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# Roots and Routes

Life stories of exiled Hungarian women in Sweden

KATALIN HENRIKSSON

THE FACULTIES OF HUMANITIES AND THEOLOGY | LUND UNIVERSITY 2015



## Roots and Routes



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Life stories of exiled Hungarian women in Sweden

Katalin Henriksson



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# Preface

The study about life story narrations has engaged me for a long time. Life stories contain recollections of high and low points, turning points and important emotionally charged events; revealing both positive and negative experiences, influencing the ways of narrating stories. Some personality psychologists argue that negative events seem to *demand an explanation*, compared to positive events that work in other cognitive ways. Negative experiences are often reduced, because they cannot be told to others – or to oneself. They can be dealt with, even though it is tough. One way is to use resilience, making meaning of the negative events or experiences by exploring them in depth, and as a second step, pledging the self to a resolution of the negative experience. This has come to be my concern, too.

Right after having finished the manuscript of my study, I was exposed to a life turning experience with vast consequences. The negative experience, demanding cognitive, emotional and social adjustments from me, forced me to recalibrate my life. The study has now become an essential part of my personal narrative, excavating the dialogical self, navigating a middle course between the personal, the social, and the official. Motivations, intentions, desire and strive for goals took an unexpected turn, and my story became entangled with the stories of the women in the study. The study is now part of my own autobiographical story, and my narrative identity in a dialogic relationship. Negotiations turned out to be necessary, as certain things from the past became insignificant; while the future seemed to be blurred. The fate of the study became uncertain; I had to face the fact that there was little chance to present my thesis. To make over the negative experience into a tolerable one, there is a way to turn to one's *redemptive self*. In that, aid and support came from Lund University. First I received a proposal to print my book, and later, a suggestion emerged to present my thesis, if conditions permit it.

I have several people to thank for their involvement, interest and support in the work done. First, I want to thank my narrators: Anna, Borka, Ilona, Liza and Pandora, and their families, for showing a great deal of patience during the interviews. Spiting their aspirations, I wish to thank my own family, husband and children, for their tolerance for the tedious work clamoring for my attention for a long time. I wish to thank my tutors: Rikard Schönström, Professor in Literature, and David Wästerfors, Ass. Professor in Sociology at Lunds University. Without their help and resilient backing the study would not have seen day's light. I wish to remember Oszkár Lázár, Head of

Fenno-Ugric Department at the beginning of my research studies there and László Keresztes, Professor in Fenno-Ugric studies at the University of Debrecen, Hungary. I am grateful to the late Aino Laagus, Ethnologue, Tartu, Estland, taking over responsibility for the department after the retirement of O. Lázár, acting as midwife at the birth of my project, and introducing me in the Fenno-Ugric community abroad. Fellow-doctoral students, Kristian Nilsson from the Fenno-Ugric Institution and Shifteh Amirhekmat, from Linguistics, had given me verbal support during the years. I thank also for the support of numerous members of the Hungarian community in Sweden. SOL, the Department for Languages and Literature, Lund, is to be honored for giving me the opportunity to finish my study. Last, but not least, Jonas Palm at Mediatryck shall have special thanks for the help I received of him. I wish to thank Samuel Byrskog, Professor and Vice Dean at the Centre of Theology and Religious Studies at Lund University for promoting the printing of my book and for encouraging me to come to a resolution, challenging me to present my thesis against the odds.

*Katalin Henriksson*

To lost family members and friends.

# 1. Introduction

“All rivers run to the sea; yet the sea is not full;  
unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.”  
(Ecclesiastes. Heb.: Qohelet<sup>1</sup>)

This study is engaged in the narrative analysis of life stories, presented by transnational Hungarian women with multicultural backgrounds living in a Swedish environment. Even if the women in the study live outside the focal point of society, there is knowledge to be attained from their life stories through learning about the diverse nature of their Hungarian backgrounds, and their experiences in the multifaceted Swedish society they live in today. Life has its moments to be shared with others; the dimensions of knowledge can be extended by studying the stories of unprivileged individuals linked through their status as exiles. Exile stories are about rescuing things to restore them to a stage known from the past, about reinventing the concept of what there is left of a home. The stories speak of lives lived internally, in which one's present becomes radically different from the past and in which the former homeland becomes transformed in the imagination into either an idealised or demonised realm, where the past is equated with the image of 'the old home'. The intimation of the above-quoted metaphoric words from the King James Bible<sup>2</sup> is that the narrated life sequences of the study speak of the commuting status, the liminality that the narrators talk about in their storytelling; speaking of a steady movement between different countries, cultures and subjectivities, living away from, and drawn back to, the motherland; exiles becoming expats.

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<sup>1</sup> Bible, Book of Ecclesiastes, 3<sup>rd</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> C. AD.

<sup>2</sup> Qoheleth (alt. Hezekiah, circa 200-900 BC).

## Family Mythologies and Forbidden Stories

Many share with me an interest in genealogy through family histories. For me, it has been like a quest to look into my own family history, a long-lasting passion for *stories of roots*, quickly becoming a driving force to engage in the present study. Readers might conceive that the terms that I am using in certain aspects (geographical names, historical contexts) are ‘emotionally charged’, and might bestow on me the appearance of being biased. Being aware of this fact, I still decided to use them, with a scientific meaning, as they are closer to the original concepts than other terms invented or to be invented. The meaning prompted by this interest resulted in finding ways into the plotlines of Hungarian ‘transborder narratives’, arching over several state borders in the Carpathian Basin, seeking out facts behind issues of origin, with my own family history in the background; with whispered stories about *Erdély* [Transylvania], a region emerging in the narrations of all of the interlocutors in the study. Erdély, a region with a substantial Hungarian population, now part of Romania<sup>3</sup>, has been a mystifying ‘land forlorn’ talking to me. I used to think that the landscape was out of my reach; it was my mother’s stories from her youth, becoming parts of the family secrets, that should not be mentioned outside family frames, our parents warned us. The stories also delimited my family from others; I never heard others talking about Erdély when I was young. Erdély was one of the topics, along with *Felvidék* [Highlands] and other geographic units in the Carpathian Basin with Hungarian populations, that were not openly discussed for political reasons, with the result that they were allotted to the family realm, tightening family links<sup>4</sup>, along with other likewise undesirable discourses. The overtly *elhallgatott történetek*<sup>5</sup> [hushed-up histories] echoed also in the narrations of the interlocutors, as *Erdély*, without me anticipating it, turned out to be a linkage, entering each narration in some way or other. The tantalising tales were about *Erdély*’s beautiful landscapes, a hidden and lost world of mountains, mystical lakes, dark forests; the Hungarians living there;

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<sup>3</sup> See map and further information in the Appendix.

<sup>4</sup> Hungarian children’s socialisation practices in official and private discourse spaces. (Corrin, C., (1992:49). *Superwomen and the Double Burden*. Scarlet Press.)

<sup>5</sup> Eng lit. transl.: “silent, or hushed-up stories”; Swe. *förtigna historier*; Pál-Antal, S., Az erdélyi Magyar történetírás, Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, Conference at Kolozsvár, 2010. (<http://www.matud.iif.hu/2011/08/11.htm>); Ungváry, K., and Tabajdi, G., *Elhallgatott múlt. A pártállam és a belügy. A politikai rendőrség működése Magyarországon 1956–1990*. 2008). Pető, A., Budapest ostroma 1944–45-ben női szemmel [The Siege of Budapest through women’s eyes]; URL source: <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00003/00023/peto.html>; Pető A., Átvonuló hadsereg, maradandó trauma [Army in transit, trauma residue]. In *Történelmi Szemle*, 1999. 1-2 sz. See also *silent shame*; film by F. Skrabski, 2013.

mythological ancestors; and a family misplaced behind borderlines. I was always convinced that my mother's lived experiences<sup>6</sup> would remain fairy tales for me forever, which made me extra curious to know more about them. I had the opportunity to study the historical and political content of the *clandestinely told stories* from the past later in Sweden; however, they still appeared to be abstract. It all changed when I met *erdélyi magyarok* [Transylvanian-Hungarians] who had been officially released from Romania around 1987-1989 and moved to Sweden, bestowing the whole Hungarian exile community with experiences to rejoice. They build the bulk of the Hungarian Diaspora in Sweden today, adding a new dimension and extending the size of it substantially. At last, in 2008 I made a trip to Transylvania and saw it with my own eyes. In Sweden I met Slovakian, Yugoslavian and Transylvanian-Hungarians over the years, making an *ethno-national homecoming* through the Hungarian associations already established in the country possible, inspiring me to present them for others in my study.

## Aims, Goals and Limitations of the Study

The present study aims to present, mediate, interpret and analyse the narratives of five so-called 'Swedish-Hungarian' women's experiences, by entering their social setting, utilizing the dynamics of self-positionality and reflexivity. By inquiring into the stories of exile, taking also the variety of cultural and historical contexts at hand into consideration, we can learn about the extent of the individuals' narrated adjustment strategies, their ethno-national homecoming, its consequences and the usability of cultural heritage, referred to as *Hungarianness*<sup>7</sup>. The study is about a cluster: the constellation of gender, subjectivity and Hungarianness. Being raised in an environment with tolerance for cultural diversity was decisive for my choice, just as my own development of multiple identities and social roles as an exile were: a Hungarian (by self-identification), a naturalized *immigrant* (from a Swedish

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<sup>6</sup> These visits to Erdély took place after 30<sup>th</sup> August 1940, when the territory of Northern Transylvania (including the entire Maramures and part of Crisana) was re-annexed to Hungary. (See First Vienna Award.)

<sup>7</sup> *Magyarság* [Hungarianness] is a polysemic word in Hungarian, used to express 1. a composition of, and aggregate of, the arsenal of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic characteristics that a person chooses in order to explain her/his choice of calling herself/himself a Hungarian, and 2. The total number of the members of the Hungarian nation; entailing a./motherland Hungarians, b./minority Hungarians or transborder Hungarians (the so-called *Hungarians beyond the borders*) and c./worldwide diaspora Hungarians. In English: Hungarianity, resp. Hungarianness, and in Swedish the polysemic term *Ungerskhet* would be used.



perspective), a Swedish-Hungarian (from the Hungarian perspective), and as a research student. Local contacts with international students and *invandrare* (immigrants<sup>8</sup>) have been useful, while studies at the Department of Sociology at Lund University gave the final nudge for the decision to focus on life histories for a study, after floating around with unrealistic research ideas for several years<sup>9</sup>.

My study includes interviews with female individuals, chosen from a larger group with Hungarian background of mixed gender, and is limited to accounts of their lives with details that are chosen by them to be included with the intention to record the stories of people that are seldom heard. On that account I decided to exclude male stories as they often are prioritised. My expectations were to make women's life stories visible by hearing them. The subjects of the study are 'ordinary' people, but who by my standards do not live ordinary lives. The study entails women's stories, i.e. 'female narratives', not based on traditional 'feminist theorising', such as the subjugation of women to society, discrimination, gender inequality, the politics of difference, conceptions of power, the body, performances of gender and the stability of sexed bodies and sexual identity, or without particular 'foci on gender aspects'. Instead, focus lies on the stories evolving, presenting various defining stages of life, such as childhood, adolescence, motherhood, work and migration. Nonetheless, these are stories of women that encourage the addressing of aspects of the narrations from a women- or gender-related viewpoint. I have had support from feminist qualitative sociological research, for example owing to the emancipatory view, in setting 'ordinary' women's everyday occurrences in the centre of the research and allowing the experiences of the researched subjects, and of the researcher, to be weaved together. The stories of the study are unique in several ways, including in the sense that they have never been told for research purposes – or for any other. Denzin suggests that there are untold stories because some individuals might not think that their life is worth telling; others cannot find the voice to tell with, or the public to tell to (Denzin N., 1989). On this account, biographical work always must be "interventionist, seeking to give notice to those who may otherwise not be allowed to tell their story or who are denied a voice to speak" (Bertaux, 1981: 16).

The reason for my interest in the present stories is that Hungarian women with their unique background are seldom investigated. My study attempts to correct this fact by

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<sup>8</sup> The concept of *invandrare* [immigrants] used in the present study conforms to the international concept of immigrants: people moving from one destination to another, seeking out conditions suitable for a new life.

<sup>9</sup> The initial intention was to make a sociolinguistic study on several generations of Hungarian immigrants living in Sweden. This plan could not be realised because the institution I belonged to was shut down in 2000 and official support became void.

presenting some of the voices through the expression of the self in the chosen narrated storyworlds; through investigating the positions the narrators attribute to themselves, and also the linguistic choices they make. Linguistic recourses are also included in the analysis about the ways the individuals speak of themselves as individuals and as members of a culturally specific group, helping us to see how the linguistic choices and strategies reflect the individual's ways of presenting the self in relation to others, i.e. their social orientations, as well as the individual's construction of social roles, with respect to social experiences, such as border crossing, migration, work and similar. The study intends to investigate people's self-positioning and life strategies in relation to migration synchronically, and to compare the same diachronically through unstructured, open-ended "research questions [that] state what you want to learn" (Maxwell, 2005 (2nd ed.)). I had no explicit premeditated theoretical allegations, but kept the following main objectives to investigate in mind:

- the narrative construction (and/or deconstruction) of private and social identities regarding various social roles in different life course transitory stages;
- the women's presentation of adjustment strategies to conditions of migration and exile;
- the women's presentation of the negotiation and interpretation of *Hungariannesses*; their ethnic, cultural, local, gendered and eventually religious traits, the self-understanding of the individuals with their paradoxical *diverse sameness*, i.e. the narrated different *Hungariannesses*.

These are the reasons behind the choice of topic for my study, helping me to develop, and to accept, the research questions and perspectives, looking for methods to make an investigation of questions about what, at first viewing, is seemingly common for the interviewees, namely their *Hungarianness*. My main objectives have also helped me to uncover the cultural and corporate affiliation emerging in the studied transnational biographies. As indicated above, the work will also rely on my own personal experiences, with the purpose of presenting life story inquiries in context, and in extension – also lives embedded in steady changes related to political, social and cultural contexts that are so relevant and that shape the life of exiles. As yet, no explicit narrative study has been conducted on Hungarian female exiles in Sweden; my study would hopefully add another dimension to narratives of exiles. The reader is invited to make a journey of exploration, to study the task with open eyes and mind and use *reflectiveness and expressiveness* (Greene, 2001), to be willing to discover the issues offered, and to reflect on his or her own life situations and compare them with those in the study. In a wider context, I wish also to address the deep-seated inability

to recognize the Eastern European – among them Hungarian – societies on their own terms; i.e. their *ambivalent otherness*.

### *Ethical Consideration*

Claims of ethical considerations demand serious reflections regarding the tension between the researcher's intentions to share knowledge with a wider audience and the claim from the participants' to their privacy, as well as about power relations between the interviewees and interviewer and the interpretation of material and the design. In our cases, the participants were informed about the aim of the study, and I received their consent without worries about eventual exposure to recognition. Obviously, total anonymity would not be possible to maintain, owing to the intimate size of the local Hungarian exile group in Sweden. Even if no limiting claims on anonymity arose, I assured the interviewees I would take precautions to safeguard their personal integrity as far as possible. Means used were to use initials instead of names in the transcripts, and indirect characterisation in the translations through metonymical names. One interviewee showed active interest in the after-life of the interviews after completion; after meeting and discussing it, she added some further untaped information on certain details of her story. Judging these as important, I have included them in the material. For a comprehensive personal identification of the interlocutors, I applied both direct, personal, socio-psychological traits and indirect characterisation through actions, discourse, style, ideology, social position, physical appearance and environment. Metaphor and metonymy turned the interlocutors into Performer, Educator, Pietá, Toiler and Homemaker, pointing to aspects of the character or a contiguous element pertaining to it in the title of the relevant chapters. The given private names presented in the chapter on the Participants are functional more for me by their phonological characteristics and connotations, than for the readers.

## Transcription, Translation and Interpretation

The tapes, which are in my possession<sup>10</sup>, contain recorded interviews that I transcribed in Hungarian in an unedited fashion, in order to achieve a written version of what was said in its complete version. The material was taped in Hungarian, but as the language of the dissertation is English, I translated the excerpts. In the translation I tried to answer the demands of globalization (trans-comprehensibility), one could suggest, well aware of the complexity of complications with translations. Newmark

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<sup>10</sup> Along with all other recorded material excluded for the present study.

distinguishes between translation methods and translation procedures: "[w]hile translation methods relate to whole texts, translation procedures are used for sentences and the smaller units of language<sup>11</sup>". The goal with translation is to transfer meanings from a source language (SL) to a target language (TL), in order to make them available to a wider public. As cultures have their diversities and languages organise concepts of the world in their specific way (Sapir-Whorf hypothesis<sup>12</sup>), i.e. language and cognition influence each other, I have included aspects of culture in my translations. The disparities between English (Indo-European language) and Hungarian (Finno-Ugric language) are difficult to neglect when interpreting texts. The differences show in style, meaning formation, use of rhetorical means, references, proverbs and idioms. It is challenging to not think *gender-wise* when translating from genderless Hungarian into Indo-European languages (English, Swedish) with gender. Intriguing ambiguities in Hungarian are not always feasible when translated, which sometimes can be a shortcoming. It is outside the scope of the present study to make any theoretical assumptions of what this means for the concepts and interpretations; nonetheless, it cannot be avoided that concepts might get *lost in translation*<sup>13</sup>. When translating, I regarded aspects of "translation methods" (considering the whole text) (Newmark, 1988), starting out from the original text using a mixture of strategies<sup>14</sup> in order to achieve an acceptable interpretation of the told. Additionally, I have also paid attention both to metalinguistic and extra-linguistic aspects which do have a special implication on the interpretation of the interviews. However, in the interpretation and translation I made an effort to stay close to the original semantic meaning of the narratives (Denzin N. a., 2005).

My primary source for the interpretations and analysis was the narrators' storytelling and private conversations with them, giving them space and authority, comparing the individual stories, looking for differences and similarities. As a secondary source I have searched through methodology and theory suggestions, analytic works of

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<sup>11</sup> Approaches to Translation. Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall. 1988: 81.

<sup>12</sup> Sapir, Edward, 1921. 1951[1929] *Language*. [1951(1929):160]], New York: Harcourt, Brace. The Status of Linguistics as a Science. In *Selected Writings*. David Mandelbaum, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press. Orig. pub. in *Language* 5:207-214. Whorf, Benjamin Lee, Science and Linguistics. In *Language, Thought and Reality*. John B. Carroll, (ed.) Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Orig. pub. in *Technology Review* 42:229-231. 247-248. [1956 (1940):212]].

<sup>13</sup> Eva Hoffman, (1989) *Lost in Translation: Life in a New Language*.

<sup>14</sup> (A) literal translation (converting grammatical units, but translating lexical units singly); (B) faithful/semantic translation (producing precise contextual meanings of SL considering constraint of TL, but also the stylistic demands of it); (C) idiomatic translation (reproducing the 'message' but using e.g. colloquialism of TL); (D) communicative translation (to keep both content and language comprehensible to the audience).

Western and Eastern European scholars, along with literary, (auto)biographical works of individuals and Internet resources. In some contexts, regarding for example ethnic confrontations, the latter is the most likely (possibly biased) source of information, as we lack official sources. For greater content reliability, consistency and for checking the results, I used *triangulation* (Denzin N., 2006); i.e. more than one method, keeping in mind that “practices of interpretation and representation are always ongoing, emergent, unpredictable, and unfinished” (ibid, 2005: 909). The organizing principle for analysing the narrations has been to listen to what is said in open-ended ethnographic interviews, transform the heard to a text and then interpret it. Language, not treated as a ‘technical device’ revealing ‘truth’, ‘realities’ and ‘straightforward meanings’ ‘out there’, has played a decisive role.

Interpretation lies on several linguistic and cultural levels. First level interpretation was done in Hungarian<sup>15</sup>, the common language for all parties; for analysis, the transcriptions were translated from Hungarian to English. Swedish was excluded, except for phrases or words used by the interviewees, and for certain names. Regarding the interpretive level, besides being a naïve listener as far as possible – respecting the subjectivity of the interviewees – I also brought in some theoretical aspects of my different multi-cultural contexts and social categories (such as age, gender, ethnic identification, national origin, citizenship, education, expectations, attitudes towards the interlocutors and the stories told which have permeated my interpretations), adjacent to the narrative excerpts of the study. The reading and interpretation of a life story depends on the extent to which theoretical understanding plays a role, either from a phenomenological view (taking the teller at face value) or, to the other extreme, using theoretical expectations from the interviewer, looking for rhetorical, intra, extra-, and paralinguistic details, such as silences, gaps, contradictions, symbols and similar clues to the implicit content. Between the two analytic poles, there are different shades of interpretation possibilities; “[s]tories are differently intelligible, useful, and authoritative depending on who tells them, when, for what purpose, and in what setting” (Polletta, May 1998:137). Taking this into consideration, I included details of articulation in the fieldnotes and transcriptions. Emphasized words were marked with bold, shorter quotations are marked with quotation marks and longer ones have been excerpted. Hesitations were typed out as words cut off, original Hungarian words were kept where I felt they served the interpretation, and the narrator’s natural dialect was reproduced by the use of compressed words, slang or an incoherent way of speaking. Relevant parts<sup>16</sup> of the

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<sup>15</sup> Further relevant information about the Hungarian language can be found in the part on Translation.

<sup>16</sup> Parts that contribute to the coherent life story narrative and to the understanding of the personal life story.

original Hungarian transcriptions were then translated into English, keeping as close as possible to the original phrasings, rhetorical means and extra-linguistic tools used by the narrator. With hermeneutics in mind, I sought “to understand the meaning of processes and experiences rather than to discover causes” and phenomenological aspects in that I sought “to describe the essential intentional and conscious structures of ‘life experiences’ in addition to their meanings” (Bentz, 1989: 15).

## Background of the Study

The material for the life-based narrative research was generated in Southern Sweden, between 2000 and 2008, using a qualitative method: recorded semi-structured in-depth interviews on more than one occasion and with different scopes. The interviews were conducted either in the participants’ homes or mine, at the interlocutors’ discretion, with the goal to secure a less formal location with a relaxed atmosphere. The five female interviewees in this study were selected from a group of around fifty to eighty Hungarians of each gender and varying generations whom I had interviewed in the 1990s, with sociolinguistic orientation<sup>17</sup>. The inexact number of people I have recorded is due to the fact that some recordings were done among groups of children, for example during their activities at the Hungarian association, or in mother-tongue classes with a few pupils. Students at the university were also heard and given questionnaires with structured sociolinguistic questions. These group investigations have not been used for analysis purposes.

After my own ‘narrative turn’<sup>18</sup>, striving for establishing a *referential contract* with the reader<sup>19</sup>, I became more observant of the content and narrative form on the tapes. I became hooked on the narrated life story details unexpectedly unfolding in front of me in the line of the initial investigation. I soon found the individual stories valuable beyond the rather dry and dull sociolinguistic questions; the answers revealing more than I had asked for, offering biographic details lying outside the scope of the original study. Answers to my inquiries into the use of the mother tongue, geographical location or ethnic belonging of family members led to ‘small bubble stories’ from the interviewees, talking of choice of language based on cultural and ethnic self-

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<sup>17</sup> Mainly by structured interviews, questionnaires and taped interviews, investigating first language proficiency, frequency and conditions in the usage of first language and so on.

<sup>18</sup> Roland Barthes (1915–1980) was the first to proclaim the central and omnipotent role of narratives in social life.

<sup>19</sup> See T. Todorov’s fictional contract (In: *Genres of Discourse*. Cambridge University Press. 1978/1990: 26).

identification, and/or the combination of those linked to genealogy, often with an essentialist view; so nuancing the narrations. Thus, story lines offered in the original interviews seemed to be merely *side-tracks* when delivered, always reminding us ‘to return to the main goal of questioning’ with linguistic orientation. It soon turned out that the side-tracks gave me a lot of details about the interviewees’ life “at home”, i.e. place of origin, and in Sweden. They revealed issues from trivial family relations to traumatic experiences; private troubles, political orientations, education, life-turning episodes or *epiphanies* (Denzin, 1989: 70), leaving marks on the lives of the individuals, such as migration, taking a life, or the loss of a child. The *micro* and *macro* histories inspired me to complete the study with the five selected individuals, doing more extended and “active”<sup>20</sup> interviews for the purpose. The final push came when studying at the Department of Sociology in Lund, inspired also by one of my teachers, David Wästerfors, who later became one of my supervisors. At long last, the present study was set in motion. I already had a perception of the life stories on my tapes; all I lacked was the insight and the tools to make sense of them.

## Participants

The five narrators made a mental journey as they spoke; remembering, reciting, explaining, interpreting, performing, portraying, recapitulating and retelling meaningful moments of their lives, full of oscillating movements between leaving and arriving, giving and receiving, in motion, revealing processes through which memory recognises the past, predicating identity, events that centre on national and personal affiliation, resistance and loss. Some spoke of childhood memories, including safe images of creativity predicating future achievements; while others remembered childhood with personal pain, whose cultural implications – to a certain extent – prepared the individual for the upcoming hostility of history. The stories present the creative potential of interrupted and conflicted lives, where desperate improvisations become significant achievements, and broken pieces of life need reassembling again and again. I find that to be a travel companion for a short track of life in the women’s lives has been a great experience. I have made my own journey by making the study, by which patterns chosen by default have become a path of preference. I intend to present the five women here below, so that the readers can make themselves acquainted with them before turning to theoretical and methodological aspects of the study.

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<sup>20</sup> The interviewer taking active part in the speech interaction, ‘prompting’ new storylines, “keep the story going” (Holstein, J.A.& Gubrium J.F., (2000), *The Self We Live By*. Oxford UP.

**Ilona**<sup>21</sup> is the oldest person in the present study and my oldest Hungarian acquaintance in Sweden; retired for many years now. Ilona was born in Transylvania (Romania) in the mid-20s, the time era she referred to as ‘the Hungarian times’ in her storytelling, in an autochthonous Hungarian family. Her father was a worker and her mother a homemaker, and she had two siblings. Ilona is the only survivor from her family. Ilona studied performing art in Kolozsvár (Ro. Cluj) and began her career at a Hungarian theatre there. Later she lost her job at the theatre and worked at a school library. She met her partner, a Hungarian engineer, in Transylvania. They shared life for three years there, until they left Romania as ‘regular tourists’ and arrived in Sweden in 1969. They both established a new life here, with work and social relations. After five years of co-habitation in Sweden, they separated and Ilona has been living the life of a single, without children of her own ever since. I met her in the 1980s in Sweden, and since then we have kept in contact, both on a private and a public basis. We worked for several years together for the local Hungarian cultural association<sup>22</sup>. She was well-known among Hungarians in Sweden. She was a dedicated supporter of her family both in Transylvania and Hungary, where she lived half of the year in her flat in Budapest. She is an exceptionally vital elderly person, with a great dedication to popularising Hungarian culture in Sweden. I was happy to have her consent for two interviews; the first one was made with sociolinguistic focus in 2000, and the second one for the present study in 2006. Data from both interviews are used for the study.

**Borka** was born in 1952 in Komárom, *Felföld, or Felvidék* [Highlands], Czechoslovakia. She had a Hungarian family, consisting of a father who was a worker, a mother who sewed clothes at home, and two brothers. Borka had become a teacher in Czechoslovakia, and worked as a teacher until she married a Hungarian exile living in Sweden and she moved to Sweden in 1994. They built a family with two children. Borka has been engaged in the local Hungarian association throughout the years; participating in different kinds of cultural activities, such as children’s groups and literary reading clubs for adults. She has also been working as a teacher within the *mother tongue education system*<sup>23</sup>, teaching Hungarian for second generation Hungarians in Sweden. Additionally she also taught Hungarian for adults in study circles. We met in the 1990s, when she was a newcomer to Sweden and since then we

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<sup>21</sup> The pseudonym Ilona is the Hungarian version of her Romanised official name, Elena, given to her by the Romanian authorities (passport), by which name she is known under in the Swedish official context. The interlocutor uses the Hungarian version in reference to herself, which is also used here.

<sup>22</sup> Lundi Magyar Kulturfórum [Hungarian Forum of Culture in Lund], founded 1957.

<sup>23</sup> *Modersmålsundervisning* [mother tongue education] in grammar school or high school is for children in families with other languages than Swedish in the family, with the goal to strengthen children’s bilingual identity development.



have met many times, both privately and via the Hungarian association. I have made two interviews with her; the first one with sociolinguistic focus in 1999, and the second one for the present study, in 2006. Material from both is considered in the study to the extent that it enhances Borka's life story telling.

**Liza**, one of the core-Hungarians in the study, was born in 1963, the only child of her family. She was educated and socialized in Hungary in the specific era<sup>24</sup> referred to in Hungary as the *Kádár-* or *Kadarian-era*<sup>25</sup>, with its specific ideology of *conformist avoidance*. Owing to the political system, Liza's family with a *cadre*<sup>26</sup> background had a comfortable life; her father was a military surgeon and her mother was a haematologist. Liza's family lived and worked in a small town in central Hungary, where she got her basic education, later studying economics at a hard-to-enter university in the capital (ELTE<sup>27</sup>). She left Hungary directly after finishing her university studies, joining her Swedish husband whom she had married in Hungary, which gave her the freedom to leave the country<sup>28</sup>. They have one child, born at the end of the 1980s. I met Liza in 1986, when she was a newcomer to Sweden, when she joined the local folk dance group where I had been a member. We have kept in touch all the years since; both while working for the local Hungarian association<sup>29</sup> and privately. I have met all her family members and I have also made an interview with sociolinguistic focus with her child. Liza has been working for many years now as a book-keeper in Sweden, disrupted by periods of unemployment. She was well integrated into Swedish society, with many Swedish friends. She is dedicated to her duties and she is a hard worker. I have 'used and re-used' Liza on various occasions when I needed 'raw material' for various university studies and Liza was loyally complying. For this study, I made an interview with her in 2006, followed up by

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<sup>24</sup> [http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country\\_studies/hungary/SOCIETY.html](http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/hungary/SOCIETY.html).

<sup>25</sup> 1956-1989.

<sup>26</sup> Rooted in the military, denoting soldier, its meaning was extended to mean a select, loyal and reliable person in communist Hungary. The "cadre politics" using selection, education, promotion and evaluation, was promoted by Stalin in 1939 in London, at the 8<sup>th</sup> congress of the Communist Party. Fodor, É., (2007) *Working Difference: Women's Working Lives in Hungary and Austria, 1945-1995*. Duke University Press, Durham.

<sup>27</sup> Acronym for Eötvös Lóránt Tudomány Egyetem [Eötvös Lóránt University of Sciences]. ELTE is a popular university with a high reputation; with a surplus of students who wish, and fail, to get in. (According to Hungarian linguistic rules, family names come first, followed by the Christian name, which I apply here, too.)

<sup>28</sup> The Iron curtain still prevented free migration; however, people who married foreigners in Hungary (with an official permit) were free to move.

<sup>29</sup> Both in official (members of the board and organisers of activities) and unofficial (audience, public) capacity.

another two years later, in 2008, both in my home, witnessed by Liza's dog, lying under the table, patiently waiting for us to finish. The material from both interviews is used for my study.

**Anna**, the other core-Hungarian, was my youngest acquaintance among Hungarians in Sweden. She was born in 1964 in Budapest, where she grew up. Her socialisation can be compared to Liza's; they were both children of the said Kadarian era. She went to school in Budapest, and later she entered the same university as Liza. Anna studied History and Hungarian, but Liza and Anna never met when they were students. Anna began her professional career in Budapest after her university studies, working for 6 years before leaving Hungary. She was first state employed at a big company with international relations in Budapest, and after the system collapse in 1989, when the state-owned companies were destroyed, she became a very successful business woman, living as a *szingli*<sup>30</sup>. In 1994 she married a naturalised Hungarian exile lawyer who had been living since the 1960s in Sweden, and after two years of commuting between Hungary and Sweden, she moved to her husband in Sweden. She became a mother to twins and she never made any effort to work outside family frames. I met her in Lund at the end of the 1990s, when she was a student at Lund University (LU). We met only at the Alma Mater, never outside. We made two interviews in my home in February and March 2006; the short interval was owing to the fact that Anna was preparing for her and her family's repatriation to Hungary. She never accommodated to the Swedish environment and therefore they decided to leave Sweden, which they did in May 2006. We have met on various occasions since her repatriation to Hungary, where she has achieved contentment in life.

**Pandora** is the fifth interviewee with a particularly touching life story narrative. The narrative is an amalgam, a merging of my two taped interviews with her. I also called her Pietá<sup>31</sup>, using a synthetic and symbolic name that describes how I think of her. We made the first interview in 2006, and the next one two years later, in 2008. Pandora was born in 1950 in *Székelyföld* [*Seklerland*], Romania, in an autochthonous *Sekler Hungarian* family. Her parents were well-off peasants before WW2, but lost property and status in the Romanian political reshaping in the 50s. Her father became a night watchman and her mother worked in administration in a factory. Pandora had a younger sister and she had settled in Sweden before Pandora arrived. Pandora became a teacher at the University of Kolozsvár (Cluj in Romanian) in

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<sup>30</sup> Pronounced as [singli]; borrowed from the English *single*; a newly (after 1989) introduced colloquial expression for the concept of a heterogeneous category (class, age, ethnicity and lifestyle) of young, independent, able, well-educated single women, pursuing careers instead of investing in family life.

<sup>31</sup> Pietá, the symbol of maternal sorrow, from the Christian religion, depicting Mother Mary mourning Jesus, her son, at his crucifixion.

Transylvania, and worked as a teacher of English and Hungarian in schools with a majority of Romanian pupils. She had met her husband, an engineer of Hungarian ethnic background, in Kolozsvár, when they were both students. They married and became parents to two children. Pandora had been working for many years in Romania before she was forced to leave the country for private reasons. After a complicated migration process, in search of a cure for their ill daughter, the family ended up in Sweden at the end of the 1980s. I met the whole family at the end of the 1990s in Sweden. I made sociolinguistic interviews with their children, then two separate interviews with Pandora for the present study. The first interview was conducted in 2006, and as it was unfinished (abruptly interrupted by the arrival of Pandora's children), I met her in 2008 again, for a second interview. Both interviews took place in her distant home town, to which I travelled by train. Owing to the traumatic situation the family perceived during these years, I found that these interviews were the most difficult to conduct.

### Background of the Participants

The narrators are urban-based, middle-class, university-educated women who came to Sweden in adulthood. They share certain commonalities with me, too, such as education level, gender, and age, except for Ilona, the oldest participant. There are similarities in the stories, but also great variations among the individuals' lives. Paradoxically, one decisive difference is constituted by their common origin: they were all born in different countries with Hungarian population in the Carpathian Basin. Two of them, Anna and Liza, had majority status because they came from Hungary; whereas Ilona and Pandora originated in *Erdély* alt. *Székelyföld*<sup>32</sup>[Transylvania, alt. Seklerland, Romania], while Borka came from *Felvidék*, alt. *Felföld* [Highlands, Czechoslovakia]); so these three are referred to as *határon túli magyarok*<sup>33</sup>. They all construct and reconstruct *diversity in sameness*, i.e. different shades of *Hungarianness*, exemplifying the notion of 'translocational' with dislocations and relocations on different levels; such as exiles and re-settlers. Diversity recognises also the interconnectedness of different identities and hierarchical structures relating to gender, ethnicity, class and other social divisions at local, national, and transnational levels, with spatial, temporal and conceptual frameworks.

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<sup>32</sup> I use the same Hungarian denomination of the regions/city as the narrators.

<sup>33</sup> *Hungarians beyond the borders*, in Hungarian vernacular.

## *Socialisation Practices of the Participants*

Beside gender, sex, ethnic and cultural identifications, all of the participants in the study share the fact of being socialised in state-socialism<sup>34</sup>, in a Central European socialistic country. Institutional socialisation in state-socialism had its own features, with certain common element in all countries. One feature, political socialisation (Szabó, 1998), taught citizens the social norms, attitudes, rites, rhetoric and behaviour that they were expected to adjust to. Nevertheless, these values belonged more to a political fiction than social practices, and citizens were confronted with *double socialisation*, i.e. partly within the formal, institutional sphere, and partly within the informal sphere (family), which often led to *double speech*, with a mismatch between formal practices and the practices of everyday life. *Reality disjuncture* (Pollner M., 1987) points out that in cases when “two accounts no longer describe an identical referent” (1987, p 40) various discursive conflicts are omitted from discourses, or different versions of the world are presented. Examples are for instance the failed distribution of equal rights, and the validation of interests that occurred within informal practices (*protekció*<sup>35</sup>), equated here with a form of informal network capital<sup>36</sup>. People learned the lesson that historical, political or social ‘facts’ were not necessarily as they were presented in study books (Szabó, 1998), which was also pointed out by Liza in her narration when speaking of the Hungarian Revolt in 1956. In double socialisation citizens learned to manage, by apparent compliance with the rules of the game, to not irritate the representatives of the system and to exploit political means to their advantage<sup>37</sup>. Institutional socialisation in state socialism also guided (prescribed) discourses on historical events, also here making use of ‘double speech’, or the “förr tillfället dominanta, kanoniserade berättelserna” [at present dominant, canonised stories. Transl.kh] (Wolanik-Boström, 2005, p 25), distributed by institutions, media, books, and similar; while in private, another kind of ‘configured story versions’ co-existed. The official and sanctioned versions of historic events about the distant and heroic past were relatively static in Hungary, while ‘facts’ about the 20<sup>th</sup> century were re-made, covered up, distorted or blacked out, which might explain the *nostalgia for the past* that was revived after 1989. The adjusted

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<sup>34</sup> A social process between 1945 and 1989 (-90).

<sup>35</sup> *Protekció* [Lat. support, help, patronage, shelter] in Hungarian context; utilisation of ‘social network’. URL source: <http://idegen-szavak.hu/protekci%C3%B3>.

<sup>36</sup> Grødeland, A. & Aasland, A. (2007) *Informality and Informal Practice in East Central Europe, South East Europe and the West Balkans*, CERC Working Paper Series 3 (Melbourne, CERC). Informal capital equates to ‘an informal circle of people able and willing to help each other’.

<sup>37</sup> Joining the *MSZMP* [Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party], or the *KISZ* [Communist Youth Organisation].

rhetorical expressions were dominant in society and used by the citizens in public contexts, while privately many acknowledged versions existed that were incongruent with the official rhetoric. Having been kept quiet for years after 1945, they slowly emerged and became public during the next decades. By the 1980s, 'line speech'<sup>38</sup> was difficult to stick to, as nobody paid attention any more. In the present study, both the 'official versions' and the 'private versions' of history from the socialistic era surfaced; I have used both kinds of discourse.

### *Allocated Social Roles of the Participants*

The exclusive gender selection of the five narrators is a result of a conscious choice on my part; it was dependent on aspects of openness to *dialogism*<sup>39</sup>, *membership category* (MC; Sacks, 1992), addressing the researcher's position in relation to the interviewees (Walliman, 2006), the location, temporal aspects of migrant life, proximity in relationship between the researcher and researched, curiosity and interest in (re)telling others' experiences, and last but not least, economic considerations<sup>40</sup>. I find it necessary to address *doing gender* aspects in the study, i.e. how discourse is gendered, or how discourse serves to help constitute gendered identities for the individual, in a theorized way. The social status category of gender is itself demarcated in relation to less abstract and more directly observable traits of personal attitudes, found meaningful and relevant by a particular culture (Hungarian, here). Certain central aspects of gender are important to distinguish; such as the bipolar contrast pair of universal categories (masculine vs. feminine) rooted in dichotomous biological difference (male vs. female), in a heterosexual social environment (the norm in a Hungarian context). Some of the central aspects of gender provide orientation to attitudes and behaviour patterns which are recognized and accepted by the majority of the members of Hungarian culture (such as the gendered role of spouses).

The narrators of the study have assigned certain relational social roles to themselves in their storytelling which shaped the stances of their identities. Close and more distant private relations and institutional aspects of social relations were included in the narrations. On the private level, foremost were relations to family members, particularly from the past (childhood); all interlocutors referred to old and current partners and friends, in addition to 'outsiders', such as bureaucrats, co-workers,

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<sup>38</sup> 'Line speech' in Hungarian colloquial refers to a politically correct speech style (from the 1950s), adjusted to the dogmas of Marxist-Leninist ideology, later with an edge of irony. (Boda, Zs., et al. (2207) *Hatalom, köbeszéd, fejlesztéspolitika* [Power, public speech, developmental politics]. MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézete, Budapest.

<sup>39</sup> "[W]riting is a trace of dialogue with oneself (with another) and the text is "a dialogue of two discourses", Kristeva cited by Crownfield (1992: 38).

<sup>40</sup> Own, private financing.

neighbours and occasional 'helpers' and 'good strangers'. On another level, the women expressed their belonging to a specific category of "ethnic group" and value system, referred to as *Hungarianness*. The women expressed evaluative and judgmental views on both themselves and others. They revealed their views on explicit and implicit norms and values; presenting moral stances by confirming, or rejecting, generally held positions. Through the presentations of these evaluations, we can gain insight into the values and beliefs of the specific individuals - and also group - providing "cultural reading" of stories (Polányi, in de Fina, 2003). De Fina suggests different levels created for the meanings expressing identity in stories, with the negotiation of personal and social roles, such as group membership and adherence to values, beliefs, and behaviours, encompassed in the narrated.



## 2. Theoretical concepts

### Narratives, Narrations, Discourse, Life Story

*Narrative* is a fundamental structure and quality of both personal and social experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 1989). I use a minimalist definition: *narration*, interchangeably used with *story*, is generally conceived as accounts of events, with the involvement of some temporal and/or causal coherence, linked to narrative thinking, expressing basic human experiences, both unconsciously and consciously restored, retold and relived through processes of reflection. Readers interpret events in life by narrative forms; i.e. in series of meaningfully (metaphorically, metonymically, thematically) related events, which they find significant, and in categories in order to arrive at the meaning of those.

Narrative theories, along with narrative approach, are constructivist, with wide applicability in various research fields. One field relevant to our study is historiography, using narrative approach<sup>41</sup>: recounting events in terms of their inherent interrelations in the light of an existing legal and moral order, with the properties of a narrative. The *reality* of these events does not reflect the fact of their occurrence; it rather depends instead on how they are remembered and how they fit into a chronologically ordered sequence. The narrated stories (Lat. *fabula*, or Fr. *histoire*) of the present study, adjusted to an external audience<sup>42</sup>, are not from the beginning temporally ordered and the major organizing of the narratives (Ru. *sjuzet*, or Fr. *discours*) was done by me, striving for wholeness and cohesion<sup>43</sup>; the latter used as the organising principle.

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<sup>41</sup> White, H. (1981), *The value of narrativity in the representation of reality*. In: Mitchell, W.J.T. (ed.), *On narrative*. University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1-23.

<sup>42</sup> *Reliable narrators* demonstrate a firm view and knowledge of what they are talking about, giving the impression they are keeping a distance from the told storylines.

<sup>43</sup> My role was to give the narrators space and agency to tell their stories in their own way with a 'proper ending'. Riessman, K. (See: Manuscript: *Analysis of Personal Narrative*: to be presented in a book, 2001.) After having heard the detailed story, I joined the fragmented story details into a whole.



*Narration* is seen as the process of telling – the temporary ordering - of the story. *Discourse* has a wide applicability: it can be an utterance with two words, or an expression of complex social meanings. In social sciences discourse is often used for verbal reports of people, which is the application here, as well. As human experiences that can be told are endless, and as my study is not, I shall only consider themes that are common in the narrated stories; such as childhood experiences and migration. Narrative is one of the privileged forms used by humans to elaborate experience, serving as a “window into the analysis of human communities and individuals” (De Fina, 2003:6.) in diverse fields.

*Life story*, interchangeably used with *biographic narrative*, is simply an individual’s personal account of past and present experiences and events that concern the person and which she finds relevant to speak about for the occasion. While personal narrative is understood as a “written account of a person’s life based on spoken conversations and interviews” (Titon, 1980: 283), the *biographic narrative* approach can be at times particularly suitable for research purposes as it is holistic and it centres itself midway between social structure and the individual as a social actor. It has been applied in research for investigating, for example relations between *truth, knowledge, language* and *research*, which are questions in various disciplines, such as in psychology and philosophy (Bruner, 1986, 1990), in cognition (Gergen, 1992; Gergen and Giddens, 1998), and in postmodernism (Alasuutari, 1997; Howard, 1991; Mitchell, 1981; Polkinghorne, 1988; Sarbin, 1986; Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

People have always told stories, while analysing them in current narrative research originates from the more or less poststructuralist tradition: from Russian formalism at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century (Jakobson, Jakubinsky, Bakunin, Bakhtin) via French structuralism (Barthes, 1977; Genette, 1979; Todorov, 1990; Foucault, 1972; Lyotard, 1984); psycho-analytics (Lacan, 1977); deconstructionism (Derrida, 1977); research with social constructionism approach (Edwards and Potter, 1992<sup>44</sup>; Haraway, 1988<sup>45</sup>; Burr, 1995); cultural studies and feminist research (Harding 1991<sup>46</sup>; Corrin, 1992, 1994; Passerini et al., 2007; Andrews et al., 2008), to name but a few. Sometimes convergence is made between the poststructuralist tradition and contemporary research tradition based on the so-called humanist tradition in social

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<sup>44</sup> Edwards, D. and Potter, J. (1992), *Discursive Psychology*, Sage, London.

<sup>45</sup> Haraway, D. (1988), Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective. *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (Fall 1988) pp. 575 - 599.

<sup>46</sup> Harding, S. (1991), Whose knowledge? Whose Science? Thinking from Women’s Lives. Cornell University Press.

sciences<sup>47</sup>, with holistic, person-centred approaches, involving case studies, biographies and life histories (Bertaux, 1981; Bruner, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988). I found two different studies on women particularly stimulating: Bateson's study exploring women's creative potential in living complex lives with constantly changing conditions today (Bateson, 1989), and Ming Fang He's study on women thrown into a new culture, experiencing multi-cultures, transformations, adaptations by learning rules, mixing and melding, but not becoming what others wish them to become; "[a]s always we are, and become *people in between*" (cursive by me) (He, 2003: p XI).

## Truth, Knowledge and Language

The study does not relate to the idea of 'universal truth'; however, the existence of *truths* as created, similar to identities, reflecting the self, is accepted, along with "narrative rationality"<sup>48</sup> (Fischer, 1987), involving "narrative probability", i.e. coherence integrity and "narrative fidelity", i.e. credibility, or "good reasons" (ibid.), as presented in actual life stories. Knowledge gathered that way is treated as adequate and the adequacy of the analysis is measured in terms of the researcher's capability to account for how a subject's definitions are produced, while the subject's knowledge is not seen as sufficient for validation of data. The present study treats the narrated story segments (plots) conveying and reflecting the state of mind of the individual in the interview situation as *true*. *Truth* is not expected to correspond to reality, as people are free to make up stories about their lives. Bruner argues, quoting James (1990: 25), that truth is "what is good in the way of belief", or "the truth is what a teller says" (Kohler-Riessman, 1993:21). The study accepts stories as true, because tellers choose to tell them and I/we choose to believe in them. Arguably, both listeners and tellers make choices in what to believe or not to believe. Gubrium's suggestion for deciding "the relative truth value of variably performed accounts" (2009: 83) is to integrate the interview into the investigation, hence gaining an important additional criterion to the "correspondence to the real world for evaluating the truthfulness of accounts" (ibid.). He also points out that meanings in storytelling are sometimes prompted by someone other than the storyteller (ibid.). The listener at an interview can redirect

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<sup>47</sup> Lowell Stone, B., Teaching Sociology in the Humanist Tradition. *Teaching Sociology*, 1988, Vol. 16 (April: 151-159). Containing 1. affinity for the literature and critical style of the humanities; 2. concern for humans as conscious and autonomous actors; 3. "value-committed" orientation; and 4. wariness of positivism.

<sup>48</sup> Fisher, W. R. (1987). *Technical Logic, Rhetorical Logic, and Narrative Rationality*. Argumentation (pp. 3 - 21). D. Reidel Publishing Company.

foci of storytelling beyond the linkages of plotlines (storylines) by asking questions, concentrating on issues that widen the scheme of the narrated storyline. Bartlett expresses his view by arguing that the individual has “an overmastering tendency simply to get a general impression of the whole; and on the basis of this he constructs the probable detail” (1932: 206).

I wish to note, that the expediency of objectivity and subjectivity in narrative analysis has not been something to discuss within the scope of the study; as well as that *objectivity* was not required from the tellers. I have used “human agency and interpretations” (Riessman, 1993: 5) in my inquiry, not avoiding the “deeply suspected subjectivity” (ibid.) often denounced by previous research expectations based on the objectives of objectivity. The narratives<sup>49</sup> of lives that I have recognised in the interviews turned out to be a source of unexpected knowledge and information that was hard to neglect.

*Language* contributes to the presentation of the self, to the construction of identity, as “[w]e act to fulfil what we say” (Harré and Stearns, 1995), suggesting a performative function of language. Language has a prominent role in the study, also because the common native language for all parts is Hungarian and the presentation is in English. Sharing a native language, being a *cultural insider*<sup>50</sup> (in contrast to the view that “traditional notions of scientifically sound” research can be conducted more objectively with non-insider researchers (Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S., 2000), helped me to treat the interview context as part of the study. I addressed *Membership Category Analysis*, alt. *Category Entitlement* (Andrews, 2009), discussed below that helped me to fill in and interpret relevant features on rare occasions, ‘knowing’ similar situations in the past. Some examples for their use were, for example, when ‘cultural stereotypes’<sup>51</sup> were used by the tellers, or when the storyline was wanting in details for comprehension. The familiarity in the heard has motivated me in my work and helped me in the interpretations of certain narrated features for outsiders who are unfamiliar with the specific cultural stereotypes. The capacity of this kind of *ethnographic knowing* has both positive and negative aspects; cultural stereotypes help

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<sup>49</sup> The series of (metaphorically, metonymically, thematically) meaningfully related events that the reader finds significant.

<sup>50</sup> The researcher doing ‘insider research’ is directly involved in or connected to the research setting (Robson, C., 2002. *Real World Research: A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers). ‘Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research’ in Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, 2nd edn, London: Sage Publications.

<sup>51</sup> Etymology of *stereotype* (Lippman, W., 1922), a compound word from Greek: *stereos* meaning hard, stiff, rigid; *typos* meaning form, template.

in familiar situations, while it might exclude outsiders who cannot recognise – or interpret and respond to – certain situations.

I venture to employ as a cultural insider, for example, the Hungarian-specific quasi-philosophical term *finitizmus*<sup>52</sup> [finitism] (Prohászka, (1936) 2008) in the study. This theory from the interwar period suggests the somewhat essentialist claim of Hungarian characteristics; attempting to capture certain character qualities that make Hungarians either ‘Refugees’ or ‘Exiles’<sup>53</sup>, embodying passivity and endurance. The concept of finitism has been controversial (Dow, 2002); nonetheless, without further discussing its correctness or incorrectness, I use it to interpret some of the narrators’ answers to certain social situations; e.g. the demonstrated patience and resolution in the face of discrimination. Finitism is seen as a kind of cultural stereotype, reproduced from one generation to another, offering a clue to a person’s resignation<sup>54</sup> to facts of life; accepting that things are as they are, and cannot be any other way.

## Hushed-up Stories, Layers of Silences and Hiatus

Fruzsina Skrabski, the Hungarian film director, has been lately processing silenced, repressed, or hushed-up stories from state-socialism, digging up “horrible things, that everybody knew”<sup>55</sup>, but which people were “not permitted to talk about until 1990” (ibid.). Skrabski’s confrontational and revealing documentary films have a strong impact on people in different ways, provoking offenders to strong reactions of outrage, protests and demands for prohibition<sup>56</sup>, but also influencing private and official opinion for the hushed-up subjects to be presented and discussed in the open. I found her latest documentary, *Hushed-up ignominy* released in the autumn of 2013, particularly strong and engaging; she got hold of silenced taboos, such as rapes committed by the Soviet soldiers in Hungary prior to and after the Liberation in 1945. Skrabski was determined to finish her project, which was a tricky undertaking,

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<sup>52</sup> “Ez van, ezt kell szeretni” [‘this is what you have, this is what you have to like’]; a frequently used Hungarian proverb in cases when there is nothing an individual can do. Not to be taken for fatalism.

<sup>53</sup> The original Hungarian substantive in the essay is *bújdosó*, lacking exact translation; implying being in hiding.

<sup>54</sup> Revoked in cases of extreme threat of loss of liberty (see Hungary 1956, and Temesvár/Temesoara 1989).

<sup>55</sup> Interview with F. Skrabski in MNO, September, 2013. Segments were translated by kh.

<sup>56</sup> *Bűn és büntetlenség* [Sin and Sinlessness] about Béla Biszku, “the stone-hard fist of the soft dictatorship” [puha diktatúra kőkemény ökle]; communist revisionist, Minister of Interior 1957–1961, the ideologue and executor of retaliation after the Uprising in 1956.

as she could not find women volunteers<sup>57</sup> to speak of their traumatic experiences. Only indirect witnesses were willing to recount the stories of others (of family members, such as mothers and daughters), subjected to the deeds. Also these indirect witnesses were highly affected by the memories.

At a less great extent, I have encountered avoidance of discussion about certain sensitive details in the narrators' lives, which I had hoped for to be told. Such subjects were, for example, political affiliation or family history. The initially untold details were both revealing and concealing when they surfaced; the initially 'kidnapped', mutilated and hushed-up stories, were actually sometimes more telling when finally spoken of, than the openly told parts. Both in Liza's and Pandora's storytelling there were details that were 'discovered' by them in the course of the narration. One *hushed-up* story detail, if spoken of, would have provided added information to demonstrate the extent of Pandora's anxiety and efforts to keep a promise and aid her family in a desperate situation in Romania<sup>58</sup>. Also, Ilona left out details about her cultural activities, which were rather central to her life in exile.

*Elhallgatott történetek* [hushed up stories] shall not be perceived as non-existent stories; they exist, but they are covert. The language of *hushed-up stories* might be partly a reaction to or an effect of non-dialogic communication internalised in state-socialism (in Hungary and other countries with a similar system), partly the result of non-communicability of taboos, such as *rape* or the *post-Trianon* experiences of Hungarians, which made regeneration impossible. I use the accumulative term *hushed-up stories* for stories that are known only to some, affecting life courses, acting under the surface, hiding shame, embarrassment, ignorance or trauma, and similar, and that are not revealed for reasons understood only by the owner of the story. *Silence* in the present study is not understood as merely a non-statement; it may infer other kinds of communication, for example *non-verbal expressions* (Denzin N. a., 1998). In this sense silence is not semantically *void*; "it is infused with narrative strategies that carry ideologies and reveal unstated assumptions" (Schlant, 1999); see also Pollner's *mundane reasoning* (discussed further in Membership Category and Category Entitlement).

Grasping the silenced details of stories puts demands of awareness on the researcher, as much depends on how the receiver of the message (listener, researcher) arrives at the meaning of silence in the specific, interview context (i.e. to know what the allegation would have been, had the interviewee spoken), challenging the listener to interpret silence with socio-psychological and pragmatic components. In analogue to

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<sup>57</sup> URL source: [www.mno.hu](http://www.mno.hu).

<sup>58</sup> I was given the information by her husband, when he drove me back to the station.

the *spiral of silence* (Noelle-Neumann, 1974), I apply the term *layers of silences* in my study to refer to life story details that surface after having been dug for in the course of the interviews. *Layers of silences* were built horizontally (interplay between the interviewer and interviewee) to one another and vertically (in family histories). They remained covert to the spontaneous storytelling; hiding fragmentary and incomplete discourses under several layers of silences. I sort the void reactions to the political and social systems in the homelands and in Sweden under this category. Certain details from family history have also been buried under *layers of silences*, discernible for cultural insiders; such as the *kulák* categorisation. To delve beneath the silence, sometimes by intuition, sometimes hoping for serendipity, or even by knowing facts about the individual, I asked explicit questions, for example about *kulák* categorisations<sup>59</sup>. In certain cases the silences took the form of *hiatus*<sup>60</sup>, such as about the Uprising in 1956 or questions of gender aspects and ethnic harassment; it was unclear if silence was constrained just for the interview, or owing to general lack of knowledge, or alternatively to other reasons.

## Dialogic narratives

To shed light on the connection between the historical context, language and literature, Bakhtin launched the language philosophical term *dialogic*, for expressing the creation of *another*, and relating to that *other* in the discourse. This applies for the interviewees' communication through their stories and the communication between the participants in the interviews. I find that the narrations in the present study sometimes lack an overt dialogic dimension in relation to history or social changes, whereas *hushed-up*, *muted*, or *silenced* stories give the potency of *dialogic* getting lost in the narrations. A narrative study may be woven around theoretical issues, either implicitly or loosely (Ronai, 1999; Dent, 2002), while the theoretical contribution revolves around the writer's intimate knowledge of the subject matter and its compound articulation through the text. The theoretical perspectives and personal involvement might be explicitly expressed (Ellis, 1997); sometimes also intertwined within a dialogue in the text (Gurevitch, 2000). When theoretical and personal

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<sup>59</sup> Zs. Hantó: *Kulákok. Megkülönböztetés, megtörés, megsemmisítés* [*Kuláks. Discriminating, Breaking, Distructing* (Bold by me.)] Rubicononline; URL source:

[http://www.rubicon.hu/megrendelheto/termek\\_cikkek/hanto\\_zsuzsa\\_kulakok\\_megkulonboztetes\\_megtores\\_megsemmisites/1/1/0#6](http://www.rubicon.hu/megrendelheto/termek_cikkek/hanto_zsuzsa_kulakok_megkulonboztetes_megtores_megsemmisites/1/1/0#6)

<sup>60</sup> Borrowing from, among others, Hungarian phonology; a short gap, alt. interruption in space, time or continuity.

perspectives have been in dialogue with each other in the narrations, it allowed me to bring in my personal, lived experiences, voicing my relationship with my research, with the processes and the interviewees within.

## Membership Category and Category Entitlement

*Membership Categorization Analysis* (MCA) (Sacks H., 1992, pp: 40 - 41) has aided my analysis work, because “analysts are also members and bring to bear their common-sense knowledge in the process of analysis” (Stokoe E.S., 2001). Individuals store their knowledge about society in *inference rich* and *duplicatively organised* (Stokoe, 2004: 1)<sup>61</sup> categories that sit together in *Standardised Relational Pairs* (Sacks) (e. g. husband-wife, parent-child). They are engaged in a set of category-bound activities to be found in a culture, with *rights and obligations* that are expected to be performed within a category or which are associated with the category in question (e.g. daughter, wife, mother). They provide a frame of reference within which the actions and activities of a person can be interpreted. In this sense MCA “is a perfect method for exploring the constitutive role of interaction” (Mäkitalo, 2002).

To avoid making one-to-one correspondence between selves, identities and stories, it is important to establish early in the process of analysis the right of the participants in an interview situation to speak on the topics being discussed, claiming *category entitlement* (Potter, 1996); i.e. to have the authority to speak, “by for instance establishing [...] membership of a particular group that has expert knowledge or privileged experience about the topic being discussed” (Andrews, 2008: 70). *Category entitlement* allows people to speak of matters without having to explain the source of their knowledge. This has helped me to establish membership in the group I interviewed, securing a positive atmosphere, as well as trust during the interviews. Trust might sometimes appear as a problematic issue among Hungarians of different backgrounds, since feelings of inferiority or mistrust harboured by ‘transborder minority Hungarians’ against other Hungarians<sup>62</sup> have been known – as demonstrated

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<sup>61</sup> URL source: [http://www.crisaps.org/newsletter/backissue/stokoe\\_back.pdf](http://www.crisaps.org/newsletter/backissue/stokoe_back.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> Distrust has been a common experience both between Hungarians and members of the neighbouring nations (R. Smoke (1996), *Perceptions of security: public opinion and expert assessments in Europe's New Democracies*, Manchester UP), and towards Hungarians (dissidents) who fled Hungary after 1956. (M.Baráth, *Emigráció - Tiltott határátlépés* [Emigration – Forbidden bordercrossing] in: *Betekintő*. 2011/3. Sz.).

also by Borka in her storytelling – which might constrain open speech<sup>63</sup>. Mistrust can invade also mutually agreed interviews; feelings of sympathy or threat might challenge the interviews. To create trust, one might let people talk freely, and listen with respect and goodwill for the narrator and the narrated. In socio-cultural contexts (Andrews, 2008) goodwill can be usefully achieved by entering the narrations. I have entered the narration in Pandora's case, for example when she talked of her experiences with Securitate<sup>64</sup> in Romania. I addressed her story by talking of similar experiences with the deeds of its infamous Hungarian counterpart (ÁVH<sup>65</sup>). I feel that *category entitlement* (sometimes similar to common knowledge), or “background expectancies, models and ideas” (Pollner, 1996: 4, quoting Garfinkel<sup>66</sup>, 1965) (i.e. normalising accounts into ‘what everybody knows’), has helped me with my work. Sometimes narrative details made me readjust my knowledge about certain things that I had a firm knowledge of; for instance in the case of Liza, and her interest in the Dance House Movement<sup>67</sup>, which I had thought of as a site of dissidence. But Liza was not a dissident, merely genuinely interested in dancing. My preconception had to be adjusted accordingly.

I wish to point out that my knowledge of the workings of the social systems in two of the relevant countries (Romania and Czechoslovakia) is far from comprehensive; nonetheless, I have gathered information about the basic social and political developments in the said countries in various ways. I have met people from there, and met Hungarians who visited the countries; I have also been watching television programmes from Romania<sup>68</sup>; and my studies in Sweden<sup>69</sup> have contributed to form an image of the systems. I have also used *category entitlement* when I was practically sure about things. Relying on *mundane reasoning* (Pollner, 1997), I have made fundamental, empirical assumptions about how people speak and behave when discussing features of the world, supposing that everyone has access to the same underlying reality and anyone placed in the same position would see the same thing

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<sup>63</sup> The attitude is partly based on minorities' assumption that the language spoken by them is 'second rate', with a lower status than normative, standard Hungarian (used in Hungary). See also: [http://www.gecse.eu/110502\\_Aspektus.htm](http://www.gecse.eu/110502_Aspektus.htm).

<sup>64</sup> Secret police in socialist Romania.

<sup>65</sup> Államvédelmi Hadsereg [Army of State Security]; secret police in Hungary (1948-56).

<sup>66</sup> Garfinkel, H. (1967) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

<sup>67</sup> I would prefer to use Dance House Club Activities, but Movement is the official denomination.

<sup>68</sup> During the 1960s, 1970s and, somewhat more sporadically, in the 1980s, it was particularly educational to be able to see everyday broadcasting.

<sup>69</sup> Central- and East-European studies and Political sciences at Lund University have been rewarding in this respect.



(‘the way things just are’). Pollner sees this as a way of reasoning; a specific way of understanding things, in the centre of people’s beliefs of reality, self and others.

## Context and Content

Context is used with two references in the study: first as a frame for the narrations (interview situations) and second, for the (political and historical) background of the narrators. I hold the view that context has a crucial influence on the structure and processing of the talk and text (van Dijk). Despite the lack of sophisticated theories and analytic models dealing with the relationship between context and text, still, many scholars have analysed context and text relations, such as discourse analysts, psychologists, sociolinguists, and sociologists, all with their own foci<sup>70</sup> on knowledge, gender, age, and reader types.

Referring to Giles & Coupland (1991) and other researchers’ theories on context, van Dijk argues that “contexts do not directly influence discourse or language use at all”<sup>71</sup>; rather, it is the “subjective interpretation of the context by discourse participants that constrains discourse production, structuration, and understanding”. That is to say that in a given social interaction (e.g. an interview); the participants actively and continuously construct mental representations of solely those properties of the given situation that are *relevant* to them in the given situation. Certain narrative details, such as the common ground the participants share, might be therefore taken into consideration.

## Narrated Realities in the Study

The narrators focused on incidents of experience, revealing identity traits, changes and development along the ‘path of life’, stopping at halts on the way, with their own evaluative assessments and moral landscapes. The narratives were not always linear with appropriate plotlines; but linearity cannot be expected in life story narratives, as life does not advance like a streetcar on a rail gliding towards an end station. It is

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<sup>70</sup> Different aspects of context are analysed by Auer & Di Luzio, 1992; Gumperz, 1982; Giles & Coupland, 1991; Furnham & Argyle, 1981; Forgas, 1979, 1985; among others.

<sup>71</sup> van Dijk, T.A., Context models of discourse processing. Pdf-document. On website of van Dijk, URL source:  
<http://www.discourses.org/OldArticles/Context%20models%20in%20discourse%20processing.pdf>.

rather a sphere, consisting of a sludgy mass and a lot of (big story) bubbles, each containing specific, independent, or loosely linked, even dormant, sub-stories (small stories), in best cases with links in-between; similar to Riessman's 'bounded' and 'unbounded narratives'<sup>72</sup>. The small *bubble-stories* build up a whole that we might call *life*; notwithstanding that life is not merely the sum of bubble-stories: sludge is an important ingredient as context. For illustration, I take a sub-story of Liza, who was describing her participation in a socialist construction camp. The story detail had no particular function in the plotline of her narration; it was a bubble that happened to pop up when she remembered some other detail. However, it still contributed to the widening of the readers' comprehension of the functioning of the *socialist youth*. The narrators arranged their life experiences in various similar small stories, along with master narratives depicting major life turning points or experiences. They spoke about realities influencing their lives in the last years, which turned my attention to examine to what extent their narratives can be seen as migrant narratives. Another kind of narrative that was emerging in the study was trauma narrative, which I found important to investigate.

## Migration narratives

Migration narratives often include themes of relocation and resettlement, speaking of motives, reasons, methods, fears, hopes, plans and imagination of the future life in a new place, but they are in fact about more complex issues than just the migration process. They also talk of losses, oppression, power, dreams, identity, work, attitudes, sentiments, emotions, disappointments, tradition(s), culture(s), religion(s), colonialism, and so on. It lies outside the margins of this study to engage in a discussion about the great variety of migration narrations. Instead, focus lies on those of the exiles in question, whose collected stories include certain aspects of immigrant narratives, speaking of discrimination, lack of power, appreciation, and opportunities for self-expression; but migration is not an overriding theme for them. The present narratives, which are not unique for the participants, are not so much about geographical re-locations, but rather about complex re-locations of the mind and the re-booting Migrant narratives provide a culturally comprehensible form for autobiographers and biographers to speak about their lives. They call attention, in a literary form, to the ways in which "alien" and "migrant" are shifting, and to socially constructed categories. There are migration narratives that relay an individualized

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<sup>72</sup> Riessman., C., Analysis of Personal narratives. (1990: 102).

story of social mobility, such as the *Bildungsroman*<sup>73</sup>, while others resist the individualistic route of the genre; challenging the terms by which the nation state defines “citizen” and “other”. Some autobiographical works aim to portray the individual’s functions in a moving way to theorise the hurt of immigration and displacement<sup>74</sup>. The narratives in my study are rather biographies, than autobiographies; still, the collaboration and the interpretations make them *as-told autobiographies*, i.e. the narrators are their own ethnographers and the researcher serves as a channel, conveying the autobiographic narrations to a wider public. The present study engages with the emergence of new kinds of subjectivities that are part of Europe today. It deals with questions of identifications and mobility and their relationships; assuming ‘migrants’ to be active agents of their lives, as well as being subjected to social, legal and political regulations. One aim of the study is to investigate if the narratives of the five women might be recognised as ‘migrant narratives’, or if they display other category features.

## Master narratives

The concept of *master narrative* that I use for the study does not imply a kind of ‘stock story’, or grand narrative, repeatedly told in order to legitimate or to maintain power relations between a dominant culture and a less dominant culture. I read them rather as *counter-narratives* (Bamberg, 2002), not with the intent of proving some social facts (for instance, the existence of forms of discrimination), but rather I see them as attempts to disrupt and deconstruct the social reproduction of ‘master narratives’ that perpetuate discrimination. My study follows Bamberg’s theoretical suggestions (Bamberg, 2002), making a distinction between *master narratives* and *counter narratives*; suggesting that *master narratives* delineate the position of the narrator in relation to the story, against which courses of events can be plotted. *Master narratives* are seen as culturally accepted frames, with underlying suggestions of known things, such as what it is “to be a mother” or “to be discriminated against”. *Master narratives* can also be fragmented, non-conclusive or inconsistent (ibid.).

To counter master narratives, one has to appeal to other, contradictory, frames, for instance de-idealised motherhood or disregarded minority subjugation. The

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<sup>73</sup> Good example is Andrew S. Grove’s *A Memoir. Swimming Across* (2001).

<sup>74</sup> See the work of Judith Ortiz Cofer, *Silent Dancing: A Partial Remembrance of a Puerto Rican Childhood* (1990), or the autobiographical work of Shirley Geok-Lin Lim, *Among the White Moon Faces* (The Feminist Press, 1996).

individual's experiences should be presented along with those frames; stressing personal experiences, expressing non-universal ideologies, life views and identities, filled with information that only the individual has access to. *Counter narratives* also give the space to accept contradictions and inconsistencies arising in the narrations, seeing them as proofs of the negotiations and management of identities that the speakers apply in a covert manner. In that, the researcher's way of working with the study can find a place; the researcher can see her or his work as *counter narrative* to contrast other *master narratives* (of doctoral dissertations, or other studies). The narrators in the study do not present themselves as victims of circumstances, despite the practised *grand narratives* that speak of discriminated against minorities or migrants. The women offer resistance through agency, or rather through resourcefulness and skills.

## Trauma narratives

This particular type of narrative has not been dominant for the study; nonetheless, I find it necessary to bring up the genre, because it permeated one narrative. One encounters *trauma narratives* in extreme cases, and the reason is that (auto) biographic narratives attempting to narrate traumatic experiences (such as child abuse, death of a child, ethnic cleansing, persecution of Jews, and similar) are caught up in a paradox of tellability. *Trauma* is often described as radically unrepresentable, since it is the cause of the shattering of the self that makes language and narrative impossible. A.W. Frank argues that narrative in this context is both an ethical and an aesthetic imperative, testifying to the narrator's continuing presence in the world in spite of injury, illness, and even death (Frank, 1995). Numerous works<sup>75</sup> explore the difficulty of representing traumatic experience; authors often treat trauma as a key site for deconstruction of the common boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, the imagined and the real. To write trauma narratives is considered to be difficult, therefore authors often turn to fiction rather than stay within the boundaries of (auto)biographic narratives; thus avoiding being placed in a position where they can be scrutinized and judged by readers (and critics). Scholars studying life stories agree upon the fact that one's life story is in general burdened with tricky representational

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<sup>75</sup> Marianne Hirsch's *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997); Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1960); *Memoirs* (1995); Anette Kuhn's *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (1995); Aurora Levins Morales and Rosario Morales' *Getting Home Alive* (1986); Shirley Geok-Lin Lim's *Among the White Moon Faces* (1996).

and political choices concerning which culturally available narratives to draw upon and which general categories to affix to the final product.

Trauma narratives seem to be universal in that they present experiences in life that hinder continuity and an even flow of life, which the speakers are expected to locate and place within their life stories. Traumas seem to disrupt narrative processes first on the level of the traumatic event, and second on the more general level of the whole life story of the individual<sup>76</sup>. I was confronted with this fact in the course of the interview with Pandora, who was obviously grappling with the presentation of the traumatic experiences of the bereaved parent invading her life.

## Identity Constructs in Narratives

Scholars, particularly within psychology, argue that life story narratives “function[s] to express, confirm and validate the claimed identity” (Mishler, 1986: 243). Mishler sees identity as the accumulated arsenal of individual storytelling. Around the same time, Bruner (1986)<sup>77</sup>, explored the ‘narrative kind of knowing’ in an empiricist manner while McAdams (1985) developed a theoretical framework and a coding system for interpreting life narratives in the *personological* tradition, linking older traditions (Eriksonian) and assuming close relationships between life story and personal identity. Today focus lies rather on identity construction and functioning, than on identifying cognitivist aspects of identity. The narrative *meta-theory* has become particularly influential in self-perception and identity theory, where, based on the life story, it offers a non-essentialist solution for the unity and identity of the individual self (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Brockmeier and Carbaugh, 2001; Bruner, 1990; Freemann, 1993; Ricoeur, 1991; Spence, 1982). Polkinghorne summarises the conception of narrative as a means of identity construction: “We achieve our personal identities and self-concept through the use of the narrative configuration, and make our existence into a whole by understanding it as an expression of a single unfolding and developing story. We are in the middle of our stories and cannot be sure how they will end; we constantly have to revise the plot as new events are added to our lives...” (Polkinghorne, *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*, 1988: 150).

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<sup>76</sup> Tuval-Mashiach, R., Freedman, S., Bargai, N., Boker, R., Hadar, H., Y. Shalev, A., (eds). *Coping with Trauma: Narrative and Cognitive Perspectives*. *Psychiatry* 67(3) Fall 2004.

<sup>77</sup> Bruner, J., (1986) *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*. Harvard UP.

*Narrative identities* combine Mead's social-psychological, temporal and intersubjective nature of identity<sup>78</sup> (stating that the self is not a given; it is rather created in a process by social experience and activities) and Ricoeur's philosophical sense of narrative identity<sup>79</sup> (a "double gaze"<sup>80</sup>, with the interplay between *sameness* (social identity) and *selfhood* (not reducible to mere social identity) (Ricoeur 1986 [1992])<sup>81</sup>), wherein the biographic narrator "appears both as a reader and the writer of her/his own life" (Ricoeur, 1987: 246). The present study does not see life story as "biographical illusion"<sup>82</sup>, as suggested by Bourdieu; instead I apply the view that narrative identity serves as a mediator between the two aspects of personal identity suggested by Ricoeur, providing a subjective sense of self-coherence by the employment of life experiences and events over time in one's life, affecting the individual's permanence in time, by *character* and the *kept word*, significant for our life stories, too.

Studies of identity formation contribute to our understanding of social agency, with the returning problem of a perhaps unintentional tendency to conflate identities with what can often "slide into fixed 'essentialist' (pre-political) singular categories (such as race, sex, or gender) - a direction that has characterized a number of feminist theories in their efforts to restore the previously marginalized female other" (Somers, 1994: 605)<sup>83</sup>. Somers argues that as a way to avoid the placing of identity into a misleading category, one should incorporate destabilising dimensions, such as time, space and relationality, into identity, using an ontological approach, engaging in historically and empirically based research "into social action and social agency that is at once

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<sup>78</sup> Mead, G., *Mind, Self and Society*. (1934) Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>79</sup> Ricoeur, P., 1987: p.246, *Time and Narrative III*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

<sup>80</sup> Ricoeur, P., *Oneself as Another*, 1986: 115.

<sup>81</sup> In Ricoeur's theory, narrative personal identity contains two parts: *idem*-identity (sameness) presuming permanence in time (contrasting the changing), reducible to social identity (Bourdieu's habitus); and *ipse* identity (selfhood), allowing other modalities of non-identical identities, consisting of aspects of the individual identity not reducible to mere social identity. (*Oneself as Another*, 1986; trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>82</sup> Bourdieu speaks in "*The Biographical Illusion*" about life story narrating as an 'artificial creation of meaning' by false conclusions about life with a beginning, middle, ending and purposes; propagating for a "practical identity" created by habitus, i.e. systems of durable "dispositions", as the only possible identity.

<sup>83</sup> Somers, M. (1994), *The narrative constitution of identity: A relational and network approach*. For exemplifying the reinterpretations of female difference into a gender identity, Somers refers to: Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978); Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1987).

temporal, relational, and cultural, as well as institutional, material, and macro-structural” (ibid.).

Many new approaches (among them, feminist movements) towards identity formation appreciate multiculturalism, difference and equality. Some also attempt to restore previously devaluated differences (e.g. female care-taking, and “being-in-relationships”, particularly between mothers and their children)<sup>84</sup>. This is a factor in my study, too, as the recounts are relational in various contexts. ‘Identity’, without exhaustive explanations, is a term interchangeably used with identification, while acknowledging that it is not an unproblematic term. There is indeed a pile of literature (from psychology, sociology, and education to political sciences) trying to deal with defining identity and identifications, and it seems that questions of ‘identity’ have been persistent in their prevalence. To research identity, one has to remember that identities reflect the complex nature of societies and generate reasonable comprehension for processes that cannot be explained by examining the purely rationally driven pursuit of interests.

The present study does not treat identity as a primordial category, rather as a result of individual or collective action. People, the narrators included, create identities by their ‘accumulated’ stories, in which they give expression to particular individual, personal, political, social and cultural identifications. Life story tellers do not present the elements of their lives as explicit traits of their personal identity; nonetheless, the battery of stories makes us recognise the individual. Narrative identity is thus about a kind of psychological unity: it is the individual’s internalised, progressing and integrative story of the self... It is not a random kind, as the experiences of the individual over time are not only passively unified in a story. Instead, the person actively puts them together, weaving experiences together, giving them coherence and intelligibility that the experiences would otherwise not have<sup>85</sup>. Thus, every event and experience of the individual becomes the “arsenal of accumulated stories”, gaining meaning by being part of a larger story that relates them to one another within the context of one life (Schechtman, 1996). As the interview context is one of the pieces in the arsenal of stories, it is an active part of the bigger story – the social and personal life story of the individual.

Drawing upon the above approaches, the study regards personal narrative identity as a situated, pragmatic, and interactive activity drawing on culturally transmitted

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<sup>84</sup> Miller, J. (1999), *The construction of anger in women and men*. Work in Progress No. 83. 01. Wellesley, MA: Stone Center Working Papers Series.

<sup>85</sup> Shoemaker, David, “Personal Identity and Ethics”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL [source=](http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/identity-ethics/)  
<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2012/entries/identity-ethics/>.

narrative conventions, which are performed within the research context. Narrative identity is created in a dialogical relationship with stories of (shared or unshared) past events and thoughts, including also certain conserved personal character traits, which the individual draws upon in order to support and legitimise her or his own version of self, experiences and events. Identities are seen as fluid, constructed both externally and internally; changing and being changed, at any time and place to suit given contexts, either for excluding or including purposes (Stier, 2004). Life story narratives in the present study provide various approaches to present a version of what the life of exiles can be like. Regarding subjectivity development in exile (Laliotou in Passerini, 2007), the narrators dismiss the rigid category of migrant; reference to personal dissidence (a will to 'move', Passerini et al., 2007), often expected in stories of refugees from behind the Iron Curtain (particularly prior to 1989) (ibid.), was not a dominating theme in their narrations.

## Identities and Identifications of the Participants

The five biographies represent different life story patterns of college-educated, professional women in different stages of their lives. They offer different discursive strategies of self-representation, with a mismatch between their narrated self-assessment and narrated achieved social valuation of their selves. As the women are more or less integrated into the specific social context, the values and ideologies of this context intrude interdiscursively (intertextually) into their performances. In line with the baseline of the study, the interlocutors were basically free to choose how they wanted to present themselves through storytelling. Thus, they created, in interaction over time and through narrations, the identities and identifications they wished to be known for. Through articulating and constructing a variety of meanings they tied themselves to members of society (individuals and groups). When the narrators go beyond the manifestations to incorporate their multiple ties to a community, they negotiate understandings of private and social relationships with other people within society. In my observations, local individual performance of the life story and the narrated identity reflect and presuppose more general cultural, professional and structural patterns.

The women in the study identify with the ethnical and cultural concept of *Hungarian*. To be Hungarian seems to be an indefinite category, when looked up in dictionaries. The Free Online Dictionary<sup>86</sup> defines Hungarian as: "1. A native or

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Hungarian>.



inhabitant of Hungary. 2. (Social Science / Peoples) a native, inhabitant, or citizen of Hungary”, and then in third place it says: “3. (Social Science / Peoples) a Hungarian-speaking person who is not a citizen of Hungary”. These definitions are inadequate for Hungarians. The Oxford Dictionary<sup>87</sup> shows more flexibility, defining Hungarian as “a native or inhabitant of Hungary, or a person of Hungarian descent”, which is still a loose and inexact definition, confirming the flexibility and ambiguousness of the term *identity*. Identity has been used to address the philosophical dilemma of “permanence, amidst manifest change and unity, amidst manifest diversity” (Brubaker et al.<sup>88</sup>), also problematizing its analytical use, between “essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers, to serve well the demand of social analysis” (ibid.). Identity is always a given, also when constructed, forged, or formed, as it is always “there”, as a ‘thing’ to apply according to preference.

Hungary-born individuals have no difficulties with identification, as seen in the study as well: the two women from Hungary did not explicitly concern themselves with “ethnic” identification at all. This does not mean that they have no strong connectedness with Hungary or (all kinds of) Hungarians. Identity categories for *Hungarians beyond the borders* are less clear, depending on viewpoint. The boundaries between the different ethnic groups presented in the study (Slovakians vs. Hungarians, resp. Romanians vs. Hungarians), when regarded domestically, are sharp with regard to language, which is definitively a dividing, exclusive ethnonational category. There are certain ambiguities (multilingualism, language shift) we need to remember. The ethnic group boundary between Romanians and Hungarians in Romania can be described as porous (on account of inter-ethnic marriages, intergenerational assimilation, education, and work), and the categorical code of Hungarian in Transylvania is a constituent of social relations. In Slovakia, boundaries are maintained, often by sharp confrontations that still frequently occur between the two peoples. We can see it from the narrations of the study that *Hungarianness* and *Hungarian identity* have been in flux for a long time for a heterogeneous group of people. Romanians and Hungarians have been – and still are – “constitutive groups” (Trencsényi et al., 2001<sup>89</sup>) for one another, still not eased in academic discourse even today (ibid.). Without further discussion about the concept of identifications, my point of view is that *doing Hungarian* under these circumstances is a conditional (alt. unconditional) collective intentionality of the subjects, taking the internal point of view (Searle, 1995), in the “imposition of status-function” (ibid., p.98), with or

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<sup>87</sup> <http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/Hungarian>.

<sup>88</sup> Brubaker, R., and Cooper, F., “Beyond ‘Identity’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1 - 4.

<sup>89</sup> Trencsényi, B., Petrescu, D., Petrescu, C., Iordachi, C., and Kántor, Z., (eds.) (2001) *nation building and contested identities. Romanian & Hungarian Studies*. Regio Books – Editura Poliron.

without positive, alt. negative power, conditional or categorical, which apply in our cases, too. We shall bear in mind that Hungarianness is extended to be perceived as more than one degree beyond the 'norm' (norm seen as 'Hungarian from Hungary'). As we are more than the sum of our parts, people's identification might be random, even if their identification is constrained by the behavioural patterns of groups they find it desirable to identify with (Tabouret-Keller, 1997). Before discussing the intentional or conditional status of 'being' or 'doing' Hungarian in various locations, and taking a look at migration, I wish to investigate the unconditional collective intentionality of Hungarians in calling themselves Hungarian.

## Personal and Group Identification

Identity *per se* is a difficult concept; and identities that emerge in discourses and narratives are likewise difficult. In interactional discourse identity can present a multiplicity of meanings, creating a diversity of approaches to discourse and analytic models; mainly dialogically. Our concern is narrative identities of the individual, which are seen here as a situated, pragmatic and interactive activity, related to exogenous factors: i.e. dependency on the specific interactional situation (such as an interview) and group belonging. Social constructionist approaches (see even discursive psychology, Burr, 1995), from the 1960s on have influenced recent reflections on identity, particularly in the area of linguistics, equating the subject and the subject of language (Beneviste, 1971 [orig. 1966], cited in de Fina, 2003) where there are claims that the subject is "inscribed in language" (Derrida 2000: 91 [orig. 1972] (ibid.)) as its function, and that "subjectivity only exists as an effect of social practices" (ibid.). This is also Foucault's (1984) argument: social practices are responsible for creating specific social subjects. Postmodern notions reject the idea of identity as a single concept, suggesting the use of *identities*, or *identifications* (Jenkins, 2004) instead. They imply that identities are an ever on-going construction and process; making possible the study of fragmented and multiple voiced (dialogic, or polyphonic) discourses (Bakhtin, 1981; (Hermans, 1996) with various coexisting identities of an individual that are context-bound and constantly changing. In a given situation, identities are created, imposed, or repressed through interactions and social institutions (De Fina, 2003).

*Ethnomethodology*, researching identity as a social accomplishment, too, examines identity in its emergence within interactional circumstances (process), constituted in 'performance', and negotiated, enacted. Identity in this tradition is seen as emerging constructions, outcomes "of a rhetorical and interpretive process" (Bauman, 2000: 1) where interactants make use of a repertoire of identities that are at their disposal in the given situation, and where orderliness of social life is a product of the moment-to-

moment action of social actors (Garfinkel, 1967), When discussing identifications, the emphasis lies on the individuals' expression of the self, where the subject is social, part of social relationships. In a cross-cultural environment in particular, identity is continuously processed; it is 'in the making'. This rejects the view of a person having a stable identity, which is instead seen as "processed in categorization" (Antaki & Widdicombe, 1993), for example by an interviewee, an interviewer or an analyser.

Categories processing people's identity/identities are locally situated accommodated to the occasion, where the analyser uses specific orientations displayed in the interaction (interview situation) negotiated with the interlocutors (Schegloff, 1997; Goodwin, 1997). The above scholars argue for focusing rather on the dialogic than on the prevalent monologic in the processes of the interview situation, as well as on the co-construction and negotiation of identities as accomplishments within the interviews (McKenzie, 1997; Lucius-Hoene & Depperman, 2000). The present study sees identity as shaped and shaping collective social and discursive practices, expressing the self, being part of social relations. The individual is seen as a "social subject" even in "her solitude" (Hanks, 1990). Ricoeur suggests a 'lighter' view on identities compared to macro structuralists (de Fina, 2003), describing identities as constituted by two entities: wherein the narrated identity is an amalgam of what he calls *sameness* and *selfhood* (Ricoeur, 1986). Selfhood can be seen as the escaping, 'mystical' part of identity, corresponding to the individual's uniqueness, which cannot be reduced to the objective features of one's own character.

Categories can be created by both the narrator (e.g. an ethnic category) and the analyser (e.g. the category of exile). The interviewees create and negotiate through their storytelling the social relations between them and others, both within and outside the local interaction. They express values and beliefs in relation to characters in stories and which the narrators evaluate according to categories of their own choice, such as ethical-unethical, sufficient-insufficient; good-bad, adequate-inadequate, competent-incompetent, and by that relate identities with tolerable or intolerable behaviour. I agree with De Fina's suggestion (2003) that narratives not only 'evaluate' actions and identities, but also create and modify them. Narrators attribute images to in-groups and out-groups by pointing out similarities and differences, i.e. by social categories, prejudice and stereotypes.

## Ethnic Identification

Speaking of identities, ethnic/ethnocentric or other, in respect of diversities and samenesses in a transnational context such as ours, I wish to clarify the basic assumption of identities being constructed, both in general and for ethnic identities in particular. The latter is based on *ethnicity*, which is described as dynamic and "a

matter of degree” (Fishman, 1965). In agreement with Schöpflin, identity can be seen as a tool of reaffirmation that communities use for cultural reproduction in order to maintain and renew themselves (Schöpflin, 2000). To achieve reproduction, communities construct means (symbols, monuments, rites, stereotypes, festivals, celebrations, memorial days and similar) that members of the community accept and endorse, by this delineating themselves (in-group) from others (out-group). One major tool individuals use to define themselves, vis-à-vis the world they live in, is social categorisation – i.e. ordering the social environment by grouping persons in a manner that makes sense to the individual, who identifies with specific social groups.

Social psychology sees identity as a person’s self-image, with two components: personal and social identity, which “is the part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his or her membership in social groups” (Fishman, 1999: 141), while group (national, ethnic) identity can be constructed by *narrative group history* (see László, 2003; Liu, 2007). Ethnic identity might be treated as one component of social identity. In the self-perception of ethnic belonging, language is a central feature by which members of a group can define themselves. That is indeed a mighty tool for self-determination for the Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. They are aware of the uniqueness of their language, the power of cohesion by language within the group, the dividing line between them and out-groups, strengthened by subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, sustained by actions, thought and policies, yet, differently dependent on the environment (Liu, 2007). For in-group members, adhering to ‘ethnic identity’ by membership in a majority situation is relatively unproblematic (two interviewees of the study demonstrate this effect), but it is quite different when, owing to external circumstances, people end up in a minority situation, particularly if they encounter a variety of obstacles to normalisation of life through, for instance, integration into another society.

Examples for the latter are Ilona, Borka and Pandora, who ended up along with millions of Hungarians in alien countries due to external political and strategic decisions<sup>90</sup>. The making of physical borders created the problematic issue with ethnicity, which became socially (and politically) significant in the Carpathian Basin, assigning people different roles with criteria that have also been changing dependent on changing historical contexts. The creation of physical borders has, in our cases, strengthened the affinity for creating ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1969), defining both in-groups and out-groups. Ethnic boundaries are sometimes unstable and elusive; but they are mostly situation-bound, dependent on the social significance attributed to the variation of ethnic distinctions (language, physical characteristics, and similar), made on the basis of social categorisation or self-categorisation.

