

“Timeless places” – Narratives about flight, exile, and belonging

Ruth Wodak

Abstract

In this paper, I present some results of an interdisciplinary (psychological, historical, discourse-analytical) research project on narratives of persecution, flight and survival. These stories told by the children (and grandchildren) of Austrian victims of Nazi persecution, all of them left-wing political dissidents and some of them also Jewish, relate to World War II and the Holocaust. In their narratives, the interviewees try to come to terms with the experiences of their parents (and grandparents) and bridge the obvious cognitive dissonance of living in Austria and holding a citizenship which was denied to their elders at a traumatic point of their parents' lives. Firstly, I focus on the narratives as they relate to flight and the loss of citizenship and homes. Secondly, I investigate what it meant – from the children's perspective – to later return to and grow up in the country that had excluded their parents. And thirdly, I reflect on what such stories imply for the present and future and what we can learn from them. In the analysis, I integrate quantitative methods (narrative network analysis and corpus linguistics) with qualitative discourse analysis. Although each story and the related context are of course unique, it is nevertheless worth discussing if specific characteristics of the narratives could be generalised to other contexts in order to illustrate the plights of fleeing and struggles for survival of refugees.

KEYWORDS: CHRONOTOPE; HOLOCAUST; NETWORK ANALYSIS; REFUGEE; SCENIC STORY

GENRE  POS

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1 Introduction: Refugees, border- and body politics

On 15 November 2015, a *Stolperstein* or ‘stumbling stone’ was laid in Vienna, in the fourth district, Belvederegasse 10, by the Viennese NGO ‘erinnern.at’.¹ *Stolpersteine* are commemorative memorials, first created by the German artist Günther Demnig in 1992, that record the names of victims of the Nazis and the locations where they died. They are placed at their former residencies, in this way symbolically returning to their neighbourhoods (e.g., Hanauer 2017; Wodak and Rheindorf 2017; see Image 1).

Sixty thousand of Vienna’s Jews are known to have perished in the Holocaust, most of them after being deported to concentration and extermination camps by the Gestapo and the SS following the so-called ‘Anschluss’ of March 1938. Other Jewish residents fled or committed suicide. Supporters of the Nazi regime quickly took over (i.e. *Aryanized*) their apartments, stole their properties and their jobs, and destroyed their shops.


At the same time as this specific *Stolperstein* was laid, in autumn 2015, hundreds and thousands of Middle Eastern and African refugees were fleeing to Europe, imagined to be a haven safe from the wars in Iraq, Syria and the



Image 1: Translation of text: “1938-1945: Robbed – Deported – Murdered”; Erna Förster, born Löwy 2.5. 1891, murdered 1944 KZ Kampor/Isle of Raab; Carl Förster (Feintuch), born 28.5.1887, murdered 1944, KZ Kampor, Isle of Raab; 1938 four more Jewish people lived in this house (personal photo)

Sudan, and from dictatorship in Eritrea and political oppression other African countries. Some 60 million people around the world,² the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates, are currently fleeing for their lives. Unfortunately, as in 1938 and 1939, national borders are being or are already closed; many countries have indicated that they are not prepared to take any refugees, or only a very small number or only specific refugees – e.g. only Christians, and so forth. In September 2015, Hungary built barbed-wire fences along its borders with Croatia and Serbia in order to prevent asylum seekers entering; other countries are considering similar measures (Rheindorf and Wodak 2017; Triandafyllidou 2017; Wodak 2018a, 2017).³ Asylum is a national concern and does not fall within the remit of European institutions. Each EU member state is thus regulating the flow of asylum-seekers according to its own laws rather than in accordance with any general EU policy;⁴ however, all signatory countries to the Geneva Convention are obliged to protect refugees and offer them shelter and support.⁵ In order to restrict the number of potential refugees, many debates concern *the definitions* of ‘real’ asylum-seekers, i.e. defining who deserves protection and who does not. Who is an economic migrant, and thus travelling voluntarily, and who is in danger of being tortured or even killed?

Importantly, nobody can or should compare the socio-political and economic situations of 1938 and 2015 in any simplistic way. This is certainly not the aim of this paper. Civil and post-colonial wars in the Middle East and Africa differ in many ways from the Nazis’ murderous ideology, which justified the systematic extermination of Jews, Roma, homosexuals and disabled people. Nevertheless, the ‘body- and border-politics’, as well as the accompanying rhetoric in 2015, in some European states and beyond, bears some resemblance to the 1930s (Norocel 2013; Wodak 2015). Once again, we hear the well-known justificatory slogans: ‘The boat is full!’ or ‘*They* don’t belong here with *us*’. In this way, nationalism, once declared an obsolete force, especially after **the Second World War** and the establishment of the European Economic Community in 1957, has obviously returned with renewed vigour. It seems to be the case that – in spite of an ever more unified and globalised world – more borders and walls arise, defining nation states and protecting them from dangers, both imagined and real. Such border politics reminds us of nationalist body-politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Musolff 2010; Wodak 2018b), although Delanty and Kumar (2006: 3) rightly point out that the ‘changed nature and function of nationalism’ today requires consideration of ‘a wider range of social phenomena’. In their view, ‘nationalism is present in almost every aspect of political community and social arrangements. It pervades the global and the local dimensions and can even take cosmopolitan forms’ (Delanty and Kumar 2006: 3).

In this increasingly nativist context, ‘us/we’ may be narrowly defined in terms of *ius sanguinis* ethnic  although the idea can be extended to a vaguely defined *cultural* or even *linguistic* form of ‘belonging’ (see the two slogans cited in the above paragraph). Such nativist (Mudde 2007) opinions are held not only by the far right; they have recently been increasingly strongly endorsed by traditional mainstream parties who – presumably out of fear of losing votes – accommodate such right-wing populist views (Wodak 2015). Because of continuous fearmongering, related to debates about security and the protection of ‘our social welfare’ (social welfare chauvinism), the ground has visibly shifted (Wodak and Boukala 2015).

