

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Sex, lies, and memoirs: on writing intimate ethnography, dealing with silence and ethically ambiguous storytelling

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This article uses the notion of intimate ethnography to further a discussion on social constructions of family ties, secrets and complex strategies of storytelling. Using the example of a book published about one's own family history, the author presents several ethical dilemmas where engagement with intimate ethnographies is fraught with pitfalls and can tear apart people, families and individuals; however, it can also give a brief and illuminating holistic experience of mutual horizontal connectedness, human harmony, and communion across time and space. The article argues that the intimacy in this ethnography traces the residues of violence and oppression, but also moments of harmony and happiness to create a holistic, complete, anthropological picture of myself and the world that makes me – with its bright and dark sides.

Keywords family • violence • secrets • intimate ethnography • Poland • Ukraine

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Introduction

In 2019 I published a book entitled *All Casimir's Children* (Polish: *Dzieci Kazimierza*). Broadly speaking, it is a narrative non-fiction, family saga, an account of sexual violence, patriarchy, class hierarchies, illegitimacy and family secrets set in the context of Polish-Ukrainian relations over the last 150 years. It is non-academic, in the sense that I do not employ any jargon, there are minimal references, no theoretical frameworks and the narrative contains plenty of subjective, emotional parts. At the same time, anthropological imagination is used to understand how the past impacts the present on an intimate level. Although set in a particular historical and cultural environment, it plays on plenty of universal themes: class, sexual violence, parental love, sibling relationships, death and kinship.

Methodologically, the book engages ‘intimate ethnography’ as conceptualised by Alisse Waterston and Barbara Rylko-Bauer (2006). Centring on the ‘intimate other’ and stretching ‘methodological boundaries in taking the deeply personal and emotional as our anthropological subject’ (2006: 398), the method has numerous advantages as a result of crossing and negotiating the emotional and the intimate in a family setting of telling a story. At its core, intimate ethnography follows a dialectic tradition ‘that emphasises change and contradiction over stasis and equilibrium, and historical analysis of social relations over positivism, universalism, and synchronism. In that tradition, social life and cultural ideas are understood dialectically as produced and reproduced in the process of dynamic, contingent, and contradictory relationships’ (Waterston, 2019: 8). Waterston’s and Rylko Bauer’s works focus on the lives of their father and mother, respectively. The dialectical nature of intimate ethnography is thus a consequence of a decision to start talking to an intimate other as a daughter, but also as an anthropologist, a scholar, and as an intimately and emotionally engaged person. The academic relationship turning into personal isn’t new, of course, but in case of family and the close Other, the relationship is cyclical, constant and mutually reinforcing intellectually, dialectical in the sense of offering continuous new angles of interpretations and frames of references shifting from the particular to universal, from the small and everyday to broad historical and political, and back. The tension generated by this intellectual practice here can be compared to the dilemma of ethnographic writing that Clifford Geertz brought up, that is, ‘how to sound like a pilgrim and a cartographer at the same time’ (Geertz, 1988: 10). The strength of intimate ethnography rests on its holistic ambition, the potential opportunity to sound like both a pilgrim and cartographer, as well as providing an ethical perspective on possibilities and potentialities, especially when it comes to understanding one’s own positionality and ‘situated knowledge’ (Haraway, 2016). As (Waterston, 2019: 8) states, ‘By rendering a more complete story of reality than is available in more narrowly focused studies, intimate ethnography also illustrates how everyone and everything are connected, making it possible for us to reimagine and remake the world.’

Inevitably, the method arises out of emotional relations with close ones. In my case, unlike Waterston and Rylko-Bauer, there was a whole plethora of ‘intimate others’, and the dialectic was much more complicated. The result is that, my own emotions and searches for meanings take precedence, and that involves understanding certain events and issues affecting my childhood and its consequences. Thus, intimate ethnography, in this version, becomes a research and writing method of self, in order to understand more holistically the social and historical material I and my close ones are made of.

The protagonist in the title of my book is Casimir Garapich, my paternal great-grandfather (1878–1940). He was a relatively wealthy nobleman living in the village of Cebrow (ger. Tsebriv, ukr. Цєбров), Galicia, part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before the First World War, Poland, between 1918–1939, the Soviet Union until 1990 and Ukraine since. He was notoriously promiscuous, a sexual predator known for fathering a lot of children out of wedlock. He had seven with his wife, Maria Łubieńska, and more than 12 illegitimate children with several local village women: Maryna Szeweluk, Anna Suchecka and Stefania Suchowera.

I grew up with the story of Casimir’s infidelity and sexual activity. In my family the story was told with a mixture of male pride, embarrassment, curiosity, and jokes that conceal uneasiness, but also plenty of silencing, omissions and lies. The identity

of the illegitimate children was unknown. However, the story evoked conflicting emotions and feelings – of tension between physical proximity and class distance, but also in the need to remember the past, although in an edited, selected form. Furthermore, my family, broadly speaking, belongs to Polish post-nobility, which lost financial status during socialism but retained social and cultural capital. This precarious situation, where the hard power of wealth was replaced by the soft power of symbols, narratives and ideas, forced them to be careful about what kinds of memory, events and emotions are passed on to next generations. Written memoirs served this purpose and these were my main written sources. Interestingly, as I explore further, their function was also to act as a smoke screen, a memory work device whose main purpose was to cloud and distort the past, to hide something.

