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Border Control Reinterpreted: Collective Memory and the Narrative Self

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Abstract

This article explores the potential of historical narratives to inform and guide action, taking the case of border control in Hungary. The Hungarian government has recently criminalised irregular border crossing and made a comparison between the Ottoman Occupation and contemporary challenges of mass migration to legitimise its new measures. Qualitative interviews conducted in 2019 seem to suggest that some members of the border police, consciously or unconsciously, have drawn from this narrative repertoire to make sense of their own role in border control. Drawing on the concept of the *narrative self,* the article outlines how the collective memory of the Ottoman conquest may have shaped the understanding of mass migration and the self-interpretation of those involved in border control.

Introduction

In 2015, the Hungarian government launched a fierce anti-immigrant campaign, sealed the southern borders with barbed wire fencing and amended the Criminal Code to criminalise irregular entry accordingly. Border control has gained priority above all else and the fence has since been patrolled by joint police-military personnel; officers have been transferred to the Hungarian–Serbian border from all over. To keep up morale, as we shall see later, PM Viktor Orbán has addressed the police on multiple occasions calling them "heroes" who "defend and protect" Hungarian families. In doing so he invoked the memory of the Ottoman Occupation, reassuring his audience that by putting their own life on the line they "joined the ranks" of those defending the country at that time.

The significance of narratives and stories in professional socialisation by helping officers to understand the purpose of policing and identify with their own role is well-established in criminological literature (for a review see Van Hulst 2020). A comprehensive framework as to how stories function in shaping our worldview and guiding our actions has, however, only recently been introduced into criminology by Lois Presser. As the founder of narrative criminology, Presser (2009) emphasised the criminological importance of considering narratives as a "vehicle for self-understanding" to better understand offender behaviour.

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Drawing from sociology, philosophy, cognitive and social psychology, and related fields, narrative criminology has predominantly sought to account for how stories bestow meaning upon criminal or otherwise harmful actions (Presser 2008, 2013). Narrative criminologists were initially interested in the constitutive role of stories in criminality and desistance, and focused on narratives of offenders and criminal subcultures (Presser and Sandberg 2015; Sandberg and Ugelvik 2016). Nevertheless, the scope of narrative criminology has since been expanded. Ugelvik has, for example, analysed the significance of stories immigration detention officers tell each other to legitimise and justify their work (Ugelvik 2016). In fact, if stories prompt crime by providing a sensible interpretation for one's own criminal actions, it is safe to assume they have a similar function in victimisation (Pemberton et al. 2019), radical activism (Joosse 2021) or even in legitimising the killing of animals for food (Presser 2013). As we shall see later, there is an inevitable interplay of stories virtually at any time when individuals act for reasons. Most importantly for the purpose of this paper, as Presser has pointed out, stories play an important role in promoting harmful collective actions when the target is a group (Presser 2018; Presser and Sandberg 2019). "Narratives of difference" fuels intergroup hostility by either "reducing" the members of the target group as inferior subhumans, or by defining them in strong opposition to the self and as such a threat to the community one belongs to (Presser, 2008: 150–151; 2013: 22–23, 36–37, 110–112; 2018: 86–103). Although the approach of narrative criminology has recently been criticised (Laws 2020), amended (Verde 2020), and modified (McGregor 2021), even critics agree that stories have a lot to do with how we understand ourselves, others, and the world.

Due to the abuse and systematic push back of irregular migrants at the Serbian border, Frontex has recently suspended operations in Hungary. Frontex's presence in the region had long put the Agency at risk of being complicit in large scale human rights violations by the Hungarian authorities (HRW 2021). Although not representative, survey data confirmed the impact of the government's campaign in tandem with the PM's legitimising narratives on the police; most of the participants displayed anti-immigrant attitudes (Gyollai, 2021). Based on semi-structured interviews conducted with police and others, this paper is interested in how collective memory in particular, in the form of historical narratives, can shape officers' understanding of mass migration and their role, thus influencing border practices. More specifically, it explores the way in which collective memory may feed into self-narratives, i.e. the self-interpretation of those involved in border control. In a certain sense, the focus is on the potential of historical narratives to thematise mass migration through (?) narratives of difference.