Rarely, however, do the media report or quote the ‘voices of refugees’ (Delanty *et al.* 2011). We usually read *about* ‘them’, but unique experiences, their plight and their stories – if aired at all – appear as images or in factual summaries (KhosraviNik 2010). Such oral experiences do not lend themselves to bureaucratic measures of registration and control at borders or police stations, and they usually remain unheard by the public. Moreover, refugees generally speak languages that require translation for most European audiences, as was seen with the refugees who arrived in 2015 from Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia. This implies that those traumatic stories that are shared are mediated and recontextualised at least twice, frequently three times: from oral experience in the native language to another language (the majority language); from an experiential oral genre into a bureaucratic written genre; and then possibly reported by the media, thus a third genre. These days, the story is even frequently resemiotised, from text to images in photographs or videos on YouTube. Hence, emotionality and the voice of the teller, their contextual experiences and histories, are usually lost.

Given the aforementioned considerations, this paper presents some findings from an ~~ongoing~~ interdisciplinary project (‘*Kinderjause*’ [children’s party]; see below) which analyses the memories of Holocaust survivors through the lens of their children interviewed about the life stories of their parents and the memories they might have of the flight of their parents. This is in order to explore, on the one hand, memories retold as stories of survival, and on the other, specific inter-generational dynamics and their impact on the lives of the next generation. These narratives allow certain insights into how refugees and other victims have learned to cope with painful and traumatic memories, which could be generalised to other contexts including the present day.

In the following, I first briefly explain the design of our study. Then, I focus on two results: on the discursive phenomenon which we have labelled as the ‘narrative veil’, which frames some narratives via a specific form of vagueness that is here called ‘timeless places’ (thus focusing on space while neglecting time; e.g. Wodak and Rheindorf 2017); and – in contrast – ‘scenic narratives’,

which re/enact terrible experiences and offer an entry point to the trauma of the parents and their children.⁶ Finally, I discuss what this study might imply for a critical applied linguistics such as that endorsed by Chris Candlin (1990: 461–462), who emphasised the aim of deconstructing ‘hidden connections say between social structure and language structure [...] as our central objective, the amelioration of individual and group existences through a focus on problems of human communication.’

2 Design and Data of the Study

2.1 The Sample

As already mentioned, in our study we focused on the memories of children of Holocaust survivors,⁷ thus on stories that parents told their children. In this way, these stories are mediated, being twice recontextualised – from real experience to another person, and then retold in an interview – and thus a very specific kind of interaction. Twenty-nine semi-structured and ten in-depth interviews were conducted with a subsample of this group, covering several areas: the biographies of their parents; their parents’ flight and forced displacement, deportation and imprisonment; and their own educational and professional biographies, their values and the duties imposed upon them by their parents to engage in political work, i.e. ‘Never Again.’ The parents, most of them Jewish and resistance fighters, or resistant in other ways, communists or revolutionary socialists, were imprisoned in the Nazis’ concentration camps or forced to leave Austria and became politicised in exile. Their biographies are widely dispersed – ranging from exile in France, Belgium, England, China, Switzerland or the Soviet Union; joining the international brigades in Spain or enlisting in one of the Allied Armies or the Yugoslav Freedom Battalion; to imprisonment in numerous concentration camps and many other places of resistance and persecution. Sadly, many of those who returned from exile were not welcomed in Austria (Berger and Wodak 2018; Knight 1988; Ziegler and Kannonier-Finster 1997).

Fifty percent of the interviewees were born after 1945. Most Jewish children among them had no grandparents who had survived the war. The distinct trauma of their parents, due to persecution, imprisonment or resistance and living through years of war in Allied or underground armies, was rarely if ever spoken about in the family or in the youth organizations to which the children belonged. Indeed, post-war, silence surrounded the narratives of both victims and perpetrators (Wodak 2011; Schröter 2013). In the project, we focused on the following questions: How do these children narrate their parents’ biographies between 1938 and 1945?; and how do they cope with and express the cognitive dissonance of growing up in a country that persecuted and displaced

their parents, a place associated with traumatic experiences for their parents? In respect to this aspect of our study, in this paper, I am specifically interested in the types of narratives produced by the interviewees and the relationship between narrative styles and emotionality. This research thus necessarily refers to research on politics of the past, of memory, and of commemoration as well as on the salience of (crossing) borders and the impact of nationalism (Heer *et al.* 2008; Achugar 2016).

The sampling of respondents considered the following criteria: (1) gender; (2) Jewish or non-Jewish; (3) Parents – resistance, flight, forced displacement, exile or imprisonment, underground; and (4) whether born during or after the war (in Austria, Belgium, China, France, England, Switzerland, and the Soviet Union). The distributions are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Sample distribution

No. of interviews (semi-structured)	Second generation	Third generation
Total	29 (2 siblings)	11
Male	19	6
Female	10	5
Jewish	20	
Parent(s) fled into exile	20	
Parent(s) imprisoned	15	
Active in the resistance	23	

Table 2: Sample distribution by year of birth

No. of interviews (semi-structured)	Second generation
Total	29 (2 siblings)
Born 1939–1944	14
Born 1945–1946	3
Born 1947–1953	12

The semi-structured interviews were conducted by three experienced interviewers, and the in-depth interviews jointly by the psychiatrist in the team (EB) and myself (RW). All interviews were first transcribed broadly, in their entirety, while important segments were closely transcribed, including hesitation phenomena, code-switching into Viennese dialect, pauses and laughter and other expressions of emotions, where necessary for in-depth discourse analysis. The quoted text extracts were first reviewed by the respective interviewees, who gave their consent for the publication. Moreover, all quoted texts are anonymised, as agreed with the narrators.

