

### Biographies and the division of Europe: experience, action, and change on the 'Eastern side'

Breckner, Roswitha (Ed.); Kalekin-Fishman, Devorah (Ed.); Miethe, Ingrid (Ed.)

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Roswitha Breckner/  
Devorah Kalekin-Fishman/  
Ingrid Miethe (eds)

# Biographies and the Division of Europe

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on the 'Eastern Side'

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## Introduction

The challenge we took on in this book was to approach a division that has separated Europe by an Iron Curtain for over 40 years, and which today still forms the background of communication and interaction between East and West. This division, in its various historical layers, involved violence and trauma, mainly during World War II, and has been embedded in various discourses. As East–West discourse it is still practiced in many contexts, with specific functions in each European society. It forms a complex field of interaction, and this makes it difficult to unravel the interwoven threads in each side’s image of the other. As an attempt to look at the experiences underlying the East–West discourse that prevails in politics and even in the social sciences, this book was intended to focus on how the historical background of the Iron Curtain—particularly the consequences of the Second World War, the Holocaust and Stalinism—have marked people’s everyday lives. We asked how people dealt with these experiences in constructing biographies as well as family and generation histories, in creating new worlds, principally since 1989. Hence this volume deals with the life stories and histories of people who throughout the last century have had to contend with personal and/or collective traumas and transformations, with borders both within and between societies. It also explores practices by which they have come to terms with radical changes.

Although the separation between East and West is its theme, the book focuses for the most part on biographies in the Eastern European context. We feel this is most important because the political and societal changes involved in the restructuring of the division have had a more dramatic impact on the lives of people in the East than on lives in the West. With the social upheavals and transformations, central social institutions (political and economic systems and essential structures) were changed. But above all, life orientations and life plans have had to be adjusted to the new conditions, or preserved in the face of the changes on the societal level. This can be seen in both individuals’ and society’s re-conceptualizations of the past, in views and shifting conceptions of borders, in the means adopted to cope with them in daily life, and in people’s future horizons. In the reconstruction of biographies, the orientations and decisions that underlie action become visible, as do the significance of past experiences and the conditions shaped by the political, economic, and historical framework.

In bringing together articles that concern Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia, Yugoslavia and the German Democratic Republic, the substantive aim of this volume is to contribute to a revision of perspectives, breaking down block images to promote a detailed differentiation of everyday life

contexts. The historical period covered by the articles in this book extends from the Soviet Revolution of 1917 to the present. In focusing on empirical observations from a number of different points of view, we would like to pique readers' curiosity and raise their awareness of the variety that characterizes the East, which in fact has always been and is once again more visibly a part of the West. In so doing we hope to counteract the inflexible dichotomies that have been imposed on our thinking by broadening our knowledge of the multifarious new realities that have evolved and are now evolving on the Eastern side of the West.

By way of introduction to the contents of the book we may note some of the issues that arise in exploring this theme.

## The Context: Shifting Patterns of the East–West Division

"Europe" and the adjective "European" are usually constructed as referring to things Western, in contrast or opposition to other regions or cultures, which are characterized explicitly or implicitly as Eastern (see Erhard Stöltling in this volume). As a cultural and mental pattern, "Europe" and "the West" also include the Americas and often other regions besides. The West is not limited to a given continent and does not refer to geographical coordinates, but is a pattern that has proliferated throughout the world. The term is used most pointedly to describe epochal cultural developments.<sup>1</sup> On such a large temporal scale it seems clear that Europe and the West are, or are becoming, the enlightened sphere of self-reflecting, modernizing societies, i.e. milieus within or in conflict with "backward" or pre-modern areas and spheres of social life.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, in these conceptualizations conjured out of contrasts, the West is seen as a model, whereas the East automatically becomes the other side, a deviation from the norm, even if its secondary status is not manifestly declared or consciously intended. However, the East of Europe has always questioned these stark divisions, and has often raised questions about where the borders of Europe could or should be drawn, in mental, cultural or political terms. The regions defined as Eastern have also

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1 This can be traced back to the 'classics' of Social Sciences as e.g. in the work of Max Weber, but also in recent publications raising furore around these questions like S. Huntington's thesis about *The Clash Of Civilizations*.

2 In his now classic, *Orientalism*, Said (1978) fired a most effective volley against the devious ways in which academic practices condoning divisions between East and West actually reinforce inequalities of power and wealth. His concern was with how Asia and the Orient are characterized as opposing 'other' and hence less than Europe and the Americas. The contrast often serves as the basis for constructing configurations of traits, which are then labeled as 'Western' or 'European'.

tended to question the concept of cultural homogeneity underlying the European, i.e. modern, nation states.

In the aftermath of World War II, these issues were resolved by force. A sharp political division was set up for the first time at the level of states within a global field of power. The historically shifting separation lines became an increasingly impermeable system border, symbolically and practically marked by the "Iron Curtain". A new context was thus created for the patterns that had defined differences in 'mentality' between East and West: these were now postulated in terms of a universal difference between socialism and capitalism. The old dichotomies based on perceived cultural differences seemed to be suspended.

This division, however, was a consequence of and a reaction to World War II, initiated by Nazi Germany. We must not forget that the Nazis' goal was to homogenize the whole of Europe, in particular by placing the "underdeveloped" East under its rule. This project evoked enmities and encouraged alignments vis-à-vis Nazi Germany, but it also influenced relations between all European countries. Notwithstanding vigorous efforts undertaken on both sides of the new dividing line, this background could not be eradicated. The violently created common prehistory of the division, marked by the War and the Holocaust on the one hand and by Stalinism on the other, did not simply disappear in the course of the ensuing partitioning of the continent. The division remained connected to the outburst of violence and pain never experienced before, even though its function had been to create a new period and a new world of two separate regions, one directed by capitalist and the other by socialist ideology. From this perspective the division can be seen as measures undertaken to deal with the atrocities by mapping them in a changed field of power. This conception, however, actually hindered the process of dealing with the historic background. Each section of Europe explicitly or implicitly blamed the other; and in this way nearly every European country managed to distance itself from its recent involvement in the War and the Holocaust. Under these conditions, East and West could not develop a shared interpretation of their common history.<sup>3</sup> Instead, each side's constant general devaluation of the other drew, perhaps unconsciously, on the older dichotomized images perpetuated in East-West discourse. In this respect the pattern of division after 1945 can be interpreted in a rather general sense as a means of dissociation from the problems of interdependence caused during World War

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3 In the eyes of historiographies established on the eastern side it was the capitalist system which had produced the destruction. On this basis one believed that these societies had been detached from this background by the 'anti-fascist' battle against the aggressors and at least cut off from this "tradition" by turning to state socialism after 1945. In contrast, especially in the West German picture of the War, the cruelties took place mainly "in the East", thus locating them completely outside of the 'own' territory and, by the way, on an already existing mental map, where 'the bad' was in general located in the 'East'.

II. It made them invisible. The dissociation went hand in hand with the construction of polarities to distinguish between the systems. Thus the border became a fundamental part of the newly created systems with the function of avoiding history on the level of societies and in biographies.

As a result, East and West remained cloaked in mutual mystification. Of course, for the generations born after World War II, the separation was natural, a matter of fact, as were the differences which had been created along this border. But the separation seems to have had a different impact on parallel generations in East and West. In the East people still felt part of a common world of communication and experience, and tried to preserve it on their side of the border. Their goal was to maintain all aspects of this world, which they had shared before, and to participate in its development. But this attempt to work against the division, and to escape isolation, was one-sided. For those born in the West, the "East" rather vanished from the experiential world and even from the mental map regarded as relevant. The "border" was experienced much less vividly and this made it easier to relegate it to the background of every day life.

This was the case even in Germany, where the separation between the Western and Eastern parts of the country blatantly disjoined families and close-knit social networks. But even there the division finally succeeded to a certain extent. One overriding reason for this may be that West Germany was involved in an effort to restructure the social and political order exclusively along the lines of the standards and history perceived to characterize the Western world. For West Germans, the East either became a dark hole or a heavily disputed but abstract model in the framework of the Cold War discourse. For East Germans, the West either became a dark hole or a heavily disputed but abstract model in the framework of the Cold War discourse. For some left-wing groups, it was an idealized prototype of an alternative to the capitalist West, and to right-wing groups it represented a horrifying scenario of state socialism. These images, which are found even in the social sciences, were rarely compared with the reality of people living in the countries referred to. Given the barriers to travel and tourism between Eastern and Western European countries, opportunities for physical contact were rare. Contact was replaced by television and newspaper reports, which are known to be a tool for reinforcing ideological separation on both sides. In the years following the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, Europeans from the East and the West discovered that they did not really know one another, and they did not understand one another.

After the breakdown of the Soviet empire, the question of what Europe is (or should be) was raised again, and was salient in the politics of every country—this time in the context of global restructuring. On the one hand, the formation of two opposing blocs had to a great extent dissolved. Each country, especially on the Eastern side, has been relocating itself in a differ-

ent mental and geographical map, a map that is still in flux. This attempt at defining nationhood has created a lively public debate and a revitalization of East–West relations.<sup>4</sup> Concomitant reclassifications of states as Central, Eastern and Southeastern European countries, are a sign of how vital the symbolic politics of self-definition in relation to Europe is, alongside the importance of insertion into economic and political structures. At the same time it is a discursive sign of the desire to differentiate contemporary processes from homogenizing tendencies in pre-1989 history. Still, the very insistence demonstrates that although their articulation has changed, the East–West divisions linked to the period before 1989 are present even now. To some extent there are still echoes of the sharp demarcation of socialist and capitalist systems. In common discourse, however, the separation is no longer formulated in metaphors of a dichotomy between two political and economic systems, but increasingly as differences based on cultural, ethnic, and national categories. There are indeed clear indications that the emphasis on cultural differences has gained new ground, not least in processes of articulating distinctions that had been suppressed between the individual countries of the Soviet bloc.<sup>5</sup>

The present East–West discourse probably involves two different dimensions. First, a latent issue is still the aftermath of an undesired part of the common history perpetrated during World War II, which, after having been partly hidden by the construction of two system blocs, now comes to the forefront, making the association visible again. Second, the new processes of cultural differentiation refer to the old, pre-World War II East–West dichotomy in the search for a new European order. This reinstates a border to the East after all, at least partially recreating the pattern of blaming the other and mapping the undesirable onto the other side.

The intricacies of this relationship are discussed by Maria Todorova in her book *Imagining the Balkans* (1997). She shows in great detail how the constructs that depict this part of Eastern Europe as a marked contrast to the West developed mainly as creations of Western ethnographers, historians, and journalists mainly from the 18th century onward (see also Stölting in this volume). But it was about the time of World War I that “Balkanism” was fashioned as a mainly pejorative discourse, which served (and still serves) the function of creating an “*internal otherness/deviance*” on which the undesirable, including conflicts and problems created on the Western side, is

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4 Attempts to create not only a European market, but also a new political order based on a European identity reconstruct the tantalizing paradox. By defining something as an entity, one is unavoidably introducing divisions between it and what is not included (Bauman 1991). In reference to the European Union, the ‘East’ is constrained anew to raise the question about who is still to be included and who is not.

5 see e.g. Schöpflin and Wood (1989).

charted.<sup>6</sup> The Balkans, characterized mainly as uncivilized, violent, and generally disorganized, works as a counter-image to the West.

“As in the case of the Orient, the Balkans have served as a repository of negative characteristics against which a positive and self-congratulatory image of the “European” and the “West” has been constructed. With the reemergence of East and orientalism as independent semantic values, the Balkans are left in Europe’s thrall, anticivilization, alter ego, the dark side within.” (Todorova 1997: 188)

Balkanism as described by Maria Todorova is a discourse implemented in nearly every country, including the Balkans themselves, and we can see that this discursive strategy, under different labels (such as “The Russian Mafia”), continues to shape the East–West communication in other regions of Europe as well.

## Transformations and the Life-World

So far, above and beyond the level of discursive labeling, we know very little about the effects of the division of Europe before the changes introduced in the late 1980s. We know even less about how these shifts in conceptual patterns of what is now defined as ‘Europe’ in terms of states, affect the life-world. Thus it is interesting to examine how the experience of the East–West division resonates in people’s lives today, and how people cope with the transformation processes they are undergoing. A further issue is the question of how perceptions of the divisions have, or have not, changed.

Although these questions form this volume’s general framework and its point of departure, we do not pretend to offer complete or unambiguous answers. As the researchers show, there are numerous meanings assigned to the division between East and West in the different countries on either side of the border. Furthermore, the separation and the transformation have had multiple impacts on the lives of people to date. The objective of compiling a coherent picture may be premature. However, the contributors to this volume have taken up the challenge of proposing hypotheses and empirical analyses of the influence of the historical events which led to the division in the construction of biographies and of everyday life since World War II.

The book is divided into three sections:

### 1. Approaching Europe—Theoretical Considerations

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6 Here she makes a distinction between the concept of Balkanism and the concept of Orientalism which denotes a division that shapes one’s own against an (inferior) ‘outside’. „It is my thesis that while orientalism is dealing with a difference between (imputed) types, balkanism treats the differences within one type.” (1997: 19)

2. Between Past and Present—Experiences of Violence and Destruction in Wars, Dictatorship, and the Shoah
3. Challenges in the Crossing of ‘Borders’

### *Part 1: Approaching Europe—Theoretical Considerations*

This section contains discussions of theoretical issues related to the concept of Europe, its divisions and its common ground. Furthermore, the theoretical underpinnings of a biographical approach are introduced as a European concept which serves as a general framework for many empirical articles in this volume.

In the first paper, “The East of Europe—A Historical Construction”, *Erhard Stölting* presents an overview of the historical emergence of specific types of East–West divisions as conceptual patterns to describe differences in a dichotomous way. He also shows the contexts in which these patterns were and are used, especially in processes of defining collective (mainly national, but also local) identities. Whereas Stölting’s paper stresses the lines of separation, *Martin Peterson’s* focus in “The Pursuit of a European Identity” is on the cultural common ground of European identity as represented in drama and literature. In this analysis, the conceptualization of European identity is not a static social fact that provides people with “stable points of reference”, but rather a fragile and constantly changing effort, driven by a need to deal with the fractures and the devastation that have been part of European history.

*Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal* takes up these questions and presents the concept of “biographical structuring” as a way of practice and understanding of individuals how they deal with changes and even with ruptures in European societies. In “Address Lost: How to Fix Lives. Biographical Structuring in the European Modern Age”, he takes “biographical work” of this kind as evidence that identities can no longer be localized—neither in terms of geography, culture, or social strata, nor in the temporal sense of assuming continuity at any level of social life. In the paper by *Devorah Kalekin-Fishman*, “Looking in on Europe from the Outside: Stories of Exclusion and Inclusion”, this approach, too, is questioned. She asks whether biographical research, as a methodological means to disclose processes of individualization and diversification, does not itself reinforce the processes of alienation that underlie the societal development that we call “modern”. In her paper, the issue of the borders of Europe is reopened for critique. She provides evidence from Israel as to how borders shift as mental productions take form and in turn shape diverse social processes.

*Part 2: Between Past and Present—Experiences of Violence and Destruction*

How people refer to the past, especially to experiences of violence and suffering during and after the crucial historical collapses in Europe in the past century, is the focus of this section: the Russian Revolution, Stalinism, World War II, the Shoah, and the War in Yugoslavia. Generational perspectives and the analysis of narrative strategies disclose ways in which “past” experiences are still part of present-day life stories, as biographies are constructed in relation to family histories, as well as to public and collective histories. Even in Europe today, coping with violence caused by war in everyday life is a relentless struggle for individuals and their families.

*Victoria Semenova*, in her paper “The Message from the Past: Experiences of Suffering Transmitted Through Generations”, begins with a conceptual discussion of possible mechanisms by which the past, mainly in the form of grandparents’ experiences in the 1920s and 30s in Soviet Russia, is used and becomes meaningful in life strategies and constructions of life stories of the younger generation in contemporary Russia, a generation that has not experienced these events themselves. Based on her empirical analysis of family interaction over two and three generations, she proposes a four-part typology to describe different ways of transmitting experiences of suffering from former periods in the family context and of “using” them in the context of constructing future oriented life strategies.

*Gabriele Rosenthal* examines the present meaning of the family past with a slightly different focus. In her paper on “Social Transformation in the Context of Familial Experience: Biographical Consequences of a Denied Past in the Soviet Union” she stresses that we gain a fuller understanding of the meaning of the past if we reconstruct its presentation in relation to experiences actually lived through. In this way the interrelations between past and present (that is, the impact of the past on the present and the re-construction of the past from the present) can be traced in its full complexity. Concretely, she focuses on the meaning of hidden parts of a family history, starting from the perspective of a granddaughter aged 24 at the time of the interview in 1992, and traces the way in which a family secret, carried over from the Russian Revolution through the Stalinist era and World War II, affects all the members of the family and influences the granddaughter’s life.

The papers that follow demonstrate that the process of transformation in Europe has opened up new possibilities for dealing with the traumas dating from the Holocaust as well. They all present analyses of how processes of “being Jewish” (Inowlocki) take shape in family configurations and family histories.

In her paper “Intergenerational Dialog in Families of Jewish Communists in East Germany. A Process-Oriented Analysis”, *Bettina Völter* traces

changing perspectives on the past in present transformation processes. Basing her analysis on the concept of “biographical work”, she explores the meaning of Jewishness and the Shoah in a mixed Communist family in the context of state socialism. In this family, the parents returned to East Germany from exile in the Soviet Union, and tried to reconstruct normality in the GDR. The focus is on how the Jewish family background, with a grandfather murdered in the Shoah, has been transmuted and communicated to the younger generation during different historical periods.

The complexities of reaching an understanding of what it means to be Jewish after the Shoah can also be seen in the family histories of displaced persons who came from Poland to West Germany. *Lena Inowlocki's* paper, “Doing ‘Being Jewish’. The Constitution of “Normality” in Displaced Jewish Families in Germany”, explores this issue as it is faced by a mother who has to decide how she can provide her children with knowledge about Jewish traditions while living in West Germany. Moreover, the mother herself, as the daughter of survivors of the Shoah, had no personal access to what she considers to be a “normal” Jewish life. Drawing on the concept of “doing ‘being ordinary’” developed by Harvey Sacks, Lena Inowlocki shows that creating “normality” in being Jewish is an active process that demands reflective decisions and aims at re-creating a livable social context beyond, or in contrast to, the destruction experienced in the persecutions during the Shoah.

Different motives for trying to escape a family past, or of creating a new basis for “normality” by living together with non-Jews can also be traced in the paper by *Júlia Vajda* and *Éva Kovács* on “Jews and Non-Jews Living Together After the Transition in Hungary”. This paper examines the dynamics of relationships in second-generation couples, which bring together family backgrounds characterized by different involvement in and experiences of the Holocaust. Presenting four different cases, the researchers analyze how Jewishness is addressed by the partners in each couple, and how the modes of adjustment influence evolving family relationships. The empirical findings conclude with a discussion of the links between the development of self and the acceptance of difference.

Whereas the studies named above show people trying, with varying degrees of success, to come to terms with past trauma and guilt feelings, *Mirjana Morokvasic-Müller's* paper, “Escaping Nationalism and Violence: Interethnic Marriages in the Post-Yugoslavian Region”, points out the challenges that marriages between people of different ethnic origins have had to face in the course of a war in which their groups and collectives have become enemies. With the return of nationalism, the entire generation brought up as “Yugoslavs”, and especially the thirteen per cent who are in interethnic marriages, have in her words “become victims, followers or leaders in the ongoing national hysteria”. The gendered experience of violence in a war is

shown as a force to propagate nationhood. This is likely to have been part of the European Wars in the past as well.

In the last part of this section narrative strategies in biographical interviews as well as in published autobiographical writing and in generational self-presentations are explored to highlight how experiences of war and of dictatorship have been articulated and presented in ongoing public discourse.

*Kaja Kazmierska's* "Polish–German Relationships in Narratives on the Experiences of World War II from Poland's Eastern Border Region" shifts the perspective on war experiences to collective trajectories and narratives. Basing herself on the concepts of "trajectory" and "biographical action scheme" (Fritz Schütze), she shows that war experiences in the Eastern border region of Poland were narrated in terms of a collective trajectory when referring to the Soviet army and in terms of a biographical scheme when referring to the German army. Concrete encounters with Germans, however, are hardly mentioned in the biographical narratives. The narrative strategies, found as a general pattern in the interviews, are explained by the different contexts of awareness involved in experiences with the different occupying forces in the region, and by the use of comparison as a descriptive mode. Moreover, we see that this perspective was not shared in other regions of the country. Thus different and isolated narratives have developed within Poland concerning the experiences of World War II.

*Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu*, in "Narratives of Extreme Experiences in Four Model Life Stories: Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Nicolae Steinhardt, Paul Goma", also deals with narrative strategies about the past in a public space. His paper focuses on recently published autobiographical texts in Romania, all of which refer to extreme experiences of prison and exile during the eras of fascism and Stalinism. In particular the author analyzes and compares the modes and functions of autobiographical writing in reference to the extreme experiences of four Romanian intellectuals whose publications are now having an impact on public discourse and even on the historiography of these periods in Romania. The analysis centers on the fact that, while extreme experiences under dictatorships demand articulation, this articulation is interwoven with the presentation of the writers as intellectuals in a public space, seeking recognition and links to experiences of others. The different types of autobiographical writing, the narrative strategies for expressing extreme experiences found in the four intellectual biographies analyzed, range from (accusatory) testimonies to (transcendental) novelized narratives, each embedded in a particular type of public reasoning about the historical events and periods of dictatorship.

On a more general level, *Zdzisław Krasnodebski's* "Dilemmas of Collective and Individual Memory in Eastern Europe: Reflections on the Example of Poland" also raises the question of how the past is reshaped in public discourse by biographical editing after a regime has undergone profound

changes. He focuses on the biographical presentation of the generation he calls the baby-boomers, who formed a large part of the Solidarity movement. Without positing an equivalence between the Nazi Regime and Stalinism, Krasnođebski points to the difficulty involved in using clear-cut “victim vs. victimizer” categories when examining the shifting of positions brought about by the change of systems. In the end the author asks how the collective memory of a society can deal with the violence experienced in the periods of fascism, the Holocaust, and Stalinism without focusing exclusively on one of these periods at the expense of the others.

### *Part 3: Challenges in Crossing Borders*

The papers in this section focus on how people deal with the consciousness of borders and the challenges they represent in ordinary living. Processes of separation, of experiencing shifting social contexts and encounters across borders, as well as practices aimed at bridging them in everyday life are the themes here. The first five papers focus on fissures that emerged within societies, while the last three provide unconventional views of how borders between societies are experienced, especially in the context of migration and migration research.

“The Construction of Cultural Difference between East and West Germans in Bowing Letters” by *Ina Dietzsch* examines Germans’ attempts to maintain a semblance of intimacy despite the uncompromising political division after World War II. Examining a corpus of letters that were exchanged over several decades, she notes that the relationships disclosed are full of tensions, yet the partners persisted in the correspondence undaunted. By sending extravagant gifts, the West Germans seemed to be establishing the superiority of their ordinary experiences. This custom actually laid obligations on the East Germans which they could only partially fulfill. The complex interplay of generosity with bids for interpersonal power on the one hand and of pride with practical limitations on the other provides fascinating sociological insights into the effects of political divisions. Dietzsch discovered that although the communication was built on misunderstandings and the creation of hierarchical difference, the cross-border communication was successful as a community-building practice, fulfilling the function of transcending the border.

Looking at “The Socialist Circus: Secrets, Lies and Autobiographical Family Narratives”, *László Kürti* deals with a process of separation within his family in the context of the establishment of a state-socialist society in Hungary. Taking up the challenge of reconstructing his own family history and story in an autobiographical anthropological approach, Kürti shows how a completely different perspective on the story of this broken family was

disclosed with the recent discovery of the diary of his father, from whom he was separated from early childhood on. In order to understand his parents' separation, he has to investigate the history of his family against the backdrop of the history of the country. By working through the anthropological intricacies of this history, the author is able to achieve a resolution which is at once deeply personal and meaningful for many others.

*Vera Sparschuh* in "The Biographies of the Biographers: Some Remarks on the History of the Social Sciences in GDR", draws our attention to a part of the public sphere in tracing the development of the social sciences in the GDR state-socialist society. She stresses that the establishment of this kind of society after World War II was an extended process rather than a momentary displacement of everything that had gone before. This is illustrated in the biography of a "founding father" of the sociology that was instituted in the GDR in the 1950s. A representative of the generation that had been intellectually formed during the Weimar Republic and then in Russian captivity, the protagonist of this paper went through all the stages of establishing sociology in the GDR, a highly politicized process. As in many other state-socialist societies, sociology in East Germany was regarded at one time as necessary and even at the forefront of social development, then rejected as "revisionist", with severe consequences for those associated with it. The underlying argument of the paper is that the "founding generation" was in an ambivalent position during these processes. They identified with the goal of creating a socialist society, yet they had reached scientific maturity before that society was established. The story is one of resisting the surrender of scientific ideals, questions, and research to ideological manipulation.

*Ingrid Miethe's* paper, "Changes in Spaces of Political Activism: Transforming East Germany", deals with the shifting borders that people experienced within their own society during the processes of transformation following 1989, as matters they had taken for granted were suddenly endangered. Based on hermeneutical case reconstructions of women in East German dissident movements, the study demonstrates how the meaning of intra-societal spaces changed during and after the transformation process, and what these changes meant to politically active women. On the basis of her empirical findings Miethe draws on two specific discourses: the discourse on resistance in Eastern Europe, and the current feminist discourse in Western Europe. She concludes that the importance of the public and private spheres for people's actions can only be comprehended in relation to the actors' concrete experience. It turns out that practical and theoretical distinctions between public and private spaces are useful both in explaining empirical phenomena and in understanding former state-socialist societies.

*Ingrid Oswald* and *Viktor Voronkov*, in "Tricky Hermeneutics—Public and Private Viewpoints on Jewish Migration from Russia to Germany", show how borders enter into scientific work by creating different bases for

interpretation. Referring to two different research projects on migration from Russia to Germany, as well as to one comparing the immigration of Russian Jews in Israel and Germany (see Schütze and Rapoport in this volume), they trace different ways to understand assertions by interviewees of different samples that they came to Germany “by accident”. The researchers in these projects, drawing on different context knowledge, provide diverse interpretations and explanations. The researcher most familiar with the country of origin, Russia, points to the specific living conditions in Soviet and post-Soviet Russia in a literal interpretation of the argument of “accidental” migration. In contrast, the German co-researcher stresses the nature of the situation of immigrants in Germany with its ambiguous messages and specific status assignments, which minimize the differences between Jewish and non-Jewish Russian immigrants. The third explanation derives from the perceived need for Jewish immigrants in Germany to justify their choice of Germany as the target country rather than Israel, given Germany’s responsibility for the Holocaust. Since none of these explanations can be excluded, the authors advocate international cooperation in interpreting phenomena constituted by and in very different contexts.

In their paper on young Jewish Russians who have emigrated to Germany or to Israel, “‘We Are Similar in that We’re Different’: Social Relationships of Young Russian Jewish Immigrants in Israel and Germany”, *Yvonne Schütze and Tamar Rapoport* trace modes of communicating and dealing with difference by exploring young immigrants’ friendships and networks in the communities of which they have decided to become members. Basing their analysis on Alfred Schütz’s concept of the “stranger”, who has to face shifts in the cultural patterns of “thinking-as-usual” between his country of origin and the host society, the authors found three “orientation types” in facing this challenge. Based on their expectations and their different kinds of knowledge, immigrants practice “avoidance of contact”, “wait and see”, or “assimilation”. These types are discussed in terms of the individuals’ orientations as well as in relation to the different receiving contexts found in Israel and Germany.

In “The meaning of the Iron Curtain in East–West Migration Biographies”, *Roswitha Breckner* focuses on different dimensions in which the experience of crossing a border between polarized social systems takes shape. Comparing two cases of young adolescents who moved from Romania in the early 1970s to the West, she shows that the border first became a structuring element of experience during the migration process. Earlier images and knowledge about the context of departure as well as that of arrival were “turned upside down”, and differences were perceived in patterns of contrast. The construction of the biographies in biographical interviews conducted more than twenty years after the migration shows the long-term impact that these experiences had. And finally, the references to history, espe-

cially to family history in these biographical constructions, disclose that the border had severed this generation from the pre-socialist history of their families and countries, especially their connections with Germany during the two world wars—a history which was reopened as soon as the border in its function as an “Iron Curtain” dissolved after 1989.

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Roswitha Breckner, Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, and Ingrid Miethe  
 October 2000

**Part 1:**

**Approaching Europe—  
Theoretical Considerations**



*Erhard Stölting*

## The East of Europe: A Historical Construction

In public discourse “East” and “West” are used to refer to two parts of Europe which are thought of as opposing each other in a dichotomous way. Another “East”–“West” dichotomy is that of “Asia” and “Europe”, in which the former continent is not identified with Chinese, Japanese, Indian, or other great cultures, but is seen as the direct opposite of a humanistic, rational, tolerant, and enlightened Europe. Thus “East” and “West” are not simply geographical, but essentially cultural and moral distinctions.

The conceptual types discussed here are variants of one basic underlying dichotomy. They are deeply rooted in European self-definitions and are used largely unconsciously. Only rarely have they become a topic of explicit discussion. That the concepts are deeply rooted is manifested in their constant circulation in all kinds of texts: literary fiction, textbooks, scholarly or popular history books, official documents, political speeches, informal discussions, etc. Constant use makes them appear to be self-evident, and they are only rarely questioned.

The consequences of this deep-seated dichotomy are considerable. Although the relationship of discourse to political and social action is not one of simple causal determination, the East–West dichotomy is visible nearly everywhere: in the inflammatory speeches which fueled the wars in former Yugoslavia, as well as in quieter debates about German identity.

As for the conceptual opposition of Eastern and Western Europe, there are certainly real factors that contributed to shaping it. In addition, this specific distinction is a modern phenomenon. Its final formulation is found only at the end of the 18th century. Astolphe Custine (1990) had a very clear vision of the difference, and for him Poland was still clearly East European. The economic roots of the difference stretch still farther back, but hardly farther than the 17th century (Brenner 1989; Gunst 1989). By Western European standards, Eastern Europe has been economically and technologically backward since that time.

Although the topic here is the conceptualization of a difference and not the difference itself, this does not mean that differences do not exist. But it does imply that these differences are interpreted by means of conceptual schemes which have a life of their own, and which have particularly grave consequences.

Thus the object of these deliberations will be conceptual patterns which can be thought of as organizing contemporary perspectives and discourses on Eastern Europe, on Western Europe, on Central Europe, or simply on Europe.

It may seem astonishing that these patterns have not yet been clearly grasped, although nearly all observers use them with dexterity. But using a conceptual pattern is not the same as being aware of it. A perusal of current publications, newspapers, journals, or even learned media is sufficient to show how widely used the East–West conceptual pattern still is. One can even surmise that it organizes not only journalistic or scholarly texts and interpretations, but also everyday experiences. For this reason, a cognitive representation of these conceptual patterns may be helpful in interpreting accounts of personal experiences.

## The Basic Dichotomy

One of the first hints on how the East can be perceived is found in Voltaire's famous novel *Candide ou l'optimisme*, which pretends to be a translation from the German: "Translated from the German of Doctor Ralph with the additions which were found in the Doctor's pocket when he died at Minden in the Year of our Lord 1759" (Voltaire 1960). To cite only the beginning of this novel:

"In the country of Westphalia, in the castle of the most noble Baron of Thunder-ten-tronckh, lived a youth whom Nature had endowed with a most sweet disposition." (Voltaire 1960: 139)

The Baron's name already suggests that no reasonable person would be able to pronounce such a monstrosity. In the wild regions east of France, people speak a language which no one will ever be able to understand. There is no cause for wonder, for the wasteland lacks civilization:

"The Baron was one of the most powerful lords in Westphalia, for his castle had not only a gate, but even windows, and his great hall was hung with tapestry."

The very idea of civilized manners and appearances is ridiculous in these parts:

"My Lady Baroness, who weighed three hundred and fifty pounds, consequently was a person of no small consideration; and then she did the honors of the house with a dignity that commanded universal respect."

This description is only a first and still pleasant step toward more terrible regions. As the novel goes on, Candide sees other countries that are even savage, where terrible massacres take place, and where individual life and honor are worth nothing.

These terrible regions are in fact not Eastern Europe, but those parts of the world which once belonged to the Ottoman Empire, including North Af-

rica. But the first glimpse of Germany already illustrates the tendency. The uncivilized East is the very opposite of the highly civilized West.

This perspective can be summarized in the general observation that the concept of the East functions as a contrast to the West with respect to civilization, or rather to being civilized. This difference can be seen as a deep conceptual structure which will be repeated again and again, wherever the difference between East and West is a theme.

It is impossible to draw a geographical line between East and West. From the French perspective, the East begins in Germany. From a traditional German perspective, Eastern Europe begins with Poland. From a Polish perspective, Byelorussia may be East, and Russia certainly is. Although Russia then extends to the Pacific Ocean, it still has its own East, namely the regions inhabited by the Tartars, or Central Asia.

But the difference between East and West is not confined to national structures alone: it operates within the individual countries as well. The difference between East and West Germany within today's reunified German state, for example, may be the result of relatively recent history. But in pre-war times, the eastern regions of Pomerania, East Prussia, or Upper Silesia were considered to be utterly backward in the German context. In Poland, the same cognitive divisions can be observed between a developed West and an underdeveloped East.

Further west, even the city of Cologne makes a traditional distinction between a "good" side of the Rhine River—the west bank—and a less desirable east bank. Thus there is no objectively definable border at which East and West meet. The boundary shifts with the position of the beholder. Within this shifting territory, the distinctions are stable, however. The West is marked by civilization; the East is stigmatized as barbarian wilderness. The wild East has at its extremes a barbaric Asia which is opposed to civilized Europe. As with right and left or foreground and background, the position of the beholder defines the line of demarcation.

This conceptual dichotomy has an additional importance insofar as it was and is integrated in different constructions of national identity as institutionalized in national public discourses. Of course the East–West dichotomy must be integrated in the specific national histories from which these identities are supposed to draw plausibility. But in this way an inherent instability is imported into the constructed identity. Thus German identity is defined quite differently depending on whether it is contrasted to France on the one hand or to Poland or Russia on the other. Likewise Polish identity appears different depending on whether it is seen in contrast to Germany or to Russia. But in each case, the basic East–West dichotomy remains in effect.

Which aspect of these identity constructions is addressed depends on the concrete situation. But the contradictions in self-perception which may then become apparent, fit into a relatively consistent pattern of perspectives.

It is possible to identify four different subtypes of the basic dichotomy that have emerged in European—including East European—cultural and intellectual history. Although they formulate conflicting views and convictions which might even legitimize excessive violence, they are nevertheless variations of one discursive type. These four subtypes are characterized as:

- An orderly, moral, and modern West looking down scornfully upon a disorderly, amoral, and pre-modern East.
- An East that accepts this negative view and hopes to overcome it by Westernization.
- A moral, poetic, harmonious, and warm East looking scornfully upon an amoral, cold, egoistic, formalistic, and decadent West.
- A formalistic, cold, and decadent West sentimentally and mimetically identifying with a pre-modern, graceful, and dignified East.

## Contempt

Let us first take up the perspective of a contemptuous Western look at the East. The territories beyond the Eastern borders are seen as chaotic and only partially civilized; civilization has to protect itself against the East. It is a dangerous space, out of which barbarian invaders tend to storm into the cultivated West. Typically, huge masses of poor, unmannered, and illiterate brutes threaten to invade Europe and to destroy civilization altogether. The imagery, which historically embodied this fear, included the “hordes” of Huns, Avars, Tartars, and other mobile and bellicose Asian populations. Depending on the geographical position of the person looking eastward, these invading masses could also be Germans, Poles, Russians, or, to complete the Asian picture, Chinese—the “yellow peril”. From very early on, the “barbarian hordes” were equated with vermin or plagues and other epidemics.

The pervasiveness of this imagery is well known and need not be elaborated here. A few years ago it was re-enacted in Western Europe in the form of warnings about the millions of Russians or other Eastern Europeans who would flood the West as the Iron Curtain opened; they would submerge order and prosperity (Stölting 1991a).

This image has had specific discursive consequences. If disorder characterizes the East, the “natural” state of Eastern societies, like the natural state postulated by Thomas Hobbes, lacks any intrinsic moral order. No one can trust anyone—sometimes with the notable exception of closely-knit families which band together without regard for the larger community. Out of this condition no civil society can emerge. This picture has been applied in varying degrees to contemporary Eastern Europe, especially Russia (Oswald

1996). But Russia in this context could just as well be replaced by Romania or Bulgaria.

In contrast to these barbaric and chaotic societies, the West is characterized by rational and humane organization. Citizens are loyal to their political structures; corruption is a marginal phenomenon. Civil society, although perhaps not perfect, is more than just a possibility. Law-abiding citizens, respected institutions, and an intrinsic social order make possible an orderly state in which crises are cushioned by mechanisms which always tend to restore equilibrium. For the same reason, the West tends to be technically and intellectually advanced. Its comparative wealth is the result of inventiveness, thrift, and hard work.

Again the East appears to be the exact opposite. Sloth, lack of discipline, and a propensity to steal characterize the Eastern masses. Under these circumstances the only possible order is despotism. The Hobbesian picture reemerges, with the notable difference that Hobbes legitimized the total surrender of all individual freedom to the sovereign by reason. According to Hobbes, the natural state in which everyone is a mortal threat to everyone is intolerable. Reason therefore motivates humans to surrender their natural individual freedom to the sovereign.

In this view people are brought to order and morals only by force. If this constraining force lapses, chaos breaks out anew. The consequences are thought to be visible in political culture. People living in chaos long for despotism in order to escape insecurity. In this way, the basic dichotomy reappears as a difference in the form of government considered appropriate. Despotism is seen as natural and healthy for the East while degrading and hateful to the West. In this respect once again the East is condensed in the specter of "Asia".

When natural individual freedom is totally surrendered, the idea of an autonomous individual makes little sense. Totalitarian despotism has the effect of completely equalizing all human beings by depriving them of all individual rights and dignity. By contrast, the individual personality, human rights, and respect for human dignity have a place only in the West.

Again, the logical path of this discourse seems to be closed. Individualism is an indicator of modernity as long as individual freedom is balanced by civil morality. Where individual freedom leads to a chaos unfettered by morals, civil society will be impossible. But since subjects in a totalitarian and *ipso facto* egalitarian society cannot develop distinctive individualities, they are just particles of a huge mass of humanity.

Although the East has been defined in this picture as a threat to the civilized West, a variation is possible. Insofar as the East is seen as chaos, as wilderness, it can also be seen as a region waiting to be civilized. Any Western country—Western by geographically relative standards—can define itself as a benign colonizing power. Then the Western nation or state has a mission

to bring the benefits of civilization to the Eastern wilderness. Only in this way, i.e. by benevolent coercion, can civilization be spread, since by definition the Eastern peoples are unable to improve themselves.

The racist anti-Slavic ideology in Germany which developed during the 19th century and eventually became part of Nazi policies in occupied Poland and Byelorussia can be seen as a variant of this colonizing trope. It argued that since the present inhabitants of the East are congenitally incapable of civilization, they must give way to Germans so that civilization could be spread eastward.

To a less brutal degree, the patronizing attitude of many Western observers, politicians and consultants can be seen as a manifestation of the original colonial perspective. The hope of transplanting Western institutions into the East—as well as resignation to the impossibility of achieving this goal—both belong to the same conceptual configuration.

But again it must be kept in mind that this conceptual configuration does not apply merely to Germans facing the Slavic East. Throughout Central and Eastern Europe this type of argument can be detected with respect to Eastern neighbors. Since the 19th century, the colonial expansion of Russia to Trans-Caucasia and into Central Asia was legitimized by the same discourses (Kappeler 1992: 141ff). Russia was depicted as a modern, industrializing and efficient European power bringing civilization and enlightenment to the Asian wilderness. From this perspective Russia was neither the backward, half-Asian, despotic state portrayed by many Western observers, nor did it correspond to the ideal of Russia pictured in Slavophile romanticism.

## **Self-Contempt and Admiration**

The Western colonial perspective could be used in the East as well. In this case, Eastern observers accepted the idea of Western civil superiority and a corresponding inferiority of the East.

On this assumption, progress can come only through Westernization, emulating the distinctive features of Western European societies. Since one's own society is identified with Eastern backwardness, Westernization implies profound societal and mental changes. Naturally these conceptions tend to take a radical reformist or revolutionary direction. Since the backwardness of Eastern societies and cultures was seen as an essential characteristic, any substantial change possible would presuppose alterations of the very fundamentals of society. Therefore Westernization nearly always meant revolution and deep mental and social transformations in the East.

In Germany, Westernizing tendencies of this kind were supported by many through 1848. One notable example was Georg Forster (Enzensberger

1996; Harpprecht 1987). Since the beginnings of the Socialist movement, nearly all Socialists, including Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, and Moses Hess, had similar Westernizing perspectives. But not all of the democrats were Westernizers.

In Russia during the 19th century, important proponents of Westernizing tendencies included Piotr Chaadaev<sup>1</sup>, Nikolai Stankevich<sup>2</sup>, Vissarion Belinski<sup>3</sup> and Alexander Herzen<sup>4</sup>. In addition, large segments of the revolutionary Russian intelligentsia were under the influence of Westernizing ideas (Walicki 1989: 336ff). Indeed, most representatives of the Socialist movement in Central and Eastern Europe can be seen as taking over a Westernizing perspective—at least until the Russian Revolution of November 1917. Even this revolution adopted characteristics of the East–West dichotomy in its quality of self-colonization rather than liberation from outside oppression.

In a remarkable shift, the Western perspective re-emerged with the intellectual opposition of late socialist times. Socialism itself was then seen as a barbaric Eastern phenomenon to be overcome by Westernization. While Russian and Soviet socialism had begun as a Westernizing movement, it was now considered “Asian”.

In postwar Germany, the same perspective has played an enormous role, especially since the 1970s. The political integration into Western political structures was considered a kind of institutional taming of a formerly and potentially still barbaric Germany. The discussions of a German “*Sonderweg*” were especially significant in this respect. The historical deviance of Germany resulted in a comparison with France and Britain and not with Russia or Italy, confirming the basic dichotomy in that Eastern Europe was practically never taken into consideration. In this context, Germany can be seen as an incarnation of “Asia”.

Since the East is constructed as the opposite of the positive West, Westernizing aspirations have always tended to reinforce the negative, “Asian” image of the East in general. Any attempt to be less Eastern tended to sharpen the dividing line towards the Eastern neighbors or within a given society.

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- 1 Pyotr Yakovlevich Chaadaev (1794-1856): Russian intellectual who from the year 1820 began to criticize Russian civilization from a Roman Catholic viewpoint. In this way, he is considered to be one of the founders of the Westernizing movement.
  - 2 Nikolay Vladimirovich Stankevich (1813-1840): Progressive intellectual and philosopher. The Stankevich Circle counted among its members many of the young radical democrats and liberal intellectuals.
  - 3 Vissarion Grigoryevich Belinsky (1811-1948): Radical rationalist intellectual, “father of Russian literary criticism”.
  - 4 Aleksandr Ivanovich Herzen (Gertsen) (1812-1870): Journalist and political philosopher who from 1847 lived in exile. He was the first advocate of a specifically Russian way to socialism.

## Resentment and Nostalgia

The basic dichotomy can in fact be inverted and the valuations exchanged so that the East is considered to be positive and the West negative. This inversion of valuations affects the concepts and changes them in a characteristic way. But it neither abolishes the basic conceptual dichotomy, nor does it create an equality of both sides. Once again, the characteristic features of the perceived West define the features of the East by negation, and vice versa.

In this variant, the superiority of Western civilization is recognized—in principle—but it is revalued. If the first type, in which the West looked down upon a backward East, could be characterized as contempt, the inverted perspective can be seen as driven by resentment.

The form of this resentment is already visible in the beginnings of Romantic nationalism in Germany. In the late 18th century, the superior civilization of France to the west was recognized, but viewed as superficial, formal, insincere, and artificial. It lacked deep poetic feeling, true sentiment, and real communal feeling. By contrast, the East was honest, unpretentious, and straightforward. This negative demarcation to the West even became a key attribute of the German character as seen in Romantic nationalism.

The underlying resentment was detected by Nietzsche (Scheler 1978). It has been described in detail by Helmuth Plessner and Norbert Elias (Elias 1992; Plessner 1982). Characteristically, neither of them considered Germany's Eastern neighbors.

The same perspective which contributed to the creation of a specifically German identity, helped to create a Russian identity as well. Both of these insisted on their uniqueness, but the attributes ascribed to each of them were—and are—largely similar. The Slavophile perspective, while pretending that the Russian character was hardly understandable to non-Russians, formulated ideas that were very similar to those of German Romantic nationalism. For all its internal differences, the basic structure of the argument was valid for the whole movement—including Alexei Khomyakov<sup>5</sup>, Konstantin<sup>6</sup> and Ivan Aksakov<sup>7</sup>, Ivan Kireevsky<sup>8</sup>, and Yuri Samarin<sup>9</sup>. In their eyes, West-

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- 5 Aleksey Stepanovich Khomyakov (1804-1860): Leading co-founder and leading intellectual figure of the Slavophile movement. His political ideal was the organic community based on cooperation rather than on competition.
  - 6 Konstantin Sergeevich Aksakov (1817-1860): Son of the Russian novelist Sergey Timofeyevich Aksakov (1791-1859), the most radical and doctrinaire of the Slavophile intellectuals.
  - 7 Ivan Sergeevich Aksakov (1823-1886): brother of Konstantin with whom he shared most political and historical convictions although he expressed them more civilly.
  - 8 Ivan Vasilyevich Kireevsky (1806-1856): one of the prominent Slavophile opponents of serfdom and reform-minded conservatives.

ern Europe was morally bankrupt. They recognized a technical and economic superiority in the West, but insisted on the moral superiority of the East. For them, Western individualism and egotism indicated the lack of a spirit of community. Russians—at least as long as they were sound—were united by their common Orthodox faith. They were a Christian community bound together by harmonious social relationships. Only in this type of community could the individual find true freedom, by subordinating the ego to the community. Khomyakov labeled this spirit “sobornost” (Berdyayev 1988; Doherty 1977; Gratieux 1953). If “sobornost” is thought to be specifically Russian, it nonetheless strongly resembles the communal spirit propounded by the German Romantics.

Since the Russian people was a spiritually united community, it was considered not to need parliaments, parties, etc. These were expressions of the materialistic and egoistic Western spirit. For the Slavophiles, autocracy was the best fitting form for the political body. One strong ruler should shoulder responsibility for the state. Western rationalism corresponded to Western individualism and egotism. Rational, formal rights were necessary where particular warring interests had to find compromises. By contrast, formal regulations were secondary or superfluous in a community built on mutual trust and a spirit of community.

Unfortunately, Russian society itself had degenerated under Western influence. For this reason the Slavophiles too urged extensive reforms: the emancipation of the serfs, civil liberties, the curtailment of bureaucracy, and the creation of an institution which could represent the people as a whole, on the model of the pre-Petrine *zemski sobor* or *veche*.

Indeed, striving for these reforms brought Slavophiles and Westernizers together. In addition, the differing use of the East–West dichotomy did not necessarily create factions which could be kept apart neatly. There existed Slavophiles who used Westernizing ideas, as well as Westernizers using Slavophile ideas (Goerdts 1995: 262ff).

Thus the dichotomy could be used and reformulated in varying configurations. Nevertheless its basic structure remains identifiable. Cold Western rationalism and civilization were opposed by deep thinking, poetic imagination and a communal spirit. If Russian society was ailing, that was because it had been infected by Western ideas and innovations which led to specific social and political ills: exploitation, formalistic bureaucracy, and political oppression. Once Russian society had been restored to its former health, its superiority would be obvious. This superiority was not seen to reside in technology nor in formal legal institutions. It relied on spiritual and communal

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9 Yuri Fyodorovich Samarin (1819-1876): Slavophile intellectual and politician who supported gradual reform in order to restore old Russian freedom and community without risking revolution.

This verdict corresponded to the Western perspective which saw the East as mired in backwardness.

The effects of central Slavophile ideas were felt throughout Russian and Soviet history. Even if the Orthodox faith was replaced for a time by Marxism-Leninism, and the autocrat by the General Secretary of the Party, the vision of a “decadent West” remained a Romantic Slavophile stereotype.

The striking similarity between Slavophile and German Romantic ideas contradicts their claim to historical individuality. Moreover, this pretense itself can be seen as a common feature. In fact, the Eastern perspective has direct links to the West. The early Slavophiles were under the influence of German philosophy, especially Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, and Baader. Many, among them Kireevsky, had studied in Berlin (Berlin 1981: 191–206; Walicki 1989: 121ff). German Romanticism, with its idealization of a pre-modern past, corresponded neatly to Slavophile views. The superiority of the French and British civilizations was not denied, but it was opposed by moral and poetic values, which, it was claimed, flourished in German culture.

The common tie to romanticism suggests that modernity itself might be at the root of the conceptual oppositions. For romanticism had been one reaction to the advent of modern society and the modern state. The similarity between Novalis’ “Christianity and Europe” and many Slavophile writings is too striking to be overlooked.

The identification with the East as seen from the West also created an important subtype: the emphatic identification with Asia as it was depicted in the East–West stereotype. According to the “Eurasian movement” of Prince N.S. Trubetskoy<sup>10</sup> and others, Russia did not belong to Europe, and found its strength in the opposition of its Asian heritage to that of the decaying West (Puti 1992; Vernadsky 1982). The poetic feelings of the “Scythians”, among them Andrei Belyi<sup>11</sup> and Aleksandr Blok<sup>12</sup>, emphasized a similar theme for a time. They identified with this nomadic people of antiquity and construed themselves as Asians.

The fourth variant of the East–West dichotomy is the integration of the positive Eastern perspective into the Western perspective. The East then becomes a focus of Western nostalgia.

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10 Prince Nikolay Sergeevich Trubetskoy (1890-1938): together with Roman Jakobson founder of structuralist linguistics. In exile, from 1922 he was a professor of Slavic philology at the University of Vienna. He was one of the most influential representatives of “Eurasianism” in Russian political philosophy of the 20th century.

11 Andrey Belyi (Boris Nikolaevich Bugaev, 1880-1934): Prominent theorist and poet of Russian Symbolism and Formalism; for some time adherent of Rudolf Steiner’s “Anthroposophy”.

12 Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Blok (1880-1921): Poet of Russian Symbolism. Strongly influenced by the mystical Christian philosopher Vladimir Solovyov. In 1918 he wrote his messianic Slavophile poem “Scythians” (Skify).

At the close of the 19th century, for example, many Germans came under the spell of Russian literature and began to see the West with the eyes of Dostoyevsky, Merezhkovsky or Tolstoy.

Although this perspective was adopted only by a minority, it is important in a systematic way. It can be seen as an example of mimetic or emphatic identification with real or imagined foreign cultures, which is a specific characteristic of modern Western society.

In our context, the identification with an allegedly pre-modern or less modern society may be an indication of a sentimental longing to leave modernity, but at the same time it is by this very fact a confirmation of modernity. It confirms the basic conceptual difference between East and West even in trying to overcome it by sentimental identification.

This sentimental flight out of modernity through identification with one's own backward East is re-emerging in many ways, in many different contexts. Since the 19th century it has been part of the Russian ambivalence toward Caucasian peoples such as the Chechens (Dunlop 1998; Fowkes 1998). On the one hand they were seen as possessing a very "Asian" character, as being cruel, disorderly, dangerous, backward. On the other hand they were idealized as being proud, honorable, brave, etc.—that is, as having typically pre-modern traits.

## **Modernity and Backwardness**

All of these four subtypes are used in very diverse contexts. As a last example it may be pointed out that even the European Jewish world before the Holocaust described itself using the East–West dichotomy and its subtypes.

German Jews were strongly assimilated in modern society, and the majority of them identified with it. For the most part, they looked down scornfully on Jewish populations in Eastern Europe who kept their pre-modern Yiddish language and their religious laws and customs.

Especially during the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, the Western Jewish attitudes toward Eastern Jews reflected the first type, the scornful look eastward. Literary examples of these perspectives can be found in two once popular novels by the German Jewish writer Georg Hermann, *Jettchen Gebert* and *Henriette Jacoby* (Hermann 1998a and b; Liere 1974). These novels idealized the assimilating world of middle class Berlin Jews, portraying them as being good-hearted and civilized. Eastern Jews in contrast were portrayed as being cold, backward, and uncivilized; to some degree they were portrayed as resembling anti-Semitic stereotypes. At the time, the German East began in what was then the Prussian province of Posen, today Poznań. A still more typical use of the East–West dichotomy in this context

was that of the writer Karl Emil Franzos, who himself had grown up in the Jewish world of Galicia. He advocated modernization by Westernization, which for him meant Germanization. His precise and in part well-meaning description of the Eastern European Jewish world was nevertheless intended to show its backwardness. Typically, his label for this world was *Halbasien*, literally “Half-Asia” (Franzos 1922; Gelber 1996).

The opposite phenomenon can be seen among the generation of Western Jews who were young at the time of World War I and who discovered for themselves the Eastern Jewish world. A well-known figure in this context is Arnold Zweig with his famous book *Das ostjüdische Antlitz* (“The Eastern Jewish Countenance”; Zweig 1988). More distinctively identified with this world, however, is Martin Buber, who himself came from a Western assimilated family. The strong identification with the world of Eastern Jews not only offered a way to flee a humiliating modernity: the idealized Jewish world of Eastern Europe came to be seen as the very essence of Jewishness in general.

The Jewish theme shows how the East–West dichotomy can be integrated into the tension between modern and pre-modern society. The West came to represent modernity, the East its opposite—regardless of how modernity might be conceptualized. Here again, inversions of the original valuations are possible, as are recombinations from different perspectives.

## National Specifications

If the variants of the original dichotomous type can be reconstructed in ideal types, it should not be forgotten that they need further specification. As a rule this specification takes place in a national context, although, as the Jewish example shows, other contexts are also possible.

National—or regional—specifications follow a characteristic pattern which can only be hinted at here (cf. Stölting 1991b: 10ff). On the one hand, any nation is given a specific history in which some golden historical past or several golden ages are followed by times of alienation and/or humiliation. The golden age defines the true essence or identity of the nation; the time of alienation and forgetfulness supplies the motive for struggle for the re-assertion of collective identity.

In the construction of national identity, a national myth uses real or invented historical events and combines them in a way that helps to create or stabilize collective identifications. The nationalization, today the ethnification, of European populations tends to use these methods in constructing collective identities. In this way national and ethnic identities gain the individuality to which they aspire and which is one of the essential claims of modern collective consciousness.

At the same time, however, the basic conceptual difference between East and West is integrated in European national histories and identities. The fundamental dichotomies can now reappear in a specific national framework. Consequently, characteristics of the general conceptual opposition and its variations appear as essential elements of national—German, Polish, Russian, etc.—identity.

## **The Shifting Border Between Eastern and Western Europe**

Endeavors to define political positions by constructing an Eastern or Western identity have been part of the game since the 19th century. Imperial Russian dominance was resisted by establishing historical distances. Against the official Russian scheme of history, for example, in which the State of Moscow was a successor to the Kiev state and attempted to unite Slavic nations as blood brothers, Franciszek Duchiniński (1817–1893) remained aloof. Duchiniński pretended that the origins of the Great Russians lay not with the Indo-European Slavs, but rather with the Finnish and Hunnish peoples of Asia. The connection between the Slavonic Christian State of the Kiev Rus and the later duchy of Moscow and its succeeding empire was, according to Duchiniński, a political fabrication. The ancestral home of the Poles was located between the Vistula and the Dnieper, and its Eastern reaches encompassed the land of the Poles and Ruthenes, but not that of the Muscovites. Poles were not related to Russians in any natural way (Davies 1992, vol. 2: 187ff). In quite a similar way, and relying on Duchiniński, the Ukrainian historian Hrushesvky was able to demonstrate that Ukrainians had nothing whatsoever to do with the Great Russians (Prymak 1987). The Russian perspective remained rather different (Solchanyk 1990).

The underlying dynamics are still valid, namely the different perspectives on the East and West, and the nature of the difference between them. The national specification may conceal it under the pretense of national individuality, hiding the general conceptual mechanism. But its force is undiminished. The exact position of the border between Europe and Asia may be ambiguous—but the border itself remains highly significant.

Today, when the European Union is thought to be more than a territory with a common market and heavily guarded barriers against the outside world, the process of inventing a European identity has already begun. The pattern of European nationalism is being repeated as historical facts and institutions are stitched together in order to put forward a credible common history and culture. Given the fact that the image of the Eastern border is still valid, the demarcation between East and West is becoming all the more important. The justification for excluding the barbaric East, whether Turkey,

Russia, or other Eastern European countries, constantly uses the original dichotomy.

So where can the Eastern border of Europe be drawn? One answer to the question has already been given: Asia begins at the Eastern border of any given Central or Eastern European state. In the given frame of reference, it is understood that people eastwards speak languages that are difficult to understand and which no reasonable person would bother to learn. Only Western languages are an indicator of cultural capital. The West by contrast to the East is clearly ordered and recognizable. It has a sensible and accessible history. There may have been different interests, or even conflicts, but the scene is not chaotic.

The Communist era has had an especially strong and defining effect for some time. After 1945, Eastern Europe was identified with the area of Soviet dominance. Thus the GDR was clearly part of Eastern Europe, while Greece belonged to the Western hemisphere. To the extent that this Eastern world was able, for a time and for certain sympathizers, to appear progressive in terms of science and technology, or even in social and political structures, it seemed to invert the traditional conceptual division. But even here the Western image of the East was shaped by the underlying dichotomy. Central traits of the Communist system—totalitarianism, despotism, the negation not only of individual freedom but of individuality altogether, and poverty—could be seen as conforming to an Asian type of society and political order.

Under these conditions it was understandable that the democratic opposition movements in Eastern Europe tried to define their countries as “Central European” rather than “Eastern European”, or as “European” rather than “Asian”. In most cases historical reasons rooted in regional or national history could easily be found.

After 1989, these self-definitions became part of efforts to restructure the European maps. Attempts to join the European Union or NATO were accompanied by an emphasis on the European character of one’s own nation. By implication, the Asiatic or Oriental qualities of the Eastern neighbors were stressed at the same time.

On the other hand, anti-Western resentments tended to return in the context of conservative, “patriotic” movements, which opposed a communitarian, honest, peaceful East to a decadent, treacherous, egoistic West. The debate will go on for a while yet, and the basic dichotomy is alive and well.

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*Martin Peterson*

## The Pursuit of a European Identity

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) have for some years persistently asked their European colleagues what made Europe so dynamic and successful during the past half millennium. They admit that China during the same period has been largely stagnating, indulging in reproductive patterns which more often than not have tended to be self-defeating. The members of the CASS want a clue as to which way success lies now that China has again begun to move in a global context. One obvious answer that Europeans can supply them with is Europe's cultural pluralism, which is about the last thing that the Chinese want to hear. How should they be able to replicate that? And after all, what guarantee is there that European-style pluralism would not intermittently explode into devastating wars like those which in Europe, at least during the 20th century, have destroyed more than they have created?

A similar question with regard to European identity emerges persistently nowadays at EU-sponsored conferences with the "extension candidate nations". Representatives of the front-running candidate nations, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland, constantly want to know what the EU representatives mean by European identity. The same answer inevitably presents itself: European cultural pluralism has produced variations of thought and artistic expression within the same cultural framework. In other words, it has been possible for any European to identify with films by both Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini, for example, who represent archetypically different national cultures. However, both Fellini and Bergman are at the same time part of the European cultural heritage, like Homer and Shakespeare, Virgil and Thomas Mann, Dostoyevski and Sartre. So, within a frame of very wide differences, the same European scope has been at work for several millennia.

As the Enlightenment project launched the modernity project, European thinking was divided into three main currents: the empiricist logic of the natural sciences; the normative construction of social justice adopted by the social sciences (which soon borrowed heavily from the natural sciences for the sake of credibility); and finally the humanities, with antennae sensitive enough to anticipate the unforeseeable. During the course of the 20th century, and especially since the Second World War, the humanities have declined in stature and influence. However, the works of at least three early 20th century writers—Kafka, Joyce, and Proust—led to new cognitions with extensive implications for the development of social science, as we shall see below. Their significance can also be measured by the fact that during the later parts of the

20th century European literature has tended to take the form of variations on themes that they initiated.

Pluralism in science and culture provided fertile ground for fairly balanced proportions of inventive, innovative, and critical thinking. However, the contributions of the humanities have been vastly underrated during the postwar period. European identity cannot be traced through empirical research in this paper; here I will focus rather upon what representations of identity in drama and literature may reflect. A survey of this kind can yield much that otherwise tends to be overlooked. Above all, I contend that there is but a thin cognitive line between identities in the form of representations and those based on empirical research. Representations magnify actual identities.

At the same time, the issue of European identity has become a political issue to an extent that is much more related to the wider philosophical debate on the semantics of identity as a whole and its relationship to globalism. As a point of departure for examining the pursuit of European identity, we may ask why the concern with identity has now become a political matter. The European integration process cannot be more than part of the answer, since this process was dormant for at least two decades, from 1965 to 1985.<sup>1</sup> A broad question of this sort requires analysis from several angles, as well as more unorthodox forms of scrutiny. The perspective applied here is a broad cultural outline of the usage and the pursuit of identity as a project rather than as something achieved and definite. In the sense articulated by Zygmunt Bauman (1996), identity as a project is more a verb than a noun.

## Identity in Literature and Drama

Identity has influenced—and been influenced by—historical elements since antiquity. Its Gestalt in ancient times was best reproduced and illustrated in drama. The form and roles attributed to representative characters in ancient Greek epics with their impact on Greek drama are more than archetypal for the modern, pluralist conception of identity. Characters are not only double-exposed, but invariably triple-exposed. In the *Iliad*, for instance, Homer described the leading Greeks, such as Agamemnon and Achilles and their elite troops, as Achaians who were simultaneously a pack of predatory wolves, emotional and hence vulnerable human beings, and demigods with divine qualities.

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1 The activist reign of the first Commission president, Walter Hallstein, was severely dampened by de Gaulle's lethal attack on federalist tendencies in the EC in 1965. Activism did not pick up again until the arrival of Jacques Delors in 1985.

Once Christianity took hold of the minds of Europeans, dualities of good and evil prevailed. The dichotomy is most marked in the Orthodox Church which admits no compromise or middle ground between these two extreme states. A similar division, with some space left for quite notable exceptions, has predominated in the Catholic view. In the historical context, Lutheran thinking appears rather as an effective machine to subdue the perceived identity of individuals. Subtleties such as dualities in character would be quite superfluous and hence absent in Lutheranism.

Before psychoanalysis it was drama and the theater that gave form and shape to the issue of identity. Moralists in 17th century comedies dealt with deluded behavior by some conceited character who would be exploited by some unscrupulous crook. At the end the deceived fool would be doubly repentant. The divine hand regulating moral order would belong to a servant, whose guise of an indisputably authentic commoner would be a moral guarantee against hubris and the nemesis that threatens the whole social order. The ideal of humanity would then be the identity of the intelligent, resourceful but ordinary do-gooder.

The nineteenth century in drama was the age of melodramatic reflection of a new sentimentality. The emergence of new and highly articulate social classes on the stage proved very complicated. It was only with Henrik Ibsen that identity acquired a new meaning in the context of drama. Ibsen's major innovation was his focus on the hidden agendas behind patterns of behavior in a social context. Every individual is driven by his or her particular hidden agenda, which may appear in the form of a hereditary disease or of some other inherited quality apparently beyond the control of the protagonist, such as some damning action by a parent or another forebear.

The hidden agenda which every individual carries along throughout life represents the first sign of a subconscious at work rather than the gods. Of course it must have been perceived both as a frightening perspective and as a fascinating insight that, in oedipal fashion, a hidden agenda might ruin not only an individual but also a whole collective and its social order. But Ibsen also dealt with the "life lie" as the conscious obverse of the hidden agenda. More bluntly, the life lie reflected the confrontation of the identity project with stark social realities.<sup>2</sup>

The emerging new societies of the late 19th century were marked with many patterns of conflict that were beyond control. Moreover, there was the

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2 Dostoyevsky provided the Eastern European epitome of a split personality between a Promethean libertarian and an amoral elitist in his portrait of Raskolnikov in *Crime and Punishment*. He may however have taken the fate of the influential Swedish avantgardist writer C.J.L. Almqvist (1793–1866) as his model for Raskolnikov. Almqvist had to escape to the United States after his alleged attempt to murder a pawnbroker in circumstances very similar to those portrayed in *Crime and Punishment*. Almqvist's personality was split between an ultra-democratic, serene mind that was more than a century ahead of its time and an impatient, demonic elitism that divided humanity into worthy and lesser beings.

rapidly growing contradiction between increasing articulations of nationalism in public discourse, clearly reflected in popular art and literature, and the prevailing cosmopolitanism of science and more advanced art and literature. Vernacular Romanticism and the social criticism of realist naturalism provided arguments for an ontological security that tended to be acquired through new collective formations such as social movements, interest organizations, and political parties.

In late 19th century society the hidden agendas of both individuals and collectives released unforeseen centrifugal forces. Half a century later, the life lie appeared as the inescapable shortcut of the identity project with, of course, sinister consequences. In this context, common critical topics of the West were continued in the American theater. Western society emerged from the Second World War with a heroic and self-sufficient self-image that was easily torn apart by Sartre and Arthur Miller, in whose plays private life lies took on astronomical proportions for the individual or for the collective, or both.

Whereas Sartre paved the way for the identity project according to structuralism, Miller became Ibsen's most obvious successor. Miller's plays *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* demonstrated how the life lie corroded the minds of the protagonists. In *All My Sons* it is the logic of one destructive lie which must be pursued to its ultimate consequences. In *Death of a Salesman*, the life lie has captured and rotted the senses of the protagonist to such an extent that his temper becomes mercurial. The life lie has destabilized his mind so that both his temper and his outlook can swing 180 degrees in a second.

Miller was strongly influenced by Ibsen's *En folkefiende* (*The Enemy of the People*), which he helped to set up on Broadway at the end of the 1940s. *En folkefiende*, which is the play of ideas most often performed worldwide, still represents the quintessential drama about the public lie and its disastrous effects on both enlightened individuals and unenlightened collectives. Miller aimed at an analogous effect with *The Crucible*, which conveyed an even more complex message in the form of an allegory about terrorization such as McCarthyism, which can invade and distort subjective reality. A well-planned public mysticism may easily be allowed to exploit a fear already existing in the population.

Meanwhile, on another front, Freudianism provided for a redefinition of identity, which began to leave deep imprints in literature only in the 1930s. This was particularly evident in British literature, where the golden class of Oxbridge literati at one stroke discovered that they did not have to provide bizarre or aesthetic angles to life in order to legitimize their own identities. Suddenly it was *comme il faut* to let loose the tormented souls of the inner

landscape for which no one but the social class situation, and upper class parenting in particular, could be blamed.<sup>3</sup>

The frame of social class was tantamount to a compulsory requirement. Not to accept Procrustean class attire often meant to resort to absurd extremes. In order to attain freedom from soul-shrinking pressures, the individual was forced under duress to produce an authentic identity, which by then had had time to become the opposite of the outer role. This authentic identity was rarely one that it was desirable to present in literature, on stage, or in the galleries. Often the dialectical circumstances led to the formation of identities of grotesque victims.

It is quite telling that there never existed such an accumulation of innovative and creative thinkers in Europe either before or after the height of the *belle époque* (1880–1914). The twentieth century brought to the fore three writers—Kafka, Joyce, and Proust—of outstanding importance for understanding social processes in general and individual identity projects in particular. Their formative years coincided with the latter stages of the *belle époque*. Franz Kafka elaborated the deeper meaning of what Habermas would conceive as the *Systemwelt* more than half a century after Kafka's death. Had Kafka not brought to life the endlessly extending and reproducing mechanisms of the System, it would have been impossible for Habermas to introduce the Central European understanding of this experience and be immediately comprehended by the rest of the world.

Quite unintentionally, as it seemed, Kafka disclosed the System's potential for horror as its functionaries pursue its inner logic as the safest path, however absurd and brutal its effects. In one sense Kafka simply described the immutable legal consequences of the transition from the often unfair and suffocating but highly responsible *Gemeinschaftswelt* to the anonymity of the *Gesellschaftswelt*, in which no one takes responsibility for anything, but everyone tries to interpret and follow the rules of the System. In retrospect, the system appears comical today and sometimes grimly farcical. Kafka himself used to laugh when he read excerpts of his work to a circle of friends.

Many recent interpreters have made the Freudian point that Kafka's work contains strongly repressed erotic overtones. When the libidinous drive of the *Lebenswelt* clashes with the *Systemwelt*, more imaginative brutalities are introduced. With the pervasive existence of a state legal system for which no one is capable of taking personal responsibility, there is an equally pervasive infliction of guilt upon everyone under the jurisdiction of this System. Under

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3 The first group that was dominant during the 1920s included Edith and Osbert Sitwell and the Bloomsbury group, whose innovative aestheticism created entirely new ways of perceiving the contemporary scene, whereas the second group became predominant during the 1930s with self-focusing and self-penetrating poetry and fiction that were clearly inspired by Freudianism, as explicitly articulated by W.H. Auden, Stephen Spender, and Christopher Isherwood.

a faceless legal System, a permanent feeling of guilt is the most natural of psychological reactions. But at the same time there is the religious notion which legitimizes guilt feelings of a different sort, especially in relation to erotic inclinations. In short, the identity project of modernizing man is haunted by guilt.

Joyce revealed the impact of the inner monologue and the stream of consciousness. He was followed by several others, including Virginia Woolf in *Mrs. Dalloway*, Djuna Barnes in *Nightwood*, William Faulkner in *The Sound and the Fury*. The surprising aspect of stream-of-consciousness literature is the heavy reliance on formal patterns which have to do with the unities (time, place, character, and action); leitmotifs; previously established literary patterns (burlesques); symbolic structures; formal scenic arrangements; natural cyclical schemes (seasons, tides); theoretical cyclical schemes (musical structures, cycles of history) according to a classification worked out by Robert Humphrey (1959: 86). But above all Joyce transmitted the relative chaos in the search for identities among his protagonists in *Ulysses*, Leopold Bloom and Stephen Daedalus. The unity of time and place in *Ulysses* provided a frame in which, in an almost anthropological fashion, it becomes obvious that Stephen Daedalus's highly disciplined powers of reasoned communication arise from a consciousness even more chaotic than the one of Bloom's quotidian consciousness, simply because Daedalus's consciousness was just that much more complex than Bloom's. In other words, a modernizing consciousness with a complex relation to the *Systemwelt* may be infinitely more chaotic than the one steeped in the *Lebenswelt*.

Finally, Proust distinguished the many dimensions of memory. In this endeavor he was generations before his time. When he focused our attention on the associative powers of sensation, he was engaged in a pioneering innovation. Until then, psychology, for instance, had never dealt with these issues. Proust recognized identity in our minds as a potential project, however evasive, through the sensations of every day associations. Trivial and unprepared events, from the madeleine cake to the sight of the twin steeples of Martinville to the stepping on a stone that was slightly lower than its neighbors, all provided for the vanishing of the protagonist's discouragement. Similarly, an unforeseen object or person created associations which contributed to a picture of an individual's identity.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Leading representatives of the French *nouveau roman*, such as Nathalie Sarraute and Michel Butor, both of whom followed in Proust's footsteps, used to note that there is still much to learn from the Proust's complex work of self-creation. In the field of psychology, a most refined method of establishing personal identities is represented by Identity Strategy Analysis (ISA), which has achieved astounding results in the troubled context of Northern Ireland. This sophisticated method was developed by the eminent cultural psychologist Peter Weinreich of the University of Ulster. In building on the associations provided by the people surrounding an individual, ISA employs an approach initially introduced by Proust.

The inconceivable terror of fascism and the Second World War created a fundamental insecurity about the concept of humanity. In the face of the new existential agony, the distressed souls of the post-World War I period paled into relative insignificance. Mass movements of displaced persons who had been exposed to different degrees of traumatic horrors were searching not only for local roots and a sense of place but literally for new identities. Once again it was drama that reflected the need to articulate and debate the postwar identity crisis.

With the war at an increasingly safe distance and the new Americanized West German identity being molded, a rather lightweight drama called *Kennen Sie die Milchstrasse?* (*The Milky Way*) by Karl Wittlinger perfectly mirrored the mood of the German stage in 1959. During that year the play was performed 674 times in 32 theaters in West Germany. The play is a hilarious juggling game with the identity question. The effect of World War II is seen only in an implied sense as the war's ghastly brutalities, and in a more real sense as the mass loss of identities that resulted from it. The war is made into an abstract element so that ultimately it is not even certain which war the play refers to.

A man is in hospital after an accident in which he lost large parts of his memory. His task at the hospital is to deliver milk to other patients, but since his identity is unclear he claims that he comes from a star in the Milky Way. His story is that at the end of the war—some war—he found it necessary to change his identity. He returned home to his star in the Milky Way, only to find that for some reason he had been declared dead and is therefore unwelcome. He snatches the identity papers of a dead soldier who is biologically dead, but still alive according to administrative records. But this soldier, it soon turns out, was a prominent gangster who had to hide in the Foreign Legion (how conveniently far removed from the German Army, or worse, the SS). When this became known the protagonist himself had to go into hiding. He took many odd jobs, one of which—in a motorcycle circus act—caused his serious injury and amnesia. He is determined to recover his memory, however. So he has written a play about his own life in which his counterpart is constituted by his involuntarily involved physician, a psychiatrist whose spotty past also includes identities as a builder and an actor.

“Man: It is a play about my life and this play is about me ... and about human beings.

Doctor: Excellent. But in that case, for me to read the play very thoroughly is quite sufficient!

Man: Not at all. You know yourself, doctor, that you do not know people until you can act them.

Doctor: And as soon as you know them, it is impossible to act them any longer! That is why I gave up acting!” (Wittlinger 1959)

Only recently has it become evident how many people lost their identity as a result of this war. Practically all of the prewar cultural identities of several million people were simply eradicated. The act of rebuilding Central Europe was ended soon after 1945 by the escalation of the Cold War. Even the act of restoring lost cultures and cultural identities became politicized. The fluctuating tensions of the Cold War and the new focus upon the previously ignored Third World left the problem of Displaced Persons in Europe up in the air. It took another two to three decades before the full extent of the uprooting caused by the war could be fully discerned. Far more people had been tossed about than had been imagined earlier.

Many Jewish children who had been smuggled into other countries, where they were adopted by Catholic or Protestant parents, necessarily assumed new identities. One famous example is that of Msgr. Jean-Marie Lustiger, who is the most prominent French Catholic leader of the past decade and who originally came from a now largely extinct Jewish family in a small Polish village. Other groups were forced migrants, many of whom changed political identities without changing their cultural or national identities.

A completely different kind of quest for identity was manifested by second generation postwar writers, and especially by their literary objects. A good example is *The Messiah of Stockholm*, a novel by Cynthia Ozick published in the mid-1980s. Ozick is by far the most exciting and talented of American women writers of the past few decades. The themes of the novel are on the one hand the Displaced Person syndrome and on the other an almost hallucinatory identity project. The protagonist is a cultural editor of an apparently run-down but highly pretentious daily newspaper in Stockholm. The interior of the paper's offices and in particular the portraits of the cultural editors are authentic stereotypes of cultural circles of Stockholm in the 1960s. Blunt retorts and strained attitudes are captured so authentically in the pointed and edgy desolation of the offices of a Stockholm daily that they border on farce. The name of the paper is *Morgontörn*, which, like its real life model *Stockholms Tidningen*, signaled a critical but rather slow start to a new era.

Ozick only gives rather vaguely disguised names to the cultural personalities in the literary world of Stockholm in the 1960s. To Swedish readers they are highly comical since the surnames are either descriptive epithets or travesties on the names of notorious cultural icons. The protagonist is called Lars Andemening ("spiritual meaning"), alternatively Lazarus Baruch. He was born at the very beginning of the Second World War. He does not know for certain who his parents were. However, from the beginning of the novel he is obsessed with the idea that his biological father is actually the Jewish Galician artist and writer Bruno Schulz. He claims that he remembers the glance in Schulz's eyes as a sure sign and evidence of the authenticity of this idea. Moreover, Lars has certain features in common with Schulz. A collection of rather peculiar letters written by Schulz to friends and colleagues have

found their way into Lars' possession. To top it off, it is hinted that, in addition to his two famous novels *The Cinnamon Shop* and *The Sanatorium*, Schulz wrote a third manuscript simply called *Messiah* which has been lost since Schulz's murder by the SS in November 1942. To Lars it seems obvious that if the *Messiah* manuscript is discovered it will clearly prove Schulz's universal genius and make him a certain candidate for the Nobel Prize.

In one of the letters Schulz writes that he is searching for a partner in discovering the mysteries of existence. Lars is feverishly convinced that Schulz is actually referring to him, even if Lars was not even conceived at that time. Lars has a sensible woman friend who tries to make him see reality by convincing him that Schulz is obviously referring to a woman partner in the letter. At the same time however she oscillates between calling Lars' hypothetical Polish-Galician parents "cloud and mist" and giving him hope by producing his equally hypothetical sister Adela (a female name that pervades Schulz's other books), who is rumored to be carrying the manuscript of *Messiah* in a white plastic bag.

When Lars meets Adela he does not believe in her history since he is convinced that he was Schulz's only child, with a singular right to that identity. But he is uncertain as to whether the manuscript is authentic or not. Adela disappears with the manuscript before he can be sure. The advent of Adela, whom he perceives as a fake, unbalances his own identity. He suddenly gives up his own endeavors to prove a connection to Bruno Schulz when he seems to detect his false mirror image in Adela.

All those closest to Lars when he is in search of his Schulz identity turn out to be immigrants. Stockholm is said to be teeming with survivors of various political catastrophes. All of these survivors have found roles in the creative margins of society while their real backgrounds remain obscure and tend to have countless secret compartments. Members of Stockholm's own intellectual elite on the other hand are busy with questions such as whether a Swedish poet has the right to borrow quite a few expressions from the American poet Robert Frost. One vitriolic critic is petty enough to call it plagiarism of the first order, while the majority seem to side with the Swedish poet. They defend his right to borrow any text in the name of deconstruction, which gives everybody the right to be his own Shakespeare as long as he sticks to good literary taste and credibility. The same sort of logic lies behind the claims of Lars and Adela to be not only the children of Bruno Schulz but also the guardians of his literary genius.

Lars' obsession with his identity project destroys his marriage and his relationships with other women. The same goes for his strained relations to his colleagues at *Morgontörn*. His life project ends in total insecurity when confronted with the fates of other immigrants from Central Europe. He becomes uncertain of everyone and everything, including Stockholm, which, he claims, reeks with odors reminiscent of Istanbul. Stockholm, the homogene-

ous capital of the homogeneous nation, Sweden, is transformed into a cosmopolitan place, even as global fame dawns upon Schulz's little universe in the Galician town of Drohobycz when his works are first translated into other languages in the early 1980s.

Just about the time that Ozick's book appeared, Norman Davies published his ground-breaking work on Polish history with the title *God's Playground* (1981). The title alludes to the dual meaning of the Polish word *igrzysko*, which means both a playground and the stage where the fate of nation is determined. Throughout history fate has indeed played havoc with Polish identity. The territory called Poland has been shuffled around over a large area, creating identity problems from a populist-nationalist perspective. But this is a fate that Poland shares with most nations in Central Europe, from the Balkans to the Baltic Sea.

In Poland, however, this geographic caprice was more expressive than elsewhere. It inspired an irony, which bridged the uneasy relation between subjective perception of existence and reality. In this sense the irony was an abstract qualification of subjectivity, with the implication that it may both release and realize the subjective mind. Irony became organically necessary in order to sanction identity and to provide it with content. But the negative relation between the principles of subjective freedom and actual reality required the use of irony as a kind of playful twist on the eternal playground.

Several influential Polish writers, cultural personalities, philosophers, politicians, and diplomats—in short, all those whose business it is to interpret and express the Polish state of mind and identity—have in themselves been vivid and telling illustrations of a Polish syndrome which deals with the search for the specific truth in the specifically Polish identity. According to the Nobel Prize winner Henryk Sienkiewicz the half-century preceding the rebirth of the Polish nation was a critical time in which Poland had been about to vanish as a collective identity.

The writer Witkiewicz, born in 1885, represented the symptomatic complexity of the Polish identity. He spent his earliest years in the Russian part of Poland, went on to live in Galicia under the Habsburgs during his formative youth, and lived most of his adult life in free Poland. Witkiewicz's work indulged in constituting the playground or stage for the play in which contemporary culture and the political state in Europe and Poland are exposed to a great deal of irony. Rather than the explicit life lie, it was the game or play which became his expression for the problem of subjectivity in relation to the reality of the early twentieth century.

After the Second World War there was a mass transfer of Polish intelligentsia from Vilno and Lwów, which became Vilnius and Lviv. Three cities had been regarded as the gems of the Polish republic: Vilno, Lwów and Krakow. The first two were lost in new reshuffling of the borders, while the third was lost in clouds of Stalinist soot from the senselessly destructive steelworks

of Nova Huta. The changes of identity which this process entailed have been vividly narrated by Adam Zagajewski. His family, high-profile professionals class citizens, suddenly had to leave Lwów, the mythical city of beauty and cultural refinement, in order to relocate as anonymous, low-profile workers in the former German barracks town of Gliwicz, which had become the polluted industrial town of Gliwice in Poland.

Zagajewski testifies that the transition affected his parents' generation to such an extent that many still pretended to be in Lwów, while others were struck by amnesia, not knowing where they were. The ladies used to put so much powder on their eyelids that they could not see the ugly new town whereas their older men accompanied them without hearing anything of the atrocious deadening sounds of a lifeless town.

"They spoke to each other about the lost things; the lost city; the hills of that city; about a certain day a long time ago; about the fine ripening raspberries; of the Germans and the Russians during the war and which of them were the worst; about hunger; about Siberia; about a maid who stole but otherwise was so kind and capable that she was pardoned; about the city they had left which was the most beautiful one in the world.

They kept addressing each other as Mr. Engineer, Mr. Editor, Mr. Magistrate, Mr. President, etc. They simply could not imagine that they found themselves in a completely foreign and different, dirty town. Basically they imagined that they remained in Lwów. They were incapable of moving to Gliwice. Whether they had lost their memories or not, they pretended that nothing had changed. The whole town became a theatre. Mr. Major, Madam Professor, we will soon be back there. In the name of realism we may never be back.

But who listened to realism when the theater of pretense and make-believe created a circulation of antiquated titles with wonderful bridge and tea parties and dinners and funerals of the old days and a dance school whose maître spoke French-style through his nose. One man refused the new order to the point that he never left his apartment but for occasional appearances in the backyard in his light blue pyjamas. He belonged to the radical wing of Lwów evacuees who refused any compromising contact with the new post-German world, living with his wife among suitcases that were never unpacked" (Zagajewski 1991: 25f).

A testimony of the extreme circumstances of Soviet conditions during the Second World War is expressed in Vassily Grossman's *Life and Fate*. This book revolves around the fate of a number of Russian citizens in very different situations in occupied and non-occupied Russia about the time of the decisive battle of Stalingrad—before, during, and after. Grossman manages to portray the gradually changing identities in his main characters to the extent that the reader feels difference from one point in time to another. One thread running through the book follows the family life of a notable physicist, who is to a large extent Grossman's alter ego.

The structure of Grossman's work is modeled on *War and Peace*, made up of one main plot and several subplots. The novel portrays a paradoxical transformation of the characters as the extreme duress of the war gradually provided accentuated identities. Increasingly liberated tongues gave voice to liberated thoughts and a developing egalitarian group dynamism during the course of the Russian defense of and ultimate victory at Stalingrad. This pro-

cess turned out to be so dangerous to the party apparatus that it was perceived as posing a greater threat to the Soviet system than the invading German army. In due course these progressive, democratizing embryos of new social networks were stamped out by the system and replaced by a post-Stalingrad chauvinism hungry for revenge.

Grossman reconstructs authentic discussions on sensitive issues, such as who contributed what to Russian literature, while the characters are sitting in Kazan, the capital of Tartarstan. In a remarkably civilized manner these deliberations took place between persons who represented widely differing approaches. Dostoyevsky is described as not fitting into the Soviet ideology and idiom, whereas Mayakovsky is called the personification of the State. Tolstoy and the State are seen to share common interests with regard to proclaiming a people's war and poeticizing the idea. Only Chekhov is uncompromised in the eyes of the motley group of intellectuals in Kazan, largely because he was the one person who brought the deeper meaning of democracy to Russia.

Better and more powerfully than any other work, *Life and Fate* reflects the pursuit of identity in everyday life during the most difficult and disrupted period of Soviet history. It has the incomparable advantage of being a literary representation from the inside of the Soviet system during the height of the Stalin era. It is unique in being an independent work, yet one written from within Soviet society in the very language of the Soviet system. As a journalist and writer Grossman figured among the nomenclatura up to the years after Stalin's death. However, in an allegorical play about scientists published shortly after the war, he had an unsavory character present heterodox ideological views which were understood to be his own. No matter how persistently Grossman repudiated such views afterwards, he was increasingly regarded as a dissident. This publication exposed him to the hazard involved in presenting any unorthodox view in any guise. The mere presentation of an uncomfortable ideological viewpoint was enough to make the author suspected of embodying the identity of such thinking.

The literary destiny of *Life and Fate* is quite illuminating. Grossman, like most Russian writers, was absorbed and engrossed by the legacy of Tolstoy. His first attempt to recreate a *War and Peace* based on the Second World War was a novel serialized in *Novy Mir*, called *For a Just Cause*, which in 1954 was published as a book and received wide acclaim. He felt encouraged to go on with *Life and Fate*, a book of more than 870 pages, and a third volume which had the working title *Everything Flows*. But already *Life and Fate* was a bit too much for the censors. The KGB came to his home and confiscated not only the manuscript, but the typewriter ribbons as well. Grossman wrote to the Politburo imploring them to return the manuscript. Suslov, as the Party's ideological whip, responded by saying that *Life and Fate* would not

be published within the next two hundred years, and this was estimated to be a sign of its lasting potential importance and influence.

Grossman's work is illustrative of how close to Western traditions an innovative masterpiece of literature in the Soviet Union could be in spite of the fact that Grossman had no direct contact with or knowledge of contemporary Western writers or even literature. Reflecting the state of *Bildung* in Soviet society at that stage, Grossman's characters are well acquainted with nineteenth century literature in both Eastern and Western Europe, quoting it frequently. Among the educated Russians there is a similar familiarity with both traditions. Among educated Westerners there is a reciprocal familiarity with Tolstoy, Gogol, and Dostoyevsky. Often Western adolescents have made their acquaintance with serious literature through Tolstoy's *War and Peace*.

It is indeed an inescapable truth that the formation of everyday identity has been and still is vastly different in Eastern and Western Europe. The disturbing fact is that the gap remains as wide as ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall, although it has shifted. Superficially, much of Eastern Europe reflects a general European reality, yet under the surface features of both old and new traumas linger. In stark contrast to the rest of Europe, Russia represents abysmal conditions in the words of Russian intellectuals themselves.<sup>5</sup>

Nonetheless, many of these discrepancies in self-reflection and articulation are in fact bridged in the realm of art and literature. It must be taken into account that most Eastern European writers have considered themselves to be taking part in the mainstream European cultural heritage before, during, and after the totalitarian Soviet period. In 19th century Russia there were outspoken Westernists such as Turgenev. But there were also many, if not a majority, who were outspokenly hostile to the West, including Dostoyevsky, who epitomized the Russian ethos and spirit that had inspired and influenced so much of Western thinking, although ironically, as Russians like to point out, he originally came from Lithuania.

## Conclusion

The contributions of the few writers mentioned to the immense extension of cognitive boundaries demonstrate the extent to which the impact of the humanities has been underestimated in relation to the present status of the social sciences. The search for European identities has reached the limits of what conventional methods may achieve. A new understanding must include a

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5 Russian academics and intellectuals express a sense of dignified hopelessness, but also of malicious expectations, as I witnessed at the Sixth World Congress of East European Studies in Tampere in early August, 2000.

much larger space for complexities and comparisons of different identity projects. In the multidimensional and multicultural world, intercultural relations will be decisive both for the development of thinking and for the creation of identities. The unforeseen pressures of ecological awareness, for example, have provided radically new but also pre-Cartesian links between identity and monism.

The new and partly justified focus on the body has regenerated the conclusion that no body exists outside its relations to other bodies. Hence the exercise of power and counter-power among bodies constitutes a central aspect of social life and society. This represents a physical expression of what Mead (1982) and Bakhtin (1981) said about the mind earlier in the twentieth century. In a fundamental sense it also demonstrates the links between identity projects and democracy, the shaky state of which illustrates the shortcomings of social theory.

In 1990 Paul Ricoeur sharply criticized the liberal conceptualization of personal identity, which for centuries has been based on Locke and Hume to a severely distorting effect. Ricoeur advocated rather the relational conception of narrative identities, which may provide an often dramatically different and alternative understanding of the interaction between social bodies and political processes. Ricoeur's findings in the 1990s should undoubtedly add a more than justified impetus to the already established method of biographical analysis in the continuing quest for identities.

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## Address Lost: How to Fix Lives. Biographical Structuring in the European Modern Age

### 1.

“There is no doubt about life after death. The question is, where in Manhattan does it take place—and when?” (Woody Allen) Aren’t we in a similar situation to the urban neurotic concerning our living in modern societies? There is no doubt about living in the modern age; the question is, where in Europe does it take place—and when? Let’s dwell a moment on the when and where, the temporal and spatial identification of Europe.

The mythological birth of Europe has the flavor of a creation myth; it is a love story of a kind. Remember: back when gods used to have fun at the beach and their moral standards did not prevent them from having affairs, Zeus, the President of the Olympian administration watched the beautiful, “wide-eyed” Phoenician princess at the shores of the Eastern Mediterranean sea. He immediately fell in love—that is, turned into a bull—and she, enchanted, let him take her—or rode him—to Crete. The kidnapping of the foreign princess resulted in honorable Zeus’s marriage—not the first—to this beauty named *Europa*, and the happily-ever-after of an entire dynasty. Undoubtedly this story touches our hearts because we feel the fullness of real life: emotions, spontaneity, success, power, cunning, crossing boundaries, and just that bit of tolerable violence that seems justified by the happy ending. Does this picture correspond in any direct or metaphorical sense to our Europe of today?

