

How Hungarian police interpret and enact anti-immigrant discourse: a phenomenological perspective

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Abstract

This paper explores how police involved in border control in Hungary make sense of anti-immigrant discourse of the political elite and how that may impact on their occupational identity and everyday routine. Specifically, based on semi-structured interviews, the paper looks into the police's understanding of their role in relation to migration in light of anti-immigrant discourse. Discourses have the potential to influence interpretation, whereby members of the audience come to identify with the subject-positions the speaker aims to pursue. To understand this persuasive function of discourse, one must look into the process of meaning constitution and intersubjective understanding. Meaning is not an intrinsic feature of experiences. Rather, experiences become meaningful in the first-person perspective, through the subjective interpretation of individuals. Adopting a phenomenological approach, this paper gives an insight into the underlying mechanisms by which this is done by those involved in border control in Hungary: 1) applying Alfred Schutz' theory of *relevance* and *ideal types*, it provides a potential explanation of why the stereotype of the Hungarian Roma is used by the police when talking about migrants; 2) drawing on the concept of the *narrative self*, it explains how historical narratives about the Ottoman conquest may have shaped their self-interpretation.

Keywords

border control, narrative self, phenomenology, police culture, Schutz

1. Introduction

Following the so-called “refugee crisis” in 2015, policing in Hungary has gone through significant changes, prioritising border and migration control tasks above all else. The government constructed a barbed wire fence at the Hungarian-Serbian border and declared a “crisis situation caused by mass migration”. Under this new state of emergency (still in force at the time of writing), the fence has been patrolled by joint police-military patrol. Irregular migrants apprehended within territory have been pushed back to the other side of the fence, regardless of requests for asylum; many of whom later reported serious injuries. Due to staff shortage, especially early on, officers have been transferred and deployed at the border irrespective of whether they had received training or had previous experience in border control. Not only that, “protecting the order of state borders” and “preventing illegal migration” have become a constitutionally prescribed duty of the police; a recent amendment to the constitution requires all public bodies to protect the “Christian culture of Hungary”. In tandem with the new policy developments, the government has launched an overwhelming anti-immigrant campaign claiming that migrants pose a threat to the “Hungarian way of life”, “national homogeneity” and the physical integrity of citizens. The vision of Muslim “invaders” threatening Christianity has been a core element of the campaign. PM Viktor Orbán has frequently drawn on the medieval conflicts between Hungary and the Ottoman Empire to fuel his politics of polarisation and justify government policy. It is thus a relevant question, at least from a criminological perspective, how officers make sense of the government's discourse and how that potentially affects everyday border control practices.

First and foremost, how discourse manifests in daily routine is heavily affected by the officers’ subjective interpretation. As Van Dijk points out, although discourse may have an impact on a community, this is realised through the subjective interpretation of its members. The interpretation process itself is the function of individuals’ underlying personal- and socially shared knowledge determined by the prevailing context (Van Dijk, 2014: 12). In other words, pre-existing practices, professional socialisation, the historical, cultural, organisational and socio-political context have a significant impact on discourse interpretation. However, the correlation is not linear. Rather, these factors constitute the background of subjective experiences of language users, in the context of which they interpret discourse. Van Dijk calls this configuration of past experiences *mental (or context) models* that account for how we make sense of discourse and, ultimately, how we act and interact in everyday (communicative)

situations (Van Dijk, 2014). Van Dijk essentially highlights the importance of subjective pre-understanding of phenomena in discourse comprehension. That is, discourses can only influence police practice through the police's subjective mental models, their stereo-typical or habitual knowledge in relation to the content of discourses.

To be sure, discourses are usually tailored and presented in a way in which the target audience can easily identify with the purpose of the speaker; engagement with organizational goals can be facilitated by certain rhetorical techniques of legitimation and persuasion. Davies and Thomas (2003) have highlighted that narratives of police reforms offer new subjectivities and forms of behaviour which may be challenging for officers if in conflict with pre-existing occupational identity. As a result, officers reconfigure their understanding of their role "in a constant process of adaptation, subversion and re-inscription of the meanings these discourses offer" (Davies and Thomas, 2003). Chan (2007) has found that *sensegiving* plays an important role in translating new policy objectives into the shared beliefs that inform occupational identity and culture. As Chan argues, when the field is changing, to avoid discomfort, attitudes must be "adjusted"; otherwise, individuals may "feel like a fish out of water". Sensegivers, such as the government, facilitate the transition by providing plausible cues "salient" to the police. Such stories help individuals to adjust to new expectations and accommodate them in pre-existing practices, tradition and cognitive patterns of decision making (Chan, 2007). Narrative presentation of policy objectives draws on and, simultaneously, reproduces the shared knowledge and beliefs of the target audience (Hansen, 2006: ch. 2).

Based on semi-structured interviews conducted with individuals involved in border control, this article provides an insight into how anti-immigrant discourses of the Hungarian government may have shaped their understanding of their role. Following a section on data collection and analysis, the first part of the article provides a potential explanation of why the stereotype of the Hungarian Roma is used by the police to make sense of migration. Applying Alfred Schutz' theory of *relevance* and *ideal types*, it essentially outlines how their understanding of migration in light of anti-immigrant discourses is mediated by pre-existing knowledge and attitudes. Drawing on a phenomenologically grounded concept of the *narrative self*, the second part looks into the way in which Orbán's historical narratives about the Ottoman conquest may have, potentially, influenced the self-interpretation of those involved in border control.