The Narrative Self

Stories and Self-interpretation

The two basic tenets of narrative criminology are that (1) stories guide actions and (2) actions are the acting out of stories.[1] Presser underlines that these approaches to stories are certainly not mutually exclusive (Presser 2018: 10), but they are the conjoint aspects

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[1] For recent developments on the mutually constitutive relationship between narratives (or language in general) and actions see e.g. Caracciolo 2014; Popova 2015; Di Paolo, Cuffari and De Jaegher 2018; Johnson 2018.

of the same paradigm called the narrative self. As Carr points out, except when we are "absorbed"[2] 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, it refers to one's everyday actions and routine. Self-narratives, as Carr (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. As we shall see, self-narratives are constantly revised and sometimes fictional in nature (cf. Flanagan 1992: 204–207). Nevertheless, not only do they contribute to our self-understanding, but they fundamentally shape the way in which we view both ourselves and others (Zahavi 2011: 184). In other words, stories are pivotal to identity formation (cf. Presser 2008: 2–6).

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).

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 by taking the external position of a narrator (Carr 1986: 60–64), but it also requires a linguistic reflection (Hutto 2012: ch. 5, 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 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, i.e. the meaning of an action is the projected goal. Not only that, projections do not stand in a vacuum, but also have an antecedent or a *because of motive* (Schutz 1972: 57–96): "I am chasing criminals *in order to* lock them up *because* they committed a crime." Actions thus have a temporal, story-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; cf. Presser 2013: 25; Popova 2015: Ch. 1). This is more apparent with respect to larger-scale activities, such as my plans and goals for the weekend, my job, and, ultimately, my life. As Goldie puts it, "we plot out our lives" (Goldie 2014: 161–162). In short, self-narratives are stories 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; Singer 2004; McAdams 2001; cf. Presser 2008: 62).

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

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[2] Carr here refers to the form of attention, which 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" or "minimal self" that operates in conjunction with the narrative self but on a more fundamental level (for detailed analysis see Zahavi 2011, 2017; cf. Laws 2020).

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; cf. Presser 2008: 13). 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).

Whose Stories?

Sartre (ibid) also notes that we view ourselves not just through our own stories but through those 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 "thank god these heroes are protecting us and defending our country". As Di Paolo et al. explain:

> Our behaviour, our ideas, our intentions are in part the result of being exposed to the linguistic acts of others. These acts can … orient and direct, even momentarily take possession of our affect and our agency … The voices of others find an echo chamber in the flow of self-directed utterances and may not be easily silenced. Since utterances are constitutive of the linguistic self and of relations to others, in these embodied resonances, words sometimes cause harm and other times remedy injuries. (2018: 314)

MacIntyre similarly argues that "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 to, 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 narrative schemas passed on by our parents, peers, and 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 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 open-ended. Self-narratives are inescapably conditioned by the constantly evolving (sub)cultural structures of the community I live in (Bruner 2003: 64–66; Gallagher and Zahavi 2012: 222–224; cf. Presser 2008: 11, 24; 2009).[3] Nevertheless, culture, hence self-understanding, is necessarily determined by our social and historical embeddedness, which Martin Heidegger calls the "historicity" of human existence (Heidegger 2010: 19–20, 368–377). As Carr (1986: 115–116) points out, this is not to be understood in a "historical determinist" sense. Rather, it means that our self-understanding "passes through history".

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[3] This paradigm is also known as *inauthenticity* (cf. Carman, 2009).

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). To be sure, the degree of explicitness as to how historicity operates may vary, ranging between a vague and unconscious impact on one's life to, in the extreme, the "proud traditionalists" who define themselves as heirs of the legacy of historical figures (Carr 1986: 94, 115). One way or another, self-narratives have a normative dimension and are always evaluative because of their social, historical, and cultural embeddedness. We choose certain narratives (and not others) based on their appropriateness in the given context as learned during our socialisation (Gallagher 2014; cf. Presser 2013: 26; cf. Di Paolo et al. 2018: Ch. 7). Historical narratives in the form of myths, legends, stories in the Bible, parables and idioms are core constituents of culture with a strong normative content. As such, they are part of the linguistic schemas that feed into the self-narratives we use to articulate our actions (Hutto 2012: 243; Singer 2004: 445; McAdams 1993). The next section outlines how collective memory in the form of narratives is instrumental in this regard.

