

**BYSTANDERS OF THE HOLOCAUST IN BUDAPEST – A TYPOLOGY BASED ON THE
NARRATIVE RECONSTRUCTION OF “ONLOOKERS”**

By

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ABSTRACT

The present thesis aims to investigate how non-Jewish bystanders of the Holocaust perceived the *othering of* Jews and their persecutions in Budapest. It also intends to show how bystanders reflect on these processes now, from the perspective of the present, when more than 70 years have passed since the end of the Second World War. The thesis builds on an interdisciplinary framework that includes a historical, psychological and a memory studies approach. There is a typology of the passive bystanders provided in this thesis based on the theoretical framework and on the analysis of four narrative life-history interviews. The findings of the thesis are reflected in the typology: 1) bystanders who replace the Jewish tragedy with their own tragedy, 2) bystanders who compensate for the Jews in order to find relief from the repression of their traumatic memories, 3) bystanders who felt closer to the Jewish cultural environment before the war and sought to maintain it after the war as well and 4) bystanders who try to avoid facing the Holocaust past but are reminded by traces of it.

Key words: bystanders, Budapest, bystander phenomenon, Holocaust, narrative interview, reconstruction of memories

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INTRODUCTION

The first time I have encountered the bystander phenomenon was during my BA studies at ELTE University, where I took an interview course. The course was taught by two researchers from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, who were in charge of conducting interviews with those whom they called witnesses of the Holocaust. The students had to find elderly non-Jewish people, i.e., “bystanders”, with whom they were supposed to conduct preliminary interviews. I knew that in my apartment building the majority of the tenants were old and not Jewish: therefore I asked each of them to give me an interview, out of which three volunteered. The three had extremely different stories, and not only in terms of their age, gender or geographical location, but also in terms of their levels of complicity: one of them helped the Jews, the other remained passive, the third claimed that she and her family did not know what was going to happen to the Jews.

These examples shed light on the fact that it is particularly difficult to define the category of bystanders: where do we draw the lines between victims, perpetrators, rescuers and bystanders? In the context of Holocaust studies, the first author who made a clear distinction between these four groups was Raul Hilberg. He, however, defined the category of bystanders as a combination of “gainers”, “helpers” and “onlookers”¹. The present thesis will focus on the third subcategory, the “onlookers”, or as I will call them, passive bystanders. These are people who remained inactive silent and who retrospectively stressed the lack of choice they

¹ Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945* (New York, NY: HarperPerennial, 1993).

had to help during the persecutions². This is the broader definition that I will use in the present thesis to define passive bystanders.

The spatial focus of my thesis is Budapest. The main reason why I chose Budapest is because the mass deportations in 1944 stopped before the capital. This means that most of the Jews in the city survived, and many returned as well after the end of the war in 1945. Hence, non-Jews did not only have the chance to witness the entire process of discrimination and *othering* of their fellow Jewish citizens, but they also had to learn how to live with them afterwards and with the guilt deriving from the memories of the persecutions. The *othering* started with the implementation of the first Jewish laws, continued by the visual labeling with yellow stars, together with the designation of yellow-star houses and lasted until the mass ghettoization. The aim of the present thesis is to investigate the phenomenon of bystanders in Budapest by focusing on how non-Jews perceived the *othering* of the Jews and how they reflect on that now from the perspective of the present, when more than 70 years have passed.

To investigate this phenomenon, I chose a qualitative methodology and I have conducted narrative life-history interviews with elderly bystanders. I chose my interviewees along two criteria: they lived either in a yellow-star house or near the Pest ghetto area. Through the analysis of narrative interviews, I intend to nuance the understating of the persecutions and shed light on the social dynamics of the mechanism that targeted the Jews at the first place but involved every single individual, every institution and whole nations.

There are two more important aspects one should mention in the case of Hungary and Budapest: first, because of plundering, taking over or receiving the properties, shops and businesses of persecuted Jews, a recurring and reinforced anti-Semitism appeared in the

² Kristen Renwick Monroe, "Cracking the Code of Genocide : The Moral Psychology of Rescuers, Bystanders, and Nazis during the Holocaust," *Political Psychology*, no. 5 (2008): 699.

public discourse³. The second aspect to mention here is the lack of processing the ‘Holocaust past’ during communism⁴. The German occupation was almost immediately followed by the communist regime and this affected the processing of the past memories. In the case of bystanders, the remembering and commemoration of the Holocaust victims was replaced by the remembering and commemoration of their own victimhood during the Soviet oppression⁵. The memories of both authoritarian systems were, however, only faced after the democratic transition in 1989. This was a new framework in which ordinary citizens (Jews and non-Jews alike) were eventually allowed to talk about the historical atrocities that they had suffered from – or they witnessed – over the course of the twentieth century.

My research intends to add to the historical knowledge that has been constructed and re-constructed through the years since the end of the Second World War. Simply deriving from the fact that those who witnessed or survived the persecutions in 1944 will very soon pass away, there is more potential for forgetting, or rather for non-remembering the tragedies of past⁶. Gyáni draws attention to that as well, and claims that the Holocaust could have never become an integral part of the national collective memory because Jews have never been considered as genuine members of the national community⁷. The framing of public history and collective remembering – especially nowadays – has shifted towards a national victim narrative: by that I mean the „defensive representation of the Holocaust” in which Hungary is

³ About plunder see more in: Zoltán Vági, László Csósz, and Gábor Kádár, *The Holocaust in Hungary: Evolution of a Genocide*, First Edition edition (Lanham: AltaMira Press, 2013), chap. 6; About anti-semitism after the Holocaust see more in: Jan Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland After Auschwitz*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007), chap. 3.

⁴ Mónika Kovács, *Kollektív emlékezet és holokauszt múlt [Collective memory and the Holocaust past]* (Budapest: CORVINA, 2016).

⁵ Éva Kovács and Júlia Vajda, *Mutatkozás: zsidó identitás történetek [Appearance: Jewish identity stories]* (Budapest: Múlt és Jövő, 2002).

⁶ Andrea Pető, “Hungary 70’: Non-Remembering the Holocaust in Hungary,” *Culture & History Digital Journal* 3, no. 2 (December 30, 2014): 16.

⁷ Gábor Gyáni, “Nemzet, kollektív emlékezet és public history,” *Történelmi Szemle*, no. 3 (2012): 357–75.

portrayed as a helpless victim of the German occupation⁸. This framework allows *us* not to remember the complicity of the nation and the people. These people are our ancestors, who remained passive bystanders, and with whose passivity the perpetrators could fulfill their goal to victimize and annihilate Jews.

The present thesis intends to contrast and contribute to the existing literature on bystanders with an approach that is based on how bystanders process and interpret their memories and how they reflect on the Holocaust past from the perspective of the present. To illustrate that, I created a typology that also reflects my findings. I will present the typologies in Chapter Two and further explain them in Chapter Four through the analysis of four narrative interviews.

THESIS STRUCTURE

In chapter two, I reflect on how the bystander phenomenon is approached from a historical and social-psychological perspective and then elaborate on the choice narrative and discuss whether people can make choices during a victimization process that is, in my case, the Holocaust. In the same chapter I also take into account the discussions about collective and individual memories, which section will be followed by the typology of passive bystanders that I have constructed based on the literature and on my interview experiences.

In the third chapter I introduce the qualitative methodology of my thesis, namely the narrative life-history interviews and I also reflect on the difficulties of finding my interviewees. This chapter is followed by the fourth, empirical part of the present research, the detailed analysis of three narrative life-history interviews, and a summary of a fourth

⁸ Gilad Hirschberger, Anna Kende, and Shoshana Weinstein, "Defensive Representations of an Uncomfortable History: The Case of Hungary and the Holocaust," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 55 (November 2016): 32–43, doi:10.1016/j.ijintrel.2016.08.006.

interview that I have previously analyzed in my BA thesis. These analyses serve as cases for the typology constructs. Each interview is summarized at the end of its analysis and in the conclusion I present my findings and I further explain and match the cases to the previously constructed typologies.

CHAPTER 2: THEORY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic literature has approached the bystanders and bystanding from varying aspects and disciplines, such as psychology, sociology and history. On the one hand this implies that there are numerous definitions and explanations for the phenomenon, but on the other hand it allows for the evolvement of an interdisciplinary understanding. This chapter will introduce the academic discussion about the bystander phenomenon from three perspectives: a historical, a psychological and a memory studies perspective. With that, I intend to provide an interdisciplinary framework for my research that concerns the individual processes and understandings of the Jewish persecutions from the bystander's point of view.

BYSTANDERS AS A TOPIC OF HISTORICAL RESEARCH

In the context of the Holocaust, the interest has shifted from finding out who did what to asking how people and organizations found out what was happening⁹. This implies the complicity of everyday people and the society as a whole as well, which has historical significance¹⁰. According to Barnett, the gradual implementation of policies and the establishment of a large-scale bureaucratic system in Nazi Germany that served the genocidal process brought people closer to become acquainted and even involved¹¹, which can certainly be extended to every nation which took part in the Holocaust. Deriving from that, we can claim that the most important perspectives to studying bystanders is that it is a situational,

⁹ Raya Cohen, "The Lost Honour of Bystanders? The Case of Jewish Emissaries in Switzerland," *Journal of Holocaust Education*, no. 2–3 (2000): 146.

¹⁰ Victoria Barnett J., "Reflection on the Concept of 'bystander,'" in *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity* (Stockholm: Forum för levande historia = Living history forum, 2012).

¹¹ Ibid.

contextual, and relational¹² phenomenon; this perspective is shared by most scholars. For example, Christina Gamstorp also emphasizes the contextuality of bystanding and that it should be treated merely as a human behavior and not as a characteristic of human beings¹³. To illustrate this, Tim Cole and Robert M. Ehrenreich developed a model that depicts the dynamics of the victim-perpetrator-bystander constellation¹⁴. They argue in the first place, that these groups should not be viewed as distinct or distinguishable, but rather as dynamic, relational phenomena. Even though bystanders have no power or authority in defining the victim group designated by the perpetrator, their choice of involvement, including the choice of non-involvement, plays a significant role in the outcomes and implementations of policies leading towards the annihilation of the victim group. The authors also point out that the bystanders, which they call the „non-perpetrator/non-victim population”, constantly change their positions in line with the actions that are taking place¹⁵. Therefore, bystanding behavior is largely influenced by the choices people make within a given social context. On the basis of the discussion in the literature, we can observe that the categories such as perpetrator, victim, rescuer or bystander can become blurred, and, consequently, permeable. Depending on the manner of information processing, a bystander can easily become part of any of the four categories. However the aim of the present thesis is to merely focus on those who did not cross these borders.

¹² Dan Bar-On, “The Bystander in Relation to the Victim and the Perpetrator: Today and During the Holocaust,” *Social Justice Research* 14, no. 2 (June 2001): 125–48.

¹³ Christina Gamstorp, “Who Cares about the Bystander?,” in *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders. Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity* (Stockholm: The Living History Forum-Forum för levande historia, 2012).

¹⁴ Robert Ehrenreich, “The Perpetrator-Bystander-Victim Constellation: Rethinking Genocidal Relationships,” *Human Organization*, accessed March 1, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/21251076/The_Perpetrator-Bystander-Victim_Constellation_Rethinking_Genocidal_Relationships.

¹⁵ Ibid.

BYSTANDING AS A TOPIC OF PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Bystanding defined as a behavioral notion involves three main psychological constructs according to Bar-On¹⁶. The first one, which he calls „mind your own business” refers to the marginal form of non-reaction to events that the individuals do know about but consciously refuse to acknowledge¹⁷. The second is „a gradual adjustment to human violence in the public arena”. This construct refers to how violence is portrayed and implemented in the public actions and discourse by which people become less and less sensitive towards them¹⁸. The third one is the „just world hypothesis” which, in other words, means the justification of the prejudices and scapegoating of the targeted victim group¹⁹. In addition to that, Staub argues that bystanders undergo a moral transformation from the beginning of the violent process, which includes, as already mentioned, prejudice, scapegoating and exclusion as well, and eventually, by remaining passive bystanders, they contribute to the unfolding of the inhuman actions²⁰.

