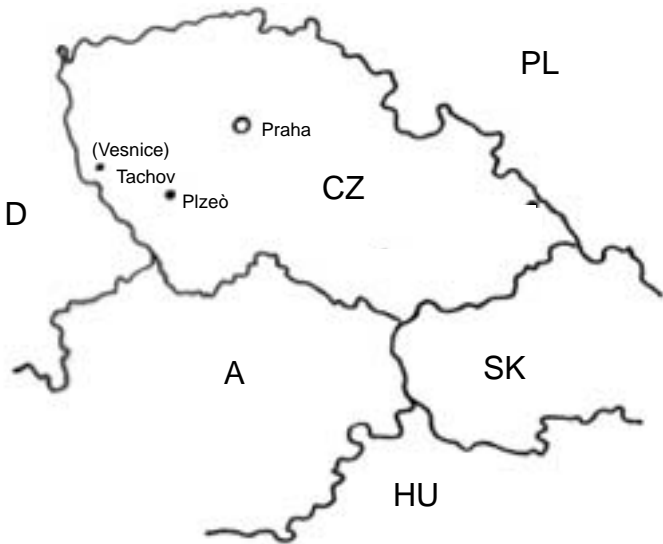


## 12. Property, power, and emotions. Social dynamics in a Bohemian village<sup>1</sup>

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### **Property: Subjects, objects, and emotions**

In the past eleven years, one of the major political issues in post-socialist Europe has been the privatisation and restitution of former state-owned property. Several anthropologists, who all regard ownership as a multi-dimensional socio-cultural phenomenon, have explored this process in a number of different countries.<sup>2</sup> Chris Hann (1998: 34), for example, noted that:

A concern with property relations requires investigations into the total distributions of rights and entitlements within society, of material things and of knowledge and symbols. It

requires examination of practical outcomes as well as ideals and moral discourses, and an appreciation of historical processes, both short-term and long-term.

Katherine Verdery (1998: 161) has similarly claimed that property should be analysed “in terms of the whole system of social, cultural, and political relations, rather than through more narrowly legalistic notions such as ‘rights’ and ‘claims’”. Ownership not only constitutes subject-object relationships between owners and their possessions but also shapes specific connections between different social actors. In other words, property relations are dynamic social relations between people with regard to rights over certain “things” (cf. Hoebel 1966; Hann 1998).

The wider, socio-historical and contextual approach to ownership has generated a number of revealing analyses of the ways in which the lives of individuals, families, and ethnic groups have been part of and affected by changing property relations in post-1990 Eastern Europe. To my knowledge, however, none of the authors have explicitly incorporated a focus on emotions in their theoretical perspective.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, this paper argues that an anthropological perspective on ownership must *necessarily* include a theoretical focus on emotional dynamics. Without such a focus, the complexities of property-related behaviour cannot be fully understood (cf. Svašek 2000b, 2001; Leutloff 2002; Zerilli 2002).

Emotions play a crucial role in most areas of social life, as noted by an increasing number of anthropologists who have focused on the social, cultural, and political dimensions of emotions in the past three decades (cf. Lutz and White 1986; Svašek 2002).<sup>4</sup> In post-socialist Eastern and Central Europe in particular, the rapidly transforming socio-economic and political conditions have generated strong feelings of euphoria, hope, disillusionment, disappointment, jealousy and hatred (cf. Creed 1998; Verdery 1998; Svašek 2000a, 2000b; Müller 2002; Skrbiš 2002). These same feelings have also been evoked in response to and as part of changing property relations (cf. Leutloff 2002; Svašek 2002; Zerilli 2002).

It is not surprising that property-related discourses are often highly emotional. "Having" and "being" are dialectically related processes, and human beings actively relate to their social and material surroundings to create a sense of individual and social self. Consequently, various forms of real or imagined ownership can be central to processes of self-perception. Daniel Miller (1987: 121), who introduced the concept of "personal property" as an alternative to the more narrow, legalistic term of "private property", noted that "personal property assumes a genuinely self-productive relationship between persons and things".

This paper argues that personal and collective ownership must be regarded as two-way processes in which "being" and "having" are closely interconnected, and in which subjects and objects are mutually constitutive. Objects of real or imagined ownership may become emotionally-loaded signifiers of personal and collective identities. The management of real or imagined property is often an inherent feature of identity politics. In this context, "management" must be understood as a wide category of different forms of subject-object involvement which may range from the down-to-earth practicalities of financial management to wishful imagination and wild fantasy.

The analysis looks at the various ways in which different social actors in a small village in the district of Tachov have used emotional subject-object discourses to construct images of self, and to justify specific property-related behaviour. It demonstrates that emotions, as powerful discourses and narrative performances, and as social forces which motivate action, have played an important role in the shaping and perception of ownership relations.

