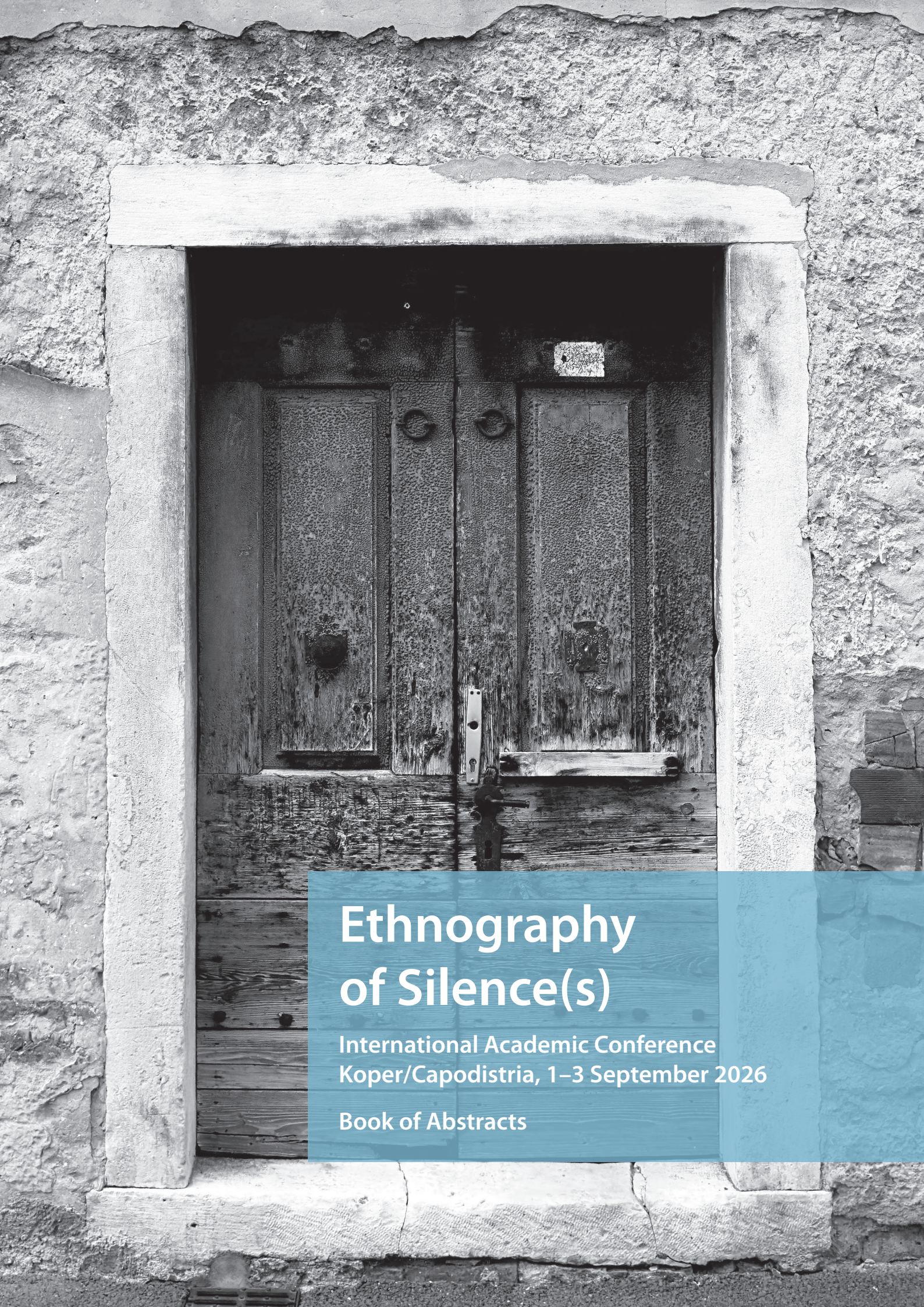




Ethnography of Silence(s)

International Academic Conference
Koper/Capodistria, 1–3 September 2026

Book of Abstracts



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Organised by
University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities
in collaboration with the University Library

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About the Conference

The Department of Anthropology and Cultural Studies is proud to host the international conference 'Ethnography of Silence(s)' at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska, Slovenia in collaboration with the University Library. The faculty is located by the Adriatic coast in the old and beautiful Mediterranean bilingual town of Koper/Capodistria, just 15 km from the city of Trieste/Trst and 18 km from a picturesque township of Piran/Pirano.

The conference addresses silence in ethnographic research, with a central question of how to understand, interpret and methodologically grasp silence in its diverse aspects.

Silence does not merely denote the absence of speech or voice; it can also function as a powerful medium of communication. It may be filled with words, affects, emotions, or it can be embedded in bodily memory practices or embodied memory. In ethnographic research, which traditionally focuses on observation and verbal expression, silence has not yet been fully explored. The conference therefore aims to focus specifically on four key aspects:

- **Silence in Relation to Memory, Conflict and Trauma.** Scholars of collective memory have drawn attention to representations of the past and to silences and omissions connected to memorial conflicts. Silence, for example, may be linked to repression, particularly when individuals bury their traumatic or painful memories in the unconscious. In such cases, trauma or intergenerational trauma can be understood as an inability to verbalise and narrate experience.
- **Silence and Structural Violence.** Structural violence – the violence produced by institutional structures that hold power in society – often creates conditions for silence, oblivion or even structural amnesia. Silence can be triggered by various factors of structural violence, creating social suffering, inequality and other forms of material dispossession and political domination. This panel is particularly interested in exploring silence in relation to invisible workers, migrants and other social groups who struggle within the neoliberal dystopia of precarity and dispossession.
- **Silence and Indigenous Peoples.** Silence can be linked to the concept of historical or intergenerational trauma of colonialism. Critical Indigenous studies have identified both colonial and neo-colonial practices of dispossession as key elements of structural violence, creating the chain of everyday violence (the violence continuum), silence and multiple layers of trauma in Indigenous communities. This panel brings together scholars with interests in Indigenous studies who have dealt with silence in Indigenous or settler-colonial contexts.
- **Silence and Reconciliation.** Where there is silence, there is struggle. It can be internalised or tacitly voiced through silence itself. When scholars trace the silent struggle, the search for reconciliation narratives become imperative to decode the buried silent legacies of heavy pasts, grounded in violent and traumatic conflicts. Once silence is voiced, reconciliation can be achieved. This panel invites scholars to provide insights and deepen the reflection on this specific aspect of silence to possibly find a common path towards the reconciliation of silent pasts in the pursuit of a peaceful present and a more inclusive future.

Keynote speakers:

- **Michèle Baussant**, CNRS, Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique, Paris, France. Her work explores memory as both a source of solidarity and a

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mechanism of exclusion, with a focus on the post-colonial displacement of minority populations in the Maghreb and the Middle East.

- **Tracey McIntosh**, Ngāi Tūhoe tribe, Te Wānanga o Waipapa (School of Māori Studies and Pacific Studies), University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. Tracey's recent research focuses on incarceration (particularly of Māori and Indigenous peoples) and issues pertaining to state care, poverty, inequality and social justice. Her earlier work looked at extreme death experiences (genocide, war, torture), particularly in the way they relate to what she calls systematic suffering. Tracey's research draws on a critical Indigenous studies framework.
- **Kathrin Pabst**, Stiftelsen Statsraad Niels Aalls Minde, Norway: Kathrin has extensive experience in museum ethics, particularly in addressing untold and traumatic themes. Her project 'Identity on the Line' received the European Museum Academy Prize, and her book *Granddad's Bunker* received a Norwegian literature prize.