The Role of Collective Memory in (Self-)interpretation

In one of his speeches to the police, PM Orbán addressed officers as "heroes" who protect "our freedom, our families, our way of life" by defending the border not only of Hungary, but also of Europe:

> 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... 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…Then all we have will be uncertainty, fear, chaos, anger, and trucks driving into crowds of people…It will demand perseverance and courage when tens of thousands are besieging the border, and alertness if only a few hundred are trying to enter.[4]

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, *The Eclipse of the Crescent Moon* 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. The references by the PM are thus not accidental; the legacy of medieval fights against the Ottoman Turks has a distinguished place in Hungarian collective memory, or, as the PM would phrase it, in Hungarian national identity. The government has frequently portrayed Hungary as the only member state in the EU that makes considerable efforts to defend European Christianity. It claimed that history repeats itself and Hungarians had been left alone by EU leaders, just as they were by the rest of Europe during the Ottoman campaigns between the fifteenth and seventeenth century.

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[4] PM Orbán's speech on 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 29 November 2020].

In reality, the Hungarians' struggles against the Ottoman Turks were just episodes in the centuries-long rivalry between the two superpowers of the time, the Ottoman Empire and the Holy Roman Empire of the Habsburgs. Both Gabriel (Gábor) Bethlen and Emeric (Imre) Thököly, Princes of Transylvania, led several uprisings against the Habsburgs with the support of the Ottomans. Not only that, Thököly actively participated in the Battle of Vienna in support of the Turks in 1683, who were defeated by the Habsburg and Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Coalition (Ágoston 2012; Ágoston and Oborni 2000). Orbán has been falsely claiming that the Hungarians single-handedly defended Christian Europe against the Ottomans. Rather, the opposite is true: there were episodes in the mutual history of the Ottoman Empire and Hungary when the two jointly fought against the Holy Roman Empire of the Habsburg Monarchy. It is not obvious why conspiracy theories about Muslim "invaders" would necessarily appeal to Hungarian police in the context of mass migration.

The historical accuracy of the PM's narratives is, however, less relevant than the narrative itself. As Bruner argues, "narrative, including fictional narrative, gives shape to things in the real world and bestows on them a title to reality" (Bruner 2003: 8). Fiction has the power not only to affect how we experience the reality they portray, but also the way in which we make sense of the real world by inviting us to draw analogies between the two (Bruner 2003; Presser 2018: 46–49). For example, when reading the monologue of a fictional character, by engaging with the text and trying to empathise with her (i.e. to access the character's attributed consciousness in an experiential sense) our self-narratives conflate and become one (Caracciolo 2014; Popova 2015). As a result, as Di Paolo et al. comment, the narrative experience might remain with us even when the book is closed, and "reverberates there in affective entanglement with all the other dimensions of embodiment" (2018: 306).

The "Usable Past"

Moreover, due to the inaccessibility of the historical past in the way we experience the present, the reconstruction of history is always "fragmentary" and significantly relies on "patching up" traces of the past. Therefore, not only is our knowledge about past events akin to fiction-making, but also "relative to (…) the cultural presuppositions of those who wish to assess them" (White 2014: xi). As Presser phrased it: "our recollections must be intelligible within our cultural environment" (Presser 2008: 12). In explaining the function of individual memories, Schachter points out that memories are "biographies of the self" that provide narrative continuity between past, present, and future, thus constituting a core part of personal identity (Schachter 1996: 93). Schachter, however, underlines that retrieving memories is by no means analogous to searching in a library catalogue or a photo album. Rather, memories are a function of the interplay between what actually happened in the past and our present subjective circumstances (Schachter 1996: 5, 28, 308). How we remember past events is very much determined by our interests and motivation at the moment of recollection, i.e. the memory of past autobiographical events constantly changes over time (Ibid: 22, 60–71, 106). As Carr maintains, "the Now is a vantage point from which we survey the past and the future". The past is subject to constant retrospective re-interpretation to preserve the coherence and success of my ongoing actions and projects: "my own coherence as a self, the unity and integrity of my personal identity" (Carr 1986: 95–96).