The village – which I shall call "Vesnice" – is regarded as a social arena in which different actors have been involved in struggles for property and the right to use public space. The main interest groups are firstly, former Sudeten German inhabitants who were expelled from the village to Germany after the Second World War and who have visited their home village on an annual basis. Secondly, the social democratic mayor and his supporters, and thirdly, a Dutch entrepreneur

who has bought large plots of land and numerous buildings in the village, and who has established a pheasant shoot with the help of a British gamekeeper. To reach their goal – the actual or symbolic appropriation of property and space - the three groups have all used emotionally powerful narratives and actions.

### **The research setting**

Vesnice is a small West Bohemian village situated close to the German border in the former Sudetenland. It was established in 1666 during the Habsburg Empire by ethnic Germans who cultivated the land and exploited the forest. For a period of almost three centuries, the village community remained ethnically German.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the inhabitants began to regard themselves as “Sudeten Germans”. As with all the other Sudeten Germans living in the Bohemian, Moravian, and Silesian border areas, they created a strong sense of “rootedness” and “closeness” to the land (cf. Svašek 2001). Their ideology of blood and soil became more outspoken during the first two decades following the establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1918, when the tensions between Czechs and Sudeten Germans increased, particularly as Hitler came to the political fore in neighbouring Germany. In 1938 most Sudeten Germans, including the inhabitants of Vesnice, welcomed the incorporation of the Sudetenland by Nazi Germany.

The 1945 Potsdam Agreement stipulated that ethnic Germans from all over Central and Eastern Europe should be expelled from the area and “return” to Germany. In the case of Czechoslovakia the Sudeten Germans’ citizenship rights were annulled by the post-war government between May and October 1945, and most of their property was confiscated. During the next two years, over three million Sudeten Germans were expelled to Germany and Austria, and were forced to leave their homes and belongings behind.<sup>5</sup>

This extremely traumatic experience soon generated the emotionally and politically powerful discourse of *die verlorene Heimat* (the lost homeland) (cf. Svašek 2000a, 2002). The *Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft*, the biggest organisation of Sudeten German expellees with its seat in Munich, defined the confiscated land as “stolen property”, and politicised their claims to the old homeland by demanding *Heimatrecht*, the right to return to “home” and to repossess their personal and collective belongings (cf. Hamperl 1996; Staněk 1991; Svašek 1999).

Immediately after the war, the Czechoslovak government introduced a policy to re-populate its border areas, and the abandoned Sudeten German houses (those which had not been destroyed in revenge attacks) were occupied by Czechs, Volhynia Czech, Slovaks, Roma, and others. The most obvious signs of the Sudeten German past, such as German sign boards, were removed, and all cities, towns, and villages were officially renamed or only referred to by their Czech names.

During the rapidly unfolding Cold War, the border with West-Germany and Austria was transformed into one of the most heavily guarded sections of the Iron Curtain. Numerous border villages were blown up for security reasons, and villages like Vesnice – situated only four kilometres from the border with Eastern Bavaria – were never fully re-occupied. Situated in a remote, peripheral corner of the Eastern bloc, many houses remained empty and were eventually destroyed.<sup>6</sup>

In 1950, a number of Ruthenian families from Northern Romania moved to the village of Vesnice.<sup>7</sup> They occupied some of the houses along the main road, worked in the state-owned forest and in the newly established collective farm. Most of the other houses were knocked down or slowly deteriorated. Over the years, in particular during the more liberal periods when the rigorous, state-controlled politico-economic system relaxed, the new villagers were able to buy the houses in which they lived from the Czechoslovak state, and some used their large gardens to cultivate fruit and vegetables for their own use.

I first visited Vesnice in the summer of 1991 as my family had bought a house there from one of the Ruthenian inhab-

itants.<sup>8</sup> By now, almost all the houses were privately owned, and being mostly small-holdings the villagers depended in part on subsistence farming. The state farm was in the process of decollectivisation.

By the time we arrived, the majority of the villagers still consisted of Ruthenians and their children. Other inhabitants included Czechs and a Slovak. The Soviet officers and soldiers who had been based in the village during the Cold War had already been demobilised and returned home. A typically 1960s-style apartment block which had previously housed the officers and their families was now occupied by the villagers, and the barracks had been turned into a home for physically and mentally handicapped children. Nearby there was also a now unused military radar post which was owned by the Czech Ministry of Defence. The village also included a number of larger buildings which had been built by the Sudeten Germans. The church, originally Roman Catholic, was now used by the Orthodox Ruthenians, and was reasonably well looked after. By contrast, the school, the parsonage, and the shop had been empty for many years, and were in a state of disrepair.

When I first visited Vesnice, I was working on another project which was totally unrelated to the history of the Czech borderland. Yet over the following period of five years, I became increasingly interested in the village and its post-1989 transformation. Between September 1996 and August 1998, I used the village as a base for a research project which mainly dealt with identity formation in the Bohemian-Bavarian border area in the light of political, economic and social changes. I slowly realised that “ownership” was one of the key issues which occupied the villagers.