Since 2013 I began to look. I travelled to Ukraine for the first time to meet people who were related to me but who didn't figure in official family stories. Since then, I have found, engaged with, and met most of the living relatives of my great grandfather's illegitimate children (these days living in Ukraine, Poland and the US). The majority wanted to meet but I was also met with reservations and rejection. I travelled several times to Ukraine and Poland, meeting new family members, including Casimir's last child, Irena Suchowera (1932–2019). The legitimate side of my family looked at my endeavours with interest and suspicion, but also condemnation (I often heard: 'They are bastards, not family'). In August 2015 I organised a ritual of remembrance in Cebrow, with the unveiling of Casimir's symbolic grave (he was killed by NKVD [Soviet political police, *Narodnyy komissariat vnutrennikh de*] in 1941 and his remains were never found); it was attended by over two hundred people from Poland and Ukraine.

The book tells this story. It is about my discoveries, dilemmas and encounters with people who by social convention were not classified as family, despite sharing ancestors, DNA, and striking physical resemblance. Since I uncovered facts that were hidden in family memoirs or deliberately forgotten, the book also contains discussions about the limits of uncovering family secrets. Where should one stop, what are the boundaries of uncovering things your ancestors decided should remain hidden or deleted from public accounts? I also ask, and try to answer, why look at all? Why did that pursuit draw me to the point of obsession?

As 'the workings of family secrets can be analysed in terms of how they both bond and exclude' (Smart, 2011: 540), my approach using intimate ethnography was to look for emotionally laden spaces of silences, half-truths, innuendos and implicit acknowledgements of emotional wounds. As I explore further in this article, the result was a rather unexpected self-driven therapeutical quest for finding an answer to own thinking and my triggers that kept me interested in the subject, beyond mere 'facts'. Uncovering family secrets has been looked at from various perspectives in social sciences and history, in particular in the context of the rising popularity of family history and amateur genealogy (Evans, 2011). Evans describes, for example, how this impacts Australian colonial settlers' own sense of their past as a nation, through uncovering secrets related to both illegitimacy and criminality. What's important in the context of the book, I wrote, is what Smart notes about the various shades and texture of secrets but also the social praxis of keeping or retelling them, as 'secrets can be kept alive by innuendo, palpable silences, evasions and rumour' (Smart, 2011: 543). Secrets can then be more or less 'open': that is, available to family members in vague contours, and changing in nature over generations. It is also very possible that

the reason for something becoming a secret may be different from what sustained its secrecy.

The book is a hybrid because it mixes genres: non-fiction narrative, 'thick description', reportage, dialogue and self-reflexivity. In terms of sources, it uses archives, unpublished memoirs, my own fieldwork, encounters and childhood memories. On the subject of illegitimacy, the written sources (family memoirs and archives) proved to contain falsehoods or omissions. It is the oral ones that contained the truth. This is a rare find and rare triumph of the weak – records written by powerful elites were created to cloud our understanding. It was the fluid and unspecific oral transmissions of those who were dominated that preserved the emotional significance of this story and the true picture of what happened.

This article will first describe the type of ethnography I engaged in and what material I dealt with, also on an emotional level. It will then discuss what difficult ethical entanglements I had to navigate and why some choices were made. The article ends with a discussion on the ethics of intimate ethnography.

Between formal rejection and informal acknowledgement

The legitimate recognition, selection and construction of kinship ties within social groups is one of the key foundations of social structure, in traditional, agrarian societies, in particular. A great deal of anthropological and sociological writings focus on how this is done, and how legitimate kinship ties determine matrimonial strategies, political alliances, economic conditions, division of labour and reproduction of culture. All major anthropological works engage with the diverse, complex and multidimensional nature of the family – starting with classic work by Bronisław Malinowski, Franz Boas or Margareth Mead, some of which questioned the ethnocentric view of the dominance of the Western model of the family. From that perspective, illegitimacy (the case of offspring born outside formal matrimonial contract) is generally treated as visible evidence of a transgression, a sign of social norms and values being broken, their strength and social functionality put into doubt; furthermore, the guardians of these norms come under threat of losing authority. In that sense illegitimacy, is a threat to power and social order. In the words of Kingsley Davis:

[t]he bastard, like the prostitute, thief, and beggar, belongs to that motley crowd of disreputable social types which society has generally resented, always endured. He is a living symbol of social irregularity, an undeniable evidence of contramoral forces; in short, a problem—a problem as old and unsolved as human existence itself. (Davis, 1939: 215)

The case in my family that I wrote about consisted of a wealthy landowning man – Casimir Garapich – from Polish nobility in a post-feudal pre-1939 Poland. He maintained several households – one in a formal marriage with a woman of his class (Maria Łubieńska) – and others (at times one, two or three) with women who were occupying lower, even the lowest, strata of social class: Maryna Szeweluk had been his mother's servant; Anna Suchecka and Stefania Suchowera were local peasant girls. In these relationships, lasting over four decades, Casimir fathered at least 25 children. At least 18 reached adulthood – six were legitimate, 12 were illegitimate.