Programme

Tuesday, 1 September 2026

12.00–13.00 Conference Registration (Faculty of Humanities, Titov trg 5, Koper/Capodistria, lobby)

13.00–13.15 Conference Opening (Burja 1 lecture theatre): Klavdija Kutnar (University Rector) and Aleksander Panjek (Dean)

Panel 1: Memories and Silences in Borderland Region

Chair: Katharina Eisch-Angus (University of Graz)

13.15–13.45 Katja Hrobat Virloget (University of Primorska) | An Ethnography of Silence and Reconciliation: Trauma, Memory Conflicts, and Ethnic Identities in the Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus

13.45–14.15 Petra Kavrečič Božeglav (University of Primorska) | Slovenes and Italians Living in the Karst Area of Italy: Stories, Conflicts, Ignorance and Perceptions

14.15–14.45 Urška Lampe (Institute IRRIS, Centre for Oral History) | Prescriptive Forgetting or Humiliated Silence? The Case of Post-Second World War Mass Killings in Slovenia

14.45–15.15 Anja Moric (Institute for Ethnic Studies, Ljubljana) | Interrupted Continuities: Silence, Heritage and Reconciliation in Gottschee

15.15–15.45 Daniel Wutti (University of Teacher Education Carinthia) | Challenging National Narratives with Memory Cultures of Minorities

15.45–16.00 Coffee break (The University Library of the University of Primorska, Trubarjeva 1, Koper/Capodistria)

16.00–18.00 **The Shadows of Silence:** film screening and discussion (The University Library of the University of Primorska, Trubar Hall, Trubarjeva 1, Koper/Capodistria), film directors: Jure Kreft and Darko Sintič

Project RE 4 Healing: Crossborder Remembrance, Reconnection, Restoring and Resilience (European Commission, Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme [CERV])

Speakers: Katja Hrobat Virloget (University of Primorska, project leader), Jure Kreft, and Darko Sintič (Fixmedia), Manca Švara (Epiona, project partner) and Špela Španžel (Ministry of Culture, Directorate for Cultural Heritage, associated partner); chaired by Daniel Wutti (University of Teacher Education Carinthia, project partner)

18.00–20.30 Welcome dinner at Armerija Hall (University of Primorska, Titov trg 4, Koper/Capodistria)

Wednesday, 2 September 2026

9.00–9.45 **Keynote 1:** Kathrin Pabst (Stiftelsen Statsraad Niels Aalls Minde, Norway) | Working with the Untold: Silence, Family Secrets and the Long-Term Consequences of War

Panel 2: Memory, Conflict and Trauma

Chair: Steve Matthewman, University of Auckland

10.00–10.30 Petra Hamer (University of Ljubljana) | When Silence Speaks: Ethnographic Encounters with Absence and Trauma in Prijedor, Bosnia-Herzegovina

10.30–11.00 Emina Zoletić (University of Warsaw) | Beyond Silence: Generational Negotiations of War Memory in Post-Conflict Bosnia

11.00–11.30 Mihaela Trișcă Zăgreanu (University George Emil Palade of Târgu Mureș) | Unaddressed Histories and Institutional Silence as Catalysts of Interethnic Conflict

- 11.30–12.00 Bleona Kurteshi (University of Regensburg) | Heroic Recognition and the Persistence of Silence regarding Wartime Sexual Violence in Kosovo
- 12.00–12.30 Nikola Puharić (Serbian National Council in Croatia) and Branka Vierda (Independent Researcher) | Producing Absence: Silence, Violence and Post-War Governance after Operation Pocket-93
- 12.30–13.50 Lunch (Gostilna Labirint, Čevljarska ulica 9, Koper/Capodistria)
- Panel 3: Silence and Structural Violence**
Chair: Marko Galič, University of Primorska
- 14.00–14.30 Ana Bezić (Stanford University) | Silence as Uncomfortable Labour and Landscapes of Care in Srb, Croatia
- 14.30–15.00 Eino Heikkilä (University of Jyväskylä) | Listening to What Is Not Said: Silence, Ageing and Communal Living
- 15.00–15.30 Nina Vodopivec (Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana) | The Silencing of Industrial Labour: Acts of Structural Violence
- 15.30–16.00 Sanja Potkonjak (University of Zagreb) | Progress That Doesn't Listen: Energy, Dispossession and Developmental Futures on the Lika River
- 16.00–16.30 Nastja Slavec (ZRC SAZU, Ljubljana) | Ambiguous Traces: On the Silences and Muted Narratives of the Basque Political Conflict
- 16.30–17.00 Coffee break
- 17.00–17.45 **Keynote 2:** Michèle Baussant, CNRS, Institut des Sciences Sociales du Politique, Paris, France | From Forced Displacement to the Memory of Displacement: Remembrance, Forgetting and Silence
- 17.45–18.00 (Armerija Hall): Exhibition 'In the Garden of the (In)visibles' by Roberta Altin, Giuseppe Grimaldi (University of Trieste), Katja Hrobat Virloget (University of Primorska) and Alessandro Monsutti (Geneva Graduate Institute)

Thursday, 3 September 2026

- 9.00–9.45 **Keynote 3:** Tracey McIntosh, School of Māori and Pacific Studies, University of Auckland, Aotearoa/New Zealand | Silence, State Violence and Civil Indifference: Māori Experiences of Abuse in Care in New Zealand

Panel 4: Approaching Silence in Indigenous World and Beyond

Chair: Manca Švara, Epiona Institute, Koper/Capodistria

- 10.00–10.30 Maja Ćurčić (Sociantro Institute) | Hyper-Incarceration of Māori: Narratives of Imprisonment and the Violence Continuum
- 10.30–11.00 Martina Tonet (University of Primorska) | The Struggle for Cultural Survival on the Navajo-Hopi Disputed Land: Decoding Silence in a Diné Remote Community
- 11.00–11.30 Steve Matthewman (University of Auckland) | The Residential Red Zone as a Haunted Landscape: Explorations in the Ethnography of Silence
- 11.30–12.00 Eszter Gyorgy (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) | Archival Silences: The Memory of the Roma Settlement Clearances in Pesterzsébet
- 12.00–12.30 Marko Galič (University of Primorska) | Intergenerational Trauma and Healing or What Can We Learn from Indigenous Epistemologies
- 12.30–13.50 Lunch (Gostilna Labirint, Čevljarska ulica 9, Koper/Capodistria)

Panel 5: From Silence to Resistance

Chair: Martina Tonet, University of Primorska

- 14.00–14.30 Richard Papp (Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest) | Absence and Silence in Hungarian Holocaust Memory

- 14.30–15.00 Asya Gefter (Artist and Researcher, Trieste) | Stories of Not Asking and Not Telling: The Architecture of the Vacuum
- 15.00–15.30 Ana Dević (University of Bologna and KU Leuven) | Aesthetics of Silence and Absence in Memory Activism: Against the Silencing of War Atrocities in Serbia
- 15.30–16.00 Christina Sterniša (University of Graz) | Listening to the Ambiguity of Silence: Women's Resistance and Postwar Memory in Greece
- 16.00–16.30 Coffee break
- 16.30–16.45 (Reading Room, Level 5): Exhibition 'Sixty Years of the Black Panther Party' by Marko Galič, Andrea Gorenc Lonžarič, Dora Plantarič and anthropology students from University of Primorska
- The Closing Roundtable: Towards Reconciliation**
- 16.45–17.45 The Closing Discussion and Reflection with Tracey McIntosh, Michèle Baussant and Kathrin Pabst, chaired by Katja Hrobat Virloget and Daniel Wutti
- 17.45 The Closing Song (Marko Galič, Martina Tonet)
- 18.00 Conference dinner (Capra Restaurant, Grand Hotel Koper, Pristaniška ulica 3, Koper/Capodistria)

An Ethnography of Silence and Reconciliation: Trauma, Memory Conflicts and Ethnic Identities in the Istrian-Dalmatian Exodus

The paper examines the enduring silences resulting from traumatic experiences and memory conflicts in the regions of Istria and Zadar in Dalmatia, which underwent the shifting of state borders from fascist Italy to socialist Yugoslavia after World War II. Case studies follow silenced memories across diverse geographic and social settings: the Slovenian minority in Italy, the Italians from Istria and Zadar in Croatia who remained after the Istrian-Dalmatian exodus in Yugoslavia, and post-war Istrian refugees (*esuli*) in the Trieste area and Australia, including people of both Italian and Slovenian identity. The novelty of the paper lies in the comparative research on Zadar in Dalmatia within the framework of the project Hybrid Heritage (NextGenerationEU). As part of the project Ethnography of Silence(s), the paper asks how anthropologists – accustomed to words, narration and observation – can address silence? Silence is approached as a product of power dynamics, memory conflicts and unarticulated trauma, but also from the researcher's positionality. Unspoken memories may be transmitted intergenerationally through embodied experiences, creating 'victims' of an unexperienced past. As a means to survive, silence – as memory itself – can connect people and become the foundation of collective identities, as seen in the case of the Italians who stayed in Yugoslavia. In these multilingual and multiethnic border regions, it is also important to acknowledge the silencing of fluid and hybrid ethnic identities resulting from the post-war redefining and renegotiation of ethno-national categories. Finally, the paper addresses the consequences of the anthropological articulation of silence. Within the framework of the RE4Healing project: Cross-border Remembrance, Reconnection, Restoring and Resilience (EU Commission [CERV]), it offers reflections on the elements necessary to foster dialogue among groups with competing narratives of victimhood, thereby promoting healing and reconciliation in societies torn apart by divisive collective memories.

