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Introduction

By the time we arrived in Pata,¹ the site of our ethnographic fieldwork methods seminar in the summer of 2022, one student from our group had already dropped out. “I just didn’t feel like writing about a bunch of racist villagers” was his laconic remark when I asked him some time later why he didn’t join in the end. As we had learned in our preparations from the seminar’s organizer Margit Feischmidt, who had done extensive ethnographic research there, about a decade ago the town we were going to visit had become a staging ground of a newly emerging wave of anti-Roma politics in Hungary – a laboratory of the far-right, in which anti-gypsy discourse has become hegemonic (Feischmidt and Szombati 2012; 2017) and which constitutes a prime example of the mainstreaming of racism (Feischmidt and Hervik 2015). Although, as Margit assured us, tensions have decreased somewhat, the series of events in 2011, when members of multiple far-right paramilitary organizations harassed the residents – or in their words “patrolled the streets” – of the town’s Roma neighborhood over the course of several weeks, with widespread support among Pata’s Magyar residents that subsequently even translated into the election of a far-right mayor, gained the town a notorious and lasting reputation in Hungary.

Prologue: the Elephant in the Room

The Facebook post read: “Hello! Anyone who likes black cherries can come and pick as much as they want. It's free.”² My fieldwork partner Balu and I had nothing scheduled that afternoon, so what better way to spend it, than to go find Zsofi, the old lady who wrote this public invitation, and go pick some cherries. By showing the post and her picture to a couple of amused but helpful strangers we met on Pata’s main street, we got increasingly accurate information of where we could find her. At first, someone could point us to the neighborhood where they last saw her. Over there, we got

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- 1 In the literature I refer to, Pata’s full name is commonly used. I opted to use the nickname many residents use for the town rather than its full name as a means to a half-way pseudonymization. Personal names are pseudonyms, too. While an interested human reader would in any case easily be able to find out the respective real names, this way at least machine readability is scrambled.
 - 2 If not explicitly stated otherwise, all quotes from interlocutors were originally in Hungarian. All conversations quoted in this thesis are renarrations of what has been translated to me by my Hungarian speaking fieldwork colleagues. Written materials such as the quoted facebook post were translated with the help of AI tools, which during my fieldwork were GoogleTranslate and DeepL.com, and for analyzing online documents and conversations, starting from 2023, ChatGPT.

pointed to the road in which she might live. Finally we met someone who knew her, and could tell us the house.

Zsofi's startled face – she seemed a little bit wary of the two young unknown men knocking on her gate – quickly lit up, when we showed her her post on a smartphone, and asked if we could pick some cherries. She then led us through her rather unkempt garden, past a rusty old car, which even though it didn't look as if it still worked, was nevertheless parked in the middle of the driveway, between two lushly flowering rose bushes that only left enough space to walk through the gap in single file. Her cherry trees were at the back of her house, part of a larger orchard of fruit trees with uncut grass among them. Over there, she stood at the edge of the grass and watched as we start to slowly pick the fruit of a tree and place them in a plastic bag that she provided for us, and we introduce ourselves as two students on a joint Austrian and Hungarian 'village research camp'. "I'm not actually from here, I grew up in the city," she introduced herself in response, as if to ward off our interest, jokingly calling herself an "immigrant," even though, as she would later tell us, she was already married to a husband from the village since long enough that the children they raised together there had already left the house.

Despite the relaxed and casual tone, having Pata's reputation in mind, I started to sense a tension. When we thanked her for letting strangers like us come pick cherries in her garden, thereby implicitly acknowledging her initial hesitant reaction at the gate, she pointed out how safe she feels, telling us that she always leaves the gate unlocked. "It's a good neighborhood". We have heard this sentiment before, already during the first time we were in this neighborhood for an exploratory stroll through the town. On this stroll, we struck up conversations with residents in one of numerous houses in the neighborhood that displayed a "Clean Yard, Orderly House" sign at their door. Given the role of notions of order and cleanliness in racist discourses, these signs seemed rather ominous to us. And while they turned out to be awards that stem from a competition that was held in socialist times, and thus held little meaning for the people who inhabited these houses nowadays, we nevertheless repeatedly heard that we were now in a "good" or "orderly neighborhood", adding explanations like: "this is the most normal part of the village. There are no minorities here, so stealing is rare."

Possibly sensing that we would be dismissive towards such an implication of pointing out the safety of her neighborhood in comparison the rest of Pata – being students from Budapest and Austria, ie. "the city" and "the west", it was easy for people

to guess our political convictions – the conversation with Zsofi then took a blunt turn. Following up on her comment about this being a good neighborhood, she asked us about our impression of Pata, to which we responded vaguely, that we were “pleasantly surprised”. With visible relief, she now verbalized what I assumed must have been cause for the tense atmosphere I sensed, thus confirming that this impression was mutual: “This whole Roma topic, it’s massively overblown, it was only created by the media. The majority of the people of Pata don’t have a problem with Roma.”

In preparation for the fieldwork, Margit informed the mayor of Pata, Klara Fehérné, about our intended stay, and arranged a group interview with her. During this interview, mayor Fehérné at first introduced us to the history of the town since the middle ages, and then proudly listed the various development projects that had been accomplished under her tenure and the municipality’s tourism-centered plans for the future. Understandably, no reference to the events of 2011 and subsequent controversies were made, and at first, none of us students dared to raise the topic either. A question that I contributed however, despite my efforts to frame it in a way that would have allowed to sidestep the issue, prompted mayor Fehérné to address it instead.

My question concerned the role of women in politics in Pata, and came with the little explanation, that I have read an article that pointed out the strong representation of women in Pata’s local politics. I omitted the circumstances to which the article addressed this unusual feature – namely that after her far-right predecessor’s tenure, Patans had been “fed up with macho-politics”, and voted for a nearly all-female team of representatives out of a desire for peace. While this question was translated, Fehérné’s countenance shifted. I noticed that her eyes focused on me with a stern look while my question was translated, as if she was trying to gauge me. Maybe she wondered how I knew about the article without knowing Hungarian, and maybe she wondered what else I knew. To me in turn it seemed like she must have known which article I referred to, since she directly addressed the parts of it that I omitted, about the events of 2011. And just as Zsofi, she did this through a gesture of relief: “I am glad that you are here. At first when I heard that you were coming, I was worried that you chose Pata because of our bad media reputation. I don’t know why women have a special role here, but after

the events of 2011 – I don't want to hurt any man's feelings when I say that, but when it comes to peace, women are better than men."

Towards the end of my stay in Pata, I had a chat over a cigarette with Mr. Molnar, the owner of a hotel our group stayed at. He was the last major tourism entrepreneur in town left that I haven't yet talked to, so I was curious to get to know him a little, especially since he was one of the few people with whom I could talk in German. As he told me, he learned German when he worked as a tool fitter in the GDR starting from the late 60ies, which came in handy when he took over a former restaurant and turned it into a hotel in the mid 1990ies. "I was the first one to open a Hotel here. During socialism, that wasn't possible. I had to do it all by myself, when I bought this place it consisted of little more than the walls," he started to reminisce. Though he clearly cherished his image as a self-made man, he also shared some of the downsides of his business: "Since Corona, there are not enough guests anymore to hire someone to work at the reception, so I have to work from early in the morning to late at night."

At that point, his wife, who had just finished clearing the dishes from the lunch our group just ate, joined our conversation. She knew we were students doing a research project, and was curious about what it actually is that Anthropologists do. Given that, as we have already seen earlier, "the media" was a common object of scorn, being blamed for Pata's notoriety, I wanted to avoid appearing similar to a journalist. I gave a long-winded and somewhat awkward answer, concluding that "unlike in Sociology or Psychology, where you can do surveys or experiments, in Anthropology you need to go directly to the people, so you can understand how they live". To my relief, Mr. Molnar seemed to like my answer. "Yes, that's very important. Just like Margit, she was here, too, during this whole Gypsy-thing. And you just can't understand these things from the outside." Then, with another solicitation for a lighter, Tatjana Thelen – the seminar's co-organizer – joined as well. Sensing an opportunity to retreat into the background as an observer and confident in the explanation I just gave, I asked whether I could take notes – to which Mr. Molnar responded with an expressionless nod. He then returned to talk about our earlier topics – how he came to be an entrepreneur in the hotel business, and once again, how he learned German as a guest worker in the GDR during the 1970ies. This time though, he embellished the story with further details. "It was just the time of

the celebrations for the 20th anniversary of the GDR, under Walter Ulbricht. There was Stasi everywhere, you really had to watch what you're saying." Then, turning towards me with a wink on his face, he commented "Nowadays it's just like it was then. You always have to stay in the middle, you can't be left or right, someone is always taking notes". After that, he just stood up and left. Our conversation was friendly throughout, and even though his voice sounded amused, after this last remark I couldn't shake the feeling that he had told me off about the explanation I gave to him.

Had I not known about Pata's reputation in advance, the defensive atmosphere that manifested around the public perception of the towns past might well have elided me. I even might not have elicited it in the first place. In all likelihood, the relative silence surrounding "that Roma topic", and the brief shifts of moods that accompanied such situation would have not occurred as special to me. After all, as my use of scare quotes already indicates, I would conceivably have been inclined to view it as an all-to familiar awkwardness around topics of ethnicity. However, given Pata's history and reputation, this was startling. After all, the surge of the far right in Pata has been characterized precisely by the breaking of taboos around this topic. As Feischmidt and Szombati argued, since a broad decline in the economic prospects of the Hungarian countryside due to neoliberal restructuring coincided with a politically liberal project of Roma emancipation, the far-right was able to mobilize a popular counter movement around racist sentiments (Feischmidt and Szombati 2017). The reaction of the political establishment – in Pata as elsewhere in Hungary – which attempted to uphold a taboo on ethnic tensions³, only exacerbated a widespread sense of neglect in the countryside. In contrast to the liberal government's perceived silence on the countryside's plight, "naming and blaming the Gypsy" appeared as a political force (Szombati 2018, 103).

What changed? Why did silence return? As the former mayor Tarr, who in 2011 stood for the "taboo on 'Gypsy-talk'" (Szombati 2018: 203) and was ousted because of it, pointed out, the impact of the events of 2011 was very bad for the public image of the town. "Now we try to repair the damage from it." In this thesis, I will trace the ways in which "being silent about the Roma topic" has been turned from a kind of inaction into

3 I chose this phrasing of "ethnic tension" since it can encompass both liberal and illiberal readings, ie. it can read both as "aggression against ethnicity" as well as "troubles caused by ethnicity"

an active political project with broad appeal, and which thus came to signify political care rather than neglect. Following former mayor Tarr's phrasing, I will call this a project of "reputational repair".

Pata and its Damaged Reputation

Pata is a small town of a little bit less than 2500 inhabitants, about 80km to the northeast of Budapest, at the southwestern foot of the Mátra mountains. With two supermarkets, several small shops, a restaurant, a pub, and a gas station; a public library, a police station, a church, and two cemeteries; a primary school, a kindergarten, an elderly home and a local health center; Pata would be well endowed for a village, yet sleepy as a town. In fact, it only recently regained that latter title, yet locals still affectionately call it a village. As our host János explained, if it were only a question of the number of residents or infrastructure, Pata wouldn't be recognized as a town. Yet, since Pata used to hold this title by royal gift from the 15th century until the 19th century, and in order to recognize the national significance of that historic act, the title was restored in 2013.

Pata has since medieval times been shaped by viticulture, the productivity of which reached its height during socialist times, when Pata produced white table wine for export on an industrial scale (Szombati 2018, 12). The economic changes since the fall of socialism have led to the decline of much industry and agriculture in the wider region, yet compared to other micro regions they had a milder impact, as can be seen in the development of employment rates, which went from below national average in 1990 to above average in 2011, largely thanks workers commuting for work elsewhere (Szombati 2018, 62). Crucially though, viticulture stopped being a big employment option (Szombati 2018, 59). In particular the local Roma population – the least mobile part of Pata's population (Szombati 2018, 65) – faced a steep decline in labor opportunities and was at times almost completely dependent on unemployment benefits (Szombati 2018, 63), although this situation has been mitigated somewhat by now.⁴ In the face of the decline of wine production for mass consumption, since the early 2000s there was a growing movement to foster ethnotourism centered around wine as a

4 As a policy paper for employment cooperation in Heves, the county to which Pata belongs, details, while in 1987, approximately 74% of male Roma of working age had a permanent job, by 1993 this applied to only 29% anymore (HMTN 2017, 33). A directly comparable ratio unfortunately wasn't calculated for 2016, though from the numbers given one can tell that about 12% of the overall population of self-identified Roma of Heves don't have a permanent occupation (ibid., 78). Meanwhile, the overall unemployment ratio of Pata in June 2016 was 7.17% (ibid., 50).

product of traditional Hungarian identity (Szombati 2018, 100). In an atmosphere where local feelings of abandonment by elites were increasingly voiced through the discourse of criminality – by accusing the state of inaction (Szombati 2018, 78) – the perceived increase in petty theft on orchards and vineyards proved to be explosive (Szombati 2018, 70).

While discrimination against Roma has a long history in Europe, the decades after the fall of socialism saw a renewed rise of anti-Roma sentiment in Hungary. This was expressed as a fear of so-called “Gypsyfication”, ie. the fear that an increasing ratio of Roma inhabitants in a certain area will undermine hegemonic Hungarian cultural practices that are credited with creating order and prosperity, and would tip the balance towards what amounts to a “culture of poverty”, and thereby lead to the decline of the area in question (Szombati 2018, 45). While this type of discourse mirrors the racial inflection that neoliberal anti-welfare discourses often take, it also adds a specifically spatial element to it, akin to a reverse gentrification. In Pata, this discourse found its way into official policy, the aim of which was to prevent Roma from moving out of the segregated part of the town – the so-called “settlement” – into what’s called the village (Szombati 2018, 64). Because of this, Roma are not able to purchase real estate outside of the “settlement” without transferring the money through non-Roma intermediaries.

All these factors coalesced in the events that eventually established the damaged reputation that has since come to haunt the town. In 2010, when the far-right party Jobbik was making their first significant electoral gains, Pata came to the attention of their leadership following a case when after a flood caused several Roma families to loose their homes, the red cross offered to buy houses in the village for them – which in Jobbik’s framing was a case of NGO-driven “Gypsyfication” (Szombati 2018, 146). Although this offer was ultimately rescinded, another pretext to mobilize fears of “Gypsyfication” soon after arose in early 2011, when rumors arose that the suicide of a local resident was caused by a Roma family that had moved into the neighboring property (ibid.). Following this, a local Jobbik mayoral candidate staged an intervention by the “Civil Guard Association for a Better Future”, the successor to the illegal neofascist paramilitary organization “Hungarian Guard” (ibid.). After a mass rally against “Gypsy terror”, that also many locals attended, uniformed paramilitary guards stayed in the town for three weeks to harass the local Roma population. Soon after, a planned military training camp, which would have included paintball games with realistically looking assault weapons in the direct vicinity of the Roma settlement, lead

to a preventive NGO intervention, in which the Roma of Pata were transported with buses to another village (ibid., 148). In international and Hungarian left-of-center media, this was reported as an evacuation, whereas in rightwing media, this was presented as the unnecessary meddling of outsiders intent on damaging the reputation of Hungary (ibid.). To the shock of many outside observers, Jobbik's candidate was elected mayor when the presiding independent mayor Lajos Tarr stepped back due to stress-induced health problems in the wake of these events.

After these events moreover, not only was Pata's reputation damaged among a liberal or leftwing public, but across the political spectrum. As the previously quoted former mayor Tarr pointed out in an interview, after these events many people started to be afraid to even set foot in the village out of fear of the Roma, so that for example it became near impossible to attract good teachers for their school. It was in relation to this issue that he sighed the comment that set the tone for my research, remarking that the impact of this episode was so bad that they are still trying to repair the damage. Although this is merely conjecture, I assume that such a reparative motive was already pursued by the very far-right mayor that was at the center of the reputational storm that engulfed Pata. Tellingly, during his incumbency Pata was awarded the title of a town. As Gabor Zongor, secretary general of the TÖÖSZ, the National Association of Local Governments, remarked in an article on the consequences of the then recently loosened eligibility requirements for township, "mayoral ambition" is the determining factor in small municipalities' quest for township. "Achieving the title of town may be seen as a kind of escape. By winning the title, the municipal leaders aim to provide a better and higher quality of public service to the residents who now live in the town and the surrounding area." (Zongor 2013, 4). This assessment echoes one of Szombati's core arguments, albeit in a different field, namely that mayoral initiative was central to the resurgence of the far right in Hungary (Szombati 2018, 10).

And indeed, after Fehérné was elected mayor of Pata in 2014, considerable investments flowed into the town's public service infrastructure, as could be witnessed through the many signboards that dot the townscape. The project of reputational repair was her official policy from the very outset, as an editorial congratulating her election in a local news bulletin founded directly after she assumed office proclaimed. The editorial expressed confidence, "that the new leadership of the settlement, in cooperation with the local people, would be able to restore Pata's reputation, and that the town would be famous for its church, its traditions, its cultural life and its development in the future."

Since then the Hungarian state provided funding for the interior refurbishment of the library (which also functions as an extension of the mayor's office), for a new morgue at one of the cemeteries, for and, most significantly, starting since 2021, 1.25M€ to the renovation of the church. At the same time with EU grants, the Kindergarten was completely renovated and extended, the primary school, the library and the mayor's office were energetically modernized and furnished with solar panels, an elderly care center was built and the health center modernized, a program to combat unemployment in communities in the north Heves area and an event series for the "strengthening of local identity and social cohesion" were funded, and most recently, the initially mentioned tourist reception center was built – to name only the EU grants above at least 100.000€.

Meanwhile, the local primary school has remained a source of contention. Former mayor Tarr even wondered whether the refurbishments done on it were worth it, given the trouble that surrounds it. The systems of segregation that were and are institutionalized in it have repeatedly attracted controversy since the events of 2011. Since the first post-socialist decade, the majority of Roma pupils have been relegated to separate classes, and thereby been deprived of many school activities and facilities, as well as good teachers. As Szombati described it, the separation of school classes was based on a system of purported merit judged by hegemonic markers of Hungarianness, which ended up segregating pupils along ethnic lines, into "problematic" and "clean" classes (Szombati 2018, 65).

Only after the paramilitary marches of 2011, however, has this been brought to the attention of a governmental anti-discrimination official. In the course of an investigation into these events, the situation of the school was brought to light. The resulting report included collected data on the ethnic composition of the different classes, showing that for each year, there was a fully Roma class, and another one in which Roma constituted a small minority. Given that more than half of the school pupils were Roma, the report concluded that an intentional design of this relation has to be assumed, since the possibility of such a distribution arising by chance can be ruled out. As elsewhere in Hungary, the result of the court case in Pata was the departure of Magyar children from the school, so that by the time of my fieldwork, out of nearly one hundred children, all but one were Roma.

