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Georg Simmel on Communal Lie, Purpose and Faithfulness to Reality

Anna Woźniak *

Abstract

The central problem of the paper is a conflict which outbreaks in a group when one of its participants turns to a purposive action, aimed at disentangling of a lie. It is argued that by this sort of action, the said participant loses the group's support but wins the autonomy from a lie-ridden narrative. The intricacies of such a conflict for the individual and for the group are analyzed. The author draws on Simmel's Theory of Opposition, on his concepts of life, form, lie, faithfulness and purpose. Simmel's theoretical statements are illustrated with vivid examples from literature, film and journalism.

Il problema centrale dell'articolo riguarda il conflitto che esplode in un gruppo quando uno dei suoi partecipanti intraprende un'azione intenzionale che ha come scopo la decostruzione di una menzogna. Si sostiene l'idea che, per via di questo tipo di azione, il partecipante in questione perde l'appoggio del gruppo, ma guadagna l'autonomia dalla narrativa menzognera. Vengono analizzate le complessità di un tale conflitto per l'individuo e per il gruppo. L'autore si attinge dalla Teoria del Conflitto di Simmel, e dai suoi concetti di vita, forma, menzogna, fedeltà e scopo. Le affermazioni teoriche di Simmel vengono illustrate con esempi vividi dalla letteratura, dai film, e dal giornalismo.

Keywords / Parole chiave

Simmel, conflict, lie, faithfulness, life-form dualism
Simmel, conflitto, menzogna, fedeltà, dualismo forma-vita

Introduction

The problem of mendacity as a moral question—as a dilemma of “should I?” or “should I not?”—has a long tradition in philosophy and social science. It was considered by Aristotle (1980), Augustine (1952), Thomas Aquinas (1947), Kant

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(1959), and more recently by Arendt (1972), Bok (1978), and MacIntyre (1994). Within the Simmelian scholarship, however, the lie has been studied not as a moral issue but rather as a neutral element of social interactions (e.g. Barbour 2012; Welty 1996; Barnes 1994). It has been even argued that the lie operates as a paradigm for Simmel's view of society in general (Barbour 2012). Less often recognized is Simmel's preoccupation with the dilemma of a person confronted with a lie shared by a community and the condition of an internal tension and conflict that it engenders. Lee and Silver address an aspect of this tension by writing about "Simmelian ethical imperative" as expressing "the abiding pressure we feel to live in reference to the sort of person we aspire to be" (2012, 133). Harrington and Kemple (2012) argue that in Simmel's work, he shows how the ethical conduct of an individual need not to coincide with the morality of the collective. A condition inevitably related to this discord is the tension experienced "between the force of external necessity and the freedom of inner purpose" (*Id.*: 19). Drawing on Simmel, Gross (2012) argues that "the tragic conflict"(Simmel 1971: 429) permeating modern society results in individual's subjective ideas and intentions falling prey to objective culture and taking unintended life of their own. Finally, in relation to conflict situation, Schermer and Jary (2013) draw attention to an interesting paradox described by Simmel—the fact that the said tension can be alleviated by the purpose: purposefulness reaches out beyond the parties of the conflict and as such "is capable of the apparently contradictory result of shaping for each party the advantage of the adversary into its own advantage (Simmel 1958, as cited in: Schermer and Jary 2013: 244). Thus the dominant character of purposefulness within conflict situation comes from its transcending quality, creating added value to the both sides of the conflict.

Discussing the problem of deception in the public sphere in the late 1960s, Hannah Arendt (1972) complained about little attention being paid to this issue in philosophy. There is also little discussion on Simmel's take on lying (Barbour 2012). In what follows, I undertake to make up for this lack by turning to Simmel's thought on mendacity in social sphere. By investigating this problem in a broader context of his writing (including concepts of form, life, conflict, faithfulness and purpose), I argue that, in spite of lie-ridden reality being part and parcel of Simmelian "sociological metaphysics" (Harrington and Kemple 2012, 7), Simmel also opens a possibility of freeing oneself from the corrupt social rule. From this analysis emerges a view of a person who, in spite of the pressure of the social milieu, remains capable of not conforming to communal self-deception.

