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*Kornelia Golombek*

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The guiding principle formulated in this essay will initially pursue the current conceptual state within the framework of empirical research, which includes hypothetical assumptions about the aforementioned Silesian women and their identity constructions, while also attempting to gain new insights or refute some of these assumptions. As to systematic research, it becomes clear the topic has been under-researched and the specialised literature is very limited. The situation is similar with the conclusion of this essay, thus only allowing low-threshold conclusions.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

This article is a preface to an empirical study that the author has just begun at a Polish university.

<sup>1</sup> The majority of Silesians feel that they belong to neither the German nor the Polish nationality, but as an independent ethnic group. However, the boundaries are not always clearly defined, as some Silesians, for example, also consider themselves to be German or Polish. In the 2011 census, over 800,000 people stated that they were Silesians. They live mainly in the districts of Silesia, Opole and Lower Silesia. Other, numerically rather small minorities include Roma, Lithuanians, Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Czechs, Belarusians and Tatars. The protection of minorities is enshrined in law in Poland. Landeszentrale für politische Bildung (2016): Society in Poland. (Accessed on 19.02.2025 under: Poland Society – Minorities).

<sup>2</sup> Makes direct reference to two other publications by the author: 'In the Footsteps of Our Ancestors' Polish Traditions of Westward Migration Meets Modern Epigenetics of Trauma".

The study seeks to identify gaps in research when it comes to aspects of the sociology of knowledge as well as regional ethnology in the case of Silesian women living in Southwestern Poland and their identity constructions.

This essay comprises three chapters, even though it will not strictly adhere to the classical structure with an opening question and final conclusions. The introduction begins with a brief timeline of Polish history, with particular emphasis on the Southwestern region of Silesia. This is followed in chapter 1 by an introduction to academic terms relating to biography research and psychosocial identity theories, while chapter 1.2 attempts a causal link to interpretations of doing gender. As a bridge to chapter 2, the problem of habitus ruptures will be addressed, which likely have occurred several times due to foreign rule in Poland and whose after-effects (Bourdieu 1970) can still cast a "shadow" on the identity constructions of Silesia's population. Reference is also made to the topic of trauma and epigenetics, which might (although this is just a hypothesis at this time) influence the often ambiguous and diffuse sense of belonging in today's Silesian borderlands. The final passages of chapter 3 conclude this preface to my upcoming empirical study.

## II. THE DILEMMA OF POLISH HISTORY. POLAND'S TENSE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE POLITICS OF PAST OCCUPATIONS BY ITS NEIGHBOURS

Even before the 18th century<sup>3</sup>, parts of Poland already were under foreign rule, for instance, the

<sup>3</sup> For over three hundred years (apart from 1772 to 1795 and 1918 to 1939), foreign rule by occupying powers (including France, Hungary, Sweden, Prussia, Austria, Russia, Germany and the Soviet Union) left its 'mark' on the country (cf. Cegielski/Kądziela 1990).

region of Silesia, located in Southwestern Poland. Polish King Casimir the Great renounced his rights to Southwestern Poland, known as Silesia, in the Peace of Prague in 1356. The reins of power in the territories were subsequently taken over by John of Luxembourg, the Czech king who saw (?) himself as a successor to the Roman Empire.

From there, changing occupiers and their rules determined the fate of this formerly Polish territory for many centuries. Later, the Habsburgs, the Prussians and, last but not least, the Germans occupied the region of Silesia and left their respective marks on it, which, in some respects, are still observable even today, for instance, when it comes to the national-ethnic feeling of belonging to a nation, ethnic group or minority.

Today, the historical region of Silesia consists of three Polish voivodeships. Despite the decline of coal mining and traditional heavy industry, the Silesian Voivodeship (województwo śląskie) with its capital Katowice is an economically stable and attractive region that ranks second in Poland (after Mazovia with its capital Warsaw) in terms of population and gross domestic product (GDP). The Lower Silesian Voivodeship (woj. dolnośląskie) with Wrocław as its capital also occupies a prominent place in Polish economic rankings. The smallest Polish voivodeship, Opole (woj. opolskie), located between the two, falls far below the Polish average in economic terms, even though it is able to maintain a strong position in economic rankings due to temporary migration and transfer payments from abroad. Therefore, its disposable income can keep up with the other two Silesian voivodeships (Riedel 2021)( accessed 17.02.2025 at: Analysis: The periphery of the periphery - Silesia in the middle-income trap | bpb.de).

