RIFL (2019) Vol. 13, n. 2: 94-102
DOI: 10.4396/12201904

The Concept of Logoclastic Violence in Carinthia[1]

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Abstract The *Ortstafelsturm*, the 'storm on the town signs', was a series of political events in 1972 in Carinthia, Austria, in which up to 300 individuals participated in tearing down bilingual street signs that were erected days before by the Austrian government in areas where an autochthonous Slovene minority lives. Jennifer M. Gully (2011) refers to these events as instances of *logoclastic* or 'language-breaking' violence. With this term Gully identifies a rather complex political phenomenon that involves a conflict over bilingualism. The term, however, goes otherwise undefined. In this paper I try to reverse-engineer Gully's notion of logoclastic violence from the particular phenomenon it is applied to. With reference to Benedict Anderson's and Ernest Gellner's theories of nationalism, I argue that it can be understood as a struggle between monolingual and multilingual conceptions of an imagined community.

Keywords: Logoclastic Violence, Bilingualism, Imagined Community, Carinthian Slovenes, Nationalism

Received 29 May 2019; accepted 25 October 2019.

0. Introduction

The *Ortstafelsturm*, the 'storm on the town signs', was a series of political events in 1972 in Carinthia, Austria, in which up to 300 individuals participated in tearing down bilingual street signs that were erected days before by the Austrian government in areas where an autochthonous Slovene minority lives. Jennifer M. Gully (2011) refers to these events as instances of *logoclastic* or 'language-breaking' violence. With this term Gully identifies a rather complex political phenomenon that involves a conflict over bilingualism. The term, however, goes otherwise undefined. In this paper I try to reverse-engineer Gully's notion of logoclastic violence from the particular phenomenon it is applied to.

What is the difference between logoclastic violence and iconoclastic violence – the politically motivated destruction of images, icons or monuments? The violence surrounding the *Ortstafelsturm* was not exclusively directed at bilingual place name signs, but was aimed at authorities and monuments as well. What distinguishes logoclastic violence from iconoclastic violence may be that the former is aimed at language while the latter is aimed at icons, images, monuments. But this object-oriented strategy to

[1] I thank Gareth Price and Günther Rautz as well as two anonymous reviewers of the article for helpful comments.

define logoclastic violence runs the risk of yielding a vacuous notion. Certainly there is an identifiable phenomenon of people attacking arguably linguistic manifestations like street signs, but there might be another identifiable phenomenon of people attacking trees and yet there may be no need to call it 'dendroclastic violence'. Both could be seen as instances of iconoclasm, one directed against a linguistic minority, the other maybe against an environmentalist organization.
Focusing this way conceptually on the attacked objects conceals the motivational history and does not help with the analysis of what happened. If we want to use logoclastic violence as the thicker political and linguistic concept that Gully's paper would seem to offer, we better have a theory that makes it more informative. The notion should be interesting beyond the physical manipulation of place name signs, rather than other cultural icons. I will first sketch some historical background of the conflict in question and suggest a distinction of conflicts between different linguistic communities and linguistic conflicts within one community. With reference to Benedict Anderson's and Ernest Gellner's theories of nationalism, I argue that logoclastic violence can be understood as a struggle between monolingual and multilingual conceptions of an imagined community.

1. The Setting of Logoclastic Violence in Carinthia

In the fall of 1918 the multilingual Austro-Hungarian Empire dissolved and gave way to the formation of new national entities. As nationalism goes, these should emerge along ethnic lines in the area. Additional lines were drawn along economic and historical arguments about competitiveness and claims to territory respectively. Two of these politically formative entities were the Republic of German-Austria, later to become the First Austrian Republic, and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, later to become the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Carinthia, today the southernmost region of Austria, declared itself part of the Republic of German Austria. Due to undefined borders and ethnically mixed populations, this declaration included Slovene speaking territory in the south of Carinthia without clarifying the status of the thereby newly formed linguistic minority.
Aware of ethnically mixed territory in its own lands as well as of the Slovene population in Carinthia the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes went on to occupy regions in Carinthia:

> The Carinthians were left to their own devices to fight back and regain the territory for Austria, as the weak government in Vienna was not in a position to officially endorse a military solution. Recorded in history as the *Abwehrkampf* (Defensive Struggle), this event forever tainted relations between the *Deutschkärntner* [German Carinthians] and the Slovene Carinthians, giving them a desperate, fatalistic tinge (Gully 2011: 5, translation in brackets mine).