Katja Hrobat Virloget is a full professor and Head of the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Studies at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska in the bilingual borderland town of Koper/Capodistria, Slovenia. She has recently received several prizes for her reprinted book on silences and conflict memories of the Istrian exodus. The book Silences and Divided Memories was published in Slovenian (University of Primorska Press), English (Berghahn Books) and Italian (BEE). Katja was also nominated for the 'Excellent in Science 2022' research recognition by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, signifying a national ethnological prize and a university award. She is the leader of the research project Ethnography of Silence(s) (ARIS P6-0460), the international project RE4Healing: Cross-border Remembrance, Reconnection, Restoring, and Resilience (EU Commission [CERV]), and the research and infrastructure programme ARIS P6-0460, 'Heritage as an Object and Reflection of Social Processes.' Her main fields of research are the anthropology of memory, silences, massive migrations and intangible heritage.

Slovenes and Italians Living in the Karst Area of Italy: Stories, Conflicts, Ignorance and Perceptions

The paper presents the research conducted within the project *Ethnography of Silence(s)*, focusing on the Slovene/Yugoslav-Italian border region established after World War II. This politically charged period was marked by ideological tensions, state negotiations and shifting boundaries that deeply affected local communities. The study examines how individuals from Slovene and Italian communities experienced, interpreted and adapted to these imposed conditions of coexistence and division. Emphasis is placed on lived experiences shaped by migration, deprivation and contestation. Employing oral history methodology, the research analyses personal narratives, emotions and memories as key sources of ethnographic insight. By foregrounding silenced or marginalised voices, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how political borders are internalised and negotiated through everyday life.

Petra Kavrečič Božeglav is an associate professor at the University of Primorska, in the Faculty of Humanities, Department of History. Her field of study is the economic and social history of tourism. She has published a scientific monograph and several scientific articles both at home and abroad. Petra has also co-edited monographs, focusing on the development of modern tourism in present-day western Slovenia and on the relationship between tourism and political ideology by revealing commemorative practices of the World War I battlefields. She is engaged in exploring relations between communities in multiethnic border regions. In her recent ethnographic research on the contested, ethnically mixed border area of present-day western Slovenia (Istria), she has observed that post-World War II communities were often confronted with traumatic experiences of the past, which were perceived and remembered in diverse and often opposing ways. Petra also participates at domestic and international conferences while being involved in national and international research projects.

Prescriptive Forgetting or Humiliated Silence? The Case of Post-Second World War Mass Killings in Slovenia

In his essay on the seven types of forgetting, Paul Connerton documented the ways in which and reasons why communities forget. He listed seven ways of forgetting and called for reflection on further types. He specifically emphasised that in academic circles, forgetting is often perceived as something negative, although this is not always the case. The contribution focuses on the significance of the collective silence surrounding the post-war killings in Slovenian society at the end of World War II. Within the framework of the newly formed Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, being in line with the central collective narrative of heroic resistance and partisan struggle, the crimes committed by this very group could not be discussed publicly. The post-war mass killings of Home Guards (*Domobranci*) and collaborators of the occupying forces were silenced and became taboo. This paper focuses on understanding the broader conditions that enabled the silencing of these narratives. I distinguish between ‘prescriptive forgetting,’ where society or the authorities imposed the idea that this silencing was in the general interest of the community (because remembering would threaten social stability and especially the new political order). ‘Humiliated silence,’ on the other hand, comes from below – from the humiliated group itself – and derives from humiliation and shame. However, although it has disappeared from public discourse, this memory survives privately in the communicative memory of the survivors and their relatives. I argue that this collective silence directly influenced the divisions that emerged in Slovenian society the moment the silence was broken. This process began in the 1980s and culminated with Slovenia’s independence in 1991. Even today, Slovenia witnesses two competing collective narratives about what ‘really happened’ during World War II. These narratives significantly impact society, while politicians continue to fuel and exploit this division.

Urška Lampe is a historian and Research Associate at the Institute IRRIS, where she heads the Centre for Oral History. Her research focuses on the period from the World War II to the present, with an initial emphasis on Italian prisoners of war and post-war reprisals in the Italo-Slovenian borderland. Her latest research focuses on cultural memory in Slovenia, former Yugoslavia and borderland contexts. She is a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow (Ca’ Foscari University of Venice), an editor, and the author of numerous peer-reviewed scientific articles and a scientific monograph. She is the curator of the trilingual travelling and online exhibition ‘Memorie liberate/Osvobojeni spomini/Unchained Memories’ and the leader of the project Border Echoes: Borderland Memories of Authoritarian Pasts: Building an Oral History Hub for Divided Societies (Horizon Europe WIDERA – Twinning).

Interrupted Continuities: Silence, Heritage and Reconciliation in Gottschee

This paper discusses Kočevska/Gottschee region in south-eastern Slovenia as a landscape where silence has become a key medium through which a violent twentieth-century past is simultaneously silenced, remembered, negotiated and contested. For centuries, Slovenian- and German-speaking (Gottscheer) communities coexisted in this multilingual borderland. This long coexistence was fractured by the rise of nationalism, Nazism and the resettlement of the Gottscheers in 1941/42. This was followed by post-war expulsions, killings and the near disappearance of the Gottscheer presence from public spaces. The region's cultural heritage was not only interrupted but actively removed: villages were left in ruins, churches and chapels were destroyed, and German toponyms were translated or erased. Kočevska thus became a landscape of absence, marked by disrupted settlement continuity and a difficult, often avoided heritage. Drawing on multi-sited ethnographic research among Gottscheers in Slovenia, Austria, Germany, the USA and Canada, the paper traces how silence operates on multiple levels: in Slovenian national memory that is shaped by anti-German narratives and post-war erasures; in Gottscheer diaspora where memory is structured around victimhood and selective remembrance; and among post-war settlers in Kočevska whose relationship to local cultural heritage was weakened by displacement and the absence of intergenerational transmission. In each of these contexts, silence functions not merely as absence, but as a social practice that structures belonging, responsibility and historical interpretation. The paper argues that reconciliation requires neither a single shared narrative nor the resolution of all historical conflicts, but the careful voicing of layered memories and the recognition of shared losses. Recent heritage initiatives – restoration, language and folklore revitalisation – offer practical openings for dialogue and a more inclusive approach to Gottschee's forgotten heritage that moves beyond binary national frameworks in the pursuit of a peaceful present and an inclusive future.

Anja Moric is a political scientist, cultural anthropologist and a researcher at the Institute for Ethnic Studies in Ljubljana. She is active in the field of minorities, migration and cultural heritage, and she is also the director of a non-governmental organisation, the Putscherle Institute, Centre for Research, Culture and Cultural Heritage Preservation. The organisation deals with the preservation of cultural heritage in the Kočevska/Gottschee region. She is the author of five exhibitions, three ethnographic films and the blog www.gottscheerblog.com.

Challenging National Narratives with Memory Cultures of Minorities

In the dramatic 20th century, (new) European nation states established historical narratives in order to strengthen national identities, evoke large group identities and (re)define themselves. The memories of ethnic and national minorities were often found at the very bottom end of the 'hierarchy of memories.' After all, they mostly challenged these one-dimensional narratives, contradicted them, and pointed out their incompleteness. But recently, their potential has been increasingly recognised: memory cultures and narratives of minorities hold great social potential precisely because they hold up a mirror to national communities and enable learning by deconstructing what has been valid until now. In Kärnten/Koroška/Carinthia, a southern Austrian traditional bilingual region, it took until the 2010s for the deportation of Carinthian Slovenes to be 'elevated' from collective silence to the cultural memory of the province. However, partisan struggle by Carinthian Slovenes against the Nazis is still received with ambivalence, as can be seen in Carinthia's landscape of monuments, which is currently still very German nationalist in character. Nevertheless, the unspoken, repressed and concealed is finding its way to the surface. A final, highly visible 'symptom' of this was the disproportionate police operation at the Peršmanova domačija/Peršmanhof, the only museum in southern Austria dedicated to the history of the Carinthian Slovenes during the NS era and their resistance against the Nazi regime. Moreover, the reactions to this police action are symptomatic – for a section of society that wants an end to the silence and new, more inclusive narratives. This paper addresses memories and silences in the context of national/ethnic minorities in borderland regions with practical implications from Kärnten/Koroška/Carinthia.

Daniel Wutti is employed as a professor of multilingualism and transcultural education at the University of Teacher Education in Carinthia, Austria. He holds a PhD in social psychology. Daniel has also worked as a psychotherapist (psychodrama) with descendants of NS victims and refugees. He is currently participating as a researcher in the Horizon Fosterlang project (University of Warsaw) and the CERV Re4Healing project (University of Primorska, Slovenia; EU Commission [CERV]). In the past, he led several projects on trauma and memory culture in the Alps-Adriatic cross-border region and is active as a board member of several memorial associations in Carinthia/Koroška/Kärnten, Austria.