### **Lost property: the politics of nostalgia**

From the perspective of changing ownership, it is interesting to examine the attempts by the expellees from Vesnice to maintain a connection with their “lost” village. Their case, however, was not an isolated one. Since their expulsion, many expellees

from all over the Sudetenland have actively engaged themselves with their pre-expulsion past, and have expressed strong feelings for their old *Heimat*. These feelings – a combination of sadness, grief, love, pride, and nostalgia – have been triggered by emotional memories which have been actively evoked and managed, for example through a continuous production of nostalgic poems, novels, and *Heimatbücher*.

The Sudeten German case suggests that emotions can be regarded as powerful narratives and performances which – when directed at property - reinforce particular subject-object discourses. As Lila Abu-Lughod and Catherine Lutz noted, “emotion gets its meaning and force from its location and performance in the public realm of discourse” (1990: 7). The emotional expellee discourse of “stolen property” and the related politics of nostalgia engender a particular image of ownership which portrays the expellee community as a collective undivided whole, and naturalizes their connection to their old *Heimat*. The feelings of loss, anger, and nostalgia clearly reinforce the expellees’ image of themselves as the rightful owners of their ancestral home.

Diasporic homeland discourses are often politicised and highly moralistic, producing claims to both property and identity (Skrbiš 2002). They tend to produce a cultural logic in which the object *is* the subject and *vice versa*. Dominant Sudeten German property and identity narratives have similarly produced an emotional subject-object ideology which equalizes being and having, and collapses the distinction between present (actual) and past (imagined) property. The *object* of ownership, the homeland as lost property, is presented as an inherent part of the owning *subject*. In other words, the lost homeland is perceived as the core of their collective being.

### **Lost property and symbolic appropriation**

Not surprisingly, after the abolition of compulsory visa requirements in 1990, the Sudeten German expellees displayed an increased interest in their *Heimat*, and many visit-

ed their places of birth for the first time in forty years. The visits were highly emotional occasions during which the expellees reconstituted themselves as a village community as they remembered and re-experienced feelings of loss, fear, and anger.<sup>9</sup> At least five expellees from Vesnice recounted how they had burst into tears when they had first seen their old family houses. In many cases they had only found groups of trees with the remains of old foundations or simply an empty field. One of the Ruthenian inhabitants of the village said: "They cried, they all cried. They searched the ruins and cried."

Property, in this context, must clearly be defined as a subject-object relation which is inherently emotional. As family homes, the houses had been important environments in which personal and family identities had been constituted. As with the school, the parsonage, and the church, the family homes had been central to their sense of personal and collective self.

As noted earlier, the call by the *Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft* for *Heimatrecht* demanded that the Sudeten Germans should be given back their property, thus enabling them to restore their "damaged" subject-object relationship. The expellees from Vesnice, however, did not believe that they would ever return to the village as actual owners.<sup>10</sup> As a matter of fact, they were not even attracted by the idea of returning. They had started new lives in Germany, their children and grandchildren who had been born after the expulsion often regarded themselves as local Bavarians, and the village itself was in a depressingly poor state.

Consequently, the expellees from Vesnice did not seek to *legally* reclaim their old property from the Czech state. Instead, they began to *symbolically* reappropriate specific social spaces in the village that still had a particularly strong emotional value. From 1993 onwards, they held commemorative services in front of the war memorials and in the church. They also renovated the memorial which commemorated victims of the First World War, and cleaned some of the still existing graves.

Emotions, in this regard, can be conceptualised as social forces which motivate specific object-focused activities.



Nostalgia and other emotions indeed moved the expellees to organise annual visits to their place of birth which, subsequently, enabled them to “feel good” in their old village. Evidently, everything needed to be organised beforehand, and this demonstrates that emotional forces do not simply overpower individuals, but that individuals, as social beings, also aim to actively manage emotional dynamics.

To realise their plan to hold religious services and ceremonies in the villages, the expellees created and used personal and religious networks. Gerhard Schwartz, one of the expellees who lived in Bärnau, a Bavarian village situated only ten kilometres from Vesnice, told me that he had befriended one of the Orthodox Ruthenian families who lived in Vesnice.

The expellees strengthened their connections with the local Orthodox priest, and with a German Catholic priest who were willing to lend their “official support”. The priests, who by their presence seemed to legitimize the Sudeten German presence in the village, were receptive to the emotional discourse of sudden loss and nostalgia, and translated it into a religious message of love and reconciliation.

To the Sudeten Germans, being able to spend some time together in the village and remember their “collective” past, was emotionally rewarding, although also somewhat confusing. “Especially the first time when we were back in the church, me and my sisters, we all cried”, said one of the expellees in 1997. “I got many childhood memories, but today the village is of course very different from how it was so many years ago. That was hard, but at the same time, it made things easier”. She had felt a sense of relief during that first visit because she could now accept that the clock could no longer be turned back, and that she would not even want to return. She noted that the act of symbolic reappropriation had had a healing effect on what was still painful (cf. Svašek 2000b).<sup>11</sup>

### **Changing ownership: property as long-term investment**

It is interesting to compare the nostalgic and moralistic subject-object discourse of the expellees from Vesnice with capi-

talist property claims by foreigners who had no previous connection with the Czech Republic.