These are the offspring I am certain of, evidenced through written and oral records, but my records also contain other, less certain cases, which I elected not to include in my book. In addition, records on still births or deaths in early childhood come only from two Casimir's partners – Maria and Stefania. It is unlikely that Anna and Maryna did not have this experience, given that it was very common at the time, hence this also puts number of children fathered by my great grandfather higher than my conservative estimate.

Legally, they had no right to the surname and inheritance. It was only in 1945 that the law equalising children's rights regardless of parents' marital status was passed. Until then, birth records and christenings put the exclusion in writing; the rubric 'illegitimi' was marked and often (although not always) the words 'pater ignotus' (father unknown) entered. Although 'unknown' was entered in the books, this was of course a fiction, a pretence for the case of Church records and legal and public morality. Everyone knew and quite a few written records exist documenting Casimir's extramarital affairs mentioning numerous illegitimate offspring. First, within the family, the matter was recorded by his legitimate daughter, Ella Geringer (nee Garapich, 1910–99). In her memoirs written in the mid-1980s, Ella mentions her father's extramarital sexual habits and their consequences three times, repeating herself while adding a small detail each time.

My father [she writes] was a great democrat; every peasant, Polish or Ukrainian, could come to my father at any time, talk to him, he would give them advice, sometimes lend money, he helped the poor, although he himself did not have much money, having six children himself, bringing them up and educating them at university, which was very expensive in those days, the so-called tuition fees were quite high. He had a high temperament and was hot-blooded as they said in those days, unfortunately, his wife, whom he loved and respected very much, was not enough for him, he always had a parallel mistress in the countryside, and that cost a considerable amount of money. It was necessary to write off a few acres to these concubines, give them a cow and help them build a house. He sired many children of illegitimate origin with them, so each of us had a peer 'born on the wrong side of the blanket'. He was not a lecher driven to take anything in his path; it was simply that one woman was not enough for him. He cared a lot about his 'bastards', took an interest in their upbringing, helped them get an education or a profession.

The second mention comes along with a description of the character of her mother, Maria:

She loved all the children very much, but she was first of all a wife, and only then a mother. She loved my father madly; he was always in the foreground of her thoughts, heart and life. She did not have a good relationship with her husband, who, although he loved her very much, was of high temperament; one woman was not enough for him, he always had some concubine in the countryside, with whom he had several children, so that each of us had a 'peer on the left side'. Mother knew about these amorous affairs, and she suffered, but she hid these matters from us as much as she could; I don't

remember a time when there was a scene or a row. She was very tolerant, I even had it in for her.

And a few pages further on, repeating almost the same thing, she writes:

She loved our father madly, although she did not have an easy life with him, because as a result of his hot, 'kresowy temperament', one woman was not enough for him; he always had some 'concubine' in the village, and each of us had a 'lefty' peer. She put up with it patiently, although she did not tolerate it, I do not remember there ever being any scenes or brawls.

*Kresowy*¹ temperament, hot blood, bastards, 'lefties', 'leftie peers', concubines: Ella uses a varied vocabulary to describe this state of affairs, while establishing a clear line of legitimate kinship. The Polish term 'leftie' is probably something she invented or was used by the Garapichs – it conveys illegality, not following the rules, being outside the norm. In the first passage, she reveals subconsciously what this is about when she writes that he had six children, and a few sentences later that he did have more, as if admitting that he had children *and* children, that his offspring were divided into the six and the rest, arranging Casimir's children into hierarchical order. 'Lefties' have no names or surnames. They are a faceless mass, an abstract entity. She mentions her 'lefty' siblings in her memoirs, but never uses the words 'sister' or 'brother'. In her memoirs her father's illegitimate children are simply not her siblings. They are nameless but familiar peers who are difficult to classify and for whom, therefore, new terms are created. Intriguingly, the memoirs were only one side of her attitude, because what Ella writes was contrary to what she did. She maintained relations with her brothers and sisters, wrote letters to them, and I suspect had warm feelings towards them. The key however, is the fact that she wants to write about this fact but without giving these children human faces, names and individual lives. She wanted to say something without saying it all.

Other records come from contemporary inhabitants of the village. For example, a railway worker, Zygmunt Lech in his unpublished memoirs written towards the end of his life, deposited at the Karta Centre Foundation,² writes: '[Garapich] owned around 300 hectares of fertile soil, but due to his propensity towards local virgins – which he was deceptively seducing – he was paying with hectares for this seduction, until he had no more than around 80 hectares' (Wspomnienia Zygmunta Lecha, Karta).