Could ambiguous and diffuse identities have arisen as psychosocial consequences of social habitus breaks in countries that were under prolonged occupation? Presumably, this might be the case in my upcoming study on Silesian women. To date, empirical studies on this topic have rarely included sociology or regional ethnology, or the concept of 'broken habitus'

(Bourdieu; Mannheim) as a result of national traumas associated with periods of prolonged occupation and multiple national tragedies. In the last six hundred years of continuous foreign rule in Silesia, its inhabitants may have experienced constant 'ruptures in the interpretation of their worldviews', during which the material world and the cultural values associated with it underwent numerous changes. What might these changes look like and what do Polish women living in Silesia think about them today? Is there a division of the population into autochthonous and non-autochthonous Silesian women? These questions will be explored in my upcoming study, but not yet in the following essay.

I would like to use the term 'problematic identity constructs' to briefly present biographical and identity theories based on low-threshold interpretations. In addition, I would like to describe the region of Silesia as the 'Western borderland'. It is a somewhat unruly patch of Polish territory, which even today occasionally causes political and historical irritation.

### 2.1 Biography

Life narratives of individuals or groups usually involve a constructive effort on the part of the narrator. However, these are no authentic narratives. Instead, these narratives are reconstructions by the interviewee, which are (once again) recreated by the interviewer and which contain 'blind spots'. On the one hand, the interpreter is too far removed from the narrator, or, on the other hand, he can be too 'close' to him and can thus be 'mute' for the subtle nuances of context-dependent answers of the interviewee (Fuchs 2004, Muster et al. 2023).

Mannheim refers to such 'blind spots' as 'aspectuality'. 'Aspectuality' is linked to a certain landscape based on perception, which can necessarily only be recognised in the landscape itself and from a certain vantage point (cf. Mannheim 1980: 212). Mannheim further explains that every human cognition and idea refers back to the 'situation of being', i.e. to the respective location from which the person

originates ('relativity of being' 1979: 229ff.) (cf. Nentwig-Gesemann 1999: 217).

Methodologically, Mannheim was referring to the question of how people's different ways of thinking, feeling and perceiving the world are dependent on their location.

With his famous sentence 'The map is not the territory' (1994: 58), Alfred Korzybski created a metaphor of mental 'maps' depicting human constructions of reality. This 'map is not the landscape, but if the map is similar to the structure of the landscape, it is useful'. This refers to the fact that humans live in two worlds: in the world of language (cognition) and symbols and in the real world of 'experience' (practice) (Korzybski 1933: 58). In the age of philosophy, in cases where it becomes part of a biography, it seeks to portray the individual as a representative of a certain typical bios. But intention means stylisation, thus leading to the abolition of the boundaries between reporting and poetry. For instance, there is not a single account from classical Greek history where we are not first obliged to ask about the intention of the reporter (Gigon 1946: 1).

An essential point of his philosophical thinking is that philosophical thinking is always at the same time a preoccupation with lifestyle questions. Korzybski understands the philosophical questions that preoccupy him are at the same time questions of lifestyle. Conversely, for him, important lifestyle issues are permeated by philosophical themes (Gunnarsson 2020: 97). Biography (Greek: description of life) is a literary, philosophical and scientific term with a long tradition that is linked to the historical development of the relationship between the individual and society. Biography was already known as a literary form in Greco-Roman antiquity. Today, a distinction is made between biography and related terms such as memoirs or curriculum vitae (cf.) Nevertheless, biographies and biographical work in the sense of empirical research can provisionally be defined as an individual life story that depicts a person over the course of his or her lifetime, the respective historical and social conditions and events, while also exploring the inner psychological

development of the subject as well as in their mutual relationship. In a biography, the dialectic of society and the individual thus finds a concrete historical, social and bodily-living expression. This general definition is expressed differently in various academic disciplines and theoretical traditions (cf. Altheit / Dausien 1990: 6ff).

Similar to the 'umbrella' of humanities, philosophy, sociology, for instance, also dedicates itself to working with individual cases in biographical research, which is limited to single individuals; the results thus cannot be generalised. Since the 1970s, sociological biography researchers in Germany have presented increasingly sophisticated theoretical considerations on the social construct 'biography', which constitutes both social reality and the subjects' worlds of experience. We can also justifiably claim that well-founded sociological biographical analysis on the methodological level always includes social history and the reconstruction of the connection between individual life-historical and collective-historical processes. It becomes clear that the systematic individual life story in the context of the subject's respective family history also involves intergenerational transmission processes – a historical approach that is becoming increasingly established given the social-historical research required for the process of understanding.