The overall objective of the paper is to highlight the applicability of phenomenological philosophy in qualitative research, which will hopefully draw the attention of social scientists to an extremely resourceful field. The conceptual framework I adopt might also be applicable

in other scenarios where there is inter-group conflict, discrimination, racism, gender inequalities, homophobia, abuse of power and so on. Phenomenological philosophy is unduly neglected by contemporary social sciences, at least as I see it. I do believe that phenomenology has nevertheless a great potential to reveal many aspects of real-life issues to which mainstream methods of social sciences have only limited access.

2. Data collection and analysis

During participant recruitment, police officers, third-party stakeholders and fellow researchers from Hungary expressed an immense level of anxiety among police personnel about sharing their opinion on border control. This applied not only to details about police practices and techniques, about which only designated persons shall disclose information, but also to any matters relating to migration in general. Police expressed serious concerns about the possibility of losing their job if they had shared their view on migration-related issues. Most of the potential interviewees refused participation citing similar reasons, others simply did not turn up for the interview. Moreover, some also suggested that Internal Affairs may have been involved to monitor compliance with information lockdown, and many would refuse participation assuming I worked for them. For these reasons, and due to lack of official access, I used snowball sampling. Between September and November 2019, I eventually conducted semi-structured interviews with 7 police officers, 2 civilian employees of the Police and 2 soldiers who had been involved in border and migration control activities since 2015. The officers came from diverse units, with different ranks and from different parts of the country. Given the circumstances, to carry out ethnographic research including participant observation and to analyse the everyday discourse of the police on the ground was not possible; interviews were conducted outside police premises in the officers' off-duty hours. To protect the participants' anonymity, names, ranks, places of duty or any information that would make them identifiable, were kept confidential. The atmosphere of anxiety, and the defensiveness of the police in general, putting the validity of the research at risk, was an issue that could not be ignored (cf. Rogers, 2014). Nevertheless, being an "outsider's insider", i.e. the fact that I previously served as a police officer myself, may have, to some extent, neutralised these effects and helped to build trust with participants (cf. Gravelle, 2014: 59). Most of the participants, in fact, only agreed to be interviewed because I used to be part of the organisation.

The purpose of the interview was to provide an opportunity for the participants to give their personal account and opinion about the government's approach to mass migration and the way in which it has been addressed. The interview questions referred to messages the government has aimed to transmit during its anti-immigrant campaign as well as policy changes affecting the police. Based on their responses, my aim was to track down the *mental models* that participants operationalised and appropriated while interpreting these messages, i.e. the (shared) knowledge, attitudes, concepts, beliefs and prejudices that narratives of the government have triggered (cf. Van Dijk, 2014). Everyday talk is a sufficient indicator of whether officers identify with policy objectives because it signals whether the police incorporate and draw from the corresponding vocabulary (Fielding, 1984). Although even "canteen chat" does not necessarily mirror actual practice (Waddington, 1999), or, at least, is context-specific (Van Hulst, 2013), discourses of the police are indicative of the prevailing occupational culture (Cockcroft, 2005). To analyse the vocabulary the police use in the context of migration and border control is thus helpful to clarify 1) whether officers have come to terms with new policy objectives, as well as 2) to identify the knowledge the police draw on to make sense of migration-related narratives. In other words, the jargon in which they talk about themselves and others whom they encounter during their everyday work is indicative of and "mirrors" the officers' subjective understanding of their role (cf. Parmar, 2020; Radburn, Savigar-Shaw, Stott, Tallent and Kyprianides, 2020). Thus, I was interested in how officers talk about migration and their prescribed tasks and what concepts and terms they use to *self-interpret* their everyday border control practices in light of anti-immigrant discourse.

During the interviews, as we shall see later, some officers mentioned "Gypsies" in the context of migrants. Although using stereotypes to describe out-group members is extensively analysed by *self-categorisation* theory (see below), it is not self-evident why the stereotype of the Roma in particular is used by the police. I found Schutz's theory of *relevance* and *ideal types* helpful to conceptually account for this problem. Officers, however, also mentioned Muslims "conquering the country", "overthrowing the West", "killing us in our homeland" and "fire at will" as the "only solution", when talking about mass migration. One officer specifically compared mass migration to the Ottoman conquest and identified his role at the border as "defending my homeland". My interview sample size is certainly not representative and as such was insufficient for coding the transcripts in order to detect general themes and patterns. Nor does it suggest that officers have unanimously and unconditionally embraced Orbán's historical analogies. Some of my participants, though the minority, found the anti-immigrant campaign, on the whole, nonsensical and explicitly refuted it. Although the excerpts provide no direct

evidence of historical narratives having had an impact on officers' self-interpretation, the comments above suggest a correlation which should not be ignored, at least as I see it. This inspired me to review the literature on the relationship between self, history and narrative. The phenomenologically grounded concept of the *narrative self* seemed to be highly relevant to explain these correlations, i.e. the role of historical narratives in self-interpretation.

3. Migrants as the new Roma

3.1 Self-categorisation

Wodak argues that the aim of racist, xenophobic discourses is to polarise its audience and construct certain in- and outgroup identities by applying “strategies of positive self-presentation and negative presentation of others” (Wodak, 2009: 40; cf. Wetherell and Potter, 1992). This section analyses how discourse may function in creating such polarities as far as the police are concerned.