Regarding the *temporal* identification of Europe, we find at least three opinions—as always—and their respective supporters.

We have those who declare this Europe dead, an element of the past and completely mythological. “There is no return to Europe, simply because it only exists in the museum of rhetoric” (Sieferle 1994: 78). Here a new epoch is proclaimed. Now we live in times of economic, political, and cultural globalism. Globalism in its various strains are seen as the main trans-national trends, leaving behind not only national societies, but also large-scale socio-regional blocs and areas in favor of powerful, corporate, global actors—or “global players”, as they like to call themselves. The ideal counter-players then are conceived of as individual consumers, individuals who are the same all over the globe. What such consumers need is money, and the means to get it. What they don’t need is to be located. They need neither roots nor history.

This party also has its faction of fierce non-globalists: those who deny any signs of globalization and try to revitalize purely national and even pre-national identifications of particular groups—whether ethnic, religious, regional, or otherwise differentiated. As a sociologist and, I admit, a European, I think this picture is too simple.

We have those who think Europe began just recently, after the fall of the Iron Curtain. After the relative success of the European Common Market and of its powerful administration—called “fortress Europe” by its critics—and after the establishment of a European parliament, we have made but a superficial beginning, and our common currency is not even virtual. Undoubtedly something new is beginning, and its history, its continuity with things past, such as national histories, may indeed better be cut off or forgotten to permit a fresh start. However, as we know from history and as we see today, especially in some parts of Europe, forgetting may be dangerous. Forgetting is not really possible, and no wounds are healed by the attempt. If you don’t know about your past, it may return at any time in a very destructive way.

Finally, on the question of when Europe came into existence, we have those in the middle position. Europe is something yet to be accomplished, an *open project* so to speak, and it has been so for quite a while. Europe provides the temporal frame of a socio-cultural imagination that has been and is still shaping our social reality. I myself tend to support this option and shall develop it in this paper.

But *where* does Europe take place? Only at first glance does this seem to be an easier question than the temporal one. The borders once defined as the open horizons of Orient and Occident in classical Greece have always been the object of shifts, clashes, and traumas, and have been clearer to those within than to those outside. They were ever-changing lines constituting “us” and “them”, friends and enemies—*barbaroi*, to simplify things and furnish legitimization for our own barbarism. The war games were similar, the “objects” on the other side seemed changeable: the Mongols, the Moslems during the crusades, the Jews, the Turks, and so on. But the borders not only changed geographically: they also became trickier. Europe as a state of mind, defined mental borders, mostly drawn along a line at first vague, but eventually more stable, called “rationality”. Rationality as the final goal of all human action and conduct became the most powerful mechanism of including and excluding behavior, people, and individuals.

Sociologists remember from their introductory courses, Max Weber’s famous preface to his sociology of religion:

“The son of the modern European cultural world will without doubt, and with full legitimacy, treat problems of universal history under this question: What chain of circumstances resulted in cultural phenomena that appeared on the soil of the Occident, and only here? Phenomena which, we like to imagine, were of universal meaning and value.” (Weber 1963: RS I, 1)

Universal meaning and value, rationality in all realms of life: at least these were terms that intellectual Europe could identify with, describing itself, legitimizing its powerful grip on the world and trying to shape it in every sense. In a social and cultural sense, such borders were broadened and transferred into a universal imaginary space. Then Europe was—or is—where its mind and spirit structured people and society. Everywhere Europeans went, they took it with them; the educational elite from all over the world used to come to Europe to study, and took Europe with them when they went back home. *Europe expanded—exploded into the world.* Indeed, this is a notion which Europeans love, and which others may hate, even if they concede that there might be some truth in it.

In this case, the question “where is Europe?” turns into the question of what its ubiquitous identity could be.

Milan Kundera defined European identity as “the wisdom of the novel”, seeing the world in its ambiguity, its irony. I am not sure that the Europeans are such masters of irony, of letting go and withstanding the temptation to do something. This may be more the Eastern European style of “be happy, don’t worry”. In any case, aren’t Europeans rather masters of rationality, bearing even its bitter consequence of producing the highly irrational by rational means? And only recently the self-critique of modernity has been turned into an appraisal of states beyond clear and distinct judgement: the discovery and *appraisal of ambivalence*, as profoundly elaborated in the work of Zygmunt Bauman, a Polish, Israeli, British, Jewish, “Old-European” sociologist of post-modernity (Bauman 1991).

For the moment let us affirm that, even if we do not know where and when, or even what, there is *something* which allows us to speak of Europe and perhaps even allows us to consider ourselves as Europeans.

The term “Europe” notwithstanding, a collection of papers on European biographies by Eastern and Western European scholars is not an occurrence that can be taken for granted. Europe produced its own division—and in view of the two wars it inflicted upon the world, Germany played a tremendous part in this splitting process. It would be far too complicated, though absolutely necessary, to reconstruct the processes of Europe’s division and the history of each country and nation in the outgoing century (cf. Diner 1999). Suffice it to state that most of the participants in the compilation—like myself—grew up after 1945 in a world split into Eastern and Western blocs, each with its own different societies and states, and contrasting economic, legal, educational, and health care systems. In the case of Germany, the nation itself came in two parts, each claiming to be the better one. This split world came to an end some ten years ago. What this end entailed, and still entails, we are about to find out simply by living and participating in the social processes of our societies. As sociologists and experts in biographical research we have the privilege to make this the objective of our work and academic ac-

tivities. At the risk of arrogance, I would like to say that this kind of discussion may contribute to a livable situation for all of us, a situation which should not only be defined as the end and loss of something, but which is richer and holds more options for all of us than the period before. This is work, and I shall address a special type of work which everyday people have to accomplish in this situation: I call it biographical work, or more generally, biographical structuring.

I do not see my task as one of presenting empirical results of research on such biographical work in different parts of Europe—or of the world. I shall rather try to provide a general framework and theoretical view of biographical structuring and biographical work as a specific *characteristic of modernity*, which is by definition European modernity. I shall embark on a long-term journey, considering the less than a century of the Eastern-Western blocs as of little significance. Thus the important question whether we need to make a distinction between modernity in the East and in the West (cf. also Stölting in this volume), the question whether there is a “congestion of modernization” in the countries of the former Eastern bloc, will be neglected here.

The question I am trying to work on is in the spirit of the general task. Max Weber formulated the classical terms, but I shall be less European, more universal and relate to what Weber had in mind when talking about the universal Occident. Why are people trying to work on their experience of crises by means of biographical structuring, by means of biographical work? I look for an answer by reconstructing the development of society in modernity and searching for circumstances, which would make biographical structuring a reasonable way of creating points of reference in social communication.

## 2.

Modernity is an inflated term. What do we mean by this? All those who talk about modernity can be accused of following a “politics of ideas” (*Ideenpolitik*), simply propagating a new regime and constructing a stable “old mode of society” as a backdrop. In this way, “pre-modern” times are everything that may serve to argue for discontinuity with what one wants to legitimize today. Taking this critically into account, scholars such as Bruno Latour have declared provocatively, “*Nous n'avons jamais été modernes*” (Latour 1991). Nevertheless, there is a broad discourse with contributions by different disciplines dealing with an *epochal change in the social communication* of society at large. This change occurred when societies began to describe themselves as societies *in relation to individuals*, and almost all aspects of pre-modern societies have been changed ever since. General and religious worldviews, politics, economics, science and technology, education, health care, and other

aspects of societies have changed, emerged, and established their own systems, thus serving individuals and making up society as a whole. The process began in the 15th–16th centuries in—yes—*Europe*, spreading from there into the world. We do not need to decide here whether this period is past and we are now in post-modernity (cf. Bauman 1991), or whether it has been refreshed and optimized and we are now in a second modernity (cf. Beck 1992; Beck et al. 1994), or whether the “project” of modernity (Habermas 1992) is still in progress. The short sketch I can give here draws on sociological reflections of this process (for a more detailed exposition, cf. Fischer-Rosenthal 2000).

At the end of the 19th century, when sociology was born and immediately reached its classical period, the heyday of enlightened hopes and promising civil society concepts of equal participation seemed to be over; but the program was still in operation. Society and individual(s) were drifting apart, picking up speed exponentially, each side paradoxically relying on the other and yet highly independent at the same time.

In sociological discourse, modern times are depicted as consequences of social differentiation (Dilthey, Simmel); more precisely, of *functional differentiation* (cf. Luhmann 1985; Willems and Hahn 1999: 9ff). The implications both for individuals and for society are immense. Both are constructed and deconstructed in a paradoxical relation to one another.

The individual is produced as a necessary element of modern functional relations. On the other hand, the person as an acting and suffering entity is eventually dissolved as a reliable focus of address in social communication. Even single actions cannot claim to have one clear meaning, but are to be related to different systems in which their meaning is only fixed for “now” and may be changed in interpretative acts after the event (on the constitution of social meaning cf. Schütz 1960: 72ff). The individual becomes a construction at the “intersection of social circles”, neither to be located completely within, nor outside of society (Simmel)—a contradiction in itself. In modernity the in-dividual became dependent on poly-textuality. The old idea of the “person” as a “social atom”, the smallest, non-divisible unit of society, could not be maintained, because this unit, called individual, is actually many things, and is dependent on—though not completely determined by—its multicultural, generally poly-textual social environment. Nor could “society” be maintained in modernity as a distinct unit (although the nation-state could). “Society” is now many things at once; it is “one” only in the same sense in which an unbounded horizon that can be reached by multiple contingent ways might be considered “one”. Orientation in society is less clear than it was in the pre-modern situation; in any case it requires choosing and acting by an active individual.

The “person” cannot perform as an individual unit in the strict sense, as “one” in any social context, because in any given communication he or she is

present only partially, as certain functions, never as a whole. This changes the concept of the person, or individual, and creates the need for a unifying form: the term "identity" comes to the fore. The issue of identity is *created* in this process, and the term always indicates a problem. One consequence of all this for the individual could be that, when s/he looks at her/himself, s/he does not know "where s/he belongs" in society: s/he has lost her/his location.

The position of the individual in modern society became a key issue of sociological conceptualizing (cf. Luhmann 1997: 16ff). However, the means of thinking, the tools, and concepts which early sociology used in order to conceive of and react to a new situation were inherited. The proclaimed new ways led to old dead-end streets. The dualistic distinction between "society" and "the individual" had been around since the late Renaissance. As a general "subject-object" issue in idealist philosophy, it had found different terms, and constituted an area of conflict, of social problems, in the early 19th century. On the one hand, the modern post-monarchical state as administration and nation-state had developed, along with the differentiation between political, cultural, religious and secular world-views. On the other hand, "citizens" with new status and rank had claimed participation and responsibility, and eventually, by preserving the normative goal of equality as a measure of individual freedom, they brought forth the class structure and inequality of societies.

Against this background, sociology by the end of the 19th century reinvented the question of social order in a structural and abstract manner. It used the old distinction between society on the one hand and the interaction of individual actors on the other. But what was the unity of this system, what held both parts together? Spatial and territorial definitions had to be ruled out; society became an abstract entity and the linking of individuals to it a difficult theoretical task. "Where" was society? Did it exist among and in the interactions of individuals (Simmel), or in the "structures" above them (Durkheim)? Was "*Vergesellschaftung*" produced by social action (Weber), and did institutions of modern society rely on such action? Or were they systemically independent of it (Parsons)? In short, in the attempt to determine how co-operation and integration are possible, subject and object were (a) identified as operating categories, and (b) perceived as *somehow* interwoven. Thus it was not possible to observe empirically the stitches that make up the fabric, nor to give up the differentiating concepts. When Friedrich Nietzsche in 1885 postulated a *poly-centric subject*,<sup>1</sup> there was no academic audience for such a concept. The vast discussion of the "identity problem" going on today is further proof of the theoretical difficulties in coming to terms with the situation (Fischer-Rosenthal 1999c).

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1 "Die Annahme des *Einen Subjekts* ist vielleicht notwendig; vielleicht ist es ebensogut erlaubt, eine Vielheit von Subjekten anzunehmen, deren Zusammenspiel und Kampf unserm Denken und überhaupt unserem Bewußtsein zu Grunde liegt... *Meine Hypothesen*: das Subjekt als Vielheit." (Nietzsche 1988, KSA 11: 650)

In order to avoid well-known dualistic pitfalls of the subjectivity discourse (and to some extent of the identity discourse), one may try to reframe the problem without referring to consciousness, yet without leaving the level of actual visible and audible communication. With the focus kept on social communication—which after all is what sociology is all about—the problem of identity becomes one of determining the “who” or the “source” of this message, the message just uttered. The question “Who says so?” demands to know whether there is a reliable expectation for “tomorrow”—continuity—and of course whether there are reasons to interpret the message in a frame transcending the actual situation, a frame to be connected to a specific “past”. Thus the question “Who says so?” is equivalent to the theoretical question, “What social structure imparts orientation to action and experience?” The two interpretative issues mentioned above cannot be solved in modernity merely by identifying a simple address of the speaker in the social stratum (cf. Fuchs 1999). The full address has been lost in the process of modernization. Metaphorically one could say that the “person” has become homeless, and now lives everywhere. We meet the source of concrete social communication in its place only while actually communicating, i.e. in its many “secondary residences” and part-time dwelling places, such as workshops, offices, and factories; leisure sites, the marketplace, the courthouse, the university, the school, the hospital. We find the “individual” less frequently in the family home or under a “sacred canopy” (Berger 1967). Is there “anyone”, then, beyond the body? If so, who is that “one” behind the many addresses, and how is he or she constructed?

The thesis of this paper is simple. Despite the assumption in modernity of a specious *disintegration of lives in functional differentiation*, integration can be observed, at the levels both of the individual and of society. But how does it work? This seems to be a riddle for some of sociology and its conceptual apparatus. My answer, for which I find strong support in other sociological work (e.g. Willems and Hahn 1999), takes into account *biographical structuring* as an everyday organizational technique. Along with the process of functional differentiation and modernization, the individual, as well as the institutions, has developed new and appropriate temporal orders. These are networks that establish meaning and cooperation; they grant the individual freedom and limit it at the same time, constituting integration. I call the specific *operation* I am concerned with “*biographical structuring*”<sup>2</sup> to give a more general name to what has been termed “biographical work” (Strauss et al. 1985: 32, 132, 136-38). The structures produced are called “*biography*” (individually) and “*biographical patterns*” (institutionally).

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2 This is similar to Giddens’ general notion of structuration, structure and the “duality of structure” as medium and outcome of social practices (cf. Giddens 1984: 21-28).

## 3.

Introducing a thesis and a terminology is not enough. One must also show in detail how biographical structuring develops from the changes in society, and what answers it gives to the structural problems of society.

A theoretical look at the problem of *de-localization* of the individual (and at the social order *in toto*) raises the question of how the poly-textual complication of the social address can be “lived”. By “lived” I mean turned into interaction oriented toward social structure and generating this structure through appropriate action. Dislocation—i.e. topological *de-differentiation*—can be compensated for by temporal differentiation. Your functional relations are more important than where you are; they operate at given times, and a different time regime is consequently needed and developed. Thus the general answer is: local orientation is “replaced” by *temporalization*. One mode of this general program, which eventually gained momentum in modern societies, is temporalization as *biographical structuring*.

Dissolving topological differentiation and replacing it with more complex functional differentiation (cf. Luhmann 1997: 595–865 *passim*) produces and requires a more complex time pattern and time management. To put it simply, different or even contradictory things which people cannot do at a single time and place may be feasible in two places at the same time (with the effect of gaining time), or one after another in the same place (using time to complicate action). *Temporalization* becomes a means of obtaining more complex structures in social systems. *Synchronizing* what can be done at the same time, as well as *sequentializing* what cannot, becomes more and more important. With the increasing complexity of the social activities to be coordinated, and of institutions with their own rhythms and their need to co-operate, a complex time pattern is produced and forced upon everyone. Instruments and systems of measuring and coordinating time become abundant. Being oriented means knowing what day, month, and year it is now; it also means to have some notion of what historical time, what epoch of your society you live in. In general, being oriented means knowing what to expect, taking into consideration your concrete past and future horizons. Temporal structures for routines and everyday life are often only implicitly “known”, and become conscious when they are disrupted (cf. for the case of chronic illness, Fischer 1982). Large-scale time patterns ranging over the life course (childhood, youth, adulthood, old age; pre-work socialization phase, working phase, post-occupational phase) are established culturally and in the occupational sphere, and function as necessary horizons of orientation. In short, all social experiences and actions of individuals are linked to institutions and large subsystems by means of specific temporal orders.

Given that all social systems consist of communication, their nature as events would limit the social world to an eternal “now”, with completely contingent “structures”—a self-contradiction. Thus the general structural feature of constitutive time, the distinctions of “before” and “after” surrounding this “now”, could create continuity despite the event nature of social interaction.

*Memory and expectation*, exceeding and transcending the now of an action or experience, have always been necessary horizons in order to provide mankind with any kind of “meaning” for actors and observers, and they have been the substance of all human culture. What is *different in modern times* is that the content of what to remember as the basis of our orientation, and of what to expect in terms of a reliable social situation, has exploded into numerous alternative possibilities. This implies devaluation and de-structuring of the past. Risk societies seem to prefer to be oriented toward the future, and tend to devalue their historical past, including the cultural patterns and political or religious “meta-narratives” that used to orient them. Since we have lost our home address, the contingency of any social situation has increased to the extent of virtual and sometimes real disorientation. If anything is possible, how should I know what to do? I only can refer to my “own” memory, my “own” history and expectations; I can only write and read myself: this is *doing biography*. “Fixing” lives in this situation of contingency means—among other things—*biographization*. According to the main trends of social evolution in modernity, this is done both on a highly individualized and on a highly institutionalized level. The individual learns how to develop and maintain his vision of life in equilibrium. In many, if not all, of its main functional subsystems (economics, politics, law, health system, education, etc.), society offers biographical patterns of how to fit in and practical ways to make individual stories “fit”, to “repair” them in the terms of the given subsystem.

Alois Hahn has coined the term “generators of biographies” (Hahn 1987; Bohn and Hahn 1999) to indicate the institutional settings which help or force individuals to create certain biographical accounts. If “biographical identity becomes the social enclave of sociality itself” (Willems and Hahn 1999: 15), then special institutions are needed to address the individual “as if it were a whole.” Undoubtedly new psychotherapeutic interactions serve as such agents to produce the feeling of being located, oriented, and whole, even if only for a time and in the exceptional setting of a therapeutic event, such as group therapy (cf. Willems 1999; Yalom 1995). The field of therapy as the site of the homeless individual (Willems 1999: 62) is certainly a dramatic illustration of “fixing” lives by biographization, but there are more, and more subtle activities by individuals, both in everyday life and in institutions or organizations, that shape biographical orientations.

The semantic form of biography arose in the eighteenth century as *self-reflection* and *self-description* using temporal distinctions, structuring (or

addressing) the lifetime of individuals, *and* defining temporally discrete engagements and participation in institutions. Though the term reflects the recent cultural historical form of written biography (cf. Fischer 1984; Misch 1970; Niggel 1989), the “text of life” is originally produced in spoken language and in communicative processes. The term still carries the sense that the construct referred to is a description following observation and self-observation, thus structuring life “*after and before the event*”. The semantic work of orientation in the temporal process of the individual’s life and of social change can be termed *biographical work*. It is a practice which has been developed in modern societies in order to solve some of the issues of integration and order. Biographical work is “fixing” lives in a socio-historical situation, when static personal definitions (such as status) or quasi-natural phases of the life cycle do not suffice to orient the individual and to make him reliable for institutions. A biography as a new “fix” has to be both flexible and definite, integrating and open for new, unexpected situations and needs. Biographical work applies to both the individual and the institution and is utilized by both.

Looking for basic, everyday means of dealing with unexpected and ambivalent situations, locating the individual and structuring the world reliably, we first come across the spoken language, its communicative and *narrative* qualities. Ontogenetically, a natural language acquired in a setting of reliable interaction is the most important social skill learned in early childhood. All later social achievements, culturally and symbolically mediated meaningful perceptions, and intentional actions, are based on this, and perhaps re-transformed in expressions of natural language communication. A natural language allows flexible creation of the world as it is shared by those who live together: consistent and at the same time open to emerging “events”. The very structure of the language cannot exclude unwanted events; everything that needs to be said can be said in a positive or negative form. By means of language we interpret what happens, communicate to others what is important, fix experiences, and build up knowledge. There is one characteristic of spoken language which makes possible the creation of biographical forms: spoken language can recall and interpret past events, can reorder them for the purpose at hand, and can even place them in a context of expected events or planned action. In general, spoken language can temporalize events, actions and experiences and thus knit a multi-referential network in which the individual can orient her/himself, i.e. both be her/himself and change. The main form that is available to the person in command of a natural language is the self-relational, self-expressive *narration* (cf. Bamberg 1997). This is the seminal competence in creating a more complex life-story. We may not know who we are and what is happening to us, but if we are able to narrate who we have become, then we integrate ourselves, because we can present ourselves as both consistent *and* contingent. Even if I have gone through a lot of con-

tradictory phases or times in life, the story I can tell presents me as myself. We reconstruct our lives in a self-relational attitude, *looking back* at what we went through and lost (e.g. a certain expected future), *looking forward* to what we aspire to, putting it together for *present purposes*. This is a self-gearing, auto-poietic process, producing our selves. In this process the relationship of the symbolic level—a communicated text—to the life really lived becomes an issue. If we are truthful about our experiences, we cannot invent the life-story as pure fiction, but must depend on our life history (which may yet be full of events that allow me to construct lies or impose certain readings while excluding others) (cf. Rosenthal 1995a). The life-story is made up of what I have gone through, my lived life, the actual communication with my fellow men and their relevancies, and last but not least my experiences in my animate body (German *Leib*; cf. Fischer-Rosenthal 1999a; Waldenfels 2000).

Modernity has *created* the form of biographical structuring for everybody—not just for “heroes” or men at the top of the social ranking. At the level of the individual, the last two and a half centuries have seen an enormous expansion of written autobiographies covering all strata of society. Empirically everyone is able to tell his life-story, to narrate his biography or parts of it in defined situations. In almost every type of communicative situation that refers to the *person*, i.e. the *complexity of action and experience* of a particular individual, biographical self-presentation may be required. There is a wide range of such situations. We all know these hardly institutionalized occasional interactions between strangers, e.g. in a bar, in a train compartment. We are familiar with frequent narrations in our own social milieu: after dinner, during family celebrations. We have all experienced biographical self-presentation in highly formalized organizational settings, such as job interviews, visits to the doctor, court appearances, running for political office. Those who are in a strict sense incapable of presenting themselves in biographical narrative create interactional disturbances. Certain types of therapy are in essence professional support in constructing a reliable and live-able version of the life-story, one that fits better with what the clients have really lived as life history and with their actual situation. Any psycho-social therapy is professional biographical structuring. Not only are changes in modes of experiencing and in behavioral patterns intended, but also the disappearance of bodily symptoms. Biographical restructuring is available on the psycho-market even for those who suffer from being “too normal” (cf. Willems 1999: 93).

All this can be explained sociologically by assuming that narrating one’s life-story (presenting the self in a biographical way) functions as a new means of coping with contingency. The “mini-narrative” of the self replaces the grand “meta-narratives”, the traditional practices and interpretative aids for coping with a contingent world (cf. Lyotard 1979; Willems 1999: 64ff).

Given the precariousness of communication, presenting and creating yourself as a "person" seems to be possible only by telling *how* you became what and who you are now. I can understand myself and communicate myself in a narration only if I conceive of myself as someone who is constantly changing, yet still me, i.e. as something integral, including biographical transformations and contradictions. The individual as a dynamic system of plural sub-selves is realized in *life-stories* and not through a "coercion of identity" in the sense of belonging or of unity. One's position in the strata of society and one's many functional relations to the major sub-systems are less important to the individual's own orientation and how it is perceived by others than the narration of the self-experienced story with its interpretative variance. Only your story seems to be able to communicate to others in good faith what to expect from you.

In keeping with the development of modernity sketched above and with the dual face of all social structuring, not only individuals, but also *organizations and social institutions* have realized that the general social complexity and consecutive selection tasks can be answered by the formalization of membership and by temporalizing requirements. The formal regulation of admittance and "processing" of both personnel and clients (as appropriate for the given subsystem) involves not just functional qualification, but also biographical checks. Complex actions and processes of shared work have to be coordinated temporally. The highly erratic individuals can better meet institutional demands if a temporally sensitive standardization is established. A "career" pattern—sometimes expanded to non-occupational strands of the biography—is required for membership status. This pre-shaping of biographical patterns happens in organizations on a small scale (e.g. in a specific occupational training course). It continues on a larger scale (e.g. the construction of familial life stages, the division of lifetime into childhood, youth, adult life as occupational life, and old age as a post-occupational phase) over one or more functional subsystems of society (cf. Kohli 1985). In the family, in the educational sector, in the occupational arena and in the economic sphere in general, and of course in the "ordering" agencies of law, politics, and religion, biographical patterns are prescribed for individuals. This process of temporal differentiation of course also entails people losing options, which they had before, just by growing old and passing age-marks. In general, we see an increasing network of temporally ordered sequences of positions and other actions which is provided for the individual and which the individual has to go through in order to be a full member of society. Many of these sequences are also directly related to sections of the lifetime.

As in the logic of institutionalization, the very process of a developing plural biographical network in institutions feeds back and produces a still greater need for individual choices, thus reinforcing individualization through the construction of biographical narratives.

All this however does not imply—given a specific individual—that anything is possible. The term “do-it-yourself biography” (*Bastelbiographie*, Hitzler and Honer 1994) is misleading if it suggests arbitrary processes of intentional choice. Such a notion pays no attention to the fact that biographical structure, like any social structure, is “real” and gives stable orientation even in fluid equilibrium. To ignore this would be to repeat a rationalistic concept of man as being consciously in charge of his actions. That would be a non-sociological pre-structural concept which does not take into account “latency”, or implicit meaning, or tacit practices of everyday life as basic to any kind of action and experience. Social orientation and structure may be highly contingent, but it is not arbitrary. This has consequences for research (reconstructing what is not seen or known by the actors) and for professional support for *doing biography*.

Biographical structuring as a special practice and form of temporalization allows both the individual and “the society”, i.e. communication on all levels of informal and formal settings, to deal with more contingency, maintain complex social structures and balance more options. Biographical structuring is thus one way to connect the individual and society in modernity.

To sum up the systematic argument:

- Biographical structuring is *multi-relational and poly-textual*; it refers to and produces a network of events and options to be combined and continuously reinterpreted over a lifetime. It is *contingent, but not arbitrary*.
- Biographical structuring is a time-sensitive—more: a *time-constituting and time-processing* procedure. This refers both to chronological irreversible sequential time order (as in institutional careers) and to phenomenological time (as in autobiographical narrations), centered in an actual present time filled with specific recollections and expectations.
- Biographical structuring creates a “*specious address*” of the actor as a “whole”, while veiling the fact that there is no “one” actor in any given social interaction. The biographical process thus replaces fixed localization by an interpretative *process of becoming*.
- Biographical structuring is *dialogical and interactive*. The symbolic network of self-orientation is constructed in a necessary lifelong process of communicating and sharing interpretations of what “really” happened and what to expect.
- The researcher’s biographical analysis follows mainly the same logic as the “biographer’s” biographical work. It is *hermeneutical and reconstructive*, while the biographical structuring or biographical narration is *interpretative and constructive*.
- Biography is related to the history and the capacities of the *living animate body* (German *Leib*). Biographical communication entails the pro-

duction of meaning of aging, sickness, social functions, and parts of the body.

- The concept of biography forestalls the individual–society split. It is an operating structure in both spheres. Its manifestations of life history, life-story and institutional biographical patterns bridge the gap between theoretically induced inner and outer spheres.

Biography is a social structure in a double sense. First, it is a structure provided by society, its institutions and organizations, in many types of timetables one has to go through in one's lifetime. The growing number of studies on the life-course and the institutional prefabrication of biographies reflects this level. Second, it is the individual's story *always in the process of being told*, which he can and must tell in social communication as long as he is alive.

#### 4.

Sociological research on modern society in general and on recent Eastern–Western European developments in particular is possible as biographical research. If the thesis of *biographical structuring* as a means of creating and transcending consistency holds, then general sociological research on all levels of society can be done in this conceptual framework and with such tools.

Once a Polish specialty and associated only with methods, biographical research has developed greatly since the times of Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, the classic study on migration at the beginning of the 20th century (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal 1995a-c). In addition to a more quantitative life-course research strain, recent biographical research is using individuals' narrations extensively (cf. Kohli 1981) in order to analyze social processes. A wide range of topics is treated to study the biographical dimensions of social orientation in general. The meaning of historical change (Kohli 1986), the experience of institutional worlds, of living with chronic disease (Riemann 1987), the past and present meaning of large scale disasters such as Germany under the regime of National Socialism (Rosenthal 1990), world wars (Rosenthal 1995b; Schütze 1992), or the Shoah (Rosenthal 1998), the recent reunification of Germany (Fischer-Rosenthal and Alheit 1995; Völter 1994), to name just a few fields (and even fewer references, as this list is limited to German authors), have been biographically analyzed. Theory, methodology and methods have been refined (Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1997a and b).

The life-story—in the literal sense of narration—is one of the best, if not the only, means of transforming lived life into experienced and understood life. The understanding pertains to the narrator himself and the others sharing his life and life-story. Thus by explaining to others what “I” went through, who “I” am, and what my world is, I am able to create a shared world. This can be the starting point not only for descriptive research, but also for intervention and therapeutic purposes.

As a research and diagnostic tool, biographical self-presentation in a narrative format is used to produce a text as database. Additional sources (archives, written accounts by the same person, interviews of family members etc.) may also be included in the body of material. The subsequent analytical task, the sociologist’s reconstruction, cannot be another narrative. Rather, the goal is to discover the *generative structure* of certain selections: on the level of behavior and experience, on the level of text production and narration in the biographical research interview, and in the relationship between the two in a mutual, non-hierarchical way. The generative structures of the lived and experienced life history and of the self-presentation in the interview (life-story) and their interdependence are understood as principles to organize emergent events in life in order to achieve consistent orientation. These structures can be discovered in a highly controlled hermeneutic process appropriate to the temporal and sequential order of the object level in question. Finally, *types* of generative structures are formulated with respect to the research question and frame. The interviewing techniques as well as the whole process of reconstruction are highly elaborated, but for now these remarks must suffice (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal and Rosenthal 1997a: 412–421; 1997b: 139–157).

Extending the “classical” focus of the single biography, current research also realizes the importance of the intergenerational transmission of experiences. Connecting the individual to the specific past of his milieu and society produces reliable orientation. Nothing works automatically in this interactive “transmission” of knowledge and experience, or in its reception in the next generation (Rosenthal 1997; Völter and Rosenthal 1997). There may be tendencies and more or less legitimate reasons to keep silent, *not* to convey what one saw, did, or experienced. Especially the Germans, with two world wars of aggression and the criminal Nazi system, and with the socialist period of the former GDR, produced a “double burden of the past” to be studied in biographical research (Fischer-Rosenthal 1995b).

The collapse of the socialist/communist states at the end of the 1980s is another issue for biographical structuring and research. There are many signs that the individuals living in the turmoil of changing societies, coping with losses of all kinds, escaping or migrating, actually *engage in biographical work* in order to find a practical orientation. Incipient biographical research in these countries seems promising.

Creating shared worlds of meaning by communicative biographical work also entails the ability to understand each other's differences and therefore to do things together. This is crucial in a social world, where differences rather than similarities determine the everyday experience of each of us, reaching our social milieu, our family and "ourselves", as each different biography is strange to the other.

As mentioned above, biographical structuring as orientational practice has reached the helping professions. Therapy, social work, education in many institutions, secular and pastoral counseling, supervision, organizational development and other activities use biographical structuring or restructuring and intervention. The internal concepts of the various professions differ, as does the degree of explicit knowledge of *biographical* concepts that they are operating with.

Given a process of continuous oscillation between the two functions of *analysis* and *interaction* with the client, two questions are obvious. What is gained by a biographical reconstruction as indicated above in the course of professional support, and how can interactive interventions and unilateral expert reconstructions be established and linked in practice?

Sociologically reconstructing principles of experiencing and presenting the life of an individual client on the basis of one or two biographical interviews and file documents gives answers to two kinds of questions. First, how are the behavior and the experience of this *individual* brought forth in the course of his/her life, especially when coping with and producing crises; and what are the crucial generative structures underlying the individual events or stories? The other type of question focuses on the *role of institutions* in these processes. In most cases, a professional expert has to deal with an elaborate "history" of the client with different kinds of institutions (including his/her own). Following this direction, the analysis has to determine what share institutions have had in shaping the trajectory (Strauss 1985: 8–39), for better and for worse. Tracing the individual's and the institutions' shares in shaping the trajectory demonstrates not only the positive potential, but also how the spiral of problems has developed and gathered momentum (Fischer-Rosenthal 1999b). Generative structures producing their own operations cannot be seen from the perspective of the individual or the institution. The function of sociological reconstruction and identifying operative mechanisms is identical with noting the *blind spots* of the individual and of institutional actors. Making them visible to the actors themselves enhances capacities for action and for experience, and reduces problems. For the client this means a better life. For the professional, self-critique and the institutional broadening of capacities for action; it improves support not only for a single individual, but potentially *for all clients*.

Taking a neutral position removed from the genuine interests of the client and the expert, sociological structural analysis of the biographical text—even

if it is done only by the expert—can present the two diverging interests of the parties. The discovery of their respective blind spots, which are necessary elements of the perspectives and standpoints of the actors, brings the general paradox (cf. Schütze 1996) of the professional and client worlds into focus. More specifically, there is a difference between individual autonomy and social integration, which is in principle insoluble, though some of the problems it poses may be reduced. The client identifies different problems from those apparent to the expert, who is an agent of a social subsystem. The relationship between the expert and the client is asymmetrical with respect to power, knowledge, and autonomy. This tends to endanger the enhancement of the client's autonomy, which is the explicit goal. This is the reason why very often professional support systems produce exactly what they aim to prevent.

Addressing these paradoxes in the concrete details of the case cannot make them vanish, but it can make them less sharp. The re-introduction of such knowledge in the interaction between expert and client cannot and should not dissolve the paradoxes, but even knowing them better will improve the range of action and the cooperation between client and expert.

For the expert, two common traps thus can be avoided. The expert is now able to distance her/himself from identifying with the client on the one hand or with the agency s/he is employed by on the other. Instead, s/he can develop a general professional knowledge and identity through work accomplished in the professional biography.

Today the critical point is not the level of structural biographical analysis as a unilateral expert method, but the practical re-introduction of the gained knowledge in the interaction of the professional and the client. This problem cannot be solved by theoretical considerations, but must be worked out practically both in the training of professionals and in the actual communication between expert and client. It is not sufficient, and can even be harmful, for the professional to simply confront the client with the bare results of the biographical analysis. The insight into structures, both limiting and enabling ones, has to be transformed and re-specified for a real communication and a process of accompanying and support. The pace has to be adequate to the client's capacities and should allow for a slow restructuring of the client's biographical conceptions and narratives, as well as for behavioral changes including backlashes in the client's life.

I have tried to maintain the thesis that biographical structuring, i.e. biographical work done in communication with others and in processes of painful recollections and memory, is a viable way to come to terms with crises of any personal and social dimensions. By definition, modernity is a phase in the development of society that has tremendously increased instability, risk, and crises. The functional regime of large-scale functional subsystems has produced the "constraints of individualization" (Habermas), which can only be lived if these individuals communicate who they are, how they became who

they are, what different things they have been through. There is no need to harmonize; the differences in one's life can be unified simply by talking about them as parts of one life.

Conversely, wherever this kind of biographical structuring is not made a part of society in individual, professional, and institutional work, and wherever it is not part of the public discourse, our argument would indicate a danger of de-differentiating the processes of modernity. If biographical work for example were simply left to a so-called private sphere, separate from political and public worlds, then other types of *participatory identity constructions*<sup>3</sup> (formation of national or religious identity) would prevail.

Following the large-scale developments in Europe over the last decade, which de-differentiated entire political spheres that had been well defined by theoretical, economic, legal, and cultural criteria, there is a new open space: structures are dissolved and people are seeking orientation. To any sociologist, this poses the empirical question, what kind of biographical structuring is permitted or prevented by the overall social communication in Eastern Europe? This question can only be answered by empirical work. Furthermore, professionals in all realms of these societies are faced with the practical question whether they want to foster biographical structuring, or place their trust in participatory identity constructions.

Biographical work is the operation that constitutes the unity of a life by taking into account the differences. Such differences are addressed in order to create a shared world. This does not mean that one must have experienced the same things or see things in the same way in the future. However, it does imply a better understanding of one's own differences and differences with respect to others. If it is true that the unity of the individual–society difference is constituted precisely in the operation of biographical structuring, then we can and must be different, and need not fear it. We can be different and free of any constraint to become all the same, and still cooperate in one world.

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3 By "participative identity construction" I refer to processes of identity construction which heavily rely on group ideologies or a total surrender to the group; the main actor is the group, the individual has to obey, execute, and participate in a subordinate, basically undemocratic style.

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*Devorah Kalekin-Fishman*

## Looking In at Europe from Outside: Stories of Exclusion and Inclusion

Coming from Israel, I can be considered at best a visitor to Europe. I will therefore be presenting an outsider's view of biographical research in a divided Europe. Underlying the approach I propose is a conviction that the human condition is inevitably implicated in alienation. Instead of associating the term "alienation" with theories that profess to describe and explain specific phenomena,<sup>1</sup> I would like to use alienation as a blanket term for the inevitable discrepancies between the possible (bordering on the ideal) and life as it must be lived in a context of constraints. In this view, alienation is likely to emerge through different processes in different zones of experience. Here I will focus on how the dynamics of alienation prevalent in many domains shape our crucial experiences of inclusion and exclusion.

In this paper I will be expounding on my own exclusion by developing a three-pronged thesis. First of all, the interrelations of inclusion and exclusion can be examined by relating Israel to Europe in space and time. Second, within Israel—the land that often defines itself in terms of its exclusion from Europe—analogue processes operate at the intersections of ethnicity, religion, and gender. Finally, the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion can be traced in the research process, and even at its heart, in the search for meaning in life stories by researchers and those they study. Biographical research will provide the frame in which I develop my thesis.

### I.

It is a somewhat startling fact that studying biography has become central to academic concerns from several different disciplinary points of departure. Within the last several decades there has been a flowering of biographical studies in sociology and anthropology, in history, in psychology, in educational research—in addition to the focus on life stories that pervades the tradition of the novel.

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1 Thus in social psychology, measures of alienation have been devised to examine the extent to which workers are oppressed, the feelings of powerlessness that pursue people in different domains, states of isolation and of "self-estrangement", and so on. Individual psychology usually explores alienation as a symptom or result of mental illness.

For sociologists who work with theoretical orientations of the school of symbolic interaction, biography and autobiography are sources for understanding the gestures that make up daily experience and define the dynamics of sociation,<sup>2</sup> and are also records of how “others” can be significant (Mead 1969; Simmel 1950). For ethno-methodologists, biographical accounts supply catalogues of the operations employed by “members” in order to maintain the social order (Garfinkel 1967; Sacks 1992; Sudnow 1972). Anthropologists’ discussions of biography and autobiography are intimately connected with “reflexivity and the political responsibility” of their discipline (Okely and Callaway 1992). Life stories are at the heart of the psychological interest in development throughout the life cycle (Bruner 1980). Narrative research has almost become a buzzword in education (Elbaz 2000; Godmundsdottir 2000; Soreila and Estola 2000).

But social scientists are not alone in these concerns. As important as the traditional dependence on written records is a widening interest in the potential of oral history (Thompson 1978, 1982). For some historians, life stories are a source of inspiration, a medley of suggestions for analyzing documents (Kandal 1996; Moore 1978). For others, such accounts are a key to conceptualizing subjectivity. According to Passerini, for example, life stories disclose “the whole meaning of cultural and psychological expressions of consciousness—indirect and collective—which can be embodied in language and behavior, [and] expressed in more ‘spiritual’ forms, like speculative thought” (Passerini 1982: 54). These interests are abetted by the mass media as vehicles of stories with diverse assumptions of fantasy and desire. Through life stories, researchers learn what types of events are truly imposing as experience. The significance of biographical research is illustrated by a passage in Cohen’s article on “self-conscious anthropology”. The dilemma he outlines applies to biographical research in all disciplines.

„People’s knowledge of themselves is of *critical* importance to us, for without it we misunderstand them.... If I am not necessarily the person that others see, and if I am not necessarily the person who I *imagine* that others see, and if I am not merely the persona whom I present to others (for whatever reason), who am I, and how might I discover the answer?“ (Cohen 1992: 229, 230)

## II

In perusing works on oral history, psychological studies of development over the life course, a philosophical treatise on scientific method and feminism, I

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2 For the theoretical use of ‘sociation’, see Simmel (1950).

was increasingly attracted to the puzzle of the biographical researchers: how their life stories connect with those of the people they study. With that question in mind, I looked at my own work, seeking a sign. As so often happens, the “sign” turned out to be the topic I had chosen to address beforehand: “looking in from the outside”.

I would like to describe the results in terms of some of the distinctions that Fischer-Rosenthal and Stoelting have presented (both in this volume). These divisions will help to position Israel as a web of exclusion in space and inclusions in time. I will then trace proclivities that come to the fore in the biographical work of individuals whose social positions are significant in the Israeli context, and hence be able to point out how they and we are all implicated in an “outside” perspective.

To define the “outside” discussed here, let us begin with the “where” of it. For one thing, Israel was conceived as an outpost of Europe. It is one of the places into which Europe “exploded” (to borrow Fischer-Rosenthal’s term). This can be seen in Israeli political arrangements as well as in the subtle practices by which official Israeli ideology is aligned with European principles and values. For another, Israel is the country of internal divisions *par excellence*, in a way a microcosm of Europe and a melee of divided practices struggling with the paradox of violence, as well as with the paradoxical reconstruction of timid hopes.

Israel is outside the bounds of the European community by its passports and currency. Still, it is a “Western” country in the heart of a region defined as “East”, and is often seen to be struggling to maintain its exclusion from that very region. The Middle East as a whole is riddled with such ambiguities. The area has long served as a space for European meddling and a buffer against the ancient civilizations (secretly held to be primitivizations) of the Chinese and the Japanese. Located in this region, Israel is excluded from the “universal imaginary space” of the European rationalities that organized massive horrors. It is, in fact, on a continent where the spiritual leaps out of a morass of irrationality. Still, under bluer skies, the lines of division are stark and clear. Like rationality, irrationality too breeds uncertain justice and nests of protest.

### III

In this country of demarcations, the theme of inclusion and exclusion is deep-seated in internal practices. It is no longer news that Israel is a country sharply divided along lines of religion, ethnicity, race, and gender (not to mention other categories familiar to us from the newspapers and from the literature of the social sciences).

Religious differences partition the population and often splinter it. Arabs are divided into Moslems, Christians, and Druse. The Moslems comprise several sects, and the Christians (only about 1/15 as numerous as the Moslems) belong to diverse denominations, including the Catholic, the Maronite, and the Latin Churches, as well as the Greek, Russian, and Armenian Orthodox Churches. Neither are the Druse (about a tenth of the non-Jewish population) an undivided group. They are divided geographically and by their varying willingness to align themselves with a Jewish state. Religious distinctions are of constant concern to Jews as well in this state that is defined as both "Jewish and democratic". There is, for example, an ongoing conflict as to which of the Jewish religious groups (ultra-orthodox, orthodox, conservative, reform—several of which are outfitted as political parties) has the right to determine who can legitimately be registered as a Jew. And there are vitriolic attacks by some of the partisans on Jewish citizens who define themselves as secular.

Ethnic lines blaze in the great divide between Arabs and Jews, the traditional distinction between East and West. Ethnic divisions surface as well among Jewish groups that immigrated at different times, from different areas of the globe. These, too, are lines drawn between West and East. Here the "*Ost-Juden*", who were disdained in German Jewish communities, become "Westerners", while polished academics of Jewish origin from Arabic-speaking countries represent the "wild East". There is, of course, no official racism in Israel, but, on the other hand, there is a kind of "common sense" that considers "black" an undesirable attribute. "Black" used to be a derogatory term applied to people from North Africa, together with a vehement denial of any racist intention. The denial is more difficult to prove now, since "black" is currently used to refer to Ethiopians. The slur is heightened by Establishment claims that the Ethiopian version of Judaism is suspect.<sup>3</sup> To see signs of a racist agenda, one need only observe (a) the treatment accorded newly-arrived immigrants from Ethiopia in contrast to the treatment of immigrants from the former Soviet Union; and (b) the inegalitarian distribution of Ethiopians in the Israeli labor market (cf. Eden and Kalekin-Fishman 1999). Still, racism remains a taboo word.

Israel is a country that is also partitioned according to gender. Women are systematically and structurally deprived in Israel. According to the practices of Jewish orthodoxy, women are not allowed to take part in the most

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3 Establishment actions toward Ethiopians include two scandalous sets of events. One is related to the realm of religion: the Chief Rabbinate has insisted on an examination of the penises of Ethiopian men (including old men) to verify that they are indeed circumcised. A second offensive event relates to health. Soldiers in the regular army were asked to donate blood to the national blood bank. The blood of Ethiopian soldiers was collected, but discarded. The explanation was that "very many" Ethiopian immigrants are HIV-positive.

consequential rituals. Similar limitations are set in Islam.<sup>4</sup> The phenomenon of women's deprivation surfaces in politics as well. There were fewer than 10 women in the last Knesset, and barely more in the current session. And of course there is the great political divide of right and left—one of the most easily manipulated to sectorial<sup>5</sup> ends.

The mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in Israel are highlighted when we examine the temporal aspect, the “when”.

Israel sits atop an ideology of contradictions that colonizes past, present, and future. This is already intimated in the title of the utopian ideological tract *Altneuland*, written by Theodor Herzl at the beginning of the 20th century. Because Israel's roots are in the biblical past, it stems from the past of all Western religions, and officially is of most significance to Judaism. Conceived as a new start after 2000 years of Jewish Diaspora, however, Israel is only 52 years old, and has just started out as a modern state. Furthermore, with respect to its Declaration of Independence, Israel is an undertaking still to be consummated. What, after all, is the character of a state that is supposed to be both Jewish—i.e., a liberating solution to anti-Semitism in all its ugliness—and democratic, which is to say rational, egalitarian, and fully modern?

Israel is a complex country, at once united over time and fragmented in its social space; a context that is clearly an outgrowth of European modernity. Quite concretely, this society still attached to Europe carries a frightening weight of domination that, not surprisingly, evokes resistance in biographical work carried out within its boundaries. Biographies of people who fall into different categories navigate among the divisions I have cited and attest to a varied platform of protest. I would like to give some examples about how life stories are shaped by criss-crossing the stark edges pointed out above. As we shall see, no subtle hermeneutic exploration is needed to understand how the biographical work issues from, and feeds into, the societal project.

## IV

In this section of the paper, I will draw on research conducted among Arab elders who are citizens of Israel, among Jewish Ethiopian professionals, and

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4 Witness Jordan's American born former Queen Nur, who was allowed to take care of King Hussein as long as he was alive, but was not allowed to participate in his burial.

5 A recent book describing the social structure in Israel is called *The sectorial society* (Yatziv, 1999). The author emphasizes the centrality of divisions into sectors that are taken for granted in Israel: ethnic, religious, gender, political, and social.

among retired Jewish teachers (Kalekin-Fishman, in progress a; in progress b; 1998).<sup>6</sup>

An Arab man in his seventies who never attended school tells the story of his life in strict chronological order. He opens with animated complaints about his life experience as an “internal immigrant”—a person who in 1948 was driven out of the village where he grew up. During the fighting he fled to Lebanon, and when he stole back, the village was abandoned, the houses wrecked, and the people scattered. He was forced to “settle” in a strange village in the same general area that he had left—a village that was not abandoned during the war. As he talks, he expands on the network of connections he has with neighbors and acquaintances in this “new” village, while protesting that he is a stranger there to this very day. The trauma of immigration is still vivid 50 years later, and seems to cloak his lifetime in a mist of discontent.

The story of his life imparts consequential details about family events and about his work as a farmer. But as the tale progresses from decade to decade, he constantly interweaves descriptions of government interventions and political constraints. He draws out the account of his “lived life” with detailed reports of the roles played by Arab rulers, the British government, Israeli officials and the International Red Cross in determining the fate of his community. All of them, in his version of history, collaborated in the betrayal of the Palestinians. Along the time line, the personal, the collective, the bureaucratic and the affective are all intertwined.

Evacuation and forced migration are a story familiar to many collectives. A Jewish social worker from Ethiopia also tells a story about having to leave a village. His migration is marked by a trek in the Sudanese desert that lasted for many weeks. The blunt truth is that, for him, migration was an act of self-preservation. As a sixteen-year-old who had grown up in a tiny backwoods community, he joined some older men in an underground struggle against the dictatorial military government. In the underground, he learned to read and write; he recalls spending hours reading Marx and Lenin. The period of preparing to overthrow a dictatorial government was a spur to his development—and his undoing. Had he stayed in Ethiopia he would have been arrested for belonging to a subversive communist organization.

As he tells it, however, the escape from Ethiopia is overlaid with abundant details derived from Jewish and Zionist ideology. The trek in the Sudan desert is a mythical replication of Bible stories. The old tales relate how the Jews who had been enslaved in Egypt shook off their chains and, under the leadership of Moses, went out to cross the desert into the Promised Land. The Children of Israel spent forty years in the desert on their way to freedom.

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6 The Arabs were interviewed by Arab students. The Ethiopian professional quoted here was interviewed by the writer; and the retired Jewish teachers were interviewed by a young Jewish woman student.

Today's Ethiopian Jews perceived their journey to Israel as a mode of reliving those times. As if to fix this ideological view of their situation, the State organized Ethiopian migrations to Israel under the names "Operation Moses" and "Operation Solomon".

In realistic terms, the social worker's life story is structured as the tale of a personal struggle for autonomy that is entangled with a collective struggle for recognition. It has chapters of physical hardship, poverty, studying under conditions of adversity, organizing and participating in demonstrations against high-handed bureaucracy, urging members of the community to insist on full civil rights, and so on. Parallel with the account of his private misadventures and emerging accomplishments, the social worker tells about the communal life of Ethiopian Jews. He recalls arguments among people from different areas "back there" and notes that those same differences affect relations within Ethiopian communities in Israel. He refers to specific instances of discrimination that recall life under a "foreign" regime. From these he concludes with generalizations about the public image of the community and its misguided passivity. His private life, on the other hand, is not a topic to enlarge on. Only towards the end of the interview does he mention a wife who fled with him from Ethiopia, a child, a divorce, and a new partner who is "now pregnant".

In a research project on the biographies of teachers, a major finding was that, in telling their life stories, retired Jewish women teachers were adept at citing evidence of their having been "good" in their professional careers. And from their illustrative examples, it turns out that they consistently assess "being good" in terms of collective stipulations (Kalekin-Fishman 1998). Good teachers align their concepts of professional competence with official ideology and policy measures, among them "absorption of immigrants" and "defending the motherland." They derive satisfaction from having found themselves "teaching [and teaching well] under the impossible conditions" that massive waves of immigration and frequent wars created. In putting together a spontaneous autobiography, they quite consistently phrase their accounts in episodes defined by the six successive wars that Israel has been engaged in.

In this way their stories are geared to demonstrate that they and their work have never been excluded from some core aggregate identity. The significant spatio-temporal division that guides the design of their life story is that of "belonging" to Israeli territory, as opposed to "not belonging" or "not yet belonging". They place themselves at the center of the Israeli experience.

## V

I have mentioned just a few stories in order to show that, in Israel, people whose lives would appear to be quite dissimilar construct their autobiographies out of materials taken from both personal and collective experience. Speakers recount the details of a life by positioning themselves within a symbolically viable collective. Thus the life stories that we have been privileged to collect all share a particular kind of complexity. They are at once accounts of what it is like to exist *inside* a life—the chronicling of acts—and accounts of what it means to be *on the outside looking in*, i.e. living an individual life while looking in on the lives of “all of us”. Their stories bear witness to ways in which people are acted on to ensure the realization of collective scenarios. The collectives touched on here are the nationality, the religion, and the ethnic group.

Interestingly, the “outside” shell is the widest collective that the person can render, and is not limited by status. The old Arab locates his life story in terms of international relations among countries in and outside the Middle East. The Ethiopian, who is a relatively recent immigrant to Israel, places his life story in a historical perspective, and finds his roots in ancient history. The retired Jewish teachers whose stories I mentioned look in on themselves from a shell that frames the entire project of constructing a Jewish nation-state, even though the official structuring of events has placed them at the periphery—with male soldiers on active duty assigned to the central tasks.

For the fact is that underlying these stories of the relatively excluded is *the* story of the perceived majority—silent only if we will not hear. People in this overwhelming modern, post-modern, and pre-modern experience called Israel tell life stories by stepping back and integrating collective times into their otherwise prosaic lives. Among the paradoxes of biographical work, we must note that the “step backward” is a way of measuring oneself by clusters of spatio-temporal norms. For minority groups in Israel (of different sizes and for different reasons: Arabs, Ethiopian Jews, women) to locate themselves in the collective is amounts to an abashed avowal of their submission to exclusion. All of these groups are emphatically excluded from the prototypical story of the native-born Israeli boy, the proverbial *sabra*, prickly on the outside and sweet at heart like the cactus indigenous to the dry climate. This is the normative story that everyone must know and take for granted, the “natural” ideal to which each marginalized group aspires in its own way.

On the level of ideas, all of these stories are examples of what it means to be part of a world of thought and yet alienated from it, although the people concerned may not be aware of it. Underlying these narrated lives is an acceptance of certain ideas, all of which are strongly associated with Europe. The Arab man presents a thoroughly cynical view of politics that is not at all

different from widely satirized European conventions of alliances and wars and treaties. The Ethiopian man considers that the Marxist principles to which he subscribed in the underground struggle against the Ethiopian military junta are universally applicable, and that they are destined to help improve the lot of Ethiopian Jews in Israel. The retired women teachers, who describe their mission as service to the country right or wrong, understand devotion to the state and obedience to its rules in terms of a political orientation that has been typical of European nationalism since the eighteenth century.

What do we learn, then, about the interplay of social exclusion and social inclusion in life stories? The entire exercise of biographical research illustrates a theoretical contradiction, if not a reversal. On the one hand, as so many of the papers in this volume demonstrate in depth, we can gain a perspective on the complexity of what it means to be a person simply through tracing how the storyteller situates himself or herself in collective spaces and times. On the other hand, being on the outside looking in is also the heart of the story. The question of social exclusion or social inclusion is one that the storyteller deals with as she constructs her tale. She signals exclusion by standing aside, looking on at her own life in order to tell it; she signals inclusion in the collective by checking the content of her account and by choosing publicly validated themes. The Israeli interviewees that I have mentioned here are all doubly “others”: they are excluded from Europe by Europeans, and by their elected, but essentially self-appointed, “representatives” in the perceived “western” majority in Israel. Yet they hover on the borders of what can legitimately be characterized as internal European history currently undergoing re-formations, and they participate in the world of European thought with agility.

## VI

I will now turn to the research and the researchers, that is to say, the research act, and our own working lives. Here too there is a paradoxical interplay of inclusion and exclusion. Fischer-Rosenthal’s concern with the fragmentation of people in modernity and the slippery evasiveness of the whole person reminds us of the subtle ways in which alienation is insinuated into daily life, on levels both personal and collective. The rhetoric of biographical research is considerate, even therapeutic. We are looking at the whole person and following her lead. One might say that when people agree to offer their life stories to a researcher, the act of sharing is a bid for approval and a tacit promise of affirmation. Since there is a listener, the situation provides the storyteller with an opportunity for self-enrichment. Furthermore, the very movement toward the shaping of a collectively defined self makes for self-enhancement.

Yet despite the means researchers embrace to safeguard interviewees' rights, sober analysis discloses that the interviewee's gains are, when all is said and done, acquired at the price of alienation. Providing the researcher with 'material', the persons who pour their lives into stories accept the commonplace fate of being estranged from their own output. Serving the research project, they hand over the product of their biographical work and the surplus value of their lives to savants whose ends are defined as science. Often viewing research as a somewhat glamorous and purposive scientific endeavor, they are ready to collaborate in one more process that is legitimated by the collective. I am reminded of claims that capitalism is not really a system of alienation because even those who do the most demeaning type of labor are able to joke and have pleasure in being together. The point is that alienation works underground far from the inquiring eye. We cannot escape the need to deal with the question of the extent to which partnerships in biographical inquiry may be sustaining oppressive ends even as they facilitate the examination of oppression and marginality.

This view through the lens of alienation has implications for understanding the untold life stories of biographical researchers. My suspicion is that being a researcher in the field of biography is a singular way of submitting oneself to social exclusion from the people whose lives we research. Biographical research can, furthermore, be acclaimed as a vocation that saves us from an obligation to deal with constructing our own life stories. This is a question worth dealing with, because the answer is connected with the crucial issue of whether it is possible at all to conceive of a truly humane social science.

Biographical research is by nature an endeavor to "look in" from some point on the outside; i.e., "looking in" in the sense that Peter Berger (1963) defines as the essence of what it means to be a sociologist: peering in through the keyhole of the bedroom! We manage to hide behind protective walls with slits well placed for peeking into lives from without. There seems, moreover, to be a prevailing insistence on making sure that, although the keyhole is "like" keyholes familiar to the people researched, the positions of researcher and researched cannot meet. Examples are many and I will mention just a few.

I think it is fair to say that all Bertaux (1981) and his fellow researchers had in common with the bakers whose lives they studied were addresses in or near Paris, and presumably the fact that all actually ate bread. When Luchterhand (1982) undertakes to interview people in a tiny village near a work camp that also served as a death camp, the partners in the research are very definitely on the outside looking in. The interviewers came from an urban center, and, by choosing to compile twenty years later a "fine-grained" account of what had gone on in the last year of the war, they were asserting a moral and political distance from the atrocities. Studies of class, such as those of Fryk-

man and Loefgren (1996) in Scandinavia for example, and all the studies presented in Thompson (1982), are well-intended observations from outside, from the comfortable vantage point of the enlightened middle class. Even in the case of feminist research by women, barriers of class and race, at the least, divide well-meaning female researchers from the subjects (or objects) of their research.

The pervasiveness of “looking in from the outside” is even confirmed by studies that have come to be called “ethno-*autobiography*”. Travisano (1998) reports on “growing up Italian” and discovering that that was not what he wanted to be! He is able to tell a story from an “outside” point which he has attained. For Barone (1997), it makes sense to write about the long-range influence of a teacher on a student as “a *collaborative auto-biography*”. He claims that this can be done because the student graduated a long time ago, and the teacher has given up school teaching. Both are, therefore, safely outside the events reported and analyzed.

When I go back to my own biographical studies, I find a similar distancing. In all my projects, I have studied situations and conditions that were, at some time (some other time) and in some place (some other place), part of my own experience. Like that of so many others, my own experience includes being a Jew in non-Jewish surroundings, an American in a Jewish milieu, an Israeli in Europe, ... and then there is the business of fleeting age groups. It is easy to see that I am using research to celebrate at once both past inclusion and current exclusion. Two of my current projects are illustrations of that celebration.

In one, I am exploring what it means to be a woman and a scientist. I am collaborating with a colleague (Dr. Lea Hagoel) in an investigation of how *she*, with a doctorate in community sociology, took on the challenge of studying toward an additional doctorate in the life sciences. She found herself carrying out participant observation as a “natural” accompaniment to the serious work of studying a new discipline. I am looking in at her construction of a transdisciplinary rebirth from the peculiar position of an intimate outsider. In this collaboration, I am lodged in the relatively comfortable niche of one who asks questions in order to help *her* delve into the depths of her professional and personal experiences so that they can be analyzed for public use (Hagoel and Kalekin-Fishman 1999).

A second project is the mirror image of that one, so to speak. With a small team I am studying fragments of conversation in an attempt to see how people create culture in their everyday lives. This study is intended to enable us to see culture as an ongoing creation, produced by people involved with one another. We are searching out tensions in a vital, if ordinary, milieu through analyses of turn units, and of signifiers at the prosodic, syntactic, pragmatic, and semantic levels that “star”, so to speak, in conversation (shared communications). Understanding these signifiers is likely to shed

light on the kinds of resolution that biographical stories are designed to offer for enacted lives.

Could it be that being on the outside looking in is a condition for one's self-actualization as a social scientist? It is likely that the partnerships created in biographical research are necessarily playing out a drama of alienation which modernity has exacerbated and which post-modernity accepts. Ironically, perhaps, biographical research celebrates, in a sense, our—and "their"—retreat from the ongoing production of living. In exploring and analyzing biographies, we unconsciously submit to being distanced from power and estranged from self in a search for the liberation from constraints that can be found in meaningfulness and self-actualization in an elusive collective.

If this is the nature of the drama, then the focus on divisions actually contributes to a reconstruction of the divides between Eastern and Western Europe. Discussions about defining other lives and other desires (in the area of the former GDR, in Hungary, in Romania, in Bulgaria, in Russia and, wherever we look, among the perpetual "others", the Jews) fix people in otherness. Moreover, analysis and discussion serve only marginally to liberate groups from rejection. Perhaps it is time—now and from now on—to recognize that "we" who pretend to represent the norm of "Westerners" are evading a moral obligation. To be human is in many ways to live out the dialectic of inclusion and exclusion on the interacting planes of biography and history. If this is, as I surmise, the human condition and human destiny, then we have to spell out the many multiform and perhaps even divergent ways in which this condition is reproduced—in action, in reflection, and in analysis and reportage. In surrendering, as all others do, to the organic mystery of the outside perspective, perhaps we can fulfill our responsibility to surrender to our common fate.

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**Part 2:**

**Between Past and Present—  
Experiences of Violence and Destruction**



*Victoria Semenova*

## The Message from the Past: Experience of Suffering Transmitted Through Generations

### **The Message from the Past in the Perspective of the Present**

Situations of uncertainty and rapid social change lend urgency to the problem of time in both public and private discourses. There arises a debate about connections between the past, the present, and the future, and such aspects of the time concept as continuity and discontinuity, historical gaps and memory. People turn to their past experience, regarding it as a basis for decision-making in the present and as a prognosis for the future. The past may also be a source of fear of the future, as a fear that past distress or disaster may recur (Roberts 1995). During such a debate the boundaries of social time, as well as a historical perspective on the life of the individual, may be significantly prolonged.

In public discourse in Russia there are wide-ranging debates about history and a rethinking of it in the light of present changes. These debates sometimes look back over centuries in search of some specific features of a so-called "traditional Russian mentality", or invoke moments of pre-revolutionary, tsarist history in order to find answers to questions about the present. In the Russian mass media, for example, it has become very popular to compare Boris Yeltsin, as the first democratically elected Russian president, not with some other leaders of our time but with autocratic rulers of distant historical periods, including Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great. The objective is to understand the historical meaning of Yeltsin's rule in the context of a time perspective. These fashions raise some general questions in the public consciousness. What is the meaning of the past in the perspective of the present? What are the boundaries between the past and the present?

The social interpretation of a time perspective is reflected in private life as the individual's increasing interest in her or his early history, or in the family history over several generations. Where for decades during the Soviet period silence about the family past predominated, there has now come a moment for a revision of family memory and a reconstruction (sometimes even reinvention) on the basis of family history.

The stimulation of interest in the past can also be explained as a consequence of the destruction of previous identities (with the Soviet state, the Party, professional status) and the construction of new ones. New identities are formed mainly on traditional foundations, in forms taken from previous

generations: ethnic identity, for example, for the Jews; or the estate identity for the former, pre-revolutionary classes (Danilova 1997). Thus individuals turn to their family memories in search of historical arguments, which they use as a cultural resource for constructing new identities.

This change in the temporal dimensions of everyday life stimulates scientific interest in the concept of social time in human life. What are the meanings of the past, present, and future for the individual? Or, what are the boundaries of the individual's "temporal horizon" and "temporal perspective" (Adam 1994) in their construction of the life-world?

This paper deals with only one aspect of the past, namely the "recorded past" as a family memory about the previous generation's experience; which is now recalled (in an interview situation) and which could serve as a meaningful basis for present decision-making in the situation of social change. The author concentrates in the present on mechanism of selecting elements from the family past, and on the way in which this selection can be used to construct or reconstruct individual biographical projects. In the framework of a biographical perspective, we focus on how the experience of the ancestors is molded by the life-world of their descendants. The main question to be discussed here is: in what situations does earlier family experience serve as a *cultural resource* for individual planning?

Among the theoretical aspects of the concept of time that will be developed is the issue of what temporal frames of analysis govern conceptualizations of individual biography and the life trajectory. Empirically, we will explore how people recall and reshape their family past at the moment of constructing anew their biographical project. What aspects of family history do they include?

## Time Perspective

Time perspective is a useful frame for analyzing narratives. Adam (1994) argues that the perception of time in social narrative must be central to every interpretation, as all human actions are embedded in the past-present-future continuity. Various modes of interconnection between the sense of experience of past and present and the anticipation of the future may be found within and between the narratives (Adam 1994).

From Schütz's writings concerning time (Schütz 1971) we can see that the past-present-future dimension is a framework for understanding how we act, interact, and know. His concept of "life-world" includes temporality as a combination of memory, attention, and expectation, and as a temporal integration of past and future in the present, especially through the mind of the individual. A historical consciousness in the process of mental activity is

expressed in the ways in which the past bears upon the present and sets a context, as a framework for experience. Since experience is continuously reinterpreted, it serves as a basis for making decisions in the present. No action can be understood unless we understand its interconnection with aspects of the past and future. One can conceive of different combinations of time and time-perspective: future futures, future presents, future pasts or any other combination. But the present remains the locus of action and communication. Aspects of past acts are selected from the totality of the past (as the whole potential range of memory) for orientation with regard to present and future acts. This selection is made according to individual priorities, and sequenced with reference to a hierarchy of the individual's values and needs. Selecting, prioritizing, and sequencing are *some* of the strategies that people take for granted and employ in the routine interplay of act and action. Future-oriented action also entails a strong element of influence from the past. According to Schütz, the past is fundamentally embodied in life projects, which are constituted by a common stock of knowledge, accumulated through language during long periods of community life.

Thus, the main positions in a theoretical approach to the concept of the past in individual life make it clear that in the process of the individual's construction of the past, the past as the whole memory potential is structured and restructured. Elements are selected from it according to present priorities and interests by attending to different moments of memory, in order to plan the future. The process of selecting from the past is based on priorities of the present; it serves as a basis for routine personal strategy.

Our research is grounded in this approach. Here we consider "the past" as it is reconstructed in present memory by young people, and as it has influenced their life projects for the future. At this point, however, we may raise some additional questions. First, what is the place of a "family past" or "family memory" in the whole concept of recorded past? "The past" may also include, for example, memory about earlier personal experience (during youth or childhood), or individualized historical memory of society as a whole, called "remembered past" (Adam 1994). Second, are there any specific techniques of recording *family* memory? Why do people who "look back" in search of reasonable motivation for the future turn first to their "family memory" resources? Third, what is the length of time in this family past that people "borrow" for their present? What are the connections of the "common past", the "family past", and the "individual past" in people's life projects? What are the specifics of the mechanism of selection from the family memory?

In distinguishing between various forms of the recorded past, Adam (1994—drawing mainly on Oakeshott's (1985) approach) named the following types of reliance on the past:

- encapsulated (the totality of the past, including the ecological past and genetic memory),
- remembered (continuity of consciousness and awareness in forming identity),
- consulted (or recalled—memory which is consulted as an aid in understanding a puzzling moment in the present), and
- message-bearing survivals (or learning from the past for the purpose of future-oriented action).

Tracing the specifics of each form, Adam stresses that these particulars lie not only in the nature of what is remembered (universal or practically oriented action), but also in the mechanism of recollection (genetic or conscious levels of remembering) as well as in its function (in order to relive / learn from / use the past for the future).

To map the place of the family memory on this landscape of the past as a whole, we will make preliminary suggestions about the nature of its dimensions: the content of family memory; the mechanism of its recollection; and the functions involving family memory.

The empirical basis for our research on family memories and the meanings of experiences of suffering in previous generations derives from the “life course” approach developed by Elder (1974). Analyzing the patterns of social suffering in a situation of social crisis—the Great Depression of 1929—Elder came to the conclusion that families that had suffered passed on their experience of suffering to the next generation during the socialization process. Furthermore, the offspring of families that had suffered earlier appeared to be better equipped to cope with a later crisis situation (Giele and Elder 1998). The determining role of such transmission depends, according to Elder, on the exact period of life—early childhood—when the experience was passed on through face-to-face communication between the older and the younger generations.

This conclusion concurs with the theoretical argument which goes back to W. Thomas: that in a crisis situation the mind operates on knowledge based on memory, and on the ability to compare a current situation with similar situations in the past in order to revise present judgment and actions in view of the past experience (Volkhart 1951). I would like to discuss these issues later on the basis of an analysis of empirical material.

In this paper, I will relate to the “experience of suffering” an episode of deprivation during the time of the totalitarian regime (in the 1920s and 1930s). The personal experience of the older family member could have formed a part of the “family memory” if it was shared with younger family members in the process of generational interaction. Such episodes may be recalled by the descendants (children or grandchildren) as a selected moment of the past. What interests us most is not how this experience or episode “really happened”, but how it is selected and recollected now as a “message”

from the older generation to the young (“what they went through”) and how it is used by them in the present as a “moral lesson” in constructing their own strategies.

Our focus on a specific historical moment and episodes of deprivation in the twenties and thirties evolved in the research situation. Such episodes were often recalled by grandchildren as a meaningful part of their family past (later we understood that this pattern does not always occur). It was surprising that the parents’ experience was usually excluded as a source of information about family memory<sup>1</sup>.

To understand the process of recollecting in the present we must “go back” in time to reconstruct the social-historical context of that moment of face-to-face intergenerational communication in the seventies, when the memory of the episode was transmitted to the young in childhood.

Some details should be noted. In general, despite wars, purges, revolutions and collectivization, Russia has a strong tradition of family solidarity within the broad network of kin, including grandparents. Grandparents and grandchildren were and still are in direct contact. Moreover, according to statistics a large proportion of young families still shared the same household with their parents (Semenova 1994). Face-to face everyday communication across three generations could therefore be a part of the offspring’s experience, and family memory and *could* include episodes of deprivation or exile in the 1920s and 1930s as an element of intergenerational interaction. Nevertheless, information about ‘past suffering’ which was now thrown open for the interviewer during in-depth interviews with young family members (‘children’ born in the 1960s) had for the most part been closed to them during the process of early socialization (1960s-1970s), since it was dangerous to speak openly about the family’s past and the experience of persecution under the Soviet regime. That is why young family members sometimes inherited silence or a “false” memory about the family history and the experience of suffering. Many Russians were reluctant to say much about their grandparents who were shot or exiled during the time of repression. The losses of memory are vividly illustrated in family albums where the images of “suspect” family

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1 One explanation for this phenomenon could be the specifics of continuity and discontinuity in the Russian context. The Soviet period of Russian history is often associated by scholars with the history of three generations: the first, the “grandparents”, born at the turn of the century, appeared on the historical scene just after the revolution and was broken by revolutionary changes. They could not adapt to the new system. The next generation, the “parents”, born in the thirties and forties, was the only truly Soviet generation. They went through the Soviet type of socialization system and associated themselves with the Soviet regime. But they could not succeed in transmitting their values to the next generation, the “children” born in the 1960s, who already had a critical attitude towards Soviet values and deserted them (Levada 1996). That is why sociological data brings up evidence of discontinuity in the parent-child dimension and continuity in grandparent-grandchild dimension (see for example Semenova 1994).

members were cut out of family photos. Sometimes people even changed their family names or dates of birth (Semenova 1994). Some families tried to forget the experience and to hide it from their children. Now this information is opened up, and we have an opportunity to compare the process of recollection in situations of “coded”, “open” and “silent” messages during childhood.

In order to understand the mechanism of selection from family memory, the method of comparative analysis was used. As the basis for this analysis we chose eight families with comparable episodes of suffering in the older generation: deprivation, expropriation, exile. We traced the process of recollection in different families in order to reconstruct the main components of the selective process<sup>2</sup>. We also traced different ways of using family memory as an argument in the motivation of the young person’s life strategy, including decisions about work, marriage, migration, and so on (memory used for future action).

In sum, we mainly analyzed three components of the selection process: (a) the recalled story about the episode of suffering, (b) the nature of the message passed on during intergenerational communication, and (c) its use as a motivational basis for a life strategy in present. Out of the different combinations of these components we were able to compile a typology of recollection, and to trace different types of interconnection between these components:

1. The “open” message used as a resource for life strategy;
2. The “coded” message used in formulating a life strategy;
3. “Silence” as a message with no use in framing a life strategy;
4. The “forgotten” message, lost to the next generation.

This presentation of the research results will focus on a detailed interpretation of the first type. The other types will be cited to demonstrate contrasts among particular components in order to highlight the main characteristics of recollecting presented in the first one.

## **Type 1: The “Open” Message**

Anna Malackova is a young woman in her late twenties, a Muscovite, married without children, working at an educational club for young children. Following a traditional model of women’s behavior in her family, she married a man

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2 The research was conducted after a family history design, in which we collected stories from several family members. In most cases, memories about sufferings were presented in two ways: in the life story of the young person (who was asked to begin with childhood and to describe life with their parents and grandparents), and as an episode in the life story of the older members of the family. The “young persons” here are now about 30 years old.

with a prestigious social position, Vasily, who at that time was an army officer of high status in the military structure. After the economic reform, the prestige of his position as well as his salary declined sharply. According to Anna, she insisted as his wife that he change jobs. Now Vasily earns a fairly good salary in his new job in a private shop. In her story she appears to be the main decision maker in her family.

Anna was brought up mainly by her grandmother, as her mother worked full time and was away from home for whole days. The grandmother was a poor peasant girl who had married a *kulak*, a wealthy peasant, in the late 1920s. The episode of family deprivation came some time later, at the beginning of the thirties.

While telling her life story Anna touched on the topic of her grandmother three times. At the beginning, while telling about her childhood, Anna presented the story of deprivation itself as one of the tales her grandmother had told her during their time together.

*“Grandmother told me that that was a terrible time. She was pregnant at that time and she remained behind alone. She told me: ‘I was left behind alone. I was lying on the stove when they came and took away our last sack of potatoes. They saw I was pregnant, but nothing was sacred to them. They didn’t care whether you lived or died.’ They considered them as kulaks, but they were middle-class peasants, not kulaks. As Grandmother told me, they took away everything, carried it out of the house. It was cold and neighbors helped. They came at night and threw some wood near the door so that she could light the stove and warm herself. They also brought her some food, but were afraid to talk to her. You understand, if they had talked to her, they would have been persecuted too. So grandmother said that it was a terrible time.” (Anna, 1992: 5)*

Anna recollected this episode as part of her childhood memories, and as one of the set of the grandmother’s tales, which impressed her as a story about her grandmother’s suffering. There is no evidence here about its meaning or influence on Anna’s own life; it is only empathic recollection of an emotional story of suffering. We can imagine that it might have some relationship with her own life: it was kept in memory since childhood and was even illustrated with direct quotation of her grandmother’s words.

The exact meaning of the story for Anna’s own life came later in her narrative, when she was talking about the present time and trying to explain her personal strategy in the changing society. While telling about her active role in changing her husband’s status and searching for arguments in support of her own present consumer behavior, she returned to her grandmother’s words.

*“Now my husband earns enough money. We can go to restaurants, invite many friends, buy rich clothes, and even do a little traveling abroad ... We decided not to invest money in property or save it. We prefer to spend. It’s because I always remember my grandmother’s words: ‘Don’t be afraid of wars: war affects everybody. What is terrible is revolutions. They bring suffering to those who have something to lose.’ As for having a child, we decided to wait a little. I couldn’t look at my poor former classmates who already have children and do not have enough money to feed them. Certainly my husband*

*and I have enough money for a baby, I guess. But I'm afraid of the future." (Anna, 1992: 16)*

So now Anna is one of those who "have something to lose": she is well off, and she returns in her memory to her grandmother's similar situation in the past. Her strategy for the future includes some fear: not investing money, waiting to have a child (her grandmother was pregnant and alone at home when her husband was taken away). She is afraid of uncertainty and includes her grandmother's experience in the framework of her own story as an argument to support her strategy. Anna does not speak about her fear of the future openly; instead she selects another argument—the words of her grandmother—as her message or lesson to be used in order to escape the experience of suffering in the future.

It is also interesting to compare this passage with the last episode involving her grandmother. Some minutes later, when the interviewer turned to additional questions and asked directly about the influence of her grandmother in her life, Anna was unable to indicate any specific influence. She was even surprised at the question:

*I: "Anna, you mentioned several times that grandmother had a great influence on your life. Could you tell me what you received from your grandmother?"*

*R: From my grandmother? ... I don't know. Grandmother was Grandmother, because there was no other. If I had had two, I might have been able to judge. This grandmother did this for me, and that grandmother that ... She never raised her voice, she always put in a good word for me. She treated me to sweets and she not only told me many stories, but she also made me understand many things in life; that helps me today.*

*I: Could you name any things concretely?*

*R: Yes, I can. To understand life, to look around ...*

*I: What moments do you remember? You say that you remember that your grandmother gave you "this and that" ... Can you name something specifically?*

*R: No, it happened somehow naturally, in a moment....*

*I: In a few seconds?*

*R: Yes." (Anna, 1992: 21)*

Turning back to the previous episode we can now see that argumentation using her grandmother's words came to her spontaneously, even unconsciously. Anna could not rationally formulate her grandmother's educational strategy ("it happened somehow naturally"). She could not name exactly what "lessons" she had received from her. Anna could only generalize—she "made me understand many things in life which help me today." In our interpretation, this could be called a mechanism of genetic memory that is automatically activated as needed.

The story about suffering in hard times was transmitted to Anna early in childhood on an emotional level, together with other stories, and was grasped not as "learning" about the past or as awareness of such suffering in grand-

mother's experience, but as a general rule for behavior in certain situations (like the information "this is hot, don't touch it"). So for Anna, that childhood story comes as a part of unreflected memory, a kind of "genetic" memory, which she imbibed with her mother's milk as it were. That may be the reason why now, when the future is uncertain and social change threatens, she selected from all possible types of motivation and explanation for her strategy the most basic and traditional one: "do as your ancestors did."

That "experience of suffering" was also transmitted together with other meaningful messages, such as, "don't be afraid of wars, be afraid of revolutions". These combined into a part of her "genetic" memory as a lesson for future action, and later were activated at moments of social uncertainty as motivations for Anna's life strategy.

Anna rethought her grandmother's experience and perhaps even reconstructed it according to the priorities of her present context. It is interesting to note that the story itself was included in the narration of her childhood as an element of her memory as a child. The message was noted later in the framework of her own life story, as a selection from the past used as motivation in the present and for the future. That experience, in the short form of "moral lesson" formed the basis of a "because-of" motivation, and is included in a present-future life project, as an "in-order-to" motivation (Schütz 1971).

The "open" type of message and "genetic"-level transmission made the grandmother's experience useful not only for a one-time action, but for Anna's whole life strategy (marriage strategy, family planning, consumer behavior). As a result we can conclude that Anna's life-world is mainly "past-oriented" and includes family (mainly female) experiences of previous generations in framing her own life. Anna is afraid of the future and its uncertainty. In her time perspective, she prefers to look backward in her arguments on how to cope with change and adapt to it with minimum loss. She can be typified as "going back to the roots" in a situation of change. For her the past is a *cultural resource* in overcoming difficulties in the present, and in choosing the best position for the future.

A comparable episode of deprivation came up in the story of a young farmer from the Urals. He is about thirty. At the time of the economic reform, Stephan decided to give up his urban life and become a farmer. He had been a journalist with a high status in town, and now decided to return to his roots—to his native village, where his family had lived since the beginning of the century. He bought a piece of land to start his private farm.

While explaining this decision, Stephan turned to the time of his childhood and recalled his grandfather. Stephan's grandfather was a wealthy peasant who owned a large tract of land near their native village. At the beginning of the 1930s, the land was expropriated. Stephan did not recount the whole story of his grandfather's suffering, but only mentioned the fact. He lingered over his own childhood memories, however:

*"In my childhood, Grandfather often took me to the land he used to own. At that time there was nothing to remind us of earlier times in that place. Except for an old well. Grandfather often stood for a while near that well and told me: 'I would like you someday to have an opportunity to learn what it means to work on your own land.' These words I remembered exactly. Now I've bought another piece of land, not grandfather's old place. But I dream of buying exactly that land that belonged to my grandfather."* (Stephan, 1991: 19)

This is another case of suffering in the early 1930s in a formerly well-to-do family, which remained in the family memory of the offspring and is recalled as a background for the strategy of going back to the roots.

From Stephan's and Anna's cases, we can hypothesize that the emotional impact of suffering, and not the impact of knowledge about deprivation, makes a message strong and meaningful for later recall by the descendants.

In the following table there appear two more cases which illustrate the same type of "open" message that is used in a present life strategy.<sup>3</sup> Naturally, the memories of deprivation and the lessons drawn from them are individualized in content. In fact, they recommend different life strategies in situations of social change, and sometimes contrasting ones: "beware of uncertainty" and "grasp your chance", for example. But the offspring in these families successfully coped with the change, having been well prepared by the lessons learned in childhood.

In all four cases, the life strategy (or choice for the future) of a young person takes the shape of a project of continuity in the perspective of the family history, in the sense that it correlates with a message preserved in the memory from the past. More precisely, the life strategy relates to the narrated motivation, selected for the present argument from the family memory. Thus their biographical project could be interpreted as a long-term strategy inasmuch as its prehistory goes back to the grandparents and their experience during the twenties and thirties.

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3 The third case concerns a grandmother from a noble family who left her previous stratum and social milieu during the revolution in order to be on the side of the "winners". Her grandson recalled the message received from her during his childhood: "You should always be with those who are changing society..." Using it as a model for his own behavior nowadays, he left his family and his friends in intellectual elite circles and became an entrepreneur in the field of sport.

The fourth story: In the Burakov case, the daughter recalled her father's words and his story about the grandfather. Burakov was the only one of six children who was not arrested and exiled after expropriation of the family enterprise. The reason lay in his "correct" marital choice and quick adaptation to the new society. He married a poor peasant girl. He was later killed during World War II, but his wife passed on that "symbolic message" as a pattern of behavior to his daughter. "He taught my mother: 'Tanya, forget about the past. The past will never return. This regime will stay for a long time. You must remember it and adapt to it.'" As a result of this message, the daughter became a Komsomol leader and made a "correct" marriage to a local party leader.

Case	Experience of Suffering	Symbolic Message from the Past	The Past in a Life Trajectory for the Present
Anna Malackova	1932: The whole family was arrested except her grandmother	Grandmother: "Don't be afraid of wars—war affects everybody. What is terrible is revolutions. They bring suffering to those who have something to lose"	Granddaughter's short-term life strategy: fear for the future; spend money today, not save it; postpone having children
Stephan Osipov	1933: Grandfather's land and goods expropriated	Grandfather: "I would like you to have an opportunity one day to learn what it means to work your own land"	Grandson's "back to the roots" strategy (farming his own land) is motivated by the message
Alex Uljan	1918: The family was dispossessed and disfranchised	Grandmother: "It's better to be on the side of those who are changing history"	Grandson's strategy of switching from intellectuals to entrepreneurs is explained by the message
Ludmilla Burakova	1932–35: Grandfather was dispossessed, uncles banished	Father: "This regime is here for a long time. You should remember this and adapt to it."	Daughter: Komsomol leader, married to a Communist activist
Irina Volkova	1937: Grandfather and father were shot, step-mother banished	Mother: Message of silence; insisted on being loyal to the authorities	Daughter: late reflection about the past, but unable to change her political strategy of acquiescence
Sophia Kantor	1929–32: Grandfather arrested, interned for five years (medical student)	Grandfather: "Coded" message: "be a doctor or a lawyer"	Granddaughter's strategy: medical profession, without reflection about the past
Tatjana Davidova	1932: Grandfather dispossessed	Grandfather: no message from the past	Granddaughter did not mention that episode in her story
Svetlana	1939: Land expropriated	Father: has forgotten about it	Daughter: Almost forgot that episode

Table 1: Overview

Furthermore, in all of these cases there was intensive intergenerational communication in early childhood, as the "recalled" memory attests. Early childhood as a special moment in the life course is dominant in the transmissions, which are mainly emotional stories about past time. Furthermore, the memory was passed on as "open" information. That means that childhood communi-

cation contained complete information about an episode and the suffering it entailed as a lesson for the offspring, a kind of “moral of the story.”

That lesson is now presented in an active form of a cognitive command. The message is to be utilized for purposes of future behavior; it is framed in the short form of “how one should act in the future, especially in an uncertain situation (revolution, social change, totalitarianism)”. Based on the hidden meaning of previous suffering, the message is now transformed into a type of reasoning—“*because of* previous suffering”—and functions as a cultural resource for the future.

Finally, all of the messages analyzed, as they were recalled in the interviews, referred to a moment of social change: what one should do at the moment of change; what one should be afraid of; how one should, or should not believe in change. This is an ambiguous characteristic. On the one hand, the message referring to a moment of social change was invoked and referred to when such a situation arose; on the other hand the most meaningful messages coinciding with the individual’s priorities in the present were extracted from memory. One might imagine that this selection was probably made still later, after the action, in an attempt to legitimize a chosen strategy *post factum*.

## Type 2: The Message of “Silence”

We have compared the “open” type of message with the messages of other families who had previous episodes of suffering. Our aim is to understand what are the most important moments for a successful construction (or reconstruction) of such long-term biographical projects of the descendants. Contrasting cases of silence about family experiences of suffering give us an opportunity to understand the role of childhood experience in the transmission.

The message of silence about previous suffering was chosen by the Volkova family, who had lost much more than the other families investigated. We learned this through the story of Irina Volkova (32 years old, an engineer in St. Petersburg). All of those who suffered died. Irina’s mother, as a witness of that suffering, was the only person to preserve the memory in order to pass it on to the next generation. Nevertheless she did not speak about that experience of suffering, even within her own family. Her daughter Irina could recall almost nothing concerning those episodes of suffering in her family.

While telling about her childhood, Irina described her childhood experience of being silent and indifferent towards such information. Such indifference was common to many children of that time. Irina gave a reason for it:

*"When some other family was persecuted, children were told that they simply went away to another city, or that they had died suddenly." (Irina, 1991: 8)*

From her account, we understand that, even suspecting that something was wrong and hidden, children, Irina among them, were satisfied with a simple explanation. Her own mother applied the strategy of silence most strictly:

*"I suspect that even my mother's second husband didn't know anything about my grandfather. Mother preferred that nobody should have access to that dangerous information(...) In all official documents we mentioned only one word about grandfather: 'deceased'. Mother was afraid that some day the truth would come to light (...) She became very upset and angry whenever I asked any questions...." (Irina, 1991: 8)*

Because her mother was very active in enforcing the strategy of silence ("nobody would have access"), the daughter accepted that message and identified with it: *"In all official documents we mentioned ..."*.

That was the message formulated early in childhood. Irina followed this "message of silence" throughout most of her life. But a year ago, she at last received complete information from her aunt. That brought on a severe conflict and changed her life. Irina is trying to rethink her past and present in light of the new information. Now she bitterly reproaches her relatives for being silent about the past. What is more, she blames herself for her passive attitude towards the tragic destiny of family members. She is trying to resolve her life project and change her attitudes.

*"It is awful that I realized all this very late. And the most awful thing is that I didn't even feel a need to know anything: who my grandfather was, where he is ... what my father's name was ... Even when I learned about my grandfather from my aunt after his rehabilitation, I thought that maybe he really was guilty... that there must be some reason, why he ... People say about us that we are a nation without memory ... maybe they are right ... Maybe that's true ...." (Irina, 1991: 16)*

Irina's first feeling is that it is very late for her to recover the lost memory. The new message about suffering cannot replace the message of silence received early in childhood. She feels she cannot change herself and be different now, as an adult. Out of this conflict of messages comes her reflection and distress about herself, which is full of unanswered questions and anguish because of this late knowledge. In search of answers, she again turns to her childhood experience:

*"Maybe in childhood the wrong genes were passed on to me—to be always indifferent and never get involved with state politics." (Irina, 1991: 16)*

Thus, Irina is not only rethinking the family past but also re-constructing her own strategy. New knowledge and reflection have formed Irina's present interest in politics, and she would like to become a political activist. But the young woman disclosed that in reality she could not change so late in life, and be open in her political attitudes. Sometimes Irina even envies "those people

who could openly demonstrate their political attitudes". This case is one in which an episode of suffering followed by the "message of silence" in childhood formed the psychology of a victim who is both passive and indifferent.

Comparing this case with the "open" message type, we can describe some features of the selection process in more depth. Let us begin with the moment the message is received. In Irina's case, the meaning of the message received during early childhood becomes more evident. It has an influence on her entire life. Another message received later, even if it contradicts the earlier one, cannot efface the first, nor change the descendant's present biographical project.

From this case we derive the hypothesis that the strength of the early childhood message depends on the level of its transmission—which is not only emotional, but practically "genetic", as in Irina's speculation about the genes passed on to her in childhood. As we have seen, her reflection about a message or hesitation about whether or not it was an accurate message, which emerge from a rational level of knowledge and adult experience, could not destroy the early message and the mechanism of using it in everyday routine.

The final dimension that is of interest here is the moment of transmitting a pattern of suffering. The mother's project of silence about the family's sufferings was oriented toward reality in her desire to avoid more suffering for loved ones—her second husband and Irina. She decided to suffer alone and to maintain silence in public. But as it happened, her strategy later brought new suffering to her daughter's life. Irina reflects a great deal and now suffers mainly because of her mother's silence rather than because of the sufferings of her father and grandfather. Thus the problem and the conflict that went unopened in the intervening generation have reappeared as a conflict in the life of the younger generation. The past is embedded in Irina's life as an object connected to suffering in the present.