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Working with the Untold: Silence, Family Secrets and the Long-Term Consequences of War

Silence plays a central role in the Untold in general, and the long-term consequences of war and forced migration in particular. In families across Europe, experiences from World War II and later conflicts were not openly discussed. Yet what remained unspoken often continued to shape individuals, relationships and societies. Pabst draws on extensive project work on the intergenerational consequences of war and migration, including the EU-funded project Identity on the Line, as well as research and public engagement related to the book *Granddad's Bunker*. Based on more than 200 in-depth interviews conducted in seven European countries, as well as a personal exploration of the consequences of the Untold, the lecture explores how family secrets, concealment and silence influence children and grandchildren of those who experienced war and displacement. Participants will gain insight into how silence functions in different ways: as protection, as shame, as loyalty, as unresolved grief, and sometimes as a strategy for survival. Pabst also addresses how institutions – particularly museums – can approach such untold histories. What happens when personal narratives are invited into public spaces? What ethical dilemmas arise when professionals work with emotionally charged material? How can one balance care for individuals who share their very personal experiences with the responsibility to address difficult pasts publicly? And how can the professionals avoid emotional strain when working with vulnerable histories? By examining silence not as absence, but as an active and consequential force, the lecture contributes to the broader discussion of memory, trauma and reconciliation. It offers perspectives on how acknowledging and actively addressing the Untold may foster recognition, dialogue and more peaceful societies.

Kathrin Pabst is a Norwegian-German ethnologist and museum professional specialising in ethics, intergenerational trauma and the long-term consequences of war and forced migration. She led the EU-funded project Identity on the Line and was awarded with the European Museum Academy Prize. Her award-winning book Granddad's Bunker explores silence, family secrets and inherited memories after World War II. Pabst has delivered keynote lectures and workshops in more than 15 countries and serves on international advisory and ethics boards, including ICOM's Standing Committee for Ethics (ETHCOM). Her work connects museum practice, professional ethics and social transformation.

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When Silence Speaks: Ethnographic Encounters with Absence and Trauma in Prijedor, Bosnia-Herzegovina

This paper examines silence as an affective and epistemic condition through which mass violence is encountered and remembered in post-war Prijedor, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Focusing on the mass grave of Tomašica, it explores how silence operates not as an absence of meaning, but as a medium through which trauma, memory and the unresolved presence of the dead are negotiated. The analysis centres on an interlocutor's account of visiting Tomašica alone, where the surrounding silence is described as 'speaking loudly,' evoking imagined voices and the unsettling sense that the dead might begin to speak. This narrative foregrounds silence as a sensory and experiential phenomenon that collapses distinctions between past and present, life and death, presence and absence. Rather than functioning solely as ineffability, silence emerges here as a mode through which violence continues to shape everyday perception. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Prijedor, the paper situates this encounter within broader post-war silences structuring social life. While silence at the mass grave materialises as a site-specific trace of violence, residents living in its immediate vicinity often minimise, avoid, or deny the site's existence or relevance in everyday discourse. Following Comte's notion of a *conspiracy of silence*, this pattern is approached not as individual ignorance or emotion, but as a collectively sustained practice of non-acknowledgment that regulates what can be publicly known and said about the past. In wider public and interethnic contexts, similar forms of silence operate as pragmatic strategies of coexistence amid contested histories and uneven justice. Theoretically, the paper engages anthropological debates on trauma, denial, and the limits of representation to argue that silence should be analysed as both a social practice and a methodological challenge. Attending ethnographically to silence, its forms, contexts and repetitions, the paper reveals how mass violence remains embedded in the present, shaping memory and constraining reconciliation in post-conflict societies.

Petra Hamer is an ethnologist and cultural anthropologist interested in (popular) music and culture in Southeastern Europe in the 20th and 21st centuries. She holds a PhD from the University of Graz, where she researched the production of popular music by Bosnian and Herzegovinian army artistic units, focusing on the question of national identity construction in a multiethnic society. Currently, she works as a postdoctoral researcher on the DEAGENCY project (No. 101095729), researching the role of the dead in contemporary Bosnian and Herzegovinian society with a focus on mass graves and political changes.

Beyond Silence: Generational Negotiations of War Memory in Post-Conflict Bosnia

The intergenerational transmission of war memories is not merely a matter of recounting the past; it is a complex social process that unfolds through narratives, silences, embodied practices and spatial encounters. In families shaped by the 1992–1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the past is continually negotiated through everyday life and relational dynamics that elevate certain experiences while suppressing or reframing others. This presentation argues that generalisation and silence function as complementary mechanisms by which wartime and post-war experiences are transformed into transgenerational narratives of identity, belonging and moral orientation. Generalisation condenses specific experiences into scripts and ethical stances, while silence operates as an ethical, affective and political instrument that bounds detail, manages risk, and orchestrates what is carried forward and how it is remembered and then transformed. To ground these claims, I synthesise insights from memory studies, narrative psychology and postmemory, alongside work on nostalgia and storytelling imagination. I also engage theoretical perspectives that treat silence as presence rather than absence – Selimović’s presence-of-absence, Virloget and Alempijević’s ethnographies of silence, Kidron’s silent-recollection and emancipation among Holocaust descendants, and Fodor and Lugossy on moral stance in intergenerational narratives. The paper’s primary contribution is a refined framework that links narrative form to social function, showing how families across generations actively negotiate the past. A notable finding is the role of younger generations in disrupting silences; this intergenerational dialogue, sometimes confrontational, shows potential for peacebuilding, challenges politically marginalised narratives, and moves beyond a simplistic ethnonational binary. Overall, the study contends that the intergenerational transmission of memory and silence is a complex social process central to identity formation and possible civic engagement in post-conflict societies.

Emina Zoletić is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Social Sciences, Faculty of Sociology, University of Warsaw. She examines the intergenerational transmission of wartime family memory in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Bosnian diaspora. She held a CEEPUS fellowship (March–June 2025) at the University of Vienna, Institute of Sociology. For her PhD research, she has been awarded the Preludium grant from the National Science Centre (Poland), the Zeit Stiftung Bucerius Scholarship, and the CE-FRES Junior Fellowship in Prague (Czech Republic). She was a Fulbright visiting researcher at Syracuse University and The New School, New York, from 2023 to 2024.

Unaddressed Histories and Institutional Silence as Catalysts of Interethnic Conflict

World War II left scars across multiple layers of societies all around the globe. In the Balkans, another traumatic chapter unfolded right after that war, as brutal communist regimes were imposed throughout the region, regimes that never addressed the war horrors local people had experienced. To observe the effects of that, my study focuses on the cases of Romania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, two states that experienced horrific events during World War II and were later sites of similar interethnic violence after the collapse of communism. In Romania, the massacres perpetrated by the troops of Miklós Horthy became taboo subjects during the communist regime. Similarly, in Yugoslavia, some of the crimes committed by the Ustaše and Chetniks were deliberately marginalised, as the newly established doctrine of ‘brotherhood and unity’ was incompatible with narratives that could reignite ethnic hatred. In both contexts, these crimes were excluded from public discourse to prevent further tensions between Romanians and the Hungarian minority in Romania, and among the different constitutive groups of Yugoslavia. We propose that forty-five years of silence and political repression were not sufficient to erase these traumatic memories. Instead, the trauma became intergenerational. In the 1990s, as communist regimes were collapsing, nationalism began to rise. Political actors manipulated and exploited the unresolved trauma of World War II, transforming decades of silence into a weapon. The past was mythologised and based on it, the ‘other’ was portrayed as an existential enemy who had to be annihilated. Thus, in March 1990, thousands of Romanians and Hungarians violently clashed in the multiethnic city of Târgu Mureș. Two years later, Bosnia and Herzegovina was plunged into a brutal war that culminated in genocide. Thus, this paper uses a comparative method to investigate the effects of unaddressed historical grievances and traumas on ethnic mobilisation and conflict in different countries, with different populations.

Mihaela Trișcă Zăgreanu currently works as a teaching assistant at University George Emil Palade of Târgu Mureș, Romania, where she teaches Roman law, Criminology, and the History of the Romanian Statehood. She is currently pursuing a PhD, with her research focusing on the 1990s war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In her doctoral thesis, she explores the conflict through the lens of oral history, the press and the ICTY’s case law, aiming to shed light on the personal narratives and lived experiences of individuals.