In Althusserian terms, one could argue, the polarisation is done by means of interpellation, whereby the members of the audience are “hailed” into in-group positions, and migrants, as a threat, simultaneously, become identified as out-group members. Shared social identity or in-group membership has an important role in the positive acceptance of such initiatives by providing a common ground and mutual perspective for the speaker and the receiver (cf. Haslam, McGarty and Turner, 1996). In social psychology, social identity theory covers the conceptual framework analysing the psychological processes which account for, e.g. intergroup discrimination, stereotyping and prejudices. It looks into the forms, conditions and mechanism of social group formation (e.g. when feeling under threat), social categorisation and the subsequent dynamics of inter-group behaviour (Hogg, 2018; Hogg and Abrams, 1998; Tajfel and Turner, 1979).

Emerging from social identity theory, self-categorisation theory is interested in the underlying mechanism of identifying both the self and others by group attributes instead of individual personality traits, a phenomenon also called depersonalisation.¹ That is, instead of uniqueness and “idiosyncrasy”, the basis of identification is “group prototypicality” (Hogg, 2004). To put it simply, social identity theory and self-categorisation theory look into how the cognitive

¹ Not to be confused with dehumanisation; for clarification see Hogg, 2018: 120.

switch from “Me” and “You” to “Us” and “Them” impacts upon social interaction and behaviour (Turner and Reynolds, 2004). One of the basic assumptions of the theory is that shared identity and shared group attributes become “salient” in the self-perception of group members and enhance a consensual behaviour within the group (Turner, 1999). Not only that, self-categorisation entails intergroup biases or inter-group discrimination in favour of the ingroup, i.e. the stereotypical perception of the self and others. It is precisely because individuals do not only define themselves by group attributes, but they positively evaluate these attributes as opposed to that of outgroups to enhance their “self-esteem” as ingroup members (Turner, 1984). In a certain sense, by depicting a particular group of people as enemies, the aim and function of polarisation is nothing less than to prompt self-categorisation by the audience. In Hungary, this polarisation process has been done by stereotyping, problematising the cultural and religious differences between migrants and the host community, integration issues and so on. The Hungarian case is certainly not unique in this regard; stereotyping is highly effective to justify exclusionary policies and enhance positive self-evaluation of ingroup members (Tajfel, 1981).

Thus, in interviewing the police, I was interested in how this stereotyping, or in- and out-group categorisation takes place on the ground, i.e. how outgroup characteristics are defined in contradiction to ingroup attributes and vice versa. In other words, I was looking at the stereotypes the police use (if at all) to describe migrant communities in contrast to the community they themselves represent in light of anti-immigrant discourse. In terms of Van Dijk, what is at stake are the mental models the police construct to interpret securitising discourse. Some participants described migrants from Arab countries as “Gypsies” arguing that migrants look like and act like the Roma:

There are already lots of Muslim in the village (laughter), Gypsies. Muslims are similar, Gypsies couldn't integrate either. (Pol01)

One of the interviewees answered the question what he thinks of when he hears the word “migrant” as follows:

To me, Gypsy, immediately, this is how we call them too, Gypsies or orcs. Once I saw 100 in a day, they are disgusting, smelly, terribly gross...they come for no reason. (Mil09)

However, it is not self-evident why the prototype or stereotype of Roma plays such an important role in categorising migrants as out-group members. Schutzian phenomenology has a great potential to answer this question.

3.2 Schutz's theory of ideal types

Alfred Schutz was the founding father of phenomenological sociology. Schutz was interested in the role of subjectivity in the construction of social meaning, and, conversely, how our subjective understanding of experiences and actions are influenced by socially pre-established structures (Schutz, 1970: 25, 79-122; cf. Zahavi, 2019: 106-107; Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009). Influenced by Husserl, Schutz argued that the social world is constituted and manifests in the first-person perspective; it appears intelligibly only through subjective interpretations, in the subjective *meaning-context* of lived experiences (Schutz, 1972: 74-86, 139-144; Schutz and Luckmann, 1974: 15-18).

For Schutz, the interpretation of our experiences is guided by a basic function which he calls *typification*; typifying means interpreting something *as* something previously known. "What is newly experienced, is already known in the sense that it recalls similar or equal things formerly perceived" (Schutz, 1970: 116-122). The meaning of an experience is always constituted in the context of past experiences. In other words, the meaning of an experience is always determined by the configuration of past experiences that are synthesized in our memory as meaning-contexts called *interpretive schemes* or *types*. Whenever we see a dog, even if we cannot tell what breed at first sight, we know it is a dog. Whatever we encounter, we are already familiar with it, because we categorise everything based on our previous experiences. *Types* conceptually encompasses and defines the "essence" of an experience. As Schutz points out, the specific meaning of a new experience is essentially constituted by a "passive synthesis of recognition", i.e. the reflective glance of the ego to its own stock of knowledge. Synthetic recognition is the classification or "self-explication" of the lived experience, whereby experiences are compared to types for a match; interpretation is thus "the referral of the unknown to the known" (Schutz, 2011: 105; 1972: 83-84; cf. Gyollai, 2020).

An experience is always recognised and understood as a result of prior situations and experiences. More significantly, situations and experiences are sequentially defined over the life span of each individual, i.e. they are "biographically articulated". The meaning of a here-and-now experience is the aggregate function of all prior accumulated experiences in the memory. This matrix of synthesized or typified meanings constitutes our primary source of

knowledge, or the *stock of knowledge* as Schutz refers to it, and this integrated network of types and interpretive schemes determines how we act and interact in a certain situation (Schutz and Luckmann, 1974: 52-58, 99-122).