In general, the changed economic climate in post-socialist Eastern and Central Europe had attracted the interest of numerous Western investors, in particular of Germans and Austrians. To avoid selling off the “family silver”, the Czechoslovak government passed a law prohibiting the sale of land and real estate to foreigners. It was, however, easy enough to circumvent this hurdle by establishing a firm with a Czech director (*jednatel*). Such companies were officially Czech, and were therefore allowed to buy property.<sup>12</sup>

The villagers of Vesnice were suddenly confronted by exactly such a “Czech” company which had actually been set up by the Dutch entrepreneur Pieter Hulshoff. Unlike the Sudeten Germans, he had no personal connection to the village, no painful memories of lost property, and was not interested in symbolic appropriation. He simply wanted to buy buildings and land, and establish a pheasant shoot and a hunting lodge.

When Hulshoff turned his attention to Vesnice, he had already a considerable amount of entrepreneurial experience in post-socialist Czechoslovakia. Shortly after the Velvet Revolution, he had bought and privatised an old state farm in a village only fifteen kilometres south of Vesnice, together with a befriended Dutch farmer. He knew how hard it was to get things organised and deal with the local authorities, but this did not discourage him. “Once I have my teeth in something, I won’t let go”, he said a number of times, and stressed that he could only hold out and take financial risks because he ran a successful company and owned an estate in the Netherlands.

It would be wrong to imagine the Sudeten German relationship with the village as “purely emotional”, and Hulshoff’s attitude as “purely rational”. The latter was not “just” looking for investment and long-term financial gain. He was also driven by a strong desire to establish a pheasant shoot and a quasi-estate. Hunting had been one of his life-long passions.

To realise his dream, the Dutchman needed to buy buildings which could be turned into living space for himself and his family, a game-keeper, and the future members of his hunting lodge. Two buildings in Vesnice which could easily be transformed into comfortable living spaces were the old Sudeten German school and the parsonage. Hulshoff managed to purchase them from the Orthodox Church and the Catholic Church within a year.<sup>13</sup>

### **Buying land as a source of frustration**

While the purchase of the school and the parsonage had been relatively easy, acquiring the thousands of hectares of land the Dutchman needed for the shoot, was to prove far more difficult. The fields around Vesnice were still owned by the Czech state, having been collectivised under Communism, and had been assigned to a state farm which was eventually privatised in 1992. The new private owners of the farm which was run by director Jan Nový, were not yet allowed to buy the fields they worked due to the slow transformation of land ownership, as well as their own lack of capital. Instead, the farm rented the fields from the national government body which officially oversees the lease, restitution, and the sale of state-owned land, known as the *Pozemkový fond*.

Hulshoff contacted Nový, and proposed buying the land on the basis of the restitution claims which he had already purchased.<sup>14</sup> In return Nový would be given a lease contract for a period of twenty years. Nový agreed to the idea because it meant he would no longer need to fear the sudden loss of land were it bought by developers or simply somebody who did not wish to lease it to him. Hulshoff, as the lessor, had first right to purchase the land thanks to the rules of the *Pozemkový fond*. This right, by means of various legal contracts was to be assigned to Hulshoff.

Restitution, however, was a slow and painful process. As Hulshoff noted with irritation: "My restitution claims have been with the *Pozemkový fond* for seven years (...) But sim-

ply nothing happens. Nothing at all.” As noted before, his frustration and anger made him even more determined to persevere. This again shows how emotions can be conceptualised as a driving force which empower people to take action in specific social contexts.

Hulshoff’s case also demonstrates that people actively manage emotions, and attempt to change other people’s emotional states to attain certain goals. The Dutchman tried to create good relationships with key figures in the privatisation process, such as with one of the regional directors of the *Pozemkový fond*, by taking them out for lunches. He also admitted to having threatened some “hopeless” local bureaucrats by telling them that he would contact their bosses in Prague and ensure that they were fired. “Nice words don’t work in this country,” he said. “The only thing that has any effect is fear.”

### **Justifying the right to buy “stolen property”**

The Dutchman knew that the village had once belonged to the Sudeten Germans. Each year, he was directly confronted with this fact when the expellees held their annual ritual in the square between the school and the parsonage, and knocked on his door to ask if they could take a look inside.

“We had whole crowds in our house”, he told me. “They pointed out the class rooms where they used to sit. Well, we are always very friendly to them.” When I asked him whether anyone had ever accused him of living in “stolen property”, he said: “Yes they did. They are actually always friendly, but once I had a discussion with some of those Germans, and they told me that everything had been stolen from them.”