### Type 3: The "Coded" Message

Another case for comparison is the Kantor family. A young family member, Sofia, is thirty-two years old, a doctor from Moscow. When she was making her professional and educational choices, she turned to her grandfather for advice. Sofia's professional choice then was a result of her grandfather's counsel:

*"Then my grandfather told me that I should forget about such exotic specialties [she had been contemplating studying art] and choose between two professions: doctor or lawyer. He said that only these two occupations can help a person to survive in any social system and in case of any event ... He had realized this in his own life. At night I put two slips of paper under the pillow: on one was written 'doctor' and on the other 'lawyer'. In the*

*morning I picked up one. It was 'doctor', and so the problem of choosing was solved."* (Sofia, 1991: 31)

That choice of a profession came as the result of consultation with her grandfather, but only by chance—a random drawing between the two professions he recommended. In her story Sofia only mentions the argument of her grandfather in general terms, and never recalls his persecution. The context of her grandfather's advice became evident only in the story he told us. He had been exiled in the late twenties and early thirties as the son of a wealthy merchant.

*"I was accused of receiving a bribe and was sentenced to five years. But I was lucky, because I was a medical student and even in prison I had more freedom than others. I worked as a medical assistant... And later in a camp I was again taken to a medical office. Only for three weeks out of those 5 years was I put to heavy manual labor... I even had an opportunity to live with my wife for a month. I had such freedom to move then because of my position in the hospital."* (Isa Kantor, 1991: 28)

Sofia's grandfather narrated this episode very simply, as a set of emotionally neutral facts, without any details about suffering. Moreover, he emphasized the positive aspects of his privileged position in the camp. His narration seems to reveal that he decided not to dwell on the negative aspects of that episode. It is highly unlikely that the experience of five years in a camp did not involve any suffering, but none is mentioned. It seems as if the grandfather does not want to share his bad experience with anybody. So the message of *suffering* was not transmitted to the descendants.

But the grandfather is open in speaking about the outcome of his experience. Medicine is a profession that helps to overcome difficulties at any time:

*"Out of my experience I came to an important conclusion. What are the most useful professions at any time? Doctors and lawyers. In order to be a lawyer you should be a talented speaker. So I always recommend becoming a doctor..."* (Isa Kantor, 1991: 31)

He divided his experience into two distinct parts: an emotional component for himself and a message for others. Sofia was one of those to whom he transmitted this message, but he did not share the significance of his message. What she received was only a "coded" message, without its meaning of suffering, and she did not include it in the framework of her experience. For her, the choice of a profession was simple—"I put two slips of paper under the pillow"—following a rather ordinary piece of advice from her grandfather.

At first sight Sofia's life strategy, becoming a doctor on her grandfather's suggestion, includes past family experience. But Sofia herself has never seen her decision in the context of the family past and its meaning—the *meaning of suffering*. It wasn't told as "the story of suffering" but only as "a piece of friendly advice". As a result, grandfather's advice was included in the framework of Sofia's own life project, but not in the framework of her family memory. The connection between the past and the present has been broken here on an emotional level.

The absence of “suffering” in this case provides an opportunity to understand the role of emotional component in constructing family memory. It seems that family memory is constructed mainly as *emotional* transmission. The meaning of *suffering*, reflected on by the individual, develops into a practical basis for reasoning and “because-of” motivation for the future (“I do this *because of* previous family suffering”).

#### Type 4: The “Forgotten” Message

Out of the set of eight cases with an episode of suffering in the family, there were two more family histories. In these the episode was recounted in the story of an elder family member as an element of individual memory, but was never referred to by a younger person. Grandparents did not mention any active attempts or will to preserve or pass on that memory.

In talking about their grandparents, the younger members of the family did not mention the episode of suffering or any message that might have come out of it. When asked about it, young family members in both cases showed little interest; they did not even know how or where the episode in question had come about. This means that during the process of recollection and decision-making, there was no interest in “borrowing” from family memory or learning from the past.

We can conclude that there are episodes of suffering which remain in the individual memories of elder members as some kind of difficult experience, but which are not included in family memory (no attempt was made to pass them on), and which are not received, selected, or used by the younger generation. It seems that there was no *interest* in the episode of previous suffering on either side. Moreover, if the episode of suffering was not included in family memory, then was there any family memory at all? What does family memory mean without an *emotional* attitude towards the experience of previous generations?

In such cases of “forgotten messages”, the strategies of the younger generation do not include the past as experience to draw on for the future. A feeling for the past as a cultural resource for the future is missing from their life-world construction.

It is interesting to distinguish between the “message of silence”, as in the case of Irina Volkova, and the “forgotten” message in these two families. In Irina’s case, “silence” meant an aggressive, actively directed strategy on the part of the mother who was determined to keep her secret. It was an active strategy with a known aim and deliberate means to achieve it. As a result, it appeared to have had a pronounced influence on Irina. But in both these cases of “forgetting”, neither the older nor the younger generation mentioned in

their stories any attempt to construct family continuity. Both cases show passive or indifferent attitudes toward the past and toward family memory. In the context of our aim to understand the mechanism of selection from family memory, the contrast brings additional evidence that family memory is a form of “the past” that has to be *actively* constructed by both sides of intergenerational relationships.

## Conclusions

The first outcome of the research is a conclusion about the sense of the past. In the course of our research we have traced different types of individual time perspectives as a basis for life strategies, from the traditional orientation “back to the roots” to the strategy of “forgetting about the past”. But the whole process of recollection and making use of the past should be seen in the framework of broader individual construction—the variety of ways in which the individual can consider something “past”. The mode of addressing the distant past to search for a reasoned argument depends on one’s life-world orientation: on the attitude towards the family itself; on the perception of the family as continuous over several generations; on the orientation towards “knowledge from the past”. In other words, the process of recollecting depends on the individual’s concept of time in a life-world perspective. The issues are: from what moment in the past (ancestors’ lives) to what moment in the future (descendants’ lives) the person builds his or her identity in terms of “what I was”, “what I am”, “what I will be”. These arguments could serve as a preliminary explanation of differences between individuals in remembering and using the episodes of suffering in previous generations. We would claim that such time perspective constructions should be analyzed in connection with the life-worlds of the individuals. This goes beyond the present paper’s narrower aim, however, which was to compare cases in order to understand the mechanism of selection from the past.

Another important aspect of the time perspective is the long-term perspective of the individual’s biographical project. In several cases it emerged that, in order to understand the individual life project, it is not enough to trace the person’s own past, including only the parents’ family. The investigation should go into the individual’s *prehistory* in depth, at least to the extent of three generations of family history. Anna’s and Stephan’s biographical constructions for example are shaped by episodes which happened thirty or forty years before they were born, and which came to bear upon their own life projects. The present biographical project of Irina Volkova could be interpreted as a story of unsolved or hidden conflicts in two preceding generations. Thus the frame of an individual’s life and the frame of the parents’ history do

not afford an adequate time perspective for understanding the individual's life project.

But one must also bear in mind that in our research, "the present" refers to a situation of drastic social change, causing a kind of turning point in individuals' projects. It is probable that the long-term family past was invoked in an attempt to solve some puzzle that arose in a situation of crisis or shock. It may be that in their routine everyday life strategies people do not operate on the basis of such a distant past in order to solve more "situational" problems. Probably not. But it would seem nonetheless that on a hidden, unconscious level this memory does exist in the individual's mind and can be awakened at some crucial moment.

From the comparison of the four types of family memory described above, there emerges a deeper understanding of the mechanism of recollection. Based on our research we suggest first of all that family memory is mainly *practical* memory. In content, it is memory of patterns of behavior in the past transmitted for the purpose of influencing future behavior. ("Here is what to do in such and such a case.") Previous experience and models of behavior are passed on to offspring in order to help them cope with future reality. If the offspring use this experience as a central motivation for future behavior, the transmission may be called successful. In this case, in the process of selection from the past, the offspring could even reconstruct the memory in the pragmatic form of a command or recommendation coming from previous generations, as we saw in the first type. In the terms of Adam's distinction (1994), we have evidence of the difference between a "recalled past" and a "message-bearing past". We *consult* the recalled past and *use* the message-bearing past for the purpose of action.

Thus, mapping the place of family memory on this landscape of "the past" as a whole, we can formulate some propositions about the nature of family memory. The *content* of family memory is more likely to be of practical use than "the past" that belongs to universal knowledge, since the former traces the special local experience of previous generations for use by succeeding generations. According to the *mechanism of recollection*, family memory is more spontaneous and emotional than recollections governed by consciousness and awareness, for family memory is passed on in face-to-face, personalized communication among several generations.

In its form of "recorded past", family memory is mainly *emotional* memory. It is constructed on the level of personal relationships between message-bearing survivors and their offspring during their emotional face-to-face interaction in childhood. Its strength and influence depends on personal empathy towards the forebears. In our examples we explored the attitudes of identifying with suffering, but we might also explore attitudes that express respect, pride, empathy, or perhaps even hate. A message without emotion becomes only advice for a single moment and loses its cultural meaning as a piece of

family memory. That is why for Sofia Kantor the choice of a profession could be simplified to a procedure of drawing lots. It also contains a message as a cognitive “lesson” or recommendation to follow some pattern of behavior. The message as the pragmatic outcome of experience serves mainly as a motivation for the descendants’ strategies. The case of Anna shows that a message could be the cognitive motivation to organize an entire life project in its various dimensions—consumer behavior, marital plans, family planning, and so on.

In the process of recalling the past, people turn first to the most empathic moments of previous suffering. This may be the reason why, in situations of drastic social change or even “culture shock”, as in Russia today, this level of memory is addressed and selected for life strategy as the most basic, “genetic” level of reasoning. Naturally there is also a contrasting dimension of selection: the priorities and values that prevail in the present. But in relating to them people search their “genetic” memory for situations and models that coincide with the present moment or provide an orientation toward the future. Those messages presented in our narratives seem strongly related to the respondent’s own strategy. Perhaps the message presented is only one of a whole set of messages deriving from the past. But offspring select and recall exactly those messages, which serve as a support in their choice for the future. The search for such a message thus becomes a search for lessons from the family past.

The process of transmitting family memory is most successful if it takes place at the moment of personal communication with the elder family members—i.e. in early childhood. As was demonstrated by the case of Irina, the message received later could not eradicate that received early in childhood. Why is the message received in early childhood so meaningful for the future? Our cases, and especially Irina’s experience of later reflection about the first message, provide evidence to suggest that family memory is transmitted not only on the emotional, but also on the “genetic” level. By this is meant that this aspect of memory is not accessible to processes of reflection. The lessons are similar to those derived from fairy tales learned early in childhood, which carry a moral lesson and lie quietly in memory for a long time, but may be awakened suddenly and spontaneously at some moment when the need arises. This would explain why, five minutes after talking repeatedly about her grandmother, Anna could not rationally name concrete instances of her grandmother’s influence. The formulated message was selected at one moment of the interview in the context of argumentation, but could not be reconstructed in another context—that of a direct question by the interviewer.

This research also provides some insight into the problem of continuity and discontinuity in family life. The “forgotten” type of message is a good basis for understanding that family memory is not a passive process of transmitting messages from one generation to another. Comparing the “forgotten”

type with the others we have discerned, we can see that it is definitely a concrete strategy on the part of the older generation with a specific aim and a deliberate choice of means. Furthermore, the result depends for the most part on the older family members' subjective strategies (e.g. the strategies chosen by Kantor, Volkova, and Malackova) for forming different types of recollection about the past. Thus continuity and discontinuity are subjective constructions based on a personal interest in developing or nullifying the connections between generations.

It seems that these problems of memory and of recollecting previous suffering are not only important in the realm of social science, but may also be of historical significance in all the East European countries. We cannot overcome earlier sins and mistakes without confession. The last type noted, the "forgotten message", has its special importance for Russian context. There is great concern nowadays that the historical mistakes of the past may reappear one day, as has often happened in Russian history. One of the reasons named by scholars is that there is no confession about the past in the collective consciousness and so social disasters repeat themselves every two generations throughout Russian history. Without confession, the past could lead not to a better future, but only to new troubles and new suffering in subsequent generations.

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*Gabriele Rosenthal*

## Social Transformation in the Context of Familial Experience: Biographical Consequences of a Denied Past in the Soviet Union

### **Introduction: The Contribution of Biographical Research**

Looking at research on social change in Eastern Germany and Eastern Europe in the last decade, one finds a dearth of qualitative studies. Particularly lacking are theory of action studies and genetic analyses, i.e. empirical reconstructions of transformations and reproductions of individuals' history of action (exceptions include the biographical analyses by Miethé 1999; Delow 2000). By contrast, a substantial number of empirical socio-structural analyses on transformation in East Germany can be found, especially event history analysis (cf. Berger 1996). Peter A. Berger calls for an analysis of structures from the inside, i.e. from the perspective of the actors. Though this sounds familiar to us as interpretive researchers, analyses of "factual" events of individual life courses tell us little about the autobiographer's own perspective. Such studies based on socio-structural data and measures of institutional change may be able to generate hypotheses about cognitive, mental changes, as well as about changes in habits, but they are not really empirically grounded. In other words, in order to prove or ground such hypotheses empirically, we need interpretive analyses that are designed to capture and reconstruct the *self-interpretations* of society members as well as the *histories of their actions and of their families*. This is exactly the contribution of sociological biographical research in a family-sensitive form. Biographical research can meet the demand for a full understanding and explanation of transformation processes not only by reconstructing post-transformation biographies and societies, but also by retrospectively reconstructing the earlier biographies and societies. This is exactly where there are gaps in our knowledge about the social reality of Eastern Germany and of Eastern Europe in general. We cannot know how social reality was altered after the system changed if we do not know what it was like beforehand.

By studying the history of action in individual cases, contextualized in the histories of the family, the collective, and the society, we are able to reconstruct the individual's genesis and, furthermore, to distinguish manifest self-interpretations from latent structures of meaning. Biographical case reconstructions of this kind are not limited to recounting self-descriptions, which

may be far removed from the structures of action. In our empirical analyses, an especially significant gap is found between conscious or explicit reflection on an experience of social change and the history of concrete action. One minor but surprising discovery in our empirical analysis of three-generation families from the former German Democratic Republic (Rosenthal 1998; Rosenthal and Völter 1998) was that the collapse of the East German regime in 1989, the German unification, and the subsequent changes in everyday life were not always explicitly discussed in biographical narrative interviews.<sup>1</sup> We had asked our interviewees to tell their family stories and life stories without specifying a theme, so that the selection of themes and presentations of periods of their lives was completely left to their spontaneous choice. It was up to the biographer to determine which themes were addressed, in how much detail, how they were presented and in what order.<sup>2</sup> During the main narration that followed the initial question, and sometimes lasted many hours, the experience of transformation was often not explicitly mentioned. Later, in the questioning part of the interview, the interviewees' answers to explicit questions about social change corroborated the hypothesis that many changes in everyday life and in the biographical overall construction are not considered in the context of social change and unification. Rather, a tendency was observed to interpret these changes as personal achievements independent of general social changes. This does not mean that the biographers did not experience social change, only that they reinterpret them in another way. If we

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1 This study was supported by the German Research Association (*Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft*) from 1992 to 1996. In addition to East German families, we also interviewed families in West Germany and Israel. The specific focus of our study was on comparing different family constellations based on whether the first generation can be categorized as victims, perpetrators or Nazi followers during the Nazi period. We examined, primarily from a sociological perspective, how family histories that differ biographically after 1945—in Israel, in West Germany and in East Germany—affect the process of transmitting the family past from one generation to the next. We looked at the process of transmission of family history through three generations of Jewish and non-Jewish German and Israeli families.

2 We began each individual interview with the following request: "Please tell us your family story and your personal life story, we are interested in your whole life. Anything that occurs to you. Take as much time as you like to tell it. We won't ask you any questions for now. We will just make some notes on the things that we would like to ask you more about later, perhaps in a second interview if we don't have enough time today."

The interviewees generally responded with a long biographical narration (i.e. a biographical self-presentation) which often lasted for hours, uninterrupted by questions from the interviewer. Only in the second part of the interview do the interviewers ask about topics referred to in the main narration. In this "questioning part" the interviewer uses narrative questions to stimulate more detailed stories or narrations of themes and biographical events touched on in the main narration. In the third part of the interview, the interviewer asks questions about themes that the biographer has not addressed. On this interview technique see Rosenthal 1995: 186–201; Schütze 1976.

were to confine our analyses to the level of *self-interpretation*, we would not be able to recognize these differences and their meaning at all.

I shall come back to the difference in the levels of action and explicit self-definition in the second part of this paper, a case study of a three-generation family in the former Soviet Union, now living in Russia. In this study the enormous biographical and family-historical meanings of social changes were seen to be minimized in self-interpretation: this observation conforms to findings by Heidrun Schulze of Vienna. Schulze conducted biographical interviews with women in Moscow who stated that the change of system was not a real issue for them (Schulze 1999: 189). We would not concur with Schulze's interpretation, however, that this statement accurately reflects the experienced reality.

First, I shall address some theoretical biographical issues of experiencing social transformations, drawing on the results of our empirical study of three-generation families (Rosenthal 1998). In the second part of the paper I shall present the results of a case study of a family in the Soviet Union, and examine some of the similarities with our earlier empirical findings. In addition to the transformation processes in Russia, I am interested in discussing a simple sociological presupposition: namely, that the history of societies can have a considerable influence on our biographies over several generations and thus also on contemporary societies.

## **Reinterpretation of Past, Present, and Future**

Not only do people change, but the transformations of political and state systems also affect members of society, producing large-scale changes in social reality. The transformation of social systems does not occur outside of social action. Rather, it has a history of acting individuals; it is initiated and carried out by the social action of members of society. The actors in this process, from the point of view of their self-definition, are not fully aware of their changed structures of action. We can assume that there are latent transformations, i.e. subtle processes which are not experienced by the actors and do not constitute decisive changes in self-perception (cf. Rosenthal 1987: 25–53; Berger and Luckmann 1966).

The transformation of state systems generally implies radical changes in occupational chances and positions related to generations and milieus. Members of younger generations with no history of participation in the prior system and members of groups that were persecuted or marginalized gain chances for advancement. Individuals once in high political and social positions are threatened with social decline. What had been a promising biographical path may become a dead end, and vice versa. In general we may

assume for East Germany and Eastern Europe an increase in options (Prawda 1995: 331). Nevertheless, the options and choices and the increasing heterogeneity of life courses follow certain patterns that are related to the past.

All transformations, whether individual or collective, and the opening and closing of future horizons which they entail, are accompanied by reinterpretations of the past, new perspectives in the present, and changes in people's projects for the future (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal 1995). Social transformations call for re-orientations and redesigned biographies. This leads to reflection on the life as it was lived before, its elective or compulsory biographical threads. Transformations do not extinguish the collective and personal past, although many might wish they could. On the contrary, they *produce* the orientational past that has to be adjusted to fit the present. This is a thesis of the present discussion: transformation processes are concerned with and generate the past. Individuals who are undergoing transformation processes thus realize the extent to which the present is affected by the past. By the same token, sociological reconstruction may disclose how the past is constructed by the present. With the new present perspective on past biographical work, more general biographical structuring (cf. Fischer-Rosenthal in this volume and 2000) becomes necessary. Parts of the experiential past, which have not been remembered or talked about for a long time, now have to be dealt with. Social and personal situations of change produce the breakdown of elements of everyday life that had been taken for granted (Schütz 1971). If the new social realities permit or even require the opening of a social dialog, the processes of reinterpretation will be still more intense. In the German Democratic Republic as well as in the other socialist countries, parts of the collective past and hence individual pasts were taboo in both public and private discourse. They were denied, mythologized, and rewritten to a great extent in accordance with the official ideology, sometimes reinforced by elements of power and violence. Opening public discourses has a tremendous effect on private dialogs and vice versa. This takes place not in a silent inner dialog of the individual, but in a real dialog with others: between the generations, especially in the family. This inter-generational and intra-generational dialog raises new questions, parts of the past are negotiated, and new taboos are established. This process also involves the remote past—often before birth—and elements of the family history in particular. Our empirical studies on biographical and family courses over three generations in the former German Democratic Republic (Rosenthal 1998; Rosenthal and Völter 1998) clearly show how the time of World War II and National Socialism was reinterpreted under the socialist state. For people in the German Democratic Republic, the collapse of socialism brought with it the “burden of a double past” (cf. Habermas 1994), i.e. the necessity of coming to terms both with the SED state and with National Socialism. If the lived family history and the history of individual action before 1989—e.g. antifascist practice in the GDR as com-

pensation for a Nazi family past—is now called into question, then the family's past under National Socialism, once put to rest, also becomes an issue. Another example became evident in the biographies of Jewish communists and their families. After 1989, their Jewish background, family history, and lifestyle, things that had been left behind in their grandparents' generation, could be discussed again. Rediscovering these formerly denied parts of the family past can make this past a central element of actual practice and self-definition (cf. Völter in this volume). Reconsidering the past does not, however, necessarily imply critical reflection on the history lived up to now. The process of looking back into the past may raise more difficulties than an individual is equipped to deal with, and this in turn may lead to new blocks against or excuses for certain sections of the individual's past.

When the past is rediscovered, certain issues, which were at work unconsciously before, may become conscious. Our empirical analyses demonstrate the extent to which the biographies of the descendants were affected by pasts which had been denied, and which may continue to be kept apart and not worked through. In Germany, the National Socialist past, with all the atrocities committed by Germans, has had a considerable influence on descendants. More than fifty years after the war we might suppose that the long-term psychological effects of that era would slowly begin to disappear. The contrary is true: the impact of a burdening and threatening past makes itself increasingly felt, and grandchildren suffer even more overtly under their grandparents' past than their parents did.

Our empirical comparison of families from West Germany, East Germany, and Israel clearly demonstrates that the structural differences inherent in the family dialog with regard to National Socialism owe little to differing socialization processes after 1945, but are very largely due to pre-1945 differences. That is, the more remote past has a far greater impact on the biographer's deep structure than the family history after 1945, whether in Israel, West Germany, or socialist East Germany. This implies that salient events in the family history which burden the family system and individual family members—even those which occurred before an individual's birth—can have a stronger impact on the current family dynamics and the biographies of individual descendants than the fact of being socialized in different social systems. Although we must restrict these findings to family histories that had traumatizing effects on the descendants, it seems safe to say that—in view of the course history has taken in our century—the same might be true of the majority of families both in Germany and in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, or in Europe in general. Whereas in Germany we are dealing with traumatic events of the two World Wars, in Eastern Europe we also have traumatic experiences in the context of Stalinist repression to deal with.

In our studies we have observed the enormous effects of family secrets, both in families of Nazi perpetrators and in families of survivors of the Shoah

(Karpel 1980).<sup>3</sup> In general, the more closed or guarded the family dialog, or the greater the secrecy about, or falsification of the past, the greater the impact of the family past will be on the second or third generation (Bar-On 1995; Danieli 1993; Sigal et. al. 1973). Children and grandchildren often unconsciously suffer from extremely detailed fantasies related to the undisclosed family history or family secrets. Our analyses clearly show a striking correspondence between the form and content of these fantasies and the specific experiences of the grandparents' generation. Subsequent generations suspect hidden parts of the past, and they act out the family past in their biographies. The impact of family secrets is especially evident in biographical choices, such as the choice of an occupation or profession, the choice of a spouse, the choice of a region or country of residence, etc.

I assume that Eastern European families are similar to German families in tending to keep silent about the painful experiences which historical events imposed on them: experiences of violence, crimes, and atrocities witnessed during the revolution, collectivization, and Stalinist repression in general; and certainly about any participation in these crimes. Consequently, I would also expect to find evidence of the impact of family secrets in the generation of the grandchildren.

Family secrets produce a *bound family system* (Stierlin 1981). They are a bond which often considerably impedes the process of separation and individuation in the children and grandchildren. A coalition of family members blocking a discussion of a family past that weighs heavily on all of them can be a decisive factor in the formation and maintenance of a closed or bound family system. Thus, the more complete the silence about the past, the more closed the family system. The bound family closes itself off from the outside world, while at the same time almost no boundaries are permitted between individual family members. Such families avoid conflict, cultivate a harmonizing style of communication and make large parts of the family history taboo (Wirsching and Stierlin 1982: 123ff).

Our empirical findings on the interdependence between family secrets and a bound family system, the enormous effect of the past on the biographies of the descendants, and on the family dynamics, correspond to a large extent with the results of the following case study of a family from the former Soviet Union. This case study offers a clear insight into the consequences of denial and family secrets imposed by the state and society. These constraints affect the family dynamics, the individual biographies, and the family members' experience of social change. Furthermore, this case study illustrates the extent

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3 This is in accordance with recent international research on trauma in different forms: "Conspiracy of silence is the most prevalent and effective mechanism for the transmission of trauma in all dimensions" (Danieli 1998: 678).

to which the collapse of socialist society changed these individual life stories as well as the family story produced interactively.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Pikowski Family:<sup>5</sup> Banishment and Secrets**

This family from the former Soviet Union stands for many families that have banned parts of their past. Past events were taboo both outside and inside the family. Perestroika made such topics permissible in the family dialog, while opening new possibilities in professional and everyday life, especially for the granddaughter.

The interviews originated as follows. I met the granddaughter of this family—I shall call her Galina—at a three-week seminar on methods that I taught in Russia in 1992. At that time Galina was a lecturer in history. She conducted oral history interviews in a group which had been suppressed and persecuted in the former Soviet Union, and about which no official records and sources were available. In other words, Galina's professional activities were greatly affected by the options opened up by perestroika. In addition, Galina's circle of friends mainly consisted of history students from the United States and West Germany. She tried hard to speak good English. When I entered her apartment I found little notes with English vocabulary stuck everywhere. She confided that she would like to marry a man from the United States. In general she seemed to be keen on relationships in which Russian was not spoken. As we shall also see, languages play an important role in her family history.

The everyday life of the 24-year-old woman and her future horizons were determined by the new post-Soviet options of which she had eagerly taken advantage. Galina herself is unaware of the extent to which many of her biographical choices—her studies, her friendships, and her 1994 marriage to an

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4 By "life story" we mean narrated personal life as related to another in conversation or as written down in the present. "Life history" refers to the experiences that a person has lived through. "Family story" means the shared construction of one family's history in the family dialog.

5 All names and several biographical data have been changed to protect the respondents' identities. The following discussion of this case study is result-oriented, i.e. the process of interpretation cannot be reconstructed here. The method used here to analyze narrated family and life stories is one of hermeneutical case reconstruction developed by the author over many years in combination with various other methods. On the procedure see Rosenthal 1993, 1995; Rosenthal and Bar-On 1992. Essential principles of this method are reconstruction and sequentiality. The texts are not subsumed under specific categories; rather, their meaning is analyzed in the context of the entire text (i.e. interview). The sequential compilation of the text of the life story as well as the chronology of the biographical experiences in the life history are essential.

American Jew—were influenced by elements of her family history reaching far back before her birth. This influence was only brought to light for me as a sociological observer by the analysis of her biographical interview.

### *Some Remarks on the Surface Knowledge of the Family History*

In the context of the seminar, in which I used role-play to teach interview techniques, Galina talked about her family history—especially about her paternal grandmother Olga. Like her first husband, Olga was a teacher of Ukrainian language and literature before and during the German occupation. The couple's political orientation was Ukrainian nationalist. In 1943, after the Red Army re-conquered the Ukraine, Olga was imprisoned by the Soviets for alleged collaboration with the Nazis and was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment and subsequent banishment.

Galina found it hard to talk about this. She was repeatedly overwhelmed by her sadness. It was clear that she still suffered from her family history, that it weighed heavily on her, and that she had strong guilt feelings. The real weight of this family past, however, was due to the fact that it had been a family secret for a very long time. Galina torments herself with guilt feelings because—as she puts it—she feels a kind of psychological barrier between her and her grandmother. Until Galina was 13 years old, she had no conscious idea of her grandmother's history of imprisonment. At this age she accidentally discovered a hidden document from which she learned that her grandmother had been sentenced to prison in 1943 and legally rehabilitated as late as 1956. Only in recent years has Galina gained some more knowledge about this period of her family history.

Galina's grandmother, who was convicted under Article 58<sup>6</sup>, was one of many who were rehabilitated during the period of political moderation following Khrushchev's "secret speech" at the Twentieth Party Congress (February 25, 1956). This not only casts doubt on the exact reasons and circumstances of the judgment, but also raises the question of whether the grandmother may have been convicted unjustly. As we will see below, the granddaughter's main problem is a different one: she blames the grandmother for not having been able to talk with her about the conviction, and thus with having created a psychological barrier.

I offered to conduct a biographical narrative interview with Galina. She was very interested because she felt so burdened. We had two long conversations of about 6 hours in all. Our interview roused a strong desire in Galina to interview both her grandmother and her parents, and about half a year later she conducted biographical interviews with each of them. The three inter-

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6 Article 58 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Soviet Socialist Federation deals with high treason. This paragraph was used rather arbitrarily in the Soviet Union.

views were conducted in Russian and translated into German. They provide insight into the structure of interaction between Galina and her parents and between Galina and her grandmother. In the interviews with her parents, Galina seems to be much more at ease than with her grandmother. I shall return to this later.

*Granddaughter Galina: "It is a big problem for me that I can't ask"*

At the end of my second interview with Galina, I commented: "You haven't told me anything about how you experienced the political changes." She answered:

*"I can say it is not important to me. At first, of course, it was extremely important. Especially for me as a historian, as I began to see an absolutely different history. Because in my family for example all these stories were something outside of the history I learned in school. I knew the history that was in my textbooks, and the fate of my grandma was an exception, and something is—(three-second pause) When I entered the university and began to study in 1986, it was when our society began—it was very important really, it was interesting to go to the lectures and to see the movies, it was very important at that time. Now I absolutely consciously try to separate my life from the life of the state and from the general situation in the country, because it is too hard. I can't solve my own problems, and to think about problems of this country is too much. ... I want to pay more attention to art, cinema, and books, but not to give my energy, my thoughts, my feelings to all the problems of this country." (Galina, 1992: 68)*

Besides Galina's assessment of the social change as unimportant to her, we find two interesting clues here. First, she alludes to the crucial role of the collective discourse in silencing a certain historical past connected with her grandmother. In the context of the complete interview, the sociological reconstruction shows this to be the unifying theme of her biographical self-presentation. Despite all efforts to separate herself emotionally from her grandmother, Galina remains identified with her and her persecuted past. The text segment also illustrates Galina's self-image as that of a person having no inclination to act politically or socially. If we were to subsume this under the general observations about the "de-politicized generation" (cf. Kon 1991: 32) to which she belongs, we might overlook the degree of political engagement Galina shows in her work. Furthermore, such an explanation would not reveal the biographical meaning of Galina's statement. The portrayal of her process of disengagement, starting with a great personal interest in the history of the state and ending with the need "to separate my life from the life of the state", is in accordance with the course of events from the collective feeling of re-awakening in 1985–1988 to the depression following 1989, with the severe economic and political difficulties that ensued. Furthermore, the case reconstruction highlights Galina's need to lead her own life more freely and lightly as the dominant topic of her self-presentation. The two competing themes,

“my grandmother’s past” and “my own life”, make it difficult for her to narrate her own life story and constitute the thematic field? “My own life is burdened and handicapped by my grandmother’s past”. This latent biographical overall interpretation is manifest in the structure of the text. Galina needs the interviewer’s help several times in order to switch from talking about the family past to relating her own biography. Galina’s present time and future projections are determined by her need to separate herself from this burdening family past and from the corresponding family dynamics. The need for separation is so strong because she still feels tied to the family and its past.

Let us now consider Galina’s life history and life story and the process of discovering the family secret.

Galina was born in 1968 in a small village near Krasnoyarsk, Siberia. The population of this formerly closed village was mainly German and Lithuanian: banished people and their descendants. Galina talks about this community very positively. She lived together with her great-grandmother Vera—Olga’s mother—and Olga herself, Galina’s paternal grandmother. Galina’s parents lived and worked in Krasnoyarsk. Galina’s first language was Ukrainian.

Galina’s grandfather, Olga’s husband, was lost and presumed dead in the Second World War. In the 1950s Olga remarried, but later divorced her second husband. He kept visiting her from time to time, trying to convince Olga to live with him again, to no avail. Galina remembers his visits, and as a child she used to be afraid of this man, whom she remembers as violent and aggressive.

In 1973, when Galina was five years old, her grandmother and great-grandmother decided to move with her to a region close to the Ukrainian border. (They were officially prohibited from returning to the Ukraine.) A family member explained to Galina that they had moved from Siberia for the sake of Galina’s health. It was then that Galina learned that her father’s family originally came from a Ukrainian village not far from the place that they had moved to. Very quickly she realized how unhappy her grandmother was to live in this region where the majority of people were Cossacks. Her parents followed one year later, and from this time on they lived together in one household. Now the parents spoke Russian with their daughter.

Until she was six years old, Galina was very close to her great-grandmother Vera (who died when Galina was aged 16) and also to a some-

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7 As the analysis proceeds, the thematic links between the individual sequences of the main narration become clear. We speak of “thematic fields” after Aron Gurwitsch (1964). The underlying assumption is that the narrated life story does not consist of a haphazard series of disconnected events, but that the biographer’s autonomous selection of stories is based on a context of meaning, i.e. the biographer’s overall interpretation. The narrated life story thus represents a sequence of mutually interrelated themes, which between them form a tight network of interconnected cross-references (Fischer 1982: 168). In Aron Gurwitsch’s terminology, the individual themes are elements of a thematic field.

what lesser degree to her grandmother Olga. When her parents moved in, the girl experienced growing conflicts of loyalty, especially because her mother and grandmother did not get along well. Galina experienced her mother as the weaker of the two and began to take her side. Today she says that at that time she developed a growing psychological barrier between herself and her grandmother.

The story of Galina's childhood and youth is the story of a child of poor health, or else one of a child of overprotective parents. In her interview, the theme of poor health is strikingly linked with that of guilt. In Galina's childhood, her grandmother Olga always felt guilty that her granddaughter was never quite well. Galina herself felt guilty for making her parents worry about her health. Her poor health, Galina thinks, was one of the reasons why her parents had no more children after her.

The hermeneutical case reconstruction has shown very clearly that the theme of "illness" here is used to work through the theme of "guilt" in the family dialog. From Galina's perspective, her illnesses always put her in the position of an outsider at school. She was kept in kindergarten only for a short time: her grandmother took her out after she had fallen ill again. At school she was exempted from sports. Only in her family circle did she feel safe and comfortable. She had no friends outside of her family: "My parents were my friends." This did not change until Galina moved out of her parents' house to attend university—and this move, she remarks, "was a tragedy for my parents" (Galina, 1992: 7).

All the interviews show that this family is a very bound or enmeshed one. Again, families of this type have clear and strong boundaries towards the outer world, while boundaries between family members are blurred. The relationships inside the family "tend to be undifferentiated, closed and diffuse. (...) A heightened sense of belonging is gained by sacrificing or discouraging autonomy" (Sauber et. al. 1993: 127). As we shall see, one cause of this bounded family system is the socially imposed taboo or secrecy.

In 1981, when Galina at the age of thirteen accidentally discovered the family's well-hidden secret, she was already allied with her mother. In an English-Russian dictionary, which she wanted to use in learning English, she found the document concerning the rehabilitation of her grandmother, which merely stated that Olga had been convicted under some "Article 58". Galina read it and stared at the number of this article:

*"I was very surprised and I couldn't understand. Why? How? My grandma? I know her and she was convicted of ... what crime? It was so strange because there was only the number of the article. And with this sheet of paper I ran to my father."* (Galina, 1992: 19)

Before Galina told me about her father's reaction, I asked her—using the scenic memory technique<sup>8</sup>—to go back in her mind to this concrete situation. She recalled the fantasies she had had when she first read the rehabilitation card. “When I read this number I connected her guilt with her second husband” (Galina, 1992: 21). Her fantasy was that her grandmother had killed her second husband—even though Galina knew that he was still alive. Recalling this man whom she had feared, she said, “It is one of the most—er (four-second pause)—frightening recollections from earliest childhood; he is coming and his voice and his presence in our home” (Galina, 1992: 22).

How may we interpret these fantasies? First of all, we may suppose that as a child Galina sometimes wished that her grandmother had been better able to defend herself against this man. This might be the reason why Galina still connects guilt feelings with her grandmother's past. Second, the analysis of the interviews with her grandmother and her father suggests other possible interpretations of Galina's fantasies. Olga's second marriage forms part of the secrets kept in this family. The grandmother argues on the overt level that she married the man to change her name, thus veiling her past and especially the fact of her conviction. But the details of how she first met him are contradictory, and they hint that she may have had certain privileges, which she denies, during her time in the labor camp. Moreover, Olga talks—in a very fragmentary way and in confused chronology—of various murders during her time in the labor camp and in banishment, and perhaps also during the time of German occupation. In short, it is likely that Galina's fantasy is in some way related to the hidden parts of the family history and thus to experiences of violence.

Now let us return to her discovery of the document. Galina runs to her father, who tears the document out of her hand. Galina asks what it means and her father says: “It is about Grandma, it shouldn't be talked about.” She grabs his arm and tries to take the document back from him, and he hisses at her: “It's none of your business; don't ask.” Galina is startled at the violence of his reaction:

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8 When our interviewees have trouble remembering certain events, we work with the technique of “scenic memory” to help them go back to past situations. Working from fragments of sensory or physical memories, we help them to reconstruct these scenes gradually by asking questions about specific details. If the interviewee wants help remembering, we ask them to put themselves back into the past situation and then begin to reconstruct the scene, formulating our questions in the historical present. We move forward from one detail to the next: What do you see? Who are you standing next to? What do you hear? Is it dark? Is it cold? and so on. This technique allows biographers to extricate the scene that has been blocked out of memory. As individual details are named, it may begin to take shape. Eventually our detailed questions are needed less and less, and the biographers can gradually remember a sequence of events and begin to translate them into a story. Fantasies and dreams are reconstructed in a similar way.

*"I was so surprised because I had a very close relationship with my parents, and I discovered that there is something he wants to hide, and I asked my Ma and she was just as surprised as I, she said that she didn't know."* (Galina, 1992: 24)

The result of Galina's discovery is that she starts tormenting herself with questions, and that the psychological distance from her grandmother grows because Galina does not dare to confront her with her questions. And this has remained so until today. As Galina says: "The story of my Grandma is not clear to me. I know only the plot ... and it is a big problem for me that I can't ask."

In fact, it is in part Galina herself who resists learning more about her grandmother's past. Although she is a trained historian, she has never tried to find out exactly what Article 58 was about, because it is still too threatening for her. As her interview with her grandmother shows, questions in connection with Olga's past during the German occupation are simply too dangerous for Galina to ask. She prefers to concentrate on the male violence that Olga suffered. She relentlessly and fiercely tries to pressure Olga into telling her painful memories in detail, especially of situations in which her grandmother suffered violence by men or where Galina suspects this happened. Her questioning becomes especially probing and pressing when her grandmother talks about the violent fights her parents had. When Olga's father came home drunk, he used to turn very violent against his wife, while treating his daughter with special tenderness—this is Olga's report. Galina's questioning makes plain that she suspects an experience of sexual violence here. Actually, in the grandmother's stories about the time she spent as a teenager in the household of her much older brother and his wife, we find some clear hints at a violent experience, but Olga repeatedly states that she does not want to recall it and does not wish to speak about it.

In contrast to the insistent way in which Galina asks about these subjects, her questions about the period of the German occupation are remarkably sparse. While Galina's questioning of Olga seems on the whole rather aggressive, she still avoids putting the questions which actually threaten her most, namely questions regarding her grandmother's conviction and imprisonment. We may ask whether the themes of male (sexual) violence and (alleged) collaboration with the Nazis are connected, and if so, how?

Only in the late 1980s after the transition of the Soviet Union, years after her discovery of the document, Galina learned from an aunt some more details about the painful parts of her grandmother's history. When Olga was arrested in 1943, she was the mother of a five-year-old boy, Galina's father. Her husband was missing in action. The story, as Galina's aunt told it, went like this: It was summer and Olga was arrested wearing summer shoes, which was why she had such bad chilblains on her legs. It was also mentioned that Olga used to be a beautiful woman. Galina's fantasies about her grand-

mother's collaboration grew around the remark that her grandmother was such a beauty:

*"I always try to imagine myself in her place, where she knows she is a very attractive woman and she has only one small child and she knows that her husband has disappeared and—eh—what should she do in such a situation, and what did she feel? What was my father's role as a boy? Should she be a woman first or a mother?" (Galina, 1992: 37)*

Galina's fantasy is that of sexual collaboration—as we might call it—i.e. that her grandmother had been involved with German men. This also explains why Galina so pressingly questions her grandmother about her violent (sexual) experiences with men, and moreover, it explains her fantasy that Olga could have killed her second husband. As Galina comments later:

*"It was the same situation in prison: because of her helplessness she could be oppressed, even by her second husband; he took advantage of her helplessness and made her marry him." (Galina, 1992: 38)*

### *Daughter-in-Law Zhenia: "Nobody told me"*

Let us now change the focus to Galina's mother, Zhenia, Olga's daughter-in-law. When Galina asks her mother in an interview, "When did you find out that grandmother had been in prison?" Zhenia answers in some detail: it was at the time when Galina discovered that document.

*"I was shocked that I had lived so many years with them and didn't know, and nobody even told me the reason—whether it was mistrust or too great a tragedy." (Zhenia, 1993: 12)*

Zhenia tells her daughter how she asked her husband why he had not told the truth. Her husband insisted that he himself had found it out only recently. Zhenia clearly felt that her husband was lying to her, yet it was more than ten years before she dared to ask again, around the year 1992, after the breakdown of the Soviet system. Her husband then admitted to her that in his family there had been a decision not to tell anyone anything.

Zhenia remembers that when she first met her husband she told him everything about her own family. She disclosed, for example, that her father was an alcoholic, that he was violent, and so on. Her husband had nonetheless refused to tell her anything about his family:

*"I told him at once everything about my family, about everything. But I heard nothing from him. And that seemed very strange to me. But I didn't dare to ask him any questions. And so (three-second pause) I felt as if something was missing. I knew that he loved his mother and (four-second pause) there was something, but I didn't know what exactly." (Zhenia, 1993: 10)*

Zhenia had felt very unhappy because of his silence, and from the beginning of their relationship she had sensed a kind of boundary between them. When she talks about her husband in the interview, Zhenia cries desperately—especially on giving the date of her marriage in 1965, and she says:

*“Well, for four years we had been seeing each other, well. He was not very sociable. And I hesitated for a long time, whether to marry him or not.” (Zhenia, 1993: 3)*

Some years after the marriage the couple went to live with his mother and grandmother. Zhenia never felt close to her mother-in-law; and she lived in a house where all the other adults shared this family secret. This is what is called an “internal family secret” which “creates subgroups within the family” (Karpel 1980: 298). This constellation strengthens alliances among those within the family who are party to the secret and among those who are unaware. It also builds estrangement between the two groups. The alliance of the “unaware” in this family consisted of Zhenia and her daughter Galina. The rest of the family was in the know, including Vassily, Galina’s father, who promised Olga and Vera that he would keep the secret. “Disclosing the secret would be experienced as an act of betrayal and would arouse guilt over disloyalty” (ibid.).

### *Son Vassily: “Don’t tell anyone about mother”*

What is the perspective of Vassily, Zhenia’s husband? Vassily’s life history is intricately entangled with Olga’s imprisonment. Furthermore, his silence about his family’s past makes him unable to talk about his own life history, about his losses and his pain. Vassily was born in the Ukraine in 1938. Both his father and his mother were teachers of languages and literature. In 1941 his father was inducted into the Red Army. In 1948, three years after the end of the war, the family was officially informed that he was missing in action. Vassily was five years old when his mother, Olga, was arrested and sentenced to ten years’ imprisonment in a labor camp in the central Volga region. During the first years Vassily lived with Vera, his maternal grandmother. It was she who first told him, “don’t tell anyone about your mother, nobody should know it”. And he goes on: “I remember only that she told me this very often” (Vassily, 1993: 3).

When the war was over, Vassily and his grandmother moved in with his father’s parents—also in the central Volga region—in order to be closer to Olga. But again, the whole family insisted on keeping the secret. In 1952 Olga was released from prison but was exiled to a “closed village” in Siberia, which meant she could visit but could not come to live in the village where her son lived. The family decided not to follow her to Siberia. On Olga’s several visits to her son, the family pretended that she was only a distant relative:

*"When she came, neighbors were told that this was a relative of ours. None of the neighbors knew that this was my mother, or about her history. And she lived there two or three weeks, I don't remember how long. It was hidden from our neighbors." (Vassily, 1993: 11)*

This conduct was maintained until Olga's rehabilitation in 1956, when at last the whole family moved to Siberia to live with her. The "public" explanation was that the family had waited so long because they had not wanted to interrupt or disturb Vassily's schooling, which he finished that same year. We may draw a parallel to the year 1973, when Olga and her mother took Galina along with them to move from Siberia to the Ukrainian border. This decision, too, was made ostensibly "for the child's sake", although we can assume there were other motives related to the family history. It is also striking that Olga's decision to leave Siberia came when Galina was the same age her father had been at the time Olga was arrested.

Vassily himself did not stay long in his mother's house. Soon after they moved he went to Krasnoyarsk to go to the university. Vassily's interview is marked by considerable gaps of memory. He claims that he has no memories before the age of six or seven, and of the later years he recalls only situations in school, but nothing about his family. His mother Olga confirms this. When Galina asks her whether she told her son about the past, Olga reproachfully answers: "The way Papa was? Papa, you know how he is, your papa remembers almost nothing until he was thirteen" (Olga, 1993: 35). Vassily was thirteen when his mother was released from prison, and he does recall her first visit. In other words, in Vassily's memory, his whole life before his mother's return is more or less obscured; he has almost no recollection of it. Galina was also thirteen when she discovered the document of her grandmother's rehabilitation.

Vassily's remarkable memory gaps can clearly be attributed to the family's denial of his mother, and by the same token, to major parts of his own biography. We must also bear in mind that the traumatic experience of his mother's arrest occurred when he was only five years old, and the loss of his father also meant a dramatic change in his life.

Another interesting feature of Vassily's interview is the almost emotionless way in which he relates both his life history and his family history, limiting himself almost entirely to mere biographical data. There seems to be neither empathy for his mother's life history, nor for himself with regard to the terrible losses of his childhood and youth. He laconically answers the question about his mother's first visit:

*"She came in summer. In summer, the year—it was the summer of 1952. So she came, we lived together as a family for some weeks. Then she went away. I had been told before that it was impossible for her to live here and so on. That is why I was ready for it and there was nothing unexpected for me." (Vassily, 1993: 5)*

Vassily does not reflect on the consequences of a denied past for his career. His daughter Galina reports:

*„My father tried to hide (his mother’s) past for her. Especially from me and my Ma, and from everyone. Even when he was recommended to go to Japan to work, he refused to go, because his department would look at his files, about his history. And he didn’t want to hurt her of course, to refresh her memory of these awful things.“ (Galina, 1992: 33)*

His wife Zhenia also talks about the career opportunities her husband missed:

*“I think our Papa refused to work abroad only so that his colleagues wouldn’t know about his mother. That is why never even discussed it. And how many times he was recommended for section chief. He refused.” (Zhenia, 1993: 13)*

Perhaps we can interpret Vassily’s denial of his mother during his youth and the denial of her history, and hence of his own life history up to his separation from her, as the development of internal family secrets imposed by the societal constraints of the period. Yet this would not fully explain why the family decided to resort to a strategy of denial which excluded even persons who had married into the family from sharing in the secret, instead of treating this part of the family history in some other way. Apart from societal constraints, this decision must have some connection to familial constraints, i.e. mechanisms in the family system itself. In Olga’s interview, we learn about a similar pattern of behavior in her family of origin, between herself and her mother Vera.

### *Grandmother Olga:<sup>9</sup> “I can’t remember”*

The interview with Olga leaves many questions unanswered, and many aspects of her past remain vague. This may be due to the traumatic childhood experiences of her father’s violence, and to Stalinist persecution and banishment in the years following 1943. Furthermore, the vagueness may also be caused by the years of silence and the denial of certain experiences, actions, and periods of her life. The following sketch cannot do justice to the life history of this woman. We shall concentrate on Olga’s own presentation, her life story, in order to understand and explain the effect her biography had on the family dialog, and on Galina in particular.

Olga was born in 1918. Her parents were kulaks, or wealthy farmers. In 1929 Olga’s father was sentenced to five years’ imprisonment for his Ukrainian nationalist attitudes, which he had expressed in public. In the course of agricultural collectivization Olga and her mother Vera were banished in 1930. Olga, who was eleven at the time, experienced a traumatic phase of disenfranchisement, poverty and famine during which millions died.

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9 I am grateful for the assistance of Maria Nooke of Berlin in analyzing this interview.

She talks about the fact that many children starved to death. Her mother sent her away for this reason:

*"The children started to die in masses. Well, every mother wants her child rescued (eight-second pause). She sent me away, no matter to whom, no matter whether to acquaintances or strangers, with whomever, she sent me away. But I was sent back: who needs someone else's children during a famine? I lived for a week with these people, then I went to others, and again to others."* (Olga, 1993:4)

After this phase of living with various families, Olga stayed for some time in the family of an uncle—more or less illegally—and later with the family of her much older brother.

Olga too denied her mother. Even as a university student, when visits were allowed, she used to introduce her mother to friends, and even to her future husband, as a distant relative. Olga's husband knew nothing about Olga's origin and family past until after they were married. The parallels across the generations in this family are obvious: the biographical experience of being raised in the absence of the mother is found in three successive generations; both Galina's grandmother and her father had to deny their mothers' identity.

The establishment of these family secrets has a very considerable impact on the marital systems of Galina's grandparents, and of her parents in the present day. This of course raises the question of whether Galina is reproducing the same pattern, and in what way. We can only hope that in her marital life she will not repeat the mechanisms of producing internal family secrets, which have proved so long-lived in her family of origin.

Let us now look at Olga's interview. On being asked to tell her life story, Olga first talks in detail and in chronological order about her history of distress before the German occupation. This is a life history full of suffering from an alcoholic and violent father as well as from a traumatic family history of persecution, disenfranchisement, and expropriation. After Olga has talked for about forty minutes, she briefly tells about the German occupation, and then continues about her time in the labor camp in more detail again. This passage is rather fragmentary, however, and full of vague hints about privileges in the camp, about criminal inmates, and even about the murder of prisoners.

The text as a whole shows that the German occupation, compared with other periods, was not a time of suffering for Olga. Presumably she rather welcomed it, which is understandable considering her prior history. Olga tells how many people were evacuated shortly before the Germans arrived: "Now those who stayed were forced to work by the Germans" (Olga, 1993: 8). After this remark Olga skips the entire occupation period and resumes her narration at about the time she was arrested: "The front wavered. Then those who had remained were closely examined as to whether they might have had a job with the Germans." Although at first, because of the quick temporal jump, this

could be understood to mean that those staying behind were “closely examined” by the Germans, it is now clear that it was the Soviets who conducted the examination—and it is at this point that Olga mentions her arrest and conviction.

Later in the interviews, when her granddaughter Galina asks to hear more about the German occupation, Olga makes a pause of about thirty seconds before she answers:

*“Either there was nowhere to work or you would be sent off to Germany. Your family would be torn apart, and then you would find it hard to leave the child behind. And to take the child with you, why that was even harder. And so you had to make up your mind.” (Olga, 1993: 29)*

Here Olga indirectly places the blame for her staying and collaborating or cooperating with the Germans on her son.

At this point the granddaughter asks no further questions about that period, but jumps back to her grandmother’s arrest. The skimpy answers she draws here include the fact that the entire teaching staff of Olga’s school had been “examined” and interrogated. Olga however does not connect her conviction with the fact that she was a teacher—and as such was obligated to cooperate with the German administration. Instead she claims to have been convicted of “defeatist agitation against the Red Army”. She also claims to have no recollection of the interrogations. Galina asks her: “Could you remember the interrogations, perhaps the first one?” Olga answers: “I can’t remember what it was like. With all I experienced after that, you don’t remember something like that” (Olga, 1993: 31).

In her interview with Olga, Galina was unable to bring much of her grandmother’s life during the German occupation to light. As a member of the generation of grandchildren Galina could be said to have an ambivalent attitude towards the past, similar to that of the grandchildren of Nazi followers and perpetrators. On the one hand they wish to uncover the burden of the family past, but on the other, they have strong fears that their fantasies about this past might prove true.

### *Family Dialog*

Finally I shall interpret a sequence of Galina’s interview which illustrates her relationship to her grandmother as well as the difficult family dynamics caused by the family history. After the interview, I asked Galina to produce a family sculpture by grouping herself and the members of her family using small stickers of different colors on a piece of paper, positioning each one to represent their emotional closeness or distance from the others, as seen from

her perspective.<sup>10</sup> When the sculpture was finished, I asked her to have each family member say one sentence to her and then to make a one-sentence statement to each in return.

Galina had her grandmother say, "I am so sorry that everything has gone wrong, forgive me".

Her father, she says, is smiling and snickering, and says, "Everything is okay". And her mother says to her, "Oh, Galina your feet are wet again".

Galina answers her grandmother: "Don't say that. You see nothing has happened, everything is okay, please don't worry."

When I asked her, "Could you forgive your grandma," she replied:

*"I try but every time I have the feeling that I can't, or maybe there is a barrier between us, and it's a matter of resentment on my part and resentment on her part."*

*Interviewer: "And what is it that she does not forgive you for?"*

*Galina: "It seems to me that neither of us can forgive the other for the existence of this barrier."*

We may infer that Galina is not quite sure what to forgive Olga for. It is not simply the grandmother's past, but has to do with her silence and the conflicting loyalties in the family. Moreover, it might be connected with the fact that Galina as a young child did not feel protected enough by her grandmother from the "most frightening" experiences: the visits by her grandmother's second husband.

## Conclusion

This family's interviews exhibit some obvious similarities with the interviews we gathered in our research on German families. We find the bound family system, and in connection with it a family dynamic marked by guilt feelings and family secrets. Peculiar to this family, however, is the attempt to keep the secrets even from those who married into the system. As in the German families, it is the third generation—the granddaughter Galina—who takes upon herself the biographical work of reconstructing the family history.

This family clearly shows how collective history—here the Stalinist repression—can affect family and life histories over several generations, and can continue to do so even after a societal transition. Only after perestroika could family dialogs like this one eventually open up in other families. This is

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10 This technique was developed in our research context (see Rosenthal 1998) and is adapted from the sculpture technique in family therapy (Jefferson 1978; Papp et. al. 1973; Simon 1972).

only a start, and a great deal of family work and biographical work is necessary to crack the old family dynamics and escape further repetition.

The impact of the past may also help us realize how family histories in turn can influence our contemporary societies. If we wish to escape certain recurring patterns that are acted out again at certain periods—Yugoslavia since World War I comes to mind—then we need to have a clear recognition of the impact of the past. With regard to biographical research, we must not be content merely to analyze individual biographies, but should reconstruct the family history as well. We need to know the family history in order to understand the biographies we are working with. In doing this of course we must draw on historical sources such as archives, and analyze public discourses.

The history of societies can have a considerable impact on our biographies for several generations. For a family therapist this assumption seems familiar enough, but sociologists, who often assume that society's influence in forming a "social being" does not start until a child goes to school, are not accustomed to this kind of thinking. On the contrary, some current sociological debates revolve around concepts such as "tinker identity" (cf. Hitzler and Honer 1994), trying to stress growing freedom of choices and deliberate self-definition. I find little empirical evidence for such de-determination processes. Perhaps some milieus and generations like to describe themselves as being free to orient themselves in different situations without being bound to some past or obligation. Nevertheless, structural empirical analyses prove that historical continuity determines acting and experiencing beyond our conscious perceptions as we reproduce old patterns in choosing biographically relevant issues and lifestyles.

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## Intergenerational Dialog in Families of Jewish Communists in East Germany: A Process-Oriented Analysis<sup>1</sup>

The reconstruction of the intergenerational dialog<sup>2</sup> in multigenerational families involves coming to terms with a network of different but interdependent ways of dealing with discontinuity. It offers an opportunity to understand the reciprocal relationships between a changing social world, biographical work and the dynamics within family systems. This is true especially when biographical research is done in families that have experienced the dramatic change of a political system with which their members identified.

The parents' generation of the families discussed in this article belongs to the group of Jewish Communists who returned to the Eastern part of Germany after having survived the Holocaust in exile.<sup>3</sup> According to Helmut Eschwege, who is the main chronicler of the history of Jews in the GDR, there were an estimated 3500 Jewish returnees to East Germany in the post-war period from Western countries (Eschwege 1988: 65). It is not known how many Jews were among the 658 Communists who returned from the Soviet Union to the Eastern part of Germany between 1945 and 1954. In spite of all kinds of different experiences during the time of exile and all kinds of motives for returning, one thing all these returnees shared was the desire to build a "better Germany", which meant above all an anti-fascist socialist Germany. Especially

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1 Thanks to the editors, Nora Goldenbogen and Gabriele Rosenthal for important comments on this article.

2 In using the term "intergenerational dialog", I am primarily orienting myself toward a combination of two concepts: the dialog model in systemic family therapy (Stierlin 1981) and the sociological concept of generation as developed by Mannheim (1928) and discussed by Matthes (1985). The concept in family therapy studies the dynamics among members of different generations of one family, whereas the sociological concept of generation focuses on the constitution of generations by common experiences in historical time. For a theoretical discussion of this combination see Rosenthal (1997) and Völter (1996).

3 In recent years a wide range of studies on Jews and Jewish life in East Germany have been published. An extensive bibliography can be found in Illichmann (1997). These publications deal mainly with life within Jewish communities. But hardly any studies exist which focus on Jewish Communists. An exception is the work of Hartewig (2000) and Herzberg (1999). The findings presented in the present article are the results of a study of a sample of nine families in which one to three generations and up to nine members of one family were interviewed from 1994 to 2000: see also Völter (1997, 1998a and b); Rosenthal and Völter (1998). In addition to narrative biographical interviews, family interviews were also conducted in which members of different generations were present.

for the returning Jewish Communists, who had suffered from Nazi persecution both for political reasons and under the racist Nuremberg laws, supporting the construction of an anti-fascist society was a way of biographically processing the experiences of discrimination. One of my interviewees, Hilde Kaufmann, expressed her feelings as follows:

*“A large number of the people who, well, had a say up there in the Politburo, they’d been in concentration camps themselves or had emigrated, they were of Jewish descent and so you somehow had a certain sense of security in that respect.”* (Hilde Kaufmann I, 1994: 23)

A key aspect of Ms. Kaufmann’s bond to East Germany, shared by many other returning emigrants, was the presence of anti-fascists in positions of power within the state as well as their anti-fascist policies and rhetoric. The leaders of the Communist Party and the government saw the socialist state as being free of all continuity with the Nazi past.<sup>4</sup> They declared the GDR the true anti-fascist Germany and the successor to the wartime resistance movement. According to the historical concept of anti-fascism, the economic basis of National Socialism was capitalism.<sup>5</sup> Anti-communism and Nazi terror against those who fought for revolutionary changes were interpreted as extreme anti-humanist ideology and practice. The Communists, not the Jews, were seen as the principal victims of National Socialism. This was one factor that influenced the culture of remembrance in the GDR, as evidenced in the concentration camp memorials, for example. Communist resistance to Nazism was emphasized and glorified, while in comparison, public commemoration of the Holocaust was played down (Kulturamt Prenzlauer Berg 1992). Jewish resistance fighters were exalted as anti-fascists, but their Jewish background was often ignored.

But how was this public discourse reflected in the biographical presentations of the subjects themselves, especially in those of Communists who were of Jewish descent?

A reconstruction of the biographies in families of Jewish Communists showed that there generally was a correspondence between the anti-fascist discourse and the life stories of the protagonists and interplay between them. The anti-fascist aspects of the family past were emphasized, while in most of the families the history of the Jewish victims was barely mentioned, and was in some cases unknown to the grandchildren’s generation. In other families the children and grandchildren characterized the Jewish family story as

4 Also, former Nazis could become confessing “anti-fascists” if they were engaged in building up the socialist German state under the rule of the Socialist Unity Party (SED).

5 This concept was based on Georgi Dimitroff’s characterization of fascism in 1933 as being the “open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist, most imperialist elements among the financial capitalists”. The fact that victory over Germany was largely achieved thanks to the Red Army was later interpreted as the best possible proof of the model character of socialism and the superior society it brought forth (Groehler 1992: 111).

knowledge which had come to light or gained importance only during recent years.

This corresponded not only with the dominant public discourse of anti-fascism, but also with other norms of the East German state. Its ideal for humankind was the “socialist personality”. Members of East German society were to be educated in order to act in conformance with a socialist conception of the world, ideological awareness, and socialist morals. They were to be molded as both patriots and internationalists. Since the ideal of the socialist personality was an image of humankind which aspired to universalism, separate identities were excluded to a great extent (Grunenberg 1993: 139–144; Meuschel 1992: 29–122). As regards Jews, this meant that cultural and life-history differences between Jews and non-Jews needed to be eradicated. This was in fact the consequence of Karl Marx’s discussion of the “Jewish question”.<sup>6</sup> It led to the general notion that Jewish particularity was religious, and had its place only within the niches of Jewish community centers—with which most of the Jews in East Germany, and especially the younger generation, were not associated. Interviews with Jewish Communists and their offspring show that the political aspect of their biographies was more significant than religious, traditional, or ethnic aspects of Jewishness. They did not actually deny their Jewishness during the existence of the GDR, but they did not consider it something which should consciously be passed on to their children and grandchildren. Children and grandchildren of Jewish Communists had been socialized as conscious and active members of society.<sup>7</sup> They learned that political activity was one important consequence of their family history, but apart from this they had no more than a hazy notion of what the fact of being Jewish meant for them. My reconstruction of the interviews indicated however that this was not only the result of public discourse and socialist norms. In all cases it became clear that a biographical and family constellation in the time before 1945 was the basis for this type of biographical structuring during and after the GDR period.

Even though this was the main basis of socialization in families of Jewish Communists, it must be described as a process which could lead to changes over time. Beginning in the early 1980s, when a wide range of groups in East Germany began to discover alternative identities,<sup>8</sup> and, especially after 1989, there was a revival of public discourse on Jewish life in East Germany and in

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6 One of the central statements of this treatise is that “the Jew” is by nature “empirical”, has “egoistic” and “practical” economic interests. Therefore he represents the typical biography of bourgeois society. Marx concludes from this theoretical analysis that “the Jew will have become impossible” as soon as the economic basis of society has been transformed (Marx 1844/1976).

7 See also interviews with this group in Bornemann and Peck (1995); Ostow (1989).

8 Social scientists in GDR reflected and incorporated this development in their conceptualizations of a socialist “mode of life” (Meuschel 1992: 249–256), which help to diversify the idea of socialist personality.

Germany as a whole (Burgauer 1993: 273–280; Illichmann 1997: 219–312). At the same time, the political convictions and the biographical concept of life as a Communist in a socialist country were very unsettled. As a possible consequence, the biographical constructions of all family members may have been called into question, not only in the public sphere but also in the intergenerational dialog (Völter 1998b). The Jewish family history, and family members' experiences of persecution during the Holocaust, began to play a greater role in many families of Jewish Communists. In the social context of changing societies and transformations of public discourse, aspects of the family history which until then had been framed differently or had been more or less unspoken, were brought to light in these families.<sup>9</sup> But how are these processes reflected in the actual dialog between different generations in families?

In this article I will focus on the question of how Jewishness and Communism, as two biographical reference points in the life stories of different generations, are lived and balanced over a lifetime in changing historical contexts. In the first part I propose some reflections on the topic of “biographical structuring” and “biographical work” in the family context. In part two I focus on an exchange on the topic of Jewishness between a mother and her son after the political changes of 1989. Finally, part three presents an argument that the two generations necessarily communicate different perspectives which can be better understood if we take into account the entire biography and the process of the “biographical work”.

## **Biographical Structuring and Biographical Work in the Context of Family Interaction**

Members of one family are not only born into different historical times or into different family constellations. Their biographies are also constituted by different events which are experienced and reflected in different social contexts. Each interaction between the members of a family produces, reproduces or transforms these differences. In order to understand the constitution of each individual biography as well as the family dynamics, we must focus on how subjects orient themselves in processes of interpreting and reinterpreting their

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9 This is not evident for all families that lived through the political changes of 1989 in the GDR. In some cases the opening of the family dialog on the past was blocked by conflicts or secrets which dated from the National Socialist period. For the example of a non-Jewish family, see Rosenthal and Völter (1998); for an example of intergenerational dialog in a Jewish/non-Jewish family, see Völter and Rosenthal (1998).

lived lives. This is true not only in the context of a changing social world, but also in the context of ongoing interaction with the members of their families.<sup>10</sup>

Fischer-Rosenthal has discussed this biographical operation on a theoretical level as “biographical work” (1995a: 43–86; 1995b: 250–265)<sup>11</sup> or “biographical structuring” (2000: 109–125, and in this volume). Despite some terminological distinctions,<sup>12</sup> both terms signify that biographies are constituted in an ongoing process of interaction, interpretation, and reinterpretation over a lifetime, within changing social networks and a changing social world: “By means of communication we interpret what happens, pass on to others what is important, fix experiences and build up knowledge” (2000: 115). This corresponds to the main idea of a socialization theory which claims that socialization should be seen as the constitution of a subject who productively processes reality, and thereby not only builds up his or her personality but also takes part in the production of social structures (Geulen and Hurrelmann 1980; Hurrelmann 1998). In this view there is not just a transfer of habits and knowledge from the older to the younger generations. Children and grandchildren are understood to be active participants in socialization processes (Rosenthal 1997: 59).

Biographical research in multigenerational families helps to formulate an empirical understanding of how socialization processes function. Reconstructing biographies within the network of a family system allows us to understand more precisely *how* the process of biographical structuring is embedded and reflected in public discourses and in family interaction processes. At the same time, we cannot really understand the dynamics within families by concentrating on their present appearance. In other words, we have to focus precisely on the interdependent processes of “biographical structuring” in order to grasp the structure and the genesis of the intergenerational dialog. What does this focus yield?

By reconstructing single biographies as well as their interaction in the framework of family systems, we can gain insight into how a historical time, which is generally much longer than a single life-span, is biographically processed by different members of one family. Each member of the family experi-

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10 The reconstruction of the dialog by sociologists and social psychologists often deals exclusively with the interaction between family members (Hildenbrand 1999; Keppler 1995; Moller and Tschuggnall 1999). These studies focus on the dynamics between family members, giving little or no attention to the biographies of the individual members or to the genesis of the intergenerational dynamics.

11 The term is also used by Fritz Schütze (1994) and—with a different meaning—by Anselm Strauss (Strauss et al. 1985: 137f).

12 Without naming the differences precisely, Fischer-Rosenthal (2000: 114) uses “biographical structuring” as the “more general term”. Despite the similarities, “biographical structuring” is used in a more neutral way for all types of structuring of life before and after the event, whereas “biographical work” seems to denote more intentional and conscious operations of self-reflection, preferably during experiences of crisis and discontinuity.

ences and interprets the surrounding social world and the knowledge about the family history from a different biographical perspective. Furthermore, we can study how a changing social world, different historical events or periods, and different types of public discourse are reflected in the biographies of different generations. These different “versions” of a biographically shared social world can be interpreted within the dynamics of the family system. This dynamics, however, must at the same time be understood according to the inner logic of each individual biography. In order to grasp this multidimensional and complex structure of interaction and socialization processes, methods of narrative interviewing (Schütze 1977) and hermeneutic case reconstruction (Rosenthal 1993, 1995) are combined with methods which were originally developed in systemic family therapy.<sup>13</sup>

### Balancing Past and Present: An Intergenerational Dialog

But how are different biographical experiences and perspectives communicated between different generations in one family? How can we imagine the actual dialog on Jewishness in families in which political identification was dominant for many decades?

Let us turn to the example of a mother and her son, Ruth and Georg Rolloff,<sup>14</sup> talking about what it actually means to them to be Jewish. Some information about the background of this interaction is necessary. The dialog took place during what was to have been an individual interview with the mother, Ruth, in 1995. Ruth was then 90 years old; her son Georg was 47. The son had dropped in to have lunch at his mother’s house and began to participate in the interview. Ruth was telling about an exchange with an official of the Jewish community in 1993, on the day she asked to be admitted as a member, when Georg suddenly intervened:

*Ruth: “So he asked me what my name is since when I am part of the Jewish community. So I said that I was actually always in the Jewish community. I never announced my departure, but I also never joined officially. But now I want to join because, I’m rather old, and I don’t want to be, exhumed somewhere after 25 years and Jews don’t do this, and therefore, I told him quite openly and he accepted that and didn’t say anything except*

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13 In accordance with the principles of grounded theory, these methods are gradually developed within each study. This combination of methods was first used in a study on the “Holocaust in Three Generations” directed by Gabriele Rosenthal (1998).

14 All names of interviewees are anonymized. In the Rolloff family I was able to interview the mother, Ruth (born in 1905), her daughter (born in 1945), her son (born in 1948) and her grandson (the daughter’s son, born in 1979). Ruth’s husband had already died in 1956. In the present article I will concentrate on the biographies of the mother and son and on the dynamics between them.

to ask if I have a son, 'Yes, I do', and does he know that I'm Jewish? 'Ye-es, he does', and he also knows that he is half-Jewish from,

Georg: No, I'm a full Jew

Ruth: What?

Georg: I'm a full Jew,

Ruth: Or you're a full Jew. So that mm—

Georg: According to Jewish—actually according to Israeli law, which is based on Jewish law—and it is now known through the whole world—it depends on the mother. If the mother is Jewish then the son is also Jewish.

Ruth: And I am a full Jew. My father was two Jews, not one, he had two sidelocks, a short beard, a short beard, but he was a person with a wonderful soul." (Ruth Rolloff I, 1995: 32)

In the ensuing narration Ruth recounts that her father had told her always to attach a mezuzah to her doorjamb. Ruth explains to the interviewer and her son that she never denied her Jewishness, even when she was confronted by the Gestapo.

I would like to underline three aspects of this sequence and the interaction between mother and son:

First, Ruth joined the Jewish community in 1993. She tells the interviewer and her son that her main reason was her wish to be buried in the Jewish cemetery so that she would not be exhumed eventually. It is striking that Ruth seems to argue against an inner voice that reproaches her because she did not live according to the rules of Judaism during most of her lifetime. She has to justify herself by asserting that she never denied her Jewishness.

Second: There is obviously no agreement between mother and son concerning the question of how the son should define himself. Ruth seems to reject Georg's claim that he is a "full Jew" (*Volljude*). Using the category of "half Jewish"<sup>15</sup> to define the status of her son underscores this still further: by not acknowledging Georg as a Jew, Ruth implies that she is the last representative in her family who can fully claim to be a Jew. Her son Georg tries to prove his Jewishness by citing rules that are recognized all over the world. This tells us that, for him, being Jewish is not a naturally developed identification, but one which has to be guaranteed by official definitions. This provokes his mother Ruth to react with irony: by saying "My father was two Jews", she signals that she does not take her son seriously. In spite of Georg's explanation she again defines Jewishness as something transmitted by the father, thus conveying indirectly that her son is not a Jew. From the interview we know that Georg did not have a Jewish father. But the mother's rejection probably also communicates her guilt feelings at not having raised her son

15 The term "half Jewish" is used by Ruth herself and—despite her statement to the contrary—is probably not used by the official of the Jewish Community. It is out of the question that he would have had recourse to this racist category used by the Nazis. In any case, Ruth's son is indeed considered a Jew according to Jewish law.

according to Jewish commandments. Her son's argument on the basis of Jewish law is the stimulus for Ruth to change the perspective and to describe herself not as a Jewish mother, but as the daughter of a doubly Jewish father. In this way she avoids the duties of a Jewish mother.

Third: Ruth's description of her father seems to be ambivalent. Her argumentation can be read as follows: In spite of his piety, her father had a kind heart. She visualizes her father as an Eastern European Orthodox Jew with a traditional outlook. She defines her own Jewishness by reference to this representative of Eastern European devout Jewry. For her son, who was raised at a time when this culture had been radically destroyed, this leaves no chance of ever being a "real" Jew. It becomes obvious, furthermore, that she not only needs to explain to the Jewish community official why she was not an active member of the community during most of her lifetime: she is also engaged in an inner dialog in which she seems to be addressing her father, whom, on the one hand, she holds up as a model Jew, while on the other hand she repudiates him.

This interpretation of the dialog between mother and son already provides us with an important insight into communication about being Jewish in this family. We can complete this picture by taking into account the present perspective of the mother and son. In other words, what is the present background of this dialog?

At the age of eighty-eight, Ruth Rolloff officially became a member of the Jewish community. According to her, the main reason for doing so was that she wanted to be buried in the Jewish cemetery. The reconstruction of her biography gives various clues suggesting that, with the demise of socialism, the object of Ruth's biographical work became her own preparation for death. This also fits in with her statement in one of the interviews that her "life was tied together with socialism". Part of her biographical work was a trip she took together with her son Georg in 1992 to meet the family of her deceased brother in the United States. Thus Ruth was eighty-seven when she finally met her brother's wife, who had been a member of the family since 1934. Her brother had died shortly after the War. While living in East Germany Ruth had avoided contact with these relatives. As an officer in the Army her son had not been allowed to have any contact with this branch of the family. As a result of this trip, Georg's perspective on his mother's family history and Jewish background changed drastically. Together with his relatives in the United States he visited a synagogue for the first time in his life and participated in a service. In the context of meeting his relatives in the United States Georg learned a great deal about Jewish practices. The interview with him makes it clear that he began to identify with them. His Jewish family story and the new contact with his aunt, his female cousin and her family in the United States help him to overcome the experience of the complete failure of socialism, which had been the realization of his family's ideals.

Although mother and son together had recently experienced the meeting with their Jewish relatives in the United States—which for both of them forms an important part of their present perspective on their Jewishness—we could see that they have quite different interpretations of what it means to them to be Jewish. Embedding these findings in the context of their entire biographies helps us to understand their different perspectives in greater depth. When their biographies are taken into account, we see that their present views are part of the ongoing processes of biographical structuring and biographical work over a lifetime.

### **Different Generational Perspectives as a Result of Biographical Structuring over a Lifetime**

Ruth Rolloff was born in 1905. She was the eldest daughter of Jewish immigrants from Russian Poland who had difficulty surviving economically in Germany. She was socialized on the one hand into the charge of integrating into German society, and on the other hand of conserving the Polish-Jewish traditions. Following an occupational disease, her father was unable to work. Ruth's mother and very soon Ruth and her older brother had to work to support the family of four children. During the First World War the family was expelled from their town in southeastern Germany and sent to live in a sort of ghetto where immigrants with foreign passports from "enemy" countries, considered "dangerous" to the Germans, were interned. Thus already in childhood Ruth experienced discrimination as a Polish Jew. When she was old enough, she tried joining a Zionist youth group. But as the group's orientation was to leave Germany, she soon left it and made contact with young Communists. Ruth's mother died in 1927. In the same year Ruth joined the German Communist Party (KPD). When she started a relationship with a gentile Party official, her father found it hard to accept his daughter's new life. He beat her and forbade further contact with her Communist boyfriend. Ruth rebelled and left home to live with him, and later married him. Ruth was now integrated into a completely different milieu. In this new social framework her anti-religious position, which had originated in her parents' house in opposition to her father, was consolidated. Her biography could not integrate both loyalty to her devout Jewish family and her socialist identity.

When Hitler came to power, Ruth took part in the Communist resistance. She and her partner lived in hiding until they were arrested and imprisoned for several years. After her release in 1938, Ruth fled to the Soviet Union. She survived the War and the Holocaust in Moscow, where she worked for the Communist International and later for the *Nationalkomitee Freies*

*Deutschland*. The reconstruction of her biography shows that during the time of the Nazi persecution and her emigration she repeatedly experienced situations in which she had to conceal her Jewishness. At the same time she was confronted with the murder or stigmatization of other Jews, including Jewish Communists murdered by Stalin. In 1945 Ruth came back to East Germany to help build a socialist state. In 1946 she married her non-Jewish partner with whom she had been living since before 1933. Her husband had survived political persecution in a Gestapo prison and in a concentration camp.

According to the documents of the Jewish community of her town, Ruth joined the community in 1946. As she doesn't mention this part of her biography in the interviews, we can only imagine what it may have meant to her, who defined herself as "anti-religious". Historical studies of Jewish communities in the GDR show that supporting the Jewish community out of a deep feeling of solidarity without practicing the Jewish religion was common during the first post-war period (Goldenbogen 2000). This would seem to be the reason for Ruth's decision to enroll as a member of the community. Ruth told me that she continuously maintained some parts of the lifestyle she had learned in her parents' house, such as cooking Jewish and Polish specialties. But it also becomes clear that it was important to her not to shut out her non-Jewish surroundings. Through her narrative about the post-war period and her life in East Germany, we can see that Ruth's definition of anti-fascism included both her Jewish and her Communist identities.

Ruth's son Georg was born in 1948. His first name commemorates his father's father who was a Catholic. His second name is Samuel, after Ruth's father. In the individual interview, Georg recalled how he was told about his Jewish name:

*"My mother was a Communist and my father was a Communist (3). When I asked my mother about my middle name I learned that she actually was a Jew from her parents' house (2) but that was not important and had no significance (2). Mother just told me that, as if I would say, 'It's not long until Christmas'. More or less like that. She said something like: 'You know, my parents were Jews, and if you like you are actually a half Jew'. I don't think she even went that far."* (Georg Rolloff I, 1995: 38)

According to Georg's recollection, this dialog took place in 1953 or 1954 when he was about five or six years old. Recalled from his present perspective, one function of this presentation was to tell the interviewer why he later became a Communist, identifying with the political part of his family history was content with not knowing much about his Jewish background. Taking into account the public discourse on the Holocaust and on Jewish life in Germany after 1945, as well as the interviewer's research interest, he may have felt a need to justify his past.

Bearing this in mind, I would like to give some data and reflections on the biographical background of the mother and son during the fifties, corresponding to the date Georg attributes to the dialog. As far as Georg is con-

cerned, he was old enough then to go to school and thus to come into contact with institutions outside his family. His name and his family background were certainly significant to him. They structured his contact with others and helped him to understand who he was. We can imagine that this dialog gave him a hint that he was somehow different from other children in his peer group. His self-perception was mainly structured by the dominant message, that being Communist was the principal characteristic of his parents. This signified being part of a minority, but an elite one, whereas being Jewish was something Georg could not interpret. In his perception he had no opportunity to learn about it, neither outside the family nor with the help of his mother.

As far as Georg's mother Ruth is concerned, being a Jew at the time when she was confronted with the questions of her five or six-year-old son had an important political dimension. It could lead to insinuations by the Communist Party, which doubted the loyalty of all those whose biographical background could place them at any kind of political distance from the dominant group of non-Jewish Communists around Walter Ulbricht. As early as 1949, a special commission in East Germany was ordered to investigate all party members, but especially those who had returned after 1945 from exile in Western countries, or who had been released after years of Nazi imprisonment. They were interrogated about their past, their loyalty to the Party, and their personal or institutional contacts to Western countries (Keßler 1995: 52–105). These measures were carried out in the same context as the show trials in the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Hungary, and most recently in Czechoslovakia. The GDR also planned to have a show trial after the model of the Slánský trial which, after years of preparation, was held in December 1952 in Prague (London 1991). Most of those who were condemned were Jewish Communists. They were accused of being "imperialist agents", "cosmopolitans", and supporters of "Zionist monopoly capitalists". At that time the Rolloff family lived in Prague, where Ruth's husband held a position as the cultural attaché of the East German mission. From her children we know that he had various contacts with Czech Communists with whom he had survived the concentration camp. Some of them had been among the accused in the Slánský trial. Ruth's husband, who even in the late forties had not been willing to submit totally to the Stalinist line, was dismissed shortly after the sentence was pronounced in the Slánský trial. Although he was given a position again in East Germany, we may presume there was a connection between his dismissal and the general suspicion against possible "internal enemies" of the Party. Obviously the Stalinist measures also had another impact on Ruth's biography. She left the Jewish community in 1951. We can surmise that one of her motives, if not the most important one, was her fear of being suspected by the Party. This interpretation seems plausible not only in light of her husband's experience. Historical research has shown that a growing number of Jewish Communists abandoned the Jewish communities from 1951 on because they felt threatened

by the suspicions of their party (see Illichmann 1997: 121; Goldenbogen 2000). Documents of the SED explaining how to “learn from the example of the Slánsky trial” reeked of anti-Semitism (*Dokumente* 1954). Many of those who were later prosecuted and/or expelled were Jews. Alarmed by the rising numbers of interrogations and arrests, some 450 Jews fled East Germany by late 1953. Among them were the most politically active members of the Jewish community and representatives of victims of racial persecution in the Association of Victims of Nazi Persecution. When a new course was embarked on in 1953, after Stalin’s death, the Jewish communities hardly had any members left. Furthermore, membership in the Jewish Community was considered suspicious by the Party even after this period. Neither Ruth nor her son mentioned that Ruth had been a member of the Jewish community after 1945 and had left the community again in 1951. Her son was apparently unaware of this part of her biography.

As far as Ruth is concerned, her presentation can be understood in the light of her present perspective on socialism. She tried to recount her biography without mentioning anything negative about her life under socialism. On the one hand this was probably because the interviewer was a West German. On the other hand, it was a result of the biographical work Ruth had carried on for most of her lifetime. Obviously she had continuously reinterpreted her cognitive and emotional dissonance with the Communist Party, and had managed to cope with its norms and practices. To give another example of her reinterpretations: Ruth explained in the interview that her husband was discharged from his position at Prague as a consequence of “the alcoholism of his superior”. From historical presentations, however, we learn that the superior himself was discharged one month after the Slánsky trial. He was indicted for political reasons and imprisoned as an “agent of the imperialist secret services”. This accusation was never proved. By projecting the guilt on this victim of Stalinism, Ruth is covering up the deeds of the Ulbricht regime.

Returning to the dialog with his mother reported by Georg some 40 years later, we can presume that it was strongly influenced by those historical circumstances. Despite the middle name which signified that he was Jewish, Georg grew up at a great distance from his Jewish family background. Furthermore, he fulfilled the mission of being a good Communist. He joined the army and became an officer stationed on the border with West Germany.

But what do we learn from the interviews and other biographical documents about the mother’s and the son’s changing perspectives on their own biographies?

Let us first look at the self-presentation of Ruth Rolloff. The reconstruction of her own presentation during the three meetings I had with her, the interpretation of her autobiography published in 1985, and the reading of

several biographical documents found in archives<sup>16</sup> revealed that Ruth was continuously reworking the presentation of her Jewish background, and especially her relationship to her father.

In two *curricula vitae* written for the Communist party in the early thirties, Ruth describes her family background in a very neutral way. She mentions her Jewish background, her father's profession, the family's emigration from Poland and her own professional and political career.

Several *curricula vitae* and biographical reports written in the forties, during her exile in Moscow, present a more detailed picture of her relationship to her family. She explicitly describes her father as a stubborn religious Jew. She claims that she never had any contact with him once she left home in 1928. Thus she distances herself from her Jewish background and indirectly "neutralizes" her father's influence over her. In her autobiography, which was published in East Germany in 1985, we can read how Ruth presented herself to an anonymous public in the Communist state. In her book she describes how she developed into a loyal Communist and member of the Resistance, who cast off her "petty bourgeois–Jewish" and religious background.<sup>17</sup> She mentions that her father beat her with his belt when he heard of her relationship with a non-Jewish Communist, and that he symbolically declared her dead and mourned her without moving or washing himself for the seven-day *shiv'ah*. She emphasizes that after moving out of her father's house she never met him again. In none of her biographical documents from the GDR period does she mention that her father was murdered in the Shoah.

The reconstruction of her biography tells us that Ruth's visit to her relatives in the United States was a turning point for her. Through this trip, the history of her father's persecution in particular gained new relevance for her. Despite information to the contrary, she had always secretly convinced herself that her father had died a natural death. She found out from her family in the U.S.A. in 1992 that he was last seen in the Warsaw Ghetto. Since then, she has regularly dreamed about her father, tormented by images of him helpless in the Ghetto. For Ruth, the integration of her Jewish family meant the onset of a new phase of grieving for her murdered father.

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16 The documents were found in the central Party archives of the SED (*Zentrales Parteiarchiv der SED innerhalb der Stiftung der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv*), as well as in the former Russian Center for the Storage and Study of Modern Historical Documents, now the RGASPI (Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории), Moscow. I would like to thank Carola Tischler for the search in the Moscow archive. In order to preserve the anonymity of the interviewees, the signatures of the archive documents cannot be published.

17 It is a general phenomenon that members of the generation of returnees who had participated in the Resistance against the Nazis wrote their autobiographies in the 70s and 80s, often after they had retired from professional life, focusing on their activities in the Communist Resistance. It is interesting to see, that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in some families, these descriptions were augmented by books on the Jewish victims in the family written by members of the children's generation.

In the interviews I conducted with her in 1995, ninety-year-old Ruth offers a different and far more detailed version of her Jewish family history, her own experiences during the Shoah, and above all the history of her relationship with her father. This is certainly due to her age and to the very different situation of communication in an interview as compared with writing a CV or an autobiography. But it is also due to her different perspective on the past since the fall of the Berlin Wall; to the current public discourse which shows far more interest in Jewish life in Germany; and last but not least, to her experiences and discoveries during the trip to the United States.

In contrast to all her earlier statements, Ruth describes her most beautiful memory as being that of singing psalms with her father on the Sabbath. She recalls that, after she had left home, her father had accepted her non-Jewish husband: they met several times. Thus getting in touch with the Jewish part of her family goes hand in hand with a restructuring of the story of her separation from her Jewish home. The healing effect of this biographical work is evident in the fact that she is now able to talk about ambivalence and parts of her own history that she had previously blocked out. The biographical work entails a very painful element as well, however. It was accompanied by a new phase of mourning for her murdered father. In general we can say that when grief has been denied for reasons related to the social and life history constellation, it can resurface in situations of social upheaval and reinterpretation of the family history. Part of Ruth Rolloff's mourning is her grief at having been unable to live her Jewishness as something natural. She describes an image that impressed her deeply:

*"Now I can really have a say in the matter. I've been to America. And I've seen Jews going out on Saturday in their caftans and with their sidelocks behind their ears. And no one stared or said anything. I stood and stared because it was the first time I'd seen that. I've never seen that in Germany, except in the twenties. Because here they view every Jew as a ridiculous figure." (Ruth Rolloff I, 1995: 39)*

In New York, Ruth encountered familiar ground again. She felt solidarity with religious Jews in traditional outfits who present themselves as Jews in public. At the same time her own otherness in German society became significant to her. She has lost the protective veil of socialism, which allowed her to see herself as a Communist on the side of the establishment.

During the encounters with Ruth's son Georg,<sup>18</sup> it became obvious that the trip to the United States also represented a turning point for him as far as his conscious identification with his Jewish family background is concerned. Getting to know his relatives, he began to dream of a new life with new opportunities. He suffered a decline in social status, having been discharged from service as an Army officer on the border with West Germany in 1990,

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18 Georg was interviewed in three sessions. He also participated in parts of two of the encounters with his mother Ruth.

and now works as a taxi driver. He thought of emigrating with his family and running a business in the United States with the help of his relatives, but he eventually abandoned this idea. From Georg's version of the family history we can see that he structured the story of his Jewish family around his mother's father, Samuel. Unlike his mother, who reinterpreted the relationship to her father, Georg continued to cultivate a quite negative picture of his grandfather:

*"I knew that he was a very religious person, a man completely incapable of surviving on free market terms; who—apart from praying all the time—was not capable of supporting his family. His wife had to work herself to death; all he gave her was religious commandments." (Georg II, 1995: 63)*

It is striking that Georg seems to reject identification with the grandfather whose name he bears. If we bear in mind that, according to Ruth, the grandfather is the one "real" representative of Jewishness in the family, we might say that Georg actually rejects an identification with this part of his family background. He thus creates an inner distance from himself as a Jewish man.

Georg told me that when he and his mother heard from their relatives in the United States that his grandfather Samuel had been murdered in the Warsaw Ghetto or in Auschwitz, he immediately tried to change the topic of the conversation. The same thing happened during the interview when both he and his mother were present. Whenever Ruth started to tell about something connected with the Holocaust, Georg changed the subject. In one of the interviews conducted with him alone, he explained that he is frightened to see his mother suffering from her recollections of this part of her biography. He fears that one day she might die while remembering. Naturally Georg wants to protect his mother, but on the other hand he obviously has great difficulty in confronting the persecution and suffering of his grandfather and his mother's family. Georg is the only male grandchild of his maternal grandfather. When we realize that all the Jewish men in this family—his grandfather and both of Ruth's brothers, as well as his own father—were murdered, or died as the direct result of Nazi persecution, we can imagine how threatening this topic must be to him. Georg, who never got to know his grandfather, has persisted in accepting the negative account told by his mother for many years. Furthermore, he blocks communication about the fate of family members in the Holocaust and about what it means for his family to live in Germany today. Regarding the interaction between mother and son, we can observe that Ruth is very lonely in her reinterpretation and her work on her relationship to her father and his fate in the Holocaust. Yet at the same time, Ruth rejects Georg's attempts to identify with his Jewish family background.

For her, Jewishness had lost the status of a collective identity which should and can be transmitted to her children. Instead it has become an individual feature of her own life history, which will end with her death. In this family Jewishness is very much reduced to the ideal of a religious life in ac-

cordance with the traditions of Eastern European Jews, a culture that was destroyed by the Holocaust. Therefore in Ruth's perspective, her son has no chance of ever being a "real" Jew.

## Conclusion

The reconstruction of biographies and the intergenerational dialog in families of Jewish Communists shows the way in which the construction of an anti-fascist state and the idea of Communist universalism had an impact on the biographical level. These social conceptions helped people to process the traumatic and painful experiences of persecution and exile. Returning emigrants could see themselves as shapers of a hegemonic anti-fascist discourse that seemed to eradicate the differences between Jews and non-Jews. But adjusting their own biographies had its price. It not only involved distancing themselves from parts of their own life history, but also meant denying themselves feelings of otherness and the right to a separate identity. Biographical work became self-discipline in the sense of eradication of differences to conform to the socially desirable model. The discovery or recovery of a more open and conscious contact with Jewishness was therefore encouraged by the dissolution of the Communist self-conception with its powerful binding character. The theoretical and political acceptance of a diversity of lifestyles in East Germany since the eighties, as well as the intensive discourse on Jewish life in unified Germany in the nineties, can be described as an accelerating evolution of the social context of the biographies presented.