We interpret both the physical and social world (situations, actions, roles, etc.) in terms of types; no experience is “pretypical” (Schutz and Luckmann, 1974: 232). Types mainly derive from our socio-cultural heritage passed on from generation to generation during our socialisation and education, but also develop by the explication and sedimentation of our own experiences. Accordingly, we experience and interpret others by means of *personal ideal types*, our own abstract, synthesized experiences of the social world; the typical characteristics of people we have previously encountered. Schutz differentiates between *characterological types* and *habitual types*. The former encompasses the typical characteristics of persons who behave or act in a certain way, the latter refers to functions and roles.

Types account for the habitual and stereotypical knowledge we rely on, and the corresponding attitudes we take up, when navigating in everyday situations (Gyollai, 2020). Types serve as guidance for us to act in a typical way in a typical situation. Schutz and Luckmann base this compass function of the stock of knowledge on the correlative assumptions that Husserl calls the “and so forth” and “I-can-do-it-again”. Simply put, the former means that the meaning of our experiences of the same type is relatively constant over time, and the latter refers to our ability to replicate previously successful actions to solve a problem in similar situations (Schutz and Luckmann, 1974: 7, 238-241). As already implied, precisely these (stereo)types and habits constructed during professional socialisation amount to the “recipe” knowledge of the police when performing their daily duty (Schutz, 1970: 74-76, 116-122; 1972: 181-201; cf. Overgaard and Zahavi, 2009).

3.3 The Roma as ideal type and its relevance in meaning constitution

Thus, it is the habitual practices and stereotypical knowledge, i.e. the *routine* of the police that determine how they interpret anti-immigrant narratives and approach migration related issues. During the sense-making process, by the appropriation of this interpretative toolkit, migrants are essentially compared to pre-existing interpretive schemes or ideal types for a match. In other words, the police’s understanding of anti-immigrant discourse is constituted against the background of their initial take on security issues. What is decisive is the overlap between the content of anti-immigrant narratives and the police’s pre-existing understanding of (in)security; the common themes and intersections of discourse and the prevailing police culture.

Not only that, the specific meaning of an experience, i.e. the type I use to make sense of an experience, varies and is determined by my pragmatic *interest* in a particular situation (Schutz, 1972: 71-96). Schutz refers to the meaning context which determines specific meaning as “motivational context”; the system of motivational relevances that guide me to master a situation called *interest* (Schutz, 1966: 123; 1972: 74-96; 2011: 129). In other words, the type we use as an interpretative scheme is always conditioned by relevance, i.e. meaning is always constituted in a meaning-context that is relevant in the particular situation.

The memory comprises all possible types applied in previous situations when encountering individuals crossing borders: traveling for leisure - tourist; searching for a job - economic migrant; fleeing warzone - asylum seeker, and so on. Each of these types has interpretative relevance as far as people on the move are concerned, i.e. they all are on the *horizon* or the interpretive spectrum of individuals who feature the basic characteristics typical to a traveller. Again, to decide which one of them defines migrants depends on the prevailing interest (Schutz, 1966: 123-124; 1972: 86-96; 2011: 129-131). To put it simply, to an NGO worker, an irregular migrant means a vulnerable person in need of immediate protection, while a human smuggler would treat the same person as a customer. So, how are the Hungarian Roma interpretively and/or motivationally relevant to police in categorising irregular migrants? On the one hand, the stereotype of Roma serves as a characterological type or an on-hand interpretive scheme that already makes sense to police officers in terms of security. On the other hand, the prevailing interest is the exclusion of migrants as “enemies” and “threats to the community”, prescribed by the government’s anti-immigrant discourses. To Hungarian police, Syrian refugees, having travelled for months in the same set of clothes, and because of the colour of their skin, may physically appear identical to the stereotype of the Roma (interpretive relevance); the Hungarian archetype of the presumably dangerous, thus excludable Other (motivational relevance), whom they frequently encounter in their everyday work.

Moreover, types, relevance and the corresponding attitudes one takes up in the situation in which the experience occurs are interrelated and jointly stored in the memory. This matrix of types, relevances and attitudes account for the habitual and stereotypical knowledge we rely on when navigating in everyday life (Schutz, 2011: 148-151; 1962: 283-286; Schutz and Luckmann, 1974: 182-233). Because of the passive synthesis of recognition, all the meanings, relevances and corresponding attitudes associated with the Roma as ideal type are transmitted to migrants: deviance, the assumed incapability of integration, victim blaming, aversion, hostility, and so on.