It is consequently the victimization process which enables the abovementioned constructs to occur. It involves the perpetrators who create the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, distance the ‘others’, portray them „as threatening and against whom violence as self-defense thus becomes justified.”²¹ What perpetrators need in order to carry out the victimization process is the passivity of the bystanders that is the result of the aforementioned three behavioral constructs.

¹⁶ Bar-On, “The Bystander in Relation to the Victim and the Perpetrator.”

¹⁷ Ibid., 127.

¹⁸ Ibid., 128.

¹⁹ Ibid., 129.

²⁰ E Staub, “Obeying, Joining, Following, Resisting, and Other Processes in the Milgram Studies, and in the Holocaust and Other Genocides: Situations, Personality, and Bystanders,” *JOURNAL OF SOCIAL ISSUES* 70, no. 3 (September 2014): 501–14.

²¹ Monroe, “Cracking the Code of Genocide.”

Arne Johan Vetlesen makes a typology of bystanders and distinguishes between passive bystanders and bystanders by assignment, which implies their physical presence on the scene, and he stresses that both types of bystanders play a crucial role in the genocidal process²². With their passivity, the perpetrators are able to fulfill their goals and the victims remain helpless. The other important aspect of the article is the discussion about agency and the decision of not acting from a philosophical perspective, following Ricoeur's definitions²³. As Zygmunt Bauman notes as well, bystanders are usually passive participants of the events but participants – or agents – in the sense that without their non-interference the perpetrators have no chance to carry out their actions²⁴. He refers to Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory based on which bystanders have to deal with "two contradictory and incompatible views"²⁵, that is to "see evil, hear evil, but do nothing about it."²⁶ This is closely related to the other aspect Bauman raises, namely the denial of guilt and the self-justification that enables bystanders (as well as perpetrators) to carry on with their lives²⁷.

Self-justification is however not only used to be able to carry on with their everyday lives but also to justify why they remain(ed) passive. Bauman also illustrates the common excuses and arguments, such as the lack of opportunity or knowledge to intervene, but it is Henrik Edgren who puts these arguments into a social-psychological context²⁸. One important social psychological factor is called "moral disengagement"²⁹, by which the bystander is able to accept that s/he is unable to help the victims. Another explanation for accepting the

²² Arne Johan Vetlesen, "Genocide: A Case for the Responsibility of the Bystander," *Journal of Peace Research* 37, no. 4 (July 1, 2000): 519–32, doi:10.1177/0022343300037004007.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, "From Bystander to Actor," *Journal of Human Rights* 2, no. 2 (June 2003): 137.

²⁵ Ibid., 138.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Bauman, "From Bystander to Actor."

²⁸ Henrik Edgren, "The Project 'bystanders - Does It Matter?', " in *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders: Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity* (Stockholm: Forum för levande historia = Living history forum, 2012).

²⁹ Ibid., 19.

persecutions is called the “diffusion of responsibility”³⁰, which means the recognition of others’ reaction in a given violent situation³¹ and making the decision – in our case – to remain anonymous by following the other bystanders who also remained anonymous and passive. Paul Slovic brings in a third explanation as well, which is somewhat contradictory to Edgren’s. Slovic argues that emotions are one of the most important factors in understanding why people fail to intervene and fulfill moral obligations such as making a good decision and act during a genocide³². “Affective responses occur rapidly and automatically”³³ he claims, and that is why emotional involvement and affect as such has a crucial role in making good, bad or any kinds of decisions. Slovic’s argument challenges the previously introduced choice narrative and his explanation excludes the potential of an active agency in the decision-making process because according to him, it is not a choice but rather a reaction under the given circumstances, that is, a reaction for the victimization process. In line with that, Monroe argues that bystanders fall into an ethical framework in which they perceive themselves as weak and unable to make choices that would lead them to rescuing actions³⁴.

Despite the differing explanations, it is important to further contrast the choice narrative and the phenomenon of self-justification, and note the irony of the fact that the bystanders are the only ones who have the potential to prevent and to stop a genocide by

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Leonard Bickman, “The Effect of Another Bystander’s Ability to Help on Bystander Intervention in an Emergency,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 7 (January 1, 1971): 367–79, doi:10.1016/0022-1031(71)90035-7.

³² Paul Slovic, “‘If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act’: Psychic Numbing and Genocide,” in *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders. Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity* (Stockholm: The Living History Forum-Forum för levande historia, 2012).

³³ Ibid., 91.

³⁴ Kristen Renwick Monroe, *Ethics in an Age of Terror and Genocide: Identity and Moral Choice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011); Lee Ann Fujii, Kristina E. Thalhammer, and Joan C. Tronto, “Genocide and the Psychology of Perpetrators, Bystanders, and Victims: A Discussion of ‘Ethics in an Age of Terror and Genocide: Identity and Moral Choice,’” ed. Kristen Renwick Monroe, *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 2 (2012): 415–24.

intervention. In another article, Staub argues that it is not only the action of individuals which are crucial in the prevention, but more so the activation of bystander nations which have the power to stop the victimization of certain groups and the violation of human rights³⁵. A different approach is the education of future generations about the (passive) bystanders that potentially inhibits or – again – prevents the occurrence of such behavior³⁶.

BYSTANDERS AS A TOPIC OF MEMORY STUDIES

The memory of the Holocaust had a great influence on the construction of collective as well as individual memories. As Vollhardt and Bilewicz argue, there is a huge psychological impact of genocides on nations' collective memory that involves the nations' intergroup relations and other social and political aspects as well³⁷. Looking at the example of Hungary, Kovács maintains that the 'Holocaust past' has not been faced in the collective memory of the nation and that anti-Semitism as well as guilt still plays a significant role in it³⁸. Therefore, she claims that Holocaust education is crucial in building a memory of the events that enables the non-victim groups and the coming generations to remember. Another example is from Warsaw: the Jewish district of Muranów became the center of the Ghetto as well during WW2. The whole area was demolished during and after the war, however the district is re-inhabited mainly by non-Jews. It has become a sight of commemoration and research carried out by Wójcik, Bilewicz and Lewicka that explores the role of collective

³⁵ Ervin Staub, "Preventing Genocide: Activating Bystanders, Helping Victims, and the Creation of Caring," *Peace & Conflict* 2, no. 3 (September 1996): 189.

³⁶ Gamstorp, "Who Cares about the Bystander?"; Henrik Edgren, ed., "Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders. Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity" (The Living History Forum, Stockholm: Forum för levande historia, 2012).

³⁷ Johanna Ray Vollhardt and Michal Bilewicz, "After the Genocide: Psychological Perspectives on Victim, Bystander, and Perpetrator Groups," *Journal of Social Issues* 69, no. 1 (March 1, 2013): 1–15, doi:10.1111/josi.12000.

³⁸ Kovács, *Kollektív emlékezet és holokauszt múlt [Collective memory and the Holocaust past]*.

memory connected to this specific place. Their results show how commemorating plays a significant role in keeping the memories of Muranów, especially in the non-Jewish locals' minds³⁹.

Concerning the individual memories, I would like to introduce the work of Dienne Hondius who analysed several interviews that were conducted in the Netherlands during the cross-national bystander research of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum⁴⁰. She makes a number of important remarks about how the “witnesses” construct their memories and she also shows the similarities of the interviews and the narrative techniques that the interviewees (un)intentionally use. She says that during the construction of their narratives, the most important factor that bystanders tend to stress is their age and their powerlessness deriving from the fact that in many cases they were children at the time of the war. The other important element is the recognition of opportunities for gain by the disappearance of the Jews, such as gaining property. The third one is gender. The author argues that women had more chances to see the atrocities and also to take action or decide to remain passive because of the mere fact that they were at home and men were not. She also claims that women only became active when men ordered or asked them to be: however, this is an extreme oversimplification and I do not agree with her strong statement. Besides that, her findings are important and they are reflecting on Staub's and others arguments that the passivity of bystanders entails denial and self-justification from the individual's perspective⁴¹.

³⁹ A Wojcik, M Bilewicz, and M Lewicka, “Living on the Ashes: Collective Representations of Polish-Jewish History among People Living in the Former Warsaw Ghetto Area,” *CITIES* 27, no. 4 (August 2010): 195–203.

⁴⁰ Dienne Hondius, “Unfolding and Questioning Eyewitness Narratives on the Deportation of the Jews,” in *Looking at the Onlookers and Bystanders. Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Causes and Consequences of Passivity* (Stockholm: The Living History Forum-Forum för levande historia, 2012).

⁴¹ Staub, “Obeying, Joining, Following, Resisting, and Other Processes in the Milgram Studies, and in the Holocaust and Other Genocides.”

TYPOLGY

Drawing on the above-introduced academic discussions and on my own experiences in conducting interviews with bystanders over the past four years, I constructed a typology of passive bystanders.

The first type builds on the findings of Kovács and Vajda, who claimed that the act of remembering the Holocaust victims or facing *that* past was replaced by the remembrance and commemoration of their own victimhood under the Soviet oppression⁴². In addition to that, Bilewicz claims that in the context of the Holocaust, “victimhood has become a desired status, resulting in the rise of *competitive victimhood*” which means “an attempt by a conflicted group’s member to prove that their respective in-groups suffered more than the out-group”⁴³.

- 1) The first construct I will call “transcending past, replacing tragedy”. The type of bystander that fits this construct might have witnessed serious atrocities of Jews, even death and disappearance of acquaintances: however, they experienced a more personal loss or deprivation during the communist regime that made them replace the memory of the Jewish suffering with their own tragedies. By substituting the Holocaust past they might as well never face their complicity for being bystanders to the events.

The second type is inspired by Slovic’s work in which he sheds light on the importance of affective responses, meaning that emotions are one of the most important factors in

⁴² Kovács and Vajda, *Mutatkozás*.

⁴³ Michał Bilewicz, “Can a Victim Be Responsible? Anti-Semitic Consequences of Victimhood-Based Identity and Competitive Victimhood in Poland,” *In Press in: B. Bokus (Ed.) Responsibility: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Warsaw: Matrix, 2, accessed June 3, 2017, https://www.academia.edu/3644172/Can_a_victim_be_responsible_Anti-Semitic_consequences_of_victimhood-based_identity_and_competitive_victimhood_in_Poland.

understanding why people fail to intervene and fulfill moral obligations, such as making a good decision and acting during the victimization process⁴⁴. I would add that retrospectively, emotions also play a crucial role in processing the non-intervention.

- 2) The second construct I named “self-exculpation”. For the bystanders of this type, the Holocaust was a fate-event after which they lost close friends but whom they did not help during the persecutions. They have a hard time processing the past and they feel the need to make compensation to the Jews they lost to some extent. With the compensation, they are able to face the past and it gives a relief from the repression of their memories.

For the construction of the third type, I borrowed the idea of Kovács and Vajda again. In their book they talk about “social Jews”, non-Jews who were born in the generation that followed 1944 and who feel so close to the Jewish culture that they portray themselves as almost Jewish. They usually react to anti-Semitism in the same way as Jews would; however, they might as well realize that the complicity of their parents’ generation imposes the feeling of guilt on them and they either inherently become anti-Semites or they only *feel* Jewish because of the victimhood, because of the desired status of victimhood⁴⁵. I adapted their idea to describe non-Jews before the Holocaust, and for the construction of my third typology, which I called:

- 3) The “socially Jewish” bystander. These are Gentiles who felt closer to the cosmopolitan Jewish culture and intellectual environment before the Holocaust. They seek to find the company of similar people – not only Jews – and try to build a similar

⁴⁴ Slovic, “‘If I Look at the Mass I Will Never Act’: Psychic Numbing and Genocide.”

⁴⁵ Kovács and Vajda, *Mutatkozás*; Bilewicz, “Can a Victim Be Responsible?”

social environment following the war as well.