The process of reflecting on their Jewish family history also has different meanings in different generations, however. Especially for interviewees of the parents' generation whose family members were murdered in the Shoah, reflection could be accompanied by a new phase of grieving for their murdered relatives. Among their children, the Jewish family background was often a new discovery, which sometimes served as a biographical resource that helped this generation to detach themselves from socialism and the moral ideals of their parents.

The dialog between mother and son demonstrates that socialization processes should not be thought of as a simple transfer of knowledge and habits from parents to their children. In fact, socialization is an ongoing intergenerational verbalized and para-linguistic "dialog" in which meaning is communicated reciprocally. Instances of alternating speech by different members of one family during an interview help to understand the dynamics of biographical structuring in communication processes. By analyzing these dialogs we can gain insight into the structure of interaction between different members of one family.

Generally speaking, research on the network of biographical concepts in families gives us the opportunity to reconstruct how biographical structuring and biographical work are processed in interactions and within changing social contexts over a historical time which can be longer than a single life-time. These changing versions of an individual's biography and of the family history must be communicated within and outside the family. However, as a consequence, family members may have very different perspectives, which can lead not only to differences between the generations, and thereby open up the intergenerational dialog, but also to a mutual blocking of the processes of biographical structuring. Thus processes of biographical work are formed in interactions in which different perspectives have to be communicated continuously. Their structure and their genesis can only be understood by taking into account the entire biography of each partner in the interaction.

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Lena Inowlocki

## Doing “Being Jewish”: Constitution of “Normality” in Families of Jewish Displaced Persons in Germany

A kind of remarkable thing is how, in ordinary conversation, people, in reporting on some event, report what we might see to be, not what happened, but the ordinariness of what happened. (...) Whatever you may think about what it is to be an ordinary person in the world, an initial shift is not to think of “an ordinary person” as some person, but as somebody as having as one’s job, as one’s constant preoccupation, doing “being ordinary” (Sacks 1984: 414).

### Doing “Being Ordinary”

The Polish-Jewish movie director Wanda Jakubowska was interviewed on the occasion of her eightieth birthday in November, 1987. She described how she began imagining the movie she later made about Auschwitz, *The Last Stage*, the very moment she was driven through the camp’s gate. The creaking of the heavy gate, she thought, would provide a good sound effect in the movie.

During the war against the Soviet Union, German soldiers filmed “everyday life” at the front with their cine-cameras brought from home; their commanders approved. Six of these former soldiers were interviewed by the German filmmakers Harriet Eder and Thomas Kufus in their movie *My War* (1989/90). From the front line footage as well as in the interviews it was apparent that the former soldiers had for the most part maintained their view of taking part in ordinary activities of “everyday life” at the war front. What was seen as extraordinary about the “experience” was the break from the routine of life at home. Speaking as tourists, for example, they appreciated having seen a number of countries at the Eastern front, and regretted not getting to the Western front as well. With their cameras they had filmed before, during, and after the war: making movies remained the same kind of activity, and there was no need to change perspectives. From working in a photography studio or store to being a soldier and then returning home to their work, it was “business as usual”.

The former commander of Dachau, Sachsenhausen and Auschwitz, Rudolf Höss, wrote a diary while awaiting his court sentence and execution in a Polish prison after the war. He described mass extermination as a demanding task and a professional challenge. In maintaining the normality of his actions, he implicitly claims that what he had done need not be questioned. In

an analysis of Höss' diary, his claim of normality has been described as a "construction of ordinariness" (Czyżewski 1995; Czyżewski and Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1989).

In fact, the utterly different actions and motives of these three cases can be taken as examples of normalizing the extraordinary events one was involved in. In all three cases, an "ordinary cast of mind" is assumed in describing the events as manageable affairs dealt with competently. In other words, in presenting what happened as "storyable", they were all "doing 'being ordinary'" (Sacks 1984). Harvey Sacks, the ethnomethodologist and founder of conversation analysis, refers to an example similar to Wanda Jakubowska's in explaining how terrifying incidents are being presented as matters of everyday life dealt with competently.<sup>1</sup> But how can "doing 'being ordinary'" describe both the filming soldiers, and at the same time Höss? An impassive view of people acting as ordinary persons under ordinary circumstances, under *all* circumstances, suspends preliminary distinctions and classifications. This allows a closer look at exactly what people are doing when they continue acting and presenting themselves as ordinary persons; in other words, which position they take for granted or consider legitimate in describing what happened.

We may imagine that the filmmaker Wanda Jakubowska was reacting to the monstrosity of the place when she imagined turning the creaking of the gate into a sound effect. She tapped her professional interest and experience as a source of normality, and perhaps thanks to her imagination the murderous reality of the concentration camp appeared less overwhelming for the moment.

Likewise in the examples of soldiers filming at the Eastern front and of Höss's diary account, reference was made to forms of professional practice, to continuing doing what was considered normal. In these cases, however, the actors made such references in proclaiming their actions as ordinary and their perspective as legitimate. Their normalizing activities carried the inherent claim that there was nothing unusual about what was taking place, and that they were not responsible for inflicting suffering and death. The need to reflect on personal and collective actions is also denied in retrospect by imposing "objective" conditions of action in place of the speaker's own agency. This is manifested in such statements as, "Well, there was a war going on", or "I was doing my duty".

In the case of Wanda Jakubowska, an as-if construction of relative normality is clutched against a situation experienced as deeply unjust and inhu-

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1 Sacks refers to the book *An Ordinary Camp* by Micheline Morel (1958), in which she reports the first day in a concentration camp, its horror, and then a certain lull: "Little by little conversation sprang up from the bunks. The rumors were already beginning to circulate. Luckily, the news is good. We'll be home soon. We'll have an unusual experience to talk about" (Sacks 1984: 417).

man. In the defenseless and powerless position of the camp inmate, holding on to normality is a fiction, but may nonetheless be of consequence. In "playing out" the symbolic character of action, reflexivity can be set into motion. By subverting rather than legitimating the situation, one refuses to take one's perspective on what happened for granted. Another important example of insisting on the symbolic character of action has been offered in Roberto Benigni's movie *Life is Beautiful*. The basic normality of reciprocity and care and of enjoying life is magically played out against their brutal denial in the concentration camp. Deprived of normality, Guido, Giosuè's father, grandfather, and mother continue acting according to basic expectations of human interaction in everyday life, which continue to operate as a normative force. This force is explored both comically and tragically. A momentum is created and a child's life is saved. It takes a magician such as the father played by Benigni, however, to work such wonders.<sup>2</sup>

In everyday life too, as in the movies, there can be unexpected and surprising ways of "doing 'being ordinary'". When something happens that destroys the routine organization of everyday life, talking represents an effort to carry on. In the case of a complete and drastic break, however, what can be said? For those who escaped the Nazi persecution, not only was everyday life destroyed, but normality was totally fractured. How is life possible when close family and relatives have been murdered, and so have friends, acquaintances, the collectives one belonged to? And *where* is life possible, if there is no place to return to?

In asking Jewish "displaced persons", their children and grandchildren for biographical interviews, I began by explaining my interest in what had changed and what had continued from one generation to another in their families. This seemed to capture a concern of my interview partners, too. They were concerned—in ways specific to the different generations—about remaining Jewish, about maintaining some kind of connection with other Jews, and about making sense of being Jewish, in religious, traditional, intellectual, and/or social terms. I interviewed mostly women and girls, since my focus was on continuity and changes in traditional practices at home in relation to interactions between the generations.<sup>3</sup> The women of the middle generation were actively concerned about their children remaining Jewish, and they expressed a wish that their children would choose Jewish partners. In some families, this went together with keeping certain traditions; in other families, with religious observance. All families and their members had social relations with other Jews, although to varying degrees, and the meaning of being Jewish was an issue for all.

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2 For a very thoughtful analysis of this movie, including the child's perspective, see Bathrick (2000).

3 I started interviewing in the late 1980s and have continued since. On interviewing the three generations, see Inowlocki (1993).

Importance was attributed to Jewish education, and in many cases the women of the middle generation were engaged in bringing about learning opportunities. Here differences came up between the communities. I interviewed families in Antwerp, Amsterdam, and Amstadt (a town in Western Germany: the name of the town has been changed here for the sake of anonymity, since only a small number of Jewish families live there). Antwerp has the largest Jewish community of the three cities, with a growing trend toward orthodoxy since the 1970s. There is a range of Jewish schools differing in religious observance which are attended by over 90% of the children from Jewish families (Abicht 1993). In Amsterdam, a small orthodox high school was established by parents who wanted an observant and intensive Jewish education;<sup>4</sup> there is also a liberal Jewish high school. In the smallest community of the three, in Amstadt, there is only a grade school and no more advanced Jewish education. In all three communities, the older family members I interviewed—and sometimes those of the middle generation—were born in Eastern Europe, mostly in Poland.

Since medieval times, Jews had settled in Poland, which became the center of Ashkenazi Jews in the 17th and 18th century (Dawidowicz 1966). This situation was ended by the Nazi occupation. After the end of the war, about 50,000 Polish Jews who had survived the camps, survived in hiding, or fought as partisans left Poland immediately and went West. In 1946, Jews who had considered resettling in Poland, or who were preparing there to immigrate to Palestine fled to the Western Allied zones because of anti-Jewish pogroms. Polish Jews returning from the Soviet Union followed, so that between 150,000 and 250,000 Jews came to stay in camps which had been established in the British and the U.S. zones. The conditions in these camps were terrible in the beginning, and policy on dealing with the refugees was uncertain. The term refugee for the Jews was avoided, as if they could eventually return to their homeland, and their status was defined in 1947 as “displaced persons” (or “DPs”), the same as that of the millions of Germans who were fleeing their places of settlement in Eastern Europe (Wasserstein 1996). Most of the Jewish DPs struggled to leave for the U.S.A., Latin American countries, or the British Mandate of Palestine, or to any other country which would accept a certain quota of them, for example, Sweden or France.

There were still Jews living in DP camps when the Federal Republic of Germany was established in 1949. Their projects for emigration had not been realizable, or they had just stayed on. The last camp was closed down in 1955. Meanwhile, small Jewish communities of a few hundred up to a few thousand were establishing themselves in West German cities. They were thought of as temporary, and until the 1970s there was a constant debate

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4 Dutch legislation provides for schools of religious communities, and a number of Muslim and Hindu schools have been established since the late 1980s, as well as a few very small Jewish schools.

within the communities as to whether Jews should be living in Germany at all. Two generations have grown up since, and with the arrival of Russian Jewish immigrants since the early 1990s, the membership of Jewish communities in Germany has multiplied. But even for the large majority who do not consider leaving Germany for another country, their relations to Germany and Germans, both historically and at present, remain subject to ongoing debate and interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

In the discussion of an interview with a woman of the middle generation in Amstadt,<sup>6</sup> some of the ambivalence of living in Germany becomes apparent through the unexpected and paradoxical solutions she found. Analyzing "practical solutions" can generate an understanding of what kinds of problems there are and how specific problems are solved, without presuppositions on the part of the researcher (Becker 1998). Structures of social praxis can be discovered through biographical interviewing and comparative analysis of single cases and specific situations of crisis resolution (Apitzsch and Inowlocki 2000).

## A Case of "Indoctrination"

Sonia Wieder, as she is called here, was born in the early 1950s and lives in Amstadt with her husband, their eleven-year-old daughter and their fourteen-year-old son. Her parents met in a Jewish DP camp, after surviving the ghetto and concentration camp. After a failed attempt to settle in Israel, they returned to Amstadt in the mid-1950s to obtain medical treatment, to apply for restitution payments, and to try to make a living.

Sonia Wieder responded to my request to tell me her life story as follows:

*"Well, when I hear the story of my husband, who grew up in Israel, I have the feeling that in Amstadt my youth was really taken away from me. Right, well, I grew up in Amstadt in a so-called, in quotation marks, 'ghetto.' My parents come from Poland as you know and have been here since the war." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 1)*

With this beginning, a better youth in a different place, such as her husband's growing up in Israel, is set against her own experience of growing up in what she calls a "ghetto" in Amstadt. Her husband is also the child of Polish Jews.

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5 This would be in contrast to the younger generation in immigrant families, who insist on the normality of their status by refusing to distinguish between their "being German" and their "being Turkish", for example. This reaction constitutes a critique of the prevalent discourse on immigrants which emphasizes their "difference". The majority discourse on Jews rather emphasizes their "sameness", with a tendency to gloss over or deny the history of their "difference".

6 This interview was conducted in 1990 and has also been discussed in another context (Inowlocki 1997).

His parents went to Palestine after the war, and stayed there. Her husband likes to recall his carefree childhood with his brothers and sisters, as Sonia Wieder tells later on in the interview. In her own youth there was no place to experience and enjoy life freely. Relations outside the “ghetto” were restricted:

*“Contact with other children I had, that is, contact with Jewish children, we had the youth center on Hill Street as you know*

*L.I.:* *mhm*

*S.W.:* *with ((slowly:)) German children really less, well that was somewhat of a taboo at home, to bring German friends to the house or to visit German friends, that was somehow frowned upon, not that my parents had said that explicitly, you just somehow got the message, right.” (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 1)*

In her childhood, Sonia Wieder made friends only among Jewish children, just as her parents expected her to. The children all came from similar backgrounds of experiencing the aftermath of persecution. Her parents imposed the socially restrictive and depressing atmosphere of her childhood, which she experienced as a “ghetto”, on her, on the one hand. On the other hand, she cannot blame them, since it had not been possible for them to live in a different place and under less depressing circumstances. Life was overshadowed by the Nazi persecution.

In this passage and throughout the interview, Sonia Wieder emphasizes that I, the interviewer, know the places she is referring to, invoking a strong sense of a shared experience of time and place. As a part of the “ghetto” experience, she sees a collective fate of those whose families were persecuted and settled down, in Germany of all places, after DP camps and unsuccessful emigration projects. My acknowledgment of the shared background and context knowledge represents an acceptance of the fact that living in Germany is how things went, as against reproachful questions by Jews living in other countries.

After the description of her youth, Ms. Wieder does not continue with her own life story. Instead she tells about her daughter, who is eleven years old, and how “self assured” she became from attending a Jewish school:

*“Well, my daughter, for example, she went to a Jewish school, and I have sent her there very deliberately so that she knows where she comes from, because she is living here in Germany, right, because we are living here in Germany. And I don't have this either, for example, I believe if you already live in Germany you would somehow have to give the children a Jewish consciousness, but I cannot reproach my parents either because they were much too preoccupied with building up a new life for themselves, you understand? And I believe that—and I admire my parents, that they even had the courage after Auschwitz, at all, a new life, well that they had the courage at all to put children into the world and, and start a new life. Yes, and that is why I cannot blame them, either.” (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 3)*

Being Jewish was identical in her youth with growing up in the "ghetto" of a group of people marked by persecution. In her view, the restrictions and suffering blocked her own personal development. Yet for her daughter, who grew up in a much larger and more varied peer group and could attend Jewish grade school, she sees a positive meaning in being Jewish. Ms. Wieder herself had been one of the very few Jewish children in a German school during the 1950s and 60s, in a situation that was often difficult yet did not receive special attention.

Ms. Wieder's parents had great difficulties in starting a new life. Their emigration to Israel in the early 1950s failed and they felt bad about trying to make a living in Germany. As Sonia Wieder tells her own story, it is characterized by her parents' trajectory of suffering (Riemann and Schütze 1991), of being overwhelmed by the aftermath of persecution, and by their difficulties in making a living. Even after many years, her parents' persecution in the ghetto and concentration camp weigh heavily on them, and hence on herself. Her father's long illness and recent death are seen as resulting from the hardship inflicted on him. As another consequence, she sees her own unhappy childhood and youth. The fact that she is still living in Germany, and now with a family of her own, is also seen by her as a consequence of how things went, as something she feels powerless to change. She knows that her parents were exposed to a constant threat of death, and that their feeling of normality of life was compromised forever. She traces her own lack of a sense of control of her life to her parents, whom she cannot blame for not finding a self-determined "new beginning".

There are only partial areas in the family history which Ms. Wieder can set against the dominant experience of a trajectory of suffering and hardship. As a counter-reality, they contrast with the dominant trajectory, inserting pockets of hope and happiness. In Sonia Wieder's account, the time when her parents met in the DP camp seems like a short but intensively lived period, a golden past when her parents were still young and could enjoy life. In transmitting "Jewish consciousness" to her children, as well as in accepting friendships of her children with non-Jewish children, she is trying to create another counter-reality. Both changes are intended to enable her daughter to grow up without the restrictive and isolating conditions she herself experienced. She is sure that her children know about her reservations about non-Jewish Germans, but she lets them have their own experiences with social encounters. In contrast to her parents, she does not mind her children's friendships with non-Jewish German children. They are invited to eat at her house and to sleep over. However, she adds immediately, she is not sure how she would react if one of her children wanted to marry a non-Jewish German:

*"Maybe then it is—I mean you can never be completely on the safe side, anywhere. In Israel it can happen to you that your daughter marries an Arab, or if you go to America she'll bring home a colored man. I don't know how I would react then, whether I would*

*accept him rather than a German because there is still a difference between a German, or a Christian, or whatever, right? But then I think, well, this is the price I'm paying for living here in the Federal Republic*

*I.: yes, mhm*

*S.W.: I mean, I am trying to ((emphatically:)) indoctrinate her, that's clear*

*L.I.: ((laughs))" (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 12)*

The paradoxes and moral dilemmas Ms. Wieder refers to characterize her own life story and the lives of her family members. While she is attempting to change for her children the restrictive situation that she compares with a "ghetto", at the same time she fears that her daughter could marry a non-Jewish German. She seems more concerned about her young daughter's future choice of partner than about her son's. The idea of a German, non-Jewish son-in-law might be especially painful because men are seen as less willing to adapt, and thus as more representative of their national identity than women. There are no precautions she can take but, as she adds surprisingly, she is doing what she can to "indoctrinate" her daughter. What could this mean? Against the worst-case scenario of her daughter marrying a German Christian, the "indoctrination" attempt is based on the following suppositions:

1. A preventive strategy would bring about such conditions that her daughter would not only be obliged to follow rules, but would herself want to observe norms.
2. A normative conviction can only result if her daughter learns about and experiences being Jewish not as a restrictive condition, but in a positive way.
3. A basis of experience and knowledge has to be created to counter the conditions and constraints of everyday life in Amstadt.
4. This basis of Judaism must be such that it can become significant for her daughter's actions, counteracting the influence of mainstream everyday life in Amstadt.

"Indoctrination" does not appear to be an exaggerated term for these objectives. It is still surprising that Ms. Wieder would use this term not in a general discussion about cultural matters, but in reference to her own daughter. The "inappropriate" use of the term is marked by inserting it unexpectedly, without an introductory explanation and by creating a dramatic effect through emphasis. Its oddity is further highlighted by asserting its apparent self-evidence ("that's clear"). My laughing at this point reflects my surprise as well as my response to the dramatic presentation.

By calling her attempt to control her daughter's future "indoctrination", Ms. Wieder has qualified her effort as a strategy which is usually considered out of place in an open and loving relationship. In a post-war Jewish community in Germany, there is hardly any normal way to maintain and transmit Judaism, either as knowledge of its habitual practices, or as awareness of its

content and meaning. Forms of transmission have to be deliberately inserted into an environment of everyday life which has no connection with anything Jewish. Transmission and learning efforts thus have to be intensified to create their own context of meaning, in the absence of established social and institutional settings. In calling this effort "indoctrination", Ms. Wieder dramatizes the effort and the paradoxes involved in transmitting her knowledge. Her reflexivity is not exceptional: many of the other women of the middle generation who were interviewed talk about "indoctrinating" or "brainwashing" their children. In all of these cases, the abnormality of the conditions of learning and of knowledge transmission is acknowledged in presenting what seems like an ordinary account of bringing up children.

The segment continues as follows:

*S.W.:* "I mean, I am trying to ((emphatically:)) indoctrinate her, that's clear,

*L.I.:*

((laughs))

*S.W.:* very consciously, I send her to Ganzmann, Ganzmann is a very religious Jew as you know, right, and the only one whose religiousness I buy, because with the others I have the feeling that all of that is just so superficial; but Ganzmann is an anachronism, right, and for me it symbolizes the shtetl, right, and in a few more years from now there won't be any of that anymore, maybe in Israel, in those areas where many religious Jews live, very religious, orthodox, but here in Germany, right, I believe that the children should get this, too, that they know where they come from. I have not consciously—because my parents haven't pushed me to it, and I think that's very important. Ganzmann tells for example—yesterday my son came back and Ganzmann had told him some fables, Jewish fables or legends I don't know at all, right? Well I wouldn't be able to pass on anything like that to him, right? And I believe it's quite a good thing that I send him there. And my daughter goes to Ms. Ganzmann who is also very religious, who also tries to indoctrinate her, even more than I do, right, and sometimes there are problems. I mean not with my son, because he is already fourteen and there's nothing they can do anymore. My daughter then comes back and says, why aren't we kosher, why? ((breathes audibly)) and things like that, but I think, that is so important to me that I send them there in spite of everything, right, and I think that—look, when I go to synagogue and I sit there, I can barely read, I feel like an illiterate, yes, and I would like my children when they go to synagogue to be able to read, not to sit there like illiterates but to know what they daven<sup>7</sup>, and that is very important to me." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 12–13)

Here Ms. Wieder explains why her children should be "indoctrinated", and also describes the ambivalent consequences. Her decision to send her children to study with Mr. and Ms. Ganzmann is a very conscious one. In contrast to her own parents, who didn't "push" her, she positively wants her children to "know where they come from".

While this may seem an obvious motive, it still needs explanation. Why would it be so important for children to know where they come from? Such knowledge could be a memorial to the past, it could stand in the place of what is gone. It could also imply a sense of what one has been deprived of and

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7 Yiddish *davnen*: to recite prayers

compensate for what the present lacks. While this is very comprehensible, it is important to keep in mind that there are other “strategies” for determining the meaning of the past. There are families, for example, which would rather “never look back”.<sup>8</sup> It is interesting therefore to look at the conditions which make the past seem so important, as in Sonia Wieder’s case.

First of all, there are kinds of knowledge she misses herself and would want her children to have: religious knowledge as well as familiarity with pre-war Polish Jewish culture in practice, as expressed through Yiddish and through a certain style of social communication and interaction. Religious practice was “domesticated” in the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries through models of a bourgeois family with women as wives and at the same time as mediators to the non-Jewish majority.<sup>9</sup> The ideal of *Bildung*, of character formation through education, was a central domain and the responsibility of women and mothers. Sonia Wieder like other women in this study is picking up fragments of this tradition of modernity in her efforts toward continuity.

Now it seems that the social style will be known and recognized as such even when many of its elements are missing or have become obsolete. There might be a feeling that something is missing, in the way it is said that a lost limb can still be “felt”, but the *Gestalt* is completed by a few references. In the sense of knowledge of social style, Sonia Wieder wants to fill in the gaps. Ordinarily, the family and the larger social group with common origins would provide experience and familiarity, but now the world for her children to participate in, represented by the Ganzmanns, is all but lost.

Since the 1970s, a new orthodoxy has created multiple references to Eastern European Jewish life in Western Europe, especially in Antwerp and in London. There are large families; Yiddish is spoken; there are a variety of religious schools and community institutions. These changes have not come to Amstadt, however. There Eastern European Jewish life exists only as a symbolic memory, as hints of a past about which knowledge is not transmitted in any fixed way: neither within families, where this memory is connected with too much pain, nor institutionally. Ms. Wieder has to find her own way for her children to learn. She has found the elderly couple, the Ganzmanns, who represent the social world of the *shtetl* in ways that seem as authentic as

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8 One example would be an irreconcilable social surrounding and ideology, as in the case of the German Jews who settled in the German Democratic Republic after the end of the war (Voelter 1997, Honigmann 1999). Another example would be when survival is attributed to sheer luck, and “gambling” remains the motto for the future, with no past to weigh you down (a case communicated by Gabrielle Varro).

9 As Marion A. Kaplan noted for imperial Germany, “Women coupled faith with domesticity. They helped families look, act and feel like Germans by promoting a culture of domesticity recognizable to other bourgeois Germans” (Kaplan 1994; see also Volkov 2000). While the situation of Polish Jews was very different from that of German Jews, a comparable project of modernity was undertaken through domesticizing religion there as well.

they are anachronistic. Her children now learn more about traditional subjects than she has, even though ordinarily she should be closer to this knowledge. But such commonplace transmission has been disrupted.

What her children learn is not "traditional" in any ordinary sense; "Jewish fables or legends" are one substitute for the oral transmission which was broken off. Understanding prayers in the synagogue, on the other hand, as Sonia Wieder would also want for herself, is not "traditional" either. Religious studies for girls and women were institutionalized rather recently.<sup>10</sup> In most cases, the younger generation in the families I interviewed is the first one to be instructed in Hebrew and Jewish studies at school. The ordinary way for girls to learn was from their mothers and grandmothers at home, which is how "domestic religion" (Myerhoff 1978) was instilled.

After 1939, all the differences between the styles of life of the more assimilated and the more orthodox Jewish families in Poland disappeared abruptly along with the ordinary way of becoming familiar with one's background. Today few are aware of the very different milieus which were oriented toward Polish urban culture or toward socialist or communist political organization, toward deeply religious ways of life, or toward Zionist convictions, to name some extremes. After their destruction, and with the passage of time, the different Jewish milieus in Eastern Europe were replaced by and subsumed in "Fiddler on the Roof" imagery and re-invented with *klezmer* music. It has been argued that such images of a commercialized pop-culture and a nostalgic connection to Jewish things, bereft of vitality for the present (Wasserstein 1996), are all that is left now among Jews in Europe. But this view overlooks the interest and efforts at finding out what Jewish culture is about. The interviews in my study show, for example, that "packaged" cultural imagery is not all there is. A closer examination of the acquisition and transmission of knowledge about the people's origins reveals that energy is not merely directed at an image of the past, but has an impact on the present. There is no way to foretell which elements of this knowledge will regain significance, and in what way.

Sonia Wieder herself grew up in a Yiddish-speaking environment. The way she pronounces "kosher" is more Yiddish than German; it is probably how she learned the word in the home. While her parents did not keep a kosher household—for reasons she goes into later—"kosher" was nonetheless an important category, indicative of a consciousness of how things used to be, how they would be under other circumstances, and maybe how they should be. These symbolic concerns are what she wants her children to know. She

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10 With advancing Enlightenment and the relative emancipation of the Jews, Jewish girls in Poland in the early 19th century attended public high schools, studying Polish, Russian, and foreign languages, while boys continued to go to religious schools. To counter the estrangement of girls from Yiddish and from Jewish traditions, *Beit Ya'akov* schools for girls were founded in 1917 (see El-Or 1994).

does not want her children to keep the laws strictly and introduce orthodox practice. Yet that is what the elderly couple of teachers have in mind. When Ms. Ganzmann attempts to “indoctrinate” Sonia Wieder’s daughter, this creates a conflict for her, since in her life eating kosher is a thing of the past. She is thinking rather about the future, hoping her children will retain their interest in being Jewish, especially by choosing Jewish partners. Ms. Wieder wants to initiate a positive identification with being Jewish, to counter the negativity of persecution. This minimal program relies on indoctrination, or rather on counter-indoctrination against the dominant non-Jewish environment in which her children are growing up. Mr. and Ms. Ganzmann are intended to represent a Yiddish milieu for her children to experience and participate in, but the teachers see their task as changing the style of life of the whole Wieder family. Pressure and tension are created through the paradoxes of sending the daughter to Ms. Ganzmann and then being asked why she does not keep kosher at home. Ms. Wieder tries to keep “indoctrination” going in a limited way as long as possible. She has to insist on these lessons against her children’s inclination; they would rather not go but respect the expectations placed on them. Sonia Wieder has to deal with her children’s reluctance, and she also has to react to the Ganzmanns’ ambition of turning her children into orthodox Jews.

I asked where the lessons took place.

*L.I.:* “Is that at the synagogue, for the children, several times per week?”

*S.W.:* That is, yes a few times per w—he takes no money for it. He does it—well, we donate something, for poor people, and he is always sending us all kinds of people, we always give because—and that is just like the kheder<sup>11</sup>, he goes there, he has to wear long pants, and put on a kapel<sup>12</sup>, and sits there and learns.

*L.I.:* And they both want that, too.

*S.W.:* They don’t want that ((laughs))

*L.I.:* ((laughs))

*S.W.:* they have to. Because I think he is—to us he is radical but I think if he weren’t that way I wouldn’t send them there at all, because he is the only one I take it from. He is a person like what is written in the Talmud about how a person should be, right? Modest, all of what we are not, yes, modest, and he always tells the truth, yes, and he is always collecting for poor people, yes, and luxury is not important at all, and he lives in an apartment, well, all that’s missing is the goat ((laughs)), you know,

*L.I.:* ((laughs))

*S.W.:* just like in Poyln.<sup>13</sup> And she always takes my daughter every time when—and they also do—look, for years my son went to Gross, he couldn’t read. Afterwards I sent him to Ganzmann, and within a week he could read, not that he always understands

11 Hebrew school (literally “room”): formerly, primary Hebrew instruction for three to five-year-old boys in Polish Jewish communities.

12 Yiddish: yarmulke, skullcap.

13 Yiddish: Poland.

him to Ganzmann, and within a week he could read, not that he always understands what he reads, but he could read, yes, well they seem to have some old kind of method to teach the children, but it works, yes, and when they come there, they get a tea first of all, and a shtikl kikhn<sup>14</sup>, you know, it is well, done with love, with sympathy, it's not just studying, yes, and then they come back and Ms. Ganzmann has packed up packages, a lekakh, ((laughs lightly)), a honey kikh, you know, things like that.

L.I.:

((laughs lightly))

S.W.:

I mean, he gets on your nerves; too, he also gets on my nerves sometimes, because sometimes he demands too much from my son. You know, he wants to make a very religious Jew out of him and of course that is a conflict, yes that's a conflict and I don't know how long it can go on. But as long as it is possible, as long as I can still push my son like this, I think that whatever he has learned, well, he won't lose it, and afterwards he will always remember him, yes and that is like in the stories of Bashevis Singer, yes, like that, and I can't pass that on to him because I have not gotten any of that here in Germany." (Sonja Wieder, 1990: 13-14)

No money is charged for these lessons. They are part of a complex economy of reciprocity and obligation, and are also a fulfillment of the religious obligations of teaching, learning, and charity. They represent what a whole community would ordinarily be involved in, and here is performed by a few. The teachers, their religious and simple lifestyle, and their old-fashioned method of instruction are described as the antithesis of Sonia Wieder's family life and of what her children are accustomed to from their schools, even the Jewish primary school in Amstadt. Her son has to cover his legs and the top of his head; her daughter might be obliged to wear a skirt instead of pants. These modes of clothing mark the transition to another sphere. The children are reluctant to undergo such normative restrictions, which run counter to the freedom of expression they otherwise enjoy. The ordeal is sweetened with tea, cakes and cookies. More than just an *amuse-gueule*, eating honey cake before the recitation of the lessons represents a long history of initiating children to religious learning (Marcus 1984). Sonia Wieder wants her children to learn, and she wants them to taste and develop a sense of the atmosphere associated with such learning. Clearly, she herself is participating in a life-world which she feels she has been deprived of knowing. Obviously, she would never want herself or her family to "go back" to this kind of life. But giving up an attachment to it is different and more difficult when it has been disrupted and destroyed, and only loss and deprivation remain in its place.

In other Western European Jewish communities, the new orthodoxy seems at first glance to have created a *trompe-l'oeil* of Eastern European pre-war Jewish life. Of course it is a completely different picture, but there is a sense of compensation in it. Or rather, as another woman interviewed in Amstadt, who has relations in London, put it, in the middle of the large families and their discussions about what one rabbi said and what another one said, it may seem as if the Shoah had never happened.

14 Shtikl kikhn: piece of cake; lekakh, kikh: cakes, cookies.

Mr. Ganzmann challenges the limits of Sonia Wieder's patience with his demands for religious observance. She is not sure how long the conflict between religious instruction and non-practicing family life can go on. But she wants her children and herself to partake in what she perceives as the last authentic heritage from *Poyln*, as she imagines it from the novels of Isaac Bashevis Singer.

The constant references to the lost world that Sonia Wieder grew up with were overburdened with loss and mourning. Fleeting images did not turn into stories. There was no way the experiences of survivors could be told and heard in terms of an ordinariness of what happened. Instead, not only for Sonia Wieder, Singer's novels have filled out the gaps and re-created a world of romantic realism. The Ganzmanns seem to have stepped right out of this world; they have reproduced everything but the goat. They support the longing for family and group history, and provide it with a nostalgic substitution.

Only a few anecdotes of what happened in the family can be talked about:

*S.W.:* "My parents were—my father comes from a very religious family, an orthodox religious family, very well known in K., yes, and when my grandmother got married they say the streets were so crowded that she had to be carried in through the window. Such a well-known, famous family. And when I got married in Israel I went to the rabbinate and they were wondering what an "N." ((her maiden name)) is doing in Germany, right... ((laughs))

*L.I.:* ((laughs))

*S.W.:* yes but all of that was—then my father was not religious, and my mother came from a very different kind of family and was not religious anyway and didn't know anything about it, how could she have, I mean she couldn't have been taught anything, she went to the ghetto when she was twelve or ten years old and then into the camp, her whole youth therefore—how could she have been taught? And then her parents died, too. And she didn't have the time or the state of mind to somehow—and not the consciousness in a way, I think, to see that this is important, right? And it was just let go. And then I had a very precocious girlfriend who didn't think much of that at all, and I thought that was great and ((laughs lightly)) then I didn't think much of it either anymore. And that is why I got so little *yidishkayt*<sup>15</sup>, in quotation marks, and I think that is really important, that the children get that, yes." (*Sonja Wieder*, 1990:14–15)

Ms. Wieder cannot even tell the anecdote about her grandmother's wedding and mention the well-known family she came from with pleasure or pride. In the same breath she recalls how, on the occasion of her own wedding, respect and recognition of the family name was turned against her by the Israeli rabbinate. By rhetorically asking her how she could be living in Germany, it was implied that she was not living up to her grandmother's name, and even canceling out its significance.

The religious background of her father's family has come to represent Jewishness, or *yidishkayt*, as more prestigious, characteristic, and recogniz-

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15 Yiddish: Jewishness, Jewish culture.

able than the non-religious milieu on her mother's side. In retrospect, after extermination politics and the destruction of life-worlds, non-religious ways of being Jewish can seem nondescript, or as lacking something essential which should not have been given up. Looking back, assimilation no longer seems voluntary, not even to a certain extent, but rather a regrettable course which should be reversed as much as possible.<sup>16</sup> The attempt to salvage practice and knowledge is made as a symbolic appropriation in this case, in contrast to neo-orthodoxy which sometimes discounts the difference between then and now. Here, certain elements of traditional learning and religious knowledge are intended to become a part of one's life, establishing an otherwise lost connection to traditions of the past which can figure as a resource. An underlying wish might be that *yidishkayt* should be conserved, passed on, or abandoned voluntarily, or be transformed just as any other cultural tradition: in a normal way, so to speak.

## Doing "Being Jewish"

Defending "indoctrination" is not new in a German-Jewish context, the use of this term has a history of its own. In 1948, the American educator Marie Syrkin came to visit a DP camp and criticized the schools' one-sided focus on the Jewish settlement in Palestine as "Zionist indoctrination". The teachers replied:

"Maybe it is not a good education if you only present one side (...) but we cannot afford such luxury. The children have nothing, nothing at all. What should we tell them—about the blessings of Poland? They know them. Or talk about visas to the USA? They won't get any. The map of *eretz*<sup>17</sup> is their only chance for deliverance (...) Indoctrination may be bad for normal children in a normal environment. But what is normal about our situation? (...) *Oyf a krumm fus passt a krumer shukh.*"<sup>18</sup> (Syrkin 1948; quoted by Giere 1993: 438)

In this case too, there is no denial that "indoctrination" is taking place, and that it poses ethical problems. Like Sonia Wieder, the teachers argue that "indoctrination" is the only solution in a situation which is "not normal". From the perspective of the educator Marie Syrkin, "indoctrination" was contrary to good education. Sonia Wieder's ambivalence is evidence of a similar concern.

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16 A woman of the older generation interviewed in Amstadt regretted in retrospect how "Polish" she had looked, acted, and felt before the war. Even though this had helped her to pass for a non-Jew when she escaped from the ghetto, in looking back it seemed to her that she had sided with anti-Semitic prejudice.

17 Hebrew: the promised land.

18 Yiddish: On a lame foot, a crooked shoe fits.

What has been described here as “indoctrination” is a particular way of “doing ‘being Jewish’”. Obviously there are many other ways of working out questions of membership or belonging, or of tradition and its practice. The reference to “indoctrination” is not as idiosyncratic as it may seem, however. In many of the other interviews as well, especially among women of the middle generation, this term comes up in reference to “immunizing” the children against losing interest in finding out about Judaism and maintaining some kind of adherence. In Amsterdam and Antwerp, “brainwashing” is spoken of rather than “indoctrination” where religious rather than primarily traditional knowledge is concerned.<sup>19</sup> While “indoctrination” is used in reference to the general importance of being and remaining Jewish as a member of a very small minority, the term “brainwashing” is used for intensive religious studies in neo-orthodox settings within larger Jewish communities. Both terms are used similarly in denoting paradoxical situations of transmitting and maintaining tradition. Clearly, neither the social situation of minority status, nor the institutionalization of neo-orthodoxy is perceived as “normal”. Distinct traditions are generally questioned, if not directly opposed, within Western European majority societies. Jewish and Islamic holidays are not noted in German calendars, for example, and thus have to be negotiated for school-children when examinations or excursions are scheduled for these dates. Neo-orthodox settings are paradoxical in the sense that they stretch the meaning of “traditional”, since the younger generation turns out to be more strictly observant than their parents, and religious studies for girls emphasize different kinds of practices and knowledge than their mothers and grandmothers are accustomed to.

In the introductory discussion of different situations of “doing ‘being ordinary’”, asserting the legitimacy of an “ordinary cast of mind” was contrasted with reflexivity as a way of coping with a deprivation of normality. The reference to “indoctrination” can be understood as a reflexive case. Given the sort of shock and ambivalence that the term evokes, it seems to be used as the reflection of a situation which is not normal. By suspending “normal” expectations for what can be communicated in an interview dealing with traditional knowledge and religious studies, it permits the generation of questions such as: am I/is she doing the right thing by sending the children to lessons which are in stark contrast and even in contradiction to their everyday concerns and experiences? The dilemma is admitted, yet the action is not precluded.

Sonia Wieder tells about the loss and deprivation of *yidishkayt* because of the persecution and then, in its aftermath, because of her parents’ helplessness to instill traditional knowledge in her. She would like to compensate for her parents’ disability by picking up the stray leads to a continuity which she

19 See for example the case of a mother talking about the “brainwashing” of her daughters in a neo-orthodox school, although she strongly supports this school (Inowlocki 1995).

herself has to help create. In this sense, being "pushed" to learn about being Jewish opposes action to the endurance of deprivation.

Two conclusions can be drawn here, in a preliminary way, concerning the social praxis of doing "being Jewish". First of all, it is important to note that *yidishkayt* is not identified with ethnic origin, nor with ethnicity. There exist, of course, claims to a Jewish ethnicity in political or in politicized religious terms, especially as part of the social and political conflicts in Israel and the Middle East. Such claims from within different groups of Jews also coincide with a dominant outside view on minorities, in which an interest in one's family background, in group history and traditions is quickly identified as "culturally specific" or "ethnic" behavior. Comparable interests of members of the dominant social majority are considered as given, and are not explained in cultural or ethnic terms. A close reading of cases can reveal that other things are at stake where "ethnicity" seems to be concerned. Thus Ms. Wieder does not sit back and say, "well, but I *am* Jewish", nor does she tell her children that. Basic definitions of being Jewish are fulfilled by being born to a Jewish mother or having converted to Judaism, but these definitions may not be comprehensive. Depending on one's background and social ties, it may not be sufficient to identify oneself as "being Jewish" and to obtain recognition within one's social networks. Depending on the social networks one belongs to, being Jewish can also require an awareness of taking part in a tradition and a history, an acquaintance with customary ways of life and religious knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

Significant social ties can also be imaginary. For Sonia Wieder, her grandparents and the social world of which they were a part represent an important and valuable connection in understanding her own and her children's involvement with "being Jewish". Since the ordinary way of transmission between the generations was broken off, she is attempting to create a sort of substitute connection, *as if* this tradition and transmission were still accessible. She is not fooling herself about the likelihood of success, since the only teachers she can find for this task have very different aims. She is hoping, however, that her children and to some extent she herself can partake of what the teachers know and represent, despite their attempts to turn her children into religious Jews.

As the reference to Harvey Sacks suggests, the "initial shift" is not to consider a person as "ordinary", as "Jewish", as "Turkish", or as "German", but to understand the ways in which this person is *doing* "being ordinary", "being Jewish", "being Turkish", or "being German". Understanding how a person is practically and reflexively dealing with the history and traditions she is involved with is very different from assuming an "ethnic identity". Presup-

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20 Thus in the neo-orthodox Jewish community of Antwerp, a young woman found that her liberal upbringing was not sufficient for her to be recognized as Jewish, and she opted for a "brainwashing" by the Habad-Lubavitch sect (Inowlocki 1999).

posing ethnicity commits the fallacy of begging the question, of taking for granted what is continuously being worked out, i.e. asserted, questioned, studied, dismissed, postulated, and so on.

The second conclusion is drawn from the ways in which forms of belonging or membership are worked out. When a connection is established to the history with which a person is involved—which in the case discussed is a history of utmost destruction and disruption—this connection is certainly symbolic in nature. Symbolic practices, however, can have very real consequences. What is transmitted and learned through “brainwashing” and “indoctrination” can be objected to and criticized, but these cannot be said to be “empty” forms and acts. Since meaning is generated through practice, it is not foreseeable what the consequences of symbolic practice will be and what dynamics will ensue. What ways of being Jewish will be worked out by the son and the daughter of Sonia Wieder, and by the children of parents who follow other paths?

It is one thing to indulge in predictions of finality, such as the thesis of a “Vanishing Diaspora” (Wasserstein 1996), for example. But such an epic view is different from, and possibly precludes, an understanding of how people live and continue to live with a cultural and religious history. In what ways is this history made livable, what kinds of knowledge are (unconsciously) relied on and referred to in this process? What does it mean to maintain, forget, remember, abandon, reclaim, change traditional practice and knowledge, and how are these affected or transformed in the process?

One way to address this question is to analyze “practical solutions” (Becker 1998), as specific cases of crisis resolution, to understand social praxis as a process in which the participants’ cultural knowledge and practice becomes manifest and transformed. The social praxis of tradition is complex, and it is unpredictable how traditions are and will be practiced and communicated. Through the interpretative shift of looking at “doing ‘being ordinary’”, as the point of departure of this paper, the extraordinary adoption of the “traditional” has emerged as a case of crisis resolution. Odd practices, such as the ambivalent necessity of “traditional” learning in the case discussed, can thus turn out to be a part of an effort to live with a difficult history, not by concealing the rupture but by making it a part of what is learned.

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*Júlia Vajda and Éva Kovács*

## Jews and Non-Jews Living Together After the Transition in Hungary

The abolition of the single-party system in 1989 enabled Hungarians to experience individual identities in everyday life. Identities banned during the reign of socialism were reborn, and it became possible to form plural or multicultural identities based on them. At the same time, members of the society were faced with the task of making their new identities “usable” in the framework of parliamentary democracy. The political changes of the last decade have not only made it possible to consider questions of identity formation, but also for a short while put such questions, and a discourse on identity, in the spotlight. Furthermore, new and rediscovered identities were beneficial for the development of new images and the orientation to change. This change, however, only appeared to be unambiguously liberating immediately after the collapse of communism.

As identities that had been suppressed during the previous decades re-emerged, numerous problems of Hungarian society that had not been dealt with over the same period became unavoidable and had to be faced.

One of the gravest and hardest periods of the “forgotten” collective history is the Holocaust. The ideology of collective guilt allowed the individual to avoid facing the problem, thus blocking the formation of collective memory. Due to this conflict between social and political needs, it was impossible to perceive the trauma caused by the Holocaust. Furthermore, since the past was not dealt with constructively, the hidden prejudices and sense of guilt of the perpetrator generation were passed on to the next generation. This phenomenon is not specific to Hungary, of course: we can observe similar defense mechanisms at work until the late 1970s in Western societies and even in Israel.

In Hungary, the Holocaust was perpetrated on a Jewish community living under particular conditions. Hungary had long been exceptionally tolerant toward its Jewish inhabitants and as a result had the largest Jewish community in Europe. As a probable consequence, Jews in Hungary at the beginning of the twentieth century did not experience the dilemma of assimilation with the same intensity that was felt by Jews in other European countries. For a long time they considered their Jewishness to be purely a religious issue. Closely related to this attitude is the fact that urban Jews were in a continuous process of secularization, and did not think of themselves as second-class citizens. Given such circumstances the anti-Jewish laws of the thirties and the Holocaust were perceived as a ‘surprise’ by the Jewish community, and concentra-

tion camps seemed unreal: this can't be happening to us, they thought. On the other hand, the radical shift in attitude toward Jews did not appear to be a logical consequence of preceding history for non-Jews either. It was all the more incomprehensible in view of the fact that, even though aversion and rejection had appeared on the political scene as early as the 1880s, anti-Semitism was not decisive in everyday life or at the level of small communities, and was never as strong as in many neighboring countries, such as Poland. Hence the Holocaust casts an ineradicable doubt upon the previous long decades of peaceful coexistence between Jews and non-Jews. The Holocaust destroyed the earlier social basis of coexistence, and earlier experiences came to appear unreal in retrospect. This then is the decisive starting point for Hungarian social history after 1945.

After World War II, the Communist regime made the Holocaust a taboo topic. In this way it banned not only anti-Semitism and Zionism as political movements and ideologies, but also any open discussion of the tragedy of the recent past, or of Jewishness as the experience not only of religious but also of ethnic identity. The taboo was accepted by both the perpetrators and the victims after 1945, and it became the new foundation for coexistence. While it did ease everyday contacts, the taboo only deepened the trauma for one side and the feelings of guilt (which remained unanalyzed) and the prejudices of the other. The next generation had to struggle with this inheritance (Erős, Vajda and Kovács 1998: 315–326). A discourse on Jewish identity, the Shoah, and anti-Semitism first appeared in the 1980s, within the 'second public sphere'.<sup>1</sup> With the change of regime, this discourse not only moved into the primary public sphere, but it also reached a wider range of social groups. For a short time it went from being a "problem" of closed intellectual circles to being a topic for society as a whole.

In our research project, we set out to examine the Jewish identity of the members of a smaller community, that of a Jewish school that considered itself a community school, who had chosen to face all the possible consequences of joining such a community very soon after the change of the political system. This school emphasized both Jewish community values and a commitment to liberal education. The Javne Lauder school was established at the same time as another private school which was more strictly religious (Amerikai Alapítványi Iskola, American Foundation School), and was therefore attractive to those who felt distant from strict religious education and

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1 As the communist system banned or sanctioned certain thoughts and topics, the loosening of the regime from the 1960s brought with it the establishment of the so-called second public sphere. This was a dissident intellectual 'forum' which was banned and persecuted, but tolerated to a degree by the regime. At first it was confined to private talks, but later (in the 1970s) it incorporated illegal seminars and lectures in flats, *samizdat* books, periodicals and newspapers.

denominational segregation, yet still felt cultural ties to Judaism<sup>2</sup> (cf. Kovács and Vajda 1993). While these interviews were being conducted, it became clear that, after the political changes in Hungary, a significant number of people chose to belong to such a community despite the fact that they did not share Jewish roots. Moreover, some of them did not even live in mixed marriages. It also became apparent that for these people, belonging to the community entailed facing a unique problem of Jewish identity. It not only meant acknowledgment and acceptance of the community's values and attributes (and the acceptance of a possible stigma), but also some degree of identification with the Jewishness of the community. The presence of non-Jews in this environment is in fact closely related to the emergence of the Holocaust trauma and the attempt to deal with it after a delay of fifty years. The non-Jews are trying to rub out a blot on their family histories. For Jews, on the other hand, the integration of non-Jews means that the Holocaust did not create insurmountable barriers between the descendants of the survivors and the descendants of the perpetrators. The underlying motives are on the one hand the desire to forgive, and on the other the desire to take on the sin. The fact that anti-Semitism emerged overtly (although it was not widely supported) after the political transition makes these decisions all the more momentous.

In the following, we will investigate some possible forms of Jewish identity in such circumstances. We will explore the potential routes offered by the political changes for the coexistence of Jews and non-Jews; how non-Jewish or mixed couples belonging to a Jewish community refer to Jewish culture and to Jewishness; what kind of Jewish identities they create for themselves; how these are embedded in their individual life stories; and what this means for the Jewish members of the community.

All our interviewees were born after the Holocaust, and therefore did not experience its persecution themselves. They are confronted with it only through their parents or grandparents, or through history lessons at school.

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2 The majority of Budapest Jews who survived the Holocaust 'broke' with religion and belief in God, claiming 'we don't need a God who would allow these atrocities'. At the same time common culture, values, norms and habits, as well as the ties of common persecution, served as the foundation of a kind of togetherness, which manifested itself mainly in the relation-systems of the private sphere, and in its 'dual-level communication' (see Kovács and Vajda 1996). Dual communication served to 'test' others to see which side the other was on, whether they were Jewish or anti-Semitic (allowing for no other alternative). At the same time the system of liberal values, which developed on the basis of a common culture, was a sharp contrast to the national value system of the majority non-Jewish intelligentsia, in which members were split into nationals and urbanists. This classification was not always based on political standpoints: two opposed, almost enemy camps were established, and the members of the urbanist group were considered Jews, regardless of their background. In this way they became targets of anti-Semitism, and it was difficult to establish whether conflicts were based on 'racial differences' or real differences in opinion (see Kovács 1994).

Thus, they constitute the first generation able to raise the possibility of co-existence without being compelled to perceive the other as a victim or a perpetrator. At the same time, their attempt can be a step toward coming to terms with their parents' trauma.

On the basis of our research, we can assume that not only Jews, but also non-Jews living in this environment are faced with the task of dealing with a Jewish identity problem. In this paper, however, we will not focus on individual solutions, but rather on strategies which couples have worked out for themselves, whereby each spouse's individual identity gains its real meaning in the structure of the relationship they have composed. Furthermore, in the case of non-mixed marriages (in this context, those couples in which neither partner is of Jewish origin), we will examine the meaning or relevance of belonging to a Jewish community.

## **Interchanged Identities**

János was born in 1950 as the son of a Jewish family (cf. Kovács and Vajda 2000). His parents are Holocaust survivors, both of whom had lost their previous spouses and children in the Holocaust. János first studied economics, then wanted to become an actor. Finally he became the manager of a theater troupe in Budapest. He met his wife at the age of 26. At that time she was still in high school and lived in the house of her anti-Semitic father, who was outraged by the fact that his daughter was dating a Jewish man. Her parents' rejection was so strong that she eloped with János immediately after graduation, and they have been living together since. They have two children.

János's attitude toward the interview was ambivalent. Although they volunteered to participate in a conversation with us, it turned out to be very difficult to make an appointment with him, and he would only accept one of the busiest squares in Budapest as the location for the interview. He hardly talked about himself, but rather about what a "stupid", "pointless" thing we were doing. His attitude toward the school is partly determined by the fact that they are ready to accept his troublesome child. Nonetheless, he only sees negative aspects of the school, stressing his aversion to its Jewishness. He agrees with his parents that Jews should assimilate rather than gathering in ghettos. At the same time, he stands by his marriage, which is charged with serious conflicts, partly due to his father-in-law's "persecutor" attitude toward him and their children.

Although the conditions set by János prevented a complete transcription of the interview, we can infer that in his case the anxiety originating from the Holocaust trauma of the parents, and from the situation in which his task was to replace his parents' lost children, hindered him in the development of his

identity and rendered him unable to accept his origins. The result of this anxiety is a sort of Jewish self-hatred.

His wife, Kati, is nine years younger than he. Her love for a Jewish man came in handy in her relationship with her father, since it embodied all their conflicts and gave her an opportunity to condemn her father morally. Nonetheless, she has shaped her relationship with her husband in keeping with the pattern of her parents' marriage. Essentially, she expects her husband to be despotic and to dominate her and her children. She cannot defend her children or herself (even when she agrees with them); moreover, her attitude to the children is also ambivalent. In her eyes, her husband's and children's main virtue is their Jewishness. On the one hand, this serves as a weapon against her father. On the other hand, she sees her children as gifts to the Jewish grandparents: the grandchildren are to serve as replacements for the children lost in the Shoah. In addition, her children's freedom to choose their own identities arouses her envy. She herself would like to become a Jew through them.

For her, the Jewish school represents an environment willing to educate her "difficult" child, permitting him to become a "good Jew".

*"I have talked to Abel about this a couple of times. He asked me whether or not he was a Jew, and I said that your father is Jewish, your mother is not. So you are half Jewish, and in fact, you are whatever you want to be. But how do you know if someone is Jewish? And then I told him that it shows. Does it show on him? I said it does, I think it shows very strongly on Abel. First he wanted to know if he could deny it or get rid of it. It exists if I so choose, and it does not if I do not. And I told him this was not possible. In a way I believe that if your environment regards you as a Jew to some extent, then you are in a way a Jew, even if you are not Jewish. Considering the fact that half of their family is Jewish and the other, less important half is not Jewish, and he might have problems because of his origins, he will have children, I thought that this should be taken care of and accommodated anyway. Since his father is not a good Jew, I expect the school to help Abel with this, that is, to give him an identity. There are children whose fathers and mothers are Jewish, they trace their families back to Abraham, and today even they are not entirely conscious of their Jewishness. This doesn't occur only in mixed marriages. So the school is very important for me for this reason, too." (Kati I, 1993: 132)*

Thus the relationship of János and Kati gives them both a chance to free themselves of their origins. János can be freed of his mainly frightening Jewishness, which represents for him the ghetto with all its dangers, even as it attracts him by its culture and by the fact that it represents his own roots. For Kati, the relationship offers absolution from her father's and her grandfather's real or presumed sins. In addition, the fact that his non-Jewish wife has such a strong desire to become a Jew provides János with the benefit of living with someone who takes on his rejected Jewishness. The invisible but constant presence of the anti-Semitic father-in-law as persecutor means that they also share in the fate of the persecuted and exterminated Jews. Due to her sense of guilt, Kati would like to share the fate of the victims. Besides, integration into

a Jewish community has two more benefits for Kati: it indicates personal absolution and an acceptance she did not experience before.

At the same time, János's and Kati's relationship appears to be a rather extreme example. Other mixed marriages we encountered, while based on similar principles, were able to handle this problem with far less grave marital conflicts. It seems that when the Jewish spouse's identity problem is less severe and the non-Jewish partner's sense of guilt is not so strong, the situation can be coped with through the non-Jewish partner's acceptance of the spouse's Jewishness. Kati and János are unable to do so: they are unable to enter into an encounter which entails accepting the total personality of the other, and thus his or her otherness as well.

## **Social Jews**

Anna was born in 1953. Both of her parents survived the Holocaust as young adults. Her father is descended from several generations of Jewish intellectuals. He was imprisoned because of his participation in the uprising of 1956, and immigrated to the USA immediately after his release in 1964. Anna was not able to meet him for many years. They were forbidden to contact one another during his imprisonment, and their relationship was limited to letters and infrequent telephone conversations afterwards. Her father had become a doctor and then a professor of neuropsychiatry. He had married and had children and grandchildren in the United States. The mother remained alone with Anna and her sister, who was two years younger. As an adolescent, Anna joined a group of dissident writers. Among them, at the age of 17, she met her first husband, a Jew, with whom she lived for 15 years. After the birth of a son, she went to college and enrolled in a program in remedial teaching. She has worked in this area ever since. After a divorce she married András, who comes from a rural Catholic middle-class family. András, their child, now attends a Jewish school.

During the analysis of the interview it became clear that, for Anna, her first marriage meant a replacement of her lost father by her Jewish intellectual husband. She could not really become an adult in this marriage. By contrast, the second marriage is the result of an adult choice, following a pattern fundamentally different from that of her parents. In András she saw a supportive partner in whom she could place a lifelong trust, as well as one who accepted the role of father to the children of her first marriage, while at the same time expecting her to take the part of an adult woman and mother in the relationship.

András was born in 1954 in a rural town. His parents are Catholic. His mother's side of the family consists of social democrats, while his paternal

grandfather participated actively in the persecution of Jews. András came to Budapest to study at the university after graduating in his hometown. Now he works as marketing manager of a small company.

He was confronted with issues related to the Holocaust and attitudes toward Jews as a child, when his parents forbade him to recite a poem he had learned which was insulting to Jews. In connection with this episode he learned about his Nazi grandfather, whom he had never met. The issue was forgotten, but was raised again when his first wife, the daughter of a mixed marriage, was struggling with her problem of Jewish identity. Together they read several books on Jewish topics—books that were still banned at the time.

András has achieved financial security and is able to distance himself from his parents (with the help of geographic distance) while remaining on good terms with them. He married Anna with the secure self-image of a “liberal free thinker” with nothing bad to say about Jews. He still finds it hard to integrate himself into Anna’s family, however.

The following interview excerpt concerns Anna’s recollection of an event related to this topic:

*“Poor András, once ... we were celebrating the birthday of my first son, the whole family got together. Andris had just been born, he was crying all evening, but screaming, he was screaming all evening, and then he calmed down around midnight and fell asleep, and he was really a baby. We did not smoke in the two rooms, we went to the kitchen, and God knows why but Mom started recalling some ghetto experiences. And she was talking about them until 4 a.m. And about her aunt, who fainted, when her husband put out his cigarette in the ashtray. When she recovered, she was able to tell them that there was a hair in the ashtray. And it was the smell of it burning ... Otherwise it was not really talked about.”* (Anna I, 1993: 44)

The scene is like an initiation ceremony. If he wants himself and his son to be accepted in the family, András has to listen to the story of their sufferings. He will be accepted only if he can stand it. And he passed the test. In his interview András himself also spoke about that night as an event of crucial importance. When choosing a school for their child, however, Anna tested her husband’s tolerance again:

*“András’s family would have liked to baptize Andris. Since my mother died I have not cared about it. I would have fought against it before then to spare my mother a breakdown. They talked about this when I got pregnant, neither circumcision, nor baptism. Well, now we have had him circumcised with this move. And I consider that a gesture.”* (Anna I, 1993: 79)

Why does Anna need to set András these trials? And why does András play along? In choosing a non-Jewish husband Anna also punishes herself for longing to identify with her father so strongly in the beginning. In marrying András she breaks with her father, and in choosing the school she creates her own independent Jewish identity in which she can accord a place to a husband who, even though he is the descendant of persecutors, has testified that he

himself has nothing to do with this past. Thus she can create her Jewish identity only in a mixed marriage after leaving a Jewish husband.

At the same time, András can identify with Jewish culture without being forced to give up his otherness. Though considered different within the family, he is thought of by the outside world as belonging to Jewish culture. And this is important for him. He has not merely chosen exoneration from his ancestors' sin, but has also internalized the values and roles offered by the Jewish community.

### **“Pseudo-Jews”**

Our next example is a family which sends its children to a Jewish school as non-Jews, and whose Jewish identity and attitude toward Jewishness are essentially different from those of the non-Jews in the two examples above (Kovács and Vajda 1998).

Attila was born in 1947 in a small town in eastern Hungary. His father, who was born in 1915, served as a lieutenant in a forced-labor company from 1941 to 1944, and was therefore unable to obtain a job befitting his qualifications after 1945. Later, however, he was assimilated into the new regime to such an extent that he retired as the manager of a co-operative. The family is Catholic on both sides. Attila left home while still a high school student, graduated in another rural town, and attended college in a third. At the moment he lives in Budapest with his wife and two children. His wife, Margit, comes from a Catholic peasant family. Her biography is characterized by a series of illnesses from early childhood on. Both their children attend a Jewish school.

Attila's desire to demonstrate his good relations with Jews plays a central role in his life story. Its main goal is to create a quasi-Jewish biography for himself in which personal experiences with Jews are connected as significant life-history events. The underlying theme is his sense of guilt, which is caused by his father's anti-Semitic opinions and actions. All this is bound up with his social ambitions. For Attila, Jews represent the environment in which he can become part of an intellectual elite.

There are no signs of the same phenomenon in Margit's narrative. She has no aversions to the anti-Semitic environment in which she was raised, and emphasizes her husband's role in choosing the school for their children.

At the same time, analysis revealed anti-Semitic tendencies in both of their texts. These are completely unconscious in Attila's case, and he struggles with them consciously. No signs of any such effort can be found in Margit's case.

Thus, the fight against the sense of guilt and the need to live down the legacy of anti-Semitism within their marriage remains Attila's ambition only, and Margit is merely obliged to consent to their children's attendance at a Jewish school because of her role in the traditional patriarchal family. But the children are enjoying their school environment. From time to time they return home with happy experiences related to Jewish culture. Their parents, however, do not welcome such stories. In connection with a particular story, the elder child even expressed his bad feelings about his parents' rejecting behavior verbally.

*"There is a very good atmosphere in the school, and I was under the influence of this whole Hanukkah thing too, and I was fascinated too, so I tried to recreate it at home, but I could not. Because my parents tolerated my excitement a little bit, but they did not know that I—in the school we observed all the eight days of Hanukkah, and every day there was a lesson when they came in and lit the candles. First there was a prayer, then we sang some Hanukkah song, and then we let the candles burn and they handed out—because the school gave a small gift to everybody every day—they had surprises for us and they handed them out and we were really excited. And then they all said the candle-lighting prayer for Hanukkah and more or less the entire story, so we were excited, and what is usually done at this time. And then I tried to light candles at home, because I had been given one of these candlesticks, but I couldn't—we had been given a box of candles, and I lit them without any special ceremony, and I told my father that we were celebrating Hanukkah at the school, and I showed him how to play with the dreidel [top]. I mean he knew what it was, but I summarized it a bit more exactly (he sighs), and he was trying to smile too, and said it was OK. But somehow he did not manage to hide, and I could feel this, that he could not really appreciate it, that is, he could not really be happy about it, I mean he could, because he pretended to be happy, he did it very well, so a—few minutes later I realized, but I was not hurt, because (he laughs), I either stopped the whole thing, I did not blow the candles out, I let them burn, and we finished the game with my brother, but then it was only sort of fun, spinning the dreidel." (Erika, I, 1992: 56)*

Thus Attila and Margit cannot really free themselves of their anti-Semitic prejudices. Attila's desire to belong to the Jewish community is outweighed by his wish to integrate into a given intellectual subculture. Accordingly, his "Jewish identity" is restricted to the world outside his marriage and family: he seeks friends with whom he can talk about his sense of guilt, and who accept his friendship (probably in order to see themselves as being free of prejudice).

This couple is essentially different from the non-Jews in our two earlier examples: Attila and Margit do not really want to identify with Jewish culture. Moreover, although Attila tries to present a philo-Semitic image of himself to the outside world, through his anti-Semitic wife he is able to preserve his own unconscious, though consciously refuted, anti-Semitism at home. The quasi-Jewish life story he represents can only be interpreted as evidence of a pseudo-Jewish identity.

## A Hide-and-Seek of Identities

Our fourth and last example concerns an extreme case of coping with the difficulties of Jewishness and forming a Jewish identity (Kovács and Vajda 1999). Due to its extreme character, this case highlights a more general strategy of dealing with identity.

Emma was born in 1956 as the third child of Jewish cadre parents. Her father had been a student during the time of the *numerus clausus*. Unable to study in Budapest, he went to university in Vienna.<sup>3</sup> He hid in Hungary during the German invasion and was active in the resistance movement, producing forged documents for the party. At that time he met his wife-to-be, who as a young girl was attracted to the communist movement. Thus both parents survived the Holocaust with the help of forged papers and their Slavic appearance—so goes the family legend. During Emma's childhood, an aunt who had returned from Auschwitz lived with them. She kept a separate kosher household for herself, and followed the prescriptions of the Halakhah. At the same time, Emma was brought up by her parents according to communist principles; and it was due to their position in the party that she was admitted to university in spite of her only average qualifications. She first learned that she is Jewish from her aunt when she was 17, in connection with the emigration of her first lover to Israel.

She met her husband José in 1976. José is a Bolivian of Native American descent, then a student at medical school in Moscow. With great difficulty José transferred to the medical school in Budapest, and they got married.

After graduating they went to Bolivia. A year later Emma returned, alone and pregnant, and from then on, apart from a short visit after the child's birth, her relationship with José was almost completely cut off. Her son only met his father once, when, at the age of 8, he and his mother visited José briefly in Bolivia.

Why does Emma send her child to a Jewish school? The analysis of the narrative and the life history reveals that for Emma, the meaning of choosing a stranger from a different culture as a marriage partner was to get rid of her stigma. The presence of a child of color born from the relationship comforts her: if she manages to conceal the child's Jewishness, she covers up her own Jewishness as well. By the same token she seems to be trying to protect her son from her own identity problem. The color of his skin gives clear evidence of who he is and where he comes from. Her partner only "adds the color"; there is no partner identity or partner role, since the partner was only present until the child was conceived.

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3 Though the first Anti-Jewish law in Hungary was passed in 1938, illegal *numerus clausus* had been in place in education since 1920.

Thus, although she belongs to the generation in which many were brought up unaware of their Jewish origins, she differs from them in that she does not try at first to trace her lost roots. She shoulders her parents' fears, and strives to hide the stigma whose consequences they managed to avoid due to the fact that it was not visible on them.

At the same time she rebels against her father. Her marriage is an attempt to break free of her despotic father's oppression and his rejection of the potential Jewish son-in-law. However, the attempt fails and Emma runs back home. A decade later, she changes her strategy. Now she wants the hidden stigma to be disclosed and visible. And once more she uses her son as a means to this end. If her son attends a Jewish school, he is Jewish. And if he is Jewish, then she is Jewish, too.

Emma's narrative shows that, from the perspective of her adopted Jewish identity in the present, past attempts to hide her Jewish identity are difficult to integrate into her life history. Though Emma is an outgoing and enthusiastic interview partner, parts of her life history can only be recounted as encapsulated stories. She speaks of José and her time in Bolivia only at the end of the interview, and even then only as tourism. She never brings up her son's "otherness". The reason for this may be that her relationship to Jewishness changed significantly when she adopted the identity. She now wants to see her ancestry, which was formerly seen as a stigma, as a positive identification. It is little wonder that she has difficulty in describing her former self.

However, her game with the visibility of the stigma fits well with the original trauma of her parents. In her game, one typical for those who survived by masking their identity, she identifies with the thought of being persecuted and being able to survive through hiding her origins under a disguise.

## **Afterword**

After World War II, partly due to the communist regime's somewhat mendacious ideology of equality and increasing secularization, partly due to the imposition of the atheist ideology of communism, the interaction among diverse denominations, including Jews, has become more and more frequent. As a result, encounters with otherness can occur more often, and prejudices and aversions can frequently be expressed and experienced. Thus in Hungary, with the highest number of survivors in Europe (compared with the remaining Jewish populations of other European countries), it is not a rare event for the members of the Hungarian Jewish population to be among other Jews.<sup>4</sup> They do not have to belong to a religious community to have this experience; it is

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4 This is because the Budapest ghetto was not evacuated until after 1944 (Braham 1981).

part of everyday life for secularized Jews as well. This means that, even before the transition of 1989, non-religious aspects of Jewish identity were not restricted to the context of family life. Jewish identity was an element of a wider private sphere; that is, it could be discussed among friends as well, not just at home. However, before 1989, with the exception of actual religious life, Jewish identity was confined to the private sphere. Only “informal” communities could exist, based on experienced similarities in identity and subculture, in which all identified themselves as Jews. Later, however, it became possible, on the basis of this “private” Jewish identity, to *belong* to a Jewish community in a formal way as well. It was possible not just to experience a private belonging to an informal community, but also to exhibit the fact of belonging to a community to the world at large. Thus, the situation of a relatively numerous Diaspora collectivity provided Jews with opportunities for a broader variability in individual social identity and collective identities. This makes it possible for them to cope with the problems of encounters with “others” (those who are not members of the community in question), with the experience of discrimination, or simply the anti-Semitic prejudices of everyday life.

On the other hand, it also is commonplace for non-Jewish Hungarians to meet Jews and encounter mutual prejudices. Opportunities for real encounters that could naturally lead to mixed marriages are becoming more and more frequent. These cases therefore represent a trend that can be observed for the first time since World War II. It is becoming common for this generation to live in mixed marriages. But, as our examples above show, dealing with such a situation is not easy. Still, we have seen how such marriages can differ in their capability of building a harmonious life—some more or less succeed, while others live in permanent conflict, so that one might suppose that the problems arising according to different “origins” may not be purely coincidental.

To explain this difference, we have to depart from traditional identity theory based on psychological ego and drive concepts and differentiate between two levels of identity (Jádi and Vajda 2000).<sup>5</sup> Primary identity evolves in the first relationship(s), i.e. in the encounters with the mothering person. The nature of her care creates flexibility or rigidity, and as a consequence,

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5 The traditional identity concept of psychoanalysis is based on the mainly Freudian view of ego psychology, which does not incorporate the concept of self. Modern experimental research on child and personality development has shown that this basis is not tenable. The baby is born with certain abilities and has not only bodily demands originating from drives, but also a decisive need for contact with the mothering person and to be looked at as a person. If we understand the baby and its development into an adult person in this way, which is reconcilable with a phenomenological view fundamental in modern theory rather than traditional drive theory, we arrive at an interpretation of identity based primarily on the self rather than the ego. In light of this concept, the earlier concept of identity can be regarded as ego-identity.

affects the possibility of a secondary identity. It is the secondary identity that is able or unable to accept otherness. This concept of a two-level identity is based on a phenomenological view of the self, and is supported by experimental findings and concepts in modern psychology of the self. It can serve as a basis for understanding how the members of different ethnic, national, and denominational groups understand or misunderstand themselves and others.

In the above terms, in those cases where the construction of the secondary self is successful, one or both members of the couple have a solid primary identity which allows them to relate to others as separate entities. On the other hand, in cases where the development of the self was not successful, where its integration is not complete, there is a danger that the other may be taken merely as a self-object, i.e. simply "used" for one function or another. These persons are unable to deal with a primary identity that includes certain orientations of their own culture, be it Jewish or non-Jewish. The identity conflicts we found in these interviews are manifested on the level of the secondary identity: these persons try to correct the failures of their self and primary identity on this level. They *try to be* Jews, Judeophiles or non-Jews. They *wear* these identities, but they do not really *live* them. They cannot succeed in doing so, regardless of their origins. What makes them incapable is their unsuccessful development of self, the fact that they had problems in building up a stable, genuine, coherent self.<sup>6</sup> Those of our subjects who were successful in finding a common solution and in functioning as a harmonious family, with a common family identity, apparently have a primary identity that is elastic enough to allow them to accept their partners' otherness, to accept them as they are regardless of their different origins and identity.

One might raise the question why there are so many individuals and couples who are in such a deep struggle for a harmonious individual identity and for an identity as a couple? And why is it that, as our research has shown, most of them belong to the second generation of survivors? As mentioned above, the political transition in 1989 has confronted the Hungarian population with the necessity of reshaping their individual (secondary) identities. They were brought up during the years of communism, when the theme of the Holocaust was taboo, when parents traumatized by the Holocaust, burdened with anxieties that originated from the persecution, and aggravated by the taboo against discussing them, hoped that under a communist regime such a catastrophe could never happen again. They grew up in a situation in which many of them were not told about their Jewish origins, and many of them spent their childhood with a skeleton in the closet.

The parents' trauma itself is the experience of a situation in which their own right to live and their right to have ancestors was denied, and in which

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6 Space does not permit a more thorough illustration of how these failures of self-development are present in other spheres of their lives, such as the deep conflicts they have in their children and at work.

their human dignity and their right to individuality and intimacy was lost. Such a narcissistic wound, of course, has caused a disintegration that made most of them incapable of turning to their children, born after the Shoah, for the coherence, autonomy, and stability of their primary identity, and for security and stability, without emotional reference to their earlier selves. On the other hand, in many cases they kept their children, in Wardi's terms, as memorial candles, and demanded that they replace earlier children killed in the Holocaust (Wardi 1992).

Living under these conditions—surrounded by the shadows of the parents' lost spouses and children but not knowing of their existence, and brought up by parents with problems of their own—necessarily posed serious difficulties for the development of a stable primary identity. In addition, as the above analysis has shown, some of the younger generation identify with their parents and regard themselves as victims on this unstable basis for identity development. From this perspective they also look upon the descendants of the perpetrators as if they were the perpetrators themselves.

However, as our examples show, there are also families in which the first generation succeeded in bringing up children without serious psychological handicaps. There are members of the second generation whose primary identity is stable enough to cope with the situation of the transition, who are able to form a secondary identity that allows them to remain Jewish while living together with non-Jewish spouses, although there are evident difficulties in completely accepting their otherness. We should not forget the fact that the surviving Jewish community is not free of prejudices against others, and these emerge even in these encounters. These prejudices are often even more difficult to cope with because of the preconceived notion of victims (and by extension their descendants) as innocent.

As for the non-Jewish Hungarians, the second generation was brought up under similarly confusing circumstances. Their parents, whether persecutors themselves or passive witnesses of the murders, suffer from the weight of their impotence and silence, and from the burden of the Holocaust taboo that prevented them from understanding and accepting themselves together with this past. This is just as much a disintegrating factor as the burden of the survivors. Furthermore, the hatred against any "otherness" in themselves is itself a serious sign of a primary deficiency. Thus their children could not experience conflict-free parenting. This is aggravated by the internalization of the parents' hatred of difference as well as by a feeling of guilt because of it, causing confusion similar to that of their Jewish contemporaries. They do not have sufficiently stable borders of self, and in many cases they actually confuse themselves with their parents, considering themselves as persecutors, deepening their aversion against the victims (and their descendants, also envisioned as victims), whom they hold responsible for their guilt feelings. Hence the non-Jewish group's hostility toward the other, which is closely bound to

the unconscious self-hatred originating from it, cannot be resolved without the conciliatory encounter of victims and perpetrators.

Viewing our cases from this perspective, we can see an unfortunate “private” attempt at such an encounter in the mixed marriages described above. Kati and János represent a type in which the developmental shortcomings of both spouses are so serious that we could say they fail in their attempt. They attach themselves to the other as a self-object. Kati reduces János to the function of his Jewishness, while János uses Kati’s non-Jewish origin to “mask” his Jewish identity. Anna and András, on the other hand, have a stable enough primary identity to be able to enter fully into such an encounter, and to face and accept each other’s “otherness”. On the basis of this mutual acceptance they can deal with the conflicts concerning their different origins with humor and self-irony. In many ways, Emma is even less successful in coping with her own past and with that of her family than Kati and János. She is unable to have genuine encounters with the people around her, whether with her partner or her son. She functionalizes them according to her continuously changing needs, first to cloak her stigma, then to unveil it.

Our fourth case is an unusual one. Attila and Margit form a non-mixed marriage that functions like a mixed one. Neither of the spouses is Jewish in origin, but the husband acts Jewish. He has built up a pseudo-Jewish identity and biography for himself as a solution to his identity problems originating from the burden of his father’s real or fantasized acts during the Holocaust. In the attempt to free himself from guilt by taking up a secondary, non-genuine Jewish identity, he leaves the role of the anti-Semite to his wife (who readily accepts it), and this division of labor causes an inner conflict in the marriage. He is getting rid of his anti-Semitic feelings—and at the same time conserving them—by hating them in Margit, all the while still accepting them by maintaining their marriage. This means of becoming Jewish, however, does not provide him with the desired integration into the Jewish milieu or community. Margit’s role as anti-Semite is an aid once again in coping with this frustration, allowing him to make a scapegoat of her.

In the personal struggle of these individuals and couples, we face the common problem of our contemporaries. There are no more patterns inherited from our ancestors that can be used in the place of individual solutions. Mixed marriages are just one of many areas where this is apparent.<sup>7</sup> Our problems of identity can only be solved on the basis of real encounters, and to do so is everyone’s individual task.

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7 Before World War II, living in mixed marriages was already common between other denominational groups, and they had elaborated schemes regarding how to deal with this situation. At that time, Jews did not usually mix, so this generation is the first to “try” it.

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*Mirjana Morokvasic-Müller*

## Escaping Nationalism and Violence: Interethnic Marriages in the Post-Yugoslavian Region

### **Introduction: Yugoslavia – a failed project of mixity**

Yugoslavia used to be, in the words of Edgar Morin, a “microcosme européen”. It was created twice, in and by the two World Wars, each time uniting populations which historically belonged to two rival empires, with corresponding differences in cultural traditions and memories. From the outset, the inherent fragility of this compromise between the forces of union and the forces of disintegration was one dimension of Yugoslavia, and this remained so over the 75 years of its existence. As the historian Stevan Pawlovitch remarks, when the first Yugoslav state was created after World War I, it was both too early and too late: too early because the Yugoslav ideal had not had time to mature and become reality. Too late, because the formation of separate national identities, Serbian, Croatian and Slovenian, was already far too advanced. The ideal “three branches of one nation” was but an ideal, and at the same time already an illusion (Pawlovitch 1992: 52-53).

For a long time it seemed that the second Yugoslavia was a successful multinational experiment, that it “resolved the national question”—something that the first Yugoslavia had failed to do. It seems now that it is precisely the manner in which the national question was treated that left doors open for a resurgence of aggressive nationalism, which contributed to the violent dissolution of the country. Yugoslavia was a state without Yugoslavs, where “Yugoslavism” was deliberately kept weak and under the control of the dominant Communist party (Canapa 1996; Janigro 1992), while local national identifications were not only tolerated, but also encouraged. The roots of what turned out to be an ethnic conflict are to be found in the institutional structure of the Yugoslav political and economic system, constructed after World War II (Crawford 1993; Schierup 1995).

As the federal state weakened, the institutional structure offered increasing incentives to political entrepreneurs to “play the ethnic card” in a bid for political power (Crawford 1993). The mass violence that occurred during World War II resulted in over a million deaths, and the losses on all sides meshed politics and ethnicity so inseparably that, as Denitch says,

“burying the details along with victims appeared the most feasible course to those Yugoslavs who rallied together after the war to reconstruct the country along the lines of Titoist

compromise, the federation of republics and the *fraternity and unity ideology* instead of Yugoslavism" (1994: 370, my emphasis).

Indeed the "fraternity and unity ideology" had a certain integrating impact on a whole generation of people traumatized by the Second World War, since it paved the way for a harmonious cohabitation of former enemies (Canapa 1996). Gradually the post-World War II institutional structure yielded numerous incentives for identification with a Yugoslav state. Sekulic et al. (1994) identified the sources of Yugoslav self-identification in modernization, political participation, minority/majority membership and several demographic variables. The persons most likely to declare themselves as Yugoslavs<sup>1</sup> were young, urban party members, minority group members and persons of ethnically mixed parentage. For the minorities Yugoslav identification was a defensive one. It avoided both assimilation to the dominant majority and self-declaration as a minority. It also reflected, among those of mixed parentage and the young in particular, a protest against traditional nationalist politics and a hope for integration into Europe: Yugoslav identification seemed closer to the ideal of Europeanism than the more narrow ethnic and national identifications. Sekulic et al. (1994) show, however, that the recognized factors of Yugoslav self-identification turned out to be insufficient, and did not have a lasting global effect. Yugoslavia was "an instance where the integrative processes of state identity formation have failed" (1994: 84). Among many factors that contributed to that failure is the Titoist compromise strategy in the national identity conflict. The compromise implied "freezing" the memories. In the name of brotherhood and unity, the Communist party prevented all public debate about the massacres of the past war. This turned out to be a powerful time bomb, a perfect instrument for the nationalist revival. Whereas Yugoslavia's political leadership may have originally believed, as Sekulic et al. (1994) suggest, that their policy of equality among many nationalities (implying not only acceptance, but also encouragement of local national identifications, combined with a neglect and even discouragement of identification with a state as a whole) would allow nationalism to be overcome as a political force. Not only were their expectations not realized, but the same leadership, years later, instrumentalized nationalism in order to increase its regional power vis à vis the federal state (Canapa 1996; Schierup 1995). This involved consciously reviving wartime memories and the same nationalist ideologies that were implicated in the atrocities of the Second World War (Denitch 1994).

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1 The identity declarations given in censuses. Each person could freely choose from lists of nationalities and national minorities. Being a Yugoslav was until 1961 counted as "undetermined". The lists changed from census to census: Muslim as a nationality exists only from 1969 on; the lists were not the same in all the republics etc. Citizens of Yugoslavia were holders of Yugoslav passports where "nationality" (Serb, Croat etc.) was not noted. The ID card, varied from republic to republic in language and alphabet.

The end result was that the Yugoslavs failed to “imagine themselves as a national community”, to use Benedict Anderson’s phrase, and their apparently predominant tendency to imagine themselves as “natural” national collectives of Serbs, Croats, Albanians, Muslims, etc., led to aggressive nationalism and a readiness to draw violent boundaries between “us” and “them”. Nationalism thus created “others” from within, seeking to reduce their presence by forced assimilation, by physical annihilation or by deportation—the aim being to rid “our” territory of the “others”, whose allegiances were considered disturbing, risky or simply incompatible with the nationalist project of ethnically pure states, entities or territories.

The whole generation of people who were brought up as Yugoslavs, among whom 13% married interethnically, have become victims, followers or leaders in the ongoing national hysteria. Millions on all sides have been displaced or fled persecution in the former territory of Yugoslavia, simply because they happened to have a “wrong” name, a “wrong” religion or a spouse from a “wrong” group. The absurd idea of ethnically pure states has carried the day, while the idea of sharing life, of togetherness, of respect for others, has become taboo or considered as a sign of disloyalty.

The first victims of ethnic cleansing have been people who “defy the impossible” (Centlivres and Giordano 1999), whose existence constituted living proof of the possibility of living together with the Other: so-called “mixed” or interethnic couples and families, people of mixed parentage. These families—about two million people—were now considered doubly disloyal, and often rejected as “others” by one group and as “disloyal” by another, both groups being driven by the ideology of national preference, with the objective of protecting the purity and authenticity of its cultural heritage from the risk of contamination through mixing with the “others”.

What is the meaning of interethnic marriage in general, and in the former Yugoslavia in particular? Who are the people in these marriages? How did they become targets of discrimination and violence, verbal or physical, in times of intense tension and conflict? How do they cope with the imposed separation that cuts across their own identity and that of their families? What are their strategies for escape or survival in the hostile milieu, whether in their original place of residence or in a place where they have taken refuge?

These are the questions I wish to address. I will show that the meaning of interethnic marriages depends on the circumstances of the actual group relations in which they are embedded, and that the meaning is different for each gender. Also gender-specific are violence and the escape from violence. My analysis is based on census data (Petrovic 1985; Mrdjen 1996), on my own interviews with refugees, and on field accounts by colleagues and students (Nikolic-Ristanovic 1995).

## Interethnic Marriages at the Crossroads of Intercultural Exchange

Merton (1966) defines “intermarriage” as marriage of persons deriving from groups other than the families which are culturally conceived as relevant to the choice of a spouse. Because it is a potential bridge between communities, a cradle of new identities *and* a potential place for direct confrontation of contradictions and power relationships, the meaning of “intermarriage” or interethnic marriage<sup>2</sup> must depend on the circumstances in which it is realized and experienced (Streiff-Fenard 1989). These circumstances may be favorable to such unions, or they may discourage or ban them and favor separation. Interethnic marriages are therefore often construed as infused with contradictory forces, both integrative and disruptive.

“As a culture communication laboratory, the interethnic household can be a privileged place where tolerance is daily tested, but also a magnifying mirror reflecting misunderstandings and interethnic conflicts. In any case it best reveals the relations between the groups to which the spouses belong” (Streiff-Fenard 1989).

On a societal level, the act of interethnic marriage can be considered as the highest level of acceptance of the Other, as the best indicator of the relationship of groups in contact, and as an indicator of the integration of such groups. Whatever the underlying meaning of integration, it may be politically favored, or at least tolerated, if the integration of different groups is the ultimate societal and political goal. Integration may be understood in different ways:

- As fostering mixture, implying creolization in Hannerzian’s terms (1983), i.e. forging a new character by mixing distinct ones. The interethnic marriage is celebrated as a place of confluence and dialogue. It is not only a space of mediation, facilitating mixture, but also of stimulation of a new, original character, one previously nonexistent in either of the partners (Centlivres and Giordano 1999).
- It may also mean eradicating differences, implying assimilation, as in the assimilationist tradition of France for example. For Fernand Braudel (1986) “without intermarriages there is no integration”, whereas Girard and Stoetzel (1953), in their pioneering study of immigrants in France, suggest that marrying a person of French ancestry represents the highest level of adaptation and a chance to raise children with a French identity.

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2 For the full spectrum of terms used in English, German, and French see Thode-Arora (1999), an excellent handbook of research focusing on theoretical and methodological aspects, a kind of state of the art on the issue of interethnic marriages, intermarriage, mixed marriage, mariages mixtes, binationale Ehen to mention just a few interchangeable and mostly used terms in literature.

Other authors too conceive of intermarriage as “a test of assimilation” (Thode-Arora 1999: 370–377).<sup>3</sup>

But interethnic marriages, by definition, upset the social order and jeopardize the reproduction of family and ethnic identities. They may be considered as “polluting”, they challenge the myth of a common origin and the idea of women as a metaphor for the Nation. For this reason “intermarriage”, implying a transgression of established boundaries, carries within it disruptive forces and brings a risk of conflict and disintegration. An interethnic marriage can therefore be socially and politically undesirable, or even forbidden, banned, or treated as treason. Polyakov (1980) speaks of “forbidden couples” (*couples interdits*). For a long time the three monotheistic religions were exclusionist to the same extent, except that Islam authorized marriages of Muslim men with Christian and Jewish women. Diderot’s *Encyclopaedia* deplores mixed union, seen as a kind of “original sin” during the Enlightenment. Immanuel Kant also warns against mixed unions (cf. Polyakov 1980: 15). Neyrand and M’sili (1995: 123) note that the foreigner in the mixed couple is often looked upon with suspicion, “perceived as a danger to the national cohesion that he risks contaminating”. The French *Code civil* of 1804, while it did not directly ban interethnic marriages, effectively precluded their legal existence: a foreign woman marrying a Frenchman automatically became French, while a French woman marrying a foreign husband automatically lost her citizenship.<sup>4</sup>

In a couple’s relationship, their ethnic or national identity can under certain conditions outweigh all else, imposing itself as the primary dimension of the relationship. Or an ethnic element may be introduced into a private conflict and give it another dimension: for example, child custody in the case of divorced Franco-German and Franco-Algerian couples has become an *affaire d’état*. Yugoslavian interethnic couples face the threat of such divisions in the current situation of conflict.

On the individual level, therefore, in negotiating their multiple identities and differences, the partners theoretically have three options, two of which entail maintaining the partnership, and one which involves breaking it up:

1. Both partners may act primarily as individuals rather than as members of a national collective, affirming their individuality and difference from all ethnic origins by overcoming the contradictory influences of their respective families, groups, cultures, religions (negotiating their languages, their children’s names, their religious and other customs, etc.).

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3 A recent favorable attitude of the Government of Sri Lanka towards intermarriages of Sinhala (majority) men with minority (Tamil) women can be interpreted as politics of assimilation.

4 The situation changed for French women only in 1927: from then on they could preserve their citizenship.

2. One of the partners in the couple may give up some dimensions of his/her identity—usually the one who has a minority status opts to assimilate, especially if this is the woman.
3. Disruptive forces may prevail and lead to separation.

The meaning of interethnic marriage is also gender-specific: women and men, their respective families and, beyond the families, the ethnic, national, religious and other groups they belong to, are not in equal relation to ethnic mixing. Women more than men are classified socially by their marriage, and are therefore more positively or negatively affected by the outcome or circumstances of an interethnic marriage. For women, such a marriage may mean social mobility or social retrogression. In other words: *A woman married into the group is gained for the group; a woman married out of the group is lost to the group.*

A man, on the contrary, usually preserves his position in his original social group, and his descendants generally continue to belong to his group, if the conditions of patrilinear transmission are not jeopardized by minority or immigrant status.

As the Streiff-Fenard study showed, French-North African marriages in France are least accepted by both groups concerned. But each community is more hostile to its women marrying the “others” than its men, and at the same time more willing to admit “other” women than men.

If a woman marries out of the group, this may lead to irreversible family ruptures and rejection by the whole group. The same group is willing to approve of its men marrying a French woman, particularly if she accepts the role the family offers her, adopts her husband’s family’s educational and cultural norms for her children, and gives up those of her own milieu (Streiff-Fenard 1989).

It is a “male chauvinist privilege” of white colonizers to take for wives the daughters of the colonized (Polyakov 1980). Centlivres and Giordano (1999) recall that Alexander the Great encouraged his soldiers to marry the girls of occupied Persia—but it was out of question for Greek girls to marry the Oriental men. The superiority of the conquerors was not questioned.

## **Evolution of Interethnic Marriages in the Former Yugoslavia: A Brief Survey**

The rate of interethnic marriage in Yugoslavia was at its highest in 1990 (13.5%), the last year before the disintegration of the country. The rate had

progressed rapidly from the postwar period until the sixties, and at a slower pace since then.<sup>5</sup>

After 1945, a number of political, social, and economic factors favored interethnic marriages. These factors were identified by Sekulic et al. (1994) as favoring Yugoslav integration: rapid urbanization, education, geographic mobility, an ideology of equality among different nationalities and the ideology of brotherhood and unity as a remedy for the memories of genocide and interethnic violence in the last war. Furthermore, the institution of civil marriage as the only legal form (religious marriage ceremonies were permitted, but only after the civil marriage) reduced the influence of religion in everyday life, and thereby lessened its negative influence on interethnic mixing. As noted above, these factors ultimately proved insufficient as far as the Yugoslav integration was concerned. Let us consider the effects on interethnic marriages in particular.

Until 1965, the rate of interethnic marriage increased rapidly, from 8.6% in the late forties to over 12% in the sixties. At that time, the trend affected all regions and groups throughout Yugoslavia. From 1965 on, however, not only did the overall process slow down, but the change in matrimonial behavior did not affect all parts of the country and all groups in the same way. Petrovic (1985), for whom interethnic marriages "were a measure of ethnic relations in Yugoslavia" during the downward trend of the sixties and the seventies, places the beginning of the deterioration of ethnic relations as early as the late sixties (1985: 75). The 1990 inclusive rate of over 13% masks great regional disparities: the two extremes are both within the territory of Serbia, where Kosovo has the lowest rate and a continuous downward trend, while the province of Vojvodina has the highest rate (28.2%), which is still increasing (Petrovic 1985; Mrdjen 1996).