4. Modern-day heroes defending the homeland

As already implied, the government has, indeed, associated the border fence at the Serbian border with the medieval border fortress system. Moreover, the police were referred to as the successors of those who defended the border during the Ottoman occupation. In his speech at the oath taking ceremony of the so-called “border hunters” (határvadászok), a newly established border control unit, PM Viktor Orbán called the police and military the “members of modern-day border-fort garrisons”. The PM urged border hunters to proudly protect “the homeland, our homes, women, children and parents” at the risk of their own life if necessary by arguing it is a “moral imperative stretching back centuries”.² In one of his speeches to the police, PM Orbán refers to iconic figures of the period such as István Dobó and Miklós Zrínyi and mentions *The Eclipse of the Crescent Moon*, a historical novel written by Géza Gárdonyi:

Heroes for us here in Hungary are those who protect and defend that which is ours, our freedom, our families, our way of life and our country. Heroes for us are those who take an oath to do this, and are true to their oath. Today you have taken an oath to defend the borders of Hungary, and our wider homeland of Europe. Centuries have stormed across the banks of the Danube, but have failed to erode the solemnity of the oath, the solemnity of oath-taking. For us Hungarians, the nation of István Dobó and Miklós Zrínyi, your oath is the most solemn thing that young people can undertake for their country...Regrettably our turbulent history has taught us, we have learnt to our cost, that it is not enough to simply build a line of defence on our borders: it must be repeatedly reinforced. In “The Eclipse of the Crescent Moon”, Géza Gárdonyi wrote that “the strength of walls does not lie in the stone, but in the hearts of the defenders”. If there is no border defence, if there are no brave men and women to guard our borders, there is no prosperity, there is no security, there is no order, and there is no progress either. Then all we have will be uncertainty, fear, chaos, anger, and trucks driving into crowds of people. We Hungarians want to live in safety...This will demand strength, determination and will. It will demand perseverance and courage when tens of

² ‘Viktor Orbán’s speech at the ceremonial swearing-in of new border hunters’ Budapest, 7 March 2019, Online: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-ceremonial-swearing-in-of-new-border-hunters>. [Accessed: 07 April 2021].

thousands are besieging the border, and alertness if only a few hundred are trying to enter.³

Dobó and Zrínyi were key military commanders during the Ottoman conquest of Hungary, well-known to every Hungarian teenager from age 12. Gárdonyi's book is one of the most popular novels ever published in Hungary, a fiction which tells the story of the Siege of Eger by the Turks in 1552. On another occasion, an oath-taking ceremony of police graduates, he referred to János Hunyadi, the hero of the Battle of Belgrade in 1456:

Hungary is a European state with a history stretching back a thousand years. And Buda Castle is the centre – the very heart – of this thousand-year-old Hungarian state. This is why the new law enforcement graduates from the Public Service University pledge their oaths to the service of the homeland here in Buda Castle...From this day on you belong among those Hungarians who rallied to the flags of Hunyadi, Rákóczi, Kossuth and the 1956 Revolution: those who wanted Hungary to have freedom, security, order and a liveable future; those who were willing to risk their lives for such ideals, and who – when Fate demanded – were even prepared to lay down their lives. Today you have joined the ranks of the best in our country's long history. You have joined the ranks of those who fought for our country generation after generation, and who knew of only one thing that they did not want to lose, because they felt it to be the most precious thing they could pass on to their children. They felt that love for their country would weave them into a shared and exceptional fate: the fate of the Hungarians, whose greatness embraced them all. I ask you, during your years of service, to think about the Hungarian homeland in this light...It took many years for everyone to understand and believe that our armed officers indeed serve and protect us – and that it is indeed us whom they serve and protect. Since then Hungarian police officers have proved their aptitude many times. Whether the floods have been of water, red mud or migrants, the police have always stood their ground...We have police officers who, during the hardest of times, will go to our borders if that is what it takes to protect Hungarian families...If,

³ 'Prime Minister Viktor Orban's speech at the oath-taking ceremony for non-commissioned police officer' 18 June 2017, Online: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-oath-taking-ceremony-for-non-commissioned-police-officers>. [Accessed 07 April 2021].

however, you serve with commitment and show commitment in leading those serving under you, then Hungary will continue to be one of Europe's safest countries.⁴

Not only that, in his preface to the edited volume on the history of border control, the Interior Minister, the head of the police in Hungary, established a functional link between border fortresses and the fence (Pósán, Veszprémy, Boda and Isaszegi, 2017: 7). The legacy of the medieval defence system to contemporary border control is a recurring theme in the volume as a whole. A textbook for police college students on basic duties depicts medieval border soldiers as “border guards at the time” and devotes an entire section to the topic (Kalmárné Pölöskei, 2018: 66-67). The Hungarian-Serbian border has been elsewhere referred to as the “front line” (Christián, 2017).

If new rules are to be taken for granted for the members of an organisation, they have to be justified not only in practical terms, but also by embedding them into a “symbolic universe” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 120-122; cf. Gyollai, 2020). Policy objectives and subsequent tasks have to be aligned with the general symbolic values attached to the police and the purpose of policing. As a result of symbolic legitimation, duties prescribed by the new policy become uplifted as a mode of participation in the symbolic universe, thereby transcending the mundane nature of these tasks. Thus, as declared by Orbán, when patrolling the border fence, not only am I enforcing the law, but I am also “protecting Hungarian families” and “the Hungarian homeland”. Symbolic legitimation brings past and present together prompting the shared memory and the frame of reference within which police function. It provides a comprehensive transcendent meaning for particular practices and roles. Symbolically legitimised practices might persist even if they lose functionality for an external observer; not because they would still be necessary or “work” but because they are “right” (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 135). This is why the portrayal of police as successors of border fortress soldiers, in tandem with the migrant-invader analogy, has been echoed in both political discourse and policing literature.

⁴ ‘Prime Minister Viktor Orbán’s speech at the passing out ceremony for law enforcement cadets from the National University of Public Service’ 1 July 2019, Online: <https://2015-2019.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-s-speech-at-the-passing-out-ceremony-for-law-enforcement-cadets-from-the-national-university-of-public-service>. [Accessed: 07 April 2021].