The last construct builds on the idea that since Jews in Budapest did not leave and also many came back after the war, non-Jews had to learn again how to live with them and to deal with the memories of their persecutions and also the memories of those who eventually did not come back. At the same time, plundering or receiving their shops or properties was a constant reminder of the past that the bystanders try to avoid facing⁴⁶. This includes the friends and acquaintances as well who survived but whom they did not help.

- 4) The last construct is the “associative recollection”. This type refers to those who tried to avoid facing the Holocaust past but who are reminded by traces of it, such as friends who survived, objects they kept, or gratitude for help they received from Jews before the war.

⁴⁶ Gábor Kádár, “Plunder and Collaboration : Financial Aspects of a Genocide,” *Facing the Nazi Genocide*, 2004, 263.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

In the following chapter I will introduce the qualitative methodology of narrative life history interviews that I have chosen for the purposes of the present thesis. The relevance of this methodology in today's Hungary is that it helps nuancing and even reframing the grander narrative of history writing by depicting individual perceptions and giving insight to the "undocumented experiences"⁴⁷.

ORAL HISTORY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NARRATIVE

In line with the representations of memory construction that I have written about in the second chapter, I will investigate the ways bystanders recollect their experiences of the Jews in light of the Second World War through narrative life-history interviews. Oral history in general is "focusing on the act of remembering the past"⁴⁸ and the remembering is dynamic in the sense that it involves the subject who remembers and the historian who interprets the memories of a given individual⁴⁹. The interview itself is a "dialogic process" during which process we are interested in the subject's emotions, political views and the way s/he constructs her or his narratives. This is called the subjectivity⁵⁰ of oral history that allows for the understanding of personal interpretations of events, and in my case this interpretation is about the fate of their Jewish neighbors, acquaintances and friends throughout and after the

⁴⁷ "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *The Journal of American History* 85, no. 2 (1998): 584, doi:10.2307/2567753.

⁴⁸ Marcin Jarząbek, "It Is Good to Ask Good Questions : Posing Questions in Oral History Interview as a Theoretical Problem," *Wrocławski Rocznik Historii Mówionej* 6 (2016), <http://ruj.uj.edu.pl/xmlui/handle/item/35973>.

⁴⁹ Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon : Routledge, 2010., 2010).

⁵⁰ Alessandro Portelli, "What Makes Oral History Different?," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (London ; New York: Routledge, 1998).

German occupation.

As Tengelyi⁵¹ claims, during our narratives we try to get closer or we try to find our ‘sameness’. ‘Sameness’ – a notion originally used by Ricoeur⁵² – is the core of our identity. When we recollect our memories, our life history, then it is the manifestation of our narrative identity. By recollecting the memories, we are reconstructing both the changes and the stabilities of our identity. This is the nature of recollection: we are recollecting events from our past, which is a selective process that represents our inner-time as well. However, there are certain events throughout our lifetime which break the continuity of the life history and force us to redefine and rewrite our narrative identity in light of those events. Tengelyi calls them “fate-events”⁵³. A “fate-event” therefore is so powerful that it is able to break the continuity in the search for our sameness, the continuity of our narrative identity, and makes us rewrite parts of our life story from the perspective of the present. Consequently, as Kovács and Vajda pointed out, one can claim that the Holocaust can be considered as such a fate-event⁵⁴ for Jews and non-Jews alike. However, in the case of bystanders, the Holocaust as a fate-event is not the only one that breaks the continuity of their narrative identity. In most cases it is assumed that the socialist regime is another breaking point concerning the construction and recollection of their memories.

To reveal these fate-events and the agents of their memory, I chose to apply a qualitative empirical method and conducted narrative life-history interviews with elderly bystanders. This methodology has been developed by Fritz Schütze and further ameliorated

⁵¹ László Tengelyi, *Élettörténet és sorseseemény [Life story and fate event]* (Budapest: Atlantisz, 1998).

⁵² Paul Ricoeur and Kathleen Blamey, *Oneself as Another*, Nachdr. (Chicago, Ill.: Univ. of Chicago Pr, 2008).

⁵³ Tengelyi, *Élettörténet és sorseseemény [Life story and fate event]*.

⁵⁴ Kovács and Vajda, *Mutatkozás*.

by Gabriele Rosenthal⁵⁵. The interview starts by indicating the research topic or question, then the interviewee is asked to tell us his or her life history. The monologue is not interrupted, and it is followed by narrative questions. Narrative questions aim to bring out further, unexplained aspects of a given biographical detail⁵⁶. It uses the wording of the interviewee and the questions should not make them give legitimizing answers.

When it comes to analysis, one should differentiate between the perspective of the past and the present within the narrative. There are two main fields of analysis to take into account separately. The first is the field of the experienced *life history*, which includes everything that a person lived through. For the reconstruction of the *life history*, all biographically relevant data should be gathered and analyzed or interpreted. The second field is the *life story*, which means the interpretation of the narrative in the perspective of the present, given that the subject is ‘talking from the present’. Interpreting the *life story* requires a very detailed sequential analysis where the researcher asks hypothetical or rhetorical questions about the narration. The combination of these two fields or aspects will give the structure of the analysis. In the case of the present thesis, instead of a sequential analysis I will go through the life stories of my interviewees in a thematic manner.

Another note concerning the interviews: every detail is anonymized, including the names, dates of birth, street names, professions etc. This is not only necessary to protect the subjects but also to distance the researcher from the subject, to be able to create a story that has almost nothing to do anymore with the actual person who shared his or her experiences with us. The essential information that we use is, however, not any less than the information

⁵⁵ Daniel Bertaux, ed., *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, Sage Studies in International Sociology 23 (Beverly Hills, Calif: Sage Publications, 1981).

⁵⁶ Gabriele Rosenthal, “Reconstruction of Life Stories : Principles of Selection in Generating Stories for Narrative Biographical Interviews,” *The Narrative Study of Lives* 1, no. 1 (1993): 59–91.

in the original narrative. We do not try to write *their* story, but rather *a* story that is based on the researcher's interpretation in light of the given theme.

PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES

My thesis concerns the bystanders of the Holocaust in Budapest. In order to make sure that they had connections with the Jews during the war, I chose them along two criteria: they lived either in yellow-star houses or somewhere near the ghetto of Budapest that was designated in the 7th district. Yellow-star houses were the so-called preliminary ghettos: 2000 apartment buildings were designated for the Jews and they moved into these apartments in June 1944⁵⁷. However, in many cases, mainly after petitions written to the government, non-Jews did not move out: consequently the buildings remained mixed in terms of tenants⁵⁸.

In 2014, on the seventieth anniversary of the Holocaust the Open Society Archives initiated a project and website to commemorate the designation of yellow star houses⁵⁹. Anyone could volunteer in the organization of programs and commemorations at any of the former yellow star houses. The e-mail addresses of the volunteers are public on the website, so I wrote to each person (122) inquiring whether they know former non-Jewish tenants. I received several responses: however, I could only manage to find two potential interviewees for my thesis. Besides using my personal networks, I also used the video collection of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, which has an ongoing cross-national project concerning bystanders⁶⁰. All in all, I could conduct three interviews during the spring of 2017

⁵⁷ Tim Cole, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁵⁸ Ehrenreich, "The Perpetrator-Bystander-Victim Constellation."

⁵⁹ www.csillagoshazak.hu

⁶⁰ United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Perpetrators, Collaborators, and Witnesses: The Jeff and Toby Herr Testimony Initiative, a multi-year project: this is merely a collection of interview, there has not yet been any extensive research conducted based on these interview

and I have previously conducted one more narrative interview in 2015 that I have already analyzed in my BA thesis⁶¹ with a different focus.

I will analyze the three interviews conducted in 2017 according to the methodology of the aforementioned narrative analysis. The one interview I conducted in 2015 will only be a summary of my previous findings with additional analytical aspects that apply for the theme of this work. The reason why I chose to use the same interview for the purposes of the present thesis is that it was extremely difficult to find interviewees who would match my criteria. On the one hand, 73 years have passed since the end of the war, and I had to find elderly people who were at least 10 years old but preferably older during 1944. On the other hand, people, or to be more specific, the children of those people who remained passive bystanders are very difficult to approach.

There are a few potential reasons for that which I would like to mention here: one is the strongly celebrated rescuer phenomenon. Rescuers are not only celebrated but also awarded by the Yad Vashem, “The Righteous Among the Nation of the World”. Moreover, a general perception suggesting that “bystanders were the rule, rescuers were the exception”⁶² definitely does not encourage bystanders to share their experiences. Studies show, however, that – similarly to bystanding – the rescuing act usually happens by chance: it is situational and never planned ahead⁶³. Rescuers are regarded as altruistic and self-sacrificing but as Tec Nechama identified, rescuers are usually individuals “with fewer social controls” that implies

⁶¹ Gabriella Komoly, “‘Kényszer nélkül békességben voltak’ - Egy zsidó túlélő és egy nem zsidó szemtanú narratívájának összehasonlító elemzése [‘They were in peace without coercion’ - comparative study of the narratives of a Jewish survivor and a non-Jewish bystander]” (BA Sociology, ELTE, 2015).

⁶² “About the Righteous | www.yadvashem.org,” accessed May 28, 2017, <http://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/about-the-righteous>.

⁶³ Claire Andrieu, “Rescue, a Notion Revisited,” in *Resisting Genocide*, ed. Jacques Semelin, Claire Andrieu, and Sarah Gensburger (Oxford University Press, 2014), 495–506, doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199333493.003.0031.

“greater independence”⁶⁴. Applying that to my interviewees, especially for those who were children or young teenagers, they certainly had more social control and less independence to engage in rescue activity. Despite all, they and their families remained passive bystanders and in the following section I will introduce cases that fit the above-introduced typologies I constructed. Namely: 1) “Transcending past, replacing tragedy”, 2) “Self-exculpation” 3) “Socially Jewish” 4) “Associative recollection”.

⁶⁴ Nechama Tec, “Who Dared to Rescue Jews, and Why?,” in *Resisting Genocide: The Multiple Forms of Rescue* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 3.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSES OF LIFE (HI)STORIES

In the chapter, I am going to introduce my interviews: first the *life history*, namely the biographically relevant data and their interpretations. Then I will analyze the *life story*, and interpret the actual narrative. There will be three interviews analyzed accordingly, and one which will only be a summary of an already analyzed interview. Deriving from the qualitative nature of my study, I do not intend to draw generalizing conclusions about the bystanders of the Holocaust but rather I would like show the individual processes of remembering, the agents of memories that influence the way how one bystander constructs his or her narrative. In the end of each analysis, I will give a short briefing about the given interviews and relate them to the typology they belong to.

TYOLOGY 1: “TRANSCENDING PAST, REPLACING TRAGEDY”

ANNA

Anna was born in a middle class Catholic family in 1930 in Budapest. Her mother was a housewife, and her father was mathematician: he was also member of several international science associations but worked as a ministry consultant at the Hungarian salt excise duty. Anna had a sister who was 10 years older. When Anna was 4, the family moved from the 8th district to Nyár street in the 7th district to company housing with four rooms, provided by the salt excise duty. Her grandfather and uncle moved to the same block of house. They did not have Jewish neighbors in the building, but Anna frequently met religious Jews on the streets and the family used to do shopping at Mrs. Klein’s store. Klein never came back after the war.