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<sup>90</sup> Schöpflin, Gy. (2003), *A modern nemzet [The modern Nation]*. Attraktor, Máriabesenyő – Gödöllő.

In certain cases, owing to the deficient regulation of the relationship between majority and minority people in a society, states might set an *ethnicisation* process into motion, which benefits the majority people of the state, and treats minorities unfavourably, for example by excluding them from participation in the “central mystery of nationhood” (Schöpflin, 2000: 426). Exclusion can naturally be both self-afflicted and forced. The cause of existing confrontations in the two neighbouring countries, Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic and Slovakia) and Romania, has been that homogeneity and total loyalty to the states could not be achieved owing to different antagonistic ethnic discourses existing simultaneously in society. People moving between cultures and nations constitute a governmental problem as they become a danger through their recalcitrance; they look across the border with their arbitrary nature and they resist the power of habit, which makes them a nuisance. The cases with Hungarian ethnic minorities have shown that this is a conflict-generating process that antagonises citizens of a state with different ethnic origins, like in both of these neighbouring countries. The cases point at the fact that acculturation and integration for the minorities has not been executed according to the initial plans of the host countries.

## Acculturation and Adjustments

In contact with members of different ethnic (cultural) groups, different acculturation strategies for minorities are at work (Berry, 1980; Berry, 1990). Acculturation is a (social and psychological) process in which members of a (ethnic, cultural) group adopt the beliefs and behaviours of another group, with the direction often from the minority towards the majority, but it can be reverse. To accommodate to a new society depends on various factors, such as value systems, developmental sequences, roles, norms, behaviour patterns, institutions and personality traits. The outcome might be total or selective, from assimilation, integration, separation (rejection) to marginalisation (de-acculturation) (ibid.).

*Assimilation* proved to be difficult, as bigger communities of minorities are resilient to such adjustments; the Hungarian ethnic groups from Romania and Slovakia are examples for this outcome. The other policy is to try to sustain the existing cultural and social ways of life by *integration*; both sides showing good-will and accepting the conditions and trying to adapt to them. Minorities might adhere to their cultural roots and still find benefits from the attitude and actions to enhance integration. In the case of *separation*, the minorities adhere to their cultural roots, distance themselves from the majority society and live their lives separate from society as much as it is possible. In the case of *marginalisation*, contacts are scarce among ethnic groups, and in the case of contacts, intra-ethnic relations benefit. Upward mobility is obstructed, coercion is applied, and alternative ways to manage life (employment, education,

health care, mass media control, and so on) are made un-feasible. I suggest adding a fifth alternative, *migration*, which is a concern for us. This is a frequently chosen 'strategy' for Hungarians, a way to solve, or to avoid, problems deriving from ethnic confrontations and political hostilities; not only in the case of majority-minority confrontations, but also for core-Hungarians at historical traumas. Hungarian migration relevant to our cases is discussed further on in the study (see Migration and Mobility).

Research studies have sometimes suggested that the concept of ethnic identity is outdated. I do not think it stands; I think the phenomenon should not be neglected, because it has a lot to reveal about perceptions of 'realities of life' also among people of different ethnic origin in Central Europe on both sides of the borders. Hungarians insist on having a (dissentient) ethnic identity, distinct from that of the majority people in their host countries, relying on their various prior political and social experiences in their minority status distribution. For the enduring conservation of segregation among Hungarian minorities in the two respective countries, I would suggest the following explanation, based on my observations. The self-assured and proud attitude of being a minority that makes a difference is often incongruent with the endeavours of the majority state where minorities live. Self-conscious minorities might impede on the homogenising efforts of the state, implying that things are not going as planned. Being seen and treated as an obstacle and unwanted citizen guides Hungarians to keep on constructing the discursive ethnic identity of apartness. This is essential to maintain, so the rhetoric about it serves as a kind of counter-discourse, because to assimilate according to the wishes of the countries they live in would cost too much. To abandon the cultural codes of one's own culture in exchange for those of an alien culture is not an option. To give up a world-view, to perceive proper and improper in behaviour and notions of ethos would be humiliating. To maintain the plausibility of a discursive 'ethnic identity', a past, regulating the moral regulation of the collective and a counter-part, is needed; providing contexts against which arguments can be constructed and pursued. Ethnic identity needs a basic (personal) identity that can be described as ethnic.

## Culture – Platform for Shared Values

The concept of culture concerns us, as it builds the platform for personal and ethnic identification for the interlocutors. Culture with its diverse forms lacks unitary definition, yet there seems to be a consensus about the concept of culture being an everyday experience constituted within certain *cultural fields*, generating symbols, impressions and meanings, which create different associations. The concept of culture categorises everyday individual experiences in a sociocultural environment. Kövecses'

concept (discussed in the Role of Metaphors below) parallels with the Hungarian concept of culture, the socialising milieu for the interviewees in the 1960s and 1970s in Hungary: “the total of all knowledge, values, reflexes, behaviour models and schema, traditions and beliefs that the individual acquires – either conscientiously or unconscientiously – in a given environment in socialisation”<sup>91</sup>. Further definitions for culture from the international repertoire entail overlapping elements, comparable to the Hungarian idea of culture; including aspects of *shared values, behaviour, transmission and socialisation* with a relative uniformity in concepts over time: “[a] culture is a configuration of learned behaviours and results of behaviour whose component elements are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society” (1945: 32)<sup>92</sup>, and “[c]ulture... consists in those patterns relative to behaviour and the products of human action which may be inherited, that is, passed on from generation to generation independently of the biological genes” (1949: 8)<sup>93</sup>, to mention a few.

Culture is closely associated with different kinds of metaphors. Cultural metaphors and the metaphors of culture have been studied within a variety of genres: in linguistics, arts, communication theory and literature analysis, and so forth. Culture has as its constituent element, using a metaphor, the *network of people* belonging to the same field of permanent or temporary interest or group, sharing cultural codes, resources and knowledge.

## Cultural and Social Network Capital

Studying the interaction between culture, social structure and creation of identities, one has to reflect over the theoretical roles that cultural and social network capital plays, introduced in Bourdieu’s and Passeron’s model (*Inheritors*, 1979 [1964]). The use and usability of it cannot be neglected in the Hungarian context, exposed by the narratives of the present study, as well. The concept of cultural capital first described by Bourdieu<sup>94</sup> is today widely used in sociology for studying the impact of culture on social reproduction, on class systems and on relationships between action and social structure. Bourdieu’s theoretical definition of social capital has become a highly influential model, even though the importance of social capital also has been

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<sup>91</sup> Józsa P., *A kultúra fogalma és értelmezései* [Concept and interpretations of culture]. S.D. URL source: [www.fk.jgytf.u-szeged.hu/tanszek/kozmuw/wp/wp-content/segedanyag/t\\_molnar\\_gizella/segedanyag/A%20kultura%20fogalma%20es%20ertelmezesei.doc](http://www.fk.jgytf.u-szeged.hu/tanszek/kozmuw/wp/wp-content/segedanyag/t_molnar_gizella/segedanyag/A%20kultura%20fogalma%20es%20ertelmezesei.doc)

<sup>92</sup> Linton, R. (1945). *The Cultural Background of Personality*. New York.

<sup>93</sup> Parson, T. (1949). *Essays in Sociological Theory*. Glencoe, IL.

<sup>94</sup> Bourdieu, P. and Passeron, J.C. in “*Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction*” (1973).

discussed by others (Putnam, 1995; Schuller, u.d.<sup>95</sup>; Coleman, 1988<sup>96</sup>; Firth and Yamey, 1964<sup>97</sup>). According to Bourdieu, social capital is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu P., 1983). This theoretical definition can be extended by the Hungarian concept of network capital used here, close to Putnam’s view on the same; implying a system of network that might be categorised as *political*, *closed* and/or *loose* networks. The political and closed types of network<sup>98</sup> were strong, dominating and inevitable (also) in state socialism, which is the temporal aspect of the study, notwithstanding that its use was not an explicit product of the system.

Taking the not exclusive example of Hungary, we recognise the *closed* type of network capital which is often family-based, working within a group or community, built on private trust, strict rules and demarcated boundaries, with sanctions when members crossed those. The *loose* kinds of network built on private and collective (through organisations and institutions) basis, work across society, among members with similar values and attitudes, establishing coalitions and organisations based on members’ knowledge and experience.<sup>99</sup> In this sense, social network capital used for promoting private goals might be evaluated to obstruct transparency and to hinder the effective functioning of market mechanisms. Social network capital can be observed from the horizon of economics, anthropology (reliability and trust), social sciences (norms and motivations) and medicine (medical instances). It is generally held that the need for private social networks developed from social necessities, and works in countries (regions) with higher individuality and mistrust in institutional support for citizens. The model of “maximal use of short-term benefits within nuclear families”, extended to dependable friends, is well established in Hungary and particularly utilised in Transylvania and Seklerland with the *kaláka* tradition<sup>100</sup>. In

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<sup>95</sup> Schuller, T., Baron, S., and Field J., Social Capital: A Review and Critique. URL source: <http://fds.oup.com/www.oup.com/pdf/13/9780198297130.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> Coleman, J. (1988). Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, Supplement: Organizations and Institutions: Sociological and Economic Approaches to the Analysis of Social Structure. (1988), pp. S95 - S120.

<sup>97</sup> Firth, R and Yamey, B.S. (eds.), *Capital, Saving and Credits and Peasant societies*.

<sup>98</sup> URL source: <http://www.tarki.hu/adatbank-h/kutjel/pdf/a757.pdf>.

<sup>99</sup> URL source: <http://www.tarki.hu/adatbank-h/kutjel/pdf/a756.pdf>.

<sup>100</sup> *Kaláka* is in Hungarian context the most known gregarious work form, with pre-planned temporal and infrastructure by the participants; whereby members of a family, community or certain groupings (local, blood relations or property), or institutions co-operate on a voluntary or mutuality basis, with members contemporarily present, working and spending time together with fun and entertainment at the same time (singing, dancing, joking, telling stories, etc.).



addition, the lack of political equality, tolerance and solidarity among citizens has also contributed to the development of network capital<sup>101</sup> mechanisms. The question of trust and dependability is central to the use and effect of social network capital, which applies also in our study, by aspects of reliability and mutuality. The narrators in the study have included social network contacts of different kinds and extensions in their narrations.

Bourdieu's polysemic writings on cultural – and symbolic – capital are extremely rich and influential. But they also are controversial, or sometimes even conflicting – not unknown feature in his theoretical works (perhaps consciously); some aspects would need modifications for our purposes. According to the model, a number of cultural attitudes (preferences, behaviours and material goods) can be studied in order to find the social and cultural resources that a person's social position and family background provide for her/him. These cultural attitudes will then be invested by the individual to yield social 'profits'. My study does not engage in Bourdieu's extensive concept in depth; instead my concern shall be limited to the aspects of the model relevant to us, such as arguments about the role of education and families in the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and the symbolic relationships between classes. Bourdieu argues for "symbolic goods, especially those regarded as the attributes of excellence, [...as] the ideal weapon in strategies of distinction" existing in a society. Bourdieu points out the role of the dominating class in shaping the above attributes to their own preference, concluding that "differences in cultural capital mark the differences between the classes"<sup>102</sup>. In Bourdieu's view, education systems reflect the experiences of the 'dominant class', and the children from lower classes have to acquire educational experience through matching up to these systems, after entering school.

Bourdieu sees aesthetic dispositions as the result of social origin rather than accumulated capital and experience over time. The acquisition of cultural capital, according to the model, depends greatly on indiscernible learning, performed within the family from early childhood. The model on the role of family (socialisation) is useful for us, yet for different reasons than implied by the model, which has certain ambiguities, ranging from attitudes to preferences, suggested to be used for a wide

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<sup>101</sup> Szakál, Gy., Gergely, A. (eds.), *Társadalmi tőke, karrieresélyek, viselkedésminták* [Social capital, career opportunities, behaviour patterns] MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézete. Etnoregionális Kutatóközpont Munkafüzetek 97. [Institute of Political Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Center for Ethnogeographic Research. Working Paper 97.] 2007. Budapest.

<sup>102</sup> Arguably in this respect 'class' is not necessarily the deciding social category, as seen in the narrators' cases; in Borka's case, her choices of *symbolic goods* (Bourdieu), promoting family distinction and strategy of excellence, were governed by her mental disposition, rather than class.

variety of theoretical explanations on different analytical levels (informal analytical standard, class attribute, a basis for social selection, and a resource for power), that might be difficult to achieve. One might object, for instance, to Bourdieu attributing the level of education to dominant classes, which in fact (as a continuous variable) can be applied instead to members of all classes, along with 'previous academic culture', which is not an essential class characteristic<sup>103</sup>. An important aspect that often is neglected in studies is the *gender blindness* of social (and to a certain extent cultural) capital. In my view, *gendered social capital* would be valuable to consider in general, but especially in our cases, as the present narrations include traces of it (e.g. mother-daughter role models).

As to the aptitude to acquire a higher level of education, as our cases demonstrate, it depended rather on the agency of the individual and on the cultural resources transmitted by their families, than on class belonging. In this regard, an analysis of the ideology of the socialistic social structure would be helpful, but regrettably, it lies outside the frames of this study to engage in such an analysis. Our narrators, all from what one might categorise as 'lower social classes', have used the *cultural wealth* they 'inherited' from their families (family socialisation), and turned it to profit. Moreover, the narrators with minority status often achieved this despite the unfavourable 'background' implied by being educated in schools reflecting the 'dominating class culture' (ethnic aspect), marked by ethnic exclusion.

Bourdieu's theory on relations between social capital, economic capital and their importance in the formation of cultural capital explains functions in the families of the narrators of the study. Bourdieu claims that an individual's choice in the way they present their social space to the world and their aesthetic dispositions depicts their status and distances themselves from lower groups. He also argues that these dispositions are internalised at an early age and guide the young towards their appropriate social positions, towards the behaviours that are suitable for them, and help them to develop an aversion towards other lifestyles. Class frictions are used to teach aesthetic preferences to the young, determined by a combination of varying degrees of social, economic, and cultural capital. He argues also for taking possession of economic capital (higher or lower income) into consideration, too, as tastes are influenced (adjusted) by these variables and social conditions from earliest childhood. Bourdieu points out that even tastes in food or culture are indicators of class, because trends in their consumption seemingly correlate with the individual's fit in society, which seems to be confirmed by Liza in her narration.

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<sup>103</sup> Lamont, M., and Lareau, A., Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments. *Sociological Theory*, Vol. 6, No. 2. (Autumn, 1988), pp. 153 - 168.

Cultural capital is re-defined by the narrators to express 'shared and limitedly used cultural indications (attitudes, preferences, knowledge, behaviours, goods and identifications) used for social and cultural self-identification with occasional exclusivist functions' to fit in society. Exclusivist functions might be, for example, vindication of cultural superiority, or professional progress defying social exclusion. An important factor in seeing cultural capital from a different angle is to have enough (self-) confidence to define signs that are not widely spread and legitimate (ibid.), which are building blocks of self-identifications. Utilising social and cultural capital the individual can also be aided in coping with the changing conditions of the culture of migration and exile life.

### Culture, Metaphors and Identity Constructs

The life of the interviewees with a liminal state, in continuous movement between destinations – commuting – in a transitory state of existence and identity development, is suitable for the recollection of the metaphor of *life as a journey*. The metaphor is frequently used both in conventional and in biographic storytelling for both the story leading "from one situation to another" (Todorov, 1968<sup>104</sup>), and for describing *life as a trip* (Psomadakis, 2007), founded on culture and determined by cultural models. *Conceptual metaphors* help us to import structures into domains where there is a lack of presumptive, recognisable constructions for our understanding (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980<sup>105</sup>).

Metaphor colours the poetic, and suggestively shapes the prosaic, mapping between different semantic domains (ibid.). Metaphors have been studied for the cross-cultural concepts of love and journey both by Lakoff and Kövecses (Kövecses, 2005, 2002) among others, providing us with a means of comprehending domains of experience that have no preconceptual structure of their own (ibid.). They help us on various levels (cognitive, physical, mental, local, temporary, individual and collective) to understand a wider range of socio-cultural phenomena (emotions, politics and thought), as well as highly complex abstract processes (time, life and personhood) (Kövecses, 2005). Without further discussions on Kövecses' metaphor theory, I acknowledge his arguments on the universality and diversity of metaphors, based on the concept of culture that he defines 'as a set of shared understandings that characterise smaller or larger groups' (quoting D'Andrade, 1995; Shore, 1996; Strauss & Quinn, 1997) (ibid.). Kövecses argues further for objects, artefacts, institutions, practices and actions to also be included in the concept of culture, which I found

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<sup>104</sup> Translation from the French by Richard Howard, Introduction by Peter Brooks, *Theory and History of Literature*, Volume 1., 1981.

<sup>105</sup> Lakoff, G., and Johnson, M. (1980) *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press.

confirmation for in the narrators' reinforcement of cultural belonging by the fact that they collect both physical and mental artefacts, documents and memorabilia from their past (prior to migration). Through practices they connect these things to institutions, building a linkage between the individuals and their previous life, in a wish to maintain identities, consistency and continuity of life conduct.

### Metaphor of Ferry-land and River leading to Diversity in Sameness

"Ferry-land, ferry-land, ferry-land: even in its most vivid dreams, it only commuted in-between two shores: from East to West, but most happily back." <sup>106</sup>

The metaphor of 'ferry-land' was introduced by the Hungarian poet Endre Ady (1905), portraying Hungary at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The *liminal*<sup>107</sup> state of Hungary and Hungarians began then and has continued for over a century now, affecting the content of the narratives of the interlocutors, as well. The state is characterised by unrest, and constant motion between different places. *Ferry-land* implies boats, or ships, always in motion, but still suitable for meeting places for short and shallow relationships and the transport of people, objects and experiences. Ferries communicate between two sides of the same world, not arriving but just brushing past. Ships are linked to the metaphor of *river* (Grove, 2001), representing the floating image of lives; conceptualising both spatial and temporal communication, serving as transportation, collecting sediments<sup>108</sup> or building a delta of material (experiences and identities) with a life of its own, with a source and destinations. Along with the metaphor of river, diverse other metaphors have a function in describing migration, with different connotations, such as *border-crossing* as described in literary works and studies (Wiesel, 1995; Ming Feng He, 2003; Morales, 1986),

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<sup>106</sup> Ady, E., (1905). "*Ismeretlen Korvin kódex margójára*". [On the margins of an unknown Corvin Codex]: "Kompország, Kompország, Kompország: legképességesebb álmaiban is csak mászkált két part között: Kelettől Nyugatig, de szívesebben vissza." [Ferry-land, ferry-land, ferry-land; even in its most able dreams it is commuting between two shores, from East to West, yet, preferably back home.] (Transl. by kh).

<sup>107</sup> Identifying in-between stages of existence and its effects on individuals' personality development. The idea was A. van Gennep's in his book from 1906, *The Rites of Passage*, elaborated by Victor Turner, who 'rediscovered' van Gennep's theory on liminality.

<sup>108</sup> Ricoeur describes 'habit' as the first one of the "durable dispositions" defined by Bourdieu's habitus, regarding a person's identity, producing a sedimentation, constituting the history of one's character and ensuring one's permanence in time (interpreted as selfhood overlapped by sameness). (*Oneself as Another*, 1986.)

*travel* (C. Noy, 2004, 2007, 2005) and the metaphor of '*roots and routes*'<sup>109</sup>, and occasional routs. Journeys lead to what are called social diversities, with the coexistence of different peoples, often translated to 'multi-culturalisms', 'multi-ethnicities', 'multi-identifications', 'multi-localities' and similar concepts discussed extensively, suggesting solutions to unsolved problems of social and political exclusion, ethnic cleansing, repatriation and apartheid.

Mechanisms exist in all societies for incorporating or excluding 'Others', but despite socio-historical knowledge of interethnic patterns and relations, the endeavours often fail. Three major models of policies for 'dealing with' ethnic minorities are in use in general: 1. inclusion (multiculturalism or assimilation); 2. Distinction (differentiation); and 3. exclusion. They have differing expectations about disappearance (by merging or migrating) or the toleration of ethnic minorities with their 'ways' (peculiarities, often called minority culture) in the name of cultural relativism, in a centrally controlled fashion. States that appreciate minorities with their '*othernesses*' within their realms might more easily accept diversity. Nonetheless, diversity is not always embraced and the reason for failing to do so is that it needs the 'theorising of either/or' – for example, agency and/or structure<sup>110</sup>. Dichotomy often leads to the failure to appreciate diversity; it stands for a kind of simplification of complex questions, such as the forging of categories for humans or constructing identities. Diversity both yields and defies theory; many people live today in a state of diversity, as do the interlocutors with their *diversities in sameness*, i.e. the paradoxical, specific, sharing and dividing Hungarian ethnic, cultural and linguistic identifications that link and separate them.

### Discursive Ethnic Socialisation in Identity Constructions

Common for the interlocutors, contributing to their construction of identification is the socialisation that has taken place in the Carpathian Basin, by the political etymology called Eastern or alternatively Central Europe, in a specific historical context. This so-called state-socialism, with a political, social and cultural content of its own, affected the lives and identifications of those living in the region. In the socialistic political context narrations filled an important social role in the different regions of the Carpathian Basin with different ethnic populations. Narratives of cultural, ethnocentric, religious and mythological motives served to connect people and strengthened the sense of belonging to the same ethnic community, often spitting official discourse.

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<sup>109</sup> Clifford, J. (1994) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double-Consciousness*. Cambridge. Harvard UP.

<sup>110</sup> See scholars discussing the primacy of agency or structure, looking for the balance between the two (see Bourdieu and Giddens (see structuration)).

The post-socialist discourses focused on more modern traditions of oral history and life history; notwithstanding that such narratology lacked tradition in state-socialism and was not favoured in socialist Hungary, thus lagging behind Western research traditions in the area. Today, increasing efforts are being made within different disciplines (anthropology, ethnology, psychology, sociology, gender studies and feminist research, literary criticism, sociolinguistics, and studies of ethnic relations) to record stories not told in open before, within different Hungarian communities. Owing to the diversity of society (with various ethnic compounds) people with different 'ethnic' backgrounds are interviewed both within and outside Hungary (Valuch, 2000; Fenyvesi, 2005; Illés, 1992). Today, the scientific interdisciplinary study called Hungarology has been established to provide "comprehensive knowledge on the Hungarian cultural legacy; [it] identifies its unique traits, and its European as well as regional counterparts and embeddedness..." (ELTE<sup>111</sup>) It has a world-wide social network capital among Hungarians, informing outsiders as well. Through the internet the 'Hungarian virtual nation' has been created to inform people about the motherland<sup>112</sup>, and about members of the Hungarian nation<sup>113</sup>, through institutional<sup>114</sup> and private web-portals, blogspot<sup>115</sup> and similar sites, providing sometimes the only sources of information, particularly about sensitive matters such as Magyar-Magyar [Hungarian-Hungarian] relations<sup>116</sup>, affecting intra- and international relations and European opinion in general. They reveal *muted stories* of hurt and hatred, as well as isolated and dejected discourse on the development of the so-called 'scattered nation'. The extensive discourses on the latter and on the perpetuated issues in the collective memory of Hungarians about Hungarian identification, attempt to seek an explanation. I found Bakhtin's theory on the *epic world* and the *narratives of epic* useful for the purpose.

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<sup>111</sup> Eötvös Lóránt Tudomány Egyetem [Lóránt Eötvös University of Sciences], in Budapest.

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.magyarország.hu>; <http://www.wideweb.hu/hungary>, <http://www.worldwided-tax.com/hungary/hungov.asp>, <http://www.nationsonline.org/oneworld/hungary.htm>,

<sup>113</sup> <http://www.hhrf.org/htm/en/>, <http://www.hhrf.org/magyarkisebbseg/archivum.htm>,  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Hungarian\\_minorities\\_in\\_Europe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Hungarian_minorities_in_Europe),  
<http://www.hunsor.se/infomedia/>

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.lib.ptc.hu/kk-interneten-elerheto-magyar-folyoiratok-es-fobb-webportalok-cimeinek-gyujtemeny>,

<sup>115</sup> <http://hungaryroadways.blogspot.se/2011/02/shooting-flames-katy-perry-firecracker.html>,  
<http://www.wesselenyi.com/magyarok.htm>

<sup>116</sup> Reference to the ongoing 'round-table' negotiations (started after 1989) around co-operation with transborder minority Hungarians, in order to tie them closer to the Hungarian culture and national interests.

## Epic World and the Narratives of Epic

Considering the deliberation with which many Hungarians adhere to the concept of the idea of the Unified Nation, often spitting real politics, one is obliged to look for concepts that might explain the phenomenon. Bakhtin refers to Derrida's description of the imagery of a nation from the *Margins of Philosophy* (Bakhtin, 1981: 13), discussing the *epic world* and its thematic aspects of structure as a genre. It is about the *national heroic past*, manifesting in the discourses of national history where valorised temporal categories about great ancestors, founders, historical peak epochs, and national splendour in general play an exceptionally important role; which echoes the Hungarian concept of national descent, shared historical events of a thousand years, abruptly disrupted in 1920<sup>117</sup>, the 'impenetrable boundary' (ibid.). Bakhtin's epic is about the poem of the past, persons with constituent authorial position speaking of a now inaccessible past: "the reverent point of view of a descendent" (1981: 13). The epic speaks of a monochromic and hierarchical past as a time for everything good; lacking relativity, i.e. links to the present time, with a boundary that is prominent in the epic. "[T]he epic past is locked into itself and walled off from all subsequent times by an impenetrable boundary..." [1981: 17).

I find that Bakhtin's *epic world* offers a clue to my understanding of the Hungarian approach to the concept of 'absolute past', similar to the concept of a *time forlorn* that Hungarians perceive regarding their place in the European geographical and geopolitical context; of the concept of and membership in a 'scattered nation', which is still an unquestionable 'truth' for Hungarians. The Hungarian interpretation of 'nation' differs from the image of a nation-state giving home to national members, overlapping with a particular ethnically or culturally defined people (often internally diverse, still a diversity contained within a larger homogeneity). Butler discussed the concept, referring to Arendt's concept of nation-state, seen as a result of political and legal formation, assuming a certain national identity, founded through the rigorous consensus of a nation, expecting a certain correspondence between that and the state. In the Hungarian case, the nation does not correspond with ethnically defined people within its territory; instead, it embraces people with different ethnic identification (e.g. Armenian, German, Slovakian. or Romanian), with an overall Hungarian ethnic and cultural transborder identification. This finds support in the Recommendations of the European Parliament, 2006, discussing 'The concept of Nation' (1975 (2006) sz. Ajánlás [Recommendations]. Pp 337-342).<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> "Ninety-three years of constant suffering" to quote László Tökés in a radio interview, on the occasion of the official remembrance day of Trianon, June 2013.

<sup>118</sup> General Assembly of the Committee of Human Rights, 6<sup>th</sup> session, 26 January 2006.

The epic world in the Hungarian case is reinforced by frequently used rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, pathos, hyperbole and synecdoche, including *anyaország* [Motherland]; *anyaország gyermekei* [children of the Motherland], *szétszakított nemzet* [torn nation]; *Trianon*<sup>119</sup>, *a nemzet tragédiája* [Trianon, Tragedy of the nation]; *soha be nem gyógyuló sebek* [never healing wounds]); many of them reintroduced after 1989. Thus, distinctive and nearly sacramental historical events (prior to WW1), inaccessible for the Hungarians, are narrated again; the concept of a once united nation is walled into the Ivory Tower<sup>120</sup> of Time. The mythology of the heroic past including all Hungarians<sup>121</sup> has a strong, mobilizing effect on contemporary Hungarians. The epic world thus created by discourse of the imagery of a nation represents a distanced idea beyond reach and hope. Nonetheless, or for that reason, it is a constant source for re-narrating and re-telling, by which it is a nation-uniting discourse increasing in value. For minority *Hungarians beyond the borders* Hungary is a “counter-site”; in Foucault’s description: “something like (...) a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites (...) are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their position in reality” (Foucault, 1986).

Bakhtin’s *epic world* is similar to Foucault’s *heterotopia*, the physical representation or approximation of utopia, where utopia is a representation of an imagined, perfect society. Heterotopia, the space of otherness, can be seen both as a space of escape from political suppression and for affirmation of difference, and this aspect, along with the metaphor of ship<sup>122</sup> (ibid.), makes it attractive for our study (see ferry-land metaphor). Ilona (implicitly), Borka and Pandora (both explicitly) expressed an affection and admiration from a distance for what they consider their *haza* [Patria], i.e. the heterotopic Hungary, the country they, (or their ancestors) have never lived in. This thought leads to the question of migration and exile.

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<sup>119</sup> More about the Treaty under the Chapter Master Narrative of Hungarians; Trianon, 1920.

<sup>120</sup> The Biblical expression is used here in the sense of a metaphysical space of solitude, as used by Hungarian discourse when depicting the fate of the nation.

<sup>121</sup> 15 million people; see the speech of the first PM, József Antall (1990-93), elected after the democratic turn in Hungary.

<sup>122</sup> A society without ships being inherently a repressive one; leading to the image of countries with communist stages of socialism in the Eastern European countries.



# Migration and Mobility

“Wer den Dichter will verstehn, // Muss in Dichters Lande gehn”  
(J. W. von Goethe)

The women of the study ended up in Sweden by what one might suggest as migration. Global migration is known as an ageless human activity with (historically) diachronic and synchronic dimensions (Sayad, 1991: 15). Migration makes life fluid, creating geographical displacement as a lived experience; frequently studied and researched worldwide and internationally. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) within the United Nations deals with development programmes studying the effects of migration; in the U.S. “stories from the field” provide material for research and analysis in social sciences<sup>123</sup>; furthermore, migration of diverse types is studied in Australia, Europe, Asia and Africa. Research on migration is extended with interdisciplinary, globalised and international research in the background, engaging in global questions of poverty, environment, labour migration and brain drain regarding migrants from all over the world.

Migration results in negotiating identity, subjectivity and belonging (Kastoryano, 2002), comprehending displacement and acculturation, including concepts of Movers and Stayers, Patriots and Traitors, bringing about a material change in the places and locations through which notions of identity, individual expressions and belonging are transformed.

Much migration research connects home and nation. It investigates migrants’ links to the past, present or imagined ‘homelands’, with translocal, transnational and diasporic lives, allowances and social networks. Global and international migration shall be left aside and I shall concentrate on the ways the women in the study went about explaining the reasons for their moving to Sweden. Obviously, the movement of Hungarians when leaving Hungary prior to 1989 cannot be described as traditional migration; it was often described as defecting or escaping, mainly a political and economic act, with the direction from East to West.

Migration, or mobility, is a historical and theoretical concept that enables understandings of the inter-relation between migrancy and subjectivity in contemporary history (Passerini et al., 2007). From a political viewpoint, migration in Europe has been going on for a long time, yet it has not been seen as “part of the

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<sup>123</sup> J. DeWind, J. Hollyday, *Researching Migration. Stories from the Field*. In: L. DeSipio, M. Garcia y Griego and S. Kossoudji (eds.). The Social Science Research Council. NY, 2007.

national self-understanding for European countries”<sup>124</sup>. Further political implications of migration shall not be considered in the study; focus lies rather on how East-West migration has been measured and described. Thus, I discard the traditional migration from Eastern to Western countries, described with conventional categories, because shared; commonly accepted, convenient groupings are almost outdated in research now. Motifs of economic need or political necessity, among others, in stressful times (such as wars, revolts, humanitarian or religious persecution, genocide, poverty, or escaping<sup>125</sup> a dreaded future) do not apply to our cases. Even if some of the ‘classic’ motives can be sensed, ‘migration’ in our cases has little in common with migration in the 19th-20th centuries<sup>126</sup>; concepts such as ‘freedom of movement’ or even ‘flight’ from East to West has little to do with the narrations of the present study. Concepts of nations and states that are left behind by migrants are difficult to use in our Central European context; nations and states are rarely co-terminus. States may claim an ethnos (imaginary community) as their demos (political community), but that is rare in reality<sup>127</sup>, as borders are seldom just a line on the map. Borderlines have a formal, legal meaning and represent also practices and ideas associated with the lines: they involve agreements between neighbouring states (Anderson M., 1997), mobilising police, judiciary, customs, and other official managements.

The national border generally possesses important affective, discursive, experiential and political relations. The Hungarian national border has all that, plus it also possesses an imaginary dimension of separating the members of the nation and excluding minority Hungarians from the global world. Borders had a highly constraining effect on Hungarian migration during the 20th century, also during state

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<sup>124</sup> Geddes, A., *The Politics of Migration and Immigration in Europe*, London; SAGE Publications, (2003: 4).

<sup>125</sup> In Hungarian socialistic context, escaping (in other contexts called ‘migration’) belonged to a specific category. Migration was seen as something that Hungarian people, and others, at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century, or in the interwar period, did. Hungarians leaving their country were classified officially as ‘disszidens’ [dissidents]; equal to traitors; lackeys of imperialistic capitalists; or just Western-Hungarians, as the direction of escaping mainly pointed Westwards.

<sup>126</sup> Example: the ‘great cyclic migration’ from Hungary (actually from the Austrian-Hungarian Dual Monarchy) to the USA, which began in 1880, peaking in 1905–1907, and continued to 1914, was due to the poor economic condition of the Hungarians (and other ethnic minorities), and the oscillating conjuncture of the USA. Statistics from the receiving state show that between 1871–1913 1,815,117 immigrants from Hungarian regions were registered in the USA; some of these returned (and re-returned); therefore, the total number of Hungarian migrants was approximately 1.2–1.3 million.

<sup>127</sup> Three million Hungarians living outside the borders of Hungary; or one can mention the great number of Russians, or Germans who live outside their ‘home-lands’ in Europe.

socialism<sup>128</sup>; partly towards the West (Iron Curtain<sup>129</sup>), but also between countries within the same ideological sphere (e.g. between Romania and Hungary, or Hungary and Yugoslavia).

I cannot see that ‘classical motives’ (poverty, superiority of the West, persecution, discrimination, war, etc.) have been commonly invoked by the narrators of the study to explain the motives for them leaving their homelands. Not even Ilona can be seen as a ‘traditional’ Eastern European migrant. She followed her partner, who sensed an escalation in ethnic discrimination that might have affected them in the future. They received a legal, short-term tourist permit to Austria and chose not to return to Romania. On account of the ambiguities, I would rather call the movements of the women mobility<sup>130</sup>, which would better explain the motives behind their actions (see respective mobility account of each narrator). They both verified and contradicted more traditional narratives of migration.

To note differences, I am going to let the interlocutors air their motives and reasons for their mobility. They seem to have been driven by a variety of motives, sometimes displaying a plurality of not seldom contradictory ones. I intend to avoid stereotypes that place migrant women on the conventional tradition/modernity continuum; on account of the narrators’ own self-categorisation, not including oppression either as immigrants or as women. The already mentioned organising topics with strategies of migrant existence (such as acculturation and adaptations, learning a new language, meeting cultural incompatibilities, nostalgia, homesickness, and maintaining relations with their home regions) were included in the stories.

As implied before, the individual narrators were unwilling to categorise themselves as “invandrare” [Swedish for immigrant], drawing a line between themselves and the category, except for Pandora, who rejected it, but saw herself subordinated to it as her everyday life was very much organised around her migrant status with a sfi course<sup>131</sup>, unemployment issues, and similar. Anna refused to be called a ‘migrant’ per se; she protested and corrected me each time I used the concept of moving/leaving Hungary

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<sup>128</sup> Borbándi, Gy., *Emigráció és Magyarország. Nyugati magyarok a változások éveiben 1985-1995*, [Emigration and Hungary. Western-Hungarians in the years of transition, 1985-1995]. Basel-Budapest, 1996. Mandelbaum, M., (ed.) *The New European Diasporas. National minorities and conflict in Eastern Europe*, Council of Foreign Relations Press, New York, 2000.

<sup>129</sup> Coined by Winston Churchill, 12 May 1945; an ideological and physical border between Eastern and Western Europe.

<sup>130</sup> Mainly used within social sciences to mark people moving from one class to another, changing their cultural and economic capital.

<sup>131</sup> “Sfi” (“svenska för invandrare”): an acronym for Swedish as second language studies provided to official immigrants to Sweden.

in the interview, depicting a liminal state with two homes: one in Sweden and one in Hungary, often and freely shifting between the two, whenever she felt like doing it. The liminal state was a characteristic in the narrations of both Ilona and Liza. Anna, Ilona and Liza had established homes both in Sweden and Hungary, frequently alternating between them, staying shorter or longer periods, feeling at home and apart in both. Borka had no 'home' in Slovakia, but she visited family there yearly. Pandora was the exception in this respect as well; she was anchored in Sweden, by the immobility caused by the illness of her daughter. The interviewees detached themselves from a self-definition as "invandrare", yet the category applies to their social status in Sweden. It should be noted, that when three of them (Pandora, Anna and Liza) occasionally mentioned the concept of "invandrare" in reference to their status, it was to explain that the term was imposed on them by external – social or individual – characterisations, that they perceived negatively.

## Migrants, Immigrants, Dissidents and Exiles

Immigrants or exiles are the result of migration. The categories are heterogeneous in general, and so are they in the case of the Hungarians in Sweden, too, which is the view of the study as well: exiles, immigrants, dissidents and diaspora. A distinction is used between *immigrant* (conclusive arrival to the host country) and *exile* (removal, with ongoing bonds to the homeland), expressing the relative strength of cultural attachments. Exile applies to the interlocutors who have moved but not definitively, maintaining strong links to their respective homelands. The words *disszidens* [refugee], meaning those who illegally left their habitat during state-socialism, and *refugee* (in the receiving countries), which has particular ideological connotations for Hungarians, are not used for the narrators. The migrant story varieties in the study defy the conventionality of categories, such as migrant, and register particular characteristics that mark their movements from Eastern Europe to the West, prior to 1989. As previously implied, the recounted driving forces to migrate do not comply with the conventional assumptions (political/economic motives) in our cases. The women do not answer the general expectations of Eastern-European migrants, denoted as internal dissidence, implying an unruly, independent or rebellious character, or *habitus*<sup>132</sup> (Bourdieu). It is hard to regard the motives of the narrators as

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<sup>132</sup> *Habitus* (Lat. *habere*; to have, to hold) defined by Bourdieu as a "system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function...". Bourdieu argues that people are strategic improvisers responding based on past experiences to opportunities and the constraints

what migration/mobility literature refers to as ‘aptitude for adventure’ (to see the world). Instead, the women “tried their luck” in the random country Sweden<sup>133</sup>; i.e. the reasons for moving to Sweden seemed *ad hoc*, relational, and the goals were blurry; in some cases even defying the expected (stereotypical) claims for motives of migration.

Borka, for example, migrated for the sake of building a family, recollecting considerable anguish before coming to her decision. Liza had fuzzy, indecisive and unspecific motives (kind of ‘why not try?’); Pandora was forced by private, moral obligation and a promise to migrate (also of political, yet not of ideological necessity); and Ilona was given an opportunity by fate, utilising a legal window in the political system that opened up for a short while in Romania. Anna actually refuted the idea of having migrated at all. The motives of the women were arguably following other referents, such as personal/professional relationships, pride and achievements, testing one’s own compatibility in the West, family obligations; all pointing at the ambiguity of the motives, or ignorance of the motives, that is articulated by the story of these ‘irresolute exiles’, becoming members of the ”invandrargrupp” [immigrant group] and also of the Hungarian diaspora living in Sweden.

Diaspora<sup>134</sup> is marked by hybridity and cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and national heterogeneity, “defined by a traversal of the boundaries demarcating nation and diaspora” (Braziel, 2003). Diaspora categories can be *classical* (Jews, Chinese, Germans), created by people moving; and *modern* (Hungarians, Russians, Polish, Albanians), created by borders being moved (ibid.), which is a ‘familiar’ status in Central Europe in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The categories are not rigid. Some of the narrators in the study belonged to the *modern diaspora* in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Then again, they became parts of *classical diaspora* when they moved to new habitats (in Sweden). I wish to answer the criticism against narratives that do not pay attention to their historical and cultural context, stepping over the ‘Western romantic impulse’ (Atkinson, 1997) and idealisation of the individual agency; and I intend to pay attention to the theoretical aspect of the ‘historical context and biographical

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offered by present situations, denying an internal, subjectivist (subjectivity) view on human actions. (*The logic of practice*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.)

<sup>133</sup> Passerini et al. (2007: 53).

<sup>134</sup> One entry in the Merriam-Webster Dictionary describes diaspora as: “the movement, migration, or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral homeland”: (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/diaspora>), which is in agreement with the usage of the term in a Hungarian context.

experience' that the listener/reader brings to her meeting of the text (Riessman, 2002), which might differ from the teller's.

## Hungarian Minorities and Diaspora

In the following section, discourses on the dispersed Hungarian nation, as narrated and discussed by open sources (academia, political institutions, government, political parties, NGOs and so forth), are presented in short, informing the reader about the ethno-historical and social development of Hungarians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The discourse on the new "Europeanised form of ethnoterritorial nationalism" (Puskás, 2009: 84) aiming at maintaining the Hungarian nation, a kind of borderless, fictional "indivisible"<sup>135</sup> nation, speaking the same language, is powerful among Hungarians. The reconditioned discourse on the large Hungarian ethnic minority and *Diaspora* communities of varying sizes<sup>136</sup> was re-introduced after the so-called system changes in 1989, after having hibernated for 45-50 years. The diasporas and the "carelessly" lost five million Hungarians<sup>137</sup>, the so-called *Hungarians beyond the borders* and *diaspora Hungarians*, in Central Europe and worldwide<sup>138</sup>, are *products* of historical and political decisions in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, beyond Hungarian control and wish. The various diasporas and other ethnic Hungarian minority groups are today included in

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<sup>135</sup> Homepage of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office; talks by the Hungarian PM meeting the Romanian PM in Cluj-Napoca. URL source: [http://www.koncellaria.gov.hu/tevekenyseg/esemeny/2002/07/706\\_e.htm](http://www.koncellaria.gov.hu/tevekenyseg/esemeny/2002/07/706_e.htm) (2008).

<sup>136</sup> Hungarian minority collectivities are in all surrounding countries of Hungary, making Hungarians "their own neighbours". The approximate sizes of Hungarian minority collectivities are 6,200 in Slovenia, 17,000 in Croatia, 35,000 in Austria, 155,000 in the Ukraine, 600,000 in Vojvodina/Serbia, 520,000 in Slovakia, and 1.5 million in Romania (all in all, around 2.5 to 3.5 million Hungarians 'beyond the borders').

URL source:  
[http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/kulhoni\\_magyarsag/2009/Jelentes\\_a\\_kulhoni\\_magyarsag\\_helyezete](http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/kulhoni_magyarsag/2009/Jelentes_a_kulhoni_magyarsag_helyezete)

Additionally around 250 thousand Hungarians live in Western countries. Source: The Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad: The Situation of Hungarians living outside the Carpathian Basin, <http://www.hhrf.org/htmh/reports2002/west2002.htm>.

<sup>137</sup> Stewart, M., *The Hungarian Status Law: A new European form of Transnational politics?* WPTC-02-09, University College of London.

<sup>138</sup> Dispersed Hungarians are made up of the larger minority Hungarian population, and the Archipelago-Hungarians (smaller groups without contact with other Hungarian population) in the Carpathian Basin (around one million people), in addition to the Hungarian diaspora in the West (around one million people, with Hungarian as first language), all living in an alien political, social, ethnic and cultural environment. Source: <http://www.hunsor.se/hu/szorvany/szorvanymagyarsag.htm>.

the official discourses regarding the state of a united nationhood<sup>139</sup>. The reason for the *dispersed*<sup>140</sup> Hungarian nation shall not be explained by traditional migration concepts, as the cause for the dispersion of Hungarians is considered to be the *partition of the nation* after the end of WW1 in the Paris [Trianon<sup>141</sup>] Peace Treaty, which redrew the geographical and ethnic map of Central Europe. One remaining part builds the bulk of present Hungary, while the other part, the *dispersed* Hungarian population, is constituted by the *Hungarians beyond the borders* (spread in the Carpathian Basin); and by the so-called *disszidensek* [dissidents] (worldwide refugees) creating diaspora populations on all continents.

The historical fact has prompted a huge research potential and thirst for information and investigations after the system collapse in 1989. The demand for knowledge and information was based on the elevated discourses on the aspects of the spatial national identification of Hungarians and the state that was split by the 'unjust' *Peace Treaty of Trianon*, causing the first substantial migration wave, with Hungarian refugees all over the Carpathian Basin. The next national trauma occurred ten years after the end of WW2, causing the next substantial migration wave, triggered by the Hungarian Revolt (Uprising) against the Soviet Union in 1956. This migration, without rival in Hungarian history as to its reckless passage of events and to its extension, was of a different character than the first one, affecting mainly the people of Hungary proper (over 200,000 people from Hungary fled). The Revolt of 1956 ['56], was a major event in the era of the Cold War (1945-[1960]1990) in Europe and it continues to be of interest for scholars and researchers<sup>142</sup>. Private interests for leaving lie on the emotive level; sentiments are either pro or contra. A common trait for the pursuer of the issue on both levels has been the many controversies surrounding the revolt from the very beginning: from the lack of expected international intervention, along with controversial and contradicting discourses on *victims* or *heroes*, and perhaps also the failing gender aspect present in the rhetoric of 1956, making the issue blurred today.

For orientation of the uninformed reader in the complexities of Hungary's past, I list some works in the endnotes that can be recommended to inform different audiences,

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<sup>139</sup> The thought of a re-unified verbally constructed nation was introduced by József Antall (1932–1993), the first democratic Prime Minister of Hungary (1990–1993), declaring that he in his "soul, wished to be the Prime Minister of 15 million people." Source: Speech held at the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of Antall's party; MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum).

<sup>140</sup> Bennett Kovrig, 2000: 3; Michael Stewart, 2009; Zoltán Nicolás Dujisin Muhara; <http://www.hhrf.org/kisebbssegkutatas/minres/index.htm>

<sup>141</sup> See: <http://www.gwpda.org/versa/tri5.htm>,

<sup>142</sup> Recent works (Békés, Byrne and Rainer 2002; Lessing 2006; Sebestyen 2007; Adam, Egervary, Laczko and Young, 2010) dealing with the events leading to and with consequences after the Revolt of 1956; among many others.

mainly in the West, about the latest research developments available<sup>143</sup>. Internationally a few studies have been done regarding 'ethnic identities' and 'identifications' in relation to the diverse *Hungariannesses*. Some of these are also listed in the endnotes<sup>144</sup>.

Research on Hungarian immigrants in Sweden has been going on in the last century. I choose to mention some of the studies on Hungarian immigrants conducted and published in the last two decades (the list is not conclusive, only indicative): Szabó (1988); Svensson/Wigerfeldt (1992/2002)<sup>145</sup>; Hamberg (2000); Straszer (2006)<sup>146</sup>; Puskás (2009)<sup>147</sup>; György-Ullholm (2010)<sup>148</sup>; with different foci. The lack of studies explicitly on Hungarian female exiles has influenced my choice to get involved in the present life history research. I wished to contribute, without an explicit feminist focus, to the canon of life story narratives through the stories of female interlocutors with Hungarian ethnic background living in Sweden.

### Ethno-Historical Assessment of Hungarian Migration

On account of the diversity in descent of the interlocutors, I find it appropriate to survey their ethno-territorial origin. The attitude '[t]o live in a territory of one's own'

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<sup>143</sup> Valuch, 2005, 2011; Schöpflin, 2000; Gerner, 2007; Molnár, 2001; Kontler, 2002; Sugar, 1990; Kovacs, 1989; Vardy, 1983, among others. Schöpflin has a British orientation, Molnár is a Switzerland-based exile scholar and Kontler lives in Hungary – they bridge over the conceptual and theoretical gaps between the local production of historiography and the international scholarly community.

<sup>144</sup> Fox investigated Transylvanian-Hungarians (Fox, 2003), with a focus on migration. Rácz studied Vojvodina-Hungarians re-claiming their socio-cultural identification. Fenyvesi researched sociolinguistic contacts of Hungarians in Central European countries (Fenyvesi, 2005). ENRI (European National and Regional Identities, European Commission) researched, among others, Slovakian Hungarians (2008-2011), while Koller studied the European identity formation with *extended transformation* regarding Hungarians, after joining the EU (1 May 2004). The regional geographical distribution of Hungarians containing all Hungarian minority groups in the Carpathian Basin is written by Kocsis (1998), and Borbándi has written several books on Hungarian emigration (1985), (1996), (2002).

<sup>145</sup> Anders Svensson (1992) *Ungrare I folkhemmet*.

<sup>146</sup> Boglárka Straszer (2006) *Ungerska för rötternas skull; Språkets betydelse för identiteten för invandrades ättlingar* [Importance of language for the descendants of immigrants] (2011).

<sup>147</sup> Tünde Puskás (2009), *We belong to them: Narratives of belonging, homeland and nationhood in territorial and non territorial minority settings* (P.I.E. Peter Lang). Linköping University.

<sup>148</sup> Kamilla György-Ullholm (2010). *Same Mother-tongue – Different Origins: Implications for Linguistic Maintenance and Shift among Hungarian Immigrants and their Children in Sweden*. (2010) Doctoral dissertation, Stockholm University.



– ethno-territorialism study object within political geography – has been a powerful force, challenging the regional systems, and re-making the borders of the political map, since the arrival of modern nationalism. Yet, we still know little about what kind of territorial order the claim implies or how it should be created (O'Loughlin<sup>149</sup>). The ideological aspiration for the conjunction of a virtual (asserting various forms of national and territorial continuities, pedigrees, historical precedence, and so on) or imaginary collective identity and a territorial region, termed 'ethno-territorialism', is often supported by projects of states known in human history over the last centuries, and particularly in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which Hobsbawm characterizes as the *Age of Extremes*. Records attest to the drawing and re-drawing of maps and the re-engineering of human space according to political interests and power relations that "brought new levels of violence into European life, militarizing society... killing millions of people with the help of modern bureaucracies and technology" (Mazover, 1998: 404; cited in: Berend, 2006).

In regions of ethnic, cultural and religious diversity, ethno-territorialism has been known to be presented by political forces as a 'solution' to the insecurities and fears that accompany these processes. It offers an apparently simple spatial solution to what is politically constructed as an *unfortunate* cultural heterogeneity and ethnic or nationality mixing. When in power, the intimidating and conceptual apparatus of the modern state can lead to minority oppression, political instability and, at its extremes, to ethnic cleansing and genocide (Brubaker, 2004; Mann, 2004), as we have seen examples of in Europe, too. Along with aspects of ethno-territorialism, the discipline of ethno-history can be of help in approaching the human condition. Historical records and documents contribute to the acquiring of knowledge from emic/etic perspectives<sup>150</sup>, looking for interpretations and alternatives of evidences, studying "identities of indigenous, diaspora and minority peoples that otherwise elude the histories and anthropologies of nations, states and colonial empires"<sup>151</sup>. Ethno-historical research engages often in the histories of indigenous peoples from America, Australia and Asia, who are often ignored. Ethno-historical studies investigate a

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<sup>149</sup> Accounting for Separatist Sentiments in Bosnia-Herzegovina and the North Caucasus of Russia: A Comparative Analysis of Survey Responses. Forthcoming in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, s.d. Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, Alexandria, VA 22314.

<sup>150</sup> In K. Pike's definition, the emic perspective focuses on the intrinsic cultural distinctions that are meaningful to the members of a given society (insider sources), while the etic perspective relies upon the extrinsic concepts and categories that have meaning for scientific observers (external sources). The terms are often used in relation to 'subjective' or 'objective' aspects of research; today complementary to each other.

<sup>151</sup> <http://journals.academia.edu/Ethnohistory?page=7>.

specific body of people with a shared identity<sup>152</sup> linked together by a sense of historical continuity; possessing and sharing the particulars of a tradition world and cultural features; claiming to be part of the same ethnic community and using the classic concept of Barth (1969); limiting themselves from others; sharing language and culture. Also, aspects of historical, cultural, and political changes are taken into account. Ethno-history is a kind of cultural biography that draws upon people's various testimonies over a long period of time. Simmons argued for a holistic and diachronic approach (Simmons, 1988) in that, reminding us of the ethnographic approach. As history and ethno-history are still continuously invoked to prove certain facts with regard to events and people, I wish to make a short overview of the historical development of the interviewees of the study from a Hungarian-Hungarian stance.

*Extra Hungariam, non est vita, si est vita, non est ita*

The popular Latin phrase<sup>153</sup> from the 19<sup>th</sup> century reflects the national romantic view that characterized life in Hungary at that time, expressing also the commitment and adherence to the Hungarian way of life, soon to come to an end. The daunting Trianon Treaty at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century put an end to these sentiments and the notion of the Hungarian nation as one knew it. The Treaty, seen as a national tragedy since 1920, although not with unchanged attitudes, altered the concept of *Hungarianness*, with sentiments growing into a perceived anxiety for the fate of the nation expressed also by the exile writer Sándor Márai<sup>154</sup> (*Memoires 1944-48*), quoted by M. Blumenthal<sup>155</sup>: "The awareness of the fact that being Hungarian meant being lonely, (...) that the Hungarian phenomenon consisting of diverse races but still typically Hungarian was also foreign to those who were next-door neighbours and shared a common fate with the Hungarians for a thousand years..."

The interviewees in the study, who are parts of the 'lonely' Hungarian nation, irrespective of the common Hungarian cultural and ethnic identification, differ to some extent in language and in historical, social and cultural development, explained by the variances of ethno-historical development of the diverse *Hungariannesses*, the

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<sup>152</sup> A specific typology of ethnic identity is applied in the study; a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group with whom one identifies through thought, behaviour and perception, claiming heritage (Phinney, 1996), separate from personal identity but influencing it.

<sup>153</sup> 'Outside Hungary, there is no life, if there is, it is not the same.'

<sup>154</sup> The writer Sándor Márai, also translated into Swedish, was born in Kassa [Kosice], Highlands, in the Hungarian Kingdom (Slovakia today) in a Saxon family (Grossschmied) in 1900. He later moved to Budapest and after the communist taking over of power in Hungary, he migrated to the USA and lived there until 1989, when he committed suicide.

<sup>155</sup> M. Blumenthal (1996). The loneliness of Hungarians. In: Hungarian Quarterly. No.141.

cultural context of the interviewees. Without diving deep into the overall historical, social and cultural transformations of Hungary, for the sake of comprehensibility, I shall call attention to the paradigm shifts leading to the so-called '*Magyar-Magyar* [Hungarian-Hungarian] *relations*' prevailing after *annus mirabilis* (1989).

The period of the so-called 'political transition' that began in 1989 shall be the breaking point for my mapping of the historical discourses and shifting paradigms in a meta-political context, mainly because that era opened up new settings in Hungarian historiography. The era is marked by a growth of political and institutional pluralism in Hungary. It also reveals a stronger continuity in Hungary compared to other former socialist countries, but also in some certain disciplines in Hungary itself, which opened "the gates of the universities for an entire generation of dissidents, who were institutionally rather marginal before" (B. Trencsényi, P. Apor, 2007<sup>156</sup>). This generation started to discuss the historiographical production and the original interpretative keys to the *learning of national history* rewritten several times in the communist era in Hungary, with blurring interpretations of previous historical issues, institutionalising historical production to a grade to generate interpretations that would serve the purposes of power' (ibid.). The authors make the point that the production of historical knowledge has for a century been closely related to the contemporary constellation of political power, which in my view is still the fact regarding interpretations of the post-Trianon development. There is little known, and understood, in the West about the particular mental re-structuring and re-creation of the wider image of *Hungarianness*, which also the interlocutors give expression to in their narrations. For that reason, I intend to refresh some relevant details of the Hungarian development in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Márai quote implies that the Dual-Monarchy provided the conditions for a multi-ethnic society, marked by substantial cultural diversity and when the Monarchy collapsed in 1918, Hungary was left without appropriate forms of political power to safeguard the interest of its territories and people. Thus, WW1 brought about drastic changes in the ideological and ethnic concept of the Hungarian nation <sup>157</sup> (*Hungarianness* (es)), also reflected in the present narrations.

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<sup>156</sup> B. Trencsényi and P. Apor, Fine-Tuning the Polyphonic Past: Hungarian Historical Writing in the 1990s. In: S. Antohi, B. Trencsényi and P. Apor (eds.). *Narratives Unbound Historical Studies in Post-Communist Eastern Europe*. 2007. CEU Press.

<sup>157</sup> According to the 1910 Census Hungarians were in majority (88.4 percent) in Hungary (part of the Austrian-Hungarian Dual Monarchy), while the rest was constituted by other ethnic minorities. Hungary's population is constituted by a majority of ethnic Hungarians (97,3 percent), the rest is constituted by a small population of other ethnic minorities: Germans (0.6 percent), Roma (ca 2,00

## Master Narrative of Hungarians: Trianon, 1920

“The national vulgate is a very rigorously normative master narrative ... indeed that is simultaneously bound and binding” (Antohi (et al.) 2007: XIV). The source of ethno-historical variety of Hungarians is to be sought at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the mentioned Treaty of Trianon<sup>158</sup>, marking the end of WW1 and the beginning of a new era for the Hungarians in Central Europe. According to the Treaty, Hungary lost approximately two-thirds of its territory to its successor states (Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the forthcoming Yugoslavia (1920)), but also to the Soviet Union and a little piece to Poland. The Treaty meant manifold losses; territory, prestige, status and power were lost, as well as a large number of ethnic Hungarians, in “severe violation of the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination” (Schöpflin, 2000: 279). On account of the fact that Hungarians were denied a hearing at the Peace conference, Hungarians of today regard the treaty as a ‘dictate’, “[w]hile the old minorities of Greater Hungary were given satisfaction, the treaty rode roughshod over the right of the Magyars to self-determination” (Molnár, 2001: 263). He echoes the official discourse and the feelings of many Hungarians, concluding that despite rational explanation, the sentiments of deep prejudice and an almost irrational element, “determined by the attitudes” (ibid.) of the heads of state of France<sup>159</sup>, is inflated in the perception of the Trianon Treaty. The official stand of Hungarians is that despite the intentions of the Wilsonian ‘Fourteen Points’, where the 10<sup>th</sup> stipulates: “[t]he peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development”. This was totally neglected and the Treaty achieved the reverse of its initial intentions: it created an unstable region, with potential ethnic conflicts and private tragedies all over the Carpathian Basin. A conclusion might be that the Treaty benefited the successor states and victimized the Hungarians. The effects of the Trianon Treaty were political and economic, among others, targeting Hungarians on all levels, both ideologically and physically.

One ideological outcome of Trianon was the unitary, and sole, national frame for any kind of discourse in Hungary, mobilising members of the entire Hungarian nation. It also came to dominate the fields of existing women organisations, introducing a

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percent), and other (mainly Romanian and Slavic minorities) under 1,00 percent. (Census 2011)  
Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wik>

<sup>158</sup> Drawn up in the Grande Palace of Trianon, Versailles, Paris. URL source: [http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty\\_of\\_Trianon](http://wwi.lib.byu.edu/index.php/Treaty_of_Trianon).

<sup>159</sup> G. Clemenceau was Prime Minister in France and principle architect of the Treaty of Paris (Trianon). S. Pichon was State Secretary at the same time.

strong ‘maternal view’ that shaped thinking, the effects of which still linger on. The most severe consequences of the Treaty were the maltreatment of Hungarian ethnic minorities in the successor states from a human rights point of view: they were forcedly moved to Slavic areas, they lost family, working opportunities, property and citizenship<sup>160</sup>, becoming stateless in their countries. The Treaty caused an eccentric and concentric mass migration with around 350-400 thousand people<sup>161</sup> moving mainly towards Hungary, and to the West. Further aggravation was the new political reality in Central Europe, leading to international isolation of the country, topped by the world-wide Great Depression during the 1930s.

The line of estrangement (boundary) drawn by the Trianon Treaty touselled the previously valid concept of the Hungarian nation that had been built on the concept of one thousand years of historical and cultural continuity; i.e. *Hungarianness*, invoking body metaphors, such as *wounds* inflicted on the *body of the nation* and *limbs cut off* leaving a *truncated* country. These metaphors have conceptual implications and provide powerful illustrations of the sense of togetherness of the separated national members<sup>162</sup>. The Treaty is still perceived by the majority of Hungarians as a menacing fait-accompli, not idealistically acknowledged as yet, which might lie behind the often finitistic, pessimistic, and ethnocentric sentiments of Hungarianness that sociological studies on national sentiments and belonging have concluded (Gy. Csepeli, 2000; European Social Survey (ESS) 2001). This is true also with regard to contemporary social content and welfare questions, social and national values, among other things.

In the interwar period, Hungary regained (First and Second Vienna Awards (1938, 1940)<sup>163</sup> some of the lost territories and population previously annexed to Czechoslovakia and Romania, with a majority of Hungarian population, referred to by Ilona as ‘the Hungarian times’. The re-annexations of land to Hungary were celebrated by happy Hungarians, but were received with disappointment by some minorities (Slovaks and Romanians); a situation setting off a spiral of on-going

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<sup>160</sup> Károly Kocsis; Eszter Kocsisné Hodosi (1998). *Ethnic Geography of the Hungarian Minorities in the Carpathian Basin*; Seton-Watson, Robert William (1933). “The Problem of Treaty Revision and the Hungarian Frontiers.” *International Affairs* 12 (4): 481–503. Macmillan, Margaret (2003). *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World*. Random House; URL source: [http://www.hhrf.org/xantusz/mvszlo\\_tortenet.html](http://www.hhrf.org/xantusz/mvszlo_tortenet.html).

<sup>161</sup> Valuch, I., *Magyarország a XX. században I.- V.. Menekülés, teleítés, deportálás, disszidálás* [Hungary in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Refuge, forced settlement, deportation, dissidence]. II: 218. Hungarológiai Alapkönyvtár. Szekszárd, Babits Kiadó, 1996-2000.

<sup>162</sup> Hungary is still considered by the ethnic minorities outside the borders as their home-land.

<sup>163</sup> Komjathy, A.T., (1993) *Give Peace One More Chance!: Revision of the 1946 Peace Treaty of Paris*. University Press of America, Boston.

feud<sup>164</sup>. Hungary having been a loser in WW2, ended up with the 'Trianon borders' re-established and opportunities for any changes lost. In state socialism, internationalism and policies without 'bourgeois rudiments of the past' (such as nationalism) were preferred, and despite the internationalist rhetoric introduced in state-socialist countries in Central Europe, no reconciliation was possible. Minorities were given collective guilt for the horrors of the war and the animosity, intimidation, harassment and discrimination continued, affecting also German and Gypsy [Roma] minorities, in several Central European countries. *Hungarians beyond the borders* were treated harshly, and to achieve improvement, János Kádár, the head of state from 1956 to 1989, carried out mainly *sub rosa*<sup>165</sup> negotiations from the 1950s on with neighbouring countries, but with poor results.

The narratives about Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin are negative also today and prevailing metaphors used to represent them in Slovakia and Romania over the years have had negative connotations. Examples are the negative metaphors recently used in the official political rhetoric about Hungarians in Slovakia; calling them an "illness on the body of the Slovak nation that must soonest be removed"<sup>166</sup>, with allegations about the necessity of launching military action against Hungary<sup>167</sup>. The new language law in Slovakia (1995) with assimilatory goals made the use of minority languages difficult, and denial of double citizenship (applying for Hungarian citizenship) finally led to deprivation of citizenship (statelessness) for Hungarians in Slovakia<sup>168</sup>, which together with physical and psychological violence and abuse<sup>169</sup> for

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<sup>164</sup> The so-called 'Benes decree', still valid today, entailing several decrees, issued at the end of WW2 by the Czechoslovakian president, Edward Benes, imposing collective guilt on the autochthonous Hungarian and German minorities living in Czechoslovakia, and pursuing a policy of ethnic cleansing of Southern Slovakia (1945-48) URL source: [http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/docs/AHF\\_Benes%20Decrees\\_2007\\_10\\_20.pdf](http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/docs/AHF_Benes%20Decrees_2007_10_20.pdf).

<sup>165</sup> *Sub rosa* has a particular relevance in Hungarian history, linked to the so-called "sub rosa conspiracy" [Wesselényi conspiracy] in 1670. The members of the conspiracy, led by among others the Hungarian aristocrat Ferenc Wesselényi, plotted against the Habsburg reign; discussions took place under a balcony with a painted rose on it, in Sárospatak, Hungary.

<sup>166</sup> Michel Ebner, Member of the European Parliament, reported Jan Slotá (leader of SNS, the Slovakian nationalist Party) in 2006 for making the following remark: "The Hungarians are a cancer in the body of the Slovak nation that should be extracted as soon as possible." [A magyarok rákos tumor a szlovák nemzet testén, amit mihamarabb el kell távolítani.] Cited in Der Spiegel.

<sup>167</sup> <http://spectator.sme.sk/articles/view/5301/11/>.

<sup>168</sup> A protest petition has been sent to the European Parliament by Hungarians, as the abolition of double citizenship is against the Slovakian constitution. The exclusion from citizenship makes Hungarians "live as immigrants in their own country" (Z. Lomnici, Chairman of the Committee for Human Rights, 2011).

private Hungarians<sup>170</sup> have increased distress. These experiences have on the other hand contributed to the preservation of a 'discourse of suppression' by the Hungarian minorities, adducing the discourses of ill-treatment and coercion.

Obviously, ethnic minorities are still used as political hostages during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries and the roots of ethnic animosities can be traced to the Trianon treaty. I blame the *muted discourse* on Trianon for many of these animosities, a part of 'stories of marginalised experiences'. Hungarians live today in eight Central-European countries<sup>171</sup>, of which two shall be presented here below, as two of the narrators originate in those countries.

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<sup>169</sup> Allegations of physical abuse among ethnic groups and individuals involving Hungarians and other ethnic group members (Slovaks, Serbs, Romanians) are found mainly on social networks (internet, blogs, Twitter, etc.) where the involved publish the incidents, which are, for one or other reason, seldom put to legal test. They are often put under the epithet: "*Magyarverés*" [Beating of Hungarians]. The search gave 48,600 comments in September 2012. Nonetheless, international sources supporting the existence of abuse involving ethnic group members are reported, e.g. under: <http://www.cafebabel.co.uk/article/27506/hungary-slovakia-tensions-ethnic-violence.html>; [http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/news\\_rumania.htm](http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/news_rumania.htm), <http://www.politics.hu/20120514/ethnic-hungarians-reportedly-attacked-by-slovak-skinheads-in-bratislava/>; European Parliament Report (No. PE 350.475) to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 2005, Voivodina/Serbia in Hungarian Human Rights Foundation, New York 2005. For more information see also note 126.

<sup>170</sup> Reports by Human Rights Watch from Romania (Helsinki Watch, 1993), from Serbia (Human Right Abuses of non-Serbs in Kosovo, Sandzac and Voivodina 2006, Vol.6. Issue 6.) and in Slovakia (URL source:

<http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country,,MARP,,SVK,4562d8b62,469f3ace1e,0.html>

(REFWORLD by the UN)) contest to this fact. Abuse occurs also in other parts of the Carpathian Basin where Hungarian minorities live (e.g. the Ukraine). Internationally observed was the case of Hedvig Malina, a student of Hungarian ethnic background, who was physically abused for speaking Hungarian in public (in Byitra/Nitra) in 2006. She took her case to the European Court of Human Rights, looking for "moral vindication", challenging what she called the "inhuman and humiliating" conduct of the Slovak officials. The incident – still not resolved in 2012 – has had international effects. See: "Letter from Tom Lantos to Robert Fico". Congress of the United States, Committee on Foreign affairs. 2007-10-17. Retrieved 2008-03-11. "Chairman of U.S. Foreign Affairs Committee Calls on Slovakian Prime Minister to disavow Beneš decrees, ensure justice for Hungarian minority." Hungarian-American Coalition USA. 2007-10-22. Retrieved 2008-03-08.

<sup>171</sup> Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia, Austria and the Czech Republic.

### *Romania – Transylvania and the Land of Seklers*

Hungarians and Romanians had been sharing living space, history, culture and occupations under Hungarian reign for centuries. Hungarians were seen as being better equipped to do well in history and throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century thanks to their favourable prospects. The Romanians were less successful until 1920 when Transylvania was annexed to Romania. The fact was “celebrated as a measure of great historical justice and compensation for the humiliation” (Schöpflin, 2000: 384) of Romanians throughout history. The situation with Romania, in contrast to Czechoslovakia, made the ‘Hungarian problem’ central for the Romanian state, a multicultural state created in 1920, uniting Walachia, Moldavia, Bessarabia and Transylvania into the state of Romania. The country gained a substantial number of Hungarians living in Transylvania (around three million), in addition to other minorities, such as Germans (Saxons and Swabians), Gypsies, Jews and some Slavic minorities. The Hungarians were a different matter, though, from a minority aspect. Not only had they been the rulers of Erdély (the province of Transylvania) for centuries, possessing the self-confidence of traditional legitimation, but in addition they “had markedly higher educational, cultural and economic standards than the Romanians” (Schöpflin, 2000: 384). Hungarians had inhabited Transylvania, Moldavia and Bukovina for a thousand years, but then became a second-rate population there after WW1. Romanians regarded two minority groups with particular antipathy: Jews and Hungarians (Schöpflin, 2000).

The ethnic controversy between Hungarians and Romanians is on the affective level with an unsolvable outcome. The cause is Transylvania. It has a special status in Hungarian ethno-genetics and ethno-history, housing the ‘ancestral cradle of the Hungarian nation’; while Romanians claim continuity from an ancient Thracian population in the Roman (Dacian) times<sup>172</sup>. Thus, the Hungarian-Romanian relationship is built on incompatible, mutually exclusive myths of origin. The Hungarian historic imperative, true or mythological, warrants for the special role Transylvania has played in Hungarian (ethno-) history. The emotive level of relationships makes it impossible to disentangle who has the ‘right to’ Transylvania (similar to the role of Kosovo/Kosova<sup>173</sup>). Against this background, when Transylvania was attached to Romania by the Trianon Treaty, both core-Hungarians and Transylvanian-Hungarians found it outrageous. Therefore, the decision of the Second Vienna Award (1940)<sup>174</sup> (Illés, 1982) to *return* two-fifths of Transylvania to

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<sup>172</sup> <http://www.hungarianhistory.com/lib/trans/>.

<sup>173</sup> Similar to the myth of Kosovo/Kosova for Serbs and Albanians.

<sup>174</sup> A part of Transylvania with a majority Hungarian population was re-annexed to Hungary by the Axis-powers in 1940.



Hungary was received with celebration and great pleasure by the Hungarians. Not so by the Romanians.

Tension increased with the short-time re-annexation of Northern Transylvania to Hungary in 1940, and in 1945 Transylvania was re-annexed to Romania, freezing its status for all future time<sup>175</sup>. The *Romanianisation policy* in Transylvania caused great damages to the ethnic minorities, reducing them to mere cultural variabilities (with some freedom of expression: e.g. dress code or dialects as "cultural manifestations"). Without political overtones they were tolerated for a while. Nonetheless, government policies tended toward assimilation and minorities were soon expected to give primary allegiance to their Romanian homeland and not to claim deeper affiliation with other countries (such as Hungary). Governmental policies with ethnic demobilisation induced strong and confrontational reactions from Transylvanian-Hungarians. They have frequently rejected the policy of the Romanian state during the years, establishing their own institutions, within which Transylvanian-Hungarian identity has been collectively reproduced.

Particular strongholds, such as Székelyföld [Land of Seklers], have an essentially Hungarian ethnic identification, with primordial traits. It is based on mythological and mythical narratives, which are central to life. Székelyföld is ethnically self-segregated, with a numerically high *Székely-Magyar* [Sekler-Hungarian] population; according to their own claim, 'the most authentic Hungarians'. As Székelyföld<sup>176</sup> is far from the Hungarian borders, the Seklers' development has always been self-centered and self-governed (see map in the Appendix), with a strong self-evaluation and separateness, yet with a firm Hungarian affiliation.

Pandora from Székelyföld recounted seclusion from the majority population. Her father did not speak Romanian and her children did not learn it, and they had only Hungarian friends. Ilona, also from Transylvania, did not mention any influence from Romanian socialisation in her storytelling, confirming Kovrig's arguments that the *Magyars* displayed a "remarkable cohesion that was reinforced by their ... churches – traditional defenders of cultural identity – and sundry organizations" (Kovrig, 2000). The thesis is supported also by Verdery's theoretical analysis of the contrast between the German and Hungarian ethnic minorities' development in

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<sup>175</sup> Without having the gift of foreseeing the future, it is fair to presume that the present status quo in this matter is going to prevail.

<sup>176</sup> Székelyföld (Seklerland), Romania contains the counties of Harghita [Harghita], Kovászna [Covasna] and Maros [Mures], with a population of approx.. 1 million, of which the Székelys account for approximately 57 %; the majority choosing primary Hungarian identification. (Source: Official Census 2011)

Romania<sup>177</sup> (Verdery, 1985). Kovrig analyses the Transylvanian-Hungarians' local nationalism that developed in the interwar period into a myth of *Transylvanianism*<sup>178</sup>, an ideology arising in the mid-1920s in Romania<sup>179</sup>. Kovrig denotes that Transylvanianism has survived, idealizing "the province's separate history, experience of multiculturalism and religious tolerance" (Kovrig, 2000: 35). The *Magyars* in Transylvania have preserved a sense of national belonging; they felt detached from the Hungarian nation in 1920, which they are not reluctant to talk about whenever the opportunity arises. The people still have a strong sense of self-identification, also holding on to the notion of dual allegiance, both to Transylvania and to Hungary. Both Kovrig and Trencsényi et al. conclude that neither the Magyar minority of Transylvania, nor Hungary has become reconciled to Trianon and the Transylvanian-Hungarians do not question their place in the *Hungariandom* (Sata). They actively work for becoming an actual part of the Hungarian nation<sup>180</sup>, without moving boundaries. Hungary's relations to Transylvania(nism) is reciprocal in that 'motherland-Hungary' supports the Transylvanian-Hungarians' claim to re-join the Hungarian nation, legally facilitated by the 2001 LXXII. Law (Hungarian Status Law, 2001)<sup>181</sup> and the Hungarian identity certificate from 2007<sup>182</sup>, including all *Hungarians beyond the borders* – and others who might wish to apply – in and outside the Carpathian Basin.

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<sup>177</sup> Verdery, K., (1985) *The Unmaking of An Ethnic Collectivity; Transylvania's Germans [Romania]*. American Ethnologist.

<sup>178</sup> S. Reményik, "Fajmagyarság" (Racial Hungarianness), *Pásztortűz* 8 (22 January 1922) 3, p. 87.

<sup>179</sup> *Transylvanianism*, as a quasi-philosophical ideological concept, introduced by poets such as Reményik, S., Tavaszy, S., Walter, Gy. in Transylvania in the interwar period. (Sata, K.-C., *The idea of the Nation in Transylvanianism*. In: B. Trencsényi, Drago Petrescu, C., Petrescu, C. Iordachi, Z. Kántor (eds.); *Nation-Building and Contested Identities. Romanian & Hungarian Case Studies*. Regio Books (Budapest), Editura Polirom (Iași), 2001.); Davis, S., *East-West Discourse in Transylvania: Transitional Erdély, German-Western Siebenburgen or Latin-Western Ardeal?* In: Maxwell, A., *The East-West Symbolic geography and its Consequences*. P. Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, Bern.

<sup>180</sup> Striving for autonomy, particularly in the Land of the Sekler, is a strong wish.

<sup>181</sup> Stewart, M., *The Hungarian Status Law, 2001: A new European model of transnational politics?* Study undertaken for British ESRC Transnational Communities Research Programme, Dept. of Anthropology, Univ. College of London, 2009.

<sup>182</sup> 29 May 2007. The Hungarian Parliament unanimously ratified the amendment to the 2001 LXXII. Law (Status Law) providing magyarigazolvány [Hungarian identity papers] to ethnic Hungarians in the neighbouring countries who wish to apply for it. The same rights are provided to Hungarians beyond the borders who lost their Hungarian status against their will, as which core-Hungarians enjoy (working, settling, going to school, health insurance, and similar), but without Hungarian domicile.

Jumping to the present-day situation, on account of assimilation and migration, there are around 1.2–1.5 million Hungarian people who still call themselves Hungarians in *Erdély*, referring to themselves as *erdélyi Magyarok* [Transylvanian-Hungarians] with two sub-groups: *Székely* [Sekler] and *Csángó* [Csango] *Magyars*<sup>183</sup>. As part of the demographic decline, Romanianisation policies of the state and migration both play a role. After 1920 approximately 100,000 Transylvanian-Hungarians fled to Hungary (Kocsis, K., et al., 1998): between 1988 and 1992 the number was 66,408<sup>184</sup>.

#### *Czechoslovakia – Slovakia vs Felvidék*

Hungarians' relations to minority Hungarians in Slovakia are less national-romantic than with Transylvanian-Hungarians. Sentiments toward *Felvidék*, alt. *Felföld* [Highlands] (the northern shores of the Danube on the Slovakian side), the strip along the Hungarian border with a Hungarian majority population, are not similarly strong. The quality of ethnic relations between Slovaks and Hungarians has often changed; from being infected and compromised, to somewhat more quiet, but never relaxed. Slovaks have been co-habitants within the Hungarian Kingdom for a thousand years, sharing space with Hungarians and other minorities within the kingdom. Czechs and Slovaks created a country together after WW1 (Czechoslovakia), which split into two countries in 1993, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the latter with a substantial Hungarian minority<sup>185</sup>. The treatment of Hungarians has not been positive in the state-socialist years, and it still has not improved. In the 90s and 00s, a harsh, nationalistic political discourse rules, applied by nationalistic Slovakian politicians<sup>186</sup>, as previously pointed out in the study.

Czechoslovakia (1918–1993) was one of the main beneficiaries of the Trianon Treaty, enlarging its population with 3-5 million inhabitants (over one million Magyars) (Molnár, 2001) in accordance with the Treaty, including *Felvidék*, with a majority of Hungarian inhabitants. In Czechoslovakia the initially peripheral question of Hungarian minorities became a nuisance and soon a '*Czechoslovakisation*' policy permeated society. Internal disputes regarding ethnic minorities (Germans, Slovaks and Hungarians) produced tension in the country, creating the notion of 'Others' on various levels. Animosity between Slovaks and Hungarians was reinforced on account

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<sup>183</sup> Not in concern of the present study.

<sup>184</sup> URL source: <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/207.html>.

<sup>185</sup> Around 500,000 was the estimation in the socialistic era. URL source: <http://mek.oszk.hu/02100/02115/html/1-1246.html>.

<sup>186</sup> The Smer governments under the leaders J. Slota and J. Fico (Slota-Fico, 2006-2010, and Fico, 2012).

of the re-annexation of the ethnically Hungarian *Felföld* to Hungary in the First Vienna Arbitration (1938).

After WW2, the Germans were expelled and the Hungarians were subjected to severe repressions, attributed 'collective guilt' for the actions during the Nazi Protectorate in Czechoslovakia and accused of criminal actions. As retaliation, Hungarians were stripped of property, denied citizenship, prohibited to have Hungarian institutions; they were forced into labour and were forcibly evicted from the Czech lands. Compulsory 'population exchange' took place in 1947-48 when over 110,000 Hungarians from Czechoslovakia were expelled and around 70,000 Slovaks from Hungary moved to Czechoslovakia (Romsics, 2005). *Czechoslovakisation* was implemented with strong assimilatory pressure by quantitative expansion of industry and urban planning outside Hungarian-inhabited areas. Hungarian cultural institutions (schools, education) weakened, expelling and blocking the emergence of educated elite, resulting in a sociological profile of the minority as being predominantly peasants and workers. Borka in my study has her roots in Felföld, Slovakia.

### *Hungarian Migration Waves in the 20th Century*

Migrating among Hungarians continued throughout the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, as indicated above. Literature on Hungarian migrants and diaspora is limited in the West: detailed descriptions are mainly found in comparative studies and books, often in relation to other migrant societies<sup>187</sup>. Relevant literature with Hungarian historical references treats specific questions of ethnic minorities<sup>188</sup>, sometimes disguised as studies of different genres (e.g. sociolinguistics)<sup>189</sup>. Research on migration in the

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<sup>187</sup> M. Mandelbaum (ed.) (2000): *The New Diasporas in Europe*; Council on Foreign Relations Press, NY; Markowitz and A. H. Stefansson (2004), *Homecomings: unsettling paths and returns*, Lexington Books; Elazar, B., and Shelton, M-L., (eds.) (1998) *Borders, Diasporas, and Exile*, Stanfrod CA, Stanford UP. Further studies on Hungarian minorities are by Taylor (on Status Law, 1991) and Sabanadze (on Basque nationalism, 2010). Bibliography made after 1989 can be attained at: <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/books/biblio.pdf>.

<sup>188</sup> N. Bárdi, Cs. Fedinec, and L. Szarka László (eds.): *Kisebbségi magyar közösségek a 20. században*. Budapest, 2008 [Minority Hungarian communities in the 20<sup>th</sup> century]. Gondolat Kiadó – MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet, (pp.162-167).

<sup>189</sup> On bilingualism I. Lanstyák, *Kétnyelvűség és nemzeti megmaradás*. In: Irod. Szle 33. 1990. 5. – pp. 450-456; [Bilingualism and preservation of ethnicum]; A magyar nyelv Szlovákiában. – 2000 [Hungarian language in Slovakia – 2000]; J. Péntek, A kollektív kétnyelvűség három típusa. In: *Kétnyelvűség* 3. 1995. 2. – p.1) [Three Types of Collective Bilingualism]; or historical studies: I. Romsics, *Helyünk és sorsunk a Duna-medencében* (Osiris, 1996) [Our place and fate in the Danube Basin], 1998, *A trianoni békeszerződés* (Osiris, 2001, 2007) [Trianon Peace Treaty]; L. Kontler, A

Hungarian context looks into the specificities with dislocation, forced relocation, repatriation, diaspora formation, exile and emigrant communities, adding up to a loss of Hungarian population, often equated by Hungarians with the prospect of the ‘extinction of the nation’<sup>190</sup>. Research material on Hungarian migration has been both quantitative (counting figures of dispersed Hungarians) and qualitative, accounting for those who did not leave but, as a result of international power relations and politics, ended up living in other countries; as explained in the saying: ‘it was not the people who stepped over the borders, it was the borders that stepped over them’<sup>191</sup>.

As mentioned above, the unsettling events in the 20th century contributed to creating several Hungarian migration waves; both within Central Europe, and also world-wide. Migration from Hungary has occurred with various degrees of intensity at different times in history in the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century<sup>192</sup>. The *first migration wave* can be ascribed to the *Post-Trianon Period* (approx. 1920-1930), directed from the successor states<sup>193</sup> towards Hungary, moving around 400 thousand people by imposed migration and forced transfer of population. The *second migration wave* occurred in the *Interwar Period* (approx. 1930-1945), particularly after 1938, in the wake of the two Vienna Awards in November 1938 and August 1940, with migration in all directions and targets among minorities of the region. In WW2, a substantial number of deportations, forced re-settlements and refuge were enforced, moving around 700 thousand people (mainly Hungarian Jews, Gypsies and political prisoners deported to German concentration camps, both from Hungary and Romania<sup>194</sup>). The *third wave*

History of Hungary. Millennium in Central Europe (2002) T Palgrave; M. Molnár, A concise history of Hungary 2001. Cambridge.

<sup>190</sup> ‘Herder’s prophesy’ has been an influential idea for Hungarians over the centuries, prophesying the disappearance of the Hungarian language, equated with the idea of the ‘death of the nation’ in the Hungarian history of ideas. J.G. von Herder: “Da sind sie [die Ungarn] jetzt unter Slawen, Deutschen, Wlachen und andern Völkern der geringere Teil und nach Jahrhunderten wird man vielleicht ihre Sprache kaum finden”. *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1784-91).

<sup>191</sup> Hu: ‘Nem az emberek lépték át a határokat, hanem a határok lépték át az embereket.’

<sup>192</sup> The total number of Hungarian migrants is appreciated as being around 1.5 million; the number was according to data from the receiving countries (1871-1913) 1.8 million, but owing to commuters and returners, the exact number is difficult to define. (Source: Magyarország története a XX. Században [The history of Hungary in the 20th century] Hungarológiai Alapkönyvtár, Band II. A Vándorlás. [Migration]. URL source: <http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02185/html/207.html>).

<sup>193</sup> Hungary’s neighbours in the Carpathian Basin created after WWI (1918-1920).

<sup>194</sup> Eli Wiesel is a witness to the tragedy in his *Memoires*. All rivers run to the sea. 1995. Schocken Books, N.Y. See also: URL source: <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005472>.

of migration occurred *post-WW2* in the *Consolidated Socialism* (1945-1956; 1960-1986), with waves of imposed migration and repatriation among ethnic minorities (Germans, Hungarians and Slovakian) from different Central European countries to relocation in their 'homelands'. Additionally, also approximately 550 thousand dislocated war officers, soldiers and homeless people were on the move in Central Europe. After the communist takeover, in 1949 migration ceased for ideological reasons. The Iron Curtain<sup>195</sup> sealed the country, making escape nearly impossible. People still tried and some managed, others became 'casualties of peace', paying with their lives for trying. Illegal migration continued from Hungary during the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century: it was voluntary, individual and often difficult to accomplish. The so-called '56ers', the refugees after the Uprising in 1956 (1956-59), deserve, owing to its vast impact on Hungarian life and its international connotations, a distinct category. They fled Hungary because of fear and uncertainty about the future, the abhorrence of political oppression and state retaliation for participating or showing sympathy for the ideas of the Uprising (and also ad hoc). People also feared oppression by the enemy (internal and external), and thousands<sup>196</sup> fled overseas and to Western Europe.

Approximately eight thousands of these refugees were accepted in Sweden in 1956–57 (Svensson, 1992; Puskás, 2009). Most of these people remained and settled for good, creating the bulk of the Hungarian first generation exile community in the country, today grown into several generations<sup>197</sup>. According to data from SMOSZ<sup>198</sup>, Hungarian immigration to Sweden went on between 1956-1957 and 1989, mainly from Hungary itself. Later, in the wake of the collapse of communist rule in Romania in 1989, a substantial group of Hungarian immigrants arrived in Sweden. Many fewer came from other successor states, such as the Czech Republic/Slovakia and Yugoslavia/Serbia. The total number of (first, second and third generation)

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<sup>195</sup> From a speech of the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill; Fulton, Missouri, U.S., on 5 March 1946.

<sup>196</sup> Estimated figure is 200 thousand Hungarian *disszidens* who left Hungary after 1956. (Used source: Lénárt András: 1956-os diákok meneküléstörténete [History of student refugees of 1956]. Az 1956-os Magyar Forradalom Történetének Dokumentumai és Kutatóintézete Közalapítvány [Foundation of the Documents and Research Institute for the Study of the History of the Hungarian Revolt in 1956].

<sup>197</sup> The Hungarian refugees of 1956 have been studied by Lundquist (1966), Dugántsy (1983), Szabó (1988, 1997), Svensson (1992), (Puskás, 2009).

<sup>198</sup> Central Organisation of Hungarians in Sweden.

Hungarian immigrants from the last 60 years is accepted as being around 25–30 thousand in Sweden<sup>199</sup>.

Hungarian dissidents (Hung.: disszidensek) are today more or less integrated and assimilated (Szabó, 1988<sup>200</sup>; Svanberg, 1992<sup>201</sup>; Svensson, 1992<sup>202</sup>) into society. In contrast, the Transylvanian-Hungarians had a slightly different attitude when they arrived in Sweden after 1987. They displayed a stronger desire for reinforcement of ethnic identity through ethnic national homecoming, joining local Hungarian associations, and establishing new ones. They also acted politically in order to aid the cause of compatriots (striving for independence, or at least autonomy) in Romania. The more steadfast Hungarian-centric attitude is perhaps dependent on the fact that Transylvanian-Hungarians have adapted and actively implied strategies of resistance during their minority experience (of a hundred years), elaborating strategies for survival in unfavourable conditions and strengthening in-group belonging.

### Migration Categories of the Participants

On arrival in Sweden, the women became part of the heterogeneous *invandrargrupp* [immigrant group]; a categorisation not fully agreeable to them. For the two core-Hungarians from majority status in Hungary, both the status of immigrant and of minority were a new experience, while the other three had internalised the institutionalised ‘migrant’ status of *the Other*, living as a minority in their homelands. As reflected in their stories, the members of the two categories regard their status in Sweden to some extent differently, based on their perception of being branded as *invandrare*. In the study, I use the category of *exile* for the women, because they have moved and changed residence on a semi-permanent or permanent basis. The narrators do not comply with the category of traditional migrant: they did not escape from poverty, or lack of domestic power, for career advancement, or for educational

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<sup>199</sup> Regarding the number, I rely on the assumptions made by the Landsorganisation of Hungarians in Sweden (SMOSZ), as Sweden does not keep records on ethnic immigration, which makes statistics from SBS (Statistiska Central Byrå) unreliable.