2.2 Relevant literature – Interdisciplinary framework

2.2.1 Narrative memories

To date, a range of interdisciplinary, sociolinguistic studies have attempted to elicit personal narratives via focus groups and in-depth interviews in order to understand, analyse and explain unique and more general experiences of refugees who have managed to cross borders to safety (De Fina 2003a, 2003b; Schiffrin 2006; Krzyżanowski and Wodak 2009; Achugar 2016; Wodak and Rheindorf 2017). Schiffrin (1997: 42) argues that (emphasis in original):

Narratives can provide [...] a SOCIOLINGUISTIC SELF-PORTRAIT: a linguistic lens through which to discover people's own views of themselves (as situated within both an ongoing interaction and a larger social structure) and their experiences. Since the situations that speakers create through narratives – the transformations of experience enabled by the story world – are also open to evaluation in the interactional world, these self-portraits can create an interactional arena in which the speaker's view of self and world can be reinforced or challenged.

Indeed, the narratives offer not only a 'sociolinguistic self-portrait' but also a possibility which allows learning about the actual processes of fleeing, surviving and exile, crossing borders legally or illegally, and their aftermath, in detail. As many refugees – then and now – have had no opportunity to publicly tell their stories, interviews with the second generation serve as unique – and necessarily subjective – access to these experiences. The analysis of these narratives (i.e. characteristic patterns, plots, actors and actions) grants insight into socially shared 'collective stories'. They serve to place fragmentary, incomprehensible experiences into a framework that is not simply individual, but socially 'meaningful'. We would thus expect members of a social group with a shared past – whether known to each other personally or not – to use a similar repertoire of types of narratives to give meaning to that past. Moreover, different types of narratives are used to refer to different kinds of experiences, some of which are regarded as traumatic and unique, others as more routinised, retold and generic. Indeed, as Schiffrin (2003: 538–539) argues, Holocaust narratives as intertextually interlinked, generic narratives, may present a (partial) solution to the dilemma of having to describe the indescribable: "Because of the radical break between trauma and culture, victims often cannot find categories of thought or words to contain or give shape to their experience" (Laub and Allard 1998: 802, quoted in Schiffrin 2002: 313).

Apart from the public functions of commemoration and historiography, this dilemma (i.e. speaking about the 'unspeakable') constitutes another cultural function, of shared narratives (Laub and Allard 1998: 802). The history emerging from biographical interviews as post factum and meaning-infused narratives is always a subjective construction, as is common with any kind of

story, and life-stories in particular. Accepted histories are thus the result of negotiation, struggle for hegemony and co-construction, and such complex processes decide which stories about past events can convey the majority's values and perceptions of the world, and thus be accepted as memories (Heer *et al.* 2008).⁸ This mediated relationship to the past, through the present and via an imagined future, is realised through language or other discursive and material practices, as Koselleck (2002: 27) proposes in his seminal work *The Practice of Conceptual History*:

What has happened, and has happened beyond my own experience, is something that I can experience merely by way of speech or writing. Even if language may – in part – have been only a secondary factor in the enactment of doings and sufferings, as soon as an event has become past, language becomes the primary factor without which no recollection and no scientific transposition of this recollection is possible. The anthropological primacy of language for the representation of past history thus gains an epistemological status, for it must be decided in language what in past history was necessitated by language and what was not.

In anthropological terms, any 'history' constitutes itself through oral and written communication between generations that live together and convey their own respective experiences to one another.

Histories consist of such normatively established relations, of interpretations of connections between people, places, events and actions in time, i.e. narratives. Collective memory could thus be termed a collection of traces of events that are significant for the historical trajectory of a specific group, something endowed with the capacity to relive these shared memories of rites, celebrations and public festivities (Halbwachs 1985).

Assmann (2009, 2011) distinguishes two kinds of memory transmission via narratives and other genres (such as photos or different kinds of material practices): intergenerational transmission and transgenerational transmission. *Intergenerational* transmission implies transfer through the family of embodied, frequently traumatic experiences. *Transgenerational* transmission relates to (national or cultural) collective memory, conveyed via a range of symbolic systems. The concept of 'post-memory' (Hirsch 1997), on the other hand, implies a relationship between the memories of Holocaust survivors and the next generation, with fragmented emotional references to traumatic events. Moreover, as Achugar (2016: 15) states, there is also a need for a 'distinction between familial (identification with family members) and affiliative post-memory (identification with contemporaries) as different forms of identification in the transmission process'. Obviously, the context of commemoration and transmission (familial or institutional) seems salient, in addition to the quality and content of narratives and symbols (individual vs group memories, cultural values vs affective orientations, and traumatic vs 'normal' experiences).

Furthermore, Kellermann (2011) reviews four strands of research dealing with post-traumatic disorders and intergenerational transmission, which come to different, but also complementary, conclusions. In spite of the broad range of studies (with different variables, samples and so forth), it seems obvious that trauma can be transferred latently (silence) or explicitly (too much talk) via specific communicative dynamics (oscillating between over-protection and projection of blame), via socialization patterns and specific behaviours, and even by genetic heritage. These studies, however, also display a surprising array of strategies of resilience in terms of the many ways in which children of traumatised parents succeed in leading interesting and healthy lives, in spite of the terrible experiences of their parents. Welzer explains that “[b]oth individual and collective life stories are constantly overwritten in light of new experiences and needs, and especially under conditions of new frames of meaning from the present” (Welzer 2015: 15, quoted in Achugar 2016: 48). Indeed, as socio-historical circumstances change, both individual and family stories are continuously reconstructed and rewritten. Analysing family conversations about the past, Achugar (2016: 62) found that “*individual* identity requires a process of differentiation from parents, (and previous generations), that allows the young to mark themselves as agents who contribute something unique to the meaning-making process, resulting in a generational identity [...]”. In sum, Achugar states that traumatic memories can be conveyed by parents in two ways: (1) *implicit* parental embodied behaviours expressed through *material non-verbal practices* (e.g. not talking about the topic, or making impersonal and generalized references to it) and (2) *explicit* parental practices (e.g. answering children’s questions, editing narratives, or justifying their actions).