In the following decade after 2011, the legal process around the school would prove to be the reason Pata returned to media attention long after the far-right militias

and politicians were gone, although it can't be viewed independently of them. The legal struggle over the school was initiated right after the mayoral victory of a far-right candidate. In response, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union (HCLU) issued several law-suits against the municipality for discriminatory practices against Roma residents. Apart from the discriminatory practices in the local primary school, there were also law-suits against the county police department for failing to adequately protect Pata's Roma residents from the racist harassment by far-right militias, as well as for racial profiling in the aftermath of the militias departure, when Roma were disproportionately fined for petty offenses (Szombati 2018, 153).

This case needs to be seen in the light of legal changes initiated by the EU accession of Hungary. Since Hungary applied to join the EU in 1997, and finally joined in 2004, such practices increasingly came under scrutiny. This empowered NGOs to successfully intervene against local elites in a number of cases (Szombati 2018, 80), and left-liberal governments took on school segregation in particular as a primary problem of their school policy (ibid.81). However, as Szombati argues through the example of Pata, they did so in a way that ultimately proved counterproductive, since their interventions moved segregation from an in-school phenomenon to an inter-school phenomenon, and thus had to advocate and legislate against the free choice of schools – even though promoting freedom of choice in all other domains (Szombati 2018, 83).

The Normativity of Infrastructure and its Repair

Since, as I will detail in the second chapter, the development of tourism infrastructure is the central political strategy to achieve the reputational repair of Pata, the anthropology of infrastructure provides an apt theoretical vocabulary. In particular, my notions of silence and repair strongly resonate on a classical theme in this literature, namely that of the dynamics of the spectacularity of infrastructure. As the common trope goes, since infrastructure tends to be an invisible feature in the background as long as it works, repair is a practice that makes infrastructures visible (Star 1999, 382). However, as Brian Larkin has summed up the result of numerous ethnographic studies, infrastructures don't need to break down to become visible. Especially in the political arena, they can be powerful symbols, that work as “signs of themselves, deployed in particular circulatory regimes to establish sets of effects” (Larkin 2013, 336). As I will show, while the working of infrastructure often becomes symbolically salient when the

infrastructure is in disrepair, a working infrastructure can be made salient as a symbol of repair.

As Jessica Barnes pointed out, notions of repair and maintenance still frequently evoke a “celebratory tone” (Barnes 2017, 2) in anthropological analysis, commonly sharing a place alongside such cherished notions as “reciprocity, love, and care” (Jackson 2019, 345). While this is often driven by a desire to acknowledge the labor that goes into it, this also reinforces the idea that repair and maintenance constitute an “inherent good” (Barnes 2017, 2). To counter such approaches, and to investigate how maintenance constitutes a “field of socio-material contestation”, Barnes suggested to ethnographically investigate the decision-making processes that select what is to be maintained, and how this is to be done (Barnes 2017, 3). Crucially, maintenance work is not merely directed at a deteriorating object, but through this object also at the social order in which this object is embedded (Graham and Thrift 2007, 4; Barnes 2017, 2; Joniak-Lüthi 2019, 146). To repair can thus just as much mean to inhibit the current functioning of something unauthorized, and return it to its authorized state (Barnes 2017, 9). This “relational character of repair means that systems of hierarchy and power present in infrastructures and related forms of human social organization are also always present via practices of repair” (Henke 2019, 267).

Through the structures that are continuously needed for infrastructural maintenance, infrastructures can also act as repositories of power relations (Henke 2019, 268). As Ashley Carse pointed out “Without maintenance, infrastructures crack, rust, and crumble and the political projects, promises, and aspirations that they carried dissipate as formerly connected places are disconnected.” (Carse 2014, 219). But also, “their decay and maintenance are ambiguous processes around which tensions accumulate.” (Joniak-Lüthi 2019, 146) Thus, also the decay of infrastructure should be viewed as a kind of state effect, shaped by provision, regulation and neglect (Lamont 2017, 172). As Henke noted, too often repair is simply understood as self-evident, naturalized response to decay that skips the question how a (the perception of) a need for repair emerges (Henke 2019, 258) – why this, why here, why now? Instead, repair should be seen to emerge “from a negotiated order of materiality and human activity” (Henke 2019, 259).

In Pata, one way this can be exemplified is in relation to the maintenance of public roads, which are one of the most popular infrastructure-related project in town, as current mayor Fehérné informed me. As she pointed out, “people prefer developments

they can see on a daily basis”. The multiple road renovations going on in the two years prior to my research were among the most commented issues on the municipal Facebook page, with many people thanking for and cheering on this development, but also frequent complaints – for example about the choice of roads to be repaired, or about damages that happened in the process. Some blamed careless farmers for the sorry state of the roads, some speculated whether it mattered who had their vineyards next to a country road. Yet these speculations over why some roads are damaged or repaired rather than others omit one feature that is blatant as soon as one walks around Pata. While the roads of the village, with the exception of a handful of small alleys, are fully paved, none of the roads in the Roma neighborhood are. As a member of the municipal Roma self-government⁵ explained, the roads easily flood, sometimes even blocking vital services – like an ambulance – from reaching people in the settlement. For this reason, it was his main goal for his term in office was to improve the quality of roads in the settlement, which hadn’t been renovated for over three decades. Yet his appeals to the municipality to give him the official support required by applications for grant money was rejected on the ground that the roads were good enough as they were. When things are “normal”, there is no need for change, yet what is normal is a relative judgment.

As anthropologists of infrastructure have repeatedly argued, to repair is also to normalize – to return something to a state that is deemed normal. And as in the case at hand, if something is deemed normal, then there is also no need for repair. Without any “normalization” taking place, one even shouldn’t speak of repair – repair needs to be distinguished from “transformation beyond repair”, which do not aim at a previously defined “normal” (Ureta 2014, 387). Most glaringly, this normalizing aspect of road maintenance could be seen in another Facebook post by Laszlo Horváth just a month after the constitutional court of Hungary ruled that 100 million Hungarian Forint (~250T€) should be spent to compensate Roma pupils that were taught in a segregated class in the local school. Alluding to this sum, and picking up on Orbán’s comments that such an act of reparation were actually an act of injustice towards “the Majority”, he announced that “the Government has decided to allocate 100 million 300 thousand Forint to Pata for road improvement! These 100 million Forint grant will not cause tension, will not create unrest, will not violate the sense of justice, but will serve all the

5 The municipal Roma self-government consists of three elected members who act as intermediaries and first points of contact with the municipality of the town. Members are elected during mayoral elections, every four years, to volunteer for the position. They receive no income for their engagement, and have only a minor budget for projects.

inhabitants of Pata equally!” To make sure that the connection wasn’t lost on people who had followed the case, the post was accompanied by a picture of him standing in front of said school. And unsurprisingly, the roads were far from serving all the inhabitants equally. The renovations were clustered in three areas – some were in the neighboring area to the settlement, that lost in real estate value due to this proximity, yet most renovated roads were in two other neighborhoods, both of which were described by residents as “normal parts of town”, because they were clean and safe – all of which were coded forms of saying that no Roma lived there, as some also made explicit.

This normalizing effect of repair can moreover also go the other way. Not only is there no need for repair if something is deemed normal, but if something is repaired beyond what is normal, further tensions arise, as I will show in the third chapter of my thesis. As the former mayor Tarr reflected, when the comparison between the costs of the new tourist reception center, which will be the focus of the second chapter, and of renovating the school was brought up, he deflected that these things shouldn’t be compared. If at all making this comparison, it is the repair of the school that one needs to ask about if it was even worth it, in his opinion. As he explained, due to the renovations that took place in it, it is now oversized for the amount of pupils visiting it, the state that funds it will view it as a waste. The only way the school could be made usable for the Majority again would be to organize among the parents, so that they can feel certain that their kids won’t be in the numerical minority, he explains. To paraphrase, only if things are returned to that normal state where “the Majority” is in the majority, and “the Minority” is in the minority, could the school be accepted in the community again. This is however very unrealistic, and so now the result is that the repair that was done on the school will be seen as mismanagement.

The question of normality moreover highlights a fundamental contradiction within the concept of repair, which mirrors the duality of the concept of normality between numerical average and ideal. As Henke points out, there is a difference between repair as maintenance, in the sense of putting something back into its usual status and repair as transformation, by putting something into the status in which it should be (Henke 2007, 138). Although this distinction has been criticized as watering down the utility of the notion of repair by allowing too many meanings (Ureta 2014, 387), I think this tension is a crucial feature of what makes repair a productive ethnographic analytic. Moreover, Ureta’s concerns against using the concept of repair for structurally transformative interventions is grounded in an implicit moral assessment, in which

maintenance is associated not only with preserving the status quo, but also “mereness”, an insufficiently intense intervention - whereas transformation is seen as the inherently better option: here repair “only” tinkers and patches up, instead of sustainably resolving and fixing problems. I do not think that imbuing the concept with an evaluation of “order” that is preferable to the analyst is helpful. Moreover, as Felix Ringel’s ethnographic account of repair and maintenance in the depopulating East German city of Hoyerswerda shows, maintenance itself can be a form of transformation, if seen in front of the horizon of the town’s imagined future – if decay is expected, endurance is a change of that future, and maintenance a form of transformation (Ringel 2014, 63).

Moreover, through question of what is deemed normal, and who and what is deemed to adhere to it or not, reputation impacts on the power of infrastructures to channel the human flows for which they were built. Yet, in contrast to gossip, which since Max Gluckman declared that “gossip and scandal as among the most important societal and cultural phenomena we [anthropologists] are called upon to analyse” (Gluckman 1963, 307) has been a mainstay of ethnographic writing, reputation has so far been relatively unexplored by anthropologists (Besnier 2019). As philosopher Gloria Origgi points out, since knowledge garnered through means of direct personal observation can only make up a minuscule fraction of the knowledge that humans act on, reputation is a crucial aspect of social epistemic processes (Origgi 2019, 78). It mediates the ways in which knowledge is socially circulated and acted upon by providing a foundation of aggregated evaluations of someone’s or some thing’s actions, thus by acting as an “informational trace” of these actions (Origgi 2019, 70). As she highlighted through the example of wine experts, and knowledge about the taste of wines, for which questions of reputation are particularly germane, “we do not acquire information in order to assess other people’s reputation: rather, we assess their reputation in order to acquire information.” (Origgi 2007, 188). Because of this preemptive dynamic, reputation is a central feature of the semiotic efficacy of infrastructure, ie the symbolic power of infrastructure to achieve its intended effects. For example, as I will show, Patans see their school as a central institution for the social reproduction of their town – in the words of former mayor Tarr “a town without a school can’t keep its people”. And since the school is not deemed “proper”, “proper people” treat it as if there were no school at all.

Through the concept of reputation, it is moreover possible to avoid the pitfall of equating symbolism with inefficacy or simulation, which is a popular way of rendering

the symbolic aspects of infrastructural repairs, as Deana Jovanović outlined in her ethnography of a Serbian industrial town (Jovanović 2018). Her ethnography details a widespread sense that the repairs that are undertaken to revitalize their town are “fake”. One could even argue that reputation could explain the sense of fakeness that Jovanovic finds among her interlocutors regarding repairs in their revitalizing town. That repairs in the public space of the town were read in terms of a “politics of simulation” can itself be understood in terms of “the idea, widespread among my interlocutors, that social relations, the state, and morality were ‘out of order’” (Jovanović 2018, 35). The public image of the state was thus taken as the basis of a judgment over local projects, which were seen as mere simulation of real repairs. The negative reputation of the state thus limited its capacity to give meaning to the repairs it enacted. Moreover, the actors that thus want to act on their own reputation face an important dilemma. Reputation is necessarily beyond the direct control of the one who has a reputation: “having a reputation implies that the information we receive about someone’s presumed qualities has been generated by somebody else.” (Giardini and Wittek 2019, 1). Entrepreneurs, residents as well as municipal officials of Pata are painfully aware of their limited control over their own reputation, as well as their dependence on it in order to give symbols the meaning they needed them to have.

As this shows, such repair is not only directed at technical components, but also at symbolic aspects. The importance of reputation to matters of semiotic efficacy is of great significance to the political functioning of infrastructure in general. As Brian Larkin pointed out, infrastructure are not just “matter that enable the movement of other matter” (Larkin 2013, 329), but also “metapragmatic objects, signs of themselves deployed in particular circulatory regimes to establish sets of effects” (Larkin 2013, 336). Hence, infrastructures not only do things, but they also represent their own ability to do things. In particular when their functioning is dependent on this semiotic ability, reputation can make or break infrastructure. An infrastructure for tourism can only work if tourists are attracted to spend their time there, as much as an educational infrastructure like a school can only function properly if parents are willing to send their children there.

Lastly, as the responses to the segregation court case showed, different reparative discourses can be in complete contradiction to each other, so that one reparative project (compensation for damages to life chances of some people) is turned into a damage in need of repair for other people. Steven Jackson, in his afterword to a

pioneering collection of ethnographies of repair, argued for the necessity of re-imagining repair as a political category (Jackson 2019, 341). He ends on the plea that “Taking repair seriously can help us towards more timely, materialized, and hopeful ways of thinking, making and fixing the worlds around us.” (Jackson 2019, 346). A central motive of my thesis will be to understand how such repairs and the hopes they are built on can very well be grounded in highly exclusionary projects. Taking the relational aspect of repair seriously requires also to take into account the way in which repair not only reverses damage, but appears as the inverse of damage – what is repair for some might be damage for others, and vice versa. To take repair serious, it is necessary to be specific about the worlds that those hopes aim to fix.

Methodological Reflections

My thesis is based on ethnographic observations, interviews and documents collected in the course of the “Local Solidarities” Fieldwork Seminar. Guided by Professors Margit Feischmidt and Tatjana Thelen, ten other students and I completed two periods of fieldwork in the summer of 2022 in the Hungarian village of Pata, spanning 19 days in total. Through this seminar, we joined Margit Feischmidt as she revisited her former field site, a research that provided a frequent point of reference for me through her colleague Krisztof Szombati’s ethnographic monograph that was based on their joint research there. During this time, I conducted ethnographic conversations with a broad array of local actors involved in the domain of municipal politics. This included mayors former and current, municipal employees, local councilors, wine and tourism entrepreneurs, members of NGOs, and other civil society actors, as well multiple as further local residents. During my stay, I moreover had the chance to volunteer for preparatory work for some public events, as well as witnessed several festivities both public and private. Lastly, I also photographically documented my stay, and in particular systematically surveyed the village for funding signboards. This onsite data collection was complemented by the detailed observation of several Facebook spaces before, during, and after my stay, focused on the topic of the development and maintenance of municipal space and institutions.

During these two stays, we students all had our own plans and activities based on the topics we chose beforehand, punctuated by some common events, that were either public events or organized for the whole group by the professors. While the first

period spanned about two weeks in June 2022, the second phase was much shorter, a few days centered around a wine festival in August 2022. In total, there were four topic-based student groups, each of which contained one native Hungarian speaker. While I was in the “infrastructure group”, there were also groups researching wine-makers, a local NGO working with Roma, and on young mothers – each of which allowed me to join for relevant interviews. During the first days of the first stay, we met for a daily common meal at the guest house of local tourist guide and event host János. In these conversations, the previously mentioned tourist reception center made its first appearances, since it was in the last steps before its completion and opening. Thanks to an arrangement by Professors Thelen and Feischmidt, Balu and I were able to volunteer to do some gardening work there together with a municipal employee. Meanwhile, more and more interview possibilities emerged, and also some other invitations followed.

All my encounters in the field were strongly shaped by the fact that I don’t speak Hungarian. With regards to written material, I could make up for this with the help of online translation tools, where in particular the possibility to cross-check multiple automated translations allowed me to create sensible composite translations, selected for their aesthetic soundness. In the field however, I relied in almost all cases on the translations of my fellow Hungarian speaking student researchers or my professors, relegating me to the role of a passive note taker in most conversations, except for the occasional question that I was able to pass along to be translated. This meant that none of the conversations were recorded verbatim, but were instead reconstructed from the jottings made on the basis of non-professional simultaneous whisper translation. Moreover, because of this need for translation, all of us students worked in teams, which is reflected in this paper with my frequent use of the first person plural.

In almost all conversations, I was introduced by my student colleague Balu, who also did all of the talking. Still, me being there allowed to turn stalled conversations back into the student research setting, where Balázs could in a moment of awkward silence simply turn around and ask me to provide an unrelated question. Meanwhile I validated what was said by acting as a scribe. Nevertheless, the act of writing down was also highly ambiguous. While the questions and answer setting lent a certain formality to these interactions, they were also limited to a kind of informality by the fact of us being students. It was important to stick to this role, and not raise the specter of journalism, and the memories of unfair representation that this entailed, as the episode with Mr. Molnar aptly illustrates.

A methodologically challenging aspect of researching reputational repair was thus that our very presence in the field was itself cast into this framework by our interlocutors. As one commentator to a Facebook post of a photo of our group by one of our interlocutors exclaimed, “We hope that they will spread our good news!”. We were welcome, yet on the condition of supporting this project. Mayor Fehérné insinuated as much when she mentioned her initial apprehensions about our visit. She anticipated, not entirely mistaken, that our choosing of Pata as a research site was connected to its bad media reputation. Nevertheless, now that we were there, in her office, asking many interested questions that weren’t connected to these events, she told us she was glad that we were here to see things for ourselves. While I wanted to avoid approaching my interlocutors with condemnation, I was also hesitant to be complicit in what could be seen as mere denial. When critically analyzing reputational repair, the loyalties to which I as an anthropologist commit myself, both towards my interlocutors and towards the marginalized, are in danger of conflicting. I tried to mitigate this directly by including Roma voices where they were available to me, even though my main interlocutors stemmed from the Magyar majority. Most of the time however, I mitigated this more indirectly, by paying attention to the ambiguities and subcutaneous fragmentations within the Magyar unity that was presented to me.

Overview of the Chapters

My thesis is divided into three major parts. In the first one, I will show how tourism development has turned from being a driver of anti-Roma racism into a force to limit the expression of such sentiments. Through an account of the annual wine festival, as well as the inauguration of a new tourist center, I will show how infrastructure is mobilized as a symbol of repair. In the second part, I will show that the project of reputational repair extends beyond the aims of Pata’s political establishment, and has become a local popular movement in its own right. Through an ethnographic account of Pata’s largest local Facebook group “Pata’s most beautiful Face”, reputation will emerge as a central anxiety, around which the Magyar majority can unite, thus refracting issues the politics of infrastructures of tourism or education alike. Last, in the third chapter, I will show the precariousness of the peace thus achieved, by giving an account of the local school, where legal and parental struggles over ethnic segregation of pupils keep undermining the silence on which the project of reputational repair is built.