While the Republic of German-Austria was negotiating its own national existence, more than 200 Carinthians lost their lives fighting back territory. Although militarily overpowered in the Austro-Slovene Conflict they resisted successfully until the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye mandated a plebiscite in the south of Carinthia.
With this plebiscite a majority of Slovenes in Carinthia voted to remain part of the new Austrian Republic. A promised recognition in form of a cultural autonomy in the region was never introduced and the minority protection regime introduced by the Treaty of Saint-German-en-Laye only partly implemented. Carinthian Slovenes were antagonized and deported during the Austrofascist and Nazi era and only after the Second World

War, with the new State Treaty of Vienna 1955, were they constitutionally recognized as a linguistic minority and given the right to be represented in the region, for example with bilingual town signs.
This constitutional recognition of the Slovene minority was however only partially executed until the early 1970s when the federal government decided to implement legally the constitutional provisions of Art. 7 State Treaty of Vienna and put up bilingual town signs (Rautz 2017: 158).

> What happened next was unexpected and sparked a political crisis that in the years since has reached an ever-higher pitch. During the night of 20 September 1972, in what came to be called the *Ortstafelsturm*, the local *Deutschkärntner* (German Carinthian) population took down the bilingual signs that had been put up during the day. In the decades that followed, political maneuverings, legal opinions, and the public's actions combined to render the *Ortstafelfrage* [town signs question] one of the most vexed, complex, and puzzling phenomena of post-war Austria (Gully 2011: 4f, translation in square brackets mine)[2].

In her account of the decades-long Carinthian controversy about bilingual town signs, known as the *Ortstafelstreit*, the 'town signs dispute', Gully introduces the concept motivating the present paper in the following way: «The logoclastic violence unleashed in the 1972 *Ortstafelsturm* is a remainder of the violence that surrounds the imposition of a national language in the proclamation of a nation-state» (*ivi*: 5f). With the «proclamation of a nation-state» Gully refers to the formation of the Republic of German-Austria after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
The organized radicalization of self-identifying German Carinthians in the 1970s saw the bilingual town signs and thus the representation of the Slovene Minority in the region as a new *Abwehrkampf*, this time to be fought with «mental weapons» (Gstettner 2004: 87, translation mine). Radical tones went so far as to suggest that if bilingual signs get erected then somehow, anachronistically, the Slovenes retroactively win and German Carinthians will be deported from the region (Rautz 2017: 169). This was the most extreme explicit narrative to enter Carinthian media. The logoclastic violence at issue was quite diffuse, it included bomb threats against local government buildings and the desecration of Yugoslav Partisan memorials, which were being associated with Slovenes, as well as the organized singing of Carinthian folk songs in front of the prevailing governor's home.
The radicalization that emerged in Carinthia was thus an interpretation and negotiation of the erection of bilingual town signs in terms of Carinthia's past: the Austro-Slovene Conflict and the Second World War. At this point I would suggest that the actual *Abwehrkampf* was not an instance of logoclastic violence. The *Abwehrkampf* was a fight over national territory between two newly forming national communities on linguistic, ethnic, political and economic terms. The *Ortstafelsturm*, on the other hand, was a struggle over representation within one national and bilingual community.

[2] *Ortstafelstreit* is the Austrian name of the conflict over bilingual town signs in Carinthia since the early 1970s. *Ortstafelfrage* is the Austrian term for the general question about how to deal with town signs raised by this conflict. Here I will use *Ortstafelsturm* for the Storm on the Town Signs event in 1972 and *Abwehrkampf* for the Defensive Struggle of Carinthians in the Austro-Slovene Conflict of 1918 / 1919. From the Slovene perspective the latter conflict is referred to as the *Boj za severno mejo*, the "battle for the northern border". I will use *Abwehrkampf* when I mean the Austrian perspective in the Austro-Slovene Conflict. I think of the relation between the terms "Austro-Slovene Conflict", "*Abwehrkampf*" and "*Boj za severno mejo*" for the present purpose simply in analogy to "Venus", "morning star" and "evening star" respectively, where the latter two terms may include historical inaccuracies about the Austro-Slovene Conflict that are integral to either motivational perspective.