Anna started elementary school in Budapest, and after four years, the family sent her to a Catholic boarding school in Győr because she was a very active child. The school was strict and she learned discipline there. Anna started to play the violin there and up until today she is a member of an orchestra. Her father was offered a chair as a professor in Szeged, and

he moved there in 1943. However, the war reached the country. The family owned a weekend house at Siófok, by the lake Balaton. They met there and considered hiding from the dangers of the war in Siófok, but they eventually decided to stay in Budapest. The weekend house was destroyed by a bomb attack during the war. Anna came back from Győr, her father came back from Szeged and in 1944 the whole family moved back together to the Nyár street apartment. Her uncle was a teacher working for the military and left abroad in the same year. The rest of the family was relocated from Nyár street because it had become a part of the ghetto and they were given two rooms the apartment of a wealthy Jew on Király street, also in the 7th district. Anna was carrying coal from Nyár street to the temporary apartment until the closure of the ghetto in December. They were living in the air raid shelter of the house for 2 months, until January. The shelter was dirty and crowded and they did not know anyone else there. One day, all of the men were taken for *malenkij robot* but Anna's father was upstairs in the apartment: consequently he escaped the forced labour. Anna learned embroidery during these months to keep herself busy and after the end of the German occupation she and her mom worked in a dressmaker salon for extra money: during the period they worked there the inflation of the Pengő, the currency of the time was extreme. Following the liberation of the ghetto, she continued to carry coal from Nyár street. Each time she passed the opened walls of the ghetto, she saw dead bodies on the streets. One time while she was loading the coal in Nyár street, drunken Russian soldiers broke in their apartment but they did not find her. Her sister was hidden as well, and dressed as an old lady. Meanwhile, the Jewish owners of the Király street apartment survived the ghetto and claimed back their apartment. Anna's family moved back to Nyár street but she herself did not participate in the relocation because she was sent to the countryside as an "exchange student"⁶⁵. In 1945, Anna's father returned to his position as a professor and the family moved to Szeged permanently, but Anna's uncle was a

⁶⁵ [Hun: Kosztos diák]

war prisoner until 1947 and only then he returned to Hungary. In 1949, Anna's father was fired from his position and the family became poor and a bourgeois enemy of the totalitarian communist regime. Anna finished high school and started to work as an accountant under the supervision of a Jewish man. After a show trial in 1957, her father was sentenced to five years in prison. Anna had to move to Budapest because her father had become a class enemy and she lost her friends and been demoted. She married at the age of 28: her husband and his family was similarly a class enemy. They had two children and lived in Budapest. Anna is widowed for 20 years.

ANNA'S TRAGEDY

Anna's story depicts an intellectual middle-class family from the 1930s. However along with the historical changes, it allows to have an insight to the impact of political power-relations that radically changed the future of many. Before the war started, the family had a decent life, living in the center of Budapest among their fellow Jewish neighbors. The family sometimes visited their property at lake Balaton, the children went to prestigious Catholic schools and their standard of living was above the average. Following the war, however, the intellectuals of the family, Anna's uncle and father – though not at the same time – were imprisoned and the family became a class enemy. Within a short time they were impoverished, Anna experienced a serious downward mobility and she retired as an average working-class woman.

Her story is however more complex. Anna and her family lived in the heart of the Jewish district and she had personal connections with the Jews, for example with Mrs. Klein, the shopkeeper. She must have also been familiar with Jewish culture because she saw them every day on the streets of the 7th district. However, she was raised in a religious Catholic

environment, and the choice of her parents to send her to a strict boarding school might mean, that they wanted. on the one hand, to maintain the prestige of the family, and on the other hand, to guarantee their child the appropriate upbringing and environment⁶⁶. So what was she thinking when she returned in 1944 from Győr, and the most part of their neighborhood becomes a ghetto? Was she preoccupied with their own relocation? Or did she blame the Jews because they were losing their family apartment? This is less likely, especially because while she was carrying the coal from one house to the other, she must have seen the conditions of the ghetto. However, their conditions in the air raid shelter were similarly bad from the perspective of a young teenager. Whose tragedy was bigger? She could have drawn a parallel between their own experience and the Jewish experience, especially when she saw the men were taken to *malenkij robot*. However, her father escaped but when she witnessed the dead Jewish bodies on the streets, she must have understood the moral dissimilarities between the two conditions: their shelter and the ghetto experience. Moreover, she also witnessed the survival of the wealthy Jewish family, who returned from the ghetto and claimed back their apartment from Anna's family. How did it affect her presumptions about the Jews? The wealthy Jews survived, but the hardworking shopkeeper Mrs. Klein never returned?

As for her extended family, we only learn about her grandfather and uncle. Her uncle, similarly to her father. was a teacher and devoted his life to his profession. Both men were, however, imprisoned for political reasons, which must have had a huge impact on the family, not only emotionally and ideologically but financially as well. Lacking two breadwinners – even if not at the same time – would entail a hard time for the rest of them. Anna started to work very early, first in the dressmaker salon but her salary did not help them out because of the extreme inflation. Four years later she begun her career as an accountant in Szeged, and she had a Jewish boss, another potentially wealthy Jew who had survived the persecutions but

⁶⁶ see more in: Daniel Horn, “Essays on Educational Institutions and Inequality of Opportunity” (Doctoral Dissertation, Central European University, 2010).

with whom she had a personal, close relationship. How did it change – if at all – her assumptions about Jews?

The real tragedy in the family's life starts with the Rákosi regime, when Anna's father is fired from his position as a professor and the family impoverished. As an intellectual bourgeois family, they became class enemies and the show trial of her father eventually determined their life. Her honorable, hard-working intellectual family ends up being the enemy in the eyes of the regime, and consequently, the people. Anna has to leave Szeged to be able to start a new life in Budapest, back to the city of her childhood. How does she perceive these changes within only a decade? Does she blame her father? Does she blame the regime? Does she see a parallel between their fate and the Jews' fate? Let us now see how Anna remembers the Second World War in Budapest and how she narrates the above-analyzed events from the present's perspective, and let us find out the agents of her story. Who and what play a more significant role in the construction of her narrative?

US AND THEM

When I ask Anna to tell me her life history, she starts with her date of birth and the house where they lived in the 8th district. She immediately gets into the forced relocation to Király street and she also mentions that the new apartment was owned by the Bauers, a wealthy Jewish family

- 1.1. The apartment **there** was the property of a Jewish family, the Bauers, who also owned the building, and it later turned out that they were free from the ghetto and in January-two-19, **January '44** they appeared from the liberated ghetto and reclaimed their apartment. Let alone this coming-going moving, well, it was a bit >bad<. I was 14 years old then (64)⁶⁷

⁶⁷ 1.1. a lakás **ott** egy zsidó háztulajdonos, Bauernek volt a saját lakása, akikről később kiderült, hogy a gettóból megszabadultak és a Január-két-**44 Január tizenkilencedikén** felszabadított gettóból megjelentek és kérték vissza a lakásukat. Mondjuk a gyerekkoromnak ez a csiki csuki költözködés hát ez egy kicsit >rossz volt<. Én akkor 14 éves voltam (64)

She immediately follows by explaining the circumstances of the temporary apartment. According to Anna, the Bauers were not only the owners of the apartment, but the owners of the whole building as well. Here she emphasizes the exact date of the ghetto liberation. Why is it so important? To prove her historical knowledge? Or maybe she remembers it so well because the Bauers suddenly *appeared* and reclaimed the apartment and consequently the family had to move again? She says that the constant moving was *>bad<* but she only silently says the word *bad*. What was bad after all? It was bad that she said this? Maybe she realized, that their comings and goings were not as bad as the ghettoization for the Jews?

There is a minute pause after these lines and I tell her to continue when she asks me what else to add, what else is interesting. When she understood that I am interested in her whole life story, she continued more confidently. However, until she finished her monologue, the story was more or less a learned text, including mainly her biographical data. When I started to ask questions, her interpretations started to be deeper and livelier, so to say.

As I am interested in the bystander phenomenon during the Holocaust, I will cite the thematically relevant parts of the interview that have to do with her connection to, and interpretation of the Jews.

After a narrative question that concerned her grandfather, she mentions a book written by a Catholic priest.

1.2 There was a book, this is now unrelated to me, I just really liked the titled of it, [...] Beaten by Christ's Cross, and David's star. It means that he [the priest] was Christian Catholic and also he had Jewish origins. So now I am not **like that**, I was born Catholic and there is **nothing else**, but I can tell that I have lived through the 20th century, I served the system so to say with my work but at the same time, how to say it, I wasn't really coming from a family preferred by the system, neither from my mother's nor from my father's side.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ **1.2.** na mindenesetre én volt egy olyan könyv, ez tőlem teljesen függetlenül csak a címe az nagyon tetszett nekem, volt egy most csak fecsegek, [...] Krisztus keresztjével és Dávid

The original title of this book uses the word “*labeled*” instead of “*beaten*”⁶⁹. Is this a punishment for the priest to have Jewish origins rather than just a sign of being different? And how is this unrelated to her? Why does she have to stress that she is “*not like that*” and what does that mean? Was it a punishment for all Jews to be Jewish instead of being Christian? Wasn’t she also punished to be Christian Catholic? Her family is the enemy of the system, and she has to work hard to be accepted, she “*served the system*” as she says. So who punished her after all? Christ, maybe David, or it was her family, or she blamed the system? Maybe it is a combination of all adversities. But did she recover from that? Did she find her way back to Christianity or she lost her faith? It seems that she still is religious and when I ask her about her Catholic family, she continues as follows:

1.3. As a matter of fact, no one could **ever** dissuade me from this faith. When I applied for my job as an accountant, the (communist) recruiter [káderező] asked me whether I go to church and I said yes. **They had no more questions.** If I would have been hesitant and I don’t know what else, then then I wouldn’t be stable=**I was stable in that as well** and they could not break me.⁷⁰

It seems that she not only found her way back to Christianity, but she never lost her faith. However, did she really dare to admit that she, on top of coming from an intellectual background, was also going to church in Rákosi’s totalitarian communist regime? And in

csillagával megverve. Ez azt jelenti, hogy ő keresztény katolikus is volt és zsidó származású. Na most én nem vagyok **ilyen**, katolikusnak születtem, nincs a családban **semmi más**, viszont én azt tudom elmondani, hogy megéltem a huszadik századot, kiszolgáltam a rendszert úgymond a munkámmal, de ugyanakkor én egy hogy is mondjam nem éppen rendszer szimpatikus családból származtam **sem az anyai, sem az apai vonalon**

⁶⁹ Kis György, „*Megjelölve Krisztus keresztyével és Dávid csillagával*” (1987)

⁷⁰ **1.3** és tulajdonképpen engem nem tudtak ettől a hittől eltántorítani **soha**. Mikor a: fölvételiztem a nemzeti bankba, mert ott kezdtem a bank szakmát, akkor megkérdezte a káderező, hogy járok-e templomba és mondtam, hogy igen. **Több kérdése nem volt.** De ha én ott elkezdtem volna vacillálni hogy izé meg nem tudom, akkor akkor nem voltam stabil=**ebben is stabil voltam** és nem tudtak kikezdeni.

what else was she stable? Did the system try to break her in her faith and in every sense, but it did not succeed?

When I ask her to elaborate more on her parents who were class enemies, she continues with the following:

1.4. well, as a matter of fact, it meant that we were so called gentlemen, to express myself like this * we were no exploiters, because as I said, **we were not** accumulating wealth, so we did not exploit anyone **in order to** enrich ourselves. But this was a caste, a category which they thought needed to be persecuted. - - - altogether, we did not look down on anyone because my father happily talked to the peasants [...] - - - we did not look down on the common people - - - but they assumed that we did, this category - - - bourgeois ((she laughs)) (23)⁷¹

They were bourgeois class enemies, but first she refers to them as “gentlemen”. Only by the end of her talk she mentions the word bourgeois, as it was called during communism. Why doesn’t she say it at the beginning? Is she ashamed of that? Why does she laugh after saying the word out loud? Is it ridiculous from today’s perspective, that gentlemen were persecuted? That gentlemen belonged to a lower caste than common people? Even though she “served the system” and she did not live her life as a bourgeois but as a working-class woman, deep inside she might have never left the gentlemen’s caste. Is it even possible to truly leave a caste during a lifetime? She very much stresses that they were not exploiting people and that they did not look down on anyone. But then why is it important to distinguish between the peasants and the gentlemen, us, and them? Who is us and who is them? Who were they looking down upon if not the peasants or the common people? Those who exploited others to accumulate wealth? And who are those people in Anna’s reading?