Verbal testimonies offer a fuller picture. My legitimate side of the family recalled only one name – Michał Suchecki – because he kept in touch over many decades with his brother Jerzy Garapich. Although the fact was well known in the family, at the time of my enquiries no one knew any names, lives or locations. All details were gathered through my visits to Ukraine, to Cebrów and a few locations in Poland. The oral transmission of illegitimate family contained many more important details about individual circumstances, inheritance and financial assistance to the offspring, but it was also more intimate in the details of Casimir's sexual exploitation tactics. Individual life stories offered a rich mosaic of material strongly linked with turbulent historical events in the area. Casimir's children were born over 33 years of his life (the first was born in 1899, the last was in 1932); his living and dead descendants would consist of around 400 people in Europe and the US, so tracing some of these lineages

showed complexities reflecting that these people lived in periods of ‘grand history’ – the collapse of several empires, two world wars with their hugely destructive impact, genocides, nationalisms, rebellions and occupation – more than half of century of living under a socialist regime (in the Polish and Soviet versions) and uneasy paths towards modern democracy and capitalism. They are Polish, Ukrainian, American, occupying all social strata. But throughout these grand historical events, were the equally important mundane life stories of happiness, tragedy, loss, survival, blessing, wealth, poverty, love, and death.

How did this work? Formal non-recognition and exclusion from the Garapich family, class membership, inheritance and family memory was coupled with an informal recognition in the form of having certain rights as biological children of the lord. As in other areas and historical times, although they were condemned by public morals and the Church, extramarital affairs were de facto accepted, as long as any children born out of wedlock were taken care of financially, and things were kept quiet (see for example, [Elisofon, 1973](#); [Macfarlane, 1980](#); [Schmidgen, 2002](#); [Zunshine, 2005](#)). This amounted to informal recognition, a form of illicit acknowledgment. In the case of Casimir, compensation usually consisted of a piece of land (around 2/3 hectares) and assistance in house building, and some livestock. In 2014, I was shown letters signed by Casimir ceding plots of lands to his partner, Stefania. As Ella notes earlier in this article, her father also felt compelled to help his children later on in life. What is also worth emphasising is that Casimir managed to keep their illegitimate sons close and in time of mortal danger, they saved his life (in 1939, when the Soviets came to kill him). Relations between siblings were therefore defined by inequality, but they did spend time together and knew clearly who was who – this was a small village. They weren’t removed from public or cast out of the village, they formed some relations which were public and visible. A snippet of these relations comes from an oral biography of Czesław Cwynar – a local farmer who lived in Cebrów in the 1930s: ‘[T]hey were coming for summer holidays, these two legal sons; so [with them] the illegal son and myself many times we went together to shoot hares, or partridges. Hunting.’ I have no doubt here that these men going on a hunting trip knew their social and biological circumstances. Everyone seemed to accept the unequal relationships; they go hunting together, after all. The social distance didn’t exclude some form of proximity, in terms of emotional relations, spending time together or being vaguely aware that these people were more than just local peasants.

Was everyone happy with the arrangement? I don’t think so, but there seemed to be some acceptance. In gathering oral testimonies, I was attentive to the instances of rebellion, contestation and holding a grudge against Casimir, or more generally the Garapichs, for such treatment of illegitimate children. I found only two cases and they both came from women, daughters who at some point of their lives asked their biological fathers (Casimir and Paweł, his brother and author of other memoirs) for formal acceptance and the Garapich surname – in both cases the request was rejected. Apart from these, I didn’t come across any instances of voiced dissatisfaction with the situation. But sons were treated differently from women in that patriarchal world, so my interpretation is that Casimir tried to offer some emotional and financial counterbalance to his children, especially to his sons who didn’t have full rights. The essence of my argument of the functionality of informal acceptance is that their unprivileged position in relation to legitimate siblings was offset by a

privileged position in relation to other peasant folk, the rest of the village inhabitants. In this small village, the sub-group of Casimir's illegitimate children who were Polish Catholics played a social, economic and political role.

That social space between formal non-recognition and informal recognition is crucial evidence of an established practice and norms in the rural society at the time, incorporating bastardy into its social structure. It needs to be said that there is also evidence of this practice by Casimir's father, Michał. I would argue that this practice was very common among Polish gentry at the time, as shown by recently growing interest and recognition of the sexual violence dimension of feudal relations in Polish scholarship (Pobłocki, 2021; Pobłocki, 2023). Before I move to the intimate ethnographic aspect and how emotions began to play their part in my research, these functionalist and practical explanations need to be taken into account.