Taking the leap and drawing an analogy between individual memory and collective memory is certainly not self-evident. However, reading these authors together, one could argue that collective memory might as well function as the appropriation or revision of historical events in the light of ongoing problems in a particular community in order to preserve its integrity. The authors seem to suggest that collective memory can be reconfigured and functions analogously to individual memory: it is just as much determined by the present as by the past. In support of this assumption, for example, the victory of the Soviet army over German troops stationed in Hungary in 1945 is now considered as the beginning of the 45 years long occupation of Hungary by the Soviet Union; before 1990, the same event was to be celebrated as the liberation of Hungary by the Red Army. We tend to remember and commemorate uplifting events but water down, if not completely omit, compromising episodes of our history2009; individuals who strongly identify with the group they belong to, are more likely to filter history in favour of ingroup values to support the perception of dominance and superiority (Blatz and Ross). Politicians, the (social) media and education all contribute to and amplify this selective presentation of historical past guided by their prevailing interests and motivations (Ibid; Haste and Bermudez 2017; cf. Presser 2018: 79). As Pennebaker and Gonzales (2009) argue, collective memory is "fickle" and reflects "the self-serving biases of human nature"; it always changes in line with the demands of an era and is adjusted to the zeitgeist. Wertsch describes collective memory as a "usable past" which links past and present but downplays accuracy, operating in the realm of "conflict" and is "almost invariably part of some identity project such as mobilizing a nation to resist an enemy" (Wertsch 2009: 122–123). History can be reinterpreted and appropriated to make sense of here-and-now experiences by "bestowing" new meanings to past experiences and events, thus creating an interpretive frame of reference for members of the community (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 86–87, 120; Bar-Tal 2000: 56–60). Supporting this argument, Schachter points out the integrative role of the stories of elders, which by "reflecting on the past in the context of present" have had a crucial importance in tribal communities to provide guidance for future generations (Schachter 1996: 302).

Thus, it can be said that blurring the memory of the Ottoman conquest with challenges of mass migration may have the potential to provide a plausible interpretation of the ongoing problems of the Hungarian society. Meanings associated with the epitome of the pillaging "invader" can be appropriated and bestowed upon migrants. By putting the present events of mass migration and the past of the Ottoman conquest in a cohesive unity, the PM re-established collective memory and, simultaneously, created a common frame of reference for collective action. Collective memories, especially traumas, have a great potential to unify individuals irrespective of their political preferences. By triggering strong emotions, collective traumas are highly instrumental in fuelling intergroup hostility (Blatz and Ross 2009; Lambert et al. 2009). As Volkan points out, it was precisely the "transgenerational transmission of shared trauma", unleashed by Slobodan Milošević identifying Bosnian Muslims with Ottoman Turks, that led to one of the most tragic events of modern history (Volkan 1996; cf. Frijda 2008).

The landslide victory of the Fidesz-KDNP coalition in the 2018 general election with no platform other than the anti-immigrant campaign is thus not accidental. PM Orbán has reinterpreted and filtered history to suit his own electoral purposes. The associative reconstruction of Turkish invaders in the character of migrants has, indeed, been successful with the public. Simonovits found that the majority of Hungarians perceive mass migration as a serious physical and cultural threat (Simonovits 2020). How the very meaning of the word "migrant" (migráns) itself has changed, gaining a pejorative connotation serves as a great

example to demonstrate the narrative integration of mass migration and the Ottoman conquest, i.e. how the past has been used for the purpose of the present.

Collective Memory and Meaning Constitution

According to Schutz and Luckmann (1989: 153), language mirrors a particular socially constructed reality. It always reflects the prevailing relevance structure of a community by objectifying experiences significant enough to assign a separate term to. As a result of this objectification by language, basic and important situations become incorporated into the common-sense knowledge of the community. Language is essentially the "depository" of intersubjectively objectified experiences and situations relevant to a particular community at a given period of time (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 55, 87; Schutz 1970: 96; 1972: 119; Schutz and Luckmann 1974: 233–235). That is, the meaning of a word, besides its dictionary entry, always has a component that points back to the experience or situation in which it has been established, i.e. its etymological origin (cf. Gyollai 2020). To most English people, for example, the word "blitz", besides signifying a sudden military attack, simultaneously triggers the collective memory of the bombing of London in WW2. In Hungary, the meaning of the word "migrant" has changed as of lately arguably because its collective sedimentation has been rerun by associating mass migration with the memory of the Ottoman invasion. In other words, the linguistic objectification of asylum seekers with Muslim backgrounds as "migrants" was carried out by the appropriation of unpleasant historical memories. Narratives "attuned to the linguistic sensitivities of a community" are hard to resist (Di Paolo et al. 2018: 320). Thus, the word "migrant" no longer signifies a person who moves from one place to another. Its meaning has been re-established and is now understood as someone "dangerous" for the word automatically triggers the memory of invaders. It is irrelevant whether one has ever experienced invasion or met migrants; this meaning is now objectively accessible to every member of the community. Groups of asylum seekers are now commonly described as "hordes of migrants" ("migráns hordák") in public discourse. Some parents nowadays scold misbehaving children by saying "The migrants will get you!" (Elvisznek a migránsok!) paraphrasing the archaic version of the phrase "The Turks will get you!" (Elvisznek a törökök!). This demonstrates how the perception of migrants as a threat has now become an integral part of the common-sense reality of the Hungarian public. The etymological origin (Ottoman invader) might fade away over time, but the *threat* as attributed meaning remains; depending on how explicit historicity may function.