2.2.2 Types of narratives

With nearly every type of narrative, the authenticity and credibility of the teller/telling primarily rest on personal experience, and thus on a correspondingly positioned, i.e. ‘performed’, narrative *voice*. The means of this positioning are manifold and yet typical:

Credibility, i.e. the possibility for a story or a narrator to be accepted as truthful, is often based on the idea of the primacy of personal experience over other forms of experience and knowledge, hence the widely held view of narrative as a privileged genre for communicating personal experience. [...] [E]mbedding narratives into accounts increases their plausibility and [...] people gain credibility through narratives because these contain many details and give particular vividness to the reconstruction of facts.

(De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 137)

The accounts into which narratives of the Holocaust and the persecution, flight and return of their parents are embedded by the interviewees in this study are

also accounts of the circumstances of their *knowing* or rather *not-knowing*. The effect of these disclaimers is thus the opposite of ‘*story ownership*’ – i.e. ‘*story disownership*’.

Moreover, we are dealing with ‘*retellings*’ or ‘*retold stories*’ characterised by specific features that distinguish them from other narratives: they are often short, succinctly formulated and devoid of detail, as well as quite abstract, with typified and functionalised actors. In their retellings, they presuppose much knowledge; they also become increasingly intertextual, drawing on certain culturally established, shared and thus discursively available patterns (including phrasings). In this sense, they are *metanarratives* (Schiffrin 2006: 275). In the process of their retelling, narratives can become either *generic* through decontextualisation, thus losing their specifics (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 108; see also ‘generic accounts’ in Baynham 2005: 15), or become ‘*scenic narratives*’ (Wodak 1986). The latter rely on a specific kind of re/enactment, with much detail (e.g. quoted or re/enacted dialogue) for authenticity, while also being decontextualized in respect to orienting the hearer or reader to time, space and specificities of context; this allows evoking manifold emotions – in the teller as well as in the audience. Sometimes, coda and/or orientation are missing; the teller assumes that the hearer can imagine how a specific incident happened, almost in real time, and as if one were present. In both cases, the underlying process in narratology is what Bauman and Briggs (1990: 70) term ‘*entextualization*’:

the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a *text* – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting.

It is well-documented that narratives about the Holocaust, flight and persecution during the **Second World War**, frequently take on a generic form, even in the case of family stories that are never made public. Schiffrin (2006) recognises in this a general function of narratives, a way of making the world meaningful, explainable and manageable, to oneself and to others. However, as illustrated and analysed below, scenic narratives occurred as well, relating unique traumatic experiences. **Below**, I focus specifically on the latter and their – to date less-explored – functions.

3 Methodology

We first used corpus linguistics to determine global topics (or semantic macro-structures – Van Dijk 2009) in the interviews (second generation only) and identify keywords by frequency; we then calculated keyness in relation to a reference corpus of 25 biographical interviews, also conducted in Austria, using WordSmith software. The keywords were clustered, according

to semantic fields, to identify macro-topics in the narratives in order to be able to select the subset of narratives about persecution and flight for analysis. The clustering showed: (1) the centrality of family, especially mother, father and grandparents; (2) the explicit addressing of the narrative situation; (3) the importance of political terms, organizations and figures; (4) events and experiences related to persecution, emigration, flight and return; and (5) historical reference points, such as dates, places and events. In contrast, work, career and personal life play a subordinate role.

In sum, we identified 19 macro-topics (Van Dijk 1992), adjusted for their keyness-to-frequency ratio (see Wodak and Rheindorf 2017 for details of the methodology). The most relevant macro-topics are:

- (1) political organizations, movements and parties, represented in part metonymically, by historical figures and leaders (Marx, Stalin, Kreisky);
- (2) Jewishness/being Jewish;
- (3) persecution, imprisonment, death (and associated places);
- (4) emigration and flight (and associated countries or cities);
- (5) Nazis, the Gestapo and National Socialism; and
- (6) identity and the self in relation to country/nation, family, heritage and politics.⁹

In what follows, I focus on the macro-topics of persecution and flight (3 and 4) in order to explore individual and shared forms of telling/retelling. As elaborated above, such patterns offer insights into the many ways in which the interviewees cope with the traumatic pasts of their parents and their own positioning – and how they assess the life stories of their parents and the relevance of their narratives for the present, in order to identify with or distance themselves from the past and their parents' political mission and beliefs. Moreover, the impact of the more general post-war silencing in Austrian society becomes apparent. I focus on the latter in the following section.