⁷¹ **1.4.** hát tulajdonképpen az, hogy úgynevezett úriemberek voltunk, ha így fejezzem ki magamat. * nem voltunk kizsákmányolók, mert mondtam hogy **nem voltunk** vagyon gyűjtők, tehát mi nem használtunk ki senki **arra**, hogy abból mi gazdagodjunk. De ez egy kaszt volt, egy kategória, amit hát úgy gondolták üldözni kell. - - - ezzel együtt nem néztünk le senki, mert az apukám nagyon szívesen elment a parasztokkal beszélgetni, úgyhogy nyáron mindig várták, hogy mesél nekik a világról. - - - egyszerű embereket nem néztük le - - - de feltételezték rólunk, erről a kategóriáról. - - - burzsoák ((nevet)) (23)

Following this section, she explained that they luckily escaped the relocations and deportations of communism and she asks me about the lexCEU and I promise to explain it after we finish the interview. My next question concerned the fact that Nyár street became a part of the ghetto and she explains that it was “*natural that the Jews were present there*” and here she mentions that Mrs. Klein never returned from the ghetto. When I asked her to elaborate more on that, she tells me:

1.5. Well, I don’t know, the shop was there but Mrs. Klein was not in the shop. And then **where** did they take the Jews, whether they died in the ghetto or they took them away that=that that we did not touch upon that, we were not interested about it, but the truth is that I- this * this was **the same** caste-like massacre that happened to the so called gentlemen [...] in the * World War the the war prisoners and the people in the gulag were in the same caste-like massacre than the Jews [...] I don’t know but they said that this Holocaust was the largest Jewish persecution * but there was anti-Semitism in the prehistoric age as well therefore it is ineradicable.⁷²

She says that they did not know whether the Jews died in the ghetto and that they were not interested in it. However, she says that Mrs. Klein did not come back from the ghetto. Is she trying to distance herself from it? She did care about Mrs. Klein but she had nothing to do with the fact that she disappeared? Does she feel guilty about what happened to the Jews? Especially because her “caste” was massacred in the same way as the Jews were massacred? But then she says that the Holocaust was the largest Jewish persecution, although anti-Semitism was not new to the society. It seems that it was not new to her either – so what was ineradicable after all? Was it the historically imprinted anti-Semitism? Or rather the Jews were ineradicable? Even though the Holocaust annihilated many Jewish lives, they are still

⁷² **1.5** hát nem tudom, a bolt megvolt és a Klein néni nem volt benne. Hát aztán hogy **hova** vitték a zsidókat, hogy a gettóba’ haltak-e meg vagy elvitték őket az=azt azt nem firtattuk hát az nem tartozott az érdeklődési körünkbe, azt nem tudtuk, de az az igazság, hogy én ezt a * ez **ugyan az** a kaszt szerű irtás volt mint ahogy az úgynevezett úriembereket irtották kaszt szerűen tehát a a * világháborúban a: a a hadifoglyokat meg : meg a **gulágosokat ugyan olyan** kaszt szerű irtásba’ voltak, mint a mint a: zsidókkal kapcsolatban. Én nem tudom, de azt mondták, hogy tulajdonképpen ez a legnagyobb zsidóüldözés volt ez a Holokauszt * de a őskorban is volt antiszemitizmus tehát ez ez kiirthatatlan

present? Whose tragedy is bigger, the tragedy of the gentlemen, her own people, or the tragedy of the Jews? What differentiates them from each other?

She told me, that they did not care about who was Jewish and who was not. However, when she further elaborates on that, there are even more interesting details coming up in her narrative:

1.6. Similarly to how people do not mock the limping or the humpback, you also don't mock the other's race. I also think that the gypsies should be taught discipline. It is very difficult, but it's a must. - - - let's not talk about the migrants now ((she laughs)) (8)⁷³

According to her, the Jew is another race, and is somewhat similar to the limping or the humpback, someone with disabilities, someone who was born different. She also talks about the gypsies as those who have to learn discipline. Are they originally misbehaving? It is really a must to teach them? And they have the potential to learn, but Jews have no potential to be "cured" from being Jewish? And what about the migrants? Before, Anna said that Jews were massacred the same way as "gentlemen". She somehow seemed to share their fate, so why does she say this time that Jews were so different? Is it rather a "second hand" interpretation, a learned anti-Semitism and racism? She lived with the Jews and she saw her neighbors dead on the streets. What made her be so hostile?

1.7. well in Makó, the Jews of Makó were really getting along well [...] the peasant grew the onions the Jew **bought** them. Then they sold the seeds to the peasant to plant them therefore it was easy to work with them. The Jews on the countryside never meant a problem * as a matter of fact, the problem was that they took the countryside Jews, this was the problem that they took those who were innocent in what they were accused with * but for instance the wealthy type who was targeted and whose wealth had to be taken those could bring their wealth to Switzerland, so there **was** something to talk about * but essentially those who suffered the deportations were the common [people/Jews] (61)⁷⁴

⁷³ 1.6 ez olyan dolog, hogy a púpost meg a sántát se csúfolja az ember, a más fajtáját **sem** * mondjuk én a cigányokkal is úgy vagyok hogy nevelni kell őket. Nagyon nehéz, de muszáj - - - most a migránsokba ne menjünk bele ((nevet)) (8)

⁷⁴ 1.7. nagyon jól megvoltak együtt a makói zsidók [...] a * paraszt termelte a hagymát, a zsidó **megvette**. Utána a magot a para- a zsidó eladta a parasztnak a magot hogy el tudja

So what makes the Jews of the countryside different? They were poor and hardworking which made them more acceptable, even one of *us*? They are not *those* who were born different? So who are *those*? Seems that in Anna's interpretation *those* are the wealthy Jews. But Anna's family was also wealthy before the end of the German occupation. We can come back to the question of who are *us* and *them* and what makes the difference between the two? Does she think that the wealthy Jews exploited others and look down on people unlike her family? Therefore they were guilty who would have deserved to be deported? Is she connecting the deportation of the Jews to the deportations/relocations of the "gentlemen" during the communist terror by not specifying who are the "common": people or Jews?

A DIFFERENT VICTIM NARRATIVE – SUMMARY OF ANNA'S INTERVIEW

One of the other interesting elements of the interview that is missing from the present analysis concerned the Jewish girls in the ghetto who, according to Anna, offered themselves to the Russian soldiers out of gratitude for the liberation. However, this is also something that she had been told after the end of the war, it is therefore not her own experience. With that, we can point at the most important features of personal memories: they are fragile and informed by all the years, political changes and discourses that have reached them throughout a lifetime⁷⁵.

ültetni, tehát nagyon jól össze lehetett dolgozni vele. A **vidéki** zsidósággal nem volt sose baj, * itt tulajdonképpen a **vidékieket** vitték el, ez volt a baj, hogy azokat akik ártatlanok **ártatlanok** voltak abban, amiket rájuk fogtak * de mondjuk a gazdag fajta akit ő mondjuk kipécézték és akinek a vagyonát el kellett venni **ugye** az azér' el tudta vinni a vagyonkáját Szejcba, tehát **volt** amiért lehetett erről beszélni, de alapvetően * akik kárvallottjai voltak ezeknek a deportálásoknak, azok mind az egyszerűek voltak. (61)

⁷⁵ Penny Summerfield, "Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews," *Cultural and Social History* 1, no. 1 (January 1, 2004): 65–93, doi:10.1191/1478003804cs0005oa.

In the case of Anna, these informants, or agents of memory include the persecutions from both the German and Soviet sides, the experience of downward mobility in the social strata, religiosity and the personal class struggles that had a heavy impact on her political socialization as well. The communist regime broke the continuity of her life, and even though she recognizes some similarities between the Jewish tragedy and her own tragedy, her impoverishment, the years and the changes in the political power made her blame the (wealthy) Jews for her own struggles. Her story therefore fits the “transcending past, replacing memory” construct and the story also proved the assumption that the remembering of the Holocaust victims was replaced by remembering her own victimhood during Soviet oppression⁷⁶, which can be true for many, but maybe especially for those bystanders who chose to remain passive during the Shoah and with that, could avoid facing the Holocaust past.

TYPOLGY 2: “SELF-EXCULPATION”

MIHÁLY

Mihály was born in 1929 in Budapest. He lived with his mother in the 7th district at Akácfa street 23. When his mom got pregnant, his refused to marry her. She moved alone to the capital to find a job. Mihály never met his father. Until his mom found a job and an apartment, she gave Mihály to various friends and families to take care of him. One of the families that hosted him in Rákosszaba kept animals and Mihály had to take care of them. He failed in school during that year. Eventually, Mihály’s mother was hired as a domestic servant by the Jewish landlady and owner of the house at Akácfa street 23, Natália Fuchs, and in exchange for her work, she acquired a one-room apartment and took Mihály there. Mihály

⁷⁶ Kovács and Vajda, *Mutatkozás*.

resumed primary school in the 7th district. He helped his mom with carrying the firewood from the basement to the apartment of the Fuchs's. He also frequently helped the old ladies at the Klauzál square market to carry their baskets home for pocket money. He had many Jewish friends with whom he played a lot on Klauzál square and went to cinema for the *matiné* shows. On the high holidays he saw the religious Jews praying on the same square. He sometimes attended sermons with his friends at the Dohány street synagogue. He helped their Jewish neighbors as well to light the fire and the candles on Shabbat. When in 1944 Jews were restricted from leaving their apartments during the day, Mihály helped them do the shopping, and he brought their food to the nearby bakery to prepare it. The Jewish neighbors often invited him for dinner. Their apartment building became a part of the ghetto and consequently he and his mom were relocated to an emptied Jewish apartment in the 6th district, on Csengery street. They spent most of the time in the basement where soldiers were sometimes cooking soup that they shared with those in the shelter. One day a few Arrow-Cross men came down to reload their guns and after they left, Mihály and those who stayed in the basement have heard shootings and screaming from the street. The next day Mihály saw a pile of dead Jewish bodies on the pavement across their building of Csengery street. Mihály and his mom returned to Akácfa street shortly after the liberation of the ghetto and their apartment was in a very bad condition because the temporary tenants used all the wooden material for heating. A few days later, someone was recruiting young men to help exhume bodies from the ghetto area: however, Mihály's mom did not let him do this work. Mihály saw dead bodies piled up on carriages and thrown into the mass graves. He learned that Natálai Fuchs was shot in the Danube. None of his friends came back to the neighborhood after the liberation.

Following the war, between 1948 and 1954 he became a repairman and served in the military. He frequently attended dance schools. In one of the dance schools he met his wife;

they got married in 1956. His wife was 8 years older than him. They had one daughter who died early. Mihály became an electrician in the 6th district and retired from there. He once had to work on Csengery street and he met the former concierge of the house where they were living during the ghetto period. He lived in the 6th district on Eötvös street during his entire married life. His mom died at the age of 70, in 1972.

10 years ago he and his wife were evicted from their apartment on Eötvös street because of a bureaucratic mistake. They moved to a retirement home where Mihály lives today. His wife died 5 years ago. Mihály initiated the placing of a plaque on Csengery street to commemorate the Jews who were shot in front of the temporary apartment building where he lived during the ghetto period but the plaque has not been placed there yet.

LOSSES AND LONELINESS

Mihály was a single child of a single mother, consequently, his life was determined from the moment his mother got pregnant and moved alone to the capital without a husband. However, we can assume that the mother's life has been determined from even earlier on: many girls from the countryside experienced a similar path, especially those coming from poor peasant families⁷⁷. Many were sent to the capital by their families and after a few years working as domestic servants returned to establish a life in the countryside, but those who became single mothers had no chance to return⁷⁸.