4.1 The participants' accounts

The public seemed ready to pick up the comparison, when a Facebook-group with tens of thousands of followers was established in support of police and military personnel involved in border control as “our warriors” (harcosaink) who “defend Hungary and Europe”.⁵ When interviewing the police, I was thus interested in how these associations had played out on the ground. When asked about the necessity of the fence and their opinion about mass migration in general officers gave answers such as:

I cannot tell whether it was better with the fence, or otherwise they would have ambushed us or Europe...I don't think they came on their own initiative...we will never really know what is behind all this...our duty at the fence was to prevent them from crossing, we did not see the consequences of what they would have done in Europe. (Pol01)

If you consider, France has already fallen in term of the Christian culture, in the next 30 years it will become a Muslim majority country...You can call it mass migration (népvándorlás)...but if they come to invade the country, it's a smart way to do it. (Pol03)

It's a different culture, there would be conflict. (Me: Do you worry about your job or family members being raped?) I don't worry about my job. On the contrary, we would have a lot to do precisely because of them, but I do worry about my family and the environment too...this could easily be sorted if conscription was reintroduced. (Pol02)

Those whom I saw were between 15-30 years old, young and strong. They cannot be refugees, they are not refugees, we look at them with disgust. Let alone when they are flooding into Europe. Those countless terrorist attacks, you immediately think that is why they come here. You just have to wait until they kill us all in our own country, this

⁵ 'Magyar rendőrök és katonák, vele-TEK vagyunk' (Hungarian police and soldiers, we are with you): <https://hu-hu.facebook.com/notes/1986628034953934/>. The word 'vele-TEK' is an untranslatable play on words: 'veletek' means 'with you'; the 'TEK' is the abbreviation for the Hungarian counter terrorism unit.

is terrible, outrageous...The solution: fire at will, from day one. These folks⁶ are ignorant, they would not comply otherwise...Fire at will, without hesitation. Yellow tape up, and from then on just empty the magazine...I've never heard of migration on such a mass scale, that they want to cross continents and conquer Europe. (Mil09)

To the question "If you had to put it into context, to what event would you relate mass migration?" one of the participants specifically replied: "when the Turks invaded the country". When I asked the same officer about the most important guiding principles when performing his duty at the border, he answered as follows:

I am trying to follow the rule of law and to enforce it, and defend my homeland; in short, to serve my homeland. (Pol06)

One of the civilian employees I interviewed spent a significant amount of time with border control police in the border region. He shared his experiences of an event that became known in Hungary as the "Battle of Röszke". (Röszke border crossing at the Serbian border was sealed on 16 September 2015 leaving hundreds of asylum seekers stranded in the border area. As a result of the spontaneous protest against the blockade, there was a clash between the riot police in full gear and asylum seekers.) The participant described the atmosphere among the police as a result of public appreciation following this "battle":

When there was the breakthrough at Röszke, the public response was overwhelmingly positive, and the prestige of policing suddenly came to the fore, which provided a boost to the morale of the rank and file. We held our ground there, we did what we had to do and we did it well...They (the rank and file) got lots of positive feedback from within the organisation as well, it was all really uplifting. We did what had to be done even in that situation...The protective role of the police was highlighted in that they were there protecting (Me: Protecting who?) Protecting us, but also helping in the (refugee) camps...not only in maintaining public order, but also with food distribution. (Civ10)

⁶ The term 'folks' (népek) is understood here as a particular ethnic group or tribe, rather than people in general.

These examples show that border control has gained an overly militaristic connotation. But not only in practical terms as to the enactment of policy and not just among military personnel. Rather, in terms of the symbolism about the nature of mass migration and how it should be responded to. Orbán's narratives relating to the medieval past have been merged not only with political, public and academic discourse about border control, but some participants reflected on their job as "defending the homeland" (and Europe) and "protecting" the people from migrant invasion.⁷ The reader might argue that the excerpts provide no direct evidence of the effect of historical narratives. However, it is perhaps not wildly unreasonable to infer a causal relationship between the government's narratives and the participants' accounts. The excerpts seem to suggest that officers, consciously or unconsciously, draw from the narrative schemas provided by the government to make sense of their roles in border control, at least as I read them. If so, to understand the underlying mechanisms of the impact of medieval role models, i.e. how historical narratives come to drive action and are operationalised to interpret everyday experiences, the concept of the *narrative self* seems highly relevant.

4.2 The narrative self

There is a view among both psychologists and philosophers that stories make up the core of self-identity. These stories are narratives of the self by the self that provide a coherent and meaningful plot for the future by reinterpreting the past from the perspective of the present, thus preserving the integrity and unity of the self over time (Ricoeur, 1988: 246-249; for review see Singer, 2004; McAdams, 2001). It follows that self-narratives, similarly to individual and collective memories, are constantly revised and sometimes fictional in nature (cf. Flanagan, 1992: 204-207). Nevertheless, not only do they contribute to our self-understanding, but fundamentally shape the way in which we view both ourselves and others (Zahavi, 2011: 184). The below conceptualisation of selfhood as an entity with narrative structure is predominantly, although not exclusively, based on a phenomenological perspective.