Hulshoff, however, did not feel any guilt whatsoever, and fervently approved of the post-war mass expulsion:

I told them: “I don’t agree with you. As a German community you lived in Czechoslovakia so you were Czechs (meaning Czechoslovak citizens). Subsequently, you chose to support an aggressive state. The fact that you were punished for that...well, such things have happened throughout history. If

you would have won [the war], you would have owned the whole of Czechoslovakia. Unfortunately you lost... and now the buildings are mine!”

He clearly disagreed with the Sudeten German claim for *Heimatrecht*, and by accusing them of supporting the Third Reich, he justified his ownership of their confiscated properties. He noted, however, that he did understand their feelings of nostalgia, and did not mind their annual commemorative services in front of his doorstep. Evidently, his “liberal” attitude was in line with his own interests. He wanted to avoid unnecessary tensions, and, after all, the Sudeten Germans were just engaged in symbolic appropriation. They did not intend to buy property in the village, and therefore, he did not see them as economic competitors.

### **Emotional dynamics: anger and resentment**

As noted before, property relations are dynamic relations between different social actors. As the shoot began to function and Hulshoff started to buy more houses and claim more land, many villagers began to feel uneasy. Hulshoff’s presence started having an impact on day-to-day life in the village. On the one hand, those who worked for him (as builders, cleaners, housekeepers, assistants to the new British gamekeeper, and beaters) or who sold property to him, benefited financially from his presence. On the other hand, many, in particular those who did not benefit, saw him as a crude profiteer.

Petr Hedrlin who had lived in Vesnice since the nineteen-seventies, argued that Hulshoff’s presence had led to increasing economic inequality and the return of the old estate system. He said: “As happened after the thirty-year war under the domination of the Habsburg aristocrats the Czech lands will soon be controlled by rich foreigners, and once again we’ll have a *panství*. History is repeating itself.”

It is telling that he used the term *panství*, which links the concepts of “estate”, “serfdom”, “domination”, “power”, and “nobility”. The image of an estate visited by members of

a powerful aristocracy was reinforced when the future king of the Netherlands, Prince Willem Alexander, came to shoot pheasants in Vesnice in 1999. He was an acquaintance of Hulshoff's brother, a banker, and although the crown prince's presence was "secret", the whole village soon knew about it.

In Hedrlin's view, the capitalist free market ideology and its approach to ownership formed the centre of the problem:

The question is: "who owns the means of production?" We are now being transformed into a developing country. We will work hard but somebody else will export our products, and God knows who will get the profits. Whichever way you turn it, capitalism is relentless. The only criterion is profit. Evidently, we haven't been prepared for that, and the governments which came to power after 1989 have not shown much interest in our region. By selling out through privatisation we have survived the last decade, and may possibly further survive but the situation will only become worse.

Hedrlin felt threatened by the fact that more and more houses and plots of land in and around Vesnice were falling into the hands of one powerful foreigner. "We're becoming strangers in our own house", he noted, and admitted that he felt threatened. "I used to think that this was my home, but now we're confronted with something we never wanted to be confronted with."

### **Gossip as a form of resistance**

One way in which the villagers criticized the changing property relations in the village and expressed their resentment towards Hulshoff was through gossip. Elsewhere, I argued that gossip is a communicative practice which both shapes and is shaped by changing power relations, and helps people to make emotional judgements and respond to rapid change (cf Svašek 1997: 115; see also Müller 2002). To most of the villagers in Vesnice, the transformation from state-socialism to democracy meant economic insecurity, changing working conditions, and the confrontation with new socio-economic hierarchies. Gossip provided a subjective, emotional account

of these experiences in relatively fixed narrative structures in which the rich intruder Hulshoff was simply “the bad guy”. The stories portrayed him as somebody who made huge profits from his hunting lodge while his employees only earned average Czech wages. They also accused him of being a burglar and a drugs dealer, and reported his “crimes” to the police.

Hulshoff, called the stories “absolutely absurd” and argued that the rumour-mongers were basically driven by envy.

### **Capitalist ownership and notions of “patronage”**

The villagers did not just protest against the disappearance of “communal (i.e. state) ownership”. They also objected to some of the ways in which the Dutchman handled his private property. Some people complained that his pheasants ruined their gardens, and covered the graves in the cemetery with excrement.

In Hulshoff’s view, the best way to respond to anger and objections was by subsidizing a number of communal projects. He explained that “patronage” was common practice to estate owners:

In our family, we always had country estates. Having an estate means owning a larger plot of land, and that brings with it social obligations. Normally you do that in consultation with the people who live there. So the first thing I did was to waterproof the town hall. Secondly we renovated the chapel by the graveyard. And then, much against my wishes, we financed a new stretch of asphalt. A gravelled road would have been much more picturesque.

Through his “help” to the village, Hulshoff clearly intended to construct an image of himself as a willing, caring “patron” who should be welcomed instead of envied. A number of villagers I spoke with indeed appreciated his concern. Hulshoff, however, was disappointed that his actions did not stop the gossip and the “antics”.