⁷⁷ Eszter Zsófia Tóth, "Manci És Franciska - a Cseléd lányból Munkásasszony Vagy Rendőr Lesz? A Városi Cselédek Imázssai a Szocialista Időszakban [Manci and Franciska - Will the Servant Girl Be a Working-Class Woman or a Policeman? Images of Domestic Servants in the Socialist Era]," in *Megtalálható-E a Múlt? - Tanulmányok Gyáni Gábor 60. Születésnapjára* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2010).

⁷⁸ Gábor Gyáni, György Kövér, and Tibor Valuch, *Social History of Hungary from the Reform Era to the End of the Twentieth Century*, East European Monographs: No. 642 (Boulder, Colo. : Social Science Monographs, 2004, n.d.).

Therefore, after settling in the capital as a single mother, she had no other chance but to become and remain a domestic servant and live alone (i.e. without a husband) until the end of her days. Mihály consequently had to adapt to the role of the man in his family without ever having had a father figure in his life—he had never known his own father. We can certainly assume that their situation pushed them onto the margins and did not allow them to have an opportunity for upward mobility and which social condition remained the same in Mihály's life afterwards as well.

When his mom was looking for a job and a place to live, she gave Mihály to friends and as we learnt, he failed his first year in primary school because of being preoccupied by looking after animals. Work was therefore a priority in his life from an early age on, which can be proved by the fact that he did not go to high school later. This might as well be connected to the assumption that he had to help his mom with the household and he had to find a job early so they could financially support themselves. Besides financial support, he supported or rather helped his surrounding as well: that is another recurring element of Mihály's biography. Usually he helped for some sort of reward such as food or pocket money, but it has also enlarged his social networks because he had the opportunity to move freely and experience the neighborhood on his own. Through that, he developed a close relationship with everyone, including the Jewish neighbors. How did this experience influence his perception about the ghettoization? He not only witnessed the restrictions that occurred to his Jewish friends but he and his mom were financially dependent on them by being employed at the Jewish landlord's home. Mihály himself also helped the Jews during the difficult times: he did the shopping, he brought their food back from the bakery, and he lit their candles, so all in all he was involved in the everyday lives of Jews, including their religious life as well. When they were relocated to the 6th district after the establishment of the ghetto, he left behind everyone and did not have the chance to follow up with what was going on there. What he

certainly knew, or what he learnt afterwards, is that his friends were squeezed into the ghetto area and that they were in danger. In the basement of the temporary apartment, he heard that Jews were shot down on the street and eventually he saw the dead bodies as well. But does his attempt to place a plaque where these people were shot only commemorate those specific Jews or would it commemorate his friends and neighbors as well who died elsewhere in the city and whom he could not help anymore? When they returned to Akácfa street, they found the apartment in pieces and by that he must have realized that the conditions in the ghetto were extreme. In addition, he had to face the immensity of death within the ghetto area: he not only saw the carriages piled up with the dead bodies but he was also asked to exhume dead bodies. Was it however his mother who refused to let him exhume or was it rather he himself who was not able to do the work? Maybe he was afraid to find his friends among the dead? Or did he actually see familiar faces among the dead on the streets of the ghetto? We do not learn more about this episode; however Mihály does tell us that he did not meet any of his friends after the liberation.

He lived with his mom for a few years after the war, but then he left for the military and shortly after his service he moved in together with his wife in the 6th district. Was it intentional for him to leave behind the area of the former ghetto as soon as possible? Did it remind him too much of his lost friends? Or he just simply wanted to live his own life without his mom's supervision?

His mom died alone at the age 70. How did he feel about leaving her alone? Did he regret leaving her behind? Or his wife replaced his mom to some extent? His mom must have been an important figure in his life, just like his wife was one. However, we also learn about his daughter, whom he lost early, but we do not learn more about her from the biography. Is it too difficult to deal with another loss? He remained without any offspring and he lost all his family members. His only emotional support remained his wife, but he lost her as well 5 year

ago. He not only lost people, but he lost his apartment as well that was his only existential achievement.

It seems that his losses started with the Holocaust: can we therefore assume that the Holocaust was such a huge turning point in his life that afterwards he could never recover? Was the Holocaust a fate-event in his life? By losing his Jewish friends he lost the environment in which he had been socialized from an early age on. A Jewish environment meant a difference in the cultural experience⁷⁹. Was he seeking a similar environment after the war? He attended dancehalls and dance schools; he was enjoying the time spent with his friends and tried to live as freely as possible in the 1950s. But this “pseudo bohemian” life could never again bring back the carefree childhood during which he could enjoy the above-mentioned different cultural experience of the Jewish district where, even though he was poor, he freely moved and experienced life.

THE STORY OF A PLAQUE

After telling Mihály that my research concerns the Second World War in Budapest, and asking him to tell me his life story he started as follows:

1.1. hahaha my life story it is * well I start it by saying that I lived in Akácfa street with my mother, I was raised * there. It is close to Klauzál square you know. Are you familiar with the seventh district? There is Dob street and Nyár street and Dohány street—I went to school in Dohány street. - - - - - Now, we lived in Akácfa street 23 with my mother * and in 44' it has become the **ghetto** the small room and kitchen apartment **it has become the ghetto** and we had to move away - - -⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Mary Gluck, “The Budapest Coffee House and the Making of ‘Jewish Modernity’ at the Fin de Siècle,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 2 (2013): 289–306.

⁸⁰ **1.1.** hahaha az élettörténetem az * hát avval kezdem, hogy anyámmal laktam a Nagydíófa utcában, ott * nevelkedtem az közel van a Klauzált térhez tetszik tudni. Ismerős az a hetedik kerület? Ott a Dob utca meg Nyár utca meg Dohány utca=Dohányba jártam iskolába - - - - -. Na most a Nagydíófa utca 30-ba laktunk anyámmal * és az 44'be **gettó** lett tetszik tudni a szoba konyhás lakásba' **gettó lett** és el kellett költözni. - - - -

Already in the first few sentences he indicates three important elements of his childhood, including the district, his mom, and the ghetto experience. It seems that these are very important in terms of the environment in which he was raised. Besides the fact that he had an idea about what I was going to ask him about because I contacted him through the USHMM research team⁸¹, it is still striking that the ghetto experience determines his narrative construction from the first instance. Furthermore, during the interview, he often referred back to his childhood and explained this period of his lifetime in more details. Sometimes he repeated the exact same events and circumstances again and again. This was true for the entire interview: in many cases, when I asked him to elaborate more on certain events, he repeated the sentences word by word that he used in his opening monologue. As far as I know, Mihály has never written down his life-story but it seems that he constructed a firm narrative about his life and his experiences in the Holocaust. What is the reason behind that?

After the first few minutes of the interview, he started to describe the temporary apartment in Csengery street, and explains that he spent most of the time in the basement and then he tells me:

1.2. Now comes the most important why I have >promised<⁸².

At this point I had no idea what he was promising and to whom. He then told the story of the Jews who were shot by the Arrow-Cross in front of the house where they temporarily lived. Is he promising something for the killed? Is he promising something for me or rather for himself? In the followings it becomes clear that the point he wanted to make was about the commemorative plaque:

⁸¹ : United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Perpetrators, Collaborators, and Witnesses: The Jeff and Toby Herr Testimony Initiative

⁸² **1.2** Na most jön a legfontosabb amiért >ígértem<.

1.3. For days they have been lying there, I was a child but I remember that they were there in the snow, **there they executed them** and so I told Mrs. Kőrösi (the head of the retirement home where he lives) that I do this because of that, because I want all these unfortunate in **Csengery street 12** to (receive) such a commemorative plaque that in **two thousand-** or 1944 here >they executed certain whatsit< - - - but not even that- **they have ordered it** but it has not been placed there yet * this was the most important you know that they were there, in front of Csengery street 12 they were there * they were lying there for long - -⁸³

The section above is extremely incoherent, fragmented and difficult to follow. He says however that although he was a child, he remembers the dead bodies which were lying in the snow, and he repeats it again, and reaffirms that this was the most important – the most important what? Memory? The most important event to remember as a child? Or the most important event to remember as an adult? First of all, it is clear that he is dealing with an extremely traumatizing memory, but why is he insisting on placing the plaque there? Is this the promise he made? Is the plaque going to calm his conscience? Does he feel guilty or responsible because he has not been initiating the plaque before? Why did it become so important today, more than 70 years after the incident? Did he realize that no one would remember those people if he passes away? Maybe it is all about him, a lonely man who will not be remembered by anyone either?

He continues his narrative with the Russian liberation, and explains the conditions in the ghetto area and the conditions of their apartment in Akácfa street after they were able to move back home. He then talks about the life event when he was asked to exhume dead bodies, but his mother refused to let him do the work.

⁸³**1.3. napokig** ott feküdtek emlékszek gyerek voltam de sokáig ott voltak a hóba ott a **ott végezték ki** na és ezt mondtam akkor a Karsai né-nek hogy * azért is csinálom mondom mert szeretném ha ez a sok szerencsétlen a **Gerlóczy utca 1be** egy ilyen emléktáblát, hogy **kétezer-** vagy 1944be itten >kivégezték bizonyos izé< - - de még az se- **megrendelték** de még nincs kitéve * ez volt a legfontosabb tudja, hogy a Gerlóczy utca 1-el szembe ott voltak a * sokáig ott feküdtek - -

1.4. My poor mom said that I do not let this kid to do such work * and then this is how * we got back - - I helped the Jews a lot before as well you know⁸⁴

He immediately follows the exhumations by emphasizing that he had previously helped the Jews – as well. What does *as well* refer to? Why does he immediately claim that he helped them? Is it some sort of self-justification or exculpation of his responsibilities? Even though he did not help with the exhumation, he did his best for the Jews before their death? And today he helps them again by initiating their commemoration with a plaque? Also, why is it important for him to emphasize that his mom did not let him do the work? He would have done it if it was his own decision? He was 15 years old at this point, and he was free to move around in the district from an early age on, therefore it must have been a consensual decision rather than his mom's only.

There was another instance during the interview, shortly after the previously quoted section, when Mihály told me that he saw a group of Jews being escorted by Arrow-Cross soldiers and that he thinks they have been shot to the Danube.

1.5. They must have been taken them to the riverbank of the Danube * they were walking in a group and each of them had a suitcase in their hands, this has come to my mind - - - - - I helped a lot in the house because there were so many Jews in our house - -⁸⁵

And again, he follows the description of a tragic event by stating that he helped the Jews. With this recurring pattern in his narrative he probably tries to distance himself from the terrible memories in which he recalls the witnessed misery of Jews. To even out the difficult memories, he tries to focus on the fact that he helped them. However, he was not able to help them in the life-threatening moments, which are somehow hiding between his sentences.

⁸⁴ **1.4.** szegény anyám aszondta ez a gyereket nem engedem ilyen munkára * és akko így * kerültünk vissza - - én előtte is nagyon sokat segítetttem a zsidókat tudja *

⁸⁵ **1.5.** vitték biztos akkor a Duna partra le * egész csoportosan mentek mindegyiknek volt a táská a kezükbe ez=ez ugrott még be - - - - - én sokat segítetttem a házba mert sok zsidó volt itt a házunkba - -

Does Mihály try to demonstrate his inability and powerlessness in the situation? Is he excusing himself to some extent?

Mihály told me that he had many Jewish friends in his childhood, but when I asked him to talk more about them he said that he did not remember any. However, in connection with his friends, he also said that *there was no such thing as religion*. When I asked him to elaborate more on that, he could recall at least four names of his Jewish childhood friends, even though he kept on stressing that he did not remember anyone. This is rather intriguing; at the end of our interview I asked him whether anyone came back from the ghetto. He avoided answering my question but then eventually he told me that

1.6. If I was in the mood, I went to the market on Klauzál square, I walked along Dob street you know and then to do the shopping at the market and then I was sitting outside the square but no one was there, no buddies or acquaintances, everyone moved elsewhere or died - -⁸⁶

There is a heavy nostalgia interlacing these sentences. Mihály had very vivid memories from his childhood that he frequently recalled during the interview, and it seems that as an adult he revisited the sites of his childhood to evoke the days of his careless youth. We learn from his narrative that his playmates did not return: however, at the same time, he seemingly did not try to reach any of his Jewish friends after the war either. Did he truly think or hope that someone would show up there by accident? Would he be able to talk to them face to face after all these years of silence? There is no yes-or-no answer for this question, but beyond a doubt, Mihály feels very nostalgic about his childhood and with that, he is working on to somehow be able to face the traumatic experiences as well.