4 Narrative veil and scenic stories

4.1 Narrative veil

Remarkably, for narratives in the data, the situation and conditions of telling are continually foregrounded and negotiated, the conditions presented like a veil of 'not-knowing' or 'not-knowing-well', of 'partly-remembering' and 'not-having-been told', themselves framing narratives of flight, persecution and imprisonment, like a meta-commentary. In the words of Erich,¹⁰ who quoted the command of silence given to him by his mother: 'You may never mention this [...] you may never know about this.' It is impossible to detect whether anything at all was actually told to the interviewees by their parents;

this differs widely in each case. The narrative veil is constructed in the ways in which the narrators, the ‘I’ of the respective narrative, position themselves to the stories told by their parents; the veil is always constructed around and throughout the narratives. This can be illustrated by a quantitative analysis of the (verb) collocates of first-person personal pronouns in the data, as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3: Verbal processes in interviewees’ self-representation (I, me, my, mine; we, us)

Process	Agents	Patients
Verbal	17	75
Material	41	36
Mental	28	186
Relational	-	19

Table 4: Collocates in interviewees’ self-representation (I, me, my, mine; we, us)

Collocate	Frequency
Wissen – <i>Know</i>	41
Erzählen – <i>Tell</i>	31
Glauben – <i>Believe</i>	28
Erinnern – <i>Remember</i>	27
Sagen – <i>Say</i>	22
Denken – <i>Think</i>	15
Eindruck – <i>Impression</i>	12
Fragen – <i>Ask, question</i>	11
Beschäftigen – <i>Trouble, occupy one’s mind</i>	9
Sehen – <i>See</i>	8
Wundern – <i>Wonder</i>	4

The analysis makes apparent, firstly, that the interviewees most frequently talk about their knowledge about their parents’ fate (‘knowing’ or ‘not knowing’) and secondly, that they perceive themselves as ‘having been told’ but *not* having *actively* asked, investigated, or even discovered. In this, we discovered a stark contrast in relation to previous research on Holocaust narratives told by survivors: The interviewees continually emphasise that their parents’ stories are not their own, that they were ‘not there’, did ‘not experience’ them, ‘know nothing’ or ‘next to nothing’, which confirms the research summarised above in Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.2. The function and positioning within the narratives are thus similar to ‘ownership’, in the sense of a *framing meta-narrative* used particularly at the beginning (instead of a conventional deictic orientation) and ending of narrative passages (instead of a coda in the traditional sense).

They also seem to occur as a form of reassurance, not laying claim to the story, *vis-à-vis* the respective audience.

While previous research on ‘orientation’ (Labov and Waletzky 1967) or ‘positioning’ by the narrator (Bamberg 1997; Wortham 2001) has proposed a temporal ordering as a basic principle of narrative organisation, De Fina (2003a: 370–372) illustrates that this does not necessarily always apply. Indeed, the relationship and relative weight of time and space in a narrative depend on the social context, teller and content (e.g. Achugar 2016). Orientation thus also functions as an occasion for narrators to negotiate and build shared understandings of experiences in specific contexts.

The linguistic means used to this effect are devices of vagueness, as highlighted in Text 1.

Text 1

It was a topic, not only but still largely in a **very general form**. Of the concrete story I **know very little**. I know that my parents fled from Austria in June 1938 and actually meant to go to France, but went via Italy. They did send their entire luggage to France, **as far as I know**, but my mother went to the Swiss consul in Italy. **Why, I don't know**, however, and she bribed him with jewellery, as she told me, and thereby got entry into Switzerland. Then my parents spent the war, from 1938 to '45, in Switzerland. My father was lucky not to be imprisoned like most others. **I really don't know anything specific, it was never this concrete.** (Peter)

Some interviewees also explicitly commented on the framing, such as taboos imposed, frequently by the interviewees' parents, immediately after telling, as in Text 2.

Text 2

My mother told me **things** and then: [...] **"You must not do anything to find out whether this someone or that someone came back."** But we did not go into this afterwards, because we said this exceptional situation should not be revisited after the war. **"But it was him and it was her, but you may never know this."** (Erich)

This paradoxical, indeed even cynical, command was imposed on the narrator as a child, ‘never to tell, indeed never to know’, what his mother had actually just told him – in order to protect the child from its environment, as the interviewee explains. During the interview, Erich has no problem anymore with talking about the once tabooed topics and events; he has distanced himself from his mother's imperatives.

Here, coherence is supported by ‘narrative affectivity’ (De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2012: 65), in that the narrator **as** a character in the story s/he

is telling. The identified disclaimers are ‘story openings’, and as such ‘consequential for what is going to come’ (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: 49). It is at these critical junctures in the narratives, i.e. junctures between the told world (which has two temporal frames: recounting memories told by parents, recounting being told) and the world of telling (the interview) that the narrators perform the *narrative veil* – precisely, in the processes of mediation and recontextualisation (Wodak and Rheindorf 2017: 27–28). The narrators thus subconsciously position themselves in two worlds, but also have to refer to a third: the traumatic experiences of their parents. It is in this mediated world that they narrate as people who were never there, who were told nothing, little or not enough, and who are now asked to tell someone else’s stories, which they only know ~~very~~ vaguely, or were even strictly told to forget. Some interviewees felt ~~very~~ uncomfortable at this stage of the interview, regretting that they had not insisted on more information or asked their parents more questions when they had been alive.

5 Vagueness: Narrative veil and timeless places

A closer quantitative and qualitative analysis of narrative passages related to the **Second World War** and the Holocaust – in contrast to events before and after – shows that few specific temporal references (e.g. dates) are used and that most temporal referencing remains vague and relational (e.g. ‘then’, ‘back then’, ‘now’, ‘later’, ‘before’, ‘after’). Indeed, we observe a quantitative cluster of specific dates leading up to 1938, the beginning of Nazi rule in Austria and flight for many, as a significant rupture in the normal space-time experience. This is not difficult to explain: everyday life with all its routines changed abruptly into a struggle for day-to-day survival, and survivors frequently remember that it was impossible to even consider periods of time longer than half a day or an entire day (Berger and Wodak 2018). Similarly, a second cluster of dates, beginning with the end of the war in 1945, becomes apparent, anchoring the narratives in a specific time again. Between these caesuras, however, the narratives largely lack any temporal specificity. Simultaneously, the events during this time refer to specific as well as generic places (*‘the camp’* or *‘a camp’*). In the particular chronotope¹¹ of the narratives analysed, these are places *outside of time*, particularly outside of official historical chronology and military history.