Since sociologists usually lack detailed historical knowledge of more distant historical periods, even though this is necessary for the process of understanding, we find ourselves, albeit unintentionally, in the position of the stranger and, as already demanded by Park (1925) and others in the context of the Chicago School, have to consider the given milieu as a foreign lifeworld, just like the ethnologist (cf. Rosenthal 2005: 1-4). They do not focus on the particularity of a case, but rather show the social element in its emergence and its respective changes in the course of action and experience. By means of the narrated life story, it is possible to show the entanglement between the individual and society as well as the current significance of collective and especially familial pasts. It is important to emphasise that both the individual history of a

person and the interpretative retrospective view of the past and the way in which the past is presented in the present are constituted by a dialectic between the individual and the social. The life story, both in its development and in the biographer's present interpretative retrospective, is always both an individual and a social product. Biographical research thus makes it possible to analyse the interrelation between individual experience and collective 'framework conditions'. With the reconstruction of each individual case, we therefore always seek to make statements about its historical-social context (ibid.2005: 21f). In his sociological discourse, Nassehi emphasises the sociological element that constitutes sociological biographical research. This statement could initially include trivial considerations that go hand in hand with the emergence of biographies in social space as biographical trajectories are determined by the structure of society. It is obvious without any sociological contamination that the life of a medieval peasant was characterised by different contingencies than the life of a postmodern dinky. And the fact that the biographical paths of industrial workers and corporate managers, of men and women, of educated citizens and members of the "Lumpenproletariat" (*It refers to the lowest stratum of the proletariat*) of the homosexual avant-garde and heterosexual traditionalists differ from one another is hardly worth mentioning given their diversified lifestyles. This sociologically sharpened view makes it possible to understand that biographies do not only arise from the gusto of individual decisions, i.e. cannot be seen as heroic histories of bourgeois autonomy or as histories of the individual pursuit of happiness. Instead, they oscillate between autonomous lifestyles and heteronomous standardisation (cf. Fischer 1986: 373). Even at first glance, it becomes clear that biographical research – and this actually applies to most of its representatives - is implicitly or explicitly based on an interactionist concept that sees ego identity as an individual balancing act between a personal and a social identity component (cf. Krappmann 1982), which is, however, temporally liquefied (cf. Nassehi 1994: 137). The only invariant structure and identity that is still assumed here is the

persistence of substance that was necessary for Kant in order to be able to grasp time theoretically at all (Nassehi cited in Kant 1983: 226, 2020: 136).

In other words, the identity of the subject is not something that can be built upon; rather, it must first be constructed itself. Subjective identities must now assert themselves in and against time: in time, because the identity of the subject must be secured in the difference of its temporal succession; and against time, because the differences in time necessarily determine the need for, or at least the realisation of, identity. Identities of subjects can at best still be thought of as biographical identities. Thus, the booming interest in biographies is probably due to the fact that the increasingly complex modern age makes subjective identity in time precarious.

Corresponding with the interpretations of human biography are theories of identity that create group-specific intentions for connections between mind and body.

## 2.2 Identity

As a representative of the Frankfurt School, the philosopher Jürgen Habermas sought to take a self-reference from self-acting individuals and thus create a 'space' in which human identity can take its place:

'...Under the gaze of the third person, whether directed outwards or inwards, everything freezes into an object...' (Habermas 347).

The individual itself is accessible in the intersubjective space as an initiator of attributions, because it is at the same time the product of socialised specifications, which it makes use of the identity of the individual and its actions. In this sense, Habermas seems to make the individual in his particularity subject to strict generalisability. The circle between the general and the particular seem to be completed. The individual is generalisable and can in principle be objectified in its structures of action from a 'perspective'. The enigmatic, 'opaque' complexity of the lifeworld as a whole is reflected in the enigmatic nature of the life history of an

individual, who is thus structurally integrated into a general context of conditions and possibilities together with other individuals (Heider quoted by Habermas 349ff, 1999: 125).

In the 'Reconstruction of Historical Materialism', Habermas differentiates between the 'natural identity' of the organism in relation to its environment, the socialised 'role identity' that adheres to conventional expectations and then, as a third stage, the 'ego identity'. This third stage integrates externally prescribed norms and roles by critically examining and appropriating them to create the 'consistency' of an autonomous and individualised person who knows how to preserve his or her uniqueness in the sequence of changing and 'incompatible' role expectations. The 'ego-identity' is the identity of a life story made up of 'identities' that have been overcome and those that need to be rebuilt (Heider 1999:128). The central socio-cultural contexts of experience and action, which can have a major impact on the individual and their future, are primary and secondary socio-cultural socialisation. These include family and school, places of education and qualification as well as places of selection and social allocation. The involvement of children and young people in school as a field of experience and interaction with other children, teenagers as well as teachers also makes school a significant place of identity for them – their own and that of their interaction partners.