1. Life–form dualism

One of the basic presuppositions of Simmelian sociological metaphysics running through the essay *The Conflict of Modern Culture* as well as through all Simmel's work is the assumption of a "chronic conflict between form and life" (Simmel 1971, 393). The same conflict gives ground to "a basic dualism pervading the fundamental form of all sociation" (Simmel 1950, 385). However, for Simmel, the conflict is not an absolute one, for the *life* needs to receive a relatively stable external *form* in order to exist. Thus, in spite of Simmel's certain incongruity in this regard, he senses that there is a need for some sort of union between the two.

In order to grasp the nature of this apparently paradoxical relationship, it is appropriate to recognize what 'life' stands for in Simmel's writing. It represents an active element of reality: it constantly "wishes to flow creatively from within itself" (*Id.*, 381); whenever it "expresses itself, it desires to express only itself" (Simmel 1971, 382); it "desires to transcend all forms and to appear in its naked immediacy" (*Id.*, 393). Considering the strong sense of agency which Simmel ascribes to life, it can be deduced that the concept of life describes all things, which have in themselves the principle of their own activity.

The concept of 'form' in turn is associated by Simmel with a unifying quality: "form is the mutual determination and interaction of the elements of the association. It is form by means of which they create a unit" (Simmel 1950, 44). The consolidating aspect of the form is most visible in a social context: "Sociation is the form...in which individuals grow together into units that satisfy their interests. These interests...form the basis of human societies" (*Id.*, 40-41). The form creates a social tie (*Id.*, 297).

In other words, form causes the unity of the elements, which are informed by this specific form. It is, thus, the cause of that which it informs. The said informing may take place either by inheritance or by imitation, as Simmel argues in relation to the work of art: "Any artistic form must reach the artist from somewhere: from tradition, from a previous example, from a fixed principle" (Simmel 1971, 381).

In *The Conflict of Modern Culture*, Simmel elaborates on the concept of life by explaining the close affinity existing between life and form, arguing that life can

manifest and express itself and “realize its freedom” only in particular forms (*Id.*, 391). It even “can enter reality only in...the form of form” (*Id.*, 392). Consequently, life for Simmel resembles the primary matter which has substantial being only through its form. Life needs to emerge under some form, or else it would not be realized and the form is life that is actualized. Moreover, once life exists under one form, it is in potentiality to other forms, but it never exists without any form: “The process of thinking, wishing, and forming can only substitute one form for another. They can never replace the form as such by life which as such transcends the form” (*Id.*, 393). This aspect of Simmel’s sociological metaphysics helps to understand how the conflict emerges. It materializes at the juncture of two forms; it “manifests itself as the displacement of an old form by a new one” (*Id.*, 376). The above implies that two forms cannot coexist in one life-creation. In principle, existence of one form in a given life-creation excludes existence of another. In this exclusivity resides a seed of a conflict situation.

The contrariety of forms is most visibly manifested in the phenomenon of the intergenerational conflict:

In general, historical changes of an internal or external revolutionary impact have been carried by youth [...]. Whereas adults, because of their weakening vitality, concentrate their attention more and more on the objective *contents* of life, which in the present meaning could as well be designated as its forms; youth is more concerned with the process of life. Youth only wishes to express its power and surplus of power, regardless of the objects involved. Thus, cultural movement towards life and its expression alone, which disdains almost everything formal, objectifies the meaning of youthful life (*Id.*, 384).