On the subject of bilingual education in the United States Suzanne Romaine notes that often «the most outspoken opponents [of bilingual education] are those of immigrant background for whom no provision was made, and who were eager to assimilate as quickly as possible to the mainstream American way of life» (Romaine 2000: 228). A similar dynamic can be found in Carinthia where some of the leaders of the *Ortstafelsturm* had Slovene family names. Also some of the most outspoken opponents of bilingualism, including bilingual education, were Carinthian Slovenes who changed their family names into German family names and stopped speaking Slovene at home. There is much sacrifice in this and so there is sacrifice among Carinthian Slovenes who decided to keep their family names and their language knowing what this may imply for themselves and their children in a polarized Carinthia.
Romaine stresses that while language is a precondition for social life, it does neither exist on its own nor is its main purpose simply the reflection of some pre-existing reality. She argues that social and linguistic knowledge are intertwined and therefore provide speakers with options that are highly peculiar to their languages. But although language is in this way important to individuals and communities, with linguistic self-identification comes a risk: «The belief that having one's own language is criterial for ethnicity may be used by a state and its mainstream population to deny the legitimacy of claims to special status and land rights made by a group who have shifted from their autochthonous languages to the language of the majority» (*ivi*: 38).
A driving factor of Carinthia's fate could not be described more fittingly. Again and again Carinthia tried to come to grips with bilingualism by assessing its merit in numbers. But on Romaine's picture, a plebiscite or a census will settle neither the number nor the rights of a linguistic community:

> Self-reports of language usage are subject to variance in relation to factors such as prestige, ethnicity, political affiliation. Even where these factors are not present to a great degree, a respondent and census taker may not share the same ideas about what terms like 'mother tongue', 'home language', etc. mean, especially since linguists themselves are not agreed on how bilingualism should be defined. Usually censuses do not recognize that an individual might have more than one 'mother tongue', or that the language learned first might not be the language best mastered (*ivi*: 37).

With its complex etiology logoclastic violence in the case of Carinthia is a diffuse phenomenon and, although its victims can be clearly identified as people of the autochthonous Slovene minority, its pernicious effects are highly ambiguous and affect family relationships, personal identities, democratic processes and institutions.

2. Imagined Factors and Real Dynamics: Logoclastic Violence with Anderson

With Anderson's theory of nations as imagined communities there is some merit for saying that, while the *Abwehrkampf* was a (proto-)international conflict between two communities over territory, the *Ortstafelsturm* was a properly nationalistic struggle within one community over imagination, plausibly to be called an *imaginative struggle* – to be fought with «mental weapons». Anderson defines the nation as an imagined political community:«It is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion» (Anderson 2006: 6).
It is exactly in this sense an image of the Carinthian community that was sustained by the neglect of the constitutional recognition of the Slovene minority and that was

threatened by the erection of bilingual street signs. Within the same village, within the same family and sometimes even within the same individual there was lurking an alternative imagination, one of a bilingual community with its own narrative and with a difficult history to address that came to the fore with a simple, bilingual street sign. «In fact, all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined» (*ibidem*). Monolingualism and bilingualism were two styles breaking the Carinthian community in itself: we are approaching what the term logoclastic violence could refer to.
With Anderson's notion of imaginative communities in mind I suggest the following distinction of language-related conflicts for my analysis of what happened in Carinthia between the German Carinthians and the Slovene Carinthians:

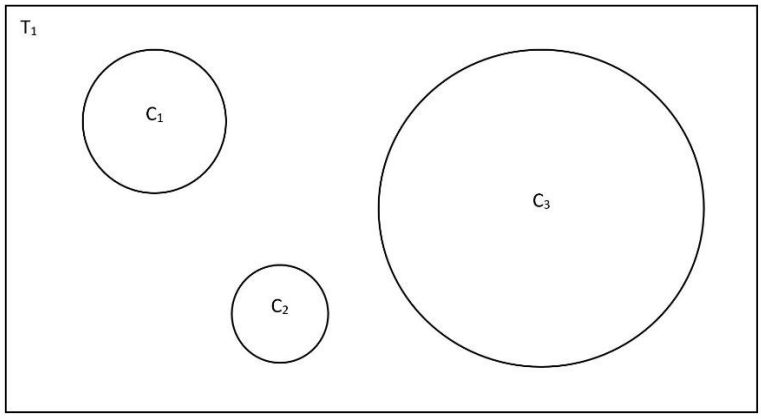

Fig. 1: Different Linguistic Communities Within one Territory

Trivially, Fig. 1 shows one territory T_1 and within it three separate (linguistic) communities C_1, C_2 and C_3 competing for the same territory. I take this to be a generic model for thinking about what happened during the Austro-Slovene conflict in Carinthia and thereby also for the *Abwehrkampf*. I want to distinguish this clash of languages from the following model of an imaginative struggle:

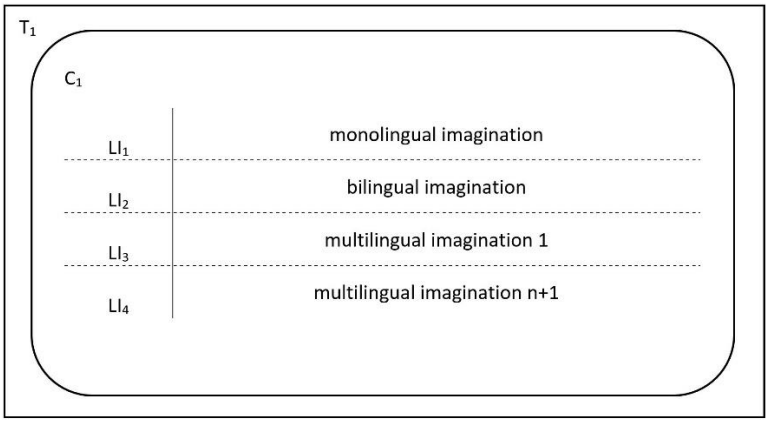

Fig. 2: Logoclastic Violence Within one Community

Here again we have only one territory T_1, but now we have also just one community C_1 claiming all of the territory: The territory becomes a redundant factor, or rather becomes one element in the imagination. The community itself however contains competing linguistic and nationalistic imaginations LI_1 to LI_4. These are mutually

exclusive imaginative options for the community to conceive of itself. Individually they do not represent a natural language or a vernacular. Each represents a number or ranking of accepted languages or vernaculars within the community, so that LI_3 and LI_4 could disagree either about whether to accept three or four languages or, for example, what the status of three accepted languages should be. To sum up the mismatch: Where an actual clash features one territory, multiple communities and multiple imaginings, an imaginative struggle features one territory, one community and multiple imaginings.
Applying this distinction to Carinthia, I would say that the *Abwehrkampf* was a conflict between communities or proto-communities, while the *Ortstafelsturm* was the outburst of a conflict between two ways for a Carinthian to conceive of Carinthia as a whole. This is so because neither German nor Slovene Carinthians moved to this territory during or anytime near before the conflict. Over centuries of living together a *relevant absence* of other distinguishing factors and markers, such as territory, music, cuisine, religion, physical traits, etc., between German and Slovene Carinthians rendered not only language, but also bilingualism as a form of life the most important difference.