This loss of time can also be measured quantitatively: Figure 1 shows peaks at biographically significant dates (1938, 1945 and 1968), while Figure 2 shows the absence of absolute temporal references between 1938 and 1945. The year 1968 turned out to be a particularly important date for our interviewees: many members of the Austrian Communist Party finally turned their backs on communism after the Soviets occupied Czechoslovakia in August, and the post-war

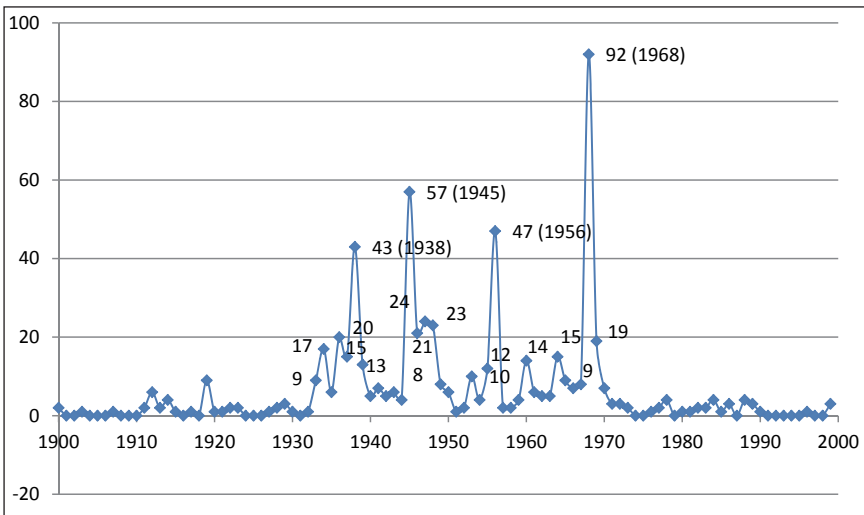


Figure 1: Temporal references in the narratives (days, weeks, months or years)

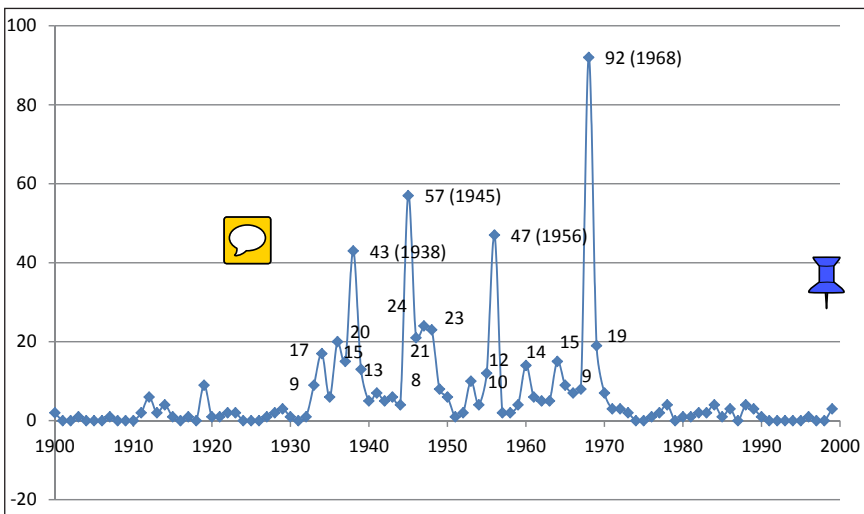


Figure 2: Temporal references in the narratives (days, weeks, months or years: 1930–1950)

generation across Western Europe (and beyond) was challenging the norms, values and routines of their respective societies. Many of our interviewees experienced both events very consciously and started to distance themselves from their parents’ beliefs and searched for new lifestyles, ideologies and values.

Within the temporal boundaries of 1938 and 1945, virtually all temporal references are vague or expressed through spatial references; in fact, almost no precise dates are mentioned occurring during the period of 1940–1945. Even the Holocaust itself is imagined as a quite abstract place and space, without specific perpetrators or other social actors. In such places, metonymically representing what are unique configurations of personal traumatic experience, ideology, historical events and public discourse, complex events are condensed into poignant, scenic decontextualised narratives (see below).

In most narratives, the narrator is in control of the telling and orientation sections, and the clauses function to identify time and place. Narrators who are ‘lost’ (De Fina 2003a: 371–372), however, adopt a different linguistic behaviour. On the one hand, there are ‘symbolically significant’ instances of precision in such ‘*narratives of disorientation*’, in which narrators mark the beginnings of salient passages, often told as scenic narratives, with detailed time references. This, though, is in sharp contrast with segments in which such references are either absent or vague. We thus discover a specific epistemic community (of refugees and imprisoned people) and a temporally abstracted chronotope, at least partly disconnected from the hegemonic historical discourse about 1938 to 1945 in Austria.

This change in chronotope is evident in all the analysed narratives of flight, persecution and migration. These are narrated as sequences of places and states (of being in a place), typically created as metonyms and/or euphemisms for flight. This form of narration indicates the situation of refugees during wartime, making it from one place to another for safety, surviving from one day to the next. The fact that flight and persecution, even imprisonment, are narrated as a series of static phenomena, rather than something *done* to the interviewees’ parents, should be seen as a way of coping with trauma (e.g. Wodak and Rheindorf 2017: 29–32). Even in these absences and silences, trauma remains inscribed in these narratives and conveyed by them. War, and all its horrors, thus becomes *a place* one might hope to leave, as expressed in Text 3.