Several villagers interpreted the Dutchman's "good deeds" in a different way. One of them remarked: "Well, the guy is so rich... he's just being strategically nice. In the end he is the one who profits and we are the ones who lose". Hulshoff objected by saying that the villagers had no idea of his expenses. So far, the shoot had yet to turn a profit. Evidently, he was in a position to take such financial risks. He also admitted that he expected his money to be well spent.

The Dutchman justified his presence in the village as a new owner through a specific subject-object discourse which was based on a mixture of capitalist, perceived "aristocratic", and kinship values. Firstly, he clearly approved of the functioning of the free-market economy, and regarded buying property in postsocialist Europe as a fundamental right. In his view, life should be enjoyed, and money should be (at least partly) used for that purpose. Secondly, in numerous cases, his ownership directly influenced the life and self-perception of other villagers. Hulshoff tried to "pacify" them through "good deeds" which he defined as an inherent component of large private ownership. Thirdly, he regarded his property as private property which would eventually be inherited by his children.

### **The Social-Democratic view: The village as a growing community**

Unlike some of the villagers, the mayor Jan Veselý, who had himself sold a house to the Dutchman, did not disapprove of Hulshoff's presence in the village. He stressed that it was financially advantageous to the community as a whole, and accepted Hulshoff's claim to "patronage".

I am not against Hulshoff's firm. He actually contributes to the village. He gives us, the community, certain gifts. He renovated the chapel, he paid 70.000 crowns for an urban study, so...I don't have problems with him. A few villagers do. His neighbour and a few other families do. My view is that we are a democratic country which is in a process of privatisation. Any investor is welcome as long as he sticks to the laws.



The mayor, a Social-Democrat, accepted a capitalist notion of ownership, and did not mind that Czech property fell into foreign hands. He did, however, also believe in shared community rights, and noted that the dynamics of capitalist ownership complicated the introduction of a socio-economic policy which would support the village as a collective. The village community badly needed to enlarge its budget. The roads were in a terrible state, only half of the village was connected to the sewage system, young people needed housing, and the children had nowhere to play. According to Veselý, the best route to take was to build new houses and increase the number of inhabitants attracting young people to the village.

Building new houses was restricted because of a nearby fresh water reservoir. Some of the restrictions would be lifted after the completion of the sewage system for which the mayor had secured funding. This meant that once the *Pozemkový Fond* would sell the plots of land which were still state-owned, more houses could be built, and the village could grow. Young families would most likely not have enough money to build new houses, so Veselý looked for other possibilities.

The only large unoccupied building in the village was the old military base that had been used during the Cold War as a radar station. The mayor came up with the plan to turn the building into flats and a children's clubhouse. He thought that the future inhabitants would be willing to pay half of the reconstruction costs. A bank could provide a low-interest loan, which would be paid back in instalments in the form of monthly rent.

The base was still owned by the Ministry of National Defence, but it no longer served any purpose, and in 2000 the Ministry put it on the market for 5,800,000 crowns.<sup>15</sup> This was still far too much for the village community, and Veselý who was a member of the ČSSD (the ruling social democratic party) used his party contacts to get in touch with the Minister. With a triumphant smile, he recounted:

When the Minister announced that the ministry wanted to get rid of most of its properties because they cost too much

money, I travelled (to Prague) to visit him, and simply used his words. And he personally told me – I have two witnesses, two parliament members who can back me up – that he would give the base to us for free.

As part of his perceived “socialist-democratic view of ownership”, the mayor thus accepted responsibility for the well-being of the village as a community. Like Hulshoff, he used personal networks in the bureaucratic jungle of Czech politics to realise his plans. Yet his political views were based on the notion of communal rights, and not on the paternalistic idea of individual patronage.

### **The future of the village according to the Dutchman**

Hulshoff ridiculed the plan, and called it “unrealistic”. More important, it went against his image of the village as a picturesque backdrop to his estate. In his words:

These people should not try to turn the village into an economically prosperous community. This is simply a very beautiful environment in which people should live who can afford to keep a pretty house in a good state of repair, and who won't make a mess and establish factories, breaker's yards, and similar crap. I don't find it necessary for people to live here, and I don't see the purpose. Young people should move to places where they can be educated and find jobs. So the military base...well, you know, nothing will come of it.

The Dutchman justified his view through emotional rhetoric which depicted himself as a neat and nature-conscientious person who “knew better” than the irresponsible locals what was best for the environment.

Hedrlin was rather shocked when he heard about Hulshoff's plans, and said that the villagers felt threatened. “If he wants that, he'll have to move us. So there, we have arrived at the problem. Is this our home or Mr. Hushoff's home? I talked about it earlier, there is an increasing feeling that we are threatened.”

## Mixed feelings in the village

The above should not give the wrong impression that all villagers regarded Hulshoff as a dangerous threat. To get a better understanding of the contradictory feelings Hulshoff's activities evoked among and possibly also within distinct villagers, it is interesting to focus on the opinions of members of the Příhoda family.