As a result of the practice of compensation through land, most illegitimate children remained till the outbreak of the Second World War in the village or very close by. This also meant economic and social proximity and illegitimate sons' and daughters' households being part of the overall economy of the Polish manor in the area – the dominant economic unit that provided the source of economic activity, cash flows and labour, especially for poorer farmers. The new households provided a potential supply of labour and support in the village that still maintained some feudal features. It also mattered that these households were Polish and Catholic – around a third of the village population – the remaining being Ukrainian-speaking Greek Orthodox. In increasingly tense Polish-Ukrainian relations through the 19th century culminating in significant violence during the time of the Second Polish Republic (1918–1939) and the Volhynian genocide of 1943 (Snyder, 2003), these factors are important – although no Polish-Ukrainian violence is recorded in the village of Cębrów. In general, illegitimate offspring began to create a sort of buffer or not-so-poor class of farmers who were relatively secure financially and with a specific connection to the wealthiest and most powerful person in the village – Casimir.

This means that the knowledge of who was who – what I call the 'informal genealogical tree of the village' – was crucial to be able to determine relationships of reciprocity: who was allowed special favours, and what was the local and social distribution of social capital. In political terms, this also functioned as a map of trust, and in 1939, proved to save Casimir's life (temporarily) as he moved to one of his son's houses, after being thrown out of the manor by new Soviet rulers, and still in mortal danger, which in the end materialised in the spring of 1940. This interpretation can be also applied more broadly. The fact of having a group of people, men in the village who are related by blood but are members of lower social class can be also viewed as a way for upper classes to mitigate risks and dangers associated with rapid social and political change and reduction of drastic inequality. In times of revolutions and rebellions, these children and their families may have acted as a potential buffer zone able to shield the elites against revengeful violence from the lower strata of local society. Polish nobility in the area experienced such peasant rebellion in 1846, with significant loss of life and property among the gentry. Its memory ran deep in the psyche of that class.

The informal genealogy of the village also had a more biological function. As with any genealogy, it provided information about the pool of potential sexual partners delineating boundaries beyond which engaging in sex would be taboo. In a small rural environment where the practice of sexual exploitation of local women through more

than one generation of landowners is not just accepted but informally legitimised through a system of rights and obligations, an awareness that biological kinship had to be maintained to avoid incest.

What are you doing and why?

This complex map of social relations balancing between formal exclusion and informal inclusion has a strongly personal intimate dimension – I was interviewing, talking, reflecting and ultimately writing about my own family history. The difference in my intimate ethnography compared to the one carried by Waterston and Rylko-Bauer was that, while they dealt with one parent, I dealt with a large number, at least fifty people connected through this story, including my siblings, parents, cousins, aunts and uncles. Over the years of my research and book publication, everyone has reacted differently. In general, the legitimacy boundary was also indicative of the attitude.

There were people whom I approached with my knowledge about their genealogy, in Ukraine, Poland and the US. Some knew, others had a vague idea, some didn't have a clue. I was bringing in details of past stories, so in that sense I wasn't just gathering information and reflections, I was also disseminating them and then seeing a variety of reactions. The response was diverse, mainly sympathetic, but also included rejection and unwillingness to discuss at all. Some were uneasy about letting it be known that their father was an illegitimate son. The majority of the new-found family in Poland was curious, and welcoming. In Ukraine, the acceptance was overwhelmingly warm; my Ukrainian family was not particularly bothered by my presence and visit, and the fact of being descendants of *pany* (Polish for lords) was sometimes a prestigious thing. Nonetheless, they also made clear from the start that they were on their own turf; they were the hosts and rightful owners of lands, plots and farm buildings that prior to 1939 belonged to the Garapich family. My visit to Ukraine, then, needs to be understood in the context of numerous other nostalgic 'returns' of former members of elites visiting the land of their ancestors, where the current inhabitants have replaced the old ones, and may be suspicious of their true intentions, sometimes not without justification. Establishing the relationship between myself and my Ukrainian family was deeply affected by wider politics and the sometimes thorny relations between Poland and Ukraine; issues related to the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Ukrainian state development since independence, by the 2014 Maidan Revolution and the slow journey towards membership of the European Union, including the full-scale Russian invasion of 2022. I was a Pole, coming to a Ukrainian village, which 67 years ago was within the Polish state, in which Polish elites were systematically suspicious of Ukrainian nationalism and vice versa. The shadow of history was there but it was entangled in a shared family story. That manoeuvring between my Polishness, their Ukrainianess and our mutual biological connection through ancestors was probably what made the whole encounter rich and emotional, as well as hugely significant for all of us. But it was also an entanglement with the legacy of sexual violence where both the perpetrators and victims had to find a common ground. Casimir had been exploiting his power and sexual violence was an integral part of this. This difficult dualism of being a descendant of both victim and perpetrator has also impacted on patriarchal relations in rural Ukraine. In the end, the horizontal blood connection enabled us to talk. Asked if they think a symbolic grave of the Garapich family is appropriate in the village cemetery, they were very enthusiastic about the idea and

were driving the initiative, including the ritual of remembrance we organised together in 2015. That day, in August 2015 numerous family 'branches' came to Cebrow. Some glitches occurred, even a scandal, but overall, this was a brief moment when a group of Poles and Ukrainians – old, young, middle-class, working-class, legitimate and illegitimate relatives of my great-grandfather ate, drank, cried and laughed together. Somehow, although briefly, a deeper connection across nationalities, generations, religions, classes, kinship boundaries and languages was possible putting behind an often-painful past.