I – Developing Repair: Reassembling Unity through Tourism

Time Travel to the Peasant World

“Szervus!”, our tour guide János greeted us as if we already knew each other.⁶ For the first lunches of our stay, we gathered for some hearty, meat-laden meals on the veranda of his “Tulip House”, right at the entrance to one of Pata’s main attractions – it’s historic wine-cellar hill. Since his retirement, János has become a key actor of Pata’s ethnotourism scene, and a self-professed cultural revivalist, as his house unmistakably asserts. Sitting on this veranda, we were surrounded by an almost museological display of historic peasant and viticultural equipment, while the roof over our heads was carried by wooden columns with curved cross-beams that formed the shape of the titular tulips (Img. 1). Yet the centerpiece of this display however was a large banner behind the table, printed with a grainy sepia-colored photograph, showing what at first sight seemed to be a historical peasant scene in a vineyard. On the life-sized image, a group of nine people standing in a vineyard in two rows face the camera, dressed in what looks like a traditional peasant work costume, the women wearing aprons, head scarves and flowery shirts, the men wearing light white shirts, black vests and hats, while holding viticultural utensils like wooden baskets, a bowl full of grapes, a small barrel, or a wine bottle in a straw basket. On closer inspection, it turns out that the man in the center of the image is actually our host János, and that the resolution in the part of the image that contains the four people in the front row is much more refined than the rest. As it turned out, the image must have been taken as a quite elaborate practical photo montage, for which a historical image was enlarged to create a life-size background, in front of which the first row of people could pose with their utensils. Flanked by two women wearing the same kind of dress as the women in the background image and fatherly leaning his arm over the shoulder of a boy, János’ thus put himself at the center of a historical reenactment scene.

Such reenactment wasn’t limited to the background, either. During one of our meals, Balu and I deliberately sat ourselves at the corner of the table where he sat, hoping to engage him with some of our questions. He wouldn’t let us have our answers casually, and postponed them until the end of the meal. Then, when everyone finished, János stood up at the end of the table, and addressed our whole group. Speaking loudly

6 The greeting “Szervus” is typically used for friends and close acquaintances

and with frequent pauses for translation, he gave a speech on the traditions and values of the Palóc people⁷. As he explained, the Palóc people always speak the truth, since they pass on their traditions orally – “just like I am passing them on to you through my speech”, he exclaimed theatrically. Only now that we understood that were we allowed to ask him questions, which he answered true to the form he now established.

Due to his prominent position in the local tourist and wine industry, as erstwhile mayoral candidate and current president of an association dedicated to the preservation of the historic wine-cellar in the middle of which the tulip house lies, several students of our group tried to ask him questions about his business. He was steadfast in his refusal of this framing. His endeavor was to be taken not as a business enterprise, but as an act of reviving and preserving local peasant traditions. As he insisted, since he is a retiree who is living from the pension he receives as a former security guard in the ministry of interior in Budapest, he doesn't need to make money, and so he prefers to remain on a basis of friendship in his exchanges – whereby the familial atmosphere of his eatery, where everyone eats from a shared pot on the table, the way in which he was introduced to us as a friend of the owner of our accommodation, up to the ostentatiously informal way in which he greeted us, where all implicitly revealed as part of his business performance, which is part of a regular cooperation with local hoteliers, as I later learned from a brochure at the guest house I stayed at. It was all part of the experience of a “Time travel to the peasant world”, as the slogan of the Facebook page of the Tulip House would have it.

When he was asked again about the new tourist reception center that was going to be opened the following month, however, he apparently already said everything that he wanted to be said, and proposed instead to give us a short tour of the building. The evening before, he was more talkative. Asked then how the new building is planned to be used, he fetched some architectural sketches to make his point. Leaning over the sketches, he repeatedly shook his head while exclaiming in a disheartened voice, “sadly”. “Sadly”, it is not going to be anything like his place, and rather than some kind of folkloristic museum, it is going to be some sort of a shop. As he heard, the plan will be to sell wine and other local produce there, and maybe also to host a coffee shop. But for such a concept, you would need casual walk-in customers, quite in contrast to his own business, where he only hosts groups with an appointment. So “sadly”, he had to refuse when he was asked if he wanted to manage and host events at the venue. So for

⁷ Palóc is also the name of the regional dialect.

now, all that was left to do was to make us see with our own eyes why it is surely going to fail.

As if to give us a taste of the proper experience that guests should expect when coming to the cellar-hill, we didn't go directly to the new tourist center, which was located just fifty meters up the road. Instead, we first took a tour through the cellar village, with its eclectic assortment of individually styled cozy little cottages that cover the entrances to the tubular cellars that were dug into the steep sandstone hillsides. After we walked up to the top row of cellar huts, we even chanced into an acquaintance of János, who invited us see the inside of his cottage, which was outfitted with a heavy wooden table and chairs, as well as massive wooden carved bar counter. After this detour, we finally went to see the new event house. Looking down the new footpath towards that house, the visual difference to the rest of the cellar village was striking (Img. 2). The newly renovated building, as the mayor would also explain in a later tour through it, retained the original's "Kadar Cube" style, typical of post-war socialism in Hungary, when hundred-thousands of these standardized, square shaped, single floor nuclear family housing units were built all over the Hungarian countryside. While the size of the original building was extended, and its interior completely transformed, in order to create space to hold seminars for up to fifty people while also housing a kitchen, showers, and wheelchair accessible toilets, its exterior style was retained. The little amount of wood that was used was barely noticeable. Instead, through the spotless light gray of the concrete parking lot and the concrete footpath that connected the house to the various cellar rows, the house emanated a drab, almost austere atmosphere that was only lightened by the lush green of the freshly watered lawn. When I tried to joke that it looks like a nice building for a supermarket, János could only scoff.

Aesthetics of Wood and Concrete

This material contrast is striking not only in relation to János' Tulip House and the cellar village, but to design trends in Hungary at large, which can also be observed all over Pata. Material preferences for wood or concrete speak to broader political visions, and in this way showcase the challenges of uniting a divided constituency. As Krisztina Fehérváry explained, socialist modernist design, of which the Kadar Cube is an example, which was "posited as a purifying force that would vanquish the formal, dark, and heavy qualities of bourgeois furnishings beloved by a proper peasantry as much as

by an urban middle class”, favored “the miracle materialities of man-made plastic and concrete” (Fehérváry 2012, 622). In a development in which the credibility of socialist modernism was waning in parallel with the diminishing potential of its aging products to signify the ideals they once stood for, a vernacular, dissident aesthetic started to emerge that hinged on organic qualities (ibid. 626). While this penchant for “naturalness” drew inspirations from Hungarian folk art, it was in particular the material and symbolic affordances of wood that came to define this so-called “organicist” style (ibid. 627). With the end of state-socialism, organicism ascended to the status of official design ideology of the new state, eagerly adopted by local councils all over the country in their efforts to create post-socialist public spaces (ibid. 630). Since then, it has been an important vehicle in the “naturalization” of Hungarian nationalist sentiments, as Fehérváry has also shown through the example of refurbished bus stops in the former socialist model town of Dunaujvaros (Fehérváry 2022)

Fittingly, bus stops are one of the prime examples of organicist design in Pata. Since at least the 1970ies, two of the six bus stops along the two sides of Pata’s main road were equipped with a shelter for wind and rain protection – one made from concrete, the other from metal. In 2017, rather than providing additional shelters to the remaining four bus stops, the municipality invested 1 million Forint a piece on renovating those two shelters. While the concrete stop received a wooden cladding, the metal one was completely replaced by a new wooden structure, decorated with carved columns, beams and ledges that mix folkloristic symbols, such as grapes and tulips, with more abstract ornamentations, and superscribed with the slogan “in vino veritas” (Img. 3). Only after these material-aesthetic replacements were additional shelters added, all created in the same style by the same local woodcarver, and each displaying another wine related slogan. This affinity for carved wooden designs can also be seen at the gates and doors of various residencies, some of which were even designed by the same craftsman as the bus stops. Another great example of how fine tuned these aesthetic alignments can be can be seen if one compares the exterior of the mayors office throughout the last decade on Google Streetview, in particular the repeated redesign of the beams carrying the porch roof of the mayor’s office. During the term of Jobbik’s mayor, the town’s name written in the defunct runic *Rovásírás* script was added to those beams, as well as to the town’s coat of arms. There is no common literacy in this form of writing, hence it is only used as “a patriotic ‘orthographic act.’” (Maxwell 2004, 170). With the current mayor’s election, these runic inscriptions were removed.

However, a nationalistic meaning was nevertheless delicately re-imbued through the incorporation of carved ornamentations of the beams carrying the porch roof over the entrance (Img 4.).

Moreover, this trend of material resignification started in Pata already before the end of state socialism, and was imbued with both anti-socialist and nationalist sentiment from the very beginning, as indicated by a story about some of the changes that were applied during the late 1980ies to some features of the church's interior's last major renovation during the early 1970ies. In the course of these earlier renovations, all the baroque elements of the church were removed, to restore it to its "original" ie. medieval Gothic state. These renovations followed principles of scientific historical restoration, so that, where no original material is available, clearly visible modern material is used, so as to not falsify the historical elements. As a result of this renovation, the former baroque altar table was removed, and replaced with a large rectangular piece of concrete – a modification that Pata's longest serving former mayor described as "traumatic" for Pata's conservative and devout residents. Some time between 1987 and 1990, two visiting members of the order of St. Paul decided that given that the central altarpiece was a tree that symbolized the genealogy of Christ, this altar table was deemed inauthentic, albeit not in a sense of historical accuracy, but of religious sentiment. The two monks thus went to search for a large tree, which they cut down to use the nearly one meter wide cross section of its stem as the foundation of a new altar table, which now looks as if it is growing out of the ground of the church, and at least from the perspective of the nave, like an extension of the family tree altarpiece. And at least judging by the look of the bark, the same trunk was also used for other elements in the church, such as the lectern, or a flag holder next to a commemorative wall to the Patans fallen as soldiers during the two World Wars onto which the map of Greater Hungary was carved.

The Political Field in Pata

For János' business, the new tourist reception appeared to pose a direct challenge. Not only does it have the potential to act as a replacement of the tourist infrastructure that his place provides, because through the way it is placed, it can effectively act like a bypass road, but it moreover threatens to displace his vision of tourism. Just as his place, it provides a place in which groups can be gathered for a rest before and after a tour

through the cellars. While the application of the tourist center promised a similar establishment, acting as an exhibition space of local tradition, to János this promise didn't seem to have been kept. It interpreted the "exhibition of local tradition" the way a typical modern exhibition space would – as a kind of display on neutral background, rather than as re-enacting performance. Marika, another established tourism entrepreneur was equally on the fence. As the owner of a hotel that houses the village's oldest wine cellar with an adjacent vineyard, she had already built up her own infrastructure for a successful wine tourism business. Thus, the new tourist center purportedly had nothing to offer her. "It doesn't matter. Unlike those other wine makers, I already built something extra!", she exclaimed when asked about what the new tourist center means to her.

This doesn't mean the project was without supporters. Even though he admitted that "from a business perspective, it still hasn't crystallized" how the center will work once it opened, former mayor and busy local handyman Tarr wholeheartedly supported the project. "All the winemakers are going to love it, it could really create a serious scene for wine here, but also for all kinds of meetings, not only for the wine festival. It will bring color to the village!". Although the only work he did on it was to install the watering system of the gardens, he called it his current favorite project. "It was really necessary. You shouldn't think of it only in terms of the building, but how also how it connects to the cellars. You didn't see how it looked here when we started!" Similarly, Gergő put high hopes into the project – it was his idea after all, even though he is the only hotel owner in Pata that does not originate from there. "I suggested it in a meeting in 2014", ie. right after the current mayor was elected, "when the head of the county government was also here, and a lot of people congratulated me for it afterwards for suggesting it. I am very happy that it got realized! Also the mayor really liked the idea. It really showed how this is one of the few areas where issues can be resolved locally and personally, without all the political back and forth!"

The range of affective stances towards the new tourist center and its aesthetics – from sympathy to apathy – aligned with longstanding political divisions of the political establishment of Pata, which in the run-up to the mayoral election of 2011 that established Pata's tarnished reputation, was split into two camps (Feischmidt and Szombati 2017, 321 ff). On one side, there were the established "pragmatists", backed by the church and an association of local entrepreneurs, who fielded all mayors since the regime change until 2006, and whose politics were defined by pursuing close

relations with actors that could provide access to development funds, in order to integrate Pata into the emerging capitalist liberal order. On the other side was a local association called the “Friends of Pata Circle”, whose social base was a newly emerging group of entrepreneurs, active in the fields of wine making and tourism, who succeeded to bring their candidate into the mayoral office in the election of 2006, and whose political alternative vision was based in a project of re-inventing local peasant traditions. Both Marika and János used to run as mayoral candidates on this platform. As Szombati found, the circle’s project of creating a local tourism industry based on the cultural attractions of an imagined ethnically homogeneous peasant authenticity was bolstered by tensions growing around the abandonment of vineyards and wine cellars on the hill directly adjacent to the impoverished Roma neighborhood of the village during the 1990ies (Szombati 2018, 70).

In 2010, former mayor Tarr won as the last party independent candidate on a pragmatist platform. During that election, the candidate of the far-right Jobbik party who garnered only 5% of the vote didn’t seem like a viable opponent. A year later however, when Tarr stepped down from his office for health reasons exacerbated by the intense attention Pata received after the marches of 2011, it was Jobbik’s candidate who surprisingly won a divided, yet unusually busy⁸ snap election, with just over a third of the votes cast. When in 2014, for the next regular election Pata’s mayoral office returned to a candidate who could mobilize an absolute majority, the election was won on the promise of bringing a “new, peaceful beginning” to the troubled community. In an address to the electorate, published in the local news bulletin, FIDESZ backed candidate and current mayor Fehérné announced her candidacy as a “real, important change of direction”. Accompanying this announcement was a note of congratulations by her party’s regional parliamentary representative, which inaugurated the theme that should come to define her time in office. Titled “Pata should be famous for its traditions”, he hoped that she would be able to “restore Pata’s reputation”. Ironically, the question of reputation already played a role in the 2011 election of Jobbik’s mayoral candidate (Szombati 2018, 150), when Magyar villagers thought they were unfairly portrayed by a media that didn’t show their side. In that election, FIDESZ focused on reputational damage control on a national level, so Jobbik maintained the upper hand

⁸ Except for the year 1998, when there was only one mayoral candidate, since the 1990ies, mayoral elections in Pata produced a stable 55% voter turnout. The election in which Juhász won was attended by 60% of the electorate however, as was the subsequent 2014 election. In 2019, turnout returned to the previous 55% level.

locally, in particular since they were also able to exploit the division of the local political elite. Central to this division was the so-called “Roma question”, wherein the pragmatist camp tried to deemphasize ethnic tensions between Magyar and Roma residents, while the ethnotraditionalists centered their political discourse on them. By the end of Jobbik’s term however, the pragmatist slogans of reconciliation and development had gained new appeal, helping the now formally FIDESZ-backed candidate Fehérné win the candidacy with 55%. While Jobbik’s candidate maintained his share of about a third of the electorate, it seemed that by now it was the ethnotraditionalists who became the insignificant force, with their candidate János – our tour guide – receiving just below 6% of the vote. In the words of her then vice-mayor, “the people are scattered like an orphaned flock, and we need to bring them together”.

Her reelection in 2019 was a clear vindication of her cohesive approach. In 2019, Jobbik had left the scene and only one candidate opposed her, Rozsa, a local kindergartner associated with the “Friends of Pata”, yet without any entrepreneurial clout. To illustrate one can compare the respective teams that the two proposed as their preferred candidates for the parallel election of municipal councilors. Six councilors could be individually elected. Out of Fehérné’s campaign team of twelve potential councilor candidates, five got elected, out of which four are local entrepreneurs, and one a medical professional. The sixth elected councilor was Rozsa, the opposition candidate herself, whose campaign under the slogan “local politics is about us – for a family friendly Pata” focused on the needs of Pata’s young people, without whom “the values of the past would also be lost”. Moreover, although in private conversations she didn’t hold back with her unapologetically racist views, in her public campaign she only directly referenced Roma in a way that actually gave credit to her opponent, remarking that “despite the scandals that have surfaced, we should be optimistic because we see more and more people, including Roma, finding employment, we see young people moving to Pata, we see the rise in property prices, and we see our buildings being renovated and beautified.” This stance basically mirrored and confirmed the slogan of Fehérné’s campaign “for the peaceful development of Pata”.

The Wine Festival: Local Solidarity on Display

Given how her signature development project, the new tourist center, irked the aesthetic visions of the ethnotraditionalist establishment, how did it support her project of

reputational repair? During Szombati's fieldwork, historical symbols came to feature centrally in politicians' efforts to unite a fragmented public behind their projects (Szombati 2018, 229). One such example from the time of Jobbik's mayorship, which is remembered as a time in which Pata was one of the most divided settlements in the country, was the construction of a revisionist monument. Dedicated to the pre-World War I territory of Greater Hungary, it was inaugurated with the programmatic slogan "in one piece – and not in pieces" on Pata's central square in 2013. Five years later, Jobbik's mayorship itself provided the foil against which political majorities were mobilized, so that in 2018, when the grant for a EU-funded project to reconstruct the town's historic "seven row cellar village" by building a tourist center next to it was granted, it was announced like this: "Pata has moved beyond the shadows of the past: work and peace bring progress!" And finally when the project was completed, a regional parliamentary representative finished his Facebook post on the ceremony with the exclamation "Pata deserves justice, Pata will get back its good reputation – now we have taken another step in this direction!" Justice was now symbolized by a seminar room with toilets and a parking lot attached – the new tourist center.

Asked if tourism also comes with any sort of negative influence on Pata, former mayor Lajos Tarr disagreed emphatically. "No, we need tourism like bread" Previously, he had just highlighted the importance of tourism to the town, and why it developed around wine in particular. As he explained, there used to be plans to attract more industry to the region through temporary tax exemptions, but after these incentives expired, the companies moved on. As he recalls from his time as a municipal councilor in the nineties, there wasn't enough capital to realize local enterprises, and there was little money from the central government. Around that time, their current tourism model started to emerge from the informal arrangements to stay and eat with locals among self-organizing tourists and wine-makers. And while they lack assets such as a beach or thermal baths, they have always been famous for wine. And precisely this reputation can now be spread again through tourists. And while the new winemakers are not locals anymore – like his parents and grandparents, who used to make wine – but are mostly newcomers from Budapest, he doesn't resent them. Their success is important because they carry the name of Pata abroad. "Everyone who comes here to make the village popular is welcome." Since 2016, Pata's wine scene has one central annual event – a wine Festival, which is held annually for a weekend in August. It has now become the major touristic event of the town, the only time of the year when all hotels tend to be

fully booked. During the festival, professional and amateur wine makers would open their cellars to guests install stalls to serve them wine and food, accompanied by a program of social events, including sight-seeing tours, wine tasting workshops, live music, and a stew-cooking competition. And this time, there was also the celebratory christening of the new building from where this event was now hosted.