Honza and Jiřina Příhoda had moved to Vesnice in the nineteen-seventies. Jiřina had two sons from an earlier marriage, and together, the couple had two daughters born in 1988 and 1993. Having worked on the state farm until its privatisation in 1992, they decided to use their acquired skills and try their luck in private farming. The couple bought five milking cows which they kept in a small stable behind the house, and rented the adjacent field from the *Pozemkový fond*.

Honza dreamt of expanding his business but found out that he was restricted by strict environmental regulations which did not allow him to build bigger stables. The few cows he had did not provide enough income, and he was forced to take on another job as a road worker. A heavy drinker, he frequently cursed and lamented his fate. Not surprisingly, when Hulshoff entered the scene and managed to set up his hunting lodge in a relatively short period of time, Honza became even more bitter and cynical. Jiřina's oldest son Petr was also irritated by Hulshoff's increasing presence in the village.

Jiřina, by contrast, reacted quite differently to Hulshoff's presence. She argued that she did not really mind him buying property in the village. At least he was repairing the school building, and his shoot might create some jobs for the villagers. Her perception was partly affected by the fact that her marriage with Honza was on the verge of breaking down. Some months later, she planned to move out, and was desperately looking for a place to live and a job to secure her financial independence.

I knew Jiřina quite well, and knew that she had been trying to find employment in Tachov. Yet unemployment was on

the rise, and being in her forties, Jiřina was greatly disadvantaged. When I got to know that Hulshoff was looking for a cook/housekeeper, I recommended her to him. Jiřina did not only get the job, she also moved into one of the houses recently bought by Hulshoff. The house, which had belonged to the mayor, was damp and in a bad state. Hulshoff did not use it because he planned to knock it down and build a bigger house on the spot. Yet to Jiřina and three of her children, it was good enough as a temporary solution. On the whole, she was satisfied, and liked her employer, his wife and their children. She had a particularly good relationship with Hulshoff's wife, who was learning Czech and who taught her a few words of English.

Ironically, in 1998, Hulshoff also employed Jiřina's eldest son Petr. Like his father, he had worked as a road worker, but he was dying to do something else. Even though – as noted earlier – he was sceptical of Hulshoff's presence and disliked the idea of a foreigner "taking over" the village, he accepted the job all the same. He did, however, not show as much enthusiasm for the pheasants as the British gamekeeper, his Czech right-hand man, and some other employees. After a few years, he was advised by the gamekeeper to look for other employment and found another job as a forest worker.

## **Conclusion**

While interpreting and recording particular emotions expressed by individuals or groups is bound to be an inexact science, perhaps akin to attempts by literary critics to interpret a piece of prose or poetry, what can factually be recorded is an emotional discourse i.e. a person's self-professed state of being which he or she believes to be "emotional".

Biologists, psychologists and other scholars have sought to objectively "measure" emotions as physical or cognitive processes based on the highly limiting definition of emotions as biological or intrapsychic phenomena (cf. Svašek 2002). By contrast, this paper has defined emotions as narrative performances which are often used by individuals and social

groups to construct particular images of their own individual and collective selves. The analysis thus regarded "emotion" as an inherently social process, even though emotions are often experienced by individuals as highly personal embodied feelings, and may help to create a strong sense of individual self.

In addition to emotions, this paper also focused on identity as generated by different emotional subject-object discourses which have arisen in the Czech Republic as a result of postsocialist transformations. It showed how three conflicting narratives of ownership produced by the expellees, the Dutch entrepreneur, and the Social Democrat mayor and his supporters, reinforced distinct moral, legal, and political arguments concerning personal and collective ownership.

Firstly, the expellee discourse of identity was based on the notion of a strong emotional connection of blood and soil in which subject and object merged into one single unit. Yet, as the analysis showed, almost none of the former inhabitants of Vesnice, even though they suffered from painful memories and feelings of loss and nostalgia, sided with the political aims of the *Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft* for *Heimatrecht*.

The expellees from Vesnice played out their emotional discourse in the context of annual, religious ceremonies. With the help of local priests, they managed to symbolically appropriate the village within the socio-religious discourse of acceptance and reconciliation which served to contradict the political message of the *Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft*.

When the new inhabitants of Vesnice were confronted with rapidly changing property relations after the introduction of a free market system in 1990, they reacted emotionally to foreign investors who sought to buy up land and real estate in the region. Some criticised the capitalist ideology of ownership because it did not give enough rights to the village as a collective unit, and thereby undermined their strong sense of identity and personal responsibility to the community which had been fiercely propagated by the Communists even if seldom adhered to. Others felt that their personal space was

being invaded by a foreigner who had no moral right to own Czech property, and to transform village life according to his own ideas. The mayor, who supported social democratic ideals of “social justice for all”, sought to generate an emotional discourse among other villagers of resentment and depression with political ambitions of his own.