My class positionality in all this is also important. Certainly not decisive, but as an academic, researcher and anthropologist, a middle-class urbanite from London – the projection of an scholarly aura over my visit may have also opened up some people. I will never know for certain, of course, why people talked to me, but I was also trying to be honest when they asked me: why do I search. While engaging and gathering information I did not know that I would write a book; the idea came later, and I never described my search as academic, it was personal. Here, apart from answering 'why do you look for this new family' with the cliché 'it is nice to meet new family', I usually referred to my own childhood and the legacy of parental separation and divorce, and the fact that family chaos, loss, separation from siblings and the confusion over who is family and who isn't was part of my upbringing generates a need for a temporary sense of order, meaning and wider significance. I sympathised with this situation, and I also don't like silencing and excluding voices that don't have the power to articulate themselves. This is what I also insert in the book, as probably the main emotional driver of my research into excluded members of this complex genealogy. Asked a few times why had I come and why did I want to meet, I sometimes answered: 'I knew you existed but I didn't know who you were.' It is probably the reason why one of the most emotionally charged moments were the ones where I learned the first names of the illegitimate children forgotten by the Garapichs for the first time: Adam, Melania, Paweł, Michał, Helena, Michał, Marian, Kazimiera, Tadeusz, Stanisław, Jan, Irena, Anastazja, Maria, Julia, Władysław and many others who died too young to be named or remembered.

There was also the legitimate side of the family – another few dozen people. They were less enthusiastic, my father's generation, in particular; his cousins, broadly speaking, were a bit suspicious of my search and meeting people face to face. Comments ranged from 'they are not family; they are bastards' to 'why bring this up', and by 'this' was meant Casimir's infidelity. Several women of my father's generation were also strongly reluctant to engage, due to their condemnation of Casimir's infidelity on moral grounds. In their view, relations with the illegitimate offspring side would morally justify an act that should be condemned. This attitude demonstrates the 'bastard stigma', as the children carry the sin of their mothers. They also framed their resistance to engage in terms of female solidarity with his wife, Maria Łubieńska, who clearly must have suffered, so any meetings with the illegitimate offspring would be disloyal to her and to her memory.

My generation was much more supportive, although sometimes doubts remained. There are various ways to approach this reluctance and I have been given sometimes elaborate explanations. Some related to suspicion towards Ukrainians in general – this was before the full-scale war in 2022 and the overall outpouring of solidarity from Polish society towards Ukraine and its refugees. But there was a deeper uneasiness, I suspect. In essence the problem was that from one 'family story' which was passed

on to us through generations and written in memoirs, everybody now had to accept that there were many of these ‘family stories’ and that their ‘family history’ contained a lot of issues we didn’t know about, and we did not have the monopoly over the Garapich story. The completeness of family story was in doubt; it depended on others now. There was no longer one story of Cebrow, Casimir, the manor, the nostalgically cherished past. My generation was brought up on a single narrative. Now it turned out to be one of many.

I am using the term ‘family story’ in a performative understanding of the term, the way narratives about the past are told to maintain family bonds and reproduce cohesiveness (Langellier and Peterson, 2004; Kellas, 2010). This performance happens over the kitchen table, during life rituals, over some everyday encounter, but can also be set down in writing in memoirs or public acknowledgements. The story told within my family I grew up with, is also a piece of grander Polish history, as the people of Casimir’s generation in my family and their children saw themselves as descendants of elites in control of dominant discourses about national political events, their decisive role in history, their power as elites: the Polish gentry, an important part of Polish gentry ethos and claim to power (Zarycki, 2015; Smoczyński and Zarycki, 2021). Implicitly this also had a hidden function of excluding minorities – such as Jews – from this role, as well as people of other classes. This war generation (people born in the 1930s to late 1940s) needed very specific stories that connected the traumatic events of the Second World War and the destruction of their world, including a burnt family manor, the death of Casimir, and their own survival in a socialist system and the ambiguous status of Polish nobility in socialist times – without financial wealth and dominance over rural folk, but with plenty of social capital and family connections. Memoirs that I critically read, written by Ella and Paweł, served this purpose – to save what was lost, to set in stone the past for it to still be useful in the present. And it was, because Polish society, despite socialism, still maintained strong cultural and political sentiment towards nobility and its culture (Smoczyński and Zarycki, 2021).

The problem with the ‘other’ family story is that it jeopardised this narrative by making it more democratic, because now others had something to say about Casimir; since he was also their father or grandfather, they also had a claim to this intimate narrative, as they had a right to hang his picture in the living room. This loss of control over the narrative was probably deeply unsettling to my family, in particular because people who were now speaking – through me – were often the beneficiaries of socialism. Some of Casimir’s illegitimate children were party members, committed socialists or members of the military. Suddenly the narrative ceased to be simple – about Polish nobility suffering from oppressive communism – but became meandering and contradictory, but most importantly, belonging to someone else too. In that sense, the loss of control of this very intimate family narrative mirrors the loss of political power of that class in Polish society; the story becomes egalitarian, plural and devoid of its oppressive meanings, although paradoxically, retaining its violent content, as it was after all a story about sexual violence.