On the morning of the opening day of the wine festival, the cellar hill area around the Tulip House and the nearby new tourist center was busy with preparations. The narrow dirt paths along the cellar's cottages were filled with large SUVs, from which cellar owners unloaded equipment for their stalls. Lounging areas of carpets and bean bags under the shade of large tarps were set up, gazebos erected, and everything from plastic chairs, to repurposed wine barrels and heavy wooden tables was dragged out to create the various eating and drinking spaces for the festival. János set up his Tulip House for a special program of the Festival – a Pörkölt stew competition, which he actually already held since before the wine festival existed, in which the mayor among others would be a judge. Beyond the stallholders, the municipality put everyone they could onto their own work team, which comprised administrative clerks, public workfare workers, and a local teenager fulfilling his school-mandated “civil summer duty”, who would turn the parking lot behind the new tourist reception center at the foot of the cellar hill into the main square of the festival, turning the porch of the building into a stage with speakers and a microphone, next to which they put out more benches and tables, together with decorations of lanterns and images of Pata made by a local professional photographer.

This busyness must have been going on for some time, as could be seen from the numerous repairs and small developments that had been done in between my two fieldwork stays in the different areas that would be frequented during the festival. In this time, several cellar owners had freshly painted the front of their cellar cottages. Also, a new bus stop in the center of town received an elaborately carved wooden shelter, which would now greet new arrivals with a slogan saying that would now greet visitors arriving from the largest nearby town with a rhyming slogan, that translates to “Who drinks the wine of Pata's cellars, their heart longs to return.” An unlit path leading up the hills received street lighting. The broken steps of some stairs on the sidewalk between two different locations of the festival was newly cast in concrete. The drinking fountain in front of the new building was painted so recently that it was still surrounded by grass slightly stained from the fresh blue color with which it had just been painted.

Even up to the last hours before the opening, some last repairs were being done, when the municipality finally fulfilled a promise I encountered two months earlier, made then in response to a complaint under the Facebook post by the municipality, which reported the official inauguration of the building, that they would fix the asphalt road that was damaged by trucks during the buildings construction. On the morning of the christening, a truck load of gravel arrived and was filled into the broken section of the road. And finally, also the new tourist reception building received a last little makeover. Hidden behind a scaffolding, a logo consisting of a name and an emblem had been attached to the front of the building, the uncovering of which would be the highlight of opening ceremony.

The ceremony started with a short piece of folk music by a Tárogató soloist, to direct the attention of the gathering people towards the stage, where the mayor would then hold a speech. The Tárogató is an Obeo-like instrument with a similar symbolic depth as the wooden aesthetics described earlier, with a history that is deeply intertwined with nationalism. While interlocutors in Pata described it to me as an “ancient Hungarian instrument”, it is an example of an invented tradition, since the modern instrument was merely named after a medieval Hungarian type of Horn, with which it has not much in common besides being a brass instrument. The modern Tárogató was designed to evoke a romantic image of 17th century anti-Hapsburg insurgents for the purpose of the Hungarian millennial celebrations of 1896 (Pap 1999, 347). The instrument was banned during the early socialist era as a “nationalistic instrument for irredentists” (Pap 1999, 350). It’s a potent historical symbol, as a historian of music wrote in the 1990ies, who regretted that only few people play it, due to the associations it carries, since “the instrument is used by certain extreme right-wing political groups at their political meetings”, and that in particular “for some ethnic minorities in Hungary, [it] has represented a tool of animosity.” (Pap 1999, 351) Without knowing this symbolic significance at the time however, what I heard was a beautifully peaceful and melancholic piece of music.

Although there were significantly more cars than usual, some of them even with foreign license plates, there were nevertheless many familiar faces in the crowd. The mayor started her speech with some word of thanks to all who participated, and by paying respect to all who took the time to attend, despite this being a Friday afternoon, which was a work day, after all – thereby alluding to the industriousness of the present guests, who took it on themselves to attend. She then talked of the intertwined history of

the wine festival and the new tourist center. 2017, the second year of the festival was a milestone for the whole community of wine makers, since in that year the decision was made to build the new tourist center, to create a tourist infrastructure that is near the wine village. Thanks to the growing festival, which extended the already previously existing stew-cooking competition, the many families who own a small vineyard in Pata are now able to open the doors of their cellars to strangers, and with their hospitality show “the real face of Pata”. Then the founder of the festival, who is originally from Budapest, went on stage, thanking the townspeople that an outsider like him was accepted by them and proud that his idea has grown into the main festivity in town. Fifteen years ago, he wanted to make wine on volcanic soils, and since other regions were too expensive, he moved to Pata. Since then, he was not only convinced by the value of the soil, but also the values of the people, and their great community ethos. He ended his speech with a comparison to other wine festivals, saying that in many cases, their traditionalism is fake, because they lack real values – in Pata however, these values are real.

With this declaration, it was time to move to the front of the house, where the scaffolding had by now been removed, leaving only a big drape over the gable end of the front wall. Then a group of seven elderly female singers from a local folk choir lined up in front of the house to pose for some pictures and began to sing. In the middle of the song, the mayor removed the drape, under which now the official name of the new tourist center was revealed: *Széleskedvű Rendezvényház*, ie “the cheerful event house”. As I was told, the term “széleskedvű” is a rather rare construction and quite old-fashioned. Over the writing there was now a big emblem that looked very floral, and on closer inspection could be interpreted as a combination of two popular motifs of the village, a peacock – after which the folk choir is named – within a tulip, which is a common motive of the local Palóc identity – as János’ Tulip House and the decorations of its veranda amply attested. The mayor then went on to explain, that the name was inspired by the song that we just heard, the lyrics of which were attached with a plaque next to the entrance of the building. As the mayor explains, the song has a long tradition in the village and expresses the people’s mentality, who are happy and energetic, and for whom, like the last line of the song, “Pata is the center of the world”.⁹

9 ChatGPT translated it like this:

The lads of Pata have no equal
When they go to the tavern on Sunday.
A wine bottle in his hand, he clinks it proudly,

The connecting theme of the speeches and performances was the notion of “Pataian values”, which were both attributed to the audience, which was addressed as a stand in for Pata, as well as being represented through the winemakers towards the audience. These values could be summed up as industriousness and conviviality. The value of industriousness, was present in multiple forms, be it in little remarks such as in the beginning, when the mayor thanked people to attend even on a working day, thus implicitly congratulating their work ethic, as well as in the overall narrative frame that paints the festival as a success story that is now coming to fruition, the people of Pata are here represented as industrious and cooperative, while the value of conviviality was not only made a part of the official name of the new tourist center, but also to make up the special character of the festival. As one of the new wine makers pointed out after the speech, what sets this festival apart from other such festivals, and what makes it so authentic is the local solidarity that flows into it, that ordinary local also partake in it, sell their home made food and wine and welcome guests and celebrate together. According to him, everyone helps together to make this festival the merry occasion that it is, and there is no competition among them. To highlight this last point, he pointed out how he had just served me wine from another wine maker, how he had praised its qualities as if it were his own. Like in the speeches before, “everyone” is here represented through two wine makers, who provide the fruits of their labor for common enjoyment. This is what Pata should stand for.

Since I could only follow the ceremony through on the spot whisper translations, I don’t know what kind of boundary work was exactly going on in these speeches. Nevertheless, piecing together comments and materials that I gathered elsewhere, I can confidently assume that this vision of being Patan harbored some tensions in particular around the notion of conviviality. While the notion of industriousness is a common trope through which Magyars distinguish themselves from Roma, the elements that I have here summed up as “conviviality” allow in themselves for no such easy distinction.

While with his left arm, he hugs his darling.

The girls of Pata have no equal
When they go to church on Sunday.
Rosary and prayer book in their little hands,
Thinking of their old sweetheart again.

The grape's juice holds mighty power,
The lads of Patak are full of laughter.
He leaps on his horse—“Giddy-up, Blackie!”—
Pata is the center of the world!

Calling the “merriness” described in the mentioned song “conviviality” is already based on the assumption that some sort of boundary work is at play here, that merriness could also refer to behavior that would be considered contrary to Pataian values. One of the most common stereotypes about Roma, besides laziness, is that they are loud and disorderly. As I was told by Rozsa, who together with her husband also owns a cellar, a small vineyard and a small orchard and also participated in the festival by selling wine and spirits from their cellar, one of the worries that townspeople had when the festival started was that it would develop into a booze fest.

This worry even made it onto a flier for the first of these festivals, which included some telling images under the heading of “what to expect when you come”. Among suggestions such as wearing proper outdoor shoes, to bring a backpack to carry home purchased items and to keep dogs on a leash, it also included two contrasting images of wine drinking guests. On one side, there is a drawing of a man with a big mustache and a crumpled hat in a crooked posture, holding a half empty wine bottle in his hand, with his head surrounded by circular lines and stars, suggesting a state of drunkenness. On the other, there are two clean shaven men with their shirts tucked into their pants, one of whom holds a glass of wine in his hands, placing their arms over each others shoulders while holding their backs straight, with a musical note next to their wide open mouths, suggesting they are singing. While there is a large X and the remark that warns against excessive drinking next to the first image, there is a tick mark next to the second, and the comment that “However, communal wine-tasting is highly recommended.” (see Img. 5). It should be noted that later iterations of the festival didn’t use such instructions on how to properly celebrate any more, and the initial worries gave way to widespread support for the festival.

Crucially, these boundary making practices should however not only be interpreted in ethnic terms, but also in terms of class. The above visualization of different drinking behaviors also corresponds to the different customer bases of two generations of wine makers In Pata and elsewhere in the region, an influx of urban wine making enthusiasts and corporate drop-outs have created a new style of wine making, creating small batches of expensive artisanal wines on the whole color spectrum between red, rose, orange and white, in contrast to an older generation of local wine makers, whose image is still defined by the industrial wine production that existed in Pata during socialism, which focused on cheap white table wine. In an argument that is also briefly touched upon by Szombati (2018: 58f), the wine region is characterized by a

threefold division, of a few large producers, a large amount of “micro-vineyard owners” who primarily sell their grapes while only making wine for their own consumption, as well as some “small-scale family wineries” who depend on alternatives to retail distribution to market their wine, mostly selling their wines directly to independent wine shops – as the tourist center was among other things also meant to function – facing the challenge of catering to demanding customers, for which intensive personal networks and branding efforts are crucial, which puts them at odds with an older generation of winemakers who learned their trade when the region was still a major producer of cheap table wine (Király 2018: 112f).¹⁰ Hence, there is a tension between images of wine as a cheap product for everyday consumption versus wine as a product of middle class distinction.

As some of the wine makers also pointed out, this festival thus seems a quite striking counter-case to the “festivalization” that Chris Hann described in his article “Ritual and Economy: From Mutual Embedding to Non-Profit Festivalisation in Provincial Hungary” (Hann 2018), provides an apt comparative case. Writing about a village wine festival that has been celebrated since 1979, Hann argues that now, within capitalist market society “the rather modest levels of effervescence generated by this festival reflect the limited extent of economic re-embedding and a high degree of disenchantment” (Hann 2018, 15). The “modest levels of effervescence”, ie. the little amount of non-instrumental reasons for participating, is made palpable by the meager attendance of the entertainment activities at the festival (Hann 2018, 25). The low level of economic embedding was seen in the fact that no local people were employed to set up and staff that festival (Hann 2018, 27), while the “high degree of disenchantment” can among other things be seen in the way wine testing is eschewed by many visitors, due to the steep price difference to prices of wines in local discount supermarkets.

Pata’s wine festival provides a striking contrast, in terms of “effervescence” insofar as there were indeed many local people there both to enjoy themselves and to show their village from its best side, full of hospitality. Even though also at this festival, prices were rather high in comparison to local supermarkets, locals happily circumvented this and still participated, bringing their own drinks and food to the area – turning the festival into an open street party, with singing and dancing. Since

10 For a visual contrast, it is interesting to watch a TV documentation about wine production in Pata from 1996, and compare it with the images that are currently produced around viticulture. Although I couldn’t understand it, the visual language was clear. The documentary of 1996 of endless rows of grapes, big tractors, industrial presses and tanks, and over and over again huge amounts of grapes piled up on trucks, tractors, etc.

the whole festival was not only organized by local wine makers, but also provided the opportunity to sell different kinds of home made produce and foods, it was highly embedded in the local economy. And last, precisely by responding to the popular desire for a redeemed reputation, the economic aspect of it becomes reenchanting – as can also be seen by the overflow of pictures of the festival shared on Facebook. This festival surpasses any other event, any other issue discussed and shared in local Facebook groups in the amount of engagement, with people also sharing their private pictures on public groups, like the one dedicated to “the pretty face of Pata” that will be the subject of the next chapter. Beyond being a celebration of wine, the festival is thus also a celebration of the redemption of Pata. By acting as an infrastructure that supports this event, the new tourist center could become a symbol of justice, precisely because it provides an infrastructure to the reputational repair that this festival allows.

The Mayor’s Achievement

Within a decade, Pata went from being a community that was deeply divided – and publicly so – to a town that hosts a festival that prides itself on its local solidarity. At both ends of this development, the public image of the town was centrally shaped by local tourism actors. In the years leading up to the events of 2011, as Feischmidt and Szombati have showed (Feischmidt and Szombati 2017), it was tourism entrepreneurs that pushed ethnonationalist and anti-Roma themes into local political discourse, which ultimately led to the fragmentation that allowed a candidate to win with the support of only a third of the electorate. By the time of my fieldwork however, more than three quarters of the electorate supported the current mayor, and judging by the supporting candidates the two competing campaigns of 2019 fielded, no member of the local business community opposed her. Coded references to the Magyar-Roma boundary were still part of the image that tourism actors wanted to represent of Pata. The aesthetic vision by local tourism actors such as János, who used to run as an ethnonationalist mayoral candidate, of what tourism in Pata should represent, was still quite different from what unfolded under mayor Fehérné's tutelage. But as the wine festival showcased, the program of reputational repair through peace and development managed to integrate the different factions of the town and gave them a common project to rally

around. Moreover, as will be the topic of the next chapter, the appeal of this project goes beyond the concerns of politicians and entrepreneurs in Pata.

II – Facework on Facebook: Reputational Repair as Common Concern

An Exchange on Facebook

Anita

I know I'm not a fantastic photographer... but recently I gathered the courage and sent a few photos of our Pata to a certain "wonderful" Facebook group... About a few minutes later, I got a message that they had deleted them... Unfortunately, this is what the name Pata means these days... What could be done about this...?

Ágota

This is exactly why I created this group. (Though I didn't expect it to turn out this great.) When someone found out I live in Pata, they practically freaked out and asked if I was in my right mind?! Because "that's basically Chicago" 😊

Anita

...and you were absolutely right to create this group. Yes, I often go through the same... when I say where I live.

Anita again, some minutes later

Woohoo... it's been 40 minutes and I haven't been deleted from the "Wonderful Hungary" group yet... that's something! Even though the post says Pata... this is just a test 😊

Judit

I was recently in Upper Hungary at a folk music camp. One of the camp leaders, when he found out where I was from, brought up the same negative things. Even though I told him about our values, he didn't even know about them. He only remembered the events from 10 years ago... it's sad.

Kata

Same thing happened to me...

Anita

I was just about to suggest... let a few of us send in photos of Pata... let's see if they get deleted... maybe I'm just doing something wrong... but it seems I'm not. So maybe our Pata is not a "wonder-place"... but if we can get past this... it will be one!

Pata's Most Beautiful Face

Given the high level of support of the mayor mentioned earlier, we could already imagine that the project of reputational repair did not only integrate different elite factions of Pata, but that it also has popular appeal. As was already thematized in the introduction, the reputation of Pata was a prevalent and widespread concern. It showed itself in a preoccupation with the knowledge and opinions about Pata of our group by many interlocutors, but was also very prevalent in the social media activity of its residents. It even carried over into social media posts about our group during our stay. After our group visited the wine cellar of former mayoral opposition candidate Rozsá and her husband for an interview, during which we were invited to homemade wine and pastries, Rozsá posted pictures from our visit. “We hope that they will carry our good reputation forward!” was the first response someone commented underneath. As quickly became clear, this wasn’t just a lone sentiment – the largest local Facebook group, from which the introductory exchange was taken, called “Here in Pata – Pata’s most beautiful face”¹¹ is dedicated to it. The group was founded by Ágota, a woman in her thirties, who is by her own account a full-time homemaker and mother, who dreams of opening an art therapy center for autistic children – such as her son. She started the group during the first summer of the Corona pandemic in August 2020, just a few months after the town received a new wave of public attention due to the conclusion of the court case against practices of ethnic segregation in the local primary school. It counts almost as many members as Pata has residents, and many of the people I met in Pata are active in it – among them Marika and other wine makers – though the mayor limits her online presence to the municipality’s own Facebook page, which is Pata’s second largest Facebook group. One of the most direct articulations of the widespread concern with Pata’s reputation can be found in the group’s self-description, in which Ágota explained the purpose and rules of engagement of the group:

“I consider it a matter of my heart to showcase the exceptionally beautiful features of Pata to the general public, contrary to what the media portrays. I grew up here, and my heart pulled me back. I am undoubtedly biased due to my ‘real’ childhood filled with adventures.

11 This was also the group through which we discovered Zsofi’s invitation to pick cherries in her garden.

I feel like everything I need is here. Besides tourist attractions, I want to highlight its fundamental natural beauty. If you feel similarly about our small village (I know, I know... it's a town, but to me, it will always be a village¹²... I believe there is greater intimacy in this word), and find its current perception unworthy, feel free to join and share the things that are beautiful and dear to you about 'Here in Pata'. I would like to emphasize that this is not a platform for debates! I am not interested in any kind of criticism related to burning, smoke, overgrown weeds in the stream, and other negatively charged matters. For those who do not adhere to this, I will ban their posts, and in extreme cases, the person themselves.”

Despite the admonition to not use the group as a platform for debates and criticism, the Facebook discussions I analyzed in this group gave evidence to the multiplicity of perspectives and positions among the residents of Pata, more than any other kind of interaction that I witnessed. The frequent postings and comments on these pages showed that Facebook formed an important part of “those relatively bounded – but never airtight – domains of social life” (Pink et al. 2016, 102) that made up the social world of Pata. Reading through several years of exchanges of the two most used Facebook groups of the town – the official channel of the municipality, and Ágota’s group “the Prettiest Face of Pata” – I got acquainted with a number of people that I never met, and thanks to the power of AI translation tools – got a chance to witness the words of interlocutors that I otherwise only accessed through whisper translation. Through their continuous presence in these online discussions, I could get to know their diverging positions. Also, for the people I did meet in person, following these interactions gave my familiarity with them further depth, and showed that these online conversations weren’t just discussions among strangers. Not only did they happen between the same people, but also between people that knew each other offline. My focus lay on the time from early 2020 to late 2022, though in case for the municipal Facebook page, which was founded in 2014, I searched through earlier content with infrastructure related keywords as well. During this time, which was marked by the re-

12 As the mayor explained to us, Pata used to be a town during the middle ages, yet lost this status in the 19th century, and only recently regained it.

occurring lockdowns of the Covid-19 Pandemic, these did indeed take on that proverbial „townsquare“ function, that social media used to be acclaimed for.