Heroic Recognition and the Persistence of Silence Regarding Wartime Sexual Violence in Kosovo

This paper elaborates on the historical trajectory of victims of wartime sexual violence in Kosovo, tracing the transition from total silence after the war to the battle for legal recognition, up to public representation. The adoption of the legal framework in 2013, which recognises the status of victims of sexual violence during the 1998–1999 war in Kosovo, served as a starting point for the public debate on this issue. However, public representation remains linked to national narratives, commemoration and collective national memory. Furthermore, this presentation examines how conventional commemoration has positioned the victims as subjects without agency, unifying the heterogeneous nature of their experiences into a single memorial. Analysing the rhetoric used on the only memorial dedicated to wartime sexual violence, ‘The Heroines Memorial,’ which names victims of wartime sexual violence as heroes who contributed and sacrificed to the liberation of Kosovo, this paper questions whether such representation within nationalist discourse is sufficient to open a stigma-free public conversation about wartime sexual violence in Kosovo. By examining the tension between visibility and continued silence, this paper argues that although legal recognition and memorialisation mark important shifts, silence remains deeply embedded in social attitudes toward wartime sexual violence. It questions whether incorporation into heroic national narratives is sufficient to foster a genuinely stigma-free and inclusive public conversation in post-conflict Kosovo.

Bleona Kurteshi (University of Regensburg, Germany, bleonaakurteshi@gmail.com) is a sociologist and researcher specialising in memory politics and the representation of wartime experiences in Kosovo. She is currently pursuing her PhD in Social Anthropology at the University of Regensburg, Germany. Alongside her doctoral research, she works as a teaching assistant in the Department of Sociology at the University of Prishtina. Her work examines the intersections of gender, memory and heritage, with a particular focus on how post-conflict societies construct collective narratives around trauma and victimhood. Bleona's research engages critically with issues of commemoration, representation and contested heritage in post-war contexts.

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Producing Absence: Silence, Violence and Post-War Governance after Operation Pocket-93

This research examines silence as a method, outcome and governing practice in the aftermath of Operation Pocket-93, conducted by the Croatian Army and police in September 1993 near Gospić during the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995). While dominant ethno-nationalist narratives in Croatia publicly commemorate the operation as a military success, the study interrogates the silences that structure this narrative: the suppression of civilian suffering, the marginalisation of survivor testimony, and the institutional non-recognition of war crimes. Through historiographical and legal analysis combined with testimonial sources, the research treats silence not merely as absence, but as an active social process through which violence is normalised and responsibility displaced. Drawing on survivor testimonies, accounts from veterans and refugees, military records and judicial documentation from both the ICTY and domestic courts, the authors identify constituent elements of persecution and ethnic cleansing, including killings, torture, destruction and looting of property, and the systematic concealment of crimes. The near-total absence of the pre-war population from the affected area today is analysed as an embodied and spatialised silence, produced through intertwined practices of violence, displacement and post-war governance. Special attention is given to the long-term production of silence through memory politics, commemorative practices, the role of the media and the legal rehabilitation and social presence of perpetrators. The presentation situates Operation Pocket-93 within broader patterns of institutional silencing of Serbs in Croatia during the 1990s, tracing how these practices persist into the present. Finally, the presentation introduces a digital platform developed as a counter-ethnographic intervention, designed to render silenced experiences visible, challenge dominant narratives, and contribute to public truth-telling, memory preservation and justice.

Nikola Puharić is an advisor in the Culture Department of the Serb National Council in Croatia, as well as a historian and political scientist. Branka Vierda is an independent researcher and educator from Croatia specialising in transitional justice and memory politics, with a background in law. They previously worked together at the Youth Initiative for Human Rights, a non-governmental organisation dedicated to education and advocacy for responsible dealing with the past in the Western Balkans. Both have served as programme directors at the NGO and have delivered lectures and talks, individually and jointly, at numerous domestic, regional and international academic and public conferences, panels and forums. They are co-authors of the study 'The Politics of Erasure: Operation Pocket 93 and Its Consequences' (Serb National Council Bulletin no. 25, 2025), as well as of the chapter 'The Croatian War: 1991–1995' in The New History of the Yugoslav War, edited by Jasmin Mujanović (forthcoming from Routledge, 2026).

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Silence as Uncomfortable Labour and Landscapes of Care in Srb, Croatia

'We didn't know what we had before you came,' a schoolteacher observed after realising that bundles of paper collected and disposed of by schoolchildren from a former factory were the last remaining traces of that workplace. In the small border town of Srb (Croatia), where once the sound of machines and workers' conversations structured daily rhythms, there is now silence. The disappearance of factories, the dispersal of local archives, wartime displacement of people and objects since the 1990s, and uneven return have not produced simple voids; rather, remnants of industrial and antifascist pasts circulate through private homes, NGO initiatives, and informal acts of collection. Situated within debates on silence and structural violence, this paper asks how ethnographic methods can register silence as a social and material formation – rather than as a mere absence of speech – by attending to fragments, soundscapes and the ordinary practices through which silence is produced and inhabited. Acknowledging the effects of shifting regimes of recognition that do not fully accommodate certain histories of loss and postsocialist transformation, I approach silence as uncomfortable labour – that does not fit, yet it attaches itself and continues to live in the ordinary. Drawing on long-term ethnographic and archaeological work in Srb, the paper examines how silence settles into everyday life to operate as a protective and relational condition through which communities continue to inhabit landscapes shaped by loss, political and economic uncertainty. Earlier environmental quiet – structured by rivers, forests and seasonal rhythms – once coexisted with industrial noise. With factory closures, this sonic environment shifted and new infrastructural projects now reorganise relations to land and anticipation. The struggle of how to live makes audible how 'empty' landscapes are rendered available for renewed extraction, and how silence itself becomes contested.

Ana Bezić is an archaeological anthropologist whose work bridges archaeology, heritage and critical theory. She received her Master's and PhD in Cultural and Social Anthropology from Stanford University and has held teaching and research positions in Croatia and Austria. Her research explores museum storage, memory politics and socialist modernity, often through interdisciplinary collaborations with artists and local communities. She is currently engaged in projects on industrial heritage and community-based archaeology in Lika, Croatia, as well as archival research on museum collections in Graz, Austria.

Listening to What Is Not Said: Silence, Aging and Communal Living

This paper explores silence as a form of knowledge in ethnographic research on communal senior housing and residents' well-being. Based on interviews and participant observation conducted in two communal senior houses in Helsinki, Finland, the study examines how silence emerges in everyday interactions among elderly residents and between residents and the researcher. Rather than treating silence as an absence of data or a methodological obstacle, the paper approaches it as socially and culturally meaningful. In the field, silence appeared in multiple forms: pauses in interviews when discussing living, well-being, or family relations; shared quiet moments during communal activities; and tacit understandings that structured daily life without verbal articulation. Some silences reflected generational norms of restraint and self-reliance, while others functioned as protective practices, shielding vulnerable experiences from exposure. There were also silences shaped by institutional contexts – topics that residents learned not to voice, or concerns expressed indirectly through routines, gestures and spatial practices. Methodologically, these silences challenged conventional interview-based approaches and foregrounded the importance of intensive presence, attentiveness and embodied participation. By tracing how silence was produced, maintained and occasionally broken, the paper argues that an ethnography of silences offers critical insights into well-being that remain inaccessible through spoken narratives alone. The paper contributes to discussions on ethnographic methods by demonstrating how silence operates as a mode of communication and social knowledge in later life. Attending to what is not said, and to the conditions that make silence meaningful, allows for a more nuanced understanding of communal living, ageing and well-being.

Eino Heikkilä is a postdoctoral researcher in ethnology. He received his Doctor of Philosophy degree from the Doctoral Programme in History and Cultural Heritage at the University of Helsinki in 2023. He currently works as a postdoctoral researcher in a Kone Foundation-funded project on community senior housing at the University of Jyväskylä. Heikkilä has held research positions at the Vantaa City Museum and served as editorial secretary of Ethnologia Fennica (2020–2024). He has also edited article collections in the field of ethnology.