Text 3

Out of the war they only, well I knew, my father was, would even have had a visa **to Brazil**. He learnt Portuguese and then, as far as I know, he voluntarily said, No, he is not going **there**, but going **out of the country**. He went **to Belgium**. They were always in this kind of, such Jewish organizations. This having a safety net **in a foreign country**. My father’s brother was already there and was **there**, I think,

already in love with a Belgian woman. Insofar as my father was **there** – Well, my mother was **in Spain** and **then**, then she could not **come back**, but **to Spain**, she also went **from France**. She did not come **from Austria**, but she was **already in France** before that. I believe, in '35 she **already** went **to France**, because she had a cousin **there**. She then went **to Spain**, **then** she said, that she actually wanted to go **back to Vienna** **one more time** to convince her father to leave, but the Communist Party, so my mother told it, took away their passports **in Spain**. (Gregor)

Here, euphemistic references presuppose tacit knowledge (Zappavigna 2013): to 'go to Spain' implies taking part in the armed fight against fascism; to 'be at Morzinplatz' means to be incarcerated, questioned and probably tortured by the Gestapo in Vienna (i.e. Morzinplatz was where the Gestapo had its headquarters in the city). In part, such references correspond with the frame of reference shared by the majority in Austria: they describe places that are part of the collective memory in Austria, conveyed through numerous narratives and experiences, denoting pain and suffering that nobody mentions (e.g. Berger and Wodak 2018 for more details).

6 Scenic narratives

In the in-depth interviews, we always encountered at least one 'scenic narrative', a narrative that had already been told in the short semi-structured interview but was retold, in almost precisely the same words, in a longer conversation. When enacting these scenic memories, the interviewees shifted in their socio-phonological style, frequently switching to a Viennese dialect, so that the sentences became shorter than in Standard German, without sub-clauses, more precise and more poignant, characterised by hesitation phenomena due to huge emotionality, and – most importantly – the teller started crying at precisely the same moment as the first time. Slowly, it became obvious that this type of narrative was special, indeed unique: it opened the door to many emotions that normally would remain repressed. Of course, we were not able to discover why exactly one particular incident, as opposed to others, carried so much symbolic value and why it triggered such surprising emotionality. But the fact is that every interviewee remembered at least one such salient story, one story which, metonymically, condensed the trauma experienced by parents that children could identify with or which they had experienced together with their parents. Although other research (cf. Wodak 1986) illustrates that scenic stories, in therapy groups with suicidal patients, most frequently occur when people of working-class origin, and specifically women, narrate their problems, in the case of the interviewees in this study, everybody – men and women of all social classes – behaved in the same way. Thus, it can be argued that scenic stories indicate an *entry point* to the many

traumatic emotional experiences that parents implicitly or explicitly conveyed in family interactions and that the children, loaded with emotions, can identify with. Text 4 is an example of this.

Text 4

Then, when the **Soviet troops** came – and of course, they took over one house after another, so to speak, they went from apartment to apartment. They of course were constantly thinking of Goldschmied, they went into the apartment of the building's owner, **the housewife**, who was somewhere in the countryside, to be safe she wasn't there. **My grandfather** was the janitor, **he** had the keys, **he** unlocked it for us. There was a piano inside; the whole building didn't have anything like it. Then the **Russian officer**, who was obviously an educated man, **he** said: “Well, **the liberated** need to show up now,” **he** wanted someone to play the Blue Danube waltz. But **no one** could play the piano. Then **he** said: “That cannot be, in Vienna **everyone** plays the piano, this is the city of music.” Then someone said: “Well, **there is someone** who can play the piano, that's Goldschmied.” Then they brought Goldschmied from the cellar and **he** played the Blue Danube **Waltz**. (Gerald)

Gerald told us this story twice, in almost exactly the same words, and he started crying at the point when the name Goldschmied was mentioned, a Jewish man who survived the war and deportation in a cellar. As Gerald explained afterwards, when we asked him what the specific emotional trigger had been: ‘What moves me is actually the return of Goldschmied from an extreme situation into a completely trivial and simple, dry banality. [...] He is in this dungeon and then comes up and stands there and plays the **Blue Danube** waltz.’ Goldschmied had thus saved the family and other inhabitants of the house from any revenge Soviet soldiers might have thought of wreaking when liberating Vienna from the Nazi regime on 14 April 1945. No concrete dates are mentioned, except ‘then, when the Soviets came’. This brief and incomplete orientation sets the scene. The impersonal pronoun ‘they’ occurs twice at the beginning of the story, once referring to the soldiers, and once to Gerald's family. The third occurrence of ‘they’ could imply either the Soviets or the family, and remains vague. The Soviet officer obviously has some quite common stereotypes about Austrians – they (must) know music and they know how to play the piano. Now that the Soviets had liberated Vienna, it was understood, one had to play the piano again and, specifically, the **Blue Danube Waltz**, a national symbol. That the hidden Jewish Viennese man, Goldschmied, suddenly appears as the only person who knows how to play the piano and thus satisfy the officer's wish, represents the complication of the narrative. Metaphorically speaking, this story symbolises the liberation of Vienna (and Austria) from Nazi dictatorship and the liberation of Jews who had survived the extermination.

Gerald remembers this story in its metonymic and emotional form, as the end of terror and the relief his family felt when the Soviet army finally liberated Vienna – a tipping point in his life. From totalitarianism and unpredictability to the banality of everyday life in freedom! Moreover, one could speculate what remains unsaid: that some Viennese families helped their Jewish neighbours in spite of the danger this might have entailed, and hid them for many years; that Gerald is proud of his family, who acted in a heroic manner; and the tension and fear conveyed – implicitly – in family interactions; and so on. His non-Jewish, Communist parents had remained in Vienna, partly hiding underground and partly successfully hiding their oppositional beliefs from the Nazis. This one scenic story condenses a huge amount of differing and conflicting emotions, which would otherwise not come to the fore.