Let me just take two frequent participants of these discussions, who would usually only engage with each other in disagreement, and who moreover undermine the common stereotype of the village community that is closed against outsiders, since neither of them grew up in Hungary – although both are Hungarian. Yet despite their outsider status, which they sometimes emphasize to make a point, they were not only accepted, but central figures in these discussions. One of them is a middle aged wine maker, who often contributes with flippant remarks, be it about the corruptness of Orbánite politicians, or the conservative character of Patans. For example, when in the course of a thread that I’m going to discuss in detail below, Ágota responded to a sketch of colorful church window designs by a local artist with a congratulatory message that ended in a row of differently colored hearts, he joked “be careful with those rainbow hearts in Pata, or you will be mistaken for a lib”.¹³ On the other side, an elderly woman from Transylvania who wrote a popular book of poetry about life in Pata, from which she liked to quote in her posts, which tend to represent the most stern and conservative opinions in discussions – indeed, in the discussion below, she was always one of the detractors. One of these poems that she cited to remind people of the true values of Patans, which was well known enough that another participant even commented by following up with another stanza of the poem, read like this: “They set an example with diligence // With true faith // With zeal // They started the day with prayer // And only put down their work when the Sun // Had already set... // (True Tale / excerpt / 2004)”

On the “Pata's most beautiful Face” page, few days went by without posts from residents as well as visitors, mixing together impressions of the title giving beauty of the town with local news and announcements, as well as occasional opinion posts. To take a typical uneventful week as an example: on Monday afternoon, someone posted two images of a man working on the tiles of a roof, advertising his mobile number and that he can help repair roofs and similar works, which multiple people shared in their own timelines, followed by a post reshared from another page, the Facebook page of the Maltai, an NGO involved in poverty alleviation and educational work with the local Roma population that will play a larger role in chapter III, which reported the news that a new sports field was inaugurated by the mayor, accompanied by over a dozen pictures of the event at which the children of the local kindergarten held a public training

13 “Lib” is a derogatory short form for “liberal” common among political conservatives.

session, to a moderate response of likes and comments of congratulations. In the evening, an elderly woman from a neighboring village shared the image of a bird feeder by a DIY page, with meager response. Wednesday afternoon, someone shared an uncurated batch of images of her sunset walk through a local vineyard, and through the garden of the new tourist reception center, which also received a moderate amount of likes, and for the images depicting the tourist center, posts that complimented the beauty of the depictions. Two days later, the social worker from the NGO that already shared the post about the opening of the sports field posts the link to an article about the event by a regional news outlet, with a few likes. On Saturday, someone simply greeted all “Erszis” a happy name day, to which five Erszébets respond with comments of thanks. On Sunday, someone shared a short report by the page of a Hungarian “regenerative farming page” about some kind of organic farming meeting in Germany, followed by the post that received the most active engagement this week, a post about a straying dog at the bus stop that received ten comments, in which people speculate who the dog belongs to, as well as express frustration over a high amount of dogs roaming freely in the streets. In terms of likes, however, the post of the sunset pictures received the most responses. The only thing that was missing was the popular genre of the local history post, in which posts of old images gather reminiscent comments.

Other than that, this week contained most of the major genres one can find in the group, namely reports of local events with images, a concrete question that lead to a discussion beyond what was asked for, and posts of local impressions, as usually of touristic sites photographed by local residents, as well as the different kinds of posts that receive barely any engagement, such as minor advertisements, and vaguely inspirational material without a clear connection to the town. Moreover, the post with the dog was typical of the underlying tensions within the groups purpose and self-imposed rules to avoid debate and “negatively charged matters”. The roaming dog conjures images of poverty and deficient domestication that are often associated with Roma (Váradí and Virág 2014, 42) that makes it hard not to read the anxious frustrations over it as a coded manifestation of those “negatively charged matters” that gave Pata its bad name in the first place. The illustrate the associations implicit in these, one could take one of the examples that this post lists, “criticism related to burning”. As Szombati found, “burning of leaves on days disallowed by the council” used to be one of the minor offenses that Roma regularly got fined for during the tenure of Jobbik’s mayor in the wake of the latter’s law and order policies. The post thus contains in a nutshell the

dilemma of the group, which admonishes its participants to “be civilized” - as Ágota phrased it in an interview. Through the notion of civility as domestication, it both upholds a core part of the image by which the Magyar – Roma boundary is drawn, while at the same time also silencing its naming. Although the content of the group seems like it could hardly be of interest to non-residents, and that it would thus be mostly directed inwards, as means of communication among residents, such an impression is contradicted by the founding statement of the group, which intends all of this as a “showcase [...] to the general public”.

The ground for the kind of online sociality that the “Pata's most beautiful Face” group fostered was already laid by another group, called “Stay at home Pata”, which was founded in the first month of the European wide lockdowns of March 2020. The content created and shared within this group, during the height of its active phase in early 2020, resembled the above given example closely. There was a crucial difference, though. While “Stay at Home Pata” too was a publicly visible group, its content wasn’t addressed at an external public. And indeed, posts as the ones mentioned in the founding statement, about the illicit burning of garden wastes, garbage in the local stream, or precisely about roaming dogs, were more frequent there. With the founding statement of “Pata's most beautiful Face” however, Ágota deployed the online sociality that arose in lockdown to an outward-focused purpose: the repair of Pata’s reputation. While she left unmentioned what the “current perception” of Pata actually entailed, she outlined clearly what Pata stands for to her: a happy childhood in the intimacy of a tight village community. By creating a space in which things that are “beautiful and dear” to its residents and no “negatively charged matters” are shared, she hoped to repair this reputation in the eyes of the public, while also shaping the way in which its participants interacted.

Breaking the Rules of Engagement

In an interview, Ágota revealed that once, she even considered quitting the group, because of the effort it takes to moderate it. The rules of engagement outlined in the founding post are broken frequently – the post about the roaming dog is one example. Initially, she posted such content on her own Facebook page, and didn’t expect the public page to become so popular. Yet by then – the group was nearly two years old – she decided that it is too important to be shut down. “It’s a page that is dedicated to

finding solutions, and I'm willing to do the work." Reflecting on how she moderates the group, she used the example of an amateur historian, who recently visited the village in order to write about the local statue of a popular Hungarian national hero, one of the leaders of the Hungarian independence movement of the 19th century. She then referred to Zsofi's post about the cherries people could come to pick in her garden, that we told her about as a way of showing that we already had some nice interactions with the group. "You see, if someone who is interested in Pata like that historian, they shouldn't be greeted by posts about picking cherries. That's why I will usually delete small posts like that after some time." Which she did indeed about a month later. Instead, she wished to see things that are more explicitly meant as a counter narrative to "negative media reception", a kind of grassroots tourism advertisement. "I would like to make a series of videos of old people's skill, and maybe also interview some of the wine makers, so that we can show the personal face of Pata and promote local hospitality!"

On the other hand, regarding posts that more directly conflict with the rules she outlined, she stepped back a little from the strict formulation in her initial post. "It's important to discuss conflicts, but in a civilized way. For example, there was a surprisingly good discussion online about the school between Roma and Hungarians. [...] Through the power of communication, we can find better solutions for problems in town. Problems are still bubbling up, so there's a need for a platform to discuss them. That's why I decided to lift the ban on divisive content for some time." The mission outlined in her statement is widely shared, as are its rules coveted. Below, I will describe in more detail two discussions that broke these rules, and analyze the efforts of participants to realign with the mission of the group despite such disturbance. The first example developed from an atypical answer to a post of a historical image. These posts are a kind of genre, wherein usually someone posts a scan of an historic image, sometimes coupled with a nostalgic story, sometimes only with a short caption, with the missing information then frequently being filled in by people who know or knew the people in the images. The other exemplary discussion will be the one between Roma and Hungarian mentioned in the interview.

An Arduous or a Virtuous Past?

A regular poster on the group, who frequently shares images of her walks, capturing the moods of fog, pretty clouds, or sunsets, as well as of flowers and gardens throughout the

village – separately posted two scans of historical black and white images, both of which created a lot of engagement. The first of the images, which showed what looks like an old manor, with two unrecognizable persons standing in the muddy square in front of it, accompanied by the caption “... where could it be...”, and was followed by a discussion that included numerous nostalgic stories of how things used to be back in the days when the image was taken – ie. in the first half of the 20th century. The other image she shared, however quickly left the nostalgic mold that the group wanted to encourage. Captioned “Pata..1989...”, depicting an old woman with a walking stick and headscarf walking on the pavement next to the main road leading to the main square of the village, with the village’s school and church visible in the background.

Although numerous similar images have been shared to mostly rather limited engagement, this image in the end received over 150 likes and over a hundred comments – more than twice the engagement than the properly nostalgic post about the manor – in which the very mission of the group became the central topic. The main discussion stretched over five days, with some minor discussions continuing until nine days later. Two comments were even posted over a year later. While over half of all comments came from the original author and two other commentators, in total over thirty people participated in the discussion. Moreover, since the question whether specific comments or the post as whole should be deleted came up during the discussion, I can’t be sure whether what I could see on Facebook was actually the full discussion – beyond the fact that, since it spread over multiple days, it might very well have been the topic of offline conversations as well.

It all started when one poster broke the established pattern of responses to such images, the mood of which would usually be either congratulatory (consisting in exclamations like “beautiful”, “bravo”, “thanks”, etc), or somber – as in the above mentioned nostalgic reminiscences. Here however, the first commentator took a different tone: “This image turned out quite scary.” One person reacted with laughing smiley, several others chimed in in agreement. However, when the original poster elaborated on his statement, comparing the old woman depicted with a witch, someone retorted with indignation “This dear aunt is someone's mother or grandmother, and she is not a witch. Do you understand?!”, to which the first commentator then replied, that “this post is a good example of how sensitive and upset our society is at the moment. An innocent picture and comment on an art analysis is met with such a flood of comments.

Everyone can see into this picture what they want. After all, no painting shows the same face to everyone.”

Others then jumped into the conversation with attempts at appeasement, for example by suggesting that the scary mood of the picture might be due to its being black and white – in turn people then reinterpret the old lady, acknowledging her “witch-like” features, like her bent back “I see a lot of work in her, loneliness, she is old, her back is bent from many years of hard work! [...] This is what old women used to look like. This is also part of the past.” to which someone else responds that to them, it brings up associations with the “trials of a bygone era that are slowly being forgotten [...] Lucky is the family where there is still someone to ask about the past.” From there on, more reminiscences about the woman in the picture poured in – someone wishing she could sit down with the dear aunt, someone else lamenting that “unfortunately there are fewer and fewer of the classic Pata aunts around, and more and more of the whiny gypsy children”. Ever more elements got drawn into this nostalgic spiral, someone even mentioned how the roads were better back then. Finally, someone interfered “Is this really Pata’s most beautiful face?”, exclaiming that “I just thought that the group’s title “The beautiful face of Pata” would show the remarkable sights, not the past and its shortcomings. Of course the broken down road and the tramp loitering in the street etc. are the picture of today, but not the pretty face! I wish it wasn’t!” The response of the author that “I uploaded the picture as a memory on Facebook ... I thought it would fit here. I didn’t mean to provoke such a debate with it.” at which point the admin supports them both and urges everyone to be calm and peaceful. “[...] There should be more photos of our attractions. I don’t think the problem is with the old pictures (because it’s always nice to see those), but with the proportions. [...] However, we might be prouder of the past than of the present. When it comes to people, an old photo with an “old” person represents a fading system of values. Maybe that’s why we love them so much – because deep down we know: what a pity, oh what a pity! [...] If only this sea storm would end, so there wouldn’t be more waves.” After this several people chime in to back the author’s decision to post the image and comfort her.

The topic of the next two days then turns into a discussion of the previous meta-discussion, at the end of which it was concluded, that after all, all these debates were in the spirit of the mission of the group. At the end of this discussion about the discussion, the original author resolves that for some time she wasn’t sure whether to delete her post, but that she now resolved against it. “It was good the way it happened, don’t worry

about anything, and don't take down the photo either. I'm proud of the members now! Opposing views were discussed in a civilized manner." At this point, the person who asked if this thread really showed "Pata's most beautiful face" conceded "I wasn't speaking about the photo, but about the excellence of the people of Pata. The photo itself is wonderful, no one said otherwise. If you read the conversation about it carefully, you'll see that only good things are said about the photo." To which the original poster repeated her point "I have no problem at all with the comments... on the contrary... I'm glad that many people reacted to it... some this way, some that way... it would be boring if everyone had the same opinion... I thank everyone who found it worth commenting on..." At last, a year later, one last commentator, writing in the proper fashion to not restart a debate: "I spent almost all the summers of my childhood in Pata, in the building to the right behind the bridge. [...]"

In this several days spanning post, several major threads can be made out, that can be separated into different, increasingly reflexive stages. During the first two days, people responded mostly directly to the buzz¹⁴ created by the image, either by commenting directly on it, or by agreeing or disagreeing with other responses. A few comments already brought up the issue of whether or not the image should be changed or deleted, displaying a heightened anxiety over the mission of the group, and how posts in it reflect on Pata. A veritable meta-discussion then started to pick up on the third day, with the question "Is this really Pata's most beautiful face?" In the admin's response, she not only agreed with both sides of the debate, but also brought them back to her own ideas of how to create a new narrative for Pata. Like the founding statement of the group outlined, the main part of the group should be dedicated to content that mimics the form of tourism advertisements, while also keeping the sense of nostalgia that drives this grassroots activism for tourism. Although that statement treated debate as something that will create the wrong kind of narrative for Pata, in this case the debate itself was recast as something that showcased Patans and their values of civility. What convinced the participants of the discussion of their own civility was their ability to return to a state of unity.

14 With "buzz", I mean the dynamic when a post receives a lot of engagement, it will be prioritized by Facebook's algorithm, and thereby displayed in people's time line, thereby creating more engagement. One factor that might have played a role in the unusually high engagement this post received could have been, that the first comment to it was posted on the morning of a drizzly Sunday, in the morning of which this first comment was written. By the end of that Sunday, the post received 15 comments, enough to be pushed into people's personal Facebook feeds.

Rejecting Modernity, Embracing Tradition

But also Ágota herself sometimes deliberately broke her self-imposed rules, as in the case of a discussion that spanned both of Pata's main Facebook groups, in which Ágota used her platform to stage an intervention. It started when the wife of a local artist, whose exhibition space of abstract paintings is a popular attraction of Pata, posted an image to the Facebook page of Pata's municipality. Captioned "Stained glass window designs for the church in Pata", it showed three sketches of what appear to be very high windows, made in watercolor on several sheets of paper, taped to a large piece of upright standing white cardboard. The windows' outer and inner frames are outlined in black, and filled in with geometric patterns of all colors. While on the top, some floral motives could be made out, the major part consists of triangles and trapezes of different sizes, created through intersecting straight lines of various angles across the whole design, which are filled in with all the colors of the spectrum, so that no shape ever touches another shape of the same color. Within a day, this image created a veritable shitstorm, with over 50 responses, almost all of which either criticized or insulted the design or artist, with many expressing concern over changes to Pata's famous church, some even suggesting that this should be reported to some heritage protection agency. The one single semi-supportive comment in this stated that "it would certainly look nice in a modern building" – thereby still sharing the common assessment, that these designs would be unfit for the local church.

The intensity of these responses bring back to mind the issue of aesthetics discussed in the previous chapter, and in particular the assessment by a former mayor of Pata that the inclusion of modern concrete elements in the church's Gothic restoration of the 70ies was a "traumatic event for the people of Pata". But also nowadays, the church plays a crucial role in the imaginary of what Pata's reputation should actually be about. As an earlier announcement on the municipal Facebook page about planned restorative works on the church exclaimed: "Pata's true symbol is being renewed: the Church of Our Lady! [...] Thanks to government support, that vision is now on its way to becoming reality: the planning contract for the renovation of the famous Gothic sanctuary and pilgrimage site has already been signed! This uniquely valuable church has symbolized Pata for centuries – this is the true emblem of the town." In contrast to the wine cellar hill, it is an already established tourist destination. Also, as the mayor pointed out in an interview, when she explained that the reasoning behind building the

tourist center next to the wine cellar hill was to attract new tourist streams, so far it is this church that attract most tourists to Pata – although these usually do not stay in Pata. Unsurprisingly, the images of local attractions that the “Pata’s most beautiful Face” group urges its members to share frequently include it.

In this heated discussion, Ágota intervened on behalf of the posted window designs on the “Pata’s most beautiful Face” group’s page, thus exposing herself and her page, “There have been many criticisms of our church’s window plans, which leaves me puzzled. 🌀 [...] Imagine the light breaking through at the morning mass, this cavalcade!”. At a later point, when it already turned out that this intervention had failed to turn around the prevailing mood, Ágota mentioned the underlying assumption based on which she started this debate, that what really matters in such discussions is “the tone of the first comment [...] because people often go only after that”. And indeed, first responses were supportive of her stance, taking the situation with humor and even pointing to the designs potential for local pride. “There’s a Swedish proverb that says, ‘Taste is like an ass – divided.’ I think it’s an especially interesting detail that the windows are being made based on the designs of a painter from Pata.” However, over time, with more voices chiming in, the mood approached that of the discussion in the other group, deriding the designs as “children’s paintings”. Only a few voices still defended Ágota’s position, writing ever longer pieces about the importance of colors in church windows, with increasing references to the history of art and churches.

In the face of the relentlessness of the design’s detractors, some supporters of the designs attempt to start a discussion about the way things are being discussed, with one of the design’s supporters claiming “I assume that if these windows had been installed, without it being posted here on Facebook, 90% of people would not have even noticed the change...” to which someone chimed in “the positive thing is how many people still find the church important... even among those who don’t even go there”. This attempt to break out of the cycle of ever increasing resentment didn’t catch on, and a resolving metadiscussion only managed to take hold once the immediate “threat” was resolved, when one member posted “There was a misunderstanding. I just spoke with painter... He designed these plans for his own enjoyment. No one is planning to replace the church’s stained glass windows.” At this point, Ágota, retreats from her intervention in favor of the designs, and only maintains her stance about the lack of civility in the discussion “[...] My goal with the post wasn’t to convince anyone that *this* is how it should be. I’m accepting. I accept if a local artist finds this beautiful and that’s what came from their

soul. And I see beauty in it, too. I also accept that someone else sees it like a kindergarten drawing. But this behavior – from people – I can't accept." Subsequently, the flow of posts started to ebb, and also the others who remained engaged started to make amends. One person on the side of the supporters recast the detractors in a new light "let's be glad for what we have. At least people are expressing opinions on Facebook. At least they care about what's happening in Pata. [...] Some people speak bluntly, but not necessarily with bad intentions [...]", while one of the detractors distanced herself from her previous enragement "I was almost ashamed that I didn't figure it out [that the designs were not meant to be implemented], since I've known the artist's work for a long time."