Data Collection

During participant recruitment, police officers 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, but also to any matters relating to migration in general; officers expressed serious concerns about the possibility of losing their job. For these reasons, and due to lack of official access, I used snowball sampling.[5] Between September and November 2019, I eventually

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[5] Considering the circumstances at the border reported, for example, by Human Rights Watch, the hesitance of the Police to provide official access did not come as a surprise. Colleagues from Hungary warned about the difficulties they face when trying to gain access unless from within the organisation. As to inter-

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. The interviews lasted about an hour, and given the above circumstances, they were conducted outside police premises in the officers' off-duty hours. The aim was to provide an opportunity for the participants to give their opinion about various migration-related matters. The questions inquired about the officers take on: the government's approach to mass migration; new policy measures criminalising irregular entry; the phenomenon of mass migration as such; officers' involvement in border control; and the most important guiding principles when on the job. I was interested in the terms, phrases, and concepts the participants use to make sense of mass migration and their own role in this regard. That is, my aim was to understand the knowledge, beliefs and prejudices the police draw from to *self-interpret* their everyday border control practices in light of the anti-immigrant campaign and PM Orbán's narratives.

Modern-Day Heroes Defending the Homeland

Some of the participants' accounts seemed to follow patterns similar to that of members of the general public interviewed by Simonovits (2020). When asked about their opinions and feelings relating to mass migration, officers expressed concerns about the wellbeing of their family, terrorist attacks, increasing crime rates and Islamisation:

> Migrants bring violence…Crime and violence would increase. I have kids too, I don't want to not be able to let them go to school on their own, because I have to worry that something bad could happen to them…Those coming from war might be terrorists. This Muslim religion can easily change people, at least as I read about them… You never know why they are fleeing their country, maybe they are terrorist and want revenge. The problem is their religion, it is unpredictable why they want to come to Europe...there are many suicide bombers, aren't there? (Benedek, police officer)[6]
> I think it's also possible that certain circles generate these conflicts...you can read different conspiracy theories about that; about how they want to overthrow the West. I read texts in English written by imams in order to generate armed conflicts. They can send quite a few people to the West this way. 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. (János, police officer)

If migrants are now looked at as quasi-invaders by a significant proportion of the Hungarian public, a view popular among the police as well, the question arose: how do the

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[6] All names are pseudonyms.

police themselves see their own role in border control? As already implied, the government has 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".[7] 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...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.[8]

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. In his preface to an edited volume on the history of border control, the Interior Minister, the head of the police in Hungary, established an analogy between border fortresses and the fence (Pintér 2017: 7). The importance of historical legacy for contemporary border control is a recurring theme in the volume as a whole. Another textbook for police college students depicts medieval border soldiers as "border guards at the time" (Kalmárné Pölöskei 2018: 66–67). The Hungarian–Serbian border has been elsewhere referred to as the "front line". Hungarians seemed ready to pick up the analogy which hence fed into public discourse. 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".[9] 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:

> Those whom I saw were between 15 and 30 years old, young and strong. They cannot

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[7] PM Orbán's speech on 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: 27 November 2020].

[8] PM Orbán's speech on 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: 29 November 2020].

[9] "Magyar rendőrök és katonák, vele-TEK vagyunk" (Hungarian police and soldiers, we are with you): https://hu-hu.facebook.com/notes/1986628034953934/.