⁷ To be sure, in the Hungarian language, the term 'határvédelem' (border defence) is interchangeably used with the term 'határrendészet' (border control). The participant, however, specifically said "megvédeni a hazámat" (defend my homeland). Furthermore, the Hungarian Police has long adopted the LAPD motto 'To Protect and to Serve' ('Szolgálunk és Védünk') and used the slogan 'Hazámat Szolgálom!' ('I Serve my Homeland!'). Nevertheless, these slogans alone without the support of historical narratives could unlikely serve as a sufficient frame of reference for the police to describe their role in the governance of mass migration as "defending" the country against a foreign "conquest".

The paradigm of the narrative self stems from the narrative configuration of our actions (Ricoeur, 1992: 143-147; Gallagher, 2012: 175-181). As Gallagher and Zahavi (2012: 223) note, the self is “realized through one’s projects and actions and it therefore cannot be understood independently of one’s own self-interpretation”; or more precisely, the self-interpretation of one’s own actions. Early on, as Hutto argues, fairy tales we are told in childhood, as exemplars or models, play a vital role in developing our folk-psychological skills, the cognitive capacity that enables us to infer and make sense of the intentions of others who act for reasons. Hutto calls this thesis the “narrative practice hypothesis” (Hutto, 2011; 2012: ch. 2). As Carr points out, except when we are “absorbed”⁸ in a certain activity, we are, in fact, quasi-storytellers. This is not to be understood as if we were on stage telling anecdotes surrounded by an audience. Rather, Carr refers to one’s everyday actions and routine. These stories, as he (1986: 61) argues, “are told in being lived and lived in being told”; in everyday life we are “telling ourselves stories, listening to those stories, and acting them out or living them through”. We are the storyteller, the audience and, simultaneously, the protagonist of our own stories. For example, while I am preparing soup for dinner and preoccupied with chopping parsnips, what I have in mind is not “me cooking dinner” but I am focusing on the movements of the knife and the width of the slices (and trying not to chop my fingers off). However, if I am interrupted by the noise of an approaching refuse truck, it would potentially divert my attention: “Bin collection. I forgot to take the bin out. What day is it? I think it’s blue bin day”. Once finished with the bin, I then have to, as Carr puts it (1986: 55), “pick up the thread” and “re-establish” myself in the dinner cooking process: “The dinner. Where was I? Parsnip already in, now the celery”. In other words, I am no longer absorbed in vegetable chopping but I am reflecting on the cooking process (and the recycling) as a unit by taking the external position of a narrator.

From the outset, to make sense of and order our actions, i.e. to act meaningfully, not only do we have to reflect on them from a vantage point, but it also requires a linguistic mental representation (Hutto, 2012: ch. 12). The “reflection” itself functions by means of “projections” (Schutz, 1972: 57-66). As Schutz argues, what distinguishes a purposeless behaviour from an action is that the latter consists of a plan. Any meaningful action is constituted by a projected

⁸ Carr here refers to a form of attention what Sartre calls the “pre-reflective” mode of attention or “non-positional consciousness” (Sartre, 2003: 6-12). This pre-reflective mode presupposes something called the “experiential self” that operates in conjunction with the narrative self but on a more fundamental level (Zahavi, 2011; cf. Laws, 2020).

goal; I always do something *in order to* achieve something. The projection or anticipation of this goal is called the “self-interpretation” of an action. Not only that, actions do not stand in a vacuum, but also have an antecedent or a *because of motive* (Schutz, 1972: 57-96; cf. Gyollai, 2020): “I am making dinner *in order to* feed my kids *because* they said they were starving.” Actions thus have a narrative-like structure that consists of a beginning, a middle and eventually come to an end to fulfil their goal. In self-interpreting my actions, the reflective glance functions like a story in holding the different sequences of my actions together by anticipating a future goal in a coherent unit with, and against the background of, past episodes (Carr, 1986: 52-72). This is more apparent with respect to larger-scale activities, such as my plans and goals for the weekend, for the duration of the lockdown, my job, and, ultimately, my life. As Goldie puts it, “we plot out our lives” (Goldie, 2014: 161-162).

Although the narrative configuration of the self does not entail external verbalisation, the storyteller analogy and the constitutive function of the story in making sense of my own actions is even more explicit in conversation with others. As Carr points out, whenever someone asks me the question “What are you doing?”, the story I have to come up with serves as a justification and clarification of my actions not only to the questioner but also to myself. Narratives do not just describe actions but create them; stories and actions are intertwined (Carr, 1986: 61-63, 112). In verbally reflecting on my intentions and reasons, they become “crystallised” and feel “more real” both to my conversation partner and myself (Berger and Luckmann, 1966: 52-53). This objectifying function of narratives is illustrated by Sartre in *Nausea* by describing the difference between living one’s life and recounting it: when living “nothing happens (...) it is an endless, monotonous addition”, it is only when one starts recounting it, life becomes “adventurous” and meaningful (Sartre, 2000: 46-47).