Symbolic interactionism is a sociological theory. It assumes that human behaviour and identity are not only determined by external forces and structures, but also by forms of interactional encounters that are formed on the basis of things and their meanings (G. H. Mead,<sup>4</sup> H. Blumer 2013). Every social interaction presupposes and at the same time shapes a reciprocal assignment of identity between the interaction partners. This means that identity is intertwined in two perspectives. One perspective is concerned with the perception and determination of the identity

of the social counterpart. On the one hand, this includes the perception and determination of one's own identity by one's social counterpart, for whom one is, in turn, the social counterpart. Here, the person is the object of the perception and determination of their own identity by others. (cf. Muster et al 2023: 81ff).

Erik Erikson, a professor at Harvard University, has dedicated himself to researching identity development without ever having completed a degree. For his part, Erikson is a Freudian ego psychologist. This means that he assumes that Freud's theories are fundamentally correct, including Freud's more controversial concepts such as the Oedipus complex. However, he also accepts theories about the ego developed by other Freudians such as Heinz Hartmann and, of course, Anna Freud. But Erikson is far more inclined towards society and culture than most Freudians – as you would expect from a researcher with an anthropological focus. He often pushes instincts and the unconscious out of the picture. But perhaps this is the reason why Erikson is extremely popular among Freudians and non-Freudians alike! The epigenetic principle, for which Erikson is famous, shows that he has redefined and expanded Freud's theory of developmental stages. According to him, development takes place according to the epigenetic principle. This principle states that we develop our personality via a fixed set of eight stages. The progression from one stage to another is partly determined by our success or the lack of it in all previous stages. Similar to the unfolding of a rosebud, each petal opens at a certain time, in a certain order, as predetermined by nature through genetics. If we interfere with the natural ordering principles of development by pulling out a petal too early, we destroy the development of the whole flower. Each stage involves certain developmental tasks of a psychosocial nature. Although Erikson follows Freud's theory in labelling these as crises, they are more extensive and less specific than the term suggests. For instance, a child in grammar school must learn a certain eagerness, and this eagerness is learnt through the complex social interactions in school and family. The different tasks are labelled with

<sup>4</sup> Obviously, Mead's identity theory, according to which identity (self) consists of the two aspects 'I' and 'Me' and their interplay (1968), is incorporated into his conception of ego identity without this being explicitly stated by him (Muster et al 2023: 83).

two terms. For instance, the toddler's task is referred to as trust-mistrust. At first it seems obvious that a toddler needs to learn trust and not mistrust. But Erikson made it clear that we need to learn a balance: We certainly need to learn trust most of the time; but we also need to learn distrust so that we don't become gullible fools! There is a time for every developmental task. When a stage has been completed well, we retain a certain virtue or psychological strength that accompanies us through the following stages of our lives.

If, on the other hand, we complete a stage less well, we may develop maladaptations and malignities and jeopardise our further development. A malignancy is the worse of the two, since too few positive and too many negative aspects have been drawn from the respective task; for instance, a person who cannot trust other people (cf. Boeree 2006:7). In addition to the psychological 'view' of what human psycho-social stages of identity could mean, Erving Goffman, as a proponent of sociology along the lines of the Chicago School, has shown that identity theories have (also) enriched modern sociological thinking.

Towards the end of his life, Erving Goffman (1922-1982) declared the 'interaction order' (social identity constructions) to be the central theme of his academic work (Goffman 1994). A closer look at his diverse studies reveals that this characterisation can be specified to the effect that he was primarily concerned with the connection between interaction and identity. Goffman's sociology can thus be characterised with good reason as a sociology of the everyday reality of interaction and identity within and outside social institutions. The book 'Stigma' (1975) is of outstanding importance for the topic of interaction and identity. Therein, he elaborates on his first major work 'Wir alle spielen Theater' (1983), while also taking up central insights from the study 'Asylums' (1972), which deals with survival in 'total institutions' and which is incorporated as a modification and extension in many of his later works. The following passage initially concentrates on this work. Then, in a deliberate reversal of chronology, 'Wir alle spielen

Theater' ("*We all play theatre*") is discussed (cf. Muster et al. 2023: 82).

With Goffman's metaphor of the 'scene and background of the play of life', the 'terrain' is prepared for further arguments in this essay, from which women and their everyday lives stand out and which are attributed in the light of modern doing gender theory.

### 2.3 Gender Doing

'...You too will not have excluded yourselves from this musings, insofar as you are men; the women among you are not expected to do so, they are this puzzle themselves. Male or female is the first distinction you make when you meet another human being, and you are accustomed to making this distinction with unquestioning certainty...' (Freud 1933: 61).