To understand the full meaning of the change of the trend that began in the late sixties, one must keep in mind two basic factors which, from a demographic point of view, are highly decisive for the rate of interethnic marriage. One is ethnic diversity: the more diversity there is, the more theoretical opportunity for mixing. Yugoslavs had considerable theoretical opportunities to mix. The other factor is the size of each individual group in the ethnic mix: the larger the group, the lower its theoretical rate of heterogamy (although, in absolute figures, marriages with that group may account for a considerable

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5 There is no evidence about intermarriages in the past, not even for the period of the First Yugoslavia, i. e. between the two World Wars. But it can be assumed that the rate was extremely low because of a very low degree of urbanization and because of the strong influence of religion and quasi exclusiveness of religious marriages before socialism (civil marriages had legal importance only in some parts of Vojvodina). If there were ethnically mixed marriages at all, it can be assumed then that they were contracted within the same religious group.

proportion of the total number), and vice versa: the smaller the group, the higher its chances for heterogamous unions.

In this light, the trends observed from the sixties onward can be characterized as follows:

- Given the ethnic diversity of Yugoslavia, the rate of interethnic marriage is much lower than could be expected given the diversity present. This is particularly true in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the rate of 11% was lower than the Yugoslav average while diversity was above average<sup>6</sup>.
- In spite of their size, the two largest groups, the Serbs and the Croats, have a higher rate of heterogamy than expected, and some small groups, such as the Turks, have lower heterogamy rates than expected. However, Serbo-Croatian unions were declining.
- Although the average rate continues to increase, this is mainly due to interethnic marriages among minorities in Vojvodina, and between minorities and the Serbian majority. The downward trend is especially pronounced among Muslim populations, where it was already generally low, as well as in Serbo-Croatian marriages.
- There are three ethno-cultural clusters of heterogamous marriages (Mrdjen 1996): the first of these, in the West, groups Croats, Slovenes, Italians, and Czechs; the second, in the East, groups Serbs, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, and Rumanians; and the third, in the South, constitutes the Islamic circle with Albanians, Turks, and Muslims. This last is the least open to marriages with other groups, and the most focused on groups of the same cultural and religious tradition. In this cluster, women marry out of their ethnic group much less frequently than men, especially among Albanians and Turks.
- The “openness” of a group is gender-specific and related to the position of women in each group. It seems that heterogamy (marrying out of the group) is more common among men than among women in the less developed areas in the South, where women’s status is lower and the rate of employment of women is also low. By contrast, women are more open to interethnic marriage than men in more developed areas in the North, where women have a more equal status and are active in the labor force (Croatian, Slovenian, Hungarian groups). The Albanian group—the least open—also has the highest difference in heterogamy rates between men and women: men marry out three times more than women. Among the

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6 For the sake of comparison: the rate of intermarriages in France was 8.8% in the situation which for Yugoslav standards would be called ethnic homogeneity: 7.8% foreigners.

Serbs, men marry someone from another group only slightly more often than women do.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, the rate of intermarriage in Yugoslavia was lower than what it theoretically could have been given the ethnic diversity of the country, with some groups more open than others. Group openness depended on their size, but also on their degree of urbanization and their religious and cultural milieu, with marked ethno-cultural preferences visible along religious lines. The openness to interethnic marriage is also gender-specific.

### *Implications for National Integration and Individual Identity*

What is the significance of interethnic marriage? As mentioned above, the impact of an interethnic marriage (the meaning it carries for society as a whole) depends on circumstances in which it takes place. If one out of seven marriages was contracted with a member of another group each year, and children were born to these marriages, then what was the contribution of these families and these children to Yugoslav integration and identity during 45 years of peace and relatively low ethnic tension in Socialist Yugoslavia? We need to know this in order to understand better what happened after the break-up of Yugoslavia, when the situation of peaceful coexistence turned into open tension and war.

Did interethnic couples in Yugoslavia produce Yugoslavian children? As noted above, the interethnic union can have an integrative function in two ways:

1. By creating something new and specific, a space of mediation where new interests and identifications are stimulated (Centlivres and Giordano 1999). Indeed, the mixed marriage in the Yugoslav situation could have been one of the sources or carriers of Yugoslav identity.
2. By furthering assimilation, when one of the two partners imposes his/her identity on the family and offspring. In this case it can be assumed that the identity of the dominant or majority group would usually prevail.

According to the available census data<sup>8</sup>, the nationality of children in homogamous families usually reproduces that of the parents (except for a tiny minority of 2% who declared a nationality different from that of their parents, or who considered themselves Yugoslavs). In mixed families, however, the situation is more complex. Theoretically the children can have the father's or

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7 But men are more "open" to women from more developed areas, whereas Serbian women are more open to men from the south: for instance there are six times more marriages of Serbian women and Albanian men than of Serbs with Albanian women.

8 The statistical evidence in this section is based on the analysis of the census data by Mrdjen 1996.

the mother's nationality, or may consider themselves as having "Yugoslav" or any other nationality. The census data show that the majority (55%) have the father's nationality, while only 26% have the mother's. 3.8% claimed a nationality which is neither their father's nor their mother's, and another 12.7% declared themselves Yugoslavs. Finally, in 2.5% of interethnic marriages (almost 10,000 families), the children did not all choose the same nationality.

In all the republics and autonomous provinces except Slovenia, patrilinear transmission dominates. The meaning of this transmission is the same everywhere: it favors assimilation into the dominant/majority culture in the republic, province, or region concerned. The dominant majority group may be extended to include others of the same religious or cultural background. In Serbia, for example, it may be considered to include members of the Orthodox minority in Montenegro or Macedonia. In all the regions except Slovenia, the dominant pattern of interethnic union involves a man from the ethnic majority and a minority woman. This pattern is particularly pronounced among certain majority groups in the south, where interethnic marriages are rare and men marry out much more frequently than women. In Slovenia, it is more often the majority women who marry minority men (usually not members of the indigenous minority population, but immigrant workers from Bosnia and Serbia). Here, matrilinear transmission predominates. This could be explained by the immigration context and the immigrant men's orientation toward permanent residence. Most of the immigrants come from the poorer South: the family adopts the dominant majority's identification, they Slovenize the children with a view to remaining in Slovenia. On the other hand, the patrilinear predominance in a developed region like Vojvodina, with a high rate of interethnic marriage and more equal status of women, could be explained by the fact that most such marriages are of majority men (Serbs) with indigenous minority women (Hungarians, for example). This reflects the processes of assimilation to the dominant majority. The places where a higher than average proportion of children of mixed couples declare themselves Yugoslavs are Bosnia and Herzegovina (22%), Croatia and Vojvodina (15%); these proportions reflect Serbo-Croatian families in Croatia, mainly Serbo-Hungarian families in Vojvodina, and Serbo-Muslim families in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The children seem most prone to consider themselves Yugoslavs when the parents belong to different ethno-cultural clusters (e.g. Serbs and Muslims, Muslims and Croats, Hungarians and Serbs, etc.). In such cases, Yugoslav identification may have a "defensive" character, as Sekulic et al. suggest: rather than assimilating to the dominant majority, the individual (or his/her parents) opt for neutrality.

Another interesting example is the Albanian group, which has the lowest rate of interethnic marriage of all, especially among women. In Kosovo, where Albanians have been a majority, the patrilinear transmission of ethnic identity to children is not surprising. What is surprising is the existence of

matrilinear transmission in couples uniting an Albanian woman with a man from another group (Mrdjen 1996). I would suggest that this concerns a small number of cases, probably involving quite exceptional individuals, and does not represent a prevalent tendency. Thus it might depend on factors related to individuals, and may not be explainable in terms of the majority or minority status of their respective groups.

As for the disruptive forces in mixed couples, there is evidence that they are generally less stable (152 divorces out of 1000 marriages, compared with 135 divorces out of 1000 for endogamous marriages), especially when they bring together members of two groups in which marriage stability is very low in general. However, social class and educational level play an important role. Ethno-cultural difference may be a factor for instability in less educated strata, but unimportant among the educated.

*Summary:* Because of the predominant patrilinear transmission, interethnic marriages tend to have an “integrative” function in two different ways:

- Usually they foster assimilation of minorities into the numerically dominant local group. Throughout Yugoslavia this contributed to ongoing tendencies of ethnic unscrambling and local homogenization, which in the long run had a disintegrative outcome for Yugoslavia as a whole.
- In a minority of cases, interethnic marriages—which, as we have seen, were more rare than could have been expected given the theoretical opportunities of the ethnic and national landscape—became a space for the rise and the development of Yugoslav identity and consciousness. However, this tended to be a marginal, local development which did not have a broader impact. This finding fully corroborates other data (Sekulic et al. 1994).

Considering that these unions were also generally less stable—i.e., had higher divorce rates—than endogamous ones, their impact on overall developments was indeed small.

## **What Happened to Interethnic Marriages After 1991?**

Although their demographic impact was minor, in the period of exacerbated tensions, strong nationalism, and open violence, interethnic marriages crystallized the hostility and became the primary targets of intolerance and violence from all sides. We saw that, theoretically, partners in these marriages have three options in negotiating their multiple identities and differences and those of their children. A working hypothesis for the period after 1991 could be the following. In the situation of ethnic tensions and war, when there was

no longer room to express a hybrid, Yugoslav identity, the tendencies towards exclusive choices would increase. Such exclusive choices can be classified as either assimilationist or disruptive. In the former case, most interethnic couples would tend either to choose one nationality (usually the husband's), in line with what we have seen of patrilinear transmission and assimilation into the dominant majority. In the latter case, those who cannot choose will have a hard time surviving, may try to escape by going abroad, or may tend to destroy the partnership or even engage in self-destructive behavior<sup>9</sup>.

There are no census data<sup>10</sup> that permit a comparison with earlier tendencies as far as the rates of interethnic marriage and transmission of national identity to children is concerned. But there is field data that can be drawn on<sup>11</sup>. This field evidence suggests that the context was favorable to division and to disruptive forces. Mixed marriages became taboo, something to be eliminated, something disturbing.

*"I used to think it was all the same, it did not matter who was which nationality, but now, now I think it is no longer good. We can be friends, meet each other, but marry, no. The people from these marriages suffer the most, they are as if between two fires." (Vera from Croatia, 1994)*

The military conflict was preceded and prepared by a media war. For several years, the population had been exposed to the systematic broadcasting of news and reports which not only carried the message that it was impossible to live together, but which directly fomented hatred and violence against the "other", including the "potential other". As Rada Ivekovic reminds us:

"Symbolically, women more than men represent the space of mixity, the cross-roads, the confluence. More than women themselves, it is this mixture that women accept, create, and represent (as feminine principle) that is attacked by those who want to purify their origins, to get rid of Others, to negate Others." (1992: 191)

With the more and more prevalent norm of militarized masculinity, men are expected to accept conscription and be prepared to die for their nation, and

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9 We do not have statistics but stories of suicides all concerned young men.

10 Only Macedonia carried out a census in 1994. All other post Yugoslav states will carry out censuses in 2001.

11 I am drawing on my own field work in 1993/94 in Yugoslavia (Belgrade and surroundings as well as Vojvodina) which represents an interesting corpus of 42 testimonies of 23 women and 19 men, refugees from Croatia and Bosnia/Herzegovina. The majority of those interviewed were young, under 30, two-thirds of urban origin, with a high educational and skill profile. Fourteen women and twenty-three men were either students, social scientists or other professionals. The others were unemployed, having irregular employment. Twelve women and eleven men were single. Most of the women were married to a man of the same nationality whereas most men were in a mixed marriage, the majority of these young people were without children (11 men and 12 women). Most of those with children had only one child, four of them had two, and one woman had three children. Most declared themselves Yugoslavs or former Yugoslavs who admit to their nationality only now; Serbian, Muslim, Montenegrin. Religion plays a secondary role in their identity.

women to sacrifice their sons and brothers for the cause of the nation. Women tend to be constructed as symbols and reproducers of the nation, as mothers of the nation. As Nira Yuval-Davis (1997) states, women embody the nation, they are bearers of its honor and love. They guard the mythical unity of imagined national communities which divides "Us" from "Them".

The nationalist media consider interethnic marriage worse than rape (*Ljiljan*, Sarajevo), probably because such marriage implies a *permanent dimension* and above all *the choice* of a partner who is "other" by a woman who is one of "Us". The woman is thus transgressing her attributed role of guardian of the national identity, whereas in rape "our" women are *merely victims* of "their" aggression .

"Nationalist projects which focus on genealogy and origin as the major organizing principles of the national collectivity would tend to be more exclusionary than other nationalist projects. Only by being born into a certain collectivity could one be a full member of it. Control of marriage, procreation, and therefore sexuality would thus tend to be high on the nationalist agenda." (Yuval-Davis 1997: 23)

The media promoted news which contributed to building distrust and hatred in the population by carrying the basic message, "We cannot live together any longer and we are prepared to kill each other as enemies". When a neighbor, a friend, even a husband and wife are ready to kill, what can one expect from a distant "other"? Once the atmosphere of fear and distrust is established, a neighbor or a friend from the "other side" is no longer trusted, regardless of any apparent readiness to help. The separation becomes total and people are more prepared to accept war and violence as legitimate "solutions" to existing tensions, which originally may not have had an ethnic component at all (Morokvasic 1998).

### *Gender-specific Experience of Violence and Persecution*

Both the experience of conflict, violence, persecution and dealing with them are gendered.

*"It is in the nature of things that women are weaker. As in peacetime, contentious men would rather pour out their rage on women than on men. Women have experienced a real scale of violence, both before and during the war. Croats used to turn their heads away from me, but not from the Serb party dignitaries...."* (Serb refugee from Krajina, Croatia, now in Serbia. In: *Nikolic-Ristanovic* 1995)

This woman is saying that the victims are those who are weakest. She sees women as the main targets whereas men from "the other group" are left in peace, especially when they are in positions of power.

Types of violence are gender-selective. As Jones (1994) pointed out, men are usually those who are abducted, killed or tortured. Women, as symbols of the nation, as markers of national boundaries, are raped.

The tendency follows the pattern, although not invariably, according to which “other” men married to “our” women are eliminated—forced into exile or killed—whereas “other” women married to “our” men tend to be accepted and assimilated.

This would be in line with the more general tendency according to which women married out of the group are lost to the group and women married into the group are gained for the group (see above). There is evidence for this both

- in the gender-specific pattern of violence, and
- in the strategies adopted to cope with violence, persecution, and conflict: specifically, in the ways women and men negotiate identities, and in the refugee/migration patterns they adopt, which will be dealt with in the next section.

Rape itself is related to the dimension of absorption of women into the group (Morokvasic 1998). In most narratives, the act of rape implies the eventuality of the birth of a child (possibly a son), the raped woman being a mere receptacle, the bearer of a child for the rapist’s nation.

Rape is a part of the war strategy. It is a message from men to men, intended to humiliate the enemy men: “You were not able to protect your women.” But at the same time, in narratives and fantasies implying a possible conception as a result of rape, it is also an extreme act of forced ethnic mixing. The resulting pregnancy is supposed to dishonor the enemy, the other national collective (such offspring are usually labeled “bastards” by women victims and by those speaking in their name and in the name of the “soiled” nation). But from the rapist’s point of view, the raped women produce offspring belonging to the rapist’s nation. It is, on one hand, paradoxical that in most narratives of rape, the offspring of a forced pregnancy of a woman of the enemy’s group, by definition an ethnically mixed rather than “pure” offspring, is supposed from the rapists point of view to represent a “pure” offspring of the father’s nation. On the other, it is in line with the prevalent patrilinear transmission, discussed earlier.

This is also reflected in the verbal violence and humiliation towards “our” women who are considered traitors because they are married to the members of the enemy nationality: Croatian women married to Serbs were called “Serbian prostitutes” or “□etnik mothers” by their fellow Croats, whereas Serb women married to Croats were labeled “Usta□a mothers” and “Serbian prostitutes” by their fellow Serbs. Women in mixed marriages are potential victims of violence by men of their own nationality, of their husband’s, and also of others, who see them as wives of an enemy. They are within easier reach and are therefore often the targets of violence and revenge directed against their husbands.

After the Slovenian war, Slovenian women married to former army officers were the targets of violence by Slovenians and by Bosnian Muslims in

Slovenia. When Croats raped a Croatian woman married to a Muslim, it was a message to her husband, the enemy. In another case, two sisters were raped by Croatian soldiers who assumed that the husband of one of them, a Serb, was fighting on the Serbian side against Croats. Or yet in another case, the rape was meant as punishment for a husband, a fellow Croat who did not get rid of his Serbo-Muslim wife (from my interviews 1993/1994, see footnote 11).

In the situation of ethnic conflict, women married to men of an “other” ethnicity may also be victims of violence by their own husbands. These women symbolize the enemy, they may become a source of husband’s shame and problems in contact with his friends.

*“They used to tell him—how come with all these Serbs around, you found a Muslim. For Serbs she thus became the guilty one, he started quarrelling and beating her up.” (from my interviews 1993/1994, see footnote 11)*

### *Gender-specific Strategies for Coping with Violence and Conflict*

Not all mixed couples face brutal violence, but as proof of the possibility of living together with the “other”, they are constantly reminded in the nationalist context that there is no more room for them in projected nationally pure states. Mixed couples, along with young men resisting military service, were among the first to flee the country in 1991 and 1992.

#### Negotiating identities

The majority of men and women alike think that national feelings are a personal matter, that nationalism has never played a role in their life, that they were not brought up in a national spirit, that nationalism is a recent development and imposed by the circumstances. Their memories of pre-war experiences, as something solid to lean on, are those of living together, celebrating each other’s religious and other festivities, full of support and mutual understanding among various communities living together. There were no tensions until 1990.

Their appreciation of the current situation is gendered. Perhaps the most striking difference between men and women is in their views of the causes and inevitability of war as outcome of nationalist tensions and conflict. Men tend to find reasons for the war, in the past mix of peoples, in ignorance, in conflicting interests, in the desire for a national state, etc. Women do not find any “good” reason for war: some find that major powers’ interests coincided with irrationality in the former Yugoslavia. Some men think war was inevitable, women instead say there is nothing to justify bloodshed (from my interviews 1993/1994, see footnote 11).

Thus, some men are more categorical than women in denying the possibility of coexistence in the future.

*"What nationality? I am Yugoslav, but where I used to live for 30 years they considered me a Serb. And yet I was not brought up with strong national feelings. I read, I know the literature, poetry, but I thought that in the name of Yugoslavia one has to forget traditions. I thought that traditions and nationalities caused much trouble in the last war. I say when there is war, fear, no matter how Yugoslavian I feel, if someone sees me as a Serb and has something against Serbs, then I fear him because he sees me as a threat to him (...) and so on (...) there is no end." (Engineer, age 40, from Mostar, 1993)*

From group's perspective, men cannot have an ambiguous national identity. An identity is ascribed to them, and if they are perceived as "other", they must leave. They give up their Yugoslav identity because it is now an ambiguous one; they are increasingly forced to choose a national group. When perceived as "others", men are not allowed to become part of "us".

*"Yugoslavism had some meaning as long as Yugoslavia existed. If there is no more Yugoslavia—if no one else besides the Serbs wants to stay in Yugoslavia, then it makes no sense to be Yugoslav any more. I used to think there was some sense in giving up some traditions in the name of Yugoslavia. I was Yugoslav, but as I said, no one saw me as a Yugoslav, but as a Serb. And it is a totally normal reaction to choose the group in which I feel secure." (Serb from Mostar, 1993)*

*"I was chased out of the town (Sarajevo). I was among the numerous citizens who manifested for peace, who tried to prevent war ... When the war started, I stayed normally in Sarajevo with my family, I shared with other neighbors the horrors of destruction; bread queues; I experienced life without electricity, water ... Then one day I was taken to prison. I never knew why, I spent a long time thinking about what I might have done ... After a while I could only accept the fact that I was in prison because I was a Serb. That it was a dirty war; it brought the dregs of society to the surface. Those who lived underground, did not work, never built this city, took up guns and started shooting. It was humiliating to see old people standing in a queue, some respectable professors, and these vulgar types in their uniforms hitting them with their guns." (Economist, age 50, Serb, from Sarajevo, 1994)*

Unlike men, women even today can claim their hybrid, Yugoslav identity. The widow of a Serb, originally Muslim but a self-declared Yugoslav, who left Sarajevo for Belgrade, said:

*"Why am I Yugoslav? My language, culture, education, everything in me is Serbo-Croatian-Muslim, and I cannot renounce any part of me. I would lose my integrity if I were to choose, I would go against myself. I was in shock when in Sarajevo the nationalist parties won the elections. I know I am a tiny minority, but I always was. I was born in a small place in Herzegovina where Muslims were a minority; it was otherwise a purely Croatian area, which was pretty dull. Yes, dull: I like it when people around me are diverse." (Teacher, female, 50, 1993)*

A focal point of the literature on interethnic couples and their strategies in negotiating identities, is the scrutiny of names given to infants (Streiff-Fenard 1989; Varro and Lesbet 1986; Centlivres and Giordano 1999). The need to

choose a name is a situation of tension and the very first confrontation with two identification options: either trying to avoid standing out, or wanting to affirm group membership and fidelity. It is seen as a turning point: adopting an "other" name is to adopt a new identity. Several examples show how the use of names as identity markers can be gendered. Goran O. who escaped from Croatia to Serbia, told me that with his typically Serbian surname (O.), he had no peace in Croatia.

*"But my first name, Goran, however, was Croatian, so there was ambiguity about my identity. My colleagues at work could not stand this: they gave me the Serbian name Stevan." (Goran, 1994)*

Now renamed Stevan, Goran became a pure "other" to the Croats and had to leave Croatia.

Those who, brought up as Yugoslavs, are unable to choose a national identity, to "cut themselves in half", may under pressure seek the extreme escape. Like a number of young soldiers who refused to choose between desertion and shooting at those who until the day before had been their fellow Yugoslavs, they may commit suicide.

The situation of women is different. In situations analogous to Goran's, minority women, when married to majority men, take or are given majority names. Thus Serbian Jovanka, married to a Croatian, became Ivanka, Stojadinka became Dubravka, Snezana became Snjezana, etc. Women still have the option of adopting this assimilationist strategy if they stay in the "enemy" territory. This is not always successful, however; there are cases in which a woman married to a man of the local nationality has been brutally killed in spite of showing a will to assimilate. One such case was that of a Serbian woman working in a Croatian army kitchen, who was murdered with her child while her husband, a Croat, was fighting in the Croatian army. Similarly, the Muslim wife and child of a Serb were killed on the border by Serb paramilitaries while trying to escape from Bosnia to Serbia, while her husband and their son, who had a Serbian name, were spared.

Women adopt a similar strategy when following a husband who joins the majority group. They change names if necessary, adopt customs and religious practices of the new community; give their children names that are typical for the husband's community, etc. This is their strategy of assimilation, trying to be invisible and avoiding disruptive forces in the partnership. In this way Zumra, a Muslim married to a Serb, changed her name to Svetlana to escape with her husband from Bosnia via Serbia to Sweden. All she wanted was to preserve her marriage and family, but she realizes that the orthodox Serbs will never forget that she used to be Zumra, while to the Muslims, she has betrayed her religion. Changing her name back to Zumra would be an admission that she had used false documents, so Zumra remains Svetlana.

A similar case is that of Fatima, formerly Gordana, a Serb from Croatia married to a Muslim from Bosnia. When she married him, he was essentially a Communist, but as he became a devout Muslim she adapted, changing her name and her style of dress, praying and raising her son as a Muslim.

Z. from central Bosnia, who came to Croatia as a refugee with her Bosnian Croat husband, did not have to change her name. But her children are Catholic and attend religious classes, and have Croatian names. She is considered fully integrated and hard working, and is well accepted in the community which is not particularly tolerant toward male "others".

The fact that minority women can gain acceptance if they abandon their national identity markers is also illustrated by a case from Kosovo: on the all-Albanian Pristina television station, the only Serb who appears on the screen is a woman who is married to an Albanian, has an Albanian name, and took part in the exodus to Macedonia (*Le Monde* 28.3.2000).

More examples are found in the northeastern province of Yugoslavia, Vojvodina, where one out of four marriages is ethnically mixed. During my field work in the province in 1993/94, I was told that because of the war and rising nationalism, mixed marriages were now being avoided. I was unable to verify this statistically, but it was frequently repeated as conventional wisdom. During that time, however, a prominent marriage apparently contradicting the reported trend was celebrated in Subotica, a multiethnic town on the Hungarian border. The granddaughter of an Orthodox Serbian priest married a Croat. But was this a contribution to ethnic mixing? Probably not. Since the Serbs were a minority in Subotica, the case was once again one of a minority woman marrying into the majority. She took her husband's name, and her children would most likely be Catholic.

### Refugee Patterns in Forced Migrations and Displacements

Attitudes toward exile and refugee patterns are also gender-specific. For women exile is a legitimate move, whereas for men it poses a dilemma.

*"Flight? Of course it is an absolute human right (...) If only many more had escaped ... there would be nobody left to fight...."* (Woman, age 35, former literature professor from Sarajevo, Yugoslav, 1994)

The refugee dilemma for men is expressed in the following example:

*"Fleeing is justified and it is not justified. If a man lives in one milieu in a town where the population is mixed, and he is a member of one nation, he might find himself in the situation of having to fight and kill his best friend, a member of the other nation. Naturally he wants to escape that; he does not want to be a criminal, so he is justified in fleeing. On the other hand, he may have to defend his home, his family: then he should stay."* (Yugoslav man, 1994)

As mentioned above, mixed couples were among the first to leave the country. Among those who stayed on in former Yugoslavian territory, refugee movements showed the following pattern. Minority men fled from majority areas, while women tended to stay put if their husbands were members of the majority, or to flee with their minority husbands.

The population exchange across the Croatian-Yugoslav border in the same area is an example. The evidence from a field study suggests that couples move so that men enter areas where they are members of the majority, and women follow as their minority wives. In a small ethnically mixed village M. in Vojvodina, Serbia, near the border with Croatia, inhabitants exchanged houses with the inhabitants of a similar village, I., on the Croatian side. Croatian men left M. for Croatia with their Serbian wives, and Serbian men from Croatia came to M. with their Croatian wives. On both sides of the border, the villages are still formally “mixed”, but now the minorities on each side are women. On the Serbian side the village is now perceived as predominantly Serb, not “mixed”. The women are not looked down upon as “others”, because they are subsumed under the nationality and the religion of their husbands. A daughter in one such mixed family that arrived from Croatia says she had not even known what her parents’ nationality was until the tension started:

*“My mother said she was a Croat. But we could not stay in Croatia, mixed as we were, so we came here to Vojvodina. My father told me he was a Serb, but that I should be whatever I like. I decided I was a Serb, that is how things should be now.” (16-year-old girl, 1994)*

## Conclusion

Interethnic unions were of course not the only form of mixing and forging Yugoslav identities. Even during peacetime, their contribution was less than one might have expected. In a patriarchal society the patrilinear transmission of national identity prevailed and usually entailed assimilation into the dominant majority.

In the time of tension and open conflict, interethnic marriages, seen as treacherous to the national collectives and as ambiguous “others”, became the first targets of violence, persecution, and exclusion.

This violence is gendered and so are the ways of confronting it. Sexual violence against women in war is a message from men to men. Women in interethnic marriages can be victims of men of their own and of their husbands’ nationalities—in the former case as “traitors”, in the latter as “others”. Strategies adopted in facing and escaping persecution suggest a gender-

specific pattern, in which women seem to be more adaptive, and to be more readily accepted as minorities by the majority. Men on the other hand have no choice but to remain in or join the majority group.

It should be noted that nationalism constructs a male nation. Mixture used to be the privilege of a dominant male, a “*privilège phallogratique*” in colonial times. But even in the almost half a century of peaceful Yugoslav experience, the “*mixtures*” did not always produce new identities. There were fewer interethnic couples forming cradles of new Yugoslav identification than one might have expected. Because of the prevalent patrilinear transmission, interethnic couples were mostly transmitters of the man’s identity, guaranteeing the reproduction of his group.

This trend was exacerbated in the period of ethnic tension and open conflict. Thus, interethnic couples, under threat and under stigma of betrayal, if they have not left the country, now contribute to the integration of the dominant group by assimilating and ceasing to appear as “*mixed*”.

The nationalist project of cleansing the territory of those whose identities and loyalties are considered incompatible with it has prevailed, even among interethnic couples.

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*Kaja Kaźmierska*

## Polish-German Relationships in Narratives on the Experiences of World War II from Poland's Eastern Border Region<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The Second World War, the most traumatic event of the twentieth century, is for most societies now “just” a tragic and unimaginable moment of history. For the older generation, however, it remains a part of life, an experienced past, therefore forms part of narrated life stories. Analysis of such biographies helps to reconstruct the most important features of war experiences and to characterize the aspects influenced by each society's specific history, cultural background, and national identity.

Polish narratives about the war first of all show the diversity of these experiences. Poles living in different regions of the country have different war biographies. Their life stories demonstrate that the war sharpened features of Polish identity that had been created before. But on the other hand, some new experiences of that time remain an important framework of interpretation even for those who did not live through the Second World War. Witnessing such a momentous historic event has inscribed individual biography in the process of construction of the collective memory through which ideas are transmitted to successive generations. For example, contemporary prejudices and stereotypes of other groups, such as Germans, Russians, Jews, Ukrainians or Lithuanians (that is, the peoples involved in the war in Poland), are influenced in the public and private Polish discourses by collective and individual war experiences (Czyżewski 1997). Furthermore, because these experiences

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1 The paper is based on the project “Biography and National Identity” which was conducted by my colleagues and me in 1992-94. We collected 55 narrative interviews with Poles who experienced the Second World War living in different parts of Poland. From these interviews we published the book *Biografia i tożsamość narodowa* (Biography and National Identity) (Czyżewski, M., Piotrowski, A. and Rokuszewska-Pawelek 1997) and a number of papers.

I focused on 20 interviews with persons who resided in the former eastern borderland living mostly in Vilnius. Nevertheless, some of the findings refer to other regions of the eastern borderland. The analysis is published in my book *Doświadczenia wojenne Polaków a kształtowanie tożsamości etnicznej. Analiza narracji kresowych* (Polish War Experiences and Ethnic Identity. Analysis of Eastern Borderland Narratives) (Kaźmierska 1999). Ideas presented in this paper are widely commented on in the book.

were specific to the places where people lived during the war, images of the “others” differ to some extent.

This paper describes and discusses the presentation of Polish-German relationships in narratives about the war experiences of the Polish inhabitants of the region along the pre-war eastern border. To this end I focus on and explain the complex circumstances that led narrators in that area to characterize Polish-German relationships in a different way than in central Poland. Although Polish-German relationships are the main theme, the analysis necessitates devoting ample space to a description of Polish-Soviet relationships, for reasons that will be explained in due course.

## **The Soviet and German Occupations**

The war began on September 1, 1939, with the Nazi German invasion of Poland. However, Poles living near the eastern border did not see German soldiers until June 1941, at the beginning of the Soviet-German war. Until that time, the eastern border region was occupied by the Red Army. Actually, half of the pre-war territory of Poland was controlled by the Soviet Union, in accordance with the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. In June of 1941 the Soviets withdrew quickly, and within a few days the eastern part of Poland was invaded by the German army.

How are these events reported in narratives? What kinds of impressions and experiences are connected with the Germans’ advance? In order to answer these questions I must step back and present at least some events and specific features of the Soviet occupation.

The Soviet Union invaded Poland on September 17, 1939. The occupation lasted until June 22, 1941, except in Vilnius and the surrounding region, where the Soviet occupation was interrupted by a period of Lithuanian administration from October 1939 to June 1940. In the war biographies from Vilnius, these changes are experienced as waves of advancing and withdrawing Soviet occupation, as illustrated in excerpts from a narrative interview from Vilnius below.

The Soviet occupation is described in all the narrations as the most significant experience of the war. This is evident in the very construction of the stories. The war story usually starts on September 17 (rather than September 1st), 1939, and most of it is devoted to the description of the Soviet occupation. The narrators present many images of Soviet soldiers. They reconstruct scenes of interaction, describe events, and give historical commentaries. They recount their impressions of a new order introduced by the Soviet system. Narrators spend a great deal of time telling how shocked they were by the Soviet invaders’ appearance and behavior (“wild faces”, “Bolsheviks like

living ghosts”, “dirty and stinking”), and by the new rules established for everyday life. The narrators express feelings of disgust towards the dirt, the poverty, and the miserable condition of the Soviet army. As one interviewee said:

*“... they were dressed in such a way that/ em, these, these overcoats weren't finished, they were just some, nothing but rags, something like that. So they looked terrible. This army absolutely did not have any conquering character. And those Kalmuck faces.”<sup>2</sup> (Nathalie, 1992: 3)*

Events occurring during the Soviet occupation are reported in the context of a trajectory. The analysis of narration proposed by Fritz Schütze enables us to depict the extended structural processes of a life course, which are modes of biographical experiencing. The backbones of structural processes of biography are specific activity relationships inherent in the corresponding phases of a life (Schütze, unpublished). There are four kinds of structural processes for organizing biographies: institutional schedules, biographical metamorphoses<sup>3</sup>, biographical action schemes and biographical trajectories.

Biographical action schemes represent intentional principles for planned social action with regard to one's own life course. The subject intentionally takes a specific action, does something specific with his own life and identity.

Biographical trajectories represent the opposite process, in which an individual is overwhelmed by outside forces which lead to the successive loss of control over his life. The basic experiential mode of a biographical trajectory is suffering. Whereas in a biographical action scheme one intends and is able to shape one's biography, the individual experiencing a trajectory lacks this ability. Suffering connected with these sequences of events leads an individual to change or rework his identity, his attitude towards others, his social relationships and the social world to which he belongs. These processes modify the individual's life situation and project for the future, and force him to reinterpret past experiences (Riemann and Schütze 1991).

In addition to individual trajectories, there are also collective trajectories related to collective processes. These are characterized by symptoms of disorder: the breakdown of social relationships, a collapse of social reality. Individuals who are members of a social group or community are subjected to sequences of events which generate an increasing loss of control and of the ability to plan. Often they are forced to undertake certain activities, and in this context there appear feelings of pressure, guilt, loyalty, and duty toward other

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2 The description “Kalmuck faces” appears quite often in eastern borderland narratives. It connotes wild, Asian faces which show no emotions.

3 Institutionalized schedules for organizing biographies represent the normative principle of being oriented at and controlled by institutional expectations regarding the life course in general or certain parts of it; biographical metamorphoses represent a principle of surprise, of unexpectedly encountering new enriching features, like creative situations. They cannot be reached directly by pre-planned steps of biographical activity (Schütze, unpublished).

members of a certain community. This part of a biography is reported in the "we" context of collective, community experiences (Rokuszewska-Pawełek 1997).

In the narratives the trajectory is presented as a collective process which could at any time become an individual experience. The collective trajectory is the only process structure of experience found in stories of the Soviet occupation. Although only two of the interviewees experienced an individual trajectory (one was imprisoned, the other deported), the theme of the "threat of suffering" is dominant in all the narratives. Each narrative contains a story about others who suffered deportation, or who were arrested or summarily executed. The trajectory approaches and withdraws in every encounter with a Soviet soldier, and, in the case of biographies from Vilnius, in the subsequent waves of Soviet occupation.

The main menace is defined as deportation, the fear of which is described to some degree in every narrative. The narrators recall how deportation occurred, and usually give an example of a person who was deported, stressing that they too expected to be deported. There were four waves of mass deportations: in February, April, and June of 1940, and in June, 1941. The last of these was interrupted by the outbreak of the Soviet-German war (Gross 1988). An examination of dates reveals that the inhabitants of Vilnius did not suffer as a result of the first three deportations, but they were conscious of what was going on in other regions of eastern Poland.

Let me dwell for a moment on the outbreak of the Soviet-German war. When biographic interview subjects talk about this event, their stories usually have the same construction: before reporting their first impression of the Germans' arrival, and before describing what kind of biographical experience was attached to this event, the narrator first presents a commentary. Sometimes this is enriched with a background construction, an additional story about someone's life inserted in order to illustrate the reported facts (Schütze 1992). In the commentary, the narrators describe deportations organized by the Soviets. Consider the following excerpt from an interview:

*"And then we heard the news about the outbreak of the German-Russian war.<sup>4</sup> Well, generally we were glad, because people started thinking that the pattern of the First World War would be repeated. Well, that the Germans would conquer the Russians and then Ger /emmi/ the Germans would be defeated by the West, and Poland would regain independence. So generally we were glad. Besides, the Russians were announcing a great deportation (...) of people to Siberia. (...) The deportations started in May of '41. And, for example, if I may say so, at the start all the people who had escaped from the [central] territory of Poland were taken, because they [Russians] were careful not to leave a Polish element. For example, of those of my friends whom I had mentioned were my friends from Katowice, and from Torun, and and a great many of them were deported. And this deportation kept going on and on. em It was horrible because there were trucks moving*

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4 Parts of the story that also appear in other interviews are indicated by boldface type.

along streets. A truck would have some address and approach some house and within a few hours they had to prepare to go in this truck, and then they were taken to trains to the railway station and they were put on trains going to Siberia. And lots of people went there in this deportation. And this deportation went on and on and probably we were all on the list. And then came the news—a war. So, it's a paradox—but it was also a sort of liberation. And again, a second paradox: before this deportation to Siberia or somewhere in Kazakhstan, first of all to Kazakhstan—and the second paradox, the war. So, as we know from history, there was no intense Russian defense. The Russians were very shocked by the outbreak of the war, and Stalin couldn't believe till the very end that his friend would attack him and that there would be battles. There were, let's say, not big air raids on the city /mm/ /emm/ and after that the Russians running away and the Germans coming in very quickly after that. And now a paradox—which /emm/ I'm sure will be visible in many such stories and many such interviews—that on the one hand we were in a sense content about their coming because, well, this, this, this, this horrible deportation was stopped. And on the other hand, nevertheless, the German Army was civilized, well it was civilized ((quietly, as if in confusion)). For example, they had a camp in our yard. They had a beautiful tent, they would come to our flat asking politely for warm water, they talked politely, they saluted, they kissed my mother's hand. So this, this in contrast to this, to such a swarm of bugs as these, these Moskals<sup>5</sup> were ((disgustedly)). So this, this was an incredible contrast, incredible, Horrib/ I mean later a man knows what the German occupation means, but, but during this first contact one was very much for the Germans." (Nathalie, 1992:10)

The following elements in the excerpt presented are common to all the narratives:

- an introduction of the topic of the German-Soviet war;
- a more or less detailed description of deportation;
- the outbreak of the German-Soviet war—a feeling of relief;
- a description of the German (and Russian) soldiers.

In the fragment above, the narrator begins telling about the next event of her war biography, which is the outbreak of the German-Soviet war. However, in order to report her experiences—that is, a feeling of relief and an observation of the Germans' civilized behavior—she needs to tell about the deportations which threatened every person of Polish origin<sup>6</sup>. The statement about a feeling of relief is comprehensible only after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war has been situated in the context of mass deportations. In addition, the feeling of relief due to the withdrawing trajectory is presented as a collective experience. The narrator refers to the opinions of others. The last part of the

5 Moskals: an archaic pejorative term for the Russians.

6 In a short historical commentary (lines 1-4) the author presents one of the anticipated scenarios of the war. This part of the analyzed fragment does not appear in other interviews. Nevertheless, the idea that the Russians would be defeated by the Germans and then the West would conquer the Germans can be noticed in some narratives. This scenario was based on experiences of World War I as well as on the willingness to neutralize the threat of communism. Therefore, the idea appears in eastern borderland narratives where authors felt endangered by Soviet Russia much more keenly than inhabitants of Central Poland.

excerpt also has the same construction found in most of the narratives when narrators recount their positive impressions. The narrator saw well-organized, clean, well-mannered German soldiers. Like other interview subjects, the narrator contrasts the Germans' appearance with that of the Soviet soldiers. Typically, the description of the German army is positive ("young, good looking soldiers", "clean", "well armed" etc.), and is influenced by previous encounters with Soviet soldiers. In the last sentence, the narrator once more stresses the relativity of her statement about the positive impression.

Thus for inhabitants of the eastern border region, the arrival of the Germans and the resulting German occupation was associated with the withdrawal of a trajectory that had been inscribed during the Soviet occupation. When the narrators wanted to express their experiences with the Germans, they were obliged to frame them in an argumentation emphasizing their relativity with respect to experiences with the Soviets.

Next, the interview subjects tell what they did during the German occupation. This part of the interview is also found in most of the narratives. First of all, the style of presentation differs from the narration of Soviet rule. Much less time is devoted to describing the German occupation. In one typical narrative of the war, the topic takes up only 3 out of 27 pages. This is significant in view of the fact that the German occupation lasted about three times longer than the Soviet presence.

The narrators present far fewer images of German soldiers, scenes of interaction, etc. They also do not talk about what the occupation was like in general, but concentrate more on their own activities, describing underground schooling and conspiracy. Some of them completed secondary school exams; some—mostly women—taught children. Women also supported their colleagues in underground activities. The narrators evaluate these experiences very positively, expressing authentic eagerness for learning, describing the opportunities they had to develop skills, and recounting loyal friendships and other experiences, such as serving in the underground resistance army, that shaped their later personalities.

When interactions with the German occupying forces are described in biographical interviews, the narrators usually describe how they cheated them or how they negotiated certain meanings of situations on the basis of common shared categories of the symbolic universe. Examples of cheating included falsifying documents to avoid deportation to German work camps. The narrators frequently report that a false medical certificate was enough to prove an inability to work. One woman, for example, describes a scene in which she participated. The story is about a very pretty friend of hers who obtained a false certificate of pregnancy. In the interaction that took place when she presented the certificate in the labor office, identities were negotiated in categories of gender: a pretty young woman (a Pole) presented the certificate to young men (German soldiers). The Germans verified neither whether the

certificate was authentic, nor whether the alleged fiancé was really (as the girl said) already imprisoned by them, although both facts could have been checked easily. This tactic was facilitated by the knowledge that the Germans were highly susceptible to the beauty of Polish women.

Other cases refer to situations in which the presentation of true statements, documents, and identities led German soldiers to accept such definitions. For example, another narrator describes how he visited his grandparents over Christmas, which involved crossing the border between the *Generalgouvernement*<sup>7</sup> and the Western Ukraine. He decided to tell the truth at the border about the purpose of his journey, and he was allowed to cross although he did not have a passport. A German soldier who had relations with the local people talked with the boy and eventually let him pass by pretending not to see him. The significance of this event is emphasized in the next part of the narration, when the author describes how he managed to avoid being killed by Ukrainians by concealing his Polish identity as soon as he had crossed the border.

These tactics were usually evaluated as successful against Germans, who could be deceived because they were not suspicious of documents or of activities arranged according to certain rules. Here again, the narrators contrast the German and Soviet occupations. Whereas during the Soviet occupation, clandestine action was very difficult and it was almost impossible to trick officials or to obtain benevolent treatment by presenting truthful motives, "Nazi German rule was more hospitable to clandestine conspiracy" (Gross 1988: 230).

## The Specific Character of Polish-German Relationships in the Eastern Border Region: Clues to Interpretation

Features presented in the life stories can help us to understand the specific pattern of Polish-German relationships in the eastern border region, but they do not relieve us of the duty to search for explanations. Clarification can be found both in the further analysis of narratives and in some historical information. We can refer to history to attempt to compare the two occupations. Some may question whether such a comparison is moral in light of the devastating character of the Nazi German occupation, and especially in light of our knowledge about the Holocaust. Jan T. Gross consequently attempts a partial comparison:

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7 The *Generalgouvernement* was the central part of Poland, occupied by Nazi Germany. The northern and western territories were incorporated into the Reich.

"... I wish to stress, therefore, that my comparison is limited to the period that *preceded* the Holocaust. Where did the people suffer more? Is it possible at all to assess the comparative damage of the Nazi and Soviet administrations in Poland from September 1939 to June 1941? I think such a comparison, though awkward, can be made. And if we measure the victimization of Polish citizens in terms of loss of life, of suffering inflicted by forced resettlement, and of material losses through confiscation and fiscal measures, the Soviet actions, relatively speaking, would prove more injurious than those of the Nazis." (Gross 1988: 226)

This assessment seems to support what the narrators recall of that time. The change of occupying forces must have been experienced as a relief after a period of heavy deportations. This feeling was probably strengthened when the narrators learned that the Soviet forces planned to deport everybody. Nevertheless, this first positive impression did not determine the general assessment of the German occupation. Why do the narrators consider the Soviet occupation to have been a harsher experience? One possible answer can be found by analyzing the forms of biographical experiences in both occupations, and another in analyzing the forms of interaction that were possible between the Poles and the occupying forces.

### *The Trajectory and Biographical Action Scheme as Two Modes of Experiencing the War Biography*

The most important difference between those parts of war stories that refer to the Soviet occupation and those which recount the German occupation can be characterized as the impossibility of action in the former case versus the possibility of action in the latter. As noted above, narrators talking about the German occupation begin by presenting their own activities, and make few general statements about the character of the occupation, the dangers, their feelings of helplessness, and so on. The interview subjects do not say much about terror, executions, or individual persecution<sup>8</sup>. If we analyze the different perceptions in terms of process structures of experience, it appears that the Soviet occupation was dominated by a collective trajectory involving an extended process of suffering which might become an individual experience at any time. The German occupation, on the other hand, allowed the introduction of a biographical action scheme, which is associated with intentional

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8 Narrators also very rarely mention the Holocaust, which must have been a part of their war experiences since eastern Poland was inhabited by many Jews. When they do talk about the persecution of the Jews, it is usually mentioned in the context of other nations (such as the Lithuanians or the Ukrainians) who actively supported the Holocaust. This remark is very important in the context of the following part of the paper. The interviewees related only to their own (Polish) war experiences ignoring experiences of others who were persecuted by the Germans, especially victims of the Holocaust. This fact indicates a very important issue which should be investigated separately.

action. According to Schütze's concept, the trajectory mode of biographical experience can be overcome when an individual begins looking for solutions, for a way out of the fateful situation, and attempts to regain control over her life circumstances. The possibility of action, and of planning how to change one's biography in order to overcome a feeling of helplessness, opens up the prospect of a new kind of experience, the biographical action scheme (Riemann and Schütze 1991). The contrast between the Soviet and the German occupations can therefore be explained as the contrast between two forms of biographical experience: a trajectory, associated with suffering, and a biographical action scheme, involving an intentional life project. Of course this does not imply that the Poles in the eastern border region did not suffer during the German occupation. Many of the people were arrested, interrogated, and tormented. I want to point out, however, that in most of the narratives that we analyzed from this region, experiences of the different occupations are retold in keeping with the structures described.

The two modes of experiencing the occupations can be seen in the following excerpts from the narrative presented earlier:

A: *"For sure, this German period was, paradoxically, but overall, the easiest, it was generally the easiest. First of all, in spite of everything there was some hope. Besides, there is some/ some psychological matter ... When the Russians were here, then it was as if an abyss was opening in the East. In a way, Kazakhstan was always—it was an impending fear. We were always talking about it, and you had such a feeling that there were these open jaws that could suck you in. And paradoxically, when the Germans came, you felt a connection with the West. And, for example, I wasn't, I was not worried—maybe naively—that I would be transported to work to Germany. Again, I had health certificates then [as recounted elsewhere] and so on, but in a way/*

B: *Mhm.*

A: *to the West there wasn't this, this, well, abyss of these opened jaws of Asia. So nevertheless, the mood was definitely better...*

A: *Besides, thanks to the underground teaching, for example, paradoxically, our social life became livelier. Because we gathered for lessons, and we met each other. Thank /em/ let's say thanks to some of, some of these opportunities to work, which gave us a minimal, but at least gave some financial base, we had more of a social life. It awakened some, some, well some form of social life. /em/ We met, we young people met, we played bridge. em Because there was a curfew, so let's say there was such a nice custom of staying for the night. So we spread out some, there even weren't these inflatable these /em/ these, what do you*

B: *mattresses*

A: *mattresses but, but you simply spread out some rugs, because it was necessary, you were/ For example, it was a name-day, so we get together, so a group of people*

B: *Mhm.*

A: *stay for the night. It was generally somehow nice and integrating. Then, for example, I fondly recall these vacations that I spent, as I said, in the country, where I worked, simply as a farm-hand. /em/ But there was a group of young people there also, so it was in a sense nice and merry. And well, being young makes a difference so, so, so generally this*

*period of three years I recall much better than /em/ those first two years of the war.” (Nathalie, 1992: 13-14)*

In this fragment of the narration, the author makes use of two levels of comparison. First (starting in line 2 with “Besides ...”) she describes figuratively the difference between the world which is unknown and wild, in which a trajectory potential is inscribed, and the world which belongs to the same civilization, and which, although hostile, permits action and the realization of a life project, however limited by the general circumstances of occupation. “Open jaws that could you suck in” are contrasted with a “connection with the West”, associated with the expectation that certain rules would be respected. This comparison requires no further argumentation. The threat of the wild East, at the time in question the threat of Bolshevism, is a familiar topos of Polish culture. This is why a very rich, metaphorical language is used to characterize the Soviet occupation, and does not appear when the narrator tells about the German occupation. Such language is very common in narratives of the eastern border region. The contrast between East and West is expressed with the help of elaborate categories of symbolic description.

The second level of comparison (starting in the first line, but interrupted in the second line and then continued in the second excerpt) refers to the contrast between the Soviet and the German occupations. Here once again, the assessment that the German period was “generally the easiest” is a paradoxical statement that calls for explanation. Nevertheless, the German occupation becomes the period during the war when the narrator’s youth serves as a background for the positive experience of certain aspects of life (school, friendships, social life).

### *Awareness Contexts Connected with the Soviet and German Occupations*

Another explanation of the particular image of Polish-German relationships in the eastern border region can be advanced by analyzing scenes of interaction reconstructed in the narratives. The narrators tell about their encounters with the Soviet and German occupying forces. In these interactions, they use a variety of strategies to present their own identity, acting according to the image of the occupying force. The analysis of particular forms of self-representation (the narrator’s own identity, the identity of the other, and the narrator’s own identity in the eyes of the other) helps to establish types of “awareness contexts”<sup>9</sup> which were typical for each occupation. In the case of

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9 An awareness context is “the total combination of what each interactant in a situation knows about the identity of the other and his own identity in the eyes of the other” (Glaser and Strauss 1964: 670). The authors enumerate four types of awareness contexts: an open awareness context, in which each individual is aware of the other’s true identity and his

the Soviet occupation, suspicion shapes the awareness context that appears to characterize the most common strategy for interacting with the occupying forces. The narrators stress that the Soviet soldiers were always suspicious of the identities and definitions of situations presented. On the other hand, the narrators quickly realized that suspicion was the best basis for interaction with the Soviets, since the latter never disclosed their true motives and intentions. During the German occupation, however, the narrators were able to present their true identity (open awareness context: the boy crossing the border) or conceal it (closed awareness context: the “pregnant” girl), depending on the strategy chosen, and making use of the assumption that Germans could be deceived.

The possibility or impossibility of using a certain awareness context influenced specific life strategies attached to each occupation. Again, life strategies were related to the ability or inability to take an active role in establishing interaction rules. Sequences of awareness contexts were therefore attached to the specific types of biographical experience connected with each occupation. While the analysis of these differences cannot serve to assess the quality of threat in each occupation, it does show how the necessity of arranging interactions according to a certain awareness context helped to build the images of the Soviets and the Germans, and to inform life strategies underlying Polish-German and Polish-Soviet relationships in this part of Poland.

### *Comparison as the Category of Description*

As we can see, in each example presented, a comparison of biographical experiences becomes the basis for the demonstration. Polish-German relationships are always described in comparison either with the Soviet occupation or with the German occupation in central Poland. These two foci of comparison become the basic category of the description of Germans in the eastern border region.

In the first case, the comparison refers to an experience of the new world of Soviet Russia, which was totally different from the Polish world. The clash is described first as the experience of a strange, unknown world. It then becomes the experience of confronting the Soviet occupation with the German occupation. In other words, the relationship between Poles, identified as belonging to civilization, and Soviets, identified as anti-civilization, is transferred to the relationship between the German and Soviet occupations. The

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own identity in the eyes of the other; a closed awareness context, in which one interactant does not know either the other's identity or the other's view of his identity; a suspicion awareness context—one interactant suspects the true identity of the other or the other's view of his identity or both; and a pretense awareness context, in which both interactants are fully aware, but pretend not to be (Glaser and Strauss 1964).

relationship can be described as a conflict between order and total disorder. This order might carry the threat of death, but it represented clear rules that allowed dangers to be identified and categories to be established for defining roles of invaders and victims. In this sense, the German occupation was orderly. Antagonism was expressed by means of unequivocal rules and patterns. The Soviet occupation became symbolic of a world in which there were no regulations, no culture (understood as a normative system), and no useful rules for identifying an invader and a victim.

But this aspect of comparison is not sufficient to demonstrate the legitimacy of the narrators' biographical experiences. They also contrast their biographies with those of Poles living in central Poland. In so doing, they compare their experiences with other experiences that they did not share, but which they know as a culturally established image of the war. This is why the narrators use highly developed argumentation in presenting their wartime biographies. Inhabitants of central Poland do not need to explain their image of the German occupation, whereas inhabitants of the eastern regions must find arguments to support their accounts of the war experience. Thus an elaborate line of argumentation is one of the significant features of narratives of the eastern border region, and is related not only to the quality of war experiences, but also to the difficulty of presenting biographies from the eastern border region in public discourse.

## **Conclusions**

In this brief characterization of the wartime experiences of Poles who lived in the pre-war eastern border region, I wanted to show something of the diversity of Polish experiences of the war, and to explain the roots of that diversity. The analysis of interviews demonstrates that Polish-German relationships are described differently in narratives from central Poland and in those from the eastern regions. The consequences of this difference can be analyzed in terms of possible or restricted forms of activity, in terms of defining danger, cruelty, menace in each occupation, in terms of prejudices and stereotypes of others, and so on.

Examining the reasons for this difference can also help to shed light on the sources of past and future conflicts, to explain why people decide to accept certain conditions and revolt against others, why they sometimes acquiesce in atrocities and sometimes resist them.

However, I would like to focus on one more aspect of the biographical experiences narrated, an aspect related to the socially and culturally established means that individuals use when constructing their life stories. In war narratives, individual experiences are combined with collective images built

on collective definitions of the past. This relationship can influence the presentation of a biography in two ways. First, it helps to locate life experiences in the past. Sometimes individual retrospection fuses with memories of others, which helps to create a coherent image of the past. Such shared history strengthens identification with the group. Second, an interpretation of the past created with the help of one's own biography may not coincide sufficiently with the collective image of history. Such a situation can exist when there are limitations on talking about certain aspects of the past. Both of these strategies for the presentation of a life story can be found in the narratives of Poland's eastern border.

In both cases, the division of Europe is the factor that makes individuals choose these strategies. The contrasting experiences of the Soviet and German occupations is in a way the result of the military and political division of Poland between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. Polish inhabitants of the region along the pre-war eastern border experienced the Soviet system much earlier than the rest of Poland did. This fact made their wartime biographies differ greatly. For this part of Polish society, the post-war division of Europe began on September 17th, 1939, although it only became an official fact after the political and military agreements reached by powerful states at the end of the war.

According to international agreements, settlements along the eastern border of Poland were moved and Polish inhabitants of this region had to leave their homeland. Their relocation also led to different war biographies and different interpretations of post-war events. They were more aware of the Soviet system. For the Poles of central Poland, these experiences and interpretations were often incomprehensible. The narrators complained that they were not understood by other Poles, and therefore could not openly present their war experiences. The two groups were unable to establish a shared universe of discourse about the war. This discrepancy, which is very clear in the interviews, was one reason why people from the eastern border region felt like outsiders in post-war Polish society. The narrators often say "we" when talking about persons belonging to their local community, connected with the eastern border region, and "they" in referring to the Poles who welcomed displaced persons just after the war. This fact influences the narratives of inhabitants of the eastern border region who, being displaced from their homeland, presented a very coherent image of their local community, its identity, and its collective history. That is why individual experiences are usually presented on the basis of collective social, historical, or even psychological processes of the narrators' community.

Another aspect of the division is connected with the fact that displaced persons quickly realized that it was taboo to disclose the entire war history of Poland. Since 1989, statements have appeared in interviews that could not previously come to light in public discourse. Often such statements were not

present in private discourse either, because individuals were afraid to reveal their personal past. Before 1989, coming from the Eastern border region was a kind of stigma in itself, let alone having engaged in clandestine activities or underground fighting. Many persons, including some of my interviewees, were under surveillance by the communist security service simply because of their background.

In other words, the official image of the war in public discourse presented Nazi Germans as the only enemy, whereas Russian soldiers were considered as friendly and helpful representatives of an allied country. Poles were presented solely as victims of Nazi German occupation. The public discourse stressed the suffering of the Polish nation on the one hand and the heroic fight against the perpetrator on the other. This image was not false. Poles did suffer a great deal: they were killed in concentration camps, executed by firing squads, killed in action. They also fought against the German occupying forces in the underground army, as well as abroad in all kinds of military organizations. Such an image could be accepted as being grounded in the Polish ethos of heroic struggle, identifying Poland as a victim of its arch-enemy. But on the other hand, this image *was* false, since it omitted the war experiences of that part of Polish society which had suffered most because of the Soviet regime.

To a certain extent, the division of Europe did not allow the inhabitants of the eastern border region to share their war biography in postwar Poland, namely, to present their experience of Polish-German relationships in the context of the Soviet occupation which was experienced as more harmful. Since 1989 the narrators' war history, which for some fifty years did not exist in public discourse, has gradually become a part of Polish history. Today some inhabitants of the eastern border region are trying to make up for lost time. Narrated life experiences are not a series of disconnected events. Biographers always have to select events according to some order which is based on the context of meaning—this is the narrator's own overall interpretation (Rosenthal 1998). In narratives of the eastern border region, talking about blank areas of Polish war history has become one of the main themes. This is certainly one more reason why Polish-German relationships are neglected in the life stories analyzed.

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*Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu*

## Narratives of Extreme Experiences in Four Model Life Stories: Mircea Eliade, Mihail Sebastian, Nicolae Steinhardt, Paul Goma

### **A Corpus of Texts**

Autobiographical and biographical writings published in Romania since 1990 form a vast body of texts. It is rewarding to analyze them from several angles, and especially to compare them with life stories, autobiographical novels, private diaries, and memoirs published before 1990, with the consent of the censorship (some of which have since been republished). Some life stories initially appeared outside the country or only in translation, while others are disclosures of unpublished manuscripts. This corpus of texts is highly heterogeneous with respect to the historical periods they relate to, the authors' social origins, and their professional careers. The publications have contributed to the structuring of a new public space in Romania in a differentiated manner, in which the political, literary, and intellectual dimensions are strongly interwoven. The moralization and over-politicization of this intellectual space and discourse constituted by literary and autobiographical writing related to Romania's past is demonstrated by the numerous polemical writings prompted by some of these publications.

A brief look at the historical background will help us toward a fuller understanding.

### *Dictatorship Experiences in Romania*

The first dictatorship (1938-1940) was that of King Carol II. Although directed against the Far Right (the Iron Guard), then on the rise but suppressed by the king, his regime adopted several elements of its totalitarian political style, such as the single party, uniforms, and anti-Semitic laws. As a result of the territorial amputations of Romania by Hungary, Soviet Russia, and Bulgaria, the king abdicated in 1940 and a national-Legionary state was proclaimed, founded on an alliance between General Antonescu, later Marshal and Head of State, and the Iron Guard. The Iron Guard rebelled in January 1941, and was suppressed by the army faithful to Antonescu.

The takeover of power by this regime in 1940, followed by the country's entry into war against the Soviet Union in June 1941, gave rise to pogroms in

Bucharest and Jassy. During the war period, Romania established its own concentration camps in the newly occupied territories in Transnistria in the East, where Jews from the eastern regions of Romania (ceded to the Soviet Union in 1940) and Roma were interned. However, Romania refused to hand over “its own” Jews to Germany. The policies towards the Jewish minority of Antonescu’s regime, fascist in nature, have been the subject of public debate before and after 1989, forming a kind of Romanian version of the West German *Historikerstreit*.

After shifting from collaboration with Nazi Germany to collaboration with the Soviet army in August 1944, followed by a few years of transition and a limited return of democracy from September 1944 to December 1947, Romania entered a new political era. It became a “People’s Republic” from 1948 to 1965, then a socialist republic from 1965 to 1989. The purges, officially justified by anti-fascism, became an instrument to impose the Communist party’s monopoly of political power, and to do away with all opposition in intellectual circles. During the first period such persecution expanded considerably and affected all sectors of the population. One of its perverse consequences was to lend legitimacy to some movements against the Communist regime in which former fascists were particularly active. The second period began with attempts at national reconciliation, such as amnesty and rehabilitation, but without any real political concessions on the part of the regime in power. By associating itself with some fractions of the former elites, Ceausescu’s regime succeeded to a certain extent in neutralizing the opposition, which then took on new forms in the context of the regime’s nationalism.

Some of these events are evoked in most Romanian autobiographical and biographical writings. The first step in the analysis of their sociological landscape is to choose model writings that have played a part in the polarization of positions on the published testimonies. These narratives have made possible the structuring of collective memory and the production of instruments for constructing identities. At the same time, they have brought to light the deep fissures between groups whose collective memories are differently structured in relation to past political commitments—fascist or anti-fascist, communist or anti-communist, or in relation to membership in different national or religious groups.

The presence in this corpus of a large number of testimonies of extreme experiences<sup>1</sup> by victims of Stalinist terror, suffered on the islands of the Romanian Gulag archipelago<sup>2</sup>, also justifies the comparison with other testimo-

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1 For the concept of “extreme experience” see Michael Pollak (1990), Tzvetan Todorov (1991) and Luc Boltanski (Boltanski and Thévenot 1993).

2 Several of these books indicate places of agony in their titles: cf. Gheorghita (1994) and Munteanu (1997). For a map of this Romanian archipelago, see the French translation of N. Steinhardt’s diary (1995). The use of the metaphor “archipelago”, and the extension of

nies published after 1945 by the survivors of Nazi concentration camps.<sup>3</sup> Other accounts that reveal painful experiences and suffering due to persecution or migration cannot be classified in the same category, although there are historical or political links, and sometimes personal ones, between these different experiences: between imprisonment and the fear of imprisonment which leads to exile, for example.

This corpus of testimonies can be sorted first by the event placed at the center of the accounts. The forced “re-education” of the opponents of the Communist regime is the subject of several testimonies and accusations. The violation of personal beliefs and convictions had reached an extreme point in one of the ‘islands’ of this archipelago, namely the prison of Pitesti. This prison, located in a town about a hundred kilometers west of Bucharest, was the site of a “re-education experiment”. It was set up at the end of the 1940s, and the role of the educator was assigned to a political prisoner, Turcanu, a former member of the Iron Guard. Charged with the task of persuading his co-prisoners, among them several former comrades, to adhere to the new political and moral order, Turcanu showed a particularly cruel excess of zeal, forcing the prisoners to denounce and torture one another. Once discovered by the authorities, the “experiment” led to a trial in 1952, and Turcanu and his accomplices were found guilty of atrocities, sentenced to death, and executed. Those who have written on “the Pitesti phenomenon” to demonstrate the injustice of the trial point out that only moderate sanctions were imposed on the prison administrators who had protected or even organized the “experiment”, while the death penalty was imposed only on those prisoners who had a fascist past. Furthermore, the event was exploited politically in conjunction with the purge of several influential members of the political bureau of the Communist party (including Ana Pauker). The history of Pitesti, which bears similarities to situations of collaboration and persecution by kapos in the Nazi camps, is also recalled in connection with the comparisons between Fascism and Communism.<sup>4</sup>

A second category of testimonies concern armed anti-communist resistance, which had persisted in the Carpathians till the mid-1950s (Gavrila-

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the name ‘Gulag’ beyond the frontiers of the USSR have been made possible by the international publication of Solzhenystin’s work, which is sometimes explicitly used as model by these authors. Having become almost a literary genre of its own, the texts of this corpus are often classified according to the quality of writing of the account as well as the quality of the information gathered, in keeping with their hybrid historiographic and literary nature.

3 See the exemplary work of Michael Pollak (1990). This work is used here for comparison of the different methods of recounting extreme “experiences”, and not for comparing the experiences themselves. The latter comparison, “Auschwitz and the Gulag”, is a favorite theme of some revisionist literature.

4 See the preface by François Furet to the French edition of Virgil Ierunca’s (1990) essay on the Pitesti “experiment”.

Ogoreneau 1993-1995). This partisan war was fought by former soldiers of the Romanian army who had refused to surrender their weapons at the time of the change of military and political alliances,<sup>5</sup> and by militants of the nationalist parties (and not only the fascists, as the new rulers of the country pretended). The resistance had benefited from truly popular support at least in some regions of the country. Recent publications celebrate this resistance both in order to rehabilitate its heroes and to contribute to the invention of a new political tradition, namely that of opposition to Communism.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, a third category of testimonies deals with political trials whose victims were intellectuals, and with their experiences in the concentration "universe". These accounts differ from the others because of the reputation of their authors, the background of the testimony—presented in literary and/or scientific works—and the public and institutional support of which they were assured, such as dissemination through school textbooks or translations abroad.

In Romania this literature is rarely treated as an object of empirical research in studies on the transformation of identities, except in a few historiographical or literary publications. Some political scientists have taken an interest in them because of their interest in the renaissance of the far right and anti-Semitism (Shafir 1998; Voicu 1999). However, for all practical purposes, sociologists and psychoanalysts have ignored them. The case is different elsewhere, as in East Germany for example, where studies are undertaken concerning the typology of intellectual discourses after the political turnaround (Land and Possekel 1994), in the framework of a sociology of elites or from a psychoanalytical perspective.<sup>7</sup> In the face of the paucity of appropriate scientific resources in Romania, it is the author's reputation (in the case of intellectuals) or the use of a sensational style of journalism which competes for the attention of readers.

## Four Representative Life Stories

The four life stories that I propose to analyze here belong to the last category. I have chosen them on the basis of the authors' reputations, the national and international dissemination of their work, the role of autobiographical texts in their writing, and finally, the controversial reactions provoked by these texts. Their texts are exceptional and at the same time representative.

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5 The coup d'état of King Mihai had taken place in August 1944, with the support of democratic parties associated with the Communist Party.

6 The presence of some fascist leaders among these heroes of the resistance has given rise to protests.

7 See as an example the debate on the past of GDR analyzed by Hans-Joachim Maaz (1990).

They are exceptional because the authors underwent extreme experiences of prison and exile which made their respective individual trajectories deviate from their original paths. At the same time, the extreme experiences favored a certain form of recognition or consecration. Viewed as a challenge, these experiences are supposed to have activated special social, intellectual, political, and moral resources. The ability to benefit from an adverse situation implies an ability to convert these resources into a rare sort of capital. And indeed, the autobiographical works demonstrate exactly this.

At the same time, these works are representative in the sense that they show aspects of the collective Romanian history of which they are a significant part. As noted above, this history is marked by a succession of dictatorships, first fascist and then Stalinist.

The four authors' conditions of political and intellectual socialization are different. Eliade, Sebastian, and Steinhardt were born before World War I, two of them in Bucharest, the city where all four did their university studies in philosophy and law. The international intellectual career of Mircea Eliade is without parallel to those of the others, whose books, although translated, have not enjoyed the same conditions of distribution and recognition. Paul Goma, who was the most politically committed opponent of the regime, is the only one of the four who is alive and a witness to the changes that transpired in 1989. All four lived through painful and dangerous experiences, yet the differences between them are considerable. Eliade's brief arrest and confinement, which did not prevent his departure on a diplomatic career a short time later, has little in common with the condition of all Jews during the war years, condemned to freedom while awaiting the "final solution". Such was the fate of Mihail Sebastian in Bucharest until August 1944. On the other hand, the passage through the Stalinist prisons could also have led to contrasting choices of intellectual strategies: the voluntary seclusion of Steinhardt, the writer who became a monk, for example, or the political stand of the dissident writer Goma. It is also important to remark that at the time they came face to face with the extreme experience which was to change their lives; all four enjoyed a form of social recognition as authors of published books. This helped to reduce the threats that hung over them, and later to reconstitute their identity, especially through autobiographical work.

We may also consider that all four, given their studies and their parents' professions, had ideal opportunities for representing a Romanian intellectual bourgeoisie. But this elite was divided and dispersed. First of all, anti-Semitic legislation excluded the Jews who had belonged to the elite; and then other members of the elite were committed to fascism. They joined the Iron Guard and/or took an active part in the war of the national-Legionary state. When the Soviet army occupied Romania, they had to flee or suffer the consequences. Finally, the structural changes that overtook Romanian society after 1945 brought a new rival elite to the fore.

## **A Model for Analysis**

I will try here to present the four life stories from two different points of view: first, the role of the extreme experiences and the effects they had on the individual trajectories; second, the production of autobiographical narrative as a response to a need, whether explicitly formulated or only felt as a tacit imperative. In general, the life stories are a condensed form of individual social history, and are the result of the encounter between the verbal supply and demand in the market of linguistic exchanges (Bourdieu 1982). In presenting them, it is important also to underline the conditions of the positions taken, which are basic to the biographical texts, as well as the conditions of presentation, publication, and public reception of those texts.

It is important to remember that to overcome an extreme experience requires an equally strong condemnation of the injustice responsible for it. As Luc Boltanski says, people must be persuaded by the indictment both to find a balance between the deeds revealed and the injustice denounced, and to join the protest (Boltanski and Thévenot 1991). The denunciation can be intended essentially to restore justice: this is the case with autobiographical texts which have the character of testimony in a more significant sense. It can also be intended as a kind of emotional communion, a search for the restoration of a link with others. This is the case with literary narratives in particular. In the four writers' biographies that I propose to analyze here, the question of the link with others is central. Each writer tries in his own way to reconcile the representation of the extreme experience he underwent with the representation of his own professional or social identity. I will look at the representations only in terms of a typology. In these texts four ethical figures that strive for universalism and individualism are discernible. This aspiration explains their capacity for mobilization.

Michael Pollak's reference work on the survivors of Nazi camps succeeds in describing the connection between the positions that the various survivors occupied in the world of the camps and the time that passed before their testimony, before the moment the survivors chose to "tell their lives". Pollak also points out the narrative strategies, which are methods of structuring the individual memory, and finally discloses the polarization of these testimonies between accusation—approaching a judicial deposition—and the novelized narrative, oriented towards a literary project. One merit of Pollak's work is that he has made possible a transcendence of the canonical dichotomy between life stories collected in biographical interviews and literary autobiographies, so that they can be analyzed together as a function of their different conditions of production. The sociological analysis objectifies the different stands taken, situating them in relation to and in interaction with each other. The issue is simply to relate the type of trauma suffered and its consequences (especially the destruction of individuality and solidarity) to the methods of

recounting them, without ignoring the conditions in which these testimonies were produced (especially censorship) and the narrative strategies employed.

### *Mircea Eliade (1907-1986)*

Born in Bucharest, Mircea Eliade was the oldest son of an officer in the Romanian royal army. He studied philosophy in Romania and went on scholarly journeys to Italy and India (1928-1931). He began his intensive literary and journalistic activities at the age of 14, and wrote a first autobiographical novel when he was 18. The considerable success of an amorous novel in 1934, *Maitreyi*, written after his return from India, and numerous press articles earned him recognition as the “leader of the young generation” of intellectuals. This confirmation came about at nearly the same time as his first mistakes in favoring the ascending far right, which played a fatal role in leading a number of his colleagues and friends into error. Eliade later justified his numerous statements in favor of the “Iron Guard” between 1935 and 1938 by expressing sentiments of loyalty towards his professor, Nae Ionescu, intellectual leader of the movement. He also described the fascination that the emerging “religious cult” of the “Legionary Movement” (known as the fascist “Iron Guard”) exerted on him. His refusal to condemn his earlier choice has its origins in his first extreme experience and in a stigma which he could never get rid of. Interned in the Miercurea-Ciuc Camp in Transylvania in 1938, as a consequence of his refusal to denounce the Legionary Movement, Eliade was nonetheless released thanks to the influence of highly placed officials. Initially appointed secretary of the Romanian writers’ association, he began a diplomatic career during the war, first in London, whence he was expelled upon suspicion of spying for the Nazis in 1940 during the bombing of the British capital. Purged from the Romanian diplomatic service in 1945, Eliade remained in exile until his death in 1986, first in Paris, where he spent well over a decade, and later in Chicago as a professor of the history of religions.

In Eliade’s numerous autobiographical writings (literary prose, a secret diary, and memoirs), the narrative of extreme experience is given rather little space. The first version of his memoirs, dated 1953, is followed by a second one in the 1960s, published initially by Romanian exiles in Madrid (1966). The specter of death constitutes one of the obsessive themes in these writings. It is primarily an expression of fear in the face of real threats. Several of Eliade’s old friends died during the years of political turmoil and war, and his first wife died of cancer in 1944 in Lisbon. He was also separated from his family who remained in Romania. Eliade escaped the fate of quite a few Romanian intellectuals of his generation who remained in the country (including activists of the Iron Guard) who were executed in 1938, or sent to the Eastern front, imprisoned after the war, etc. But this specter of death is likewise a

hyperbole for a danger hanging over Eliade's professional career after the repudiation of his earlier commitment. The conflict between myth and history that he reiterates in his works appears to be a strategy to evade his own historical responsibility.

It is possible to read certain of Eliade's autobiographical writings as attempts to avoid the ignominy that threatened him. Having enjoyed wide international recognition of his academic career and his role as charismatic leader of the Romanian exiles, Eliade approached the extreme experiences he had undergone as "rites of initiation" granting access to another universe. These experiences had been the source of his fortunate deviation from a foreseeable trajectory, the deviation which led to his exile and his fame. The narcissistic self-complacency of the scholar at the end of his career, waiting for the Nobel prize, drove him to evoke his "original sin" as *felix culpa*. It is this self-entertainment and the attendant lack of remorse and culpable self-justification that have damaged him morally as well as intellectually.

The biography and work of Mircea Eliade became the object of many polemical articles after his death in 1986. His intellectual heritage has been debated after disclosures concerning his involvement with Romanian fascism. Eliade's purified and idealized presentation of this period (1935-1945) in his autobiographical writings has also been contested. With the publication of more recent historical writings, and after Eliade's attempts to whitewash Romanian fascism, his position seems to be closer to that of a fellow traveler or even an ideologist than an ethnologist and participant observer. He distinguishes between a good and an evil period of the Legionary Movement and draws a more than pleasant portrait of Codreanu, his "captain," and Antonescu, the "administrative dictator". Eliade passes in silence over the criminal beginnings of Codreanu's political career as well as over Antonescu's responsibility for war crimes in the Soviet Union and in Romania itself.

In his interpretation of Eliade's writings, Daniel Dubuisson (1993) has tracked the influence of the intellectually formative years to identify an "anti-Semitic ontology" in the "occultism and the motifs of a nationalist-racist ideology". He opens to debate and consideration the high esteem in which the "writer and scholar" Eliade is all too frequently held. Dubuisson's criticism, which is at once scientific and an exercise of moral judgment, refers to "mystification and intellectual sham", "a deeply mystical attitude toward his subject", "methodological mistakes: simplified and arbitrary selection, complete indifference towards the historical and ethnographical context", "abuse of generalizations", and "disputable interpretations". Due to his "morbid taste for irrational and esoteric experiences", Eliade aligned himself with certain "enlightened ones raised to the dignity of thinkers", such as René Guenon, Henry Corbin, or Julius Evola, all of whom entered into the same intellectual tradition: namely that of aristocratic, anachronistic, and elitist thinking, archaizing mysticism of the soil and the glorification of the people as preservers of the ancient virtues" (Dubuisson 1993: 222 ff).

After forty years as a charismatic figure among Romanian exiles, Eliade's inability to clarify his past, together with the claims laid on his heritage by a resuscitated far right, has called his ethical values into question.

### *Mihail Sebastian (1907-1945)*

Born the son of a Jewish merchant in the same year as Eliade, in Braila, a port on the Danube, Joseph Hechter adopted the name Sebastian as a literary pseudonym, while retaining his first name (for which he was later criticized). During his studies of law in Bucharest, his literary and journalistic activity brought him into the circle of the journal *Cuvântul*, under the direction of Professor Nae Ionescu. Thus Mircea Eliade became his closest friend. Through his autobiographical novel, *For Two Thousand Years*, published in 1934, which questioned the condition of the Jewish intellectual in a society marked by anti-Semitism; the novelist and playwright Sebastian triggered a spirited controversy not only among Romanian nationalist intellectuals, but also among Jewish journalists, who decried the author's old friendships. The double denunciation of which Sebastian became a target can also be explained by the unusual fact that the book had been published with a preface by Nae Ionescu (who is easily identified as the model for one of the characters) justifying anti-Semitism and the suffering of Hechter/Sebastian's co-religionists. In response to the accusations of his various critics, Sebastian repudiated the bad faith and the misunderstandings of which he had become a victim in a little book called *How I Became a Hooligan* (1935). The anti-Semitism of a considerable section of the intellectual elite on the one hand and his disrepute among the members of the Jewish community as a "friend of anti-Semites" on the other, pursued him as a double stigma until the end of his life.

Victim of professional persecutions and of racial legislation, disbarred in 1940, and prohibited as a writer even from giving autographs, Sebastian survived during the war by teaching French at the Jewish secondary school in Bucharest. He continued to write his secret diary as well as two plays and a novel. One of the pseudonymous plays, *The Star without a Name*, was performed at the national theatre of Bucharest in 1944. Sebastian died in a traffic accident in May 1945, a few months after the liberation of Romania by the Red Army. *The Star without a Name* was produced in Paris in 1956 as part of the repertoire of the National Theatre of Bucharest on its first tour after the war. It was published and studied (and was the subject of two monographs before 1989), whereas Sebastian's books that had caused a scandal in 1935 remained unknown to the wider Romanian public until 1990.

As a narrative autobiography, the novel *For Two Thousand Years* reconstructs the stages of an impossible "assimilation" into Romanian society and the loss, without compensation, of ties with the Jewish community, although

co-existence within the one intellectual community still seemed possible in 1934. The novel as literature was a denunciation of nationalism and anti-Semitism, an attempt at emotional mobilization against injustice. A year later Sebastian began keeping a diary. The manuscript of this diary, written from 1935 to 1944, was taken out of Romania in 1961 and preserved by one of his brothers, a physician in Paris. It is primarily this secret diary that constituted the essential "revelation" of Mihai Sebastian, the writer and intellectual, after 1989. Somewhat comparable to the diary of Victor Klemperer, Sebastian's diary is direct testimony of the growth of fascism in an intellectual environment, and of the conditions of everyday life under a regime of racial persecution. In Romania this process is often referred to as "rhinocerotization", after the title of Eugène Ionesco's play *Rhinocéros*, which was inspired by the same experience. Unlike the novel, the diary, written in expectation of historical justice, indicates a progressive and definitive moral break. The author of the diary resembles Béranger, the main character of *Rhinocéros*, and indeed Ionesco thought of Sebastian "as a brother", an alter ego. Confined to a Romania that was becoming increasingly fascist, Sebastian the diarist dreamt of a liberated France and of America, so that at one point he was regarded as a likely candidate for emigration after the war. With its accumulation of disenchanted observations on the deterioration of human relations, the diary is written from a perspective that we could call one of sociological ethics.

The publication of Sebastian's diary in Bucharest in 1996 provoked various reactions in Romania, Israel, and France. In France, Sebastian's testimony presented further evidence to support the recent revelations about Eliade's and Cioran's youthful commitment to fascism. It also raised public consciousness of the dangers of newly growing nationalism and underlined its roots and affiliations. In Romania Sebastian's diary triggered a controversy about the relationship between fascism and communism, the "two totalitarian regimes", "the Holocaust and the Gulag". Reminiscent of the German *Historikerstreit* of the previous decade, this controversy highlighted the laxity towards the tenets of the far right on the part of some of the new Romanian intellectual elite, who justified or minimized *a posteriori* the fascist involvement of the "Young Generation" of the 1930s. In Israel, certain commentators have noted the relatively privileged conditions of a young Jewish intellectual in Bucharest compared with the fate of Jews in the rest of the country, especially in the Eastern regions.

Although he had escaped the "Final Solution", Sebastian survived for only a few months after liberation, and appears today rather as a victim of fate than as a survivor of an extreme experience. The publication of his diary has helped to erode the illusions that had been cherished in Romania about the pre-war elite. At the same time, it was the cause of contradictory claims about Sebastian's moral heritage. In a review published in the American journal *The New Republic*, Norman Manea traces the path Sebastian could have been presumed to follow after the war, which would have inevitably led him into

exile (Manea's own choice). Gabriel Liiceanu, the editor of Sebastian's diary and one of the important figures of the "Group for Social Dialog" in Bucharest, also claimed the writer's moral heritage for himself in a paper read at the Jewish community center in Bucharest and published under the title "Sebastian mon frère". While Liiceanu regarded himself as having escaped from a similar experience of terror, the tribute he paid to Sebastian was ambiguous. Liiceanu expressed his conviction that Sebastian, if he had lived in the years after the war, would not have traded his shirt as a victim for the uniform of his torturers. Considered an allusion to the concept of "Jewish Bolshevism" (attributing collective responsibility for Stalinist crimes to the Jews), this passage was criticized as an attempt to equate the two regimes and the two experiences.<sup>8</sup>

### *Nicolae Steinhardt (1912-1989)*

Although only five years younger than Sebastian and Eliade, Steinhardt did not belong to the same "Young Generation". The little volume of pastiches *In the Way of the Young*, published under the pseudonym of Antistihus in Bucharest in 1934, shows from the beginning Steinhardt's distance from, but also his identification with the young writers of the time. Born in a family of Bucharest's Jewish bourgeoisie, Steinhardt was a distant relative of Freud, whom he visited in Vienna in the 1930s. He took his doctoral degree in constitutional law, and also published two volumes of essays before the war, "Essay on a Catholic Conception of Judaism", Bucharest 1935, and "Jewish Illusions and Realities", Paris 1936. A collaborator on the *Revista Fundatiilor Regale* ("Review of the Royal Foundation"), the most important literary publication in the country, he was kept away from work during the years of anti-Semitic persecution, but contributed again after 1944 until the *Review* was

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8 Gabriel Liiceanu's article "Sebastian mon frère", originally a lecture held at the headquarters of the Jewish community of Bucharest, has been one of the most frequently cited pieces in the debate on the comparability of the Holocaust and the Gulag. Liiceanu compares himself to Sebastian as a survivor of persecution based on the categories of exclusion from the collective, due to race in one case and class in the other. The personal persecutions mentioned by Liiceanu include the following: (a) he was discriminated against in admission to the University (descendants of the bourgeoisie were subjected to quotas for several years); (b) he was excluded from the Institute of Philosophy of the Romanian Academy because of his refusal to join the Communist Party (a place was found for him in the Institute of Art History); and (c), during the anti-intellectual demonstrations by the miners in June 1990 in Bucharest, he was named among those whose death the demonstrators demanded. If the association between anti-Semitism and anti-intellectualism appears fully justified, other topics of his text are ambiguous and have invited criticism. Thus Alexandra Laignel-Lavastine (1999: 238-240) accuses Liiceanu of having insinuated that Jews had been torturers as much as victims through their responsibility for the establishment of Communism in Romania, and also sees him as suffering from a "comparabilist obsession", seeking to extend the idea of crime against humanity to include Communism.

suppressed in 1948. From 1948 until his arrest in 1959 Steinhardt was a modest civil servant. Interrogated as a witness in the investigation for a Stalinist trial against some intellectuals unjustly accused of a fascist plot, Steinhardt refused the role the investigators asked him to play and consequently found himself on the side of the accused; he was convicted together with them. After his release from prison in 1964, he was able to resume his activity as an essayist and literary critic, and was published and recognized. He published a number of translations from French (in particular Alain) and English (Kipling, etc.), but also from Romanian into French (Orthodox writings published in Belgium, where he had visited a Benedictine monastery, held courses, and read papers). Converted to the Orthodox religion in prison, Steinhardt pursued his double vocation, literary and religious, for the rest of his life. In 1980, the year in which his writings were awarded the Romanian literary critics' prize, he retired to the monastery of Rohia in Transylvania. The manuscript of his memoirs, a literary masterpiece and his main posthumous work, was initially seized by the Securitate in the 1970s, but given back to the author after the intervention of the Writers' Union, who were willing to protect one of their prominent members. These memoirs were published in Romania in 1991; the French translation *Journal de la félicité* (*The Diary of Bliss*) was published by Arcantère in 1995. Considered among the revelations of "drawer literature" even though several excerpts had already been published under a pseudonym and others broadcast by Radio Free Europe, the *Diary of Bliss* gained Steinhardt considerable posthumous recognition in Romania and in Romanian émigré circles. At the same time, however, it was criticized from two angles. Intellectuals such as Norman Manea accused Steinhardt of reviving certain tenets of the far right and harboring a certain implicit anti-Semitism. And dissident writers, including Paul Goma, criticized his ambiguous position during the Ceausescu regime and his refusal to get involved in open opposition.

The Orthodox baptism in prison, performed as an ecumenical sign by an Orthodox priest and a Uniate<sup>9</sup> priest, brought Steinhardt close to the elite of old Romanian society, many of whom were at that time behind bars. Moreover, he gained a degree of recognition among anti-Semites that would have been unlikely earlier; and was now hailed by many, including former fascists, with gestures of reconciliation and fraternization. The accusation of being a fascist "Jewish Legionary" had already been brought against him by his persecutors at the time of his investigation by the political police. It was a label repeatedly used later on, even though Steinhardt never declared membership or political sympathy for the far right. His anti-communism and his religious vocation were essentially based on his experience in prison. Several facts in his life contributed to his reputation. Former fascists and practicing Orthodox Christians visited him frequently in jail. He made several provocative ges-

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9 The Uniate church developed out of a unification of Catholic and Orthodox rites.

tures: he crossed himself ostentatiously in front of places known to be sacred to the Legionaries; he made contemptuous remarks about the “red Jewish bourgeoisie” willing to “make up for the injustice towards the Romanian people” of which they were the cause. These acts were an often ambiguous challenge to the moral order established after the war.

Steinhardt’s narrative is written in a double register: memories of life in prison and sequences of his itinerary after his release are interspersed with notes on reading and exercises in literary criticism. Although he, like Sebastian, had spent the war years in Bucharest, almost nothing of this period is mentioned in his autobiographical writing. The faded memory of anti-Semitic persecution is mainly due to the conditions of his thirteen-year incarceration after the end of the war. Unlike Sebastian, who did not have any way out, Steinhardt had the possibility of making a choice under constraint. He could either collaborate with the representatives of the new Stalinist political order, or refuse and preserve his dignity. Steinhardt made this second choice. He said that in doing so he obeyed the desire of his father, who had told him not to behave like a “Jewish coward”. In a post-Shoah context, where the questions of the victims’ responsibility were strongly laid out, proving courage and refuting the bad reputation of the Jews meant to deny one of the anti-Semitic stereotypes. This moral choice preceded Steinhardt’s discovery of his religious vocation and the decision to convert. The imprisonment had enforced his split identity as an “assimilated Jew” and obliged him to demonstrate “good faith” to escape the suspicion of complicity with the new Stalinist persecutors. His conversion to Orthodoxy, which had initially been an act of opposition in the face of political oppression, later constrained him to the quasi-logical maintenance of the new community relations that had been established in an extreme situation. Steinhardt’s passing through prison forged a new identity, one of a “monk writer”, and exempted him from making a political choice. His autobiographical narrative was written from the perspective of a double ethic, both religious and literary. It is a fragmentary narration, with no trace of self-analysis, and is locked in its own contradictions. Because he could not overcome his split identity, typical of inmates,<sup>10</sup> Steinhardt transformed it into a symbol of the human condition. In contrast to Sebastian, the ethical figure of the exiled Romanian Jewish intellectual, Steinhardt went the way of “assimilation”, but under the extraordinary circumstances of his imprisonment. And although Eliade’s and Steinhardt’s trajectories seem very different in view of their origins, the conditions of their intellectual formation,

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10 The split personality of the prisoner appears in relation to the original trauma of the imprisonment, both at the time of entering into a “total institution” and at the time of leaving it. In the first instance it is a matter of the process of de-socialization—separations and break-ups, uprooting the individual from his current social links—before a re-socialization leads to the formation of new links within the institution. Upon release, the same process takes place but in the opposite direction, reinforcing the split personality (see also Goffman 1968, Pollak 1990).

and the circumstances and impact of their extreme experiences, their similarities cannot be overlooked: most of all their affirmation of an opposition between (spiritual) ethics and politics.

*Paul Goma (\*1935)*

Among the four biographies, Paul Goma's is most marked by violent discontinuities, breaks and deviations of trajectory. His father had been a teacher in a village in Bessarabia, and was deported to Siberia after the annexation of this Eastern province of Romania by the USSR in 1940. At the end of the war the family took refuge in Transylvania and managed to escape forced repatriation to what had become the Moldavian Soviet Republic. Goma studied at a provincial teacher training college (Sibiu) and later at the *Scoala de Literatura* in Bucharest (1954-1956), and was condemned to two years in prison after a demonstration of sympathy for the 1956 Hungarian revolution. Later he was deported. After his release, Goma studied literature at the University of Bucharest (1962-1965) and published his first book (the only one to appear in Romania before 1990). He became involved with the Communist party to affirm his solidarity in view of an impending new Soviet occupation after Romania had denounced the invasion of Czechoslovakia and declared her readiness to fight with the "Patriotic Guard" constituted for this occasion. Refusing to come to terms with his censors, Goma was prohibited from publishing in Romania after 1971, but his novels appeared in translation, particularly in France and West Germany. He traveled to the West, gave interviews, and had his novels broadcast by Radio Free Europe. Declaring his solidarity with Charter 77 of the Czech opposition, Goma was among the first to denounce the dictatorship of Ceausescu, at the time still credited with maintaining "independence" within the Soviet system. Goma collected many signatures on a petition of support for Charter 77 (but very few from intellectuals). After the failure of negotiations with one of the Party leaders, Goma was arrested. Conscious of his isolation in his own country, he agreed to leave for France, where he asked for political asylum. There, between 1978 and 1990, he was actively involved in various organizations for democratization in Eastern Europe. Eleven of his books were translated into French, and some into other languages as well. Goma's novels have been published in Romanian since 1990, but Goma fell out with his principal Romanian editor, Gabriel Liiceanu, whom he accused of having deliberately prevented the distribution of his books. The controversies became fiercer over the years, especially after the publication of Goma's diary in three volumes in 1996 (two more followed in 1998), in which he settles scores with everyone. Abandoned by his old friends and isolated, Goma refuses to return to Romania, but publishes cultural criticism and books there regularly.