As Simmel maintains, life manifests itself only in particular forms. Therefore, the intergenerational conflict, which suggests a struggle between life and form, is in fact a clash of two forms. In order to understand better the nature of the difference between the two, let us investigate a kind of a “revolutionary impact of the youth” presented by Hans Christian Andersen in his tale *Emperor’s New Clothes*. It is a story, known by all, of an Emperor who cared excessively for his garments. Once, he was approached by two weavers who promised him a very unique suit of clothes—invisible to anyone who was unfit for his office or unusually stupid. Employed by the Emperor, the swindlers started to create their masterpiece, pretending to weave the magic fabric. The Monarch, curious but also anxious to find out about his subordinates’ incompetence, decided to send

his trustworthy officials to check the progress of the work. The ministers obviously haven't seen anything but they simulated enthusiasm and admiration, not wanting to be judged unfit for their offices or, worse, unusually stupid. The Emperor himself visited the weavers and faked awe at the sight of the invisible fabric. Soon, the whole court shared his delight, while looking at the empty loom. The day came when the clothes were "ready". The weavers pretended to help the Emperor to put them on and the Monarch went off in procession to show his new clothes to his subjects. All of them faked the admiration for the garments, until a child cried from the crowd: "But he hasn't got anything on". Soon the whole gathering repeated the child's words. The Emperor and his court, however, continued the procession and arrogantly ignored the voice of the people.

The "iconic status" (Tatar 2007, xxiii) of this tale across lands and ages makes it, in its universal significance, an interesting illustration of the Simmelian idea of conflict. In spite of not being an open fight, the relation between the view promoted by the adults—the Emperor, the officials and the subjects—is clearly contradictory to the judgement made by the child. Analyzing the same tale, Slavoj Žižek notes that the child's liberating gesture has "the catastrophic consequences...for the intersubjective network within which it takes place" (2008, 11). He argues that the child's action is prototypical of the behavior by which the very community of which one was a member of disintegrates and so unknowingly and involuntarily, the child "sets off the catastrophe" (2008, 12). Thus, Žižek postulates that the usual praise of the innocent child should be abandoned. Žižek is right to sense "the catastrophe" ensuing from the child's sincerity. However, the disintegration, which is its consequence, is not an absolute one; it does not advance *ad infinitum*. Rather, what seems as the catastrophe is precisely the event of collision of two forms in Simmel's understanding of the term. The conflict between the two parties is induced by two contradictory forms. Thus, the question that becomes relevant here is not whether the child should or should not cry the remark aloud but rather what kinds of forms are involved in the conflict. A simple intuition suggests that the two are of different natures. Simmel's idea of *lie* helps to understand better the difference and the asymmetry between them.

2. Lie-based conflict

Simmel explains that by its nature, every lie engenders "an error concerning the

lying subject" (1950, 312). However, this error is not accidental or involuntary. The error involved in a lie "consists in the fact that the liar *hides his true idea* from the other" (*Ibidem*; emphasis added), just as all the characters of Andersen's tale, except for the child, have hidden their true perception of reality from all others. Thus, an integral element of a lie is an *intention* to lie. Furthermore, Simmel explains that the cause of one's ignorance and error, constituting part of a lie, is a consequence of human concerns for practical aspects of life:

[...] in view of our accidental and defective adaptations to our life conditions, there is no doubt that we preserve and acquire not only so much truth but also so much ignorance and error, as is appropriate for our practical activities (*Id.*, 310).

This may explain why the officials, Emperor's subordinates, being concerned about their own statuses in the Emperor's court, so eagerly embraced the lie. Simmel is interested in a lie not only as a single discrete occurrence. He also elaborates the concept of a "vital lie" [*Lebensluge*] in order to describe the condition of a person who lives in a state of deception, allowing him or her to maintain a desired status quo. One is "so often in need of deceiving himself in regard to his capacities, even in regard to his feelings.... in order to maintain his life and his potentialities" (*Id.*, 310).

For the same reason, a person can deceive others: "He may, intentionally either reveal the truth about himself to us or deceive us by lie and concealment" (*Id.*, 310). In the Simmelian framework, lie is also "a means of asserting intellectual superiority and of using it to control and suppress the less intelligent" (*Id.*, 314). Simmel calls it even an "aggressive technique" (*Id.*, 316) supporting the formation of certain concrete relations.