3. The Marketplace of Words: Logoclastic Violence with Gellner

But is it really one community if it is split up this way into imaginings and are these imaginings anything real? Isn't it simply a clash between two speakers of two languages rather than a national pondering between monolingualism and bilingualism? For one, it is not that straightforward to distinguish two groups of speakers as the censuses show. But there is a whole other way to say that it is one community which struggles over the number of languages. This line of argument is an alternative account of nations and nationalism that was developed by Gellner.
For Gellner nationalism is a theory of political legitimacy that demands for ethnic and political boundaries to match and for leaders to stay within these two boundaries. He would think of imaginings as false by definition and prefers to speak of *inventions*. Of course, he would account for the fact that every nation and nationalism summons some ethnic, historic or political aspect that predates the nation or a combination thereof to define and justify itself. But there are simply too many such aspects to be found, combined, interpreted or even *imagined* for there to be valid, old, unambiguous traditions to found one's nation upon. Indeed, there may be more such fancies or imaginings than there are individual people, let alone nations.
This is why Gellner prefers to speak of inventions, for any such imagination of one's own community will be almost unavoidably arbitrary and may thereby transform the very tradition it claims to preserve or represent:

> Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all it is not what it seems to itself. The cultures it claims to defend and revive are often its own inventions, or are modified out of all recognition. Nonetheless the nationalist principle as such, as distinct from each of its specific forms, and from the individually distinctive nonsense which it may preach, has very very deep roots in our shared current condition, is not at all contingent, and will not easily be denied (Gellner 1990: 56).

With Gellner we can give an alternative account of what happened in Carinthia. When he analyses how Marxism as well as liberalism ended up with the same prognosis, which turns out to be less and less true, that, due to the universalization and alienation of labor, the erosion of social structures and more industrialism we will get less nationalism, he distinguishes two forms of society: (1) advanced agrarian societies with a fairly subtle technological equipment and status system and (2) industrial societies

oriented towards growth and endowed with a fluid system of roles. The important difference between these two is for Gellner the way they produce social cohesion and how they deal with culture. He argues that with advanced agrarian societies there comes little need for linguistic and cultural homogeneity, but that diversity is accepted and welcomed.

While the clergy can speak its Latin and the higher strata of society have their ranks and hierarchy to exert power and manage its lands, neither cares much what the peasants in their villages or their fields say to each other. Even more diverse groups are included into this form of society by conquest and the diversity of its people also supports the stable hierarchy of its rulers:

> The externalization of this relatively stable and accepted hierarchy, by means of differences in speech and cultural style, is a considerable convenience for the system as a whole and for its members: it avoids painful ambiguity, and constitutes a system of visible markers which underwrite and ratify the entire hierarchy and make it palatable. […] But what is virtually inconceivable within such a system is a serious and sustained drive for linguistic and cultural homogeneity, sustained by universal literacy in a single linguistic medium. Both the will and the means for such an aspiration are conspicuously lacking (Gellner 1987: 14).

By contrast, Gellner continues, an industrial society lives on eternal growth and innovation. With this comes a demand for the ability to change occupations from generation to generation and even within a life-span. With the changing of jobs comes the changing of speech context, audiences, social positions and the demand to be able to communicate in speech and writing. Village communities however possess neither the means not the need for literacy or a standardized mode of expression:

> People who spend their lives in stable social contexts, facing repetitive and standard situations, involved with the same people communicate with each other by intonation, posture, facial expression: language for them is a stylized art form, like their folk dances, and it is not altogether a machine for the production of infinitely varied, context-free messages (this being, in effect, the Chomskian definition of language). Only the higher strata of an agrarian society (and by no means all of its members) are able to use language in an abstract, context-free manner, and live a life within which such a capacity possesses a function, and is socially acceptable. For a peasant, to speak in such a manner would constitute a remarkable piece of insolence, and might well earn him a whipping. Who does he think he is? (Gellner 1994: 39).

Linguistic diversity can, therefore, neither be all too explicitly invented within the job market of an industrialized society, nor can it be all too explicitly imagined to support social hierarchies in an advanced agrarian society. Being of one culture and one language is perceived as a precondition of competitiveness which explains nationalistic resistance towards foreigners in industrialized societies, while the public and economic acceptance of new languages in these societies is also feared as it is difficult for citizens to learn a new language to stay competitive on the job market. Carinthia went through both forms of society contrasted by Gellner. And one could imagine how the famously multilingual Austro-Hungarian Empire merrily tolerated diversity as it was preserved in Carinthia. With its downfall, however, there was no such preserving super-structure left and a new balance between ethnic and linguistic homogeneity and economic competitiveness had to be invented on the spot with the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs and the Republic of German-Austria.