⁸⁶ **1.6.** ha kedvem volt akkor elmentem a Klauzál téri piacra, mentem végig a Dob utcán tudja és akkor a piacra vásárolni és akkor én még kiültem oda a térre de már senki nem volt senki hogy haver féle vagy ismerős, mindegyik már vagy elkerült vagy meghaltak - -

REMEMBERING AS A TOOL – SUMMARY OF MIHÁLY’S INTERVIEW

Mihály’s life path can be characterized by a series of losses that he is constantly trying to process. Remembering is a tool for him in this process. The Holocaust was a powerful fate-event in his life, after which he had to reframe his inner narrative. The Holocaust for him meant the loss of friends, the loss of and the environment in which he grew up and he has never been able to recover from the traumatizing experiences. His contemplation about the past manifested in an attempt to place a plaque for the killed Jews on Csengery street. Mihály’s story is a case for the “self-exculpation” type is because by initiating the idea of a plaque, he frees himself from the guilt and responsibility. He is using it as a tool for compensation for not helping his friends in need, for not trying to reach them after the war and also, to some extent, to commemorate himself. Today, he lives alone in a retirement home. He has no family who would remember him, who would know his story and who would know that 70 years later he was eventually able to face the Holocaust past.

TPOLOGY 3: “SOCIALLY JEWISH”

VIKTOR

⁸⁷ Viktor’s father was coming from a middle class Catholic family. Viktor’s grandfather was an engineer and his father became an architect. Viktor’s mother was a photographer with French and German ancestry. She was born and raised in France but she spoke both languages at a native level. Her father came from a peasant family but became a merchant who constantly sold everything and bought new things. Viktor’s parents met in

⁸⁷ Even though my interviewee gave his permission to use his real name and details of his life, I have decided to anonymize it anyways because I do not intend to write *his* story but to create *a* or rather *my* story. Moreover, because the analysis and interpretation can go (psychologically) deep, the anonymization helps to keep a distance from the real subject during the analysis and creates an independent story with different actors in it.

Vienna and his mother moved to Budapest in 1929. Their first child, Viktor's sister, was born in 1930 and Viktor was born in 1934, in the 5th (then 4th) district, at Molnár street 30. Viktor's mother taught both French and German to her kids but she learnt Hungarian only by 1947.

More than fifty per cent of the tenants were Jewish at Molnár street 30, including one of Viktor's best friends, Sándor. Sándor was baptized in the summer of 1944 and his godfather became Victor's father. The social background of the inhabitants was diverse: lower-middle class, middle-class and intellectual families all lived together and Viktor mingled with their kids on an everyday basis. In June 1944 the building was designated as a yellow-star house. In November, before Jews had to move to the ghetto, a neighbor called Miksa Juhász, who was a shopkeeper asked Viktor's father to take care of the shop until he returned. Viktor saw when the Jewish tenants left the house to move to the ghetto. During the period of the siege, Viktor stayed in the basement. After the liberation of the ghetto, all Jewish tenants came back to the house except for one little boy who died of sickness. Juhász got his shop back with all the goods in it. Not only the former tenants moved back but also their relatives and friends moved in and the house became crowded and loud. In February 1945 Viktor was walking around the neighborhood and saw corpses on the streets. By 1948, most of the Jewish families had left Hungary.

Viktor went to high school in 1949 and the majority of his Jewish classmates were from communist families and Viktor became friends with them. The communist Jewish students launched an independent literary student journal with the title: *Our Word*, and Viktor launched a counter-journal with the title *My Word*, a satirical and critical weekly. In 1953 Viktor began to study agronomy at the Kossuth Lajos University of Debrecen, and in 1956 he actively participated in the revolution. He was a founder of the Kossuth Kör⁸⁸, the local

⁸⁸ 1956 *Dokumentumai Hajdú-Biharban : Az 1956-Os Forradalom Hajdú-Bihar Megyei Történetének Válogatott Dokumentumai [Documents of 1956 in Hajdú-Bihar County]* (Debrecen : 1993, n.d.).

hotbed of the MEFESZ⁸⁹. Viktor was fired from the university and in 1957 he was transported to the internment camp of Kistarcsa, near Budapest. He could only finish university 7 years later and instead of working as an agronomist, he started to work as a translator and editor. He got married in 1970 and he had 4 children. During the 1980s he was involved in the activity of the democratic opposition⁹⁰.

LIFE IN A YELLOW-STAR HOUSE

Viktor's biography depicts a middle-class non-Jewish family however his parents were coming from an extremely different cultural and social background that influenced the family's and Viktor's afterlife as well. His mother must have had a huge influence on their position in the Hungarian society, representing the West with her French and German origins. On the one hand, the fact that Viktor's mom did not speak Hungarian determined her social abilities and made it more difficult for her to mingle with the locals and the tenants of their house. On the other hand, deriving from the mother's origins, Viktor spoke fluently French and German that must have been a great advantage for him particularly in the 1930s and 1940s when many – especially Jews – spoke German as well. The marriage of the parents was probably based upon love, mainly because from the mother's perspective it must have been a difficult and significant decision to move to Hungary and leave behind France. However, Viktor's father assured a financial and existential security that she did not have in France. Her father was a merchant, who could not necessarily guarantee her a stable life and inheritances. Her husband on the contrary, was coming from a well-educated middle-class Catholic family

⁸⁹ HUN: Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Szövetsége, ENG: Association of Hungarian University and College Students (AHUCS) that was based in Szeged but spread around the country during the second half of October 1956

⁹⁰ B. Shenitz, "Haunted by 1956: Hungary Seeks Its Own Glasnost," *Nation* 246, no. 14 (April 9, 1988): 495–98.

and compared to the merchant father and the countryside of France, her husband and his family in Budapest must have been a promising future prospect.

Viktor therefore was raised in a diverse cultural environment and he had insight to the life of different social classes through his childhood friendships in the house on Molnár street. His best friend however was a Jewish kid, Sándor. Did he find it easier to establish a closer friendship with a Jewish kid? Is it deriving from the fact that he was also, to some extent, different than the other children because of his mother? Did Viktor's family perceive this difference as well and that is why Viktor's father became the godfather of Sándor? Besides Sándor's family, when Jewish tenants had to leave the house that had previously been designated as a yellow-star house, Miksa Juhász asked Viktor's father to take care of his shop. Why did the Jews trust Viktor's family and especially his father? Because he chose a French wife and with that he and his family became cosmopolitan as well, just like the Jews were cosmopolitan? Or the sympathy was merely based on their similar class position? Did the choices of the kids bring them closer or the kids were brought closer by the choices of their parent? In any case, the Jewish friendships of Viktor's childhood have certainly impacted his social orientations later on as well.

Interestingly, during his high-school years he established friendships with the communist Jewish kids, although, ideologically they were not on the same page. From Viktor's part it has been expressed by launching a critical, counter -journal titled *My Word* as a response to *Our Word* that had been launched and edited by the communist student. How was he able to maintain the friendship with his communist Jewish classmates if he seemingly disagreed with their standpoint? Even though they were communists, their Jewish origins made them intellectually attractive for Viktor? He was more familiar with their originally cosmopolitan bourgeois culture than with the culture of others in the school?

The enthusiasm to express his political views culminated in Debrecen during the '56 revolution and even though he was severely punished and deprived from finishing his degree for 7 years, he stood up and fought against the regime by taking part in the activities of the democratic opposition before 1989.

From what we have seen so far, Viktor – probably because of his origins in his class position and family background – was able to establish good relations with his Jewish surroundings that he maintained after the war as well. He was young, only 10 years old during 1944 but he must have understood the injustice and severity of the atrocities committed against the Jews. Maybe that is why he engaged in political activities during 1956 and before 1989. However, deriving from the fact that he did not have to face the loss of any friends or acquaintances, the Holocaust was presumably not as a traumatic an experience in his life as the communist regime was.

DISTANCING, REMOVING THE SELF

As a preliminary remark, it is important to mention that Viktor wrote down his experiences in the yellow-star house and also his experiences during the '56 revolution. His narrative is therefore previously constructed and carefully framed, but deriving from the nature of the narrative interview, his interpretations certainly vary from what he had previously written. His style of speaking, however, remained writing-like, so to say, and he frequently described feelings with carefully chosen words and remained in the position of a narrator rather than an actor.

At the beginning of our discussion, Viktor depicts his parents and says that “*my mother moved here to Hungary in 1929 because she had no idea what was awaiting her*”. As we know, his mom had German and French origins, she must have been an outsider in the

Hungarian society and she transmitted that unintentionally to her kids as well. What was awaiting her probably refers to the Holocaust and then the communist system which both targeted the outsiders of the society. He talks a lot about the house in Molnár street and already at the very beginning of his recollection he tells me that

1.1 The tenants of the house were not really anti-Semitic, they were not at all anti-Semitic except for the concierge * besides that this house remained the land of peace all along⁹¹

How did a ten-years old child know that no one in the house was anti-Semitic? Did he somehow feel that this is an exaggeration when talking about the period of WW2 and therefore he makes a correction saying that the concierge was anti-Semitic? What was the ostensible manifestation of being anti-Semitic or not being one for a young kid? Why is it important to make sure that the tenants were not at all anti-Semitic? Is it rather a projection of his own perceptions on the entirety of the micro-social sphere where he was raised?

Shortly following this section, as some kind of a self-justification for anything he says he claims that

1.2. A child is not yet aware of what means what therefore the events are not yet captivated conceptually but on the level of **ideas there they are, the ideas are** very sensual formations, from which concepts arise [...] and my memories, and my knowledge are reminiscent of my contemporary ideas which I am now naming with concepts and consequently they are impoverished and shifted towards a direction that is defined by my upbringing⁹²

⁹¹ **1.1.** a ház lakói nem igazán voltak antiszemiták, egyáltalán nem voltak antiszemiták ő a házmester kivételével, * ezen kívül pedig ő ez a ház mindvégig a béke szigete maradt

⁹² **1.2.** egy gyerek még nem fogja föl teljesen, hogy itt pontosan mi mit jelent, tehát **fogalmilag** még nincsen megragadva a történet, de **képzetek** szintjén már **vannak, a képzetek** azok ((hadarva)) /nagyon érzéki képződmények, azokból keletkeznek a fogalmak/ [...]és ezek az **emlékeim**, ez a **tudásom** a korabeli **képzetek** maradványai amelyeket én a mai fogalmakkal nevezek meg és ezért **mindenképpen** elszegényítik és eltolják a neveltetésem által meghatározott irányba

This is a very well-thought and carefully constructed explanation of his position in the story he is restoring. With that however, he is definitely distancing himself from the *events*. These events are referring to his childhood memories in the yellow-star house, his memories of the Jews and experiences connected to them. He also claims that the ideas he is able to conceptualize today are deriving from his social background, from his upbringing. Is he merely referring to his parents or is that including the environment in which he was raised as well?