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The Silencing of Industrial Labour: Acts of Structural Violence

This paper explores silence in relation to structural violence directed at industrial workers in Slovenia within the context of post-socialist reconfiguration, with a micro focus on deindustrialisation. Silence is understood as a social and political act through which workers' experiences and emotions are dismissed and disqualified. Structural violence operates not only through factory closures but also through political, social and bodily dispossession, depriving workers of rights, status, social value, recognition and their bodies. Its effects persist beyond the closure as workers' struggles remain largely unacknowledged. Without public recognition, these effects are individualised, manifesting in embodied forms of distress, illness and psychosocial suffering that extend to families and local communities. Rather than approaching silencing primarily through trauma or suffering, the paper emphasises the need to recognise the mechanisms that produce social pain. Loss is not neutral or natural but the outcome of structural forces that fragment working and local communities. The study situates these processes within broader political-economic transformations, framing deindustrialisation as dispossession rather than mere loss. Drawing on historical materialism and theories of embodiment, affect and attachment, it explores how structural violence is socially reproduced. The paper also reflects on researcher responsibility: interpretations can either challenge or reinforce silencing. The analysis draws on a micro-level case study of a textile factory closure, followed ethnographically in the immediate aftermath. Placed within broader research on textile deindustrialisation in Slovenia over time, the paper shows that the 'silencing of the machines' constitutes a powerful act of structural violence, enacting multiple forms of dispossession. For workers, the closure disrupted employment, social worlds, life trajectories, collective belonging and selves. Shame, humiliation and unrecognised injustice were embodied, producing distress with long-term effects on workers and communities. Even today, as restructuring continues under green or 'just' transition programmes, these processes largely ignore the political and social dimensions of labour, treating work solely as employment managed by capital and the state, while continuing to silence workers as political subjects.

Nina Vodopivec has been a research fellow at the Institute for Contemporary History since 2006. From 2010 to 2020, she worked in the Economic and Social History programme, joining the Political History programme in 2021. She has also coordinated research infrastructure programmes and an international DARIAH project, and was a Fulbright Scholar at Wittenberg University in Ohio in 2010. Her research explores post-socialist and neoliberal transformations through experiences of work, time, memory and social change. Her work focuses on the anthropology of work, industrial workers, postsocialism, gender and memory studies, the anthropology of the future and social entrepreneurship.

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Progress That Doesn't Listen: Energy, Dispossession and Developmental Futures on the Lika River

This presentation examines the socio-environmental struggles generated by hydropower development on the Lika River in rural Croatia, focusing on the Kruščica reservoir (1950s–1960s) and the ongoing Gornji Kosinj dam project, Senj II (2016–). Conceived within socialist Yugoslavia's post-World War II energy expansion, these projects framed large-scale infrastructure as inevitable progress, while marginalising rural communities and rendering their lifeworlds silent. Drawing on five years of archival, ethnographic and narrative research conducted in Zagreb, Gornji Kosinj and Mlakva, the presentation analyses how infrastructural development produces silencing through techno-ontologies that devalue rural lifeworlds. By placing socialist-era hydropower projects in dialogue with contemporary green-capitalist energy initiatives, the presentation reveals a persistent violent grammar of infrastructural power across political regimes and mediascapes. It shows how specific techno-political imaginaries rely on mediascaping to silence (manage, diffuse and contain) resistance to infrastructural violence. Tracing moments of muted consent, enforced compliance and attempts at resistance, the presentation argues that the techno-political imaginaries of energy infrastructures not only transform landscapes but also fail to listen and, in doing so, systematically silence alternative social and ecological futures.

Sanja Potkonjak is a professor of ethnology and anthropology at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb. Her research focuses on postindustrial violence and environmental injustice. She is the author of Teren za etnologue početnike (2014); Misliti etnografski: kvalitativne metode u etnologiji i kulturnoj antropologiji (2016, with Nevena Škrbić Alempijević and Tihana Rubić); and Gdje živi tvornica: etnografija postindustrijskog grada (2022, with Tea Škokić). She currently participates in several research projects, including Postscapes (NextGenerationEU), PostCity (Croatian Science Foundation) and EPP (NextGenerationEU). She is a member of the WIM (Waste in Motion) research group funded by the German Research Foundation.

Ambiguous Traces: On the Silences and Muted Narratives of the Basque Political Conflict

This paper reflects on traces of troubled personal and political histories that I observed during fieldwork encounters with sympathisers and activists of the Basque cultural and language revitalisation movement. Taking the form of unexpected comments, allusions, whispers, discomfort and reticence, these ambiguous traces reveal glimpses of their (embodied) memories and experiences of the so-called Basque political conflict. Yet, their recollections remain conspicuously incomplete, simultaneously emergent and muted in silences. Over a decade after the end of the half-century-long conflict between the Basque nationalist armed group ETA and the Spanish state's repressive forces, the official memory frames the conflict in terms of terrorists and victims. However, for Basque people who grew up and spent a significant part of their lives in an environment permeated with political activism, tension and violence, the conflict cannot be subsumed under such a straightforward and univocal representation. Rather, their fragmentary and affectively loaded memories index complex, and at times contradictory, emotional and moral orientations towards what they have lived through. Hindered by the institutional discourse on terrorism – as well as by their own mixed allegiances and a genealogy of silences spanning several generations – at present they appear unable to articulate a coherent narrative that would allow them to integrate their multifaceted and changing experiences and stances, both at a personal and a community level. Yet, the latent need to elaborate on the not-so-distant past is mutedly voiced through traces that cannot be readily analysed as just instances of traumatic memory, or of silent resistance to dominant discourses, or of secrecy around outsiders, but rather as an elusive combination of all these.

Nastja Slavec is a PhD candidate at the ZRC SAZU Postgraduate School (Ljubljana, Slovenia). Her research interests include minority language issues, linguistic anthropology and anthropological approaches to (political) subjectivity. Her PhD project is an ethnographic exploration of the intimate and sociocultural worlds of people committed to living in the minoritised Basque language in the city of Pamplona/Iruñea (Spain), where she has conducted over 18 months of fieldwork research.

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From Forced Displacement to the Memory of Displacement: Remembrance, Forgetting and Silence

This paper focuses on the links between memory, silence and forgetting, drawing on the example of mass population displacement. It begins by reviewing the analyses that have defined the concepts of memory and forgetting from a theoretical perspective, long setting aside the notion of silence, which is nevertheless better suited to revealing the dynamics of memory erasure, the absence of traces, discourse or, conversely, the inflation of certain narratives that erase others. It then examines the different scales and their articulations through which these phenomena of memory and silence occur, as well as their spatial and temporal contexts. To this end, it explores on the specificities of mass population movements and the violence associated with them, as ruptures in the frameworks of memory and the narratives produced by different actors, their silences, and the social and political uses of the past. The aim is to reflect on the lasting effects of violence and displacement on subjectivities and collective frameworks of memory, i.e., the way in which acts of violence and social and biographical ruptures are expressed, reformulated, or euphemised according to the institutional, academic, judicial, or ordinary mechanisms in which they take place.

Michèle Baussant is a research director in anthropology at the CNRS, based at the Institute for the Social Sciences of Politics (UMR7220). Her research focuses on the processes of diasporisation, dediasporisation, and rediasporisation, particularly among Jewish communities, and on the transformation of migration memories into cultural heritage.

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Silence, State Violence and Civil Indifference: Māori Experiences of Abuse in Care in New Zealand

New Zealand's Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care revealed the extensive abuse, neglect and violence experienced by children and vulnerable adults in state and faith-based institutions across Aotearoa New Zealand. While thousands of survivors shared their experiences, Māori were disproportionately represented among those harmed. This paper argues that the violence experienced by Māori in state care cannot be understood as an isolated failure of welfare institutions but must be situated within the broader context of colonisation and the ongoing exercise of state power. Drawing on scholarship on settler colonialism, Indigenous erasure, state crime, slow violence and collective memory, the paper examines how state care functioned as a mechanism through which Māori lives were regulated, disrupted and reshaped. The over-representation of Māori children in care, the fragmentation of whakapapa (genealogy) relationships, the suppression of language and culture, and the violence experienced within institutions reflected broader colonial efforts to undermine Indigenous autonomy and authority. Central to this analysis is the role of silence. Survivors frequently described not being believed, while evidence of abuse was minimised, ignored or rendered invisible within institutional and public narratives. This silence was reinforced by forms of civil indifference that normalised the suffering of children in care and distanced the public from responsibility for addressing it. Alongside this, state agencies employed practices of denial, forgetting and bureaucratic erasure that obscured the scale and significance of harm. The paper argues that state violence operates not only through direct acts of abuse but also through the production of social amnesia. By examining the intersections of testimony, silence and the public memory, it explores how survivors have challenged colonial forms of forgetting and forced abuse in care into the national consciousness, raising critical questions about accountability, historical justice and collective responsibility.