<sup>200</sup> Szabó, Mátyás, 1988: *Ungrare*. I: Svanberg, Ingvar & Runblom, Harald (eds.) *Det mångkulturella Sverige. En handbok om etniska grupper och minoriteter*. [Multi-ethnic Sweden. Handbook on ethnic groups and minorities.] Centrum för multietnisk forskning vid Uppsala universitet. Gidlunds Bokförlag Stockholm. S. 463–471.

<sup>201</sup> Svanberg, Ingvar & Tydén, Mattias, (1992): *Tusen år av invandring. En svensk kulturhistoria*. [Thousand years of migration. Swedish cultural history.] Gidlunds Bokförlag, Stockholm.

<sup>202</sup> Svensson, Anders, 1992: *Ungrare i folkhemmet, Svensk flyktingpolitik i kalla krigets skugga*. [Hungarians in the “folkhem”. Swedish refugee politics in the shadow of the cold war.] Cesis Studies in International Conflict 7. Lund University Press. Studentlitteratur, Lund.

enhancement, which is seen as a common ground for migration (Omelianiuik, 2005). Their migration can be described as external, voluntary, and individual. They are rather *inter-state commuters*<sup>203</sup>. Not with the classic sociological aspects, moving for work on a daily basis, instead they move regularly between two/three homes in different countries, being at home and away in all of them.

Moreover, all of the women were prepared to leave their commuting way of life and resettle in their respective homeland, if the right opportunity was offered. The women are possibly temporary Settlers, and one of them has become a Returnee; all moving between different countries, places, languages and cultures to various degrees. Some of them have done so during all their life, as minority members in their host countries, while others (the core-Hungarians) have adapted to the way of living 'ferry-land' lives, moving back and forth between the old and the new homeland, experiencing the existential strangeness in culture, language and behaviour everywhere. For the interviewees in the study the old home seems to have provided the frames of identity formation and the new home the frames of existential survival.

### **Motifs and Motives of Movements**

The reasons for moving to Sweden vary for the individuals. Ilona, the only *disszidens*, left Romania in a period of unrest in Central Europe, in the wake of the Prague Spring of 1968. Three of the women are refugees of the heart: Liza married an (ethnic) Swede and moved to Sweden in 1985, while Borka and Anna moved in 1989 and 1994 respectively after marrying naturalised exile Hungarians living in Sweden since the 1960s. Pandora, with the deviating life story, partly a refugee, left Romania in 1986 with one of her children, joining her husband and their other child, who had already moved to Sweden prior to her.

After escaping from Communist-ruled countries in the late 1960s until the 1980s, migrants constructed a sense of identity separate from the common society they left, combining the elements of the old society with the elements of the new one, balancing between two cultures, developing *liminal* identities<sup>204</sup>, with disambiguates and disorientations in a passage of rite, and a new subjectivity (Turner). In a state between 'exiting' and 'entering' identities, particularities with rejection, nostalgia and idealisation of the old country are narrated by dissidents. Exile-identity can become a defence mechanism and a way of coping with the stress of migration. How old and new elements are utilized by the individual is dependent on various aspects: the cohesion in the group, grade of integration affinity, establishing new relationships

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<sup>203</sup> Mental and physical, inter-state movers with domiciles in several countries.

<sup>204</sup> Identity is used here in the modern sense: i.e. durable, constructed yet stable (Bauman).



with others, loyalties, participation and convictions of the individual, among others, giving them a special position both in their homelands and the target countries. It is not unknown regarding migrants to keep in touch with the old country, becoming *commuters* or ‘tourists’ using Bauman’s phrase; moving between societies and cultures, having a home for safety, though the locality of home becomes less and less clear – it is often a postulated mental image filled with sentiments. Hybridity is a key concept, a phenomenon well researched around migration from Eastern-European countries, as migration from them has created new kinds of migrant communities in the world. The narrators of the study attest to this, too.

### Ethno-national Homecoming of the Participants

The basis and justification for membership of the nation, the ethno-national homecoming for Hungarians, are based on an ideology of an essentialist<sup>205</sup>, historical affinity to the Hungarian ethno-national collective by virtue of blood ties, experiences through shared historical events (collective memory) and cultural values sustained across the nation, recognised as ‘homeland nationalism’ (Brubaker, 1996) or ‘kin-state nationalism’ (inter alia, Schöpflin, 2000; Fowler, 2002<sup>206</sup>). To belong to the ‘Hungarian nation’ was not always possible during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Now this has been remedied by the legal and normative Hungarian ethos fixed by the Status Law<sup>207</sup> (Stewart, 2009). The Law awards Hungarian citizenship to *Hungarians beyond the borders* – and others – upon application, making ‘homecoming’ a major ‘constituent ethos’ of the Hungarian civic discursive field. Hungarian ‘*homecomers*’ negotiate and construct their civic identity and manner of belonging, also in Sweden, within the cultural-symbolic field, utilising *Hungarianness* whenever they can, both in private and in an official capacity. Home-coming becomes two-edged when in exile: to seek community in exile and to connect with homeland(s). The interlocutors demonstrated, with the exception of Pandora, that they accessed the *ethnic discursive*

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<sup>205</sup> “Because God made me Hungarian” was the answer to the question about ethnic identification to a young man from Ukraine on the Hungarian Television channel, on 4 June 2013, who explained that he was really Hungarian, even if he was born and living in the Ukraine.

<sup>206</sup> URL source: [www.one-europe.ac.uk/pdf/w40fowler.pdf](http://www.one-europe.ac.uk/pdf/w40fowler.pdf).

<sup>207</sup> Stewart, M., (2009) ‘*The Law Concerning the Hungarians who live in neighbouring States*’. The law passed with an overwhelming 93% of the votes in the Hungarian parliament on 19 June 2001, registered as ‘Law LXII of 2001’, granting a cross-border kind of ‘citizenship’ to Hungarians beyond the borders (and everyone with Hungarian ethnic credentials wishing to become a Hungarian citizen). Amendments to the Status Law were ratified on 12 June 2007, with modifications of technicalities.

field by joining local Hungarian associations<sup>208</sup> in Sweden, and also by frequent visits to their respective homelands.

## Narrated Social and Gendered Roles

In addition to the movement of migration and exile, the category of gender is shared by the women in the study. Research has lately focused on the various constructions and performances of female (gender) identities, implying that “gender can be constructed, performed, represented and indexed” (Sunderland, 2004: 22). The women in the study have made their own choices as to how to present themselves through their narrations, constructing *in-talk* identities and identifications they wish to be known for. They articulated and constructed a variety of meanings that link them to members of society (individuals and groups). When the narrators go beyond the manifestations to incorporate their multiple ties to a community, they negotiate understandings of private and social relationships with other people. I wish to point out the fact that the local, individual performance of life story and narrative identity always reflects and presupposes more general cultural, professional and structural patterns. My choice is to take a gender-neutral stance towards my narrators; my attitude would not be different if the narrators were men. The starting point for my analysis is that the women create their identity(ies) in interaction over time and through narration. In this context narrative identity provides a subjective sense of self-coherence, regardless of gender; where the individuals plot their experiences and events in life into their life story (Ricoeur 1986 [1992])<sup>209</sup>.

### Stories as Fibre of Women’s Experiences

The fact that my choice for the narrators in the study fell on female persons, can prompt by all means further exploration of the gendered, or female form and style of their narrations. Female and male narration styles have been investigated in Western

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<sup>208</sup> The local Hungarian association that the interlocutors have had relations with is LMKF (Lundi Magyar Kulturfórum) [Hungarian Cultural Forum in Lund]. URL source: [http://www.lundikulturforum.se/tortenet\\_se.php](http://www.lundikulturforum.se/tortenet_se.php).

<sup>209</sup> Ricoeur, P. describes personal identity containing two entities. The first he calls *idem* (sameness), presuming permanence in time (contrasting the changing), reducible to social identity (Bourdieu’s *habitus*). The second, *ipse* identity (selfhood), allows other modalities of *non-identical* identities, which contain aspects of the individual identity not reducible to mere social identity. (*Oneself as Another*, 1986; trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992).)

and Central European research for decades (e.g. Coates, 1998; Kovács and Melegh, 2004; Lakoff, 1975; Trudgill, 1972; Labov, 1990) to look for any consistent differences in the speech of the different sexes. Confirming the existence of certain differences, the interpretation of those together with their communicative function (Bergvall et al, 1996) remains somewhat elusive, making generalization into a number of ‘universals’ (Holmes, 1993) controversial. Still, *women* are often described as being more attentive to the affective function of conversation and having the tendency to use linguistic devices that set relationships. Some scholars (Langellier and Peterson, Kovács and Melegh<sup>210</sup>) argue that stories told by women differ from men’s ways of telling narratives, rooted in their “assigned social role” from an early age based on the feminine identity formation that women often pragmatically accept (Gilligan, 1982). Investigation of gendered identity (from a feminist viewpoint) is outside the scope of the present study; my view is that gender may mean different things for different women<sup>211</sup>. Thus, there are women whose awareness of gender involves traditional ways of displaying *femininity* (e.g. through domestic and caring roles, motherhood or assertion of sexuality).

Narratives of lives are the unquestioned ‘marks of [being human]’ observes Jane Marcus in her book *Bluebeard’s Daughters: Pretexts for Pre-Texts* and concludes that humans occur in two genders<sup>212</sup>, and the storytelling and texts that women write are gendered activities. Bartaux stresses the role of *écriture féminine* (Bartaux, 1981) in biography research, as these “transgress[es] structures of domination” in power relationships. The feminist researcher England argues that “[m]ost feminists usually favour the role of applicant, seeking reciprocal relationships based on empathy and mutual respect, and often sharing their knowledge with those they research” (England, 1994).

In my view, these opinions point at gender stereotypes. Moreover, one does not have to be a feminist researcher to share knowledge with the persons one researches. One can dismantle the belief that research is an exploitation of others, by acknowledging the inter-dependence between researcher and the researched and the reciprocal

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<sup>210</sup> Kovács, Éva-Melegh, Attila (2004): A vándorlást elbeszélő narratívák neme avagy nők és férfiak elbeszélései – női és férfi elbeszélésmódok. (The Gender of Migration Narratives. The Narratives of Men and Women – Male and Female Narratives) In: Pető Andrea (ed.): A társadalmi nemek képe és emlékezete Magyarországon a 19.-20. században. (The Image and Memory of Gender in Hungary in the 19th and 20th centuries.) Budapest, Nők a Valódi Esélyegyenlőségért Alapítvány, 175 - 198.

<sup>211</sup> In the definition of *woman* the present study does not include the exclusion aspect that the feminist “status of womanhood of Western theoretical discourse” (Felman) implies looking at women as a different, oppressed strata of society. Instead, I view ‘woman’ in her own right, as an individual, acknowledging that the language the women in the study use is the language of the individual.

<sup>212</sup> Open discussion on the ‘third gender’ has not started yet.

relationships between those. The elicited stories in the study are ‘drawn from the fibre of women’s experiences’ (Langallier, 1992), and the women narrators’ style is seen as ‘feminine narrative style’, even if they do not explicitly focus on ‘traditional female’ (feminist) issues, such as patriarchy, oppression, emancipation, women’s chores, child-raising, elderly care, and so on. Nonetheless, their presentations are soaked with the listed themes in an unstressed manner. I appreciate a *variationist*<sup>213</sup> view on gendered experience and I apply it in the study. Women (and men) may perceive and accomplish gender in different ways, influenced by their ethnic group belonging, cultural orientation, religion, nationality and so on. The women in the study relate in a relaxed and neutral way to womanhood and the feminine side of their experiences. However, some also exploit these experiences to various extents whenever they find them to be useful<sup>214</sup>. Feminine and gendered roles, or the narrators’ way of *doing gender*, shall be explored to the extent they narrate those.

## Doing Gender

Gender is seen as a basic means of social classification, a constructed social concept, used both in academic writing and everyday life. It is socially realized, subjectively experienced (an identity), positioning individuals in a specific way, according to the gender attributed to and adopted by them. Gender, as a construct, orients and mediates the relations between biological bodies as givens, with the social meanings around them, similar to the concept of *nation* and *ethnicity*, both constituting contexts of the narrations. The participants’ gender experiences lead to the investigation of the conceptual term “doing gender” was introduced into social thought by West and Zimmermann (1987)<sup>215</sup>; later extended to examine “doing difference”, in the intersection of sex, race and gender<sup>216</sup> (West and Fenstermaker<sup>217</sup>).

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<sup>213</sup> Applying the sociolinguistic view of open-ended, analytic method to achieve comparable data.

<sup>214</sup> Kathy Ennis, *Women’s Consciousness, From International Socialism*, No.68, April (1974, pp.25 - 28.), Sheila Rothbaum, *Women’s Consciousness, Men’s World* (1973), Penguin Books.

<sup>215</sup> “Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimising one of the most fundamental divisions of society. The *doing of gender* is accomplished by the individual, but according to Zimmerman it is a situated doing, carried out in the company of others, understanding the rules of ‘doing gender’. *Doing Gender*, Candace West; Don H. Zimmerman, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 1 No. 2. (June 1987), pp. 125 – 151.

<sup>216</sup> In “Doing Difference” the authors examine the intersection of gender, class and race, which I would wish to extend here to also cover ethnicity, to see those as an ongoing accomplishment rather than “mathematical metaphors” (West, C. and Fenstermaker, S., *Doing Difference. Gender and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1. (Feb., 1995), p. 35).

The concept of *doing gender* has been used, and misused, and criticised over the years; for instance by Risman, firstly because it made out that the concept of initial ‘implicit feminist critique’ has now been lost; secondly, because the concept of *doing gender* as used by ‘the feminists’ has become a tautology, in which whatever females or males do today is called *doing gender* (Risman, 2009<sup>218</sup>). Also other studies have problematised issues deriving from the theory of *doing gender* (Stokoe, 2003), some claiming that the patterns used by the theory reproduce and maintain a particular ‘arrangement between the sexes’ (Davis, 1988; Shaw, 2000; West, 1995). Stokoe<sup>219</sup> argues that the ‘doing’ of gender in our society is founded in people’s situated categorisation practices, and advocates for Sacks’ ‘MCA<sup>220</sup> machinery’ for the understanding of how people produce and sustain the social and moral order, allowing participants to both “construct and manage their conduct in relation to conventional expectations for women and men’s activities and character” (ibid., p. 7).

Regarding the issue and study of *doing gender* in the present narrations, I had the following concerns. First, the term ‘gender’ is often used as a fixed category (essentialised; something that one *has*, instead of what one actually *does*); i.e. it is compared to pre-defined categories (e.g. men’s assumed inequality attributes). The category of ‘gender’ is also often seen as ‘real’, existing ‘out there’, ready to be connected to conversational patterns. Conversation analysts, such as Schegloff, also claim that categories such as gender should only be considered within the context that is built up by interactants within emergent social actions, which they express an understanding for (Schegloff, 1992, 1997). I would like to argue for the setting aside of one’s sexual and gender practices, saying that individuals should have the social freedom to choose their ways as separate persons in a just world beyond gender. Risman et al. suggest the (seemingly utopian) deconstruction of gender as it is “inherently unequal”<sup>221</sup>.

The interlocutors of my study do not treat gender as explicitly relevant to their ongoing interaction (storytelling). Thus, the question is to what extent the category of

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<sup>217</sup> West, C. and Fenstermaker, S., Doing Difference. *Gender and Society*, Vol. 9, No. 1. (Feb., 1995), pp. 8-37.

<sup>218</sup> Risman, B. (2009), From Doing to Undoing Gender As We Know It. *Gender & Society*, Vol. 23 No. 1 (February 2009), pp. 81-84, Sage Publication.

<sup>219</sup> Stokoe, E. H., Doing Gender, Doing categorisation, [http://www.crisaps.org/newsletter/backissue/stokoe\\_back.pdf](http://www.crisaps.org/newsletter/backissue/stokoe_back.pdf).

<sup>220</sup> Membership Categorization Analysis.

<sup>221</sup> Risman, B., Lorber, J., Holden Sherwood, J., (eds.) Paper for an American Sociological Society meeting in 2012 Toward a World Without Gender: A Utopian Vision.

gender has been created in the interaction between my (academic) self and the individuals; using *gender* as a frame to (perhaps) subconsciously categorise people. One might ask whether it is the narrators' understanding that led me to raise the issue of *doing gender*, or if it is my academic training that brings the question up. This can be a problem, as in my view academic research interest should not be the sole guiding factor for implicit claims for seeing the category of gender as 'cause or explanation' of the emergence of a pattern. But I believe that it is useful to use the category for analytic purposes, as gender has strong implications for individual identities and sense of self or for cultural meanings. It is also used by people to explain their attitudes, behaviour and actions. Stokoe's arguments I find useful for the potential of MCA in studies and analysis of language and gender, or of categories, such as age or ethnicity. Our narrators do not explicitly categorise themselves 'genderwise' ('wife', 'woman' or 'mother'), thus the frames of reference are implicit, *commonly-known* attributes associated with gender categories. However, their talk includes details that are identifiable as "cultural procedure for doing and recognising instances" (Wowk, 1984: 77) of for example gendered practices, displaying taken-for-granted facts about gender appropriate behaviour and characters.

Gendered practices in the Hungarian context are also culturally-related; i.e. following cultural codes and patterns, including stereotypical women's roles as *care-givers*. It is important to consider the complexity of the aspects, because, as pointed out, the relationship "between biological and cultural processes" is far more "complex and reflexive" than previously expected (West and Zimmerman<sup>222</sup>, quoting Rossi, 1984: 10-14). How much a person's gender identity is dependent on her biological 'make-up'<sup>223</sup> or whether it is influenced by society, age cohort and socialisation can be further debated, but owing to the space allotted here I shall only acknowledge the fact that gender identity is a mixture of biology and socialisation, and gender identity/identification has both social and cultural dimensions, in which age also allegedly plays an important role.

The term *doing gender* in the study is applied to what women and men experience and the strategies they choose in their daily lives. The choices are mediated by gendered institutions, norms and policy contexts. The *doing gender* is done in an interaction,

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<sup>222</sup> West, C., Zimmerman, D.H., *Doing Gender*, Gender and Society Vol. 1. No. 3. (June 1987), pp 125 - 151.

<sup>223</sup> Blum, D., *The Gender Blur: Where does Biology end and Society Take Over?* Source: <http://www.studymode.com/subjects/deborah-blum-the-gender-blur-page1.html>; Martin, J., *Free from Gender Roles*. Source: [http://www.whiterootmedia.com/database/dusty\\_arlia/freedom\\_from\\_gender\\_roles.html?gclid=CL3SwciznrMCFWF7cAodFnAASQ](http://www.whiterootmedia.com/database/dusty_arlia/freedom_from_gender_roles.html?gclid=CL3SwciznrMCFWF7cAodFnAASQ).

and the way it is done, for example in challenging the gender status quo, will be judged by others; presupposing that intersectionalities across gender, class, ethnicity, nation and age impact on *how* we do gender. Following the narrators' own orientations, I wish to acknowledge here the multiple femininities that exist (according to class, social occasion or ethnicity), keeping Giddens' structuration<sup>224</sup> in mind, stating that social structure both constrains behaviour, and is created by it. Accordingly, even though individuals are products of their social worlds, they are not determined by them (Giddens, 1984). This should go for gender being a social construct like age, ethnicity, and similar, as well.

### Doing Pure Love Relationships

Linked to *doing gender*, I was expecting the emergence of the discourse of 'love' in the narrations, perhaps as a social legitimisation for the intercultural heterosexual marriages that made the women move to Sweden. I must confess that I had expectations of stories of emotional relationships, even of 'romantic', and/or of 'pure love relationship' (Giddens, 1992)<sup>225</sup>, or at least 'romance'. Nevertheless, I did not ask explicit questions about love relations; I hoped for them to appear un-prompted. Actually, no regime of romantic (or other kind) of love arose, no discourse on 'self-identity awaiting validation from the discovery of the other' (Gross, 2002, in Passerini et al.) emerged (Passerini, 2007). The narrators omitted almost all emotional and intimate accounts in relation to their lives, presenting detached individuals, not visioning marriage or marital life. Their story details about personal relationships were rather rational (pragmatic); explaining sympathetic and good sides of their partners, pointing out intellectual affinity and, indirectly, their mutual dependency (support, professional life, practicalities of life, social network). Discourses on 'true love' might legitimise transnational marriages if used; if omitted, one looks for explanations. The speaker might wish to avoid stereotypes meeting migrant women's discourses on 'matters of the heart', implying 'instrumental' use of marriages: economic interests, fake marriages, exploitation of social and economic benefits in the West, and similar. The women might have been shy, or did not find it necessary to make efforts to convince the audience about the 'purity' of their intentions; matters of the heart being

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<sup>224</sup> Giddens' structuration theory aims at explaining the relationship between the individual and the social forces that influence her in her ways of acting; proposing that though people might not have complete control over their actions and they might have a restricted knowledge of them, they still recreate social structures and produce social change (through agency).

<sup>225</sup> 'Pure love' is seen by Giddens as a social relationship, entered for its own sake, continuing to be sustained as long as both partners find the relationship satisfactory to stay within.

strictly private business. Neglecting an issue can sometimes be a better strategy than to denounce and go into explanations or denial.

## Hungarian Models of Doing Gender

Reports from Hungarian researchers often conclude that the general attitude and the status of feministic, gender or women studies is not prioritised in Hungary (Koncz, 1996; Fodor, 2003; Pető, 2007<sup>226</sup>); reflected in the declining figures in the World Economic Forum's statistics for 2011<sup>227</sup>, as well. Reasons can be sought in the policy driven during state-socialism, where neither sociology, nor feminist and gender studies<sup>228</sup> were pursued. Another explanation might be the traditionalist view of women being not aware of other values than the familiar ones, as some women might value the traditional social roles higher than other, more 'modern', roles. The question of *mother and work*, vs. *mother or work*, is constantly on the agenda in Hungarian *women research* and sociological studies, concluding that Hungary is one of the most family-centred societies in Europe regarding family values and attitudes, where family is seen a cohabitation and social unit with prestige (Pető, 1994<sup>229</sup>; Pető, 2010).

I find Pető's pioneering works in Hungarian gender history research, with extensive studies on Hungarian women, very useful, giving me insight into Hungarian gender studies. One of Pető's studies on women in politics after 1945 is particularly instructive, with several important messages about the challenges that gender perspectives produce within researching 'society'. Pető investigated, among other things, the question of 'love relationships' in state socialism, by placing the political transformation after WW2 within the conceptual sphere of emotional structures and

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<sup>226</sup> *The State of Women's and Gender History in Eastern Europe: The Case of Hungary*. Journal of Women's History, Volume 19, Number 1, Spring 2007, pp. 160 - 166, The John Hopkins UP.

<sup>227</sup> <http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-2011/>.

<sup>228</sup> Two of the most active women study researchers in Hungary, Pető and Szapor, expressed their view on this matter: "következtesen képviselt, elkülöníthető fogalmi keret és módszertani megközelítés hiányában, a nő- és társadalmi nemek történetének tanulmányozása még nem érte el [nálunk] azt a szintet, hogy elfogadtassa magát, mint legitim [...] önálló tudományos kutatási terület" [lacking consequent representation and separate conceptualisation and methodological approach, the history of women and gender studies has not yet reached [here] the level to make it acceptable as a legitimised [...] independent scientific field of research]. (Pető, A., and Szapor, J., (2006). *A "diszkriminatív" nőtörténetlem tanításától a társadalmi nemek történetéig*. [From studies in "discriminative" women's history to the history of gender studies.] In: Pető A., (ed.): *A társadalmi nemek oktatása Magyarországon*. [Gender studies in Hungary.] Budapest 75-84.

<sup>229</sup> Pető, A., *As He saw Her: Gender Politics in Secret Party Reports in Hungary During 1950s*. In *CEU History Department Working paper Series*, No. 1. 1994, 107–121.



value systems. She found that in Communism, movement was always prioritised over private life; the Communist Party had authority to govern sexual (and gender-related) behaviour and attitudes of the people. In Petö's conclusion, the actual emancipation of women was prevented by the rigidity of emotional structures in the socialistic order.

Petö also investigated the prevailing traditionalist (conservative) role that women still play in the Hungarian society, after the political collapse in 1989. She argues that stereotypical women's characteristics such as *intimacy*, *sensitivity*, or *family centeredness* were performed in communism to resist a left-wing *statist feminism*, whose rhetoric was aimed exactly against these characteristics (Petö, 2003; 2008). Conservative resistance to communism was based on restoring so-called 'female virtues' within the family according to the cult of the Virgin Mary<sup>230</sup>, aiming at preserving family values in private life against the *pseudo-equality* in socialism. According to Petö, the persistency of traditionalist thinking today can be explained by the fact that these 'female virtues' have been saved and transformed to post-socialism (Petö, 2008).

Petö's observations make a plausible explanation for the puritan presentation of marital relations in the present study, as well, perhaps the reason behind certain *un-voiced* story details, because all kinds of resistance, including resistance against 'statist feminism', was done *sub rosa*. In my view, claimed equality between genders in socialism was not based on the perception of the treatment of equal citizens, but rather on working mothers, delineating the Hungarian kind of emancipation from the Western concept of emancipation. Arguably, the conclusion can be drawn that the perspectives on gender research have also informed people's everyday lives. Thus, it is reasonable to think that it has influenced the interpretations of women's roles and the aspect of 'doing gender' in the stories of the study, as well. For the sake of argument, looking for an explanation to the *relative unreflecting, explicit attitude* of the interviewees to gender issues, I am inclined to seek arguments in various sources; using Petö's above conclusions, and also the studies of two Western scholars, presented below.

### Social and Gendered Roles in State Socialism

The development of the Hungarian model of welfare state with its pseudo-equality system, which started in around the early 1960s, also gives a clue to the matter of the Hungarian way of doing gender. In addition to Petö's study, relying on Membership Categorization Analysis (MCA) and MC Device (MCD) (Sacks, 1972), I wish to use the works of Chris Corrin and Lynne Haney that studied Hungarian women. Haney

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<sup>230</sup> Mother of Jesus.

made sociological case studies with a feminist focus<sup>231</sup>, investigating the relation between the Hungarian welfare state and state socialism from women's viewpoints. Corrin made ethnographic interviews on different occasions with Hungarian women, studying their life conditions<sup>232</sup> in socialistic Hungary, using also sociological documents and surveys.

Conditions for both women and men in Hungary were influenced after 1947<sup>233</sup> by the Soviet theoreticians Kollontai<sup>234</sup> and Trotsky<sup>235</sup>. New, mainly alien ideas were introduced into the previously primarily conservative, individualist and religious (catholic) Hungarian society. They emphasised 'socialist awareness and consciousness', guided by the ideologies of the Soviet Union. The question of the construction of gender and, within that, genderness of the welfare state (Griffin et al., 2002)<sup>236</sup> has a rich literature in Western scholarship, but there is no agreement, yet, as to how to view the role of state and how to analyse its gendered underpinnings. I believe there is a point to considering this subject in the Hungarian context, because the Hungarian welfare state from the 1960s on was comparable to the Swedish 'folkhem-welfare state', perhaps even superseding it in regard to social benefits and support<sup>237</sup>, affecting women's status both ideologically and psychologically.

Relying on long-lasting pre-war social values, the (heterosexual) 'ideal type' of socialist family<sup>238</sup> structure prevailed: mother, father and two (or three) children, with equal allocation of household tasks and decision making (Corrin, 1994: 90). Women were viewed as necessary attributes to the survival and smooth running of family life, thus their position within families had been socially elevated to a level to which women were expected to aspire, following an ideology of *proper* behaviour for women (a taken-for-granted appropriate gender category). This, together with the concept of

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<sup>231</sup> Haney, L. (2002), *Inventing the Needy: Gender and the politics of Welfare in Hungary*. Haney made her study in Budapest, Hungary, with the support of Funds and Hungarian institutions.

<sup>232</sup> Corrin, C. (1994), *Magyar Women. Hungarian Women's Lives, 1060s-1990s*. St. Martin's Press, New York.

<sup>233</sup> Communist takeover in Hungary.

<sup>234</sup> Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952), feminist ideologist in Russia and the Soviet Union; the ideology could be called 'socialistic colonisation', showing similarities to classic colonisation (appropriation, exploitation, acquisition).

<sup>235</sup> Lev Trotsky (1879-1940), Marxist revolutionary, theoretician, member of the Politburo, founder of the Red Army and leader in the Russian Civil War (1918-1920).

<sup>236</sup> Griffin, G., Braidotti, R., (eds.) *Thinking differently. A reader in European Women's studies*, ZED Books, London, New York, 2002.

<sup>237</sup> Turning Hungary into the 'the merriest barrack' in the socialistic camp, with 'gulyás' or 'frigidaire communism'.

<sup>238</sup> The Family. Source: <http://countrystudies.us/hungary/58.htm>.

*desexualised* woman, accepting the “double burden”<sup>239</sup> (Corrin, 1992) as a natural division of labour within the family, encouraged women to form the domestic domain to their liking. They worked hard “to please their husbands in what they considered an appropriately feminine way”, thus maintaining gender categorisation practices. Corrin writes that Hungarian women seem to be reluctant to share domestic work with a partner, which is interpreted by her as women in Hungary would perceive it as a loss of power (*ibid.*). This is a fairly realistic observation about the condition of women in Hungary, also supported by my own observations *in situ*, and by several sociological surveys (ESSP; TÁRKI<sup>240</sup>; Tóth, 1996<sup>241</sup>), answering social (and ideological) gender role expectations within the Hungarian cultural context (Pongrácz, 2006<sup>242</sup>). Hungarian women in almost all families organise(d) their household (home) and are/were responsible for the care of the children (Labour Focus on Eastern Europe, 1978: 18.).

In Haney’s interpretations, the overall state policy in early socialism targeted the decoupling of work from welfare and re-distribution from the enterprise to the national government (Haney, 2002). In state-socialism (1945-1989), women and men were viewed according to their social contribution as workers and family members. Positive segregation benefited women; men’s roles (as spouses and fathers)

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<sup>239</sup> Corrin, C. (1992), *Superwomen and the Double Burden. Women’s Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union*. Scarlet Press, London.

<sup>240</sup> TÁRKI (Társadalomkutató Intézet) [Social Research Institute] in Budapest.

<sup>241</sup> Tóth, O. (1998): *Házasság és gyermek: vélekedés és viselkedés*. [Marriage and children: opinion and behaviour.] *Századvég*, Új folyam., 11. Pp.80 – 93.; Pongrácz, T., S. Molnár, E., Dobossy, I., (2001): *Család és munka – Értékek és aggodalmak a rendszerváltás után*. [Family and work – Values and worries after the system change.] (KSH NKI Kutatási jelentések. 62.) KSH Népeségstudományi Kutatóintézet, Budapest; Blaskó Zsuzsa (2006): *Nők és férfiak – keresőmunka, házimunka. A „család” tematikájú ISSP 2002-es adatfelvétel elemzése*. [Men and women – bread-winning work and domestic work] (KSH NKI Kutatási Jelentések 82.), KSH Népeségstudományi Kutatóintézet, Budapest; Dubcsik, Cs., and Tóth, O., Feminizmus helyett Familizmus. [Feminism vs. Familism.] *Demográfia*, 2008. Vol. 51, Issue 4, pp. 307 – 328.

<sup>242</sup> Pongrácz T.-né, (2006) *Nemi szerepek társadalmi megítélése. Egy nemzetközi összehasonlító vizsgálat tapasztalatai*. [Social evaluation of gender roles. Conclusions of an international comparative study.] TÁRKI, Ifjúsági, Családügyi, Szociális és Esélyegyenlőségi Minisztérium, Pp. 73 – 86. Pongráczné concluded that the Hungarian society’s view on the function of male and female roles is the most traditional, or conservative if you like, in the European context, even compared to the previous socialistic countries, which she says derives from the exceptionally family-centric ideology of the Hungarian people. She warns not to conclude that this means that Hungarian women are oppressed or exploited, rather, it is because with respect and the high appreciation of family values, they consider it as their key priority to see to the provision of domestic work and they see the central and decisive role they fill and their indispensability as a compensation for the extra burden.” (p. 85) (Transl. by KH.)

weakened, while women's roles as mothers were emphasised with the growing maternalist welfare state from the 1960s on (GYES<sup>243</sup>, GYED<sup>244</sup>, pregnancy support, maternity support, family allowance, baby bonds<sup>245</sup>). Through the intervention of the state, the needs of women as mothers<sup>246</sup> were separated from the needs of other social groups. Labour conditions adjusted to assure that the welfare of women was upheld, whereby motherhood became a key entitlement claim and domesticity tests became a common way to assign support. Women were put into the centre of social attention, neglecting other groups' needs and sustaining, moulding and cultivating the myth of the 'good mother'<sup>247</sup>. Feminist analysts have pointed out how welfare systems shaped gender/power relations through sex-segregated spheres of redistribution (Fraser, 1989).

Haney states that Hungarian society had become 'sex-segregated' in state socialism, by the specific welfare state policy influencing both men and women (1994). As a result, women drew the longest straw in the 'struggle between the sexes', as the state supplied women with measures satisfying their needs, mainly as mothers<sup>248</sup>. Haney points out that this policy did not stop Hungarian women, or men, from having agency to act on social policies; they neither passively submitted to state policies, nor resisted and

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<sup>243</sup> GYES is an acronym for Gyerekgondozási Segély [Child Care Subsidy] paid monthly to any citizen taking care of the child (guardians, parents, adopted parents, grand-parents), payable from the child's first birthday until the child's third birthday (for twins until school starts), without the need to participate in the labour market.

<sup>244</sup> GYED, an acronym for Gyerekgondozási Díj [Child Support Fee], is paid to parents or adopted parents who had been employed before the birth of the child, payable until the child's second birthday.

<sup>245</sup> *Babakötvény* [Baby bonds]: fixed sum, payable once per birth, through a saving account at a bank, opened by the State (Tax Office).

<sup>246</sup> The new cadre of family experts (social workers) rationalizing the Hungarian family pointed out that mothers are the source of the welfare or lack of it of the family. Through institutional measures they shaped mothering: i.e. by forbidding women to do jobs that could impair their ability to reproduce within a family; a new childcare grant (for every one year of paid work); subsidized maternity leave for every child; new child-rearing funds that gave financial support to mothers, covering the costs of institutions like creches and kindergartens. These policies focused attention more on mothers than on families.

<sup>247</sup> An ideology with continuity in Hungary during the 20<sup>th</sup> century; supported and strengthened in the interwar period and continuing also in socialism. Women are the soul of Hungarianism. Lecture series by Mrs. K. Kálmánné (1959).

<sup>248</sup> These measures were provided until the collapse of the state-socialist system. The late socialistic regime in the 1980s still focused on women, and within that category, on mothers. Not until the last days of state-socialism did other criteria take over the role of 'needy'; first they became society gender-neutral and divided into categories such as rich and poor (material need).

fought it all the time. Instead, people either accepted or rejected state understandings of their needs. Hungarians have always strategized to gain discursive and economic resources (ibid.), as contested to by the narrators, too. Corrin draws the opposite conclusion, criticising the socialistic society that deprived its citizens (both men and women) of individuality, thus limiting their space for actions, making them inactive participants. The two opposing standpoints can be interpreted from the horizon the researchers had worked from. Haney was involved in direct contact with people, while Corrin was inquiring into institutional measures. However, a dualistic relationship (similar to double socialisation) characterised Hungarian society during 'socialistic realism'. Both sides had their ideological basis and practical rules working in mutually influencing interaction, satisfying the demands of what was expected from them.

In my view, based on the above, state-socialism strengthened a perception of elevated gender regime for women (making life relatively comfortable), which provided women with a sense of free agency and autonomy in the domestic field, and a socially bigger space to engineer their lives discursively, practically, and institutionally. It is fair to say, that the so-called *women's issues* from the socialistic era are rather social issues, and as such, they should have been subjected to open, social discussions, which they were not. The above studies were limited to Hungary, but I dare venture a parallel with the other socialistic countries with similar social and political systems, following the Soviet model, also reflected in the narrations of the present study, to make comparison feasible<sup>249</sup>.

### **Hungarian Models of Social and Gendered Roles**

As already mentioned with regard to Hungarian models of doing gender, social roles, or patterns of relationships<sup>250</sup>, are still traditional and rigid in the Hungarian

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<sup>249</sup> A collection of literature dealing with gender and feminist studies in Eastern European countries is to be found in e.g. the yearbook *Aspasia: International Yearbook of Central, Eastern, and Southeastern European Women's and Gender History* <http://journals.berghahnbooks.com/asp/>; <http://www.awsshome.org/WEWBibliography2012July-September.pdf>; <http://www.gender-studies.org/>; or individual research by Passerini et al., *Women Migrants from East to West*, Berghahn Books, 2007; Corrin, C. (ed.), *Gender and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, Frank Cass, London, 1999; Griffin, G., Braidotti, R. (eds.), *Thinking differently. A reader in European Women's studies*, ZED Books, London, New York, 2002; Roman, D., *Gendering Eastern Europe, pre-feminism, prejudice and east-west dialogues in post-communist Romania*. *Women's Studies International Forum*, Volume 24, Issue 1, January–February 2001, pp 53 – 66; just to mention a few.

<sup>250</sup> With four main functions. Roles are: 1. properties; 2. dynamic; 3. relational; 4. contextual.

family<sup>251</sup>. People generally take roles according to social expectations, and on this account, Hungarian women still separate the societal from the domestic, thus also the roles within the domains. Family roles in Hungarian state-socialism were regarded as the least contradictory among social roles, possibly because taking social roles according to what is expected of one is the smoothest way to cope, avoiding confrontations, contradictions, and open resistance, while also attaining rewards, benefits and positive acceptance of the individual. In politically troubled eras, not playing social roles according to the 'right script' could also have serious consequences, whereas playing along assured a quiet life. In state-socialism, private family life was often a place for retreat, recreation and tranquillity, compared to social conventions or contexts at large<sup>252</sup>.

The narrators in the study portray their family roles as *care-givers*, with husbands and children. Even Ilona, who has lived alone without family of her own, has been expressive in pointing out this side of her life, while Borka, Anna, Pandora and Liza all spoke of their caregiver role in one way or another. The women have also presented themselves in relational roles as children, mothers, or wives with different foci still adhering to traditional Hungarian family values<sup>253</sup> (care, understanding, and emotions); confirming the importance of the institution of family as a platform for socialisation of the next generation (*ibid.*)<sup>254</sup>.

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<sup>251</sup> Pongrácz, M. (2006), *Opinions on Gender Roles* in: Ildikó Nagy, Marietta Pongrácz, István György Tóth (eds.) *Changing Roles: Report on the Situation of Women and Men in Hungary 2005*. Budapest: TÁRKI Social Research Institute, pp. 71 - 84.

<sup>252</sup> Further reading on the Hungarian society in the Kadar era can be found in the works of Blaskó (2002), Tóth (2010), Valuch (1996-2000), Beluszky (2000), Szabó (1988), Hankiss, 1989), to mention a few.

<sup>253</sup> Olga Tóth, *Családformák és együttélési minták a mai Magyar társadalomban*. [Family forms and cohabitation models in contemporary Hungarian society.] Source: <http://www.tarki.hu/adatbank-h/nok/szerepvalt/totholga97-2.html>. Bodonyi, E., Busi, E., Hegedüs, J., Magyar, E., Vizely Á., *Család, gyerek társadalom*. [Family, Child, Society.] Bölcsész Konzorcium. 2006. Pongrácz, T.né., A család és a munka szerepe a nők életében [The role of family and work in women's lives] in: Nagy, I., Pongrácz.T.né, Tóth I., (eds.) *Szerepváltozások. Jelentés a nők és férfiak helyzetéről*. 2005. [Changing roles. Report on the situation of women and men. 2005]. TÁRKI, pp 73 - 86. US Library of Congress: The Family. Source: <http://countrystudies.us/hungary/58.htm>.

<sup>254</sup> Roles in the family: <http://mek.niif.hu/02100/02185/html/192.html>.

## Official Domains – Careers, Professions and Work Relations

Along with the social roles in the family, Hungarian women play an important role in family support as professional workers. The interlocutors presented their individual attitude to work, except for Ilona, who had been retired for decades by the time of the interview. The other four women, all with higher education, talked of their individual solutions to professional roles. Borka, Ilona, Pandora and Anna had already established careers after university studies<sup>255</sup> prior to their moving to Sweden. Borka, Liza and Anna complemented their education by further studies in Sweden (at Lund and Malmö Universities). Liza has successfully adapted to Swedish labour market conditions, while Borka was displeased having a part-time job. Anna had no intentions of working in Sweden, while Pandora proclaimed that she had hopes to work as a teacher (of English), complementing her studies in Sweden, but she sadly was unsuccessful in achieving this goal with productive results.

Details of family undertakings and professional achievements are best narrated by the interlocutors, which are to be found in the respective parts of the study. A short conclusion before discussing my methodological choices for the analysis of the narratives is, that regarding working conditions and achievements in Sweden, these regrettably did not reach the level of ability and competence of the individuals, as mirrored in their narrations.

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<sup>255</sup> Common for Hungarian families and also migrant families, as described by Andersson and Szabó.

### 3. Methodological Approaches

"The narratives of the world are numberless. ... carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gestures, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news item, conversation. /.../ narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself."

(Barthes, 1977: 79)

The palette of working topics with "narratives of the world" are seemingly endless, which has inspired me to work on my elicited material with the view that stories of lives are not reducible to structural determinism. The interview is the form and the narration is the content that my study is interested in investigating. If individuals are storytellers by nature and they tell stories because they wish to create continuity and coherence within their experiences, these stories may be perceived as interpretations of the self. De Fina (2003), who discusses the variability of texts that belong to the narrative genre, asserts that there are a variety of topics, functions and internal structures that are reflected by narratives, involving a variety of participation and innumerable interactional formats. These reflect the power and social relationships between interactants (Goodwin, 1990; Schegloff, 1997; Ochs, 2001), which find their expression in the study, as well.

#### Interviews and Elicitations

As indicated in the Introduction, I have made approximately 50-80 recordings with Hungarians with the initial goal of using the collected data for a sociolinguistic investigation. After a while, changing the focus of the study, I decided to make a life story narrative analysis. As a final step, I chose the stories of five individuals (see section Participants; p. 20) and with the consent of the interviewees I made a qualitative study with in-depth interviews. The locations for the interviews were



chosen with consideration for the interlocutors, securing quiet sites for our meetings. As I had known the interviewees for a long time, the meetings always began with some small talk, exchanging greetings and talking of trivialities of life. I had previously explained to the interlocutors the goal of the interview by mail, which I reminded them of before starting the tape recorder. Each of the interviewees wished to be reassured that they would get help (by questions) should they get 'stuck'. My objectives were to get freely narrated, possibly coherent life story details, including events and actions from the past, everyday life occurrences in the present and thoughts and plans about the future. Whenever I considered that more information was necessary or a topic had to be cleared up, I put questions, but I tried not to explicitly direct the narrators and influence them in giving the 'expected' answers. From time to time, the narrators stopped talking, either deep in thought, or because they had exhausted the topic or had come to a spot which they were not comfortable talking about. Sometimes I had the feeling that the interlocutors did not consider certain details as important to talk about as I did, like the Hungarian Revolt of 1956, or ethnic minority status, and in such cases I put specific questions.

Soon after making the individual interviews, which took 1.5-2 hours each, I listened to the tapes and began to transcribe the whole text, putting notes and codes in the margins. I spent the next years with the tedious job of transcribing the texts of the first interviews. As these were creating new questions I asked the interlocutors for a second interview, which I made with each. I repeated the transcription procedure of notes and codes, consolidating and strengthening the information that I found in the transcriptions of the first interviews. After reading and re-reading the transcriptions, I compared the different texts of the individuals with each other, looking for commonalities or differences. Simultaneously, I started writing sections of a coming whole text, making notes on theoretical and methodological issues, and grouping the story details by themes, such as 'form and content', 'mode of narration', 'socialisation', 'family matters', 'education', 'social life', 'professional life', 'migration', 'exile life', 'attitudes to work', and similar, for each individual. Finally, after having chosen the themes I found common in the interviews, I began to analyse the stories, applying the theoretical and methodological approaches that I found meaningful for my study.

## Method Choices

The study has been built on two main method orientations: 1. *biographical narrative analytic approach* and 2. *social constructionism*, sometimes also referred to as *discursive psychology* (Edwards, 1995, in Harré and Stearns, 1995), extended by other method approaches, as explained below. As it plays an important role in the narrations, language use has been addressed in the study. My choice of orientations emerged

slowly during the process of interviewing, as a response to the actual narrations. I recognised the unique opportunity they offered to explore, allowing the use of multidisciplinary approaches with social constructionism as the guiding method, completed with aspects of biographic narrative inquiry, with ethnographic and sociologic inquiries in the background, and applying holistic-content narrative analysis of *extended accounts*<sup>256</sup>.

When people tell biographical stories, there might be an underlying ambiguity of placing oneself between the 'self' and 'life' (Bruner, 2001), when participators might feel they have to justify their actions in the past. The present study credits the actors as having the legitimate ability to account for their actions by giving them meaning. I recognise the difficulties with the concrete telling of the actual story about oneself: the result is that people tell what they believe others expect them to tell (Riessman, 2008). Following up on the thought of telling a story, we approach fiction, which has the implication that it is not possible to get access to empirical evidence of 'what happened' because it is out of our reach and sight. What there is left, is interpretations of what we hear.

My methodological choice was informed by the purpose of the research, rather than by epistemological assumptions about how to obtain valid data. By combining aspects of different methods, I hoped to gain diverse forms of knowledge providing complementary insights (House, 1994), and to challenge the work and prompt modifications or new understanding of facts. I hoped that this would lead to different, method-dependent consequences, providing creative and adventurous means for a research project. I found that by using aspects of *ethnography* and aspects of *feminist research* approach, more opportunity arose for interplay between the interviewer and interviewee, and I was hoping for tentative or submerged meanings to surface. In the course of the work, I have indeed gathered knowledge through the life story construction of others, observing and examining historical records, the international and multicultural aspects of lives, making the context of other's lives more readable. Refracting the past, re-imagining lives, the tellers used imagination and strategy to choose between the events and actions to narrate in order to make them meaningful for others.

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<sup>256</sup> Kohler Riessman, K., Analysing personal narratives. In: Gubrium, J.F., and Holstein, J.A., *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*. 2001, Sage Publications, London.

## Biographical Narrative Approach

The features of the biographical approach, suggested by Miller (Miller, 2000) as one of three<sup>257</sup> basic approaches to the biographical perspective, has much in common with the qualitative research methods with their 'breadth'. It makes it possible to bring a variety of variables into the analyses, independent of huge resources and not demanding large-scale research. It also allows for the depiction of processes. This view on 'process' distinguishes the life story perspective from other qualitative approaches, making it possible for us to "look at subjects as if they have a past with successes as well as failures, and a future with hopes and fears", as pointed out by Plummer (p. 69)<sup>258</sup>, also supported by Becker (1970<sup>259</sup>:424-5).

By using a narrative approach, knowledge that is hard to find in other ways can be obtained about modes of thinking, emotions and how people act in different cultures, or in-depth understanding of identifications and subjective experiences of particular persons (P.C. Smith, 2000). The focus lies on individual stories and experiences, expecting and appreciating differences between individuals (Webster & Mertova, 2007). The researcher works to capture the voice of the interviewed individual in a particular time, place or setting (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). It should be stated that behind promoting a narrative understanding of personal storytelling there is no expectation to *reveal the past*. Life stories are not *open to proof*, so they reveal 'truths' by interpretation of the individual's experiences, and the ways they want to be understood (Webster Barbre, 1989).

A central function of biographic storytelling is to present and represent identity(ies) in a specific interactional context. Researchers in both sociology and psychology (Bruner (1991, 1996) and Gergen (1994); Hermans, Rijks and Kempen (1993); McAdams (1993); Polkinghorne (1991); Lieblich et al. (1998) to mention a few) equate personal narratives, in content and form, with people's identities; with an implicit meaning of presenting an *inner reality* to the outside world, while reciprocally shaping and constructing the narrator's reality (Lieblich et al., 1998). Thus, by making biographical interviews we can develop an understanding of a person's biography or trajectory, as well as their development, opportunities, choices, and coping strategies. By telling life stories, individuals inform not only about the self, but also about their identity constructions (ibid.). They convey meanings both about the teller and the

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<sup>257</sup> Realist, neo-positivist and narrative approach.

<sup>258</sup> Plummer, K. (1983), *Documents of Life*. London: George Allen & Unwin.

<sup>259</sup> Becker, H. (1970), The Relevance of Life Histories, in: N.K. Denzin (ed.) *Sociological Methods: A sourcebook*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company. Pp. 419 - 28.

teller's identity, and about the teller's social context (Crossley, 2000; Wetherell & Maybin, 1996). The individual telling a life story for research purposes is also communicating knowledge about how the story evolved.

Owing to the flexibility of narrative approach, it can be used for different research purposes; e.g. for research on identity constructions (see Josselson & Lieblich, 1995, 1999; Lieblich et al., 1998; Mishler, 1986; Riessman, 2002, 2003)<sup>260</sup>; while Tamboukou (in Andrews et al., [2008] 2009) puts stress on the performativity and productivity of narratives, implying that narratives *do things*; i.e. they compose realities, and shape society. (ibid.).

Riessman (2003) describes four models that are suited for narrative analysis: *thematic*, *performative*, *structural* and *interactional* approaches<sup>261</sup>. I found particularly three approaches fruitful: the structural and interactional approaches, using aspects of thematic analysis to a certain extent; in that I did not see language as a topic, but as a tool of my investigation, and I did not intend to theorise over a large number of cases, as the thematic analysis would suggest, as I had no intentions of coming to theoretical conclusions. Riessman puts the rhetorical question, "what happens to ambiguities, 'deviant' responses that don't fit into a typology, the unspoken?"<sup>262</sup>. These are also issues for our study, not deserting certain themes that I used for structural reasons, as the analysis shall demonstrate. A structural approach is suited for the analysis of longer stories that do not take the classic temporal form, constrained by the features of the told; instead studying 'idea units' rather than a cohesive story, similar to our cases. The interactional approach treats also the dialogic relation between the teller and the listener. Performative analysis aspects have been useful particularly when the teller was 'doing' rather than merely telling her story – using gestures, varying tone of voice and other rhetoric features. The model pays attention to characters' positioning in the story, settings and the listener's reaction, among others.

Identity notions are perceived differently by different theoretical concepts, dealing with personal, social category or group and gender identity, among others, construed both intertextually and relationally. Obviously, none of the concepts are independent of some sort of discourse, narrative or storytelling. Identification, the classifying act, is best seen as a process in which the individual accepts the values and interests of a social group as their own (Webster dictionary). For defining identity, I have addressed

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<sup>260</sup> Larsson, S., and Sjöblom, Y. (2009), Perspective of narrative methods in social work research. *International Journal of Social Welfare*.

<sup>261</sup> Kohler Riessman, C., Narrative Analysis in M.S. Lewis-Beck, A. Bryman and T. Futing Liao, eds (2003), *The Sage Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, 3 Vol. boxed set, Sage.

<sup>262</sup> Riessman Kohler, K., (2005, p.3) *Narrative Analysis*. In: *Narrative, Memory & Everyday Life*. University of Huddersfield, Huddersfield, pp. 1 - 7.

the *social interactionist* concept of identity, suggesting the notion of identity being based on the premise that social realities are constructed and not given (Berger and Luckmann, 1967), and that people actively make choices through interpretations in creating social realities. Consequently, identity, as a social construct, is attainable by the individual through social interaction (Zimmermann, 1970). This idea is supported by *ethnomethodology*, assuming that identity emerges in interactional circumstances (being a process); in *performance*, dialogically negotiated and enacted, influenced by the context at hand. The concept of categorisation processes is linked to this notion – individuals are not seen as having an identity, but rather being “cast into a category with associated characteristics or features” (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998)<sup>263</sup>. Within discursive psychology, which shares several features with social constructionism<sup>264</sup> (Edwards and Potter, 1992; Harré and Stearns, 1995) such as anti-essentialism, and does not regard language as a tool for internal mental states of cognition (such as beliefs, emotions, memories, and similar), focus lies on language use (discourse) in examining questions of identity and subjectivity; i.e. how individuals “construct versions of themselves, how they build defensible identities, how they present versions of themselves and events as factual and how they legitimate their actions” (Burr, 1995 [2003]).

The employed narrative approach<sup>265</sup> with an open agenda served the treatment of personal life stories, or biographical narratives, presented within the actual interview context. The narrations at hand profited from history, literature and myth, all central to the development of social and personal identity, being a thematised, or emplotted<sup>266</sup> experience. “Through narrative self-employment one groups the events of one’s life thematically in order to understand and monitor oneself”, Braun argues (2003: 279-300)<sup>267</sup>. Through this approach, I have been able to investigate life

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<sup>263</sup> There are other concepts for identity studied in genres like psychology, anthropology, literary theory, political and social sciences, feminism, cultural studies, communication, to mention a few. They have their own definitions and foci (using social variables, such as geography, gender, age, race, class, occupation, and ethnicity: see Stockwell 2007 for a summary). In ethnographic approaches they apply social network structures, speech communities, communities of practice and nexus of analysis (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller, 1985; Johnstone, 1996); in social constructivism, the pragmatics of politeness and power have come to redefine identity (see Eckert, 2000; Eckert and Rickford, 2001; and Llamas, Mullany and Stockwell, 2007 for an overview).

<sup>264</sup> More on social constructionism in the Methodology discussion.

<sup>265</sup> Avoiding the constraints of the structuralist analysis method.

<sup>266</sup> Ricoeur, P., in *Oneself as Another* (1990, Eng. Transl. 1992): “Emplotment allows us to integrate with permanence in time what seems to be its contrary in the domain of sameness-identity, namely diversity, variability, discontinuity, and instability.”

<sup>267</sup> Braun, R., *The Emplotted Self: Self-Deception and Self-Knowledge, Philosophical Papers*, Vol. 32, Issue 3, 2003: 279-300. Special Issue: Narrative understanding.

experience narratives with focus on the experiences narrated in the interaction, rather than on the narrated events (story), even if their influence on how lives evolve is acknowledged. My aim was to learn how memories and realities are narrated by the interlocutors, for example the assertion to a particular collectivity (*Hungarianness*) and about the claims of the interlocutors' stories (myths) and their claims about the stories, linking them to *Hungarianness*. Like other discursive social practices, biographical narratives reset according to socially shared meanings, conceptions and ideologies (van Dijk, 1998), establishing a constant dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) and generating new meanings and actions.

## Social constructionism

*Social constructionism* (Berger and Luckman, 1966) advocating for the concept of identity creation, but not limited only to that, provides 'an alternative to the study of human beings' (Burr, Social constructionism, 1995), with roots in psychology and its crisis<sup>268</sup> (Gergen, 1973). It criticises mainstream psychology and is known under different names, including 'discursive psychology' (Edwards and Potter), 'discursive critical psychology' (Wetherell & Edely), 'discourse analysis' (Potter & Wetherell). All these different enominations have contributed to the confusion over application of the approach. This diversity of denominations implies also that the concept cannot be seen as a unifying method, but rather as a family of various characteristics within the disciplines that use the approach (within psychology and sociology) with resembling, overlapping features. Burr argues that there is no one single feature which identifies a social constructionist stance, but there are "things you would absolutely have to believe in order to be a social constructionist" (ibid.).

In our case, the "things" that make me use the approach are that I wish to be critical about my own observations regarding the understanding of the world, to look at the objective and unbiased observation with critical eyes. I wish to acknowledge the performativity of language<sup>269</sup>, to focus on social interaction (i.e. on processes rather than pre-fixed structures), and to see knowledge as something of 'doing' rather than 'having' (ibid.).

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<sup>268</sup> Gergen, M.M.'s *Social psychology as history* (1973) discussed for the first time that all knowledge is historically and culturally specific; therefore, we must study people in their social, political and economic environment.

<sup>269</sup> Austin J.L., (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*. Cambridge, Harvard UP. Searle, J. R., ([1969] 1995) *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Social constructions take place in everyday discourse in interaction, in 'joint action' (Blumer's term). Social interaction can be divided into two, not exclusive, branches: *micro* and *macro social constructionism*. Micro social constructionism stresses the dynamic, interpersonal processes of construction (Schotter, 1993). Among those who share the emphasis on interaction in discourse, we find scholars from the UK such as Potter, Edwards, Wetherell, Harré, to mention a few. Macro social constructivists are Foucault (1972, 1976) and feminist analysts treating (among other things) power relations, gender, race and ethnicity like Hollway (1984, 1989) and Burman (1990). There are scholars who try to merge the two views, feeling the need to take into account both the situated nature of accounts and the intuitional practices within which they occur, creating a synthesis between micro and macro social constructionism (Burr and Butt, 2000; Davies and Harré, 1990).

Discussions are not settled on the question of realism vs. relativism within social constructionism. Realists claim that there is a reality, even if they are not accurate assemblies of facts, while relativism argues that even if there is a reality, we cannot access it, we can only access our representations of it. This latter might be a problematic position, in my view, as it implies that people do not have grounds for their moral choices in their actions.

Social constructionism assumes the constructive force of language. Therefore, the analysis of language is an important asset within the approach, in which interview transcripts and other documents are examined using qualitative research tools. Several aspects of social constructionism (micro approach and language use) have been appropriate for my theoretical and methodological approach in analysing the material in relation to particular contexts (regarding narrators' agency, gender aspects, etc). Social constructionist theorists do not see identity as a prerogative of a subject and a function of the individual's beliefs and feelings; instead, they base the notion of identity on the premise that social realities are constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1967).

Some followers of social constructivism reject altogether the notion of 'subject' as a unit that incorporates rationality and freedom of choices<sup>270</sup> (discussed in de Fina, 2003). In my study, the narrations are seen as culturally and relationally defined and embedded in power/knowledge relations, allowing for subjectivity and choices for the individuals (*micro social constructionism*, according to de Fina). The interlocutors are engaged in a narrative co-production, involved in a dialogic exchange, producing a

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<sup>270</sup> Beginning with the *The Death of the Subject Explained*, Sheffield Hallam UP, 2002, in humanities and natural sciences (Sokal) structuralists, postmodernists and deconstructivists (such as Lyotard, Althusser, Foucault, Derrida and Butler, among others) have been discussing the (internal/external) existence of the Subject.

story that evolves through the interaction process (Riessman, 2002, 2003). Not all social constructivists deny that nature and things exist, they merely “bracket this issue” (ibid.). Essentialism, without discussing its nature in any depth, might be described as an ontological theory about the real world, while (mild) constructivism is seen as a mosaic of theories about the ‘symbolic and linguistic construction (meaning-making) of the individuals’ subjective world’ (Reedijk, 2010). Essentialism and constructivism are not seen to be contradictory; instead, they work in dialogic relationship, not being determinist but dynamic, which is helpful when linking matters of instinctive and learned character. Both essentialism and constructivism discuss identity development, a relevant issue for the study. Pointing out the processual approach regarding essentialism vs. constructivism, when claiming an immutable core for identification (which Hungarians often do), one might discover that the core is already reasserted in new circumstances.

## Supporting Methods

Aiding my methodological work, in applying an interpretive and constructivist umbrella view, I found other theories and methods useful. In the analysis work, aspects such as participation, closeness and acquisition of knowledge were essential. Also taken into consideration were aspects of *ethnography*, *ethnomethodology*, *hermeneutics*, *sociology*, and *analytic induction* to a certain extent, along with certain aspects of *psychology* with holistic-content analysis (Lieblich et al, 1998; Lucius-Hoene, 2000) and *feminist field work* (Harding, (ed.) 1987; The Personal Narrative Group, 1989; Petö, 2000; Passerini et al., 2007; Andrews et al., 2008 [2009]), concentrating on ordinary narrative activity unfolding in a situated interaction. As previously mentioned, Riessman’s four models (p. 93. Riessman-Kohler, 2003) initiated partly by Goffman’s dramaturgical framework and suggestions on performances<sup>271</sup> were inspiring for my work.

To a certain extent, Labov’s widely influential and applicable structuralist approach (Labov, 1979 [1997]) has also been helpful for my study, even though Labov’s method is most appropriate for event-focused narratives, analysing language aspects of narratives, with temporally ordered narrative sequences as a defining property of narrative. It is less appropriate for non-linear narratives, built on fragments, sketches, anecdotes, episodes, tales, rather than whole rounded life stories, which are seldom used in interview situations, as contested to by the cases of the present study. The Labovian approach has a tendency not to treat narratives as self-contained

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<sup>271</sup> Goffman, E., *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Anchor Books, US.



monologues with an autonomous existence. A further drawback (from my viewpoint) was that Labov's model does not incorporate the interactional context, essential for my study. Other downsides were the model's event- and text-centric nature, not paying attention to context; and not counting details (corresponding to discrete events) that were not chronologically ordered. Goodwin criticised the model in that a narrative might eventually be taken for a representation of reality (*what actually happened*) as constructed by the method. She also argued for cultural and social variation and warned about the "culturally-specific conceptualization of narrative" (Polanyi, 1979: 208), along with the normative application of the method setting standards against which narratives should be measured (Langellier, 1989). Another weakness with the model, I find, is that the model, based as it is on men's storytelling, fails to adequately address the subtle intricacy of women's personal narratives, such as mine. Riessman found Labov's analytic model inadequate for "subjective experiences, events that extend over time and even extend into the present... [narratives are] as much about affective 'actions', i.e. things the narrator feels and says to herself, as about 'what happened' in a more objective sense" (Riessman, 1993: 51-2).

Owing to the above downsides, I used Labov's model as a tool in the final interpretational organisation of the stories, in which I found it was useful for the formal interpretational organisation of the stories. With narratives that had vague temporal ordering (non-'BME'<sup>272</sup>), or jumped between diverse small stories, dates and facts, I made adjustments to the chronology of the narrated story. I also utilised the model for common underlying structures, i.e. a series of *bounded* (transcribed) *stories* (Riessman<sup>273</sup>) of migration and I extended Labov's model by including several episodes to analyse a variety of experiences<sup>274</sup> (Attanucci, 1991; Riessman, 1990<sup>275</sup>; De Fina, 2003; Passerini, 2007). Intruding into the literary field, I would like to quote Péter Nádas<sup>276</sup>, talking about his way of writing<sup>277</sup> supporting my view on small story bubbles in a sludge: "My narrative mode and rhythm are not organized by closure but determined by an open form. It would be nice to believe that life begins

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<sup>272</sup> Beginning, Middle, End.

<sup>273</sup> Riessman, C., *Analysis of Personal Narratives*. In: Gubrium, J.F., and Holstein, J.A.:, *Handbook of Interviewing*. SAGE Publications, 2001. <http://alumni.media.mit.edu/~brooks/storybiz/riessman.pdf>

<sup>274</sup> Attanucci, J., *Changing Subjects: Growing Up and Growing Older*. *Journal of Moral Education* 20 (3):317-328.

<sup>275</sup> Riessman, C.K. 1990. "Strategic Uses of Narrative in the Presentation of Self and Illness." *Social Science and Medicine* 30: 1195-1200.

<sup>276</sup> Péter Nádas (born in 1942 in Hungary), freelance writer, essayist, previously photographer and journalist.

<sup>277</sup> URL source: <http://nymag.com/guides/fallpreview/2011/books/peter-nadas/>

with birth and ends with death. If that were the case, I'd probably tell well-shaped, rounded little stories. Instead, I'm interested in how these stories are interconnected, or how they remain ignorant of one another, unaffected by one another, lying side by side."

*Ethnography* has been inspirational, particularly when encountering unanticipated situations and studying issues that were relevant to the people studied, independent of any outsiders' preconceptions (Stinchcombe, 2005<sup>278</sup>). This produced situated knowledge rather than universals and helped to "capture the detail of social life" through 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973). *Hermeneutics* proposed the understanding and interpretation of linguistic and non-linguistic expressions about human experience and cultural interaction, and the acquisition of knowledge by historically effected consciousness: "[u]nderstanding tradition undoubtedly requires a historical horizon"<sup>279</sup> (Gadamer, [1960] 1994). I have searched for explanations on various levels, with the help of *analytic induction*, applying a steady and progressive redefinition of the phenomenon to be explained (explanandum) and of explanatory factors (explanans), while the *holistic-content* analytic perspective (Lieblich, 1998) guided me when analysing and reading the individuals' life stories, treating them as members of a community, focusing also on the interview context, studying the wholeness and continuity of individual lives. Initiated by my supervisors, I turned my attention towards the significance and necessity of continuous and reflexive monitoring of gender-related issues, paying attention to understanding women's social realities that had not been paid particular attention to in previous sociological research (Dilorio, 1982).

I have considered certain aspects of *feminist fieldwork* with various objectives in mind, such as questioning the need for a specific 'feminist method' for researching individuals, and addressing the positive feminist view on the researcher's direct involvement and experience in the studied social realities and in the production and understanding of social knowledge that is gathered. I wish to note here, that I do not consider the interaction between interviewees and interviewer as the result of (as sometimes pointed to) an explicitly 'feminist' ethnographic approach. Instead, I rather see it as a result of the personal relationship between the parts, using shared interests, cultural values, and an ethnographic knowledge mutually acquired about each other.

In my analytic work, I followed up the interactive and contextual aspects of the interview situation, considering both the interviewees' background, and the rhetoric

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<sup>278</sup> Stinchcombe, A.L., (2005) *The Logic of social research*. Chicago University of Chicago Press.

<sup>279</sup> 1994: 304-5.

and positioning strategies in the act of telling. The silences left in these details can only be filled by the listener's interpretations. My view is that excluded details might tell more than included ones, particularly in cases when the storytellers are cautious because of weary, unpleasant, or (for the storyteller) hazardous previous experiences. In such cases, the context, the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, the *cultural capital* and *category entitlement* might be helpful. In the analysis, the life story telling forms the narrative frame and the stories of shared events (content) form the embedded frame, with thematic relevance<sup>280</sup> to the main narrative activity, serving the illustration of a point, supporting an argument, making a comparison, providing examples, etc. (For discussion of embedded narratives see Ochs and Capps, 2001: 36 - 40<sup>281</sup>.)

### Researcher's Role

Regarding my own role in the study, I feel that my own experiences from my socialisation process in Hungary and my accumulated migrant and academic experiences from Sweden authorise me to seek out the experiences (and some of the events) of others with whom I share understandings and certain practices. As the present study is rooted in intersubjectivity and personal experience, and it is built on a limited interest of the chronology of the events recounted, and also on a greater curiosity to know how the experiences were (re)presented in the narratives, it is free to say that there was no intention to apply a purely "factist perspective" (Alasuutari, 1995: 47) for validation of the told. The narratives are analyses of events in the past *per se*, re-structured for the purpose of interviews. In a way they are at-hand interpretations, where the narrators are their own first interpreters<sup>282</sup>.

The intention was to personalise the characters of the stories, portraying the narrators, and taking a journey with the speakers and me, the interpreter of the 'indigenous texts' (Geertz, 1973). Some tales might be described as impressionist, with the researcher's mark on them, and some might have aspects of critical tales, in that the study tries to look through the eyes of disadvantaged groups – without the Marxist

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<sup>280</sup> Self-evaluation of the narrated story, looking for overarching themes for creating coherence for the narration.

<sup>281</sup> Ochs, A. & Capps, L. (2001), *Living Narrative*. Cambridge, MA. Harvard University Press.

<sup>282</sup> In narrative identity definition, the individual is neither merely the one who tells the story, nor the one the story speaks of; the narrator "appears both as a reader and the writer of her/his own life," (Ricoeur, 1987: 246, *Time and Narrative III*. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago.) Thus, the individual is both the interpreter and the interpreted, as well as the recipient of the interpretations; suggesting an intermediary status; notwithstanding that in the present study, detours through the text are not suggested.

edge – instead, choosing a strategically situated culture. It should also be noted that, with regard to the narrations and my self-positionality, considerations and commitments by the interviewees to the interviewer are measured as equally important as other conceptions of ‘how life is’ or should be, from an academic tradition, sharing the social constructivist view that women's experiences across cultures and history should not be over-generalised.

Thus, I build my cases on the women's experiences *in their own accounts*, using analytic aspects of the trade. I might remark, that the usefulness of *intersectionality*<sup>283</sup>, without the feminist edge, has crossed my mind. In that, the multidimensional aspects of power-relations are of interest, focusing merely on the social category of ethnicity and disregarding others. Nonetheless, I take the relations between ethnicity, nation and gender into consideration, as they are linked to identities. According to Prins<sup>284</sup>, identities are lived in the modalities of other categories of identity: “gender is always lived in the modalities of ethnicity and class, nationality in the modalities of gender and race, and class in the modalities of gender and nationality”. Regarding ethnicity, the question of the dichotomy between us and *the Other* also arose in the study's narrations. The question is to what extent power relations saturated the narrations of the women in the study.

### Elicited Life Stories

La vida no es lo que uno//vivió, sino la que uno//recuerda y cómo la  
recuerda//para contarla, Gabriel Garcia Márques

(Life is not the one you live//but the one you remember//as you remember  
it//when you tell it. Transl. kh)

The elicitations that I have made are intended to help the teller, me the listener, and also the reader, to learn how others want to present and represent themselves through their life experiences, choosing themes that will give an image of the self that can represent the narrators for all involved. The chosen themes are then expected to add up to present the individual's identity and life in a coherent system, giving evidence of a meaningful life. When I started to transcribe and analyse my own material, I soon realized that my expectations about seeing nicely packaged narratives, with a straight line, soon faded. It was soon clear that further interviews and extended knowledge, possibly based on my ethnographic knowledge (as organising principle) of the narrators, would be necessary. The fact that narrations are not always neat, linear, or

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<sup>283</sup> Coined by K. Crenshaw for studying black women in the U.S.

<sup>284</sup> Prins, B., Narrative Accounts of Origins. *European Journal of Women's Studies*. 2006. SAGE Publications (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi). 1350-5068. Vol. 13 (3): 277–290.

logical (in sequences), is not surprising, considering that lives are not either. They are instead often fragmented, and improvised. In Denzin's words: 'lives, like words, exist only in traces, spaces, and differences'.

Doing the interpretations and making myself into the "co-author" (Ricoeur<sup>285</sup>), I started out from the basic view that several different, probable interpretations and comprehensions were available. In my view, the researcher has no privileged right to the interpretations, even though he or she has responsibility towards the narrator and narration. The goal with recording life story interviews is not simply to collect 'complete interviews', but, through a conversation between the 'listener' and the 'teller', to reach a "conversational narrative" (Grele, 1998: 40), or "dialogical discourse"<sup>286</sup> (Bakhtin), with dynamic and relational processes, such as *intertextuality*<sup>287</sup> and relatedness, among the discourses, and *interdiscursivity* (Fairclough). As previously pointed out, the collected narrations were not always linear with appropriate plotlines, and if there was a 'plotline', it did not always lead to any specific destination.

The five biographies presented in the next chapters represent different life story patterns of college-educated, professional women in different stages of their lives, displaying different discursive strategies of self-representation. The latter is important to consider, as, in some cases, one can find relevant contrasts between the images the interlocutors' project and perform through their actual narrations in this interview context. One can sometimes suspect a mismatch between the individual's narrated self-assessment and her narrated achieved social valuation, and as the women are more or less integrated into the specific social context, the values and ideologies of this context intrude interdiscursively (intertextually) onto their performances when they, for example, conceal or avoid speaking of certain details of their lives.

The next sessions of the disputation the narrators have stage to take and tell their story details of their choice. Let them lead the readers through the rite of passage.

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<sup>285</sup> Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 1983.

<sup>286</sup> The term "dialogic" in literary theory (novels), is attributed to Bakhtin, emphasizing "performance, history, actuality and the openness of dialogue as opposed to the closed dialectic of Structuralism's binary oppositions" (Crownfield, 1992), leading us to 'relational' thinking, respecting alterity, implying interconnectedness, with other discourses from the past and present (also referring to language) mutually fertilizing each other. The concept leads us to the conclusion that we (speakers, writers, readers, male and female) always take part in a dialogue, not always entirely under our control.

<sup>287</sup> Kristeva, J. (1966), *Word, Dialogue and Novel*. Columbia University Press, New York.

## 4. The Performer

“I am living through Hungarian culture, taking part either as audience or interpreter, and I am always ready to help out and represent [it]...”

### Interview Settings

The interview in 2003 took place on a cold March day, at Ilona’s home, among her Hungarian artefacts. She is known among exile Hungarians to have promoted *Hungarianness* in Sweden, assertive both in the style of her home and her thoughts<sup>288</sup>. Ilona herself is both the accumulator of past artistic achievements and the expression of continuing tradition and creativity. Her flat is a museum for Hungarian artefacts; the rustic style of furniture, embroidered tablecloths, decorations, figures, cushions, hand-painted plates on the walls, curtains, carpets are representations of familiar Hungarian folklore style, recognisable by Hungarians.

Ilona’s way of conducting her life, her thoughts and actions, for me, manifest *life through Hungarianness* and *Hungarianness through life*. Ilona had Hungarian books, listened to Hungarian music, watched (old) Hungarian films (on video) and Hungarian programmes on Duna TV<sup>289</sup>. The strength of her *cultural capital*, both with the embodied (by socialisation) and the objectified state (Bourdieu, 1987(1979)) and connections to Hungarianness is manifested partly by the physical representations (artefacts) in her home, but also by her social relations with exclusively Hungarians, both in Sweden and outside Sweden (in Hungary and Erdély). Ilona has demonstrated through her way of living that she possessed the code to symbolic goods

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<sup>288</sup> Stern, S., (1977) *Ethnic Folklore and the Folklore of Ethnicity*, Western States Folklore Society.

<sup>289</sup> Duna [Danube] Television (launched in 1992) is an associate member of the European Broadcasting Union, a worldwide satellite broadcast for Hungarians living outside Hungary, with the goal to strengthen and maintain ethnic and national unity. URL source: <http://www.dunatv.hu/portal/>.

and the instruments of appropriation, and her narration showed us that excellence was not only a condition of social (class) origin.

## Form and Content of Narration

Ilona was glad to be interviewed, appreciating the gesture, taking it as a token for confirming her status within the Hungarian exile community. In the analysis of the narrative material, I use the one from the second interview, not totally neglecting the knowledge I gathered in the first one, while Ilona remembered past events in a dialogue with herself and me. Details that I use from our first interview are, for instance, from her recollection of the 'Hungarian times', including holding Hungarian citizenship for four years (1940-1944) in Erdély<sup>290</sup> during her youth. Witnessing the strength of her professional identification, I recall documents of great sentimental value for her that she had saved and gave to me as proof of her career as a young actress in Erdély. I use these documents with the background of a symbolic relationship between us, applying the *cultural insider perspective* (Stier, 2004). At the second interview, which took place in Ilona's home, she made efforts to (re)present herself as an organised person; yet, my impression was, in a somewhat 'chaotic way'. I mean to note here, that Ilona had always been following inscrutably her own thoughts when she talked, without a care if others could follow her storylines. She was dropping names, dates, and events higgledy-piggledy as they occurred to her, fluctuating between themes. In other words, her narration tactics needed a flexible mind, I have always thought; and she was hard to govern. Nonetheless, she received me with great cordiality, prepared to share with me events from her long life.

In the interview with Ilona, perhaps more than in the interviews with the others that I have used for my study, language played an important role; not in a linguistic sense, but as a device for the performance of her life history narrative. Ilona speaks on any occasion with great awareness of language use and modulation. She has a full command of Hungarian even after her forty odd years in Sweden and the traces of her young days' rhetorical training was noticeable. She used language as a tool when she talked, even in everyday communication. She acted like a professional; her speech style during the interview bore traces of an old-fashioned rhetorical schooling. She utilized a dramatic prosody adapted to the content of the speech, where form and content met. Even if the interview topic at the beginning of our session was very relaxed, she did sound conscious of the technical device. During her narration she also used stereotypes and irony; sometimes self-irony, laughing often over her own

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<sup>290</sup> Referring to the 1940s, when Northern Erdély belonged to Hungary (Second Vienna Award).

storylines. She was emotionally engaged and she escalated the use of her rhetorical tools; she got sentimental, used rousing pauses and finally also tears to underline the emotional charge of the story line.

Additionally, she also used extra-linguistic tools (kinetics): she was pointing, gesticulating, drawing lines with fingernails on the table to visualise a situation. Ilona rather performed her tale than recounted it; she owned and directed her story, and I had the feeling she reluctantly tolerated interference from me. Most of the time she did not care to answer my questions when I stopped the flow of a discourse, which made me sometimes feel uneasy. I felt as if I was interrupting a performance, interrupting a theatrical act. She was the narrator, actor and director in her storyworld and I was her audience. I found myself not trying to interfere much anyway. Rather, I was interested in hearing how our interaction regulated her tale, if at all. I actually enjoyed her performance. Her style was engaging, because of her own personal engagement and involvement in her own storytelling. Ilona was speaking openly, yet discretely – she was apparently not eager to disclose things that she considered to be her private property.

## Narrative mode - Performative Narration

“All the world’s a stage, and all the men and women merely players”<sup>291</sup>, came to mind when listening to the *performance* of Ilona presenting herself through her narration. Aware of the opportunity, the *dramatism* (Burke, 1945) or Goffman’s *dramaturgy*, with the metaphor for *life as a theatre* rich in meaning, Ilona was aware of the situation of giving interviews; rooted in her professional background, expressed by playing the role of a *life history teller*, utilising the interaction provided in the frame of the interview as a theatrical performance. She was well prepared and rehearsed for the occasion; having chosen the parts of her life as important to be told, and the ways of presenting them, improvising in a dialogue with agents in her story, and with me, her audience.

Ilona’s ‘story bubbles’ were not temporally ordered, but stringent, set like pearls with different sizes, shapes and colours, on a string. She was picking themes and topics which she thought were meaningful to be remembered by, fit to be presented in front of an audience, presenting herself as she wanted to be presented and avoiding details of too private, awkward, painful or difficult subjects in life. I might be the only

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<sup>291</sup> Shakespeare, W., As you like it (approximately 1600).



person who would ever tape her ‘confessions’, and she seemed to be determined that the traceable story she passed over to me would present her in a positive way.

The storyline did not seem to be randomly chosen. Eventual detours caused by my interruptions (questions), made her lose the thread of her narrative for a while; she faltered for a short time, then she picked up the storyline where I interrupted her, finished the small story narration she had been engaged in, before eventually answering my question. She did this on various occasions, such as when I asked her – three times – if her family knew about her migration, ignoring me, continuing her storyline untroubled. (I learned later that her parents died many years prior to her migration.) Ilona’s narration followed an argumentation of its own, aimed at confirming a ‘coherent’ (purposeful) life and making a good impression.

In order to create a relaxed atmosphere for the interview, I let Ilona take command and speak freely according to her personal interest and preference. Her narrative had two foci: first, herself as a private person in relation to (significant) others in a closer context (family and friends), and second, herself as a cultural person in relation to (general and significant) others in a larger context (in working life, in Hungarian contexts, in Sweden and in the Carpathian Basin). I felt included on both levels; as our paths have crossed many times in Sweden. We utilised our mutual knowledge of each other in the narration and interpretation. Knowing her strong sense of performativity<sup>292</sup> (Austin, 1962), using speech in order to ‘do things’ and her strong physical presence in her storytelling – rather acting upon the world, instead of telling truths about it and being hard to govern – anything but an unstructured interview would have been unrealistic (and time consuming). Ilona used performativity (her trade-mark) frequently to make an impression on her audience (me), engaging in scenic descriptions. She was utilising illocutionary force (performative function for performative utterances, declarations, indirect quotes, sometimes even assertives<sup>293</sup>) in her storytelling, achieving perlocutionary effects (persuading, convincing) on the audience.

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<sup>292</sup> On both the level of story (*histoire*) and the act of narration.

<sup>293</sup> For more detailed information on speech acts see Austin (1962), Searl (1969) and Butler <http://rhetorica.net/speech.htm>.

## Story from Coffin to Cradle

After exchanging expressions of politeness for a while, Ilona showed me with great enthusiasm photos from her latest (80<sup>th</sup>) birthday party that her Hungarian friends had thrown to celebrate her some weeks prior to our meeting. Ilona had prepared some photos that she showed me, and she asked me to pick one to take home to remember her by. I chose a photo with a smiling Ilona with a champagne glass, sitting in the centre surrounded by flowers in her home. Then I saw the twinkle in her eye (her body language was revealing), signalling that she would tell me something worthwhile taping, so I switched on the tape recorder. Ilona began her story at the ‘wrong’ end, if considered from the typological (generic) approach<sup>294</sup>, which expects linearity and static forms in life story telling, or from the sociological biography writing approach, which has a “genre-driven, common-sense, constitutive approach” (Denzin 1989: 40), dealing with dates, locating beginnings, turning points, and so forth. Ilona was not following this format. She rewound her life story, disregarding the rules of a tidy, temporally sequenced life history telling from the cradle to the grave. Ilona actually began with the grave, following a plotting of her own.

It is worth mentioning that the translation of the monologic recounting of this following sequence into English does not serve her (theatrical) narrative mode well, and Ilona’s performative storytelling cannot be presented by text alone. Aware of this fact, I make an effort to follow up her storytelling using a truthful/semantic translation mode, monitoring her storytelling at close range. In the vivid introducing part of her storytelling, Ilona used intonation, voice control, tone level, extra-linguistic (body language: facial expressions and gestures) and intra-linguistic tools (irony, punchlines, ellipse, characterisation of a third party, quotes imitating and parodising the characters not present in the story), essentially throughout the whole interview. Her performance was both monologic<sup>295</sup> at times, excluding me from the interaction, and also dialogic, including other persons in her monologue. By her storytelling, Ilona negotiated knowledge, informing and also emotionally manipulating her present audience, using a rich interlocutory repertoire (Ricoeur, 1976).

Ilona thus began her story with a spontaneous episode triggered by the seemingly unrehearsed, yet still well-told (and not taped) narrative on her (80<sup>th</sup>) birthday party, within the conversation that was part of the culture-specific *small-talks* we had been engaged in so far. Apparently, having had her 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, she came to think of her

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<sup>294</sup> Elbaz, R., (1987) *The Changing Nature of the Self: A Critical Study of The Autobiographical Discourse*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

<sup>295</sup> Performing a monologue: a single person speaking.

own demise and she suddenly began to talk of an impulse that made her go into a funeral parlour in her block, some time prior to our meeting. The dialogue between her and the clerk followed the scheme of a 'sequenced narrative' (Abbot, 1995), with a temporally and spatially ordered list of elements of speech. She ordered time artificially, as the events told within this small story took the form of steps, constructing the process of successive parts of a ritual. The ritual is here defined to be the storytelling of Ilona, choosing the randomly recounted event for the telling. Ilona used reported speech on the interactional level, another characteristic of her style of storytelling:

I'd heard that funerals were very expensive in Sweden, and I have entered the age when you never know when the Great Almighty from Above decides to call upon me, so I went to a...----- .. well, help me out...----- [here she asked for my help to find the Swedish word for funeral parlour: *begravningsbyrå*], and I say: 'hello' to them and they say: 'hello' back and ask me 'what can we do for you' – in Swedish – and I said with a smile on my face: 'not because I am at the verge of bidding farewell, but I have come to inquire about funeral costs, because I do not want to become a burden on my relatives [...] I would like to put down a sum – because I have heard that it might cost as much as sixty thousand, in crowns, a funeral' and then the man says, 'well, it depends, it depends on what kind of funeral, the kind of funeral you want', and then I say, 'it's all the same', I say, 'I shall very well be cremated and spread around' [...] – I said 'wherever' – and then he says 'would it be all right over the sea?' – 'Sure', I say, then he says, 'well, that might cost ya around sixty thousand, because we will have to hire a little boat to transport you out and scatter your ashes around' [Ilona was amused at this stage] – then I say, 'well, in that case not there, wherever else would be suitable [she laughed aloud], where it is allowed to spread out ashes, where it is cheapest' [at this point I joined in her laughing] – 'Oh my', then he says that [laughing], then he says that 'in that case it would be around six thousand' – and I say, 'to cremate and then to spread me out?' [...] 'is it possible to do it in the cemetery?' – 'of course', he says, 'that would cost you around six thousand', then I told it to L. [a relative living in Sweden] and gave him, - my sister's son-in-law, Gy.'s husband – [she explained to me the family links in detail], twenty thousand crowns, so that they should have the means to bury me." [she laughed heartily]

Ilona extended the small, absurd story by adding information on Romanian funeral traditions adopted by Hungarians living in Transylvania. Ilona was aware of the fact that this custom was locally developed and un-known to other Hungarians, so she explained (for L. and me), the kind of funeral she had in mind:

So you see, with this twenty [thousand] you will have even enough for vodka' [we both laugh at this point] – because you know, [turning to me, explaining] it is customary in K., in Romania, that after the funeral one opens the back of the car, where you have put in a white table cloth, drinks, brioches, et cetera, and one lays it out and every guest and visitor gets one glass of vodka, pálinka [Hungarian spirit] or what you have, and one big brioche – or two – and then people drink to the peaceful rest of the deceased – this [tradition] is taken over by the Hungarians from the Romanians now, and it is obligatory, otherwise you do not honour the deceased as he or she deserves it, to spend money on – so, you see, I have already made my down-payment ... [Ilona laughs loudly]

This narrative segment reflected well Ilona's way of telling a story; also fleshing out a small part of her inner world. This story detail revealed more about Ilona, the storyteller, than interpretive words could. Her mode of storytelling reflected (and accomplished) her personality. It was spontaneous, light, informative, amusing and serious, strange and familiar, all at the same time. She performed for me, and explained in a dialogue, a familiar and yet unknown cultural tradition (funeral feast), which made me think intertextually<sup>296</sup>, denoting the instance of discourse of Ilona's storytelling in a dialogical relationship to other instances, such as the *magic realism* in the film sequences of Emir Kusturica<sup>297</sup>.

### Identity and Subjectivity Constructs of Ilona

Ilona is a multiple border-crosser, a cold-war migrant from Eastern Europe, with a self-confessed dominating Hungarian ethnic and cultural identity, a strong feeling of belonging to the Hungarian exile group in Sweden. She had been allotted a variety of identities; in Hungarian and in Romanian contexts she was defined as an *erdélyi Magyar* (Transylvanian-Hungarian) or as Romanian, while in Swedish official contexts she was an *invandrare* from Romania. Hungarians have sometimes referred to her as 'Romanian Ilona', a categorisation perceived as pejorative by a Transylvanian-Hungarian. Distinguishing minority *Hungarians beyond the borders* by categorisations that put them into other ethnic categories (eg. Romanian or Slovakian) is an expression of identifying with the person, or more often, of detachment from the person; an articulation of personal appreciation or rejection. However, the seemingly 'ambivalent national identity' had not made any impression

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<sup>296</sup> Kristeva, J., thesis about theories overlapping each other; i.e. the transportation of one sign system (or more signs systems) into another (a particularly useable space is the novel).

<sup>297</sup> The well-known Yugoslavian-Serbian filmmaker of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

on Ilona. She has always displayed a pragmatic<sup>298</sup> (not only in her way of organising storytelling) and firm identification with *Hungarianness*. Ilona's narration did not contain explicit references to an eventual Romanian identification; she did not speak of other links to Romanian culture or society than language, which she had to learn along with Russian at the Music Academy, and that she used sometimes when she performed. After moving to Sweden, she brushed up her Romanian on certain occasions when she met 'real' Romanians who could not speak other languages, she said.

Similarly to the other two minority Hungarians in the study, Ilona kept a low 'minority profile', which was a surprise for me, as the Transylvanian-Hungarians are known by other Hungarians as keeping a purposefully high collective profile, stressing their distinctiveness. This might not be valid for those individuals who supposedly apply the policy of low profile in order to reduce repression of their minority chances. Arguably, the influence of historical conceptions of Hungarianness derives from the group's socio-structural position in Transylvanian society in the past. A first motive for the absent discourses might have been that Ilona interpreted the interview context as Hungarian (between cultural insiders). Second, Ilona's Hungarian-centric life ideology excluded Romanian connotations in general. Third, after having lived 44 years in Sweden, a 'Romanian identification' was apparently not meaningful for her; thus she omitted all connotations with a Romanian identification. The purpose of moving from Romania was to evade (anticipated future) coercion (ethnic discrimination), envisioning a better life in the West. The decision was hers, even though it was prompted by her partner.

Ilona's composition of her life story was not linear, and for the sake of facilitating my own work, for the sake of composition and for better comprehension, I restructured the storylines and selected certain categories and themes to illustrate her life course and private affairs.