Three types of autobiographical narration can be distinguished in Goma's writings. The first is related to the novel, and is identified with a spokesperson of the victims of the Gulag archipelago and similar institutions. This discourse is still oriented towards the re-establishment of community relations through the emotion provoked by painful scenes. The second type of narration is the political break by a militant, a report of which is given in the diary for 1977, the time of the "Goma movement" (the petition against the regime). The title of the 1979 French translation, *Le Tremblement des Hommes* (*The Quaking of the People*) is an allusion to the fear of his countrymen who did not join him in his protest. Here the charge of complicity between the persecutors and their victims is made explicitly. In its efforts to stop the Goma movement, the regime benefited from an earthquake in 1977, which killed over a thousand people in Bucharest and made the Romanian people quake with physical fear. The diaries published since 1990, five volumes so far, constitute a third category of autobiographical writing, a strategy of singling out by the aging dissident writer. He primarily attacks intellectuals who are late to take a stand, and claim for themselves a status of opponent or victim after the fact. Goma's most recent stance, consisting almost entirely of a reckoning founded on private conversations, have been characterized as "political suicide" and "death of the writer", who is transformed into a journalist and pamphleteer.

Over time, the multiple persecutions to which Goma was exposed have had a cumulative effect. Originating from a region of uncertain national status (Soviet Moldavia), his father was deported by the Soviet authorities and his family had to hide from the Romanian authorities to avoid further deportation. His initial imprisonment and his literary emergence in a period of relative liberalization allowed him to maintain that he bore memories, which others preferred to forget. Goma also identified himself with the figure of the political prisoner without taking into account the wedges dividing the various categories of victims (right and left, opponents and dissidents). After the reconstitution of the political space in Romania from 1990 on, with the return of certain exiled leaders of "historical parties" on the one hand, and the constitution of a "civil society" movement composed of critical intellectuals on the other, Goma was no longer able to keep up as an affiliate. The length of time spent in political detention became a criterion for establishing a hierarchy among victims. Goma, with "only" two years, carried no weight. This was the criterion of seniority in the opposition and therefore the standard of legitimacy within the new "political class". At the same time it is true that those who were able to endure and resist within Romania, rather than yielding to the temptation to emigrate, had maintained networks of solidarity and practiced forms of political mobilization that were more effective than the short waves of Radio Free Europe.

## **Narrative Strategies**

The four authors chose different moments to tell their life stories. The task in Eliade's case is to relate the past and the present, the literary project and the scientific project in the different autobiographical stories written in exile. This was the way to overcome the split personality, the division between the Romanian writer and the international scholar writing in different languages. All of this has allowed him to give several responses (in his novels, memoirs, and personal diary) to the accusations of having been a fellow traveler of the fascists. His denials only cost him the sympathy he had enjoyed for his intellectual heroism, and exacerbated the doubts as to the hidden connotations of his work.

Steinhardt's autobiography is likewise a literary reconstruction after the fact with the objective of reconciling his career on leaving prison, his aesthetic research, his double personality, and the identity crises he suffered in prison. For Sebastian and Goma, the diary is the medium of indictment, and at the same time an instrument for preserving a literary identity. But Sebastian's disappearance immediately after Liberation, and the effect of dissimulation produced by the nationalist-fascist persecution, draws his account away from the search for a purely aesthetic literariness and brings it closer to scientific objectivity. Although likewise written in the mode of denunciation of persecution, in which literary discourse comes close to a judicial deposition, Goma's diary, in contrast to Sebastian's, looks for the affirmation of political differences in a universe made uniform by dictatorship and censorship. The two also differ in the circumstances under which their diaries were received. Published fifty years after his death, Sebastian's diary poses questions about the memory of a community that has disappeared (the Jews of Romania), and about the responsibility of intellectuals before the Shoah. Written under pressure with a view to immediate publication, Goma's diary succeeded in denouncing an authoritarian regime and the silence of the victims, who were at the same time accomplices.

The relations found in all these narratives between what can be said and what can be done are of great interest, for they have all been suspected of deliberately concealing a part of the truth (in Sebastian's case, this suspicion falls on the editor rather than on the author). In contrast to the testimonies collected and analyzed by Pollak, the long silence that separates the narratives from the events they relate is often due to explicit interdictions and censorship, particularly in the case of accounts published in exile. And in contrast to certain survivors of the Nazi camps, who were faced with the memory of an antinomic tension between the preservation of their moral integrity and the behavior necessary in order to defend their physical integrity in the daily life of the camp, the testimonies of survivors of Stalin's prisons and camps tend to emphasize in detail the sufferings they experienced, seeking to persuade the

reader that they had indeed been victims. This is because there is much skepticism about the political past of those condemned (especially in the case of erstwhile fascists) or because of the solidarity and the moral support which Stalinist regimes enjoyed during a certain period after the war.

The four narratives are written using very different stylistic strategies, which structure individual memories in diverse modalities. Eliade constantly looks for the myth behind history, for a romance or a personal story. But the strategy of raising his life story to a supposedly higher level of generalization—that of religion rather than literature or biography—arouses opposition. For those who place history at the center of the universe of values he becomes a writer of myths, or even a liar. With Steinhardt, the contrast between the “pure” aesthetic discourse and the “realistic” details of the horror scenes experienced in prison calls into question the author’s capacity to integrate the two registers, to overcome his dual personality in order to undertake a self-analysis. The two rhetorical modes appear as a rejection of both the past and the present realities. For Goma, the value of the testimony is highlighted by oral discourse and dialogue. The violence of various persons’ raw speech is as much a documentation of the injustices suffered as his observations and descriptions. But once the surroundings have changed (exile in France, the collapse of the Ceausescu regime in Romania), the same rhetorical procedures are applied to a changed object (the compromise of intellectuals, the new political alliances), and are considered as an illicit means of magnifying the author’s self (revealing confidences, betraying old friends and defenders).

It is Sebastian’s story most of all that meets the criterion of unselfishness, proof of the intellectual value of his testimony. This is true to the point that it has become doubly embarrassing. First, for a part of the Romanian public, his writings are embarrassing because of his observations on the behavior of certain intellectual heroes such as Eliade, who had compromised with the fascists. At the same time, as an autobiographical anti-hero, Sebastian reveals his own weaknesses, self-doubts, and cowardice in passages often eliminated in the French translation, which projects a more heroic image than the Romanian original.

## Conclusions

The lines of power drawn within the Romanian intellectual space as a function of polemical stands around the testimonies of Mircea Eliade and Mihail Sebastian (Manea 1997, 1998; Shafir 1998; Voicu 1999) indicate the new conditions of reproduction of a certain form of cultural ethnocentrism. The celebration of Eliade as a national cultural hero—his name has been given to a boulevard in Bucharest—has not abated, even after the denunciation of his

early fascist commitments, which he neither acknowledged nor repented. At the same time, the empathy shown for Sebastian's destiny as the Jewish intellectual confined in a city under anti-Semitic rule has been the consequence of retrospective solidarity with those intellectuals who remained in the country being bled dry by decades of emigration.

In a comparable manner, the reactions provoked by the testimonies of Steinhardt, the monk writer who chose religious conversion and voluntary seclusion as a style of intellectual life, contrast with the reservation and even hostility shown toward dissident writers such as Paul Goma (or Dumitru Tsepeneag), even though their choice of exile was forced on them.

The distribution of these testimonies results, first of all, in a structuring of the past by the imposition of a new vision and a new version of national history. The Golden Age is located between the two World Wars; the lack of solidarity with the persecuted intellectuals is justified by the exiles' betrayal. This vision has also given birth to a new cultural model whose social function is twofold. For one thing, it justifies the new liberal elites' contempt for the crowds and masses considered to be the incarnation of evil in history. It is the basis for an individualist ethic that is hardly tempered by religion; and has an ideological role—mobilization against those who undermine the process of social differentiation accelerated since 1989 (e.g. the miners who threatened the "young democracy").

For another, this cultural model imposes the criteria of distinction held by the elites themselves, and their classification of authentic and non-authentic elites. The new elites cannot define themselves in material terms alone, for while wealth is quickly amassed, it calls for an equivalent intellectual investment. Their strategy is fundamentally one of double denial. It is possible to refuse entry to the newcomers into the elite (including those who hold their position as a result of their membership in new forms of association such as political parties, trade unions, professional organizations) in the name of "pure" values stored in places protected from the society, such as monasteries or libraries. At the same time it is possible to confer the title of nobility—acts of resistance—to past compromises by a magic transfiguration. Thus a certain number of values belonging to religion and national culture, viewed as conservative, are placed at the service of the new liberal ideology.

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*Zdzisław Krasnodębski*

## Dilemmas of Collective and Individual Memory in Eastern Europe: Reflections on the Example of Poland

### **Changed Reality and the Reappraisal of Biographies**

Profound change in political and social orders, as seen in the transition from communism to democracy, has a great impact on people's biographies. It opens up new life possibilities, but at the same time destroys others to which people were accustomed. It requires a reorientation in a new social and symbolic space. Such change also influences the way in which individuals perceive, interpret, and narrate their biographies, how they remember or like to remember their own past. The new order compels them to rethink and to reconstruct their biographies, a task that in many cases is a quite awkward and painful, as well as a morally and emotionally demanding process. The move from a political and social system which is now recognized by all as oppressive and unjust to democracy compels individuals to look at their past life in a new way and to ask questions about their own political and moral responsibility. Even if this process of reinterpretation often takes place in silence and even if individuals often try to avoid these questions, they are to a large extent inevitable.

The process of reinterpretation of individual biographies is driven by a change in collective memory, in publicly accepted interpretations of the past, in official history. Moreover, dealing with the collective past is not without difficulties and is often accompanied by political controversy. The opinions about its relation to democracy can be contradictory. Often it is argued that focusing on the past hampers the process of democratization and is in opposition to the principles of liberal democracy. Others, however, maintain that an authentic democracy cannot be achieved without dealing critically with the past. And there are characteristic differences in the prevailing opinions between different countries.

In dealing with this question—in real life and in research—one faces cognitive and ethical problems connected with the influence of context and time upon our moral norms and rules. Even the standard of rationality can, to some extent, change with time. The problem of judging different periods is similar to the problem of judging different cultures (Reemtsma 1997).

In a context of change there are moral losers and winners. Not only "real life", but also the degree of skill in dealing with one's own biography influences the results. There are often misinterpretations, arbitrary selectivity,

concealments, dishonesty, hypocrisy, and outright lies which can be observed both on the level of individual biography and on the level of collective memory. Some phenomena in post-communist countries are similar to those which occurred in post-Nazi Germany. In the case of communism, however, the process of reappraisal and judgment of the past is more perplexing and ambivalent. The main reason for this is the fact that the moral and political condemnation of communism is much weaker than the condemnation of National Socialism (Koenen 1999). Crimes committed in the name of progress and humanity seem to be more likely to be excused.

In this essay I address the issue of collective and individual memory in Poland, focusing on different generations or age groups, which have shaped political life. The essay relies on work done by Polish sociologists, and focuses on my own analysis of biographies published in recent years, of numerous press interviews containing biographical information, of many years of participant observation, and of thousands of conversations with Poles from different social classes and milieus.

## **Authentic Revolution**

Some years ago a good friend of mine said to me in a moment of reflection about our generation, which might be called a Polish baby-boom generation,<sup>1</sup> that although our professional accomplishments remain relatively modest, we all have very interesting biographies. I must add that she is a very well known and widely praised literary translator. She was also a very active participant in the Solidarity movement and was therefore interned for several months during the time of martial law (1981–1982).

Although her comment was based only on personal observation, and not on sociological research, I am inclined to think that she was right in both respects. I am reminded of this when I compare the biographies and achievements of my Polish colleagues with the typical biographies of West German intellectuals of the same generation.

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1 This is of course the term which is widely used in America for the post-war generation. In Poland the corresponding generation, born after the War in the late forties and in the fifties, is sometimes referred to as the generation of “*wyż demograficzny*”. It could also be called the Solidarity generation, since its members formed the mainstream of the Solidarity movement (1981–82). The problem with this name is that the generation was deeply divided in its attitude toward Solidarity and the existing political system. However, despite these differences, the entire generation was obliged to react to the late phase of “real socialism,” the emergence of the new opposition, the Solidarity movement, martial law, and the downfall of communism.

However, these interesting biographies are not an achievement of our generation (especially in their public aspects), nor are they to blame for the modesty of our professional achievements. Rather, they express the influence of the historical situation. C. Wright Mills wrote once that all of our lives represent the “intersection of biography and history”. Doug McAdam commented on this phrase in his book *Freedom Summer*, dedicated to the 1964 civil rights movement in Mississippi, in the following manner:

“For most of us, however, the confluence of biography and history is somewhat prosaic. That is, if not seamless, there is a certain predictable match between each of us as social products and the historical era in which we grow to maturity. Who we are raised to be is relatively consistent with the broader social world we encounter as adults. For a few others, the course and texture of the interface between their own biographies and the history of their era is less predictable. Faced with historical circumstances unanticipated by those who helped socialize them, these individuals suddenly confront new possibilities for social action and self-conception.” (McAdam 1988: 11)

My generation experienced the last attempt to modernize the communist system, the emergence of an opposition movement, the birth of Solidarity, the introduction of martial law, a deep economic crisis, and—finally—the amazing electoral victory of 1989 which put an end to Soviet-style communism. The reality of “real socialism” seemed to deprive us of many possibilities which were taken for granted by our contemporaries in the West. Many of us took part in various forms of struggle against the seemingly immortal oppressive system. Not only did none of “those who helped socialize” us in schools and formal organizations, that is, the supporters of the system, but also none of us imagined that the system could change, and certainly not so radically. But suddenly it happened, and it was a truly exhilarating experience. Participation in the opposition movement will presumably remain one of the most important experiences in the lives of those who were active in it. In that movement, perhaps to an even greater extent than in the case of the American civil rights movement, “biography and history meshed in a way that only those on the cutting edge of social and political change can ever appreciate” (McAdam 1988: 237). The downfall of communism meant that the old social reality collapsed, the new emerged, and suddenly the present opened up unexpected opportunities, even if the societal transformations turned out to be more difficult than imagined.

The profound change of social and political reality made many persons prominent and widely known. Prisoners became ministers and editors in chief; an electrician became president. You can see these changes in many published biographies, as in Jacek Kuroń’s biography (which was also translated into German). Similar biographical turns are characteristic for the whole generation, or at least for a large part of it (Flam 1998; Krasnodębski 1998a).

The peculiarity of this generation appears even more striking if we compare it with the life courses of members of the '68 generation in West Germany.

Our West German contemporaries of the same professions lived in a stable condition. Their lives could be carefully planned, were predictable, without great surprises, without the collapse of accustomed social reality. Probably the most important change in their lives took place when they became professors rather than lecturers. Of course, reality changed in Germany as well: the decline of communism led to German reunification. However, Germany was reunited almost without any participation by the West German baby-boom generation. They missed one of the most important historical events in German national history. They did not participate, even intellectually, in one of the most important events of our era, for the decline of communism closed the 20th century. As Heinz Bude remarks in his study of the 1968-generation in Germany: "With the German reunification the '68 generation has lost its hegemonic interpretative position. The break in 1989 minimized the importance of the break in 1968" (Bude 1995: 96).

The 1968 student movement constituted the high point in the collective political engagement of the baby-boom generation in the West. Some similarities to later opposition movements in eastern central Europe are striking. In Germany, the '68 generation rebelled against their parents' generation, which had been involved in National Socialism, while in Poland many activists of the student movement were rebelling against their communist parents. Similarities included anti-authoritarian attitudes, the ideals of direct democracy and even the critique of capitalism, because at the time students in Warsaw still preferred socialism to capitalism. Thus it is no coincidence that the protests and demands for liberalization surfaced in Poland and in Czechoslovakia in the same year, 1968.

There is, however, an important difference between the Eastern European opposition movement and the Western European student movement. It is probably true that the Western student movement positively changed and liberalized Western societies, but it is also true that this liberalization was a side effect rather than the declared aim of the movement. (When I asked one of my German friends, who had been a student activist in 1968, later a professor of sociology and now mayor of a small town, what would have happened if the students had won, he answered typically: "A catastrophe".) The opposition movement in eastern central Europe, especially in Poland, did achieve its declared goal: the abolition of totalitarianism. Civil rights activists living under "real socialism" were also right in terms of the political philosophy they developed after 1968. At least it seems so today. In his book *A tale of two utopias: The political journey of the generation of 1968*, Paul Berman describes a moral history of the baby-boom generation in the West. He sees

one of the reasons for the decline of the student movement in its movement toward Marxism-Leninism.

"SDS's backsliding into left-wing authoritarianism went in stages, beginning with insincere anti-Communism, sinking to anti-anti-Communism, then arriving at what ought to be called a democratic-Stalinism." (Berman 1997: 78)

For Berman it was in Eastern Europe that the authentic revolution took place. In his view, this revolution was in some sense a realization of the genuine values of the '68 movement:

"Suddenly it was obvious that the authentic political revolution of our era was now (this means in 1989), not then (1968); liberal and democratic, not radical leftist in the '68 style, not imaginary. Here and there the leaders of the revolutions of '89—a Vaclav Havel in Czechoslovakia, an Adam Michnik in Poland—turned out to be the same heroic persons, now adult liberals, who as young radicals had helped lead the movements of '68." (Berman 1997: 18)

This pride in the achievement of one's own generation, this appreciation of one's own involvement in the opposition movement is, of course, connected with the conviction that the whole transformation was a success, and that the decline of communism was a liberation. Such a conviction is probably not shared by the people in countries in which reforms were not carried out or were not successful: in Russia, Romania, or Bulgaria. More ambivalent feelings—as we know—also prevail in East Germany, because communism was accepted more in the GDR than in Poland and because of the domination of West Germany after 1990. In Poland, however, intellectual elites generally show no signs of nostalgia, nor any inclination to rush to the ideological defense of "real socialism" and its values; our post-communists are definitely of a different kind. The disappointed are mostly peasants, workers, and public service employees. But even they do not want a return of the communist system and its ideology. In Warsaw, unlike Moscow, no one has held a demonstration carrying portraits of communist leaders.

However, after revolution comes everyday life. Charisma—as we know from Max Weber—soon vanishes and is replaced by routine. The experience of a harsher, more competitive reality, new political divisions, scandals, and difficulties, which accompany the process of building a democracy, suppress to a considerable extent the earlier positive emotional experience of struggle and victory. In the new reality different competencies are needed. Transformation also means a radical change of attitudes and ethos, a challenge to habits and customs. Some observers say that it has spelled an end to the romantic ethos which was dominant in Polish culture since the 19th century. Soon it became fashionable to speak ironically of the struggle against the old regime. The change in 1989 caused a radical generation break. The young generation that came of age after 1989 is often described as confused, lost, without clear aims, totally pragmatic, the "generation without a face" and

“without qualities”. Some sociologists maintain that, ironically, this generation envies the older generation because it had communism to struggle against. Youth seems not to be very interested in the past, however. It is considered to be a closed chapter. Yet, somewhat unexpectedly, the past remains a great burden in Poland and in the whole of Eastern Europe. Not only is the present difficult, but the past as well returns as a moral, cognitive, and political problem. People struggle with it and quarrel about its interpretations, both on the individual and collective levels. The chapter is closed, but we still debate how to read it and what consequences it should have.

## **Editing Biographies**

The people who lived under the old regime are compelled to rethink their past, even if they are reluctant to do so. This pressure is felt by all, not just by those who remained supporters of the system to the very end. Even heroes of the opposition were not heroes all the time; the brave did not always behave bravely. Many were communists before they became opponents; or their families were deeply involved in the system at its most brutal time. For many people the process of taking leave of communism was long and went through several stages. The years 1956, 1968, 1970, 1980, and 1981, the years of massive protests against the regime, were the turning points at which changes in their biographies occurred. The people who remained passive during communism, or who actively supported it as party members, state officials or loyal fellow travelers, naturally have many more problems with their own biographies. They are under pressure to look at their past from the perspective of the present. If they are honest, this is a painful process which often leads to the rewriting and reinterpretation of their life stories.

The parents of the Solidarity generation spent most of their lives under communist rule, and in the course of life inevitably adapted to the situation. In their youth they lived in the second Polish Republic (1918–1939). They experienced the catastrophe of 1939, the Nazi occupation; many of them participated in the anti-Nazi underground; later they were persecuted or—in some cases—seduced by communism. Almost all adapted to the situation, especially after liberalization in 1956. The situation was more difficult for members of the Ukrainian, Belorussian, Silesian, or Jewish minorities. Often they accepted communism more easily, because they never fully identified with pre-war Poland.

The well-known journalist, essayist, and diplomat, the late Kazimierz Dziewanowski, characterized his generation in the following way:

"It was born in 1930, but its real cradle was the defeat in '39, this feeling of helplessness, this poison which caused a hampered development, psychological rickets. I do not maintain that everybody was taught such a lesson nor that everybody had such rickets. Surely it depended on individual sensibility. I think, however, that this experience was so strong that it was able to stigmatize the whole generation. Hence its lack of character, reserve, reticence. Hence the fear of risk, looking at what others will do, wavering." (Quoted in Jedlicki 1993: 147)

In a later letter dated 1988, Dziewanowski enumerated all the painful experiences of his generation:

"In our life: (1) Hitlerism emerged, developed and declined; (2) there was the nightmare of Stalinism; (3) an entire nation was extinguished practically next door; (4) our town was burnt down; (5) we were poisoned by communism; (6) the situation of our world has changed since the advent of nuclear weapons; (7) now we are witnessing the collapse and dismantling of the most cruel and most nonsensical utopia in history." (Quoted in Jedlicki 1993: 149 f)

The distinguished and influential historian Jerzy Jedlicki, who belongs to the same generation, did not share Dziewanowski's pessimistic judgment and resignation. He pointed out that earlier generations had also had feelings of defeat, and said it is an aspect of Polish experience in general.

"How is it that in our country each generation laments itself, each thinks it is crooked, lost, crippled? Well, it is known what this is. It is just because in this damned country nobody ever achieved anything. However, it cannot be said that we did not try." (Jedlicki 1993: 148)

In 1989 there came at last the long awaited victory. Dziewanowski became ambassador to the United States. Jedlicki was an author of the preamble of Poland's new constitution. After many lost generations, success did come.

One may say that the generations born in the late twenties and thirties lived in at least three or four different political contexts with totally different demands: prewar Poland, Nazi occupation, communism, and now democracy. Once again they have to examine their biographies, which now appear in a new light. Take for instance a man who was a member of the anti-communist partisan group directly after the war. In the fifties he was persecuted for this reason, and later on he adjusted to a reality in which he was no longer threatened. He certainly did not protest publicly against it. Today for the first time he can speak publicly about his anti-communist past. It has ceased to be publicly considered a shameful or at best an ambivalent part of his biography, and is now perceived as a heroic contribution to the present political freedom. The public commemoration and celebration of that past has now become possible. Now that he feels properly appreciated and honored, however, he is inclined to conceal, to forget or to minimize his passive adaptation to reality in the intervening years. Such rearrangements and revaluations of one's own biography constitute, of course, only one possible set of strategies. There are also cases of radical conversions, radical changes of political attitudes, which have

been studied in an interesting way by one of the leading Polish sociologists, Joanna Kurczewska. There are cases—rather rare in Poland—in which old behavior and the old regime are stubbornly defended. More typical is silence, refusal to deal with the past, or minimization of one's commitment to communism. Some have justified their support of communism as a purely pragmatic act which allegedly never presupposed a belief in its ideology.

In a sense, this type of coping with the past found its expression in the biographies of both democratically elected presidents of Poland. The first, Lech Wałęsa (born 1943)—once a national icon—symbolized Solidarity's struggle with communism. He failed in his bid for election to a second term in 1995. Certainly one of the reasons for this defeat was the destruction of his former heroic image. Among others, he was accused of collaboration with the secret police in the early seventies. The accusations that were disseminated were never proven, but they were also never dismissed because there was no legal mechanism that could do so. This problem and his behavior as president led to a more critical look at the opposition movement of the past.

His opponent, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, was born in 1954. He was a member of the Communist Party and held high governmental positions between 1985 and 1989. Today he describes himself as pragmatic, his generation as skeptical, anti-ideological and professional. He likes to compare himself with Bill Clinton and Tony Blair. He ran his presidential election campaign under the slogan of choosing the future—rather than bothering too much with the past. History should be, as he has often said, confined to schoolbooks. In 1993, during the parliamentary election, he stated characteristically:

"Even now we declare, as the Alliance of the Democratic Left, that if we had influence on government in Poland, there would be no "lustration", no desolidarisation, no action which smells of collective responsibility; we will not destroy monuments, we will not build new monuments, we will not change the names of streets, because we are more interested in having these streets safe, with no holes in them. This is the conception we propose. We support the principle of pragmatism, debating essential questions, avoiding ersatz issues." (Quoted in Kraško 1996: 128)

Interestingly, it turned out that this radical prospective orientation is not so much a neglect of history but its reinterpretation and a kind of cloaked rehabilitation of the communist past. One commentator remarked after the elections that from that point on no one could be blamed for having been a party member in the past.

Aleksander Kwaśniewski is a great editor of his own biography, adapting it to current political goals. Once, for instance, he said to a German audience that when John Kennedy said in Berlin, "ich bin ein Berliner", he, Kwaśniewski, had also felt like a Berliner. During the 30th anniversary of the 1968 protest movement, he made a widely discussed speech in which he—rightly and eloquently—condemned the anti-Semitic campaign of that time. He did

not mention, however, that it was the communist Polish United Workers Party which had launched and steered this campaign, the very party which he himself joined shortly afterwards. In this speech he describes his personal sorrow over the fact that Poles of Jewish origin or Polish Jews were compelled to leave Poland. Yet in an authorized official biography published before the presidential elections, he stressed that he did not notice either the 1968 crisis or the workers' protests on the coast in 1970. His case might be said to illustrate a pure biographical "presentism", widespread among people with a similar political past. We learn not only that "is" can have very different meanings—as Bill Clinton maintained in reference to his "improper relationship"—but also that what once "was" depends entirely—according to Aleksander Kwaśniewski and in reference to his own "improper relationship" with the communist regime—on what "is" is or what "is" should be.

## Politics of Memory

As we can see, problems with individual biographies are closely connected to problems of collective memory and the problem of official state tradition. The standards of guilt and pride are mostly socially produced. The individual in dealing with his or her biography is under social pressure. One has to justify one's own biography in relation to the prevailing beliefs and patterns. In studying biographies one must not forget the role of the collective memory and public discourse about the past. However, another serious problem turns out to be collective memory itself, understood as a

"body of ideas about an earlier history of the group to which one belongs, together with persons and events one remembers and commemorates from the past, whose commemoration is one of the forms in which collective memory manifests itself." (Szacka 1998: 33)

The Solidarity movement was accompanied by an "explosion of memory". It was also an attempt to regain "confiscated memory" (Baczko 1994: 194–247). Communists were especially eager "constructors of traditions and identities". A struggle against communism was therefore also a struggle for memory. As Paul Connerton rightly comments:

"What is horrifying in totalitarian regimes is not only the violation of human dignity but the fear that there might remain nobody who could ever again properly bear witness to the past.... In such circumstances ... writing of oppositional histories is not only the practice of documented historical reconstruction, but ... it preserves the memory of social groups whose voice would otherwise have been silenced." (Connerton 1989: 15)

The dilemmas of memory did not end in 1989. The question of what kind of policy toward the past would be good for the establishment of a stable and liberal democracy was one of the major problems after 1989 in Eastern

Europe. Yet it went largely unnoticed by Western political scientists. This is the question of the politics of memory (or the politics of forgetting), of reconciliation and punishment, of compromise and moral principles, of justice and formal law, of individual responsibility and condemnation of the old regime and calling to account the persons responsible for its support, functioning, rule and legitimization. This is, of course, not only a problem for post-communist countries. All countries that have moved from an authoritarian or totalitarian regime to democracy have had to cope with the past. This was apparent in the case of Latin American countries such as Argentina and Chile; it was also evident in South Africa. There are various dimensions—legal, political and pedagogical—in which different institutional measures are undertaken in order to come to terms with the past: holding trials, removing those responsible from public office, truth commissions, public discussions, and historical debates. Yet after the downfall of communism, a general reluctance to deal with the past prevailed. It is interesting to observe that in the case of other authoritarian regimes, the punishment of crimes and the public condemnation of injustice were conceived as necessary, whereas in respect to post-communist countries the opposite was true. As Tina Rosenberg puts it characteristically:

“The trouble with purges in Eastern Europe is the reverse of the Latin American problem. The biggest danger is not that the guilty will stay in power, but that the innocent will be removed.” (Rosenberg 1995: 143)

There has been no consensus as to which measures should be taken, or even as to whether any should be taken at all. Of course, there are strong arguments for letting bygones be bygones. One of the most popular and influential arguments is that this is the best way to turn anti-democrats into democrats, particularly where the change of system was made through a power-sharing arrangement between the old elite and the democratic opposition (as was the case in Poland). Many authors also stress the danger of political manipulation. Often the reappraisal of the past and punishment and condemnation of responsible persons and institutions are considered incompatible with the rule of democracy or with principles of a liberal order. Different countries have taken different paths in dealing with the communist legacy. A great contrast can be observed between Poland and Germany in this respect (Ash 1998; see also Hirsch 1998, Krzemiński 1998).

In Poland, the famous policy of “gruba kreska”, of the thick line dividing present from past, dominated in the first period. It was based on the idea of a new beginning, a radical break with the past and a decisive orientation toward the future. Notwithstanding some vehement political discussions in the first post-1989 period, the major actors in the former opposition decided that the policy of reconciliation and a kind of moral “amnesty” was the only proper way to deal with the problem. Legal prosecution was limited to a few spec-

tacular cases, although even in those cases the results were very unsatisfactory from the standpoint of the victims.

Although some countries were more inclined to deal with the communist past than Poland, the reluctance to touch the problem of responsibility for totalitarian terror prevailed. If one considers that, after 1989, not one commanding officer of a Siberian camp was tried, or that the person known as bearing major responsibility for killing more than four thousand Polish prisoners of war in Katyń lives a peaceful life as a free man even now, and that in Romania not a single Securitate agent was jailed, and so on, one cannot avoid the impression that different standards apply in dealing with the totalitarian past and with political crimes.

In Poland, the election of Aleksander Kwaśniewski to the presidency in December 1995 can be seen as the high point of the politics of oblivion, silence, and hidden rehabilitation of the communist past. Yet it was also a turning point. Immediately after the elections, the scandal over accusations against Prime Minister Oleksy of having worked for the Soviet secret service all along, resulting in his resignation, showed that there is still a need to deal with the past in legal terms and on the institutional level. Since the return of the post-Solidarity political camp to government in 1997, politics have clearly changed, even if greater obstacles and reluctance are encountered on the part of society and of the president. Of course, in Eastern Europe the question of overcoming the historical legacy is not limited to the communist past, but also applies to the period before and during the Second World War. It concerns the treatment of ethnic and national minorities, relations with neighbors, the deficiency of traditional political culture and failures of Eastern European states before the war. One of the most important moral questions concerns national attitudes toward the Holocaust and collaboration with the Nazis. In the case of Poland and the Czech Republic, another widely discussed issue is that of the expulsion of Germans from these two countries around the end of World War II.

Often in dealing with the communist legacy the tragic intertwining of the two totalitarian systems becomes visible. Victims were also perpetrators. For example, the rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinism in Lithuania who were killed or deported by the Soviets, sometimes neglected the fact that the persons in question were guilty of collaboration with the Nazis and participated in their crimes. On the other hand we also have examples of people who were victims of the Nazi terror, but were later involved in Stalinist crimes. In Poland there are two well-known cases. Polish authorities have sought to extradite Schlomo Morel from Israel. He was a chief officer in the Świętochłowice camp where thousands of Germans perished or were killed after the war. He immigrated in the 1990s to Israel, but still received a special pension from Poland for his services in the secret police. Israel refuses to extradite him, arguing that his crimes can no longer be prosecuted since, according to Israeli

law, there were no crimes against humanity after 1945. The other well-known case is the case of Zofia Wolińska, the former military prosecutor responsible for the persecution and subsequent execution of General Fieldorf, one of the resistance heroes. In her public defense, she pointed out that she herself is a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto. What in legal and moral terms should be separate is in a very dramatic way biographically connected.

## **The Need for Rituals**

As I mentioned above, there are strong arguments against the politics of memory, especially against the legal persecution of the elite of the old regime. However, one should be conscious of the dangers fostered by a complete neglect of punishment. First of all, it can shake the people's sense of justice. Second, it can suggest that law has nothing to do with morality. Third, it can promote a vision of politics as a sphere with no connection to values, as a play of interests and power (Smith 1997; Schwan 1997b).

The post-war German experience has shown clearly that without legal prosecution no real change of attitudes can be expected. Nothing can refresh memory more effectively than a legal proceeding. Only now, after the victims have brought their case to court, do Swiss banks recall that they have their money. Only now has the Deutsche Bank remembered that it financed some buildings in Auschwitz. As regards post-communist societies, some intellectuals argue that a liberal society does not need historical consciousness and that Eastern Europeans suffer from having a memory that is too long, although selective. The political community should—according to this post-modern version of liberalism—be considered solely as a voluntary association of totally heterogeneous and culturally different subjects. Yet such a society never existed in reality, and there is no sign of a decrease in the number of commemoration rituals and ceremonies in the West. The opposite is the case, even though collective memory has become more individualized and—perhaps—to some extent denationalized. As John Gillis observes:

“The recent proliferation of anniversaries, memorial services, and ethnic celebrations suggests that, while memory has become more democratic, it has also become more burdensome.” (Gillis 1994: 14)

New democracies also need common commemorations, rituals of memory and at least minimal symbolic integration. That is why discussions about the past cannot be halted by intellectual postulates—indeed, some influential intellectuals have argued that such a debate has to end because it leads to conflicts and political disintegration (Stomma 1997). In fact, the state tradition of Poland has changed dramatically. The election promise made by Alek-

sander Kwaśniewski was not carried out. Some old monuments were destroyed, new ones were erected, the names of streets were changed, and the parliament finally passed the lustration law. This happened because in reality the definition of collective memory is one of the “essential questions”, not a diversion from politics, as Kwaśniewski and his supporters maintain.

Commemorative ceremonies are ritual re-enactments.

“A community is reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative... But rituals are not just further instances of humanity’s now much touted propensity to explain the world to itself by telling stories. A ritual is not a journal or memoir. Its master narrative is more than a story told and reflected on; it is a cult enacted.” (Connerton 1989: 70)

The dilemma in a post-communist society consists not only in confusion resulting from the radical change of rituals, but also in discrepancies between personal, cognitive and habitual memories. It is exacerbated by a discrepancy between individual biographies, especially biographies of state representatives, and new commemorative ceremonies. As Gabriel Motzkin stressed:

“Participating in the rites of memory is a quasi-religious function. It signifies acceptance of the truth of what is being remembered. I can go to a monument without believing in the memory, but my participation in its rite of memory is also an assent to the truth of the event that the monument memorializes.” (Motzkin 1996: 166)

In cases where the publicly known biography of the main celebrant is in striking contradiction to the commemoration, the ceremony can easily become a farce, promoting cynicism instead of integrating society. (A good example of this was the speech delivered by Prime Minister Oleksy in 1995 during the official state commemoration of the victory of the Polish army against the Red Army in August, 1920.) However, the discussion about *The black book of Communism*, edited by Stephen Curtois, shows clearly that not only Eastern Europeans have problems with the reappraisal of the communist past and commemoration of victims. John Gillis pointed out that “millions still make their secular pilgrimages to places like Gettysburg, Auschwitz, and Hiroshima, but no longer in quite the same compulsory, ritualized manner” (Gillis 1994: 14). One can only hope that in the future the lists of such places will also include Workuta, Sołowki, Katyń and so on. I believe that only then will we achieve an adequate, honest, and unbiased interpretation of the history of the 20th century. When we stop being selective in our commemoration of victims, we can finally overcome the division of Europe and the division between nations.

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## **Part 3:**

### **Challenges in the Crossing of 'Borders'**



Ina Dietzsch

## The Construction of Cultural Difference Between East and West Germans in Bowling Letters

After World War II, the Allied occupying powers created a political boundary which not only separated Germans on either side, but also brought about a new type of border, a situation that created new social relationships. This is evident in the continuous exchanges of letters between friends and relatives in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). However, there is very little information concerning the frequency and volume of the correspondence during the period in which Germany was divided. Statistics from the Allensbach Institute for Demographics show that, between 1949 and 1989, almost one third of the population of the FRG had contact with persons in the GDR, and that the majority wrote at least occasionally to friends and relatives in the GDR. Over time, however, the number of people writing letters to the GDR decreased: in the early years it was a bit more than one third, but sank to somewhat under one third of the population of the FRG (Noelle-Neumann and Peter 1965: 92).<sup>1</sup> With the reunification of Germany, these exchanges either ended completely or lost their significance—this at a time when public debates were beginning to take place about the internal unification of Germany and the seemingly unbridgeable differences between East and West.

Since 1994 I have been examining the exchange of letters as a form of interaction, using personal letters written between East and West Germans from 1948 to 1992. I am searching for the characteristics in the broader context of German–German relations after 1945, and for the role of personal letters in the construction of hierarchical differences between East and West Germans.<sup>2</sup> My work on this subject is guided by the public discussion on the social integration of East Germans in the new united Germany. For this reason I became interested in examining the letter exchanges not only as documents of the “history of the everyday” during the period of division, but also in understanding them as an area in which individual negotiations of legiti-

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1 These figures are only for the Federal Republic of Germany.

2 I am referring to materials collected by me in 1994. At that time I placed ads in various newspapers asking people to allow me to examine their correspondence. From the materials that I received, I selected seven very extensive exchanges of letters to analyze; this formed the basis of my dissertation titled “*Grenze Denken*” (“Thinking Borders”). These exchanges consisted of 2215 letters. In order to analyze them, I have used the interpretive method of Hans-Georg Soeffner (1989) as well as qualitative content analyses as proposed by Mayring (1993). In this paper I refer to the analyses from my dissertation.

mate meaning took place. I focused in particular on where and how difference was constructed, and how these differences could be integrated into the relationships, which were cultivated over many years.

German East–West correspondence provides excellent material for this endeavor for two reasons: first, because letters document the fluid situations of everyday life, in which the practices of differentiation are a matter of course. And second, because these exchanges, some of which lasted for over 40 years, and which were often accompanied by regular exchanges of gift parcels, permit an examination of the construction of hierarchical cultural differences. This can be attributed to the fact that the German–German border after World War II constituted a new political border situation, one for which no meaning existed. With this political division, an immense process of cultural signification came into being in which the newly “separate” had to be given new meaning. What constituted “ours” had to be defined in contrast to what now had to be blocked off as the “other” or the “foreign”. A new understanding was required, not only of the relationship between the Germans on both sides of the border and their identities, but also of a new order in Europe at the symbolic level.

When I first read the letters, I was astonished at the number of what seemed to be misunderstandings and insults contained in them; this led me to question why these epistolary relationships were not simply broken off. The continued interaction must be seen as a considerable achievement. Despite the increasing recognition of unbridgeable differences over the years, people still managed to maintain these relationships. In my view, the long-term personal correspondence between East and West Germany, as a form of everyday communication, contributed on both sides to the acceptance of the political border, as well as to the construction of a cultural boundary between East and West. It also helped to make the German–German border and the new political division conceivable in everyday life.

It is no coincidence that, precisely in the 1950s, war veterans, friends, or relatives began to re-establish old contacts and enter into a regular exchange of letters. In so doing they created a medium with which they could project their conceptions of the “other” and define themselves in relation to those conceptions.

In this paper, drawing on examples from various collections of letters, I want to show how the border, and with it a hierarchical differentiation between East and West Germans, was inscribed in everyday life and reproduced as something taken for granted. First I will sketch some of the characteristics of these exchanges that I feel are important for the interpretation of the examples that follow. Most of these are letters that contain descriptions of gifts that were exchanged. I will use these descriptions to show how the hierarchical difference was constructed, both through the exchange of packages and through the negotiation of rules which defined how the gifts were to be under-

stood. I will then show how, by means of community-building practices, this hierarchy was made invisible in the relationships.

## **What Did Correspondence Between East and West Germans Mean?**

The fact that letters are written out of a need to bridge a spatial division is still undisputed among those who deal scientifically with letters. According to Thomas and Znaniecki,

“The bowing letter is normally written by or to a member of the family who is absent for a certain time. Its function is to manifest the persistence of familial solidarity in spite of the separation.” (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918–1920: 303)

In this quote, there is a reference to a dimension of letter exchanges, which has received but scant attention in the German-speaking reception of the work of Thomas and Znaniecki. Their work is concerned with community letters which are not only exchanged between two people, but which are read by all the members of a community that extends over a spatial distance. In this sense, the letters to which I had access can be considered bowing letters.<sup>3</sup>

Correspondence is part of a more complex relationship of exchange. That is why I have included the acts of writing, sending, receiving, reading, and answering letters in my interpretations. In epistolary relationships other things are often exchanged as well, such as photographs and gifts, for example. Exchange relationships, such as correspondence or gift giving, are characterized in their interactive structure by a constant shifting between states of symmetry and asymmetry. A partner gives something (a letter, a gift) and thereby brings his counterpart into debt. Such an exchange relationship can be symmetrical in its entirety if the passing phases of asymmetry are distributed equally on both sides. The debt incurred by receiving a letter or a gift can normally be repaid by answering, thanking, or returning a gift. This continuous exchange gives the partners in the exchange of letters the feeling of equality and mutual respect which is necessary for the maintenance of a long-term relationship.

In both everyday life and scientific discourse, letters are considered to be a substitute for face-to-face communication. However, in long-term letter exchanges, there is a possible danger that the relationship can be damaged by face-to-face communication or interaction. Over time these exchanges typically develop an inherent imaginary reality, influenced by images of self and

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3 I use the term “community” in the sense of Anderson’s “Imagined Community” (Anderson 1998).

other which slowly distance themselves from the “lived reality” of the partners in the exchange. Due to this imaginary reality, letters, much more than spoken conversations, are spaces in which misunderstandings occur between the lines (Simmel 1992: 432).

Through the example of discussions about gift-giving in the letters, I would like to show how closely the construction of difference was connected with community-building practices and harmonizing strategies, how fundamental misunderstandings could occur in the letter relationships, and how much effort was required in these relationships to make these differences invisible—that is, how eager the partners were to overlook misunderstandings.

### Gift Packages: A Fundamental Misunderstanding

The packages, as well as their contents, were a topic of discussion in almost all letters. This is evidence that there was an immense need for clarification. Each party asked what the other would like to receive, and the feasibility of acquiring and/or sending the gifts was discussed, as well as the necessity of the requested object(s). After receiving the gift(s), the act of giving was evaluated. The necessary “thank you” or acknowledgment was requested by the givers, and the contents of the packages were honored with “stories” in which the recipient described how the gifts were used. The “good” coffee from the FRG was used for a birthday party; the “practically packaged” soap and the “Tempo” tissues for the vacation, and the “good” book from the GDR was used to fill a few quiet moments during the Christmas holidays.

The motives behind sending gifts varied. Giving from West to East may have signified generosity as well as a sense of moral duty. But the most important motivation, especially in the 1960s and 70s, was charity. It was a commonly held belief that the people in the East were worse off than their relatives and friends in the West, and that they needed support to survive. The belief that people went hungry in the GDR was tenacious, although the GDR strove to eradicate it. For example, a bookkeeper and a housewife in Leipzig wrote in 1962: “We still have enough to eat, and you don’t have to go to so much trouble for us” (Nessler, E., 11-12-1962).<sup>4</sup> A railway official, also from Leipzig, insisted,

*“It is a good thing that food staples are still available in sufficient quantities as before. No one needs to go hungry, and everyone can afford them; and we still haven’t parted with our well-provisioned coffee-table on every Sunday during all of the winter months.”* (Buch, E., 3-30-1979)

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4 All names have been changed.

In this way, East Germans made it very clear that they had a different idea of what “scarcity” meant than did the West Germans. They maintained that “scarcity” in the GDR was defined by a different logic than that which had prevailed after the immediate post-war period. The Eastern writers also demonstrated that they had developed a different understanding of necessity, usefulness, and luxury than their friends and relatives in the FRG. In the FRG, “necessity” was equated with the period of want and sacrifice that followed the war; this period was also contrasted to the abundance that accompanied the period of the “economic miracle” in the FRG. Necessity was measured by cost-effectiveness, and luxury was understood as something that one could only occasionally afford. In the GDR, daily life determined necessity, as up until 1989 there were always things one needed daily but could not buy. The usefulness of an object was determined by whether or not it made work easier, and luxury was determined not only by what one could or could not afford, but also as that which one could *occasionally* procure, what was *impossible* to get, or that which could only be obtained from the West. Through these comments, East Germans took pains to demonstrate that not only was everyday life in the GDR inadequate, but also completely different to that in the West.

The charitable gift giving from the West was connected to the expectation that thanks were enough to mitigate the debt. There may have been expectations of a gift in return, but not of something that was considered an everyday necessity in the West. For example, Magdalena Nessler from the GDR was lectured by her uncle in the West in 1959 about how she should view the relations of giving and receiving:

*“Your box of chocolates ... has more than surprised us. Thank you again for your courtesy, but you must know that we can get such things in quantity and—as you can imagine—in better quality and cheaper” (Hauschild, W., 6-28-1959).*

The uncle takes the chocolate for granted in the context of his day-to-day experience. At the same time, he interprets the gift from the GDR in relation to his image of the GDR, an image based only on a few visits to East Berlin, visits of only a few hours. Key elements of this image were rationing, hunger, and scarcity. He interpreted the giving of chocolate as a sacrifice—a sacrifice to which he could not give a corresponding gift, because his everyday life was governed by other conditions. In this context his insistence on not being sent any more chocolate can be read as a strategy to evade the duty of giving an equivalent gift in return, which would have balanced the inequality in their relationship.

At the outset of her correspondence, housewife Erika Schneider of Essen viewed her gifts to friends in the GDR as an act of charity and the return gifts as sacrifices. She writes:

*"The package with the Easter bunny came on Easter Day ... although Rita was very happy, the sacrifice is too much for you ... you must not mention reciprocation any longer." (Schneider, W., 4-10-1959)*

The polite command, designed to spare her friends in the GDR the obligation to send an equivalent gift in return, actually created an unequal relationship, in which one partner's gifts should not be reciprocated.

On the other side of the border, people in the GDR did not feel that thanks alone would cancel their debts: they were always searching for an adequate return gift. To give useful gifts to the friends and relatives in the FRG was seen as unsuitable. After all, every set of letters in my material contains the sentence: "We can always obtain everything, and significantly cheaper than you." Therefore the correspondents in the East were always looking for something special.

## Creating Hierarchical Difference

The misunderstandings between East and West German gift-givers are an expression of uncertainty in daily communication. Familiar cultural rules to deal with such situations were lacking in the new German-German relationship. The insecurity caused by this lack nurtured the construction of hierarchical differences. The items given and received were accorded different values in the everyday understanding of the correspondents in the GDR and FRG. In this constellation of differing expectations and mistaken interpretations, gifts from the West to the East became charity.

The problems that arose during these gift exchanges can be traced to cultural misunderstandings. These problems were expressed, for example, by the fact that day-to-day goods sent from the FRG to the GDR were often reciprocated with expensive handicraft gifts, yet no real alleviation of the debt could take place.

In order to understand fully the exchange of gift packages between the East and the West, it is perhaps useful to keep in mind that different cultures have many different forms of giving and of attaching meanings to them. The cultural and historical repertoire of meanings that gift giving can have ranges from archaic barter to modern gift forms which transcend necessity (Berking 1996). All of these forms create various types and degrees of dependency.

In the exchange of packages between the GDR and the FRG, problems arose from the fact that the sending of "supply packages" and gift giving as a form of recognition were mixed together. In this case, two different cultural forms of giving were mixed, even though they are based on different kinds of logic and are very hard to combine and synchronize. No cultural rules for dealing with this situation were available. On the one hand were supply pack-

ages, comparable to "CARE" packages from the USA or packages from Polish emigrants in America to members of their family who remained in Poland (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-20: 80). For these, a "thank you" was quite sufficient. In those situations in which emergency help and support were given, a return gift was not necessary, as this would have diminished the meaning of the support offered. Typically, the supply packages contained foodstuffs, and later, used clothing. These supply packages were also sent as birthday packages, Christmas packages, and on other gift-giving occasions. In this way, they took on the function of gifts, and as such had to be answered with an equivalent return gift. The supply packages were then considered as the beginning of a gift exchange, which had to be continued on the next occasion. In this way, the two different types of giving were mixed together in these postal relationships, and the recipients in the GDR found themselves in a calamitous situation. If they received everyday goods which were things that they ordinarily could not obtain, be it because the quality or design was better than that which they normally had, they then felt compelled to find and send a return gift which would produce the same effect. Because of the difference in the goods available on either side of the border, this presented a problem throughout all the years of correspondence.

Citizens of the FRG also confused the logic of gift giving and the logic of sending supply packages. This was reinforced by the fact that GDR customs authorities required both GDR and FRG citizens to mark packages as containing "Gifts, no merchandise". This resulted in packages from the GDR being understood in the FRG as birthday or Christmas presents. The misunderstanding was reinforced when friends and relatives in the GDR, who were asked what they would like to receive from people in the FRG, mentioned licorice, cocoa, raisins, almonds, or coffee. In some cases, the impression that a package was a gift package was increased because the things inside were in gift-wrapping paper. Even the hesitation, at the beginning, to send used clothing can be seen as a clue that the packages were generally understood to be gifts. There were always clues that could be interpreted as indicating that the packages were gifts. This created a paradox: on the one hand, regardless of the contents of the package, it was understood as a gift, and therefore required an equivalent return gift; but at the same time, this return gift was declined by the gift givers in the West.

This can be clearly seen in the letters between Magdalena Nessler from Leipzig and her relatives. Magdalena Nessler, who wanted to free herself from the obligation she felt due to the monthly supply packages, tried again and again to prepare a nice surprise for her aunt and uncle. However, she often received the answer that in the West one had enough. Moreover, one liked to give, because in the GDR one could not yet get everything; and furthermore, she should not always send something. In one letter, her aunt in the West sent back gifts with the following reply:

*"You might wonder why I'm sending back your beautiful Christmas necklace ... but please don't be angry! ... in the picture you can see me with Rosi Friedl in the Killespark, and I'm wearing a chain that is almost the same color as the one you sent. It made me happy that you wanted to make me look pretty, but it would be a shame if it just sat around here. To be very honest, I don't even really wear the jewelry that I have that often or at all, because I can't really see well anymore if the clasps are closed; and the one on yours was a bit difficult, I can hardly get it open. Please don't be angry: someone else would be very happy with it."* (Hauschild, W., 3-22-1982)

And then later, "your coasters were very pretty, but over the years I have collected coasters made of velvet, wicker (handmade by the relatives), and also leather (from Kaisers!) and tile." (Hauschild, W., 3-22-1982)

## Hiding Hierarchy

These misunderstandings would have led to conflicts if they had not consistently been ignored. They all signal the high demands made on the willingness of the writing partners to continue the relationship and demonstrate how a hierarchical asymmetry could be introduced into the relationship without being discussed.

One strategy to create an imagined balance between the letter partners entailed the definition of all types of packages as gifts. It allowed both sides to interpret the inability to find an appropriate return gift as an individual shortcoming; in such cases, the hierarchy written into the relationship disappeared from the correspondents' awareness.

What sorts of reactions were possible in the GDR to the charitable gifts from the FRG? One possibility for East Germans was to send a return gift to the FRG that had the same exact monetary value as the gift they had received. While the value of the objects was determined by the unofficial exchange rate, these were usually expensive gifts: Jena glass, crystal, handicrafts such as Plauen lace or "*Blaudruck*" (a blue colored textile), to name a few. Another possible reaction was to ignore the special circumstances of the East-West context and send gifts that were typical for special occasions, such as flowers, green plants, pralines, knick-knacks, books, and hand-made objects. If this were done, then the package exchange between the East and West would have been no different from an ordinary relationship between relatives or friends.

Due to the mixture of gift-giving and supply packages, the package exchange between East and West Germans developed into a hierarchical relationship, because sending supply packages is an act that explicitly creates a hierarchy. The givers are in a considerably more favorable position: they have something to give that the receiver lacks. Furthermore, the generosity of the

givers allowed both them and the recipients to demonstrate the level of affluence which they had achieved in their own society. In the material that I have examined, this can be seen most clearly in those instances where a person fled to the West and constructed a "success story"; these stories were shored up with the help of the packages.

The lengths to which GDR citizens went to find an equivalent gift shows that they were aware of these differences and did not accept them. Keeping this in mind, however, it would have damaged the relationships if they had rejected the packages from the FRG. For this reason, two strategies were developed which legitimated the status of the receivers. The first was a response that focused on the argument that as Germans, the citizens of the GDR had a right to "their share" of the prosperity located in the other part of Germany. The other response was to promise both themselves and the others that an equivalent gift would be sent in the future. Over time, however, it became pointless to apologize for the packages sent from the FRG. Because they responded to the packages with return gifts instead of simply with expressions of gratitude, East Germans found themselves caught up in a web of dependency.

A second strategy that enabled the correspondents to overlook misunderstandings, differences, and inequality was to define the relationship between the letter partners as that of a community which transcended the border.<sup>5</sup> In all of the letters in my material, the writers considered themselves as members of one community, which had, however, been hurt by political division. The border, or its removal, is therefore the central motif of communication. This was often mentioned, but seldom as explicitly as in a letter written in 1956 by Karl Hauschild, the uncle of Magdalena Nessler, himself a politician and owner of a small publishing house.

*"Everything must be done to prevent the construction of barriers between the Germans. Despite the fact of ten years of separation, the feeling that we belong together must be reinforced."* (Hauschild, W., 10-10-1956)

In the strategy of community building, the obligation to supply provisions and aid for survival to those believed to be in need comes to mind immediately. This obligation resulted in a generalization of all relationships between East and West Germans as kinship relations. An example of this was the image of the "poor brothers and sisters in the East" in the FRG of the 1950s. This feeling of obligation among West Germans changed very little over the years, despite the improvement in the quality of life in the GDR.

Moreover, a feeling of togetherness was created by thinking of one another and informing the correspondent about the conditions of all members of the community. Thus they developed a "sense of family", described by An-

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5 In the case of Magdalena Nessler, the community enjoyed a particular stability, as it was defined by kinship.

gela Keppler following Felix Kaufmann as “the context of orientation, nurtured by shared experience, which cannot be traced either to biological or emotional attachments, or to economic necessities” (Keppler 1994: 14). This context is usually established in an interactive process, as during the common family meal, where “a formal tie of communicative relationships is formed between the members of a family, which in most cases is stronger than the differences in content often enough apparent in the conversations” (Keppler 1994: 10). It is exactly this tie of communicative relationships which was germane to the sense of community in the usually long-term correspondences. A very graphic example of the imagined community is the image of the common coffee table, often symbolized in the pound of coffee sent regularly from the West to the East. Erika Schneider wrote in a letter sent with a Christmas parcel to the GDR in 1963: “I always say, since we cannot drink the coffee at the same table, let us at least drink the same brand. We here and you over there” (Schneider, W., 11-1-1963).

The dinner table where meals were eaten together became the place of imaginary meetings and togetherness. In many families, for example, the same ritual of opening packages at the dinner table was described. It was common to wait until “official” family celebrations such as Christmas, Easter, or birthdays, and until all the family members were together, to open the package along with other gifts. This strengthened the symbolic power of the act of community building.

Gifts, and especially coffee from the West and in some cases Stollen (a special German Christmas cake), whose ingredients came partly from the most recent package from the West, came to represent the absent members of the community. This also made the imagined communication at the coffee table possible. In another letter, Erika Schneider wrote: “At Christmas we had Stollen from Leipzig and coffee from Essen on the table, just like you” (Schneider, W., 1-30-1966). One sees again and again in her letters just how “real” the absent members of the community became; this is also clearly demonstrated when she wrote of “written conversations” or “written coffee klatsches”, and ended letters with “auf Wiederhören” (literally, “until I hear from you again”).

The coffee table is the strongest metaphor for the imagined community and appears in several exchanges. If it is not the common eating table, it is at least the common drinking or smoking table. In 1989, the schoolteacher Anke Ellrich wrote to her friend who had fled the GDR: “We think of you often, especially here in the garden or on Saturday evenings ... and I would really like to have a smoke with you here in the garden” (Ellrich, E., 5-23-1989). Her husband closed another letter with the following: “I just wanted to ‘talk’ to you and I will drink your health with Elli in a quarter of an hour” (Ellrich, E., 6-3-1989).

Two further forms of communication point to an imagined family-like community. First, *events* of the world at large and their treatment in the Eastern and Western media were discussed. The members of this imagined East–West community tried to form common opinions about world affairs. Every person in the community was given a certain role, as competencies and expertise on certain topics were distributed. Second, travel experiences were shared in a branch of the family, with one side writing travel reports to be read on the other side by the whole family, who often traced the writers' travel routes on a map.

## Conclusion

All of these community-building practices allowed differences and inequalities to recede into the background and disappear from the perspectives of the correspondents. In their understanding, the writers successfully bridged the distance between East and West by juxtaposing the political division of Germany to an imagined everyday community of both East and West Germans. Within this community there existed forms of treatment shared by everyone; here everyone had his or her place, and people understood one another.

Leaving the imagined reality of the writers aside, however, the exchange of letters and parcels, with its intention of overcoming the division of Germany, must be interpreted as a deliberate strategy for dealing with the contradictory demands made upon individual action by the installation in 1945 of a political border that crossed all former social and political boundaries. These contradictory demands were to define the Germans on the other side of the border on the one hand as part of a national community, and on the other hand as “other” and in certain instances “foreign” people. The imagined community provided a perception of solidarity which was strong enough to absorb basic differences and misunderstandings without endangering the relationship. A closer examination of the topics discussed within the imagined community reveals clearly that the practices of differentiation and the misunderstandings were an important part of this communication. Explanations, disputes, corrections, comparisons, evaluations, and hierarchies appear. But excuses, revocations, and silence on certain topics also appear—conflicts were avoided by adamantly ignoring misunderstandings. In this context, the definition of packages as gifts is to be seen as an attempt to equalize the hierarchical differences between East and West Germans. Paradoxically, however, the attempt failed because this definition served only to disguise the structural hierarchy. The resulting invisibility contributed to the reproduction of these differences.

At the outset of the research, I hypothesized that epistolary communication, besides maintaining relationships, mainly served to imagine the “other” on the other side of the border, and to define one’s “self” in contrast to those “others”. If this thesis is correct, then it is less important in correspondence to understand the others and their living conditions than to arrive at an awareness of the differences between them and oneself. The basic pattern of epistolary communication was therefore the construction of difference along a demarcation line between “over here” and “over there”. Although the perceived differences between the writing partners varied, they were interpreted against the background of individual living conditions: work situations, family situations, future perspectives or health conditions. The practices of differentiation between East and West and their grounding in the confrontation between economic and political systems served as a secure and dominant pattern of orientation for the perception of self and other. And the longer and more intensively the letters were written in order to keep up the sense of community, the more natural the coping with the division and the knowledge of differences became. These cultural differences are defined not by their content, but rather through their practices of production. Beneath the surface, routines developed which transformed the cultural hierarchical differences between East and West into an unreflected everyday occurrence—regardless of the writers’ perceptions.

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*László Kürti*

## The Socialist Circus: Secrets, Lies, and Autobiographical Family Narratives

“Memoirs—in our century the most deceitful genre of literature”—Hannah Arendt

### Introduction

In this paper I shall give examples of different ways in which anthropologists relate to informants through interviews, and of different ways of narrating and anthropologizing personal histories. The original motivation for this analysis was to understand biographical narratives in the life stories of Hungarians before and during state socialism. This paper relies on family ethnography to argue for a personal anthropology based on biographical and autobiographical narratives combining ethnographic and historical autobiography. The goal is to reconstruct not only a family's history, but also historical aspects of a whole community.

If we want to utilize the concept of autobiographical family narrative, and if we wish to develop it for anthropological use, the methodological problem is a challenging one. It is all the more so since personal life history and narratives based on memory can be assumed to be a complex whole composed of (a) autobiographical memory, which is to a certain extent the researcher's recollection of his or her past experiences, (b) autobiographical narrative by the informants, and (c) written or oral history of the group or region in question.

One of the first questions that should intrigue all anthropologists is: can I be my own informant? The answer to this almost banal question must be a resounding yes. I base most of my knowledge on my own experiences, that is, my own private recollections derived for the most part from public events. Who are my other—my “actual” informants? First and foremost, my mother, with whom I spent my life, and second, my father, whom I did not know, having met him only once when I was small.

It is perhaps a stereotypical statement that children in broken families could reconstruct family biographies based on partial, often biased perspectives. Surely my knowledge about my father's family was one-sided, based on what my mother told me. What Kristeva has written in “The father, love, and banishment” seems very close to my own search for the lost parent and family history:

"It is a life apart from the paternal country where nonetheless lies the obsessed self's unshakable quiet, frozen forever, bored but solid." (Kristeva 1980: 150)

This was the case until February 2000, when at the funeral of my father's half-brother, I was told about the existence of my father's diary. This opened up an entirely new world for me, as the diary has provided an alternative to my mother's account and my own perceived history.

Clearly, what my father attempted to achieve with his narrative was an urgent recasting of history, an offer of reparation to both of us, for he felt, and rightly so, that in losing me he had lost an important object from the past—his son, whom he mourned for the rest of his life. As Roy Schafer (1968: 339) suggests, through such recasting of the past the lost object is immortalized and becomes real. I am not, however, searching for reality about my family's past: rather, I consider Edmund Leach's (1987: 1) observation valid for ethnographic narratives, that "most ethnographic monographs are fiction [in which] the past becomes a fiction invented by the ethnographer". However, with the discovery of my father's diary I must argue that, although I am reconstructing family narratives, this history is based on a complex mosaic of memory, personal experiences, and both written and oral autobiography.

This autobiographical description, then, is more a conscious search for the way in which we can recreate a balanced view of the past, a recollection based on originally contradictory and, at times, highly selective information. What is important in this search is the fact that I view the past as a contested reality and not, as some would have it, a unilateral reality. The contesting of this past is the contest of views about the period of Hungarian history right after World War II and during much of the state socialist period. In a sense this is also a symbolic return to my home country, which I left in 1974. But I am also investigating the socialist past of the late 1940s and early 1950s—an era referred to here for convenience's sake as Hungarian Stalinism—when I was not yet born or too young to be able to experience myself.<sup>1</sup>

In reconstructing my childhood experiences during state socialism, I draw on family events, biographies of family members, and my father's diary in order to contest official history and the grand narratives of the socialist past.<sup>2</sup> In so doing, I share the opinion of Rom Harre (1976: 44), who observes that

1 In a sense this analysis is also a symbolic questioning of the return home. Peter Loizos (1994: 51-52), for instance, speaks of his experiences with his field work site and the villagers there—many of them his relatives—and how, after the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, he has decided in favor of disengagement, i.e. not to return to research.

2 It will suffice to argue here that one could read various histories about the period between 1948 and 1990: we might easily counterpose "official" (i.e. Marxist and state socialist) versions with those published by émigré or exiled writers living in the West. Interpretations of traumatic events—such as the Holocaust of the Hungarian Jewry or the 1956 revolution—are sometimes wholly antithetical or contradictory.

“biographical accounts may be so one-dimensional, that is, using one perspective all through, that history and self-presentation and self-image are merged; the history is the self-presentation, the self-presentation is the history.”

Clearly one fundamental utility of autobiographical family narratives is to be able to connect to these “feelings” that are hidden from history. However, as I discovered in reading my father’s diary, one must be cautious since these feelings and the stories embodying them may change at different stages during the reworking of the autobiographical material, during interviewing or the writing of a diary. This is what Harre (1976:45) calls “perspectivity”. This perspectivity is what interests me here, especially in relation to George Gusdorf’s (1980: 38) view of autobiography. As he puts it, in the autobiographical account, I “situate what I am in the perspective of what I have been”. Moreover, in order for this to happen, memory must be spatialized, or mapped onto territory: this is a fundamental mechanism of recalling past events and relating to one’s past (Perlman 1988; Yates 1966).

One striking aspect of my autobiographical narrative has been the discovery that my family’s history crisscrosses almost all of Hungary. I found that the notion of the stationary or localized traditional society—completely grounded in one locality and a specific piece of land—has to be dispelled as conscious mythologizing.

Clearly, then, there are many questions concerning the usefulness of my father’s diary, of my mother’s stories that I grew up with, sewn together with my own memories, and of the more encompassing family memory. Like most social discourse, however, the diary too is negotiable in the emplotments of evasions, denials and lies about what actually happened. Lying, however, like truth, is not a simple matter, as Barnes (1994: 12-13) warns us. There are always many different kinds of truths to past events, and lying—the intentional misrepresentation of facts—can be done in different ways. In terms of family autobiography it does not matter at all, however, whether the fabrications are protective or benevolent or malicious lies (Barnes 1994: 14).

In reconstructing my family’s past, I believe that both my father and my mother actually believed that they were doing the right thing, in their own respective ways: my mother by her victorious custody battle and my father by writing down the “truth”, wanted to safeguard their child’s welfare. Yet “in lying to others we end up lying to ourselves” (Rich 1980: 188)—and this notion is not far removed from Nietzsche’s formulation that the most common forms of lies are those one has uttered to oneself. But all individuals need some form of self-delusion—to believe that their lie is not a lie but truth—and some self-deception in order to work out internal conflicts in the “reality negotiation process” (Snyder 1989: 130).

In discussing autobiographical representations, Catherine Portuges (1993: 35) makes a nice point that the denial of the past functions “to destabilize the narrative by interrogating the status of ‘official’ truth claims”. Clearly what

my father attempted in his autobiography was to destabilize the official truth about the custody battle and to interrogate the Stalinist state's policy of giving preference to mothers over fathers.

Losing the custody battle prompted my father to write his diary. By writing down his version of the past, by creating an alternative reality, my father preserved his moral righteousness and was able to give me something that my mother could not: a chance to come to terms with my family's past in a more balanced and satisfying way. Family autobiography thus can achieve the purpose (whether or not originally intended) of readjusting historical facts, balancing perspectives of past events, and, what is more, providing individual satisfaction and self-liberation from the hegemonic and overpowering views of the "official" past.

## The Family

Questions about family are central to historical and anthropological investigations. What constitutes kinship and family has been contested since time immemorial. Yet one is constantly reminded of the importance of one's family, lineage and descent.<sup>3</sup> Relatives and family members work hard to rearrange family relations and the importance of closeness and distance between the various members of the family. Such contested and personalized views concerning my family have also become apparent as more and more information has come to light. The more facts I have learned, the more I have become convinced that the history of my family is a miniature version of the history of Hungarian peasantry since the eighteenth century.<sup>4</sup>

By the time my mother and father met, right at the end of World War II, both their families were about to lose everything they had to the devastation of wars, to unscrupulous land speculators, or to the all-powerful state. My mother's family had settled on the Great Hungarian Plain sometime during the last decades of the nineteenth century in the town of Törökszentmiklós. From 1700 on, the town and its environs were owned by Count Almásy, who brought poor peasants from the North as cheap laborers in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>5</sup>

The family's origins, like those of many millions of the poorer social classes, is shrouded in mystery. The earliest couple that my aunts were able to recall was János Hajdrik (1865–1932) and Klára Bana (1869–1926), who had

3 Anthropological discussions on the changing nature of kinship, descent and families are found in Birdwell-Pheasant (1992), Godelier et al. (1998), Kertzer and Saller (1991), and McDonogh (1986).

4 For a similar treatment of peasant material, see Hofer and Niedermüller (1988).

5 Most of the written history is available in Tóth (1980).

nine children, a number which was not unique among Hungarian peasants, although rather atypical at that time (Fél and Hofer 1969: 103). As the saying went in my family, “more mouths to feed, more hands to work”.

The only property they had besides the small plot was the household animals. In such poverty, the ideal family pattern prompted parents to seek advantageous marriages for their children, or if possible, to educate them. Education meant only six years of school (*népiskola*), or one or two years of trade school. Only rich peasants, merchants, and shopkeepers were able to afford a high school education for their children. For the masses, the only route was apprenticeship. As I see it now, both my father and my mother saw this as the only way out of misery. Yet despite all the stories to the contrary, my father’s family shares a surprisingly similar social and genealogical past. My father’s mother’s family, originating from Nagykőrös, was equally poor but honest. My paternal grandmother had two illegitimate children and never discussed the true identity of their father. Both families were able to eke out a meager living, and depended on others for survival.

## Diary and Autobiography

My father’s aunt, who married Ferenc Szikora, died in 1925, leaving Szikora with one young boy to raise. That was when Szikora and my grandmother finally decided to live together and become husband and wife, never mentioning the name of the farmhand who had fathered my father and his younger sister. From that point on, my father’s nickname became “Little Szikora”, for the simple reason that he was small. The only information that is available in my father’s diary is: “My father is Ferenc Szikora. But since I was a love-child I was given my mother’s name, which is Kürthy” (Diary, p. 1). The expression “love-child” (*szerelemgyerek*) is common in Hungarian parlance, referring to children born out of wedlock who are baptized with their mother’s name.

In the first pages of my father’s diary written in the early 1950s<sup>6</sup>, he describes his physique, mentality, and emotions quite realistically as follows:

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6 My father began writing his Diary on November 26, 1955, at nine o’clock in the evening, and the first six pages, describing his early years, were written that night. Obviously he wrote about his childhood from memory; the last entry is from early Spring, 1965. He did not write every day, but only on certain occasions; mainly when events concerned me and the custody battle. He also recorded the dates and places of the circus tours. He described everything before 1955 retrospectively; the dates for Diary quotations refer to the dates when the events described occurred, not to the unspecified dates when they were written down. I may mention here in passing that my mother wrote long letters to me in the early 1990s after she returned to Hungary. These, however, deserve a special, separate treatment.

*"I am a small, blue-eyed and blond man with a well-proportioned body. I am also a sensitive as well as sensual man. When I was only in the first grade I fell in love with my female teachers. I also fell in love with a little girl, who, unfortunately, died very suddenly. I was sad for a long time, but I hid my real emotions. As a devout Christian, I was thinking about dying at six because I thought that I would become an angel." (Diary, 1955: 2–3)*

Despite his studious character, my father was destined to become a farmhand and only finished the sixth grade and one year of trade school. His parents forced him to learn the tailor's trade. He unwillingly but dutifully bore the apprenticeship for two years. By his own admission he did not like this occupation at all.

*"My parents were working as farm laborers. Naturally, they wanted to make me a peasant. Since that was the only thing they knew, during and after grade school I worked as a herd boy." (Diary, 1955: 1–2)*

My father respected traditional ways of life, and moreover he was a very religious person. He followed the parental advice even though he was unhappy with his parents' choice. During my youth, I was not told how he took up music and how he began to play musical instruments. In his diary, this mystery is solved instantly:

*"Once, when I was herding animals I was able to purchase a fiddle from a Gypsy for 2 pengős. From that point on, I started to learn music with all my heart." (Diary, 1955: 5)<sup>7</sup>*

To be sure, this was a good investment, for he spent his whole life as a fiddler and accordion player, a dishonorable profession in the eyes of the peasants, and characteristic of the nomadic, Gypsy way of life. Obviously determined and unwilling to compromise, father began spending nights and weekends away from home playing with Gypsy bands for weddings, baptismal feasts, and other festive occasions.

Perhaps because of his short stature, my father served in the Hungarian army for only a few months in 1941 and was spared from combat. As for many Hungarian males at that time, the army was his first opportunity to experience a love affair and to learn about women and sexuality. In my father's words:

*"When I was twenty-one, I was recruited into the Hungarian army for three months. Actually, this was the time when I had a chance to touch a woman for the first time in my life." (Diary, 1955: 6)*

It has been a fascinating discovery in my father's diary that during the rampages of World War II there were local dance schools operating and traveling theatre companies that managed to perform throughout the devastated and burning countryside. One of these travelling companies sealed his fate:

7 During the early 1930s, the pengő—originally introduced in 1920—was the official Hungarian currency; and the price of his first violin was equivalent to about one week's wages.

*"At the beginning of July, 1943, a theater group by the name of Lajos Antal came to Lajosmizse. At that time I was playing the fiddle for the local dance school, but since the theater group did not have their own fiddler they called on me, an invitation that I gladly accepted. Since I loved theater and was eager to become an actor, I felt that my time had come and my life-long desires would finally be fulfilled."* (Diary, 1943: 7)

As mentioned above, I see his attempt to join the nomadic life of the wandering theatres and circuses as a way out of the peasants' misery.



Photo: My father as a clown

This separation, as well as the break with his peasant family background and tradition, was predicated upon his calling as an "artist", a musician. Between 1943 and 1953, my father earned money as a musician playing the fiddle and the accordion; and later he learned other instruments as well. He played in travelling circuses, theater groups, movie showings, and even appeared as an extra in two films made in 1952. For the next ten years, he traveled with various circuses all around Hungary performing as a musician as well as participating in some clown acts.<sup>8</sup>

After that time, until his retirement in 1980, he led his own Gypsy band at the local restaurant, the famous *Kakukk* ("Cuckoo's"). An obvious source of conflict and tension between my mother and my father, the artist's life did not make for a happy family. As Hungary was redefining itself as a socialist state,

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8 Besides his diary, my father also left other documents behind: he wrote down scores of the music he played; in addition, he transcribed some of the circus acts he performed. These are often very amusing small skits and seemingly innocent buffoonery that Hungarian circuses utilized as clown acts during the 1950s.

my father was also intent on reinforcing his status as both an artist and a father.

I did not find out from my mother how they met since she denied all recollection, blocking out any memories that concerned my father and their few years together. Actually, the pages of the Diary mention 1947, when my father's travelling theater troupe arrived in Törökszentmiklós and, perhaps wholly accidentally, the company was installed in the house of János Hajdrik, who was my mother's father. The chance to learn a scorned profession at that time must have been exciting and unusual for a beautiful eighteen-year-old such as my mother was. But the diary is terse about this momentous encounter:

*"In that theater season I met our landlord's daughter, Magdolna Hajdrik, who became my bride shortly thereafter. On July 19, 1947, I bought a professional piano accordion for eight-hundred forints. I started to learn to play accordion." (Diary, 1947: 17)*

This statement was obviously written after their separation had taken place, for my father minimizes the importance of my mother—his wife. Although he keeps referring to her simply as Magda, the Diary devotes more attention to his instrument and musical advancement. Needless to say, reconstructing this major conflict between the two of them provides a key to understanding why they did not manage well together. My father does not mention anything about my mother's desire to become an actress and join the theater troupe. But she clearly did want to do so, although she failed to mention this to me during our thirty years together. But history sometimes comes to the investigator and slaps him or her in the face, and this is exactly what happened when, together with the Diary in my father's house, I found some photographs revealing all the conflicts. My mother obviously left her parents' home with my father in the hope of starting a new career. Petó's (1999a: 141) observation about this period, that "the reconstruction of femininity went on in parallel with the reconstruction of Hungary", is certainly true with regard to my mother's situation as well. She wholly internalized the life chances presented in the new (socialist) era. For her, my father's connection to the theater was a chance to start a new career. This career, however, was not in line with the Stalinist state's drive for more children and industrial workers (Kürti 1991: 58-59).

One black-and-white photograph, one newspaper clipping, and one certificate testify to these troublesome events. Both my mother and my father took acting classes in Budapest as the inevitable nationalization of private companies was in the air by 1947. Working in any artistic company had become the privilege offered only to those who took state exams and received official permits. This forced Hungary's artistic community to comply, and thus Father and Mother went to Budapest to become legitimate performers. The Diary has this entry:

*"On January 27th, 1948, I took an acting exam. Pictures of this exam were printed in the weekly newspaper Magyar Nap. They took pictures of me too and one of them was in the newspaper." (Diary, 1948: 18)*

With my father's paper I found a typed certificate proving that my mother was taking acting classes with Hungary's famous actress of the prewar period, Margit Makay, during November 1947. By the summer of 1948, we find both of them acting in the City Theater of Mohács in southern Hungary, and the next year was spent traveling with the theater company. This is when the only picture was made showing both of them in the theater; in fact, this is the only picture taken of them as a married couple. Although they both smile in this photograph, the smile is neither very natural nor very happy. Of this occasion my father wrote:

*"In the city of Rakamaz all hell broke loose because of a secret love letter I received from a female admirer. This put an end to our marriage for good. On June 5, my wife left me and went home to her parents." (Diary, 1949: 21)*

They lived separately until February 11, 1950, when suddenly my maternal grandmother died of pneumonia and my father went to the funeral. They managed to make up somehow, for the Diary has this entry: "After the funeral I came home and went to church. On March 3rd I made my last confession" (Diary, 1950: 23). My father had always been very religious; he went to church regularly, even playing music and singing on some festive occasions. Maybe this piety helped their relationship for a while: in any case, they decided to live together again. My sister Edit was born on March 1st, 1951. The Diary tells briefly and cautiously about their troubles together, and about the overwhelming presence of the Stalinist state:

*"In the town of Hercegszántó the authorities stopped us and I came back to Lajosmizse on October 7. At home I continued my earlier practice: of organizing cultural programs and giving violin and accordion lessons. In December, 1951, the local Communist Party leadership forbade me to organize cultural performances, arguing that it was not "educational". This was followed by another order making all music an illegal activity. But God was on my side! My colleagues asked me to perform with them and on March 30th, 1952, I joined an illegal itinerant theater group, and only returned home on June 2nd." (Diary, 1952: 24)*

## Contested Identities

Obviously, my father did not find married life and fatherhood satisfactory, and as soon as the opportunity arose he joined another travelling theater company and left Lajosmizse, leaving my mother and the infant daughter home alone with my father's parents. This soon proved to be an irreversible mistake

for three reasons. First, the young mother with no means of support was left with the baby in a somewhat unfriendly environment. Lajosmizse, of course, was not wholly unknown to my mother: she already had spent some time there before. Moreover, three of my mother's brothers, Sándor (1918–1981), Imre (1930–1994), and János (1932–1990), also lived there with their families. But my mother's contacts with them were strained for some unknown reasons. Second, my mother—perhaps unconsciously—resented not being able to join my father on the theater tour. Nursing my little sister, she was confined to the house for several months.

But the third reason was even more important, and more appalling. This concerns another aspect of the hidden family story from the end of the war. In the Diary there is no mention of what happened to the inhabitants of Lajosmizse; for instance, there is no mention of how hundreds decided to flee with the withdrawing German and Hungarian armies. Moreover, there is silence about how the whole Jewish population of the town disappeared, with only a few individuals returning after the war (Schweitzer 1994: 365–366). The Diary only says that the Russian liberation of Hungary occurred at the end of 1944 and the beginning of 1945. As usual, Father was away, and when he returned he was confronted with the brutal facts: his father and two of his half-brothers had been rounded up and taken away by the Soviet military police. They were away for only a few weeks in the nearby city of Kecskemét and when they returned it became public knowledge that they had been abused and beaten badly. What my father never dared to mention was the fact that his mother was also taken away and for ten days was an unofficial prisoner of the Russian garrison in Kecskemét. What actually happened to her can only be imagined. But her story, and many similar fates, was a forbidden subject during state socialism. Who dared to speak about the looting, murder, rape, and lawlessness suffered at the hands of Red Army soldiers? These acts have not been forgotten, but fell under what Andrea Pető (1999: 85) calls the “conspiracy of silence”.

What I was able to discover—again, not from the Diary but from other family members—was the horrifying fact that my grandmother was officially declared insane as a result of the maltreatment. She had her rational moments and even days, when she acted quite normally, often playing the zither and passing the time with neighbors and friends in a joyous atmosphere. But relatives spoke to me of horrendous acts, of moments when she was completely out of her mind: defecating in the middle of the room, dancing naked in the garden, screaming, and not knowing at all who she was.

This rural environment, far from Budapest where the Communist Party's ideologies produced the family policies associated with the name of Anna Ratkó, the Stalinist Minister of Health (Kürti 1991: 58), was the setting in 1951 when my sister was born. In such settings abnormal things were bound to happen, and they did. On September 8th, 1953, when my mother was in the

sixth month of her pregnancy with me, an accident occurred that cost my little sister's life. This is what the Diary tells us:

*"The saddest day of my life took place in this theater season. Carelessly and with her usual quarrelsome attitude, my former wife placed a bowl of hot water on the floor, near where my beautiful two-and-a half year old little daughter, Edit, was playing. She fell into the water and was scalded so severely that after a day of incredible suffering, she died on September 8, 1953. I only saw my beloved little daughter in the coffin. This finished our marriage, which was on the verge of breaking up anyway."* (Diary, 1953: 45)<sup>9</sup>

After this, my mother and father could no longer relate to each other. My understanding was based on my mother's stories, and throughout my life I believed that my sister's death was caused by our mentally handicapped grandmother. With all these personal traumas, perhaps there was only one-way for my father to come to terms with life: to entertain others and make them laugh, either as a musician or, even more ironically, as a circus clown. When I was born, on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 1953, my father was occupied with performing in a milieu that was an increasingly sore point for the state, which viewed all the arts as remnants of the capitalist and bourgeois past that had to be eradicated and completely reorganized. But by that time my father's identity as an artist and a performer was established. He took off again and joined a traveling circus.

All the Stalinist rhetoric notwithstanding, my father and mother did not manage as a model socialist nuclear family "built on partnership, where husband and wife and adult children are in approximately the same position as regards both responsibility and autonomy" (Hegedűs 1977: 167). After my birth my mother moved with me first to Budapest, then after considerable wandering around the countryside in search of housing and work, to her birthplace. In Budapest she met her second husband, my stepfather Lajos Honti, who was a policeman and the father of three sons from his previous marriage, another broken family that was far from the socialist norm.

My parents spent the late 1950s and the 1960s in a vicious open and often symbolic custody battle. However, the courts ruled in favor of my mother, requiring father to pay child support until I turned eighteen in 1971. When my mother received her diploma as a pastry chef, in Cegléd in 1961, she finally managed to recover and build a new identity by completely breaking with her

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9 There was another document in my father's possession that describes this horrifying event. It is an official letter written by the local Social Committee in Lajosmizse certifying that Magda Hajdrik was fully responsible for the death of her daughter on September 8, 1953. It is stamped and signed by several individuals and dated January 6, 1956. My father obviously wanted to use this in the context of the custody hearings. Apparently, however, the courts believed the mother rather than the artist "father".

past. She had separated from my father, put the acting career behind her for good, and prevailed as a strong and independent mother and breadwinner.<sup>10</sup>

But as the Diary makes plain, the court decision and the socialist state's pro-child policy was one thing; the continuation of the battle between the two parents was another. At one point my father decided to kidnap me from my mother's home in Budapest:

*"In February, 1955, Magda simply took our son, went to Budapest, and gave him to a woman to take care of him. The child caught cold in the unheated apartment and got some sort of rash. On February 10<sup>th</sup> I got a permit from the City Council and together with a nurse I broke into the apartment and took my child from the vicious woman. I immediately arranged a nursery home for my son, a place where they were shocked at his bad condition. This is how I saved my son's life from his careless mother. On March 23, she took him to her sister's place in Kengyel. From that date on we have been living separately." (Diary, 1955: 36–37)<sup>11</sup>*

What is clear from these pages is that each of my parents felt justified in their actions and viewed the other as a cunning and evil person committing illegal acts of abuse. In his analysis of British divorce narratives, Bob Simpson (1997: 56) suggests that

"such narratives are particularly revealing in that the breach they seek to repair concerns the fundamental and paradigmatic notions of family and its constituent elements such as 'fatherhood', 'motherhood', 'love' and 'marriage'."

Similarly, my father's autobiographical narrative sought to define his new identity as a person recently divorced, a loving father, a single man, a protector and the head of a broken but nevertheless still existing family.<sup>12</sup> Strangely, but by no means unexpectedly, in this redefinition he was constantly in conflict with the socialist state even though he was, according to relatives, neighbors and even acquaintances, a peaceful, quiet, and gentle person.<sup>13</sup>

In 1955, when he was travelling with the "Ifjúsági Cirkusz" (Youth Circus), he uttered an unfortunate phrase that was blown out of proportion and interpreted as political. No doubt my father already had a police record before this time, mostly because of his religious world-view, but he also got involved

10 The only reference to her acting past was a series of photos she commissioned of herself. In these she is presented in an alluring way as a beautiful geisha.

11 The letter cited in Note 9 also describes this event. This letter was used as "official" evidence that my mother was an unfit parent and incapable of caring for me.

12 As he writes touchingly: "Since I received the title to our house—in return for my services for my parents—my salary has become less and less, especially since I have to earn for four people. By four I mean: my father and mother, my son—to whom I send child support every month, and, finally, myself" (Diary, 1956: 46).

13 In the Diary my father writes: "I never touch things that belong to others. I do not like to tease others, I have never lied in my life. I do drink alcohol—only sweet liqueurs, but with moderation. I have never been drunk, and I think I never will be... I do not like smoking... as a rule I never curse" (Diary, 1955: 4).

in local events during the 1956 revolution. What actually took place can only be pieced together from diverse, often contradictory, sources, for like all those who were too young to experience the events of 1956, I never had the chance to relate personally to what actually took place in Hungary at that time. For most of the Kádárist period, during 1957 and 1988, we were given the “silent treatment”, except for the official line of lies about the counter-revolutionary activities of hooligans and riff-raff causing turmoil, unnecessary upheaval, and capitalist attempts to overthrow the communist government. With the rediscovery of personal documents, my indifference to and partial belief in official propaganda suddenly changed.<sup>14</sup>

When citizens gathered in the town square of Lajosmizse, a small group of radicals encouraged bystanders to take weapons from the local police station. The few policemen barricaded themselves behind closed doors, and as the townspeople gathered in front of the station someone shot through the windows, killing two innocent demonstrators. During the main gathering in the central square, a small performance was organized: people sang patriotic songs, played music, and made speeches. Being a man of culture and a performer, my father felt, and rightfully so, that this was also his moment. The only lines I can read in his Diary are:

*“On November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1956, I went to Budapest again. Since everyone was on strike, there was no bus or train service. I hitched a ride with a truck that carried food to the revolutionaries in the nation’s capital. I was shocked by the devastation on both Úllői and Rákóczi Streets.” (Diary, 1956: 50)*

Then he writes in his usual factual style about what he actually did during the revolutionary days:

*“During the night of March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1957, policemen came and took me in. I was guilty of only one thing. During the revolutionary program, I recited the patriotic poem ‘Hungarians, ARISE!’ For this I spent ten days in jail. On April 20<sup>th</sup> I joined the Happy Circus on a nation-wide tour.” (Diary, 1957: 51)<sup>15</sup>*

Paul Bouissac (1976: 6–7) makes an apt remark with reference to circuses when he says that “certain negative or unpleasant situations are commonly

14 Unfortunately, in my father’s Diary there are only a few lines about his involvement, and some of these were blacked out, obviously as a conscious act in fear of consequences.

15 From other recollections, this story seems quite authentic, and some Lajosmizse citizens who were active in 1956 still remember my father performing on the makeshift stage. There are two narratives of the 1956 events in Lajosmizse: one from János Páldeák, who served a jail sentence because of his involvement; the other from the policemen who were charged with the murders (but later acquitted). According to Páldeák, during the late afternoon or early evening of October 26, 1956, groups gathered in the main square in a festive mood. At that point, my father is remembered as follows: “Laci Szikora took the microphone” (see “Kik voltak? Mit akartak?”, in *Lajosmizse és Vidéke*, Vol. II, No. 11, November, 1991, 11, p. 3). The song my father started to sing was the patriotic Kossuth song, an 1848 song of liberation, and “Hungarians Arise!” (Talpra magyar) is a similar patriotic poem that was popular during the 1956 events.

characterized as being circus-like.” With Bouissac, then, we may certainly argue that the socialist milieu of the late 1950s was indeed a socialist circus. While tens of thousands opted for emigration, hundreds faced execution or sentences up to life imprisonment; by the spring of 1957 life had returned to “normality”. As show trials of revolutionaries were mounted, factories slowly restarted production and, for the time being, state socialism regained the upper hand. The country’s artistic life also received a serious facelift; the traveling circuses, with their amusements, wild animals and acrobats, also came in handy for the state in search of legitimacy. Slowly the country started on the road to “goulash Communism”.

My father was one of the lucky few: he did not serve a jail sentence, but managed to get off with a few slaps in the face. This is a piece of information he was probably too frightened to preserve in his Diary, and I was told about it by an uncle, who even in 1989 still whispered the story. Maybe this miniature victory—survival—encouraged my father to step up his campaign against my mother and the state. Performing as a clown and playing music in circuses and in the restaurant, he wanted to show that against all odds he was still managing, was still in control. This was the year when he noted in the Diary that my mother began a vicious court battle for custody. His real concern became earning enough money to keep up the house, taking care of his elderly parents, and of course maintaining some sort of contact with me. Among all his troubles with the authorities, my father recorded only one incident in which he had to rely on the police during one of the domestic disputes, events that my mother actually described as the “family circus”:

*“On March 16, 1959, I visited my son in Jászkarajenő, a village where they lived at that time. The mother was extremely aggressive toward me; she kept screaming that I had no right to visit the child. I went to the police station and I asked for a police escort. One policeman came with me. We went to the store where I bought six hundred forints’ worth of presents for my son. Then we both went to the kindergarten to see my son. The police asked if I paid child support. I told them yes (250 forints per month) and this is the reason why I have the right of visitation.” (Diary, 1959: 59)<sup>16</sup>*

There is no question in my mind that both my parents wanted to avoid such meetings and reliance on the police in dealing with me. In the Diary there are also other entries that mention the meetings between him and me, meetings that my mother probably also knew about. The few meetings, however, were arranged secretly by my father and by two of my mother’s brothers.

