be one thing –, slightly disregarding the standards of Teschen Silesian memory policies. The Czech version of the application contains the Czech names of the town on the Polish side of Olza [*Bílsko-Bělá, Jasenice, Javoří, Brenná, Zámorsk, Skočov, Visla, Jistebná*, etc.] – and *vice versa*, the Polish version of the application contains the Polish names on the Czech side [*Trzyniec, Nawsie, Jabłonków, Bystrzyca, Wędrynia, Gnojnik, Trzycież, Cierlicko, Stonawa, Karwina*, etc.]. In this way, the transnational corporation provides its local clients with at least a sense of linguistic freedom, a kind of cross-border “relaxation”.

Google Maps, as a player relatively independent of local memory policies and at the same time extremely influential, creates a healthy counterweight to the drives of local demarcators. The Google Maps user can see that we have Polish local names on this and that side of the border, as well as Czech names. And it is fine, because the name in the conditions of healthy communication – without innuendo, understatement or suspicion of this and that – is an expression of the wealth of one or another language, and not a tool of possible claims, as it might seem to swordsmen of topographical correctness. The consistent use of local names in the spirit of linguistic and cultural demarcation (only Czech on the Czech and only Polish on the Polish side of the border) is not only an expression of tragically understood “internationalization”, but also a proof that the return of the common topos covering the area of the former Duchy (on both sides of the present border), which disappeared from the mental maps (Błahut 2013: 47–56) of the inhabitants of Teschen Silesia, is politically undesirable.

Both sides of the border have at least one common feature today, namely the **colonization of the past by the national states** present here, in that the history of the Polish part of Teschen Silesia is commonly seen here as the history of Poland, and the history of the Czech part of this area as the history of the Czech Republic. It is an unconscious – and thus unreflective – order of things that affects all identities. The demarcation logic analyzed here can be considered a tangible expression of a similar unconscious conceptual structure.

On the set of local colloquial discourses, the border here gradually transformed into nature in the sense that it lost its historicity. Memory disappeared, which would allow to recreate how a given boundary over time became something obvious and eternal, present here “from the beginning”. This is an example of a kind of collective amnesia (Ong 2002: 47–48). It is proved, for example, by a joke that

I managed to hear in Cieszyn: *Do you know how the Czechs were created? When God at the beginning of the world made people out of clay, he threw everything that he failed at beyond Olza river.* (Read: God created people on *our* land, and threw all “failed products” onto *foreign* land). The wit implies in an imperceptible way the existence of an eternal, natural difference between *own* and the *foreign* state, as well as the difference between *own* and the *foreign* nation – identified with the territory of the national state.

Even the Poles of Zaolzie in the Czech Republic are no exception. The statements recorded in the otherwise very successful documentary film by Izabela Wałaska, entitled *Zaolzie – the Z phenomenon* (Wałaska 2021) confirms that contemporary Czech Poles do not know anything about the existence of the local Teschen dialect on the other side of the border, and if they do, it is not important for them. They are not going to share their linguistic and cultural heritage with someone who lives abroad – outside Zaolzie. From the point of view of the opposite side of the border, things look identical. No one likes to share his/her “right to property” with strangers, and the other side of the border (considering both perspectives of looking) always steals from *us* the alleged exclusivity. It should be noted that the neighboring national states in Teschen Silesia were very successful in the production of the identities of their own citizens 100 years after the creation of the border. The scope of what is local or *homely* always ends at Olza, no matter from which side we look at the river. Authors from the Czech side of the border who wrote in the Teschen dialect are usually not read or known on the Polish side of the region, while authors from the Polish side of the border who used the same language code do not count on the Czech side. Take Karol Piegza and Paweł Łysek. Piegza was born in Łazy (nowadays in the Czech Republic) and Łysek was born in Jaworzynka (nowadays in Poland) in the then undivided Teschen Silesia. Even if both of them wrote in one local dialect, it does not matter much in the social imagination. In the light of banal nationalism understood as a collectively shared code (conceptual structure) used to organize the world on a daily basis, two politically different territories must have two different dialects, respectively.

In the postmodern world, the national state has largely lost its monopoly on narratives about the past. Old media (classical press, radio, television) have been replaced by the so-called interactive new media, whose main feature is interactivity. Today, everyone can be a broadcaster – a blogger, youtuber, influencer, etc., so some kind of national grand narratives (or metanarratives), implemented and maintained by the institutions of the national state, have been largely replaced by small narratives, functioning parallelly next to each other and usually contradict each other (Lyotard 1984: 37–38). This is associated with both dangers – if the voice of an honest professional weighs as much as the voice of a hater or dilettante wishing to reverberate – and opportunities, as the plurality of identity narratives may thus escape the curatorship of the nation state. In Teschen Silesia, so far, various interest groups have not been able to undermine

the demarcation vision of the world. Any interest here usually concerns either one or the other side of the border. Never both sides of it at the same time. Teschen Silesian current imagination – so far – does not reach this far. The border divided not only a territory. At the same time, it divided the space of historical imagination in the sense that each side of the border assumes for some time the existence of *its own* ancestors – incompatible with those from behind Olza river, regardless of which side to look at the river. The Polish and the Czech part of Teschen Silesia are currently inscribed in appropriately different symbolic universes (Berger, Luckmann 1991: 110–122).

It should be noted that the unconscious demarcation logic, which affects all the past, has achieved in Teschen Silesia the form of such an ingrained habitus (unconsciously reproduced habit) (Bourdieu 1990: 52–53) that it will be extremely difficult to overcome. In addition, a similar habitus gains strength by functioning as a kind of social glasses, through which even local natives look at their own past. For this reason, David Lowenthal's statement that *the past is a foreign country* (Lowenthal 1985) also refers to the discussed region. Teschen Silesia before the division in 1920 is a "country" so different from the one we know from everyday experience that the categories of thinking to which the present accustomed us are more disturbing than helping in its understanding. Oblivion eliminates all conflicts of memory in a given area, but at the same time it takes away from its inhabitants the rebound needed to reflect on the socio-cultural conditions of social memories and their changes.

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