Sartre also notes that we view ourselves not just through our own stories but of others. Narratives of others about me have particular significance if they intersect and confirm (or negate) my own self-narratives (Gallagher, 2011); “this officer just saved a puppy from a burning house, she is a real-life superhero” or “you are heroes who defend our country, freedom and families like your predecessors did”. Not only that, as MacIntyre phrased it, “we are never more (and sometimes less) than the co-authors of our own narratives” (MacIntyre, 2020: 247-248). On the one hand, because we always find ourselves in a social situation, to make ourselves genuinely understood and maintain integrity with the community we belong, our narratives are tuned in to the narratives of others and necessarily overlap. On the other hand, any social situation in which we can possibly find ourselves consists of nothing more than a set of pre-established schemas. Our scripts are never fully genuine but are based on already

available linguistic schemas passed on by our parents, peers, colleagues and the society as a whole (Schechtman, 2013: 404-405; Carr, 1986: 83-84). This is not to say that self-narratives never change. Rather, they are shaped both by the tradition, and new cultural and social trends or expectations. That is, my narratives in terms of which I interpret myself and my actions, whether conscious or not, are inescapably conditioned by the community I live in and its prevailing meaning structure (Bruner, 2003: 64-66; Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012: 222-224; Varela, Thompson and Rosch 2016: 149-150).⁹

That is, the self is realised through the interpretation of our actions by means of narratives, and these narratives are determined by the belief system and the overall cultural setting of the community. If we accept this view, it follows that historical narratives in political discourse may, in fact, be instrumental in interpreting one's own actions and thus contributing to self-identity formation; especially if facilitated by the rhetoric of the leader of the community (cf. Carr, 1986: 71, 155-160; Ricoeur, 1988: 247-248). This might explain why police officers talk about "defending the homeland" and "protecting the people" when asked about their objectives and guiding principles when on the job. Not only that, Goldie argues that we often display "fictionalising tendencies": we transport plots, genres and characters from fiction to real life to simplify and make sense of the otherwise complex, unexplainable, if not unjust, events in our life and become reconciled with them (Goldie, 2014: ch. 7). To what extent the imagined patriotism represented by the character of medieval heroes serves as self-justification to counterbalance and neutralise (cf. Ugelvik, 2016), the brutality and power abuse against irregular migrants, is, perhaps, a question worth analysing for that matter.

In one way or another, historical narratives are always part of the linguistic tradition in forms of myths, legends, stories in the Bible, parables and idioms that feed into the self-narratives we use to make sense of our own actions (Hutto, 2012: 243; Singer 2004: 445; McAdams, 1993). When talking about their role, consciously or unconsciously, some of the participants seem to draw from the linguistic schemas of historical narratives that have been dominating public discourse about border control. This is not to say they would necessarily view themselves as direct heirs of medieval border fortress soldiers, but their self-narratives seem to be caught up in the historical legacy. As McAdams phrased it, "we do not discover ourselves in myth; we *make ourselves* through myth" (McAdams, 1993: 13). To be sure, understanding is always and necessarily determined by our historical embeddedness, which Martin Heidegger calls the "historicity" of human existence (Heidegger, 2010: 19-20, 368-377). As Carr (1986: 115-116)

⁹ This paradigm is also known as *inauthenticity* (cf. Carman, 2009).

points out, this is not to be understood in a “historical determinist” sense. Rather, it means that our self-understanding “passes through history”. How we make sense of here-and-now experiences is shaped both by our own past experiences and the knowledge, beliefs and overall worldview of the community we were born into and which have accumulated over history (cf. Gallagher and Zahavi, 2012: 93-97). However, the degree of explicitness of how historicity operates may vary, ranging between a vague and unconscious impact on one’s life and, in the extreme, the “proud traditionalists” who define themselves as successors of past “heroes” and heirs to their legacy (Carr, 1986: 94, 115). Given the government’s campaign, it is safe to assume that the effect of (medieval) history in this case is relatively explicit in the sense that officers are likely to be aware of the historic origin of their role as “defenders” of the country. Nonetheless, it would be interesting to see how the problem of explicitness plays out in future generations. If this interpretation of border control becomes prevalent, would officers long after the Orbán-era know why they “defend the country” and not simply “intercept”, “stop-and-search” or “filter” irregular border crossers?

Conclusion

The paper argued that the way in which the police interpret anti-immigrant discourse is heavily determined by their daily routine and pre-existing stereotypical knowledge. The stereotype of the Hungarian Roma, as an interpretive schema that represents a security issue the police are already familiar with, has seemingly had a significant role in the process. Because we make sense of things by the appropriation of pre-existing schemas relevant in the particular context, anti-immigrant discourses triggered the stereotype of the Roma to some officers. Consequently, all the corresponding attitudes associated with the Roma have been transmitted to migrants, such as aversion, hostility and punishment. Moreover, the police have been portrayed by PM Orbán as the successors of medieval soldiers who defended the frontier during the Ottoman conquest. Because narratives play a constitutive role in our self-interpretation, the medieval role model offered by Orbán has, potentially, had a significant impact on the police’s occupational identity formation. Some officers now seemingly understand the role of border control in the governance of mass migration as defending the country against invaders.

The paper has demonstrated that phenomenological philosophy can be extremely useful in qualitative research. Phenomenology, “the treasure of knowledge opened up by Husserl” (Schutz, 1978, p. 140) has been long neglected in contemporary sociological research.

However, a phenomenological focus that consistently draws from phenomenological philosophy, in conjunction with the relevant psychological literature, would be instrumental for qualitative researchers. The concept of *interpretive schemes, types, relevance, historicity* and the *narrative self* were proved to be highly instrumental in understanding why police act in the way they do in light of anti-immigrant discourse. When analysing the intentions, purposes and whys of people, the problem is always analogous to Max Weber's famous example of the woodcutter: an outside observer can never be fully certain of whether the woodcutter is actually working or working out. An outside observer might only see *what is there*, because actions only become meaningful in the first-person perspective. The potential of phenomenology to provide a strong theoretical support in this regard is clear, which will hopefully draw the attention of social scientists to an unduly side-lined field.

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