With all the difficulties my father had, he tried to maintain contact with me through material things as well. He overextended himself by buying and sending me gifts that I rarely received. Only after reading the Diary did I realize how much he had sent, and how much my mother had lied about it all.

16 The small settlement, Jászkarajeno, is a few kilometers from Törtel. My mother and her older brother Sándor worked in Jászkarajeno for a few years. At that time, six hundred forints was about two weeks of my father’s salary.

She made sure I did not receive most of them. My father was very sad that his efforts were in vain and he heard no news of me.

The packages and messages stopped after my mother managed to obtain a restraining order against my father. As she told me several times: "He was harassing me and causing unnecessary friction in our family." This obviously worked, and my father had to give up conspiring against my mother, give up his efforts to keep in touch with me, and maintain his identity as a father.

As a musician his earnings were modest, but he only complains once in his Diary of the difficulties: taking care of his parents and using up his hard-earned savings to fix up the house and the garden as he tried to make ends meet. It was surely a difficult project, but he did not give up. As he wrote, "I have faith as well as hope" (Diary, 1964: 80). He certainly needed both, for he was becoming lonelier. In 1968 he buried his stepfather; in 1976 his mother. According to his work permit (Munkakönyv), he stopped playing music at the *Kakukk*, which was demolished soon afterward. On February 9th, 1980, he received a new official status: he was retired.

Completely separated from my father, my mother and my stepfather tried until 1974 to act like a harmonious family, an artificial unit that in reality was neither harmonious nor a unit. In that year my mother and I left Hungary with tourist visas and, after six months as immigrant workers in Germany, decided to settle in the United States of America. I now know that my mother was unhappy and dissatisfied with her second husband. She realized that the socialist state's promises were empty: the socialist family was neither socialist (liberal, balanced and respectful), nor a genuine family. Most working-class families managed to stay together by force of communist ideology, but without shared goals, feelings of togetherness and cohesiveness. Just as before, she wanted much more. But strangely enough, even living as immigrants in America, the complex web of our earlier family relations continued to haunt both of us. First my mother's second husband decided to file for divorce in her absence, an act that broke my mother's heart. Not knowing what to do and how to fight for her rights, she cried for days and nights on end. I did not understand her tears; I believed that this was the best thing that could happen to her. I was wrong.

Living in exile and far away from her homeland, my mother shed tears not only for the lost years and lost hopes: she mourned for her youth, but even more for all the broken promises. She kept telling me about how bad men really are, how they mistreat women, and how she would never have married anyone if she had had a chance to start her life all over again. Ironically, but not unexpectedly, she also felt antagonism toward other women: to her, all women were whores. She also felt that the state was the cause of all her troubles. For one, she blamed the Hungarian socialist state, which, for all its political rhetoric, did not allow her to become what she wanted in her life; it did not support her pursuit of a real profession. Slowly she came to the realization

that women were only good for the state as long as they were willing producers and silent reproducers.<sup>17</sup> She felt that no one was interested in her efforts to get an even break. At the end of her life, she spent all her energies fighting the state as well as her second husband. She wanted him to pay for everything—for the lost years, the unfulfilled dreams, and all the suffering. We did not agree, for I was eager to see a compromise and willing to forget as well as to forgive.

Besides the shock of mistreatment by her second husband, she had to deal with a deeper and much more troubling scar from the past. In 1981, an unexpected letter arrived one day from my uncle saying that my father had had a stroke and had been taken to the regional hospital in Kecskemét. We decided to call him up with the hope of repairing what had been lost. But it is difficult, if not altogether impossible, to reconcile the past with the present. All we could do was exchange a few words with my father, a minuscule reparation for his two decades of waiting and not hearing from me. Two days later he passed away holding two pictures in his hands: one showed him and me together, and the other was the only picture of him with my mother. These are the only pictures left of us with him, but sadly—and curiously—there is not a single picture of all of us together. I wonder now whether such a picture was ever taken at all.

## Conclusions

This story, I must concede, is not unusual. In itself it provides some personal glimpses into the history of a family and some intimate, often tragic, accounts of a family's life under state socialism. Yet most such private stories and family biographies—which are the flesh and blood of current anthropological and historical writing—are fascinating. They are miniatures of the society at large, and this is exactly the question I want to ask: What can we make of diaries and recollections framed as written narratives? What is the real utility of such sources for the individual, for the scholarly community and for comparative scientific pursuits? What can we understand from this autobiographical reconstruction about state socialism? These questions do not have simple or unambiguous answers.

Without turning to the broader theoretical question of whether these stories are indeed “narratives” (Rosaldo 1993: 127-143), or whether they may be called “accounts” (Orbuch 1997: 459), I am more intrigued by the question of how they really work as autobiographical family stories (Okely and Callaway

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17 I have written about some of the problems of a systematical gender bias toward women in the state socialist period (Kürti 1991).

1992) balancing past events. The members of my family have used them in constructing their selves, organizing their views and locating themselves in the past through the process of storytelling. What is clear from the above is that one fundamental benefit of utilizing personal stories, diaries, and autobiography is the definite closeness one achieves to past events.

Reading about things historical is often a mechanical task that offers no opportunity to feel something approaching an experience of them. Mainstream and official histories written from the perspectives of global interrelationships and abstract configurations often do not provide us with detailed knowledge of local events. More important, however, we need to acknowledge—and I must admit this on the basis of my autobiographical family ethnography—that private (family) histories, like collective and societal histories, may be extremely painful and filled with lies, evasions, and silences. Autobiographical family narratives may assist in recovering some of the lost feelings and balance the opposing versions of histories.

Remembering and rediscovering the past is never easy; it is certainly far from being a joyful undertaking, for the more we search, the more we unearth facets of our lives that we are not ready to accept. This is how I felt when, in 1992, after much debate and soul-searching I returned to Hungary and settled in my paternal home town.<sup>18</sup> I was not really ready to learn the ugly truth about my little sister's death from elders in Lajosmizse who had lived through those difficult years and still remembered that horrible accident. Others in Lajosmizse have constantly reminded me of how much I resemble my father: my eyes, my body, and my manner of speaking. Others maintain that my face resembles that of my mother. Every day I am reminded that there is no escape from the legacies that frame me and make me what I am. The realization that one should not, and cannot, escape from the shadow of one's ancestors may be burdensome to those not willing to accept such legacies.

Naturally it is difficult to judge in retrospect that was right or wrong in regard to the denials and lies about what took place, both in a family's history and in society at large (Bailey 1991; Barnes 1994). There are many questions; nevertheless, which raise moral issues about rights and wrongs in the past. These questions become more important when they concern the author or the scholar who is facing a painful side of fieldwork, or when an investigation involves a return home (Clifford 1997; Houseman 1998). As far as the personal aspects of the past are concerned, there are various choices involved in the question of whether parents have the right to deny children their past in order to spare them the immediacy of trauma. Based on my autobiographical story, I believe that individuals, like groups and societies, need opportunities to remember, and narratives of and from the past may make that task easier, even if the memories are painful and filled with traumatic experiences.

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18 This symbolic return, however, was also followed by a more conscious professional decision and practice (see, for example, Kürti 1996, 1999).

Moreover, we as scholars and educators may reap enormous benefits from autobiographical family narratives. They may educate us as no textbooks, films or outsiders' accounts can. Closeness to and emotion about historical events may make a world of difference to ourselves, to the informants we are emplotting and to others with whom we share these stories.

Now a final note is in order. My mother passed away in 1993 and in an act that required courage, although some relatives called it dishonorable, I decided to rebury my father, my mother, and my little sister in a common family grave. They rest in peace now in a way that was not possible for them in the past: together.

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*Vera Sparschuh*

## The Biographies of the Biographers: Some Remarks on the History of the Social Sciences in GDR

Regarding the biographical ramifications of social revolutions it is important to ask: In what way was the constitution of state communist societies interwoven with the emergence of specific biographical patterns? The importance of this question even today is apparent in all contemporary examples of societies in transition. Reunited Germany presents a historically unique case in the sense that the indoctrinated, trained, “certified GDR citizen”<sup>1</sup> and the earlier West German federalist now find themselves living together in one country. Moreover, certain communication problems have begun to appear: in curious everyday observations of one another, and fundamentally, in the ignorance or at least incomprehension of each other’s biographies.

East Germans’ attitudes toward their own biographies appear to be highly ambivalent. On the one hand, they suffer constantly from feelings of inferiority in the shadow of their Western counterparts, and on the other hand they cannot accept the form of patriotism demanded by the Communist state. After 1989, these former GDR citizens developed not only a new federalist identity, but also a politically nostalgic, regressively oriented one. This development can be explained, however, by examining their biographies directly. Their personal histories received little attention in the GDR.

In the GDR, biographies played an insignificant role. Individuals had an official CV or resume, but were otherwise interesting only to the extent that they were members of a collective entity, a group. As I recall, essential biographical experiences—not just names and dates of kindergarten and primary schools, secondary schools and finally vocational or professional training, but pivotal events or exceptional family histories—were only exchanged in very intimate relationships.

“Biographical thinking” began only after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Then countless volumes with a biographical orientation appeared; GDR history was no longer officially written, but rather told. In the process, it called itself increasingly into question.

The essential initiative towards this biographical re-evaluation process came from the Western social sciences. And what did East German social

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1 A phrase that appeared shortly after 1989.

scientists, whose business it should have been to compile biographies, contribute during this phase?

Unfortunately, very little. What has been said above of the GDR as a whole—that biographies played a minor role<sup>2</sup>—seems to be true of East German sociology as well. Today of course sociologists often claim in individual retrospection that they have always thought biographically and tried to integrate qualitative methods into their work (cf. e.g. Meyer 1996), yet like so many other statements given today, that seems to me to require explanation.<sup>3</sup> Such a declaration is nostalgic, regressively-oriented and untenable: it ignores the significance in the GDR of a philosophical attitude which was primarily oriented toward the discovery of “objective” laws and saw itself as situated within the tradition of positivistic, humanitarian, Enlightenment philosophy. When coupled with a class-conscious dependent notion of truth, this philosophy was ultimately developed *ad absurdum*. The entire methodology also influenced sociologists’ self-definition: they considered themselves as subordinate parts of the dominant whole and therefore neglected their own biographical experience.

Nevertheless, I would like to talk about the history of the sciences and specifically about biography in the history of the social sciences in the Soviet-occupied zone, which later became known as the German Democratic Republic. I have studied the peculiarities of this history intensely in the past few years, analyzing the subject matter treated and discussed in the field of social sciences, and conducting interviews with participants in that field.<sup>4</sup>

But is this subject important? Must not political responsibilities, ideological restraints and misguided institutional developments be discussed first and foremost in this context? Certainly—and that has been diligently performed in the last few years in connection with GDR sociology and its participants, while the rest has been forgotten.<sup>5</sup> The central idea of this presentation, however, is that this is not enough. The reference to biographies as a perspective on the history of the sciences brings to light significant new in-

2 In this sense, the title of this paper is somewhat misleading.

3 GDR literature was often of sociological significance due to its essentially individualistic character, its tendency to resist conventional, state-supported, collective, class-conscious treatment in its emphasis on the individual.

4 In 1997 Sparschuh and Koch published a book about the founding generation of GDR sociology. It is a treatment of the sociological (or “sociogenetic”, to use Mannheim’s term) rather than the ideological history of sociology in the GDR. Twenty sociologists from the GDR were interviewed. During the analysis I found that it is also crucial to understand the history of sociology in the GDR as a history of generations. In the 1997 book, only the founding generation was considered, but these “founders” cannot be understood without their teachers. The interview with Robert Schulz, to which I refer here, is included in the 1997 book. A closer examination of this generation (whom I call the “activists”) has not yet been made. The following interpretation of the interview with Robert Schulz is my first attempt on this topic.

5 Cf. for example the collection by Bosch and Fehr (1998).

sights for the interpretation of the development of science, and of GDR history in general.

I would like to address these aspects in the following, and to propose two introductory theses.

*Thesis 1:* The development of state socialist societies after World War II attracted the full attention of political historians. Thus the advent of state socialism often appeared to be an event which, in historical terms, was able to establish itself in a brief amount of time.

Repression and political violence were the defining points of departure for these societies, and characterized them until their very end. Equally characteristic, however, is the fact that these societies, due to their long existence and history, had to face the problem of integrating diverse biographies in the process of socialization. Levada (1992) finds, in reference to the Soviet Union, that it is possible to identify a crucial generation for the establishment of state socialism, i.e. a single generation that entered social life and took over leading positions in society between the beginning of the 1930s and the middle of the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> These persons brought their biographies with them upon entering the system. The incorporation of these biographies into the political structures further structured and diversified this process.

For this reason I argue that it is necessary to put the focus on the *process*, both in the case of the Russian revolution, and in the introduction of socialism in the Soviet occupied zone in East Germany. The revolution should not be seen primarily as a brief historical event in which a new power and ideology suddenly became established. What should interest us are the processes, the way in which this power was established. In this manner, historical documents of the period—including sociological analyses and biographies—once again become new and interesting.<sup>7</sup> I find this distinction is also necessary in order to understand today's transitions.

*Thesis 2:* The same can be said of the history of the sciences: here too it seems as though Marxism/Leninism had appeared upon the stage overnight. What at first seems to be reducible to fixed dates—the Sovietization of the humanities and social sciences in the GDR, i.e. the institutionalization of Marxist/Leninist theories, is increasingly evident from 1949 on—is actually a process in which political planning, institutional re-organization, scientific content and scientists themselves interact.<sup>8</sup> Even if the thesis that GDR sociology is to be viewed primarily as a political institution<sup>9</sup> is correct, it is nonetheless interesting from a biographical perspective to retrace how the characteristics of this process developed, and how it was structured by individual

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6 Also called the generation of “completely Sovietized persons” (Levada 1992: 31).

7 Compare Alla Chernykh's (1998) work.

8 The same can be said of sociology in Russia in the 1920s.

9 See the summary of the discussion about sociology in the GDR in H. Bertram (1997).

participants. In the case of sociology it should be noted that the first flourishing of this discipline, initially banned in the context of the Stalinization of the GDR, was not a result of its official readmission<sup>10</sup> in 1964: it had been budding earlier as scientists attempted to keep sociology in the GDR alive. One of the founding fathers of this discipline in the fifties will be introduced here. In the following presentation I will be relating to the biography of one of the GDR sociologists I interviewed; the biography that was endorsed, authorized, and published by the person in question. Because he has published his biography, there is no need to provide him with a pseudonym. The entire interview with Robert Schulz, one of the founding fathers of sociology in the GDR, could be titled “The Search for Truth Using Sociological Evidence”.<sup>11</sup>

Before I explain a few points in detail, however, a brief introduction will be helpful. Schulz was born in 1914 as the son of a farmer in Baden, where he also attended the local gymnasium. He became a clerk because his family was too poor to send him to the university. A soldier from 1939 on, he was in Soviet captivity from 1943–46 near Stalingrad, where he survived the battle of encirclement. During his captivity, he learned the Russian language and attended an anti-fascist education program.

On his return to East Germany, his political development during captivity qualified him to serve as an instructor (1947–49) in a college preparatory program affiliated with the University of Leipzig while he studied the social sciences. After his graduation, with a thesis on social free-market economics, he became a Professor with teaching duties in 1951, even though he did not receive his doctoral degree until 1953. In 1955, he became actively involved in the struggle to have sociology admitted as an academic discipline in the GDR. This effort failed to overcome the opposition of the Party, however. Schulz soon experienced political repercussions, was suspended from teaching because of his “revisionism”<sup>12</sup> and because of his collaboration with Ernst

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10 One spoke, of course, not of re-admittance, but of the “construction” of sociology.

11 The interview with Robert Schulz is cited in this text as “Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997”.

12 The term “revisionism” was never clearly defined (Kolakowski 1988: 117). It first appeared at the end of the 19th century in criticism of E. Bernstein in reference to a revised interpretation of Marxism, i.e. one adapted to new historic conditions. Later the term degenerated into a pejorative aimed at any deviation from a doctrinaire Marxism. Under Lenin and to a much greater extent under Stalin, regular campaigns were mounted against revisionists, social democrats, and other deviationists. Beginning in the mid-1950s, in the wake of the 20th Party Congress in the Soviet Union and the Hungarian rebellion of 1956, this policy was reconsidered by intellectuals in the GDR, who aimed for a full examination of the related past experiences. These efforts were themselves branded “revisionist” and “counter-revolutionary” by the SED leadership, and their proponents were prosecuted. The public trial of W. Harich and W. Janka is well known. In this context, sociology was seen as a “bourgeois, revisionist” science incompatible with Marxism and Historical Materialism.

Bloch.<sup>13</sup> After 1959, however, he was gradually reintegrated into the system, as signs of a reform policy multiplied. Finally, in 1960, the Party leadership raised the question of why there was no sociology in the GDR. In 1965 Schulz became Chairman of the Department of Sociology in Leipzig. He retired in 1979.

Using the experiences of Robert Schulz as an example, we may trace this period on the following two levels: on the level of the ideological premises established by those in power—first the repression of sociology and then its development subject to ideological structures—which represented the norms in force throughout Schulz's life; and on the level of the actual scientific disposition, the true frame of mind which Schulz developed as a scientist, and which manifests itself in his biographical history.

In answering the question how he came to sociology, the biographer reaches far back into the past. He tells of his childhood in Baden and mentions his first contacts with philosophy and social philosophy in secondary school. It is important here to note that he views this encounter as fundamental for his later development: "Here the foundations were laid" (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 35). One could view these "foundations" merely as a reference to the beginnings of a scientific interest. Another plausible interpretation, however, is that the first elementary notions of a scientific standard *also* begin to develop. We will return to this important point later. Growing up near the French border, the biographer develops, as a further biographical characteristic, a healthy attitude toward foreign languages. He learns French as well as Latin and Greek. Furthermore, this interest in languages, and in learning in general, made him less dependent on circumstances: during his military service in France he took a translators' examination; during his captivity in the Soviet Union he began learning Russian.

Schulz relates little about his activities during the war. He was on active duty at the front from 1939 until 1943. As a prisoner of war, he was present throughout the siege of Stalingrad, which must have been a traumatic experience. However, Schulz talks more about his time as a prisoner than about the siege itself. While others are concerned with their plight of disease and starvation and can think of nothing else, he studied:

*"The others spoke, the Austrian, about Powidldatscherln (a sweet dish), about the hunger in the infirmary, and I sat down in the corner and learned Russian."* (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 36)

To study or to learn something seems to become a survival strategy for Schulz. This point is extremely important for his further biographical development. During the 1992 interview, Schulz explains that his knowledge of foreign languages and his belief in scientific standards were to become a

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13 Ernst Bloch: philosopher, 1885–1977, after World War II professor at the University of Leipzig, forced into retirement in 1957, moved to West Germany in 1961.

major reason for his problems in the GDR: they “spelled his doom” by making him different from the normative pattern of a simple Marxist-Leninist social scientist. On the other hand, as we shall see below, it is precisely these qualities that helped him to survive without giving in to ideological pressure.

After mastering Russian, he visited the POW camp library and was disappointed with the available selection on political economy. On his return to Leipzig in 1946, he worked as a translator in a refugee camp and began studying economics. He is struck by the “weak theories”.

Here Schulz discusses his first experiences with Marxism. His previous experiences, especially during the war, convinced him of the necessity for studying this theory. Although the dogmatic Stalinist Marxism that was then being introduced in East Germany does not correspond to Schulz’s conception of traditional Marxist theory, he did have the opportunity to study other undogmatic versions of Marxism.

Schulz mentions that he attended Ernst Bloch’s lectures while studying in Leipzig from 1947 until 1950. Bloch, who had studied with Georg Simmel and later experienced the radical ideas of Fascism, had chosen to live in socialist East Germany, and taught at the University of Leipzig until 1957. There he was able to show his students the foundations of a Marxist philosophy which had nothing to do with political doctrines. Through the lectures of Bloch, Schulz also had the opportunity to learn about sociology and was able to integrate it with Marxism.

In 1951, when the passage of the second Education Reform Act made Marxism-Leninism a required subject at the university, Schulz is involved to a considerable extent in the process of education reform. Luckily, however, he does not have to work in a completely dogmatic environment. By chance he meets a high-ranking administrator whose secretary he knows from his years in Soviet captivity, and thanks to this connection he obtains a position under Fritz Behrens, a renowned GDR economist (later to become an architect of the country’s market liberalization) charged with organizing the social science faculty. As Behrens’s assistant, Schulz is able for the first time to undertake theoretical work and receives stimulating criticism. Of course, he is obliged to teach Marxism-Leninism, which was taught not as theory, but as dogma. Reflecting upon this, Schulz states: “Marxism must be read, but instead it was regularly stuffed into the students’ heads” (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 38).

Simultaneously, he was overburdened with administrative duties and was even named acting director of the social science institute. Given his limited knowledge of the field, he considered himself incompetent for the post. He was baffled by the political treatment of the scientific community, and asked himself: What is the Party doing to its cadres? He did not view the new beginning as optimistically as some of the younger representatives of the founding generation, who for the most part seized the opportunity to climb

the social, political, or career ladders. Schulz's conception of science was at variance with the conception of the dogmatic party machine and with the policy of developing a scientific cadre. He did not actively oppose policies at that time, but instead attempted to work as much as possible. Thus he tells how, after being named Director, he spent most of his time reading in the library.

Later Ernst Bloch shows an interest in him and attempts to recruit him for his Institute of Philosophy, offering him a post teaching Historical Materialism which he has been obliged to create. Schulz agrees, and at long last feels that he is in a position which suits his talents, both academically and administratively. Under the name of Historical Materialism, Schulz does not begin teaching orthodoxy, but rather uses the opportunity to practice sociology. He spends 1955 and 1956 lecturing on social theory.

In 1955 he travels with philosophy students to New Brandenburg to study the processes of radical change caused by the agricultural policies of the GDR. He assigns a student to carry out an analysis of the conditions of working women. The student plans to question women working in a department store. On the morning the study is scheduled to begin, Schulz finds himself facing two men in long leather trench coats in his office, the confiscated questionnaires spread out on the desk before him. He is subsequently accused of leading students astray and trying to disturb the peace of an honorable institution. The Party secretary of Leipzig asks him sarcastically, "So, Robert, what's this I hear about sociology?" (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 46).

In retrospect, Robert interpreted this phase of personal accusations brought against him, as the rejection of sociology. He was a "revisionist" who wanted to establish "a bourgeois, middle-class science" in place of Marxism. He read Western sources, worked with bourgeois concepts, and associated too much with Western colleagues at conferences. Schulz's earlier notions about social philosophy, his cosmopolitan orientation had come full circle. He sealed his own fate by explaining his international contacts at conferences simply by saying that he, unlike other GDR scientists, *was able* to communicate easily with them.

He was described as "being out of touch with the Party, harmful, dangerous, and positivistic", and was barred from setting foot in the Institute. At his trial,<sup>14</sup> he receives severe censure (although he was not dismissed from the Party due to his time in the Soviet Union), and is *de facto* unemployed.

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14 The case of Robert Schulz actually was dealt with by a "trial-like" Party meeting at which the accusations and verdicts were determined. At the same time, the GDR courts of the Ulbricht period were hearing "juridical" cases and passing prison sentences on alleged counter-revolutionaries. One example is the trial of Walter Janka mentioned above. Because the efforts to establish sociology were hardly publicized, however, the disciplinary measures taken against them were effected more quietly than in Janka's publicized case.

At this point, why didn't Schulz come to the logical conclusion and move to the West, as Bloch did? The drama of the original situation can still be felt in Schulz's 1992 narration. Schulz tells of a colleague who hanged himself during a similar trial, and wonders how he himself was able to withstand the pressure. Schulz refers above all to his personal situation. His wife, who clearly took his side during the ordeal, held a steady job and felt that they could survive in the GDR even without the university. She did not want to leave Leipzig because of her parents. But in the interview, alongside this private moral support, one finds repeated references to his belief in the truth of his conception of science. During the phase of the trial in which he was given time to "think things over" (i.e., to confess and recant), he remembers repeatedly reviewing his notes and thinking, "I'll stand by my position, come what may" (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 47). This position was substantially tied to the conviction that social analyses and logical reasoning should stand above ideological cant. The foundations laid earlier in life helped him to defend himself internally against the accusations, and were solid enough to enable him to withstand massive political pressure.

If one follows the interpretation of the biographer himself, one can see how his biographical experiences and scientific convictions hurt him later in East German sociology. Although he considered this to be a setback, it was actually necessary in order to re-establish sociology in the GDR: he never gave up his efforts to practice sociology, even though he was harshly criticized for them.

Schulz remained in the GDR, and it seems as though the Establishment began to move in his direction a few years later. Schulz recalls a trip that Ulbricht made with a delegation of the Central Committee to Russia, including the Baikal Sea and Novosibirsk. Sociology departments were already in operation in Moscow, Leningrad, and Novosibirsk. Ulbricht returned to the GDR and asked his Party colleagues: "Why isn't there any sociology in the GDR?"

From the perspective of former GDR Minister of Education Böhme, who at that time was the Party secretary for Berlin, the matter was presented to Schulz in this way:

*"Robert, your Party censure has just been annulled. All is forgiven. Come back. We have been criticized. The largest and second largest universities [i.e. Leipzig] and no sociology. And in Berlin and Rostock they're beginning to develop sociology. You'll get the positions, whatever you want..." (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 49)*

A great deal has been written about the late 1960s and early 1970s. But even if much of that history seems glorified, it is certain that the period was one of relative tolerance. During this period, the development of sociology in the GDR was directed to a large extent by the scientists themselves. There were various groups working independently of one another who met regularly for round table discussions (organized by themselves, on weekends). There

evolved at this time a true forum for the open exchange of ideas. "And it was a wonderful time too. We were able to do a lot of things here in sociology from around 1962 to about 1975" (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 50). However, the Party machine increasingly intervened in this process. In 1964 a Party research center was formed which soon commanded a leading role. In this way the process of institutionalization of sociology through the Party was set in motion, and ultimately the necessary autonomy for independent scientific development was not attained.

Controls from above as well as within the institute—the social scientists were generally Party members—became routine, part of the daily drudgery. Journals were shut down, the polling research institute was closed, and Schulz himself experienced the political power structure's inability to learn from experience. Thus he reports how a well-prepared and well-executed analysis of data on working youth produced the result that acceptance of the trade unions among them was low (about 4%). When Schulz published the result, he was branded by a high-ranking party official as "the professor there with his 4%". This blatant disdain for social findings disgusted him; it ran counter to the rational foundations of his thinking. He concludes:

*"And now I have to say that sociology did not have a chance, because in the leading circles of the Party as well as in the scientific community, there were enemies of the truth in connection with sociological evidence."* (Schulz in Sparschuh and Koch 1997: 54)

I would like to leave the biographical record at this point and take up a thesis formulated at the outset, using the insights just gained concerning both Schulz's personal life and the general development of sociology in East Germany.

In the introduction I mentioned the processual nature of the reciprocal relationship between systems in transition and biography. The most conspicuous feature in the biography outlined above is the development of a scientific disposition. This has structured Schulz's life, beginning with the transmission of social philosophy by his secondary school teachers. From his attempt to teach social philosophy in the GDR to his collaboration in the effort to establish empirical social research, and even in the insight that this effort must fail owing to the narrow-mindedness of the powers that be—it is the "early foundations" and their development that run through his life. But at the same time, this specific lifestyle structures social developments. Schulz combines pre-war scientific attitudes, such as thorough knowledge, curiosity about foreign cultures, and respect for the traditions of science, with his political experience in World War II, and sees for himself the chance to become a scientist in East Germany. He is fascinated by the idea of participating in the new beginning. However, it is important to note that his pro-Communist convictions (originating in his years of captivity and, more specifically, in his political schooling in the Soviet Union) do not eradicate his original attitude. On the con-

trary, it is his language interest, even as a prisoner of war in Russia, that first brings him into contact with political topics; and even here, as we have seen, he is able to retain some distance from strict Marxist dogma.

Thus it was that thanks to the particular biographical characteristics of a scientist, the education reform that was intended as a Marxist-Leninist alternative to "bourgeois, capitalist science" became a back-door attempt to redevelop sociology under the conditions of state socialism.

It is worth noting once again that scientific habits of mind such as we have described above were not dominant in the GDR. These particular biographical characteristics were often found in representatives of the generation born before 1915. I refer to this generation as the "activists" of GDR sociology. They had finished their studies before the foundation of the GDR, and therefore did not have a dogmatic perspective on science. Because of their experiences of war and fascism, they saw socialism as an interesting theoretical and practical experiment. They were willing to develop socialism, but were later frustrated by the actual outcome. Two examples of sociologists from this generation are Jürgen Kuczynski and Kurt Braunreuther.<sup>15</sup>

This generation is not identical with the "founding generation" of the GDR (*Aufbaugeneration*),<sup>16</sup> born between 1920 and 1929 (Niethammer et al. 1991; Zwahr 1994). The founding generation of sociology in the GDR were those born between 1927 and 1937, and yet their collective experiences follow the same lines as the socio-historical founding generation. They were children during the Hitler regime and World War II, yet completed their education in the GDR. Their careers were closely linked to the development of the GDR.

Both the activists and the founders were involved in the process of institutionalizing sociology in the GDR. The rapid process of institutionalization in the 1960s resulted in Schulz's students evolving, in the quickest way possible, into his colleagues, part of the founding generation. Schulz recalls that, for the publication of the first dictionary of sociology in 1967, mainly the "younger colleagues" brought with them "Hager's lines"<sup>17</sup> and determined what was printed. They were not as critical as the "activists." However, one must not over-generalize when talking about the "younger generation" or about representatives of the founding generation. This generation included various groups which influenced the institutionalization process of sociology in different ways. Among other factors, they differed with respect to their mentors. Many younger sociologists were fascinated by the scientific ideals of their mentors, yet refrained from following in their footsteps. But the experience of their generation was different. They finished school during or shortly after the war, and later experienced the radical university reform. Unlike their

15 Ernst Bloch was a representative of this generation in the field of philosophy.

16 Also called the "skeptical generation" (Schelsky 1957).

17 Kurt Hager, propaganda director on the Central Committee.

professors, they viewed the reform as a necessary break with scientific tradition. Finally they got their chance, upon acceptance of certain conditions, to climb the steep career ladder.<sup>18</sup> Thus several distinct groups in the founding generation acquired an understanding of serious science from their mentors, yet this understanding did not play a part in their scientific biographies.

It is not my intention to trace the entire process of institutionalization here. My objective was to shed some light on the many facets of this process by means of some biographical and generational particulars. I believe we have succeeded in pointing out a very special point at which interplay of forces prevents the unrestricted organization of a society from the top down.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

In closing I would like to cite Karl Martin Bolte, if only to hint at a more playful dimension, at the principal reason why, as mentioned at the outset, we cannot fully compare the development of sociology in East and West Germany with regard to scientific standards and outcomes, when considering the individual participants and their biographies:

*"In the early 90s, as I sat on the organizational and personnel committees for social studies during the reform of Humboldt University, I often wondered how differently my personal biography would have developed if back then I had stayed in the East." (1996: 143/144)*

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Ingrid Miethe

## Changes in Spaces of Political Activism: Transforming East Germany<sup>1</sup>

This paper deals with the shifting borders that people experienced within their own society during the processes of transformation following 1989, as things they had taken for granted were endangered overnight. I will focus on the biographies of a specific group, namely women who had been active in dissident groups in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). These examples serve to illustrate the meaning of the public and private spheres for political resistance in the GDR, and how the locus of political activity with respect to these spheres changed after 1989.

The full study (Miethe 1999a) is based on 30 narrative biographical interviews<sup>2</sup> conducted with female activists in dissident movements in East Germany. In evaluating the material, the focus was narrowed to one group, Women for Peace (*Frauen für den Frieden*). In the fall of '89 these women were among the principal local initiators of the civil rights movement New Forum (*Neues Forum*). Selected interviews were analyzed by means of hermeneutical case reconstruction (Rosenthal 1993, 1995).

In my usage of the terms "public" and "private", which are subject to a wide-ranging and controversial debate, I am drawing on two specific discourses. On the one hand I will show how these terms are used in research on (and in) Eastern Europe to explain resistance action, and on the other I will discuss a current within the feminist debate going on in Western Europe. Because political opposition in the GDR is a very special scene, this context must be described, especially with respect to the importance of public and private spaces. Two hermeneutical case reconstructions are then presented to illustrate the different meanings of public and private spaces for the political activity of dissident women, as well as the shifts that took place after 1989. Finally, I will point out areas in which these discourses can stimulate one another.

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1 The research reported here was conducted with the support of the Hans Böckler Foundation.

2 On this interview technique see Schütze 1976 and Rosenthal 1995: 186–201.

## **“Private”, “Public” and “Politics”: Confusing or Helpful Terms?**

The processes of transformation after 1989 have rekindled the debate about the public and the private in Eastern European research, as well as about what can be considered political (see for example Garcelon 1997; Keane 1998; Shlapentokh 1989; Studer and Unfried 1999). The attention devoted to these terms by both Western and Eastern European authors is an indication that the terminology seems to be helpful in understanding state-socialist societies, even though there is not yet any generally shared understanding of the terms themselves, or of their use in a conceptual framework.

The terms are used in widely varying contexts and with very different meanings. There are but few sociological terms which show such a correlation between inflationary use and analytical fuzziness as the pair “public” and “private” (cf. Lang 1997: 83). Depending on the individual perspective, the public sphere may be conceived as space or as activity, as a social or geographic locus, or as certain forms of action. Likewise, the private sphere is presented both as the space of family and household, and as a psychological expression for the personal or intimate.

The various terms used to denote an intermediate space, such as “private-public sphere”, “semipublic sphere”, “informal sphere”, “second society”, or “civil society”, are only provisional solutions to the terminological problem. The discussions and empirical studies published to date, however—especially on the former state-socialist countries—show that precisely this intermediate space was crucial, and can be very helpful in analysis. Yet it has been dealt with only rarely in conceptual work (see for example Voronkov and Chickadze 1997; Voronkov 2000).

All these attempts at definition have one thing in common, however: they all emphasize the difficulty of developing a “mapping” in both historically and epistemologically unambiguous boundaries, a political and sociological geography of the public and private spheres. Widely dissimilar scientific debates take place parallel to one another using the same terminology. For this reason I will explain what meanings can be attached to these terms in specific contexts, and which meanings I intend by their usage here. This debate has many nuances which cannot be presented here. Rather, I will limit my remarks to the two discourses which I found helpful in explaining the empirical phenomena encountered in my investigation and which, as described at the end of this article, might be further enriched by some of my empirical findings.

The two discourses brought together for discussion here are:

- first, a part of the feminist discourse as it is carried on primarily in Western Europe, and

— second, the discourse that takes place in and about Eastern Europe especially with respect to dissident movements.

What are the intentions of these two discourses in using the concepts of public and private?

*The Feminist Discourse: "The Private is Political!"*<sup>3</sup>

The feminist discourse as it is carried on in Western Europe generally questions the dichotomy between public and private spheres in society. The problem is that this split necessitates certain classifications. In classical political theory, the public sphere is associated with politics and masculinity. The private sphere by contrast is the apolitical space, and the sphere of women's action. More recent feminist concepts of the public sphere attempt to break down the dichotomies and hierarchies that have been established between public and private spaces. The risk inherent in this project, which was pointed out early on (Elshtain 1981), is that the terms lose their edge as analytical tools.

Two chief currents within feminist theory and practice can be distinguished for the sake of simplicity as the "compensation strategy" and the "differentiation strategy" (cf. Lang 1995: 105). The former draws on a liberal-democratic conception of politics that favors the preservation of a private sphere in the sense of a non-political space, and sets as its political goal a numerically increased representation of women in the public sphere. The latter is based on the concept that women have a different kind of experiential knowledge that requires its own forms of expression and its own language in the public sphere. "The private is political" became the well-known slogan of this position, pointing out that phenomena such as domestic violence are indeed political issues even if they take place in the private sphere. This is the position to which I will refer below.

*Eastern Europe: Was There a Non-Political Sphere?*

It is no coincidence that I introduce the Eastern European positions in the form of a question. The general form of the inevitable question is: Are the

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3 German: *Das Private ist politisch*. In the United States the corresponding slogan is "the personal is political". Although the two discourses discussed here are basically the same in the USA and in West Germany, the terminology used reflects slight differences. Whereas the US slogan is a way of resisting psychologizing rather than overcoming the limitations of the private sphere, the focus in West Germany is less "personal" and focuses more on the structural aspect of the private sphere. Psychological aspects are nonetheless important in Germany too, but are not the starting point of debate.

concepts developed for the most part in Western Europe and North America applicable to former state-socialist societies? The answers vary widely.

According to Habermas (1990), who is often referred to in this context, the public sphere is constructed strictly by procedure and language, and is always connected with an institutionalized location for a political discourse which is initially outside the bounds of relationships and structures that take the form of state or market. Since the existence and development of such a civil-society sphere were possible only in a rudimentary fashion in the state-socialist countries, it is highly questionable whether a "public sphere" can be assumed to have existed in these societies as it did in democratic societies. Accordingly, very detailed investigations are going on today to determine when and in what areas a similar sphere was able to develop, and to what degree it is actually comparable. In this context, the use of the same terms in describing state-socialist and democratic societies is often a hindrance, since the same terms had completely different meanings under state socialism from those assumed in reference to Western Europe.

As Britta Schmitt (1997: 60) observes, social spheres of action for which, in Western Europe, a gender subtext can be assumed (as indicated above), cannot be constructed on the basis of the same meanings. This is true of the public as well as the private sphere. Evidently it is very difficult to postulate a role of *citoyen*—and to underpin it with a male subtext—for state-socialist societies. The single-party state monopolized and controlled all social organizations. Men and women, under the same paternalistic yoke, were able to appear and express themselves publicly to the same degree. Furthermore, women's participation in politics was a substantial aspect of the model image of women in most states of the Eastern bloc (cf. Penrose 1993; Rueschemeyer 1998). Of course, self-expression and participation here do not imply a free exchange of opinion, but rather declarations of loyalty closely monitored by officials. "The structuring role here", writes Britta Schmitt (1997: 60), "was rather that of a domestic of unspecified gender. Whether a person appeared as a maid or a manservant in this sphere was of little importance."<sup>4</sup>

Role assignments for the private sphere are likewise doubtful. The traditional role of women in the private sphere was maintained almost intact (in spite of the emancipatory rhetoric of state ideologies), and the relationships of power and force within families were hardly better than in Western societies. Yet this is not the level at which the debate in Eastern Europe has been conducted (up to now). The question discussed in Eastern Europe is rather whether and where there was a private space at all in state-socialist socie-

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4 The upper echelons of power in state socialist societies remained closed to women, however (cf. Hampele 1993; Penrose 1993; Rueschemeyer 1998).

ties—a space that was inaccessible to the state.<sup>5</sup> In fact, it was just such a private space—at the “kitchen table” so often cited—that dissident action evolved.<sup>6</sup> Even if the actors themselves did not always conceive of their action as “political” or as “opposition” (Miethe 1999b, Tchouikina 2000), the state’s reaction to these private activities indicates that they were indeed perceived as highly political and as dangerous to the system. Because these discourses are situated at very different levels, the “non-political” private space which Western feminists either criticized or considered worth conserving—but in any case took for granted—was a source of irritation from the Eastern European point of view. The *question* once again is whether there ever was such a thing as a non-political private sphere.

Although this digression is incomplete, it should be clear by now that the discussion in and about Eastern Europe is sharply focused on defining what, in a system of state socialism, can be considered as private or public, how these spheres have shifted, and what their significance is for participants’ actions; and on showing that operating with the same terms that are applied to Western societies can easily lead to misunderstandings. With this in mind we can move on to a general description of the dissident scene in the GDR as part of an “intermediate space”, after which two case reconstructions can serve to illustrate the meaning of the various “spheres” and the shifts that occurred after 1989.

## Dissident Movements in East Germany: “With Bärbel at the Kitchen Table”

At the beginning of the 1980s dissident groups began to organize in the semi-public space under the auspices of the Protestant church.<sup>7</sup> These groups took up topics that were taboo in the GDR such as peace, human rights, environmental protection, and women’s issues. Whereas earlier opposition to the regime in East Germany had remained sporadic and episodic, the peace movement became the first organized and sustained movement to integrate nearly all political dissidents. This independent peace movement in the GDR began to develop in 1979.

Its rise was conditioned by several factors. It was provoked by a series of events initiated by the system itself. Attention to matters of war and milita-

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5 In the GDR, the immensity of the data amassed by the state security agency is evidence of how closely the so-called private sphere was monitored, and thus—even if the secret files cannot be called public—no longer private.

6 The “kitchen table” is a leitmotiv in practically all the literature on dissident activity in state socialist societies (cf. Tchouikina 2000 and the anthology Ruschemeyer 1998).

7 For an overview see for example Neubert 1997.

rism in the GDR grew considerably with the government's announcement in 1978 that it intended to introduce compulsory military education (*Wehrkundeunterricht*) in schools. In 1982 the planned inclusion of women in compulsory military service led to the development of the women's peace movement. The NATO "double-track decision" to station Pershing and Cruise missiles in West Germany in response to the Warsaw Pact's deployment of Soviet SS-20s in the East had given rise to a tremendous wave of pacifist sentiment on both sides of the German-German border (cf. Torpey 1995: 90).

While the state-sponsored "official" peace movement protested against the missiles in West Germany, the independent peace movement called for "beginning at home" and criticized the stationing of Soviet SS-20s on GDR territory. The GDR regime, which supported the peace movement in the West, could not totally repress a peace movement within its own borders. At the same time, the apparent contradiction between peace advocacy in foreign policy and domestic militarism provided an obvious target for opposition.

The Protestant church adopted the peace issue early on and later provided a haven for autonomous peace and other groups. In East Germany the Protestant church was the only institution free from state control. The role it played in the opposition movement is ambiguous, however. On the one hand it sheltered the groups and to a limited extent made public events and discussions possible. On the other hand, the GDR regime very soon learned to use the Protestant church as a buffer to neutralize domestic discontent and opposition. Opposition was tolerated as long as it remained within the church, but faced unyielding persecution as soon as it stepped outside (Joppke 1995: 83).

The dissident groups did not see themselves as direct opponents of the socialist state; rather, they strove to reform socialism. Their goals were to establish basic civil rights such as free speech, free and secret elections, and freedom to travel. Nonetheless, they increasingly acquired the role of a political opposition and an anti-establishment stance, and they were the direct precursors of the grassroots citizens' movements of fall 1989 that emerged publicly during the collapse of the GDR and took on a historical role they had never expected.

In each phase of the history of opposition in the GDR, women played a significant role, even when it was not explicitly a feminist one.<sup>8</sup> For a long time female dissidence remained the resistance of single women or of women in mixed-gender groups. The "Women for Peace" groups, founded in 1982, were the first major mobilization of women that attained a certain public visibility.<sup>9</sup> These groups formed in response to a government plan to include women in compulsory military service. Petitions (*Eingaben*), the only form of "legal" dissent, were circulated against the new draft law and signed by some

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8 On the different phases of female dissidence see Mieth 1999b: 4–8 and Mieth 2000a.

9 Women for Peace was initially organized in Berlin. Other subgroups were later founded in the other major cities of the GDR.

200 women, an extremely high number by East German standards. The regime backed down and left intact a network of women's peace groups under the umbrella of the Protestant church.

The women's peace groups considered themselves primarily as pacifist groups with a critical stance toward the regime, and only incidentally as women's groups (Miethé 1999b: 17, 2000a). The women used the official channels of protest—writing petitions to state agencies—and more importantly made use of critical church publicity, such as politically motivated worship services, prayers of supplication, grass-roots church councils (*Kirche von Unten*), and vigils. A small proportion of these groups consisted of women active in the church, and dealt with Christian topics such as feminist theology. The vast majority of the groups included Christian women and women active in the church, but considered the church mainly as an umbrella.

Private relationships and private spaces predominated in the political activity of the GDR opposition. Political action was always closely tied to personal friendship and friendship relations were the basis for the organization of dissident activity.<sup>10</sup> Most active groups formed along the lines of existing friendships and family relationships. Similarly, contacts among groups were established along the lines of personal relationships. It was thus perfectly normal for a group to have no contact with another group working on the same issues in the next town, but to communicate with a group interested in unrelated topics far away due to a personal relationship between members. Likewise, which of the various movements a person joined depended much more on personal acquaintance than on specific political positions.<sup>11</sup> The first calls to action of the civil rights movements in the autumn of 1989 were spread along these paths of communication.

Political workplaces were “in the kitchen”, “at Bärbel's kitchen table”<sup>12</sup>, “in the living room”, or “in Katja's garden”<sup>13</sup>. In this way politics took place in locations that, in contrast to the locations of formally institutionalized politics, held a traditionally female connotation. A conception of politics as a “work relation” or a job with set hours was totally alien to the dissidents.<sup>14</sup> Thus there was also no clear division between political activity and private life, as both were practically coterminous and confluent. The decision to raise

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10 As Vladimir Shlapentokh (1989: 172) wrote of the Soviet Union, for example, personal friendship was an obstacle to the absolute dominance of the state over the individual. Friendship frequently constitutes the basis for the creation of underground organizations and antigovernment activities of any sort.

11 The founding manifestos of the various groups of the civil rights movement are largely similar.

12 A reference to Bärbel Bohley, a well-known figure in the opposition movement.

13 The “New Forum” was founded in a garden belonging to Katja Havemann.

14 This is not true of dissident groups in all of Eastern Europe. Sofia Tchouikina writes that dissidents in the Soviet Union had a tendency to consider political activity their profession (cf. Tchouikina 2000).

one's children at home or to organize childcare among friends, for example, rather than subjecting the children to the influence of state ideology by sending them to the public kindergarten, was considered a political act.

On the other hand, the power of the state was always present in the form of the state security service. There was *no* opposition group that did not have at least one "unofficial employee" of the Ministry of State Security among its members, i.e. someone who reported whatever was discussed in the group. Most members of the groups were "handled" (*bearbeitet*) in personal or group-related "operational procedures" (*operative Vorgänge*). This "handling" entailed secret surveillance in all domains: secret searches of the home, telephone taps, reading mail, provocation of conflicts in marriages or friendships, and arrests and interrogations.<sup>15</sup> The mountains of state security files are clear evidence of the state's perception of these activities in the private or at most half-public space as threatening to its power, and thus as political.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, it makes perfect sense in this context to ask whether a space so minutely surveyed by the secret service can be called "private".<sup>17</sup>

The existence of such groups was a condition for the development of social movements in the fall of 1989. The evolution of these citizens' movements represented a new level of opposition to the East German regime. The New Forum, initiated in September 1989 was the first step out of the dissident ghetto. The foundation of the New Forum kicked off the feverish creation of similar political groups and platforms, including Democracy Now (*Demokratie Jetzt*) and Democratic Awakening (*Demokratischer Aufbruch*). These groups consciously stepped outside the semi-public space of the church and very rapidly grew into a publicly visible mass movement. Afterward, however, they disappeared from the public spotlight as quickly as they had entered it. The former dissidents split apart in all political directions, even in diametrically opposed ones, after 1989. Some of the personal friendships were maintained, but they no longer represented a basis for common political action. There is no uniform site in the period after 1989 that can be described as linked to the former East German opposition.

With the unification of East and West Germany, the locus of political activity was shifted out of private space and into the public sphere. At certain points the private space remained a locus of political action, but its importance was reduced drastically under the conditions of a democratic society by contrast with what it had been during the period of dictatorship. Activities carried on in the private sphere did not have the far-reaching effects that they had had under the GDR. As one respondent puts it: "Today you can do what-

15 Whereas direct repression was foremost in the 1950s and 60s, at the end of the 1970s the state security organization resorted to "quiet" methods, such as psychological subversion, developing a whole branch of "operational psychology" (cf. Behnke and Fuchs 1995).

16 For more detail cf. Miethe 1999a: 84–90.

17 For a comprehensive description of spaces of political action see Miethe 2000b.

ever you want, but no one will pay any attention". What does this change in the political sphere of action mean for the actors involved? Two typical cases<sup>18</sup> are described below to illustrate opposing meanings of the same space of political action.

### **Jutta Bertrams: "For Me It Was a Kind of Voluntary Family"**

The first of these cases is that of a woman activist born in 1950 whom I will call Jutta Bertrams. The first narrative of her biographical interview contained an episode that Jutta experienced as a schoolgirl of about fourteen. A classmate, Franz Schneider, was to be expelled after having brought a West German sports magazine to school. The class demonstrated solidarity with him, and in reaction a tremendous power structure was mobilized, including the school administration, the municipal government, and the local Party authorities. The students were instructed to "dissociate themselves" from their classmate's behavior. The interviewee describes this situation as one of fear. One student after another was told to stand up in the classroom and say; "I dissociate myself from the behavior of Franz Schneider." As she tells the story:

*"Although it was totally clear that none of us wanted to, one after another stood up and said, 'I dissociate myself', and it was getting closer to my turn, closer and closer, five more, four more, three more before me, and I didn't know what to do, I was really in distress, because I knew that it would be self-betrayal if I stood up, my backbone would be broken, and at the same time I knew that if I didn't do it, I'd be the only one, and I'd be thrown out of school." (Jutta Bertrams II, 1996: 12)*

Jutta Bertrams was lucky. The ceremony was stopped before her turn came. Years later, the fear and desperation of the situation are still expressed in her narration. The situation Jutta describes took place in a public space, the school. But this is not a public sphere in the Habermasian sense, because no political discourse or processes of negotiation take place here. The communication is one-sided; the strongest go to nearly any length—even "breaking spines"—to impose their point of view.

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18 The cases presented here are typical in the sense that they do not represent the real life of one woman, but a compilation of qualities and events taken from the life stories of several women. Care has been taken to ensure that changes in the biographies portrayed conform to the basic structure actually reconstructed in empirical cases. The following discussion of cases is focused on the results of the completed analysis; the process of interpretation is not reconstructed here. On the procedure see Rosenthal 1993, 1995 and Fischer-Rosenthal 1996.

Jutta Bertrams presents her family as an opposite pole to the school. "In school I wasn't supposed to talk about what was said at home", she recounts. Jutta's family is Lutheran; her parents were displaced from the former German territories east of the Oder-Neisse line. Both of these facts are topics which were not welcome in the public sphere in the GDR. They were therefore discussed only within the family or in the parish.

Jutta had to observe a strict separation between the public and private spheres. Her childhood and youth are structured by the desperate wish to find an "in between"—a middle ground between school and home, between the public and private spheres. She finds her "in between" only later, as a student, when in the context of the church she meets other people who think as she does, with whom she can talk openly. "I thought I was in America", she says, describing the new possibilities she discovered. Without leaving the country, she discovered a space that was structured completely differently: not a space oriented towards the rules of the regime with its rituals of cant and subservience, but one of communication in which actual negotiation processes took place among partners. This space corresponds to the "private-public sphere" described by Voronkov and Chickadze (1997) and Voronkov (2000).

At first the church provided only the physical location, which subsequently became a semi-public sphere as people used it to carry on discussions that otherwise had only taken place within the family or among intimate friends—i.e., in private. For Jutta, the discussions in this private-public and semi-public sphere were a liberation: this is the first place she found outside the family where taboo subjects could be talked about openly. Outwardly directed action only developed over the course of the years that followed.

Jutta Bertrams originally had not intended to become politically active. As she said herself, she had "always been afraid to raise her head above the crowd", and preferred to "hold back". Her life increasingly became centered in these circles, however. They became a kind of "voluntary family". Increasingly, Jutta began to withdraw from "normal" life and live in the "scene". She abandoned her studies and lived for the next few years by sewing clothes and selling them at markets,<sup>19</sup> and organized childcare more or less jointly with her friends.

At the same time it is clear that this new sphere has rules and expectations of its own. When the independent peace movement began to form in the GDR in the early 1980s, Jutta at first stayed out of political action. Men refused military service, and other women and men initiated public activities. Jutta

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19 This development is not comparable in scale with the shadow economy described in the Soviet Union, for example (Shlapentokh 1989:190), but is a step in the same direction. That is, the developing informal space is independent from the state, supplies the people with merchandise that is otherwise unavailable, and allows the "producers" a certain financial independence from the state. Occupations of this sort are quite typical in biographies of people in the dissident scene.

herself became active, stepping outside the private sphere only when a law was passed to include women in military service, so that as a woman she was directly affected by militarism. According to the tacit rules of her setting, which of course corresponded to her own values, political action was expected of her at this point:

*"My friend sat here on the sofa and said, Jutta, we have to do something! We'll write a petition! You'll write a petition! Wow—and I was so scared."* (Jutta Bertrams I, 1994: 5)

The fear of losing significant others, her voluntary family, became greater than her fear of the consequences of political action.

This biography illustrates the importance of the private-public sphere in the development of the semi-public space for action for GDR dissident groups. This sphere began to evolve in the early 1970s as an "in between", as a third space in a polarized society. Because state repression of dissident activity was still quite strong in the 1970s, opponents to the regime strove to insulate this space as hermetically as possible from the state-controlled public sphere. Only in the 1980s did the number of groups begin to grow significantly thanks to the incipient peace movement, and the groups then began to appear in public.

With the collapse of the GDR regime and the unification of East and West Germany, the locus of political activity shifted out of private or semi-public space and into the public sphere. Although the former dissidents generally welcomed the opening of the public space, these changes also entailed fundamentally different conditions for women. The following two interview excerpts may serve to illustrate the significance of this change of place. The first deals with work in an opposition group:

*"In the eighties, when I was in these groups. Sometimes, too, it got to be just too much for me. I had a job. And then the children were little, every evening there were people over, I was constantly short on sleep. Get up again at six in the morning, take the kids to their kindergarten, run to the supermarket and then the doorbell would ring again. We couldn't even eat dinner in peace without people from the Dutch peace movement or somewhere else coming in (laughs). Then I hung a note on the door: 'Visitors: please leave us a dinner break between 7 and 8 p.m. for the family', or something like that. For dinner and bedtime to run smoothly, that was important. But then another peace group would arrive from far away, a lot of times they didn't have children, so they just didn't understand why I'd sit by the children's beds for twenty minutes, when they'd come such a long way to talk about matters of world politics."* (Jutta Bertrams I, 1994: 7)

The basic theme of this sequence is a personal overload caused by all kinds of demands: family, work, political activity. It also includes a particular characteristic of this woman's political activity: visitors have to adapt to the rules of the private space. Even if they do not understand why a politically active woman has to "sit by the children's beds for twenty minutes", they have to wait.

With the collapse of the SED government, the opportunity had arrived for opposition groups to leave the private space and express themselves openly. In the interview this new possibility was cast in a positive light. At the same time, however, the nature of political activity changed. In the following sequence the same respondent discusses her experiences during a round of negotiations on a common campaign platform for the various citizens' movements in the 'House of Democracy' in Berlin:

*"That was a terrible experience. Interminable sessions and nothing, no results. ... So this experience more or less put me off. And coming from the rather easy-going methods of reaching agreement in the groups I had known up to then, where we sat at the kitchen table and came up with something in common, although of course there were arguments, I don't want to deny that. But a completely different atmosphere set in at the 'House of Democracy', where everything was somewhat professionalized. The negotiations got harder, you didn't know each other personally, to say nothing of being friends. Negotiations were formalized and a different mentality was suddenly called for. Forming lobbies in the background, negotiating tactics, political skill, and experience played a part, hard elbows, a stubborn attitude, confident appearance, plenty of time to wait everything out. You couldn't leave early because the kids haven't had dinner. Then you would have lost right away". (Jutta Bertrams I, 1994: 7-8)*

In this passage the interviewee addresses a phenomenon described in the literature as everyday institutionalized political business. In the public space, it is not the others who have to wait with their "world politics" until the children are asleep. It is the woman who must now adapt to the conditions of the public space if she doesn't want to "lose right away". The idea of a connection between politics and personal friendship, as well as of common activity as the basis of political action, now collides with their understanding of institutionalized politics as "hierarchical, formalized and distant". The "male coding" of such activities has been exhaustively demonstrated in Schöler-Macher (1994). The sociologist describes the essential elements of politics in institutionalized arenas as "belonging to factions" and old-boy networks. As a result, women as newcomers to the political club "felt alien" there (Schöler-Macher 1994: 33). At the same time, these women were entering a field in which most positions of power are held by men. For East German women, entry into these political contexts was particularly difficult because they were newcomers in three senses: as women, as East Germans, and as members of former dissident groups. In this outsider position, they lacked the close social networks on which their previous political activity had been built.

The private, or at most semi-public, location of political activity for the GDR opposition group was replaced after German unification by institutionalized public arenas that are "oriented to the premises and demands of the normal male actor" (Schöler-Macher 1994). In contrast to the frequently cited female gendered "kitchen table", the public space is a "sphere of activity in which men have the last word because they have the appropriate institutional legitimization" (ibid.: 252). Thus the opening of the public space for the GDR

opposition, although generally welcomed, brought with it a gender-specific inequality in the initial conditions for use of that space. Many politically active women, including Jutta Bertrams, dealt with this changed situation by withdrawing from institutionalized politics, going back into the private space. But discussions at the kitchen table are no longer political in a democratic society that has a public sphere—except in the sense of a certain feminist discourse. The following case illustrates this sense.

### **Anna Weber: “Karl, This Can’t Go On Any Longer ...”**

A second biography, that of Anna Weber, looks quite similar at first glance. For Anna Weber too, the semi-public sphere is the principal space for political action. Her evolution is similar to that of Jutta Bertrams. Both women were active in dissident groups in the 1980s, both were members of “Women for Peace” and co-founders of the “New Forum” in the fall of 1989. But whereas for Jutta Bertrams the friction between the public and private spheres is fundamental for her political activity, Anna is concerned with a completely different dimension.

In the first interview, thematically focused on her political biography, Anna Weber presented the beginning of her political activity in the context of the putsch in Chile, which had been reported in detail in the East German media. All she said about her personal life in this interview is that it had been “fairly normal”.

*“Well, I had a fairly normal life. With a family and marriage and a job and all that, pretty quiet, and then a turning point was the putsch in Chile<sup>20</sup> ....” (Anna Weber I, 1994: 1)*

When Chilean exiles arrived in the GDR, Anna began helping them under the auspices of the church, and in this way she soon came to the attention of the state. This “turning point” is developed extensively in the course of her narration, and the interview follows a strict chronological listing of successive stations of her political life. No further details are mentioned about her own family.

Two years later, when I conducted an open biographical interview with Anna, I expected to hear a more detailed life story, but not a completely different one. To my surprise, the open biographical interview focused on her failed marriages, intimate relationships and domestic violence. One reason for this interview, apparently so different in structure, is no doubt the fact that a trusting relationship had developed between Anna and myself during the two years that lay between the interviews: she now trusted me with such personal

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20 Many Chilean exiles came to the GDR after the putsch in 1973.

topics. Another reason, however, is the change in method. The open phrasing of the initial question in the second interview invited Anna to tell about her personal life to a greater degree than in the interview on her political biography.<sup>21</sup>

Thus in the second interview Anna goes into details of what she had referred to in the thematically focused interview on her political biography as a “fairly normal” life, “with family and all that”. The “fairly normal” turns out to include physical, sexual, and psychological violence on the part of husbands and other partners. After a particularly brutal instance of abuse by her first husband, Anna attempted suicide.

*“After abusing me so badly he usually broke down, wept bitterly, repented, promised eternal love, faithfulness, and change, and I clutched at that again and again, until the next time. ... And after one bad maltreatment, when I didn’t know which way was up any more and I tried to take my life, I mean just, I was so—er—helpless, desperate, I cut open my veins, in both wrists.” (Anna Weber II, 1996: 13–14)*

At this point Anna was far removed from any conception of the personal sphere as political, or from making such abuse public—which would have been a very difficult procedure in the GDR (cf. Diedrich 1997). Instead she does all she can to hide the violence from public view. She tells her coworkers lies to explain the lacerations, cigarette burns, and black eyes, and hides her bandaged wrists after her suicide attempt under a long-sleeved sweater. Only after a long learning process does her point of view begin to change.

Her political activity is situated fully within the context of this domestic violence: the more difficult the family situation is, the more she directs herself outward politically. “I became more and more militant and self-destructive”. The putsch in Chile, introduced in the thematically focused interview as a political turning point and the beginning of her political activity, is now fully embedded in the context of a difficult family situation, one that was such a burden to Anna that she thought about suicide again.

*“And then I, very often I must say, I thought about suicide again. That was, I was often very sad. And then when I said, from time to time, ‘Karl, we have to talk about everything, I can’t go on living like this, this can’t go on’, then it was, ‘Whatever’s wrong with you, I want to watch television now, I’m tired’. So, well, and in this situation, into this, yeah, maybe that was the beginning, that was, ’78 was the putsch in Chile, we heard about that,*

21 Narrative interviews are not random, but follow certain biographical and narrative principles. There is a rich literature on this theory in the German-speaking countries which is too extensive to be reviewed here. The principle at work here is the “need to condense” (cf. Kallmeyer and Schütze 1977). Since it is never possible to recount a life in its entirety (as such a narration would have to be as long as the life narrated), biographers are always obliged to make a selection. The thematically focused stimulus suggests a selection of those parts of the biography which the narrator sees as related to political activity. Family, marriage and work evidently do not belong to political activity, and are only briefly mentioned to set the narration in time. The putsch in Chile on the other hand is presented as a political turning point and is dealt with at greater length.

*we were aware of how bad all that was, and we were aware that the government of the GDR had responded and taken in refugees. Naturally that was made into a big deal politically to advertise once again how great we were.*" (Anna Weber II, 1996: 24)

It is interesting to note that Anna dated the Chilean putsch in 1978, although it actually happened in 1973. It is true that the East German media reported extensively on the putsch in 1973, so that it is unlikely that Anna was first confronted with the issue in 1978. Furthermore, the largest influx of Chilean refugees, both in the GDR and in the city where Anna lived, was in the first half of 1974.<sup>22</sup>

The time shift suggests that what sparked Anna's political activity, her "turning point", was not the events in Chile nor the arrival of Chilean refugees in the GDR, as she had portrayed them in the thematically focused interview, but the internal family situation which had not been presented at all in that interview. The putsch in Chile as a motivation for political activity was called upon at a time when the family situation became unbearable.

Anna's political activity thus represents a strategy for coping with violence in the private sphere. Perhaps not least because of a social taboo (cf. Diedrich 1997), this aspect comes to light only after a long and detailed analysis. For Anna—unlike Jutta Bertrams—opposition to the regime was a secondary aspect of political activity. Her membership in the group "Women for Peace" provided a space of safety and growth in which she could talk about her experiences of violence. With the support of the group, Anna eventually succeeded in divorcing her husband.

Domestic violence was among the strictly taboo topics in GDR, but has been discussed publicly significantly more often since 1989. After 1989, Anna was a co-founder of a women's shelter. As a director of the shelter she is currently active in all kinds of committees and organizations, and works to publicize the issue of domestic violence.

## What Do These Two Cases Stand For?

Jutta Bertrams represents a type whose resistance develops out of a personal experience of Stalinist repression and along the lines of the contradictions inherent in East German society. Anna Weber on the other hand represents a type whose political activity is related to the experience of domestic violence. Whereas Jutta Bertrams' political activity evolves out of friction in and with

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22 945 Chilean refugees, almost half of the 2000 who would obtain political asylum in the GDR, had arrived by mid-1974. By 1978 many of them had already left the country again—usually to go to West Berlin (Elsner and Elsner 1994).

the actual society in the GDR, for Anna the system is an interchangeable, external context.

The family as a private space has a very different meaning for the two women. For Jutta Bertrams it is a place in which she can speak more freely than in the public sphere; for Anna it is a place of violence. Both aspects are part of the reality of life in East Germany, and both are constitutive elements of resistance. The private sphere is thus not simply determined by a space—such as that formed by the family—but also depends on how the space is experienced and how that experience is interpreted.

The semi-public sphere developed under the wing of the church and at the kitchen table. It evolved because people were able, in this protected space, to discuss topics which were taboo in the official public sphere: politically dissident opinions, domestic violence. With the unification of Germany, the space for political action was fundamentally shifted: the private-public and semi-public sphere rapidly dissolved. Some of the spaces that belonged to this sphere would be called public today, others private. The two cases, Jutta Bertrams and Anna Weber, demonstrate two opposite tendencies. On one hand, domestic violence before 1989 could be discussed only in the private-public sphere, but is now part of the public discourse. On the other hand, political discussions at the kitchen table, as part of the private-public sphere, were once political action, but today they are part of the private sphere.

## **What Conclusions Can Be Drawn From These Observations?**

1. The public and private spheres, and the assignments of activities to those spheres, are to a certain extent social constructs. The private space of the family can be a place of political action—as the classic dissidents' kitchen table. In state-socialist societies, that potentially political space was where the private-public sphere evolved.  
For the discourse on Western feminism, this means that the assumption of an “apolitical” private sphere criticized by Western European feminists cannot necessarily be applied in state-socialist societies. The Western feminist discourse must realize that what is ostensibly the same space had a different meaning under the conditions in former state-socialist systems.
2. The private sphere can, in state-socialist societies as elsewhere, be a place of violence, as the case of Anna Weber illustrates. The social taboo against discussing domestic violence was much stricter in the GDR than in Western European societies, where a strong women's movement had made it a public issue. The private sphere in state-socialist societies was

thus doubly political: both as the space of opposition to the regime, and as a space of violence that could only be combated, as Western feminists did, by treating it as political and publicizing it. On the other hand, however, this implies that there was a private space in state-socialist societies which was only subject to state intervention in exceptional cases. This space must be considered as private to the extent that the violence that took place there was not made public or treated as a crime.

3. The public and private spheres are not genderless categories. Men and women experience different realities in these spheres, and the different spaces are also subject to different culturally transported connotations. A shift from one sphere to the other is coupled with different conditions for men and for women. As the biographies illustrate for female experience, the East German society has developed into one that now corresponds to the classic notion of a bourgeois (i.e. male-dominated, extra-domestic, politically defining) public sphere.

Researches who criticize the division of society into public and private spheres are not intent on abolishing the categories, but on exposing the logic by which they are constructed. As the study presented here shows, this logic is important not only for gender-specific contexts, but also in regard to their specific meaning for former state-socialist societies and the transformations that have taken place since 1989. The categories of public and private and the associated concepts can be very helpful both in explaining empirical phenomena and in understanding former state-socialist societies. The importance of the “informal sphere” is also apparent, and should be discussed in greater depth in conceptual analyses than it has been up to now. Yet at the same time it is evident that the importance of each sphere for people’s actions can only be comprehended in relation to the actors’ actual experience. The extent to which these categories are applicable in understanding former state-socialist societies and especially the people who live (or lived) in them is a matter for further empirical study.

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*Ingrid Oswald and Viktor Voronkov*

## Tricky Hermeneutics: Public and Private Viewpoints on Jewish Migration from Russia to Germany

### Foreword on Methodology

One of the theoretical foundations of “interpretative sociology” is the assumption that phenomena do not speak to us directly, and that they are not the same thing as facts. Facts, as parts of a theory, only become facts in the framework of contextual knowledge. Especially in dealing with research based on biographical or narrative interviews, we are obliged to interpret respondents’ remarks in numerous cycles of contexts.

This finding is not new, of course. It is rather the pillar of hermeneutic research. Nevertheless, we would like to take it as our starting point, raising the following issue: we must consider context—but which context?

On the one hand, the social, institutional, and discursive contexts of the respondents are different from those of the interviewer and the researcher. This is why we must continually ask about the contents of common contextual fields, and about their boundaries as well. In order to overcome contextual barriers, research is often done by persons who are concerned. Women do research on women, homosexuals on homosexuals, and natives of a given country on persons of the same ethnic background abroad. But far from solving the problem, this strategy creates another one. The contextual boundaries are only shifted, not eliminated. The reader of research literature is no longer a potential contributor, but is relegated to the role of an outside observer of an exotic scenario. The organizational and methodological problems we face are not trivial, since the need for a certain distance in observation is well known. When the “subject” and “object” of research share a common milieu, many of the rules, norms, and habits of that milieu are taken for granted, and not reflected on. As shared aspects of a common horizon of understanding, they are visible and conceivable only from outside.

On the other hand, both partners in a given interview situation form a new context of understanding which is not taken for granted because it emerges from their negotiation of this situation. What are the topic and the purpose of the interview? Is the topic in question part of public discourse, or is it more or less private? Why would a person want to give “correct” information, and why should they do so? If this negotiation is successful, it promotes trust and willingness, and forms part of a preliminary text that third party observers do not share. Often this pre-text or subtext is not subject to interpretation.

Another level of context consists in the accumulation of texts, interpretations, and information produced by prior research. Qualitative methods are the result of efforts to avoid the difficulties which arise first from the lack of common experience, and second from the lack of distance. We wish to acquire a stock of knowledge that will furnish all the considerations necessary to understand others. We compile texts, interpretations, and extracted information in order to build a common store of knowledge. Cultivated and revised, this material forms not only the background of new research, but its very context, and even more: the context of its own merit as scientific knowledge. There is no research which does not quote other research or common knowledge to make its findings more "true", i.e. more credible.

We would like to look at a concrete empirical finding in research on Russian Jewish emigration to Germany. We will discuss the different perspectives and point out some of the difficulties in understanding the other in different cultural contexts. We would like to show how convincing divergent possibilities can be, and how irritating shifts in perspective are.

## The "Case" and Different Interpretations

One important aspect of research on migration is the discussion of reasons and motives for migration. Motivation for East–West migration, and Jewish emigration from the former Soviet Union in particular, is often interpreted against the background of ethnic conflicts and anti-Semitism. Moreover, the legal criteria for immigration to Germany are ethnically defined. A person is entitled to come to Germany because he or she is German or Jewish and subjected to ethnic discrimination. These criteria are clearly different from other cases, such as political asylum or work migration. This policy is maintained for historical reasons. Germans from Eastern Europe were permitted to come to Germany after the Second World War because their living conditions seemed precarious in those parts of Eastern Europe where the war had destroyed multi-ethnic coexistence. Immigration of ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe is defined as "return": immigrants who can prove their descent from German emigrants are entitled to the status of "*Aussiedler*", or returning emigrants.

In the period of German reunification in the years 1990 and 1991, the last East German government expanded the ethnic immigration options for Jews from the Soviet Union. The decision was taken in order to "compensate" for consequences of the Second World War, and to take responsibility for Jews who had survived the Holocaust. (The obvious contradiction in not extending the right to immigration to Germany to Jews from other East European countries, whose families had suffered as much or more from Nazi destruction, is

beyond the scope of this discussion.) The unified German government ratified this policy—the “Law on Measures Regarding Refugees Accepted in the Line of Humanitarian Relief Operations” (*Kontingenzfluechtlingsgesetz*)—with little modification. But since the law is not part of the German constitution, as is the right to political asylum, it can be modified or repealed at any time. This fact is not discussed in German politics, but it nonetheless influences the considerations of potential emigrants from the former Soviet Union. In the context of migration theory it is therefore a “pull factor” in its own right: persons who tend to use this “emigration gate” must decide quickly, or risk facing closed doors.

The process of ethnic migration, or rather the ethnification of the East–West migration pattern, began in the nineties. In other words, while migration across the Iron Curtain was thought of as politically and sometimes socially motivated, the new migration since the collapse of Communism is organized and described only in ethnic terms. However, the underlying assumptions are often questioned in public debates and mass media. It is claimed that the immigrants are not real Germans or Jews. Alternatively, or in addition, it is said that there is no longer severe ethnic discrimination in the Soviet Union, at least when compared with other political and/ or economic cleavages, or when considered against the backdrop of open xenophobia against people from the region of the Caucasus.

Migration research has reacted to this quarrel by designing numerous projects dealing with questions such as the following. What reasons for migration are specifically ethnic? What percentage of the emigrants concerned are Germans (or Jews), and to what extent are they conscious of their ethnicity? We do not intend to continue this very unfruitful discussion, for two reasons. First, it is useless to define ethnic affiliation by any “essentials” which do not refer to the person’s self-definition. Second, all research clearly shows that there are no isolated reasons for emigration, but only whole complexes of motivations. Nevertheless, we are confronted with the contexts of scientific explanations and public and political debates that affect not only researchers but also the immigrants themselves. This is why we should consider the way in which the immigrants present their motives, and examine the fields in which researchers interpret these patterns of presentation.

In the following we will focus on one aspect of presenting or reflecting on the decision to emigrate, as found in some sets of interviews that were made with ex-Soviet Jewish immigrants to Germany. These sets of interviews formed parts of independent research projects that were not linked to one another, and are therefore connected with different research designs with respect to the aims, samples, and guiding questions of the research. Nevertheless, the pattern of argument in question arose in many interviews in the contexts of the different sets. This fact is striking enough to justify a second interpretation of the separately published findings.

As we have already mentioned, the problem of obtaining different results by different research designs and in different contexts is generally known. Yet this methodological problem is generally discussed abstractly, and that is why we would like to take the rare opportunity to consider a concrete example.

### **The discourse of “accidentalness” and “unwillingness”**

One way to present the decision to migrate is the argument of having migrated accidentally or by chance. The first interpretation of this very specific pattern of argument is that of Yvonne Schuetze, who found this explanation of emigration motives during a project on young Russian Jewish immigrants in Germany (Schuetze 1997a, 1997b). When asked about their reasons for leaving their home for Germany rather than Israel, they very often answered that they did not actively make that choice. They came to Germany because their parents had so decided; they followed in the wake of others when emigration increased; they rejoined other family members, and so on.

In her first paper Schuetze (1997a) explained this pattern as follows. The young Jewish immigrants feel obliged to justify their coming to Germany because they are under the influence of the moral norm of not immigrating to the country of the perpetrators of Holocaust. Therefore they bridge the gap between the norm and the actuality by denying the act of will. They did not *want* to come, but came accidentally.

We are thankful for Schuetze's work because this finding was the starting point of our own reflections on typical patterns of argument regarding motives for migration. In the following we will present two other interpretations of this finding, and then discuss the different contexts which led to them.

In a research project that we, the German-Russian research team led by Oswald and Voronkov, conducted on ethnic community building and ethnic reorientation among ex-Soviet citizens in Russia and Germany, we also interviewed Jewish Russians. The sample of respondents was completely different, however, because Jewish-Russian interviewees only made up part of the sample together with other, part-Russian ex-Soviet citizens of several age groups, including some who still lived in Russia and others who had emigrated to Germany. But some of the respondents interviewed in Germany were about the same age as those in Schuetze's sample.

After our first joint paper based on these interviews (Oswald and Voronkov 1997), we continued the interpretation of the interviews separately. First we looked at the interviews with Russian Jews in Russia, and could not find that they gave great attention or weight to the norm of not emigrating to Germany. Only those in the youngest age group who were very closely affiliated to a Jewish community in Russia had ever heard of such considerations

and felt the influence of the norm. They firmly rejected the idea of migration to Germany, but could imagine emigrating to Israel or to the USA. This corresponds with the interpretation of Yvonne Schuetze, who, in a further paper (Schuetze 1997b), stresses the point that the norm is hardly at work in the Russian context because a public discussion of the Holocaust has only recently begun there.

In Germany, as elsewhere in the Western world, the situation is totally different. There is extensive discussion of the Holocaust and, moreover, an ongoing dispute over the question of whether or not Jews should live in Germany. As Schuetze shows, young Jewish immigrants perceive the problem after their immigration, and then begin to conceive the relevance of the norm of not immigrating to Germany. This means that they remember not having felt they were violating a norm, but now, after their immigration, they acknowledge its existence and feel uncomfortable. In their argument of accidental immigration to Germany, they try to avoid conflict with the norm which exists in the Jewish world and which therefore affects them now whether they like it or not.

In the light of this thesis, Ingrid Oswald took up the interviews with immigrants to Germany from the former Soviet Union (Oswald 1998). These interviews were conducted in the context of the above mentioned research project on ethnic communities and ethnic reorientation after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Indeed, the young Jewish immigrants spoke of accidental or unwilling immigration to Germany. But as other interviews show, not only did older Jewish immigrants use the same pattern of argument as well, but so did immigrants of other ethnic affiliations. Although many immigrants in this sample were Jewish, almost half of them were Russians, Ukrainians, and others who had accompanied their Jewish spouses. Even the “returning” German immigrants and their spouses—whether German or Russian—spoke in the same way. They had not originally wanted to immigrate to Germany, but other “forces” (friends, relatives, circumstances) led them there.

It must be mentioned that the interview manuals in the two research projects were not identical. Whereas Schuetze asked directly about the respondents’ reasons for coming to Germany, this was not the case in our project on ethnic community building and ethnic orientation. Nevertheless, when we invited the respondents to speak about the circumstances surrounding the decision to migrate, they very often used the same arguments as Schuetze’s respondents did. Our interview partners additionally reported that they considered migrating further—to the USA or to Israel—or migrating back to Russia. Superficially, both interview sets showed the same pattern of argument, although, as already noted, the questions guiding the research and the sampling were different.

Schuetze’s interpretation of the “accidental” or “unwilling” pattern of argument is highly plausible in regard to the young Jewish immigrants, but why

should others—as described above—use the same arguments? This was the key question for our interpretation. Turning to the interviews conducted in Berlin among ex-Soviet immigrants of different ages, we could see that the pattern in question was very often combined with another argument. The immigrants felt somewhat uncomfortable because they were dependent on the social welfare system. Although—or perhaps because—they live under good conditions and are given enough money, they feel uneasy. Some of them expressed the hope that some day they would be able to pay back all the expenses that the German state had undertaken on their behalf. They added that they experience xenophobia in Germany only when they are at the social welfare office to get their benefits: the civil servants there regularly make them feel they are a burden on German taxpayers. Against this background, Oswald interpreted the discursive element of being in Germany accidentally as follows. The immigrants—particularly German and Jewish ones—had been invited to come to Germany, and now feel that they are not really welcome. They are aware, of course, of the public debate on undesired economic immigrants and on eventually closing the borders to further immigration. Therefore they express their reservations, as if to make their presence in Germany more harmless by stressing its accidental nature.

At this stage of interpretation, Oswald gave little attention to the various ethnic affiliations of the immigrants. Against the background of our interviews in Russia, it seemed unlikely that Jews could have another reason for stressing their accidental immigration (in the context of considering the consequences of the Holocaust) than Germans (in the context of disappointment of their hopes concerning their “home country”). Without exception, the respondents in Russia had discussed the “German option” without reference to any historical context. Moral considerations or anticipation of deprivation had no place in these interviews. There was no specific ethnic argument, only a specifically ex-Soviet argument: to leave a country that offered slim prospects for them and their children. Accordingly, they seemed rather similar in Germany, being immigrants in a relatively marginalized social position.

Viktor Voronkov, co-leader of our project on ethnic communities and ethnic orientation, agrees with Oswald’s interpretation in viewing the emigrants as “Soviet”. This corresponds with findings from many sets of interviews on ethnic problems and on ethnic community building in Russia, which demonstrate the relatively weak ethnic bonds in ex-Soviet urban populations, especially within higher educated strata. The “nationality” factor in Soviet politics on the one hand produced clear official demarcation lines between the nationalities because the ethnic (“national”) affiliation was registered in all vital statistics and personal documents. Nevertheless, this official stigmatization became blurred in the 70s and 80s, and above all, ethnic identity formation in daily urban life was weak. Only in some exceptional cases did it outweigh the shared “Soviet” self-definition that arose from the influence of

Soviet socialization over decades. This is the reason why official ethnic classifications very often do not correspond with individual self-definition, especially when the persons affected are descended from so-called “mixed marriages”, which are extremely widespread in ex-Soviet metropolises.

For this reason Voronkov tends to understand the argumentation of accidentalness and unwillingness more literally, pointing out that ex-Soviet citizens, when thinking about their emigration options, do not consider historical dimensions at all, but decide on the basis of their actual social situation and living conditions. The opening of the borders in 1989–90 was completely unexpected, and many people decided overnight to get their documents ready and emigrate. They wanted to be abroad in case the post-Soviet regime should close the borders again. Today—potential emigrants already face a different situation: they can act more calmly because it seems very unlikely that the Russian authorities would interfere with their leaving the country. But up to the mid-1990s, when Yvonne Schuetze and we conducted our interviews, the respondents very often had emigrated in a hurry, or had lived in a situation where the question of emigration or staying was one of survival.

## Interpretative Cycles and the Influence of Public Discourses

We would now like to present the different social and discursive contexts that could have had an influence on these three interpretations of a single finding: the accidentalness or denial of active intentions in emigrating to Germany. To put it briefly, the three of us are involved in separate fields of public discourse, each of us shedding a different light on the pattern of argument in question, leading to different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive, interpretations. Schuetze’s interpretation emerged in the context of a German-Israeli research project; Oswald’s interpretation is linked with the discussion of immigration to Germany in general; and Voronkov’s interpretation arose from the knowledge of everyday life on the one hand and from familiarity with the corresponding scientific discourse in post-Soviet society on the other. These three discursive fields serve as different interpretative filters, which we would like to describe here.

Schuetze’s project compares the situation of young Jewish immigrants in Germany and in Israel. In the German-Israeli public discourse, the question of emigrating to the “country of the Holocaust” plays a considerable role, and it became even more significant at the time the interviews were conducted. Ezer Weizman, then president of Israel, officially stated at the beginning of 1996 that he did not approve of Jewish emigration to Germany. Jews should “return” to Israel, i.e. they should aspire to *aliya*. Schuetze (1997b) gives us an impression of how strongly the norm to emigrate to Israel was felt in the

Jewish world by explaining the meaning of *aliya*. The term *aliya*, used to refer to immigration to Israel, literally means ascent or rise, while the opposite, emigration from Israel to another country, is called *yerida*, or descent. But, as Schuetze supposes, we may be sure that few people in Russia are aware of this usage. Nevertheless, the public discussion about Jewish immigration to Germany in the mid-nineties became a controversial mass media event in Germany, and doubtless influenced both sides of the interview situation. The researchers became interested in the moral and intellectual position of the young Jewish immigrants on this question, and the immigrants themselves may have felt an ethnic dilemma in accepting life chances from the descendants of the Holocaust perpetrators.

The frame of Oswald's interpretation was not primarily linked with the Jewish-German discourse, even though many of the respondents were Jews. This was because the project focused on socio-structural and not on ethnic specifics of migration and ethnic orientation. It was therefore very useful to learn of Schuetze's interpretation, which provided the impulse to re-read the interviews from a new perspective. As noted above, the pattern of argument pointed out by Schuetze was indeed found, but in interviews with both Jewish and non-Jewish emigrants from the Soviet Union. The finding could not be compared with reports from non-Soviet immigrants, but those immigrants from the Soviet Union who came to Germany in the "fourth wave"—the migration that started in the late 80s—presented very similar stories of, and reasons for migration, as well as very similar descriptions of their life situation in Berlin. In fact, the lives of the new immigrants from the ex-Soviet Union seem standardized to a high degree, and differ greatly from the lives of other immigrants, such as labor migrants. In contrast to other immigrants they can benefit from the welfare system without the problems that labor immigrants or asylum seekers must face. At the same time, their legitimacy is regularly questioned in public and political discourse—without special consideration of their ethnic affiliation. All Russian-speaking immigrants in Germany are considered ethnic Russians by the native population, and to a certain degree this accords with the immigrants' self-perception.

The social, professional, and ethnic differences among the immigrants from the Soviet Union were equalized in Germany. It seemed obvious to interpret the respondents' presentation of their motives for migration as a reaction to their current social situation in Germany, rather than as a consequence of their former situation in the Soviet Union, and even less as an expression of abstract moral considerations. In the context of latent and manifest xenophobia, and of institutional discrimination against immigrants as an important issue in migration research today, Oswald read the explanations of our respondents as reservations typical of persons who expected more than they could actually get. This disappointment does not refer to the material standards found in Germany, but to professional disqualification that results

in loss of prestige and intellectual isolation. Stressing the accidentalness of the given situation could help them to relieve the discomfort of these negative implications.

Voronkov's interpretation in the joint project is linked to his position in post-Soviet society, both in everyday life and in scientific discourse. As an ex-Soviet citizen of partly Russian origin, he is familiar with the position and self-perception of potential emigrants; he has been aware of the everyday discourse on emigration for over a decade now. As a scientist who is deeply involved in the field under study, he feels enriched by learning about the perspectives of Yvonne Schuetze and Ingrid Oswald, who combine knowledge of the problem examined at a certain distance. Nevertheless, he is convinced that the immigrants' perception of accidentalness should be read more literally, because it arises from the Soviet and post-Soviet context of everyday life, with its political influences. Above all, this entails an acute consciousness of the various possibilities of diminished emigration options—either by the repeal of the right to emigrate from Russia, or by the closure of the German borders.

According to Voronkov, there are several aspects to consider. The first is that ethnic origin has lost its significance in everyday life in the past two decades, at least as far as Jews, Germans, or Ukrainians are concerned, for example (see Oswald and Voronkov 1997).<sup>1</sup> Soviet citizens, especially in the big cities, practically always live in bi-ethnic or poly-ethnic families because the proportion of "mixed marriages" is extremely high. In families of good education and high qualifications, as is the case with the respondents in both sets of interviews, they identify themselves first as members of the "intelligentsia" and only secondarily, if at all, as members of an ethnic group. Everyday life has lost its specific ethnic coloring; religious and cultural traditions are almost totally unknown. Now in the post-Soviet era, of course, some ethnic communities are endeavoring to rebuild "ethnic life", but without making a great effort to enhance the size of their memberships. After all, Jewish potential emigrants who are closely affiliated with the Jewish community and who are taking part in the Jewish reawakening in Russia do not tend to emigrate to Germany: they choose Israel or the USA. The result is that the emigration wave of Jewish Russians splits before leaving Russia, and moral doubts about being in Germany as a Jew only arise once a person is in Germany. This, of course, does not contradict Schuetze's interpretation, which stresses the influence of public discussion in the Western world. The point is how to distinguish the original motivations and considerations before emigration from retrospective judgments. Voronkov's position stresses the weak ethnic but strong Soviet identity of emigrants from Russia. Accordingly, he

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1 The problem of the new xenophobia against people from the Caucasus is a relatively new phenomenon which does not affect the sets of interviews discussed here, and cannot be outlined in this paper.

points out that ex-Soviet immigrants in Germany very often perceive themselves not as ethnic emigrants, but as emigrants who can take advantage of the ethnic options that Germany (or Israel or the USA) offers them.

Secondly, the semi-public political discourse on Jewish emigration in the Soviet Union was not anti-German, but was, if not anti-Semitic, then at least anti-Israeli. Above all, emigration was considered a betrayal of the Soviet Union. That means that until today all potential emigrants have had to consider the problem of violating this deeply emotionalized norm, which varies little with the choice of the country of destination. The anti-Israeli element of state politics was very often translated into anti-Semitism in everyday life, resulting in a dichotomy of Jewish behaviors between the so-called "good Jew", a normal Soviet citizen with a "normal" rejection of the Israeli state, but of Jewish origin; and the "bad Jew", who is interested in Israel and considers emigrating there.<sup>2</sup> This is the reason why Germany as a potential destination for emigration is far more attractive than Israel for a large part of the Russian Jewish population. Russian Germans are not exposed to the same question, of course, but face other difficulties. Their problem is that of identifying themselves as Germans while separating this idea from that of the fascist Germany that invaded the Soviet Union. Two possible solutions are open to them: making a connection with the former GDR, or a non-historical, "cultural" bond. In the mid-1990s, both solutions turned out to be anachronistic. Neither the GDR as an "antifascist bulwark" nor a culturally homogeneous Germany existed any more (if indeed it ever had existed). Nevertheless, Germany plays an important role as one of the rare countries that still represents an option for emigration. This simple fact still has its implications for motivating migration and the considerations that are weighed, even if expectations and hopes turn to disappointment and disillusionment.

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2 In this respect it might be useful to glance at another research project on Jewish migration, by Schoeps et al. (1996: 280ff). The respondent B., a Russian Jewish immigrant in Germany, also stresses the point that immigrants speak about accidentalness because they are considered traitors in their country of origin. To a certain degree this could indeed explain the emotional dichotomy of the immigrants in Germany. But if we follow Voronkov's interpretation, emigration to Israel should then be doubly burdened: as a betrayal of the home country, and as migration to a politically dubious country. Schuetze however, who had the opportunity to compare the German and Israeli situations, could not find corresponding arguments in the interviews with young Russian Jewish immigrants to Israel. As we know from the literature, the situation of Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel is also not always easy, because they are often seen as non-Jews bringing strange customs and crime to Israel. We may say that they sometimes face the same situation as Russian Germans in Germany: invited by the government, but mistrusted and estranged from the native population. Nevertheless, they obviously do not express such doubts and uneasiness in referring to their immigration as do the immigrants to Germany.

## The Nature of the Soviet “Public” Sphere

A third aspect that must be considered in order to interpret the respondents' reports adequately, is their specific reaction towards persons from the “public”, i.e. the official, sphere. Voronkov's interpretation of the private and public spheres in Soviet Russian society clearly differs from that common in Western societies (Chikadze and Voronkov 1997). In short, the two spheres corresponded to the different fields of written law and custom which had developed under the Soviet regime. Although official control has weakened since the middle of the 80s, persons socialized in Soviet society continue to act under this influence. Whereas written law regulated and still regulates social relations in the public sphere, social relations in the private sphere are regulated by custom. Nonetheless, both law and custom were legitimate. The private sphere was subdivided in turn into a private sphere proper and a private-public sphere.<sup>3</sup> The latter turned out to be a niche for social action, and being relatively outside state-party control, it was regulated by custom. Anything could be discussed in this sphere. Conversely, it was strictly taboo in the public sphere to discuss events occurring in the sphere not regulated by written law—that is, events in real life. As public discussion was restricted, social action and its discussion necessarily vanished into the private sphere. Certain issues of social “real life” took on an official form: standardized patterns developed which imitated the experiences of everyday life and could be discussed in this semi-private or “private-public” sphere. The strong division between private and public spheres became a norm for the Soviet personality. No one mixed the two spaces, since that could lead to harsh consequences.