Successful Facework

In both examples, it was made explicit, that the outlined rules of engagement of the group were broken. Nevertheless, the posts were not deleted, contrary to Ágota's announcement in her statement. Given that it was evident, that the participants of these discussions knew each other, this brought about a dilemma. In the terms Erving Goffman's essay on Face-Work (Goffman 1955), both Ágota and the person breaking her rules have put their own face, and the face of the other at stake. If she would leave rule-breaking posts unanswered, her stance, and by implication the project of reputational repair that she has staked on it, would be exposed as unserious. Removing such posts however would assert the division of neighbors that the page is meant to overcome. As Goffman also points out, one of the most common ways to avert the loss of face is to simply ignore that any offense has taken place, at least for as long as that is still plausible to do. This threshold of plausibility was crossed by both examples above – and thus the broken relationships had to be mended more explicitly, by turning the attention of the discussion towards itself. This way, the participants of the discussions engaged in a collective effort of reinterpreting of what had happened before, so that it wouldn't offend anymore. In the ensuing efforts to make amends, common values and their negotiability became visible.

In the first example, the discussion about the image of an old lady that to some looked like a witch, what was at stake for the offended side was the question of respect for the elderly and for the past. This offense was grounded in a widely shared value, as already Szombati found, according to whom "young [Roma] men's failure to show

respect and deference toward elderly residents” (Szombati 2018, 86) was one of the major grievances cited by residents living close to the Roma neighborhood in the run up to the events of 2011. However, as some detractors noted, not all aspects of the past are equally worthy of attention – and indeed given the project of reputational repair, a perspective centering more on present and future feats might be more helpful. Reconciliation was achieved by recasting this exchange as actually an expression of the offended value – by pointing out the civility, the “cultured way” in which participants engaged in this discussion – as well as the detractor’s concern with reputational repair – by reinterpreting the discussion itself as a present feat worth displaying, as a showcase of Pataian values which both sides here had exhibited. As it turned out, the image of an outside observer that reforms their opinion of Pata based on what they see in this group, that Ágota formulated in the founding statement of the group, was instrumental to achieve this unity.

In the second case, reconciliation wasn’t come by so easily, since Ágota herself broke her own rules, and thus couldn’t act anymore as a neutral arbiter that offered a middle ground solution. The resulting protest however not only broke the rules that Ágota outlined for her group, but more importantly, her value of civility, on which she – and as the previous example showed, other members of the group as well – staked her idea of how reputational repair of Pata can be achieved. Thus Ágota’s intervention itself was an attempt at mending the offense that the other post created. However now the idea of reputational repair afforded no path for resolution, since both sides could lay claim to it, due to the symbolic importance of the church. This contradiction was only resolved when the threat that one side of the discussants perceived turned out to be moot. When Ágota then reiterated, that she just wanted to urge civility, a presumptive resolution is found in the recasting of the indignation that offended her as a type of care and truthfulness. Now, after all, an outside observer might find an example of civility in this exchange, she reasoned. With this, her commitment to Pata’s reputation and thus the work she staked her Face on was undoubtedly upheld.

In both cases, moreover, two aspects of Pata’s reputation were at stake, and needed to be reconciled. On one side, there was a concern with the presented behavior and its civility. On the other side, there was a concern with the general sense in which Pata’s past should be presented. By renegotiating the meaning of the image of the old woman as an image of a virtuous rather than arduous past, and by defending Pata’s figurative church windows against a modernist make-over, participants in these

discussions generated a common sense of Pata's past as something that isn't broken. As will become clear in the next chapter however, this achievement is rather precarious. Seen in the light of the actual past events that established Pata's reputation, the past discussed here is mostly inconsequential. In contrast, when the school – an institution that stood at the center of ongoing controversies around Pata – is involved, the mere possibility of repair was cast into question.

III – Beyond Repair: Negotiating Brokenness in the School

A Temperate Dance

The program of the wine festival, the opening of which was the topic of chapter I, ended with an afternoon of folk dance in the yard of the primary school, organized by the Maltaí, as mentioned earlier, an NGO involved in poverty alleviation and educational work with the local Roma population. As posters hung up around the bus stops of the town advertised, beyond traditional “*Tánc ház*” (literally “dance house”) dancing to the music of a live band, guests would also be able to attend pottery and jewelry workshops, *Kürtőskalács* pastry grilling, and a raffle there. Scheduled to start in the early afternoon, the yard started to fill up with school-aged children and teens, as well as their mothers, around midday. Given that apparently all children except one who attend that school are from Roma families, I assumed that all of them were Roma – an assumption that as it later turned out was shared by Magyar attendants who joined later.¹⁵ Already from the outside of the event’s venue, there seemed to be subtle mismatches between the type of event – which should be an expression of regional identity – and how it was instantiated here.

Seemingly small details already contained deep symbolic contrasts with the main venue of the festival, the tourist center. The school yard’s fence was decorated with “TÁNC HÁZ” written colorful cardboard letters, ivy vines and ribbons, as well as paper sunflowers and bundles of blue and yellow balloons. At the time, the Hungarian government blocked EU sanctions against Russia on the grounds that this would raise energy prices for Hungarians too much. Thus, both the sunflowers and the colors of the balloons seemed to be a reference to the invasion of Ukraine by Russia. I was first alerted to the association of the school with the topic of energy during the interview with the mayor, who took the school as an example of the problems the war in Ukraine brought for Hungarian citizens, when she stressed how necessary the recent renovations to increase the energy efficiency of the school and other public buildings were, given the rising prices of energy. When I entered the yard, the balloons and sunflowers reminded me of another occasion, when on my first day in Pata I went to buy tobacco together with Balu. Not expecting one of us to speak Hungarian, the vendor wondered

15 Regarding the difficulties of the category of “Gypsy”, and its shifting position as cultural and socio-economic, as well as self- and external designation, see Olivera and Poueyto (2018).

aloud towards the other customers, two old women, in the shop where all those strangers suddenly were coming from – we weren't the first from our group to buy tobacco there. To her surprise, Balu answered, explaining we were students on a field trip, which got him talking to the two old women as well. As he told me afterwards, one of them was Roma and suggested, that we should go visit the Maltai, it's supposedly really great, she volunteers there herself for Ukrainian refugees, while the other warned us from going there. The ambiguity of the support of Ukrainian refugees by the Maltai was further underlined during the already mentioned interview with Ágota, the admin of the "Pata's most beautiful Face" group. When we wanted to know whether she sees the Maltai as an ally in her project, she affirmed our question, and mentioned that she also thinks it's good that they give out clothes to Ukrainian refugees, even though not everyone agrees. Apparently there was a big online discussion on another platform about Ukrainian refugees, during which she even got blocked by one of the participants for her stance. "There are rumors among locals that the Ukrainian refugees will be Roma", she explained. Given these connections, as well as the absence of a comparable show of solidarity at any other moment during my fieldwork, I read these balloons and flowers as an index of separation through the contrast they provided, also given the importance of a different floral motives – the tulip – at other venues of the wine festival. No such signification of regional belonging was to be found here. In place of such symbols of regional belonging, there was a show of solidarity with a comparatively distant place.

Inside the yard, which was enclosed by the newly renovated school building on one side, and its newly renovated sports hall with a swimming pool on the other, step by step, gazebos were set up to shelter a food stall and the prizes of the raffle as well as provide some shade in the hot summer sun, a soccer goal was turned with a big piece of white cloth and some more paper sunflowers into a backdrop for group photos, folding benches and tables were taken out of the school building and covered in small boxes full of plastic trinkets for the jewelry workshop, a charcoal grill and heavy pottery wheel were hauled off a trailer, and mats and bales of straw were laid out to create a lounging area. In the school's kitchen, volunteers prepared sandwiches, which alongside soda and donated home made syrup or wine would all be offered for free at the food stall. On the other side of the yard, hiding away from the sun under a small perched roof next to the sports hall, gathered a man and a woman in heavy looking folk attire, chatting with

some more casually dressed musicians, who set up their drum kit and string instruments on the stairs of the school's sports hall.

Meanwhile, the largest presence of civil guards I have witnessed during my time in the town started to gather next to them, inadvertently separating them from the families in the other half of the yard. The civil guard is a type of Hungarian civil society institution, that in many ways resemble voluntary fire brigades, except for their different stated purpose of providing security. It is composed of voluntary members that wear government sanctioned uniforms and badges that closely resemble police insignia, and can often be seen at public events. For example, at the wine festival, there were always two members of the civil guards stationed at the access road, to help drivers find a parking spot and to deter drunk driving. At another festivity that I mentioned, a small fair organized by the local Kindergarten, which is the town's last remaining mixed Roma-Magyar institution, the entrance was observed by four civil guard members – one of whom there described their role there as “preventing the Roma from causing trouble”. Here in the school yard, there were all together eight uniformed civil guard members. With the exception of one of their members that I knew since he was the friendly neighbor of our accommodation, they kept standing closely together in a semi circle, without interacting with any of the already gathered attendees. This only changed briefly with a new group of visitors that came shortly before the event officially started, an uncanny group of tricycle riders that entered the yard for a short stop-over. For a couple of minutes, the guards stood admiringly around the spectacular machines, engaging in friendly chat with their Nazi insignia adorned owners. Just when they left, about a dozen of rather elderly people came over from the church, where there had just been the farewell concert to the festival by the local “Gypsy Orchestra”. For many of them this would probably have been on their way home anyways, since both buildings are located near to each other in the center of town.

At this point, the couple dressed in elaborate folk costume placed themselves on the front of porch up on the stairs so that people would gather, and then opened the event with an explanation of what a *Táncház* actually is. Him and his partner were going to first show, and then teach us some traditional folk dances, one step at a time. “All you need for a *Táncház* is a band, and a house”, he underlined the humble nature and community spirit of this kind of event. This was followed by a short speech of thanks to all people involved, with special thanks going out to the absent mayor and the civil

guard, who came in such big numbers to make sure we're going to have a safe event. Then, to the lighthearted melody of a fiddle, the lead dancer started the first performance. He was wearing a thick blue pair of felt pants, tucked into high black leather riding boots that he would slap in his dance, a black vest with big silver buttons over a long-sleeved white shirt, as well as a black short brimmed hat. In the summer heat, this autumnal attire made the sweat run down his forehead in big pearls right even before he started, and so he quickly took off his hat. Meanwhile, his dancing partner who joined him for the second dance was wearing a long blue skirt covered by a white apron, a long-sleeved white shirt, and she covered her hair with a light-yellow headscarf that she never took off during their performance. Then, for the remainder of the dances, the attendees would be included. For every dance, the two lead dancers would show us how to lock arms, and in which pattern of steps we should follow the rhythm. Then we would all form a circle and follow the steps at increasing speeds, with common laughter over the shared difficulty of sticking to these patterns within the rhythm.

By the time the common dancing started, most of the elderly visitors that came over from the church had already left. While one commentator on Facebook noted allusively about the concert in church that sadly, on top of the overall low turnout, “not a single Roma family or person attended”, the situation was reversed in the school yard. As ethnotraditionalist wine maker Marika anticipated the evening before, “they should have hosted this event in the new tourist center, whites¹⁶ don't go that school anymore”. By all appearances, after the first couple of minutes and taking a few snap shots on their phones, as far as I could tell only one non-Roma person stayed in the yard who was neither staffing the event, nor a (student) anthropologist. I even knew her, she took part in the stew cooking competition at the wine festival not because she was the owner of a wine cellar at the hill, but because she was a butcher – so curiously also somewhat of an outsider there, who had to be provided with a space to be able to partake in the festival. Despite its placement in the wine festival's program, the *Táncház* event thus had a completely different audience from the rest of the festival, for which the large presence of civil guards was the best indicator. And while the mayor did stop by briefly to take some group pictures in front of the photo wall set up, she didn't mingle with the guests the way she did at the wine festival the day before, instead conversing with the members of the civil guard for the most time, just like she did at the Kindergarten fair mentioned

16 This was the phrasing of the translation I received.

earlier. And just like at that fair, by the time the dances had finished no trouble to look after had emerged, so they waited out for the end of the event around their cars parked outside of the yard. They only came back inside when the event ended in the late afternoon with a raffle, where donated prizes consisting mostly of small toys, sweets, and school materials were given out to the children, and a few bottles of wine by local winemakers to adults, which were coveted prizes.

These prizes were one of the rare reminders that this event was actually part of the wine festival, and the way in which wine was treated at the *Tánc ház* in comparison to the wine festival could let one forget that they were part of the same program. Seen in this light, wine emerges as another potent comparative index between the wine festival and the *Tánc ház*. At the food stall, next to the sandwiches, soda and syrup, there stood two unlabeled big clear plastic jugs, containing five liters of red and white wine each. Although they were supposed to be given out for free, they remained almost untouched until the end of the event. The differences to the rest of the festival were striking, and bring the leaflet about how to behave while drinking wine analyzed before (Img. 1) back to mind. Although the wine was apparently bought from a local winery, the lack of branding and the big containers made it appear to be of low quality. Seen alongside the way it was handed out to people, in plastic cups rather than glasses, this wine was thus meant for a different purpose than the wine at the festival. This wasn't about the sophistications of taste, and the usual gestures with which people drank the wine at the festival – smelling and swirling the wine around the glass before taking small slurping sip, followed maybe by the smacking of lips – would have seemed woefully out of place here. But despite the wine's appearances, it wasn't meant as an intoxicant either.

In one telling episode, I went outside of the yard for a brief smoke, a plastic cup of wine in hand. There I was approached by a male Roma teenager, who, when he figured out I can't understand him verbally, gestured towards my cup. I understood that he wanted me to fetch him a cup of wine, though, sensing through this very gestures that apparently he was not supposed to get wine and unsure about his age, I pretended not to understand. A little bit later, while I was standing at the food stall and chatting with the social worker who gave out the food and drinks, he approached me again. Overseeing this, the social worker then explained to me that he is older than the others and thus allowed to have wine, but not too much. After he left with a dismayed face and the quarter cup of wine that she poured him, the social worker explained: "he has lots of

problems, that's why he can just have a small sip, so he can taste it." Apparently the wine was meant for an occasion that didn't arise, and thus probably also for the non-Roma audience that didn't show up.

Regardless of how disquieting some elements of this event had been to me, in particularly the different attitudes of the civil guards towards Roma children and Swastika bearing bikers, the general mood of the guests who stayed was cheerful and relaxed. The yard was filled with the sounds of children and fiddle music, but no one was particularly exhilarated. The civil guards must have felt this mellow level of excitement, too, otherwise they wouldn't have left the yard. It was an unremarkable mood if seen in terms of how appropriate it was to the event's primary school audience and location. However, that's not how a trenchant should have felt. A *trenchant*, literally "dance house", isn't some sort of generic folk dance event, but rather an established type of event, which is codified enough to be recognized and lauded by UNESCO as a model for the transmission of intangible cultural heritage. As anthropologist Mary Taylor describes it, during a *Tánc ház*, trained "tradition bearers" lead and teach folkloristic dances in the style of the locality to the accompaniment of live music to anyone who wants to participate, paying particular attention to also integrate unskilled dancers. Typically traditional handicrafts and other "ethnographic presentations" are also showcased (Taylor 2021, 2). While this applied also to the event I witnessed, thanks to the lead performers folk dress as well as the *Kürtőskalács* pastry grilling stall, it was unusually tepid, since, as Taylor points out, a *Tánc ház* is usually a night-filling, intensely social event, with an "atmosphere intoxicated by the exhilaration of live fiddling, dancing, sweat, and alcohol" (Taylor 2021, 2).

Thus, this *Tánc ház* was not only unusual in its own right, but given the self-ascribed purpose of the wine festival, which is not only dedicated to the joys of drinking wine, but furthermore similarly dedicated to the revitalization of intangible cultural heritage, one could have even more been led to believe that it would have been just the kind of event that Taylor described. Such expectations on behalf of the organizers might even have informed some of the details described above, such as the too large amount of wine that was provided, as well as in the large presence of the civil guards, who probably had expected more intense emotions. At the same time, the fact that so few of the people that visited the main festival showed up is also a clear sign that many people – correctly – judged that this would be a different kind of *Tánc ház*.

Thus, two sets of questions emerge. First, why did so few attendees of the festival show up? As already alluded to by one of the brief curious visitors, the brief answer to this question is, because of the reputation of the school. Yet secondly, given how unsurprising the unusualness of the Táncház becomes once one takes its location into account, why indeed did it not take place in the tourist reception? What purpose did this event serve in this particular place? And the brief answer to this second question will again be that it is a project of reputational repair. In the rest of the chapter, I will show what kind of reputation the school has among the general public, as well as what kinds of hopes and anxieties the school holds for Patans in particular, to then last show how this event could emerge as reparative in relation to them.

The Reputation of the School

We already heard an explanation for why so few non-Roma people showed up, namely in the reasoning of Marika who lamented that “no whites go to that school anymore”. During my fieldwork in Pata, the primary school was a central source of worries, to the point that if one wanted to direct a conversation in an interview to the discussion of current problems of all kinds, all it took was to ask people about their opinion about the school. It also received considerable media attention the years prior, though that has subsided by the time I was there. The school has emerged as the site of the continuous renewal of the reputation acquired in 2011, as well as of the humiliation that Magyar Patans feel because of it. Since the year of the marches, it has been the site of an official report and intervention by the ombudsman of minority affairs, followed by a court case that went in multiple iterations up to the constitutional court, being charged with practices of ethnic segregation. This development culminated in early 2020, when the deadline was reached for the enactment of a ruling that awarded 100 million Forint to Roma pupils in compensation for the education of which they were deprived. This translates to roughly 250,000€, which were divided over 60 claimants, who were compensated more or less depending on how much time they were illegally and discriminatorily forced into substandard education. As pointed out before, a central source of anti-Roma aggression in the year 2011 was the prospect of Roma moving into Hungarian neighborhoods, and these compensations raised this prospect again. The average sum that every claimant received amounted to a bit over 10% of what I heard a house costed in a good neighborhood of town (15 million Forint). Given that what some claimants received was more than twice the average, as well as that in some families up

to three children were compensated, this enabled some families to buy a house outside of the Roma neighborhood, namely on the main street. As one news report found, housing was indeed the main use to which compensated families wanted to put the money. By making this court case the subject of repeated populist interventions – in one case even adding a question related to it to a national poll – the FIDESZ government has played a central role in the renewal of Pata’s reputation, Pata’s mayor’s party affiliation notwithstanding.