The Dutch investor used a discourse of capitalism, environmentalism, and patricianesque sentiments. He profited from the weak Czech economy, and thanks to his capital and business acumen was able to transform himself into a transnational estate owner, partly by slowly finding his way within the Czech bureaucratic system. As he spent an increasing amount of time and energy on the development of his estate, he also developed an emotional discourse to describe the whole process. This discourse served by contrast to strengthen his own identity as a worldly wise benevolent benefactor who helped to create a happy village.

In conclusion, the analysis has shown that specific emotional discourses and practices have been inherent in the rapidly transforming property relations in the post-Cold War Czech-German border area. The experience of having lost possessions, and the prospect of losing or gaining property generated strong emotional discourses as people sought to ground a sense of personal and collective identity by relating in particular ways to their social and material surroundings.

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Justin l'Anson-Sparks for his helpful comments.

<sup>2</sup> Katherine Verdery, for example, analysed the distribution of property and power in Transylvania's decollectivisation, and David G. Anderson examined modes of land appropriation and privatisation in Arctic Siberia. Gerald Creed looked at the effects of privatisation and land restitution on the lives of Bulgarian villagers, and Deema Kaneff examined rural transformation and changing ownership patterns also in Bulgaria (Verdery 1998; Anderson 1998; Creed 1998; Kaneff 1996).

<sup>3</sup> This is rather surprising, especially because some of them have clearly alluded to the emotional dimensions of changing ownership. Katherine Verdery, for example, hinted at the emotional involvement of Transylvanian stakeholders in cases of contested ownership. Similarly, David G. Anderson (1998: 65), who defined property as "a way of knowing", referred to the emotional reactions of his informants to changing property relations in Siberia. He did, for example, refer to the angry response of a brigadier to a newcomer family, and to the "aggressiveness" of the property claims made by the latter (Anderson 1998: 80-1).



- 4 As with “memory”, “emotion” has wrongly been regarded as an interior process which takes place within individuals’ minds and bodies. Since the 1980s, anthropologists and some psychologists have stressed the social nature of memory and emotional dynamics. Brian Parkinson (1995: 169), for example, suggested that “the central function of many emotional states is social”. He further noted that “although [most psychological] theories may provide a relatively comprehensive analysis of individual emotion, they are still limited by their inattention to the social dimension which is crucial to many instances of emotion as it occurs during everyday life” (Parkinson 1995: 146).
- 5 The Sudeten German expulsion began as soon as the war ended, a few months before the signing of the Potsdam Agreement. The mass expulsions took almost two years to complete. During the first six months, a period also known as the “wild expulsion” (*wilde Austreibung*), tens of thousands were terrorised and brutally killed in a spirit of revenge (cf. Hamperl 1996; Staněk 1991).
- 6 A comparison of the numbers of inhabitants before and after the Sudeten German expulsion demonstrates the extent to which the village was affected. At the time of their expulsion, over one thousand Sudeten Germans had lived in Vesnice. Today the village houses only about two hundred inhabitants, eighty percent less than before.
- 7 After the war, the Czechoslovak government invited Czechs and Slovaks who lived in Hungary, Romania, the Soviet Union, and other East European countries to resettle in the areas. The Ruthenians took the opportunity to move to Czechoslovakia lured by nationalist propaganda.
- 8 Being a Czech refugee who had left his home country for the Netherlands in 1948, my father had decided to buy a second home in his country of origin after the 1989 Velvet Revolution.
- 9 For a discussion of the distinction between the concepts of “remembered” and “re-experienced” emotions, see Svašek 2000b.
- 10 After the Cold War, politically-active Sudeten Germans had hoped that their demands would finally be met. They had taken their case to the American Senate and the European courts whose members both decided not to support the claim.
- 11 On the day of the annual service, the presence of the expellees in Vesnice was undeniable. Their shiny cars were parked all over the village (which consisted of one main road), and their voices could be heard as they walked from one end of the village to the

other. Over the years, they also left more permanent marks on the village by restoring the old war memorial and doing up the few remaining Sudeten German graves.

- <sup>12</sup> Inhabitants from the Czech border area both welcomed and feared the strength of the German economy. Some profited by working across the border for *Deutschmarks*, and by selling products to German customers.
- <sup>13</sup> The school was owned by the Orthodox Church, and the parsonage by the Catholic Church. Within a year, Hulshoff managed to buy both buildings, respectively for 600,000 and 250,000 crowns (about 12,000 and 5000 pounds). He clearly profited from the weakness of the Czech economy, also by hiring cheap Czech and Ukrainian labourers to renovate the buildings.
- <sup>14</sup> As part of the democratisation process, the Czechoslovak government had designed a law to grant former land owners or their descendants the right to reclaim previously owned land which had been nationalised or collectivised. People who did not want to reclaim land, either because their plot was too small to make it profitable or because they now lived in cities, sold their restitution rights to third parties. Various entrepreneurs such as Hulshoff bought as many restitutions claims as they needed to start particular projects.
- <sup>15</sup> In 1997, the official (but highly unrealistic) value of the base was still 15 million crowns.