For Soviet citizens, sociological research, including biographical interviewing, was an act of public communication and therefore regulated by written law. Only certain issues could be discussed in this sphere, and even today a meeting with a sociologist is not an appropriate setting for talking about problems of private life. This is the reason why a sociologist always has difficulty interpreting interviews. When does the respondent speak in the framework of the public sphere? When does he/she use the patterns of the public-private sphere? When and under what circumstances is he/she able to

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3 It may be useful to compare this concept with Goffman's theory of several “stages” in societal communication (1959). In Goffman's terms, the Soviet “public sphere” would coincide with the “front stage”, although smaller in extent, and the “private sphere” with Goffman's “back stage”, but larger. The “public-private sphere” could be described as part of the back stage that works as a well-guarded, and well-monitored channel or corridor to the public sphere. Within this picture we can easily conceive that only a small proportion of potential communication acts concerning Soviet everyday life could be discussed openly by everyone, and that each new item could reach this field of communication only by passing through the channel that functioned as a “censor” of private, not public, morals.

cross the strict demarcation line to discuss problems arising in the purely private sphere, those that have to be solved within the family?

This is the context that guides Voronkov's interpretation of the respondents' reports. The opening of the borders in the early 90s was—in spite of the political reforms of the 80s—unexpected and unpredicted. To leave the country turned out to be possible “overnight”, something inconceivable for people who grew up in Western countries. The feeling of potential release was at the same time firmly connected with distrust of the political leaders. Who knew when the borders would be closed again? That is why many emigrations were planned and carried out in a great hurry, and people were up and away to any country that admitted immigration. Up to the middle of the 1990s, Germany was for many immigrants a place for re-orientation after a hurried, only half-planned move. For many Russian Jews or Russian Germans, Germany is more or less the country that gave them the chance to immigrate, but does not have a realistic social profile of its own. In general, up to the mid-1990s little was known about contemporary Germany. Russian Germans—mostly from rural or provincial regions—cultivated an anachronistic image of pre-war Germany; and Russian Jews—mostly from the urban centers—tended to compare the cultural and intellectual level of potential destinations. From this point of view, Germany is considered to be “more cultured” than the oriental or “half Arab” Israel, and therefore an option until immigration to the USA becomes possible. Both images are an aspect of the myth of Germany as a “nation of culture” (*Kulturnation*), and at the same time part of a strategy to avoid reflections on Germany's past and its role in history.

## Possible Conclusions

The discussion of these various interpretations of one area of research does not lead to a definitive solution. But can we really speak of *one* area of research, considering the different aims and sampling of the research projects carried out by Schuetze and by Voronkov and Oswald. At the very least, the findings in question could be dismissed as merely superficial, especially when the (ours and Yvonne Schuetze's) project designs are compared. Yet this would not explain the different, mutually exclusive interpretations presented by Oswald and Voronkov upon examining the same interviews. Indeed, although the logic of the interviews was different, the respondents' reactions were linked to the same issue in each case: their motivation in emigrating.

We would like to suggest that these findings provide an example of how the common situation of interaction between interviewer and interviewee influences the subtext of questions and answers. Schuetze approached her

respondents in the context of an Israeli-German research project, which necessarily highlighted the historical and moral/ethical implications of the topic. Against this background, neither the respondents nor the interviewers, nor the researchers, can easily ignore the potential uncertainty for Jews in the decision to settle permanently or temporarily in Germany. Oswald, however, could do so—or rather, she was led to put aside this issue because non-Jewish immigrants to Germany had also presented their motivations with the same pattern of argument. This led her to interpret the finding as a socio-structural phenomenon concerning all immigrants: the threat of social marginalization due to their disqualified position in the labor market and their dependency on welfare benefits.

Neither of the two “Western” interpretations influenced Voronkov when he conducted his interviews and read interviews conducted by other Russian-speaking interviewers, and therefore he emphasized the respondents’ situation in their home country. The Russian interviewers’ position in the interview situation was completely different to that of Schuetze, who used German interviewers or conducted the talks herself. As Voronkov suggests, she always found herself in a sort of “public-private” sphere, if not in a public sphere that allowed the respondents only to speak in “politically correct” terms. Oswald faced the same situation, since she could not really define her position and that of the respondents; she took the public for the private and vice versa. According to Voronkov the argument of accidentalness is not an interpretation or postponement of something that belongs to the public sphere, such as moral considerations in the Israeli-German dialogue or considerations of repositioning in the societal space, but rather refers to the private sphere. In terms of logic, it is the *explanans*, and not the *explanandum*. It explains how the more or less spontaneous decision to leave the country was the outcome of every day life experience that could not be discussed openly.

We have traced our path through numerous cycles of interpretation. One problem is the shifting of meaning through different perspectives, because we can hardly fix on a single position as *the* most valid one. This is the well-known problem of interpretative sociology. A second problem has to do with the proportions of public, semi-public, and private spheres which are not shaped in the same way in each society. One way of overcoming these problems is, we suggest, the formation of cross-cultural research teams, or at least continuing discussion in poly-cultural forums. This is the opportunity we gratefully have taken advantage of in this article.

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*Yvonne Schütze and Tamar Rapoport*

## “We are similar in that we’re different”: Social Relationships of Young Russian Jewish Immigrants in Israel and Germany

In the sociology of migration, the initiation of social relationships between immigrant and native residents is one of the central aspects of the process of integration. But the process of integration takes place over several generations. Whether a person is ever completely assimilated, to the point of giving up his or her original identity, is debatable. Yet there is agreement that the first generation acquires a range of knowledge and qualifications which are necessary for life in their new society, that the orientation toward the culture of their origins remains intact, and that social relationships are limited primarily to inter-ethnic contact (Esser 1989; Heckmann 1992).

Studies concerning first generation immigrants have focused mainly on adults who are or intend to become active in the work force. In the present study, however, we have concentrated on the social relations of first generation adolescents and post-adolescents with members of the receiving society.

The data used in this study was collected for the project titled “Russian-Jewish Immigration in Jerusalem and Berlin: A Comparison”.<sup>1</sup> The project focuses on the process of social integration of young Russian Jews who emigrated to Israel and Germany and had resided in the new society for roughly five to six years at the time of the interview (1995/1996). The interview subjects were 38 young Russian Jews in Jerusalem, whose mean age was 24 years, and 46 in Berlin, with a mean age of 22.6 years. The interviews in Israel were conducted exclusively with university students, while the Berlin group consisted of 35 university students and 11 individuals preparing to enter the university or other educational institutions. The central question of this study can be summarized as follows: Do the different approaches to Russian Jewish emigrants taken by Israel and Germany—approaches which are historically, politically, and culturally distinct—have diverging effects on the process of integration, and thus on the immigrants’ future perspectives in the new society? In this paper, we have dealt only with a part of this question, namely social relations between emigrants and native residents.

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1 This project, “A Comparison of Russian-Jewish Immigrants”, was carried out in cooperation with Prof. Dr. Tamar Rapoport and Dr. Edna Feder-Lomsky (Hebrew University, Jerusalem) with the support of the German Endowment for Research (DFG).

## **The First Generation—Adults and Youth**

From a perspective that draws on theories of adolescence and post-adolescence, one may be inclined to assume that young immigrants, especially young first generation immigrants, tend more than adults to maintain social relations with members of the receiving society. Adult emigrants who enter the workforce often experience a loss of status (Heckmann 1992). This is equally true, or even more so, of those who are looking for work. Young people who are integrated in the educational system, however, share equal status with native students on a purely formal level. Since friendships tend to be established between persons of the same status, the structure of opportunity to form inter-ethnic friendships among students should be markedly better than among adults. Secondly, from the perspective of developmental psychology, adolescent and post-adolescent phases are coupled with specific developmental tasks such as separation from the familial home, increased attention to others in the same age group, initiation of heterosexual relations, and the search for a career (Hurrelmann 1994).

For young emigrants, these developmental tasks occur within the same time frame as the process of emigration, which itself involves upheaval. Because a structural openness to the possibilities for action is inherent in both adolescence and the process of emigration, we can assume not only that young emigrants who are encumbered neither by work nor by family find more opportunities to form relationships with native residents, but also that their interest in, or orientation toward, establishing inter-ethnic contact must be higher than that of middle-aged emigrants.

By "orientation" we mean the subjective evaluation and desirability of social relations with native residents. In this context, the term "social relations" refers to a meaningful relationship over a discrete period of time from the perspective of the ego, not a short interaction or "encounter".

The assumption of a more rapid social integration of young people who are integrated in the educational system, in comparison to adults, is based on research of both subject groups. Nevertheless, we can assume that the groups differ from one another both in the numbers of native friends and acquaintances they have, and in the structure of their opportunities for and orientation toward social relations with native residents.

## **Israel and Germany: Different Strategies in the Integration of Russian Jewish Emigrants**

Israel and Germany are considerably different in their political and ideological attitudes toward Russian-Jewish emigration. All Jews who migrate to Israel are officially welcome according to the 1949 Law on the Right of Return. Israel seeks to assimilate immigrants into its society rapidly and completely. The extreme policy of absorption has relaxed somewhat over the past two decades, so that immigrants' maintenance of cultural practices that they have brought with them from their countries of origin is tolerated longer. Nevertheless, the goal of absorption politics has remained the transformation of immigrants into Israelis, and not the promotion of immigrant cultures set apart from Israeli society.<sup>2</sup>

Germany's political stance toward Russian Jews is less clear. On the one hand, the state feels historically obliged to admit Jews who are suffering under anti-Semitism. At the same time, Jewish immigrants are expected to contribute to the establishment of a "new Jewish life", thus providing evidence that it is once again possible for Jews to live in Germany. On the other hand, immigrants in general are actively kept out of Germany. In 1990/91 this ambivalence led to a situation in which prospective Russian Jewish immigrants were required to apply for a residence visa for the Federal Republic of Germany in their country of origin, rather than simply entering with a tourist visa and being permitted to stay, as had been possible before.

Israel pursues the objective of turning immigrants quickly and smoothly into members of Israeli society by various insertion techniques. The "Ulpan" language schools, for example, are responsible not only for language instruction but also for conveying Jewish culture and religion. Immigrants are introduced to the country and its people through class trips. The kibbutzim play a unique role in this process by offering young emigrants in particular a chance to live in a kibbutz for a period, with both sides having the right to terminate the stay if desired. Because Jewish immigrants become Israeli citizens immediately upon arrival, they are eventually required to perform military service, which naturally implies extremely close contact with native residents, whether desired or not. The universities are also similar in this regard: native and immigrant students are housed together in dormitories.

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2 In a talk show on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the State of Israel (ARD, April 5, 1998), participants debated the question of whether it is right to admit only Russian Jews who are Jews according to the laws of the Halachah, i.e., those born to a Jewish mother, into the Jewish community. The Israeli diplomat Avi Primor, explained that Israel does not have this problem, since all immigrants become Israelis and, as is well known, there are also non-Jewish Israelis.

In Germany however, history leaves no room for expectation or hope that Russian Jews can be assimilated into German society in the same way that "Aussiedler"—ethnic Germans arriving from Russia or the Baltic countries where their ancestors moved one or two centuries ago—can. Because it is hoped that Russian Jews will be able to contribute to the revitalization of the Jewish community, social integration of the immigrants is left to that community. The state government is responsible for the material well-being and the procurement of gainful employment for immigrants (assistance in finding jobs, unemployment benefits, retraining, housing, language courses for those under 60). The Jewish community by contrast sees itself as responsible for the social, cultural, and religious well being of the immigrants. The division of labor between state institutions and the Jewish community is best expressed in the symbolism of the language courses. The state government promotes induction into the workforce through language classes. For this reason, 60-year-olds are no longer eligible for the courses. The Jewish community, however, is interested in social integration and therefore offers language classes for this age group as well. Because the Jewish community seeks to win Russian Jews back to Judaism, it offers a variety of activities, especially for young people. Group outings are especially popular, and present an opportunity to introduce children and young adults to Jewish culture and religion.

The contrasts can be summarized in the following way: Whereas in Israel Russian Jews are not merely encouraged, but expected to assimilate into mainstream society, in Germany they are expected to strengthen the minority Jewish community.

A further difference between Israel and Germany, which establishes the structure within which opportunities for social relations with native residents arise, is the difference in numbers of Russian Jews who emigrate to Israel and to Germany. While 45,000 Russian Jews arrived in Germany after 1989 (Bubis 1996), 700,000 went to Israel (Leshem and Lissak 1999). This figure is more than 10% of the total population of Israel. This could mean that, despite all state efforts to promote assimilation, these immigrants may be able to limit their contacts to fellow immigrants.<sup>3</sup> By contrast, immigrants to Germany find but few fellow immigrants from the same country of origin with whom they can initiate social relationships. For this reason, they might be more likely to seek contact with native residents than the immigrants in Israel. It also appears to be relevant to the establishment of social relations whether a person arrives alone or with a family. Those who are able to retreat into their families are probably less motivated to make new social relationships than those who have to make their way on their own in their new society.

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3 The fact that Russian Jews exhibit strong tendencies toward "domestic integration" (Elwert 1982) has led to the formation of a new party in Israel, which mainly constitutes a pressure group for the "Russians", as the immigrants are called. (In the 1999 elections there were two 'Russian Parties'.)

## **The Network of Immigrants: Numbers of Network Members and Structures of Opportunity**

Our hypothesis that young, first generation immigrants, who have a solid footing in the educational system, are more likely to form contacts with native residents than adults who work or are unemployed, has been confirmed, we believe, by the results of this study. Sixty-six percent (66%) of the immigrants in Israel and 50% of those in Germany claimed at least one native resident among their circle of friends or acquaintances.<sup>4</sup> This is not entirely comparable with the results of the study by Schoeps et al. (1996), which, using a different set of questions, differentiated only by age and not by education. Nevertheless, their results also point to the same trend. Thirty percent of Russian Jews under 30 reported having "regular" contact with native Germans, compared with only 12.5% of those over age 45. If we first consider the complete network of both subject groups, it appears that the immigrants in Israel generally have a significantly larger network, than their counterparts in Germany, but this difference is accounted for by the fact that the first group reported more Russian friends in their network. They also have slightly more native friends, but this difference is too small to be considered significant. Looking at the network structure, we are unable to detect a significant difference between the two groups: native residents made up 22% of the network members in Israel and 20% in Germany.

Where do immigrants meet new friends and acquaintances after arriving in their new country—whether people from their country of origin or native residents? Subjects reported meeting the individuals in their respective networks in educational institutions, in leisure activities (including activities in the Jewish community), through family, through friends, through a job, in the army, in the kibbutz, and in other contexts.

The immigrants in Germany form contacts with native residents largely through educational institutions. All other contexts were less decisive. These results are surprising inasmuch as the subjects in the interviews repeatedly emphasized the fact that the university is not a place to meet other people.

In Israel, however, there are more opportunities for meeting native residents. The educational system was also reported as playing an important role, but it did not represent the central opportunity for forming social relationships as it did for the immigrants in Germany. Other contexts, such as work, the army and the kibbutzim were also frequently mentioned. The fact is that there are more opportunities for forming social relationships in diverse contexts implies a more opportune structure for meeting native residents in Israel than in Germany.

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4 The egocentric, subjective network of the subjects was measured with a modified version of Kahn and Antonucci's (1980) "Network Questionnaire".

In summarizing the network data, we were able to reach the following conclusions. Both groups maintain and prefer social relations with fellow immigrants and feel more connected with them than with native friends and acquaintances. The fact that the immigrants in Israel report a higher number of Russian friends than those in Germany may be the consequence of the greater density of Russian immigrants in Israel, but it may also reflect the fact that immigrants in Israel tend to live alone and therefore apply more time and effort to their friendships. This also correlates with the results that they feel a stronger emotional connection to their Russian friends than the group in Germany. Immigrants in Israel also tend to have more contact with native residents, and their opportunities to establish such relationships are more plentiful. This may suggest that they are more integrated in their new society than the immigrants in Germany. Yet the differences between the groups are not as great as their similarities. Both groups established a relatively large number of relationships with native residents in the five to six years since their immigration, but are still closer to more individuals from their country of origin, both in numbers and in intensity.

### **“From the Stalls to the Stage”**

As noted, the network data provide information on the number of network members from the native culture as well as on different opportunities for forming such contacts. Yet it is uninformative with regard to the immigrants' subjective interests or orientation in establishing social relationships with native residents. Upon analysis of all passages from each interview in which social relationships with native residents and Russian Jews were mentioned, five types or models of orientation became apparent.<sup>5</sup>

In the following presentation of types, we have drawn on the renowned essay by Schütz (1944/1964), “The stranger”, in which he describes the process of rapprochement by which the immigrant draws closer to the receiving society. “The cultural pattern of his home group” forms the stranger's first frame of reference for interpreting his new environment (Schütz 1964: 97). As long as the stranger interprets the cultural pattern of the new society along the lines of “thinking-as-usual”—as s/he would in his/her country of origin—s/he takes the perspective of an “uninterested observer”. However, if s/he “is about to transform from an unconcerned onlooker into a would-be member of the approached group”, the imagined model drawn from his/her home group is inappropriate, as it only serves in the interpretation of the members of the

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5 Two interviews in the German sample did not provide adequate information to permit the identification of a type.

new society, not in interaction with them. If it is important to the stranger to establish social relations with members of the new environment, he or she must be able to clear out the "cultural pattern" and its "thinking-as-usual" to make room for a new attitude. This means the stranger is no longer content to view the new group from the perspective of his or her former home group, "who do not intend to establish a direct, social relationship with members of the foreign group" (Schütz 1964: 98), but must change his or her system of relevance. Schütz describes this transformation with visual imagery:

"Jumping from the stalls to the stage, so to speak, the former onlooker becomes a member of the cast, enters as a partner into social relations with his co-actors, and participates henceforth in the action in progress." (Schütz 1964: 97f)

Schütz assumes that the "stranger" has an interest in initiating social relations with native residents. Whoever cannot or will not make the leap onto the stage, Schütz explains in the terms of Park and Stonequist, becomes a "marginal man" and a "cultural hybrid" who belongs to neither culture (Schütz 1964: 104).

However, we do not want to reduce the question to an exclusive choice between assimilation and marginality. On the contrary, we view integration in the new society as an open process, which does not lend itself to an either-or formula. Considering the young immigrants in our research groups from the point of view of Schütz's metaphor, one could say that the majority does make the leap to the stage, but there are clearly several different types of leaps. A minority remain onlookers, although after the relatively short period of five to six years, it is impossible to say whether their observer status will be lifted at some point. The attitude of this minority can best be described as "avoidance". Because this character type is only represented in the group of immigrants in Germany, we are referring here only to the responses of the Berlin group.

### *Orientation Type: Avoidance*

This type can be essentially derived from two viewpoints. The first of these is that "true" friendship only existed in the country of origin:

*"Here there is less a friendship than in Riga. There I could say, he's my friend and he does everything for me and I do everything for him."* (Boris, 1996)<sup>6</sup>

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6 Interviews in Israel were conducted in Hebrew, those in Germany were conducted in German. All interviews were verbatim translated into English (together with a bilingual native English professional translator). In order to facilitate comprehension of materials, square brackets are used to indicate authors' inserts. Text omissions in interviews and indications of hesitations are marked with "...".

The notion that friendships in the USSR corresponded more to the ideal of friendship than those in the West appears to form an important part of a well-cultivated myth among Russian Jewish emigrants. Markowitz (1991) reports that the Russian Jewish subjects in her study, who emigrated to Israel and America, also maintained that friendships in Russia were more reliable and unwavering. However, the idea that friendships “there” were better than they are “here” does not necessarily entail the rejection of friendships with native residents. Among immigrants in Israel, there are also some who cling to the myth of true friendship in Russia despite the fact that they do not fall under the orientation type of “avoidance”.

An attitude of avoidance with respect to friendships with native residents thus requires a further perception, based on the notion that Germans are materialistic (“Here it’s more about money, it’s really more about money” [than friendship]), (Lonja, 1996) or that they are unreliable:

*“One could say, [if] you have got problems with a friend and one would at least give some advice or something. And here you can’t always expect help. I would never come to a German and say that I have a problem, because you’re just pushed away.” (Alla, 1995)*

These statements are based not on real experience, but on suspicions, which perform the double function of immunizing against potential contact with native residents *a priori*, while at the same time protecting against rejection. An especially telling example of “defensive” protection is Mark’s report.

*“So one says that the German doesn’t need us, for example in relationships, but I think, it sounds terrible, it sounds cynical, but we don’t need them either” (Mark, 1996).*

In the “avoider” it is not difficult to recognize Schütz’s “stranger”, who is still stuck in the stalls, i.e., in the cultural patterns of his or her original society, and may possibly remain so. However, he or she is different from Schütz’s “stranger” to the degree that the avoider considers the cultural patterns not from a completely neutral perspective, but from one formed by his or her judgment with respect to the society of origin. Schütz’s “stranger” gives members of the new society the chance to form personal relations with him, while the avoider rejects this possibility out of hand.

### *Orientation Type: “Wait and See”*

Like other immigrants, the “wait and see” type makes comparisons between “here” and “there”. But unlike the “avoider”, the immigrant with a “wait and see” attitude does not pass judgment. He or she explains the difficulties in relations with members of the new society as the expression of different mentalities—that is, individuals are perceived as bearing traits that are attributes of a particular culture, not character flaws.

Alexandra reports she has no Germans among her circle of friends. To the question put forward by the interviewer whether she regrets this fact, she replies:

*"I'm not sure. It just happened that way. I mean, I didn't kick any Germans out [of the circle of friends], and they haven't kicked me out either. It's just the way it is. Because, I don't know, maybe that's the mentality, ... I do not know why it is but ..."* (Alexandra, 1996)

Alexandra doesn't really explain what these differences in "mentality" are that she says are responsible for the fact that she maintains no friendships with native residents. Daniel, on the other hand, makes it clear that he really doesn't have anything against Israelis, but that rapprochement is hardly possible in the face of mutual misunderstandings:

*"I have a lot of contacts with Israelis. I can be in the company of Israelis only and it does not disturb me really. I do not have Israelis that are very close to me. We speak different languages. I do not understand what they have to say and I guess they do not understand [me] either ... the relations with them [Israelis] never reach the same depth [compared with relations among Russians]. They do not understand when I talk about seasons and do not know what it is [the difference between] day and night, they say, 'What is wrong for you in Tel Aviv? Tel Aviv is like New York.'" (Daniel, 1996)*

Even though Daniel already thinks of himself as an Israeli—"I feel Israeli, not a sabra<sup>7</sup>, but I feel Israeli"—the difference between Russian and Israeli cultural patterns forms an impediment to establishing friendships:

*Interviewer: "What bothers you in establishing friendships with Israelis?"*

*Daniel: "I think it is the background. We have different myths. The conceptual world is a little different. All my interactions with Israelis are generally like that: we talk, everything is okay. It is interesting, but it does not move forward. They start talking about the army, it's interesting enough, but it has nothing to do with my life. And when I talk about the migration process, it has nothing to do with their life. Maybe there are no common experiences, no common interests." (Daniel, 1996)*

Mark did not have German friends. To the question "Would you like to have more contacts with Germans?" he replied: "To tell you the truth, I have enough already, because, well, it's just that the relations with each person are a bit different," and, as if he had read Schütz himself, he continues:

*"Well, the way everything works is different, the mentality is just different, and the things that are natural for us ... they just aren't understood here, and vice versa." (Mark, 1996)*

Interviewees also gave examples of difficulties in comprehension between individuals in situations where jokes are told. Viktor reports having an acquaintanceship with a few Germans. But these acquaintanceships "don't develop into true friendships". When asked the reason for this, he responds:

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7 A Jew born in Israel.

"[It comes] from both sides. It's not just the fault of the Germans or only my fault. But the mentalities are probably—it's a cliché, but that's how it really is—the mentalities are different."

Interviewer: "Can you give me an example?"

Viktor: "Yes. The best example is humor, the best example that I can think of is humor. There are also many different [types of] people but I can only speak from experience."

Interviewer: "That means that one can't laugh about the same things".

Viktor: "One could, quite a bit. In Russian there is a lot of humor that is based on word-play. But there are things which somehow just aren't funny to Germans. I can give you an example. I've tried, well there's this joke, I tried to translate it, it isn't difficult, it's short and I told it to a German I know. He definitely liked the idea but he didn't laugh, and that's not the reaction the joke evokes". (Viktor, 1996)

In the Israeli sample, David also experienced the problem of jokes sometimes being misunderstood on both sides, although on the basis of other examples from the interviews he cannot be categorized as a "wait and see" type.

"I purposely asked to live with an Israeli guy, and I understood that it is not enough to know the language, that there are many ways in which I don't understand him and he doesn't understand me, even though we speak the same language. For instance humor, jokes. I couldn't understand the jokes he told, and when I started to tell a Russian joke in Hebrew he became tense, because he understood that he was supposed to laugh, but he couldn't, and he was uncomfortable, so he asked me not to tell him Russian jokes. It's funny, but it's a part of cross-cultural misunderstanding". (David, 1996)

The fact that jokes are mentioned as indicators of cultural misunderstanding in the context of rapprochement between emigrants and native residents points to the ambiguous condition of these relationships. When jokes are exchanged, complete foreignness is overcome; a certain degree of rapprochement has taken place. At the same time, however, in the misunderstanding of a joke, the gap between members of different cultures becomes clear. While in ordinary, everyday situations, a misunderstanding can be corrected by explanations or repetitions; explaining a joke, if it is possible at all, destroys the humor in it.

In the context of Schütz's metaphor of the stage, the "wait and see" type represents an onlooker who jumps up on the stage, but is still hesitant to overcome the gap between mentalities. Subjects often describe desiring more contact with native residents, but at the same time express uncertainty as to how a mutual understanding can be reached.

### *Orientation Type: Assimilation*

The emigrant with an orientation toward assimilation corresponds to Schütz's "stranger" who has taken on a role in the play, or at least has made the leap to the stage. An orientation toward assimilation implies that the emigrant no

longer makes the distinction between the society of origin and the receiving society from an observer's point of view, but has adopted cultural patterns of the receiving society. This doesn't necessarily mean that one is completely divorced from the country of origin and now only recruits members of the receiving society for social relations. Nevertheless, the emigrant with an orientation toward assimilation is aware of the new rules of the game and, in contrast to the "avoider" and the "wait and see" newcomer, is able to apply them.

This is how Tamara, for example, reflected on the different ways of relating to friends in Russia and in Israel. She places herself in the context of the changes that she herself initiated in the new society. In Russia, her friendships took priority over all other activities, such as study or work. In the new society, the situation is reversed. For Tamara, this is not a cause for complaint. Rather, she realizes that what was right for the old society is no longer appropriate for life in the new one. Concerning her old friends in Russia, she said:

*"There are things that they do not understand, also my interpersonal relations; when I was there I suddenly realized that I demand from them a very different hospitality than I give here to friends who come to visit me. When I am there [in Russia], I demand all the free time of my friends and expect them to be committed to me and to be with me and to go with me to theaters and clubs and bars, just name it. And when my friends come here what is important for me is my study and work and only if there is some time left I am willing to devote it to them, and this also only when I finished what I have to do urgently..."*

*"...for instance, in Russia, if one day you do not talk on the phone with your friends it is a disaster and there is meeting together, everything together, and together, and together. Here it is something else, I know that with my very, very best friends [sometimes] I do not talk even a month and if something happens I know I will not be alone..." (Tamara, 1996)*

The differences that Tamara mentions between her friendships "here" and "there" are presented at the same time as differences between the systems of the USSR and Israel. "There they treat work and study as if it is not real life ... and here it is exactly the opposite." The capitalist-oriented Israel reflects the businesslike friendships—"what can you do for me and what can I do for you"—and the consumer society—"let's go have a picnic and have fun." In the USSR, by contrast, the reciprocal exchange of material and immaterial goods forms a central aspect of Russian friendship, as Markowitz (1991) also states, which is not shifted to the context of "business", but rather is conceived as an obligation of friendship which one follows, as it were, selflessly.<sup>8</sup>

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8 It is interesting to note that for some immigrants both in Israel and in Germany, "true" friendship in Russia is also associated with the former socialist system. They recognize that in the current situation in Russia, the formation of friendships is also subject to market-economy conditions.

While Tamara's orientation toward assimilation appears as a quasi-natural process which she recognizes happening, rather than actively creates it herself, Emma on the other hand represents the classic version of assimilation in that she distances herself from fellow immigrants and turns toward Germans. Emma came to Berlin with her parents with the intention of studying. Her parents, whose life in Riga was going quite well, came as chaperons, so to speak, for their daughter. Originally, Emma was friends with a circle of Jewish emigrants who all moved to Berlin—parents and their young children—at the same time. She is the only woman in our subject group of interviewees from Berlin who has an intimate relationship with a German friend.

*"Before [shortly after emigrating] I used to be in these groups [of immigrants from Riga]. I never thought ... I never could have imagined for a second in the beginning that I would be together with a German. And not really because he's a German. I couldn't have imagined being together with an American either. I mean he would just have to be a Russian! You have to be able to understand each other. You have to be, ah, able to tell each other everything, what you think and all. Well, it's all right. Now. But before, I was only only with Ru—Je—Jewish Russians or Russian Jews—or something like that—and we went places together, and I had a Jewish boyfriend too. Well, but that has changed and now they don't really take my boyfriend seriously. Although, he's ... well, I didn't ... I don't really have problems because he's likeable. You just have to say that about him. He's just a very interesting man and a handsome man. They have to admit that but they don't accept him anyway. No real friendship is possible there. Only good relations are possible. And that's why ... it doesn't really bother me. I'd much rather give up this Russian circle than my boyfriend."* (Emma, 1995)

The rejection of the old friends from Riga serves as a pretext for Emma's continued contact because of her definitive goal to integrate into the new society:

*"Well, I think it's more important to really try to fit into the society, which, it seems to me, most people don't do here."* (Emma, 1995)

Tamara structures her social relations in terms of the forms that are usual in the new society, but she does not distance herself from members of her society of origin. Unlike Tamara, Emma criticizes other Russian Jewish emigrants, who "don't want to speak German" and "work out their prejudices". She does not see any reason to establish a friendship with people "only because they're Russian". Thus, in order to assimilate with the Germans she has to distance herself from her former friends.

Ilana represents a third variant of an orientation toward assimilation. Like Emma, Ilana came to Berlin with her family, her parents' friends, and their children, with whom she has been friends since childhood. The friendships continued in Berlin.

*"And the others, they think how great our clique is and ... I don't think so. I have to be honest with myself. But that is ... I don't want to talk badly about other people, maybe it's their way of life now and how they think about immigration. I don't know what they're*

*thinking but ... I don't like it, this way ... and that's most important, they are not honest any more, as they were there." (Ilana, 1996)*

Ilana does not describe different forms of friendships in the original and receiving societies, as Tamara does, but rather maintains that the process of emigration itself has altered the friendships. The old friends have changed in the new society: they are no longer available at a moment's notice; they are no longer "honest", meaning they no longer demonstrate unrestrained openness as in Riga. In other words, in order to free oneself from the old friends, some justification is needed. Emma points to her friends' rejection of her German partner, and Ilana refers to her friends' loss of openness. However, a few minutes later in the interview, she criticizes the model of behavior in Riga and praises the German way of life.

*"This way of living I like better than ours. Because ours is always ... when you drink a vodka together, then you think, that is the best friend and you try to pull everything out of him and to shake everything out of yourself. That's not for me." (Ilana, 1996)*

In contrast to Tamara, who explains the difference between the forms of friendships as a difference in systems, not in terms of the advantages or disadvantages of individuals, Ilana argues on the basis of vague perceptions and aversions. Because she does not recognize that the model of Russian friendship is useful "there" but not "here", as does Tamara, she is left with little choice but to renounce the form of old friendships—although her renunciation is hardly consistent. She now accuses the old friends of exactly what she claimed to miss beforehand: openness and the outpouring of the soul. On the one hand, Ilana is still strongly tied to her old friends: "We are now not so many here and we've got to stick together, whether we want to or not." On the other hand, she perceives emigrant culture as an impediment to entering and succeeding in German society:

*"We are trapped here and we can't get out of this circle. So we're at one level and we can't get any higher. By higher, I mean into German circles." (Ilana, 1996)*

The cases above show how the orientation toward assimilation is marked by a higher degree of complexity than the "avoidance" and "wait and see" orientations. Whereas emigrants who avoid assimilation are satisfied with the notion that friendships are only possible among themselves, and those with a wait-and-see attitude wait for possible changes to come, immigrants with an orientation toward assimilation perform a balancing act between the trusted cultural patterns and the new group which is seen as being more attractive or more useful. This balancing act does not always succeed, as the three examples have shown. Only Tamara is able to take on a new model without discarding the old one.

### *The Jewish Religious Orientation*

Schütz did not conceive of the stranger's rapprochement with the new society as a series of phases. Nevertheless, the types of orientation that we have examined here—"avoidance", "wait and see", and "assimilation"—could be interpreted as stages in an ongoing process. But it is clear that not every immigrant will undergo every phase. The following two types of orientation, however, do not conform to Schütz's notion because the differences in cultural patterns in the original and receiving societies no longer play a role, whether as obstacles to be overcome or as attractive challenges.

The first of these types, which we have termed here a Jewish religious orientation, points to the fact that neither Schütz's research nor research on migration in general recognizes that all societies are culturally heterogeneous. In every society there are various cultures and milieus, which can be so different from one another that members of diverse milieus are more foreign to one another than members of similar milieus in different societies. A concrete example of this is religious Jews who live in different parts of the world but are more similar and better able to understand one another than are religious and secular Jews within one society. For emigrants of a Jewish religious orientation, the cultural differences between the original and receiving societies are not decisive factors. Such individuals choose their friends according to the criteria of affiliation with Judaism, where affiliation in this case is indicated by piety, concern for Jewish issues, or a bond with Jewish tradition. Emigrants like Sara who personify this type do not avoid relations with native residents or with other Russian Jews. However, these relations are not considered very important.

Sara's parents were Communists by conviction. At the age of 16, she turned toward religion and began to abide by the dietary laws; which was not always easy. She became very active in the Jewish community, which was often dangerous for students.

*"And I decided, after I turned 16, I limited myself, [I spent] all my free-time, only with the Jewish community ... and my entire circle of friends, all at once, were just from the [Jewish] community, and we had a very strong feeling of belonging which is absolutely not the case here in the [Jewish] community."* (Sara, 1995)

Like those who actively avoid social relations with native residents, Sara praises friendship "there" in contrast to friendships "here". However, Sara is referring only to friendships within the Jewish community. Friendships outside the Jewish community, whether in her country of origin or in Berlin, are not mentioned.

The young people whom Sara meets in the Jewish community in Berlin do not live up to her expectations. They are superficial and are only concerned with money and consumer goods. Nevertheless, she has found some,

who "somehow reach my intellectual level", although these acquaintances cannot be compared with her past relationships. Although the new acquaintances are hard pressed to live up to Sara's expectations, she is still oriented "here" solely toward members of the Jewish community, just as she was "there". In her country of origin, to pursue a Jewish lifestyle was a conscious act of opposition against the regime, and this was also a unifying factor for young Jews. In Berlin, personal relationships with members of the Jewish community should serve as a bulwark against the danger of assimilation. From Sara's perspective this danger exists because being a Jew in Berlin is less dangerous, and therefore it is easier to give up one's Jewish identity.

As we can observe, the Jewish religious orientation in Germany defines itself differently than in Israel, inasmuch as in Israel, the criteria of religious piety are narrower, limited to orthodoxy. Ilana, for example, chooses to develop personal relations mainly with Israelis chosen according to religious criteria:

*"I am not very closed in my Judaism and I understand very well the secular newcomers from Russia. The fact that they are secular is not a reason for me not to be with them and be their friend. We have a lot in common, but with the secular Israeli I have no relation, because I have not had the chance to meet them, because all my life here is in a religious environment." (Ilana, 1996)*

Regardless of whether the Jewish religious orientation is defined as more or less devout, in any case it offers inner stability and external support, even though it clearly places *a priori* limits on the circle from which friendships can develop. Because this limit is chosen freely, however, it does not appear to be a hindrance.

### *The Personal Orientation*

A personal orientation is similar to the Jewish religious orientation in that cultural differences—in the sense of differences in mentality—are not considered important in the initiation of inter-ethnic relations. These two orientations are opposites in other ways, however. Immigrants with a Jewish religious orientation limit themselves to a narrow spectrum of possible relationships, while immigrants with a personal orientation are open to many kinds of relations. Those with a personal orientation note differences between "here" and "there" in the ways of relating to others, no less than immigrants with a wait-and-see attitude do, for example. But they do not orient themselves according to generic criteria of cultural similarity. They are guided rather by individuals' shared characteristics: "We are, we all are similar by the fact that we're different. That's what we have in common."

In this sentence Karel was able to formulate the leitmotif of a personal orientation. This type also finds no place in Schütz's work, apparently because it is

always assumed that differences in culture and mentality play the major role in the initiation of personal relations between immigrants and native residents. As the following example shows, this is not necessarily the case. Karel reports that because of the Israeli-Arab conflict, it was unthinkable for him in the Ukraine to be friends with a Palestinian. In Germany, he has met Palestinians and reports that they are

*"really normal people. We are good friends. And from that point on, I believe in choosing my friends based not on belonging to a particular group, but just on whether or not I like the person."* (Karel, 1995)

Larissa has "German, Russian and also Jewish friends". In response to the question about whether she perceives differences in the way personal relationships are formed in Russia and Germany, she replies: "No, absolutely not." To a follow-up question by the interviewer, who apparently could not believe that Larissa does not see any differences between "there" and "here", she says:

*"I mean—to the point—it's clear that people have different mentalities but that plays, that's merely interesting to me. It's not so important. That doesn't mean that I, in this way, that they are a little different, that they maybe have another religion or something, I don't know, a different mentality. Really, that attracts me."* (Larissa, 1995)

Alfred, from the Israeli group of subjects, also rejects the interviewer's assumption of meaningful cultural similarities and differences. Alfred speaks of a Beduin friend:

*"I met him by chance. He is a very good friend. I wish all the Israelis and Russians will be like him, and I also have Arab friends that I met at the preparatory program at the university and at the dormitories."*

*Interviewer: "Do you feel that these friends are similar to you culturally more than the Israelis?"*

*Alfred: "No, I talk only about my friends and good friends without any consideration of their race and nationality ... I have German friends, good friends; as I said before, I do not generalize about people."*

When he arrived in Israel, Alfred lived first in a Kibbutz. The uniqueness of this lifestyle did not bother him. For him, individuals count; some are nice and others less so:

*"They were different from me, but not to an extent that prevented me from accepting them and them from accepting me."* (Alfred, 1996)

## **Waiting in Germany—Assimilating in Israel**

If we now look at the distribution of orientations in our groups of interviewees, it becomes clear that the immigrants in Israel are much more interested in initiating social relations with native residents than immigrants in Germany.

The "avoidance" type does not appear at all in the Israel group. In the German group however, 18% (N=8) consider social relations with native residents undesirable. The "wait and see" orientation shows up strongly in both groups. Among immigrants in Germany, 43% (N=19) have difficulties overcoming "differences in mentality" which they perceive as an obstacle, with 36.8% (N=14) of the Israel sample reporting similar difficulties. The largest difference between the two groups appeared in the "assimilation" type, which described 42.1% (N= 16) of immigrants in Israel and 15.9% (N=7) of immigrants in Germany. The Jewish religious orientation is represented with low percentages in both groups: 6.8% (N=3) among those who went to Germany and 10.5% (N=4) among those who went to Israel. The personal orientation can be found more often in the German sample (15.9%, N=7) than in the Israeli sample (10.5%, N=4).

Because subjects were assigned to orientation types regardless of whether or not they actually maintained personal relations with native residents, we now turn to the correlation between orientation and actual relations—i.e. relations which were explicitly named in the subject's description of their network. Much as we had expected, the majority of the avoiders and those with a "wait and see" attitude did not maintain social relations with native residents. Nevertheless, there was a minority in every group who identified native residents in their network, even among the avoiders. It was also not surprising that almost all immigrants who were categorized as "assimilation" types had native friends or acquaintances, with only three exceptions. As expected, the personal-orientation types maintained contacts with native residents, as did those with a Jewish religious orientation, with one exception.

Our initial question was: Does social integration occur differently in the new society depending on whether the person emigrates as a Russian Jew to Israel or Germany? The answer is that, on the level of actual social relations, there is only slightly more integration among the Israeli group. But this difference is much more marked when the orientation toward social relations is considered.

This difference in orientation between the two immigrant groups can be explained in connection with Schütz's concepts of the "stranger" and the "homecomer" (Schütz 1944, 1945). Russian Jews who go to Israel are welcomed, at least according to official ideology, as "homecomers". For the Russian Jews themselves, however, this "return" is often alienating. This is explained by the disappointment of a homecoming in which things and people

do not turn out to be as expected. At the same time, and in spite of the alienation, there is a feeling of affiliation, which is based on the notion of a home for all Jews. So while immigrants in Israel experience a more alienated or alienating return, the majority of immigrants in Germany remain simply estranged.<sup>9</sup> In Schütze's terminology, it is clear that the immigrants in Israel are more inclined to enter into social relations with their fellow actors as partners, and to participate in the action in progress, than those who went to Germany.

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9 Regarding the question: "In which way is your relationship to Germany and Germans influenced by an understanding of the Holocaust?" see Schütze 1997.

*Roswitha Breckner*

## The Meaning of the Iron Curtain in East–West Migration Biographies

The conceptual opposition between the ‘East’ and the ‘West’ of Europe (Stöltzing, this volume, and Todorova 1999) became after World War II for the first time a geographically fixed border between two politically and economically polarizing state complexes. The historically shifting separation lines, depending on the period and point of view from where they were drawn at any one time, were now set up as an increasingly impermeable ‘system border’ symbolically and manifestly marked by the ‘Iron Curtain’.

We can assume that “borders” always structure relations between two “sides” by constituting a difference. But what kind of relations and difference were created by the Iron curtain as a specific historical border? Looking at theoretical examinations of relations to the ‘other’ as ‘strangers’ (Bauman 1996; Schäffter 1991; Waldenfels 1997) we can find different modes of experiencing and constructing difference (see also the patterns discussed by Stöltzing in this volume). The relation can be structured as a conceptual dichotomy between two sides, in which each side denies having anything in common with the other and thus defines itself in contrast to the other. In this kind of relation, one’s own side is dependent on the negative bond of such a distinction. In contrast, supplementary relations can be constructed, in which each side feels whole only in conjunction with the other. The complementary mode of relation is then defined as one where each side feels itself to be shaped by the other in a mutual creation of difference. And we can imagine relations in which borders (and differences created by them) are neglected by reference to a common ground or a common “origin” (Schäffter 1991: 11–28). These specific modes of relating to ‘others’ correspond to different ways of structuring social space, where we can imagine clear-cut demarcations between different forms of social organization, forming divided spaces in geographical or local terms as well, but also overlapping and transitory regions or border areas, and conceptions of social space in which ‘borders’ are denied or transcended. Moreover, borders which create, structure, and organize social space can be conceived both as part of and as a result of social processes (Simmel 1992: 698–702). Thus borders change as social spaces change, while these spaces themselves change in relation to shifting borders.

With this background in mind, let us return to the Iron Curtain as a specific historical border. The East–West separations which preceded it, although they were also shaped as dichotomizing concepts, had been relatively open as far as their shifting socio-geographical mapping is concerned. They

had allowed one to imagine overlapping milieus, transitory regions, fluctuating tensions. The coordinates of the newly created “bloc system”, in contrast, were instituted as a clear-cut demarcation. Seen from a general system perspective, the pattern of dichotomizing contrast thus seems to have prevailed at least on the level of state policy, where new collective identities were created. These were mainly based in patterns of constructing the ‘own’ in opposition to what was defined as belonging to or as being a characteristics of the ‘others’. But how did this kind of a dividing line between systems affect people’s lives and the symbolic worlds in every day life? And how have these arrangements and worlds changed since 1989, after the dissolution of the border? What did the experience of living on different sides mean, and how did it affect biographies?

In this paper I will focus narrowly on border-related experiences of those who crossed from East to West at a time when it was still relatively closed. East–West migrants were confronted with the mechanisms that created differences with reference to this border to such an extent that they had become relevant in every day life, and they were constrained to develop strategies to deal with these differences and divisions before the oppositional stance of the systems started to dissolve in 1989–90. Their experiences and biographies can therefore be expected to illustrate aspects of experiencing this border and its evolution. In this paper, I will look for the *biographical* significance of these experiences, i.e. the specific meaning which the border had acquired over the long term in life histories and life stories of migrants; a line of thought which is based on a biographical approach (see for example, Fischer-Rosenthal 1995 and in this volume; Rosenthal 1995; Schütze 1983) and on my research on East–West migration biographies (Breckner 1994, 1997a, b, 1999, 2000).<sup>1</sup> However, I do not aim to present a typological range of the empirical diversity of experiences related to the border. Rather, through a presentation of two cases as examples of a specific type of migration biography with Romania in the late 1960s as the point of departure and West Germany as the locus where these interviewees had settled by the time the interviews were conducted in 1993 and 1994, I will describe *three specific contexts* in which the border-related experiences took shape:

- in the migration process itself;
- in the act of constructing a biography retrospectively referring to the lived life;
- in processes of “re-situating” one’s life in changing historical dimensions, especially after 1989.

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1 I conducted biographical narrative interviews following the method developed by Fritz Schütze (see for example, Schütze 1983) mainly from 1993 to 1995. I began with a wide scope including migrants from Hungary, Poland, Russia, and then focused on those from Romania with different and also mixed national and ethnic backgrounds (Romanian, Hungarian, Russian, German, Jewish, Armenian).

The border experiences of those whom I have interviewed differ widely in each of these contexts, and also differ in the way they are interwoven and in how they gained biographical relevance. In some cases the border experiences are still a structuring element of the present life, while in others they have receded into the background and belong rather, with the migration process as a whole, to the past. In every interview I have analyzed, however, these dimensions have turned out to be relevant in the processes that shaped the meaning of the border.

## **Migration from Romania to the West**

After several political crises during the Cold War,<sup>2</sup> more or less harsh restrictions were imposed on travel, especially from the East to the West. The apparent difficulty of crossing the border resulted in a significant reduction of mobility from the West to the East as well (see figures in Chesnais 1991; Morokvasic and Tinguy 1993; Münz 1990). However, each country in the East had its periods of "liberalization" during which travel to the West was allowed to a certain extent, and emigration and even movements back and forth were possible.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of Romania, the first considerable wave of emigration developed mainly in Jewish and Armenian communities in the late 1950s.<sup>4</sup> The main target countries were Israel and the USA. A second period of slight opening began in the late 1960s, when Ceausescu was seeking contact with the West. Sports, cultural, and scientific exchanges were organized and negotiations were initiated with the Federal Republic of Germany about the emigration of an increasing number of ethnic Germans.<sup>5</sup>

When compared with interviews conducted with migrants from Hungary, Poland and Russia who moved during the same period (from the 1950s to

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2 1956 in Hungary, 1961 in the GDR, 1968 in Czechoslovakia, 1981/82 in Poland.

3 As in Yugoslavia where the border had never been closed, in Poland and Hungary where many channels of contact and exchange with the West had remained open except during political crises, and in Romania where the Ceausescu regime had begun a policy of opening toward the West from 1968 on.

4 In the figures published by Trond Gilberg (1973: 58ff) it becomes apparent that between 1956 and 1966 the Jewish community diminished from 146,200 to 42,800; the Armenian from 6,400 to 3,400.

5 To the extent that statistics provide a reliable picture, we can say that between 1974 and 1989, around 130,000 ethnic Romanians, 160,000 ethnic Germans, 46,000 ethnic Hungarians and 19,700 Jews left Romania to go to the West (Poledna and Poledna 1994). The main receiving countries in this period were France and the USA, the Federal Republic of Germany, Hungary, and Israel.

1988) to East or West Germany, the interviews with migrants from Romania show clearly that, before 1989, the differences between experiences of crossing the border were not shaped primarily by the migrants' national background. Whether the migration ended in East or in West Germany, and whether it was shaped as a legal or illegal move, was much more important than whether the migrants came from Russia, Romania, Poland, or Hungary. The national background did become relevant after 1989, however; this is manifested in the fact that it was dealt with at length in nearly every interview I conducted, although neither my opening question nor my narrative questioning in the second part of the interview (Schütze 1983) focused on this aspect. Even though nationality issues had a different meaning for the construction of the biography in the various cases, their thematization always was linked to the historic changes of 1989, after which the self-location had to be re-created in relation to the dissolution of the border, which had formed the migration experience and to a certain extent the whole biography.

The context of this process was characterized by changing Western discourses on East European countries (cf. Czyżewski 1995), and especially the discourse on Romania, which now became mainly pejorative (Wodak and Matouscheck 1993; Bohn et al. 1993). This served to legitimize the creation of a protective wall against immigration from the East, as manifested in the Schengen treaty (Stölting 1991).<sup>6</sup> A different immigration status was ascribed to different groups of migrants, on the basis of different symbolic and cultural assets. In other words, it now made a difference whether the migration had begun in Romania, Hungary, Poland, or Russia, and whether the migrants presented themselves as having a Jewish, ethnic German, Armenian, or Roma background.

The following discussion of experiences related to the Iron Curtain focuses on the biographies of two men born in the early 1950s in Romania who moved to the "West" in the late 1960s: one with the status of an ethnic Romanian directly to the Federal Republic of Germany, the other with an Armenian family background via Lebanon and the USA back to Europe, where he shuttled between West Germany and France from the mid-1970s until 1988.

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6 In the Treaty of Schengen, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria and Italy agreed to protect their "eastern border" since all refugees who manage to cross it and enter other Western European countries from any of these countries can be sent back to the first "safe" country which they had entered. In addition, if an immigrant or even a tourist is accused of having violated a regulation (including failure to have a visa extended even by a few hours), and is therefore forbidden to enter the country where the violation occurred, this ban is applied in all other countries that signed the Schengen agreement as well. This means that such a person would be unable to enter any Western European country as long as the ban is in force.

## Experiencing Differences and Divisions in the Migration Process

### *An Irreversible Flight*

Romica Brasovean, a 17-year-old Romanian adolescent, had the opportunity to participate in a sports event in West Germany in 1970. On his way back home, but before leaving West Germany, he managed to escape the surveillance of the secret service escort, took the risk of “stealing” his passport in an unguarded moment, and left the team. When he arrived at the reception office for East European refugees, he was at first refused recognition as such and threatened with deportation. As a child of a Romanian family without an ethnic German background, Romica did not have the *ius sanguinis*, the most readily accepted justification for Eastern Europeans applying for immigration to West Germany.<sup>7</sup> Only after he declared that he would commit suicide in case of deportation to Romania did the authorities relent and accept him as an applicant for asylum. For Romica, crossing the Iron Curtain meant risking his very life, since he clearly knew that he would have been in danger in Romania if he had been sent back. His border crossing was a decision to move to the other side with little hope of returning or even establishing a link to the context left behind.

Romica’s decision to flee was prompted by the wish he had developed during his youth to become a German and to live in the West. Still, right at the beginning of the first interview I conducted with him in 1993<sup>8</sup> he described his first experiences in Germany after the flight in the following way.

*“It was interesting, because in Romania never, I had no idea of folklore and traditional dances, I refused that sort of thing, it was overdone. And here, at the beginning, it was interesting, you found your origins then a little bit—so I learned more about Romania here than in Romania. Because in Romania you always got, from official quarters, only this ideology. And here you had the opportunity to get other books, some of which were banned in Romania, and to see it differently. And suddenly the whole picture that we had had in Romania was turned upside down.” (Romica Brasovean I, 1993: 1)*

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7 *Ius sanguinis* accords citizenship on the basis of ethnicity. All those who are able to demonstrate German ancestry are automatically granted German citizenship. Interestingly, this law, which dates from 1913, has been applied only to ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe, not to those coming from Switzerland, for example. The use of this law may thus be influenced by the specific historical relations with ethnic German communities in Eastern Europe especially during World War II.

8 This interview lasted four hours and was followed by another one a year later, in 1994, also lasting four hours. The case analysis (following Rosenthal 1993, 1995; Fischer-Rosenthal 1996) is based on the transcriptions of these two interviews.

Paradoxically, the crossing of the border had made Romica a voluntary Romanian.<sup>9</sup> For the first time he became curious about his own cultural heritage, as soon as he felt protected against being overrun by it. At the same time, this involved a confrontation not only with additional knowledge concerning his origins, but also with a divided knowledge: opposing views and contradictory images regarding the history and culture of his country, which turned his earlier conception upside down.

Moreover, for Romica the border turned out to be an impermeable one, tending to swallow up all that he had left behind, to the point of making him an "orphan", as he puts it in the interview.<sup>10</sup> Thus it is also likely that Romica now identified himself as a Romanian in order to preserve a link to his family and his past.<sup>11</sup> Inspired by a priest who became a kind of surrogate father during this period, Romica joined a Romanian exile group,<sup>12</sup> which formed the basis for the re-formation of his "we" relations in terms of ethnic identification (Weinreich 1989). In this group Romica found support in finding an apartment and a job, learned traditional Romanian dances, which were performed in public, and dealt with religion in the context of the changed perspective on Romanian history.

But Romica's identification as Romanian was also due to a third influence, namely the typical experience of immigrants who feel a lack of recognition for their particular culture in the new context.

*"When people asked me, 'Where is Romania? What is Romania?' I must admit I was a bit nonplussed when I had to explain where Romania is. People either confused it with Bulgaria, or Bucharest with Budapest. (...) At these points I was a bit, well, not shocked but a bit astonished, you know, that Romania in fact was an unknown country in Germany, culturally as well. (...) And then in my case, I identified with Romania during the first four years in Germany." (Romica Brasovean II, 1994: 20f)*

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- 9 Basic ideas concerning the biographical meaning of changing relations to particular traditions in migration processes have been inspired and reinforced by the work of Lena Inowlocki, especially by a paper given at the conference "Lebenswelt Universität" in Halle/Saale (1999) and her paper in this volume. For a broader discussion of this issue see the papers published in Apitzsch 1999.
  - 10 Romica now was blacklisted by the secret service, so that it was impossible for him to meet relatives or friends even in another Soviet-block country.
  - 11 Processes of separation from significant "objects" and their replacement in migration processes during adolescence are described by Amia Lieblich (1993) and by Julia Mirsky and Frieda Kaushinsky (1989).
  - 12 This framework was set up after 1944 mainly through the activities of Romanian officers who had refused orders to cease collaboration with the German Army and to join the Soviet troops, but had decided to remain with the German army and thus came to Germany in the last year of the war or shortly thereafter. Most of them remained loyal to the former dictator Antonescu, strongly opposed the establishment of a state socialist regime, and tried to preserve hopes for a system change until the late 1970s (Dumitrescu 1997). This group organized the reception of all ethnic Romanian refugees in West Germany during the Cold War, and tried to recruit as many of them as possible, not least by providing considerable help in coping with the immigration situation.

However, Romica's strong identification as Romanian was, as indicated in the quote, just a temporary reaction. After four years he escaped from this Romanian emigrant milieu as well. He moved into an international commune and lost all contact with Romanians. His objective was to become a hippie, which was how in Romania he had perceived the Western lifestyle of his generation in the 1960s: the "young communists of the West", as he puts it. After three years living in this setting he began a new phase, working as a freelance cameraman for a local broadcasting company, which lasted until 1989. During this period the dramatic experiences of his migration faded into the background, and the dream of a life in the West came true, although he still refused to establish his new life entirely within the West German society. During these years Romica moved back and forth between his apartment in Italy and his workplace in West Germany.

### *Divisions Within a Family Before the Move*

For *Stefan Georgescu*, a talented and promising young artist of 19 at the time of his departure from Romania to Lebanon and then to the USA in 1970, the border crossing had already become part of his family life long before the actual move. His Armenian parents had pursued emigration plans, applying repeatedly for passports<sup>13</sup> over a period of seven years from 1956 when Stefan was twelve years old. Stefan was not included in the decision making and was only partially informed about these matters. His parents kept their plans to themselves as much as possible, since aspiring emigrants risked increasing exclusion from the societal sphere, and so that Stefan could continue his artistic secondary education without insecurity. That their fears were well founded became apparent when Stefan's uncle, who worked in the administration, blocked the emigration at a stage when the parents had already received the passports and sold all their valuables. The uncle would have risked a demotion if he had relatives in the West, and therefore he had betrayed his own family. Stefan and his parents had to wait for another two years, and then left in complete secrecy. Thus for Stefan the move across the border involved the creation of separate worlds within his family, with his parents attached to the Armenian milieu as a minority context on the one side, and his uncle forming part of the power of the communist state on the other. Stefan himself as a child and adolescent represented the unproblematic integration and even assimilation on a high cultural level in the Romanian society, which he himself felt no strong need to leave. Above all, the move for Stefan meant quitting his artistic training in the most prestigious state institution, to which he

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13 As travelling outside the country was restricted, a tourist or emigration passport and visa had to be issued for every journey.

had just been admitted, and leaving Bucharest, which he had enjoyed greatly and considered as “his” city.

Unlike Romica, Stefan had experienced the crossing of the border as a ambiguous process: he had no real choice about whether to go or to stay. Nor was this question a crucial one for him, since through his intense identification with modern performing arts he already felt part of a shared European culture of modernity, which was present in Romania as well. Thus he did not feel cut off from something that he desired and that was located exclusively on the other side of the border. At the same time, he was keen to explore the other side, where artists he considered great masters were working and living. Hence he did not object to the emigration, and even shared the meaning of this experience with his parents, at least partly during the long journey to America.

*I: “What was the situation like at your departure?”*

*G: Like getting out of prison. Everything was controlled; we were not allowed to take anything with us, no money, no dollars, nothing. Like getting out of prison, we were examined like public enemies. Actually, it was somehow unreal, as if I were on the moon, you know—I had seen the first landing on the moon, I remember, it was in August, and we arrived in Lebanon in November at the time of the second landing, and they showed it on TV, but nobody really watched it (...) We had followed the first landing the whole night, and I remember that I had the feeling, America to me is like Mars, like another planet.”*

The experience placed Stefan in an indeterminate process of transition to something completely unknown, which had, in addition to the feeling of liberation, other connotations as well.

*I: “Can you tell me more about the journey to Lebanon?”*

*G: My mother started to sing because her brother in law didn't know we had left, we were gloating. We hadn't told anybody we were leaving, and we had a wonderful journey, with a stopover in Istanbul. For the first time in my life I saw, in the airport—this was capitalism, I was completely—people could buy and simply went in and out. And then we arrived in Beirut and I felt like a refugee. Up to this point I had been a free person and then I was no longer free, had no documents, no money (...) [cassette is changed]. I was able to do my exercises at the home of a Lebanese family, but it was a strange time, we were up in the air.” (Stefan Georgescu I, 1994: 62f)*

The ambivalence of his “liberation” becomes even sharper when Stefan talks about his first experiences in America, where the pattern of feeling placed in a completely contrasting world took shape:

*“I came to America and my first reaction was, actually we come from, we descended from a more civilized country. (...) In America I have experienced the images of capitalism that we had learned in school: how bad capitalism is, the boss smoking a havana, just like the cliché. My teacher smoked havanas and I smelled a havana for the first time in my life. It smelled terrible, I didn't like it at all—these uncivilized habits, this coarseness, this rudeness (...) the whole mentality was strange. (...) America was kafkaesque to me. It was an emigration that had gone wrong.” (Stefan Georgescu I, 1994: 66)*

Stefan's strong identification with European culture in Romania gave him, as it did almost all intellectuals and artists of his generation, an orientation as part of the Western world; and gave rise to concepts of what kind of behavior can be expected in the world. These conceptualizations proved dissonant with and even contradictory to his later experiences. Thus for Stefan as for Romica a conception was turned upside down by his move across the border. In Stefan's case, however, it was not his image of Romania but of the West that was challenged. Surprisingly, even the clichés he learned in school about the world beyond the border gained some plausibility. At that time the border which organized Stefan's perception of different and contradictory worlds in the immigrant situation was clearly defined as one between capitalism and the Romanian society, along which he explored many other dissimilarities, among others, the quality of his teachers, the fact that his stipend did not cover the costs for his education forcing his parents to a rather high financial sacrifice, and in general the meaning of money in connection with religion. Moreover, Stefan 'located' the border between the different worlds as one between America and Europe. This was probably also due to the fact that he was not allowed to leave the USA for two years in order to complete the immigration procedure and obtain a green card.

After Stefan had completed his artistic education he left for Europe in 1974 and settled there, while his parents remained in America. Moving all over Western Europe, he continued his professional career now in the way he had dreamed of, assisting the masters who had been his models during childhood. His life during this period was that of a cosmopolitan artist, oscillating between France and Germany over nearly ten years. Stefan identified with this world, in which migration was now a normal condition, no longer related to the Iron Curtain as a separating line between capitalism and socialism creating disturbing experiences of difference.

### **Crossing the Iron Curtain in a Biographical Perspective: Turning Points in Past and Present**

In a long-term biographical perspective, the crossing of the Iron Curtain had attained a structuring relevance as a turning point in the biographies of both Romica and Stefan, but in different ways.<sup>14</sup>

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14 As an example where this was not the case among those interviewed see Breckner 1997b.

### *A Radical Separation with Shifting Perspectives*

In Romica's case the move across the border constituted itself as a biographical turning point which divided his life into two parts, one before and one after the migration, which have not been easy to reconnect until today. On the one hand this is, as we have seen, a result of the conditions of his "flight" which made it impossible for him to return for nineteen years, even as a tourist. Yet at the same time, considering the period before the move, it becomes apparent that Romica used the impermeable border to create a radical separation from his home context in a situation of adolescent conflict with his father: his father had forced him to attend a Romanian boarding school in an exclusively Romanian town, thus cutting off his contacts with the ethnic German peer group and the athletic club in his home town. That his father's intent was to sever Romica's connections with the Germans in his home town, who represented the Western world, is patent in numerous other incidents in the escalating conflict, which reached the point of physical violence. Thus Romica's flight to the "other side" was a liberation from his father's authority: the border protected him and guaranteed him the autonomy he had longed for.

In the long run this separation, initially an adolescent act of rebellion, was not easy for Romica to integrate into his life, as his action scheme immediately after the move shows. This difficulty is also apparent in the way he tells his story (Breckner 1999). The second period in which the border experiences gained significance, constituting another biographical turning point, began in December, 1989, when Romica first took the opportunity to go to Romania. He was sent by a film company to do a documentary on the "Revolution" as a professional observer; and although he maintained this position and perspective, another point of view imposed itself as well. Romica vividly recounts his first crossing of the border, the encounter with the border officer, how he first saw the flag with a hole in the middle where the emblem of the communist state had been cut out, etc. He summarizes his feelings as "like being pregnant". Then he talks about the following significant situation:

*"That is also interesting, the first time we drove into a village just across the border, (...) for me that was really like Columbus discovering America and the first natives approaching, that's how we looked at each other. For me too, Romania, you are in Romania now, now you see Romania, and we looked at each other like that. First they asked, 'Are you German?' [laughs]. 'Well', I said, 'you can talk Romanian with me, I am Romanian.' 'Oh, really, you speak Romanian?' I said, 'Yes, I am Romanian.' And then, at that moment I really felt like Columbus, I looked really greedily at people, what kind of people they are, what country I come from."* (Romica Brasovean I, 1993: 20–21)

For Romica it was not clear from which side, from what position in relation to the border, he was looking at the country he came from: from 'outside', like Columbus, or as a Romanian not only 'speaking' but also 'being' Romanian, and thus a participant in what was going on 'inside' (see also Kalekin-

Fishman in this volume). This reveals that different angles and viewpoints had developed with respect to his “doing ‘being a Romanian’” (Inowlocki in this volume), viewpoints which had remained separated until then, but suddenly appeared concurrently: the distanced yet greedy view of Columbus seeing strange people, and the feeling of being one of them at the same time. Generally speaking, we can say that before 1989 Romica’s identifications, including his nationality (Weinreich 1989), were organized sequentially in separate life periods and milieus, yet after 1989 his different and partly contradictory orientations suddenly became concurrent, compelling him to deal once again with the question where to situate himself, in a symbolic as well as literal sense.

### *A Retrospective Turning Point in a Situation of Biographical Crisis*

For Stefan, the move across the border had not created a biographical turning point at the time it happened, as it had in Romica’s case. Although Stefan unlike Romica did not experience the migration across the Iron Curtain as a way of solving a problem, even latently, but rather as a problem in itself, the experience did not immediately represent a rupture in his biographical path and self-definition. This was due in large part to the fact that he was able to continue the career he had begun, and thus to continue defining himself primarily as a working modern artist. Furthermore, as a legal resident of the USA, Stefan was allowed to travel all over Eastern Europe even before 1989, which he did from time to time when invited to present his art.

Nonetheless, Stefan’s emigration from Romania eventually did become a biographically structuring experience, but only in *retrospect*, in the light of developments in his life after 1989. This was the result of a biographical crisis which arose in the early 1990s when Stefan’s international career did not continue at the high level he had formerly attained. It became apparent that Stefan’s cosmopolitan self-definition had depended on a continuing successful career. Furthermore, this self-definition had allowed him to overcome the fragility of his situation during periods when he had tried to settle in one location more steadily, first in France where he had applied for naturalization, then in Germany in late 1988. But after 1989, with his career interrupted, Stefan’s “coming from Romania” became a seriously challenging biographical issue.

*“In the twentieth century it is taken for granted that artists are emigrants. (...)”<sup>15</sup> Why do I say this? Well, because of the syndrome of being an emigrant. It was not easy for me as a young man to be in such different countries, especially in America. Then I remembered all these great names and said to myself, as an artist you are at home everywhere, and that helped me somehow. And then later, when I was over thirty, I felt like a citizen of the*

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15 Here he lists the “great names”, which are omitted here for the sake of Stefan’s anonymity.

*world. I said, I am at home in any country; there is no problem. But then I realized finally that someone who is born in France or in Germany or elsewhere can say—regardless of where he lives—I am German. But what will you say you are? I no longer had the self-determination to say, I am Romanian, that doesn't work [draws in air]. And then I said, maybe a part of me is as if handicapped, so that I don't have this ethnic-national function [sniffs], and then I said, you must be happy with being what you are, but now I am ambivalent again. Now I think it was a bad joke of nature that I was born in Romania, when I know how my mother was born,<sup>16</sup> all these coincidences with my father who wanted to emigrate in the 1950s. I said to my mother, "You are Armenian, there are Armenians all over the world, why did you give birth to me in Romania? Couldn't you have stayed in Odessa or where you were born?" And now I think, at this juncture, I wish I had not been born in Romania, I really do." (Stefan Georgescu I, 1994: 17f)*

Although Stefan tries to dissociate himself from Romania as a biographically relevant context, his arguments show that his birthplace still means something to him. Similarly to Romica (and to the typical experiences of the returning emigrant as described by Alfred Schütz 1972), he had rediscovered Romania during extended travels in the early 1990s after having lived for twenty years in the West. This formed his perspective on the country he "came from", which now appeared to him—though not to Romica—as devalued mainly in terms of material decline, but also in terms of political and intellectual crisis. Nonetheless, Stefan in Germany defends Romania against the media's dominant negative representation of it, mainly by highly selective reporting that almost always creates an image of Romania as part of the "barbaric Balkans".<sup>17</sup> Stefan remains attached to Romania as a context with which he had identified positively in his youth, but which now appears demoralized.

Thus Stefan's emigration and subsequent relocation on the other side of the border produced ambivalent biographical positions and perspectives. Seen from the bleak present perspective of his discontinued professional life in the West, the emigration *retrospectively* constitutes a turning point which separated him from an easy life, including the prospect of a splendid career in Romania's modern urban life. But seen from the perspective of a struggling country with a severely diminished cultural life in comparison to the period during which Stefan lived there, his emigration seems to have saved him in the nick of time from many hardships. Torn between these two perspectives, Stefan has difficulty detaching himself from Romania as the context which formed his past.

16 Stefan's grandparents had fled to Odessa after the German invasion of Romania in 1916, but then returned because of the Russian Revolution in 1917. His mother was born near the border between Romania and Russia on the return journey.

17 See also Lindlau (1990), who describes reporting on Romania in this period as "trend journalism" which corroborated set views rather than testing information. As it turned out, the numbers of casualties reported in the incidents called the "Romanian revolution" had to be corrected from 4,300 to 130.

## **Discovering Family Histories and Linkages Between Romanian and German Histories**

In both Romica's and Stefan's lives the dissolution of the Iron Curtain that began in 1989, together with the new possibility of returning to Romania, marked the beginning of a new confrontation with this border and the question of where to situate themselves. This confrontation was fueled by a strong interest in the family histories before 1945, and in the way in which family history was interwoven not only with Romania's national history but also, as we shall see, with German history.<sup>18</sup> From this perspective the Iron Curtain is seen, in the moment of its disintegration, to have been not only a border in space but also a mental border in time, one which had blocked out history, especially the interconnection of different national histories during the two World Wars and their impact on family lives, generational perspectives and the dynamics of biographies in the period after 1945. With the dissolution of the border this layer came to the fore, and became for both Romica and Stefan a *biographically* relevant issue for the first time in their lives.

### *Reconnecting with a Contradictory Family History: Transcending Divisions from a Position of Being 'Uprooted'*

As we have seen, Romica's life had already been visibly affected by questions of history, mainly in the Romanian exile group which he joined after his move, but also in the subsequent period when, living in a commune, he began to deal with Germany's Nazi past. But this had remained somewhat abstract. It was only in the process of defining his position after 1989 that "history with a capital H" became relevant in connection with Romica's family history, and thus took on biographical significance. Romica became especially interested in the family history of his father, who had died four years before Romica first returned to Romania. In particular, events and developments during World War II, which had remained unmentioned in Communist Romania, came to the fore. Now Romica learned and remembered that his father, an officer in the Romanian army, had strongly admired "the Germans", as represented by the German army during the Nazi period.<sup>19</sup>

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18 One might speculate that the topic "relations with Germans" emerged so strongly due to the interaction in the interview with me as a German interviewer. Since my interviewees all knew that I too was born in Romania, however, the interaction was structured not so much as a relation to a German, but rather as one with a member of Romania's German minority, which can also vary depending on where my interviewees positioned themselves in the ethnic landscape of Romania.

19 During the whole period of military collaboration and even afterwards, Germany was admired as a model, especially with regard to the power, wealth and "civilization" per-

In response to a request to tell a bit more about his family, a request which did not focus on any specific aspect because family had hardly been mentioned in the preceding interview, Romica replied:

*"My father was, that's also interesting, an admirer of the Germans, he had—he was a pilot in the Second World War, he studied mechanical engineering, and he was—therefore he always admired the Germans. So when he told stories they were about airplanes, Messerschmitt M 104s or something, that were the famous airplanes [of the German air force] in the Second World War, and for—for him the Germans were the great masters."* (Romica Brasovean I, 1993: 106)

From here Romica goes on to tell the story of his father, trying to find the reason why he found the Germans, who at that time represented a fascist regime and a murderous war, so fascinating. Romica's grandfather, who had returned from work migration to the US in the 1920s, had raised the status of the family not least by allowing his oldest son, Romica's father, to study engineering. Thus Romica's father formed part of the first generation that had to cope with the tension between agrarian and industrial ways of life, which arises in most industrializing countries. Romica introduces this background in order to make it understandable that his father, as a mechanical engineer, was fascinated by modern German war machinery, and that at the same time the fascist regime had allowed him to remain attached to his agrarian origins through a nationalist ideology.

Moreover, once equipped with this knowledge and perspective Romica traces the background of his conflict with his father anew. He recounts how his father had entered the Communist Party in 1964 after a long period of 'political' difficulties in order to get a steady job as an engineer, thus probably breaking with his past by entering into a new commitment to the communist state. It now appears likely that Romica's involvement with Germans was related to his father's difficulty in dealing with his own past relationship to the Germans. The adolescent conflict appears as a struggle between a father and his oldest son about the unresolved entanglement with the Germans during the war, an issue which had been made invisible in communist Romania since the West Germans as the successors of Nazi Germany were now situated on the other side of the border. At the same time, the meaning of "the Germans" for Romica and his generation was different from what it had been for his father's generation, which probably added to the latent tension in their conflict. In view of these tensions, Romica's flight can be understood as an attempt to escape from the complex of 'traditions' affected by fascism and communism, which he had felt imposed on him.

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ceived in its army's technical equipment and organization. Even its use of power and force was perceived as more "civilized" (Friedrich 1993). Conversely, Romanians were despised by Germans as underdeveloped and uncivilized, even if they were ideologically idealized as an archaic peasant people. At the same time, Romanians resisted German power and arrogance by strategies which had been developed in centuries under foreign rule.

Having worked through these layers, Romica today refuses to identify with either of these backgrounds. Instead, he construes himself as having been uprooted all his life. In this way he can situate himself at a distance from the difficult historical constellations which have become significant in his family history without denying them. At the same time, his self-construction as an uprooted person creates a biographical frame in which he can include both periods of his life (i.e. the period before and the one after his flight), which had remained largely separate until 1989.

*"The bad thing is, for me it was like this: you live in a country [i.e. West Germany] and you assume you belong there. In my case it was like this because I'd lived with Germans in my hometown, so the change was not so radical. You're always looking for contexts where you are accepted. But sometimes you just get a little idea and then you don't belong in this place. I often thought basically I always was uprooted, but I'm happy to be uprooted because you look at things differently. Although you sometimes feel lonely and have your doubts, I am, I always was happy to be uprooted."* (Romica Brasovean I, 1993: 37)

This solution, however, with its opportunity to "look at things differently", is not reciprocated in all the social relations in which Romica is involved, neither in Germany nor in Romania. Moreover, since Romica is perceived to a certain extent as German in Romania and as Romanian in Germany, he still represents the 'other side' in either context. In Germany this becomes significant in situations in which Romica experiences discrimination or stigmatization due to his Romanian origins. In Romania, he is confronted with the fears of his relatives and friends that he could become a target of violent xenophobic attacks, which have increased throughout Germany since 1990. Romica concludes:

*"You are confronted with fascism all the time, everywhere, no matter whether you are Romanian or German, but if you are confronted with chauvinism there [i.e. in Romania] and nationalism here [in Germany]...."* (Romica Brasovean I, 1993: 34)

... then it makes no difference whether you define yourself as Romanian or German, and it makes no difference where you live, one could continue. Thus Romica has put an end to the mapping of disturbing aspects of a common history to the other side of the border, although his position is challenged. It is not surprising that he intends to keep the passport that identifies him as "stateless", which he considers the most appropriate position for him.

### *Discovering a Remote Family History: The Precarious Normality of Ambivalence*

After 1989 Stefan began struggling for the first time in his life with his family background and its interconnection with Romanian and German history. In contrast to Romica, Stefan's main issue was not a hidden collaboration with

Nazi Germany during World War II, but the unspoken threat to his family as Armenians during World War I. In the present, Stefan contextualizes this layer in questioning his decision to settle in Germany. He feels reminded of his parents' and grandparent's history, and he has now begun to explore that history in greater detail and to see it in the context of the Armenian genocide, in which the German state was also involved.<sup>20</sup> This point of view is fostered by public discussion of the Holocaust in Germany, which challenges Stefan to deal with his family and community history as one marked by persecution and even extermination.

Right at the beginning of his interview, the extent to which Stefan's new knowledge and perspective have reshaped his view of his own life becomes evident. Asked to tell his life story from the beginning up to the present with everything that has been important for him,<sup>21</sup> Stefan answered:

*"The most important thing is what happened before. I mean, I only discovered it at the age of forty, after forty years, when I was over forty. And then I understood some connections, especially with regard to Germany, which of course were more or less coincidence, but not only coincidence."* (Interview Georgescu I, 1994: 1)

He goes on at length about the death of his paternal grandfather after a German army attack in World War I;<sup>22</sup> the emigration of his maternal grandfather from Turkey to Romania in 1912 as a reason why he was not affected by the Armenian Genocide in 1915; the escape of nearly all Armenians from Bucharest when the German army invaded in 1916. These stories represent the German threat of persecution and even extermination of the family during World War I.

Then Stefan turns to the kind of relations that might have developed between German soldiers and his family during World War II, when soldiers were customers in his grandfather's shop. This question had become important after 1989 when Stefan became interested in the history of Romania during World War II, and had remained unanswered. However, the disclosure of Romania's pre-socialist national history had changed Stefan's perspective on Romania as well.

*"Once I'd read this book by Cioran, it bowled me over, even though the book is a bit crazy, it completely smashed my judgment of Romania. (...) It's like half a century of amnesia. Half a century is hard to make up for."* (Stefan Georgescu I, 1994: 18)

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- 20 Germany supported the Turkish government which carried out the persecution and genocide against Armenians mainly in 1915.
- 21 Concerning the opening question of narrative biographical interviews see Rosenthal (1995: 187, and in this volume).
- 22 It is quite likely that the German army used chemical and biological weapons during this attack, spreading typhus in order to infect the enemy army (Pascu 1983: 248ff). Stefan's grandfather died of a typhus infection.

Seen in the context of his family history, with its connections to German and Romanian history, Stefan's own life with its manifold migration experiences now appeared much more fragile than it had in his professional situation, where migration had become a normal condition. The family history added a historical and existential dimension to the biographical uncertainty and discontinuity which had first arisen during the emigration from Romania to the USA and which had become more severe during Stefan's professional crisis after 1989. The emigration from Romania now symbolizes an expulsion from certainty and the beginning of permanent exile.

*"I was very attached to my place [in Bucharest] and suddenly I was forced to become a professional emigrant in my life—reluctantly; I have no talent for that [laughs] ... I wish I were no longer an emigrant" (Stefan Georgescu I, 1994: 70).*

Whereas Romica has transcended his experiences of biographically significant divisions and separations due to the crossing of the Iron Curtain to 'rootlessness', Stefan still struggles with his attachment to and detachment from the former 'home context' and the related ambivalence of perspectives. In the present, however, he has found a solution to this situation as well, which is to construe himself as a "professional emigrant", i.e. someone who has, however reluctantly, developed a professionalism in dealing with the biographical uncertainties, the fragile and ambivalent relations to different milieus, nationalities and histories, which have become significant in his life. To bridge periods of discontinuity and to construct and re-construct all kinds of different relations in different contexts has become a skill which Stefan uses to build continuity in his life story.

## **Conclusion**

The presented cases have shown that the Iron Curtain could become a rather significant element in the life arrangements and experiences of those who crossed this border at a time when it was still relatively closed even though it did not affect biographies in the same way. Furthermore, it became apparent that the experience of crossing this border has different levels on which it acquired biographical significance according to the contexts in which it was and is shaped and has changed especially in the course of the historical re-structuration of Europe after 1989. In all these contexts and biographical layers it is clear that both Romica and Stefan were faced with contrasting and contradictory perspectives and knowledge which shaped their experiences and biographies considerably.

In the migration process the experience of crossing the Iron Curtain became relevant as one turning former conceptions upside down. In the case of

Romica this was related to an inversion of his knowledge of the pre-socialist history of Romania in the framework of a right wing Romanian exile group. In Stefan's case, his original image of the 'West' was challenged since his actual encounter turned out to be contradictory to his expectations, so that even the ideologically informed image of the West propagated by the socialist state gained some plausibility. This indicates, that the created contradictions between East and West on the level of state systems including the re-writing of national histories had an influence, even if temporary, on the perception of the respective 'other' side. This was in both the cases I have presented here also due to the hierarchical structure of difference in which they found themselves in the receiving country, where their former conception of already being part of the 'western world' before the move was rejected by placing them in the position of immigrants not (yet) belonging to this society and not recognizing their background as part of a common world. Both Stefan and Romica reacted at first by re-identifying with the context they had just left behind, although only for a relatively short period. After that they both worked against being separated from the receiving context and established new lives in the West by adapting to its conditions and developing new perspectives.

However, in a long-term biographical perspective the crossing of the border was seen to have constituted a turning point in both cases even if in a different way. In Romica's case, the turning point became manifest immediately after the move, and separated his life into two parts which were hardly connected until 1989, while in Stefan's case the turning point was constructed retrospectively in a process of biographical restructuring after 1989. Thus the lives of both Romica and Stefan, like those of most of the emigrants I interviewed, were strongly influenced and even structured by the experience of crossing this border in accordance with the profound changes in their life arrangements brought about by the circumstances of their crossing. At the same time, the biographical meaning and function of this experience varied: for Romica it was a means of escape from an adolescent conflict, and for Stefan it was at the root of a professional crisis that became a biographical turning point in the present.

For both cases the dissolution of the Iron Curtain after 1989 again opened up a new historical dimension in the biographical perspectives including the perception of their family history and the commonalities in Romanian and German history. In the process of considering how to situate themselves culturally and historically after the border which had structured their lives before had re-opened nearly over night, both men show that the Iron Curtain had also formed a border in time for this generation, since prewar history was blocked out by the conceptual construction of a universal dichotomy between socialism and capitalism. In particular, the interconnection between Romanian and German history during the two world wars had been made invisible, and came

to the fore after 1989. For Romica this meant to be confronted with the involvement of his father in the collaboration with Nazi-Germany. For Stefan it was rather the discovery of his Armenian family history in the context of persecution and Genocide in which Germany was involved during World War I, and which had changed his biographical coordinates as well.

All these different contexts, which constitute different and sometimes contradictory interpretations of reality and thus create different worlds and social spaces—whether concurrently or in succession—are part of the experience of East–West migrants. The two emigrants presented above have developed a kind of expertise in dealing with and communicating the shifting perspectives they have experienced. Ingrid Oswald and Victor Voronkov (in this volume) have discussed the issue of dealing with different perspectives as a question of hermeneutics in cross-cultural research projects in which different researchers who focused on one specific context found different explanations for the ‘same’ phenomenon. In addition I would like to argue, that seeing things from very different and even contradictory angles, and drawing on different context knowledge is part of every day life practice, especially for migrants but also for all of us who live in worlds divided by different borders. In order to consider different sides of these worlds, co-operation across the border, especially between the formerly polarized East and West is required in many fields of social scientific research, indeed.

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## About the Contributors

*Roswitha Breckner* is currently lecturing sociology and consulting on projects in various Universities on a freelance basis. She was lecturer in sociology at the Technical University of Berlin (1990-1995) and methods consultant as well as researcher in the international project "Social Strategies in Risk Societies" funded by the European Union (1996-1999). Since 1998 she has been doing research on male biographies in Austria focusing on relations with 'Germans' during World War II. Presently she is completing her research on East-West migration biographies. Her work is theoretically based on interpretative sociology, historiography, and biographical research.

*Ina Dietsch* (born 1966 in Leipzig) completed studies in Folklore in 1993 and was awarded a Ph.D. in European Ethnology in 2000, in the Department of Ethnography at Humboldt University, Berlin. She has worked in various projects of sociological research dealing with social and cultural transformation in East Germany, and was Scientific Assistant in Gender Studies at Potsdam University.

*Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal* (born 1946) is Professor of Sociology and Methods of Case Reconstruction at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Kassel, Germany. Before this, he held professorships at the Technical University of Berlin, Gießen, and Mainz. During 1980-82 he was a research fellow with Anselm Strauss at the University of California, San Francisco. He was president of the biographical research sections of the International Sociological Association (1990-94) and of the German Sociological Association (1990-96). His research interests include the sociology of knowledge, biographical research, living with chronic illness, forced migration and health, professional interventions, and qualitative methods.

*Mihai Dinu Gheorghiu* (born 1953 in Jassy, Romania) has been living in France since 1989. He studied sociology and psychology at the University of Jassy (Romania) and was awarded a Ph.D. in sociology at the Centre de Sociologie, de l'Education et de la Culture (Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales—EHES) in Paris. He was a researcher at the Max-Planck-Institut für Bildungsforschung and at the Centre Marc Bloch de Berlin 1994-1995). Since 1990 he has been a Research Fellow at the EHES Paris.

*Lena Inowlocki* is associate professor of sociology at J.W.Goethe-University in Frankfurt/Main, Germany. Her work is in qualitative-interpretive social research, mostly biographical analysis, on issues of culture and knowledge in society, e.g., on right-extremist youth group membership, immigration and society, traditionality and transculturality of three generations of women in families of Jewish Displaced Persons.

*Devorah Kalekin-Fishman* holds an MA in sociology and education from the University of Haifa, Israel, and a Dr. rer. soc. from the University of Constance, Germany. As a senior member of the staff of the Faculty of Education at the University of Haifa, she has had a variety of academic responsibilities, including heading the Department of Educational Sciences and coordinating teacher education. She is currently president of the International Sociological Association Research Committee for the Study of Alienation. She has published many articles in journals such as *Sociology of Education (US)*, *Humanistic Sociology*, *Journal of Education*, *The Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, and has published several books. Her research interests include intercultural education, sociology of knowledge, qualitative methods, and biography and social structure.

*Kaja Kaźmierska* (born 1964) Ph.D., is an Assistant Professor for sociology at the Institute of Sociology (Chair of Sociology of Culture) at the University of Lodz, Poland. Her research work is based on biographical narrative interview analysis and she works on problems such as collective identities, biographical experiences of the war and ethnic identities.

*Éva Judit Kovács* (born 1964) Ph.D., is a research fellow at the László Teleki Foundation at the Institute for Central European Studies, Budapest, Hungary. Her main research fields are Jewish identity in Hungary and Slovakia between the two world wars and is currently studying Hungarian political and economic elites and their discourses in the 19th and 20th centuries and cultural globalization in Hungary after 1989.

*Zdzisław Krasnodębski* (born 1953) is Professor of Eastern European Cultural History at the University of Bremen. He was lecturer in sociology at the University of Warsaw (1976–92); fellow of the Fritz Thyssen Foundation (1979–80); visiting fellow at the Institute of Humanities in Vienna (1985–86), and fellow of the Alexander von Humboldt-Foundation (1990–91). In 1991–92 he was visiting professor at Kassel University, 1998–99 at the Catholic University of America, Washington D.C. His main publications include the books: *The Understanding of Human Behavior*; *The Decline of the Idea of Progress*; *The Postmodern Cultural Dilemmas*; *Max Weber* (in Polish). He has also published numerous essays in Polish, German, and English.

*László Kürti* received his Ph.D. in 1989 from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (USA). He is a social anthropologist and currently teaches in the department of political science, University of Miskolc, Hungary. His interests include socialist and post-socialist East-Central Europe. His articles have been published in *Anthropology Today*, *East European Politics and Societies*, *Social Anthropology* and *Ethnos*. His books include *Beyond Borders* (Westview, 1997), and *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (SUNY, 2001).

*Ingrid Miethe* (born 1962) studied educational science, political science, and sociology in Berlin and received her Ph.D. at the Free University Berlin, in the Department of Political Science. She is a lecturer and researcher in Adult Education at the University of Greifswald, Department of Educational Science. Her fields of interest are biographical and qualitative methods, adult education, social movements, and gender studies.

*Mirjana Morokvasic-Müller* is a sociologist and senior research fellow at the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris and teaches at Université Paris X. Her areas of research interest are migration, interethnic relations, and gender studies. She has taught at a number of universities in Europe and North America, including at the Ruhr-University Bochum in 1999/2000, where she was Marie Jahoda Professor in gender studies.

*Ingrid Oswald* (born 1957) Ph.D. and Lecturer in Sociology. She has been lecturer and researcher at the Institute for Eastern European Studies at the Free University Berlin. She received her post-doctoral qualification at the University of Magdeburg and is currently researcher and Visiting Lecturer at the University of Magdeburg. She is on the Board of the Centre for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg. Her research topics include ethnicity and migration, urban sociology, social structure, and social change (in particular in relation to Eastern Europe).

*Martin Peterson* is a historian active at the University of Göteborg and the University of Bergen, Norway, as a professor. During the 1990s he has headed a faculty program on European research, been a member of committees on the "New Europe" and on "Globalization" within the framework of the Swedish Research Council. He has also been Swedish teamleader of three EU-projects.

*Tamar Rapoport* is Professor in the Sociology of Education at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. Her research interests are gender and education, immigration and Sociology of Youth. Her current research project is about the immigration passage of Russian Jews in Israel.

*Gabriele Rosenthal* (born 1954) studied sociology and psychology at the University of Constance and received her Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Bielefeld in 1986. In 1993 she completed a post-doctoral thesis on "Experienced and narrated life" at the University of Kassel. She currently lectures at the University of Cologne as Professor for Sociology in the Department of Education. Teaching and research interests cover interpretive sociology, qualitative methods, and biographical research.

*Yvonne Schütze*, Ph.D., studied sociology, psychology, and education at the University of Frankfurt/Main. She received her post-doctoral qualification at the University of Göttingen and is Professor of Sociology and Education at the Humboldt-University Berlin. Her research interests include sociology of the family, socialization, and migration.

*Viktoria Semenova*, Ph.D., is Principal Researcher at the Institute of Sociology in the Russian Academy of Science Moscow (Russia). She heads the project on the "Sociodynamics of Generations" and lectures at the State University Moscow.

*Vera Sparschuh* (born 1954) graduated in 1978 from the University of Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) and received her Ph.D. in sociology at the Humboldt University, Berlin in 1984. After 1989 she worked on several projects concerning the history of sociology in the GDR, recently holding a scholarship from the German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft). Her research interests are the history of sociology, sociology of knowledge, and sociology of science.

*Erhard Stölting* (born 1942 in Freiburg) studied sociology at the Free University Berlin. He was Scientific Assistant and received his post-doctoral qualification at the University Erlangen-Nürnberg. In 1985 he was editor for Eastern Europe for the newspaper TAZ. From 1992-1994 he was in Berkeley, California, USA and since 1994 has been Professor of Sociology at the University of Potsdam. His research interests are political sociology among other things about Eastern Europe, history of the social sciences, schemata of social perception, and emotions.

*Júlia Vajda* (born 1960), Ph.D., is Assistant Professor at ELTE University, Institute of Sociology, Budapest, Hungary, and Psychotherapist at the Child Advisory Board of District XI, Budapest. Her main research fields include Jewish identity in Hungary today and identity of patients with psycho-somatic illnesses.

*Bettina Völter* studied political science, sociology, and history in Erlangen, Paris, and Berlin and graduated in political science at the Free University Berlin. From 1993–1995 she worked as a research assistant in the project of the German Research Association (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft) on “The Holocaust in Three Generations. Families of Victims and Perpetrators of the Nazi Regime.” She is Lecturer at the Institute of Social Sciences, Technical University Berlin and is writing a dissertation titled “Biographical Analysis of Generations. The intergenerational Dialogue in Families of Jewish Communists in GDR-Socialism in German Society after the Fall of the Berlin Wall”.

*Viktor Voronkov* (born 1945) Ph.D., is a sociologist and was a researcher at the Institute for Sociology of the Academy for Science Moscow (St. Petersburg branch). Today is he the director of the Centre for Independent Social Research in St. Petersburg. His main research fields include ethnicity and migration, social structure and social change (in particular about Eastern Europe).