### Gendered Performative Narration

Ilona's (biological) female identity, consolidated by her profession as a performer, is not explicitly accentuated. However, it could be discerned all the way through her storytelling. Performance is a process-oriented tool, improving one's sensuous, intellectual, social, and aesthetic appreciation of life and the world. A performer is

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<sup>298</sup> Here used in the sense of dealing with the problems that exist in a specific situation in a reasonable and logical way instead of depending on ideas and theories; i.e. being practical in one's actions, relying on the individual's common sense and practical solutions of problems, both in actions and in what is said.

often perceived as a *doer* whose public actions are carried out dialogically in a space shared with other people: an audience. The visible image of a performer contradicts the stereotypical image of the passive female. A performer, in the majority of societies, does not live on the margin of society but is appreciated for being a professional, an evident contributor to the cultural scene. Performers, together with authors and other cultural persons, are often expected to prompt social change in their community by both preserving and expanding the horizons of gender and by firmly exercising power, which is particularly important in a society with patriarchy (such as in Transylvania)<sup>299</sup>. “Scheherazade’s bedtime stories proved to be a stratagem to change her fate and that of her sisters.”<sup>300</sup> An important characteristic of a female performer is transgression of the boundaries of limitations, and in certain cases transgressing boundaries of gender seems to be a lesser problem than transgressing ethnic and national boundaries, as demonstrated in Ilona’s narration.

I am aware of the fact that by writing the above lines, I might imply a prejudicial view about Ilona’s professional self ‘locked into place’ through categorisation processes (Baker, 2000), allowing me to categorise ‘her’ in terms of gender. Using the category – ‘female performer’ or ‘actress’ – when analysing her conduct, increases the degree of reprehension to be attributed to her, relying on common-sense knowledge about normative and appropriate behaviours for occupants of the category ‘female’, particularly in male-dominated societies. Ilona has presented a self-demonstrating integrity, agency and independence, characteristics that could be followed during a coherent and consistent narration.

## Relational talk

Interpersonal contexts exposed in women’s personal narratives suggest how the lives of women are shaped through and evolve within relationships with others, revealing also the reliance of women on the resources of the networks of family and kinfolk. The important role women play in promoting and maintaining such networks has been pointed out by feminist researchers, sometimes interpreted as a “function of women’s relative powerlessness” (Group, 1989); although one should add that these functions that contextualize women’s lives in this manner are negotiated and structured within a larger social context, and are, therefore, difficult to reveal in narrations and within analysis. When listening to Ilona’s storytelling, I contextualize

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<sup>299</sup> E. Magyary-Vincze (2005), Patriarchy on the edge of continuity and change in the context of Romania. (Paper for the European Journal of Women’s Studies.)

<sup>300</sup> Knio, M., Editor of *Al Raida, The Pioneer*, Issue 122-123, Summer/Fall, 2008. Women in the Performing Arts.

(and interpret) the relationships she speaks of as important both for the individual and for the interactional storytelling.

To compensate for her lost professional appreciation (partly through the loss of language as a professional tool), Ilona created an identity in Sweden by binding together several instances of identity, allowing also for the troubled relationship with her father, who seemed to play an important role in her life.

Ilona was explicit when she talked of her relations to *significant others* (family members and friends) on a conceptual level, accentuating the mutual importance the maintenance of relationships played in her life. She was particularly clear about how important supporting family (back in Romania) was for her. Ilona, not having a family of her own, constructed the character of *humanitarian relative* in Sweden; a role that she apparently found very rewarding. Family members were to a certain extent physically dependent on her charitable good-heartedness<sup>301</sup>, and on her philanthropic (economic) support, which she gladly provided, out of duty and for her own emotional satisfaction. Ilona invested in a humanitarian self, fulfilling a goal that has kept her preoccupied all her life; creating an image of the *good fairy*, which was particularly appreciated in Romania during the Ceaușescu-era (1970s-1980s), whereby the family in Transylvania and Hungary could rely on her support. She also purchased a flat in Budapest which she shared with family members from Transylvania, and where she spent her summers. It would be a part of their inheritance from her after her demise, she explained. The family could benefit from Ilona's good-heartedness also in Sweden, where she helped and supported family members who moved there from Transylvania. The story about the charitable relative from Sweden arriving in Kolozsvár with "twenty-one packages" makes me draw consequential moral assumptions about her life conduct; Ilona performed as a kind and caring person, complying with the expectations of the category 'aunt from the West' (with ideological underpinnings):

I help those who have a worse fate than I; I would rather economize, and I help the adults of my family, [...] there were times when I had gifts for sixty persons with me...

Ilona was *doing gender*, and acting upon her class and ethnicity, in the capacity of the 'charitable relative from the West' (relationality) by doing good. She reflected awareness of the importance of maintaining contact networks, which play an

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<sup>301</sup> People in Romania suffered famine and shortages of all sorts of necessities during the 1980s owing to the megalomaniac forced remaking of society in the 1980s by N. Ceaușescu.

important role in interpersonal relations in all three countries (Romania, Hungary and Sweden). Ilona repeatedly emphasised the importance of being attentive towards family, friends and the needy; be it through invitations to her home, giving parties, going to Hungarian balls, or providing material gifts.

### **Family Structures – Patriarchy, Discipline, Respect, Affection**

Ilona was born in the interwar period, ‘some years before’ the outbreak of WW2, she said, not wanting to give away the year of her birth (which she inconsistently disclosed later, when speaking of the party her friends had thrown to honour her on her 80th birthday, in 2006). The era of her childhood is significant from a historical point of view<sup>302</sup> and had relevance for the readability of her life development and for the choices she made in life. Ilona’s life has also been governed by local and global political decisions, affecting individual lives without consideration.

Ilona’s birth place, Kolozsvár (Ro.: Cluj), is a medium-size town in Transylvania. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was a sophisticated centre of the Hungarian intelligentsia and was considered to be the ‘intellectual and cultural capital of Transylvania’<sup>303</sup>. Ilona was not explicit about her town, region or parents; I had to ask questions to get information.

To introduce a kind of sequential order to her narration, when she finished the plotline on the funeral arrangements, I directed her attention towards her childhood; pleasant or unpleasant memories that she would share with me. After some thought, she began to talk about her father, apparently reminding her of unpleasant memories:

Well, --- in the first place /.../ the thing that frightened me a bit in the family was the sternness of my father, that was extended to the extreme, he adored the military and he would rear us [children], as if his words were like the Holy Scripture that he uttered and we had to obey and he (...) I don’t want to say that we had to treat him as if he was master of the house, because that he was, but as if he should have priority rights, he demanded things all the time...

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<sup>302</sup> The Second Vienna Award (1940-1944, referred to as “the Hungarian times”) changed Ilona’s status from being a Romanian citizen to Hungarian. After 1944 she lost her Hungarian status and became a ‘bozgor’ [Eng. ‘countryless’] (<http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=bozgor>). More on the treatment of Hungarian ethnic groups in Romania in Helsinki Watch Report, 1989, Vienna.

<sup>303</sup> Today, the town is fighting to gain back something of its previous glory.



Ilona's parents were autochthonous Hungarians, the head of the family was a steel worker and her mother was a homemaker. Ilona had three siblings. The authoritarian father governed, controlled and regulated the details of the household, including his wife and children, with an iron fist, as recollected in Ilona's storytelling. He set the norm; or rather, he *was* the norm. Ilona was respectful about her father, in spite of her (reconstructed) fear, demonstrating loyalty and affection towards both her parents. She explained that she had learned discipline in her childhood, a lesson that she had taken with her and which governed her life. The rather traditional patriarchal family construction of Central Europe, often misleadingly ascribed to the family organisation policy of the communist regimes, had been in existence prior to WW2, and nothing much changed within its value system after 1945 in the family structure of Transylvanian- Hungarians. The principles for that structure remained familiar during communism, except for the possible ideological twist that was introduced by the new political system ('father' replaced by 'the party').

The traditional Hungarian family organisation system prior to communism was supported by two 'moral pillars': the 'church' and 'school'<sup>304</sup>. Thus the transition from the older hierarchical 'moral' construct to another hierarchical 'political' construct did not seem to bring deep alterations in family lives, as demonstrated by Ilona's storytelling. Religion had traditionally played an important role in the life of Transylvanian- Hungarians, also confirmed by Ilona. The stern Calvinist life ideology ruling in Transylvania might explain the attitude of Ilona's father, where religion governed private conduct and regulated the relationships between people, obeying the Ten Commandments<sup>305</sup>. I have observed the religious 'moral' attitude among Transylvanian-Hungarians in Sweden at the meetings of the National Federation of Sweden-Hungarians (SMOSZ), where conservative social expectations, respect for tradition and pressure from the group also regulate the lives of the Hungarian exiles. As far as I know, Ilona is not a regular church-goer in Sweden; occasionally she attends the Lutheran Mass at Christmas. I asked Ilona if she had had a religious upbringing and Ilona told me about regular visits to the church when she was young:

I had a very religious upbringing, yes – my father was a good friend of the vicar and in my childhood – ... – we had to go to the religious lessons in church each Sunday at nine o'clock, all the children, [...] and then at eleven we had to go to the Mass, in the afternoon we went to the Mass again and my elder siblings had to go together with my mother to the women's church

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<sup>304</sup> Discussed in a lecture at the 6<sup>th</sup> Hungarologi Congress: Culture, Nation, Identity. (Kultúra, nemzet, identitás, A VI. Nemzetközi Hungarológiai Kongresszus Debrecen, 2006. augusztus 23–26.)

<sup>305</sup> Exodus 20:12: Honor your father and mother (first commandment).

choir, and my father went to the men's, so we had our real share [of religion].

Ilona admitted to being content with the bonds that developed with her parents, pointing out certain (given) character traits that she had inherited from them, such as the “good-heartedness” she ‘got’ from her mother and “pedantry, righteousness and honesty” from her father, describing his ‘pedantry’ as follows:

He sat sometimes down on the stairs, and we had to – there was a sand path leading to the gate and a bit further there was grass – and not a single blade of grass was to be carried past the gate, he sat down on the stairs with a stick in his hands and [said] ‘come along, why did you not pick off the grass...?’

Ilona's father used the stick to foster his children, a child-rearing method<sup>306</sup> used both in families and institutions in Hungary (and seemingly in Transylvania, as well) prior to WW2. It was meant to make children ‘behave’ when the stick smashed down on the palm of the hand or the fingertips. When I asked Ilona if physical punishment was normal in her home, she explained with drama in her voice:

If we were spanked? – yes, it happened, when my mother, – I did not like gooseberry soup, I did not like garden sorrel soup, I did not like lettuce soup, and my father said ‘there is nothing else until you eat it up, you will get nothing else!’ I took one spoonful of the soup, I tried to swallow together with my tears, but it just forced its way back to the plate... my father went out, then my mother told me, come on, hurry, I make you scrambled eggs from two eggs, you can eat that!

She described her mother as a background-figure, a stereotypical ‘good-hearted mother’, a mellow person, counterbalancing a harsh father. Ilona's mother was a home-maker, with the responsibilities of a devoted wife, obeying her husband and minding the children and household. She was *doing gender* by answering the social expectations of an ‘appropriate wife’ and good mother. Ilona made some short, random remarks about both of her parents; she was obviously more affected by her father, who apparently played a more salient role in her life. He was portrayed as a conservative and authoritative person, with a hierarchical structure between father

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<sup>306</sup> Classified as child abuse today.

and mother and children. Apparently, Ilona's father treated his wife and children the same way:

---- every Sunday we had ---- no, not that we had to, because it was part of our life that we were to go to church – my mother baked some cakes every Sunday, my father came to the kitchen where she was cutting the dough, he counted every piece of pretzel – and when we went home he said – he was always back home later than the rest of the family, and...[...] my sister, you know, she was a lot like my father, stern and so, she inherited it from my father, but she had also another side, you know [...] and she said, 'I will take a pretzel, I will, I will!' and we others told her, 'please, don't, you will get caught' – 'I don't care!' and she ate two or three pretzels before lunch, and my father came in and counted them, and then he asked: 'Who ate the pretzels?' – my sister had already disappeared under the table, which was the punishment she always used to get, the minimum – and my father said, 'Cin-Cin (using her diminutive name), come on out! – and he would spank her with the stick.

Ilona continued in a dialogue about her rebellious sister, relating the experiences that taught her discipline, a lesson guiding her all her life:

...this frightened me so, that I never ever dared cross him, I never did anything naughty, I obeyed him and did as he expected, and I followed his dictate [...] my sister used to tell me: 'you were never spanked, it was always me who tasted the stick' – and I said, 'yes, because I never [crossed him]'... – I was so afraid of physical punishment that I would never have dared to cross him from this point of view – no, ... no .... not because he was evil, but this military side of his, it was never considered that children... – or I don't know....

Nonetheless, Ilona's father was not only the stern, 'military' type of father; he also appeared to be affectionate:

---- my father – you asked, how he was – it was my father, who [was] in favour of culture ... – .... he directed the family toward culture and he was present at each of my performances, at every performance where I had a role, my poor father, in his Hungarian 'attila' [a special, old, traditional Hungarian garment for men], he sat on the balcony for little money (tickets were cheaper there), and they [the audience]

said, 'oh, isn't that wonderful how that woman recites', and he said to them 'that is my daughter!'...

Still, the authoritarian attitude of her father was overwhelming and the time came when (the obedient and adult) Ilona could not tolerate it any longer. The triggering factor was the humiliation that she was subjected to at home:

I was already earning my own money, I was a member of the theatre in forty...four, when the Russians came in; and a student stood in our yard, he used to come now and then to visit us, to chat and, so to say, he seemed to want to court me... and .... my father – I stood with him [the student] in the door, to say good-bye, and the door to the hall was ajar and he [her father] saw me standing there with the handle in my hand and talking, I just stopped there... only – I was twenty then – asking who would contact whom the next day [...] we would go to church together. And my father came out and in front of the boy he gave me a slap on the face, 'no girl is supposed to stand in the doorway with a boy at half past nine in the evening!'

This was the 'last straw' that made her decide to move out and start an independent life: "then I went back to the room and said, [F]ather, the detention ends here. I make my own money, I have done nothing wrong". By earning her living, she was encouraged to stand up to her father and reject the humiliation she had been subjected to.

### **Adulthood: Professionalism and Personal Autonomy**

After leaving home, Ilona established herself outside the family frames; she recounted it in a personal way, talking of her first years as a professional. She depicted the period of her apprenticeship with great warmth. She appreciated her work at the theatre in her home town and talked of fellow students, colleagues, teachers, recalling them by name. She talked of these times with emotional engagement, full of detailed information about the work and the people involved, praising a teacher who impressed her. He was a 'very interesting teacher' of 'rhetoric', popular among students, who taught them together with his wife, N. Ilona described N. as '[t]he dear one had so many funny things about her', recalling one occasion when she called upon Ilona and told her to come home to her for a rehearsal. Ilona obeyed, she went to their home up in the hills; it was in the evening and they went outside, looked up at the stars and Ilona was instructed to 'shout now! – louder! – silent now! louder again!' – rehearsing her role. Ilona dramatized the occasion, making the scene come to life with the episode of the two figures in the garden, looking up at the stars in the

sky, shouting the lines of the play towards the stars. Ilona was amused by the memory, her voice reflecting the warm feelings she had for N. She revealed that she still visited the graves of the couple, whenever she visited Transylvania, and at times, when meeting ex-classmates, ‘those who are still alive’, they always remembered N.: ‘she was such a dear néni [aunty]...’

## Political and Social Contexts of Adulthood

The decision to leave home, a result of the humiliating act, was facilitated by an episode of political and social character. Ilona was at some stage speaking of the general feeling of discomfort caused by the ‘bad behaviour of the Russian liberators’. The story is intertextual, speaking of and about other stories of this type that circulated in the countries of the socialistic bloc (as well). Ilona’s story is a personal account of how their life had been influenced by the Russian soldiers moving into their neighbourhood:

... on our way to the theatre, we used to go together, MB, AD and ZJ [three women] all at the theatre company, and if we went on this side of the street we met Russian soldiers from the Jewish school, if we went on the other side – I lived here [at this stage she pointed out a fictional home on the table and drew the lines with her thumb and fingernails], they [her colleagues] could have chosen another way, taking a shortcut [showing it again on the table] but I could only go here – and .... eh – the soldiers lived in the Jewish school [synagogue? kh] and then it was them we had to be frightened of...

Ilona decided to make further explanation redundant, assuming that I had the idea of what she was talking about and could interpret the implication of the Russian soldiers’ ‘bad behaviour’. The assumption was correct; several of these stories have been lately excavated from under the *levels of silence* and were presented<sup>307</sup> to the public in Hungary, increasing awareness of them in society. The unpleasant ‘bad behaviour’ of the “Russian liberators” belong definitely today to the ransacked *elhallgatott történetek*<sup>308</sup>, parts of selective collective memory. They are about delicate

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<sup>307</sup> For example, Skrabski’s documentaries and Pető’s studies, among others, treat these sensitive issues.

<sup>308</sup> Pető, A., Magyar nők és orosz katonák – Elmondani vagy elhallgatni? [Hungarian women and Russian soldiers. To tell or to keep silent?] In: *Lettre* 32. szám, 1998. Tavasz [Spring]. Pető, A., Budapest ostroma 1944-1945-ben - női szemmel, [Siege of Budapest 1944-45 – through women’s eyes]. Budapest Fővárosi Levéltár [Archives of the Capital City of Budapest], Budapesti Negyed /29-30. Csonka, E. A forradalom oknyomozó története 1945-1956 II. Rész [Deductive history of the

matters, seldom brought out into the open<sup>309</sup> even in private. The sexual assault (rape) and the atrocities by the ‘liberators’ – the concepts being contradictory – were previously not part of open discourse in Hungary; mainly on account of the political power relations, and also on account of the feeling of shame (female category attribute), linked to the deeds<sup>310</sup>. The issues were hushed up, together with their tragic consequences, such as involuntary child births, sexually transmitted diseases, suicide, death of women, and also social exclusion. The elliptical invoking of the subset category of (male) ‘bad conduct’ is also part of a universal discourse about alien soldiers’ ‘bad behaviour’ in places of occupation, following the gender categorisation of ‘enemy soldier’, aiding the teller and listener with inferential work that makes the account ‘pass’ as an adequate description of events, producing a moral order out of the told (and untold) particulars. Further details about the historical, personal and public effects of the Russian occupation of Romania were revealed by Ilona when I asked her what the Russian soldiers were doing in the ‘Jewish school’;

... well, what would they do, they had their head-quarters in the synagogue! [her voice is very tutorial at this point] – Of course! Yes! There – there was a certain watch – the Russian guard, immediately after their arrival – in August it was, the twentieth, when the Romanians joined up [to the Soviet Army] and then in October – in 1944 the Romanians signed the treaty, they joined the Russians and for that they were rewarded with Transylvania – and then around mid-October, they came in, to put it so, the Russians came, they just spread out all over the town and everything, and so forth, and from that moment on – well – the ex-director, leader of the theatre received a call.... and they said that a new theatre must be established. There was no question of Hungarians going away [dismissals] and as the Romanians were not there yet, so we had to open the Városi Színház [Town Theatre]... –

Ilona’s personal encounter with the Russians was interpreted by her in a dialogic, scenic way, speaking of her meeting with the Russian troops on the street:

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Revolt 1945-1956. Part 2]. In: Database *Betiltva.com* [Banned.com]; F. Skrabski: Hushed up ignominy. 2013

<sup>309</sup> From my own family history I know this to be a fact. I have been informed about witness cases that correlate with the results of the above sociological studies.

<sup>310</sup> Pető, A., Átvonuló hadsereg, maradandó trauma. Az 1945-ös budapesti nemi erőszak esetek emlékezete [Transit Army, lasting trauma. Reminiscences of sex assault cases in Budapest, 1945]. In Történelmi Szemle [History Review], 1999. 1-2- sz.

... it is possible I would not be living now or I would be living somewhere in the Soviet [Union]. The Russians got to work and started to gather people on the streets, they put them in lines and they were taken to Russia – that is what happened to my neighbours too, they took also my father, but he luckily escaped from them. They also grabbed me, and I had to join the line and we were marching along the street [she shows the line of marching with her finger on the table] – I was taken here, there was B. street and I just turned rapidly into a small street and I thought that my heart would fall out – I was very lucky that the other passengers [sic!] did not point me out and say ‘look, there escapes one!’ and I ran...

The intertextuality of the above scene reminded me of the lines by the Jewish poet, Miklós Radnóti<sup>311</sup>, and film scenes with similar themes (often about German soldiers, e.g. Schindler’s List, The Piano Player). Apparently, it was a close escape this time for Ilona; she continued her story by explaining that she was spared on account of her director contacting the governor of the town the next day, who in his turn went to an advisor of a higher rank (a military person), “a Jew”, Ilona recalled, newly “arriving back”<sup>312</sup>. The advisor signed a paper that freed her from being taken for ‘malenki robot’<sup>313</sup>, she said. A further scenic detail with the Russians reminded Ilona of another incident which also contributed to her decision to leave home. It was about her father, who, while walking home one evening in their street “was knocked down by Russians”, who “robbed him of his money” (...) “he came home bleeding from his head”. After this incident Ilona was scared of meeting the Russians in their neighbourhood, so she moved to the town centre, where she hired a room from a female colleague. She managed well on her own; she was a bread-winner who “made good money, so to say”, because she was “very popular” and had a lot of engagements both at private events, such as at the meetings of the ‘home-coming Jews’, she

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<sup>311</sup> Miklós Radnóti, *Razglednica 4* [Postcard 4]: “I fell beside him, his corpse turned over, stiff as a wire soon to snap.//Shot in the back of the head.//This is how you will end, too; Just lie still, I whispered to myself.// Patience exhales death now. //‘*Der springt noch auf,*’ I heard from above. My ear was clotted with filthy blood.” [Transl. kh] Szentikirályszabadja, 31 October 1944.

<sup>312</sup> Ellipsis used for expressing the arrival of a person from a concentration camp.

<sup>313</sup> Euphemism for Hungarians taken to the Soviet Union for forced labour; from Transylvania an unknown number (estim. 400 thousand) of Hungarians, accused of being Partisans, were deported to Siberian and other labour camps on Soviet soil. The victims of these deeds have been categorized as ‘the little known’ (Várdy) as they were kept silent about it until 1989. (Stark, T., *Malenki Robot. Hungarian Forced Labourers in the Soviet Union (1944-1955)*. *Minority Research* 7. Pp. 155 - 167.) Many of the prisoners were women, Várdy: *Forgotten Victims of WWII: Hungarian Women in Soviet Forced Labor Camps*. In: Várdy, H.A., *Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2003, pp. 503 - 516.

recalled, and at the theatre, too, receiving ‘two hundred twenty pengő’ in salary (the Hungarian currency at the time), so she could easily afford the rent.

Ilona remembered details about the circumstances and relations in Romania in the early decades after WW2, which coincided with the start of her career as an actress. She was happy to speak about these days, then changed plot, slowly gliding into the story of the deterioration of the general social situation within the political system, reflected in life at the theatre. The first one had an impact on the life of minorities, among them the Hungarians in Erdély, the second one influenced also Ilona’s personal life.

Ilona had plenty of mixed memories from this period of her life; both good and bad ones. Nonetheless, she talked about them in a cheerful way when talking of happy details (professional relations), and she talked pragmatically about unpleasant memories, without getting sentimental or emotional, except for a few insertions on intimate personal matters.

### **Individual Strategies for Bypassing Political Obstruction**

During the cold war period<sup>314</sup>, the rigid cultural policy<sup>315</sup> in Romania developed on the basis of proletarian internationalism, with the blessing of the Soviet Union; permitting various folklore aspects of culture and language use, for both the majority and ethnic minorities. Ilona became interested in cultural expressions at an early age. She engaged in folk dances, folk music, folklore in general, along with high culture activities appreciated even by the regime. Culture was arguably a reasonable, unthreatening activity for the masses and it could even be used for propaganda purposes abroad, showing off a tolerant political system. ‘Culture’ in Romania was perhaps seen by Ilona and her family as the least harmful area for a young girl with ‘ethnic deviation’ to engage in. But Ilona truly loved her work: she described her engagement in the spreading of Hungarian culture in her home town at this time with enthusiasm and evident pride. She remembered the repertoires and the roles she had had in her beloved theatre and in the Opera House, one of the ‘best Hungarian theatres’, once the leading institution of the Hungarian national movement, with well-known actors of Transylvanians-Hungarian origin<sup>316</sup> on their pay-roll. Ilona played both drama and operetta at the theatre, and as proof she showed me – and gave me - the saved programs, pamphlets and cast lists from various plays from this time. She had also

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<sup>314</sup> Between 1950 and 1988.

<sup>315</sup> Illés, E., National Minorities in Romania. <http://www.hungarianhistory.com/lib/minor/index.htm>.

<sup>316</sup> Ilona recalled names that are known to Hungarians also outside Romania: Bara Margit, Dóriáni Anna, Jánosi Zelma, Szendrő Ferenc, Tömves Nagy Lajos and his wife, Nóra.



saved newspaper cuttings about her stage performances written by critics for Hungarian newspapers in the 1940s (Hungarian was an official language in Transylvania then), as a demonstration of her former career competence. The language policy later changed from using Hungarian and Romanian parallelly in the theatre, to segregating the theatre into a Hungarian and a Romanian part.

...Hungarian State Opera – that is ... it is so today, and [there was also] the Hungarians' State Theatre, but only for a while, right in the time following the revolt [referring to the Hungarian Revolt in 1956 in Hungary] – the Hungarian Theatre was called Town Theatre until then, I mean there were both, there was a Romanian department, and a Hungarian department. I was working at the ...Hungarian department and then after a couple of years we got separated. The old [Hungarian] National Theatre ... was given to the Romanians and we got a Theatre Circle, the Promenade Theatre, and thereafter, there were two theatres: the Hungarian State Theatre and the Romanian State Theatre.

The fate of the theatre was not easy to follow, because its history changed due to the twists and turns in the distribution of political power and national interests in Romania before, during and after WW2. Ilona's memory seemed to work faultlessly throughout when talking about this period. She recounted the changing ethnic configurations in her beloved Hungarian theatre – one day Hungarian, the next becoming Romanian – without evaluating remarks. After WW2, the theatre with both Romanian and Hungarian ensembles was on the verge of losing its status. The discourse on the political changes that brought about cultural and social deterioration for the minorities in Romania contributed to the maintenance of the boundaries between ethnic groups (Romanians, Hungarians and Saxons)<sup>317</sup> and increasing self-esteem and nationalism among Romanians. Stereotypes created both internally (in-group) and externally (out-group) as the basis for ethnic self-justification and for the preservation and maintenance of cultural differences as markers of ethnic *superiority*, were more successfully used in Romania by the Hungarians, than for example by the Saxons; Hungarians exhibited “much greater ethnic mobilization than the Germans”<sup>318</sup>, preserving a definite ethnic identity.

Ilona reasoned further, that despite a consolidated relationship between the colleagues with different (Hungarian and Romanian) ethnic definitions at the theatre (“yes, we

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<sup>317</sup> Interchangeable with Germans.

<sup>318</sup> Verderly, K., American Ethnologist, 1985. Vol. 12. No.1. pp. 62 - 83. The Unmaking of Ethnic Collectivity: Transylvania's Germans.

had contact with each other”), a less promising future was a looming threat for the Hungarians:

there was only one problem, that the Hungarian public was more interested in culture and we always had a full house, while the Romanians had very few visitors [...] and then they [the authorities?] decided that it must be shared; the ministry in Bucharest put the incomes from both theatres in one pot and divided it and we, the Hungarians, had to support the Romanian theatre, too. And then it came to ... well, there were more actors among Hungarians, there were less among Romanians and then the number of Romanians ... their status had to be raised and then it turned out that I happened to be dispensable, the number had to be decreased and I was there without a contract for a year and then they arranged for me a job as a librarian...

### Professional Life in Romania in the Ceaușescu-era

Dolgozni csak pontosan, szépen, ahogy a csillag megy az égen, úgy érdemes

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[“You should work with precision and beauty, like the star moves in the sky.”]

Attila József’s words were in school classrooms in Hungary in the 1950s and 1960s; part of the efforts to educate the masses using big letters on the wall. Ilona’s life seems to confirm that the slogan worked: she did her job accurately and well, finding refuge in it. She did her duty, despite the deteriorating status of Hungarian culture in Romania; starting in the 1940s, worsening in the 1950s, according to Ilona. These decades were full of political unease and problems both in Hungary and in Romania, and the situation there escalated further in the 1960s, with growing ethnic discrimination against Hungarians and other national ethnic minorities<sup>320</sup>. For Ilona it meant the loss of her job at the theatre, but this fact did not mean that she was without employment (in socialism unemployment was prohibited). She was consequently provided with a job at a school library, which she accepted, showing her capacity to adjust to any situation.

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<sup>319</sup> Attila József, *Ne légy szeles...* [Don’t be hasty ...] (1935-37).

<sup>320</sup> Reference literature by Illés, E., Magyaródy, Sz., Mallows, L., Kovrig, M., and others.

... so I became a school librarian. I played a big part in culture there too, because of the masters in the Hungarian classes – it was from the beginning a Hungarian school, *Ady* was its name – thereafter it was changed to *Ady-Sinkai* – first we had one Romanian class, then two Romanian classes, then three, then four, and finally it [Romanian] dominated, and then, at the start there were two librarians, one for the Hungarian department, one for the Romanian, and as you would put it, in order to save money, one would soon have to be dispensed with...

Ilona's ability to adapt worked; she seemingly turned the disadvantage to her advantage and began immediately to focus on Hungarian cultural activities in the school library. She set up theatre performances, prepared children for roles and rehearsals. Considering that her career as a performer came to an abrupt end at this time, and she never had the opportunity to work within her profession again, it is remarkable how fast Ilona adapted to her new social conditions. She managed to use her professional skills wherever she landed, seemingly also profiting from it to her personal satisfaction; she navigated successfully by her skills within a particular social context, also conveying aspects of her *personae*.

Nonetheless, I found it rather odd that she was still talking about the imminent second dismissal in a pragmatic way. Nonetheless, Ilona did not comment and express any feelings of disappointment or aggravation regarding the increasing intolerance in society and the workplace, or about the creeping discrimination and the negative treatment she and her colleagues were subjected to, during the interview. Consistently, she had no comments on the rule of the Ceaușescu regime, at all. She might have presumed that it was unnecessary, assuming 'shared silence' between us, by 'knowing how it really was', based on implicit mundane reasoning.

Ilona talked of the degradation in a matter-of-fact way, with a kind of finitistic attitude; accepting that things could not have been any other way than as they were and one had to accept that. In this way, Ilona's narrated attitude to deteriorating life experiences is similar to the narrations of the other interviewees (Borka and Pandora), expressing a pragmatic and sometimes apologetic interpretation of external factors controlling one's life; accepting what comes to one. To hold one's tongue was preferable, because telling one's opinion could have meant trouble. I find that the theory of the 'spiral of silence' (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) can be used to explain Ilona's non-critical stance, displaying acceptance and resignation, a response to ethnic discrimination that the individual learned at an early stage (socialisation). In order to have peace in life, it was natural to avoid confrontations and harassment.

When listening to the narrations, I drew the conclusion that people with ethnic minority status, living in everyday situations, adjusted to their status in society, and they did their jobs as best they could. They lived their lives '*au contraire*'; trying to be

unnoticeable, but firm about their ways of life. This contradicts certain sociological theories describing the grey masses in the socialist countries working un-willingly, feeling unhappy all the time. Life was made agreeable by the individual under the given circumstances; people were seemingly not always gloomy, displeased and depressed. Arguably, it worked this way also for the interlocutors, both in Slovakia and Transylvania, even when lacking control over the aversive impetus from society.

Discouraging policies can influence people positively, urging them to work harder, to beat the output of their 'antagonists'; which can strengthen and maintain the boundaries of ethnic differences, as well as strengthen the sense of ethnic belonging within the *in-group*, and by that also identification with the whole group, which is particularly important in the case of discrimination by the 'other'. It is also a doubly gratifying feeling of self-fulfilment; partly by proving oneself superior compared to the 'others', partly because through the policy of 'passive resistance', one could still demonstrate civil courage.

The minority Hungarian culture could benefit from the attitude that comes from a sub-culture being under (real or perceived) threat from a majority culture. Additionally, the quality of prudence, a kind of religious purist attitude, was cultivated in the socialist countries after 1945; with moral messages for the newly-forming 'socialist people', bearing signs of a continuum from before WW2. This policy hid the obvious political intentions of the Communist Party and its ideology that quenched all personal agency in society by performing a messianic call, reinforcing the idea of ideological superiority, a self-image of omnipotence and omnicompetence, creating a society with ideocratic power, socialising people into passivity and disinterest.<sup>321</sup>

### *Duty, Pride and Devotion*

Ilona was obviously dedicated to the job at the library; for her, combining her profession and hobby was a match made in heaven. Ilona was a hard worker whatever the task. Now, she became absorbed in her work to a degree that made T., her partner, somewhat impatient with her dedication, finding her at the library at eleven o'clock in the evenings, where she was preparing theatre 'rehearsals' for the children. To the remark of T.: "you start working Monday morning and you finish Sunday at midnight in the school", Ilona said that she just loved her work. She "sometimes /.../ received some gratification – and this, well this satisfied my cultural cravings." She was proud of her achievements and the appreciation she received from the

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<sup>321</sup> An adequate psychological term would be 'acquired helplessness'. (For further information, see: Seligman, M. E. P. (1975). *Helplessness: On Depression, Development, and Death*. San Francisco: W. H. Freeman.)

(“Romanian”) school director, who seemed to appreciate her work because the pupils achieved much better results and worked harder since Ilona had taken charge of them. Ilona was appreciated by the pupils; they chose to participate in Ilona’s ‘rehearsals’ rather than go to lessons in other subjects (possibly when not prepared enough for those). Ilona played along, but demanded that they catch up on the missed studies or else they would not be called upon to work with her in the future. The *emotional blackmail* worked, according to her storytelling.

Ilona was very keen to present herself as a person with a strong drive for being seen as a hard-working individual, adjusting to the changing roles around her, making the best of it. She was openly and proudly describing her work at the theatre, or the work with children, her pride in them, tokens of appreciation, personal gratifications, prizes, and appraisals, sometimes in the form of extra vacations and tourist trips. She found pride in prizes that ‘her’ pupils occasionally won, or when they were invited to perform at other places. Her own words might serve as a motto for her ideology of life: “... well, this gave meaning to my life; just as it does today, I am living through participation in Hungarian culture, either as audience or interpreter and I am always ready to help out and represent [it]”.

### **Intersections of Individual Life and History**

In Ilona’s life, similar to the lives of the other Hungarian minority women in the study, the intersection of the individual life course and the specific historical instance is a recurring aspect of context. But during the many years I have known Ilona, I have never heard her complain or express criticism about the social conditions in society. Consistently, references to the majority society are redundant in her narration, which depict Ilona as a person who, curiously enough, successfully constructed a life built on Hungarianness in an alien environment – in Sweden as well. In her storytelling, she once made an indirect reference to the Swedish society when expressing her satisfaction over the appraisal of colleagues, particularly underlying the elevated social status of the individuals in question, which was probably important for Ilona’s self-esteem. Her Swedish friends appreciated her hospitality and homemade traditional meals, which prompted her to repeat the invitations. Ilona spoke with pride of having had their lasting friendship; even after many years they kept on sending seasonal greetings to her, with details of events in their families.

When talking of inherited characteristic traits, she was particularly proud of being charitable (inherited trait from her mother), an essential principle in life, which she has lived up to in her life. Ilona recounted carrying as many as “sixty gifts”, or sometimes “twenty-one pieces of luggage” to people in Transylvania, which made me wonder if she had a big family that would get all those gifts. Ilona explained that the gifts were not only for her family, including a small educational story in her storytelling about the function of bribes in Romania. Speaking of siblings reminded

Ilona of a sister (not named) who had moved to Hungary during the 'Hungarian time' (1940-44). She died two years prior to our interview, and was buried in Hungary. The recollection of her sister led Ilona into an emotional state, remembering the sister's first visit to Transylvania after having been barred from returning to Transylvania for several years after the Liberation in 1945. Unexpectedly, in the 1950s (unspecified date), owing to the fact that the tension between Hungary and Romania was easing up, the sister was permitted to visit her family in Erdély. Ilona was working at the library at the time her sister unexpectedly came home to visit them.

Ilona became very emotional at this stage of her storytelling. She dramatized the entry of her sister to Transylvania, using an arsenal of dramatic and theatrical tools. performing the event with great sentiment, talking with a low and trembling voice. I could easily visualise the storyworld detail of when her sister fell on her knees and kissed the soil of Erdély (Ilona got very sentimental and was lost in tears at this point).

After the first visit of her sister, both Ilona and their mother were repeatedly permitted to go to Hungary to visit the family of her sister. One of Ilona's visits to her sister leads us to a crucial stage in the narration. As it happened, Ilona found herself in Hungary on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1956<sup>322</sup> ['56].

### Historical Events Reflected in Everyday Life

23rd October 1956, the date of the Hungarian uprising, has a particular importance for Hungarians (wherever they live). As I am particularly interested in knowing others' recollections about this topic, I was eager to hear the story of Ilona's perception of the events; as she was both a cultural outsider (*Hungarian beyond the border*) and an insider (*Hungarian*)<sup>323</sup>. '56 is now a controversial and politicised topic in Hungarian official and private discourses; dividing the nation. Both sides (the old regime and their victims) were affected; both sides lost family members. Nevertheless, '56 is also a nation-uniting traumatic event for the majority to remember; it is a national holiday in Hungary, and Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin esteem it as their own national day. Transylvanians are of special interest; they supported Hungary in the uprising<sup>324</sup>, and were victimised for it. It was an exciting

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<sup>322</sup> Outbreak of the Hungarian Revolt of 1956.

<sup>323</sup> Békés, Cs., Az 1956-os magyar forradalom a világpolitikában. Az 1956-os Magyar Forradalom Történetének Dokumentációs és Kutatóintézete kiadványa, Budapest, 1996. [The Hungarian revolt reflected in world politics. Documentary Publication of the History of the Hungarian Revolt of 1956.] Budapest, 1996.

<sup>324</sup> The Hungarian Revolt was supported by Transylvanian-Hungarians, both physically and mentally; some offered even their lives by taking active part in the actions or supporting actions. The memory

coincidence that Ilona should have been in Hungary on that particular day, so I took the opportunity to ask her about her feelings about the day. The discourse on '56 took me by total surprise; especially knowing the fact that Ilona, in the 1980s, as chairman of the local Hungarian association in Sweden, an enthusiastic and active participant in national memorial days (reciting poems, too). She had arranged memorial days for '56, as well. With my own presumptions in my mind, I was prepared to hear Ilona's accounts of the events. What I received was not what I expected to hear:

... fifty-six came,... I happened to visit them [*her sister's family in Hungary*] and my brother-in-law came home at noon [...], and he said, that there was something going on, because the newspapers were publishing very openhearted articles – and I had to leave at two o'clock, I had to reach a train at six from Pest [Budapest], the Baltic-Orient [express train] – [I was] on my way to Kolozsvár – and in the waiting room while I was waiting for the train, I heard Russians passing in wagons, singing in Russian, they were on their way, they knew that Romania had given them permission to extinguish the revolt. I heard them with my own ears...

Ilona was obviously on her way back to Transylvania that very day, sitting on a train, missing the Revolt in 1956 by a few hours. She post-constructed the events, linking the newspaper articles to the interpretations of her brother-in-law and the singing of Russian soldiers she had heard on the train (a very scenic description again), to support her post-constructed knowledge of the events on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 1956, without grasping its meaning at the time. Ilona continued to talk about the afterlife of the story in a dialogic manner; she arrived in Transylvania quite ignorant of what was going on in Hungary in the meantime.

...when we arrived at V. [in Transylvania] many came on board and they asked, 'what happened in Hungary? – and I said, 'why, what did happen?' – and then they said; 'well, a Revolution broke out' – and I said 'My, my, is this the way I should learn about it?' – because it is possible, if I had known about it, I might not have returned home... that time – I was already a

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of the Revolt lives on in the collective memory of the Hungarians, with international implications and consequences. See more about the Revolt of 1956 in Transylvania in Tótfalvy, Z., *Az 1956-os forradalom visszhangja Erdélyben*. [The Echo of the 1956 Revolt in Transylvania.] Hunsor, Info Media FFRW Publication. Source: [http://primus.arts.u-szeged.hu/doktar/texts/tofalvi\\_56.html](http://primus.arts.u-szeged.hu/doktar/texts/tofalvi_56.html).

couple of days late getting back, and I told my director at the theatre ‘sorry, that I am a few days late, even though I still have holiday...’ and he said ‘never mind *dear* Ilonka, we are very happy to see that you’ve come home! That is the main thing!’

The discourse turned into a meta-narrative, not depicting an actually lived experience. I acknowledge the possibility that my own version of the discourse on the said Revolt has become normative and I have an expectation of others to orient towards that. There are other alternatives for the interpretation of Ilona’s discourse; one could be that she did not find that the nature of the local interaction (interview) was the right site for a display of nation-centred discourse, or she did not know how to frame it. Ilona recounted the event from her memory, with hindsight knowledge about its extended implications. Anyway, I found it remarkable that the importance of the Uprising was equated by Ilona’s *well-behaved* (duty-bound) return to her workplace; which I would have thought was a trivial detail in relation to the uprising. But the level of sequencing of the two topics was actually the same in her recounting.

After having been in Hungary for some days or weeks in the autumn of 1956 (we do not learn the duration of her visit, or if Ilona was allowed to return to Hungary after ’56), one could sense the social movements going on in the country that had preceded the uprising. There were signs in several university towns (Szeged<sup>325</sup>, Debrecen<sup>326</sup>, Budapest, Sopron, Pécs), implying and anticipating that something was afoot. Even if freedom of speech was banned and open protests against the political government were out of the question, still, there was social unrest, and a faint suggestion of the need for – even if not of the possibility of – a kind of general social (or political?) change in the country, and also the manifestation of solidarity with the Polish protests earlier in the same year (June, Poznan), all peaking on the unexpected day of 23<sup>rd</sup> October, the beginning of the bold Uprising.

Whatever the reasons for the way Ilona narrated her experiences from 1956, I had expected a more coherent story about the Revolt and was disappointed not to receive

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<sup>325</sup> The igniting spark came from the law students at the University of Szeged, initiated by a letter from an anonymous student from Budapest (13<sup>th</sup> October), calling for changes in the education system (Russian language), that made them prepare a list of claims (union for students, freedom of speech, freedom of gathering, etc), starting a movement of great proportions (gathering students in the thousands at the university meeting) that could not have been missed by the masses outside the university world. János Szolcsányi Szegedi szikra gyújtotta fel az ’56-os forradalmi lángot. In: Magyar Nemzet, 2005. Nov. 3. 6.p. [Spark of Szeged igniting the revolt of ’56.]

<sup>326</sup> University town in Eastern Hungary. The first three victims of the Revolt were killed in Debrecen, where the police shot at the demonstrators.



it. The *hiatus* on '56 that appeared in her storytelling was for me remarkable, but with hindsight not unique, as I soon learned in the course of the interviews. Acknowledging my own pre-established anticipations of the discourse about 1956, Ilona's narrations were unexpected and partly unreadable for me, knowing Ilona's dedication to Hungarianness. Relating to her personal identity, Ilona's permanence in time is supported by the final lines of the above segment. Ilona had previously explained that she had learned her lesson when she was young; 'do as you are expected to do' ('duty above all'), which was her guiding principle in life. Ilona's uninformed discourse about '56 was not out of character; Ilona consistently avoided personal opinion on any political or social issues<sup>327</sup> in her narration, just as she refrained from expressing any personal opinion in relation to any other topic, other than personal matters (charity, professional achievements).

Nonetheless, when transcribing Ilona's uninspired discourse on '56, comparing it with the other narrators' stories about the same, it soon became clear that the perception of '56 was individual and my expectations about the 'right discourse' could not be fulfilled. Hungarians have a variety of discourses of the heard, learned and experienced in 1956. The interpretation of the overarching national event was not internalised, or conceptualised, the same way by the narrators of the study, either (see the stories of Borka, Anna and Liza). Ilona's part in the experience of the revolt, twinned with the narration segments on other political and social phenomena in Romania or Sweden, seems to be in line with her overall neutral attitude towards open discussions of matters of this kind.

### Privacy, Emotions and Political Discrimination

Ilona was a young woman in 1956, which made me wonder what life was like for a young girl of her age (gendered aspect) during those days in Romania; hoping for a story with some romantic angle or some intimate details (love story). I learned later that this was not to be expected. None of the interviewees were particularly open regarding this pocket of their personal lives. None of the women talked openly about their (heterogeneous) sentiments and relations, unless explicitly asked. Even then, the answers were short and distanced. I interpreted this reaction as a kind of demonstration of a claim on privacy: an expression of a prudent attitude towards intimate topics not intended to be displayed in front of a wider public. Ilona mentioned a young man wanting to court her when she was young, but he was linked to an unpleasant, humiliating situation (paternal abuse) and she did not return to the topic later. Her narration was pretty much ungendered from this aspect throughout,

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<sup>327</sup> Ilona did not mention the events of 1989 either in reference to Romania or Hungary; as if they did not take place at all.

so I asked her an explicit question about the partner with whom I knew she had arrived in Sweden.

Ilona was open in her answer about the young man, whom she apparently met by coincidence on a train trip in Transylvania. While working at the school library, she and a female friend of hers were on a pleasure trip and on the way back they heard some young men onworking life the train speaking Romanian. Ilona's friend told Ilona in Hungarian that she fancied one of the guys, and Ilona added – also in Hungarian – that she also liked the look of one. The young man in question turned to her and asked her mockingly (in Hungarian), 'Well, you like *me*, do you?' He [T.] saw her home from the station, then they went out a couple of times together, and after some time they were 'mixed-up together' in 1960, Ilona said; and they continued to keep each other company after that.

T. was an ethnic Hungarian, an agronomist who lived in Kolozsvár. I was sure they had got married, but Ilona revealed later that this was not the case. It turned out that they were living without the blessing of the church, which I imagine must have been a rather unorthodox action in Transylvania, considering the normative religious family and patriarchal family construction. Ilona ventured that she was 'living in sin' (making inferences through practical categorisations that allow moral assumptions about the young woman). She went way beyond the expectations within the category of 'good female conduct'; she broke several religious and social codes, expectations and norms for women, by which she demonstrated autonomy, a great deal of agency, and individual strength. She explained that she and T. lived together for approximately three years in Kolozsvár and then five years in Sweden, not going into detail about their shared everyday life. I was still curious about the relationship with T. and what she found in T. that attracted her. I was expecting a romantic story detail, but Ilona's answer was short and dry, that he was good-looking, nice, and he liked her. Anyway, the relationship thrived, so they moved in together. Nonetheless, on the social side of the story about a personal relationship, there was more to come, resulting in a life-changing action. Times began to change for the worse in society; they both recognised the increasing discrimination. The treatment of minority groups changed character in the late 1950s, early 60s<sup>328</sup> in Romania. As narrated above, Ilona was dismissed from her job, and began to work at a school library, while T. worked in his profession, but with the deteriorating working conditions he felt threatened, and more and more frustrated about the prospect of never getting a job that was up to his level of education and professional skills. The decision to take action came when he had applied for a job and was (unofficially) told that the job he had applied for would

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<sup>328</sup> As Ilona did not care for temporal definitions of her actions, I made the temporal sequencing of the social processes and the context according to my own knowledge of the events and experiences.

go to a 'Romanian man' with the 'right contacts' (the son of a Romanian Party Secretary, as it turned out), while T. was allotted a place at the rettery factory in a distant city (with a Romanian majority). Ilona was not pleased and told him that she would never visit him there because of the stink around the factory. '[H]e went mad', Ilona said, when he received the notice of job refusal. The refusal was in line with the policy of the Romanian state directed against Hungarian intellectuals in the 1980s, coercing them into leaving Transylvania and making them take jobs in non-Hungarian areas, contributing to the *Romanianisation* (Bugajski, 1995) of the population.

This was the last straw for T., who began thinking about defecting. Ilona explained the circumstances around their leaving in a reported speech. T. was worried also about Ilona, who might again be forced to lose her job. Considering the threatening clouds gathering over their heads, he confronted Ilona one day:

[H]e told me "if you love me, you will follow me, because I will not stay". [...] he was my life companion then, and he said that he would never get a job matching his qualifications and he was thinking of defecting, so he put his name – he had a form [paper] for me too – on a list for a bus trip – so we ended up in Austria; because, he said, 'now it is your place that will be downsized, and what do you think, is it going to be the Romanian [member of staff] who will be dismissed? No, it is going to be you. And then there you are, without employment.' – And, well, there was also love ...

The stripped discourse explained how the life-changing decision came about; the threat of losing her job and a small hint that also love had to do with it. This was the only time that any of the women mentioned the issue of love as an explicit motive for their migration. Nonetheless, Ilona did not mention how she felt, and she did not reflect on the situation about leaving Romania. Ilona's parents were dead by that time, and Ilona's siblings had their own families, which might have facilitated her consent to follow T. into exile. The one thing that Ilona seemed to take with her was her affection for Hungarian culture.

### Adaptations and Resistance Strategies

Ilona's life revolved very much around Hungarianness, i.e. about all expressions of Hungarianness. Her conduct in the Hungarian language was flawless. She never learned Swedish to a good level, perhaps because a new language would not cooperate with one's need to control a new situation. Ilona was an adult when she came to Sweden, which might have restricted her ability to acquire a new language. Adjustments to a new life might be overwhelming enough, and not to learn a new language might be the key to maintaining independence. However, the lack of good

command of Swedish has never put obstacles in her path for getting by in Sweden. She spoke Romanian (with Romanians) and had studied Russian in her youth<sup>329</sup>, but no other languages. The powerful tool of her trade, the Hungarian language, was lost in transitions; first when she lost her first job in Romania, then again, this time for good, when she left Transylvania and moved to Sweden. The story of Ilona's life in Sweden is about a young individual with a strong drive to do justice to herself, to compensate for the professional loss and to prove to be a worthy individual.

## Unorthodox Migration Narration

Ilona was part of a – sometimes barely – tolerated minority<sup>330</sup> in her homeland, and after her arrival in Sweden, she became soon a pillar of the Hungarian exile community there, with various external categorisations as to her identification. Officially she was categorised as an *invandrare* and a Romanian, concepts that she did not relate to in her narration in any context. She could almost be regarded as a 'regular migrant', only because she did the Eastern Europe to Western Europe line in her journey and ended up in Sweden, both in an orthodox and unorthodox way. The first part, describing the beginning of her journey, following the stereotypical route of escape, via *gyűjtőtábor* ['relocation camps'] in Austria, depicts the expected story of traditional migration in an ideological context, also separating her narration from the other narrators. She arrived in Sweden together with T., who initiated their 'escape', which did not follow the stereotypical story of migration of penetrating the Iron Curtain. They did not have to creep under barbed wire in the middle of the night, as we often hear from the storytelling of migrants from Central Europe and Hungary.

Instead, they had a comfortable 'escape' by bus, as T. and Ilona left Romania in the time of a lukewarm political climate, using a *window of freedom* which had opened up in the wake of the Prague Spring of 1968. Their application for a journey to the West was surprisingly easily accepted and signed; and perhaps unexpectedly for them, too, they actually were allowed to begin the trip in 1969. The story becomes orthodox at this point. When they arrived in Austria, they were placed in a relocation camp and actually decided not to return to Romania. The plan to leave Romania was T.'s, but he had no specific target country. Austria just happened to be the first step on the way. When they arrived there (when exactly this happened was not revealed in the

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<sup>329</sup> To learn Russian was obligatory in the countries of the socialist bloc.

<sup>330</sup> See Chapter of Historical Survey.

narration), in the camp for Eastern European immigrants, they apparently decided to continue to Sweden.

Thus, Ilona's story turned out to be a less traditional migration story. We learn very little about the background to the important decisions, we do not learn how it felt to leave Transylvania, where Ilona grew up and was once a celebrated professional. We do not learn about their time in Austria either, or why the target country for their move was Sweden, or what it was like to begin a new life there. It was at first frustrating not to learn anything about the transition time, but I have failed to break in and ask questions about this topic, because Ilona was fluent and signalled by her posture and change in voice that she had arrived at an important stage in her life – a story detail which I did not want to interrupt or stop her from telling. The forthcoming storyline turned out to be her traumatic story of a 'broken heart'. Before presenting the story lines referred to, I wish to add some concluding remarks on Ilona and her migration story. Looking for an explanation for why I think she did not concern herself with talking of their 'escape', which in any circumstances was a great and dangerous leap and life-changing event, I interpret it as Ilona simply not relating to the issue of migration. Ilona was not telling the story of an *invandrare*; she was telling the personal history of Ilona.

### **Life-changing Experiences: Traumas and Private Failures**

Ilona did not reveal much about the years in Sweden, or about her relations to T. for that matter. The only detail Ilona revealed about T. from this time (and generally) was that he was a bright guy and was treated much better in Sweden than in Romania. He got a nice job in a research lab in Sweden on their arrival, while Ilona was given an administrative job in a library in Lund. She omitted to talk about her working experiences in Sweden, too, which I find significant, compared to her detailed storytelling about her professional life in her youth. I interpret it that her working life in Sweden could be seen as part of the typical 'invandrar'-life with the employment offices aiding immigrants in the 1970s and 80s in Sweden, by that also passifying her, while in Erdély she had to rely on her own agency to get by and do what she loved to do.

When Ilona finally opened up about the relationship between her and T. (in Sweden), she began to talk about the background of the traumatic experience of their separation, which I consider to be her master narrative. They had been living in Sweden for five years, and the separation was apparently a serious emotional trauma for Ilona, judging from her performative dramatic narration of the experience. We learn from her that the experience marked her forever, curing her from the follies of "this love business". The emotional consequences of the separation had obviously greater effects on her than the whole migrant experience; at least that is the conclusion one might draw from the details of the narration.

Ilona began to explain that their relationship went wrong in Sweden, without going into the reasons why. She presented the act of separation by using reported speech, dramatising details quoting the dialogic discussions between her and T., in which Ilona described T. as an apparently caring and dutiful partner, trying to adapt to the codes of the category behaviour of the chivalric male to “act as a man is expected to act”, he told her. T. was trying to play the role of a responsible man taking care of his partner. He referred to their escape from Romania by implicating that he ‘rescued’ her, as Ilona put it: “he said to me: ‘I brought you to safety’” and therefore (and otherwise also), he considered her to be his responsibility.

The dialogic detail pointed at Ilona showing T.’s attempt to take control, complying with traditional (male-oriented) gender expectations. He even told her once that ‘at home [in Romania], you dictated; here, I shall be the one to dictate’. This might have been a misjudgement from T. Ilona has already presented herself as an independent person, with strong personal integrity, knowing the best for herself. This possibly might have been threatening to T.’s role expectations, and therefore he decided to change the situation. This was of course the wrong strategy toward Ilona; she could put up with integrity-threatening issues to a certain degree, but when a certain level was passed, she adhered to her own rules of integrity. Ilona explained to T., that “that” [i.e. dictating] would never happen, he could forget it. “Our paths part at this point,” Ilona told him, and saw to it that the relationship came to a definitive end. Ilona did not reveal the actual reasons for their break-up; the painful decision can be interpreted to verify the articulate behaviour of Ilona, presenting the coherent self, endorsing the truthfulness of her storytelling.

After that, they parted, although they kept in touch by phone afterwards, Ilona recounted in her story. T. allegedly asked her over the phone some years later to marry him, but she refused, because she was aware that he had already met another woman. Ilona remained single ever after, turning her attention to compensating issues in life that could satisfy her need to be needed and useful.

The dramaturgy of the narrative segment about their separation was remarkable. Ilona turned the narration into a majestic main narrative and performed the situation, choosing words with great care, getting sentimental at the ‘appropriate’ points, turning the kitchen into a theatre stage, transforming into the role of ‘sorrowful deceived woman’. She was physically changing her posture, sitting at the kitchen table, speaking with a trembling voice and tears in her eyes, for the second time during our interview. To illustrate the gravity of the situation of their splitting up, she used intertextuality, and recalled a play from her youth in which she had played the role of an old, betrayed woman. Ilona played the role in front of me, quoting the extremely sentimental lines; using her body, gestures, voice, tone, prosody and tears. She recited with a broken voice the woman’s role in the play:

*My God, I do not want to be left alone! I do not want to be left alone...! ...*  
Curtain. And there it is, my life also ended – with the curtain. Because I have been left alone.

The scene that I had witnessed made me feel uneasy. Nonetheless, Ilona achieved her goal of involving me in her story by making me a part of it. It was easy to visualise the (theatrical) scene and also T. (whom I have never met) and their discussion leading to the final split. I was influenced, although not convinced enough, to take sides, but it was enough to turn the monologue into a dialogue between Ilona and me. The storytelling mode involved me. For the first time in the interview we engaged in a conversation, because I felt the urge to comfort her, reminding her that with all the friends she had, she was not alone.

Ilona recuperated rather fast and continued her story. She said that while recovering from the blow, she realised that she had to reformulate her life and look for a meaning to fill it with. In that, she did rather well, as demonstrated in the next part. Ilona found meaningful substitutes that made her private and public life complete in Sweden. The next chapter is an assembly of material from my overall knowledge of Ilona from the interviews I made with her, also adding bits of my ethnographic knowledge about her life.

### **Self-realisation in Publicly Private Domains**

Despite a modest salary and later also a modest pension, Ilona devoted her life to supporting her relatives in socialist Romania. The gesture was certainly appreciated by them, knowing the material and social difficulties people in Romania experienced in the 1970s and 80s, regardless of ethnic belonging, with famine and all sorts of shortages of basic necessities<sup>331</sup>. Ilona enjoyed her role as a do-gooder, helping her family in Transylvania and the members who lately moved to Hungary and to Sweden. Her philanthropic quest also benefited other people, as we learn from the segments about her trips back to Romania (twice per year, in winter and summer) and when she sent supplies to the family by post. She recounted with some irony and amusement that the demand for ‘gifts’ at the borders and at the post office was great, each time taking the ‘toll’ the officials expected for releasing packages and baggage. The packages were usually opened at customs, the officials asking ‘well now, what do we have in the package?’ Packages sent by mail underwent the same treatment; they

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<sup>331</sup> "Beyond Hunger. Perceptions of and Reactions to Shortages in 1980s Romania" in New Europe College Europa Program Yearbook 2006-2007. Bucharest: New Europe College, 2007. Doctoral dissertation by Simina Badica.

got opened and the receiver had to show the contents: “they [family members] opened the package and they gave away coffee, ham, cigarettes, as much as was necessary ... just so they [the officials] would close their eyes and release the package that came from the West.”

The tradition of hand-outs, ‘gifts’ or bribes (Wästerfors, 2004) is a well-researched and documented phenomenon in business life, frequently used to a great extent (also outside business) in Eastern European countries. Rumour had it that this was particularly the case at the custom offices at the border between Hungary and Romania: ‘gifts’ distributed among clerks at the customs offices had a miraculously beneficial effect on in what shape<sup>332</sup>, and how fast, packages could pass through. If the ‘tradition’ of giving ‘gifts’ was not followed, it could take painstaking hours to get by. Pandora confirmed in her storytelling that this kind of attitude was not a single occurrence at the borders; she had experienced the treatment of notoriously thorough customs officers, when she was leaving Romania by train.

Ilona was no longer targeted by custom officers as her trips were decreasing; her family and the number of friends was shrinking. Some younger family members lived in Hungary, and there were also a few old friends in Transylvania whom she still visited from time to time. To compensate for the loss of social contacts and family, Ilona became a central point in a ‘circle of good friends’ from the old times living in Sweden. They were all Hungarians from Hungary and Transylvania; middle aged or elderly men and women, whom she had kept continuous contact with since 1969. She had friends among ‘56ers as well and according to her tale, she was highly appreciated by them.

[Her friends] can hardly wait, I mean they are always waiting with impatience that I should be back [from Hungary where she lived in the summers], because I am the glue in the circle of friends and the family... when I come back, I immediately set out to arrange [parties] and I immediately make programs, and we are happy to see each other, so this fills my life, I mean even at home [in Kolozsvár].

### **Ethnonational homecoming by Presenting and Re-Presenting Culture**

We had unfortunately no time to reflect on Ilona’s cultural activities within the present interview situation. Therefore I wish to draw upon previous interviews describing her role in the Hungarian exile community, because this is a key issue to understanding Ilona’s life story. It has been a central role for her to act within the

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<sup>332</sup> In some cases certain parts of the content were missing.



Hungarian scene (both literally and in an abstract way), giving her opportunities to use her professional and cultural capital. She cultivated her mother tongue, seen as a major task for Hungarians<sup>333</sup> in migration. The slogan ‘in her language lives the nation’ has an important meaning for Hungarians, equating loss of the mother tongue with death. Linguistic skills in Swedish could not compensate for Ilona’s loss of Hungarian; nonetheless, she not only managed to get over the linguistic deficiency, she compensated the loss by presenting and re-presenting culture in Hungarian, with the legitimate motif of ‘preserving one’s own culture’<sup>334</sup>, performing in front of a broad, and mixed public in Sweden.

Ilona was also active in the Hungarian Language Education Foundation (within SMOSZ) in Sweden, because she held the view that it was the older generation’s duty to hand down language to the younger generation in order to keep one’s identity. As chairman of the local Hungarian association in the 1980s, and board member thereafter, she advocated these values. Ilona invited guest lecturers, performance artists, sometimes even whole theatre ensembles from Transylvania or Hungary, and she organised national memorial days, recording the events on video tapes. Ilona was fond of arranging balls and the annual *Mikulás*<sup>335</sup> festivities for children, preparing packages with sweets and fruits<sup>336</sup> for the children. She herself used to play the role of *Krampusz*<sup>337</sup>, dancing the dance of the troll to Grieg’s music (*I Dovregubbens sal*), in black body stocking, horns and tail. A sight not easy to forget! She represented the

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<sup>333</sup> Having the threat of ‘extinction of nation’ through loss of mother tongue in mind that Hungarians do take seriously (see: *Herder’s prophecy* predicting the disappearance of the Hungarian language) and the demographic decline in our days.

<sup>334</sup> Within the Hungarian *Nyelvőr* [Language guard] movement in the regime of SMOSZ, in Sweden.

<sup>335</sup> The Hungarian version of Santa Claus; arriving on 5<sup>th</sup> December, distributing small packages to children (of good conduct) both privately (at home) and for continuity, in exile, at Hungarian associations.

<sup>336</sup> According to an old tradition for children in the Hungarian regions, the children shall clean their shoes and put them in the windows on the evening of 5<sup>th</sup> December each year, waiting for Mikulás to fill them with candy, chocolate, nuts and fruit. Those who have been ‘good’ during the year get their sweets, those who have been naughty get a bunch of (golden) thin twigs in the packages (along with the candy); they are supposed to be punished with the twigs. Hungarian associations in exile organise Mikulás-evenings for the children, with a ‘real’ Mikulás in red clothes, bringing the sweets in a sack on his back, and *Krampusz* in black clothes; the devil figure bringing the twigs. It is an appreciated tradition also in Sweden.

<sup>337</sup> *Krampusz*, the ‘bad guy’ figure in black with (red) horns, is the counterpart of the ‘good guy’ Mikulás. He has a vicious atmosphere around him, intimidating and naughty; nonetheless an important part of the festival.

Hungarian exiles also within the local immigrant umbrella organisation of her time (LISO<sup>338</sup>).

## Reflections on Ilona's Tale

Ilona staged the unfamiliar storyworld about her life for spectators, with the intention of drawing the audience into it in order “to see, hear and feel, as the fieldworker saw, heard and felt” (Van Maanen, 1988: 103). Nonetheless, this was not done by giving facts and accurate accounting, instead it served to recognise the “poetic dimension of ethnography” (Clifford referred to by Van Maanen, 1988: 101). I am surely not mistaken in presuming that she saw the present interview also as a platform for the presentation of the self and her objectives to an audience. Looking at Ilona's narrated life history, her content tone in narrating, it seems that Ilona feels that she has had a fulfilled life; she has achieved her private goals through her activities as a central figure for her family and friends, and as an official person she has acted as an ambassador of the Hungarian language and culture in exile. There have been others with the same idea; the difference is that Ilona worked intensely and actively for the Cause, a key to her life. She was not only living the Hungarian way in an alien country, but she made meaning of it; achieving goals and purpose in life. Ilona managed to keep in touch with both her ethnic and cultural roots and to contribute to their spread. Through Ilona's not so temporally sequenced story, when putting pieces together a whole life emerged; presenting childhood, adolescence, professional life, Hungarianness, a romance and companionship with a young man, family relationships and friends. Ilona's life seemed to be complete, albeit with interruptions and ruptures, which one expects to occur in life.

According to the storytelling, Ilona spent her life in the service of (significant) others, filled with meaningful activities directed towards them. She seemed to have a need to be helpful; both for her own sake and for the sake of others, thus finding compensation for losses of language, family, professional appreciation, partner, and for being a powerless immigrant without social status. Ilona was keen on presenting herself as a decent, kind and friendly individual, with a strong feeling of duty, concentrating on confirming, both for herself and for the reader, that she had lived a meaningful life. She had made adjustments, but certain characteristics, such as duty, moral and ethical obligations, and above all, being truthful to the self, remained

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<sup>338</sup> Lunds Invandrarföreningars Samarbetsorganisation [Cooperative Organisation of Lund's Immigrant Organisations] working in the 1980s–90s.

constant throughout her life. In that, she presented a stable narrative identity with dignity.

However, there are certain intimate details about Ilona's life that her narration lacks, with my own expectations in the background. For example, we cannot learn about Ilona's opinions on any sensitive topics (politics, ethnic discrimination, hardships in Romania, migration and life in Sweden) from her storytelling. For me, she seemed to have set her mind on recounting mainly positive things about her life experiences, and while she had also had negative experiences, she recounted them only when prompted. The storylines were filtered through her professional masks, showing a resourceful person with an active life in Sweden. Nonetheless, there is no denying that the life she has been living has been 'Hungarian', letting her be an outsider in the Swedish context. If this was a choice of her own or a consequence of her circumstances is hard to conclude; she did not say. In her storytelling Ilona safeguarded her personal (self-centred) integrity. Despite the fact that some distinctive and circumscribed, emotional and influential episodes in life punctuated the mundane occurrences in her life, portraying those as life-changing events in her biographical narration, the personal landmarks (via personal event memory as defined in psychology<sup>339</sup>) such as the memory of child abuse, humiliation (by her father), leaving family, country and profession in Ilona's case, have changed her life, to a broad extent, outside the context of occurrence. The landmarks have influenced her life course in an active and persistent way, without making her lose the scope of her life and diverge from the path she had found meaningful.

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<sup>339</sup> Pillemer, B. D., *Momentous Events and the Life Story*. Review of General Psychology, 2001. VI. 5. No. 2, 123-24.

## 5. The Educator

Application of Symbolic Goods and re-inventing the Self

“I was again a drop in the ocean (...) just following the others...”

### Interview Settings

I first interviewed Borka at the Finno-Ugric institution at Lund University in 1999; the second interview took place in 2006, in a more relaxed setting in my home. The first interview was more formal, made with a sociolinguistic focus, with structured questions and a pre-written questionnaire, followed up by less formal information on personal matters. The second time around, it was conducted in a more relaxed setting in the sitting room of my own home, drinking coffee, at the outset talking about trivialities – health, weather, work, family and the like. Borka felt relaxed and was soon entangled in a complaint about her working conditions as a teacher of Hungarian within the Swedish *mother tongue education programme*<sup>340</sup>. She was displeased with the situation. She found that the hours were too few, there was too much competition, too little payment, and too few pupils. Despite a proper educational background (one diploma in pedagogy from Czechoslovakia, another one from Malmö University, and a third one in Montessori pedagogy), she still had no proper employment as a teacher, she complained. I had known about her dedication – she prepared for each course in Hungarian at home, then commuted daily by bus or by train between several schools in several cities in the region, which she found sometimes tiring. The work she had invested into these few hours did not pay off, either professionally or financially.

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<sup>340</sup> *Modersmålsundervisning* [mother tongue education] in grammar schools or high schools is for children in families with another language than Swedish in the family. The goal of the education is to strengthen children's bilingual identity development.

After warming up with mundane affairs (complaints and talk of family, outside the ‘official interview’), I switched on the tape recorder to register a ‘proper interview’, with “an innate blueprint following a beginning, middle and resolution” (Atkinson, 1998: 121) and the many repetitions in-between. I hoped for a ‘coherent life storytelling’, based on my knowledge of Borka’s well-organised mind and orderly neatness, as well as her attention to detail, which I had learned about during my visits to her language classes and children’s activities at the Hungarian association, and also when she showed me the maps she prepared for each pupil, which contained self-assembled and updated study material tailored to each child.

## Mode of Narration

Borka’s narration was a planned, structured, linear and chronological narrative, based on certain facts and themes in life. These included family, upbringing, education, choice of profession, minority aspects, working experiences, migrant status in her homeland and in Sweden. She talked in an unbroken flow, picking up on certain themes from her life in a sequential narration, using a sober, factual, semi-formal narrative style, free from emotional expressions. Relational narrative mode surfaced once with full power when she was talking of her mother and her illness. Members of her family were mentioned in different sequences; some being important (significant others) for her own development (mother, brother), while others were mentioned in a supporting, less prominent role (e.g. husband, children). I take them for narration strategies: Borka was not the only narrator to speak of more distant relatives in detail, while distancing<sup>341</sup> closer relatives (emotionally, temporally and locally)<sup>342</sup>.

The narrative entails certain constituents of *genderlect*, including both a ‘female’ narrative mode (Haas, 1979, Vol. 86, No. 3.I) (i.e. with category attributes of female *gender doing*, such as relational, polite speech, talking about care-giving, family, relatives and feelings, showing emotions, being supportive and non-confrontational, etc), mixed with elements of ‘male’ narrative mode (ibid.), which are said to be more direct and action-focused, with physical movements and objects. Borka was happy to lead and govern others, tutoring and explaining, which is obvious from the narrative segments regarding her relationship with her brother. Borka had been leading an independent life, making her own decisions, taking actions and using her agency, taking command, and to a certain extent influencing others, which are said to be ‘male’-oriented social role attributes. Particularly detailed were those concerning her

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<sup>341</sup> Liza and Pandora used a similar strategy, revealing little about significant others, such as husbands or children. (In Pandora’s case this does not apply for the storylines about her daughter.)

<sup>342</sup> Perhaps with the Wittgensteinian proposition 7 in mind: “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen”. Logisch-Philosophische Abhandlung, 1921. Wien.

mother and brother, in which she played the roles of devoted daughter and tutoring sister.

A consistent feature in Borka's narration was the rarity of open evaluation, complaints, assessments and emotions displayed. It was a goal-centred narration, linear and sometimes categorical – meaning unambiguous – interrupted only by my questions. The aim of the narrative sequences told were purposefully chosen: they aimed at placing the narrator into the centre of her narration, demonstrating the self as one would like it to be seen by others. The discourse was relational in places: the focus of the narration was placed on Borka's role in the family and professional life. Consequently she concentrated on two main tracks in her narration; first, presenting the family-centric self, secondly, revealing the Educator, with a firm, yet subtly advertised ethnic minority identity, from the perspective of her profession. Both aspects have saturated her attitudes in a refined way and influenced her conduct of life.

## Socialisation in Czechoslovakia in the 70s and 80s

Borka was born and grew up under G. Husak's state socialistic regime (1969–1989) in Czechoslovakia, of which there was practically nothing recounted in her storytelling. Our 'proper interview' began with a statement of identification, anchoring Borka's ethnic belonging in the historical context of her place of origin. The interview began at my call<sup>343</sup>, and had a structured, sequenced and linear organisation. Borka started by telling her name and date of birth (1950), then pointed out the region and town of her birth in a dialogic way:

As you know, I come from Felvidék<sup>344</sup> [Highlands], i.e. the part that is called Slovakia today; sure, we are very close to ... Hungary – I was born in Komárom [Komarno] and I lived there for thirty-eight years, thirty-eight and a half [years].

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<sup>343</sup> My request was that she should tell her name, date of birth, and any particulars that she found important to tell in relation to the person she had become by the time of the interview.

<sup>344</sup> Highlands: the previous Hungarian denomination of the territory that today forms the southernmost part of Slovakia. Geographic names of certain areas and towns once part of historic Hungary have their Hungarian versions. In the study I use the versions used by my interviewees. (Foreign versions of these are bracketed.)

*Felvidék* has belonged to Slovakia since 1920, but was previously part of the Hungarian Kingdom, Borka explained in a short historical survey. The town of Komárom, her place of birth, has a long history. It lies on the border between Hungary and Slovakia on both shores of the Danube, “divided by the Trianon Treaty” and “the Duna” [Danube], she explained. The part on the northern shores of the river in Slovakia has been renamed Komarno, while the smaller part on the southern shores, in Hungary, kept its Hungarian name: Komárom. Borka referred to her birth place [Slo. Komarno] by the Hungarian name whenever she mentioned it. They were living “in this kind of an atmosphere”, as by the time she was born, Borka continued, “this was a given fact that it was Slovakian and it was Komarno, but we always used the name Komárom among ourselves and I grew up in a Hungarian family in a Hungarian setting”. Borka often repeated meanings to which she assigned particular importance, or which she did not want to evolve on; which are themes that are part of her *master narrative*, revolving around her ideological homestead (i.e. *Hungarianness*), and family relationships. Borka made a personal presentation in a segment of around 50 minutes, anchoring a firm ethnic belonging in subtle, steady and unquestionable statements<sup>345</sup>, while the second important topic about Borka’s family relationships saturated all her narration and popped up in various contexts.

### Converging Personal and World History

Borka came to Sweden because of her marriage to K., a naturalised Hungarian from Czechoslovakia, living in Sweden since 1969, whom I had known before Borka met him. He was a well-known figure in the Hungarian exile community, famous for being a confirmed bachelor. On this account his marriage drew some attention among Hungarians in the region: everybody was curious about his wife, still in Czechoslovakia after the wedding. She arrived later in Sweden, in 1989, a year that marked a cornerstone in European (and world) history with far-reaching consequences, among others for obviously demolishing a 40-year-old socialistic political system in Czechoslovakia. Even if the ideological context of this year had influenced Borka’s moving, the move had apparently no connection to the historic events. Instead, it was strongly influenced by her personal relationship with K., who had left Czechoslovakia on account of the Russian invasion in 1968 (‘Prague Spring’)<sup>346</sup>. Both K.’s and Borka’s years of departure (1969 and 1989) can thus be linked to major political landslides in Central Europe that marked history and

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<sup>345</sup> A small alteration is due: Borka was born in 1950, when today’s Slovakia was part of Czechoslovakia. She left her home country in 1989, when it was still called Czechoslovakia (until the separation in 2003).

<sup>346</sup> I learned about his life development when I made an interview with him in the 1990s.

initiated waves of migration because of a general anxiety that arose in the countries of Central Europe<sup>347</sup>. The consequences likely to come after the discomfiting events of 1968 made K. decide to leave Czechoslovakia, while there was allegedly no ideological consideration behind Borka's moving.

I met Borka for the first time in the early 1990s, not long after her arrival in Sweden, at the Hungarian association, where she became an active member (K. was already active there) and since that time our paths have crossed many times. Having known Borka for some time, I find her story worth telling. Certain aspects of her life have impressed me, particularly her devotion to teaching Hungarian, both in Czechoslovakia and in Sweden, and her persuasive engagement in conveying her 'Hungarian cultural capital' (skills) in Sweden. In 2006 I asked her actually for a second time to participate in my study. I had already made a sociolinguistic oriented interview with her in 1999 and the facts I learned then had contextual implications for the present interpretations.

### **Multi-border Crosser Exile with Roots in Hungarianness**

I would describe Borka as another of the ethnical and cultural multi-border crosser exiles with multiple cultural and linguistic identities, assigned to her internally and externally. Borka's story is partly similar to some of the other interviewees' story, yet also different, on account of her status of origin: she had an autochthonous Hungarian ethnic minority status in Czechoslovakia<sup>348</sup>. She identified herself both ethnically and culturally as Hungarian; politically she was a citizen of both Sweden and Slovakia. Borka's personal identification included strong indicators of representation of Hungarian culture, language and ideology, which she supported by the supra-national category of professional, saturating her narration as a safe category of identification. Borka's narration is a testimony to her vocational choice, advocating Hungarian cultural qualities, both in private and in public. Personal values revealed in her narration show a strong family-centric view, with impressive influences from a 'mother-daughter' (matriarchic) relationship from her youth. Borka was a typical *gender-doer* with a strong sense of responsibility and dedication to close relatives.

Borka was born five years after the end of WW2. She was educated and socialised in the socialistic Czechoslovakia, in the middle of the cold war, behind the Iron Curtain<sup>349</sup>, which did not only function as a divide between East and West (Europe),

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<sup>347</sup> Ilona, the other narrator, left Romania in 1969.

<sup>348</sup> Hungarian people were in majority pre-1920 and in minority post-1920.

<sup>349</sup> Ideological and political divide with a long etymology, with geographic consequences, used to mark the border between Eastern and Western Europe after WW2. Latest use is said to derive from



but also divided the countries of the socialistic bloc, separating countries and also people within the socialistic countries. Those who grew up in a socialistic system recognise the dual education system that existed in the socialistic countries: the official (school) version taught one side of the facts, while education in the home (family frame) could teach the opposite. Education travelled on two parallel, yet separate tracks. The official sphere demanded lip service, the other one was where 'truths' could be revealed. Minority status, such as in the case of the Hungarian minorities, added another dimension to the levelled communication system between the official (Czechoslovakian) majority political system and the private (Hungarian) minority system. Borka adjusted seemingly well to the official system – succumb but not capitulate – while her personal education and socialisation were situated within the frame of the family. This fact, saturating her narrations in a subtle yet firm way, was pointed out by her early in the interview.

Borka's storytelling was actually free from political and open ideological revelations. She made an effort to give a 'neutral', 'objective', and 'unreflecting' narration, arguably attuned to the external audience. Her storytelling revealed a quiet child, diligent in school, a well-adjusted student, living a family-centric life with a content that she seemed to be pleased with. Family expectations converged in this respect with those of the socialistic Czechoslovakian state and Borka adapted to the system, not touched by it, avoiding confrontations, living a quiet life in a created, private cultural bubble. Borka did not reject Czechoslovakia in her narration, but she distanced herself from the ethnocultural<sup>350</sup> effects of the Czechoslovakian culture (language, literature, behaviour), which might be viewed as a strategy of resistance against assimilation into a majority society.

As a member of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia she was multilingual, with Hungarian as her native language, and as she put it, also studying "some Slovakian

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Churchill (1945) after Yalta (conference) in February 1945, from his correspondence to Truman (President of the USA).

<sup>350</sup> In North America (USA, Canada) and other parts of the world (Australia) with different ethnic groups, ethnological terminology distinguishes ethno-cultural groups. It is derived from the term ethnocentrism, discussing, among other things, in-group and out-group attachment-hostility dichotomies. See: Ethnocentrism (Sumner, 1906); J. Duckitt *Ethnocultural Group Identification and Attitudes to Ethnic Outgroups* (2006) in G. Zhang, K. Leung, & J. Adair (Eds.), *Perspectives and Progress in Contemporary Cross-Cultural Psychology. Selected Papers from the Seventeenth International Congress of the International Association for Cross-Cultural Psychology*. Beijing, China: Light Industry Press. Here the term is used for the culture pertaining to the culture of a group that defines itself as ethnically different from other groups based on having a distinct culture that differs from the other group's culture.

authors and Slovakian orthography” (in school). According to her own linguistic assessment, she could not ‘remember Slovakian’ today, having not used the language for ‘twenty years’. She had detached herself from Slovaks, but when she went back for her annual holidays she heard Slovakian spoken: “they speak it at the bus stop, I understand it – but I do not care for it”. Borka expressed total indifference towards the majority language and people, which she could obviously ignore, yet still cope and get full education – to learn and teach Hungarian – within her profession. Regarding other linguistic proficiencies, she had studied Latin and German, but curiously and unexpectedly<sup>351</sup> enough, Russian was omitted from her narrative. She learned Swedish to an adequate level in Sweden and used it in her communication, mainly with other professionals. In the family they used Hungarian, yet her children often switched over to Swedish when they talked to each other, to Borka’s regret. This might be doubly disappointing for a teacher of Hungarian who teaches others’ children to preserve the language, I would think. Nonetheless, Borka did not comment on this matter in her narration.

### **Socialisation behind the Iron Curtain**

After introducing herself and her place of birth, Borka evolved her narration about the population of Komárom, and its mixed ethnic composition:

Along with us, also Slovaks lived there, perhaps in a minority in the town; we Hungarians were in majority, Hungarian families; a population speaking Hungarian, but we were used to the fact that there were Slovaks living amongst us, at a certain level we even learned Slovakian, it was compulsory in school, and in official places we used Slovakian, in shops, at the Police. We spoke Slovakian, if they asked us in Slovakian, but otherwise, my circle of friends and my working place were all Hungarian...

Borka showed indifference in her narration towards the composition of the population and the lack of mixing. She had just a few personal acquaintances among Slovaks, despite the fact that they were sharing living space.

There were one or two Slovakian-Slovaks living in our house, we heard them speak, we children, but it was utterly rare that I spoke to the children in Slovakian...

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<sup>351</sup> Russian was obligatory to learn in Czechoslovakia as well, at that time.

Borka's Hungarian identity has been nourished by language, as 'everybody has always spoken Hungarian' in her social environment. Nevertheless, it turned out that she had some cousins who went to a Slovakian-speaking school, which made me wonder if there were any mixed marriages in her family. Borka fiercely denied it:

No, no, no, no, I have never had any [Slovakian relatives]... everybody speaks Hungarian in the family, in the wider family, with cousins – there were one or two cousins who were sent to Slovakian school – they spoke Hungarian at home, but – I don't get why they were sent to Slovakian [school] – but when we meet, we speak only Hungarian – I knew that they went to Slovakian school, but we never paid attention to this fact – it was – well, if not a taboo – it was just not an issue.

Borka's identification with Hungarianness is obviously channelled in the first place through language, and even if she studied Slovakian in school, the knowledge acquired stayed on a basic level. We learn from the narrative that at university Hungarian students (including Borka) relied on 'decent' and tolerant Slovakian teachers, who were open-minded towards Hungarian students with poor knowledge of Slovakian. The young citizens with a minority background in Czechoslovakia came close to the Slovakian society when they followed the obligatory socialistic path of how to become a useful citizen. The demands on language proficiency in Slovakian were seemingly not high; bilingualism was not uncommon, such as when they were pressured to participate in programmes together with Slovakian participants "within the pioneer movement (...) or when it was some communal or regional [event]". At these occasions "they were talking both Hungarian and Slovakian mixed: first they told us in Slovakian then in Hungarian."

Borka functioned socially as a Hungarian in Czechoslovakia, which she continued doing in Sweden, as well. In Czechoslovakia 'everything was in Hungarian', as she put it, and in Sweden the family communication was carried out mainly in Hungarian. Her few friends, whom she met through her husband, were also Hungarian speakers. Naturally, she spoke Hungarian in the Hungarian association, and also in her professional life as a mother tongue teacher. The Hungarian dominance made her a somewhat reluctant Swedish speaker; she assessed her Swedish to be all right, but not good. Using public stereotypes, she argued that her lack of knowledge was due to scarce and sporadic contact with Swedes. She did not have Swedish acquaintances, except for some older friends of her husband whom she occasionally met; thus the use of Swedish was limited to the professional domain. The maintenance of ethnically homogeneous networks helping Borka to maintain her Hungarian skills, and also segregating her from society, were used by her in explaining social segregation in Sweden.

Nonetheless, the tendencies to ethnic homophily may also contribute to the reinforcing of the public's stereotypes, such as the familiar migrant narrative discourse implying the closed nature of Swedish society, which is a common migrant claim and recognised by *invandrare* in Sweden. Immigrants sometimes might take the blame and argue that the reason must be their poor linguistic and cultural competence, combined with the social perfectionism that immigrants may feel they have to live up to. Immigrants argue that they must prove themselves by surpassing indigenous people in order to be accepted in society. This is also one of the public's stereotypes, particularly popular within minority situations; the reasoning feels familiar from feminist arguments for the need to prove oneself in order to be appreciated and accepted. Nonetheless, Borka's reasoning is somewhat original, expressing full understanding in her narration of the Swedish attitude. She found it justifiable that 'the Swedish labour market' had expectations of a 'homogenous labour market', preferring Swedish job seekers to 'immigrants', she explained.

### *Differentiation, Discrimination and Denial*

There are a few traces of subtle, vague references to ethnic differentiation in Borka's narration at various levels, but in general it is difficult to find any overt complaint in her storytelling when speaking of minority or migrant experiences. Borka refrained from speaking of any eventual negative backdrop of being a Hungarian in Czechoslovakia; she did not reject the country, which is frequent with Hungarians (see Puskás, 2009). Borka even denied the existence of tension, when asked, which is confusing, considering the long-lasting strained relationship that has existed between the Hungarian minorities and the majority population of Slovakia<sup>352</sup>. But Borka was keen to exhibit verbal patience towards the majority (Slovaks). I interpret this as an expression of submission, or conformism, brought about by minority position, but Borka might call it 'common sense' – with us both using different points of view.

Considering the fact that Borka's hometown had a Hungarian majority, it seems odd to find it natural that the majority (Hungarian) people of the town (and region) had to adopt the language of the (Slovakian) minority, while the opposite was not on the agenda. Moreover, the majority had restricted language rights for the national minorities<sup>353</sup> (which happened to be in the majority in this context). But Borka's basic attitude, with an adjusted acceptance, expressed throughout the interview, implied

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<sup>352</sup> See: the UN Refugee Agency report at: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/country„MARP„SVK,4562d8b62,469f3ace1e,0.html>.

<sup>353</sup> Reinforced by The State Language Act (1995), uniting "status planning" and "corpus planning".

that it was the way things were and it was what you had to like<sup>354</sup>. Borka illustrated her view on minority and majority relations by using an analogy, comparing life in Czechoslovakia and in Sweden:

It was natural for us that it was a bilingual town. We were Hungarians, my family and the circle of my friends were Hungarian, but if you went to an official place – you know, just as in Sweden: ... if I go to a methodology lecture in Swedish, I have to listen to it in Swedish, I speak Swedish there (...) – so, for us in minority, it is very easy to accept a situation like that, you speak one kind of language and there are others who speak another kind, and I must learn that language and I must adjust to the situation – that is only natural. I don't complain if others do not use my language, because it is natural that they use their language. I am sure that the Hungarians from Erdély [Transylvania, Romania] and from Felföld [Highlands, Slovakia] and Vajdaság [Voivodina, Serbia]<sup>355</sup> are also used to this [situation], it is no problem for them (...) I have never experienced any unpleasantness [while in Czechoslovakia]...

The above segment describes a situation where some parts of a population in their respective homelands seem to live in a *dissident-situation*. Borka's reasoning entails certain contradictions regarding the use of Slovakian among Hungarians; while it was "natural" for others to speak their own language, minorities had "to accept a situation like that" and learn the language of others (majorities), not expecting them to learn the language of co-habitant minorities. Language acquisition in Sweden seems to be an exception, because Hungarian minority exiles show willingness in general to acquire Swedish (as Borka and the other narrators did). By applying two sets of judgments on social behaviour, different aspects of minority situations can be approached. It seems to be easier to adjust to majority dominance when that domination is not overwhelming (such as in Sweden), while other kinds of majority domination can produce resistance. When speaking of language use, Borka came across memories of her visits to Hungary in the 1970s, when border crossing became suddenly permitted:

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<sup>354</sup> "Ez van, ezt kell szeretni": is an often-used aphorism in Hungarian for expressing that nothing can be done to change a certain situation, so it is better to accept it (acquiescence).

<sup>355</sup> Voivodina: a region in Serbia which has a Hungarian minority population that is the second largest Hungarian minority population after Transylvania.

When we visited Hungary, well, Hungary was a marvel for us; everybody was speaking Hungarian, all the signs were in Hungarian – that was a real wonder to us. The *erdélyiek* [Transylvanians] usually tell you that coming to Hungary was like going to Paradise, because everything was in Hungarian. They could go wherever they wanted...