Tracey McIntosh is Ngāi Tūhoe and is Professor of Indigenous Studies. She is a Commissioner of Te Kāhui Tātari Ture: Criminal Cases Review Commission. She has recently finished her appointment as Chief Science Advisor for the Ministry of Social Development. She was the former Co-Director of Ngā Pae o te Māramatanga New Zealand's Māori Centre of Research Excellence. Her earlier work looked at extreme death experiences (genocide, war, torture) particularly in the way they relate to what she calls systematic suffering. Her work in this area has focused on the Holocaust and on the Rwandan genocide. Her recent research focuses on incarceration (particularly of Māori and Indigenous peoples) and issues pertaining to state care, poverty, inequality, and social justice.

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Hyper-Incarceration of Māori: Narratives of Imprisonment and the Violence Continuum

This paper presents narratives of Māori ex-inmates and their family members who have been affected by structural violence and its modes of dispossession. The research is situated in New Zealand – a settler-colonial society that has created specific myths of New Zealand as an egalitarian society where the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples flourishes. While negative statistics about Māori and social problems are usually loudly proclaimed, the long genealogy of New Zealand's targeted incarceration or hyper-incarceration of Māori is often forgotten or even silenced. In this paper, the over-representation of Māori in the criminal justice system is therefore not understood as a criminogenic problem, but as a wider social harm issue that has been shaped by specific historical and structural processes of dispossession. This paper brings to light Māori voices who have experienced incarceration, emphasising the destructive consequences, particularly the intergenerational trauma and the violence continuum.

Maja Ćurčić an independent researcher and co-founder of the Socianthro research institute. She finished her PhD at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, where she researched the issue of Māori hyper-incarceration under the mentorship of Māori scholars.

The Struggle for Cultural Survival on the Navajo-Hopi Disputed Land: Decoding Silence in a Diné Remote Community

Silence entails different meanings. It can indicate a state of subjugation, or it can signify a form of resistance enacted in response to a silent state of domination. Decoding the meanings of silence in socio-cultural contexts with violent histories of colonial domination and Indigenous struggle has been an important task for researchers seeking to counter the repercussions of a tacit coloniality of power that continues to coerce Indigenous lives today. This paper explores how a process of systemic domination has attempted to disrupt the lives of a Diné (Navajo) Indigenous community from Big Mountain, located on the Navajo-Hopi disputed reservation land in the state of Arizona (USA), and yet, how its members have silently and resiliently persevered to protect their way of life in the pursuit of well-being. To comprehend the dynamics between a persistent coloniality and the community's ongoing struggle, one must map the intrinsic mechanics of a violent historical legacy rooted in the reservation system. The latter was founded with the Indian Removal Act of 1830, which institutionalised the forceful removal of Indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands to make way for European settlement. Specifically relevant to the struggle of the Big Mountain community is the establishment of the Grazing District 6 in 1936 and the consequent endorsement of acts that fuelled what is today known as the 'Navajo-Hopi Land dispute.' This violent historical lineage clarifies how the fight for Indigenous cultural survival continues to manifest today through coercive measures such as the 2014 livestock impoundments, which further threatened the livelihood of the local community.

Martina Tonet is an assistant professor and research assistant at the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska. She is currently participating as a researcher in the project Ethnography of silence(s) (ARIS J6-50198), and the CERV Re4Healing: Crossborder Remembrance, Reconnection, Restoring, and Resilience project (EU Commission [CERV]). Her research focuses primarily on Indigenous struggle and minority issues in the Americas and Europe, as well as on historical trauma experienced in the above-mentioned communities.

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The Residential Red Zone as a Haunted Landscape: Explorations in the Ethnography of Silence

Damage from the Canterbury Earthquake Sequence (2010–) led to the forced removal of over 8,000 properties along the Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor, running from central Christchurch to the sea. Over 15,000 people were displaced to create a 602-hectare ‘red zone.’ This is possibly the greatest example of ‘managed’ retreat in a contemporary urban setting globally. The red zoning process was highly traumatic for impacted residents. Yet local Indigenous peoples recall an earlier trauma. They were red-zoned in the 1860s, moved to make way for the colonists’ city. The sociological project has been defined as giving voice to silences, exposing suppressed truths. In this spirit, our research seeks to do two things: (1) surface buried histories: Christchurch is a city founded on the exclusion of its first people, (2) surface buried ecologies: the settler city eradicated natural features like wetlands, built over others – like the area’s network of streams – and imported exotic plants and animals. The red zone can be seen as a haunted place. Haunting, in sociological parlance, is what happens when home ceases to shelter us, when our anchor points come undone, when what was resolved troublingly returns, and when the silenced suddenly speak. Settlement has been undone here: the land was contained; Indigenous persons were displaced. Now the land is dangerously lively. It has subsided. The water table is rising. The wetland is returning. Ngāi Tahu [the principal Māori iwi of the South Island] are an official party to disaster recovery, signed into law, while mana whenua [people with customary authority over the land] now co-govern this newly created space. This presentation considers the complexities of managed retreat at a human scale, paying attention to its affective dimensions, and to the broader challenges of ‘developing’ green space in settler societies post-disaster.

Steve Matthewman is an Ahorangi Professor in Sociology at Waipapa Taumata Rau at the University of Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand. His research interests include the sociology of disasters, STS and social theory. Recent book projects include edited collections on COVID-19 and the social sciences, and a decade of disaster experiences in Ōtautahi Christchurch (with Shinya Uekusa and Bruce Glavovich). Theoretically, his work currently explores the connections between Critical Disaster Studies and Critical Future Studies. Practically, it looks at what happens after ‘managed’ retreat.

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Archival Silences: The Memory of the Roma Settlement Clearances in Pesterzsébet

In my presentation, I aim to use the interpretative framework of *archival silence* to examine the history of Roma settlement clearances in Budapest during the state-socialist period. The first half of the presentation explores the concept relating to the invisibility of marginalised social groups in archives, with a particular focus on its applicability to the study of Roma history, taking into consideration the denaturalisation of archival sources through an ethnographic approach. This is followed by a reflection on the historical memory of the clearances of Roma settlements in light of this partly methodological, partly epistemological and interpretative challenge. How much do archival sources reveal about the intensive clearance operations carried out across the city during the 1970s and 1980s? What can they tell us about the fate of the 'protagonists' – the Roma of Budapest – or about their lives before and after the clearances? These actions can certainly be regarded as attempts at social integration in various districts; however, it remains problematic how much of their realities can be reconstructed from sources that preserve only the voices of planners and executors while omitting those of the actual subjects.

Eszter Gyorgy received her MA at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE) in Budapest, at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and her PhD in History at ELTE in 2013. Her dissertation, written about Roma cultural practices and identity building processes in the eighth district of Budapest, was published as a book in 2021. Since 2012, she has been involved in several EU projects focusing on cultural heritage, cultural participation and minority heritage. She is a senior lecturer at the Atelier Department for Interdisciplinary History, ELTE. Her fields of research and publications cover Roma cultural history, Roma heritage in Hungary and urban inequalities.

Intergenerational Trauma and Healing or What Can We Learn from Indigenous Epistemologies

Since the beginning of the 20th century, communities in South-East Europe, particularly in the so-called Western Balkans, have gone through a series of conflicts, wars and traumatic events. Through selected and refined collective memories, today's nation-states (or ethnicities within the state) continue to compete for victimhood, blaming each other for inflicting pain and violence. This paper calls for a radical change in language, concepts and practice in order to begin a common path towards reconciliation and peace. The paper draws from Indigenous epistemologies and experiences – particularly Māori – in assessing concepts and responses to intergenerational trauma, bringing the narrative of mutual understanding and liberation to the core of the restorative process. The religious and emotionally heavy term 'guilt' is substituted by 'responsibility,' while all divided social groups begin a process of *aroha* (love and compassion), *whanau-natanga* (complementarity, kinship and careful attention to relationships), *kaiti-akitanga* (guardianship, the obligation to care) and *mokopunatanga* (responsibility for the well-being of future generations). This paper calls for transformative change, learning from Indigenous peoples in a common quest for peace, respect and collective flourishing. The contribution draws from critical Indigenous studies, memory studies and the pedagogy of liberation.

Marko Galič is assistant professor and Deputy Head of the Department of Anthropology and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Primorska. He completed his PhD at the University of Auckland in Aotearoa New Zealand. For many years, he taught the university course Understanding Aotearoa New Zealand, and he also played the guitar in a traditional Māori waiata group at the university. Since 2024, he has been working at the University of Primorska in Koper/Capodistria, focusing on intergenerational trauma and healing in various community settings (research projects Ethnography of Silence(s) ARIS J6-50198, and RE4 Healing: Crossborder Remembrance, Reconnection, Restoring and Resilience European Commission (EU Commission [CERV])).