This is precisely what the lie inscribed in the Andersen's tale is designed to accomplish. It designates a deception of the other and of the self by creating a shared belief in the invisible suit. It is a belief which gets spread among the functionaries insecure in regard to their competence and knowledge. The subjects, out of the concerns for the practical aspects of their lives, also subdue to the Emperor's bubble. Unchallenged, the belief informs those who believe and allows the Emperor and his officials to sustain a fictitious vision of reality; it secures their power and domination over the subjects. Thus, the belief in the magic quality of the invisible clothes denotes a *form* in that it is a cause of that

which it informs.

The only person not informed by it is the child. Although the child's reaction may be seen as an expression of the "youthful life", it is not the life itself, for as Simmel asserts, life manifests itself only in particular forms. If the child is not a subject to the form initiated by the belief in the magic fabric, the question arises: through what form the child's judgement is actualized. In case of the child, the form is not the Emperor's lie. The child is faithful to the evidence of senses and reason, although it is contrary to the wide-spread belief. The form that informs the child's judgement must thus be the child's intrinsic form held by it in so far as it understands. It is the likeness of what the child understands, existing in the child. Once the child allows this form to be enacted by its judgement: "But he hasn't got anything on", the bubble is gone, and so is the false belief. As the result of the exclamation, all the adult subjects instantly admit what they had previously refused to.

The tale demonstrates that the communal lie itself does not have any stable form. It only informs those who decide to conform to it in spite of the evidence they have before their eyes. It is best expressed by Simmel when he explains that: "The lie is merely a very crude and, ultimately, often a contradictory form" (*Id.*, 316).

The contradictory quality of a lie comes from the following dichotomy: on one hand, the liar wants to sustain the belief in a certain imposed opinion (e.g., the belief in the magic quality of the fabric); on the other hand, he/she possesses a natural, sometimes unconscious, desire to express the form of the likeness of what he understands (as the child did in the tale) in spite of overtly giving up to the deception. The lie opens the way to a split between being simultaneously attracted by a deception and by a child-like desire to pursue the experience.

3. Faithfulness

Simmel might have been skeptical about the assertions that the child's judgement was an exact expression of the intrinsic form. For Simmel, the cognitive power, which understands the reality by adequately comprehending and expressing its forms, is an impossible ideal. He argues, *au contraire*, that in actuality, the forms lag behind or move ahead of the inner reality:

Our inner life, which we perceive as a stream, as an incessant process, as an up and down of thoughts and moods, becomes crystalized, even for ourselves, in formulas and fixed directions often merely by the fact that we verbalize this life. [...]. There still remains the fundamental, formal contrast between the essential flux and movement of the subjective psychic life and the limitations of its forms . . . Whether they are the forms of individual or social life, they do not flow as our inner development does, but always remain fixed over a certain period of time. For this reason, it is their nature sometimes to be ahead of the inner reality and sometimes to lag behind it. More specifically, when the life, which pulsates beneath outlived forms, breaks these forms, it swings into the opposite extreme, so to speak, and creates forms ahead of itself, forms which are not yet completely filled by it (*Id.*, 385-6).

The passage above suggests that inner life is necessarily determined by the limitation of the form in the knower, which explains why so often, also in Simmel's writing, life is put into opposition with form—the limitation of the latter creates a sense of antagonism between the two. However, Simmel himself agrees that there is a moment where the said opposition disappears. It is the moment of *faithfulness*:

Faithfulness bridges and reconciles that deep and essential dualism which splits off the life-form of individual internality [*Innerlichkeit*] from the life-form of sociation that is nevertheless borne by it. Faithfulness is that constitution of the soul (which is constantly moved and lives in a continuous flux), by means of which it fully incorporates into itself the stability of the super-individual form of relation (*Id.*, 386-7).