As the ombudsman’s report found and the courts confirmed, since 2004, there existed separate “gypsy classes” that were barred from a number of curricular and extracurricular activities, such as the use of some sports facilities and IT classes, as well as school festivities. These classes were also spatially segregated, on different floors of the school building. For this purpose, students had to undergo admission tests that officially divided them into categories of learning abilities. The principal responsible for the introduction of this system explained to Szombati, that this actually had little to do with pedagogic concern, but instead was meant to “reduce interaction between children who came from different backgrounds and thereby prevent conflict situations that teachers were ill-prepared to handle” (Szombati 2018, 64). As the report found, this was a response to a strong pressure exerted by parents (Fórika et al. 2011, 32). As result, two types of classes – which Szombati found to have been labeled “a”, “clean” or “normal” and “b”, “c” or “gypsy” classes (Szombati 2018, 80) – were set up. The report found them to have been only attended by Roma children, whereas all Hungarian children attended the “a” classes. Tangentially, these letters by which the classes were called are a good indicator of the bellicosity with which reports of this case are treated by many in Pata. In a telling episode, during a break of a guided tour for a large group of tourists through the town that I witnessed, the tour guide started chatting with some of the participants, who also brought up the topic of the school. He ridiculed media reports about “c” classes – where “c” would have stood for “cygan, ie “gypsy” – as a liberal obsession with political correctness, in response to which one of the tourists chimed in, “I guess we shouldn’t use the letter c anymore then.”

Crucially, and I will return to this point later when discussing the divergent understandings of what is thought of as “segregation” in Pata, this system of classes did not create complete separation, but worked to transform the ratio by which children of Roma and non-Roma backgrounds were mixed, since there also were Roma children in the “a” classes, a quarter on average (Fórika et al. 2011, 27). Since half of the school’s

pupils at that time were of Roma background, this meant that two-thirds of them were placed into Roma only classes, to achieve a more desirable level of mixture in the other classes. In the explanation of one teacher, rather than viewing it as a system meant to exclude Roma, this system of separation was designed to “uplift” at least some Roma, by granting them access to better education. To give credence to her claim, she gave a story of her husband’s funeral, which was attended by many of her former Roma pupils, all of whom expressed their gratitude to her. In my encounters, such alternative views on segregation would also present themselves through the way in which events relating to the school were temporalized. When people spoke of things that happened either before or since “the school was segregated”, they were not referring to the time in which above system of classes existed. What their temporal reckoning referenced instead was the time before and since the decision of the courts, thus before and since Magyar parents collectively withdrew their children from the school, and which thus turned it into a school that is almost only attended by Roma children. That the courts denounced practices of segregation is omitted in these ways of referencing.

Szombati described an economic motivation behind this separation, namely the aim of the municipality to retain the children of the town’s wealthier residents in the school. To do so, it was necessary to ensure sufficient resources were available for their children, so that they wouldn’t choose to send their children elsewhere. Thus, so one explanation went, it was necessary to concentrate the school’s resources and assets only on the “normal” classes (Szombati 2018, 88). An apt illustration of this channeling is provided by the way funding plaques were attached in this school. These signs, which document funding sources such as the EU or the Hungarian government, are usually attached to the front of buildings – the library, the mayor’s office, Marika’s hotel, the hotel we were staying at, the Kindergarten, and many other public buildings, they all had these proves of investment hanging next to their entrance, visible for all to see who enter. The school used to have a sign like this, too, which even was a lot larger than usual – almost two meters wide, proclaiming the almost 200 mil Forint the municipality received from EU funds for the “energetic renewal” of the building – but this sign was taken down after it was heavily vandalized. Now, the only signs publicly documenting the funding the school received hung inside the school, up in the stairways that lead to the upper floor on which “normal” classes would have been taught. All of these plaques documented different EU funding grants which the school received. Three of them were related to renovations that affected the building, while the others acknowledged funding

received for the renewal of “infocommunication infrastructure” in 2016 as well as for additional sports equipment in 2016, incidentally the very curricular domains (IT and sports), from which the classes on the lower level were excluded.

Despite these investments, which also included a major renovation in 2019, since the legal actions against segregation in the school started, the school lost nearly all non-Roma pupils, with attendance dropping from around 160 to around 70 pupils. By 2018, there were reportedly only four non-Roma children still attending the school, and by the end of the trials in 2020, not a single non-Roma child attended the school, while in 2021, a single non-Roma child, by a mother who was locally known as a pro-Roma activist, was enrolled. In effect, the attempt to enforce desegregation within the school has thus led to a situation of segregation among schools, with Pata’s children now being dispersed to the schools of surrounding towns and villages. As Szombati also pointed out, this was by no means a unique case (Szombati 2018, 82), but rather a common development of the educational policy the pre-Orbán liberal government, which wasn’t able to enforce their desegregation policy based on equal opportunity principles, since it stood in contradiction to other educational policies and values of theirs, which were grounded in the principle of freedom of choice (Szombati 2018, 83). I found this reflected in common opinions, such as “This didn’t need to happen here, it could have happened anywhere!” or “Why is it segregation here but not in other towns?”. This freedom of choice was established through liberalization and decentralization reforms of the 1990ies, which replaced the direct administration of school curricula on the national level with a system of targets and incentives that handed responsibility for developing and approving curricula to the individual schools and their municipal administrations (Radó 2001, 46), who were then to compete for pupils according to free market principles.

What was different about Pata however was the already high public exposure gained through the 2011 events. The Foundation that led the law suit against the school already threatened with legal action in 2005 (Szombati 2018, 83), but only sprung to action right after the election of Jobbik’s mayoral candidate. The hope to set a precedent with high public visibility was in turn met by strong resistance from the FIDESZ government, who used the case to set precedents of their own, among them a regulation that cases of educational discrimination shall only be compensated through reparations in kind rather than with direct monetary payments. This argument followed a common anti-Roma trope in these discourses, namely the accusation that the money they receive

will be squandered, and that it thus will not fix the damage it is meant to repair, and that it is therefore the duty of the state to make sure that the compensation will be used for its intended reparative ends. In the case of Pata, it was for example argued that, since pupils were barred from taking IT classes, this should be made up by providing them with IT courses. The compensation awarded by the constitutional court was even used as a pretext for a planned national consultation, in which citizens would have been questioned about their opinions on the welfare worthiness of different groups of recipients¹⁷ – although this plan was ultimately scrapped amid the onset of the Covid pandemic as well as questions of the constitutional legality of this undertaking.

Many Hungarian Patans responded to this scrutiny the same way they did to the scrutiny their town received after the events of 2011, denouncing it as an act of humiliation. The far-right side of the spectrum of this attitude can be well illustrated with an article which Google selected as most relevant for me in 2022, when I was looking for Hungarian language news articles with nothing but the name of the town as search term. In this article, the conservative weekly “Demokrata” called the school a “symbol of humiliation”, which “puts shame to the name of the city” and for which Pata’s residents, rather than the school’s pupils, were owed “moral reparation” (Demokrata 07.08.2020). The article furthermore claimed that Hungarian children were the real victims of the case, since their learning got disturbed by unruly Roma, and since they would be the ones that now had to go elsewhere, including a succinct quote by a passersby: “I cannot tolerate that we, the majority, are segregated by the minority”. The article calls the compensation that Roma received “humiliating liberal Forint” and went into great lengths to describe how badly the money is spent by describing scenes of Roma with expensive cars or, or going out for Pizza, thus using it for individual consumption rather than shared reparative purposes. In contrast, the article does find such purposes in public spending in the town on infrastructure projects and public institutions, such as the school. Thus, on one side it finds “the so-called rights defenders [that] have turned [Pata] into a curse word”, whereas on the other it sees the FIDESZ government¹⁸, which “is thinking much more with the locals about how and as soon as possible to restore the old good reputation of the settlement”. But also more moderate outlets shared a bleak outlook on the school. For example in an article that was shared

17 Besides Roma, the other group of recipients would have been prison convicts that received compensation for the conditions of their incarceration.

18 Incidentally, every project listed in the article was funded through EU grants, as was publicly visible for everyone through funding signs displayed on them.

on the Facebook page of the Roma municipal council, which called the monetary compensation that Roma were awarded in the court case an important symbolic reparation, even though it could only mitigate the damage already done, and that Roma and non-Roma can't even agree on what constitutes segregation. It concluded that the case has thus so far only contributed to deteriorating the conditions of Roma and non-Roma coexistence.

How to Fix the School

Given this entrenched significance of the school as a symbol of the towns intractable conflicts, I'm left to wonder not so much why the *Tánc ház* in the school was unusual, but why it took place there in the first place. Despite the stubbornness of the problems associated with the school, in my conversation with people in the village, a second shared conception also emerged. In tandem with the close association of the school with local ethnic tension, people usually nevertheless saw the school as crucial for the social reproduction of the town. The contentiousness with which reparative efforts around the school are viewed stems from this circumstance. When former mayor Tarr, who was a driving force in acquiring funds for the renovation of the school, mentioned that he wonders whether the repairs of the building of the school had even been worth it, the exasperation was palpable. As noted in the introduction, neither the states that require repair, nor the urgency of repair can be just taken for granted. As Henke pointed out, repair emerges "from a negotiated order of materiality and human activity" (Henke 2019, 259). It is its central role in the local imaginary of social reproduction that makes the school not just a problem, but a problem in dire need of a solution. As a commentator to an intense Facebook discussion I will detail below put it, "because of [the problems of our school], the otherwise beautifully developing Pata has been branded across the whole country. And no matter how much it beautifies and develops, this stain can only be washed away from the little town if this problem is solved. Then, when people hear the word "Pata," they won't think of Chicago — but of a place where unity triumphed."

This need for a solution was voiced in many different circumstance. For the mayor "it's hard to accept on a political level that the children of the Majority are forced to leave the town to go to other schools" - "the Majority" being a common euphemism

for non-Roma Hungarians. As former mayor Tarr, put it, despite his pessimism: “a place without a school can’t keep its people”. The situation that their children are visiting schools away from Pata figures prominently in explanations of local decline. The mothers that one of the other student groups present in Pata interviewed repeatedly stressed, the most common reason that people they knew moved away was not for economic reasons, but because they wanted to live in the same place as their children went to school. The local church’s cantor, who used to be the music teacher at the school, worried that since Hungarian parents have started sending their children to other schools, no more young people joined her folk choir, and no more young people attend church. Moreover, pointing out the central role in the social reproduction the school is taken to have in the village, they would now form friendships away from Pata, will fall in love elsewhere, and thus finally move away. In an online discussion that I will describe below, one participant worried that “newcomers are usually childless due to the lack of a school”, claiming that one can hardly see any children in the streets anymore, except those coming and going to and from the bus. And this very worry already underwrote the institution of segregated classes in the early 2000nds in the first place, as interviewees of Szombati “voiced their fear that the school’s transformation into a ghetto-school would deal a heavy blow to the village’s reputation and thereby negatively affect its ability to retain high-status groups” (Szombati 2018, 88).

The most prolific negotiation I witnessed over how the school could be returned to its proper social place and function took place in the “Pata’s most beautiful Face” group about one year before the events described above, spanning more than 180 posts over the course of three days. This discussion, which one of its participants ironically called “a village meeting” due to the high number of residents that took part in it, presented one of the few cases in which a discussion not only broke with the groups stated purpose of only focusing on positive things, and not to discuss problems there – but more rarely, a discussion in which also Roma Patans took part. It even warranted pointing out in an interview with the administrator of the page, who singled it out as a “surprisingly good” discussion about the school between Roma and Magyars. On top of that, the discussion happened at a time when she wanted to give up the page, but this discussion showed her how important that page has become for the town. To her, it has shown that Roma and Hungarians are able to discuss their conflicts in a “civilized” way, and that they can solve the problems of the town through the “power of communication”. Although no clear actions have emerged from the discussion, it gives

nevertheless a vivid picture of the different ways in which the problem that the school poses is conceptualized, and what solutions are considered, almost like a spontaneously formed focus group interview.

The discussion unfolded in response to a post in which the admin elaborated upon the non-nostalgic sentiments expressed in her opening post, the sense that “I feel like everything I need is here.” Mostly within a day, over sixty comments followed, and the main reason it weren’t more was the circumstance that another poster, in response to the discussion initiated there, created a post that put the issue of the school in the main post. Over twenty people participated in the discussion, with most responses coming from the admin herself, who was in a defensive role throughout the discussion. The main post consisted of an image of a wall at the local Kindergarten, which carried a washed out children’s drawing of a local map, covering Pata and its neighboring villages and landscapes, accompanied by a statement and a list:

“I was thinking the other day that let's face it, we have everything! You can project that onto everything, whether the bucket is half empty or half full, but I'm looking at it from the village's perspective. Or rather from my time-saving and convenience point of view. Since my workplace is here, it's great that I can put my little boy in daycare here. I've already saved 1 hour every morning. And from that came this flood of listings, that we have a lot of things locally. (I'm not focusing on attractions now, but on livability). I could list them all without being exhaustive, and I don't mind if you help me out if I've missed something. In fact, you can write what else you need.”

This was then followed by a list of almost fifty separate institutions, services, and businesses. Someone immediately pointed out what she missed, however by pointing out items that couldn’t be put on this list of positives: “We need a proper school, so that the parents of Pata don’t have to take their children to other settlements, and let’s not even talk about the roads.” Given the timing of the founding of the “Pata's most beautiful Face” group right after above mentioned court case made national headlines when Orbán used it as a pretext for a national consultation, the issue of a “proper school” is also probably the most salient of the “negatively charged things” that should have remained unmentioned according to the groups rules. These were invoked only

two comments later, the mission of the group was invoked, when the one Magyar parent whose child still attends this school posted “What would a ‘proper’ school be like? What would be needed for the children to stay? As [the admin] requested, let’s have a “pretty” conversation, since it’s a sensitive topic.”

From then on, the post gathered more lengthy comments by the minute, and then even a possible solution: “if every parent enrolled their future first-grader here, then at least in one grade, wouldn’t that start something so that the minority wouldn’t be the majority?”. This then sparked a second post, so that the discussion wouldn’t be hidden under a post that on first glance had nothing to do with the school. The author of that opening post started with a short story about his own background as a former pupil of the school. More than just legitimizing him as a speaker, his narrative already prefigures the rest of the discussion, introducing a diagnosis which remained uncontested. Subsequent division centered mostly on the question whether this might realistically be brought about in the near future. It is worth quoting in full:

“A very important issue came up from a different kind of post – one that’s also a really big problem. I was a student at the school in Pata during the 90s, like many of you. I can hardly say anything negative about my eight years there. Yes, I also had Roma classmates – in fact, the higher we went up in school, the more there were, because some kids were held back – but back then, the problem hadn’t escalated nearly as much. Actually, I even worked with some of them later in a factory on rotating shifts. Then, gradually, fewer and fewer Hungarian kids remained, and proportionally, the number of Roma students increased. Ten years ago, there was already a serious warning sign that things were going wrong, but nothing has been done since, because most people prefer to send their kids elsewhere. In other words, they’re avoiding the problem, choosing the “easier” path – if you can even call it that. Of course, it’s not clearly easier either, because it would obviously be better for everyone to send their child to school 10 minutes away instead of 10 kilometers.

Here’s what I can say... Ten years ago, something could have started moving in a better direction. I – along with many others – joined

a civil guard unit because we wanted to do something for our little village. While others laughed at us at the time, now – karma or not – the tables have turned. Those who laughed at us back then are now forced to choose a different school for their kids – ironically, for the very reason they mocked us. I see only one solution: unity. Those of you whose children are starting first grade this year need to come together, sit down – perhaps even with the teaching staff – and make a decision: Yes, this school is ours. Our children will go here. We won't run away. We won't take the "easier" road.

There's that beautifully renovated school with a fantastic gym – and it's all going to waste... It has to start somewhere. Yes, maybe the first year will be tough, but parents and teachers must come together, and based on the saying 'many geese defeat the pig', we have to put everything on the line. That is, if you truly want your children to go to the elementary school in Pata. I know – a lot has changed in 20 years. But there's always a solution if people truly want it and are willing to act. We have to try and do something while we still can – because if one day the school is shut down, then it will be too late to do anything."

The main tenets of this argument are that things should be again like they were in the past, about which the author "can hardly say anything negative". Things turned bad however, when "Hungarians gradually became fewer, and the Roma population increased accordingly" and that this problem is exacerbated by the lack of solidarity among Hungarian parents, who "choose the 'easier' way". The envisioned solution inverts this diagnosis – if Hungarian parents would act in solidarity, the "geese could defeat the pig", meaning they could win because there is strength in numbers. And last, it argues that even though such a reversal would be difficult to achieve, it would be worth it, for that "beautifully renovated school" that for now is "going to waste".

Strikingly, in a rhetorical move I have not witnessed elsewhere, the author raises the specter of the events of 2011, which happened exactly ten years before this post, while also hinting at his own role in them. It isn't entirely clear what kind of "**civil guard unit**" (*polgárőr testület*) the author joined. It could have been the national civil guard, the same one that I saw at various events in Pata. At that time however, it could

also have been the “**Civil Guard** Association for a Better Future” (*Szebb Jövőért Polgárőr Egyesület*), an explicitly neofascist paramilitary organization, and one of the far-right groups marching in Pata during the events of 2011. In any case, he frames the events of 2011 not as something that merely befell Pata, but as something that he had a part in, in a way that others in Pata disagreed with. Thus, in an almost confessional tone, he acknowledges his part in the actions that have brought derision onto Pata, which however now affected all residents equally, no matter how they positioned themselves back then. For this reason, he urges solidarity among Magyar parents.

Right from the start, some dismissed the proposal outright “As long as anyone has more rights than duties, this will remain an unsolved problem”, one elderly woman retorted with a common trope of Roma unruliness, that would prohibit the solution proposed by the original poster. Others added in anger: “it would be better to shut down the whole mess and be done with it. [...] It already feels as if it doesn’t exist. Let them [the Roma] go wherever they want for a few years, and while it remains locked, we can contemplate how to go on”, which was cheered on with the comment in that case “they can experience firsthand what the Hungarians are experiencing now.” When the admin wanted to interfere in this outpouring of “negativity”, she even got snarled at, that “If your child also goes through at least one year here, then we can talk again. Until then, it’s pointless!”. This was passed over for a while, until one of the proponents of the hopelessness of the situation wrote in exasperation, “does anyone seriously believe that if we sit down and talk to each other, everything will be solved?”, followed by a tirade about the dysfunctionality of Roma families, whose problems their children would bring into school. From there on, the proponents of the proposal were on the defensive. “Believe me, we also see these things. Nevertheless, we still want to do something. [...] your attitude is not helpful, with that mindset nothing matters, and we might as well move away from here.” The debate ended for the time being without a conclusion, and in this sense seemed to have confirmed the dismissive voices. Moreover, such dismissive comments throughout gained more confirmatory reactions through likes than more hopeful posts.

Yet, even among those who were dismissive of the proposal, nevertheless many also expressed the desirability of the proposal in principle. As a mother commented: “I understand what you want, and it’s all nice and good if parents are making efforts, but what about the children?! Will my child learn to behave while others don’t, will it be my child who suffers?”. The worry there was whether enough other parents were going to

participate, or if they will drop out, and thus leave the children of other Magyar parents behind. The situation was thus a classical prisoner's dilemma stalemate – while everyone could agree, that solidarity would yield the best result for everyone, people didn't trust each other to not take the second best option, which was to look out only after their own children. As one of the groups participants excused himself, "We also took our children to another town [...]. It's not worth taking the full weight of this failed story upon ourselves, since it happens everywhere." Thus, under such circumstances, it was only possible to lament, as another participant did, "What used to be in the past will only remain a utopia for us [...]".