Killing by silencing, resurrecting by writing

Setting the narrative in stone through memoirs, the written word has become more than just memory work and a hobby of pensioners. In fact, the postwar period and in particular the period after 1989 has resulted in a boom in the publication of Polish

nobility memoirs. This specific genre emerged as a way of former elites' positioning in a fast-changing social landscape in socialist and then post-1989 Poland. Hence the importance in this family story of the other source I used: the memoirs of Casimir's brother, Paweł Garapich. He elected to completely silence any reference to illegitimate offspring – there is nothing. He had to navigate carefully as he himself had a daughter out of wedlock, with a woman considered not to be of his class. In the light of what I now knew and had learned, this total silence was provocative. Combined with Ella's memoirs, who as we saw, said something but not all, this was an invitation to explore why people elect silence. I began to experience a certain level of satisfaction that I managed to see through all the lies and omissions that Paweł had typed into his memoirs to carefully avoid acknowledging that Cebrow – the village that he loved and missed so much – was also full of peasants connected through this ambiguous kinship, about whom you have to know who they are, but you cannot admit that formally. I really took joy in being able to find and then write about what he had missed, lied about and omitted, and to speculate why.

The gaps and omissions in Paweł's memoirs are understandable but they raise an important ethical question about the limits of the critical examination of sources. Paweł had a daughter, Maria Kubiszyn. He took care of her at some stage, but from a distance. Later on, in the 1920s, as an adult, she lived with him and his wife in Lviv. She was one of the two illegitimate children of Garapichs who rebelled; she was unhappy over her being denied the family surname, and from this time in Lviv comes an extraordinary tale of open defiance. At one point, she asked him for formal recognition, to be given the surname, and he refused. She then took a hunting rifle, aimed it at him and said she would shoot if he refused. In the end, she did not, and she didn't get the surname. I heard this story verbally at first; it was such a powerful tale that its oral version survived almost a hundred years. Then I found a newspaper clip about the incident – Paweł called the police and as he was a well-known figure in Lviv (former governor), the newspapers wrote about it. In the clip she is presented as a maid, not a daughter. Despite this incident, the relationship endured. After the war, she visited him with her son, Wojciech Krzywobłodki. I got in touch with him. He remembered his grandfather; he was 19 when he died in 1957. But he didn't know about the memoirs. He couldn't because they weren't written for him. He might have been Paweł's only grandchild, but there is nothing in the 700-page memoir about him or his mother.

I have to admit that Paweł's total erasure of his own daughter, because she was illegitimate is emotionally difficult for me to bear and understand. There is something deeply unsettling in this act, and I cannot hide that this determines my attitude towards the uncle – I don't like him, he repulses me. All his elegant, often boring, very old fashioned grammatically but at times engaging and even moving prose fades in the light of this particular spot of silence. I find his decision cruel and immoral. I cannot fully comprehend it, but it resonates with me so strongly to the point of not being certain whether all that searching for illegitimate family is ethically justified, or I do this just to seek revenge for what happened to me a long time ago. My feeling of dislike towards this man is odd. I am not often prone to disliking someone and in my profession, I try not be judgemental. I find it hard here. And here I am, looking at Paweł and his memoirs realising that this act of silence and my distaste for him is actually what may have fuelled me in these searches over the years.

I was confronted with a difficult decision. I decided to send these memoirs to Wojciech, thinking that he has the right to know, especially because he will learn about the book I wrote, in which Paweł's silence is vivisected. I did not ask what he thought, but I presume it wasn't easy for him to learn that the author – his grandfather about whom he has some fond memories – elected to delete his daughter and grandson from history.

This space of silence inevitably demands further attention. Is Paweł here torn between individual emotions and collective morality and social control so obvious in his class? As Seljamaa and Siim note in the special issue of *Ethnologia Europaea* on silence: 'Silence and silencing as culturally constructed practices are never merely matters of personal choice, but are also informed by shared evaluations and resources of conduct deemed acceptable or desirable in any given situation' (Seljamaa and Siim, 2016: 6). Silence and power to silence is 'fraught with power asymmetry. They can suppress the multiplicity of points of view and inhibit change' (Seljamaa and Siim, 2016: 6), and as Maria-Luisa Achino-Loeb writes 'silence is a vehicle for the exercise of power' because it 'allows us to believe that the nonspoken is nonexistent' (Achino-Loeb, 2006: 6, 11; cited in Seljamaa and Siim, 2016: 8).