Simmel calls faithfulness “the inertia of the soul” (*Id.*, 380), for being faithful keeps it on the path on which it started, even if the original reason that led the soul onto this path no longer exists. It allows for the continuation of a certain relation independently of affective elements that sustain its content. Thus one's faithfulness preserves one's attitude in spite of movements of the internal life that are directed against it. However, one may object that faithfulness may also go wrong. After all, the Emperor's subordinates were also faithful to him, which has led them astray. The faithfulness of the child was, however, different in nature. The child was faithful to reality, even at the cost of entering a conflict with those who were not.

4. Formation by intention

Faithfulness to reality might be associated with a state described by Simmel as the purely intrinsic relationship between ego and object” (*Id.*, 259).

However, the relationship is not direct but is mediated by knowledge, as even “the most extreme realism wishes to gain not the objects themselves but rather knowledge of them” (Simmel 2004, 455). Simmel recognizes existence of the “real knowledge”, making, however, a stipulation that it “only gradually and always imperfectly approximates to that realm which includes all possible truth” (*Ibidem*). One of the reasons why the mindset of faithfulness to reality may seem attractive and desirable is that it gives a sense of freedom from lie-ridden reality. The latter, as Simmel explains, sometimes may “give us a hold, a relief from responsibility” (Simmel 1950, 259). However, only “the purely intrinsic relationship between ego and object” gives autonomy to a person (*Ibidem*). In the *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel expounds on this point, arguing that the human cognitive powers aim at an intellectual freedom—“self-sufficiency and independence” (Simmel 2004, 100).

An example of a person fighting to remain faithful to reality and to sustain his autonomy from the lie-ridden family reality is Christian - the main character of *Festen*, a film by Thomas Vinterberg¹. Christian takes part in a weekend family celebration of his Father’s 60th birthday. The latter is admired and respected by all. Recently, Christian’s elder sister, Linda, committed suicide. The Father asks him to say a few words about her. Christian starts, what he calls, “the Speech of Truth.” He reveals that the Father abused him and Linda sexually when they were children. Initially, everybody is shocked and silent, but gradually the party returns to normal and the guests react by silent denial and even more vigorous partying and dancing. Christian’s mother accuses him of having an exuberant imagination and refuses to confirm his version of events although she herself was a witness of the abuse. Christian’s brother, Michael, and two other guests violently throw him away from the hotel. When he comes back, they beat him and tie to a tree. Meanwhile, a waitress finds Linda’s suicide note, in which she stated that she had decided to kill herself because of not being able to deal with

1 *Festen* is a film made as part of the Dogma 95 movement, whose originators, directors Lars von Trier and Thomas Vinterberg, intended to revive the traditional way of making movies by refraining from the use of special effects and technology widespread in commercial film industry of the time. As they put it in their manifesto, their “supreme goal is to force the truth out of [their] characters and settings”.

the reminiscence of the Father's abuse. The Father admits to his misdeeds. The family lie is exposed.

The structure of the story is analogous to Andersen's tale. There is a patriarch with his court; a lie—a deception designed to hide some awkward truth; and finally, there is the child—the one with no formal power but with strong desire to express the truth behind the shared lie. In the case of *Festen*, however, the social milieu is much more resistant to accept the judgement disclosing the troublesome facts. And thus, the conflict becomes much more violent.

The conflict in *Festen* also ensues from two clashing forms. Simmel explains that human society is *formed* by “interests” (Simmel 1950, 41). A discrete sociological form is “the association based on some particular interest” (*Id.*, 317). Regarded from the internal perspective, an interest emerges out of one's purpose and intention and thus ultimately, the form results from the agent's intention: “In accord with our purposes, we give materials certain forms and only in these forms operate and use them as elements of our lives” (*Id.*, 41).

However, Simmel observes that an interest shared by a group may be an impediment to individual freedom:

Where specific interests (in cooperation or collision) determine the social form, it is these interests that prevent the individual from presenting his peculiarity and uniqueness in too unlimited and independent a manner (*Id.*, 45).