The presence of Roma in this discussion didn't change this circumstance, although it lead to a further refinement of what was seen as the problem, and what as the solution. It started when one participant intervened: "I have two daughters going to school here, and as a Roma parent I'd like to say a few things". And although they cautioned, that this dilemma is in part caused by parents, who "scare each other off, as if bringing their children here would be like throwing them in with wild animals?!", they also agreed that there were significant problems at the school – arguing that "A lot of kids allow themselves to get away with more because they have nothing to fear!! And whether you like it or not, that's the fault of the school and the teachers! That's the truth!!!" - thus actually confirming the reality of the fears over unruly classmates they just contested. Their closing admonition "You shouldn't judge based on skin color, and you shouldn't lump everyone together!!!!" was then gladly taken up. After all, it confirmed the need to draw boundaries. By exclaiming "you are exemplary families, the negative criticism isn't about you! [...] if the majority of Roma families were like you, there would be no problem!" as well as urging them to take action "Roma people who think like this should also unite against those who hinder learning!", Magyar respondents congratulated the Roma discussants for upholding common values of distinction.

After this comment, two more former Roma pupils chimed in, still keeping with the reminiscent mood: "I also had non-Roma classmates — in fact, about 80–90% of my class was not Roma. We got along so well that we didn't just hang out together at school, but also outside of school with my non-Roma friends! The focus shouldn't be on whether someone is Gypsy or Hungarian, because we absolutely can live alongside each other in peace... [...]". One of them, a participant who was among the more than seventy former Roma residents that fled to Canada due to the policies of Jobbik's

mayorship, and who attended school together with the author of the original post, even picked up the original authors comments about the events of 2011: “I left because tempers got way out of control on both sides — but let’s be honest, more so from the majority society’s side. What’s happening in the school is, for the most part, the fault of the teachers and the local council members. It would take too long to write everything out here, but what you wrote — that’s exactly what everyone should do: sit down, Roma and non-Roma, and talk it through — how to live together with respect and appreciation. But both sides have to take part.” However, he, too, provided an explanation that the majority could agree with: “And for those who can’t, the child protection authorities should be contacted — and then they’ll take action and remove the child who’s not fit for living together. But even that isn’t the child’s fault — 99.99% of the time it’s the parents’ fault.”

The intervention of former Roma pupils into this debate shifted some parts of the reasoning. Rather than arguing for non-Roma parents to bandy together to form a class with an acceptable ratio of Roma to Magyar children in them, the significant difference afterwards shifted to a more colorblind circumscription, of troublemakers against well-behaved children and parents. Through the repeated use of the phrase “honor to the exception”, some Roma were thus included in the collective concerns of the majority. The concern with ratios of good and bad pupils however remained, and the solutions offered to this problem remained disciplinary, since, after all “Even the old peasant children may not have turned out any better if they hadn’t received a slap on the wrist in time.” What is striking about this debate is that what is treated here as a daring solution seems to be simply a return to the previous system of school internal segregation – at least its professed motivation to separate those willing to learn from those who are merely out to make trouble. This was even acknowledged by some, who complained that “we won’t be able to separate children based on abilities again, because of course, this would be considered “segregation””, and that “one doesn’t understand what to do or how to bring about change without violating the law”, as well as calling the old system is “the previous improperly designed and managed “separation””. Moreover, this return to separation isn’t just a fantasy, but according to reports in that discussion also part of recent attempted developments, where attempts are made to separate newly formed classes of first year pupils from established classes and older students. “There was a time when the parents, the school administration, the district education director, the mayor, and the chief advisor to the State Secretary for Roma

Affairs at the Ministry of the Interior all sat down together. They would have supported the parents in everything — a new pedagogical program we had seen at a model school, we even received training, a separate hallway, separate toilets, separate breaks. At enrollment, it turned out that out of 22 children, 8 remained — the Roma.” And indeed, for the latest class, “the little ones have their own corridor, their own restroom”.

The Brokenness of the School

A few weeks before the wine festival and the *Táncház* in the school’s yard, the discussion was revisited again by some for a few comments, among them one by the mother of the only Magyar child in school: “I’m happy to report: we have completed the first school year, with excellent results despite 295 hours of absence due to COVID. My child really loves going to school — almost every day he came home saying, “I had a really good day.” He loves his classmates, and the other kids like him too. The teacher did a wonderful job with them. We’re looking forward to September and the second grade. So, dear parents, courage — this is the right path!” In this light, the *Táncház* can be seen as a way of disproving assessments as the one by former mayor Tarr – that not only the building had been renovated, but that actually, the social make-up of the school had been so, too, and that thus, this repair had indeed been worth it. This impression is given further credence by the rumors that circulated at the time, that the Maltaí wanted to take over that school – which indeed has happened by now, with the local head of the Maltaí now acting also as rector of the school. The *Táncház* showed clearly the high amounts of suspicion among Magyar Patans towards any claims of repair that might be made on behalf of the school, but was also, as I pointed out, a display of Roma meekness and composure, and as such a display of achieved repair. Finally, in discussing how such an achieved state of repair should look like, we also already got a hint as to why it is Pata’s reputation that needs repair – because repair consists in a return to a past that is not deemed broken. In contrast, for most Patans, the school remained beyond repair.

Postscript: An Other Concern

While Pata’s Magyar residents could unite behind the vision of an unbroken past, only the image of which were broken, this position was hard to sustain for many

Roma. Through a chance conversation Balu and I had on one of our walks through Pata, I was able to witness how this common concern over reputation, which I so far only presented through Magyar voices, was refracted through a Roma lens. In one of the quiet side roads of the “good neighborhood” that I already introduced above, a mother invited us in. When it turned out she was Roma, we were naturally curious how she got to live there, given that earlier someone had just explained us that “there are no minorities here”. “We only moved a year ago”, she explained, “and my husband had to save money for 10 years for that.” Before, they lived in the mixed neighborhood of Pata, but through the help of a Magyar intermediary, they were able to buy a house away from the Roma neighborhood. This is a rare achievement in a town that has a history of residential segregation upheld by both legal and extralegal means – as Szombati details, while local buildings codes have been intentionally designed to prevent Roma from leaving the segregated residential area, and failing that, there have apparently even been acts of arson against Roma families who moved into the Magyar part of town (Szombati 2018, 86). The woman explained, “When we moved here, there were tensions and rumors, but by now, people have changed their mind, because they see that we are working. We have good relations now with our neighbors.”

In her arguments, concerns over reputation were pulling in various directions. Following her reasoning, which highlights employment as the crucial difference that changed people’s minds, one could think that she merely wants to distance herself from the collective reputation of Roma in Pata, contending herself with personal redemption through being recognized as a “good Roma” - similar to what we have also seen in the discussions analyzed in the previous section. As she pointed out herself, “I want to live an integrated live”, and she wants people to know that. This isn’t the whole story however. She, too, shares the reparative desire that guided many of the people I introduced above, and like many of them, believes in the power of the internet for this purpose. “The majority still demonizes us, but through the internet, people can connect and be educated, to destroy stereotypes”. While she was mostly concerned with how people perceived her and other Roma, to a degree, this translated into similar worries as those of her neighbors that were concerned with the public perception of Pata. “I’m afraid the state will destroy the school, now that there are only Roma left in it.”

Worrying about the reputational standing of Roma however also carries the potential to directly contradict efforts of reputational repair towards Pata. This was made clear to me in a meeting with the head of the Roma council, a representative body

that is elected alongside the municipal council by the Roma residents of the town, with its own parties and representatives, however without a clear legal mandate nor recompensation. In practice, their main function is to act as an address when conflict arises. Me and a group of other students met him for an interview in his home, which, as he explained, he always used for official purposes. There would be a room in the mayor's office that he could use as an office, however since that room is currently used as a break room by the local *Közmunka* workers – ie. welfare recipients that participate in mandatory work programs – he didn't claim it. During the interview, we heard a lot of the different limitations under which the Roma council had to operate. An apt example are the roads of the Roma settlement. He ran on the promise to improve the conditions of the roads of the Roma settlement – the only residential neighborhood without asphalted roads. However since he can't legally apply for the necessary funds, all he can do is to plead with the mayor, who however rejected his case, arguing the roads were good enough as they are. "Now we have cameras all over the settlement, but the roads are still as they are!", he summed up their predicament.

When asked about his biggest success in his role however, he nevertheless had a quick answer. "The monetary compensation for segregation." As he explained, when, in a highly publicized court case, former Roma pupils of the local primary school were awarded 100 million Forint in damages for the educational discrimination they experienced, he was approached for a special offer. The Roma council was offered 100 million more, 200 in total, if he would publicly reject the reparations awarded by the courts, so that the government could say in public that they didn't pay anything at all. "Behind the scenes, they didn't care about this money, they were happy to pay double, but they wanted to pretend they paid nothing. But I declined this offer, and that was the real success!".

Conclusion

Returning to Pata

At the beginning of my stay in Pata, a chain of events was starting to unfold, which eerily matched the patterns of the events immediately leading up to the events of 2011. Within the short time since the Malta Order's arrival one year ago, two times a lottery price large enough to afford buying a house was won by residents of Pata's Roma neighborhood. Both these winners subsequently bought houses in the "proper" part of Pata, so that they and some of their family members could move there. In response, rumors started to circulate that accused the NGO of secretly buying houses for Roma families as a desegregation measure, with the story of the lottery prices as cover up. Someone even threw a rock through a window of the house in which the Maltese Order offered their services. Back in 2011, as explained in the introduction, the Hungarian Red Cross offered to buy houses outside of the segregated neighborhood for two Roma families that were turned homeless by the flooding of the creek that runs through the settlement (Szombati 2018, 145). Back then, midst growing resentment over alleged preferential treatment towards Roma in comparison with self-identified "ordinary citizens", rumors of an NGO led conspiracy to force an undeserved egalitarianism onto the village proliferated. When then – for unrelated reasons (Szombati 2018, 146) – a resident of the street bordering the Roma settlement committed suicide, the local leader of the far-right party Jobbik declared that the man's despair was caused by the relocation of Roma, in other words, by the prospect of the decline of the neighborhood due to a so-called process of „Gypsyfication.“ (Szombati 2018, 45) This set the stage for the developments that Pata ultimately became famous for, in which several neo-fascist paramilitary organizations harassed the local Roma population for over three weeks and Jobbik launched a successful bid for the mayorship a few months after, and which Szombati analyzed as the making of "redemptive anti-Gypsism" as a political force.

"There is a potential, an atmosphere that is very similar to what it felt like in 2011", Margit reflected in conversation with me and my research partner Balu. Back then, she and her colleague, Krisztof Szombati, went to Pata to understand the local conditions and perspectives that allowed the far-right to rise there (Feischmidt and Szombati 2017; Szombati 2018, xv). Ultimately, after about a year of research, they were declared unwelcome by the then new far-right mayor, and had to leave their field

site, an experience that Margit was adamant not to repeat. Anticipating what Margit might not have wanted to say out loud, Balu then continued to spin her thoughts further: “there is this new far right party, Mi Hazank. They are not strong in this area yet, but they might come here looking for something to win over former Jobbik¹⁹ voters...” – “... which is why we shouldn’t spread any rumors! So please don’t mention the story of the lottery tickets to anyone!” Margit then interrupted.

Luckily, things turned out differently this time. About a few days after our interview with the mayor, a town hall meeting was held in which the head of the Maltese Order and the lottery winning families tried to dispel the allegations of illicit behavior by presenting the original lottery tickets, to prove the families who moved out of the Roma neighborhood had done so without the intervention of the Malta. At the meeting, the original tickets however couldn’t be shown, accordingly it didn’t persuade any of the skeptics and thus the underlying conflict remained unresolved. The framework of “redemptive anti-Gypsism” however, ie. the “naming and blaming the Gypsy,” which previously turned a similar local conflict into an issue of national significance, wasn’t picked up. If it hadn’t been for the circumstance that Margit could actually witness this meeting, I wouldn’t even have known of its outcome, since none of its contents were communicated through the public channels of the municipality. In contrast to the year 2011, when the local politicians who tried to impose inaction and inconspicuousness on ethnic tensions were sidelined by those actors who increased these tensions visibility, this time, silence won out – and not even for lack of grievances, or, to put it in less euphemistic terms, racist anxieties, without which the meeting wouldn’t have been called in the first place. What was different now was the existence of a shared political project, behind which the “Majority”, ie. Pata’s Magyar residents, could unite, that rendered glossing over ethnic conflict meaningful, the project of reputational repair.

The concept of reputational repair emerged as a response to the question of what has happened since the events of 2011, and why. Although it was my first time in Pata, equipped with Feischmidt’s and Szombati’s writings, I could conceive of my fieldwork as a kind of return. Equipped with their accounts, I was able to question the seeming matters of course of many small details. Details such as the aesthetics of the new tourist center, the ways in which members of a Facebook group congratulate each

19 Since 2011, Jobbik has softened their far-right positions to be able to enter an ultimately unsuccessful large umbrella anti-Orban coalition. Mi Hazank emerged in the wake of this development.

other for their civilized way of talking to each other, or the mellowness of a folkloristic dance event only became noteworthy in front of the background that these accounts provided. To an uninformed observer, these would have appeared as simple matters of course, but after reading previous ethnographic accounts of Pata, they demanded an explanation, an explanation moreover that would return to them the atmosphere of normality in which I encountered them. In a move of what social science methodologists Tavory and Timmerman call “abductive analysis” (Tavory and Timmermans 2014), wherein one centers theoretically grounded surprises, of which one then asks “what would have to be the case for this to follow as a matter of course”, and by grounding my experiences of the ubiquitous concern with reputation in the sprawling anthropological literature on the rich symbolic worlds of infrastructures, I came up with the concept of reputational repair.

My thesis followed this project into three different yet interconnected domains, each of which stood for a different aspect of it. In the field of tourism in Pata, which was marked by the development of the town’s major touristic site, as well as a festival that was held there, we could see how old rifts through the political elite of Pata, which as Szombati explained were an important precondition in the success of far-right politicians there, were transcended with the help of a common project. Secondly, I showed the populist appeal of this project through a look at the vivid digital social life on local Facebook, how it spawned a kind of grassroots tourism advertisement activism, and how the normative demands of such engagement are negotiated. Last, I showed the limits of this project, when and how repair is deemed necessary, through analyzing the out of joint atmosphere of an event at the local school, as well as the ways in which its brokenness is conceived to be resolvable.

I pointed out that, when we follow Jackson’s call to re-imagine repair as a political category in his plea that “taking repair seriously can help us towards more timely, materialized, and hopeful ways of thinking, making, and fixing the worlds around us” (Jackson 2019, 346), we would do well to heed Henke’s reminder of the “negotiated order” from which the need for repair originates (Henke 2019, 259). In the kinds of resolution of the brokenness of the school that people dared to hope for, a way to imagine the past as unbroken was established. What judges ruled to be segregation was remembered as a time of ethnic mixture – albeit in desirable proportions. It is here that we can see the transformative potential of reputational repair. The project of reputational repair entails a declaration that it is representation which is broken, rather

than the worlds so depicted. In doing this, it harkens back to the image of a previous normality, which following Ureta would be a precondition to even speak of repair (Ureta 2014, 387), even though the past of this previous point didn't need to be conceived of as normal at the time to which this repair aims to return. In making the representation of this past the object of repair, this past is transformed.

Images



Img. 1: The porch of the Tulipános Ház (image by Andrea Heise)



Img. 2. The new tourist center and its access paths to the cellars (image mine)



Img. 3: The first of three “new organicist” bus shelters. (image mine)



Img. 4: the renovated mayor's office (image mine)

what to expect when you come



You can find the list of guest and host wineries [HERE](#).

Some wineries from across the border will only present themselves to the guests on-site.



It's worth climbing up the wine cellars in comfortable and durable shoes. High heels and fancy footwear should stay at home.



A backpack may come in handy if you want to take home a few bottles of the purchased wines.



Dogs and small pets are allowed on a leash at your own risk in the wine cellars. However, please note that a wine stew cooking competition will also take place parallelly, so we recommend visiting with dogs immune to smells.



Excessive drinking can be particularly dangerous at the event since the wine cellars are located on steep hillsides. We recommend moderate tasting and using spill and spittoon containers. Let's take care of each other and ourselves!



However, a communal wine-tasting is highly recommended. We hope that the first event of the Volcanic Wine Meeting will be a friendly and quality experience for all!

Img. 5: How to drink at the wine festival (image translated by Google)

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Abstracts

English

A decade after Pata gained notoriety as a site of ethnic conflict and the rise far-right politics in Hungary, its residents became united in repairing the town's reputation. This thesis traces how political moderation was recast as an active political project through the aspirations for reputational repair, now framed as care rather than neglect. Three dimensions are explored. First, tourism development, once a catalyst of anti-Roma racism, now restrains such expressions, while events like the annual wine festival and the opening of a tourist center mobilize infrastructure as symbols of repair. Second, reputational repair extends beyond the concerns of political elites into a popular movement, visible in the local Facebook group "Pata's most beautiful Face," where reputation emerges as a unifying concern for the Magyar majority. Third, the fragility of this moderation is shown in the local school, where struggles over ethnic segregation undermine the silence sustaining repair. Ultimately, reputational repair declares that it is Pata's representation that is broken, not the realities so depicted.

Deutsch

Ein Jahrzehnt nachdem Pata als Schauplatz ethnischer Konflikte und des Aufstiegs rechtsextremer Politik in Ungarn einen berühmte Bekanntheit erlangte, vereinten sich Patas Bewohner*innen in dem Bestreben, den Ruf der Stadt zu reparieren. Diese Arbeit untersucht, wie politische Mäßigung durch die Aspirationen nach reputationaler Reparatur zu einem aktiven politischen Projekt umgedeutet wurde, das nun als Fürsorge statt als Vernachlässigung verstanden wird. Drei Dimensionen stehen im Mittelpunkt: Erstens wirkt die Tourismusentwicklung, einst ein Katalysator von anti-Roma-Rassismus, heute dämpfend auf dessen Ausdruck, wobei Ereignisse wie das jährliche Weinfest oder die Eröffnung eines neuen Tourismuszentrums Infrastruktur als Symbole der Reparatur mobilisieren. Zweitens reicht die reputationale Reparatur über die Belange politischer Eliten hinaus und hat sich zu einer populären Bewegung entwickelt, sichtbar in der lokalen Facebook-Gruppe „Patas schönstes Gesicht“, in der der Ruf als zentrales gemeinschaftliches Anliegen der ungarischen Mehrheitsbevölkerung erscheint.

Drittens zeigt sich die Fragilität dieser Mäßigung in der örtlichen Schule, wo Auseinandersetzungen über ethnische Segregation die Stille untergraben, auf der die Reparatur beruht. Letztlich erklärt reputationale Reparatur, dass es die Repräsentation ist, die beschädigt ist – nicht die dargestellte Wirklichkeit.