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 is terrible, outrageous…The solution: an order to fire at will, from day one. These folks 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. (József, soldier)

I cannot tell whether it was better with the fence, or otherwise they would have ambushed us or Europe…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. (Ottó, police officer)

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. (Benedek, police officer)

One of the civilian employees I interviewed spent a significant amount of time with border control police in the border region. She shared her experiences of an event that became known in Hungary as the "Battle of Röszke". (Röszke border crossing was sealed in September 2015 and there was a clash between the riot police in full gear and asylum seekers stranded at the border.) 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. (Officers said that) we held our ground there, we did what we had to do and we did it well...They 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… (Melinda, civilian employee)

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 around mass migration and how it should be responded to. Stories about the medieval past have been merged not only with narratives of the political and policing elite, and public discourse, but some participants also reflected on their job as "defending the homeland" (and Europe) and "protecting" the people from migrant invasion.

Discussion and Conclusions

My interview sample size is certainly not representative and as such it is insufficient to draw far-reaching conclusions about border control in Hungary in general. Nor does it suggest that officers have unanimously and unconditionally embraced Orbán's historical analogies. Police culture is always heterogeneous rather than being uniform. Some of

my participants, though the minority, found the anti-immigrant campaign nonsensical and explicitly refuted it. However, the excerpts above seem to suggest that others, consciously or unconsciously, have drawn from the narrative schemas offered by PM Orbán to make sense of their roles in border control. As we have seen, some officers mentioned "invaders", Muslims "conquering the country", "overthrowing the West", "killing us in our homeland" and "an order to 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". Historical narratives seemed to be instrumental in thematising mass migration for the purpose of *narratives of difference* whereby officers interpreted migrants as a threat and identified with the role of defenders.

As has been argued, the self is realised through the interpretation of our actions by means of narratives, which are a function of the prevailing cultural settings of the community we belong to. We also saw the potential of collective memory in the form of historical narratives to produce, or shape meaning in society and serve as a driver of collective action. If we accept these views, it follows that collective memory might be instrumental in interpreting one's own actions and thus contributing to self-identity formation; especially if facilitated by the continuous rhetoric of the leader of the community (cf. Carr 1986: 71, 155–160; Ricoeur 1988: 247–248). Thus, the invoking of collective memory by PM Orbán seems to have had an impact on officers' self-interpretation, and the medieval role models have been appropriated by some to interpret everyday duties. This is consistent with Presser's findings that stories deeply rooted in culture may have a powerful emotional impact on their audience precisely because of the strong normative content (cf. Presser 2018: 63–67, 137). Similarly, Berger and Luckmann argue, if new rules are to be taken for granted by the members of an organisation, they must be justified not only in practical terms, but also by embedding them into a "symbolic universe" (Berger and Luckmann 1967: 120–122). 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". In prompting collective memory, symbolic legitimation brings past and present together creating a frame of reference within which the police can function. It provides a comprehensive transcendent meaning for 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 would 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. They do not chase migrants *in order to* push them back for breaking the law by crossing the border undocumented, but rather to protect Hungarians *because* migrants are "dangerous".

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). Given the government's campaign, it is nonetheless safe to assume that the effect of 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. It would be interesting to see how the problem of explicitness (see Sect. 2.2 and 3.2) plays out in future generations, if this interpretation of border control becomes solidified and prevalent. That is, whether officers long after the Orbán-era would know the

etymological origin of why they "defend the country", if at all, and not simply "intercept" or "stop-and-search" individuals to prevent irregular entry.

Goldie's observation is also worth considering regarding the findings. He argues that we often display "fictionalising tendencies" and transport plots, genres, and characters from fiction to real life to simplify and make sense of the otherwise complex, inexplicable, or unjust events in our life and become reconciled with them (Goldie 2014: ch. 7). To what extent the imagined heroism, represented by the character of medieval warriors, serves as self-justification to counterbalance and neutralise the brutality and power abuse against irregular migrants, is, perhaps, a relevant question for future research (cf. Ugelvik 2016). Conversely, Presser found that the prevailing discourse and supporting public atmosphere make individuals feel *alright* about their otherwise condemnable actions (cf. Presser 2013: 12, 42–45). More than that, as "heroes" people sometimes feel they have the "licence", if not moral responsibility, to fight against the "enemy" (cf. Presser, 2013: 37–38, 48–49). One way or another, collective memory seems to have had serious implications for officers' understanding of their role, which might account for the push back practices at the Hungarian–Serbian border. The narrative conceptualisation of self-understanding has served to improve our understanding of the underlying dynamics of border control in Hungary. An outside observer might only see *what is there*: people are, sometimes brutally, being pushed back to the other side of the border fence. Conversely, the police themselves potentially interpret and view this approach as pure patriotism.

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