This may explain why faithfulness to reality may be inhibited by the social context. This is also why *Festen* character, Christian, had such a difficulty when confronted with the family's belief in impeccability of the Father. It was in their best material interest to remain loyal to the wealthy patriarch. Christian, however, chose to remain faithful to reality, by disclosing his Father's abuse and the reason for his sister's suicide. “Faithfulness,” as Simmel explicates, “is accessible to our moral intentions” (1950, 385). Consequently, Christian's action was not formless, but informed by his intention to faithfully recount the events of the past.

An interpretation of reality may become a “purpose in itself” (cf. *Id.*, 42). In *Festen*, a clash of two conflicting forms—two interpretations of reality—leads to the disintegration of the fictitious one. However, when the interpretation that is according to which the Father is faultless comes apart, the family members do

not join Christian in accepting his version of events but rather they enter the mode of instinctual denial. Simmel explains an analogous condition in the following terms:

To the extent that our actions are purely instinctual, that is causally determined in the strict sense, there is a fundamental incongruity between the psychological state, which is the cause of action, and the ensuing consequences” (Simmel 2004, 204).

The “incongruity between the psychological states” is a natural consequence of a lie, which creates the condition of contradiction. Internal inconsistency, which it provokes, leads to emotional derangement:

The feeling that we call ‘instinct’ appears to be tied to a physiological process in which stored up energies strive for release. The instinctual drive terminates when these energies find expression in action. If it is simply an instinct, then it is ‘satisfied’ as soon as it has dissolved into action (*Ibidem*).

To the extent that our action is simply causally determined (in the strict sense), the whole process comes to an end when the turbulent forces are discharged in activity, and the feelings of tension and constraint disappear as soon as the instinct culminates in action (*Id.*, 205).

Christian’s “Speech of Truth” gives the family members a possibility to leave the lie-ridden reality. However, they do not take their chance. Faced with the two competing forms—interpretations, they choose to remain in the state of the internal contradiction and to go on with their instinctual, causally determined, reaction. They engage in excessive drinking, eating, singing and dancing, which allow their feeling of tension to be released. In spite of having doubts, Christian, encouraged by his childhood friend, pursues his end—unveiling of the facts about the Father’s conduct and the reasons which had led his sister to commit suicide. Following this purpose separates Christian intellectually from the corrupt system and thus he does not experience himself as a victim of it:

Our opposition - Simmel explains - makes us feel that we are not completely victims of the circumstances. It allows us to prove our strength consciously and only thus gives vitality and reciprocity to conditions from which, without such corrective, we would withdraw at any cost (Simmel 1971, 75).

Simmel remarks that one's opposition makes one feel that he/she is not completely a victim of the circumstances "even where it has no noticeable success, where it does not become manifest but remains purely covert" (*Id.*, 76)

Such is the case of Christian's intellectual opposition which allows him to remain detached from the lie. Interestingly, when the truth comes to light, Christian's younger brother, Michael, beats the Father in anger. This way, he also opposes the lie but not in an intellectual way; his action is not purposeful but purely instinctual. Acts that are purposeful are different from the instinctual ones, because when acting purposefully,

we experience ourselves as being drawn rather than driven. The feeling of satisfaction, therefore, does not arise from the action alone, but from the consequences that the action produces" (Simmel 2004, 204).

It is the mode of being which makes possible the real meeting between the knowing subject and the object of his knowledge: "The fundamental significance of purposive action is the interaction between subject and object" (*Id.*, 205). According to Simmel, it is a way of developing one's integrity:

It is only when a purposive agent is distinguished from the purely causal system of nature that the unity of the two [the self and the world outside] can be re-established at a higher level" (*Id.*, 205-6).

Christian's consistency provides his actions with congruous form, because, as Simmel argues, when the conception of an end is experienced as a motive, cause and effect are congruous in their conceptual and perceptible content (*Id.*, 205).