An important criteria of personal and ethnic freedom obviously was the readability of signs in Hungarian, which Borka appreciated, and she elevated the experience in Hungary to the realm of “wonder”. I asked Borka how she was received in Hungary and she exposed a predicament with what later became officially categorised as ‘*Magyar-Magyar kapcsolatok*’ [Hungarian-Hungarian relations], seasoned with ethno-stereotypes and existing in the global Hungarian context. Stereotypes are escalating with the weakening extra-patria Hungarian identifications and people’s general attitude in Hungary towards *Hungarians beyond the borders*. The minority Hungarians sometimes perceive that they are categorised as “second-rate” Hungarians, feeling doubly discriminated against: first in their homelands for being Hungarian, and then they feel that their legitimacy as Hungarians is questioned by core-Hungarians<sup>356</sup>:

[the reception in Hungary] was not so... it was rather mixed, because I was the ‘Czech’, if you want to know it. I used to go to Hungary a lot in the 1970s, to summer university, as an adult, I was already working as a teacher ... I went to summer university courses about film history, urbanism, folk arts, homeland orientation [sic!], pedagogy, and others – so I learned about the whole of Hungary this way, the counties, and wherever I went, I was the only *félvidéki magyar* [Highland-Hungarian]. There were people who accepted the fact that I came from Slovakia, but there were others there who.... [she grimaced at the memory] – well, ‘Czech’, my foot! [with sarcasm] – because I came from Czechoslovakia – then – back then it was called Czechoslovakia...

Borka was cautious and implicit in her pragmatic criticism about in-group vs. out-group relations when speaking of how she was treated in Hungary, so I asked her explicitly what she felt about being identified as “Czech”:

Well, first I just kept silent – we, who live in minority, we, we are normally not aggressive, so we – we just hold our tongue and then at first, I also kept

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<sup>356</sup> An example is the case of Hedvid Malina from 2006. URL source: <http://www2.macleans.ca/2009/10/26/second-rate-citizens/>.

my mouth shut, and then later I told them ‘listen you, I am not Czech, I am Hungarian!’

Borka experienced differentiation in Hungary, which (partly) confirmed the existing ethnic stereotypes among Hungarians. Talking with caution about her experiences that she perceived as derogative was arguably partly based on the fact that she was reluctant to accuse Hungarians of being verbally discriminatory against other Hungarians (loyalty), and partly on the fact that discourse on *Magyar-Magyar* relations did not surface until after 1989, having been previously silenced by the Marxist-Leninist state socialistic ideology.

The open political and social discourse from 1989 on triggered a landslide in some of the countries with Hungarian minorities (one being Czechoslovakia<sup>357</sup>), opening up discourse on matters regarding the whole Hungarian conglomerate, based on identity-related issues and minority rights. It caused, obviously, a lot of tension in the Carpathian Basin<sup>358</sup>. Borka turned to her professional capital to explain the reasons for the general ignorance about the *Hungarian-Hungarian relations* among Hungarians, blaming a defective education system prior to 1989 in Hungary, appreciating the changes that have occurred since. She focused on one of the issues closest to her heart, education:

... and I am happy that situation did change since, because today there is a lot of talk about ‘Hungarians beyond the borders’ – even in schools, they teach the map of Greater Hungary and so on – but then, say during the 60s and 70s, one did not teach facts about the Carpathian Basin, they talked only about Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Romania. So as I always say, the roots to many evil things are ignorance, not being cultured, if you lack knowledge on things. If you know things, you can look at the world with other eyes. I mean, they didn’t teach young people in schools in Hungary during the 60s and 70s – where many acquired the major part of what they know – that there were Hungarians living outside Hungary. People belonging to the nation, speaking Hungarian, following the Hungarian culture; but now, they are aware, many know today, also because there are many people from Transylvania, the Highlands and Kárpátukrajna

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<sup>357</sup> See the report of the European Council regarding Slovakia not fulfilling “in a satisfying manner the European political conditions set by the European Council” (1997).

<sup>358</sup> For further information see URL source: <http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org;http://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2006/07/slov-j07.html?view=print>

[Carpatho-Ukraine] who go to Hungary – so they know now, but at that time all this was unknown.

Borka confirmed the existence of working stereotypes from as early as the 1970s in the context of *Magyar-Magyar relations* using the filter of her profession, even though one should note that there are different categories and degrees to which the stereotypes work in the region. Hungarian researchers (and the public) agree that cultural and linguistic differences are widening between the once relatively homogenous Hungarian<sup>359</sup> population in the Carpathian Basin, under the cultural and linguistic influence of the hosting countries. What are referred to as *Hungarian-Hungarian stereotypes* were investigated in attitudinal and longitudinal surveys among Hungarians in Central European countries by sociologists with regard to the existence of (auto- and hetero-) stereotypes<sup>360</sup> among Hungarians. The latest research, conducted between 1997-1999, concluded that stereotypes were used both by core-Hungarians (in-group) towards Hungarians beyond the borders (out-group) and by the various *Hungarians beyond the borders* towards each other (out-groups against out-groups). The result of the above sociological investigations also showed, when measuring the distance between core-Hungarians and Slovakian-Hungarians, and its reciprocal values measured in stereotypes, that the difference was perceived as being smaller there than between *core-Hungarians* and other *Hungarians beyond the borders* neighbouring each other.

Borka experienced the Hungarian-Hungarian stereotypes in Hungary; then later, she applied some of them when speaking of her meeting with Transylvanian-Hungarians in Sweden. She described them as “very bright, enduring, cunning, diligent – but they fight with each other all the time!”, which made her cautious in approaching them. Borka was consistent throughout her narration about the fact that her minority ethnic identity formed the ideology of her future life, in which patience, acceptance and adjustment were important elements. With the *spiral of silence* at work, strategies were necessary. Borka found her personal asylum within the framework of her family.

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<sup>359</sup> If one takes mother tongue as the criterion for defining membership of a nation; such as in the case of Hungarians.

<sup>360</sup> Allport, G. (1954). *The Nature of Prejudice*. Addison-Wesley. He discussed and scaled the nature of prejudice and stereotyping, describing the latter as “a perceptual and cognitive process in which specific behavioral traits are ascribed to individuals on the basis of their apparent membership in a group... A stereotype is an exaggerated belief associated with a category. Its function is to justify (rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category.”



## Family life sphere: Cradle, Incubator and Vacuum

Just as Borka was weary about commenting on discriminatory issues, she also avoided explicit talk about *women's* or *men's roles*. Yet her narration was saturated by 'gender issues', confirming an internalised expected female role. She had a lot to say about the institution of family, particularly about her own family in Komárom. Borka emphasised the importance of her mother, the role model in her life, whom she had been inspired by and whom she respected above all. Borka's narrative disclosed details about her environment, the *workers' paradise*, people living in 'socialistic realism', the living conditions, schools and private interests that she had experienced in the 1960s, presenting also the results of the *panelák*<sup>361</sup> (*panélház* in Hungarian) building boom, which was performed both in Western and Eastern Europe. The main objective was to build huge and uniform housing blocks in cities, thus improving life and providing social benefits for the workers. These activities went on in all the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Buildings had been destroyed in WW2 and the demand for housing was enormous. Eastern Europe became a huge building site, inspired by competition with the social and economic advancement of Western European countries.

Despite the many new buildings, it was difficult to get a flat in one of these blocks and, when achieved, it was a source of great family happiness. Borka's family belonged to the working class, consisting of five persons who lived in one of the typical newly built blocks, sharing two rooms, a kitchen and a bathroom:

It was tough. But as I told you, my mother sewed, so there was enough money for the grub; she used to say: twenty crowns for a skirt, forty crowns for a dress – so that money was enough for you to buy food and ... well, in this way we had everything, we lived all five of us in a two-room system-built house. I was six when we moved in there, [we] were only four when we moved in, my brother, myself and my mother and father – and there I lived from six to twenty-eight years of age.

When assessing their living conditions and their status during these years, Borka used a pragmatic descriptive style, talking about these things with a matter-of-fact tone, repeating things she found important to get across to the listener. Alternatives were non-existent in the days of her youth: things were what they were and that was what one had to accept. Borka seemed almost content while recalling the hard conditions.

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<sup>361</sup> Colloquial for panel houses, built of pre-fabricated elements of concrete from the 1960s on; to be found in all of the socialist countries.

She expressed a certain satisfaction over the state of things in the past, and concluded that things were good. Indeed, they lived in a small flat, but the family was together and that was the most important thing. Arguably, Borka seemed to send the message that hard social conditions do not automatically make the individual feel disadvantaged in life, what counts is what the individual makes of them. Borka implied all along in her narration that despite difficulties, there were ways to secure a happy life, in which family played an important role:

The most important thing [to tell] from my childhood is that I had a very good childhood. I grew up in a very good family: with a father, mother and two siblings, two brothers. I have an older and a younger brother. The circumstances, our home, were very poor, but I only remember the good things, the good things, security, which a childhood should provide everyone. I still feed on these memories. (... ) it gave me a secure background, by the book. Even now, at fifty-six, when I think back, I am sure that my childhood was decisive for my life. Yet, I had very simple parents, my father was a blacksmith at a shipyard and my mother was at home, [she was] a home-maker, she had been a trained tailor...

Borka spoke with respect about her parents and with both respect and pathos about her mother. Both parents belonged to the working class, having had a basic education. Borka praised particularly her mother, whom she described as a provider of security and future prospects for the children of the family.

My mother was the one, who still is in my soul; my mother was the motor, the lifeline of the whole family. She was at home, rearing three children, she was sewing and so ... she could earn some money, so we had [enough] for food. Because the salary of my father, who was a blacksmith in the shipyard, was barely enough for covering – other costs. So we lived in very poor conditions, but we had everything, because my mother was fantastic at saving. We never took out any loans, yet she always managed, if we needed a new fridge, or a TV, it was her money, the money she had saved, she could put aside, and when there was enough money saved, we bought what we needed. ... Everything had to be done step by step, successively. And that is what she was like – the three children were her life.

The family structure in Borka's family did not comply with the most common family model investigated in the *Visegrád*<sup>362</sup>-countries in the 1980s, with the expectation that both adults should share bread-winning activities<sup>363</sup>. Borka presented the picture of an idealised stereotypical proletarian mother: a hard-working, unpaid, self-sacrificing, powerless, yet strong character in Hungarian imagery. My thoughts went to a well-known image from Hungarian literature, built on the complex relationship between the poet Attila József<sup>364</sup> ("the prisoner of the idealised mother-gestalt"<sup>365</sup>) and his mother that appears in his works. Borka was a dedicated reader of Hungarian literature, and with high probability she read Hungarian literature from Hungarian authors in Czechoslovakia<sup>366</sup> as well, thus she was well-acquainted with the Hungarian literary canon and used analogue pictures from it.

The proletarian mother worked hard, performed miracles with the little money there was, took care of both the finances and the rearing of children, finding ways to make ends meet, sacrificing her life if necessary. Borka used an intertextual and dialogic description of the mother-figure, who appears as a mythologised figure, a proletarian *mater familias*, devoting her life to the cause of family, with submission to family welfare. She *did gender*, but the economic contribution from the sewing that Borka's mother did was not negligible, Borka explained, because her father, the family breadwinner, did not earn enough to provide for the family<sup>367</sup>. Borka's mother appeared as a respected and admired individual with an important social gendered role; she was the key to the well-being of the family and to the future of the children. Borka explained repeatedly, with great stress and sentiments, how important her mother was for the children's' progress; their achievements were possible because of their mother.

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<sup>362</sup> Town in Northern Hungary; denominator of the Visegrad-Four (V4), the name of a political alliance between four Central European states: Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary.

<sup>363</sup> Gyarmati A., Koltai L., Korintus Mné., Mózer P., Szikra D. (eds) *Családpolitikák változásban*. [Changing family policies] Szociálpolitikai és Munkaügyi Intézet, Budapest, 2010.

<sup>364</sup> Attila József, (1905-1937) is the archetype of the proletarian poet-son, who idolized his 'lumpen-proletarian' mother, writing the most expressive poems about her after her early death. Prosaists, such as Kálmán Mikszáth (1847-1910) and Ferenc Móra (1879-1934) wrote emotionally-loaded short stories about their proletarian mothers at the beginning of the 20th century.

<sup>365</sup> Jókai, A., Por és Istenpor. [Dust and Dust of God.] *Tiszatűj*. April 2005, pp. 40 -51.

<sup>366</sup> László Cselényi, Imre Forbáth, Dezső Györy, Olga Gályi, György Dénes, Vilmos Csontos, István Gyurcsó, Katalin Ordódy, József Mács; to mention a few poets and prosaists. They were published in the first magazines permitted to be printed in the Hungarian language in Czechoslovakia (around 1948: Új Szó, Új Ifjúság, Fáklya, Pionírok Lapja, etc).

<sup>367</sup> Contradicting the traditional dichotomy of male-female roles in the family, with the male breadwinner model. Lewis, J. and I. Ostner (1991): Gender and the Evolution of European Social Policies. Emergent Supranational Social Policy: The EC's Social Dimension in Comparative Perspective. Center for European Studies, 15.17 Nov., Harvard University.

Borka admitted that her mother was her idol and the examples that Borka followed all her life were set by her mother, who played a decisive role both for Borka's mental judgements and her actions, even in her death:

Yes. And even now – she gives me answers to everything: her views, her attitude, her views on life ... I still wonder what she would say in certain situations, not as an almighty authority, because I am a different person ... but her way of thinking, having lived beside her, my life ideology is based on it, on my relationship with her, as I saw the way she lived her life. Her relationships with other people, how she thought, how she valued things...

Contrasting the highly esteemed mother figure, Borka described her father as a decent, good person, a simple worker, not making any deeper imprint on her:

... I had no close relationship [with her father], only a kind of loose one – he was a simple man, he did his job, he came home, looked at the papers, he sat down in front of the TV, he slept, he went to fish – let's just say that he was a person without higher prospects. I had no strong attachments to him.

He was also placed in the category of the stereotypical proletarian: a hard-working man, doing his job in the factory, coming home after his working hours, tired, worn out, moderately (un)interested in the family affairs, leaving the taking care of loose ends to his wife. It could be seen as a token of total trust, but one might interpret the father's attitude as realising that his chances were not good in the domestic competition with his wife. Doing gender in this family seems to comply with the Hungarian family structure described in the study, in which women without socially authorised power used their 'gender capital' (gendered social capital).

Borka explained that her father did not get involved in the planning of the future in his children's education either; the driving force was again their mother. The plan of their father for the boys' education was to get vocational training because they would earn more money faster, Borka remembered. Their mother pushed the children to study further, wanting them to achieve higher levels: '[m]y mother was the motor, our support, "children, go and study whatever you like".' The father's indifference towards higher education drew upon his memories of the poverty during his childhood that had prevented him and his siblings from studying, we learn from Borka. Their father argued that if it was good enough for them (him and his siblings), then it would do for his children, too, which their mother did not agree with. She refused to yield to this argument and rejected the thought that the hard conditions that prevailed in the family of her husband should prevent their children from studying further. She achieved her goals in respect of higher studies: all three children

studied at university. In that, the ‘twenty crowns here, and the forty crowns there’ that she saved from sewing skirts and dresses for acquaintances played an important role. The boys became engineers and Borka herself became an educator, making her profession also her lifestyle.

### **Symbolic Goods Attributing to Excellence**

Drawing upon Bourdieu’s model, looking upon taste and culture as indicators of class (see chapter Identity Constructs in Narration) have suggested that ethnic belonging could also be indicated by them. Arguments for that are both confirmed and refuted by the attitude of Borka’s family, as we have learned from her storytelling. Her father was ‘correlated’ with his place in society and class, satisfied with preserving the ‘differences in cultural capital’; while her mother showed the opposite, breaking through class barriers, she herself using her own ‘aesthetic dispositions’ to support the children in leaving a given social space. She pushed the children to crave for more, to make distinctions, to achieve more, and not to accept unchangeable ‘social fields’. Her message was that it was possible to leave lower positions in society and by using one’s own preferences in regard to education a social space could be broken away from, which would in turn lead to economic and cultural capital, as confirmed by the family making a social and class ‘journey’ (via social mobility). The achieving of cultural superiority by minorities works similarly to what Bourdieu expresses as ‘indicators of class’, so the category of class might be expanded by the social variable of ‘ethnic group’.

### **Collecting cultural capital, creating excellence**

Under the impact of her mother’s influences, Borka developed early a preference for studying, reading and learning. Borka apparently had known early on, she argued, that she wanted to become a teacher and she studied hard to achieve that goal. Through socialisation at an early age, she learned to like reading:

I was at home until six or seven years of age, my mother ... I could play with my mother, she used to tell me a lot of fairy tales ... when I was six, I could already read, the books were my best friends, I sat down and I read, and so it is even today – and to make friends, that is important...

In the system-built, small flats one did not invite friends up to play – the space was too small for that. Children played mostly outside on building sites (there were always building sites in the sixties) and Borka and her friends went over the railway bridge to play:

... there was a meadow, we found insects, flowers there, we built a flat for ourselves, we made furniture there and we could play with simple things (...) we invited very rarely anyone to our home... instead, we sat down somewhere and talked. So it was during my grammar school, I always had ... one or two friends, two, three or four of us met and there was the pioneer movement<sup>368</sup> (...) in the school, and then I was in a choir.

Borka was at high school in the 1960s, and she appreciated the atmosphere of her school, where she studied in the first 'human-sciences-oriented' class ever, orienting towards social sciences, she explained. She recalled a memorable teacher whom she valued because he gave lessons in extra curriculum issues in his spare time. Lacking books on Hungarian history and literature in Czechoslovakia, he used somewhat unorthodox methods, dictating the study material to the students, who wrote it down by hand. Very 'outdated' as a method, as Borka put it, not 'very useful today', but those were special times and circumstances. She found his way inspiring, she explained, very effective, and everything she learned about Hungarian history, she learned in that class. Borka and her co-students 'sacrificed' Saturday afternoons to meet the teacher for extra tutoring, instead of going to 'dance school' as some of the other students did. Borka was proud of the fact that she 'missed out learning dancing, but (...) did not miss getting to university' (by pursuing studies instead of being idle).

Borka was pleased with the school and fellow students. She became almost emotional when she remembered them spending time on the stairs at the Danube, engaged in rewarding discussions on Hungarian authors, poets and their works. The majority of teachers and students were Hungary-oriented; they used to listen to Hungarian radio broadcasts (youth culture), with among others The Beatles and their Hungarian equivalent, the *Illés* band. They read youth magazines published in Hungary (IM<sup>369</sup>), and they also watched Hungarian television. The school was popular among the students; they wept when they departed in 1968 and they still meet every fifth year for a reunion, with her participation. Borka pointed out that she found great pleasure

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<sup>368</sup> The pioneer movements in the socialistic bloc were the counter-part organisations to the Western scout organisations with two goals: first, to avoid the spread of Western 'rebel' youth ideology against adult society, and second, to bring ideology into the education and formation of the new kind of socialistic citizen. See more about the Hungarian pioneer organisation in the part on Anna and Liza.

<sup>369</sup> The 'magical' Ifjúsági Magazin [Youth Magazine] was first published in the autumn of 1965 in Hungary, a beloved and very popular magazine for youth culture, fighting KISZ (Communist Youth Organisation) and MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party), amazing teenagers with the wonders of Western popular music and Hungarian ditto. [Memories of P. Erdős, photograph at IM, 1989.] The magazine still exists, but it is now just one of the many mainstream youth magazines.

in being part of the past, by re-visiting it: she enjoyed the high-spirited reunions, the cultivated behaviour and the civilized attitude she experienced in the company of those friends; something that she missed in Sweden, she remarked.

Borka decided early on to be a teacher of Hungarian (and German) language and literature and applied to study at the Teachers' College in another town that "was Slovakian". She was accepted and began her studies, but the town never grew on her. She seemed to be indifferent towards the College years in the 1970s and 1980s, when she was confronted with the 'blessings' of *socreal*<sup>370</sup>, which Borka remembered as five of them (students) living in a small room in the dormitory, with each four-room unit sharing one toilet and a bathroom. She remembered that her days were hard and disciplined, with lots of studies, with no space for individuality, participating in frequent, tedious organised activities. She got up at seven o'clock in the morning, had lessons from eight until four, and only had one free afternoon per week.

Borka was a student in 1968 (Prague Spring) and the particularity of the date inspired me to ask her about how the Hungarian students and Borka experienced the historical events. Knowing the international relevance of the date, and not knowing enough about how Czechoslovakian Hungarians reacted at that particular historical moment (which in certain aspects was analogous to the revolt in 1956 in Hungary<sup>371</sup>), I was rather expecting an 'insider's' view on the experience about the contribution that Hungarian students might have made during the events. I was sorry to conclude that my 'expectancies' remained again unfulfilled by the rather uninspiring and weary account that the narration revealed.

What we did? We began [studying] in 1968 and there were one or two strikes at that time, some protests, we were in the autumn of 1968... Well, at these, [I was] just a drop in the ocean, I went along with the others. Happily, a Hungarian club was started at the college, and there were some organised programmes, we invited politicians, one author, I was again a drop in the ocean: not an organiser, I was just following the others; we invited an author, a poet, a politician; they came from Hungary...

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<sup>370</sup> M. Horváth, *Művészetpolitika húsz év távlatából* [The policy of aesthetics in retrospect of twenty years], *Kritika*, 1975. 11th issue. 'Socreal' is an acronym with a pejorative meaning, short for *socialistic realism*; first a (Soviet) movement of didactic aesthetic systems, later filled with political-ideological content based on Marxism-Leninism, adapted in the socialistic countries of Europe. It governed several areas of existence, from the creative arts to the building of houses and the fulfilment of social expectations (migration, meeting housing needs by building "socialistic building blocks" (Stalinbarock), or socialistic industries and whole new towns, etc. (Transl. by kh.)

<sup>371</sup> Not to the same extent, perhaps, but the consequences were similar in that the country made an effort to distance the national aspects of socialism from the Soviet Union's model.

I found that the discourse on the Prague Spring was anticlimactic, ignoring the societal magnitude and importance of the event. According to the storytelling, an important detail in history went nearly unnoticed by Borka; the establishment of the Hungarian cultural club received more attention and space than the events themselves. I asked her if they [Hungarians] were merely passive outsider spectators to the events and Borka said somewhat reluctantly:

Well, yes, because the Slovaks organised kind of demonstrations, “we do not want this or that” – it was then, as you know, that the Russians came in [to Czechoslovakia], in August 1968. There had been a kind of “free terror” from spring on, I was still at high school at that time. On the 15th of March<sup>372</sup> we all went from our school to the statue of Jókai<sup>373</sup> – the teachers were disciplined later for that, come to that. By the way, one of the teachers, my history teacher ... he is also an idol of mine, because he was the way a teacher should be, in my opinion, with public consistency – a teacher should be a public figure .... [*a teacher*] should go to the theatre, lectures, should be a model for the children...

The Hungarian students around Borka were seemingly not active agents in the actions of 1968. To pay tribute to Hungarian (ethno-)cultural values was preferred by many to sharing the events with the people in Czechoslovakia. If so, the reasons do not need to be purely high-handed and anti-social. One explanation could be that this distancing from the majority was a kind of protest on account of the controversies and mal-treatment the Hungarian minority was subjected to after 1947. Minding one's own business, keeping one's mouth shut, was sometimes a way to keep out of trouble; on the other hand it might be an expression of passive resistance as well. Or, another reason might have been fear of the (probable) winners; Hungarians had already experienced bad treatment in the confrontation with the Soviets (1956, Hungary) and *Hungarians beyond the borders* have seen the consequences. We must point out that, in reality, there was actually a Hungarian reaction to the Prague

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<sup>372</sup> Hungarian national memorial day to the Revolt and War of Independence (from Hapsburg) of 1848, commemorated by Hungarians in all parts of the world.

<sup>373</sup> Mór Jókai (born 1825, Komárom, Hungary – died 1904, Budapest, Hungarian-Austrian Dual Monarchy). A great patriot, participant in the war of independence, later in the Ausgleich (1867), romantic writer of the Reform Age in Hungary (1925–1849), one of the creators of the Hungarian language. He might be claimed to be an amalgam of W. Scott, Dumas Sr. and Dickens, in regard to his literary works.



Spring. Hungarians did join the movement, and they ended up drawing the shortest straw<sup>374</sup>.

Borka left the discourse on the Prague events in 1968 with these thoughts in my head: it was hard to know if she was just naïve, or reluctant about speaking her mind, or she just did not care to talk about it. Anyway, Borka repeatedly and consistently demonstrated an apolitical attitude; also when she was talking about her move to Sweden in 1989. Borka shied away from ‘coming out’ with a discourse of what an analytic would hope for (i.e. an account of the events of the system collapse in 1989). That collapse was just as significant for the international community as the Prague Spring, but it was treated with the same indifferent discourse as the Prague Spring. Borka finished the discourse on 1968 by bringing up the unproblematic, supranational theme of the professional (teacher’s role). This reminds us of Ilona’s discourse on 1956, which finished off in the same spirit. They both evaluated in their narrations private virtues rather than public ones.

### **Making Career in Czechoslovakia**

Borka finished her college studies and was assigned as a teacher<sup>375</sup> in Očko<sup>376</sup>, a little village not far from her hometown, in a Slovakian dominated area of Czechoslovakia. She worked in the village school, commuting daily for the coming years between the flat that she shared with her parents and younger brother in Komárom and her working place. Borka said that she was content with her job:

Well, I felt OK, I felt alright, I can say that, I felt OK – luckily, the whole teachers’ college was young, my generation... this was very, very important, and especially the fact that half of the college came from Nyitra [the location of the college] --- it was OK, we had a good time. Our director was of course a communist, a hard-core communist, an older person, older than we were, at least fifteen, twenty years older – but he accepted our opinion, we had of course to act as he said, him being the director, but as individuals, we could form our own teaching methods and we could talk freely about anything we wanted ---

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<sup>374</sup> After 1968 the situation was not favourable for Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, as they had supported the democratic movements of the Prague Spring, fighting for minority rights, and similar. They lost influence after the defeat of the Prague Spring and could not prevent the reduction of Hungarian education and schools.

<sup>375</sup> In the socialistic system one had a place ready and waiting after having finished a line of education, as we can see in the narrations of the other narrators of the study.

<sup>376</sup> Očko in Slovakian; Borka used the Hungarian name of the village.

Borka did not go into details about the contradiction between the authority of the Slovakian director and the free agency of the teachers. Borka explained that she made modifications and re-structurings to the 'soreal' material by excluding unworthy writers, substituting these with more interesting and worthy ones (without revealing her choices in this respect). She copied the method of the admired teacher in high school on how to prepare the missing teaching material: she was 'cutting-and-pasting' from various sources, from books she bought in Hungary when she was allowed to cross the border. Borka evaluated these sixteen years in the village school as trouble-free, appreciating having a free hand, working relatively free from interference from the leaders: "... it worked so to say, I even had a favourite class (...) there." Borka used a polyphonic dialogue (Bakhtin, 1981) for expressing the appreciation she still received from her former students during her visits back to Slovakia:

... it is very pleasant. Even now, after fifteen years, you know, I go on the streets of Ocskó and they still recognise me. Also in Komárom, persons pass me by and they call out: 'Schoolmistress E.!' – I have to ask them who they are, because I don't recognise them... Not long ago I was visiting the churchyard with my sister-in-law and there was a young couple at the nearby tombstone and the girl said loudly: "Schoolmistress E.!" and I answered, "Yes, that's right, it is me" – "My, I still remember when you taught us the poem...." [Borka recited the part of a children's poem in Hungarian that the former students had quoted for her at the cemetery]...

### **Interlocked Individual and Family Lives**

During the teaching years at Ocskó, she continued to live at home with her family in the same two-room flat where she grew up. The good relations with her mother and particularly close relationship with her younger brother developed there. The relationship between Borka and her younger brother was a kind of 'tutor-pupil' relationship; Borka took upon herself the education of her 'little brother', who was born in 1958 when she and her older brother were 9-10 years old. She revealed her idea of an ideal sibling relationship:

we were very happy about him, we, the elder siblings, we just loved our little brother, he learned a lot from us, I always repeat that the elder sibling should be the educator of younger siblings ... they learn a lot from their elder siblings, it is the siblings that are the best teachers... not the parents, it is the siblings. They [the young ones] see how the older [siblings] behave, what they talk about, what books they read, what friends they make, where they go, what they take home from their experiences, the little sibling gets a lot out of this...

According to Borka the influence of the female members of the family was substantial on him. Borka was telling it with pride, that feminine influence and closeness, by sharing living space for a long time, made him to become the kind of man he was today. The segment below contests partly to Borka's awarnes of the concept of socially required practices of *sex category*<sup>377</sup>, partly to her brother's challenging those categories expected in their cultural and social context. The same phenomenon can be seen in Pandora's description of her husbands actions, outside the expected sex category, in their social context. (See Pandora's storytelling: section Doing Gender and Gendered Role).

The relationship with my little brother was very good; he learned a lot from me, because, well, he saw how I behaved and talked, and that gave him a lot, I am sure, and – well, this is again a family thing, my brother was brought up by my mother and me [she smiles] – you can tell by his behaviour, my brother has a very interesting relationship with women. He has high esteem for them. And he likes to make friends with women. Well, he is a kind of man... he demonstrates his affection for his wife and he shows interest in his family life – he has two daughters [she laughs out loudly] he adores them too... Well, all this comes from being brought up by my mother and me... A positive image of women was formed in his mind this way... and all this is because we lived so close. It is important to have relationships, live together, to share common experiences ... if you have this, you will have it throughout your life...

### Emotions and Rationales

Borka became emotional when she recounted her mother's last years, her illness and death, calling it the most traumatic experience of her life. She had already been an established teacher for many years when the catastrophe hit them. Her mother became seriously ill in 1974 and when Borka recognised that she was ill, she moved back to her home in Komárom, "because helping hands were needed". Borka's brothers had already moved out and now there were only three of them living in the flat. In 1978 they were allocated "a[nother] flat, a three-room flat, owing to my mother's illness..." The mother's illness is in many ways a key turning point in Borka's life: besides being an alarming experience, it also brought about some positive changes in her situation. It was external promotions provided by the social system

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<sup>377</sup> With socially required identificatory displays that assert one's gender belonging (not determined by sex), according to the concept of doing gender by West and Zimmerman.

that she benefited from, owing to the poor health status of her mother she finally got her own private space. She explained, smiling at the memory of the occasion:

[a] totally private own room! In a flat! We lived in a three-room flat then, my brother visited us at weekends – so I had my own room, my mother and my father had one, and we had a dining room and kitchen, too! I was 28 years old when I got my own room: I went into my room, closed the door, and I was on my own in my own empire...

Borka was visibly touched by the memory of the time spent with her mother's illness; her life became totally family-centred, concentrated on the mother's condition. Borka's narration seemed to uncover a life in relative isolation; the outside world was shut out from her life for years. The emotional and physical isolation was resolved by her mother's death: "... my mother lived two more years, she died in 1980, in February 1980 my mother died – and I was left with my father [in the flat]". I asked her how she coped with this situation, and Borka gave me a pragmatic answer with finitistic traits, accepting what life has to offer:

You just must. You have to. That is life. Isn't it? You just have to. My brother was not around any longer (...) living with his family since eight years before, he had a six-year-old daughter... so you had to live through those years with illness, with treatments, you had to live through it, you had to be present – the last few weeks, they were – we hired an old woman, an old nurse, she stayed with my mother before lunch, she came at half past seven, I threw myself into a cab and went to teach, one o'clock I came home, my mother was lying all the time in bed, I made lunch for the old woman and then she left. I took over ... my father came home at half past three, and then we kept my mother company. Sometimes my sister-in-law came over... – it is how the last weeks were spent, my mother severely ill in bed, and she died on a Sunday evening in my arms...

Borka distanced herself from the difficulties of the emotional strain of this period of her life by using a pronominal change (*second-person narration*). She turned to the gendered role of the conscientious daughter, acting pragmatically and responsibly, nursing her mother during her illness and taking care of the necessary practical things around her. Her affections and strong feelings for her mother are hard not to take to one's heart when listening to her narrations. She was markedly moved and touched by the memories of the period of her mother's severe illness and her demise. The kind of attitude and behaviour she gave evidence of was not unique for her. She did what she thought was expected of her under the circumstances and implied that everybody would have acted as she did in reacting to the imperative of a single daughter living

with her parents, which had a compelling effect on her. Various studies have shown that there is a general expectancy inscribed in the culture of many Central European countries<sup>378</sup> for daughters to actively take responsibility for the elderly (parents, grandparents and similar).

The demand was often rooted in the under-dimensioned social service facilities provided by the state: owing partly to a lack of resources (poor economic conditions) and partly to the attitude that leaving responsibility for one's parents to social care was just not done – it was connected to condemnation, heartlessness, irresponsibility, lack of affection. In the worst cases it could finally lead to shame and external denunciation ('what would others say?'). Borka demonstrated in her narrative that she was aware of her duty, following expectations, personal moral and social obligations, without complaints, internalising them. She presented her actions as part of a natural and unreflected life ideology of hers, accepting responsibility and acting upon it by aiding her family, as tradition prescribed it for a daughter with 'good conduct'. The 'reward' in this conduct is the satisfaction of having been dutiful, useful, helpful and humanitarian, not to forget affectionate.

Borka was still a young woman when her mother died in 1980. The death of her mother meant a decisive emotional break in life as she had known it; the loss of an important family member initiated definite changes in the family structure: it broke up. Borka's father (who died in 1987) established a relationship with a woman, and the younger brothers had moved out. Borka remained in the flat for two more years, then she applied for a smaller flat on the estate. She was granted one with one room and kitchen, giving her access to a private life for the very first time in her life, not sharing her living space with anyone. Borka was not too talkative about this transitional period of her life, which actually did not last long, because soon after moving out, Borka met her future husband, K. This brought about more profound changes because of Borka's permanent departure, which was preceded by a serious period of anxiety for her.

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<sup>378</sup>Messing, V. & Ságvári, B. (eds.) *Közösségi viszonyulásaink. A családdal, az állammal és a gazdasággal kapcsolatos társadalmi attitűdök, értékek európai összehasonlításban* [Our community relations, attitudes and values within family, state and economy in a European context.] Centre for Social Sciences. Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Bodonyi, E., Busi, E., Hegedüs J., Magyar E., & Vizely, Á., (2006) *Család, gyerek, társadalom*. [Family, child, society.] Bölcsészeti Konzorcium. Turai T., (doctoral dissertation) *Az Öregek Társadalomnéprajzi Vizsgálata*. [Socio-ethnological Study of the Elderly.] Valuch T., (2005) *Magyarország Társadalomtörténete a XX. sz. második felében*. [History of Hungarian society in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.] Osiris Kiadó.

While explaining her experiences with the Prague Spring, Borka included a ‘small story’ about her husband, packed within a story bubble<sup>379</sup>. After the events of the Prague Spring, K. hoped, according to Borka, that the Russian invaders would draw back and leave the country. When this did not happen, he decided to defect, “because he ‘could not stand’ the political situation”. I wondered if K. was ever involved in the Prague Spring in any way, and Borka said that he was “in a small scale”, not as “a leader”, only as a member of the József Attila<sup>380</sup> Hungarian Culture Club in Pozsony [Slov. Bratislava] and implied that his interest in his present engagement in activities at the local Hungarian association in Sweden derived from this time. Borka did not explain in what way K.’s membership of the above club was linked to the Prague events, but it had evidently nothing to do with his defecting from Czechoslovakia. The reason for his defecting was rather the historical blueprint at hand. Hungary had also had its share of foreign (Russian) occupation after WW2. The Hungarian Revolt in 1956 was monitored by Hungarians in the whole of Carpathian Basin, including in Czechoslovakia. After his arrival in Sweden (Northern Scania), K. established himself in society without delay, beginning from the bottom, working on the ‘floor’ at first: “He came out [to Sweden] in 1969 and those were hard, those were brutal years for him...” He was almost immediately employed in a factory, he found an apartment, learned the language practically ‘on the shop floor’, and was fully integrated into the Swedish society within a few years, according to Borka. Later, K. established himself in southern Sweden, at a private company, where he worked until retirement. He could not return to Czechoslovakia for years after defecting, therefore family reunions took place in Hungary for several years, where everybody could go. After 1980 national policies in Czechoslovakia eased, and K. was permitted to visit his homeland. He made his first visit in around 1984. The next year, K. and Borka met on his next visit to Czechoslovakia.

### Emotional Ties and Gendered Relations

Borka’s narrative included many references to her educational and professional experiences, but it was not generous with details about emotional attachments to people outside family frames. As Borka did not mention any eventual partners in her youth, I asked her if she had had any romantic relations when she was young. She answered with a laconic, plain and rather dismissive ‘no’. Without trying to over-interpret and get the details wrong, I can approach the non-information and interpret

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<sup>379</sup> Riessman’s *unbound narrative* might also be describing the narrator’s storytelling mode; a detached detail with links to one’s own life.

<sup>380</sup> Attila József (1905-1937), the ‘melancholic realist and late-modern classic’, one of the most important Hungarian poets of the 20th century.

it as Borka not being prepared to share information about her past emotional life; either because there was no infatuation to talk about, or she did not wish to display her emotional life to an audience. Not having intimate relationships might have been her strategy to avoid distractions that might stop her from achieving her goal of becoming a teacher. It was one of Borka's well-kept 'secrets'; this segment of her mind remained hidden and beyond the realm of my interpretations. I was therefore interested in what she would be willing to reveal about her first meeting with K. In this respect, Borka's description was rather 'matter-of fact'; recounting pure facts about their meeting, arranged by K.'s sister, who was an old teacher colleague of Borka's in Ócsa. K. was searching for an old friend in his homeland, and as Borka was known for having a lot of acquaintances, K. and Borka were introduced by Borka's colleague at her flat on New Year's Eve 1985. After that, Borka and K. kept in touch by correspondence and in 1987 Borka was invited by K. to visit him in Sweden. Her application for a 'permit to leave' was denied at that time, so a year later, in the summer of 1988, K. sent her the money to apply for a visa again and this time she was granted a permit to visit Sweden. She did that without any ulterior motives, she explained. Instead, the decisive motive for her moving to Sweden was quite pragmatic:

[I] had no intentions to come here [to Sweden] to settle as a future citizen. I came as a tourist, to look around, I was interested ... I liked it. I liked Sweden. I liked it. It was pleasant. I looked around in Malmö; I liked it. Then there were so many, so much – I never actually thought of coming here [to live]. What made it permanent was that I got pregnant and this was, you see, the deciding moment for me.

## Migrant Narrative – Motives, Reasons and Feelings

Arriving at the crucial year of 1989, I ventured the question about her perception of the overwhelming political changes that were going on in the region during that period of time (actually during the entire 1980s). Borka reacted as follows:

... it grieves me to think that I failed to recognise the changes at home. I came [to Sweden] in June [1989] and the changes came in November. ... – It had been so ni[ce] – if I only had known it I would have stayed at home! This makes me feel a little pain, that I have missed this in my life, that I could not experience the changes...

It was a stunning statement about the overlooked changing political climate, I thought, having expected to hear a vivid account, knowing as I did Borka's engagement in things that she cared for. It was remarkable that she could miss the changes around her, which she, looking back, thought was regrettable. I was prompted to ask her if she had had any notion of the actions going on in society during the last couple of months of her stay in Czechoslovakia and she answered in a reported speech, recounting the memory in a small dialogic story that she did not really, as she was "busy with being pregnant". She soon realized how this might have sounded, and she continued laughing that she did not pay attention, even though she sensed that "there was something, but in '89 November" (she must have meant June following the chronology of events), when she was still in Slovakia, a retired teacher, a good friend from Hungary, came to visit her, to say good bye to her before her departure, and she told her:

Bori – it was '89 – said 'there are great changes coming', she was talking about Hungary – 'but believe me, half of them will spill over here!' 'Well, who can tell.... I think, never!' I told her ... And how right she was! She lived in Hungary, in February '89, you know that things were happening, already in '88 there were things going on – well, opposition meetings, round table meetings, and all that – Well, she told me, but I was so occupied with myself, with the baby, I was so busy and preoccupied – and of course I knew I would have to leave, to go to Sweden, but if I had realised, the big changes, I had lived in the old system for thirty-eight years, and if it would all change – perhaps it would have been worthwhile staying! [she finishes with shy laughter]

Obviously, Borka had no ideological, political or economic motives behind the decision to move to Sweden. Borka was explicit about the highly family-relational and emotive things that happened around her prior to and after moving. The immediate 'cause' for moving was of course the relationship with K., which she described in one of the shortest stories about courting: "well, the relationship between us developed, we met, I became pregnant, I got married, and then I decided that I would move here [to Sweden]". I did not expect this kind of short and unsophisticated recounting of motives for a life-changing act. The lack of details made me ask her if she ever regretted moving to Sweden and she answered pragmatically:

No – actually, there was the child, for me it was the child [that decided]: I was pregnant; we wanted to have the child, then [I had to come] here [to Sweden], because he [K.] wouldn't want to come home [to Czechoslovakia], because he had already an established life by that time; he had an apartment, a workplace, the idea wouldn't cross his mind to come home, so... – I said



‘home’: I mean to Slovakia – it was the only logical thing to do, that I should move here, the family must be together; of course there were other options, choices to make, but I made this choice: I married him and I moved here to live our lives in a family with the two children.

The decision to move was based on the image of starting a family of her own in Sweden, as her husband would not move to Slovakia. Single parentage was apparently not considered, neither was abortion. When I asked her how it affected her to take the big step and leave her family and work, Borka gave me another of her laconic answers, talking of issues that she seemingly was not happy to talk about. She explained how much pondering it took before she actually decided to move: even though she had had a positive impression of Sweden in 1988, she was not entirely convinced that she was doing the right thing:

... Had I wanted to, I could have stayed at home with the baby, but I chose this, to live in a family and then – he [K.] too, wanted the child – so I came out here with the little child, he was two months old...

Borka revealed that she had given birth in Slovakia, because she “did not want to come [to Sweden]” because she knew no one:

I did not know the language, I did not know social life, I wanted my child to be born at home. (...) Yes, he was born in Komárom... and yes, he is also a Czechoslovakian citizen – he was registered in my name, in the mother’s name, and then – I did not want to give birth here. K. wanted me to come here, because it [to give birth] would be safer here than there [in Czechoslovakia], but I told him that I would be totally alone, without my family, without my little brother and my elder brother, my sisters-in-law; I know the hospitals [in Komárom] ...

Borka’s family and friends were supportive to her at home. Nonetheless, she had to make the important decision: to stay or to go. Borka apparently reasoned with herself to convince herself during the period before leaving Komárom, interpreting the factual situation. She indirectly moved family and friends into the narration, who acted heteroglossically (Bakhtin, 1981) and as silent actors, feeling sorry about losing her, even though they accepted the fact of her moving:

They accepted it, they were sorry... They accepted the fact. They did not say – they did not try to convince me pro or contra, they accepted my decision: ‘Bori, it is your decision.’ – My family accepted it totally, my sisters-in-law,

and the daughters of my younger brother, he had two [daughters] by then, and my elder brother had also two bigger daughters, those too, in a way accepted my decision – I was a grown-up woman.../.../ Everybody! Everybody felt sorry for me! That, that, it was a bad thing that I would leave, ‘it is so sad that you’re leaving!’ But nobody butted in; nobody opposed it. They did not say: ‘stay Bori!’ No, they accepted it.

Borka remembered in an internal dialogue the reactions of her family and friends, constructing identity and subjectivity for herself when negotiating the decision she had to make. She weighed up her options in the past, reasoning around the justifications for her choices. I thought Borka was making meaning of the situation, as well as making a claim about the kind of person she was: one who knew the value of the *kept word*. She interpreted her friends’ attitude as treating her as an agent of her own fate, as an autonomous adult with the right to make her own decisions. I wondered, though, whether she would have changed her mind if her family and friends had pleaded for her to stay. Borka thought it was a hard decision to make; but finally, when it was made, there was no return. Borka left a minority life in Czechoslovakia and moved to K. in Sweden, to start a migrant life there. She experienced little social and economic gain and there was no improvement in her status either in the new country; rather the contrary. Borka suffered losses in proximity to family ‘at home’, friends, property, employment, economic security, and esteem. While listening to Borka’s anguish before deciding to leave her homeland, I was reminded of the Hungarian 18<sup>th</sup> century poet<sup>381</sup> Mihály Tompa: “Change your heart if you change your homeland”. Her first years in Sweden were not easy either, which she described as:

awfully difficult, because one becomes a ‘nobody’. I left an existence behind, I had my own flat, I had a car, I had my friends, I was known in the village, I was known in the town, I was known in the county. I had never been a public person, but I visited exhibitions, I went to the theatre, I took part in excursions, I had a reputation as a teacher, I was known, and here I was nothing. You come out, you do not know the language, you do not know society, you begin a new married life, you have small children, you start from scratch in all aspects which is a very difficult thing to do....

Borka evaluated the first period of her time in Sweden as difficult, resulting in a fractured identity because the strong personal and professional identity that she had

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<sup>381</sup> M. Tompa. (1851) Levél egy kibújdósott barátomhoz [Letter to my friend in exile].

built up in interaction with people around her in her homeland was shattered when she moved to Sweden. Borka assessed this situation as having changed from being 'somebody' to becoming a non-person, a 'nobody', resulting in identity-loss, not an uncommon experience for migrants. When leaving, "sorrow abides and happiness takes his leave"<sup>382</sup> and the more you leave behind the more difficult it is to start a new life again. It takes eclectic ingredients to succeed: finding motivation, setting goals, inventing meaningful activities, finding support from others, and feeling re-assurance and recognition as an individual.

### Re-inventing the Self

Borka explained her regrets about missing her family, as she was left "alone with [her] little child". K. was working during the day-time, and "[t]here was no one else". This experience is echoed in Liza's storytelling, too. Borka's thoughts drifted to the times when her brothers had their babies; she had assisted them all, and now, "nobody was there to see my son... I missed the family..." She felt lonely and isolated during this period: there was no one to share the pride and experience of motherhood with, she remembered. The isolation was made worse by her linguistic shortcomings, which is another migrant experience. There was no one to talk to. K. had some Hungarian acquaintances whom Borka met sometimes, "but everything was so alien, different. I left my existence behind, I had to start from zero: linguistically, socially, as a person; it was awfully difficult."

However, Borka managed to adjust to the social and cultural expectations to a large extent, and apparently found solutions to make life meaningful and 'useful'. Family life compensated her for losses; she succeeded in building a family, which was important for her. After a while she summoned the power and acted in order to realise her other goals. She recognised that she lacked certain skills for establishing herself in Sweden. She set out to acquire those skills by studying Swedish at the *sfi* course, which also helped her break out of the mental, social and cultural vacuum she had found herself trapped in. She was "lucky to be accepted at the [Teachers'] College to study Mother tongue education in Malmö..." Borka and K. engaged a baby-sitter for a year, before placing the child in a nursery, while Borka kept on studying. She evaluated this experience with a certain finitism, as "dreadfully difficult", but not a new thing:

you see, I am used to this, since my childhood I have been doing this: that is the way things are, that is what you have to manage. If school: you have to

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<sup>382</sup> W. Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, Act 1. Scene 1, p. 5.

study; if dirty dishes: you have to wash up – in other words, that is what you have, that is what I was used to doing. This time too; that was what I had to do. And then I did what I had to do...

But then new trials appeared; at 43 years old she found herself pregnant for a second time. The new baby tied her up again, yet she managed to finish her studies in Malmö. She was incapacitated by the small children when she stayed at home with them, but she appreciated the time. It was nice to be with the children, she revealed, but also difficult, because of the lack of family support. Then she had an opportunity to break out of the repeated isolation thanks to a new switch; K. had been offered a job for two years in Italy. The short story about their life in Italy was again uninspired; a muted story of improvisation and the re-inventing of the self emerged in a few sentences. The family followed the bread-winner to Italy. This combined new and unfamiliar components of life, with them responding to new situations, following an underlying grammar of spouses who uproot everything for the family's sake.

I asked Borka what she occupied herself with during the two years in Italy, and Borka said that she and the children made use of the time and learned the language; and she concluded with a smile: "I was a mother, to put it like that... I was a mother." The answer seemed short, dismissive, and somewhat mysterious to me, giving room for interpretations; either of contentment or disappointment; I am not sure which.

### **Ethnonational Homecoming**

Back in Sweden after two years in Italy, everyday life began again for the family. Borka made a comparison between life experiences in Sweden and in Slovakia, where she lived an active life of seeing friends, visiting theatres, exhibitions, and the swimming pool. On the streets, she was recognised by 'everybody', pointing at her (she told me laughing): "look, B.E. is here..." they cry out"... "I go out and parents greet me and everybody recognises me – and that is such a good feeling". I asked her what she missed most in her life in Sweden; her answer revealed her resourcefulness in compensating for what she lacks:

Well, today I am used to this [life], [before] I had a bad longing for culture, but since around five-six years back I have television with two channels bringing me news from Hungary and from *Felvidék*, and all the artistic, literary events, books, theatre performances, reports ... since then life has become easier. I get the news, too much of it, if you ask K. He means that I get involved too much, much more than in Swedish culture, and that is a fact. So my longings for these things have ceased now ... and that is very good – I am sure my life is economically more comfortable here – at home I

would not have a house .... and I live a good life here ... to my great fortune, I have no problem with accepting Sweden. I like everything here, it is a good life I have here, and I am very grateful to Sweden for that, I am very loyal to the state.

Borka gave the impression of reasoning in order to convince herself (and the reader) in a monologue about her gratitude, looking for rational reasons why she found Sweden a nice country to live in. She spoke of the free education system, the possibility to gain several diplomas, the fantastic health care system (compared to Czechoslovakia) – all ‘free of charge’ – as well as the previously criticised working conditions, contradicting her own comments at the beginning of our meeting. She talked also highly of her (Swedish) colleagues; expressing at the same time a less favourable opinion about her colleagues within the mother tongue education system:

... there are problems, they say that they are sorry, we have to save, and that I will not be able to teach, but I am enchanted by the Swedish school, they have everything you could ask for! The mental and moral contribution is expected from me, but as to the economic conditions, they are fantastic.... I teach Hungarian ...I have been doing this for seven years now ... I feel very good doing it. I – my loose contacts with the Swedish colleagues – I feel very good among them, I have never been molested by anyone and I visit method courses happily, too. The way the Swedish teachers talk, behave, I am impressed by the intelligent way they tackle a problem. We have meetings with the mother-tongue teachers, too. They do not deal with problems in the same intelligent way ... there is a difference. I like to be with the Swedish teachers at these kinds of meetings and discussions – I am rather quiet at these meetings, though.

After having praised the education and colleagues, Borka went into details, speaking of mother-tongue teachers who lacked (in her judgement) some of the necessary characteristics, such as tolerance, compared to the Swedish teachers. Borka listed some examples that showed that they were apparently not open to professional ideas she had tried to introduce to them. They don't have the tolerance towards others' ideas to the same extent as the Swedes do, she concluded. I asked her if she had had any negative experiences concerning the Swedish society and after some thought, Borka referred to education:

they do not demand much ... – how shall I put it – knowledge... Let's say, with regard to literature, there should be more authors, writers, more works to get acquainted with – well, they ought to be a bit more knowledgeable, brighter ... they have all possibilities, all conditions are at their disposal.

There are seemingly certain inconsistencies present in the arguments. Borka produced generic answers, as if she was aware of what she was expected to say in given situations; thus producing an ‘unreliable narration’<sup>383</sup> (Olson’s model presents a wide scale of shades between fallibility to untrustworthiness regarding storytelling), suggesting the readers should ‘read between the lines’ (Chatman, quoted by Wall<sup>384</sup>). When Borka was asked explicit questions, then given time to reflect over the question and answers, she was more nuanced; or she possibly implied other discourse frames, such as both complimenting and criticising the same institution (school), which she described as ‘fantastic’ as a working environment with good working conditions, with both “intelligent”, yet undemanding, and somewhat ‘different’ colleagues. When I pushed her a bit for an answer about how she felt about what she was doing, reminding her of her three diplomas (two of them wasted) and reminding her about her own complaints about lacking job opportunities and appreciation, she brought up a theme that she had avoided so far in her narration (namely, ethnic discrimination) as the reason for her difficulties in finding permanent jobs, while also displaying tolerance and sympathetic acceptance when evaluating the situation:

I miss not being able to work. ... It is impossible for you to get work.... I do not get the work I seek, because I am not Swedish. I can have whatever diploma from Montessori or as a teacher in Hungarian, or as a teacher in mother-tongue education; I am not Swedish. Answering the ads, there are thirty persons applying for the job, fifteen of these have the right education, but thirteen of them are Swedish. In that case: they can pick from these thirteen. I will be the last to be contacted for an interview. That is what there is. And I understand it.

Not having work disturbed Borka, but she was not criticising anyone overtly. When I asked her opinion about the Swedish employment market, she argued with public stereotypes that she found it natural that ‘they’ (employers) ‘employed Swedish’ [people], by that assuring a smooth cultural homogeneity in the working places. At the same time, Borka blamed also herself for not getting the jobs she wished for, because she said that she was lacking linguistic proficiency and a network of contacts.

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<sup>383</sup> Olson, Greta: *Reconsidering Unreliability: Fallible and Untrustworthy Narrators*. In: *Narrative*. Nr. 11, 2003, S. 93–109. See also Nünning, Ansgar (ed.): *Unreliable Narration: Studien zur Theorie und Praxis unglaubwürdigen Erzählens in der englischsprachigen Erzählliteratur*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag: Trier (1998), and Booth, W. C., (1961) *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Univ. of Chicago Press, pp. 158 – 159.

<sup>384</sup> K. Wall, The Remains of the Day and Its Challenges to Theories of Unreliable Narration. *The Journal of Narrative Technique. The Journal of Narrative Theory*. 1994.

These obstacles were a problem for Borka, as working was an imperative for her. To secure it, she even turned to Slovakia (she had also Hungary in mind) looking for jobs, prepared with plans of alternative education systems she would introduce there, given the opportunity. But this would be a wish that could only be realised when her children had grown up, she added. Nevertheless, she would not hesitate to leave her family then to move to Slovakia, even if only temporarily, she explained.

In the following section, using a mixed collection of material, I intend to give a notion of Borka's promotion of Hungarian in Sweden. I apply my ethnographic knowledge about her, membership category and information from a previous interview, as she omitted these details during the second interview. In this way I hope to bring together parts that will give a more holistic picture of Borka's life in Sweden.

Borka has been working actively for the Hungarian cause in many ways: anchoring knowledge of Hungarian in schools, engaging in cultural activities within the Hungarian association (Play House activities) with the small children and their parents, helping the small children's socialisation (second or third generation) in the Hungarian language and culture, explaining the values of Hungarian culture by creating social networks. She was also keen to remind the children to be aware of the values of the Swedish culture that surrounds them, because she had the view that living in a multicultural environment enriches life.

On a related issue, Borka participated in the meetings of the *Őrszavak-Custos Magyar Nyelvápolók Egyesülete*<sup>385</sup>. Nonetheless, she was disappointed that the association was not receptive to her ideas:

Nothing came out of it. We, Hungarian teachers [mother-tongue teachers], haven't met in two years now<sup>386</sup>, there is nothing – nothing at all and nobody cares (...) In an organisation there are members and ideologies and if you do not agree, you are out – this organisation cannot stand it, they mean if you do not want to do it [their way], then you should stay away. Those outside either work in their own way, or they just don't care. ... Those who want something different ... or behave differently, who have other ideas and methods than what SMOSZ prescribes, then SMOSZ has no use for them, no matter how hard they work for the Hungarian cause.

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<sup>385</sup> Word Guard – Custos, Association of Cultivators of the Hungarian Language, sub-organisation of SMOSZ.

<sup>386</sup> The *Custos* association organised annual meetings for mother tongue teachers (in Hungarian), building networks, exchanging experiences, material and information in general.

Behind the negative evaluation of the functioning of *Custos*, one can sense some hurt that it neglected initiatives and efforts from outsiders (such as Borka) to contribute to the education of Hungarian children in Sweden. But Borka was not discouraged; she turned instead to the local Hungarian association, where she also led a literary circle for adults with a Hungarian background, along with teaching Hungarian for adults at a Swedish study promotion circle. This is also the thread that leads to Borka's *ethnonational homecoming* in Sweden, which I find also converges with her *master narrative* about her activities within the home language education system and finding her way into Swedish society.

## Reflections on Borka's Tale

Borka has offered a lot of explicit information about her gendered role within the family in her youth, but she shied away regarding emotions and relations in connection with her present life in Sweden. Nonetheless, she demonstrated an implicit *doing gender* behaviour in her narration. She did it practically all her life, at first in her homeland in her relations towards her family when she was young. In addition, the motives for moving to Sweden, rearing her children, following her husband to Italy in the line of duty, all contest to that fact. She presented herself mainly from the aspect of mother-child relations, not talking about her role as a wife. She used a *dutiful-caring mother* discourse frame, in that she took care of her children when they were small, sacrificing her career and stepping back as an individual. We do not learn if this decision was voluntary or because of lacking full skills in Swedish and not having a full-time employment, she felt, that this conduct of life was a meaningful option. She might have seen this opportunity giving a two-fold benefit for her: partly in being there for the children, partly in taking the opportunity to update herself by studies.

The other important track that Borka was happy to talk about was her profession. Borka found teaching (Hungarian) a lifestyle, while not being able to teach at some points seemed to create personal problems for her, not just in terms of the economic side of not having a satisfactory job. Borka has created a platform for herself as a teacher in Sweden. I dare say, I have never seen such a similarly dedicated teacher in action; teaching Hungarian was like spreading the Gospel for her. Her professional dedication from Czechoslovakian schools has followed her to Sweden. She worked for not much reward, as the income she made hardly covered the travelling costs to the schools, she explained, but she continued to work with great enthusiasm. Her husband, talking of Borka's enthusiasm and dedication to work, described Borka as 'nuts', spending endless hours at the kitchen table preparing questions, gathering up-to-date material about Hungarian-relevant linguistic, literary and historical issues



(‘cutting-and-pasting’). Borka saw this as her duty, as there was a lack of adequate teaching material in Sweden.

The shaft of narrative is Borka, the Educator, the professional woman; her master narrative is about the professional life she sought out and pursued to her satisfaction. Borka’s storytelling rotated around this shaft, supporting the main theme with arguments. Borka proved her mother right through her consistent life, as by using her cultural and symbolic capital she achieved what had been improbable, namely to work as a teacher of Hungarian language and literature in Sweden, pursuing her goals with the same systematic and profound deliberation in Sweden, as she had done back in her homeland. Borka’s narrative is a witness statement about a pragmatically led life, explaining occurring events with objective causality, using a Hungarian disposition of mind and an acquired (learned) impartial and formal attitude to a perceived reality, accommodated to the aim of presenting a meaningful everyday life created in dislocated conditions (exile).

Borka governed the interview in her own way, answering dutifully and politely my occasional questions, picking themes that she was eager to talk about. This has the risk that the narration takes us to places that one had not counted on, or one can be directed towards themes that can be difficult to use for analytic purposes. Borka’s narrative was, similar to her professional self, well-prepared, structured, systematic, organised and linear (small stories), where spontaneity would have been seen as an interruption in a logical sequence of argumentation for a good life. I sometimes had the feeling that my questions came as an unwelcome, but politely accepted nuisance that doubtlessly stopped the well-structured flow of self-presentation, yet which were easy to overcome by one-syllable – or short – answers. The source and owner, of the narration was Borka herself, presenting a migration story, pointing at difficulties, still avoiding the victim theme.

## 6. The Toiler

“Do not degrade yourself, you are a person of higher value...”.

### Ambiguous Narrator with Defined Goals

Liza is the first of the two core-Hungarian interlocutors that I shall present below, followed by Anna. Liza's story is the story of a separate individual, and of her relations with society, recounting her achievements in sustaining the self (care, support, dignity and control), the needs of the self (culture, appreciation, and enactment) and a career (proficiency, performance, identification and esteem). Liza had had a politically and to a certain extent also socially sheltered and privileged life in Hungary. This did not prevent her, though, from experiencing failures and difficulties in life. I shall make a common reflection on the two core-Hungarian women's storytelling after presenting them separately, because there are certain commonalities in their lives that make comparison possible.

### Interview Settings

I made two interviews with Liza, two years apart; first in 2006, then a second interview in 2008, as indicated also in the Participants' presentation (p.20). The location was agreed upon by both of us: we decided that Liza would come to my home. She had her dog with her, she did not like to leave it at home alone. Liza had problems with her back and said she was uncomfortable sitting for a longer time, so we decided to get started and see how long we could manage. It went rather well and we were able to make an hour-long interview, sitting in the library, with the nose of the dog on my toes, drinking tea and small talking. At a certain stage I switched on the tape recorder and Liza began to speak. After about an hour we were disrupted by Liza's cell-phone and after answering and talking for a while, she finished and said that we should continue the interview later, because she had to go home. We ended the interview and she left. In the next years things happened in her life that prevented

us meeting for a continuation. The opportunity came two years later, in 2008, when we conducted the second interview, with fruitful results.

## Style and Mode of Narrations

The two interviews differed in style. In 2006, Liza was thoughtful and brooding, producing a disrupted narration; she seemed to be grappling with thoughts and words. Liza's storytelling lacked flow and showed ambiguities, contradictions and controversies. It was more like a semi-structured interview, less a narration, with me asking questions. Sometimes details and aspects of her life were ignored by her (e.g. on family relations), which I would have expected to be part of the family mythology. As the interview evolved, the hesitation disappeared and by the end the story of a self-conscious individual with a firm view on things in life emerged. Nonetheless, to find clues to certain suppressed details of segments of Liza's life, I sometimes used *insider knowledge* and moved outside the account (text). Acknowledging the dangers of interference from the researcher influencing storytelling, I find that by doing this I have gained new distinctive contexts and also more complex narrative fields opened up for the study: such as details on Liza's attitude to the political system in Hungary or migrant status in Sweden. The second interview in 2008 was different, more relaxed with freely narrated accounts of events and thoughts. It contained embedded, complete bubbles of 'small narratives' on various topics. The segments had a temporal sequencing and structural units (Labov and Waletzky, 1967, 1997), which let me stand back more this time. Liza opened up a little about her parents, presenting a low-profile mother and a father with so-called deviant behaviour<sup>387</sup> (alcohol addiction).

At a private meeting in 2009, Liza, the only interlocutor who showed interest in the afterlife of the interview, explained the disparities in style between the two interviews. Owing to a complex web of negative factors, such as her parents' health problems and difficulties with her child and with work, she found herself in a stressful situation in 2006, demanding her attention simultaneously both in Sweden and in Hungary. Also an unexpected element emerged in her explanation: she said that she was trying not to talk too much out of consideration for me, i.e. to spare me the job of transcribing

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<sup>387</sup> E. Goode, *Deviant behaviour*, 1994: 29, Prentice Hall. Deviance in this study equals norm violation, influenced by norms in society (and dependent on social context); behaviour or characteristics that are found offensive and would on recognition cause disapproval or punishment in society. Alcoholism is one of the deviant behaviours categorized in Hungarian society. Andorka, R., Kolosi, T., Vukovich, Gy. (eds.). *Deviáns viselkedés* [Deviant behaviour] (1990). In: *Társadalmi riport 1990*, pp 217-227, Budapest: TÁRKI, 217-227).

really long story sequences (sic!). This piece of information reminds us of the contextuality and power relations in an interview situation. Cognitive narratology deals with the issue of nexus between the narrative and mind as psychological status, influencing the way a story is told in a particular time frame in the individual's life. This gives us also hints about the uniqueness of storytelling on a particular occasion and the fact that a storyteller uses her social character and different roles – functional, interactional or complying with social norms – at the storytelling occasion (B. Smith in Chase, 1995). This also challenges the power-relationships in an interview situation, pointing out the fact that the interviewer does not automatically have the power of control, even if it might seem so.

## Social Category – Privileged Cadre Socialisation

Liza was born in 1963, the year of general amnesty<sup>388</sup>, in a regional town in the Great Plain of Hungary as an *egyke*<sup>389</sup> (only child). She was socialised in the Kadar-era in Hungary. She went to school and lived with her parents in her home-town, commuting between the home of her parents and that of her grandparents, spending a lot of time with them. Commuting was extended when she later shared her life between three nodes (her home in Sweden, and the above two homes in Hungary), continuing until the deterioration of her mother's health (2000s), when finally the regular shuttling lost its reason. After the death of both of her parents (in mid-2000s), she continued visiting her homes in Hungary with her child, sometimes also with (but more often without) her Swedish husband.

After high school, she moved to Budapest for university studies at ELTE, where Anna, the other core-Hungarian narrator also studied at the same time. From the slimmed-down narration about her youth, a young person with a comfortable, sheltered, yet, not trouble-free life emerged. She had a privileged upbringing with socialistic overtone, being a child of a *cadre* (military surgeon). The cadre-status was normally handed down in Hungary to the next generation in a family, a fact which Liza did not seem to acknowledge in her storytelling. Social categorisation could produce ambiguities in the Hungarian social system; Liza even implied that to be a

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<sup>388</sup> 1957-1963; Consolidated socialism, marking the beginning of the 'mushy dictatorship', or the political defrosting after the Hungarian revolt in 1956, also called 'fridge communism', leading to 'goulash communism', or described by Western journalists as 'the happiest barrack in the socialistic camp'.

<sup>389</sup> The word has qualifying connotations, sending the message of the lonely child enjoying the full attention and support of both parents.

daughter of a surgeon could have disadvantages: “category III<sup>390</sup>, you know, the child to *deviant academic parents*... that was me, you see; not worker, not ‘doodad *comrade*” [her stress].

*Social category III* was used for people belonging to the social elite; it was a more unfortunate category at the beginning of state-socialism than later, being linked to various social disadvantages until the 1980s when social categorisation of the above kind began to dissolve. This was the only time Liza included a hint of criticism of the political system in her adolescence, presumably owing to her socialisation. Liza demonstrated a kind of suppleness to the ideology of socialistic order advocating friendly relations with the Soviet Union. She explained that she regretted that she had not visited the Soviet Union when she was young:

‘cause, well, then it was just so tacky... oh, no, no, no, to go there, well, what a sleazy thing to think of! But it would have been nice to go; I mean I regret it [not having gone]. And I could speak Russian too... / ... I had a great time with the Russians and the Bulgarians: they are also just human! ...

Regretting not having been to the Soviet Union is a rare lament among Hungarians and Liza seemed to be aware of this fact when she said that her competence in Russian had faded away by the time of the interview, adding a remark that was not requested; that she “did not hate Russian, contrary to everybody else”. The storyline points to the fact that the Russian language enjoyed poor popularity in society, based on a (well-established) stereotype that anything in relation to Russia was appalling to people – including students – in Hungary<sup>391</sup>.

Reasons for the unpopularity of Russian were various: a general political stand-taking and a proclamation to put distance from Soviet influence at any level of social life. Before 1989<sup>392</sup> Russian was obligatory in Hungary and it was “one of the least popular subjects”<sup>393</sup>, because of political motivation and the inefficiency of the teaching methods, which was due to the high number of centrally-selected teachers

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<sup>390</sup> Excluding social category for those who did not fall in line with Party preferences. In Liza’s case, her father was elevated through social mobility by the state – from peasant to *intelligentsia* – by that, losing privilege on this level.

<sup>391</sup> Giving air to feelings of national superiority.

<sup>392</sup> Aversion to Russian was one of the sparks that set the revolt in 1956 into flames by students in various towns.

<sup>393</sup> Article from *Rusizsztika Központ* [Centre for Russistic Studies] by Péter Dancz, Russian teacher and deputy dean at ELTE’s Radnóti Miklós Gyakorlóiskola [Radnóti Miklós School of Practice, Budapest]. 24 March, 2007.

and their lack of knowledge of pedagogical methods. The counter-realities in the content of available teaching material also contributed to the rejection of Russian in school. (ibid. Transl. by kh.) When Liza was about to finish her studies in 1986, “many things began to change” and Russian lost its protected position, which meant it ‘could be left out’ [from studies]. This was also confirmed by Anna in her storytelling, as we shall see.

Interest in the new kind of Western-influenced youth culture, complete with pop music and “decadent” behaviour, was present in Hungary too from the late 1960s on and caused headaches for the Party, but it was omitted from the storytelling. Liza’s recounted freetime activities seemed to be in harmony with the norms of building a *socialistic society* with controlled freedom. I dare say the reported interests she had were rather typical parts of the educational upbringing of the young at the time. Liza participated in *Táncház* [dance house] activities<sup>394</sup> during her student days in Budapest, but she gave the impression that she was unaware of the ideological content that the movement had in the Hungarian context:

My favourite pastime.... my mother did everything you see, to give me a decent upbringing, my mother, the classic case; I took lessons in ballet, then I went to music school to learn the piano, then I studied also *szolfézs*<sup>395</sup>, and then when I was a teenager, perhaps twelve-thirteen years old, I told her that I had had enough of ballet... I took lessons for almost nine years – I began when I was three years old... but by that time my girlfriends all were engaged in sports, athletics and I preferred to go there, I had no talent, but – well, eh – it was good exercise. Regarding dance, there was always dance somewhere in the background, and it remained; ‘cause in high school, I still went to ballet, and then after that at the university – interestingly I was not at all drawn to folk dance at high school ... ‘cause in that period, it was nil,

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<sup>394</sup> *Táncház mozgalom* [Dance House Movement, in English: Tanchaz was founded in 1972 in Budapest, by F. Sebő, F. Novák, B. Halmos, Gy. Martin, S. Tibor)], on UNESCO list since 2011. The movement was started for the young, it sprang out of Hungarian folklore culture and the traditions of Kodály’s folk music collecting, perhaps also as a statement against the international spread of pop-culture. The goals with the movement were multiple: preserving folk dance and folk music traditions, spreading them both at home and abroad, and a samizdat function developed at the same time as a counter-cultural movement against the monolithic, Soviet-inspired culture preferences. Kelemen László, *A subjective history. The first decade of the Hungarian Dance-House Movement in Transylvania*. University of Indiana (Bloomington, USA) 1 April 2008.. URL source: <http://www.u-szeged.hu/szegedi-egyetem/hangsuly/tanchazozaoom/objectParent FolderId=1937>.

<sup>395</sup> Hungarian music education was very comprehensive; almost all children with some talent for music went to music school to learn to play instruments and to take singing (choir) lessons, where the theoretical subject called *szolfézs* [solfege] was applied.

somehow they condemned folk dance at that time. However, interestingly, when I began at the university, I was immediately attracted to the kind of Greek and Bulgarian dance groups ... well, I went there, I went to the Technical University too [to dance].

Her university years did not leave Liza with many friends; she described herself as a loner. Her relationship with a boyfriend came to an end after some years in Budapest, and she found it difficult to find new friends, she said, because “there were already established [friendships]...” Liza felt like an outsider, and still does; “interestingly, this feeling is still there – and so from that time on there have been somehow no good friends...”

The use of social network capital, “contacts”, was mentioned for the first time when Liza talked of how she came by a place in a student dormitory. Helpers re-appeared in her narration, returning later at life-turning points:

I had no right to a student dorm, but you see, here, we had to use ‘contacts’, we could make adjustments, I don’t know what, and then you found good friends in order to fix the bloody student dorm, a room, one single place, one bed in a four-bed room – so I ended up in the S. [student home] for the medical students together with two tough dentist girls in the same room and we went out plenty and had fun...

Liza’s storytelling revealed that she had a compelling urge to arrange things for family members, setting goals and achieving them. These undertakings (we can call them Liza’s small ‘life-projects’) might include spectacular arrangements with no pain spared,<sup>396</sup>. One such occasion was when she fixed a work experience place (*prao*<sup>396</sup>) for her child in Hungary. She spared no time, managerial skills or energy and contacted various Swedish ‘myndigheter’ [public authorities] and succeeded in getting permission: her child did *prao* in a toy shop (the child’s preference) in Budapest. This arrangement, as Liza saw it, was a step in the right direction to maintain the child’s Hungarian competence; therefore it was worth all the effort (time and money). Liza did her utmost over the years to help her child acquire and maintain skills in Hungarianness<sup>397</sup>, which she managed well by ensuring that her child had contacts, family, friends and pals in Hungary thanks to frequent visits there.

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<sup>396</sup> Praktisk arbetslivsorientering [Practical workplace orientation].

<sup>397</sup> Defined here as: speaking and understanding the cultural context and the ways of being Hungarian.

Liza was consistent in presenting herself as a dedicated, tidy and hard-working individual: “rather a structured kind of analytic; I love orderliness... not too much of it, but more of a routine instead of letting things go...” Her urge to do, manage and organise things, particularly in relation to giving meaning to her life, was directed in the first place towards her child and deteriorating parents. She was involved in the care of both of her parents remotely during their last years; she organized her father’s funeral from her workplace in Sweden, and secured institutional care for her mother when she could not manage on her own any longer. Curiously, little is mentioned in her narration about the ‘small projects’, carried out over the years, such as Liza’s undertakings with the ‘prao’ arrangements for her child, caretaking of her parents or her assiduous work for the folk dance group in Sweden.

A significant other, Liza’s husband J., was presented in small portions in the storytelling (e.g she described in detail how they met), but only a few references were included about their everyday life. Liza talked about appreciating aspects of their life together (for example J.’s supportive attitude), but at the same time she displayed her need for free agency and independence. J’s gave his support to Liza in various ways; e.g. when he saw an ad in the local paper about a show performed by a visiting Hungarian folk dance group and informed her about it. Liza was a newcomer to the country and could not yet read Swedish, therefore his help was appreciated. She went to see the show and met in the audience members of a Swedish folk dance group that she later joined. This connection was the starting point for Liza’s *ethnonational homecoming* in Sweden. She met Hungarians in the group and revitalized her links to the *Táncház culture*. Liza’s interest in folk dance lasted many years, providing her with international contacts, both in Hungary and Transylvania. She also became an instructor of folk dances in the Swedish group. Later she extended her ethnonational homecoming by an engagement in the local Hungarian cultural association.

### Revealed and Concealed Family Histories

Liza’s narration included, to varying degrees, details about relationships with both significant and general others. Some close relationships and some with people who, in one way or other, had influenced her at specific turning points in her life. The relationship with her parents was strained by the problematic co-existence with her father, who emerged slowly in her narrative and turned out to be a significant, but troublesome figure (with alcohol abuse and occasional wife abuse), making Liza’s and her mother’s lives stressful. Liza presented her mother in small story portions; she was seemingly a quiet, withdrawn figure: “not too much of a homemaker... for her it was her profession that was important in all her life”, who “buried herself” in work. Her mother became the central figure of Liza’s interest when her health began to deteriorate some years after her father’s death. She became dependent on her daughter’s efficient and effective assistance, which Liza gave with great care. Several hidden facts about family relations surfaced in her narration, facts which sometimes



seemed to surprise even Liza. One such occasion was when I asked her about her father's relations to the socialistic system that he served.

First yes, he really believed in it [the system] – then later – he must have seen all the filthy things, which they, well, had committed but for some reason he shut his eyes [to them], and he was very shaken by the changes in eighty-nine – well, then his attitude to things changed radically. /... / [after thinking for some time] He told me, that .... he, just as many others, had no idea about many things... the fact is, though, that they forced his own wife's parents, my maternal grandparents, into joining the *TSZ* [acronym for agricultural cooperative]; they were persecuted and so forth... no... well... they were not put in jail, the situation was not so serious for the old man, but ... but they were deprived of their few assets...

From my own experiences and as a cultural insider, I had a notion of what “being forced to join the cooperative” and “being deprived of assets” meant at that time in Hungary. It made me suspect that Liza's grandparents had been categorised as *kulák*, which Liza confirmed: “they were categorised [as such]... with those three-four cows, or I don't know what, I mean, it was downright ridiculous! ...” Knowing that there was a system-supporter in the family (*cadre*), I wondered if Liza's father was aware of what had happened to his parents-in-law. Liza affirmed it, but with extenuation for her father. She suspected that he must have known it: “how could he not... – I mean, somehow, I think it is difficult for him to process it for himself...” Liza had not been aware of these things in her youth, she revealed, mainly on account of closed internal communication within the family: “... they would hardly ever speak of things like that in front of me...”; what I refer to as *hushed-up stories*.

The grandparents were peasants before WW2 and soon after 1945 they were stamped *kulák* and they became a target of state policy actions<sup>398</sup> through forced *tsz-esítés*<sup>399</sup> [cooperativisation]. To get stamped as *kulák* had wide consequences for the individual, including physical abuse, imprisonment, and loss of property; while families suffered aggravations which they stood defenceless against during their whole

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<sup>398</sup> Gyarmati, Gy., (2011) A Rákosi-korszak. Rendszerváltó fordulatok évtizede Magyarországon, 1945-1956. Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára [The Rákosi era. Decade of System Changing Turns in Hungary, 1945-1956]. Rubicon, Budapest.

<sup>399</sup> Tsz(cs) is the acronym for termelőszövetkezeti (csoportok) [agricultural cooperative groupings]. This was performed on a Party-political basis from the late 1940s in Hungary, whereby peasants had to ‘join’ a cooperative by passing over ownership of the fields to the cooperative, sharing work on them and production with others in the same cooperative.

life. From Liza's narration we learn that the status of *cadre* apparently did not protect against social stigmatisation. Pandora, the fifth narrator, experienced the humiliation of her father who was accused to be a kulák, (see Pandoras story: chapter The Roller period, national cadres, purges and political deviation)<sup>400</sup>.

Liza, who was cautious with her criticism of her father's attitude and actions (or lack of actions), now implied that she had condemned his attitude of "shutting his eyes" to the situation. But she was still looking for absolution, interpreting his behaviour as having difficulties with processing the "filthy things" he saw. (Again, an expression used by Pandora as well.) As a Party member, Liza's father was expected to have 'impeccable conduct of life' in accordance with the directives of the Party, which also included the avoidance of having politically uncomfortable family members. Being a member of the Party in Hungary meant benefits during the whole post-war period and to risk those was rather bad judgement, unwise and adverse. The claim on Party membership changed slowly during the 1980s, and after the system break in 1989 coercion towards membership as a key to professional success relaxed more and more, as confirmed also by Anna in her narration. Liza, however, was still exhorted by her father to join the Party:

I remember, when I went to university, to the University of Economics, well ... I was halfway through and my father came to me with this drivel that 'well, it is time that you joined the Party, because, well, you see, the future...' Because, you know, at that time it was not only the level of competence that was important, but also the **background** [her stress] /.../ I would have been disadvantaged, you know, that is why he told me that I should ... join the Party, but I had no inclination – because I just had no stomach [for it].

In the 1980s the demand on being born in a socially promoted family (worker, peasant)<sup>401</sup> was more relaxed; and joining the Party was no longer a condition for a future career. In every case, the issue of Party membership was weighed against the expected promises of better opportunities and when opportunities were not linked to Party membership, the question had no decisive force.

The next, up to this point hidden, issue was what Liza called "an enormous trauma": the revelation about her father's family history, that Liza allegedly learned as late as at the time when she was getting married. The topic was sensitive, "he could hardly talk

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<sup>400</sup> The parallels point at the commonality of methods of ill-treatment in several Central European countries.

<sup>401</sup> In the previous decades it was definitely an advantage to have a politically correct family background and a disadvantage not to have one.

about it..." Liza explained. It turned out that Liza's father was actually born in Transylvania, in a family of Hungarians in autochthonous minority. After WW2, they were forcibly relocated to Hungary on account of the refusal of Liza's grandfather to join the Romanian army (in WW2). Thus, being denounced as nationalistic, they were expelled from Transylvania. Taking the historical context into consideration, the attitude of the grandfather was not surprising<sup>402</sup>, but the consequences of his 'nationalistic' stand-taking were harsh. The family had to flee helter-skelter, leaving property and family relations behind and settling in a small village in the middle of the Great Hungarian Plain in Hungary. Having the 'right social origins'<sup>403</sup> as a peasant (a positive background in Hungary at that time), and because of the "classical situation"<sup>404</sup>, as Liza put it, of being the eldest son and also "an eminent pupil", her father was socially selected to get higher education and become a surgeon (socialistic social mobility)<sup>405</sup>:

[A]s the Hungarian state had provided this huge opportunity to many poor youngsters at that time.../.../ the army wanted to snatch up all the men – among others my father, too – they [the army] approached them [the chosen persons] and offered them financial support during their university studies: they would cover all costs during the studies and this was the way my father became the educated man [in the family]...

Liza did not disclose her own thoughts about what she felt about her father's deportation to Hungary; instead, by some association, she remembered her mother's background. It was plain that her mother's parents wanted her to have a profession, so they sent her to study at university to become a doctor (in haematology). Knowing that the children of kulaks were not allowed to enter university studies, I wondered how her mother had achieved that; but Liza gave me no explicit answer: "[i]t was not easy", she guessed. They talked about "things like that" at home "[v]ery little", Liza revealed, suggesting that these were difficult topics to talk about for both of her parents. Then she unexpectedly remembered a further family secret in relation to her

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<sup>402</sup> The relevant historical context is discussed separately in the Historical overview.

<sup>403</sup> Members of the *numerous politicus* were children of peasants and workers, who enjoyed the privilege of being promoted to universities, by which the system secured an 'intelligentsia' of its own. This tendency gradually weakened by the 1970s-80s. Nonetheless, the next generation was still educated to be the next generation of intelligentsia. (T. Valuch, Social History of Hungary in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)

<sup>404</sup> In poor families in Hungary it was the eldest child that was given the chance of 'becoming something' (studying for upward social mobility) – particularly if the child was gifted.

<sup>405</sup> Doctors (of any kind) have traditionally had high social status in Hungary.

mother's background, who was daughter to Hungarian *Slovaks*<sup>406</sup>, an autochthonous minority in Hungary. Interested in her own roots, she had done some genealogical research some years back and she had discovered unknown relatives in Slovakia<sup>407</sup>. Liza remembered that she had heard her grandparents talk "tót"<sup>408</sup> [Slovakian language] between themselves. This memory segment led to another unveiling of an awkward family conduct of her grandparents: the banned mother tongue. The reason 'must have been the pressure from my father ...', who 'forbade them to speak [Slovakian]'. This information was somewhat astonishing and I wondered why he would do such a thing. But Liza did not know why, and became slightly irritated, perhaps because she had to face certain hidden facts about the family, or because she became irritated by her own lack of knowledge on family matters, or perhaps by her father's attitude towards his parents-in-law. Liza vehemently denied any knowledge of the fact, laughing somewhat embarrassedly, and perhaps just for the fun of it, she added: 'also my baptism was done hush-hush...'

This was again a surprising detail. My expectations, or bias, were that Liza would not have been baptised, on account of what she had disclosed so far with regard to the family's political affiliations. The behaviour could be interpreted as part of a family adjustment strategy to the prevailing circumstances, answering private claims and complying with the expectations of the official stand in matters of the church. Socialistic ideology made efforts to stamp out the religious traditions in Hungary, including baptism. It was replaced by the 'name-giving ceremony' (a euphemism), which was a socialistic event institutionalised by the state to transform the original meaning of the religious ceremony. It was common knowledge that party members were not supposed to baptize their children in church, but in Hungary, there were always ways to bypass Party expectations and defy the system<sup>409</sup>. This was facilitated by the pragmatic policy of J. Kádár from 1963 on, which permitted a certain relaxation in society, including religion. Religion was not banned, and church was

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<sup>406</sup> Indigenous Slovaks (approximately 100 thousand people) have been living in Hungary since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, scattered around the country, from Northern Hungary to West and South East. URL source:

[http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszagi\\_kisebbssegek/2008/Nepi\\_konyha/pages/002\\_magyarorsz\\_szlovakok.htm](http://www.sulinet.hu/oroksegtar/data/magyarorszagi_kisebbssegek/2008/Nepi_konyha/pages/002_magyarorsz_szlovakok.htm).

<sup>407</sup> A Slovakian ethnic minority has its seat in the Great Hungarian Plain, in the region where Liza was born in Hungary; it was obvious that her mother was a member of that ethnic minority.

<sup>408</sup> *Tót* is the Hungarian colloquial for a Slovak or the Slovakian language.

<sup>409</sup> For people to manage in their everyday lives, various 'small gateways' stood at their disposal: most of them within the framework of a social network.

never totally forbidden; it should be used for political purposes<sup>410</sup>, Kádár argued. Through ‘double socialisation’ the system made it possible for people in a socially raised ‘position’ (Party members and similar) to use both mimicry and camouflage in order to observe old traditions and avoid confrontations with the system. In practice it meant that in the case of baptizing (and, indeed, of weddings and funerals) in church, people went to church early in the morning or late at night, hoping that the whole matter would be concealed from public knowledge.

Seeing my surprise, Liza hastily added:

Yes, I was baptised in Sz., my mother together with her parents slipped somehow [Liza laughs awkwardly at the disclosure] I dunno when [laughing embarrassedly again, stopping talking for a while] /... / Sixty-three it was, well those were hard-core communist times, and my father was deeply believing in it – well – yes /... [She seemed to lose the thread of her thoughts and did not pursue the line of information.]

The incident with her baptism got its explanation when Liza revealed that her maternal grandfather was “a so called presbyter... don’t ask what that is, because I don’t know; it is a kind of church-whatever...” He was well-renowned among people; a good public speaker, delivering well-liked speeches at weddings.

Liza thought that multilingualism in the family – having Slovakian grandparents – might have explained her linguistic proficiencies; it might have contributed to her ability to “relatively easy” learn languages. She still remembered certain expressions they used: “they come back [expressions] – but they [grandparents] were never allowed to talk [Slovakian] with me....”. The grandparents talked *tót* with each other and with relatives, or with those with whom it was possible. Liza’s mother had her own attitude towards the matter of her parents’ mother tongue use, according to Liza her mother might have felt “shame for that... I mean, she told me once that she was ashamed of not speaking Slovakian ...” Liza thought that her grandparents’ mother tongue was perhaps not silenced entirely by “the pressure from my father, but also because of my mother”. Liza thought that her mother might have felt ashamed for neglecting Slovakian, but also for not standing up for her parents’ language use.

Speaking about family secrets, I found the time had come to hear Liza’s version of the events of 1956. I was interested in hearing about how the memory of 1956 would have been kept in Liza’s family. Liza mentioned that her parents were young students

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<sup>410</sup> Glatz, F., A mi egyházaink. Kérdőjelek a múltról, jövőről. [Our churches. Question marks about the Past and Future.] *Historia* 1951 -056.

in 1956, and the Revolt belonged to that generation. The story in her version was actually not out of character; as a matter of fact, it was according to my expectations, taking her family background into consideration:

We have never talked about it openly, for some reason, interestingly – obviously, with others in my generation – well, we actually discussed things like this sub rosa, that well, not everything was like as it is presented, of course not everything is as it is written in the text books, ‘cause well, there they were talking about ‘counter revolution’, and there was ‘that bloody Mindszenty’<sup>411</sup> in them and I-don’t-know-whom, and the Russian liberator army, etc. etc. ... Well, well, we had some kind of notion that this was not really so ... and that well, “the 56-dissidents”, that they had left the country, well, in the 80s sometimes it could happen even if there were no actual home-comers [repatriating Hungarians<sup>412</sup>], but interviews were made here and there; Puskás Öcsi<sup>413</sup> was discovered, but you might say that he was an extreme, because, well, OK, he defected too, but well, he became a successful person, and what the heck, you see, he was Puskás Öcsi, well, in other words... [Liza stopped; seemingly out of arguments.]

Obviously, Liza had a notion of ‘56, even if this was not a topic that they discussed at home. She revealed that she had sensed controversies around it<sup>414</sup>, reading versions of it in text books that did not seem to convey reliable information, according to her. She did not specify what information the books should have presented instead. I asked her whether she had met any ‘dissidents’ in Hungary, which she fiercely refuted, and at that, she seemed to run out of memories of ‘56 and changed the subject.

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<sup>411</sup> Cardinal József Mindszenty (b. 29 March 1892, Csehimindszent, outside Szombathely, Austria-Hungary, d. 6 May 1975, Vienna, Austria), opposing dictatorship (national socialist, communist), victim of the Revolt of 1956. Read more: <http://www.answers.com/topic/j-zsef-mindszenty#ixzz226rAUvrR>.

<sup>412</sup> This information is incorrect: Liza is ignorant of the fact that between 1957 and 1963 thirty-thousand Hungarian dissidents repatriated to Hungary. Betekintő. Az Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltárának internetes folyóirata. URL source: <http://www.betekinto.hu/node/181>.

<sup>413</sup> Ferenc Puskás (1927-2006); the most famous Hungarian dissident, legendary football (soccer) player of Hungary; “the first international superstar” (Encyclopedia Britannica) of football.

<sup>414</sup> In official discourse it was treated as a counter revolution, initiated by murky, criminal elements aided by ‘Western imperialists’, as the ‘daily’ slogan went.