With these words, the brilliant psychoanalyst and physician Sigmund Freud began his series of lectures in the early 1930s, one of which was entitled 'On Femininity'.

For Freud, as a 'child of his times', the attribution to the female sex appears in some of the sentences of his lecture, for instance one lecture from 1933, about the 'woman' as a narcissist or as a being sexually controlled by 'Mother Nature'.

'...We thus ascribe to femininity a higher degree of narcissism, which still influences her choice of object, so that to be loved is a stronger need for the woman than to love...' (Freud 1933: 71).

"...That's all I had to say to you about femininity. It is certainly incomplete and fragmentary, and it does not always sound friendly. But do not forget that we have only described woman in so far as her nature is determined by her sexual function" (Freud 1933: 73).

Several years after Freud's findings on 'Femininity', modern scientists have created a new 'stage' for epistemologies of gender that can be seen not just as a characteristic of an individual, but as a series of social-societal processes.



Simone de Beauvoire, a socialist feminist and philosopher from France, who also was a political activist, made a name for herself in the world of philosophy and elsewhere with her world-renowned book 'The Other Sex' (1949) (first published in Germany in 1951). The consequences resulting from biological sex and cultural or social imprinting of gender differences are at the centre of her work, and the basic understanding of gender studies was derived from this. In the foreword to their book "Gender and Deconstruction. Concepts and annotated basic texts of gender and queer theory", Babka and Posselt refer to current approaches to gender theory, which now play a central role in almost all academic disciplines and research areas. The realisation that gender – together with other social categories such as ethnicity, class or age – is a key factor in how societies organise the coexistence of people, how we experience, describe and evaluate our social world and how individuals perceive themselves in their relationship to others and constitute themselves as subjects has finally become well-established. Despite their diversity, different methods and research interests, the various approaches largely agree that the category of 'gender' is not simply a given, but rather a complex construction that influences our self-image and our ideas of masculinity and femininity as well as our sexuality and our psychological structures of desire. Both the construction and contingency of gender therefore take centre stage. Because if gender and gender relations are not simply a given, but are always also made, then they are changeable in principle and can be formulated and conceptualised in different ways. However, there is disagreement regarding the question of how exactly the constructed nature of gender is to be understood, which areas are covered, its ontological and epistemological status, and which historical, political, social, economic and cultural factors are shaping it (cf. Babka / Posselt 2024: 13f).

In order to actively counter traditional notions of gender, everyday understanding or personal experiences regarding gender ('I know what men/women are like, I am one myself' or 'I know my

husband/wife and therefore know what men/women want') is not enough; instead, the highly complex construct of gender must be understood (Leitner 2005: 18).

'You don't have a gender, you do it!' This is how the approach to the social construction of gender can be summarised in one sentence. The sex-gender debate characterised the feminist discourse of the 1990s, even though it turned out to be a divisive issue inside the women's movement and feminists. The extent to which gender is socially constructed, how gender relations are influenced by this fact and the respective political consequences were and still are interpreted differently. Currently, a consensus seems to have emerged among feminists that gender is not (solely) naturally determined and that there are more than two genders. According to the traditional gender difference model, biological sex is identical to social gender. Biological sex is held responsible for social behaviour and all individuals can be assigned to the biological category of sex as a matter of course. You are either a man or a woman. This unambiguous categorisation is based on a bipolar gender concept. However, as early as the 1960s, a distinction was made between the terms sex and gender in the medical-psychiatric debate (Knapp 2000). In the 1970s, these terms were taken up by feminism in order to better reject biological arguments about the 'nature of women'. Gender nature should not unalterably determine social position and role (ibid. 1f). The key question of constructivist gender sociology is: 'How does the binary, mutually exclusive classification of two genders come about and how is this exclusivity maintained every day?' (Knapp 2000, 74). They create a new version of the sex-gender relation in which biological sex is no longer understood as determining social gender. Instead, their relationship is understood reflexively (ibid.3).

In the following section of the text, the reader can delve into this tense relationship from which insights will be gleaned into what connects the end of the Polish state with the transgenerational trauma of losing one's homeland. This trauma could probably have led to a certain perception among individuals affected by this loss.

Specifically, they might see themselves and their socio-cultural identities as a product of painful periods during which their homeland was under occupation, thus giving rise to a 'foreign', socially-related construction.

In parallel, Bourdieu's Algeria study from the 1950s will be addressed, since it depicts the Kabyle population during similar periods of occupation. This might also be informative when it comes to so-called gender-independent habitus breaks among populations who have been repeatedly subjugated.