Thus, this sense of integrity, the intellectual unity of the self and the world outside may persist in spite of hostility, antagonism and opposition of one's social milieu.

5. The case of investigative journalists

The internal cohesion described by Simmel is a result of not only having a certain form-intention in oneself but acting on it—being a "purposive agent" (*Id.*, 205-6). This implies that a principle of union is given by a form and an act. A

form merely considered by the intellect does not move or cause anything except through one's willingness to accomplish an end, by which a person is moved to act. This is why both characters—the child in Andersen's tale as well as *Festen's* Christian—not only know the facts but also act on this knowledge by expressing the judgements disclosing the fraud of their respective environments. Expressing the judgement is an action and “actions are the bridge that makes it possible for the content of the purpose to pass from its psychological form to a real form” (*Id.*, 206).

It is therefore not through the knowledge itself but through taking action based on this knowledge that the relation between the knowing subject and the real object is established: “Purposive action involves the conscious interweaving of our subjective energies and the objective world” (*Ibidem*). It makes possible “an interaction between the committed self and external nature” (*Id.*, 207). However, taking action of expressing judgement about what one deems true always creates a risk. Simmel himself admits that pursuing a purpose requires making a sacrifice, which “is the inner condition of the goal itself and the road by which it may be reached” (*Id.*, 82). In a way, the sacrifice is essential for the goal which “would not be the same without impediments to overcome” (*Ibidem*).

Communal lies are not only a matter of fictional tales and films, but most of all, they are part and parcel of reality. Sissela Bok (1978) points to the parallel existing between thus understood deception and violence. It pervades public life because, as argued by Bok, it affects the distribution of power: lies “add to that of the liar, and diminish that of the deceived, altering his choices at different levels” (1978, 19). Discussing the case of totalitarian states, Hannah Arendt talks about devastating consequences of deception undertaken by those in possession of the means of violence. The same principle operates today, obviously to a lesser extent than in totalitarian states, in situations of exposure of public mendacity by investigative journalists whose efforts oftentimes lead them to conflict situations, to hostility of those whose lies and abuses they expose, and sometimes even to the loss of their lives.

One of such journalists was Slovakian reporter, Ján Kuciak. On the 25 February 2018, he and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová were found shot dead in their house. Police has admitted that their murder was probably linked to his journalistic work.

Ján has investigated the participation of local oligarchs in the Panama Papers scandal, the unclear relations between the ruling party and business, cases of tax evasion and the activity of Calabrian mafia *Ndrangheta*, which had illegally collected EU funds for agricultural activities in the east of Slovakia (Kačan 2018). In his last and unfinished article, Kuciak revealed that one of the mafia members was a business partner of close associates of Róbert Fico, then the Prime Minister.

In 2017, Kuciak has exposed Marián Kočner, a tycoon of the Slovakian construction industry, linked to Fico. Kuciak has suggested that Kočner had sold a hotel to himself to get an unjustified VAT refund. Kočner accused Kuciak of lying. He called the journalist, threatening him, his parents and siblings. Kuciak reported the incident to the police, but it did not start the investigation.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, since the beginning of 2017 until June 2018, 37 journalists were murdered (Committee to Protect Journalists 2018). Nineteen of them were print and internet reporters writing on crime and sensitive social issues. In almost all of these cases, the murders were preceded by threats and sometimes by physical attacks. According to the relevant evidence, all of the described acts of violence were provoked by the investigative work of the reporters. Over the past 30 years, there were hundreds of similar cases. In spite of each of them being different and motivated by different reasons, they all share a similar pattern: a fraud devastates a social milieu; a conflict emerges: one side—the deceiver—defends the corruptive reality (sometimes he/she is joined by official authorities), the other side—the journalist—desires to unravel what he understands as the truth. The aggravation of hostility against him/her leads to threats, physical assaults and ultimately to him/her being killed.