The short and uninspired answer from Liza about '56 made me realize that I needed a big dose of reflection to lead to “reconciliation” through *anamnesis*<sup>415</sup> with myself to *unforget* certain social structures: e.g. small familiarisations of situations in which I have found my *practical knowledge* in the past about, for instance, the *Uprising of '56*, in order to understand the *hiatus* emerging in Liza's narration. Liza's hiatus was by no means unique or a momentary lapse; I have met the same kind of waning interest in other people for presenting a *proper* discourse on the historical events in 1956. But then, 'proper' in this case would be defined by my terms, seeing the revolt in its correct context: as a response to the failures of the dictator-regime in the 1950s, questioning the legitimacy of it for not meeting people's demands for greater democracy in its own right.

### *Intimate Relationships – Family Impairment*

Hushed-up details of family history were epitomized in Liza's storytelling when she tried to speak of sensitive topics, such as the complicated relationship between her and her father, caused by his long-lasting deviance problems, such as his alcohol abuse. Alcoholism is known to have been a common problem in socialist Hungary<sup>416</sup>, not only among the socially needy, but also among the politically or economically privileged, where Liza's father belonged. Among them it was a '*way of life*'; the economic situation and social standards demanded social fraternization with people belonging to the same social class, sharing attitudes and tastes in life. During the *Kádár-era* 'deviant' behaviour (suicide, alcoholism, drug abuse) escalated in Hungary (J. Kiss, n.a.; Máriáss, 2003). Deviance manifested itself in increasing alcoholism, leading to social and health problems; male alcohol abuse and physical abuse were widespread in society (Bárány, 1995). Liza's family, having all the privileges and background of the new *socialistic elite*, developed from the working class; they were set apart from the working masses by their privileges in the transformation of society after WW2 (ibid.).

Speaking of domestic problems was not part of the social strategy in Hungary (Haney, 2002); a *layer of silence* covered up the resultant shameful behaviour, which

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<sup>415</sup> Miller, D., Turning Anthropology Against Itself. Bourdieu on Participant Objectivation. (In: Browitt, J. & Nelson, B. (eds.) P. Bourdieu and the Field of Cultural Production. University of Delaware Press. 2004.

<sup>416</sup> [ugyvitel.uw.hu/.../Devians%20viselkedesformak%20Magyarorszagon.doc](http://ugyvitel.uw.hu/.../Devians%20viselkedesformak%20Magyarorszagon.doc), Kiss Judit, Gábor Edina, Országos Egészségfejlesztési Intézet [Hungarian Health Development Institution]. Az alkoholfogyasztás hazai tendenciái a 80-as évektől napjainkig I. [Domestic Tendencies in alcohol consumption from the 80s up to the present day.]

alcoholism was one aspect of. Liza's family lived in a 'military ghetto'<sup>417</sup>, or as one might call it: a 'gated community' within the city where families like Liza's, belonging to the military, lived in splendid isolation. People from the same social class or profession often gathered and had fun, throwing socialistic type parties by the dozen. As Liza's father was part of the military and social *elite*<sup>418</sup>, he would follow societal norms in those days and he would go along with social expectations.

Because on the one hand, my father drank, on the other hand he battered my mother – not me. So you can say that I got away... but all my childhood went with, you see, their quarrelling, their tussles... we lived in a house where soldiers lived – officers – and everybody did this, because everybody drank. I am sorry to say, this was – the accepted [norm].

The years of abuse and domestic violence ended up in a crisis and led to divorce, which put Liza to the test. She had to choose a parent to stay with. She decided on her mother and lived with her for years. The situation ended with Liza's father slowly becoming remorseful, quitting his social environment (work and living) and alcohol abuse. Although still living separately, the family reconciled on Liza's mother's initiative. Her father re-joined the family. He had never stopped caring for his daughter; he supported her also after Liza left Hungary. Yet, the experience from her childhood put a strain on their relationship for a long time, Liza explained. Liza exposed a deep affection for him despite his destructive behaviour, but she was still living in the shadows of his abuse. Liza talked also of her dutiful and workaholic mother "escaping into work" during the troubled years. She later turned to religion, which was something of an enigma for Liza.

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<sup>417</sup> 'Ghetto' is used to mark the area of segregation within which elite families of a certain social importance lived during the socialistic era in Hungary.

<sup>418</sup> "The reforms which were instituted in Hungary in the 1960s, and which were aimed at solving the problem of economic stagnation, have resulted in changes in both social stratification and the composition of the political elite. The high level of social mobility which was characteristic of the earlier 'mobilization' phase has given way to an increasing rigidity in the stratification system, and to higher levels in inequality. At the same time, differentiation within the elite stratum has been increasing; relatively separate political, technocratic, intellectual and social elites may now be distinguished, each having a distinct world-view. With the development of these changes, the pattern of conflict in Hungarian society is shifting from an inter-class to intra-class basis." (Ivan Volgyes, Univ. of Nebraska at Lincoln.)



## Social and Gender Roles – Doing Gender

From a general Western-style gender point of view, Liza's narration did not focus on overt women or gender issues, while she covertly included themes like the role of daughter and mother. It should be said, that she was the only individual who, on my initiation, explicitly reacted to the question of "gender aspects". In the second interview in September 2008, I mentioned that gender-related issues had been neglected by the other narrations. Gender was an obvious context in the narrations, but it was not explicitly referred to by the interlocutors. Undeniably, a non-issue can also be interesting for an analysis, enlarging and bringing up different views on the matter. Liza, on the other hand, said that "talks on gender" [nemiség] were important for her, partly because she was married to a Swede. She gave some examples of feminist ideas in her discourse on gender, comparing her own life with the life of her friends in Hungary:

'cause, 'cause 'nemiség'<sup>419</sup> was definitively very decisive for me, I think, in the turn of my life, at least since I left [to live abroad], as I live with a Swedish man and – well, they say that it takes a long time to reach equality, many steps must be taken to become emancipated, but if I compare – and I constantly compare – my life with the lives of my friends, I always conclude, that I live in a better situation compared to them.

Liza evaluated her own situation, where 'personal wishes and desires were given more space here than at home' [in Hungary]. Liza showed awareness of the social strata distribution in her examples, choosing 'appropriate' individuals who would make a comparison 'representative' for answering my question. Liza chose Hungarian (female) school friends of the same age and "not people in general". One of her friends was 'a medical doctor', another had a 'vocational exam', and a third was 'a simple shop assistant'; all of them living in 'traditional' (conservative) Hungarian marriages. Owing to continuous contact with all of her friends, it was possible to compare, Liza concluded:

I mean, that I can once a week go to dance [in the folk dance group], once a week, I have a hobby, I go to sing in a choir or I go wherever I like – I do not sing, I just tell that as an example – but at home [in Hungary] this

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<sup>419</sup> Translated here to 'gender'; due to the ambiguity with the *incompatibility* of the Hungarian word "nemiség", used by Liza; equal to 'biological sexuality' in English. I used the English word 'gender' in order to give the correct denotation of the word, which Liza translated into its connotation.

would not be possible. I know one person who was a member of a choir... but she too, is divorced by now. [Here I interpolated my hope that the reason for the divorce was not the fact that she sang.] No, obviously not for the reason that she used to sing – I mean to say that they [Hungarian women] work, and they get home, the whole household is their lot, they have to do the shopping, the cleaning, they take care of the children – I think there is a huge difference. I am now talking about people with two diplomas – in cardiology and in pulmonology – with a high rank – what you would call – ah – she could be like a deputy manager, a bloody competent specialist she is and she still asks her parents – or her husband's parents – to baby-sit, or to cook for them [the children and husband], when she is on duty! I mean, she cannot solve it any other way, 'cause her husband – he is a municipal senior engineer – ... the ring would probably fall off his finger<sup>420</sup> if he helped his wife or took care of the children or did the cleaning! /... / cleaning is really not his job! [Liza said this with caustic irony and sarcasm.]

The next example depicted the situation of a female friend who was doing physically heavy agricultural work in a cooperative while living with a partner, now retired and therefore mainly sitting at home, Liza explained. Nonetheless, he would not lift a finger to help his wife. On the contrary, he expected her to clean the house, to cook and put the food “in front of his nose!”, when she came home exhausted from work. Noticing Liza's critical stand, I asked her (knowing that I might lead her by my question), if the years in Sweden might have influenced her view on gender-related and/or feminist issues. According to her this might have been the case, adding with sarcasm: “Well, I certainly would not put it [meal] in front of him [husband]” and she smiled when she said that she probably would have been a five-time divorcee “at home [in Hungary], because I would never [put up with it]...”.

I wondered if Liza and her friends had ever talked about the differences she found between her role of wife in Sweden and the status of her friends; and if they had, what were their comments on the matter? About her activities in the folkdance group, her friends would ask her, Liza said: “and what does J. [Liza's husband] say to that?!” Liza interpreted her friends' thoughts: “that would almost be like to rebel, to use a bad word – but that is what they say...” Liza sarcastically evaluated the ‘decent’ Hungarian women's options: “they hang around sitting at home, they do the dusting... but to go out, no, never!” Liza concluded that ‘feminist aspects’ and gender

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<sup>420</sup> A gyürü leesne az ujjáról: a Hungarian (ironic) phrase to express that a person would not do something because he/she sees it as beneath his/her dignity.

issues have not made their way into the lives of her married female friends in Hungary, yet.

This is confirmed by sociological research studies in Hungary where institutionalised gender research and feminist research results (if there are any, and which are often converging) show that the reception of gender (socially constructed sex) and feminist issues (attitude and relations) are negative and very often obsolete. “In the best case they neglect the topic, in the worst case they oppose” (Nagy n.d., transl. KH)<sup>421</sup>. Apart from this sequence, Liza’s narration resisted explicit gender focus in that she, similarly to the other narrators in the study, did not build a ‘*gender narrative*’, even if she included certain details in relation to her natural sex according to social role expectations (e.g. relational talk<sup>422</sup>). Nevertheless, I still consider her storytelling as a neutral female narrative avoiding the most common ‘*female pitfalls*’<sup>423</sup>. As pointed out before, gender mainstreaming<sup>424</sup> is in its infancy in Hungary as yet, so consequently women’s narratives (including gender-related or feminist issues in Hungary) are at present not a ‘*most likely case*’ to emerge, as they would be in Sweden, for example (Sainsbury, 2009, 11:2<sup>425</sup>).

My view is that while Liza did not comment, explain or discuss her own actions in order to establish herself as a feminist. It is nevertheless clear from her storytelling that she fits the description of an emancipated woman *per se*, without having to agitate or act to achieve it. Liza has seemingly come far in realising feminist goals of equality

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<sup>421</sup> More details on questions regarding ‘doing gender’ in Hungary are found in the chapter on Methodology.

<sup>422</sup> Talking of family members, friends and colleagues.

<sup>423</sup> There are no complaints in the narrative that can be derived from gender discrimination and any other kind of situation that could point at phenomena that would put her into an underprivileged status on gender basis.

<sup>424</sup> The technical term ‘gender mainstreaming’ was introduced by the UN in 1997, defining it as: ‘Integration of gender concerns into the analyses, formulation and monitoring of policies, programmes and projects, with the objective of ensuring that these reduce inequalities’ (ECOSOC 12 June 1997, E/1997/66), used as a concept in “public policy of assessing the different implications for women and men of any planned policy action, including legislation and programmes in all areas and levels. Mainstreaming essentially offers a pluralistic approach that values the diversity among both women and men.” (Booth, C. and Bennett (2002), ‘Gender Mainstreaming in the European Union’, *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 9 (4): 430–46).

<sup>425</sup> In their article *The Promise and Pitfalls of Gender Mainstreaming* D. Sainsbury and C. Bergqvist discuss and analyse gender mainstreaming internationally, and in Sweden in particular, where its implementation for various favourable conditions is perceived as likely, according to Bergqvist. The authors discuss the pros and cons of gender mainstreaming, looking into the extent and the consequences of its implementation (since 1994) in Sweden. Hungary has a long way to go, compared to the extent of implementation of the Swedish gender mainstreaming policy.

within her marriage. Looking for tradition or traces of emancipated thinking in Liza's past, I considered what Liza told me about her family in Hungary. The earlier, problematic behaviour of her father (alcohol abuse) and the troubled relationship between her parents did perhaps not contribute to build a role model for family relationships, but it might have contributed to Liza's striving for a strong independent position in her marital relationship, apparently in line with her husband's world view and attitude.

Liza, similarly to the other narrators, did not stand alone with regard to keeping a low profile when it came to closer relationships with her partner. Liza's reaction rather complied with the pattern built by the other narratives. That is to say, that the spouses presented in the narratives of this study have or had a modest, discrete, pushed-back role. It is difficult to know if the men really have or had that laid-back role in real life, or if this role was given to them by their spouses in the narratives. It is also possible that their role in the personal life story narratives and the individuals' experiences is judged as marginal, or negligible, by the narrators – as something that lies outside the private and personal sphere in terms of presenting the self that they wish to bring to the open in front of the interviewer and/or a wider audience.

### Female Roles – Mother and Wife

Liza answered questions about her relations with her parents and she also mentioned her husband and child, without displaying intimacies. She was more puritan, compared to the other women's narrations on the same topic. Ilona, Borka, Anna, but also Pandora were somewhat more extended and included relations with family members in their childhood, including also the presentation of significant others (siblings, aunts), friends and strangers. Certain themes, such as the 'stereotypical mother roles' were omitted in the core-Hungarian women's storytelling; their story details did not testify to an undivided delight in mothering. Instead, they presented different versions of what I call *hesitant mothering*. This is not meant to say that they did not have strong ideas about how they wished to 'mould' their children's mental, spiritual and cultural development.

Liza did not relate to the notion of motherhood at all. She was more withdrawn and retentive with details when speaking of relations with her child, but what she said confirmed the attitude of an engaged parent working to achieve goals and results. Liza did her best to enable her child to have total access to Hungary (and Hungarianness), frequently visiting the country and Liza's parents, grandparents and friends with their children. These people were invited to visit the family in Sweden in order to provide close links between the child and significant others.

An interesting detail in Liza's narration was the reference to her child; instead of using the child's name, she used the Hungarian word 'gyerek' [child]. As an intricate detail, I find it also worth mentioning, that owing to the properties of the Hungarian

language, we never learn of the gender-affiliation of Liza's child. The use of the word "gyerek" (similar to 'child') does not include gender markers, and because Hungarian lacks gender-based pronouns it is possible to avoid revealing a person's gender affiliation in communication. I do not wish to imply here that this fact has any bearing on Liza's relations to speaking of her child. Nonetheless, it must be said that it has caused me (as such cases always do) difficulties when translating the taped material into an Indo-European language. Liza's neutral way of talking of her child might have been an attempt to maintain a distance from the topic; alternatively, a wish to generate neutrality and objectivity in relation to her child. It might also have been a desire to exercise discretion about a person not present at the interview – or simply, a custom.

Liza's storytelling testified to her success in achieving their common goals, namely to preserve the child's Hungarian cultural proficiency. The first language spoken of them was Hungarian, she thought the child the blessings of the Hungarian culture and history; she secured contacts with people (significant and general others) in Hungary, thus achieving a desired level of Hungarianness<sup>426</sup>. The family's economic standards allowed to support these goals: Liza and her child, but the child also without Liza, frequently visited Hungary, underlining a great personal freedom of choice (agency).

#### *Dutiful and Goal-oriented Mother*

As Liza did not pick up on the topic of motherhood as such, I had to ask explicitly about her view on motherhood experiences. Instead of giving a direct answer, Liza demonstrated her attitude towards the thought of being 'domesticised' in a situation like hers (a migrant in the process of acquiring cultural competence). She illustrated this by talking of her *fi*-studies, which she found pleasing:

It [sfi] was superb! Superb! I loved it. I had German, English and Russian in my pocket [from before], I had no problem with them, I had no small children at home to take care of, and no husband expecting food on the table, nothing of the kind – there were Arabic and other [immigrants] – you know, the Iranian war was going on – there were plenty of us [students] – there were Polish, and I dunno-what [kinds of nationalities].

Liza implied that family life could constrain the learning process and she herself appreciated not having ties that came with children and demanding husbands. She was "very motivated" in her language studies; she recalled that she sat at the kitchen table every day with a dictionary, a cookery book, or whatever she had at hand, asking

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<sup>426</sup> With remarkably good results, as confirmed by an interview I made with the child in 2000

her husband, family and friends for the meaning of Swedish words whenever she could. In this way she achieved her goals of learning Swedish “in three months”, and then she started to look for a job.

When portraying herself in her storytelling as a responsible, preoccupied and dutiful individual, with an aptitude for languages and studying, Liza revealed an upwardly mobile personality, persistent in her attitude towards tasks that she found important. It was not overtly mentioned, but one might assume that motherhood was not prioritised at this stage of Liza’s life. Knowing her also outside the interview context, I know that Liza soon faced the dilemma of integrating potentially conflicting roles and responsibilities as mother and professional.

She made preparations for a professional life and that won over motherhood in the beginning. Liza faced the challenge of the rather traditional assumption that all young women must become mothers to fulfil female maturity (Ireland, 1993). Instead, Liza apparently moved towards a professional life in Sweden, expecting to have a career, but she did not speak of a choice of not having children. Liza’s strategy for managing the conflicting demands of work and family roles seemed to be to delay childbearing until she had acquired the skills to secure an equalitarian marriage and, when the child arrived, to be able to choose part-time work.

When she finally became a mother, she linked her mother’s role to the ethnonational homecoming in the local Hungarian association. She frequently participated in various activities during this stage of her life; taking care of children’s activities together with another Hungarian woman: “...when the child was born, I really had my fair share [of Hungarian activities]...”, which Liza continued to do “during many years, yes, we were very happy doing that.

Liza’s attitude and efforts towards immersing her child in Hungarianness were impressive. She had been determined to bring up her child to be a competitive Hungarian (both linguistically and culturally) and I had expectations of hearing about her engagement in this direction in her narration. As she did not seem to make any effort to include it, however, I asked her about the ways she went about it. Liza said that she spoke to the child in Hungarian all the time, which had reciprocal benefits: it could be used for instrumental purposes. Liza’s multilevel goals were directed towards competitiveness and proficiencies both in the Hungarian and Swedish languages and cultures; talking Hungarian would benefit both the child and her. To become immersed in the Swedish culture, she would have the help of both her husband and son.

Well, I thought that I would in all circumstances talk to [the child] in Hungarian, because it would learn Swedish anyway, and I should not be the one to teach bad Swedish to [the child], and I needed the active use of Hungarian, otherwise I think it would have deteriorated after a time.

Liza said that she appreciated the support from her husband and his family towards her efforts to rear the child in a Hungarian spirit. They showed “great tolerance” regarding her way of handling the issue of multiple cultures and languages in the family. To give an example by contrast, she told the story of her girl friend from Hungary, who had married a German man and was now living in Germany. Liza said that the girl would “not dare” risk talking Hungarian to her own child, being afraid of the family’s disapproval, while her friend “took it [talking German to her child] as a ticket into society, making it easier for her to assimilate”. Liza, on the other hand, was lucky not “to find herself in such a situation”. She managed to “go as often as possible to Hungary with the child, and at home [in Hungary]” where they met her friends with their kids, Liza arranged it that the child should actively talk Hungarian, knowing that the child’s language skills would not come from talking to Liza alone: “not only adult talk all the time, but talking to mates of the same age...” She added that the mates were still “around... but we shall see now”.

Liza implied here that now, with her parents no longer around, she did not know how long her efforts would work for strengthening the child’s Hungarian identification. In her narration, Liza did not include an evaluation of what her husband’s thoughts and attitudes were about the upbringing of their child. The reason might be that they secured two cultural environments, Hungarian and Swedish, which were far apart, and her responsibility stretched only to the Hungarian one. Liza’s strategy was obviously successful regarding the strengthening of ties between her child and Hungary, where childhood friends still exerted enough attractive forces to make the trips desirable. However, the outcome of Liza’s efforts might not please her as much as she might have wished for. When I asked her about the child’s relations to Hungarianness, Liza revealed somewhat hesitantly that this detail in their relationship has not been openly spoken about:

...well, that you should ask (the child<sup>427</sup>). I would think that (the child) somehow – (the child) somewhere considers to be Swedish – obviously – but... I would not wonder if (the child) had identity conflicts.../.../ I would think that (the child) would choose a Swedish identity, but I don’t know, I’ve never asked – I believe, (the child) would rather choose the Swedish [identity].

Liza finished her pondering about the child’s eventual identifications by displaying an uncertainty about the permanence of the child’s interest in Hungary after losing the

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<sup>427</sup> I use [the child] here in want of a subject in the sentence in English, which is redundant in Hungarian.

tight links that Liza's parents had meant: "so the relatives... so to say, the family thread is torn now .... There is no one to go to..."

Liza hoped that the young friends of her child would still be the attraction to make her child continue to go to Hungary. As the storytelling began to be less and less fluent about her child, I did not see any point in pursuing the matter any further.

### *Relations, Partnership and Rationales*

Liza mentioned J., her husband, a couple of times during our interviews, not always spontaneously. She presented him as a supportive and understanding husband, aiding her both in her ideas and aims throughout the years. Liza spoke of her partner but restrained herself from emotional or romantic elements. She introduced J. through a cheerful story about their first meeting which happened by coincidence in the 1980s in West Germany (FRG<sup>428</sup>). They were both doing practice there through a scholarship from AIESEC<sup>429</sup>, granted to students in economics. It was J.'s last year in Sweden, while Liza had one more year ahead to study in Hungary. J. was placed at a smaller company, while Liza was at Miele, in Gutesheim. Liza gave her motivation for her choice of country that she had already been to the GDR<sup>430</sup> (East Germany) and now she wanted to see "the other side"<sup>431</sup>, too. Liza was accommodated in the company's guest home, a comfortable villa with all necessary facilities. Liza met J. on site; they spent a lot of time together in Gutesheim, supporting each other, going out and enjoying one another's company. J. was often at her place to sit around or he would take her out.

Liza commented on their first time together in cheery storylines, praising the practical sides of J. around the kitchen, and stressing her own clumsiness regarding domestic work, which she illustrated with three detailed examples. One was about her ignorance of the handling of the modern washing machine she found in the villa. Another experience she remembered was about whipping cream without an electric device – she had no idea how to do it manually. Here J.'s practical advice came in handy, as he showed her how to do it. The third problem emerged in the middle of

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<sup>428</sup> The acronym FRG stands for the Federal Republic of Germany, see also West Germany (a separate state prior to 1989).

<sup>429</sup> AIESEC is the world's largest youth-run organization, focusing on providing a platform for youth leadership development, the opportunity to participate in international internships, and a global learning environment to experience leadership. URL source: <http://www.aiesec.org/cms/aiesec/AI/about/index.html>.

<sup>430</sup> German Democratic Republic, 1945–1989.

<sup>431</sup> Referring to the political division of Germany, and also Europe, by the Iron Curtain in the cold war: East and West.



cooking when she had invited J. for dinner. Liza wanted to cook spaghetti, which she had never done before, and when she saw “how bloody long the spaghetti were” compared to the size of the casserole, she was lost. J. told her not to “make a fool of [her]self”, to just put them into the water, and when Liza found that “they don’t fit! Does one break them?” J. solved the Gordian knot: “You just put them into the water and they get soft... and then they slowly slide down” into the water.

Liza remembered and performed these experiences of hers in a very lively way, using means of rhetoric (body language and facial expressions) to express the larks by using a lot of gestures and a changing tone of voice. Liza was laughing loudly at her old (young) self, as if amused by the memory of her own awkwardness. She acted out the part with much expression so I was captivated by the storyline. Her illustrated storytelling made it easy to see her making a fool of herself in the German kitchen some thirty years ago<sup>432</sup>.

In a Hungarian context it has been chic in certain (elite) contexts to give the air of being a less accomplished person (in certain respects), and to show an ungainly female side of oneself when a young woman. This is underpinned by the defying of the female stereotype of standing in the kitchen – ‘in front of the stove’ – to show unfamiliarity with female category adjustments, such as domestic work. Liza used this strategy and as a result gave J. the opportunity to use his male role of aiding her for practical and pragmatic reasons. J.’s intentions were to show Liza how to get by in whatever she failed to get by in. In the above examples, in a dialogic way, Liza illustrated her ungainliness, highlighting J.’s more accomplished domestic conduct, which were complementary. Liza was joyfully telling these anecdotes, or small stories, baked into the big story, linked to her everyday life. We both found them amusing.

After this *summer love* in FRG, as Liza described it, they parted. J. went back to Sweden to complete his studies and begin to work at a well-reputed international auditor company. Liza saw it important to finish her studies, so she returned to Hungary. “I did not think it [the ‘summer love’] would lead to anything”, she said, but J. came to visit her in Hungary in this intermediate time of Liza’s life, when she did not know what to do in the future. At the beginning of her studies she signed a contract with an agricultural cooperative that supported her during her 5 years of study and would continue to support her also afterwards<sup>433</sup>. Liza did not think much about it while studying, but a career out on the fields “behind the bottoms of cows”

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<sup>432</sup> Liza supposedly learned since how to cook spaghetti; but for the record, I have seen J. making spaghetti in their home in Sweden.

<sup>433</sup> This was a general procedure to link to a company who supported the student during his or her studies, writing a contract of work assignment for some years with the company.

among “a bunch of oxen” (ambiguous reference<sup>434</sup>), became less and less attractive when she was about to finish her studies. After having lived in the capital, the job prospects in the countryside were not seductive, and she was preoccupied with thoughts about her future life.

Liza found decision-making difficult, she said. She was indecisive and uncertain of what to do in her life, which she felt that she still was at the time of the interview, she added. To solve the dilemma of what to do after getting her diploma, Liza turned to J.: they discussed the possibility of Liza coming to Sweden and getting a job. Liza found the idea attractive, but had one condition: it would have to be done in a ‘safe way’, not through defection. Therefore, Liza suggested to J. to use the safest way she had been familiar with from home, namely turning to network contacts. She asked J. to approach AIESEC and ‘rig’ a place for her in Sweden through them. He complied, but was turned down. Liza was upset for a while, somewhat disappointed with J’s failure in utilising indirect social capital, but then she had to accept the situation. Her plan with AIESEC having failed, a plan ‘B’, involving marriage, came up on the agenda, as...

there was J. too [as a factor], and we could try it; either we succeed or not. But I had no ambitions in this direction from the beginning, well, then it did not work out with AIESEC – but I didn’t want to just drop out [defect], there was nothing else that worked out either, so then we will have to get married, because, no way I would come out... [move to Sweden as a ‘dissident’].

### *Autonomous Wife*

Liza and J. married in the ‘proper way’<sup>435</sup> in Hungary, although against the will of Liza’s parents. It shocked them at first, Liza revealed. When they learned about the young persons’ plans, they tried to stop Liza in any way they could. According to Liza her parents *panicked*, her father even used *psychological extortion*: “he told me he would exclude me from his will”, and her mother tried to bribe Liza with “leaving the summer house [to her]”, if she would change her mind about getting married to J. As none of the threats worked, Liza’s parents finally gave in and they began planning to give away their daughter in proper Hungarian style. They went against the young couples’ wishes to have a quiet wedding; “a properly big wedding” was arranged by

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<sup>434</sup> *Oxen* sometimes can refer to describe a type of (uneducated) people.

<sup>435</sup> Marrying Western citizens with official permits made it possible for the Hungarian partner to return to Hungary unlimited times.

Liza's parents in her home town with 130 guests, "which was not much by Hungarian standards", Liza said with an ironic smile. Soon after receiving the necessary documents and official permits to leave the country<sup>436</sup>, she packed and left Hungary, arriving in Sweden "with two suitcases" and "a container" filled with books and Hungarian folklore artefacts, which are still in use in their home. Liza's presence shocked J., who found his wardrobe invaded by this "strange" person. He was not accustomed to sharing, Liza recounted with irony.

Liza's meeting with Swedish society was bumpy and evaluated as "[t]his first period consumed enormous energy from me", reminding us of Borka's storytelling about the first period of her life in Sweden. J. was, according to Liza, not quite ready to give up his bachelor lifestyle. He "went out, just like before, to play tennis and golf", although he was not an "ale-drinking type", he was doing sports "together with his pals". At the time Liza found J.'s behaviour offensive, but in retrospect she thought that her attitude back then was ridiculous. However, she was all alone during the day, and when J. came home from work and then went out again she took it as a personal offence. Regarding Liza's relations to Hungarianness, J. took it, "how shall I put it, like a tolerant husband", Liza explained. He joined her sometimes on her trips to Hungary, but was not keen on going there. As it was, efforts in this respect from J. were not always appreciated by Liza; she was not "in need" of his company in Hungary. His presence was sometimes even problematic, because Liza had so many friends that she could easily fill her days with them. Liza did not see "any meaning in conversations with only a few words" about "the nice weather", which was all J. was capable of. Her friends did not speak a word of English, and J.'s linguistic proficiency in Hungarian was "not enough to carry on a normal conversation or discussion". She added that she did not know the meaning of and never felt the necessity of carrying around a husband like a "blood-stained flag"<sup>437</sup>, showing him off, "well, look, here he is, my husband, I have a husband".

To my knowledge, J. was acting as a tolerant partner. He had accepted the Hungarian links and did not object to Liza's efforts to raise their child in the Hungarian spirit. J.'s tolerance seemed to be insufficient for Liza, or she perhaps had a stronger need to connect to Hungary, even at the cost of marital peace, as it turned out in the next part of Liza's storytelling. From my communication with J. and from Liza's comments, I gathered that J. had developed a rather loose interest in Hungary and Hungarianness,

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<sup>436</sup> The bureaucratic procedure to get a permit to leave could take months for those who married (Western) foreigners in state-socialism.

<sup>437</sup> Hungarian locution with historic roots. In 1241, the Hungarian king Béla IV sent a bloodstained flag around the country to call the Nobles to assist against Djingis Khan's Mongolian hordes invading Hungary. (This request was ignored by the Nobles.)

and kept it on a detached level. He still made infrequent visits to Hungary – mainly while his parents-in-law were alive – staying for shorter periods. J. found time spent in Hungary tedious, he explained once, therefore he did not always accompany Liza and their child to Hungary. Liza felt sometimes edgy having J. around her in Hungary; particularly during the last years of the illness of Liza's mother, when Liza was busy fixing things around her mother. Liza felt that he was often in her way. The reason was a clash of cultures. J. questioned the ways of official (bureaucratic) things that had to be arranged – the how and why – which were familiar procedures for Liza. This led to discussions and differences in opinion. Thus, Liza preferred to go alone, she revealed. In a short anecdote Liza also explained about her repatriation trial (see below) at a time of her life when things in her professional life were not working out well for her.

## Migrant Narrative – Invandrare, Immigrant and Professional

“You know what? I am also a bloody immigrant...”

Liza did not deliver a stereotypical (*im*)migrant narrative but she was aware of the fact that she was externally categorised as *invandrare*. This fact and her self-image as a professional build an often inseparable narrative unit in her storytelling as well. Studies on migrants in Sweden have showed that immigrants have had difficulties on the labour market<sup>438</sup>, apparently for a long time now<sup>439</sup>. Thus, when immigrants tell their stories, the topic is bound to arise, just as it did in Liza's narration. Still, it surprised me, as she had not given the impression so far of seeing herself as a social example of migration, as we shall see it below, when speaking of her professional role.

From agency<sup>440</sup> viewpoint, Liza was seemingly successful as a professional, adjusting to Swedish conditions, finding her own solutions to problems with the working conditions. In her narration she did not dwell on the pitfalls of migrant categorisation such as institutionalised discrimination, social stigmatisation and everyday inequalities, and she avoided lamenting over her social status. Nonetheless, one can

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<sup>438</sup> Arbetsmarknad och integration. [Labour Market and Integration,] Report by Swedish Svenskt Arbetsliv and SACO, January 2010.

<sup>439</sup> <http://www.rod.se/content/sverige-s%C3%A4mst-i-oecd-p%C3%A5-jobb-f%C3%B6r-invandrare>.

<sup>440</sup> Here used in the meaning of acting independently, upon one's own will.

sense from her narration that, similar to Anna. Liza had her own image of a status higher up in the social hierarchy, corresponding to her level of education and competence. When reasoning about working conditions, Liza went to great lengths to avoid references to the category of 'invandrare'. Instead of blaming her unemployment periods on this category, she used rational arguments about demand, downsizing, shrinking working time, and managerial problems at her workplaces.

Liza's story about herself in regards to working dates back to the time after her arrival in Sweden, when she entered a long and winding road which lead to the commitment she felt today. She did a lot on her own to succeed, also acknowledging the helping hands, beginning with her *sfi* teacher, who gave her advice on taking *emergency jobs* [beredskapsarbete<sup>441</sup>], in order to "get her foot in the labour market", which Liza followed. Nevertheless, the work did not last longer than half a year, and Liza was again without work, which made her lose her nerve. She found mental guidance in the advice of their Hungarian neighbours, "56ers" as Liza called them. The lady next door gave her the following guidance:

Do not degrade yourself, you are a person of higher value and you will be able to get work within your own trade; don't compromise, don't be a char lady! – That still has an echo even after twenty, twenty two years... /.../ I first thought: 'what of it, what is the problem with cleaning? That is also earning money...' I did not understand, or did not believe, what it meant, namely that you should not become a cleaning lady because you will never be able to higher yourself, or only at a very very high cost. You will be placed in a specific box, no matter that you have higher education; you will never get out of it. That is what they told me. True, or not, I don't know. I did not become a char lady.

Liza added the last comment with a waggish smile, indicating that she did understand the implications of being an immigrant and also the symbolic value of the message; to work as a charlady was more than just working to earn money, as in addition it had a social categorisation content. The comment is a reflection of the sense of dignity, which popped up in the narrations of several interviewees<sup>442</sup>. But Liza explained that she did not become a charlady, because economically she "did not need to", being

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<sup>441</sup> Relief work during the 1970s-80s provided job opportunities for maximum 6 months, for those without employment and registered at the Arbetsförmedlingen (Employment service) in Sweden.

<sup>442</sup> Counter to the conclusion from Beatriz Lindqvist's study on Chilean immigrants, who did not find it undignifying to do cleaning jobs. (1989) *Drömmar och vardag i exil*. [Dreaming and everyday life in exile.] Stockholm: Carlssons.

assured by J., who advised her to wait for the right opportunity to rise. This came some years later; it was about a book-keeping job, which actually was below Liza's competence as an economist. Nonetheless, Liza did not reflect on the 'costs' of 'devaluating' herself in this regard, and she took the job, settling for being a book-keeper, for which she lacked formal education as book-keeping did not have a high reputation among economists:

Well, the irony of fate is, you see, that we studied book-keeping only unwillingly at the university, we actually suffered a lot of it, we did not understand a bit of it. We thought it was a total waste, it was office rats, or we shall perhaps say 'torrboll' [Liza uses the Swedish word for 'drag'] for people who worked with it, how could one want to work with that? There was also an exam after it; all of us who went to the exam, who took an exam, got our little 'two' [mark 2, with 5 being the best], we didn't have a clue about anything. It was like – let's say – the History of the Workers' Party [an obligatory and tedious topic in university studies in state-socialism], or other comparable idiocies...

The opportunity for the job arose as a lucky coincidence by the involvement of network capital when, at a dinner party, Liza met a young woman, an acquaintance of her husband, who was doing part-time book-keeping at a small company. She planned to move abroad and asked Liza if she would consider taking over the job. Liza was happy to say yes, she explained, but she also revealed to the woman that she was ignorant about book-keeping. She was then invited to the office to learn about the job. Liza complied and in the office she was confronted with "DOS, a kind of DOS-based computer programme", which she had never seen before. Book-keeping seemed rather difficult for her even in the manual version, but the computer-based programme made it even more complicated, she thought. Nonetheless, with persistence and the help of her husband, training at home in the evenings, and in addition doing voluntary book-keeping for the dance group, she finally grasped the essence of it. She learned both the trade and the computer programme with all its applications.

This was the beginning of Liza's book-keeping career in Sweden, which she had been doing, with disruptions, for twenty odd years by the time of our interview. She had never implied, either within the interviews or outside, that she was in any way discontent with *degrading* herself to be a book-keeper. Liza did not imply either that not finding employment as an economist had anything to do with being an immigrant. But times were not always easy and sometimes came unwelcome changes: bosses left, others came, there were re-organisations, and a so-called 'lack of work' resulted in repeated unemployment periods for Liza. Judging from her storytelling, unemployment periods were a major disaster for her. They made her lose self-

confidence, and led to long periods of depression with psychological treatments to follow, as told by her.

## Professional Career Fulfilment in Sweden

Liza began to work as a book-keeper and she liked doing it. She was content with her first workplace and she was also liked there; her boss even liked to have “foreigners” around, Liza said. Then she became pregnant and took maternity leave. While at home with the child, her workplace was reorganised, her boss had to go, and Liza found herself with no work to go back to. *Tyche*<sup>443</sup>, or as Liza put it, “an enormous stroke of luck”, interfered again, because soon after losing the job, an old ex-colleague of Liza at the firm was moving to Australia, and asked Liza if she was interested in taking over the economic responsibilities at the company. No question, Liza took the job and was happy, going from part-time to full-time, even though her child was still little. Liza initiated clever plans in order to manage the increasing workload by employing university students to help her, while the students got training in book-keeping at the same time. She also got help from other unemployed people sent by the Employment Office doing ‘relief jobs’.

Liza was apparently appreciated at her workplace and her work load was increased; it soon included the responsibility also for human resources and administration. She was fully occupied, which she enjoyed, but soon she began to feel inadequate and she wanted to increase her proficiency, particularly in her Swedish, by going back to university studies, taking single courses in a mixture of different topics (behavioural sciences: psychology, sociology, pedagogy). Meanwhile, while she was doing her studies, bad luck struck again: her workplace was reorganised owing to changing “economic conditions”. Lacking money, “they decided that we must do something new”, which meant employing a new boss and a new assistant to replace Liza, who was made redundant on the basis of ‘a lack of work’ and there she was again without employment.

### Repatriation and Escape Trial

The situation made Liza distressed. She felt upset and unsettled, which apparently strengthened her desire to tighten the bonds between her and Hungary. She linked her desire to go to Hungary to the idea of testing her child’s degree of Hungarianness there. Liza decided not to go as a tourist, but as a student. She applied for a

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<sup>443</sup> Greek Goddess of Luck.

scholarship for studies in Hungary through the Erasmus programme<sup>444</sup>, which was granted to her because, as she posed in a rhetorical question: “who else would want to go to Hungary? The idea to go to Hungary seemed like:

... a cool thing, a great opportunity for me to be there again, for a longer time, to be at home... to poke my nose into home stuff, and perhaps, as an alternative it popped up in my mind that I would look for a working opportunity, and then, perhaps I would stay on. Because, well, what the heck; I would try it.

Her plan was to find a ‘proper’ school for her child and rent a flat in her town of birth where they could both live during their stay. During weekdays when she would study in Budapest, her parents would look after her child. She presented the idea to J., whose reactions she had not anticipated:

J. took it badly, he was panicking, that I wanted to take the child with me for two terms. So it came to nothing, the plan for two terms, /.../ but I did not bend down and after that [she stayed on for a term and studied in Sweden]. I went [to Hungary] anyway. And this was in the year 2000, 2000, in January...

Liza won the battle even though she had to change some parts of her plan; J. gave in with the condition that Liza would not part him from his child for more than one term. Liza accepted his conditions and they went to Budapest for a shorter time than previously planned. Nonetheless, the experience had strained their marriage, as J. found Liza’s actions in this regard rather incomprehensible and stressful, but accepted the situation for the sake of marital status quo.

### *Loss of Career Fulfilment*

Afraid of not having work after returning from Hungary, before leaving Liza had applied for several jobs and she was “lucky again” to find one. However, she was worried about the fact that she wanted to go to Hungary more than she wanted to take a job in Sweden. She decided to describe the situation for her prospective future employer in a letter; thanking him for offering her the job, at the same time turning the it down because of her need to test her abilities at the university in Hungary. She would regret it all her life were she to not take the opportunity, she wrote in the

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<sup>444</sup> Student exchange programme organized by the European Union.



letter. She felt good about her own honesty, but also panicky because she realised that she would not have a job to come back to after the adventure in Hungary. As fate would have it, after a few weeks she received a letter from the prospective boss, informing her that the job had become vacant again and it was hers would she want it on her return from Hungary.

[W]ell, there you are. Well, this is just unbelievable! Such things happen only in fairy tales! I wrote back, of course, that it was incredible, I was overwhelmed, and yes, of course, yes, yes! Thus, by the time I came back, I already had fixed a job to myself!

After returning to Sweden, she began to work and the place “made me suffer more than anything”. Her boss seemed to be a problem, “a psychopath”; the workplace became unbearable, filled with strangely-behaved co-workers and suspicion, with distrust spreading and silence ruling. Liza felt inclined to look for other job opportunities, but had no luck. Certain irregularities were in the meantime discovered at her workplace; they were not of her doing, but she came under a lot of stress. In 2003 she “gick in i väggen” [crashed], with sick leave to follow and psychological treatment for several months. In the meantime, to remedy the problem at the workplace “[w]hat do the Swedish do in order to get rid of a problematic boss? Well, they reorganise” As a consequence, Liza was dismissed again, making her feel really bad:

At times like these, one recognises that one is small and insecure, and loses self-appreciation, and thoughts come, that well, I am only an immigrant, and I am only this, and I am only that, and I am not worth anything, and it was just awful, awful! Total lethargy!

I was actually surprised by Liza’s multiple failures on the labour market that she talked about at the interview. Liza had always given the impression of being self-confident, self-aware and cocky enough to take a pragmatic stance as the basis for rational evaluations of life situations, and she never complained about working conditions. Also, the way to tackle her wish to go to Hungary, declining a job opportunity in Sweden that she so much wanted, and her way of reasoning, demonstrated that even though the choice was emotional, her actions (looking for a job prior to leaving, and informing the employer of her decision) were rational. Liza continued her story about going to pieces and living under great pressure at home, “throwing plates on the floor” in despair, to the general amazement of her husband and child. The chaotic state lasted for six months, during which time she also had to seek work, on the demand of the Employment office. A staffing agency finally helped

her to find a job, but it did not work out. It proved to be too soon to go back to work; Liza could not cope with the workload. She was also to blame by...

a characteristic, which is not an advantage; because of a want to meet expectations, it is – I have difficulties to say no [to requests]; I have low self-esteem, I mean, I am always inhibited to think that if I do not manage to fix something within the given time limit, then it is my fault. It would never occur to me to question if the workload is actually reasonable... I dig into it, full speed ahead; come on, come on, work, prove yourself...

The retrospective evaluation of her situation was that she must have been “a lunatic, or perhaps ill” to even try to work considering her health status; “of course, it could not work, socially it did not work”. The bureaucratic stipulations [the policy of the Swedish Employment Office] did not allow longer sick-leaves either, which made her feel even more stressed. Liza added with sarcasm that the unemployment office probably judged her still fit “to sell sausages at some bodega [snack hut]”.

Nevertheless, Liza soon struck by luck again, through a “decent” clerk at the Employment office. Her CV was put on the home page of the National Labour Market Board (AMS<sup>445</sup>), and “someone there above was feeling sorry for me”, sending her a “life buoy”, she said. A potential employer read Liza’s CV, interviewed her and employed her to replace a woman who, “the irony of fate”, had “gone into the wall” [had a nervous break-down], Liza explained. The rest is history; this place became Liza’s permanent workplace for years to come. She continued doing book-keeping and administration, beginning with part time, extended to full-time for the past few years. Liza was pleased with this situation, and always content when I asked her about her work.

### *Career and Self Image of a Bloody Immigrant*

The unorthodox and surprising quotation from the second interview on the status of ‘bloody immigrant’ serves as a motto for a step out, and for articulating Liza’s perception of her status in Sweden. Reflecting on employment, jobs, employers and periods of unemployment, Liza evaluated her own contribution in reaching the position she had now by concluding that she had worked hard for it. She also admitted that, had there not been “all the helping people” (“kind people” in Pandora’s narration), nothing of it would have worked. Conclusively, she said with slight irony:

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<sup>445</sup> National Labour Market Board.

it depended on me too, but it came at a price. The price is that I don't know who I am, what I am. Sometimes I am Hungarian, sometimes a Swede. Either this or that, or neither. I am *so* [stress by her] tolerant, I am *so* flexible, I can adjust *so* well, and then problems cease... [she would have thought]

Network capital was given different names in Liza's narration: "helping hands", "life buoy", "helping people", "someone above" and "good fortune", but they were not categorised by her as 'contacts' serving her well in Sweden. In comparison, helpers in Hungary were referred to as "contacts". I was thinking about the role of her husband in this context, considering that he had a lot of 'contacts' within the field of economics and book-keeping. However, it is not disclosed by Liza; she did not imply that she was helped by J. at some of the lucky turns in her professional career. Liza discussed the professional side of her life in detail, which is the reason why I see this part of her narration as Liza's *master narrative*. She was explicit about her relations and attitude to work in her storytelling; they make up a great part of her narration. They were apparently crucial for her well-being. She also asked me outside the interview situation to make sure that the need to be working, as a crucial attribute in her self-identification, would be emphasised in the study. No complaint had been narrated by her so far in relation to the discontinuities in her working situation; she rode out all of the problems in relation to work and the connected psychical problems. Liza found a way back to work, which fact contributed to her well-being. On that account, it was a surprise when Liza, speaking of the many turns in her career, suddenly referred to herself as a "bloody immigrant" (presented further on in the chapter), disclosing the awareness of the fact that the excluding social category of migrant was applicable also to her.

The story of the perception of her immigrant status surprised me for various reasons. First, as already pointed out in the study, Liza was pragmatic about her situation in Sweden, never lamenting or complaining. As a newcomer Liza had made great efforts to adjust, which she thought was the natural way to establish a life under new circumstances. She stressed the fact that she liked what she did and she was content and enjoyed living in Sweden, just as much as living 'at home' (in Hungary). Second, Liza seemed to have made great efforts to completely integrate into society – she worked hard in order to adjust to the necessities of life (a pragmatic); she had a very good linguistic command of Swedish, and she socialised with many Swedish citizens of her own free will. She had experiences from different workplaces; the majority of her jobs were regular (labour market regulated) when she was employed. The periods of unemployment put obvious strains on her, resulting in psychological problems that demanded treatments for many years. Even though Liza did not achieve heightened 'status attainment', she did not blame her immigrant status for this circumstance. Liza seemed to accept the fact that major policy changes, and events similar to those, could result in 'status loss'. She continued to work as a book-keeper all her working life in

Sweden and had no complaints. That is why the quoted utterance came as a surprise and I find it significant. Referring to herself as a “bloody immigrant” surprised not only me, but apparently also others, who heard her saying it.

Liza was in the middle of talking about how content she felt today with her present working conditions; having a good working atmosphere, and good relations with her boss and colleagues, with whom she regularly went to eat out at lunchtime. The incident came about when one day they were having lunch together at a “small joint, you go there and take the food with you, a kind of Chinese...[place]”. A young colleague of Liza made an offensive comment about immigrants from China coming to work in Sweden. The discourse triggered a reaction from Liza, who had a notion of herself, supported by her friends’ perception of her, as being “more Swedish than the Swedes”.

Well, ... at work, ... I was the only, so-called ‘foreigner’ and at lunch, we sat at the table and they [colleagues] began to witter ‘Chinese here’ and ‘Chinese there’, I don’t know what, ‘why don’t they take a boat back home’ and similar. I intended it to be a humorous remark, I opened my mouth and said: ‘you know what, I am also a bloody immigrant’... The guy, he became [red] like your t-shirt... he was like... [she began to laugh at the memory]. Liza mimicked her colleague stammering... ‘No, well, no, no, not you, you’re not... it was not about that – absolutely, no!’ Uh oh, gimme a fire extinguisher! [Liza implied that the young colleague was as red as a blazing fire and she laughed heartily at the memory. She drew the conclusion of the episode with some hesitation:] Well, this I could take as a token of not being seen, not being taken for *invandrare* ... If that is good or bad, I am not sure.

Her colleagues were embarrassed and taken by surprise by her reaction, Liza revealed. This might have been because they were surprised by the contradiction between their own attitude towards Liza and Liza’s perception of herself. The colleagues apparently saw Liza as a non-alien, an in-group member, not separate from them in any way, considered to be a ‘neutralised’ zero-immigrant, including her in both their open-minded and narrow-minded talk. But Liza realised that she did not share this image when the worst came to the worst; she identified with the immigrant. Nonetheless, her reaction made the situation awkward.

Yet, for Liza, it was not completely clear if she should interpret it as something positive or negative. When the pejorative remarks were uttered, Liza immediately sided with and became the *Chinese immigrant*, sympathising or just simply realising that there was not much difference between her and the Chinese immigrant. Liza interpreted it that the slander could not be selective; it was meant for all immigrants, even if it was not ‘intended’ for Liza. The joke, which Liza had perhaps used with the

intention of easing the awkward situation, made it worse, when the young colleague reacted with embarrassment and the other colleagues realised the implications. This small story was about the multi-level perception of the feeling of belonging, or not-belonging; identifying with the concept or denouncing it. Liza had been working for inclusion for a long time, while taking on its exclusionary power when approached by categorisations that one cannot, or does not want to, identify with. To recognise belonging to groups such as immigrant groups is a personal process and a complex affair. It depends on personality traits, age, the reasons for migration, acceptance, aptitude for changes, adapting and adopting, open-mindedness towards new situations, and similar. It seems that it is greatly dependent on the reception, i.e. the so called resident-newcomer relationship. In our case, it seems that Liza's efforts to not be seen as an outsider in the Swedish society have worked – and when this had been achieved, Liza realised that whatever her efforts had been she still found herself belonging to another category: the category of *discomforted conformists*.

### *Contentment and Failure in Professional Life*

To change the direction of the interview, I asked Liza about her first years in Sweden, wondering about the expectations she had had on her arrival in Sweden, and her perception of the beginning of her new life. After considerable time thinking, Liza concluded: “Oh, yeah. Work... it was rather bumpy... and homesickness... sometimes strong, sometimes less strong...”

I find it significant that the first word that Liza came up with was: “work”. From her narration it became obvious that work gave focus to Liza's existence; work had a decisive bearing on how she perceived the new country and life there; work affected her health and well-being, according to her declarations (see chapter Professional Contentment and Failure).

Women's narratives often emphasize, similarly to men's even if differently, the importance of work, “which is not always indicative of the identity that will be dominant in the overall biography” (L. Passerine (ed.), 1989). This is arguably true to a lesser or greater extent; except for Liza, who identified with work to an extent that could be called *indicative* according to her life story narration. For Liza work was essential; the oscillation between the two states of employment and unemployment affected her health and family relations. The stringent narrative sequence on Liza's efforts to find work in Sweden offers swift details *between the lines*, when talking of other things, pointing at the importance of the status of employment-unemployment and its relation to her Self.

When it concerned particularly important experiences from Liza's life, such as the *political context* of her youth, her attitude to *migrant status*, or to her *cultural roots*, the narration often returned to the main storyline, the objective of Liza's life; namely her more or less successful attempts to become a worthy citizen, doing her job as best she

could and complying with the idea of being an efficient person, both on societal and private levels, which for her was mainly achievable through work. She talked openly about her efforts, acceptance and adjustments, the latter popping up in her storytelling at various stages. Liza's description of the first period in Sweden explained the adjustments she made that consumed a vast amount of her energy: "because, well, you see, everything was quite different...", reminding us of Borka's similar first experiences in Sweden. The next instance was Liza's acceptance of the inevitable and unchangeable (finitism); the meaning of her days was "to adjust... I came out here [to Sweden] and that is all there is to it!", which she mentioned again when talking about the importance and absolute need of keeping in touch with Hungarian culture:

on the one side I had done my best in order to adjust, to learn the language and to... to – well, to learn how everything, how, how things were here, all those other kinds of things, it was all alien...

Liza's frustration showed throughout the interview each time she accounted for fiascos in respect of the painstaking exertions on her side to adjust that had outcomes not rewarding her efforts. She discussed details about her discontent and frustration in relation to her own performance-inhibiting experiences further when speaking of career experiences.

## Ethnonational Homecoming

We learn from Liza's narration that it was important for her to maintain Hungarianness while also adjusting to the Swedish society. Liza accentuated her need to keep in touch with her cultural heritage through private initiatives at home, visiting Hungary as often as she could and by her ethnonational homecoming in Sweden. At home, she used Hungarian with her child, by that both using the language for herself and supporting the child's development in Hungarianness, but at the same time not denying the importance of the development of a Swedish identity for the child. Liza was a member of the Board in the local Hungarian association, and used her professional skills there by doing auditing for them. The association provided the grounds for maintaining contact with compatriots in Sweden, and to enjoy the cultural aspects Lisa was interested in. She also revealed in her narration that her intentions did not always give the optimal result she had hoped for; for example the desire to preserve cultural capital (Hungarianness) and the institutionalised processes do not always converge. This became obvious at the Hungarian association, where she was only interested in "[T]heatre performances, and similar" and participated in commemorations and national holidays, such as for the Uprising of '56. She was

often frustrated there, she said, realising that the ‘linear speeches’ held were “like at home, just like the *szövegek*<sup>446</sup> [gibberish] of these idiotic Party leaders...” Her meeting with “old-56-ers”<sup>447</sup> was not a success either. They had “nothing in common”, she felt. There was the age difference and also her indifference to politics: she has never been a “politically heavy person”, only striving for “a basic idea about things”; otherwise she has not “bothered about politics much...”

By attending cultural activities, Liza wished to compensate for missing opportunities in culture. In Hungary she used to visit theatres and movies a lot. She compensated also by setting up Hungarian TV channels (e.g. Duna TV and others) in her ‘Hungarian’ room, where she often entertained herself by watching old Hungarian films and comedy programmes. Her ties to Hungary have remained strong during the years, in which family and friends have played an important role. She regularly invited family and friends to Sweden, and she sent her child to Hungary as often as she could. After her parents’ death, whom she cared for during their last years, Liza took over the family home, along with her grandparents’ home that she inherited. She refreshed both domiciles; spending quite a lot of money on renovating the old buildings. This way she created two homes in Hungary, visiting them, making changes, re-building them, making them adequate for her needs and expectations. She visited them several times per year, with or without her husband and child. She also invited Swedish colleagues to spend time with her there. She disclosed that it was not impossible that she would move back, also alone, if it would come to that, there when she retired.

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<sup>446</sup> The Hungarian word *szöveg-ek* [text-s] used as a colloquial/slang, applied by Liza, has special connotations for Hungarians, implying ‘line speeches’ given by ‘politically correct’ people at official gatherings such as national holidays, celebrations of different kinds involving official speeches, Party rallies and similar meetings.

<sup>447</sup> Colloquial for the ‘dissidents of ‘56’.

## 7. The Homemaker

### Idiosyncratic Narrator with Indefinite Goals

“... [W]e have perhaps not accepted the fact that our children would become Swedish”

### Interview Settings

Anna came to my home twice, first in February and then in March 2006, in order to make the interviews. I met her at the bus station and led her to my home because she had never been to my place before. We talked about trivial things, before going into the living room to sit down. The conversation went on for a short while, drinking coffee and eating cookies, before I switched on the tape recorder. Anna did not have too much time before she had to go home, so we got started without further delay. The second interview came just a few weeks later at short notice, because Anna was preparing for their repatriation: finishing contracts, getting rid of furniture, emptying their life in Sweden. Anna was looking forward to moving to Hungary with great anticipation; her talk revealed the fact that she was happy about it, speaking freely and openly.

### Mode and Style of Narration

Anna's style was easy-going and light, with frequent interruptions because she was often laughing heartily. She used rhetorical tools (self-irony), mainly in relation to topics about herself, trying to avoid overstating her own achievements. Such cases were when she talked of her tentative attitude to becoming a mother or when she described her childhood, when she, as a girl, did not like to play with dolls; thereby not complying with gender role expectations. She was ironic when pointing out revealing characteristics about the self, or about social issues that had met her disapproval. Her critical remarks in the storytelling served as general arguments for



criticism of social or political phenomena in Hungary or for the lack of intimacy in health care and social network support in Sweden.

Anna's narration style was relaxed and smooth on both interview occasions. The interviews with her were interesting and rewarding, and also entertaining, owing to Anna's easy-going way of conveying messages that contained a lot of information. She included surprising elements and presented an elated narrative at both interviews, talking with flow, finding it fun to talk. The evenness of the styles of both interviews might be explained by the fact that there were only a few weeks between the interviews, and Anna was high spirited because of her expectations about the approaching ending of her time in Sweden and the family repatriation to Hungary. This decision had been made by both Anna and her husband a long time before and now it was time to put it into effect. Anna was open, relaxed and chatty, presenting her life experiences without hesitation, bursting out in frequent, loud and high laughter, giggling and chuckling – sometimes to the extent that the narrative became inaudible. The narration presents her as an individual, a serious, dedicated, quiet young person, preoccupied with obligations towards hard studies and work. When talking of her student time in Hungary, no distracting side-tracks were included in the narration, no romantic relations, boyfriends, hobbies or attachments. While in Sweden, she seemed to have lived a focused domestic life.

### Pragmatic Issues

Anna, one of the two core-Hungarian exile women, uttered the sentence quoted on the page before, which I chose to use as the motto for presenting her approach to the concept of immigrant and national consciousness. Anna had built up her life between the two main ports of existence, Sweden and Hungary, and lived moving between those during the years until she decided to stop commuting and settle in Hungary again. To understand Anna's choice to resettle, we will have to listen to her story about life-turning choices, attitude, and relations to family, work, job opportunities, professional career and immigration. Anna explained the reasons for relocating her family to Hungary, which were motivated by the welfare of the children. The decision to go back to Hungary was not sudden; it was obvious from her narration that the thought had been central to her mind. Anna would oppose the expression 'return', considering that she never arguably 'migrated'. She detached herself from being categorised as *invandrare*, because as Anna described it she "actually never chose [to leave Hungary]", and she did not move to Sweden to live there "and go to Hungary for two weeks per year at the most". The motives for not needing to make the choice was according to her: "[b]ecause I had the option not to".

Anna's story is a specific type of 'non-migration' story of a 'mobile person from Eastern Europe'. The singular story revealed that Anna's life in Sweden revolved

around commuting and transition, a kind of “tourist”-life, and a kind of life on hold. She described her first period in Sweden:

... when I came out to live here [in Sweden] occasionally-wise, but also to live like a tourist in a way, I mean like a tourist going to a place for two weeks, I have been thinking a lot about this. I have never ended up in a Swedish environment; I ended up in a Hungarian one. You ask about my acquaintances... they are Hungarians, friends are Hungarians, clients [of her husband] are Hungarians... so I mean... well, I liked it here, a lot of things worked quite differently, people think differently...

Anna, similarly to the other interviewees, admittedly had no ‘expectations’ when she arrived in Sweden. She was pragmatic about it: “well, at least it would be nice to learn, at least, a language...” On the act of leaving Hungary, she commented as follows:

when I left... uh no, actually I did not leave, I didn’t come here like ‘oh, how fantastic, that I now can be free from Hungary’. I am sure that those who came before the fall of communism [1989] had this thought. I had nothing like that [kind of thought] in me – /.../ I was living in a very good economic situation, I actually had a very good life [in Hungary]. Uh, I mean, /.../ ... I came out here for two months, then I returned home. I have never given up Hungary – it was nothing like [that]...

The reference to “good economic situation” was about her career development after her university studies in Budapest. The storylines on this aspect of her life reveal a fascinating life development, retold in a light manner, including some gossip, some reflections on the old socialistic system and on her own life development after 1989. It was a singular story that revealed a lot about Anna; both the form and content were characteristic for her storytelling: she seemingly enjoyed telling it, including details about the making of an unusual professional career. She performed a detailed narration in a vivid way, laughing and modifying her tone of voice, using paralinguistic expressions and rhetorical means to deliver a long, interesting and amusing story.

The story details can be divided into two distinct sections. In the first, during the time prior to her moving to Sweden, focus was on paths for chasing ambition, achieving goals and self-fulfilment. The time after moving to Sweden was devoted to self-development, family life and Hungarianness, where professional aspirations had no space at all. Anna appeared in the interviews as a self-aware, self-assured and well-educated person with several university diplomas up her sleeves, who curiously settled

for a domestic life in Sweden. Her life centred around her own, her husband's and the children's welfare. I found Anna's attitude extremely curious, knowing her background that pointed at a highly competitive, ambitious and bright person, with various well-used qualities but some exceptional and wasted qualities. The reason to inquire into the fascinating aspects of Anna's life was to wish for answers about the split character of Anna; the complete change she seemed to make after moving to Sweden. I was curious to know why she had ditched the way of life that she had pursued so successfully in her homeland. I believe that I have found some answers in the interviews, but some questions remain unanswered.

## Socialisation and Family Relations

In Anna's self-portrait, we also find depicted an only child with a structured upbringing, a family girl doing what was generally expected of 'orderly girls' in Hungary: to be a good pupil and study to find a proper profession. Anna's path of cultural education was similar to both Liza's and mine, in which studies and spare time music and language studies were particularly important aspects. Anna did not begin her life story 'from-the-cradle'; after introducing herself she began to speak of her thoughts on the Swedish university study system, pointing out aging in relation to being a student. She was a student and felt somewhat old in her study group. She found this problematic, to start with; it was certainly fun to be among young people, but age segregated her from them, she felt. Still, when making a comparison between studying in Hungary, where entering studies was age-restricted, she reconsidered the age factor and concluded that she actually appreciated the age-neutral Swedish education system. To break up the storyline on university studies and structure the interview, I asked Anna to speak of her background in Hungary. She began to provide a linear story about her early childhood, family life and schools.

Anna was born in 1964 in Budapest, where she lived with her parents. She was raised and socialised by school and parents in the capital city of Hungary. Accordingly, her story is a story of an urbanised young person, a girl with a strong and independent personality, going her own way in developing the self. Similarly to Liza, she was also '*egyke*' [an only child], working out her own way with her parents. Listening to the interviews with her, to the frequency of references to her parents, particularly to her father, whom Anna gave more detailed information about, I made the interpretation that her bonds to her father were apparently closer than to her mother. She still missed her father, who had died two years prior to the interview occasions. She visited her mother frequently in Budapest, where she lived.

Both Anna's parents moved from the countryside to the capital in the wake of city reconstructions owing to the destruction caused by WW2. They settled in Budapest,

living with relatives at first, both studying at the university. They met in 1956 and got married the same year, Anna recounted. Because of my interest in the different versions of discourse on the Uprising in 1956, I asked Anna too for her version. She delivered a story with entirely different connotations than what I had expected to hear, reflecting on the event through the lenses of family history. It soon showed that the story of '56 in Anna's version was overwritten by the story of the romantic meeting of her parents. 'Trivialities' gained more importance than the ongoing historical events; the importance of which people were not completely really aware of at the time of their occurrence. In Anna's version, the focus lay rather on the parts of her family history linked to the year of 1956, than on the Uprising itself.

Anna began to tell the story of her parents' first meeting, which was a random occurrence. They were in their 20s, her future father was doing his military service of three years, while her mother was an economy clerk at the Budapest Soda Water Factory, which later produced Coca Cola, too, Anna added. The meeting between Anna's parents took place over the phone, finishing off with marrying after a short acquaintance on 26 November 1956. I remarked that the timing for getting married seemed somewhat odd, with regard to the serious tension that had been spreading in Hungary during the summer and autumn of 1956, causing general social unrest and anxiety in society and leading to the outbreak of the Uprising in October.

The small story of Anna's parents was about mundane occurrences in the middle of a time period which, without them knowing about it, soon escalated and became part of the canonical stories of history with tragic and irreversible consequences worldwide and ongoing controversial discourses:

... Well, anyway, in Nov... – the revolt of '56 ... well, they [her parents] see it from a totally different angle, because they were in love and for them this fact was much more important than the horrors around them. So, accordingly, their picture of the revolt is quite different from, let's say those who took an active part in it with weapons – albeit my father did defend the barracks for a while [doing military service], with 3-4 people against the Russian tanks, but then they evacuated, they fled to Buda, where he was for the time being living with relatives... so so – as I said, after three months of acquaintance [they married].

I cannot deny that my reaction to the story version was disappointment. I regard Anna's version a non-discourse of '56, along with the continuation of it; i.e. the told story of the *unimplemented flight* that Anna delivered. In the unrest caused by the uprising and the subsequent armed struggle, hundreds of thousands of Hungarians, insecure about the future, with Soviet soldiers and Hungarian freedom fighters fighting on the streets, planned and executed flight to the West. I asked Anna if her

parents had perhaps belonged to those who felt anxiety and considered leaving the country. I hoped to hear about the young couple's 'adventure-aptitude' and Anna told me a familiar filmic story of a planned but not executed flight, with transportation waiting in vain in the cover of the night. Anna described what she thought were the pragmatic reasons for her parents staying in Hungary:

But of course they did! [plan to flee] It was already arranged, it was agreed upon, the truck stood and waited on the street – and then for some reason they decided against it – you ask why? I don't know. I do not know – my father – it is most probable that my father – but this is just guessing ... it is not sure, it might have been – it could be obviously so that he had changed his mind about this later, when thinking back of this time – but my father has never been a mobile person – actually he never liked to travel or move about – uh – he was attached to his grandmother very much, it was she who raised him together with his aunt...

When listening to Anna speaking of '56, I was reinforced about my newly learned insights that '56 could be acquired, confiscated and used for fully private interests. Both Anna's and Liza's stories about '56 confirmed the 'controlled discourse'<sup>448</sup> that the Uprising has lately been treated with in the Hungarian discourse, both official and private. Listening to the different stories about '56, my reflections were that the narrative sequences confirmed the historiographical *hiatus* reinforced during the socialistic era; the ambiguity in people's relations to the revolt, also appearing in the narrations of both interlocutors from Hungary. One consequence to draw is that the *hiatus in discourse* regarding '56 today is not necessarily an outcome of people taking sides ideologically, as the narrations of families loyal to the system (like Liza's) and others who were indifferent or neutral to it (like Anna's) confirm that the indoctrination during socialisation<sup>449</sup> to relate uniformly to the 'discourse on '56' was successfully executed in Hungarian society. They actualise also the relevance of the wide discussions in Hungary in the present day about the ignorance and unawareness that characterizes people's knowledge of the so-called 'events of '56'<sup>450</sup>, seemingly serving as a divide between the younger and the older generations. Not only can they

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<sup>448</sup> R. Young. *Untying the Text* (1971) from M. Foucault, *The Order of Discourse*, arguing for the controlled production, selection and distribution of discourses in societies in order to "ward off its powers and dangers", similar to the *elhallgatott történetek* in Hungarian contexts.

<sup>449</sup> Both the individual's basic and political socialization.

<sup>450</sup> Strange as it may seem, it is still under discussion as to whether one should call it revolt, revolution, uprising or simply hooliganism.

be viewed from different aspects<sup>451</sup>, either from a post-Marxist view<sup>452</sup> or from a post-socialist view<sup>453</sup>, but also from private or collective views with totalitarianism as frame theory, which increases the ambiguities.

The Uprising might be said to have found its place in the history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but no innovative versions have been presented yet in the field of scientific interpretations. The divide, post-Marxist and post-socialist, has ruled in the past few decades, with the ‘events’ not exactly finding the right category: revolution, revolt or uprising. This confirms that the Hungarian revolt of 1956 has become an open historic event, with endless narrative versions and interpretations, through which thousands of individuals can find their own worldviews confirmed. One reason for the confusion might be, I feel, that the topic was dealt with with one official *voice*, creating an *enforced historical amnesia* by which other versions were expected to be restricted to the private and unauthorised discourse fields.

After these storylines on ’56 Anna continued to talk of her family. Not having siblings was due to the economic and housing problems of that period in Hungary, which limited people’s personal choices in the 1950s:

... typical for the time – and later too – that as long as one had no place of one’s own [flat], and to raise a child properly needed money, and I dunno what, and when they managed to get a flat, my mother was thirty-four, it was then that I was born, and after that there was no [other child]...

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<sup>451</sup> Rainer, M. J., and Somlai, K., (eds.) *Az 1956-os forradalom visszhangja a Szovjet tömb országaiban* [The echoes of the Hungarian revolution of 1956 in the countries of the Soviet bloc]. *Évkönyv* XIV. 2006-2007. Budapest. 1956-os Intézet [Institution of 1956].

<sup>452</sup> Providing an alternative theory to Marxism; often applied by ex-Marxists, taking Marxism as the departure for a “critique” of Marxism. They reject socialism, as a failure, and outdated ideologies; dismiss the idea of class struggle; distance themselves from corrupted state power; emphasise local struggle for democracy; stress the values of culture and various identities (race, gender, ethnicity, sexual preference, etc).

<sup>453</sup> The underestimation of the potential impact of national issues had a huge negative impact on the political legitimacy of the Hungarian left in the entire communist period. Lacking national political culture, the new social strata of communists (cadre) were seen as hostile to national claims (Jewish representation among communists becoming a taboo in the Party), being ‘anti-national’, supported by the Russian army, perceived as occupants by Hungarians. This was the soil in which the Uprising in 1956 found its roots: an anti-Soviet, anti-Stalinist, and anti-communist ideology, emphasising nationalist interests. See more in Bodoni, S., *Sovietization and nationalism in Hungary*. The Historical Journal, 52, 3 (2009), pp. 789 – 797. Cambridge University Press 2009.

Anna said about herself, using irony, that she was not only a hard-working pupil, but to top it all, she also was a “nice little girl”; even though she was unusual because she did not comply with gender expectations: “well, you see, dolls – I was not interested – I did not find them interesting, to dress them and undress them, I didn’t see what the point of it was...” She preferred to read books already from the age of five. She was a diligent pupil, studying in a school on the outskirts of the capital. Anna laughed loudly and with joy when she recounted happy memories of her first school and old teacher, singing and playing the piano for the gymnastic exercises. She was not over-industrious but bright enough to manage in school without a great effort, she remembered.

Anna’s mother did her part in her daughter’s upbringing; she was determined, with firm hands. No closer attachment can be discerned from the narrative regarding the relationship between Anna and her mother, while from the following short anecdote we get a picture of her mother’s rigour.

Anna was 6 years old, in her first year at primary school, and she had a dream to own a transistor radio named *Sokol*, a Russian brand, the only one available and very popular in Hungary. Anna was promised a radio under the condition that she got good marks (minimum average of 4.5 out of 5<sup>454</sup>) at the end of the first term in school. Anna studied hard, driven by the specific goal, and came home with an average mark of 4.2, just under the expected score. This was not satisfactory for her mother and Anna did not get the radio, she remembered, laughing about her experiences with the unfulfilled wish. She said that she was upset for a while, but then she drew the necessary conclusions that became the guiding philosophy of her life:

I did not break down, I cried a bit, I remember that I cried, and I felt awfully disappointed, but I did not make a scene, because I knew that with mother you could not do that, no hissy fits, and when recalling it, I know that already then I knew that ‘well, all right, if you want something, you’ll have to work for it...’

Anna worked diligently in school. Her interests included maths, chemistry, and her favourite topic, inspired by a dedicated teacher, which she continued studying at university: Hungarian language and literature and History. Anna told a curious story about how she and her classmates ended up studying history in high school – instead of Russian. Anna recalled with certain cheerfulness the young *gimnázium*<sup>455</sup> teacher

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<sup>454</sup> On a scale of 5, where 5 was excellent and 1 meant failed.

<sup>455</sup> A type of high school in Hungary, a grammar school, preparing for university studies.

with History and Russian as her main topics, fresh from university, offering the students in her first lesson in Russian a free choice between Russian and History. The students, among them Anna, chose History. The episode revealed surprising facts from this era. First, the optionality of Russian had been unimaginable in Hungary during the previous years<sup>456</sup>. Second, because the bold option was put forward by a fresh teacher in a class full of individuals whom she did not know, which could have been hazardous some years earlier. By the 1980s great changes had apparently taken place in Hungarian society. The choice of eminent students such as in Anna's class confirmed that the segregated school system, based on elite rearing, opposed the trite official slogan of social equality. Anna also demonstrated the existence of the general stereotype of the unpopularity of Russian in school, countering Liza's view on the Russian theme:

... nobody, and I mean *nobody* [her stress] wanted to study Russian; Russian was only – in high school, it was ... well, in our class, around fifty per cent studied Chemistry-German<sup>457</sup>, I dunno; around eleven, twelve [students]... and the other twelve studied Physics-English ... we were natural sciences-oriented and there was a kind of general class with weak students – and then there was a class for Russian. I was in the class for Chemistry and Maths, that was the... well, elite.

Choosing History and getting away with it shows that the acquiring of Russian was no longer prioritised by either the students or even the teacher who had Russian as her main subject. After appropriate negotiations with the students, the teacher gave each a mark 4 (with 5 being the best) in Russian, without expecting knowledge of Russian in return, Anna recalled, seemingly amused by the memory. The unorthodox handling of an “obligatory school topic” satisfied each part. The students had their marks that were necessary for a course to be treated as finished, while the teacher could give her attention to history, which she apparently preferred. Further studies were in demand and university studies were desirable, offering higher status and it was “obvious”, as Anna put it, that they helped secure a prosperous life in the future:

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<sup>456</sup> In the Hungarian education system topics had been centrally fixed and were not optional. Once stipulated, monolithic, inflexible and uniform study plans were distributed and applied in all schools and classes in the country and teachers had to stick to the centralized plans, without remake or revision (School Plan from 1983). Source: Neveléstörténet [History of ‘Bildung’; <http://magyar-irodalom.elte.hu/nevelestortenet/index.html#12>].

<sup>457</sup> In the Hungarian school system, two topics were paired as each teacher's specialties.



Well, in Hungary, it was decided already when you were fourteen or fifteen, where to go to study further. If you studied in a 'gymnasium' [grammar school], you obviously would continue in some way; because *gymnasium* did not give you a profession.

Anna's class was eminent, she pointed out in a matter-of-fact way, and twenty-three of the twenty-four of the students in her class studied further. The entrance exam in history at ELTE – the university where Liza studied economics at the same time – was difficult, but Anna had no problems with it. She studied hard for the next five years, very motivated from beginning to end, she explained. The storylines on studies are rather similar in both Anna's and Liza's narrations: taking studies seriously, omitting interpersonal relations from their narrations until explicitly asked about them. Both Anna and Liza presented rather the story of a student and less the story of a young woman.

Regarding leisure time activities, private interests, hobbies and extra-curriculum activities were obviously pursued by Anna as well; but for both women, studies were seemingly prioritised. Anna studied hard, but in her spare time she worked, too. This was a somewhat unorthodox behaviour for a student in Hungary at that time:

I was working all through [the student years], so when I began to work, I mean as in regular work, at a workplace, I got a shock. I mean money-wise [she laughs loudly]. I used to work all the time... and on the side... well, I earned loads of money.../.../ I worked like an angel; from teaching to cleaning. [I showed my surprise.] Yes! Sure, sure! So at that time I earned around five thousand forints monthly and my first salary [for a teaching job] was four thousand forints... / I gave lessons in Hungarian history, I tutored grammar school children, those who lagged behind, I dunno what... I did babysitting during the summers. I worked... at the C. [supermarket in Budapest] also at [inaudible, apparently referring to a hotel], they had just opened then and I was employed as a chamber maid, so I cleaned there --- well, I had to clean seventeen rooms daily, I just loathe changing bed clothes now, that's why my husband does it, it was only a small part of my job, you see – well, I earned enough money to pay for my driving license...

Along with studying, Anna worked for her own sake<sup>458</sup>, and used her earnings for her own purposes: such as for a driver's license and for trips abroad, which she took frequently, against the wishes of her father. She lived a comfortable life at her parents' place during her student years and also at the beginning of her professional life. Not having expenses for food or accommodation, and no family of her own, she lived comfortably, as evaluated by her below:

I lived at home, it was not, and it was no... well, you know my parents – when I studied – but it was not compulsory to work, if I had not wanted to do it... I could have managed but it was such a nice thing to have some money of your own [laughing loudly] --- so I travelled quite a lot... abroad, to my father's despair... [laughing heartily] he did not like it...

Anna's father did not like her traveling habits. "He was not much for moving around a lot" himself, and he objected to her travelling outside the borders of the country, mainly because he was "the anxious type", Anna added. But he did not stop her from traveling and she did a great deal of it. After finishing her studies, Anna began her self-governing life. She carried on living in the family home, but was relatively independent in choosing her lifestyle. Her career moves in Hungary, as presented in the chapter show a high degree of agency and self-confidence. She succeeded in building herself a unique professional career before moving to Sweden in 1994, where her life took a twist.

Anna was scarce on details of family histories, either because there were none, or she chose not to speak of them. In relation to her father's immovability, Anna mentioned a detail from the family history that can be interpreted as covert family circumstances. When speaking of the revolt of '56 and to my question as to whether her parents had planned to leave the country, Anna divulged that her father did not want to 'be a dissident' (by emigrating), not only because he did not like to travel, but also because of his family history:

He was not keen on travelling, he was very devoted to his grandmother, who actually raised him along with his aunty – I mean, I think that ... as... the grandparents were owners of a mill [prior to 1945] – and all that was taken away from them... they had nothing to live on, because they of course did not get any compensation.../.../... so it was my father and an uncle of his, I

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<sup>458</sup> In Hungary it was uncommon for students to work while studying; partly because of the amount of studies making it rather difficult to both study and work at the same time, and partly because of family support that made (free) full-time studies possible.

mean a child to them [the grandparents] the two together were providing for them ... in my opinion this might have played a role in that he did not want to go. I do not believe it had anything to do with my mother because she has always been much more mobile, she could get used to strange places easily – in other words she was not so afraid of change – my father, there was, I think, an element of fear of ‘what will happen; we cannot know how it will be’. No, they did not leave, they did not take the opportunity – there were fantastic house occupations in Budapest – they did not have a place of their own and there would have been great opportunities for them – many people left and flats stood empty, and people just moved in – so, there you are!

In Anna’s understanding, the reason for her parents not leaving Hungary in 1956 was a bit of family history, which she recounted in a pragmatic way. We recognise similar storylines from the other interlocutors in the study; revealing people’s conflicts with social realities in the 1950s, in Anna’s case in the Rákosi<sup>459</sup>-dictatorship. History repeats itself. Nationalisation deprived Anna’s grandparents of their property on the road to the ‘radiant future’, as the communist slogan went. The treatment was a common phenomenon in the socialistic countries of Central Europe; Pandora from Romania, and now both Liza and Anna from Hungary<sup>460</sup> recalled similar details from their family histories. Anna added also further information, regretting her parents’ ungainly inability to seize the opportunity arising in the capital in the wake of the revolt of ‘56, when many apartments left by their tenants (who either were dead, had been taken into care or custody by the system, or had defected), were up for grabs.

### Elitist Social and Private Domestic Roles

Theories on social roles assume that gender roles reflect a societal distribution of males and females into different roles, such as breadwinners, homemakers, as well as occupations (2000: 125<sup>461</sup>), accordingly women often are distributed *female roles* alongside *gender roles* (gender stereotyping); *doing gender*. This was not given too much discursive space in either Anna’s or Liza’s narration. There is no explicit indication of their perception of having lower power or status on account of their gender. Also, the narrative sequences on home-making roles are limited and the little

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<sup>459</sup> Mátyás (Rosenfeld) Rákosi (9 March 1892 – 5 February 1971), Stalinist, despotic communist leader, who steered Hungary with a personal cult and an iron fist. His policy lay behind the unrest in 1956 leading to the Uprising.

<sup>460</sup> I recognized the story details, as my family had also had multiple experiences of this treatment.

<sup>461</sup> Eckes, T., and Trautner, H.N. (eds.). *The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender*. Lawrence Erlbaum Ass. New Jersey, 2000.

that there is said about it, is not presented as something negative. Despite this, we can recognise relational accounts and gender stereotypes pointing at the gender of all narrators in the study. In summarising the core-Hungarian women's' narrations, one has the feeling that the gendered or few *feminist* issues included, if considered as problematic, could be reversed by the narrators and presented as not being a problem at all, utilising their selected social and private domestic roles to their advantage ('positive illusions', Taylor (1983<sup>462</sup>)).

Anna did not treat problematic questions as gender-related, similar to Liza. For example, the fact that Anna, with several university degrees behind her, hesitated to go out and seek a job in Sweden, was not linked to gender discrimination, but rather to her social status as *invandrare*. Anna, similar to Liza, did not treat eventual worries about finding employment and the alternating unemployment periods in Sweden either as gender-related or feministic; instead, they both tied these experiences to their "foreigner"-status.

#### *Gender-related issues in Anna's narration*

Regarding gender-related issues, Anna presented unspecified views on her and her husband's roles in the family and presented a tolerant view towards female roles, following traditional (conservative) Hungarian expectations within the family, as previously presented in the section Hungarian Models of Social and Gendered Roles. Anna depicted a symbiotic (dependent) relationship with her husband, showing great consideration and appreciation towards him. Anna's attitude can be interpreted as in compliance with the Hungarian expectations of what is 'due' her social standing (wife of a lawyer) and what she, as an individual with certain social and cultural roles and expectations, saw appropriate to provide for her husband, as described in the segment Devoted Wife.

With regard to Anna's parents, there were not sufficient orientations in her narration to make an evaluation regarding doing gender. What we learn is that her father was a rather anxious, cautious and immobile individual, worrying about his daughter's conduct in relation to trips abroad; while her mother seemed to be a determined, dominant, stern and rather uncompromising individual, who allegedly might have governed family life more than Anna's father. Nevertheless, she was not portrayed in detail. Avoiding generalisations, I build the above inferences on the unbending attitude of Anna's mother referring to the episode with Anna's unfulfilled wish to get

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<sup>462</sup> Taylor, S. E. (1983), Adjustment to threatening events: A theory of cognitive adaptation. *American Psychologist*, 38, 624 – 630.

a radio and on Anna's few short remarks about her mother's limited interest in aiding her in the looking after of Anna's children.

When I asked Anna to tell about her childhood and adolescence, she explained that she perceived her youth to be fairly private and free. She used her agency, e.g. she travelled a lot, often against her father's approval. Anna described her mother as 'the toughest one of the two', and her father was 'mellow', seeming to be more of a background figure. To my inquiry about relations with the children and her partner, Anna was generous with information, even though she also avoided emotional and intimate details. Anna talked about her husband L. to a more limited extent than the children in her narration, but the received information was inspiring enough to look into the feminine roles that Anna included in her storytelling. Anna did not treat the dilemma of 'mother and work, or mother or work' as gender-related. In some vague way she instead tied it to her immigrant status, choosing the domestic realm that provided her with emotional and economic security.

### *Discourse on Mindful Mothering*

Anna delivered a less enthusiastic notion of motherhood, speaking of a feeling of insufficiency. Nonetheless, her narration revealed a devoted mother, lurking behind the unsecure feelings, focusing on the rearing of her children. Anna portrayed herself in the mother's role as a somewhat drained, incomplete, sometimes unaccomplished kind of mother, working hard to cope with responsibilities that she had tried to deal with by herself at the outset. Anna referred to her children by their names; she had a pair of twin boys, which made gender-identification of the children less complicated than in Liza's case, who avoided the child's gender specificity. Despite the fact that Anna did not consider herself an adequate mother, she declared she was a good mother, taking full responsibility for and care of her children, assuring them a solid basis for a future in a Hungarian context. Concretely, this meant undertaking, together with her husband, the children's education in the culture and history of Hungary. The little that was said about domestic tasks revealed that Anna and her husband shared responsibility for the rearing of the children, just as for everything else; such as making the beds, doing the shopping, going to Hungary and on holidays, participating in cultural activities. Particularly important was to involve the children in the latter; but also travels and holidays together were seen as important from a child-raising viewpoint, Anna said. She illustrated her view when talking of their upcoming trip to Hungary. She revealed that she had already bought tickets to the Budapest Opera, "with the boys" to see

The Blue Bird [unspecified version] – God, I would go mad if they had to grow up without going to the opera – I used to have [while living in Budapest] a monthly pass for the opera, L. [her husband] too, you know...'

Anna marked with an embarrassed laugh that this information might sound somewhat elitist (snobbish); to take her children to the opera might sound strange in a Swedish context, implying that visiting operas together with children was perhaps not a usual activity for a Swedish family, but it was important to them.

Anna, similar to Liza, was keen on the children establishing and maintaining linguistic proficiency and competence in Hungarian by speaking only Hungarian with them. These objectives have been relatively easy to maintain for Anna. Both parents being Hungarian, they talked “Hungarian, only Hungarian, yes only Hungarian” at home. The children learned Swedish first in the kindergarten. They were now familiar with Swedish and alternated between the two languages. In public they used Swedish, and at home Hungarian. Their proficiency in Hungarian was uneven in Anna’s evaluation: the older brother could talk “*better and more*” [Hungarian], while the younger brother often mixed the two languages and she did not think that he talked well enough for his age. Still, Anna was satisfied with their adjusting to Hungarian when they were in Hungary, but she was not satisfied with their proficiency in their mother tongue in general. She illustrated it by a small story about coming home from Hungary. In the previous two years she had noted that after having spent a longer time in Hungary, on the way back to Sweden the children switched to Swedish in the car:

They acted that we were going to Sweden and there were four people sitting in the car; the two Hungarian parents and then the two of them ... yeah, well...

Anna found this behaviour disturbing; on the way to Hungary the children spoke Hungarian, mixed with a few Swedish words; while on the way back to Sweden they used almost complete Swedish without mixing it with Hungarian.

I asked Anna how the children adjusted in Hungary, and Anna revealed that they spent a significant time with their grandma. This “was important” for them, Anna said, and also the contact with the six to eight children in the neighbourhood where they lived in Hungary. Anna and her husband have, with their “two hands”, built a playground in their garden so all the children, all about the same age as theirs, could come and play together. Anna added, to underline her happiness about the established contacts of her children: “don’t you know it, we have wonderful pictures [of the children together]... yes, there are pals [in Hungary]”.

### *Role of a Mindful Mother*

Anna, in contrast to Liza, delivered a lengthy, coherent narrative on how she experienced her role as a mother, describing her unfulfilled feeling about becoming

one. She revealed that this was her first and her husband's third marriage, and it was rather her who was keen on having children. Her husband's children from other marriages were adults and he was doubtful about having more. Anna "talked him into it", promising not to burden him with the care of children. She obviously succeeded in persuading her husband of the necessity of having shared children even though he was...

reluctant, but I swore big, he sometimes reminds me mockingly [imitating her husband] 'darling, I will be doing everything!' It was of course inexperience speaking, I realised that later... He always used to tell me, 'believe me, our life is going to be changed', and I told him it was impossible.

Anna remembered, laughing for a long time at her own naivety, that after the birth of the twins she recognised that her original expectations were nothing compared to reality. The birth itself was already something else, we learn from Anna's coherent, long story, in an anecdotal form, about her experiences with giving birth. She had a great deal to criticise the treatment in the hospital about, painting a negative picture of the Swedish mother care system that belied her expectations. She put forward serious accusations, showing her discontent with the reception at the Swedish hospital. The experiences there supported her generally critical attitude towards certain Swedish ways, which she frequently returned to, pointing at the negative effects of them. Anna recounted in an open way the somewhat unorthodox context of the childbirth experience which began when she was on the way to a course in economics at the university. Unexpectedly her waters broke and she realised that she had to rush to the hospital, where she gave birth to two boys without any complications. The nightmare began afterwards, which she summarized as follows:

I was kept [in the hospital] for eight days; during the eight days, not once did they change the bed clothes, not under one single fresh mother... it was 1998 when I gave birth, it [the state of Swedish health care] went so far that they did not change the linen in eight days, and you know very well the queues that are building up to get the most urgent operations... Not to speak of the impossibility of having a discussion about an appropriate time for an operation at your convenience... it [hospitalization] was very-very unpleasant... and – well – it was not at all a nice experience. A lot of nurses came and opened the curtains, they introduced themselves, they asked how I felt and before I could answer, I was facing their back... there was a new nurse every four hours, – well, in other words...

Anna underlined her contempt about the whole experience at the hospital with paralinguistic means and facial expressions. She constructed these experiences in detail, apparently deeply shaken still. The list of her criticisms was long. She was denied food after giving birth; she was treated with disrespect directly after the delivery, when she had to walk along a very long corridor to her room; and after she had just about managed to stagger to the room with her clothes and coat on her arm, it turned out that the room had not been prepared for her. She was then instructed to sit in the corridor with her personal belongings on her knees, weak, hungry and tired, and wait for a bed.

Nevertheless, the worst was yet to come, when some hours after birth, Anna and her husband were going to visit their new-born children. Because they had been born prematurely, they were placed into incubators for a short while after birth in the neonatal department, which the parents were not informed about, so when they arrived at the ward room full of new-borns they could not find their own babies. Anna became sick and faint of stress, thinking that the babies had died: “an awful experience”, which still made her upset, she added. As it was, her new-borns were healthy enough to be soon brought back to the ward units and the parents could breathe out and relax.