Silencing is thus an act of domination and in the context of preservation of one 'family story' an act of expulsion. To make sense of this act I use a metaphor of killing – murdering one's kin. The metaphor allows me to counter this act with my own research and writing, which is the reverse – it revives, resurrects and brings to light and life what was hidden. Silencing is slightly different in Ella's and Paweł's memoirs – in the first case she can't resist the need to write about the fact of her father's notorious infidelity, but omits the names, dehumanising her siblings; in the second we have total silence, non-existence. Both meet however in the power positionality of all this – they are the ones in control of the narrative, and it is the act of writing that conveys it.

It isn't hard to note that my reversal of their act of murder-domination uses the same tools of power – writing. It is thus difficult to disentangle their writing and mine, as I have entered into a dialogue with what they tried to do, using the same tools, but armed with my own academic background, knowing how to write convincingly (a key skill for ethnographer). This reversal of power relations of course raises the question as to whom I have unintentionally 'resurrected' by writing about them in my book. To be more precise, what other information I have included that some people wished to stay hidden, deleted, silenced. I didn't ask anyone for permission to write and publish. I have inserted details and information that some readers from my family may have – and did – find harmful and offensive. In the spirit of not-being-silent, I also wrote about things seemingly unconnected, but which had a huge impact on my writing and what was happening to me then – such as the suicide of my brother in 2014, and my guilt around it. My intimate ethnography took me cyclically between venturing into the past of my family and piecing the deliberately discarded puzzles of this story together, but simultaneously also inwards, into my own childhood traumas and self-silenced narratives around my status as a son, brother, father and husband. I answer why I write and search for people who by social convention were alien and distant, but with whom I shared a sense of fractured family bonds in need of mending. But these answers also caused tension, emotional harm and in consequence, family

estrangement. I have unburied some secrets, given voice, but the costs were high, and rightfully so.

But silence can also be the tool of the oppressed, the weaker side of this relations. Silencing the stigma of illegitimacy in some of my newly discovered families, was sometimes an act of revenge. The descendants of one of Casimir's daughters simply refused to engage, saying that my surname 'doesn't mean anything to them', although through other members, I knew they were well aware. There was a wound there, which I attempted to open and they had all the rights to refuse to engage. But simultaneously, they had also decided to condemn Casimir – to family oblivion.

Ethics of intimate ethnography: never-ending story

Intimate ethnography as described by Waterston offers a dialectical tool connecting dimensions still not that common in social sciences, 'the personal and the political, the past and the present, social life situated in multiple places and in changing political-economic conditions, and the individual in history and history in the individual' (Waterston, 2019: 19). The attention to bridge these opposites and balance the writing of pilgrim and cartographer in order to deliver a harmonious story, requires constant dialectical relation to both text and experience, to both what is out there and what lies within, to myself and the society that constructs me in numerous ways. Consequently, any intimate ethnography is an unfinished endeavour. This also makes it a deeply challenging ethically exercise where every step and meaning-making practice is affecting both sides of the equation, not just in epistemological but also practical ways. The learning and research curve in the case I am describing involved filling an oppressive space of silence and erasure, which meant giving voice and agency to the silenced. But it also meant exposing something others wished to remain hidden, it meant disagreeing with their choices, it meant appropriating the power of deciding what to write.

In the course of my experiment and engagement with intimate ethnography, I went back and forth between the world of the kinship, class and ethnic legacy left by my great grandfather and my own childhood memories, my parents' divorce, my mother's infidelity, my father's highly insecure masculinity, and my brother's suicide. All of this made more holistic sense and meaning in the context of finding an emotional connection with people whose lives were also full of secrets, masculine anxieties, female resistance, separations, tragedies, violence and lies. And yes, possibly visiting traumas of people long-time dead, allowed me to – slightly – heal mine. This simultaneous venture into distant family past and personal fears which is the core of intimate ethnography in my case, isn't for everyone, but it almost certainly brought together what was earlier separated. And there was no way of knowing whether this intimate ethnography would work, or whether it was ethical. This could only be judged after the act. As Geertz (1988: 147) writes:

Like poems and hypotheses, ethnographies can only be judged *ex post*, after someone has brought them into being. But, for all that, it seems likely that whatever use ethnographic texts will have in the future, if in fact they actually have any, it will involve enabling conversation across societal lines-of ethnicity, religion, class, gender, language, race that have grown progressively more nuanced, more immediate, and more irregular.

The conversation I stimulated was an odd one, since it involved, not just close and distant relatives, but also dead people. The ethical dilemmas are numerous and, I presume, the exercise is fraught with pitfalls and can tear apart people, families and individuals. Yet, it can also give a brief and illuminating holistic experience of mutual horizontal connectedness, human harmony, and an experience of communion across time and space. Thus, the intimacy in this ethnography traces the residues of violence and oppression, but also moments of harmony and happiness in order to create a holistic, complete, anthropological picture of myself and the world that makes me – with its bright and dark sides.

Notes

¹ Kresy means ‘borderlands’ in Polish, the area on the East in pre-1939 times; today it is part of Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. The expression *Kresowy temperament* indicates that this area was associated with nature, wilderness and violence, its inhabitants regarded as hot-blooded and emotional in character.

² Poland’s digital social archive (karta.org.pl).

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