Simmel himself is fully aware of all that is at stake in a conflict over truth. He admits that:

Truthfulness and lie are of the most far-reaching significance for relations among men. [...]. Under modern conditions, the lie...becomes something much more devastating than it was earlier, something which questions the very foundations of our life" (1950, 312-3).

Simmel associates interactions based on truthfulness with democratic processes, because freeing the public space of the lie supports the interests of the majority:

For those who are lied to or those who are harmed by the lie will always constitute the majority over the liars who find their advantage in lying. For this reason, 'enlightenment,' which aims at the removal of the untruths operating in social life, is entirely democratic in character (*Id.*, 314-5).

For Simmel, conflict, especially the one where truth is at stake, "is a way of achieving some kind of unity, even if it be through the annihilation of one of the conflicting parties" (1971, 70).

Such was the case of murdered journalists. However, their deaths have not signified closure of the problem for those whose abuses they had disclosed. On the contrary, the deaths of reporters usually drew even more considerable attention to the issues which they discussed in their reports. Conflicts which they provoked were not ends of their actions but only byproducts of their faithfulness to reality and to truth-seeking.

6. Discussion

In a lie, the subject is internally split between two competing attractions—the one related to the expected gains resulting from the continuing deception and the other, resulting from the possibility of following the desire to remain faithful to reality. Choosing the latter does not mean that one immediately moves to a lie-free reality. Rather, it signifies recognizing that, sociologically, lie has "quite positive significance for the formation of certain concrete relations" (Simmel 1950, 316) and it is inherent in the social context.

In spite of that, one may decide to stay faithful to reality and make judgements resulting from his/her best knowledge which in consequence may damage certain social relations. Thus, it involves taking the risk of becoming part of a conflict situation, of bearing a sacrifice and of being overwhelmed if it turns out that the defended truth was in fact only another deception. Faithfulness—deemed by Simmel as the way of bridging and reconciling the dualism which splits off the individual life-form from the social one—applied to reality, creates a sense of integrity in spite of the external turmoil. The child's statement in Andersen's tale, Christian's "Speech of Truth" and many of the investigative reports uncovering crime, fraud and corruption—all of these are cases of the people desiring to remain faithful to reality. In all the cases mentioned, the integrity is not derived from attempting to free oneself from lie, crime, fraud and

corruption, but it results from engaging in the purposeful action of creating accounts which their authors deem truthful to reality.

The above reading of Simmel's theory has noteworthy consequences for the students of sociology and culture, aspiring to analyze conflicts with an objective eye and not taking side of any of the opposing parties. For Simmel himself argues that

the most intellectually disposed elements of a group lean particularly toward impartiality: the cool intellect usually finds lights and shadows in either quarter; its objective justice does not easily side unconditionally with either (*Id.*, 152).

The question, however, arises whether those "intellectually disposed" operate in a lie-free reality, whether they are free from interests which predisposed them to take side of groups that support those interests. Aren't they in a similar position as the peasant, the merchant and the civil servant described by Simmel in the following passage?

Whereas the peasant who has been bought out, the merchant who has become a rentier or the pensioned civil servant seem to have freed their personalities from the constraints that are bound up with the specific conditions of their property or their position, in reality the opposite has occurred in the instances cited here. They have exchanged the positive contents of their self for money which does not offer any such contents (Simmel 2004, 405).

It takes substantial effort to remain faithful to reality and to keep one's eyes fixed on the purpose of adequate accounting for "truthfulness and lie" being "of the most far-reaching significance for relations among men" (Simmel 1950, 312).

Simmel demonstrates that being truthful is not a matter of following an ethical code but rather it is the matter of being faithful to reality. Integrity which it involves is possible only if a researcher admits and recognizes that he/she does not operate in a sterile interest-free environment. Only if he/she acknowledges the nature of the lie that afflicts the "intellectually disposed" world, will he/she be ready to deal with the lies and conflicts of his/her research subjects. This topic begs for further research.

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