With Gellner we can also say that Carinthia after the Second World War, becoming more industrialized and struggling not to be left behind as an agrarian region of Austria, and in the early 1970, with the founding of its first university, faced an increasingly mobilized job market, which would explain resistance towards bilingualism in particular. Certain jobs, especially in education, for example with the establishment of bilingual schools, simply cannot be given to monolingual job-seekers or, particularly painful, to monolingual protégés of power-holders. Carinthian Slovenes are not simply speakers of one different language. As Carinthians they are usually speakers of German as well. With this, and even more so with the later downfall of Yugoslavia and the economic opening of Slovenia as a new neighboring nation, bilingualism in particular, much more than just the speaking of a different language, would seem to be an advantage on the local job-market – a reality Carinthia was not able to reconcile with its history.

4. The Concept of Logoclastic Violence

Since Anderson and Gellner contradict each other in understanding nations as imagined realities and invented fictions respectively, I would like to say whose theory I would prefer for an account of logoclastic violence. It seems to me that in describing Carinthia's case of logoclastic violence they complement each other so far. With Gellner we can argue that Carinthian bilingualism could be seen as rising to a threatening economic advantage in an innovative nation since the *Abwehrkampf*. Anderson however gives us a model for the ideological radicalization and shifting identities that came with the *Ortstafelsturm*. I would say that with Gellner we explain the logoclastic violence in Carinthia as a national problem, while with Anderson we explain it as a case of problematic nationalism.

Suppose we would have tasked Anderson and Gellner with an analysis of some magic trick performed by an impressive stage magician. Gellner delivers what many of us would hope to get from an analysis of this sort: an account of the actual stagecraft – wires, mirrors, perspectives, secret rooms, etc. – necessary or sufficient for creating the illusion. He concludes that there are many ways to pull this off and that it is now interesting to ask why this magician in this setting chose the way she chose. Anderson on the other hand submits a psychological study of the audience and the magician's performance from the point of view of the audience: attention, framing, narrative, distraction and everything that explains the power that the illusion exerts on our minds. He concludes that in many other magicians' performances as well as maybe other situations in life similar means will be employed and that he expects to see even better tricks in the future. Both Anderson and Gellner provided us with an analysis of the magic trick, but Gellner holds that the illusion produced thereby is sheer make-believe and that hopefully no one will ever be fooled again by this, while for Anderson the illusion is something very real and in itself worthy of our scientific understanding as we will unavoidably face and create other illusions.

It strikes me that by default I would want to have Gellner's account of things, whenever I encounter a difficult, real life, political situation that I would need or like to understand. His theory is good for asking the backward-looking question: Where did logoclastic violence come from? But as I would like to approach a definition, I need to answer a forward-looking question: When will I encounter logoclastic violence again? To this end I will side with Anderson and say that what manifested as logoclastic violence in the *Ortstafelsturm* was not simply one linguistic community clashing with a different linguistic community and it was not only a radicalized group breaking, attacking or destroying signs of the language peculiar to a minority.

The plebiscite, the censuses, the constitutional neglect and the identity politics suppressed an alternative, bilingual imagination of the Carinthian community as belonging to Austria, whose subliminal presence was interpreted with the *Abwehrkampf* and the later Austrofascist and Nazi antagonisms. I suggest that logoclastic violence is violence defined not by its targets, which can be as diverse as laws, objects and people, but by its dynamic, which is an imaginative struggle not only or primarily between languages and linguistic communities, but between monolingualism and /or bilingualism and / or multilingualism within one (national) community. Similar struggles could of course have been present on either side of the Austro-Slovene Conflict as well. This would be the case if we find – not new clashes between different groups – but, as indicated in Fig. 2 above, the emergence of new linguistic, ethnic and political divisions over identity that befuddle a multilingual, while otherwise relevantly homogenous community.

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