After the birth of the twins, life changed in every respect for both parents. Anna was not quite prepared for the changes; she had thought life would carry on as before and she would manage to ‘fix everything’ by herself, sparing her husband any related worries. She laughed heartily and at length when she spoke of her naivety in this respect, concluding that she had soon recognised that “it was inexperience talking through [her] mouth”. Anna had no experience of children; there were no small children in her family, so she had “no idea”, but she “learned, yes, indeed”. Anna de-idealised the romanticized mother’s role, too, calling the picture of “the happy mother feeding her child” an overstatement:

the picture, you know, about the mother breast-feeding her child, a happy smile on her face, a deep feeling of happiness forever in life! – Well, the suckling did not work out – I tried, but it was not ... I fell apart all the time, I was nervous about everything; if they did get enough to eat, if they did not get enough, why one would just scream all the time, and why was it that the second one was able to eat while the first one continued to scream... I tried [breastfeeding] during the first six months ... as long as I had food for them ... Anyway, I have no pleasant and wonderful feelings in relation to breastfeeding them [Anna began to laugh high and long so that she could hardly finish the sentence] – it was just awful!



Summarising her negative experiences from this period of her life with “awful” memories, she added that she hoped that some day she might remember also the pleasant ones. On top of all that, she also felt alone. The same experience was pointed out by Borka: when she was a fresh mother, no external help was available to her; she felt perpetually anxious, afraid, tired and exhausted. It should, however, be pointed out that this anxiety has no similarity to the anxiety that Natalia Baranskaya writes about in *A Week Like Any Other* (1989), describing Russian women’s eternal anxiety, recognised by many women outside Russia, too, tearing from work to home and back again to combine child care and a job. Anna escaped because she chose personal migration from society exactly in order to avoid that kind of anxiety.

In Hungary, parents often help out when their children have their own kids, and Anna was no exception. Her parents came to Sweden soon after the birth of their grandsons, but their visit made things worse, Anna added. She mentioned that their stay was too short, just a few months, and her mother was “anyway not much help”, without explicitly explaining why she thought so. Anna praised their friends, actually neighbours in Hungary, for their help when the family actually went “home” (to Hungary), with the three-month-old babies, staying for a longer time there. Despite the shaky start, Anna “learned” how to be a mother, which she did to the full; justifying her choice of full-time mothering by shielding herself off from working outside the domestic domain.

Anna criticised several items she perceived at this time, for example experiences in the hospital, then the insufficient coping strategies, such as network support from family and friends. She did not mention the possibility of hiring external help, which perhaps was not an option. On the description that Anna gave of herself as a mother, I would say that we get a picture of a somewhat ‘unprofessional’ and insecure mothering, with low self-esteem, much anxiety, and perceived shortcomings. Nonetheless, Anna accepted full responsibility for being a mother and did her best to act as one. Despite self-criticism, she seemed to be a content and satisfied parent, having the welfare of the children as her focus. When speaking of future expectations, she expressed great hopes for bringing up her children in Hungary. In that and in several other aspects of the domestic sphere, she had the help of her husband. He kept on working as a private lawyer, and as such he was able to manage his time so they could share family responsibilities.

The proper upbringing of the children was important for both parents, and it was a decisive factor in their choice to repatriate. Anna had been preparing for it for a long time, and her wish was supported by her husband. The final decision to move now was taken because of the children’s age; moving would become more difficult after they had begun school, Anna explained.

## *Devoted Wife*

In addition to raising children, the role of wife was a task that filled Anna's time. She undertook and cultivated this role with great determination; the task was both important and pleasurable. Anna supported her husband in his career, as well, as the bulk of his professional engagements as a lawyer regarded Hungarians living in Sweden, and Anna kept a contact net among Hungarian exiles.

Anna arrived in Sweden on account of her marriage to L. in 1994. Anna's husband, an exile Hungarian lawyer, came to Sweden as a fugitive, together with his family (wife and children) at the end of the 1960s. He settled in Sweden and after having had odd jobs for some time, he began to study law and became a lawyer. Anna met him through her work; her job in Hungary in the 1980s and 1990s involved contacts with international lawyers and her future husband was one of them. After divorcing his wife, he and Anna married in Hungary in 1994. She became a Commuter after two years of long-distance marriage, during which she was a Wanderer with a "ferry-identity" between two homesteads.

The marriage was Anna's first and L.'s third; L. had been living in Sweden for almost forty years when he married Anna. When speaking of her marriage, I came to think of the possibility to get a glance into the romantic side of Anna's life, and asked her about previous boyfriends in Hungary, as she had omitted those from her narration so far. She answered that she did not have any, "as a matter of fact you can say that my husband was my first love". She had had some relationships, but "nothing came out of it"; she was "interested in boys but ... not just any kind of boy..." I asked her in what way L. was special to deserve her attention. Anna said that:

he was such an intellectual – and even now, it is so marvellous that [he] forges me, he has travelled a lot – and the physical part is also important, it has to work, but the most important thing is that you are not sitting beside one another like mute fish and that his areas of interest are the same as mine...

Travelling was an activity that they shared an interest in, and it served as education for the children. Prior to journeys, the parents prepared them by showing educational films and giving them information about the place they would visit. One place the family often visited was a small village in Székelyföld (Séklerland in Romania), where Anna had been with friends when she was young and had experienced the harshness of the Romanian political system. They came into conflict with the Romanian

Securitate<sup>463</sup> for singing the “Székely [Seklars’] national anthem” at a railway station in 1982, which was seen as an offence against the Romanian state. They were interrogated by the Securitate and they were “thrown out” of Romania, not welcome back for quite a while, Anna explained.

The situation has changed after 1989 and EU membership in 2007, and Székelyföld is now a permanent destination for her and her family; they visit the region every year; and they had plans to visit it right after moving back to Hungary. The reasons were emotional:

... as I say, every year – with the kids, the children love, they love it very much to go there, and there is a place, I don’t know how to explain this, it has an effect on me, I just lose all my strength and a calm, such a calmness takes over me... It is in Gyimesbükk at the *thousand-year-old borders*<sup>464</sup> ... at the Tatros stream... there is a mountain and a valley surrounded by vast meadows...

Anna talked lyrically with emotion about this place that had made a huge impact on her and which had become an important place of recreation for them. Apparently, Anna found pleasant family projects which they all enjoyed, having the *Bildung* of the children in the forefront of her thinking. To my question about her future activities in Hungary, she revealed that she had no plans to take up work in Hungary either; she wished to enjoy life in Hungary in the house with a beloved garden. Later, she admitted that even if she did not plan to have employment, she knew what she was interested in doing in Hungary, involving other kinds of interest rather than work.

## Professional Life in Consolidated Socialism

But Anna had once had a working career, and a rather exclusive one, I thought, when she talked of it in a very detailed way, which made me call it her master narrative. After her university studies she created a new career identity and business domain for herself, seizing the opportunity with the new political and economic order that opened up after the system collapse in 1989. She began her working career in the

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<sup>463</sup> Feared secret police (Departamentul Securităţii Statului, 1944-1989) in Romania.

<sup>464</sup> The border to the East in Székelyföld is called this by the Székely people (reminding them of the easternmost borders of historical Hungary).

socialistic system, in the second half of the 1980s, recognising and utilising unexpected opportunities within the new order, making money in different ways.

In the sequence on her working life, Anna included in her storytelling her perception of working in the last days of a state-owned company in its death throes, sticking to the rules of the socialistic system now in decay, before turning over a new page and using agency in establishing herself as a professional. Anna's story revealed an absolutely unique life development (for Hungary); it might be taken as representative of the story of the new generation of Hungarian women who came 'of age' when the old socialistic system broke down and new opportunities appeared. Anna became an utterly successful young '*szingli*' [single person], achieving a very good reputation in business and a good economic standard of living in the transition from *state socialism to democracy*, as we learn from her own presentation. When listening to her story of success in Hungary and comparing it to her life in Sweden, a question arose in my mind: what were the reasons for her detaching herself from her previous self and establishing a totally different lifestyle in Sweden? To find an answer, we will have to listen to Anna's story.

Anna's 'small story' about her working situation and ex-workplace during the last years before the system change in Hungary was told with a lot of irony, sarcasm and malice. Her story began with the time after finishing university studies. She was looking for a job as a teacher and was reading the ads on the bulletin board that offered a salary of "three thousand and eight hundred forints per month", she recalled; "a catastrophe", she called it. But as it was "necessary to work", and "one cannot go on as before", like how she lived before when studying and doing odd jobs at the same time (which actually brought in more money than the teaching job offered): "You have to have a workplace, otherwise they would brand you as being a work-avoider<sup>465</sup> and then you would be punished ... but it looked bad..."

Displeased with the salary offered within her profession, she looked for a job of her preference utilising her linguistic knowledge in Italian and German. She found an administrative job at the Monetary Centre of Hungary (MCH), a state-owned company with a bad reputation. The name was a *Nom de guerre*, Anna explained with a malicious smile on her face, implying that the name was meant to cover up its other, real operations. MCH had a "bad story, a very, very bad one in the rear side", but "I did not give a damn, I began to work there". Her department at the company operated with "two groups: one dealing with Eastern European, another with Western European inheritance matters". The MCH was known in Hungarian society as a governmental office, with employees with the *correct* ideological background.

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<sup>465</sup> Work-avoider was the status of those who for various reasons did not take a job. This was against the law and, accordingly, it was punishable by a jail sentence.

Aware of this, I asked Anna if she had been a member of the Party, which I assumed she would have had to be, to be employed at the company. Anna's answer revealed that times were rapidly changing in Hungary in the 1980s; reminding us of Liza's storytelling, who also implied that at this time, with the many changes, Party membership began to be optional within a successful professional life:

... eh, well, at that time, I mean it was in eighty-six when I began to work, there was not a soul who came to me to make me join [the Party] or whatever... that I should become a member of the Party... kind of foxy-maxy<sup>466</sup>, I mean the Marxist-Leninist [education system] – because we used to have a thing like that... even in technical college or college there was... /.../...well, there was no one approaching me, but I can very well imagine that those previously, my old colleagues, I can well imagine that those who began [to work] during the 60s, well – they had to join the Party, it was compulsory, but as I tell you, I was never approached with such a kind of [offer]...

Anna admitted she suspected, correctly, that membership was a prerequisite at earlier stages, but by the time she began to work, the ideological criteria had lost their attraction (and usefulness). Nevertheless, the kind of socialistic political influence was still at work when she joined the company; which becomes apparent in the subsequent narration.

### **Building a Career and Career Fulfilment in Transitional Hungary**

Anna explained what her work was about at the department dealing with matters of Western countries: she had to handle inheritance issues for deceased 'foreigner Hungarians' (i.e. *disszidens Hungarians*<sup>467</sup>). The concept was that if an individual with Hungarian roots living abroad, meaning in the West, with heirs in Hungary died, the Hungarian heir was not allowed to deal with his/her inheritance directly. Instead, either the heir or the foreign lawyer representing the deceased had to contact MCH, which then intermediated between the parties to get the legacy. MCH took a percentage of the inheritance for their involvement. Anna, who was competent in several languages, was entrusted with several Western countries: Italy, USA, Israel, Spain, Norway and Sweden. She stood in contact with legal executives and lawyers in all these countries. One of the contacts among the lawyers was L. in Sweden, her

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<sup>466</sup> Sarcastic mocking expression in colloquial Hungarian for the Marxist-Leninist cadre education system at the universities, obligatory for those who wanted to pursue a career.

<sup>467</sup> Those who fled for political or economic reasons.

future husband. Anna worked for the company for many years, and she “enjoyed it a lot”, despite an unpleasant experience at the start of her employment. Anna recounted the experience in a story bubble; the ‘small story’ painted the picture of murky business transactions, with the potential to bribe and misuse power, as inherited from the previous system but still at work in the transitional time. These kinds of details were kept silenced in Hungary during state-socialism, so I found it most rewarding to hear them from an insider.

Anna was out shopping with her mother one evening, and when they came home, they met an impatiently waiting, upset father, informing her that two detectives had come looking for her. They did not say why, but they instructed him to drive Anna to a specific police station as soon as she came home, because they wanted to talk to her. Anna arrived with her father at the police station where they were received in a cordial way. They informed Anna that they wanted to interview her as a witness about some colleagues and their dealings at MCH. She realised after a while that some of her colleagues were allegedly involved in some nasty business that smelled of embezzlement. Anna was new at the company, she was not suspected, still, she was “interrogated” – Anna’s expression – for several hours in the night. She found the whole business very upsetting and scary, especially as one of the interrogators made a comment that she conceived as sexist, directed against her, which she found nauseating. She called the police “disgusting”. Somewhat shaken, finally she was free to go and her father, who had waited for her outside, drove her home.

Anna put the whole thing with the police behind her and she continued working at the company for several years. The colleagues involved in the embezzlement had received their punishment, she learned.

At the end of the 1980s, when the political system began to deteriorate, embezzlement on various levels continued in order to fry the “last fat fish in the muddy waters”, Anna implied. Well-connected people from the *Cursed*<sup>468</sup> era continued to enrich themselves in the transitional system, too:

they changed the company into a share-holding company with 5 million in capital, I am sure my previous boss bought it for himself – a kind of Gyurcsány<sup>469</sup>-figure, only on a smaller scale – oh, yes!

New bosses came and old ones went “because of this circus [the embezzlement business] and also the political changes”. Finally a machine engineer took over:

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<sup>468</sup> *Atkos* [Cursed], Hungarian colloquial for the socialistic system (1945-1989).

<sup>469</sup> PM in Hungary from 2004 to 2009 with a dubious reputation.

a very shrewed guy he was, he always knew where to put down his behind, he was good for nothing. Nevertheless, he travelled in one year several times around the world, from America to Australia, on the company account, from the money we earned ...

MCH fought on to survive by reorganising, but the time came when nothing helped any more, and the company vanished into oblivion. Anna was out of a job, and she had to look for a solution for herself. She soon came up with one, combining her humanist and economist experiences. She established a company of her own; and not any kind of company, it turned out. Anna exclaimed with a lot of pride in her voice: "I opened the first Collection Agency in Hungary!" The 'K.M. Saga' she called it; Saga after The Forsyte Saga<sup>470</sup>, but the source of the K.M.-part she could not recall.

It was impressive to try to open a private company at all during those times, recalling that Hungary was then (and 20 odd years after the system change still is) an underdeveloped country with regard to entrepreneurship<sup>471</sup>. The 1990s were difficult transitional times in Hungary. The old system did not work any more and the new one had not begun to work yet, and remained so for quite a while<sup>472</sup>. I was really overwhelmed by this information and asked her how this idea of hers worked with her as a historian. I was surprised by her explanation, in which she understated her capabilities, while describing herself as a very resourceful young woman:

Historian, well, yes, you see, I did not become a thing [laughing loudly] – because, when I get fed up with this too, then I go over to the other side and this way, I actually never get anywhere. That is the way it is; no need to cry over spilled milk [frowning] – at that time it was possible to open a business of one's own, not awfully much capital was needed to do that, and eh... well, I enjoyed my work, alongside the inheritance thing... Uh, well, we dealt with a lot of things that could bring in money...

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<sup>470</sup> Galsworthy, J., (1922)

<sup>471</sup> Fostering Gender Equality Meeting the Entrepreneurship and Microfinance. Country Report, 2007. On a historical basis there is no tradition; socialism limited private entrepreneurship, and on top of that, the totally provisional paternal state organisation made it unnecessary for people to take risks or be innovative.

<sup>472</sup> Many business opportunities that opened up around the system change soon failed.

Anna explained that the Western Insurance company contacted her firm whenever a Hungarian in the West had, for example, an accident, and “we took care of insurance deals, at least I, I pumped out so much money...” Anna recalled with humour that she “made the Italians mad once” by her persistence, but she enjoyed her work very much, all parts of it.

The most disagreeable bit was to drive in money after hospital treatment; the nasty Westerners [Western citizens] came to Hungary, for example, they became dead drunk sometimes, and then they woke up in detox... which costs money. And they left, without a thought, without paying... we were the only company the hospitals would send their bills to – and can you imagine the amount that was?

This was a devaluation of her competences when she talked about “not becoming a thing” in the above segment, presenting an image that conflicted with the picture I had formed of her. She confessed to having low self-esteem by presenting herself as never becoming anything because of her poor endurance. I did not agree with this image of her. As a paradox, she had just admitted her ability to recognise a niche in business life that could be exploited. By implementing a totally new concept in Hungary, Anna established a very successful business, indeed.

She disclosed her business concept with satisfaction in her elated way; explaining the fun it was to drive in money from Western citizens who had incurred debt in Hungary by not paying. She worked out a unique business concept; i.e. she sent letters of claim to the individuals, and if they did not respond, she contacted the mayor of their home town! This proved to be a very effective way to get money from the Western citizen, she told me, laughing and giggling very loudly and at length. She continued the story of triumph and revealed that the business was successful, with fast financial development for her from a normal wage-earning working girl to a millionaire. Her ego was boosted, she felt happy, and she ended up being ‘responsible for four families’ (her staff), she explained. The money helped her buy a flat of her own in the middle of Budapest, where flats were rather expensive and hard to come by.

Anna “loved it [the work] very much”; she enjoyed lying awake at night, tired, yet still thinking of new ways to do business and make money. It was difficult and her days were filled with work, as she had to build up the business from scratch as it was a completely new niche for Hungarians, but her new business concept worked very well for several years while she was practically alone in the market.

Anna kept some old and loyal customers from the MCH-times for network utilisation, and she utilised her female role as part of her business concept in order to prosper, she revealed. The latter was built on her presumptions about the social



construct of gender markers; she used it to establish successful business relations with male customers. Achieving good business relations with men confirmed that feminine identity, paired with social stereotypes about women, can in certain contexts be beneficial in doing business. She explained that she regarded men only as “the customer”, and the majority of her partners and directors were men, “who, well, I visited [them] with the [business] proposition: ‘...look, we have this company...’” She imitated her approach to them in front of me, demonstrating it in a performative way, how she manipulated them by rhetoric means, such as changing the pitch of her voice to a whiny tone and changing the posture of her appearance in order to make them susceptible to her business proposition. She influenced the male business associates, pleading for their sympathy by her femininity. She evaluated also the situation with female partners, who were scarce and more difficult to deal with:

[Y]ou see, ... all were men. All of them were men – I had a problem if it was a woman [as a counterpart]. It was very rare, but it happened – there, there – I mean when dealing with men, it was much more pleasant, I got always a much nicer response from them, than from women...

With regard to business, the hard part was not finding customers and writing contracts, but keeping them, Anna explained. Nevertheless, she pursued her career as a business woman and found it very rewarding, she said cheerfully when recalling those days of success which she enjoyed for years in Budapest. Anna kept on driving her business also after she married L. in 1992, staying on in Hungary. Two years later she moved to Sweden, not to settle, just to share a greater part of life with her husband, Anna explained. Her mind was set on continuing with her work remotely and commuting between the two countries, spending a few months in each. Anna’s husband had already retired, but he kept on working now and then, in charge of his own time, which gave him the freedom to accompany Anna to Hungary on her business trips.

Commuting between two homesteads worked out to begin with. From 1994 on “for about a year, the company worked so that I was partly here in Sweden /.../ but you can’t manage a company in this way [laughing loudly]... I realised that!” After that it became more and more unmanageable to govern both marital life and business, and Anna began to lose control over the latter. One of the reasons was that competition had grown in great proportions in the meantime in Hungary, making her realise that she had to give it up. She sold the company and invested the money in a property right outside Budapest, a house that can be seen as a symbol for the shift in perspective in Anna’s life and as the basis for their future family life.

Anna’s story is a delightful story. I enjoyed listening to her description of working realities; revealing ambitions, abilities and solemnity about taking responsibility for

herself and others. The story showed the agency with which Anna established her independence in a hard environment that the transitory conditions brought about in Hungary. It revealed Anna to be self-confident, self-content and fearless, not knowing any boundaries when she worked to prove herself. Anna was successful from the beginning, but her career became routine-ridden, the field soon filled with competitors, and one should also add the fact that the general economic situation in the country went from bad to worse<sup>473</sup>. Marrying might have contributed to the downfall: the economic excitement perhaps lost its appeal for her, or she just shifted focus in life. Anna finally left business, to exchange it for the domestic realm. Despite Anna's own devaluation of her abilities, I find the story of her professional career to be a story of success. Nevertheless, the lessening of her achievements might have to be read in the mirror of her life development in Sweden.

### Acculturation and Integration into Swedish Society

Anna remembered that the first period of her life in Sweden included Swedish lessons at a *sfi*-course, followed up (on her husband's initiative) by an art course in Denmark, as she apparently had artistic talents. In order "to do something" she later began to study at a university in Sweden, without having concrete plans about what to use her new competence for, she explained. The *sfi*-course was not a success, she divulged. The system was not created for handling divergence, and Anna did not fit the fixed frames of the Swedish immigrant system. She was still engaged in company management abroad, while also trying to comply with the demands of the Swedish immigrant policy. Nevertheless, Anna kept on doing both, reaching a high enough level of linguistic competence to be admitted to university.

Anna was not convinced that the competence from *sfi* was useful for her, apparently already hesitating about whether she would ever look for work in Sweden, because she was not sure that she would get a job that was worth having. There was no economic pressure on her to work, and she was definitely not interested in some "charlady" job.

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<sup>473</sup> In 1994 reality caught up with dreams in Hungary and after some hopeful years, it showed the faults in the Hungarian economic developments. Owing to the EU's agricultural protectionist policy, Hungarian agriculture lost 40% of its capacity; the free market was opened, with an influx of high-quality high-price products; Hungarian industrial production fell by 30%. KGST [COMECON], the inner market within socialist countries, collapsed, taking ¾ of the country's income with it; and as a result 1.5 million people lost their jobs (rate of unemployment in 1990 was 1%, while within four years it rose to 10%). Loans from abroad rose from 20.4 billion USD in 1989, to 28.5 billion USD in 1994. (Source: Országinfo Kormányzati Portál, site of the Hungarian government. URL source: [https://orszaginfo.magyarorszag.hu/informaciok/gazdasag/gazdasagtortenet/gazdasagtortenet\\_3.html](https://orszaginfo.magyarorszag.hu/informaciok/gazdasag/gazdasagtortenet/gazdasagtortenet_3.html) 1.)

Besides, her husband “would not have permitted” her to work as such, she revealed. It should be noted that this utterance is not to be taken as an expression of patriarchal exercise of power, or of a man controlling the activities of his wife. In a Hungarian social and cultural context the expression “my husband would not permit me (to do something)”, means that the social position of a man or of a family would see it proper to keep up a certain social position. Simply: a lawyer’s or doctor’s wife does not do a cleaning job, because that would mean a bad reputation and degradation for both parties.

At the beginning Anna’s life was similar to any traditional immigrant life, but then again, not quite. She often had to interrupt her *sfi*-studies for frequent trips to her priority, the business in Hungary. Anna did not mind, as there was nothing at stake by not succeeding at the *sfi*-course, and by having no pressure to seek a job, Anna reversed employment problems and turned the disadvantages to her advantage. She used proper arguments for choices made in life and made it clear that she did not find the issue of making herself a career in Sweden worthwhile pursuing. In my interpretation this attitude was based on Anna’s wish to avoid putting herself at risk; i.e. finding herself in the pejorative status of a ‘foreigner’<sup>474</sup> (the word that Anna used instead of the word immigrant) who has been tested and rejected on the job market.

To “do something”, she began to study economics at the university. She found the initial times hard, she said; there was no place for her in the study groups that seemed to always be “full up” and nobody cared to include her. Anna did not know the reasons why. I wondered if it might have been the age difference, or language deficiency. Anna answered, after some time thinking, that the reason might have been that she was a *foreigner*. She excluded language problems, as even though she “did not speak Swedish that well” she “was not speaking gibberish”. On the other hand, there were only a few ‘foreigners’ at the course. She remembered some Poles and Arabs; she recalled writing a D-paper with a Polish guy. She rejected the idea of age difference; it could not be an obstacle, she thought, and her age could not be the reason “for, so to say, not accepting me”. Finally Anna came to the conclusion that...

it somehow was strange for them that a foreigner ... yes, I felt so, actually subsequently, I was not thinking about this then, I was just frustrated then within myself, and as I say, I was ready to pack it in after three weeks...

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<sup>474</sup> Anna refused the identification and the semantic content of the word ‘immigrant’, and I went along with it, doing the same by using the word ‘foreigner’ in our communication.

But she did not pack it in; she was 'stubborn'. "After having been accepted for the programme, I just would not give in..." Anna finally ended up with 'the group of left-overs', she remembered. She took resourceful mental revenge on the group in several ways later. Anna evaluated the market research course in Sweden by comparing it with studies in Hungary. She found the Swedish system much easier; it felt as if there was 'nothing... at stake', while at ELTE in Budapest, taking an exam was a "question of life-or-death". As an example, she explained that at her first exam, writing a paper on market research in Sweden, she was astonished to have five hours to do it: "such a luxury!", she exclaimed. She finished within three hours and panicked a bit when she looked around and saw that the other students had barely begun to put down their answers. At first she wondered if she had misunderstood the questions, but on checking them she could not see any inconsistencies in her answers. She handed in the paper and went home and some time later she got 'Väl Godkänt' (VG; the highest mark).

Anna was satisfied with herself, but not with the pace of work in the group. They also lacked dedication to the task in hand, she felt. She found herself 'tied up to a group, that was just awful', and when they had to write a pm [written project] together, Anna lost her patience. She was in a hurry "to go to Hungary the day after tomorrow and I wrote the pm by myself. And we got a VG, the only time the group received a VG!" The group that had not taken her seriously at first, and had even ridiculed her when she showed them the finished pm on product life cycle, changed its attitude towards her when they all received a VG.

Anna went on with her studies, interposed with trips to Hungary, and she felt quite satisfied with life. She kept on studying even when she got pregnant the next summer, getting good marks also in statistics, continuing on to the last moment before giving birth to her twins. She used her "big belly as a book support", with a sprained ankle to top it off, Anna recounted the memory cheerfully. After giving birth to her twins, she took a break for a while, returning soon to complete her studies in national economics. For gratification, she was "taken to Cyprus" by her husband. While pursuing her studies, a friend did the babysitting, taking the babies to her to be fed in study breaks. After lessons she 'ran home' to take charge of the children. Anna studied alongside minding the babies: "I did it like this all the way through", she concluded with satisfaction in her voice.

### **Opting out of Career Fulfilment in Sweden**

In my mind, all that work coming to nothing was a terrible waste of Anna's skills and efforts, therefore I asked her if she never felt tempted to make use of her many diplomas in Sweden. Anna explained her reasoning around the question as follows:

Well, you see, I have been studying, and the children, they began to grow, the children and, to tell you the truth, it developed more and more in my mind that I would absolutely not do anything like going to a workplace early in the mornings, at about eight, and going home at five in the afternoon – and then you would have a few weeks vacation per year, – uh, and then the children should be left at the kindergarten or child care institution of some sort and – well, no, I mean, no way! I did not even, I mean, I have not even tried to apply for employment at firms – I am not quite convinced that I would have been successful either [to find a job].... I have not even tried it, see, I cannot say that I have sent my application and nowhere, I was not even called in for an interview, how ugly these Swedish are, well, you know: I cannot tell you that, it is not part of my own experience ...

Listening to her reasoning, it is obvious that by her negative attitude to seeking work, Anna attempted to repress social exclusion at its source. It was also clear that Anna did not evaluate the fact of being without a job as a defeat. Rather, she turned it around, reasoning that staying at home and being a home-maker, prioritising the roles of wife and mother, was more rewarding for her than the alternative.

Anna finished the sequence of narration with a hearty big laugh, marking that she was aware of certain migrant and gender stereotypes hidden in her conclusions. She increased the stack of wasted knowledge with further university diplomas in Hungarian and History, making the list of missed opportunities even longer. To explain the easy-going way she had taken the neglect of eventual opportunities to make a career in Sweden, she added:

OK, an attitude like mine draws naturally upon the fact that I am not dependent on [working] – I mean I am certain that if I had to, I would go like an idiot ... to that – what do you call it, the place you seek employment and the papers, to apply ...that is sure, oh, dear God, well, sometimes my mother gets displeased about it: ‘you shouldn’t’ – and I thank God every day for.. [not needing to work] we are not millionaires, but... well, there you are!

The reported speech from her mother witnessed that her mother was not pleased and tried to get Anna to change her mind about the way of life she had, but Anna obviously found an approach to avoid hypothetical migrant stigmatisation ‘out there’, and she found self-realisation. Not having any economic pressure to seek work made it easier for her to choose this path. But Anna had also a pragmatic explanation, which she presented by recalling the example of the Polish girl and the other immigrants she had met at the *sf*-course. These people were ambitious and had “a brain too”; they had sent their CVs to “seventy-thousand places” without ever being invited for an interview.

I don't know why I would be different. It is possible that it would be the same [as with the others] and then there is another thing. If you get in to a company, a firm... well, it might be an ugly prejudice regarding the Swedes... 'cause one has experiences of one's own... I actually do not want to talk about this<sup>475</sup>, well, [at] a workplace, there are limits. There are limits and if you have ambition and you have your own ideas in your head [of how to do a job], they would knock it out of you. If you do not have a guardian angel, that is. And I did not have any, so to say ...

Anna revealed several hidden facts about her fear of seeking jobs; she apparently would have felt humiliated if she had not been summoned for a job interview. Anna disclosed that she actually had been working for some short periods for an institution at the university, and in a subtle hint she disclosed also her disappointment with this workplace, where she apparently did not feel appreciated for her abilities. And finally, she also mentioned the lack of a contact network, which made it difficult for foreigners to get employment; this is often an experience for migrants and exiles in a new country. All in all, there were several narrated motives behind her decision to stay at home and utilise her traditional female roles in order to find self-esteem and appreciation. Still, I presumed that the desire to be able to go to Hungary as often as she wished was also something that Anna considered, which she confirmed: "But of course! Absolutely!"

Obviously, career ambition and money-making were not something that Anna pursued in Sweden; she looked for substitutes, which she found within reach and where she still could benefit from her skills. She found one substitute within the domestic realm, another she sought within Academia. Ruling out having a career, I wondered what the most important things might be for Anna to do in the future. I think Anna's narration revealed that one important thing was the management of her cultural capital, Hungarianness, in Sweden – and another was the finalising of the family's 'national home-coming', i.e. repatriation to Hungary.

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<sup>475</sup>The 'experience of one's own' referred to here is among others about unpleasant experiences at the Institution of Central European Studies at LU; the narrator told me outside the narration.

# Migration, Exile, Ethnonational and National Homecoming

Anna approached the topic of ‘Hungarianness’ at various segments of her narrative, disclosing the extent of her attitude and actions in the preservation of her cultural capital. Obviously, emphasis on Hungarianness saturated her and her husband’s life, forging their attitudes and way of life with the prospect of leaving the transitory existence in Sweden and moving back to Hungary. To promote this, she raised her children according to a Hungarian rearing model<sup>476</sup>. She built her contacts in Sweden around Hungarians, she studied Hungarian at Lund University, she regularly shuttled between Sweden and Hungary. The family had a house in a small town outside Budapest that served as home for them whenever they went back to Hungary. Anna played a part in the ethno-national homecoming in Sweden too, by joining the local Hungarian association in her home-town, taking an active part in the association’s activities that focused on children.

## Migration and Repatriation

Each time I inquired about Anna’s (im)migrant experiences, Anna rectified me, correcting my word choice, refusing to see her movement to Sweden as migration. She had never left Hungary, and she had never settled in Sweden, she lived there as a “foreigner”, she explained. At one stage I asked her if she had felt sad when she left Hungary, and Anna answered that she was not sad then because...

... I never had the feeling that I had left [Hungary], I mean that I left and I would never be able to see [Hungary] again. I cannot tell you an example, because I don’t remember exactly, but when I came back here for two months [after having been to Hungary], I knew that after two months I would return back [to Hungary] and I have a place to go back to – and now, we are going to return to [Sweden, on holidays after repatriation], – it is of course a shock /.../ to pack the vegetables, the pickles and the preserves with beans ... and I am sure, that we will terribly.... no, I am not so sure [about having regrets] because we will be very busy with the children’s schooling...

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<sup>476</sup> As perceived and applied by her; including cultural traits, travel to different sites, and the love of Hungary.

Anna considered herself a foreigner, temporarily living in Sweden. I had been aware of their moving back to Hungary after the second interview, and I asked her if she would mind if they could not return to Hungary and she said:

Of course! I don't know, somehow my half would disappear, the half, the half of my life, or my identity, I don't know what we should call it, it would disappear – so, therefore, so it is extremely important.

Anna revealed that she sometimes had felt homesick, but this was easy to cure: “we often were back at home [in Hungary]”, where they had a network of friends and contact with parents:

[a]nyway, we always went home for Christmas. I have never had any Christmas here, but I confess I have seen two summers [in Sweden]... so that is the sacrifice I have actually made for the Swedish language...

Consistent with her plans to return to Hungary, she did not apply for Swedish citizenship either; she remained a Hungarian citizen, using it as a kind of security for preserving Hungarianness, which was important for her and her family. She raised her children from the very beginning with the prospect of going back to Hungary before the children would begin school. Anna did not encounter any difficulties convincing her husband to ‘go home’, she told me; he did not really like living in Sweden any longer. When I asked her to summarise her feelings about leaving Sweden, Anna told me that she was not sure what to say and I should “ask after a year again... then perhaps I might be able to tell you more. I don't know, I don't know – there are certainly things that I have become accustomed to.”

They leave behind some business acquaintances, as she called their Hungarian contacts in Sweden; none that she wanted to point out as close to her. Certain things she would perhaps miss, she said, laughing heartily when she remembered some “triviality” that she would not find in Hungary:

there is certainly nothing that I would terribly be crying over... Well, I mean, perhaps when I go home [to Hungary], I often find myself feeling the lamp post at the *zebra* [pedestrian crossing], looking for the button to push and there is nothing to push...



Then Anna praised certain things that she found in Sweden's favour. Firstly, the library system, including at the University Library (UB<sup>477</sup>), compared to the library in Budapest she frequented (Lőrinc Szabó Library<sup>478</sup>), which had a clumsy system. Car traffic was also smoother in Sweden; in Hungary drivers were impatient and impolite towards each other, which she found irritating. She appreciated also that things could be fixed smoothly in Sweden; many things worked better here than in Hungary. And then, with a quick blinking of the eyes, half-mocking, Anna mentioned, "well, at home [in Hungary], you can always *fix* things", referring to the utility in Hungary of a contact network.

While talking of things and thinking about what she might be missing when moving from Sweden, she approached what I perceived as being the main argument for their repatriation. She recounted multiple reasons for moving back to Hungary, including her homesickness and her husband's discomfort after forty years in Sweden. That weighed heavily, of course, because he "did not feel good in Sweden, perhaps he had never felt good". However, the real reason was something that they both felt could not be achieved in Sweden, what she summarised in the sentence that serves as the motto at the top of the chapter on Anna: they did not want their children to have a Swedish identification. Anna and her husband had the view that the children's socialization and upbringing was served best in Hungary: to raise them according to what they thought was best for them would have to be done in Hungary. They went about the preparations for repatriation systematically and for a long time. One step on the way was to have a second home in Hungary, by that creating closer relations to neighbours and providing a basis for the children to feel at home in Hungary. Another step was to secure cultural and linguistic competence for the children by using exclusively Hungarian at home, which made both children accomplished speakers of Hungarian, conscientiously cultivating the language. The elder brother often urged his younger twin brother to "speak Hungarian!", when the brother spoke Swedish, Anna recalled.

However, the fact of repatriation was not common knowledge, I learned at the interview. Neither the children nor Anna's mother and friends had been told yet about their repatriation plans. This was only two weeks before they would move, and I was a bit taken aback by this information. Anna told me that I was the only person who was told about their intentions so far; they did not want anybody to know them. She asked me to keep quiet about their plans on account of her husband's Hungarian clients. It was best that they did not know yet, Anna said. I took the revelation as a

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<sup>477</sup> University Library.

<sup>478</sup> <http://www.fszek.hu/>.

token of trust and I assured Anna that I had no intentions of telling their plans to anyone before they left.

Anna continued explaining how she and her husband had been reasoning about repatriation. Not finding the environment in Sweden suitable for the children to grow up in and in consideration for “their future” they were convinced that settling in Hungary would serve the purpose best. They had also come to the conclusion that in order to find one’s place in Sweden, to integrate and to find a future for the children, one had to become Swedish. Anna signalled by facial expressions that she was aware that all this could be interpreted as controversial. Nonetheless, she expressed their view:

we are perhaps not prepared to see our children become Swedish. Or they just would not want to become Swedish... in such case, [life] would just be stagnation...

Finally, I asked Anna about her own plans on her return to Hungary. She gave me a consistent answer, by telling that she was not interested in looking for employment in Hungary either. She had other plans which she hoped she could realise. She revealed that she had been a member of the Fidesz<sup>479</sup> Party since the 1990s, and as her interest for political life in Hungary had grown over the years, she was convinced that she could contribute to their work on a local basis<sup>480</sup>, by which contributing to her own prosperity, as well, she thought.

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<sup>479</sup> *Fiatalkor Demokraták Szövetsége* was founded in March 1988 [Association of Young Democrats], led from the start by Viktor Orbán (PM 1998-2002 and since 2010). The Party was founded by young university students to counterbalance KISZ, the only youth organisation at that time; while today they have moved towards being a more civic-liberal-conservative party, called Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség [Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Association].

<sup>480</sup> Which she has fulfilled after her return to Hungary.

# Reflections on the Life Story Narrations of the Social and Socialistic Elites

## Aptitude, Integration, Adjustments and Detachments

I will jointly reflect over the storytelling of the two core-Hungarian women, on account of the various common themes in their storytelling. Socialisation was one of these, along with family conditions (only children in a family of three, with no siblings), comparable educational system, and similar external social, political and ideological influences. Their lives took individual turns after finishing their university studies, when temporal and spatial boundaries decided their fate, with a final separating line when they moved to Sweden. Common themes that appeared to various extents in the two narrations were related to topics such as *socialisation* and *relationality*; *career and professional life*; *exile or migrant life*; *expressions of Hungarianness*; and *gender-inspired* or *gender-related*, alternatively *female* issues, which have more relevance in Western-influenced research<sup>481</sup> than in Hungarian. Gender and relationality emerged in the two narrations, although they do not occupy a mindful, central space in the narrations.

The above themes were not treated temporally sequenced, therefore I presented them when they emerged in the narrations. For example, education issues have repeatedly emerged when talking of other matters, such as career fulfilment, immigrant status or lifestyle in exile, and so forth.

Both women had a similar historical background. They were born one year apart in the 1960s, a decade after the Uprising of '56 in Hungary, which had left marks on society, affecting people's lives<sup>482</sup>. The socialisation process for both narrators took place during the so-called years of *consolidated socialistic development*, colloquially called the *Kádár (Kadarian) era*<sup>483</sup> or what I would call *conformist escapism*, providing similar traits for their upbringing, educational and political conditions, according to centrally sanctioned expectations. It expected a 'relaxed mind' from the citizens, with them refraining from dissent or from diverging opinions about the Marxist-Leninist

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<sup>481</sup> It should be pointed out that interest in gender studies shows a declining tendency in Hungary, as discussed in various articles by sociologists. [Struggling institutionalization of gender studies in Hungarian higher education. Bíró, E. 2007.] At: [http://www.iskolakultura.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=76](http://www.iskolakultura.hu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=76).

<sup>482</sup> The year of Liza's birth, 1963, was the year of the general amnesty in Hungary.

<sup>483</sup> [http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country\\_studies/hungary/SOCIETY.html](http://www.mongabay.com/reference/country_studies/hungary/SOCIETY.html).

ideology in public management. Observing the rules secured relatively good social welfare. Both Liza and Anna were educated, obtaining academic degrees in the 1980s, studying at the same university in Budapest, before leaving the country by marrying men living in Sweden. In their narrations, both contested to have lived a comfortable life under the circumstances, cushioned from external conditions in Hungarian society; they had appropriate objectives for the future, such as studying industriously to achieve goals with job preferences, enjoying family and social network support.

**Liza** left Hungary in 1986, thus missing the period of transition/transformation at the turn of the 1980s-90s. Nevertheless, she had the opportunity to experience the period of un-specific changes pointing at social unrest and political decay which marked the second half of the 1980s. In the 80s and particularly in the 90s, exceptional and specific 'system changing' measures happened in Hungary, followed up by the change from one given social system to another, at that time, volatile system. In the narration, Liza did not speak of personal impressions with regard to the transitional era. Apparently, she sensed 'certain changes' going on in the 80s, without explicitly explaining what those changes might have been. One concrete comment was recounting her defiance towards Party membership when prompted by her father in the 80s.

It is informative in Liza's case that close relations were only mentioned marginally in her storytelling. Her parents, child and husband were presented in complementary roles, mainly as ground for the individual to emerge from. Liza did not mention for example the many Swedish friends and relationships she had, as she lived an active, 'associative' life. The narrative accounts for the inner world of the narrator, relying on the self, with the exception of a few strangers, who became life-turning devices in her life; those who surfaced at the right time and place in order to aid her in finding whatever she needed to find. These were to be found both in Hungary and in Sweden, as narrated by Liza. Hungarian connections were important for Liza, but not exclusive.

**Anna**, on the other hand, had fully experienced the changes *in situ*, and she recounted details of the dynamic 90s, the time of transition/transformation (Tökés, 1996), that she had been affected by in tangible ways. Still in Hungary during the transition period<sup>484</sup>, she experienced the process leading to the so-called 'system change' (on the level of political institutions and public policies). Anna spoke about this period high-spiritedly, telling an illuminating story about her murky professional experiences in the muddy waters of the last years of state socialism in Hungary. She not only witnessed the barely functioning system in its twilight zone, but she grabbed the

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<sup>484</sup> I use the term 'transition' as a general label for the political, economic and social changes during the 1980s in Hungary.

opportunity opening up in the transitional period, creating for herself a rather unique professional career, which was previously unheard of for a woman in Hungary. Her experiences as a professional in the withering of state socialism are telling and full of information.

Social Role Theory<sup>485</sup> talks of different types of social roles that women (and men) are expected to play. Women's roles, or *female roles* are for example mother's role, given that women perform more childcare in most societies than men, linked to *gender roles* (gender stereotyping, women are expected to be gentle, tactful, neat, etc.) or with a more up-to-date term, *doing gender*. Doing gender was given rather little discursive space in the narrations by the two women and there was practically no reflection on feminist aspects. The treatment of *doing gender* was not dominant in their narrations; there was little about issues generally related to it. Their narrations exhibited rather 'gender blindness'<sup>486</sup> instead, possibly a sign of a *conservative, tradition-ridden* attitude<sup>487</sup> toward gender-related topics<sup>488</sup> (Tóth, 2007/12) among Hungarians, reminiscent of the *statist feminist period*<sup>489</sup>. The recounting of home-making roles was limited and the little there was said about it, was not negatively evaluated by them.

Nonetheless, relational accounts and gender stereotypes point at the gender of Liza and Anna, similar to the cases of the study's other narrators. I found that gendered or

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<sup>485</sup> Eagly A. H., Wood W., Diekmann, A.B. (2012) Social Role Theory of Differences and Similarities: Current Appraisal in: Eckes, H., Trautner, H.M., The Developmental Social Psychology of Gender, Psychology Press;

<sup>486</sup> Neglecting to talk of differences on basis of gender. Wood, W., Rhodes, N., & Whelan, M. (1989). Sex differences in positive well-being: A consideration of emotional style and marital status. *Psychological Bulletin*, 106, 249-264.

<sup>487</sup> Pető, A., Awareness or change? Conservative women's participation in politics after 1989. (Conference paper: Prepared for International Seminar. Gender Difference and Democracy. Ideas, Experimentations and Routes in Rome, 12-13 March 2008.) After having conducted interviews with Hungarian women, she concludes that discourses with narrative frames of revival of religious cults (she saw similar developments in Croatia, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and normative motherhood have been introduced in Hungary as well; instead of adapting discourses on human rights.

<sup>488</sup> Sex vs gender: the Hungarian language – perhaps on account of being a genderless language – lacks the equivalent of the English word 'gender', therefore it is constituted in vernacular Hungarian by the concept of 'társadalmi nem' [socially constructed sex], used in expert literature (sometimes in short: 'social sex'). (See further discussion on social sex and natural sex in relation to languages in Magyar Nyelvőr [Hungarian Language Guard], <http://www.c3.hu/~nyelvor/period/1241/124110.htm>. Those who speak English understand the expression in English, but competence in English is unfortunately not a given for Hungarians either in Sweden or in Hungary.

<sup>489</sup> Havelkova, Hana (2000). Abstract Citizenship? Women and Power in the Czech Republic in Hobson, Barbara (Hrsg.). Gender and Citizenship in Transition. London: Macmillan. S. 118-138.

*feminist* issues were not considered problematic; they rather reversed these to their benefit, using their social and private domestic roles to their advantage. In response to my explicit question about feminist standpoints (such as doing domestic work), Liza demonstrated a firm opinion on the matter, which she presented when she spoke of her Hungarian friends' marital status (see above under the subtitle Social and Gender Roles - Doing Gender). To my question about Liza's attitude towards gender-related questions, she commented expressively the fact that she thought it important to discuss gender and social female roles. Despite, she did not arise the matter by herself in her narration.

Regarding general female roles, such as intimate relations with partners, there is not much we learn from the two narrators. Both women presented themselves as partly non-domestic, married, fairly and partly (in-)dependent women, bringing different resources into their marriages in order to solve family problems. No discourse of close relationships with emotional intimacy or of *getting-married-and-having-children* have been included by Liza or Anna. The two women did not include details about their marital relations or partners. Nevertheless, I wish to point out that some parts of feminist issues, particularly the importance of freedom of choice (for women), have been salient in Liza's narrative, in congruence with her whole life conduct and storylines. In Liza's case one could sense a great measure of agency in minding her own business within her marriage as well, acting as a fully emancipated person.

The portrait the two women painted of their own female roles differed from the stereotypical picture of a conventional and emotional wife and mother, and also from my pre-conceptions, or expected feminine discourse regarding gender issues. Liza did not comment on her role as a mother, or on general experiences from mothering at all, and she had no reflexions on the relations between her and her husband.

Anna talked loosely (as if not seeing the issue as significant) about sharing household chores with her husband. She revealed a dependency based on mutual respect, shared experiences and affection in relations with him. She showed no interest in talking about feminist issues in her narrations; she rather spoke of a symbiotic relationship that existed in their marriage. Anna's narration differed with regard to her role as a mother, speaking openly about the anguish she felt when she became a mother, painting a picture far from the picture of the idealised happy mother.

Regarding strategies and attitudes towards professional life, Liza and Anna offered discursive resources provided by skilled experiences from their working years, with maintained self-reliance and self-respect. Using these discursive resources they argued for having overcome difficulties with fulfilling professional ambitions and with commitment, perceived as limited and constrained in Sweden. They regretted the fact of having been denied appreciation for their personal competence and work experiences. They did experience discrimination owing to inequality, which they based on being placed in the category of *invandrare*. They recounted a variety of

efforts, ambitions and strategies they had applied during their years in Sweden to help them not concede to personal defeat and avoid feeling inadequate.

Neither of the two women treated issues of work experiences as gender-related. For instance, the fact that Anna, with several university degrees in her pocket, decided against seeking work in Sweden, was not linked to gender discrimination in any way; instead she connected it with her *foreigner* status, similar to Liza, who treated difficulties with repeated periods of unemployment in Sweden as being linked to the status of immigrant rather than to gender. She gave us a glance of a *doer*, or alternatively a *fixer* in her narration, with roots in a strong urge for optimal family organisation, systemisation and management in situations that were premeditated and weighed up by her.

A commonality in their narrations was the story of adherence to their ethnic roots by maintaining Hungarianness. Links to Hungarianness were used for recharging batteries; both by language use within the family (in Liza's case just with her child), and also by their contacts with the local Hungarian associations. Both women maintained frequent contacts with Hungary and friends there, and they both established homes in their home country which they visited several times per year, both with family and alone, which make them emotive commuters.

Liza's and Anna's storytelling demonstrate to us that women's choices are related to the structure of opportunities and constraints they meet in society, both in their workplaces and in their homes. The individual arguments and strategies presented by the two interlocutors above show that by theorising the choices shaped by conditions, it becomes easier for us to better understand how individuals develop interest and desires in one or another aspect of life. Anna and Liza, both self-reliant women in their own right, concentrated in their storytelling on the relation between culture and self-understanding embodied and expressed in talk. They use cultural discourse to make themselves intelligible both to themselves and others, and by using discursive constraints they produce meaningful self-understandings and make comprehension easier for us.

## 8. Pietá

### Displacement, Disorientation, Impairment, Discontent

“I have always been a loser (...) a coward (...)  
I keep my mouth shut and I clap my hands with eagerness...”

### Interview Settings

The first interview session had been difficult, but the second time I met Pandora was even more so, as in the meantime she had been struck by a personal tragedy by losing her daughter, O. This fact made me hesitate. I was concerned about not violating the unstated rules of staying inside the code of acceptable discourse within a difficult interview situation. Still, having made the first interview, I saw it necessary to make another one when the time seemed appropriate.

For the first interview in 2006, I took a train to Pandora's hometown, where I was met by Pandora and her husband at the station and we drove to their home. It was a clear, early spring Saturday afternoon in March when we arrived at their home in the outskirts of the town. The table was set and coffee and cakes were waiting in their sitting room. Their two children were out, at the movies. The room was Spartan, with only a few pieces of furniture, and the house was surprisingly free of Hungarian artefacts, which was unexpected. It is common in Hungarian homes to use folk art artefacts; idealizing reminders of a native culture, with 'nostalgia for the past' (Halbwach, 1992).

At the second interview, in 2008, the atmosphere of the house was different; the people were different, even though the table was again prepared with coffee and cakes. Only Pandora and her husband were at home. The second interview did not take long; the time was used to clear up questions that remained unclear after the first interview. Pandora's narration is a story of hardships of the individual hit by social, political and private anxieties, incapacitating her for the major part of her life.

At the first meeting L., Pandora's husband, took command of the conversation in his subtle way, talking of his exposed situation on the labour market, the difficulties he



faced with finding a permanent job. After about 30 minutes I turned to a quietly sitting Pandora, to set the interview in motion. It was an inert interview. I had to ask questions at the beginning; Pandora seemed distant, hesitant, even reluctant, or perhaps just cautious during the interview that was more a “casual conversation” (Eggins, 1997: 217). Pandora took command of the storytelling; she chose themes to speak about, seemingly following a narration strategy of her own, approaching sensitive topics with caution and talk of less sensitive ones with agitation, leaving me with a kind of *interpretative illusion*<sup>490</sup>.

After revealing individual multiplicity and the need for further discoveries, the first interview was abruptly stopped by Pandora when their children came home from the cinema. She put her finger on her lips, whispering that O. did “not like it [that she talked of her situation]...” and by that she placed me outside the family boundaries, making me aware of the cautious predicament the field-worker can experience in relation to her/his role. I felt that I had been dismissed, so after exchanging some words with the young people, I left. L. drove me to the train station and I went home. At home, working on the interview, I soon recognised that the interview text was fragmented, unstructured, incomplete, and discontinuous, lacking coherence; not unknown phenomenon within research studying ‘divergent’ life story narrative units. I found that I needed more information on certain details and by thematising the interview we could focus on important experiences talked about in fragments of utterances in the interviews. I decided to return to Pandora as soon as possible and ask her for an additional interview, but fate had other plans for us.

I realised that tragedy had struck the family in the meantime first when I contacted Pandora around Christmas 2006 to ask her for a meeting. She told me then that O. had passed away in the autumn. The constant deterioration of O.’s health, heading towards tragedy, was naturally a source of increasing distress for the whole family; they had closed ranks and lived isolated from the outside world. The tragedy, which was the peak of a chain of traumatic events that they had been enduring for the previous twenty years, had life-changing effects on the whole family, bringing a kind of closure, and the beginning of an entirely new kind of disrupted life, with an unknown fate; it shattered their existence and had serious consequences for the health and relations of the members of the family.

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<sup>490</sup> To paraphrase Bourdieu’s “biographical illusion”, suggesting that by biographical narratives one can make “oneself the ideologist of one’s own life (...)”. An interpreter of life story narratives might also think she or he can create causal or final links between the other person and her life created in storytelling, reaching from the past to the future. One might end up with an “artificial creation of meaning” (Bourdieu) or interpretation.

It was impossible for me to know when, or even if, the proper time would come for meeting Pandora again. It took me over a year to gather the courage to approach her (in December 2007) with the request of a second interview. Pandora agreed to do it at the beginning of 2008, but owing to on-going psychological treatment, the second interview had to wait until the end of May 2008. The external settings for the second interview were similar to the first one, yet it felt very different.

The atmosphere of the house had changed. When I entered the hall I saw a picture of O. on the side table, as if greeting the visitor. Pandora guided me to the garden, but it was chilly outside, so we went into the living room and sat down there this time too. The table was laid, cups and saucers were waiting. L. was out gardening, but came in to greet me and then he went back to his work outside. He came in from time to time to check up on us (mainly on Pandora, I thought) bringing us coffee and ice cream. Pandora and I were left alone in the house for an hour, after which L. joined in the conversation about a life with unemployment, never-ending courses for immigrants, project work leading nowhere; basically, with no change in his experiences since the last time we had sat there. Time seemed to have stood still.

Pandora seemed relaxed while L. talked. She joined in the conversation, saying she found life unstable and unpredictable and that the future was unsure. Pandora had lost the feeling of agency; society interfered too much in their lives; 'they' set rules that she did not comprehend and had no control over. I soon tried to focus on certain details unclear from the first interview and Pandora did her bit and complied with clarifying them. After a while, I felt the conversation was stilted, so I turned off the tape recorder, thanked them both for their hospitality and took my leave. L. drove me to the train station and in the car he revealed some minor, yet important details, which I regretted not hearing from Pandora herself. I found the information important for the evolution of her story; certain actions of hers prior to their migration had been omitted from her narrations and the hushed-up detail would have given me valuable information about the desperate actions she had taken to lessen the burden of existence and migration for the whole family. I interpret the silenced detail that she kept from me purposeful, perhaps because her good intentions were counter-productive, not achieving the desired effect, or perhaps even worsening their situation. I realised with a certain perplexity after the interview, that L. did not mention their daughter or his own relations to her at all. He did not talk of his role in attending her child, either at the first or the second interview.

## Methodological cogitations

Ricoeur describes life story narrative as an indispensable mediator of an individual's identity; reuniting *sameness* and *selfhood* (Ricoeur, 1986)<sup>491</sup>, combining being in society with being apart, locating one's own identity within a medium between two identity poles<sup>492</sup>. When I began interpreting the material of the two interviews with Pandora, I met both methodological and theoretical difficulties in the interpretation of her narrations. There was an (unhappy) medium with different narrative identities, proposing one individual identity at a time, i.e. one interpretation of the self among many other possible ones (refugee, migrant, wife, parent of two children, bereaved parent, unemployed *invandrare* [immigrant] professional, student, parent of one child, etc.), building, dismantling and rebuilding by new starts from different beginnings, different points of departure and different perspectives with an unbendable thread throughout the difficulties: the welfare of their daughter.

The totally changed life conditions for Pandora, amplified by the likewise (yet to a lesser extent) traumatizing, yet secondary trajectory of Pandora's life development (social and professional aspects), made me conscious of ethical considerations. I felt I was imposing my presence on the family this second time. My excuse was that I wanted to find out about the '*who*'s, unsure of what to expect, only hoping to find out more about the individual identity, within a retrospective narrative, confronting eventualities and unexpectedness. With the interview setting, I found myself in a situation where (...) "the self returns just when the same slips away"<sup>493</sup>. By giving space to Pandora's narration, I had the intention of paying tribute to O.

I was, and still am, extremely grateful to them all for taking the time and making the effort to engage in a (tedious) academic study, enduring the clumsy efforts of an

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<sup>491</sup> Ricoeur, P., describes personal identity as containing two parts: idem-identity (sameness) presuming permanence in time (contrasting the changing), reducible to social identity (Bourdieu's *habitus*); and ipse-identity (selfhood), allowing other modalities of non-identical identities, which consists of aspects of the individual identity not reducible to mere social identity. (Oneself as Another, 1986; trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.)

<sup>492</sup> Between the two poles of concepts of identity; such as narrative being the best way to make sense of identity (a '*theme*': Charles Taylor), or the concept of identity being narrative (or '*plot*': Paul Ricoeur), both taking narrative as the one that forms life and in which life is seen as a whole. In accordance with the above, cross-cultural identity is regarded here as discursively-rhetorically constructed (narrative), whereas the (biographical) story tells about the '*who*'. More on identity in the Chapter Identity and Identification.

<sup>493</sup> Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, pp-128.

interviewer to make meaning of their lives for us outsiders, at a time when their lives had lost all meaning.

## Analytical reflections

To contrast the sprawling storytelling burdened with problems and sorrows of life, I tried to systematise the material, partly based on the theoretical aspects of Labov's narrative analysis (Labov, 1972; Labov and Valevsky, 1985), partly based on the specific mode of Pandora's narration. However, I found that Pandora's narration resisted a structural analysis for various reasons<sup>494</sup>. Narrated traumatic life experiences make an interpretation difficult; which became even more evident in the second interview. Unanswered questions, such as the role of Pandora as the caregiver in the family that was reinforced for her dramatically during the last years of the Ceaușescu era<sup>495</sup>, had to be cleared up, not to speak of the migration process. Last but not least I wished to hear about her experiences in Sweden.

"Adequate causality" (Linde, 1993), which means arguing for "a sequence of events" in a life story narrative that is "both a social and an individual achievement", was not supported by Pandora's narration; neither was how 'proper lives', 'proper reasons for action' and 'proper sequences of events' are expected to be presented in narrated life stories. Pandora did not seem to care about presenting 'proper sequences of events'; yet, it was perfectly possible to re-construct her life in a sequential presentation. Pandora seemed keener to support the 'proper reasons for actions' she had taken to help her daughter, than to support actions taken for her own sake.

The illness of O. was the central point in family life. Everything revolved around it. This was demonstrated by Pandora's storytelling, when for example certain facts or dates (of importance) were related to O's health status: "she [O.] was suddenly ... – in eighty... eighty-seven – eighty-eight, now I don't know for sure, the years float together..." Pandora linked her own arrival in Sweden to a stage of O.'s condition: "Eight... --- wait a minute; O. had her operation in eighty-nine – yes, I came in November eighty-eight". The first encounter with an assistant at the job centre in

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<sup>494</sup> First, I valued interaction, which was essential, between the interviewee and interviewer, which a structuralist analytic method has a limited applicability for. Second, I had no intention to make a linguistic analysis. Third, the storytelling was in parts incoherent and un-sequenced, even ad-hoc; admittedly, linearity was created by the interpretations, in order to make the narration more comprehensible for the reader in an attempt to 'bring order' to the text, to unite themes and topics in the two narratives for coherence.

<sup>495</sup> Nicolae c, head of state, Party leader (1965–1989) in Romania.

Sweden was marked by O.'s malady, too: "Well... it was in eighty-nine: O. was having her operation then; in ninety-ninety-one... yeah, [it was] in ninety-one". Despite the confusion around years and dates, and the fragmented family life, by using segments from the narrative clipboard the story can be assembled to become totally comprehensive – by collecting details from both of Pandora's interviews, and chaining together the experiences of Pandora's "practical field" and "ethical field"<sup>496</sup> presenting her (Self), as seen in her *master narrative*.

### Staging metaphor

The *staging metaphor* was developed for describing how linear sequences in a text can be manipulated in order to give them greater importance. "Every clause, sentence, paragraph, episode, and discourse is organised around a particular element that is taken as its point of departure. It is as though the speaker presents what he wants to say from a particular perspective." (Grimes, 1975:323.) Other scholars have argued for staging having a dimension of prose structure that emphasises and gives relative prominence to various segments of (prose) discourse (Clements, 1979).

Staging (as a metaphor) has been an important process in the structuring of the narrations of the present study. For one, Pandora's use of staging influenced her own discourse structure to both emphasise important details and neglect others, which I thought she did on purpose. Other narrators also used staging strategy, but in Pandora's storytelling it was more prominent in that it seemed more determined to serve a purpose – namely, delaying telling the story of her daughter and their relations (which I was not aware of at the outset). I have applied staging in my interpretations of all the narrated material (in re-structuring the narrative), focusing on important parts; in this case, built around Pandora's narration about trauma experiences and migration, including important details about family life, which I found to be focal points in her master narrative.

### Reported Speech, Pronominal Choice and Depersonalisation

The 'regular' interview session started when Pandora joined us, ending the general conversation between L. and me that had given me the impression of being a 'scapegoat discourse', just stalling for time. Pandora began her initial contribution with an evaluation of her husband's unfortunate experiences with various purposeless and meaningless courses organised by the employment office, interrupted by eventual employment/unemployment periods, never leading to permanent jobs. Pandora emphasised L.'s negative evaluation of the various encounters with labour market

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<sup>496</sup> Ricoeur, P., *Oneself as Another*, p.115.

authorities, and extended it with comments on her own meetings with the Swedish bureaucratic and education system. She expressed her distress over not having succeeded in getting a permanent job matching her qualifications, despite her twenty years in Sweden spent in various courses and studies. She assessed the progress with her studies in Sweden (first at *Komvux*<sup>497</sup> and later at the university), talking with lots of hesitations. Slowly, the conversation turned into an interview. It contained a storytelling that was peculiar in that Pandora continuously depersonalised her stories and moved focus away from herself as a protagonist of the story world. Sometimes she also shifted focus towards a collective agency, using the pronoun ‘we’, which in her case did not imply a shift of focus to a group – it merely included certain persons, but without introducing them. The shift of pronoun was often applied as a strategy for distancing (deleting) herself from a (critical) stance, or for generalising an experience, marked by pronoun switching, from ‘I’-narrative to ‘you’-narrative. The strategy was rather characteristic for her rhetorical organisation throughout the interviews:

... it is very complicated and very disillusioning – it makes .... you .... uh ...very depressed – ‘cause .... well, for years, we have just been studying ... Neither --- well – I mean first you begin to study Swedish at Komvux and then you want to get into the college /.../ I managed to get in [to the Finno-Ugric studies], where I studied, well ‘Ungerska’ [Hungarian] – I managed to get 60 credits but then they closed down [the Hungarian courses] and I could not get 80 credits /.../ for my ‘kandidatexamen’ [Cand. Phil. degree].

Pandora kept repeating certain details of her/their (and her husband’s) life experiences, evaluating encounters with the Swedish immigrant education system, and harshly criticising *sf* courses at Komvux for the incompetence of the teachers, the methods and the goals of this education system, the low expectations and standard of both co-students and teachers, and also the mixing of students from different ethnic backgrounds on the same course.

Pandora was also critical towards job centres. She found that the stigma of *invandrare* was humiliating (as applied by the authorities), just as the treatment of their children at school was in her perception. Pandora was particularly critical about the Swedish health care system: she claimed that their shortcomings directly worsened the chances for her daughter’s recovery. Pandora was explaining these things when we were dragged back to reality as her son and daughter returned home from the movies and Pandora did not wish to continue the interview, which left me with the feeling of

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<sup>497</sup> Communal Organisation for Adult Education.

having made an incomplete interview and left me with the desire to return for a continuation, to learn more about her and their lives.

### Personal, Social and Familial Relations

With her flexible, diaspora and hybrid identities, Pandora verifies the notion of multi-ethnic, multilingual and multi-cultural individuals living in Europe today. She arrived in Sweden from Romania in 1988, as an invisible and unheard member of the Hungarian exile group living in Sweden. Her story is a separate, non-resembling story, despite certain analogue patterns with the other interviewees' stories; carrying the memories of similar historical events and political experiences, social positions, traditions and cultural patterns to the other narrators' stories. The resemblances between the life story development of Pandora and the other interviewees cease here; the rest is specific to her life development. The narrative is about a nuclear family, once socially positioned by mobility in the middle social strata in the early decades after WW2, in a country behind the Iron Curtain.

## Childhood Socialisation

Pandora was born in Köröspatak, Székelyföld [Seklerland], a region in Romania with the Székely-Magyar population in majority<sup>498</sup>. Both of Pandora's parents were *Székely-Magyars*. She had a sister, who was the first to move to Sweden in the 1980s. Pandora's narration was restrictive with information about her family. The first – and only – information came when I asked her specifically about her parents; the answers I received were more or less mono-syllabic, or short, dual-choice (yes-no). Not until we arrived at her master narrative did she offer coherent sequences with details. Of her family members, Pandora's father was given most attention in her narration. In Pandora's childhood, the region enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy for some years (1952-1968), under the name of *Magyar Autonóm Tartomány* (MAT)<sup>499</sup>. Pandora went to school and took her school-leaving exams there, then she moved to Kolozsvár (in Transylvania; Ro: Cluj) to start her studies at Babeş-Bolyai University, qualifying as a teacher of English and Hungarian. She recounted frequent visits for shorter and longer periods to her and the children's birthplace; a returning symbol in her storytelling, of the once happy home and family life.

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<sup>498</sup> According to 2002 census around 75 %.

<sup>499</sup> *Regiunea Autonomă Maghiară* in Romanian; Hungarian Autonomous Region in English.

Pandora identified herself ethnically and culturally as a Hungarian, educating her children for the preservation of the double values of her *Székely-Magyar* and general Magyar cultural traditions, with the family language being Hungarian both in Romania and in Sweden. Romanian was obligatory from the second grade of grammar school, and Pandora acquired English at university. Their children have never learned Romanian; they were “too young” (around ten years old) when they moved to Sweden, Pandora explained. Since her migration to Sweden, Pandora has been studying Swedish (for twenty years) now. She evaluated her proficiency in Swedish as ‘of high school standard’.

### **The Roller period, national cadres, purges and political deviation**

The silenced ideological value system that Pandora felt she has been ‘cowardly’ following all her life is easier to understand if we know the political circumstances of Romania after 1945. Pandora was socialized in the Romanian version of the socialistic system, while her parents, two ‘simple’ people with lower school education, were well-established peasants before WW2, a status lasting until the ideological remake of society (in various periods between 1947 and 1989) was set into motion. Pandora’s youth was dominated by the ideological synthesis of Romanianism and Soviet internationalism, worked out by Mihai Roller, the contemporary Marxist ideologist of the system. He was a communist activist and propagandist, carrying out communist assignments in the field of culture in Romania, following the Zdanov doctrine<sup>500</sup>. In the name of internationalism, similarly to in other socialistic countries in Central Europe, the doctrine of socialistic (communist) society was introduced with the desire to shape the ‘right kind’ of citizens, adjusted to the new ‘socialistic society’, in which ‘enemies of the people’ – ordinary citizens of the state, without ethnic segregation at the beginning – had no place. People with the ‘wrong background’ were to be eliminated.

The so-called misadjusted, mainly middle-class people were the so-called ‘class enemies’, along with national minorities (Hungarians and Germans (Swabians and Saxons)), clergy, ‘kuláks’, former capitalists and members of the aristocracy (Illyés, 1982). In rural settings, to be a kulák was seen as a major offence against the socialist (communist) state. This forced the peasants (with the aim of putting an end of private ownership) into ‘voluntary’ membership in the thousands of agrarian cooperatives (collectivisation). Accusations were followed up by systematic harassment,

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<sup>500</sup> “*The only conflict that is possible in Soviet culture is the conflict between good and best*” represents Zhdanov doctrine. Zhdanovism soon became a Soviet cultural policy, wherein the intelligentsia in general had to conform to the party line in their creative works.  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihail\\_Roller](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mihail_Roller).



discrimination, and physical abuse, leading to torture, imprisonment of the ‘guilty’ parties, sentencing after politically correct show-trials, or without such; whereby family members also suffered the consequences. Pandora’s family was not spared this fate either, as her parents were doubly stigmatised for being well-to-do peasants (*kulák*) and also members of a minority (Hungarians). Breaking people both existentially and physically was reserved for ‘*kuláks*’ and other ‘enemies of the state’ in Central European countries in the 1950s and 60s. It is striking that the families of three of the five women in the study experienced this treatment<sup>501</sup>.

### *Enemies of the State*

Pandora spoke with empathy and a shy respect about her father; perhaps partly owing to the miserable turns his life took after WW2, and also to the family model still in function in Transylvania: an archaic, hierarchical, patriarchal family structure with values that had roots in religion (but not necessarily explicitly religious). Part of the cultural capital and family structure is respect for the elderly and for the head of the family, both inside and outside the family system, which is followed by both male and female members. Pandora talked in a non-dramatic way about her father, who had been subjected to the political cleansing of the 1950s in Romania, stigmatised as *kulák*. Pandora was often hesitating and using staccato when she talked of this experience; addressing her father as an impersonal subject, giving the impression of a somewhat incoherent and cautious narration. She was looking for the right expressions, with stops and trials-and-errors in both interviews. Even though she provided more information in the second one, she still avoided giving any opinion of her own on the above. It was difficult to know if the incoherent way of narrating was because she was not used to talking about the past of the family to an audience, or simply because she was not comfortable talking about these things. No matter which, the following was revealed about her father and family circumstances in the first interview:

... well my my dear father, the poor one, he was a peasant, and uh uh uh uh, how to put it, what he – what I awfully regret is that genera... – the estate stood there for generations, with a lot of land and a big manor – the forest – and the forests .... everything, well [was lost] /.../ I am a Sekler – And the children were also born there, O. [daughter] still – asks every day if we remember – well, we had a big house there, with a big yard – there was total freedom.

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<sup>501</sup> I can also be included in the group of the concerned.

In the second interview Pandora extended the information about her father at my request; interlacing it with general information on people's living conditions in Romania in her youth in an intertextual and also cautious way:

--- I was born in 1950 – collectivizing was well on the way by then ... and it had consequences, as far as I recall it, 'cause my father was often summoned [to the secret police], well, you know yourself [ *my cultural insider status*] as ... as we say, between us, it was a horrible time, you never knew in the village which of your neighbours said what and then they [the secret police] just came in the night and they took him away, because, well, that he was a kulák this, and he was a kulák that – so there, that is how it was. --- And then – for a day – as the story goes – there were interrogations, there were threats, that he [her father] should hand over everything, all his possessions, he must hand over to the collective – and and the – and then there were intimidations, and there were squeals, so they told me afterwards, there was a neighbour who told them [her parents]: 'don't lie, 'cause you had a carriage – and you had even a new carriage' – well, it was in this manner it went /.../ I was born after the collectivizing, and my father was extremely traumatized by losing everything he owned from one day to another ... the stables were empty ... well, you know it yourself how it is in an estate [involving me again]. – After, then after that, he was working as a night watchman, you know what that is, at an outside [*illegible word*] – but yes, they were Hungarians, I don't even know if he talked Romanian – in the village where I grew up, there were only Hungarians ... after that he withdrew [into isolation] very --- very much ---- [*deep sigh*]

Pandora explained in a small 'bubble story'<sup>502</sup> the cause and the result of the physical and psychological atrocities her father suffered because of the treatment of the Securitate. The experiences with prison and the deranged system shattered her father. Arguably, the loss of property (confiscation) affected the whole family. Her father had to start a new life as a night watchman at a "workplace" that was perhaps not his own choice; a "kind of building-site, you know, in Szentgyörgy, well, five kilometres [away]". Her father walked to and from his workplace. After the persecution he suffered, he "withdrew, he became shut-in 'cause he had this workplace..." After his prison sentence his personality changed. He was a broken man, Pandora remembered with sorrow in her voice for the last time recollecting her father's fate. She did not

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<sup>502</sup> As suggested by C. Kohler-Riesmann's 'bounded stories': i.e. it is not always easy to know where a story begins and ends; often it is the reader that does the locating, finding the beginnings and ends of stories or story sequences. (C. Kohler-Riesman, *Narrative Analysis*. 1993. SAGE Publications Ltd.)

disclose how long he lived, how his tragic life turn affected Pandora's mother, or if his imprisonment had any negative consequences for Pandora's chances for social mobility and opportunities to study at university<sup>503</sup>. She was even more reticent about her mother and sister, leaving the relationship between them open for speculation. Pandora disclosed about her mother that she had been working with administration in a bakery in their hometown. The only voluntary reference to her sister was linked to a childhood memory located in Székelyföld, including also cousins and local people.

Pandora claimed that there was a lack of appreciation from her family's side with regard to her, supporting her claim by recalling a meeting with an outsider (a linguist), who obviously had heard about her (no mention of in what connection). When speaking of this meeting, she also mentioned that her father was the only person in the family who showed her some appreciation:

[the linguist] came to Köröspatak and told me that [he/she] just had to see, wanted to meet 'this person' [meaning Pandora]; he/she wanted to know where, where I came from – [*Pandora is somewhat embarrassed at this point as if she thought that it might sound boastful*] – ... And this, so to say, after all that happened [*she giggles embarrassedly*] – After all the many failures, it is still a nice memory and a good thought, a tiny-little thought, that my father appreciated my efforts, 'cause I have never ever received any appreciation from my mother or from a close relative.

Without clearing up what 'all that happened' implied, Pandora appraised dialogically, quoting others, the reasons for the negligence she was subjected to. At that time her conduct was "not appreciated", according to her recollection of her younger self:

there she is, always just sitting there, studying, well, stewing', so, you see, I have always been that sort; never liked company and then it was more appreciated if you had a lot of friends, you were to go out, you were to find a good husband [*she shyly laughs at her description of herself*].

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<sup>503</sup> In the 1950s-60s in Central European countries to be stigmatized as an 'enemy of the state' was a socially unacceptable 'offence' for generations to come, which crippled their life chances, such as studies or employment. The children of such families started with the epithet 'priusz' (Lat. for *previous, prior*), as it was called in Hungary; implying an undesirable (criminal) penalized pre-history in the family, stopping young people from stepping over invisible social boundaries.

I knew that Pandora's sister was living in Sweden, so I asked Pandora about the contact between them. The answer was rather vague, revealing occasional phone calls and rare meetings; pointing at a loose family relationship. My intuition told me that Pandora and her family lived rather isolated and apart from public life, most probably burdened and limited by the illness of their daughter and the circumstances around her condition, which Pandora was very reluctant to speak of at the beginning, taking time to put the memory into words.

### Personal and Local Identity

Despite the depressing story about her father that changed the economic and social status of the family after his life-changing prison sentence, Pandora recounted childhood memories from *Székelyföld* in a light manner; showing a positive local identity, recalling play mates, cousins and nice local people. At home, she and her sister had chores around the house: minding the animals and cleaning the house. Brighter memories from her childhood were linked to a tradition that she shared with her sister; namely, that they used to get a new-born lamb each spring, together with the responsibility for caring, feeding, and keeping it safe from predators (wolves). This specific memory showed to have mystical content, as Pandora remembered the sadness she felt when they failed to save lambs that were killed by wolves, leaving the bloody cadavers on site. The unpleasant childhood detail seemed to predispose Pandora for an early confrontation with blood from injured creatures, pointing to a future that was inescapable and fated.

Hearing Pandora's description of the lamb-sacrifice, it stroke me that she was talking of the premonition of her destiny; as if in this memory segment information lay hidden about the fate of her daughter: the unavoidability and the blood, which Pandora loathed and had been disgusted by all her life, she revealed. Life was otherwise idyllic in her home village in *Székelyföld*, where she returned after university studies as a married woman. However, Pandora did not go into details about their lives there; so we do not learn how long they lived there and why they moved away. She repeatedly pointed out, though, that they "spent each summer holiday there – so the children had all their holidays there, where they were born". Memories of *Székelyföld* and their life there were steady ingredients in their life; a reminiscence of happy days in difficult times. The children recalled those days daily; they were especially comforting for her daughter, Pandora explained. *Székelyföld* became the key to Pandora's opening up about her daughter; the nostalgic memories of the happy days in *Székelyföld* and talking about them serving apparently therapeutic purposes in their everyday lives, giving strength to her daughter and the family. Pandora talked of their visits to *Seklerföld*, draining herself through the storytelling, ending with an unfinished storyline which hangs in the air for the reader to finish off:

... every summer we went back and, as I have already told you, we talk about these things every day with O., because the poor one is very ill now --- [choosing her words with great care, using reported speech] and I keep telling her to remember, what 'a clever, little girl you were', how everyone in the village loved her, all the 'nénis' [Sw. 'tant'; En: 'aunt'], – the néni who sold bread, the néni who sold ice-cream in the shop, she [O.] was such an accomplished little [deep sigh] knowing little girl she was, she used to go alone ----- [losing voice] ---- and ----- now -----

### *Student Life and Adolescence*

Pandora described herself as a quiet, hard-working, serious, rather dull young person, interested only in her studies and learning things. She saw herself as not much of a social person, different from what was expected of a young woman in the 1960s. After a successful entrance examination to the university in Kolozsvár [Cluj], she began her studies in Hungarian and English to become a teacher.

She graduated in 1969, an exciting year in Europe; yet there was not a hint of reference to the events of the Prague Spring in 1968 or how the students in Romania reacted to it. She spoke highly of the city of Kolozsvár, though. She loved “university life”, and “the atmosphere of the town, the lovely town, uh, yes, very very much”; a city in which she was proud to be part of the special, prestigious Babeş-Bolyai University. She showed me how to find it in the town by drawing a map on the arms of her chair with her fingernails, directing me through the streets of Kolozsvár. As a student, she opened up and found friends among young Hungarian students. There were eighteen students of mixed ethnic composition (Hungarian and Romanian) living in one room in the student home. There were never problems among them, but they did not mix, she explained:

at one end of the room the Hungarians [students] had their head-quarters and at the other end the Romanians ... We never mixed, but we never sabotaged one another's affairs either, everybody was respectful towards each other /.../ I had some friends, mainly my own classmates.

Good study results meant gratifications (from the university) and as Pandora had good marks, she was granted accommodation in a student home, together with one of her fellow students, a Hungarian girl whom Pandora still has contact with by e-mail. They shared a flat in a newly-built block of flats in the middle of the town during their student years. Pandora enjoyed being a student and concluded that these were “the four happiest years of my life”.

## Gendered Social Roles and Family

In 1969 she met her future husband, L., a young Transylvanian-Hungarian man who was studying at the same university as Pandora. They met in a café for students, having breakfast, lunch and supper there, on the main square of the city. She had apparently had her eye on him for a while: "... I had already previously seen him on the streets, in the café, in the theatre --- and then ---- well, he always, he uh, uh, he was always stalking me", she told me, laughing somewhat embarrassed at the memory. Pandora mentioned friends they shared, mainly Hungarians, but she did not follow them to parties, she had other priorities: "I liked to do what was expected of me (...) I was always a commendable student." The two got married, and to my question about the reasons why she fell for L., she answered:

We shared the same interests, L. and me. [deep sigh] I liked his sincerity. The whole of his attitude towards life, that he was serious, honest .... [long silence] ... and somehow I always felt that he would not be able to tell a lie, to con me – this was for me ---- this was very important for me to feel secure that you could have total trust in another person. He would not lie to me, he would not cheat on me, and things like that.... And honesty, to have a spine, to be truthful – this is what I have been most disillusioned with here in Sweden, because of what I have experienced here.

In relation to evaluating the personal (desirability) traits of L., Pandora used the same types of morality-competence stereotype categories<sup>504</sup> as when, later, judging people in Sweden (honest, sincere, trustworthy vs. dishonest, unreliable, etc.).

After their studies the two young people began to work: L. as an engineer and Pandora as a teacher of children from a mix of ethnic backgrounds at an elementary school in Kolozsvár. In the second interview she revealed that that she had also had to join the (Communist) Party; a 'necessary evil' in order to forge a career in the public sector in Romania, she explained. Being an unproblematic agent in society, she advanced and became a form tutor in the school, a job which she did not give details about, similar to her marital life, safeguarding privacy.

I became curious about the distribution of the expressions of doing gender in their family, as L. emerged in the first interview mainly in his role as a supporter to the family in hardships in all the countries (Romania, Hungary and Sweden) they

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<sup>504</sup> Rosenberg, S. & Sedlak, A., 1972. Structural representations of implicit personality theory. In L. Berkowitz (Ed.) *Advances in experimental social psychology*, Vol. 6 (pp. 235 - 297). New York: Academic Press.

encountered, as accounted for by Pandora. I learned from a slightly impatient Pandora, in answer to my question about shared domestic work, that they shared the work, as well as all other family responsibilities at home. Pandora seemed somewhat uninterested in the gender-related topic. It was not clear if my questions were indistinct for her, or if she actually did not find the topic interesting in its personal relevance. Pandora waved away the question about ‘division of labour at home’. At a later stage she answered, implying that she interpreted my line of questioning as somehow irrelevant, in a way Swedish-inspired; using a social discharging stereotype with social-value oriented outgroup-ingroup perspective, i.e. the *other-concern*<sup>505</sup>:

Yes, yes, yes, we have always done that [shared responsibilities at home]... also at home [in Székelyföld] ... yes, yes, yes – once someone asked me about this thing at a Swedish lesson [sfi], I think, and [I told them too] that it was only natural.

I asked her if L. was exceptional in that respect and Pandora answered (somewhat impatiently) “no, no, no – ... it was the normal thing among our friends”. She then terminated the topic, and did not return to it at all. All in all, the information on the role of L. was mainly evaluated for its moral character; i.e. his engagement in the daughter’s health conditions and his actions in monitoring them – as presented in the master narrative; described as a nurturing, essential and irreplaceable partner.

### Intersections of Gendered and Ethnic Identity Aspects

As previously pointed out, through general biased stereotypes used by the different kinds of Hungarians one learns how other Hungarians ‘are’. Such stereotypes are about men’s and women’s roles and attitudes, traditions and moral evaluations about actions in life. Gender-related aspects of life are not treated to the same extent in Transylvanian-Hungarian discourses as in the West, for various reasons. One is that women are said to identify with the traditional roles of women (caregivers, good mothers, good and dutiful wives), which are seen as honourable roles and generally taken seriously by (Hungarian) women. It also strengthens identity, as the well-being of children is seen to be the responsibility of women. One will also be judged by the surroundings (neighbours) as being a ‘good mother’, or a ‘bad mother’; the latter category can also lead to exclusion from communities, which is hardly something a

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<sup>505</sup> McClintock, C.G. & Van Avermaet, E. (1982). Social values and rules of fairness; A theoretical perspective. In V. J. Derlega, & J. Grzelak (Eds), *Cooperation and helping behavior: Theories and research* (pp. 44 -73). New York: Academic Press.

woman in a small town or village would risk. (We have seen other examples of the discourse of ‘good mother’ in both Borka’s and Ilona’s stories.)

This might contribute to the commitment to ‘ways of life’ as inscribed in culture; ‘communal and consequential’<sup>506</sup>, deriving from the cultural community we belong to. To be a ‘good mother’ is partly linked to heightened self-esteem and social status, partly to meeting social expectations patterned in the Hungarian community. To be a good mother is also part of the larger image of being a good person, making a good life. Pandora’s narration is a tribute to the image of the ‘gendered role of mother’. She recounted her own actions mirroring a caring, and sacrificing mother, devoting her time and efforts to the ill child, while relying on the loyalty and support of the other.

To underline her affection towards the children and to demonstrate it to me, she showed me pictures of the children in their first grade in school in Székelyföld, recalling how loved they were by the village people (speaking mainly of O.); how well they behaved even in the most ghastly politically and socially stressful situations in Romania and later, in the first difficult years in Sweden. Pandora’s narration often weaved together memories of various topics (family life, work, illness, and similar) with migration experiences and compared them. One example is when she was talking of how liked her children were in Székelyföld, and her thoughts were directed towards the negative experiences they perceived in the Swedish school after their arrival:

– well, it is rather disappointing that – it was the children who reacted to this too – they were sent to such a förberedelseklassen [preparatory class], now I know, that this was right away a kind of categorisation, the children themselves reacted, because they met ALL kinds of nationalities there, and they had to hear it from a Romanian [pupil] that ‘you, Hungarian, if you are Hungarian, why did you not stay in Hungary? Why did you come here?...’ and he battered L.ka [*familiar name for her son L.*] all the time... well, it was like that. Which he did not experience in Kolozsvár... because there were Romanian classes, how to say it, the selection there was so natural...

Pandora’s basic identity, that of being a good parent, preoccupied her narration, looking for explanations and reasons for her feelings that she had failed her children. She (and her husband) had to redirect family life for the aim of saving the life of the seriously ill O., demanding contributions from and influencing the well-being of all the members of the family. Pandora mentioned for example her son having health

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<sup>506</sup> Bruner, 1990: 29.



problems ('tummy ache'), which made her run with him to the hospital at nights. She blamed the son's worries on the forced separation from his father in 1986, caused by his search for a cure for the daughter, as explained in the master narrative. Pandora was sorry for not coping and for neglecting her son over the years, describing him as a lovely child, patient and stable, attentive towards O., actually O.'s only friend in life. She regretted that he had never been given much attention in his childhood, because O. took all of it. Pandora indicated that their life as they knew it was fragmented, disrupted and on hold.

... 'cause, well, yes, O. had all our attention... when she [O.] is in hospital, she is very ill.... and when we are not there [in hospital] all the time, we stay at the 'anhörighotel' [hotel for relatives of patients], you know, – one of us stays there, we alternate; at one time it is my husband who stays, going to work in the morning, back in the afternoon – or it is me.... Many things have stayed unfinished so far....

### *Context of Ethnic Identification*

Pandora's ethnic, or rather minority, identity, similar to two other interviewees (Ilona and Borka), with an external national homeland (Brubaker, 1995), is part of her self-consciousness and self-identification, developed in separation from the mainstream Hungarian national discourse. Despite the fact that Pandora had never been to Hungary in her youth, she had established a 'remote relationship', an imagery of the homeland, based on a stable, substantial degree of evoked personal and social identification, influenced by the "general reaction and discourse of fellows who share the same identification" (Bloom, 1993); i.e. other Transylvanian-Hungarians and Hungarian institutions in Romania who shared the same ideological view.

Crossing the border was not permitted for Transylvanian-Hungarians in Romania during the Ceaușescu era, except on specific occasions (family funerals, illness and medical treatments) when people were permitted to go to Hungary. This was the case when Pandora's son was little and needed medical treatment and they went to Hungary – for the first time in their life. Pandora's storytelling confirmed the specific relations Transylvanian-Hungarians had towards Hungary (as suggested by Borka in the interview with her, when she compared the Slovakian-Hungarians' relationship to the same). In an answer to my question about her perception of Hungary, she said:

Well, we saw Hungary as ---- well, as our own homeland. As we belonged there, the whole Hungarian language- -- well, uh ---- it never occurred to us, that we would seek... on the Romanian side [within Romania] ---- work, or things like that - --- even if it was our own [country] – ... We looked upon

Hungary as if it was our own country. It was only natural that we adored and admired Hungarian literature and the children [their children] were also brought up to listen to Hungarian fairy tales ... they had a happy childhood, they often talk about that, how lucky they were to go to the Hungarian theatre, to see puppet theatre performances ... the [Hungarian] opera was still there, too.

Pandora recognized that Hungary was her 'fictional' motherland, an unattainable realm of imagined community<sup>507</sup>, confirming the concept of diaspora described by William Safran as any exiled group dispersed from a specific historic homeland, collectively developing ethnic consciousness and solidarity both among its members and toward that "mythical" land<sup>508</sup>. Hungarian language, literature and similar cultural manifestations were a frequently revisited territory for Pandora in her storytelling, stressing their importance, and perceiving the memory of them as a source of happiness for the children when they were young. By that Pandora also confirmed that the non-controversial, possible and for them open channel for displaying 'national belonging', with traits of *Transylvanianism*, was the image of the 'Hungarian cultural nation'<sup>509</sup>, which is often stressed in international discourses.

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<sup>507</sup> B. Anderson, 1983; although, it might be added that, while "communities" might be (and often are) "imagined" by elites, there is a context of a system of representation for a spatial location for the nation (equal to imagined communities). Smith declared that territories were relevant to ethnic communities, because of "an alleged and felt symbiosis between a certain piece of earth and 'its' community". (Smith, A.B., *The ethnic Origins of Nations*. London: Basil Blackwell, 1987.)

<sup>508</sup> Safran, W., "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return." *Diaspora* 1. no. 1 (1991): 83-99, even if he also states that the Magyars of Transylvania cannot be regarded as living in a diaspora. "[They] were not dispersed; rather, their communities were politically detached from the motherland." (Ibid. p. 86.)

<sup>509</sup> After 1989 the discourse on cultural nation (emerging among other 'buzzwords' such as regional, territorial, non-territorial, and similar, instead of national, ethnic, minority, and so forth) has been dominant regarding Hungarians beyond the borders (avoiding the terminology of ethnic, or minority Hungarians. See: the article with L. Sólyom, previous President of Hungary. URL source: <http://shp.hu/hpc/web.php?a=commorakozigaz&o=NICJHc8p5p>). Terms with non-fixed meanings (*Volkseele*, *Volkgeist*, *Volkbewusstsein*) are included in 'cultural nation', denoting irreducible, irrational spiritual forces close to perception or behaviour, providing platforms for a range of cultural characteristics in a way that explains why people of one nation differ from or share similarities with one another. Hungarians tend to accept the German concept of cultural nation (as opposed to the French concept of nation built on citizenship), wherein cultural nation exists without political boundaries, built on common cultural values, language and "Bildung".