### III. 'THE GENETIC MEMORY'. EXAMINATION OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF HABITUS BREAKS, WHICH COULD HAVE DIFFERENT NEGATIVE EFFECTS DUE TO TRAUMAS IN THE HISTORY OF PEOPLES

The birth of Poland is dated back to the year 966. In modern times, there are three democratic constitutions that were adopted before 1800: the US constitution of 1787, the French constitution of 1793 and the Polish-Lithuanian constitution of 3 May 1791, in which the Poles established the separation of powers, civil rights as well as the democratic majority principle. The political privileges of the nobility were drastically restricted. Shortly afterwards, however, Poland was 'punished' for the non-absolutist path it had taken. Overall, the country was divided three times. Poland's second bloody trauma that followed was called National Socialism. No other country had to make more human sacrifices in relation to its population: Of almost 35 million Poles, 6 million perished in the Second World War - almost one in five. (Accessed on 17.02.2025 at: A history full of trauma | taz.de.)

At this point, I would also like to mention a sensitive topic, which deals with the implicit psychological dimensions of culture that are probably (also) passed on to next generations via national trauma, including traces of memory and symptoms of traumatic experiences. One conceivable consequence of historical periods

with multiple occupying powers, during which the native population had to change both surnames and nationalities several times, would be the development of an 'unstable' or 'diffuse' national-ethnic perception of identity.

Sigmund Freud eventually coined the term 'archaic inheritance' for this in his 1937 essay 'Moses and the Monotheistic Religion' (Freud, 1940ff., GW XVI: 204f.). This includes 'not only dispositions, but contents (...), traces of memory of the experiences of earlier generations' (Freud, 1940ff., GW XVI: 206), which have an effect on the unconscious of subsequent generations (cf. Weigel, 2006: 139ff.; 2010b). The question of the transgenerational transmission of cultural experiences became even more relevant in the 1970s, when striking trauma symptomatology was observed in the children of Holocaust survivors (Weigel, 1999; 2006: 141). At the beginning of his Algeria study, Bourdieu studied Arab tribes in order to explore the transition of the local political-economic system that was bound to change social structures and their rules forever. Consequently, the archaic, traditional system in which the Kabyle tribes<sup>5</sup> had been socialised and educated for thousands of years, was experiencing cracks and habitual ruptures.

These processes of transformation arose as two very different cultural codes, those of France and Algeria, confronted each other. With the introduction of French colonialism into the Maghreb states, the traditional Arab social structure in Algeria underwent massive economic and political upheavals, whose marks on the country are still visible today. However, these changes cannot always be construed as purely positive and beneficial for the formerly subjugated countries.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Bourdieu's field research

<sup>5</sup> This book was published in German in 1979 under the title 'Entwurf einer Theorie der Praxis auf der ethnologischen Grundlage der kabyllischen Gesellschaft'.

<sup>6</sup> His studies range from ethnological analyses of Kabyle society to detailed lifestyle analyses of late capitalist consumer society. His extensive oeuvre includes works on the reproduction of social inequality through the education system, analyses of the social use of photography, food and leisure, socio-analyses of the use of photography, food and leisure, socio-analyses of intellectuals and the lower classes and research into the reality-generating power of the media.

in Algeria coincided with the complete collapse of the local agricultural subsistence economy. (Steiner 2001: 3). Amid a rapidly advancing process of industrialisation and the emergence of monetary exchange relations, Algeria suddenly became entangled in world market dependencies. In addition, the French government issued a colonial decree converting what had previously been communal property into private property. This in turn created a huge and underemployed rural proletariat, which gradually migrated to the cities as well as to France. The new economic system in Algeria therefore was the legacy of French colonialism. This imposed system initiated a structural change for which those affected had not yet developed adequate behavioural options. A great discrepancy became apparent between the behavioural patterns demanded by the new economic reality and the behavioural patterns of the rural and urban sub-proletariat (ibid.: 11).

In his view, thanks to generative behavioural patterns, individuals are able to develop strategies for appropriate behaviour in a given situation. In the Kabyle villages, for instance, traditional cultural values such as the sense of honour, which the indigenous Kabyles have freely at their disposal in daily life without being aware of it, changed (cf. Steiner 2001: 17). The typical Kabyle house and the placement of the objects inside also changed as the foreign culture of the colonists increasingly permeated the everyday life of the Kabyles. Here, Bourdieu fundamentally develops a binary opposition and emphasises that functionalist explanations are not sufficient in order to understand the structures that this system has produced. All objects of the house are part of this symbolic system (cf. Steiner 17ff). Bourdieu also scrutinises the marriage practices of the Kabyles in order to document their respective transformation, how phenomena and strategies can be interpreted in modern and postmodern contemporary societies and what consequences this may have for transformation societies. (Reflecting on the relationship between theory and practice). Bourdieu's praxeological approach and its theoretical elements emerged

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Areas such as the sociology of religion, law, art and gender are represented in his work (Steiner 2001: 3).

from the theoretical reflection of his empirical studies and, as the 'Draft of a theory of practice on the ethnological basis of Kabyle society' makes clear, have been continuously refined (cf. Steiner 2001: 33ff).