7 Discussion

Refugees' stories about the past are, on the one hand, always subjective and unique, frequently at least twice removed and recontextualised due to the specific teller (in this case, the children of survivors) and the interview context. In spite of their uniqueness, they display generalisable patterns of retelling: the narrative veil, silencing and re-enactment of scenic memories. All of the parents of our interviewees had lived in Austria after the war – in two instances after surviving by hiding underground, and in the others by returning to the country they had been forced to leave, either as refugees in fear of imprisonment, torture, deportation and being killed, or in some instances as deportees. As the interviewees maintain, their parents always wanted to 'come home' in order to help build a new democratic country and to prevent any revival of fascism. In exile, they rarely felt accepted and continued to carry their pre-war identities with them. This recalls Ono's (2012: 28) observation about migrants crossing into the USA from Mexico, that 'issues about the border continue long after the border crossing', and that 'the threat of deportation and of control and surveillance akin to that at the border continues as well'. The experiences of war, flight and persecution did not end with the end of World War Two – even after their liberation from camps and return from exile, the traumatic memories persisted, sometimes latently and silently, sometimes overtly. In any case, they were transferred to the next generation, usually as retold generic stories, set in space but not in time.

In the absence of time as a default way of narrative sequencing, *spatial reference* provides a means of marking story episodes with specific events, evaluations and/or resolutions. The narrators often struggle at these transition points; space remains the only element of orientation, or works as an anchoring device for any time reference. On the other hand, while scenic stories contain con-

denser emotions, frequently they are situated neither spatially nor temporally. The interviewees' retold narratives about war and the Holocaust focus on the spatial dimension – to the point that these places and spaces metonymically and euphemistically represent and indicate, as well as hide or repress, memories of perpetrators and persecution. These results indicate the salience of borders – of passing from one place to another, by overcoming many obstacles, by crossing borders with or without documents. Currently, in spite of the knowledge of past atrocities and experiences of survival, and in spite of the obvious fact that no refugee would ever voluntarily give up their home and undergo such dangerous journeys, many countries are closing their borders again.

The hegemony or permanence of certain historical discourses in particular groups or times makes visible the appropriation and contestation of discourses about the past. These semiotic processes involve collective symbolic practices and individual acts of meaning making that position groups and individuals in relation to others. Dealing with parents' stories is a common experience: shared understandings and shared knowledge, but also a specific way of talking about time and space, have become part of their common discourse. In this way, an autonomous self can be achieved when working through the narratives of parents in unique and specific ways, of appropriating them or even distancing oneself from them, of rewriting and reconstructing them or of re-enacting them. In some cases, the narratives offer an entry point to repressed emotional experiences and identification with the trauma of the parents.

Furthermore, such narratives offer insights for therapists and other auxiliary staff dealing with trauma or post-traumatic disorders, then and now. Listening to what refugees want to talk about, listening to their stories, opens doors to their experiences; giving them the time and space needed to remember, cognitively and emotionally, can lead to better understanding of unique and collective experiences of persecution and flight. In a different way, stumbling stones also offer an entry point to people passing by, forcing them to reflect on the past, and in any case to remember and not forget.

Notes

1. See http://www.zwangsarbeit-archiv.de/buecher_medien/online_ressource/o00174/index.html.
2. See <https://www.uno-fluechtlingshilfe.de/fluechtlinge/zahlen-fakten.html>, downloaded 18 November 2015.
3. See, for example, the report in <http://www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/fluechtlingsskrise/fluechtlingsskrise-ungarn-baut-zaun-an-der-grenze-zu-kroatien-13810213.html>; downloaded 18 November 2015.

4. See http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/asylum/index_en.htm for details.
5. See <http://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3b66c2aa10.pdf> for details, downloaded 18 November 2015.
6. In this paper, I must neglect other typical patterns of storytelling due to space restrictions (see Berger and Wodak 2018 for the book summarising the entire project).
7. The interdisciplinary (psychological, historical, discourse-analytical) research project 'Kinderjause', funded by the Austrian Zukunftsfonds and the City of Vienna, analyses narratives of persecution, flight and survival told by the children (and grandchildren) of Austrian victims of Nazi persecution, all of them left-wing political dissidents and some of them Jewish. In addition to linguists (Ruth Wodak, Markus Rheindorf), the team of researchers includes the historiographer Helene Maimann and the psychiatrist Ernst Berger. In this paper, I primarily draw on the results of the quantitative analysis conducted with Markus Rheindorf and elaborate the qualitative discourse analysis of types of narratives (see Rheindorf and Wodak 2015 and Wodak and Rheindorf 2017 for further discussion of the concepts of 'narrative veil' and 'chronotope').
8. Tracing such historical processes in their multiple and multi-level contexts qualitatively and quantitatively has been the focus of much interdisciplinary critical discourse studies, usually oriented towards a discourse-historical approach (DHA) (e.g., Wodak *et al.* 1990; Wodak 2011, 2015; Reisigl and Wodak 2015). In this paper, I also follow the DHA by de-constructing the many collective, shared and individually perceived and experienced contexts, as well as the various layers of meanings in discourse and text, recursively.
9. See Wodak and Rheindorf (2017) and Rheindorf and Wodak (2017) for an extensive discussion of quantitative procedures, which I leave out here due to space restrictions.
10. For ethical reasons, the names of our interviewees are anonymised.
11. As a conceptual framework for the linguistic analysis, I draw here on Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, defined as a 'unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and characteristics of the temporal and spatial categories represented' (Bakhtin 1981: 425). Insofar as the chronotope is both a cognitive concept and a feature of narrative, it provides a conceptual frame to discuss the complex interplay between the wider cultural context, shared cultural norms and discourses, personal experience and the situational context of telling a story to an audience (see Wodak and Rheindorf [2017: 21] for more discussion of this concept).

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