People often might apply a ‘*neutral value system*’<sup>510</sup> regarding national belonging in order to avoid political confrontations with other nations. It has become a controversial and sensitive issue, but worth mentioning, that Hungarians, particularly core-Hungarians, often have to look for guidance and information on Hungarian culture to people with descent in Transylvania. The medieval town Kolozsvár, part of the Hungarian Kingdom, is known to have been actively working for the emergence of a Hungarian public sphere, with theatre and newspapers in Hungarian, industries and so forth. The second largest Hungarian university, Pandora’s alma mater, opened in 1872 in Kolozsvár in order to promote *Hungarianness*. When I studied Hungarian literature, I learned that many of the authors from the Hungarian literary canon, plus also other artists (musicians, sculptors) and politicians<sup>511</sup>, were born and lived – both pre- and post-Trianon – in extra-Hungarian territories (Transylvania, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Austria), triggering a less popular discussion on the effects of borders on the centre-peripheral development of cultural representations (for example, language or cultural traditions)<sup>512</sup>. This is true also today; for knowledge of Hungarian literature and aspects of Hungarian history and culture, core-Hungarians often turn to Hungarian people registered as born in foreign countries in order to comprehend their past. (Borka’s narration acknowledged this fact, as well.)

This aspect of history and culture has been part of the many ‘*elhallgatott történetek*’ in the socialistic era (in my time in Hungary); and this is a fact that, strangely enough, does not penetrate the discourse and narrations of transborder Hungarians either. The Hungarian-Hungarian stereotypes confirm a somewhat unbalanced discourse, often free from criticism (with inferiority complex) that Hungarians beyond the borders present towards core-Hungarian (high) culture, which they ascribe to the motherland, downgrading their own ‘backward’ Hungarian cultural capital. Arguably, this belief

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<sup>510</sup> ‘Neutral value system’ in this regard refers to the Hungarian arguments against accusations from certain neighbouring countries to Hungary, claiming that the so-called ongoing ‘reunification’ process of the Hungarian cultural nation does not insinuate the re-drawing of borders, which would threaten the political status quo in Central Europe.

<sup>511</sup> Endre Ady; Tibor Ág, Sándor Antal, Lajos Áprily, János Arany, Bálint Balassi, Balázs Ferenc Balázs Tamás, Miklós Duray, Teri Engel, Mór Jókai, Sándor Márai, Miklós Zrínyi, to mention a few literary persons.

<sup>512</sup> Sociolinguistic analyses in the last decades have considered the development of the Hungarian language (centrum-periphery relations) in a geographic context, focusing on the relation between the normativity of core-Hungarian and the minority variants developing in the neighbouring countries. URL source: <http://pentek.adatbank.transindex.ro/>; Lanstyák, I., (2000) *A Magyar nyelv Szlovákiában* [The Hungarian language in Slovakia], Budapest, Osiris; Kontra, M., (1991) *Tanulmányok a határainkon túli kétnyelvűségről* [Studies on transborder bilingualism], Budapest, Magarságkutató Intézet, Foreign Language Study; Göncz, L., (1991) *A Magyar nyelv Jugoszláviában* [The Hungarian language in Yugoslavia], Budapest-Újvidék, Osiris – Fórum Kiadó, among others.

system is essential for supporting Hungarianness and is maintained in the quest to keep the illusion of an unattainable, common past and to restore the grounds of the imagery of a common nation. The belief system is useful both for core-Hungarians (fear of demographic decline, threat of extinction of the nation<sup>513</sup>) and for the transborder Hungarians in their argumentation for – if not accession – for autonomy<sup>514</sup>.

### Intersections of Ethnicity Aspects and Professional Performance

Pandora mentioned a few segments from her teaching career in Kolozsvár. She had begun to work in a school with ethnically mixed pupils, using Romanian as the working language. She appreciated the parents and children she met and, according to her testimony, she was liked by the pupils and their parents as well, showing and receiving respect in her profession. Her regional identification (linked to in-group identification) was well outlined in several fragments that I joined together during interpretation. Regional (Székely) identification entailed stereotypical traits, such as being industrious, minding your own business, being hard-working, honest, and serious. Pandora's narration refrained from talking about 'ethnic aspects' of her occupation, with a *spontaneous disinterest*<sup>515</sup>, or as a question of taste, and in that case, an expression of *class ethos*<sup>516</sup> (Bourdieu). When I asked her explicitly about the ethnic aspects of her occupation, she gave me open answers, but ethnicity seemed to be a

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<sup>513</sup> See Herder's prophecy.

<sup>514</sup> Csapó Dr. J., (2003) Nemzetközi kisebbségvédelem. Autonomiák és Autonomiatörekvések. [International Protection of Minorities. Autonomy and Striving for Autonomy.] URL source: <http://www.hunsor.se/dosszie/autonomiarorekvesek.pdf>. Discussions by Magyar Autonomia Tanács (KMAT) [Council of Hungarian Autonomy]. URL source: [http://www.felvidek.ma/nezopont/velemenyl/34195-velemenyek-az-autonomia-torekvesek-eselyeirol;http://www.kethanodrom.hu/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=2085:velemenyek-az-autonomia-toerekvesek-eselyeirl&catid=96:kitekint&Itemid=85-](http://www.felvidek.ma/nezopont/velemenyl/34195-velemenyek-az-autonomia-torekvesek-eselyeirol;http://www.kethanodrom.hu/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2085:velemenyek-az-autonomia-toerekvesek-eselyeirl&catid=96:kitekint&Itemid=85-)

<sup>515</sup> The 'right thing' to do, for instance for an intellectual; an acquired and expected attitude of the 'learned' to display patience, tolerance and understanding about social matters (emancipation, social equality, human rights, ethnic discrimination and similar); intellectuals doing what is in their personal and long-term professional interest because they are sincerely interested in being seen as enlightened and 'modern' in their ideology.

<sup>516</sup> P. Bourdieu discussed how knowledge and use of cultural artefacts (body of culture, and the taste that people develop for culture) constitute multiply refined transformations of a single relation of dominant to dominated class. In the process people learn to shape their expectations and their self-perception to their place in a hierarchy of political power and their share in the social product. At the same time, vehicles are provided to *contest* the place a class fraction has in that hierarchy and for an individual to claim a place in a given class fraction. (A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste. Pierre Bourdieu (1979). Transl. by Richard Nice, published by Harvard University Press, 1984.)

‘shut down’ category for her in this relation; it did not seem to be a central and overarching explicit category in her self-identification, as to her narration.

Pandora’s attitude seems to be contrary to the often claimed thesis that ethnicity is prominent in the public discourse of Transylvanian-Hungarians in Romania (Plainer, 2007). Nonetheless, in the course of the interview it became rather obvious that Pandora’s referral frame is the regional ‘Other’. I find it significant that whenever the ethnic self-category appeared in her narrative, she had difficulties with speaking her mind; weighing her words carefully, refraining from open opinion (criticism and evaluations). This showed when Pandora was at one stage talking of the 1980s, an obviously hard decade with severe social decline in Romania. Pandora talked about the increasing competition for jobs, and a spreading mistrust among people on account of being constantly watched both by both institutions and in the private sphere, whereas people were informing on each other. Somewhat surprisingly, Pandora was admittedly unaware of this social phenomena, as student:

... it developed with time... because as a student, studying at the university, you did not perceive these things, but when you began to teach – for instance it was eventually about teaching English – others would have liked to [get the job] too ..... – and --- well, this was probably how it evolved – ... – it was from the beginning of the 80s on – it was so that there were moles in the workplaces, then – then people began to be anxious about what they were talking about, how they were talking – because there was always someone..... we knew that ... just as at your home, you could never know, what ... uh --- who your neighbour was – so, I mean, they were always helpful, seen from the outside – but I am sure, would we have talked about [*laughing embarrassedly*] political issues, or similar, then...

The above quotation manifests the hesitation in Pandora’s narration when talking of things that still seems to stop her speaking her mind openly. The awkwardness in narrating made this sequence somewhat incoherent and confusing. The political and social system of Romania in the 1980s had its Kafkaesque absurdities. I asked her if citizens generally were treated like that, or if it was directed particularly towards certain groups in society. She confirmed that ‘intellectuals’ were more controlled, and ‘Hungarians were absolutely [bugged].... that is 100 per cent...’ I asked her what she thought the reasons were, and Pandora explained:

They did not want people to have contact with Hungary – that Kolozsvár and Transylvania should have contact with Hungary, they had already

started Romanianisation<sup>517</sup>, they re-wrote history<sup>518</sup>, this and that – I must tell you, I cannot be objective now, because this was the period when O. became ill, and then I was not so... how to say this, I don't say I was not interested, but one could not take it in, you were only thinking about each day ----- to manage your everyday, to survive another day, [you hoped] that they would not come and look for you and they would not follow you... because they were doing that... every day there was some filthy business.

'Rewriting history' I assumed referred to the idea of creating 'Great-Romania' through the Romanianisation policy by the state, and the efforts to establish historical continuity ('theory of Daco-Romanian Continuity') pursued in Romania during the Ceaușescu era. Transylvania was officially made a 'property of Romanian historical ideology' in the process, while minority culture was pushed into oblivion. Hungarian was further disadvantaged by the shortage of Hungarian-language teachers and language experts; 'internal regulations' assigned Hungarian university graduates to work outside their communities, usually out of Transylvania, while minority languages were restricted in the cultural field. Local libraries constantly lacked literature in minority languages. (For 'multiple comparison' (Glaser, 1965), i.e. for internal consistency, see Ilona's recounting of her predicament with working conditions in Romania in the 1960s.)

After 1973, Hungarian-language newspaper publishing was substantially decreased; in 1985 television broadcasts in Hungarian (and German) became obsolete<sup>519</sup>; books, newspapers, theatre performances, schools, university studies in Hungarian were banned. Brubaker described the conditions for studying in the particular town that both Pandora and Ilona were linked to, both affected by the policy of the Romanian state: "Hungarian schools and sections were Hungarian only in form; the curriculum was a vehicle for socialist and Romanian nationalist indoctrination." (Brubaker, 2006: 118).

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<sup>517</sup> The policy of the Romanian state in order to assimilate minorities in Romania into the Romanian nation after 1945.

<sup>518</sup> Referring to the conflicting views in Hungarian and Romanian history writing about the 'belonging' of Transylvania. See: Andersen, C., 2004 (Final Paper) Daco-Romanian Contra affected Romanian national awakening. URL source: <http://www.net.hu/corvinus/lib/index.htm>; Balogh, S. Separating Myths and Facts in the History of Transylvania <http://www.hungarianhistory.com/lib/separating/separating.pdf>; Ion I. Russu, *Etnogeneza românilor* (Bucharest, 1981).

<sup>519</sup> National Minorities under Communist Rule. Romania. URL source: <http://countrystudies.us/romania/41.htm>

I interpret Pandora's covering up and hushed-up ideological content presented in her narration as a kind of remnant of a survival strategy used over time. Being preoccupied by private matters, such as the daughter's illness, functioned perhaps as a filter, or barrier, to keep out external matters. It can be compared to the other narrators' omission of political developments from their narrations. Pandora explained (she perhaps judged that there was a need for an explanation, or justification) that she "had never been political" in her student years, because of the feared harassment. Speaking Hungarian openly was enough to be arrested, she implied, while punishments, torture and imprisonment would have been the result of an active political stand. To my question as to whether she had known people treated that way, she said that she knew no one, but she would not have dared to engage in politics: "as I told you, you did not have the opportunity – it was in other circles, you had no opportunity to preoccupy yourself with politics".

Pandora argued that it was safer not to have an opinion at all. I asked her why this was so, and Pandora answered with a hint of finitism, shifting to general subject in her answer:

Why it was so? One was thinking about it a lot – an attitude wasn't it, or...? – because you just had to accept that things were as they were. You could not – it was just to fall into line and when comrade Ceaușescu came to visit somewhere in the neighborhood, in Kolozs county, then – well, some months prior they checked everyone, only the tidy side of things could be shown – well, you see, it was like a theatre show; everything was staged, then we knew, that OK, he [Ceaușescu] would land somewhere [near] with his chopper and then you will have to line up on the streets, they told you 'you, you go out on the street at 8 o'clock, you stand in line there', you would have your own special place in the line pointed out for you and then you had to stand there – the possibility of saying 'no' was just not realistic...

Pandora's criticism of Romanian society did not seem to be over-ethnicised: all citizens of Romania were the victims of the treatment of the Ceaușescu regime. Still, there was a feeling that implied that Hungarians were a target of harassment because of ethnic discrimination.

### **Real Politics: Hungary Revisited**

To have contact with Hungary and Hungarians from Hungary became impossible for Transylvanian-Hungarians during the 1970s-80s. Exclusion was exercised by Romanian nationalism with the opposite result to what was hoped for by the regime. The Hungarian 'motherland' received a higher status; Hungary represented hope, and was often expected to act as the ultimate Saviour of *Hungarians beyond the borders*,

which was also physically manifested. Ethnic minorities turned to Hungary for help, although the image of Hungary changed in the 1980s from being positive to immigration from the transborder regions to a lesser open attitude; the 'good parent' turned away from 'her children' (Hungarians beyond the borders) in need.

Still, a substantial majority of the ethnic minority Hungarians in the host countries (Romania, Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and in Czechoslovakia) found it worthwhile to avoid becoming full members of their respective societies by internalization of the social world in site (Berger and Luckmann, 1999); not considering that world to be their own<sup>520</sup>, not feeling at home there. Instead, they created some *significant others*, partly represented by the majority people of their own homelands (of different ethnic identity), partly by core-Hungarians (of the same ethnic identity) in Hungary. Minority Hungarians looked upon Hungary from the outside, like (to use a metaphor) a child looking in a shop window, separated from a desired toy by invisible boundaries.

### *Teasing, Longing, Envy*

Halbwach notes that "we preserve memories of each epoch in our lives, and these are continually reproduced; through them, as by a continual relationship, a sense of our identity is perpetuated" (1992: 47). Interpreting this into the Hungarian situation, we must rephrase the above. Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin *download* 'preserved' memories from their ancestors (very few survivors are still around today from the Trianon generation). They pass them on to the next generation, reproducing the recollections of a historical time they have no personal experience of; by that ensuring sustainable continuity of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983), which one calls the Hungarian nation.

Plainer (2007) points out in a life story study of a Transylvanian-Hungarian woman in Romania<sup>521</sup> that dominant discourses about 'being a Hungarian in Romania' usually claim ethnicity to be a central "overarching" category of minority identity, resulting in Hungarians in the public sphere mainly appearing as agents of a steady nation-building process, involved in Hungarian cultural questions and shaping their ethnicized social places (schools, associations, parties, university, NGOs) in order to discern themselves from the Romanian society. The question arises whether there might be other socio-cultural differences (local identity, class, and gender) behind the

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<sup>520</sup> A young Transylvanian lad participating in a youth camp in Hungary in June 2012: "we are Hungarians, we only live abroad" (report on Kossuth Radio).

<sup>521</sup> Plainer, Zs., Beyond the Gates: Ethnicity, Class and Gender and Local Identity in a life-story from Baciú. Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai – Studia Europea (2/2007).



stereotyping description of 'Hungarian', which Plainer also examined in the Romanian context. She found that ethnicity was not the most outstanding driving force for the actions of the narrator in her study. In Pandora's case, her story partly verified the existence of other categories than ethnicity behind her actions and attitudes; she acted for example as agent in her personal life in the Romanian public and private contexts. It partly refuted it, considering the necessity of social opportunism and their motives of migration.

## Master Narrative – Form and Content

Pandora's narration contained mixed discourses, accounts, accusations, evaluations, excuses, explanations of humanitarian hardships, segments of (im)migration, discrimination, social exclusion, private and social disappointment and delusion. The 'master narrative' was constructed with a flow so far not experienced in Pandora's narration. It entailed essential specifics of family life, focussed on their main consideration: the well-being of their daughter, reflecting painful details in the process of O.'s illness, which Pandora had held back so far.

The open recounting of the illness of her daughter turned out to be essential, as it revealed the reasons and motif for the life development of the family, and for their migration. The storytelling is rich, with a clear focus on the health condition of O. and its consequences for the family, with content that surpasses reality. Pandora also talked of the family's dependence on the good-will of 'kind' people (i.e. of both ad hoc and regular social networks, both private and official in Romania and in Hungary) in both interviews, which I have combined into one account, and I present my interpretations as close to the source as possible, assembling the text into one whole. Despite the temporal gap and personal difficulties that arose between the two interview occasions, there is a noteworthy congruence between the phrasing, themes and thoughts. Pandora used Romanian society to frame her story of despair and migration. The triggering factor for the 'master narrative' was my displayed incomprehensibility of the details of their migration: details would not add up and I could not see coherence in the told. After one hour's interviewing, we arrived at Pandora's migration story, which was worthwhile waiting for as it turned out to be anything but a traditional migration story. It made my heart sink.

Still disoriented about the way they arrived in Sweden, I asked a question about it. Pandora finally realized my confusion and began to clear things up for me: beginning with the time when they recognised the seriousness of the child's illness, pointing out the difficulties of finding medical treatment for her in Romania, continuing with the hunt for a cure for her, leading to the banishment of her husband and daughter from Romania and finally to a forced separation of the family members. She talked also of

meeting kind people before leaving Romania for good, and of helping hands in Hungary.

Now Pandora talked with a flow for the first time, only stopping for emotional breaks, marking the importance and familiarity of the topic. Her openness about the hardships they experienced surprised me, including essential information. This is Pandora's master narrative and I therefore recount the whole of her storyline here, below. The somewhat incoherent and at times flustered style of narration reflects the difficulties with telling an un-tellable story; explaining, disputing and defending oneself against the arguments and accusations of the significant Other, through indirect quotes:

... I had a second cousin [in Hungary], and a lot of very good friends, [and] some acquaintances – and then as there was no medicine [in Romania] – that is why, I have told you, what a lovely school I worked at, the parents in O.'s class, the fellow students, they helped us, telling us that there were some acquaintances [in Budapest], and that “you just have to go to Hungary” [quoting others] and they [friends] told me that they had already arranged it with a hospital by mail – it was ... a hospital treating kidney patients [in Budapest] – because [*with a deep sigh*], you see, we recognized, she [O.] became ill very suddenly, we saw that she became swollen, full of water – she could finally hardly go, so full of water her body was ... [*inaudible, taking a break to gather her thoughts*] ... She was eleven, in the fourth grade, it was the beginning of December, when we saw, that she had become swollen, the poor thing, so we thought that – she used to swim, she liked sports and we thought that perhaps there was too much chlorine in the water, but then the [test] results showed [*losing strength of voice*] that she was full of water and --- - her kidney did not work [*she begins to talk very fast and loud again*]. So we had the diagnosis, to our great sorrow, it was a ‘correct’ diagnosis, because we did not believe until then. And it was so we ended up in Pest [Hungarian colloquial for Budapest] – It was arranged by correspondence, – acquaint-, uh, total strangers, it was the classmates, who loved [her] so much and appreciated [her] – the classmates’ parents – and it was in the middle of the school year and so I could not go. Therefore it was my husband who went with O. – the pair of them. I still remember clearly, I said there at the railway station ‘do not get sad, my little O., because in April when we have vacation, your mother will follow ...’ And then they [authorities] did not let me go [whispering]. They would not let me go, because there was a new law stating that if one, anyone from a family was abroad, no one else from that family would be allowed to go .... – Well, explain this to an eleven-year-old child, she did not understand it and this is still – I don’t know how to put it – it is still a source of distress for her, that .... I tell you, this is still .... there is a strain on our relationship. ... [*talking very fast*] – I mean, she feels that I

betrayed her. That I ... – ‘you told me you would come and you did not’ [*deep sigh*]. Well, then, well then we had the diagnosis, to our great grief – and we had to rely on very good people – very helpful people – we ended up .... they received [*diving into memories, keeping silent for a while*] – acquaintances helped, they [L. and O.] were taken in by acquaintances who gave them accommodation, then there were people helping in the hospital, so that L. could stay on with O. – I can only say very – very-very positive things about that. But time flew in the meantime, and then the two weeks holiday were over for L., he could not come back to his workplace, because he did not want to leave O. there [in Hungary] and no matter how many times I visited the boss of Securitate – because to tell you the truth, also our Romanian neighbours, the ones who knew us, also they felt sorry for O. and they felt sorry for us. – Well, we had very kind neighbours, we had sometimes played cards together, and that that helped a lot, a Romanian man, he was some Party boss but I [still] could not get a passport. And then I said, what kind of country is this, it had never occurred to us to go abroad, to take a trip abroad, to go to Hung-, --- as I told you before, we had been in Hungary once before – and a second time somewhat later, in connection with my son’s car accident, we visited an orthopaedist there, but we had never otherwise been abroad. We actually never longed to go either; there was mainly work, the family.... And then I said, what kind of a – I have always honored my work, I always loved my work, I loved the town – I loved the whole country and then there we are, my husband is there [in Budapest] – well, how far is Kolozsvár from Budapest? Perhaps a couple of hours and you cannot go there .... [*whispering*] --- Not in a million years.

Pandora evaluated her own character in the storytelling about what she did and what she failed to do, admitting to the narrative’s ethical dimensions; namely the ethics of the kept word<sup>522</sup>. She gave a promise first to her daughter to join her in Hungary, which she could not keep; and second, to herself, namely to bring her daughter to a place where she would be mended. She could not keep her word, and by that she breached the unity of her life. Pandora expressed her feeling that she had failed in the promise of responding to others’ needs, and in the hope of bringing about a better life for all concerned.

I was taken aback by the content of Pandora’s above story and hesitated to go on with the interview after this revelation. In a not particularly bright way, I asked her how

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<sup>522</sup> Ricoeur’s narrative identity representing the “laboratory of moral judgement” implying that a *promise* has ethical implications and a narrative is never ethically neutral, because the function of narrative is to articulate the promise with the character.

she coped. Pandora continued to talk, explain and evaluate; she was trying to understand the consequences of a promise not kept, literally and in an abstract sense<sup>523</sup>. She valued the help they received highly, she said, contradicting herself in other parts of her narration.

[*With a deep sigh*] Well, I had my son with me – he was such a great little boy [*with great emotion*] – now we know that all the tummy ache, and all that – because also O., – it is caused by stress – many nights I had to run over to the emergency with him because he had tummy ache – well, to cut it short; I had to look after him, and then there were the queues – it was not only that I had to work, you had to find food, too – You could not only leave it at that – and you had no time to think, ‘cause in the morning at five o’clock you went out to stand in line for milk and then.... And so on, and so on.../.../ By that time things were getting real difficult, I repeat, to tell to O. also that her classmates were so kind, and the neighbours too, because the ration, I don’t remember now what it was; perhaps one chicken per family [monthly]... Never mind; it was anyhow too little and she [O.] needed protein-rich nourishment and then her classmates came over with their rations – this way she [O.] could get some extra meal: chicken, extra butter, extra eggs, and I don’t remember it all, I would tell you if I remembered [the ration]: perhaps six eggs? for a month – I know, on the other hand, that we got one kilogram of meat [a month] ... And then when you queued for the whole night [bitter laugh] and then they [people] break down the door and they break the shop windows – then you get the meat, you know yourself, [turning to me] when you cut the skin away and you clean the fat away and the-I-don’t-know-what, you know what is left ...– but ---- well, I met a lot of very nice people.... That was – whatever high-and-mighty politician, or whatever, but there were many simple people – righteous people – or take the neighbour woman, the one that came over with her milk ration to La., or the other neighbour, who let you use the phone, because a phone, that was not everybody’s privilege. – So it was awfully difficult, because you did not know anything about them [husband and daughter in Hungary], how things were going, how things were with them. /.../ And then Easter came – and I remember this Easter particularly well, because acquaintances came from Hungary to Kolozsvár, with a message on a piece of paper, it was so I learned for the first time how they [husband and O.] had it [in Budapest], I had had no idea about that either [before that]...

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<sup>523</sup> In the Ricoeurian sense: equating selfhood.

It was painful to hear her tale of sorrow. I wanted to cut in and ask some diverging questions, but Pandora was unbendable now and continued to tell her story about the past. She talked about ‘they’ [the Securitate] coming to their house in Kolozsvár, snooping around and asking questions about having so many Hungarian books, and similar. Pandora disclosed finally the consequences of her husband’s and her daughter’s hunt for medical treatment in Budapest:

[*Beginning with a deep sigh*] Well, then it resulted in – well, L. could not come home, because he was fired /.../ he [L.] lost his passport [it was withdrawn] and everything and he could not cross the border, because that would have been a criminal act, well, you cannot [re]enter the country without a passport – I am making a mess of this now [the story], because I am so disillusioned by all that and everything – anyway, he could not come home, he lost his job, he had no passport, so if he had come home [to Romania], he would have been punished. And the problem was, that O. did not understand this, and one could not explain it either, and she keeps repeating it even today: ‘why did you not let me die at home’ – and ‘all these bad things [illness, migration?] were good for nothing’ ... and it seems, I am sad to say, that she seems to be quite right about that [Pandora kept silent for a while] /.../ And then L. stayed in Hungary – and that fact had consequences [for Pandora]; first you lose Party membership, because it is just not possible that you have some relations abroad /.../ and remain a Party member /.../ and then it happened more and more often, that when there was not enough food, or there were shortages of other kinds, then [people told them] ‘go to Hungary – well, you are Hungarian, go to Hungary!’ It was the same with the medicine; ‘you are Hungarian you go to Hungary!’

Using illocutionary and perlocutionary means, Pandora’s narration built up to a crescendo. She became more and more explicit about the experiences with humanitarian rights restrictions in her homeland. She felt undesired as a citizen because of their ethnic belonging (Hungarian) and she expressed genuine disappointment over the fact that all this happened in the aegis of mutual understanding and friendship (as the official slogan went), between two ‘brother (socialistic) nations’, pointing at the total mistrust and suspicion that they encountered in her homeland. The untenable situation with Pandora and her son in Romania, her husband and daughter in Hungary, led to the inevitable decision to leave Romania, which in turn also explained how they ended up in Sweden:

/.../ It came about by coincidence. The first difficulty we had was with medicines; as I told you before, and with the medical treatment, ‘cause:

'you're Hungarian, [go to] *the Hungarian doc[tors]*... *ask the Hungarians*' [when in need] ... well, this kind of... talk we heard from the Romanians – then -... that was truly so, really [*she tries to excuse her allegations seeing my perplexity*]. We had to go away with O. because she needed the medicine... with high protein value and then somehow, well, [you were told] '*you go to Pest because there – there – they might be able to help*'. – And then we were at that time so trusting, we thought that well, one month, two months and she will get better and when she will be better, they she can come back. [But] Confronted by the system, you will learn about it. When you do your daily routine, you do your job with honour, you queue for food, you find 'the ways', you take care of your children; then this is [what you get]. So it was. You keep your mouth shut, you even clap your hands heartily, because you are expected to do it with enthusiasm, because 'they' were watching, ... don't give them a reason to talk about you... you were not to make faces to show that you were not satisfied with things – Well, in January [1987], they suddenly tell you not to exchange letters, letters would not be delivered to you, they would not be sent – we also knew that the phone was bugged, it was the normal thing... they were listening, you could hear it 'click', and you knew you were observed everywhere, on the main square in the town there were cameras, to control who was meeting whom, foreigners, so they were... – you were watched, always observed.

Pandora felt indebted for having been dependent on the kindness of other people (from Hungary and Romania) and for not being able to return it; mainly because it was not permitted to invite Hungarians to her home. The story went on about the sick political system, with restrictions on human rights and discriminations. Hungary was at this time on the way to breaking away from the 'camp of brotherly countries', but the discrimination by intimidation was not a new phenomenon in Romania; it had been going on throughout the Ceaușescu regime. Pandora condemned it for the first time in her narration:

... if a family member was abroad, you [others in the family] could not have passport... the rest of the family was a hostage – yes, it was terrible. You see; there you were in Kolozsvár, you take a train in the morning and at noon you are in Budapest, and both were socialist countries – and there you were, you did not even know where the others were, or how your child was, and you are not allowed to go to see them to meet your husband and child [almost whispering] – and then I thought, that you had been living your life blamelessly, you had worked, you had never done anything against the system – because the only important thing was that you honored your work, and you cannot ... – I say, what kind of a world is this, you cannot go to

meet your husband and child who is ill. I could not get any news from them;  
it was just horrible.

## Migration narrative

The picture of migration that was blurred before had begun by this time to take form in my mind. Pandora's 'migration' was performed in two different stages; first it was L. and O. who left Romania in 1987, and then later, Pandora and their son in 1988. When L. left with O. it was for treatment in Hungary that they hoped would cure their daughter. The treatment took a longer time than expected, they stayed over the permitted three weeks and L. was declared *persona-non-grata*, and was forbidden from re-entering Romania; but they could also not stay in Hungary, as their stay could have led to a diplomatic conflict, disturbing the fragile political equilibrium between the two 'brother' nations, as authorities informed L. in Hungary.

They were suggested by the authorities in Budapest to go to Stockholm; therefore, L. bought two tickets, took his fiercely protesting daughter (she did not want to go to Sweden) under his arm and intended to leave as suggested. They were delayed by some bureaucratic (and political) hassles and had to stay in Budapest for some more days. Still there, without money, they were offered help by an unknown, older woman, who invited them to stay at her home while they waited for the missing papers. After having fixed those, they left for Stockholm: Pandora's brother-in-law met them there, as his presence was necessary for the two, in order to get an entry permit into Sweden. Pandora was meanwhile unaware of all these things going on; she and her son were still in Romania, unable to get any news about or from the other two somewhere in Europe. Finally, after having gathered information about L. and O. through pieces of papers delivered by unknown Hungarians, Pandora heard the news about her husband and daughter and felt compelled to apply for a permit to join them. The following storylines described in an absurd, comic and tragicomic way their rite of journey; revealing the vulnerability of the individual when meeting the Romanian system:

You could not just leave Romania ... you had to give up everything – you applied for a final and for an irrevocable [permit of leave]... that you want to leave the country. So we came with two suitcases, but we were happy that we could come at all, we had among other things O.'s collection of paper

napkins<sup>524</sup> with us [laughing loud], we were not sure whether to laugh or to cry with La., because the guards at the border and the police, you know that awful, rude, insolent behaviour, when, not only did they go through your things, but you know, you were totally at their mercy; had they told you that you were a killer, or that you had narcotics on you, it was not possible to defend yourself .... And there we were trembling that everything should be in order, because there was always something that was not in order and you had to pay [bribe]; I remember that I had to pay extra for something on the train...; I had a pair of old leather shoes on me, but I had to pay a custom's fee for them, because they were of leather... They wanted to make sure that I was not hiding any secret documents or letters or things like that among the napkins, so you just go through all the napkins, one by one, we were already approaching Budapest when we still kept on folding paper napkins, putting them back into the suitcase [laughing loud] – and the woman who took in L. and O. [before leaving for Stockholm] came and met us at the station, we stayed at her place that night and then we continued to Sweden... we had no idea how the trip would go, how to change trains in Berlin – you know, we had never been farther before than to Budapest...

## Social Stigma

Pandora explained that the only expectation she had when she arrived in Sweden was to find a cure for her daughter and make her healthy again; and by moving, she would also reunite the family and, after a long while, mend their family life. The most striking memories she had from Sweden were her meetings with authorities. She recalled the first encounter with an assistant at the job centre, meeting personnel at the 'sfi' courses, and contacts with health care institutions.

The evaluation of her experiences in Sweden actually challenged my ideas and interpretations of their life in Romania, as described right above. All encounters with authorities have led her so far to feel from 'disappointed' (told in the first interview) to 'depressed' (expressed during the second interview). Paradoxically, Pandora concluded, when talking of the differences between life in Romania and in Sweden, that 'you cannot even compare'; meaning that life was better in Romania (first interview): "I miss it very much. Very much. I miss all of it, and the children miss also the big house where we lived in Kolozsvár." She was disappointed with her life in Swedish society; today she felt 'physically sick' [in her hometown] each time she passed Komvux, "having been a target ... I tell you now as it is --- so much

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<sup>524</sup> It was popular among young girls of the socialistic bloc to gather 'luxurious' paper napkins in the 1960s and 70s.



humiliation one has been put through...” Evaluating her status, she blamed her own character traits for the failures and said with low self-esteem: “I have always been a loser”.

Pandora was not explicit about the content of “much humiliation”. I interpret it that she summed up the amount of ‘humiliation’ she had been speaking about during her narration so far: sending her, a highly-educated language teacher, to incompetent language teachers at *sfi*; making her do meaningless exercises; visiting never-ending courses that led nowhere; being sent to pick strawberries, with a seriously ill daughter in their company, when they arrived in Sweden; her husbands’ never-ending, unfinished temporary ‘projects’ that never led to employment; the loneliness of her daughter and the neglect of her son at school; and the most painful experience of all, the medical maltreatment of O. The list of discontent would be long.

### Judgments and Evaluations

Using the cultural content of her knowledge from her birthplace, Pandora generalized over both the system and the people (teachers, job centre assistants, medical experts and fellow students) in her judgment of Swedish society, underlining personal traits (industrious, honest, hard-working, a loner, looking after herself and taking things seriously) that she found important, building the ideological ground for evaluating others.

Pandora perceived dishonesty, unfairness, incompetence, insincerity, deception in Sweden, and that people did not take their jobs seriously. The *sfi* system, for example, made her feel like ‘a prostitute’; the courses for immigrants were of low quality, aimed only at securing job opportunities for Swedish people. The teachers were not “real teachers”, in the sense she thought a teacher would be, she explained. A psychologist might be a better judge to decide to what extent Pandora’s perception of the negative social experiences was influenced by the traumatic stress she had been exposed to as an exile in her homeland, a parent of a seriously ill child and finally a bereaved parent, now conceptualising the traumatic experience, processing it at her individual and social (cultural) level. Lacking social support, or not being able to make better use of the social support available, might cause Pandora to respond with bitterness, disappointment and accusations. Pandora felt that they had been subjected to harm, particularly by the health care system (doctors), repeatedly making fatal mistakes in the medical treatment of O., leading to her death. She remembered the sudden, acute attacks that drove them uncountable times to the hospital in a panic; all in vain. Upon the death of their daughter, they felt urged to take legal measures, declaring that they felt that the health care system was responsible for the death of their child, but she did not believe the family had a chance to win, she concluded.

Pandora added some less serious, yet still important, issues of discriminatory actions manifested and fixed because of a social categorization (as migrants) in Sweden.

Pandora perceived being placed in the category *invandrare* as being disqualifying and humiliating, limiting one's role, possibilities and hopes for the future. She equated the stigma of the category of 'invandrare' used in Sweden with their situation in Romania, where they were treated as an autochthonous ethnic minority. Other examples that Pandora perceived as discriminatory were often linked to the children's predicament, for example when they [parents] had to fight for the children to be placed in a 'normal class' (instead of a preparatory class for 'invandrare') on their arrival in Sweden; the children proved their worth by showing skill and catching up fast and achieving good results by the end of the first school year. Another example was not getting information about the 'fritids' activities [daycare activities after school] for children, Pandora claimed. It would have helped them to have been able to place their 10-year-old son there when they had to rush the daughter, suffering from a collapse, to a hospital in a distant city instead of leaving him at home, alone. Nobody in school asked how he managed, Pandora reported. She criticised the school for inattentiveness too in relation to their daughter. Handicapped as she was, she was not able to take part in children's activities, and seeing her walking home from school every day alone, without friends, broke Pandora's heart, she said.

## Ethno-national Homecoming and the Mirage of Home

Ethno-national homecoming did not play any great role in Pandora's and her family's life, she explained; they apparently did not have the time or the energy to do 'ethnic relations'. Family life was regularly interrupted by unpredictable visits to the hospital. They had no contact with local Hungarian institutions or compatriots from Transylvania or other Hungarian regions either. A long time ago, they saw some theatre shows arranged by the local Hungarian association, but as their visits could only be at random, they stopped going. Ethnicity played a role in her evaluation of their situation, in that all negative confrontations with Swedish society were placed on ethnicity bases; not for being Hungarian, but for not being Swedish. Pandora expressed a view of hopelessness, and mistrust about ever having a brighter future in Sweden.

In the 1990s the family visited Székelyföld in a hired bus with medical equipment, but it became impossible to repeat it after O.'s illness got worse and she became dependent on more sophisticated clinical apparatus, Pandora explained. The three of them went back after O.'s demise, to visit Kolozsvár and Székelyföld in 2007. It felt good to see her former school, meeting some old teacher colleagues, still alive and experiencing that teaching in Hungarian was possible again and things seemed to have changed for the better, Pandora remembered. On a personal level, their homecoming to Székelyföld was not a success; without going into details, Pandora only revealed that a family matter went sour and her homeland lost its power of attraction

for her. However, Pandora said, she could imagine going back to live in Kolozsvár, but this possibility had never been discussed in the family. To my question as to whether she longed for her former native land, Pandora answered affirmatively, but she also said that to go back would be impossible owing to economic constraints. L. did his fixed-term 'projects' and Pandora had been looking for an employment since her arrival to Sweden, but despite her efforts, all her endeavours to find a job resulted in teaching some hours weekly within the mother tongue education system and teaching English in an evening course for adults. She could not take a full-time teaching job, partly due to her poor psychological state, partly also for not having fulfilled her *sfi*-studies at Komvux, as far as she could understand due to the 'incomprehensible' bureaucratic system and constantly changing conditions and demands.

As for the 'sfi' studies, Pandora explained that she was fed up with the meaningless language studies. She had been studying for twenty years in Sweden now and she had not yet achieved *hemspråkslärarbehörighet* [authorization to become a mother-tongue teacher]. The demands have continuously changed over the years, and courses she had attended changed name, with the result that Pandora had always been doing the 'wrong' course that did not authorise her for a licence. There was always another course that she was recommended to take. Pandora said she felt 'like a prostitute' doing the present course she was attending because she had to sit among a lot of 'illiterates', and the exercises were beneath her professional dignity: "well, you understand this; it has nothing to do with education..."

Nonetheless, she decided to continue the studies, even though she was feeling frustrated; even if she did not have "the patience ... to adjust to their pace" in the class, as she put it. It seemed that Pandora was stuck in her studies, never coming to a closure, while the years passed by.

## Reflections on Pandora's Tale

*Nomen est omen*<sup>525</sup>. Pietá: I have thought of Pandora by that symbolic name when listening to her tale. It implies a life burdened by grim and sorrowful experiences, and a lack of hope. Pandora has had plenty of such experiences. Life seemed to go on without catharsis, without purification and release. It was somewhat surprising, when confronted by the many shocking details that revealed the tremendous difficulties the family had had to go through in Romania and later, that Pandora was so vague and

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<sup>525</sup> Name is Omen, a name that forebodes a future.

timid in her critical remarks about the Romanian system. She seemed to adapt to it and lived her life without making a fuss; referring to a characteristic of hers, calling herself a “coward”. Cowardice, Confucius is said to have defined as ‘to see the right thing and not to act’. Considering that, she cannot possibly be called a coward.

Pandora sought out the best alternatives to act upon in order to do the right thing for her family. She has lived an adjusted life full of compromises, all in order to safeguard herself and her family. She did her duty in Romania, living unnoticed in order to be able to concentrate on the only task she cared for: to take her daughter to a place where she could find cure for the illness she had been suffering from since her teenagers. Pandora focused herself and her family’s life on the daughter’s recovery; she offered everything in a private and official capacity, including her homeland. She gave her daughter and herself a promise to take her to a place where she could be cured. She fulfilled the first part of her promise; she took her daughter to Sweden, but she failed in fulfilling the second part.

The narration was very different from the other narrators’ stories, on various grounds. Pandora did not speak of role models, basic ideas or ideologies that could offer explanations to be used as clues to her life ideologies or attitudes. Cooley<sup>526</sup> suggests that identity is built through multiple interactions between the social actors and the self. In Pandora’s case, she was shaped mainly by the rules of her community, in interaction between her, the local community and personal relationships that she developed within the social environment of her childhood in socialization with *significant others* (Berger & Luckman, 1966), acting also upon the role of *generalized other* (Mead, 1934), linking her to the greater community. Allegedly, the community had a greater impact on her than the relationships with her parents and sister. Her own family, husband and children, had a strong influence on her life development. Pandora and her husband sometimes seemed to have been living parallel lives on separate tracks – for practical reasons – understanding each other by way of the plot that tied them together through what had happened to them, the goals and missions they assumed, and what they actually did in order to take care of each other and their family.

Pandora has been living in Sweden for two decades now, experiencing negative input in society, and feels dissatisfied with many aspects of it. Nevertheless, I do not find it sufficient to look merely for sociological explanations to analyse Pandora’s attitude, as the individual cannot be reduced to their social position and personal identity is not equal to social identity. A part escapes; the part that Ricoeur referred to as ‘*ipse*’-

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<sup>526</sup> Social interactionism.

identity (selfhood<sup>527</sup>) and this might be the part that is in confrontation with Pandora's 'idem'-identity (sameness<sup>528</sup>). Pandora's storytelling confronts us with an individual who has been shaken by the losses in her life. She lost a variety of social roles as mother, as citizen, and as professional, which causes difficulties for her to find consolation and balance in her life. I would suggest that Pandora has lost something that is argued for by Ricoeur in this way: "perseverance of character is one thing, the perseverance of faithfulness to a word that has been given is something else again".

The individual, with her many modalities of human existence (plurality), strives for a unified narrative; uniting an irreducible selfhood with plurality, looking for the temporal permanence of the self, corresponding to the kept word, with ethical implications. MacIntyre<sup>529</sup> argues that the need to create a unified narrative answers to the ethical need to assign responsibility and work for the shared vision of good. Pandora had taken responsibility with the vision of taking her child to the Land of Promise. However, she was not able to keep her word and cure her. The faculty of promising has a power of stabilization of the self. Hannah Arendt writes in "The Human Condition" (1958: ch. 33<sup>530</sup>): "Without being bound to the fulfilment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities".

I have the feeling that Pandora has now begun climbing the long and painful path to recover from a broken promise and look for new identities in order to stabilise the self.

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<sup>527</sup> *Who* is not equal to *what*; corresponding to the individual's uniqueness. Selfhood is the part of one's identity that *resists* the objective features of one's own character that sustain the individual's social recognition: "keeping one's word expresses a self-constancy which cannot be inscribed, as character was, within the dimension of something in general but solely within the dimension of *who*?" (Ricoeur, P., *Oneself as Another*, 1983.)

<sup>528</sup> Sameness is one character trait by which the person is recognised. (Ibid.)

<sup>529</sup> MacIntyre, A. (1984). *After Virtue: A Study of Moral Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.

<sup>530</sup> Arendt, H., [1958]. *The Human Condition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. The University of Chicago Press. 1998.

## 9. Conclusions

### Discursive Reality Disjuncture

Narrations of migration provide a site, and insight, for the teller, the researcher and the reader to study the meaning people ascribe their lived experiences with a wider historical, socio-political and cultural context in the backdrop. The present *exiled stories* reflected on the ways individuals made sense of their displacement, exposing the weaknesses and strengths of their own culture, exploring the scope for the possible, desirable and impossible in the new culture. The stories speak of the establishment of new identities, while adhering to continuity; exposing the system of dispositions and different kinds of capitals (Bourdieu) in constructing new lives. Stories about migration might sometimes be constrained; bridging the past and present might include delicate details that give the urge to control the narrations of experiences and events from the past in order to make them intelligible in cultural terms, supplying memory details from a general knowledge pool, fitting stereotypes.

When reading the stories my impression was that they present different ‘realities’ (reality disjuncture, Pollner, 1987), which were sometimes revealed by rhetorical means, such as irony or metaphors, on the account level. Nonetheless, there still are cases when certain conflicting versions of the world remained unresolved between the different presentations and interpretations of the same (discussed further in the segment Unfulfilled Background Expectations, p. 310), for example regarding world views, or expected recounts of historical events). Looking at the stories with aspects of the study’s theoretical background, I have the following reflections.

The stories of the study can be divided into large and small stories. The large stories tell about how the interviewees constructed their own individual solutions to the common problems and phenomena that migration brings about (self-identification, migrant status, exile, work, hopefulness, nostalgia, etc.). They also reflect my own initial expectations and general theoretical and practical assumptions about the narrations to be delivered. The smaller stories were about everyday life experiences from the past and the present, as well as foreshadowing certain future expectations, describing spatial-temporary processes of the narrators’ personal development. The women survey, diachronically and synchronically, aspects of migration from the time of taking the decision to leave, to the time of arrival, and to their eventual settling

down in Sweden, including presentations of their roles in family and society. They spoke also about attitudes and relations to work experiences and the importance of preserving and conveying the Hungarian culture in exile.

The storyline followed a loosely given structure in accordance with the objectives of the study, which were to elicit material for an analysis. The plots, the narrated life experiences, have been assembled (i.e. constructed) for intelligible reasons (open reading) by the narrators themselves, who edited their own narrated life stories to some extent. Thus, both negative and positive details may have been left out. I had the feeling that sometimes this was at the cost of making the stories less readable, corroborating the social constructionist theory (Berger & Luckman, 1966) that the build-up of 'reality' and 'knowledge' relate to specific social contexts (for instance the interview). Having followed the life developments of the interviewees during several years at close range, I have forged a kind of understanding and knowledge of their lives. After listening to their storytelling, I soon realised that the narrated lives did not fully overlap with my insight into the lived lives of the narrators. I would have expected, for example, Borka to speak about her children, or Ilona to tell about her many engagements within the local national and international immigrant organisations. In Liza's case, I was counting on story details of the 'caring daughter'; i.e. her efforts to take care of her elderly parents.

I found reality disjuncture between my knowledge of the world and the narrated knowledge of the storytelling individuals' world, and one might assume the same for the lived and narrated life experiences of the storytellers. Reality disjunctures appeared in relation to everyday and sociological discourses that are dependent on assumptions about the nature of people's *objective reality*, assuming the existence of a *there-being* world [from Heidegger's *dasein*, meaning presence] based on their beliefs about reality. I tried to disentangle *mundane reason* from sociology (with 'sociological imagination', citing Pollner), which was not always easy. One kind of disjuncture, or *hiatus*, was about discourses on historical events (1956, 1968 and 1989) which in my world (real and storyworld) had a strong and specific content that I expected to be adequately dealt with, which the narrators failed to do.

The "nature of reality disjunctures" Pollner argues (1987: 86) rests on the fact that people see and experience the facts of the world in differing, and sometimes also conflicting, ways. This implies that the versions of reality accounted for by different people must differ, or at least have competing validities. The challenge, when hearing disputed versions of reality, is to avoid questioning the other's ability to properly perceive the world, and to continue to act upon the received version as the grounds for further interpretation and actions.

To give an example: reality disjuncture appeared in relation to the experience and perception of sharing living space with 'the Russians' during my adolescence in Hungary. Apparently I perceived it quite differently than Liza and would have

presented a different version of it than what her narrated experiences implied; in which case, stories within and without the study could have been juxtaposed as alternative discourses. I find it quite understandable that major incidents with severe consequences (for example suicide attempts) would not be likely to be included in the storytelling, which in my view increases the effect of *reality disjuncture* on personal narrations. Nonetheless, I find it natural that there will be untold details that leave the reader with incomplete knowledge of the teller's life. The consequences for the study, and for me, were to make the choice of refraining from the "politics of experience"<sup>531</sup> (1987: 86); i.e. not to imply doubts about the narrated, but to act upon the narrator's particular version of "what really happened" (ibid.).

## Reading of Narrations

In the overlapping reading of the five narrators' storytelling, the reader finds that the stories are embedded in cultural traits which are recognised by both the teller and reader, and, as argued for by Pollner's *mundane reason* (1987), deliver accounts with *taken-for-granted* content accepted by both sides. Nonetheless, some accounts were difficult to honour; as explained in the next segment. The interviews were organised around certain topics, and the answers were typified according to those themes (regarding social roles, family relations, mobility through migration, ethnic belonging, and the relationship between personal and professional life experiences) with interpersonal contexts in the interviews. The five women employed diverse *narrative strategies* and presented different, yet shared experiences, that connected all the participants. The narrators delivered life stories that they thought were appropriate for the occasion. They had been approached by me prior to the interviews so they had certain pre-conceptions, or – using Garfinkel's term – *background expectancies*, meaning they normalised their accounts into 'what everybody knows', allowing of course, individual features to be included.

The examples in the study seem to confirm both van Dijk's arguments about individuals in a special context (interview), making a subjective interpretation of the situation which also constraints the production, structuring and understanding of the same – along with the social constructionist view on social realities being subject to the context of both socialisation processes and conditions of living space. The narrators were telling the story according to the limits of their socialisation. There were constrained and restricted discourses in socialistic Hungary and in other countries with a similar political system; hence, it was possible to narrate different

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<sup>531</sup> Act upon discrediting the other's narration on her/his reality.



discursive versions of the same events ('double-speech'). The ways the people had been taught to narrate the events laid the ground for how events were experienced, perceived and conveyed.

To give an example, Liza's narration did not reflect the general disapproval of Hungarians towards the *occupants* (soldiers from the Soviet Union) in Hungary, which in my interpretation echoes Liza's socialisation practices. The opposite could be said for Ilona, who presented discourses with the family's view on Russian soldiers' behaviour in Romania, based on her and her father's experiences of them.

## Unfulfilled Background Expectancies

As indicated above, I found that some discourses were deficient or omitted (*hiatus*) in relation to certain topics. In two cases the hiatus was particularly notable. First, there was *hiatus* about *gender*-related issues, which apparently was not culturally useful for the individuals to talk about. This aspect includes the frugally narrated husband-wife and parent-child relationships. The second hiatus showed in the discourse on historical events of major importance where my 'expectancies' were not met.

Regarding the subject of gender issues, Hungarian sociologists have for a long time been highlighting the lack of attention that the subject is given in Hungary. Reasons for this attitude might be linguistic. Hungarian lacks the equivalent of the concept of 'gender', which is substituted by the terms 'social sexes' or 'socially constructed sexes' in social sciences, making the issue technically heavy. It is also possible that the reason is that the concept is equated with "leftover state feminism" (Tóth, 2007/12) from the highly unpopular socialistic system, or, just equating it with '*bad*', such as 'radical Western feminism' (ibid.).

Nonetheless, the individuals in the study, stressing their free agency in their migration process, acted upon their traditional gendered roles when coming to terms with their new situation. Considering the motives for the individuals' migration and adjustment strategies, notwithstanding individual deviations, the stories reveal some common features. Ilona explained that she joined her partner on the bus trip to the West urged by his mistrust of the system and will to migrate. Borka, Liza and Anna married Swedish citizens and soon were engaged in building families, adjusting to society and homemaking activities. Pandora left her homeland in the hope of safeguarding security for her family and finding a cure for her ill daughter. The motives reveal concrete goals for leaving the homeland, including hope for a new, successful and happier life. The narrators all engaged in family-supporting activities, according to their narrations; they provided care both for parents and members of the wider family, which points to a certain dependency within the traditional female (gender) role.

## Hiatus in Doing Gender and Gender Roles

Talks with gender content (i.e. the ways the narrators went about addressing ‘*doing gender*’ in their everyday lives) were obviously part of the narrations, confronting us with gender-related issues in small portions. In every circumstance, the narrators assigned themselves aspects of traditional gender roles, and a particular kind<sup>532</sup>, both in Hungary and in Sweden. Anna, for instance, talked of the social construct of gender markers she utilised when doing business with male associates. Liza made a presentation about her younger self posing as a clumsy young woman wanting certain female attributes, for example to know one’s ways around the kitchen. She demonstrated this when speaking of her student experiences in Germany, failing to have basic kitchen skills and needing to be aided by a helpful boyfriend (husband-to-be). I recognise this attitude from my youth. It was popular, particularly among those with higher education, to use it as a measurement of the extent of one’s emancipation and free agency.

The narrators talked of their gendered role in their childhood family, but were less talkative about their present marital life and family relations and omitted matters of love or big emotions. When I asked explicit questions about details of domestic life (such as the organisation of gendered division of labour in their families) the individuals responded dutifully, but did not show any interest in elaborating on the topic. Pandora even pointed out with some irritation that it was a ‘Swedish thing’ to be asked questions like that, and implied that the topic was not worth mentioning; it was quite normal in her circle of friends that married partners shared domestic work. Four of the narrators talked of their roles within the domestic sphere (family) of *doing gender*, but they were not reflective over the subject, except for Liza, who did not show any need or affinity to talk of domestic matters, such as the role of ‘good wife’, or other ‘female’ roles.

My experiences with the analysis make me refine the relationships between the themes with *professional life* and *gender-based inequality* on one side, and *unsettled and settled discursive realms* (Chase, 1995) on the other, and I introduce the category of *trivial discursive realm* as a third category, to cover explicit *gender-related* discourses that were disregarded in the narrations.

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<sup>532</sup> Culture-bound, female attitude, promoting occupational achievement.

## Doing Gender in a Hungarian Way

Even if the women were, in general, neutral in their stories about feminine aspects of life, they reflected traditional (Hungarian) female attitudes to relational aspects, such as being helpful and caring, and also adjusting to the demands of family circumstances (staying at home with small children, moving abroad with the breadwinner husband) in a very noticeable way. Liza did demonstrate these qualities (providing care) too, but she talked about her thoughts on these issues, as a result of my appeal for the inclusion of her thoughts on gender-related issues in her narration. Liza delivered an evaluation of her view on 'gender aspects', comparing her life in Sweden with the lives of female friends in Hungary, pointing out differences to her advantage. Her narration dealt with mainly questions of the domestic division of labour (doing the washing up), without relating to wider social structures. The agency she pointed out in this respect might have been influenced by her having been living in Sweden for a long time, Liza admitted.

Arguably, the women presented their actions and attitudes in relation to 'gender issues' in a way that has to do with their socialisation. I used socialisation as a base for comparison between the narrations, because of their similar upbringing in an idealised type of 'socialist family', with heterosexual relationships, building nuclear families, with parents and one or two children. This ideal concept of the 'family' was particularly strongly upheld in Hungary (see Corrin, Haney), seen and praised for being a democratic, collectivist social unit, based on equality and with a common burden of raising a family, ignoring the fact that the system was feasible owing to the unpaid work of women, their *double burden* (Corrin, 1992). But the concept is still the ideal family concept in Hungary today; it has been somewhat weakened since the system collapse in 1989, but Hungary still lives by the traditional ideas of women's central place within families.

Our concern is the socialist period, when the domestic units (families) in Hungary functioned as a retreat from the intervention of the state, which politicised every level of official and unofficial life. The concept of the 'good Hungarian family' has been popular for Hungarian women, who see an unmarried woman as being somehow 'defective' (ibid.). This in turn elevates the status of the married woman, who carries out a large chunk of both the professional and the domestic work, does the budgeting, and takes care of the family economy<sup>533</sup>, taking on a large share of the

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<sup>533</sup> Ponrácz T.-né., Nagy, I., Tóth, I.Gy. (eds.). (2006) Nemi szerepek társadalmi megítélése. Egy nemzetközi összehasonlító vizsgálat tapasztalatai [Social evaluation of gender roles. Results of an international comparative study]. Published in: Budapest: TÁRKI, Ifjúsági, Családügyi, Szociális és Esélyegyenlőségi Minisztérium [TÁRKI Ministry for Family, Social Life and Equality]. Pp. 73 – 86.

responsibility for the running of the family. Women in Eastern European countries experienced similar social elevation (the cult of motherhood), part of the common socialistic policy of glorifying the female role of wife, mother and proud homemaker (Hauserová, 1991 July/August).

I find that the women in their narratives reflect on the effects of their socialisation. Doing gender (being a 'good wife' and a 'good mother') has high regard and includes traditional female tasks<sup>534</sup>, such as looking after family members, taking care of family matters, safeguarding family relationships, helping family members in need. The narrators address these social roles and ideals, sustaining the notion of 'women's virtues' appreciated in the Hungarian context, both during state-socialism and the post-socialistic era (ibid.).

## Hiatus in Expected Accounts

The second type of *hiatus* involving fragmented accounts of events with major universal importance I found situationally 'inappropriate and unreasonable' (Scott and Lyman, 1986). The unfixed and unsettling non-discourses about the Hungarian Revolt of 1956, the Czechoslovakian Prague Spring in 1969 and the system collapse in Central Europe in 1989 displayed a gap between the presented and the expected. There were some other, minor issues that also lacked discourses; these were often about private matters and assets of 'cultural, social and symbolic capital' (Bourdieu), with great importance for the tellers. Ilona might have mentioned her leading and driving role in the cultural life of the local Hungarian community, or Borka could have spoken of her extra-curriculum activities within the Hungarian literary circle. Liza left out parts of a more private character, such as the psychological stress she had been under at a stage of her life<sup>535</sup>. Pandora omitted certain efforts she had made to rescue her family back in Romania, and Anna did not offer explicit accounts of the reasons for distancing herself from Swedish society<sup>536</sup>. The cases confirm both

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<sup>534</sup> Tóth, O., 2007. Nőnek lenni – társadalmi nem (gender) az egyenlőtlenségek rendszerében [To be a woman – gender in the system of inequalities]. *Magyar Tudomány* [Hungarian Science], 2007/12 1590. Társadalomtudományok a Magyar Tudományos Akadémián [Social Sciences at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences].

<sup>535</sup> Knowledge about the narrator's various activities not accounted for in the narrations are part of the ethnographic knowledge that I have about the individuals, as indicated by the category entitlement and MC that I refer to in the study. I use them as background information because they are relevant partly for the narrators' categorisation, partly to support my point about reality disjunctures and unfulfilled expectancies.

<sup>536</sup> The examples referred to here are taken from my ethnological knowledge of the individuals.

mundane reasoning and reality disjuncture found in the narrations at various stages. The narrators omitted details, sometimes at the cost of not giving full credit to personal life trials and achievements. Had they been included, they would have contributed to reducing ambiguity and would have made it easier for the readers to grasp the life strategies of the individuals that they applied and adjusted to the *demands of the present*.

The examples of void or deficient discourses in the narrations indicate that the intersection between the self and the social world can fail. Reasons might be sought within the socialisation of the individual. Family or personal interests might sometimes demand more attention than the events of the social world – or the narrator might show indifference towards certain matters in order to safeguard self-interest, or similar, in an alien or foreign social world surrounding the individual. In such cases, when the individual focuses more on matters in her proximity than on things at large, certain *taken-for-granted* facts, such as the perception of events with massive national and international implications, might not be observed and presented to the same extent as in the researcher's *background expectancies*.

I would include here the neglect of discursive preservation of the heritage of major historical events within the families, as well. In a situation when faced with pressing matters that the person perceives as a threat, social skills might not be sufficient to repress anxiety, and the individual is left to concentrate on the task of trouble-shooting. Obviously, the individual's decision has priority in ranking matters of importance. Thus, private matters might in certain cases rank higher than issues of greater general – and historical – magnitude; and mundane personal matters that needed decisions from the individuals and which affected their lives in a concrete way might have surpassed more abstract issues that they had no control over anyway.

The missing details of 'hushed-up stories' were surprising, and invited me to come to certain conclusions and a revision of my theoretical assumptions; namely, that seemingly trivial life is important. It matters. The purposes and associated interpretations of situations and contexts that the interviewees encountered in their everyday lives overshadowed events that I, both in a private capacity and as a researcher, would have expected to be given more attention.

## Migration, Expatriation and Mobility

Migration has become a constitutive element of the subjective histories of the five women, contributing to the need for modifications in the view on contemporary theoretical aspects on migration and the notion of mobility. The present study allowed me to assess the ways in which the narrators construct boundaries, meaning and morality and multiple repertoires across borders, embedded in more than one

context. Migrant categories used for describing individuals who leave their homelands are fluid; also for the individuals in the present study.

An important aspect to bear in mind is that the narration is retrospective. The narrators left their homes between fifteen and forty years ago. Thus, the narration reveals how the story of migration is constructed today, in the rear-view mirror, and I feel that the categories reflect this fact, as well. In any case, it is not quite sure which category to apply to the narrators and to the narrations. With regard to choosing a category of *discursive realm* for the narrations about moving to Sweden, I would use the term *trivial* (in its appearance). The women's narrations revealed that the decisions to migrate were their own, they had cosmopolitan motives rather than any other, implying that leaving their homes was a *gamble*; *giving life abroad a chance*. The rigid categories that are used in official classifications do not always make sense for these women's stories; their moving showed ambiguity and the aptitude for change. Assumptions of involuntary migration grounded in widespread images of migrants being either political dissidents or 'powerless' Eastern European women do not hold.

In mobility, child-parent relationships are an important aspect to consider. The individuals in the study have indirectly and directly talked of their relations with parents and children; the latter sometimes the driving force behind their migration (Pandora, Borka). It is clear that for the study's women it was important to secure a 'proper upbringing' for their children, implying the provision of Hungarian cultural proficiency to the children while supporting the development of 'Swedish cultural capital', as well. 'Double cultural identifications' was supported by the parents, even when the whole family was Hungarian, leaving the provision of the Swedish cultural capital to society, while they took care of the children's Hungarian upbringing within the four walls of their own homes. Liza, whose husband was Swedish, was particularly keen on strengthening the Hungarian links of her child, while also supporting the development of the child's Swedish 'identity'. To act in this spirit can be doubly beneficial to migrants. For one, it can provide a partner ('keep company') in the native culture, while it can also serve as a link between the individual and the host society.

## Discursive Realms and Social Categories

With Chase's categorisations in mind, I made an analysis of the discourses on professional experiences linked to the alleged negative social status of *invandrare* and the discourses on *ethno-national homecoming* and suggest a re-placement of the discourses into categories that will be adequate for us. I base my categorisation on the observation that the question of belonging to either sort of discursive realm is not so

much subject to social phenomena per se, as it is to do with the connotations, the perception and attitude that the individuals are subjected to in society.

Combining the remarks made outside and inside the narrations, I find that each individual discourse has been influenced by pride, disappointments, self-esteem, or rather the lack of it. The conclusion is that the extra- and intra-foci of discourses differed (reality juncture), and show the narrators' awareness and mindfulness of what might be said and what should not be said in an open interview situation, depending on what the narrators identify with in respect of the told. We should remember that identification is the result of 'discursive work' (Hall, 2000), assembled from many available discourses. Context situates narratives, which are then influenced by the reaction of an audience (Goodwin, 1986; Polanyi, 1985); making personal identities audience-dependent, i.e. contextual. Some of the interlocutors were reluctant to speak of migrant-, and work-related issues ("unsettled discursive realm"), (Chase, 1998), but were happy to talk of their achievements within the area of ethno-national homecoming ("settled discursive realm"), (bid.). Borka and Liza, who found a certain satisfaction in their professional lives, placed their discourses on occupational achievements within the "settled discursive realm", with certain reservations towards how their achievements were evaluated and rewarded in society. Liza was particularly clear about pointing out the importance of having work, in direct links to her self-esteem and self-identification, while Borka was proud of her educational contribution to the preservation of the pupils' competence in Hungarian. The other individuals did not have much to say about work and professional life in Sweden: Ilona did not mention her working days at all, while Anna and Pandora were downright negative, based on the perceived derogatory social category of *invandrare*.

Expatriation is about accepting a break in life, imagining new spaces, influenced by the inscription of geographical and existential spaces from before migration in the individual's subjectivity. A question was whether the women identified themselves as political refugees, migrants or exiles. Pre-1989 migrants from Eastern Europe have often been identified as political refugees. The women in the study would not fit this category for various reasons. While it is difficult to point at explicit motives for their moving, in each of the narrations there were traces of key referents, such as relationships, emotional links, nostalgia, family obligations, professional pride, personal achievement and curiosity for the West. Whatever the reasons for their moving, the women demonstrated important elements of agency, complexity and multiplicity. They revealed that given the complexity of motives behind their decision, the choice was made by them, i.e. they expressed a will to move abroad (Sweden) – under their conditions. The narrations are about their experiences of leaving home, moving, meeting the challenges of the unfamiliar environment, adjusting and reinventing themselves there, with the option to return 'home' (country of origin).

I found that their judgment and evaluation of their space in the new place was dependent on the autonomy and self-determination of imagined space, the material reality of it and the resilience of the individual. Going beyond the ways we view mundane everyday events, the women present their points of view on their lives as commuters, and *invandrare*, based on the stories of their migration experiences. Listening to the stories, we need to re-conceptualise the meaning of migration, to see migrant life as living in a process of continuous back and forth movement, in liminality, the *ferry-life* that Endre Ady wrote about (see chapter Theoretical Concepts).

### Constitutive Elements of Mobility

References to Sweden, the incidental target country of the individuals' migration, and their attitudes towards their native countries, particularly with regard to repatriation, or ethnic migration<sup>537</sup>, were embedded in the narrations, expressing the propensity for repatriation, which was interdependent of their experiences in the country of migration. The choice of migration country was not premeditated; the power of coincidences decided it in most of the cases. The women who moved to Sweden through marriage (Borka, Lisa and Anna) did so because their partners had already been living there. Ilona was 'redistributed' from a refugee camp in Austria, her first station in migration; while Pandora joined her husband and daughter, who had by coincidence ended up in Sweden.

Mobility includes the concept of return, as well. In order to explain the wish to return, in one or other way, to their country of origin within a continuous process of migration, we must look into the women's judgment and experiences in the country of migration. The attitude towards and judgment of Sweden was influenced by their attitude towards their homelands, and vice versa, making the process of migration into a perpetual movement. Personal migration is associated in the narrations with a will to move, as already pointed out, rather than to escape (a politically motivated act). The individuals were made aware of the category of *invandrare* in Sweden, which is perceived as a devaluation of the status of the individual, which contradicts the expressed personal will and the agency of the person. To contrast the status that the categorisation of *invandrare* implies, one can invent stories of cultural and social migration and/or commuting, with a variety of motives.

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<sup>537</sup> In Hungarian relations this is a fairly well-researched area, owing to the migration waves from Romania and (Czecho)Slovakia, particularly after 1988-89. Feischmidt, M., and Zakariás, I., Hazatérő idegenek. Az etnikai migráció formái, okai és hatásai a Kárpát medencében [Modes, causes and effects of ethnic migration in the Carpathian Basin]. *Változó migráció, Változó környezet*. URL source: <http://www.mtaki.hu/data/files/64.pdf>



## Conceptualisation of Migrant Subjectivities

In the narrations of four of the five women we do not find an emergent conceptualisation of migrant subjectivity, as if they did not attribute explicit meaning to the notion of migration. The stories were marked by indecisiveness between distancing themselves from, and associating with the notion of immigrant; the women have resisted migrant categorisation throughout their narrations as far as it was possible. Not speaking about the position of a migrant might also have been caused by the fact that I did not ask explicit questions that would have triggered narrations on migrant roles and perception of migrant reception (in Sweden) for argumentative narrations to emerge. In self-reference, pointing out their otherness, the narrators favoured the word 'foreigner', instead of *invandrare*.

The different alternative choices for acculturation strategies open for minorities (Berry, 1990) have been mixed to a various extent as the narrations of the present study demonstrated, depending on whether or not the individual showed affinity to remain within her own cultural sphere (through language, identification, and so forth), or whether they wished to adapt to the majority group in question. The strategies were differently applied by the individuals, in different areas and in different circumstances of their life courses. The strategies had been familiar to and applied by the narrators with minority status in their homelands (Ilona and Pandora in Romania, and Borka in Czechoslovakia), while the individuals from Hungary (Lisa, Anna) had to get used to being a minority, being new to acculturation strategies when they arrived in Sweden. It seems that the applied strategies were partly dependent on the circumstances in their country of origin, partly on the reception in the new country and the majority people that the newcomers would share living space with.

Ilona, with a nearly marginalised status in Transylvania, continued to live in marginalised ambiguity in Sweden too. She did not belong either in Romania, Hungary or Sweden; but at the same time she was connected to all these countries by emotional and pragmatic links. Pandora, also from Transylvania, talked of her integrated status in Romania, despite occasional rejection for being an out-group member (Hungarian among Romanians), before she became marginalised in Sweden. The Durkheimian thesis about individuals constructing social identification through work<sup>538</sup> applies for her. She was bitter about not being able to find employment matching her professional skills. The strategy that Borka chose in her homeland, Czechoslovakia, was separation, relying on her Hungarian cultural competence in her everyday life, which she continued to do also in Sweden, while also showing affinity to integrate into the Swedish society. Liza showed the greatest affinity to integrate

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<sup>538</sup> Durkheim, E., *The Division of Labour in Society* (1892).

through work, and managed relatively well in exile, employed by Swedish companies. Anna did not wish, or try, to integrate at all; mainly because of her mistrust of the conditions regarding immigrants on the Swedish job market.

The acculturation strategies used in different social spheres varied for the individuals. Some sought economic assimilation (through work), while four of the five women sought linguistic integration (by bilingualism) and marital linking (endogamy). Regarding the achieved results of the applied acculturation strategies, the success was partial; that is to say that in my view, intended integration leading to full bicultural identity was not achieved by the individuals – perhaps it was not intended, at all. Particularly, if we consider the ‘original identity’ (Hungarianness) of the narrators, which none of them reported as being negotiable, and remember that identity loss does not centre on any particular marker (e.g. language). Partial integration has been achieved by four of the five individuals, in that they have preserved their ethnic and cultural heritage (maintained identification with the ethnic group they originated from), and they have also acquired the necessary cultural skills (i.e. proficiency in the dominant language) in Sweden. They have all made careful choices about the specific ethnic and cultural markers they wished to hold on to and those that would be possible to alter. Language was one unconditionally preserved marker and cultural heritage was another.

For the special position that they are placed in by their mobility, and the contradictory elements in their accounts, I would place the discourses on migration in the study into the “unsettled discursive realm”, together with the discourse on professional life. This is in contrast to the discourses on *ethno-national homecoming*, which I would place into the “settled discursive realm”. Some narrations presented paths that were not expected to have been chosen, in co-existence with political and cultural conformism. This fact, in any case, is vital to help understand the ways in which the women conceptualised themselves as migrants.

## Sites of Ethno-national Homecoming

Examining the narrations of the five exile women, the study explored their adjustment strategies to migration and the role of national homecoming, including questions of civic cultural participation and belonging. I have studied the ways in which the narrators of the study negotiate the *national ethos of homecoming* that constitutes the Swedish social and migrant discursive field, adjusting to the components, such as affinity to the place, collective memory, cultural and network capital, and the national ethos of *Hungarianness*. Tension between Hungarianness and migrant subjectivity, or between the personal and the collective, that might have been embodied in the actions of the individuals, were not traceable in the narrations. The

narrators used their cultural and network capital to secure their right to participate in the local discourse on Hungarianness, using a neutral tone, with a reduced capacity to undermine the tenets of Swedish society.

A dominating and consistent common trait of the narrations was the utilisation of Hungarian cultural capital. Converging it by rhetoric into a unified group, the narrations turn into a meta-discourse on Hungarianness, informing us about the strategies the individuals applied in order to realise membership. Despite similarities, there was diversity in the density and concentration of the strategies. The interlocutors of the study constructed a unified, yet differently underlined self-identification by recounting the use of various dimensions of their symbolic and cultural capital, for various purposes and with various results. The cultural capital was also used for explaining how the women used different strategies for an ethno-national homecoming. Some used it within strictly private domains (in the family), while others used it for making their way in society, it being useful for a larger population, or within their professional life. No doubt, they have all used them in order to anchor themselves in society, making sense of their lives presented in inarticulate and contradictory ways.

The narrators talked about the difficulties they perceived with leaving their homeland behind, the difficulties with moving to Sweden, an imagined or hoped-for, contributory homeland, and the difficulties linked to adjusting. As a step in their adjustment, it seems that all five narrators found security, and perhaps inspiration, in the maintenance and preservation of cultural capital, providing support in a liminal state. The individuals applied various measures, but joining the Hungarian cultural community was a shared experience. Four of them participated actively within the local associations, and all five worked keenly on the preservation of their cultural capital. The affinity to making contacts with compatriots in Sweden is termed *ethno-national homecoming* in the study, which I use in an uncomplicated way, expressing the historical, temporal and local membership in the local Hungarian institutions in Sweden.

*Ethno-national homecoming* meant different things to different narrators of the study. For Liza and Anna, the two core-Hungarians, the thought of meeting compatriots behind the borders prior to their migration to Sweden was not exotic, because it was possible to go to Czechoslovakia, and also to Romania. The latter country became more open to Hungarian migration to Hungary in the late 1980s. In comparison, for *Hungarians behind the borders* it was a new experience to meet Hungarians from other geographic locations of the Carpathian Basin. Thus, Sweden has become the site for the *ethno-national homecoming* of diverse Hungarians, which was a shared experience for the interlocutors of the study, as well. To meet in Sweden was one of the most euphoric experiences many Hungarian exiles perceived when also Transylvanian-Hungarians arrived in 1988–89 and the next couple of years. I include myself in these

sentiments, as I recall the meeting in the local Hungarian association: it was an amazing experience. Apart from motives of migration, the narrations were unifying, with common traits in the discourses on membership in the Hungarian community in Sweden, reconnecting the narrators to in-group members within their own sub-categories (Voivodina-, Trans-Carpathian-, or Slovenian-Hungarians, to mention a few). The goals and means were common for joining and being within it; reuniting and working for the preservation of the acquired Hungarian cultural capital for continuity across generations and differing backgrounds was part of the women's lives in exile. Despite an anticipated homogenising effect of the concept of *Hungarianness*, in my view, it is fair to say that it instead includes confrontational traits, bringing about counter discourses, differences and diversities in sameness.

The site for *ethno-national homecoming* in Sweden shares different manifestations of Hungarian culture expressible in exile; including practical things that must be executed in the company of others. Four of the narrators (Ilona, Borka, Liza and Anna) participated in the cultural life of the Hungarian association, organising different activities and participating in national memorial days, lectures, visiting Hungarian theatre shows. The activities have been consistent during the 1980s and 90s, but one should note that the character of activities within the Hungarian associations has changed in the past decades from being a site for meeting and remembering pre-1989, linking members of the Hungarian community together, to later, in the 1990s, becoming a site for talk of reunification with Hungarians beyond the border. Today, their importance has faded in the globalised world order taking shape around us, with the Schengen Agreement that fixes free passage for the citizens of many countries in the EU (Luxembourg, 1985) as a main factor in the hopes for reunification of the “carelessly” (Stewart, 2009) lost national members. Pandora was the least active in this area, hindered by the health status of her daughter. Private manifestations were also used by the women; I have seen Hungarian folklore artefacts in the homes of the narrators and through watching *Duna-TV*, which provides a range of cultural programmes, one always had some topics to discuss.

### **Social Network Capital**

As part of the ethno-national homecoming, I wish to remind us of the use of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), an attribute arising to varying extents in each narrator's storytelling. Liza benefited from it in Hungary, but also in Sweden (as discussed in the respective chapters in her storytelling). The other narrators' relations to and frequency of mentioning the use of network capital varied in the interviews. Anna did not speak explicitly of it; she hinted at it once when referring to her working experiences in Sweden, and once more when talking of her future prospects in Hungary. Pandora talked of several (often to her unknown) people who helped her and the family to change their difficult life situation. Borka talked of her vulnerability without family support; she was missing contact and help within the family

enormously, feeling alone and without support when she needed help the most, when her children were small. Ilona spoke of network capital in relation to her own philanthropic input and efforts; her support was essential among her Transylvanian family members and in the pre-interview situation she also praised her Hungarian friends from old times now living in Sweden for still caring about her.

### **Benefits with Cultural Capital for Integration and Work**

Hungarianness was maintained within the private sphere by all of the women, but some also managed to utilise it within a professional capacity. Particularly successful was Borka from this point of view, considering that she used her cultural capital within her occupation, teaching Hungarian as the mother tongue language to children of Hungarian exiles and to adults at various evening courses, giving her great possibilities to exploit her skills and use her knowledge within a wider social relevance. Borka recounted that she was happy doing what she did, and she found self-esteem and pride in helping others learn Hungarian. We have learned from Borka's narration that, even if one does not have private social network contacts within the majority society, living in relative separation, one can still compensate losses through making use of one's own cultural group in a professional capacity, thus possibly contributing to knowledge accumulation in society. Engaging in various activities with Hungarian connotations, Borka took the opportunities both to keep and to distribute her cultural capital and proficiency in Hungarian, which supported her self-esteem, and made her feel useful in society.

Ilona, who lived in segregation, apart from the majority, compensated for this by doing meaningful activities using her cultural capital combined with her professional skills, through performing, which she did as a hobby, living for the preservation and distribution of *Hungarianness*. To use one's cultural capital in minority is not an easy thing to get appreciation for, but Ilona succeeded in achieving that, despite the fact that she lost her professional tool – language. We have learned from her narration that life lived in marginalisation can be compensated for by acquiring social position and status within one's own exile community, through ethno-national homecoming. This is a particularly viable way in Sweden, with a culture of institutions within a wide range of areas. To be a chairman in an *invandrarförening* [migrant association] contributes also to heightening the individual's social status, thus gaining self-esteem and relevance in society.

Another kind of minority adjustment strategy was used by Liza. She was the most eager minority member to adjust to social expectations, which she decided was best done by work. It is a known fact that work is important for the individual's self-esteem and self-identification, a way to membership of a social group. Liza found work and connectedness to the Swedish society important; consequently, she thought it less important to use her Hungarian cultural capital in an official capacity. Liza

showed great affinity, making efforts for adjustments and integration, separating professional life from private. However, Liza's narration showed us that cultural heritage can be just as important as integration. Integration and preservation of cultural capital were quite compatible measures in Liza's life; participation in the cultural activities of one's own in-group in exile provides opportunities to keep in touch with one's roots and with other in-group members, which Liza appreciated.

Anna from Hungary lived a different, segregated life, focusing on family, maintaining Hungarianness within her family. Additionally, she participated in the local Hungarian organisation and her social network was all Hungarian in Sweden. She had contacts with other Hungarians through her (ethnic Hungarian) husband, who worked as a lawyer for Hungarians. Only through her studies at the university, studying economics, Hungarian and history, did she come in contact with others; but despite her educational aptitude and professional skills, acquiring a stack of diplomas, she had no intention of using any of it, she revealed in her narration. We have learned from her storytelling that personal disappointments in society, such as failing to get appreciation for one's professional proficiency and skills, when strengthened by economic security, can make the individual turn her back on the receiving society and return to the home country. Also keen on her children 'remaining Hungarian', Anna decided to take this step and repatriated together with her family, right after our interview.

Pandora, the perpetual exception, was different from the other narrators in relation to migrant conditions, parental identification and Hungarianness. For Pandora, it was evident that Hungarianness should be held onto, but owing to family conditions, she had to settle for doing it within the family domain. She worked (according to her narration, under unsatisfactory conditions) as a teacher of Hungarian at evening courses, and she was also studying Hungarian at university in Sweden, mainly in order to enhance her chances of getting more job opportunities up to her professional level, which she regretted she lacked.

To sum up the importance of the use and effects of cultural capital for the narrators, it is obvious that they worked on keeping it and used it to their benefit, both in a private and in an official capacity. We can link the aptitude for ethno-national homecoming and preservation of cultural capital to the acculturation and adjustment strategies of the individuals, from integration to segregation. It seems that the grade and intensity of holding on to Hungarianness and accomplishing ethno-national homecoming, depends to a great extent also on the individual's migration strategies. Without making generalisations, we might conclude that the more integrated the person, the less overt was the construction of and action upon homecoming ethos sensed in the narrations; while the more segregated the narrator, the more overtly she construed and acted upon the homecoming ethos. Even when Hungarianness belongs to the private sphere of life for the narrators, given the opportunity, they held on to it

tightly, using their cultural roots and working among like-minded people, but also outside the Hungarian community. While struggling over their new positions and identifications, the interlocutors actively used their cultural heritage, and the relations to it obviously served as a spine. It held them up and supported them in times of problems and secured the continuity of the self. It also supported their social network, which the individuals both built and used for adjusted purposes.

The discourses on migration in the study did not borrow elements of the *rhetoric of loss and despair*, which is perhaps not unusual to find in migration narratives. The dynamic and living links between the land of migration and homeland and the commuting experience of continuous movement make the experience less traumatic and final in the cases of the study. The relationship, attitudes and experiences in relation to the homelands and the country of migration is ambivalent; but owing to the lack of discourse on migrating to the 'land of desire', a utopian vision of Sweden, there cannot be an evaluation of the migrant situation in their stories, in relation to that kind of vision. As the reasons for moving to Sweden were mainly pragmatic (practical), it might follow therefore, that no laments have been expressed by the narrators, who accounted for the motives of their migration as a result of being free agents and following their own will in their actions.

Even if disappointed at certain stages of their lives, the narrators did their best to adjust and accept the conditions of life in Sweden, which they perceived as cultural (as opposed to political or ideological), in terms of the stereotypical national character of citizens in Sweden. Liza was disappointed, for instance, when an inconsiderate and rude colleague made uncivil remarks about *invandrare* in her company. Borka was discontent with the fact that her professional suggestions were neglected by both Swedish and other ethnic language teachers, them not paying enough attention to her judgment. Anna did not find her way into Swedish society, and, feeling unappreciated, she decided to return home to Hungary, taking her family with her. Pandora was most sharp in her criticism of Swedish society. She expressed her bitterness with regard to a future in the country, linking it to private tragedy (loss of a child), personal and professional failure resulting in loss of self-esteem. Ilona had no comments at all in relation to her being an immigrant, narrating instead about the individual self.

### Place of Aspired Mobility – Sweden, the Country of Settlement

The interviewees described Sweden as their second homeland, talking about it with inconsistencies and contradictions. The women's references to their native homelands were on the other hand scanty; not stressing on particular positives or feelings of nostalgia and homesickness. Yet, pragmatic considerations of repatriation was, to different extents, in their thoughts. It seems that for four of them, the desire to test themselves outside the national borders has become predominant and independent

from territorial factors. Mobility *per se* was important for the individuals, distancing themselves from social norms, creating unorthodox subjectivities. Freedom of movement is a great motivation for people who venture to try out new ways of life.

Still, the practical side has been a companion to the women in the study; their feet were rooted in the soil of *Hungarianness* but their lives bound them to Sweden. The place of migration did not matter so much in these cases; to be somewhere else was perhaps the most weighing motif for the migrations, allowing them to take the opportunity to act differently. Lack of appreciation for their efforts is perhaps the reason why their criticism, the one that four of them expressed, was an allegation against the traditions of social life in Sweden which they saw as cause of their isolation; they pointed out the lack of contact with Swedish people.

Immigrants find Swedish people culturally reserved and emotionally 'cold', difficult to make *friends* with. This is not entirely incongruent with the Swedish self-perception, as I see it; people in general admit to being somewhat formal and keeping their distance (1989<sup>539</sup>), while also claiming to be hospitable and friendly to *främmande* (foreigners). Liza, the integrated narrator, had no open comments on her migrant experience in Sweden until the embarrassing adventure at the Thai restaurant. The reason for not complaining might have been her outgoing social personality, her working actively to build up contact nets in society, and having experience of Swedish people, both on private and on professional basis. Ilona did not comment her immigrant status at all.

The gendered practices of mobility described in the study need to re-define the political space of migration, conceptualising Sweden rather more as a condition of aspired mobility than a specific geographic space or a site for cultural identification. The 'personal dissidents', as we might call the individuals in the study, expressed their demands for personal migration: unlimited commuting between places of homes, and pursuing alternative life-courses. Because migrants seem to need to maintain social contacts and ties to their home countries – particularly in case they were to return 'home' – they need to use kin networks. Investigating the narrators of the present study one can also sense a process of transnational class differentiation, in which more prosperous family members provide support to less powerful people whom they have defined as kin. Transnational moral economy often places family interests first – for example, marrying into the right ethnic network in order to accumulate social capital in the host society (Ballard, 2001).

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<sup>539</sup> Daun, Å. Swedish Mentality 1989. The Pennsylvania State University Press.





## 10. Epilogue

The stories in my study are about people with marginalised experiences with contradictions or even obscurities within experiences that sometimes confound the logic of ruling discourses, by that problematizing the institutions and ideologies that shape our lives. Stories of experience are not mere unreflected reports of spontaneous awareness; they display retreating and sometimes also traumatic experiences. By representing the stories of experiences, I wished to challenge the capacity of readers to attend to phenomena not directly articulated, but only hinted at in metaphors in texts, eventually also defying our categories for representing experience. The challenge with stories of these kinds was to transform them into critical knowledge, which I hoped to achieve. The present study has noted differences in the experiences of women undertaking migration.

More knowledge could be attained by further comparative studies, exploring in depth the migrant and exile experiences of female members of other ethnic groups living in exile in Sweden. One could learn further facts about the same women by doing a longitudinal study with them, following up their life developments after some years. Another kind of knowledge could be attained by studying younger women with Hungarian background or male emigrants from the same regions that the women in the study originated from, in order to make comparisons.

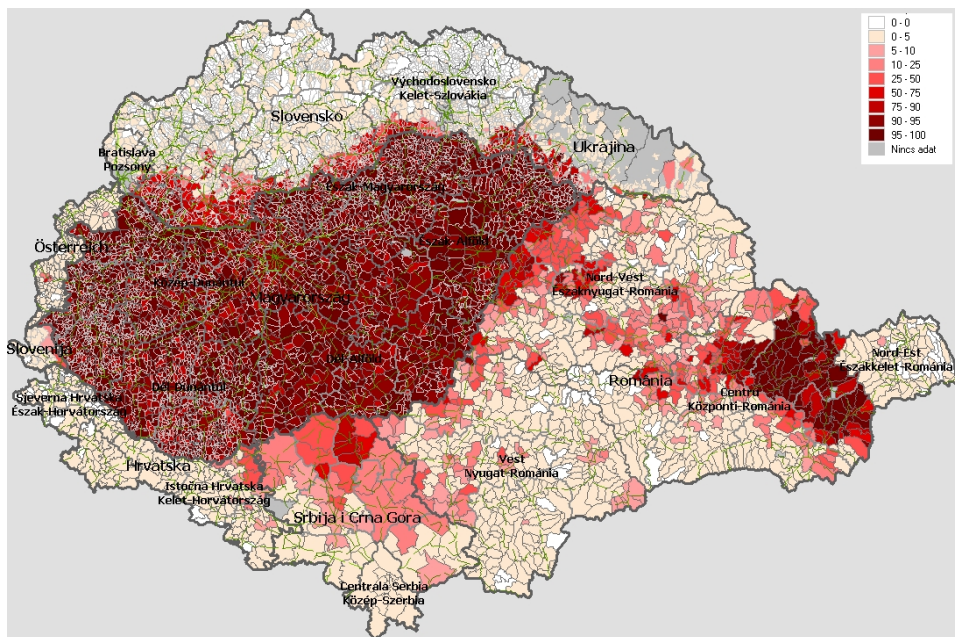
Finally, I can reflect on my own journey with the study. I have signalled in the introduction that I wished to learn about the presentations of the narrations, the attitude and strategies towards migration, the construction of individual identities and social roles in exile, and the narrators' attitude towards Hungarianness. I can conclude that I have learned a great deal about these things in the course of the study; and I have learned more besides. I have learned that by looking closely behind and "within" the stories one can see diversities in sameness, not only in *Hungariannesses*, but in exile lives, in 'doing gender', with society in the background, making living conditions invisibly gendered on all levels.

One can also see how the diversities of dealing with social expectations and social roles have been evidenced by the narrators; keeping their word, remaining the same, and yet, still constructing new identities adjacent to the old ones were important traits in constructing new lives.

These stories, along with stories of other emigrants living in Sweden, could inform future policies and plans that will assist more diverse and reasonable institutional practices. This takes imagination and flexibility but will make room for people who arrive in Sweden with life experiences and skills that expand on the knowledge accumulated in society.

# Appendix

## Spread of Hungarian Population in the Carpathian Basin



Figures in %

URL source:

[http://www.nemzetpolitika.gov.hu/index.php?main\\_category=2&action=view\\_item&item=405](http://www.nemzetpolitika.gov.hu/index.php?main_category=2&action=view_item&item=405)



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## Roots and Routes

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How do people shape a life in exile? What does *nation* or *homeland* mean in such a life situation, and how is the inevitable social and moral turbulence – embedded in the migrant's biography – employed and interpreted by the migrant herself?

This book addresses these issues through an imaginative analysis of five life stories as presented by Hungarian women living in Sweden.

The author shows that exile stories revolve around rescuing and restoring things from the past, around reinventing the concept of what is left of a home. The stories speak of lives lived internally, in which one's present becomes radically different from one's past and in which a former homeland is transformed into either an idealized or a demonized realm.

A society's grand narratives do not necessarily define an individual's experience of life in exile. Rather, one must listen to what *personal* narratives say.

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