'...The phenomena of social, economic and personal decay must obviously be understood as the result of the interaction of external forces (penetration of Western civilisation) and internal forces (original structures of indigenous civilisation)...' (Bourdieu 1958: 54).

In his essay on 'The Problem of Generations', Karl Mannheim<sup>7</sup> also deals with the fact that people connect their formative or decisive experiences with each other in certain transgenerational frameworks. The parental trauma is not only experienced differently by the descendants, but in some cases also in opposite ways, so that it can be perceived as both a curse and a legacy by a single person (cf. Auerbach 23). One possible explanation for this mental orientation could again be the inherited Polish trauma of the long occupation. Mannheim describes the unintentional reproduction of the transgenerational trauma as an unconscious cultural asset.

Here, reference is made to the level of abstraction that attempts to connect the existent with the non-existent with Mannheim's concept of contagion. For Mannheim, the alternative is

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<sup>7</sup> Mannheim's idea of a 'contagion' is intended to remind us of conjunctive thinking and conjunctive spaces of experience (subjective cognition), which can, for example, protect people from alienation. The contagion could be understood as a kind of 'community of origin' in which conjunctive knowledge and conjunctive spaces of experience (communities that contain stretches of shared experience) are present (cf. Mannheim 1935, 1980). Karl Mannheim's 1928 treatise 'The Problem of Generations' has had a significant impact on the field of research in the social sciences. However, other disciplines such as history and cultural studies also refer to Mannheim's concept of generations. In contrast to biologicistic social theories, Mannheim attempted to theoretically link generational and social change. For Mannheim, the difference between generational storage and generational context lay in the culturally organised stratification of consciousness and experience (...). Generation building is a communalisation process that is predominantly localised in the public sphere and is therefore the object and result of collective understandings (cf. Jurait 2011: 1ff.).

another concept of cognition that reflects the special relationship between subject and object. Instead of abstracting and grasping an object or a person purely rationally and supposedly objectively, this concept seeks to define the special relationship that arises during the process of cognition. Mannheim uses the concept of contagion for this purpose. Mannheim describes this special feeling of unity with the object, which is preceded by any objectification and abstraction into indirect language, as contagion. In this contagion, the self, the soul, is touched by an object. This object is absorbed into the 'self-circle' and forms a unity with the individual, thus leading to a fusion. Only through this existential oneness can there be a tangible subject-object relationship. Mannheim therefore seeks to show that we can only truly recognise and comprehend an object when we enter into an existential, specific relationship with it. Only by taking in the object, by merging it with ourselves, is it possible to truly understand the object, the relationship to the object, as well as ourselves. In this context, any absorption of an object into the circle of the self is seen as contact. It is not always clear when it is possible to speak of contagion in Mannheim's work, and what really constitutes such a relationship. However, Mannheim makes it clear above all that touching or being touched by the other does not occur via already objectified forms of expression (which already represent an abstraction). As Mannheim explains 'contagion',<sup>8</sup> it is a special feeling of unity with the object that includes all objectification and abstraction in indirect language (cf. Oberfeld 2010). On the other hand, however, in understanding, we grasp mental realities that belong to a certain experiential space and that have special, existential, perspectivistic meanings (Mannheim 1980: 271f). The theoretical approach for a possible answer to these questions is based on

<sup>8</sup> Mannheim's idea of contagion represents a possible way out for people in an alienated environment. In his cultural sociological work 'A sociological theory of culture and its recognisability (subjunctive and communicative thinking)', he explains and discusses possible forms of recognition and understanding, pointing out the problems of modern societies. At the same time, however, Mannheim also outlines a solution to everyday alienation by referring to contagion and a return to this form of cognition (Oberfeld 2010: 10).

habitus theory, namely through the consequences of Bourdieu's after-effects (1962).