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Absence and Silence in Hungarian Holocaust Memory

Eighty years have passed since the tragedy of the Holocaust. Meanwhile, in recent decades in Central Europe, there has been no collective confrontation with the memory of the Shoah. With the support of the Visegrad Fund, I had the opportunity to lead a research project using qualitative social science methods to explore translocal and intergenerational meanings of Holocaust memory in the four Visegrad countries (Research on Transgenerational Holocaust Memory in Central Europe 2022–2024). We sought to interpret the meanings of Holocaust memory and forgetting in different types of localities through spatial analyses, conducting interviews, and observing commemorative rituals. My research in Hungary was permeated by an atmosphere of mistrust and silence on both the Jewish and non-Jewish sides. While everyone participated openly in discussions on the topic during my fieldwork, most of my interlocutors did not want to participate in a recorded interview. From this perspective, the following questions arise: What could be the reason for the silence and fear that continues to prevent the memory of the Holocaust from becoming public in Hungary today? Is there a difference in the persistence of silence in Jewish and non-Jewish narratives, as well as in different localities and generations? Are there visible signs of local Jewishness and/or the Shoah in the spaces of the different settlements? Do the people living there know what happened to local Jews during and after the deportations? Have the interlocutors talked about the Shoah with their parents, relatives, acquaintances, and teachers? What might have been the reason for the Holocaust memory becoming a ‘taboo,’ as our interviewees repeatedly mentioned during the interviews? In relation to the above questions, my paper will explore the Jewish and non-Jewish narratives of local Holocaust memory, as well as regional and transgenerational differences and similarities.

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Stories of Not Asking and Not Telling: The Architecture of the Vacuum

This paper explores silences as a strategy of survival that evolves into a form of structural forgetting. Through an ethnographic analysis of personal correspondence, I examine how family narratives become fragmented and recessed, producing a void that shapes the identities of subsequent generations. The study centres on Eduard Karllin, whose life was marked by multiple ruptures: migration from post-revolutionary Russia to Latvia, and later to Fascist Italy. Following the 1938 racial laws and the 1943 German occupation, survival required the concealment of Karllin's ancestry. Consequently, his children grew up 'fully Italian,' with their Russian and Jewish heritage rendered unspoken to enable a new sense of belonging. Drawing on the distinction between 'functional' and 'storage' memory, I analyse the paradox of Karllin's silence through the tension between these mnemonic registers. His functional memory was oriented towards cultural integration. Conversely, his storage memory, preserved in a carefully kept box of Russian correspondence, remained a dormant reservoir of an abandoned identity. Turning to Italian sources, one section focuses on letters sent from Trieste to Milan in 1943–1944. Written in the 'Kleine Berlin' neighbourhood, the epicentre of Nazi terror, these documents recount domestic and urban life while omitting surrounding repressions and deportations. I interpret this contrast as a practice of self-censorship in which the mundane functions as a structural shield, ensuring the safety of both correspondent and recipient. I place these findings alongside my own family history, where my grandfather, a maverick Soviet historian, retreated into scholarship while leaving personal traumatic legacies unaddressed. He remarked that 'Stalinism entered into all of us' – a statement that underscores the internalised nature of such silences. I argue that this architecture of the vacuum constitutes a shared transgenerational phenomenon in which the absence of questions reflects a lost habit of remembering.

Asya Gefter is an artist and researcher working at the intersection of storytelling, memory and history. Combining archival inquiry with practice-based methods, she explores the relationship between the personal and the political, with particular attention to hidden records and fractured family narratives. She is currently completing her first book, Living on a Volcano: A History in Letters, based on a cache of family correspondence uncovered in Trieste. Since 2020, she has lived in this border city, drawn to its complex past and pivotal position between Moscow, where she grew up, and London, where she spent her adult life.

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Aesthetics of Silence and Absence in Memory Activism: Against the Silencing of War Atrocities in Serbia

The paper begins by defining the dominant mechanisms of dealing with war atrocities of the 1990s in Serbia through referring to atrocities as committed by ‘all sides’; and ‘putting it into the perspective’ of comparisons with World War II atrocities (‘what was done to “us”’). Official commemorations of the atrocities, paradoxically, often use the transitional justice mechanism (ICTY) to further the nationalist cause, collectivising the verdicts of guilt and innocence. These processes generate a state of ‘loud silence’ regarding war atrocities committed by ‘one’s own’ (Serbian) side (‘cleansed’ memories). The paper then turns to activist commemorations of the Srebrenica genocide, taking as its first case the 2022 digital artwork by Mia David called ‘Life is What the Dead Dream Of’: the projection of the names and ages of the people killed in the genocide on the building of the Serbian parliament. The second related case is the activism of Women in Black, a veteran feminist collective which has performed silent vigils honouring the atrocities’ victims on the main square in Belgrade since 1991. The third case is the 2016–2020 artworks by Vladimir Miladinović, titled ‘counter-archives,’ based on archive materials of the ICTY – one is the material documenting the discovery of remains of the Kosovo Albanians murdered in 1999 in a concealed mass grave near Belgrade; the second is the diaries of Ratko Mladić, Bosnian Serb commander convicted of the Srebrenica genocide. Miladinović overdraws and overwrites the texts and maps, amplifying lines and letters, emphasising the routine *absence* of the war atrocities from mainstream knowledge. The links between art and activism are analysed as striking, less immediate than regular, forms of social movement, i.e. *artivism*, which disrupts the routine of memory erasure, seeking possibilities for just memory. The paper examines the radical potential of aesthetic intervention in wrestling the spaces of violence away from elite actors through acts of artistic disobedience. It also links the anthropology of absence and loss to a ‘negative’ methodology, which could help reconceptualise the notions of space and place to bring about inclusive forms of remembrance.

Ana Dević is a historical and cultural sociologist, adjunct associate professor of sociology at the University of Bologna and associate research fellow at KU Leuven. As a Civis3i senior fellow at Aix-Marseille University and CELSA fellow with KU Leuven between 2024 and 2026, Ana worked on two projects related to activist interventions in memory politics. Her research specialisations include nationalism, social movements (antinationalist cinema and theatre and feminist mobilisations), and the relationship between aesthetics and memory contestations. Among her recent publications are: ‘Pro-Ukraine Activism in Serbia: Diasporas and Locals Against the War in a State of Adversity’ (2025) and ‘Artefacts of National Subversion: The Flag as a Critical Presence or a Disturbing Absence in Contemporary Visual Art’ (with P. Vermeersch, 2023).

Listening to the Ambiguity of Silence: Women's Resistance and Postwar Memory in Greece

Although recent scholarship and activist circles have increasingly focused on women in the resistance during World War II, female experiences remain marginalised – not only in official historiography but also in anti-fascist remembrance culture. Women's silence reflects not only gaps in the archives, but also responses to a political and patriarchal postwar order that indicated which stories could be told and would be heard, and which were excluded, requiring careful negotiation in storytelling. This contribution intervenes in dominant historiographies and anti-fascist remembrance cultures by examining the political and patriarchal frameworks that silenced the experiences of female resistance fighters against the occupying powers in Greece in a violent post-war setting and far beyond. At the same time, it explores the diverse motivations and functions of silence, drawing on memory practices of former resistance fighters and subsequent generations. Silence and concealments appear not only as effects of oppression and violence, but also as practices of care, protection, complicity, exhaustion, denial and resistance – as forms of political and affective labour that challenge binary interpretations of victimhood and agency. Using empirical material, the contribution addresses both the dynamics of silence in Greek transgenerational memory and methodological approaches for engaging with those silences. In addition, it considers the ethical and methodological challenge of writing about the unspoken or unspeakable without succumbing to fetishising narratives of (sexualised) violence in which recognition is tied to the detailed retelling and reliving of traumatic experiences. Through anecdotes, jokes, songs, poems, or other objects of memory, experiences of violence become narratable for research partners. Through ethnographic poems and vignettes, they become further communicable to readers. The contribution argues that ethnographic observation of silence does not mean forcing it to speak but rather listening to it attentively and carefully and learning when – and how – to write about it.

Christina Sterniša is currently a university assistant in the Department of Southeast European History and Anthropology at the University of Graz. For her PhD she is conducting research on the culture of remembrance of the Greek resistance during the 1940s. Christina focuses on female experiences of resistance, transgenerational memory threads, narrative forms and various writing formats such as ethnographic poems. Her other research interests include representations of and writing about (sexualised) violence and mechanisms of silence in relation to field research processes and academia. She is a long-standing member of the Kuckuck. Notizen zur Alltagskultur editorial team and part of a field research supervision group for many years and currently teaches at the Institute of History at the University of Graz on silence in narrative interviews.





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