During Bourdieu's aforementioned fieldwork in Algeria in 1976a and 1976b the philosopher experienced an exceptionally brutal colonial war, which shook him deeply, as the Kabyle societies were torn apart by existing anachronisms and social contradictions, which in turn led to numerous changes and transformations ('transformations of habitus',<sup>9</sup> which refer to one constitutively multidimensional dimension of habitus (cf. *ibid*, p. 285ff.) and which can therefore lead to habitus breaks). What is important here is that '...As a product of history, the habitus produces individual and collective practices, i.e. history, according to the schemata produced by history; it ensures the active presence of previous experiences, which are reflected in every organism in the form of perception, thought and action schemata and which seek to ensure the consistency and constancy of practices over time much more reliably than any formal rules and explicit norms...' (Bourdieu 1987b: 101). For our argument regarding the title of this essay, which addresses the consequences of multiple foreign occupations in Poland, causal connections could be assumed, which, via manifold identity irritations and diffusions, have given rise to some sort of hybrid identities - 'objects' - that still bear the stamp of their occupiers to the present day via the foreign hegemonic culture. Therefore, even today it is not unusual that the population of Silesians still finds itself in a national and ethnic ambivalence, in which a Silesian or Czech ethnicity, the German ethnic minority or the genuinely Polish population come into play.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The habitus (orientation framework as a collective phenomenon, referred to as primordial sociality: see Bohnsack 2013b) can (also) be understood in its concrete socio-historical context, which is determined by participation in social practices and thus represents a genuinely social phenomenon. (cf. Eva-Maria cited in Bourdieu 1987b: 100ff.).

<sup>10</sup> Poles make up 95.5% of the population. The largest minorities are the Silesians (2.1%) and the Kashubians (0.6 %). The German minority makes up only 0.3% of the population. Their numbers have continued to decline since the democratic transition in Poland due to emigration to Germany. State Centre for Political Education (2016): Society

*'... Implicit knowledge is a historically produced solution to a crisis (probation) and can 'at any time again fall into a crisis of validity' or 'have currently lost its validity'...' (Oevermann 2006, p. 105).*

But what about the connection between experienced traumas, transgenerational transmission and thus identity dilemmas, which is (also) being investigated by today's molecular biology?

It is the multifaceted field of epigenetics that has dedicated itself to these questions. Epigenetics is a branch of biology that deals with heritable changes that do not involve a change in the DNA sequence. It is assumed that these changes are transmitted through a combination of chemical modifications of DNA (e.g. addition of methyl molecules; DNA methylation), similar modifications of histones and proteins that surround DNA molecules, and RNA molecules that pass on the genetic code present in DNA sequences (cited in Bohacek / Mansuy, 2015, 2021: 280).

This type of inheritance challenges the conventional concept of heredity, which assumes that only genetic factors are involved. Instead, transmission does not depend on the DNA sequence, which serves as the genetic code, but implies mechanisms such as certain signalling pathways that alter the activity of the genetic code without changing the sequence. This is known as epigenetics. These mechanisms are activated in response to various environmental influences. Their modification can be passed on to the offspring and may lead to certain traits in the offspring, sometimes across generations (Bohacek / Mansuy 2015). This form of transmission is referred to as transgenerational epigenetic inheritance when it affects individuals over several generations (Jawaid / Mansuy 2021: 277). The idea that psychological trauma leads to effects that are potentially inheritable is of great importance to society, considering how many individuals have been traumatised by current and recent conflicts (ibid: 279).

in Poland. Accessed on 19.02.2025 under: Poland Society - Minorities.

Social trauma could be both a clinical and a socio-psychological category. As a clinical category, it defines a group of post-traumatic disorders caused by organised social violence or genocide. In this case, a social group is the target of planned persecution and therefore not only the individual but also their social environment is affected (cf. Hamburger 2022: 13). As a psychoanalyst, Vamik Volkan has worked extensively on the consequences of war, displacement and migration for several decades. He is convinced of the fundamental importance of the transgenerational transmission of imprints from the country of origin and the processing of traumatic stress, which is often deposited in the next generation. Finally, Volkan looks at the psychology of the foreigner, at definitions of one's own in relation to the foreigner, which have their traces in the collective memory (cf. Streeck-Fischer 2016: 112).

Instead of a conclusion, I would like to finish my essay with a final hypothesis as to whether stormy historical passages not only influence the national collective memory. In particular, the modern search for genetic traces of our inheritance could shed more light on such socio-psychological issues as in our case, namely hybrid and ambiguous identity constructs that can be deciphered via habitual ruptures caused by a series of national tragedies.

The concept of memory and remembrance, beyond a fixed attribution to a particular discipline, still holds many undiscovered 'secrets' and includes preserved codes for collectively shared histories and cultures of memory that can either unite or divide most nations across the world. They can be both the source and origin of deeper insights. This will be the subject of my upcoming empirical study, which is currently being prepared at a Polish university, and to which I will dedicate myself with a passion for Poland and scientific curiosity, and as a 'searching' migrant who left her native Poland as a teenager.

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