When Viktor talks about the yellow-star house, he adds some more aspects to his perception about his self-positioning

1.3 In the house - - - when still - - -the Jews were living there - - **except for the star** the yellow star * there was no **sign** at all - - that there was no ideological * opposition between **non** Jews and Jews * truly, I did not experience that and in my family there were no traces of that, because of my French-German mother this has not even been raised and my father's family was deeply Catholic, his upbringing was deeply Catholic, uttermost the usual non-Jewish silliness could work there that oh how nasty things they are doing with them⁹³

As Viktor has already indicated, his perceptions about the Jewish, non-Jewish relations are deriving from his parents, his socialization. But why would his mother's origins determine that they had no ideological dissimilarities with the Jews? Because she was also different? Because she was a foreigner, or to put it even in a further reaching context, as someone similar to the *pariah* Jews⁹⁴? And how does his father's Catholic upbringing contribute to that? Was it a simple "silliness" when non-Jews reacted to the atrocities against the Jews as "nasty things"? Viktor himself is a non-Jew as well, was it that silly as well? Or is he

⁹³ **1.3.** a házban - - - amikor még - - a zsidók ott laktak - - a **csillag** sárga csillag **kivételével** *, az ág adta földön semmi féle ö - - **jele** annak hogy bármiféle üm ö világnézeti, szemléleti, * ö ellentét lenne ö a **nem** zsidók és a zsidók között * **tényleg** nem tapasztaltam, a családomba meg nem volt nyoma a francia-német anyám következtében ez úgy föl se vetődött, az apai családom meg mélyen ö ö vallásos, katolikus nevelésben részesült legfeljebb ugye a szokott ö ö **nem** zsidó együgyűség ho- **működhetett**, hogy **ej** be csúnya dolgokat csinálnak velük

⁹⁴ Arnaldo Momigliano, "A Note on Max Weber's Definition of Judaism as a Pariah-Religion," *History and Theory* 19, no. 3 (1980): 313–18, doi:10.2307/2504547.

projecting that on his father and distancing himself again from the responsibility? Does he identify himself more with his mother's French and German mentality than with his father's Hungarian and Catholic?

At one point in his narrative, Viktor told me that *with the help of my mother, I have always kept my distance * from this whole Hungarian environment since I grew up with French and German mother tongue*⁹⁵. Seemingly he gave the answer for the above-mentioned question, however when I asked him to elaborate more on the distance he kept because of his mother, he says that

1.4. Well all it means is that today, since I hopelessly became Hungarian that * this waffling is really pissing me off⁹⁶

So who is waffling here? Hungarians, whom he cannot identify with? He became hopelessly Hungarian but he still cannot *be* one? He is still different?

1.5. My homeland is the culture and not Hungary and therefore I have three homelands, **three and a half** because the French and German culture is also my homeland, the Hungarian and to some extent the Israeli because of the roots, since the Euro-Atlantic culture is based on the Jewish-Christian culture and these are the lands where I feel home while the Israeli is so different⁹⁷

Viktor unquestionably distances himself from Hungary and he merely identifies himself with it in cultural terms. However, besides the Hungarian, French and German culture which are already somewhat contradictory, he claims that the Israeli culture is an extra half that adds to the entirety of this cosmopolitan identification. Why does he feel the need to mention Israel

⁹⁵ miközben anyám segítségével **egész** életemben megmaradt egy távolságtartás * ettől az egész magyar környezettől mert hiszen francia és **német** nyelven nőttem föl

⁹⁶ **1.4.** hát ez csak annyit jelent ma már, hiszen reménytelenül magyar lettem * hogy ő * nagyon bassza a csőrömet ez a sok mellébeszélés

⁹⁷ **1.5.** nekem a hazám a kultúra és nem Magyarország és ezért nekem három hazám van, **három és fél**, mert nekem a német és francia kultúra is a hazám, a magyar és bizonyos mértékig Izrael a gyökerek miatt hiszem az euroatlanti kultúra a zsidó keresztény kultúrán alapszik és **ezen** azok a földek ahol én valahol kulturálisan otthon vagyok miközben hát az Izraeli olyan más

when the Judeo-Christian bases of the Euro-Atlantic culture precede the existence of Israel by centuries? Is it rather an identification with Jewish culture, or even more, with Jews?

When he was talking more about his mom and the Molnár street tenants, he tells me the following:

1.6. The one half of the tenants who were Jewish, for my mom, * she never formulated it this way but she precisely felt that these were not **as** Hungarian as the others and at least they were lying in a different way⁹⁸

Is he truly referring to his mom who thought that Jews were not as Hungarian as the others, and who were lying in different ways, or implicitly is it a projection of his own thoughts? His mother never formulated it this way; isn't it rather him who aims to formulate it in that manner after all? Why is he hiding behind his mother's image? Because his mother, who is a foreigner and not *hopelessly Hungarian* has more right to say such things? And why does he assume that both Jews and *others* were lying? To which category does Viktor belong? The others, who are very Hungarian and who are lying, or the Jews who are not as Hungarians, and probably not notorious liars? It seems that Viktor is completely removing himself from this context and he is only an observer and a storyteller of the types of people and the categories that he creates. To sum up this wave of thoughts, he adds that *if origins have any affect then that is not genetic but cultural, and in this sense it was clearly a different strata*⁹⁹. He is talking about the Jews here, and explains – again from an outsider's perspective – that their origins are cultural determinants and there are no racial connotations of their differences. However, by these origins they belong to a different social strata and most probably Viktor

⁹⁸ a ház lakóinak az a fele amelyik zsidó volt az ő anyám számára * ezt ezt így soha nem fogalmazta meg ő de pontosan érzékelte hogy ezek nem **annyira** magyarok mint a többiek és legalábbis másképp hazudoznak

⁹⁹ ha van származásnak a hatása az nem genetikai hanem kulturális és ő ilyen értelemben * ez egy nagyon világosan más réteg volt

feels himself to be a member of that strata, where the origins affect the acculturation of people.

Viktor's self-identification with the specific Jewish culture remained the same after 1944 as well. In his high school, forty per cent of the class was Jewish, and most of them were communist *káder* Jews the rest were bourgeois. He tells me that bourgeois Jews were boring and they did not have the same type of cultural education that he inherited from his mom *as a European, as a French. These idiotic communist Jewish kids were representing it the most, which caused a constant schizophrenia in me.* He refers to the fact that even though he was anti-communist, he could only bond with the communist kids and according to Viktor that bonding is derived from the cultural similarities they shared. When he talks about the '56 revolutions, he does not go into details, because this is another episode of his life that he has written down, that he has already constructed, but which episode was difficult to process for him.

DEALING WITH CHILDHOOD MEMORIES – SUMMARY OF VIKTOR'S INTERVIEW

Viktor lived through three major political systems and each system influenced his remembering, his reflections on the past memories. His memories about the 1944 period are the memories of a child, and as Culbertson argued, "a child's memory is a story that the child never knew, from a perspective that was not part of the original scene or experience"¹⁰⁰. This is referring to the fact that as adults, the childhood memories become socially constructed stories, and in the case of Viktor, these constructions are embedded in and fixed by his written memoirs. During the interview he was talking from an outsider's perspective, he was much rather an observer of his story than a participant in it.

¹⁰⁰ Roberta Culbertson, "Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-Establishing the Self," *New Literary History* 26, no. 1 (1995): 181.

Concerning the Holocaust memories, he is not only distancing himself from them but he is also trying to project these childhood memories on his parent's and other adult's perspectives that make these memories more valid to him today, as an adult. The reason why he fits the "socially Jewish" construct is because he also felt different during the times of the Jewish persecutions, because he felt foreign and he somehow constructed a feasible understanding of why he was not able to fit into the contemporary social and cultural environment. He perceived and still perceives himself to be a culturally cosmopolitan individual that was a characteristic of Jews as well. Eventually, in an abstract way, he even shared the victimhood that was expressed by his punishment for his political activity in the '56 revolution. Fighting against all regimes during his entire life is also an articulation of the distance that he feels or that he tries to explain between himself and the Hungarian society.

TYPOLGY 4: "ASSOCIATIVE RECOLLECTION"

As I have already indicated, Livi's interview was conducted in 2015 for the purposes of my BA thesis. In that work, I analyzed and compared her story to a Jewish survivor's story, who was her best friend and with whom she lived in the same yellow-star house. Their friendship that has started years before the war was situational; they lived in the same house that serves as a source of memory as well. This is called *place memory* that is composed by recollections of individual meanings and emotions that are "related to the history of a specific space"¹⁰¹.

The main findings of the BA thesis were specifically related to their friendship; I found that that they mutually shared the war's experience, but from a very different perspective. One of them was a victim and the other remained a passive bystander who

¹⁰¹ Wojcik, Bilewicz, and Lewicka, "Living on the Ashes."

witnessed the persecution of her friend. Despite the fact that Livi did not become a rescuer of Ágnes, there was a strong feeling of gratitude from both sides, but in Livi's case the feeling of guilt was also a significant element in the narrative¹⁰². They are still friends, although since 1945 they have only met once. They do sometimes call each other and every time Livi tells Ágnes that she is still her best friend. In the following, I would like briefly introduce Livi's life and highlight some interesting elements of her interview to explain why is it a case for the "associative recollection" construct.

LIVI'S BIOGRAPHY

Livi's mother was coming from an originally Polish family and her father was Hungarian. Her father was an engineer and he was offered a job in the Bukovina region: however, Livi's mother refused to move there. They moved to the 13th district in 1925, when Livi was born. Livi's father became the concierge of the house in Pannónia street. Livi went to primary school and then she was admitted to a prestigious Catholic high school with the help of her father. Her father died in 1936 and Livi's mother took her out from the Catholic school. This is when Livi met Ágnes who became her best friend and it turned out that Ágnes's father had known Livi's father from before. Livi remained deeply religious — she even built an altar in her room. She went to a social worker school where Sára Salkaházi was one of her teachers. She volunteered in the countryside as a social worker but eventually she moved back to Pannónia street and started to work at a printing house on the same block. When in 1944 the house was designated as a yellow-star house, Livi wrote a list of the Jewish tenants. When they moved to the basement, a lot of Jews converted and Livi brought a priest

¹⁰² Komoly, "'Kényszer nélkül békességben voltak' - Egy zsidó túlélő és egy nem zsidó szemtanú narratívájának összehasonlító elemzése ['They were in peace without coercion' - comparative study of the narratives of a Jewish survivor and a non-Jewish bystander]."

who helped to prepare them for it. After the Soviet troops arrived, Ágnes's father saved Livi in a situation when Russian soldiers were looking for her. In 1945 Livi moved to the countryside where she met her husband. She had seven children and she has lived in Szolnok ever since.

A REMINDER - SUMMARY OF LIVI'S INTERVIEW

In Livi's life, the main trauma was that she lost her father fairly early: however, she found a substitute in Ágnes's father. This makes it even more interesting that she did not help them more during 1944. She was a grown-up working woman, almost 20 years old during the Arrow-Cross era, and as the daughter of the concierge she was aware of the policies and decrees targeting the Jews. When I ask her to elaborate more on the designation of the yellow-star house she tells me that

Maybe Ágnes knows more about that, because she was directly **she herself** and her family was [directly] affected. I can only talk about it as an outsider well it was terrible but what is certainly sure is that my mother was happy when I was not home, if I am not the witness and participant and what not of these events that happened there * this was simply horrible. It was horrible¹⁰³.

Livi admits that she not only remained an outsider but also tried to avoid being a witness or participant in the atrocities. Seemingly she did not even intend to help her friend or other Jews but she did know about the horrible events that had happened.

After a short pause she adds that

¹⁰³ hát mit is tudjak erről mesélni. mit. Marika talán jobban tudja, mert őt őt közvetlenül **őt magát** meg a családját érintette. én hát kívülállóként tudom ezt csak mondani, hát rettenetes volt, de az biztos, hogy mondom anyukáék akkor örültek, hogy ha nem vagyok otthon, ha nem vagyok szemtanúja meg meg résztvevője meg nem tudom ezeket az eseményeket amik ott lezajlottak. * egyszerűen borzasztó. Borzasztó volt.

And one was the witness of it in a way that he or she could not do anything * only if there was an opportunity could one help but essentially - - only - - a few could help, those who were capable of hiding 10 or 100 people or=those who could write a Schutzpass¹⁰⁴ or had the chance to ensure to that they survive these years alive and healthily¹⁰⁵

She is distancing herself from all responsibilities by not only what she says but also by how she says it. She is using the third person by which she puts herself in a completely outsider position. She clearly tries to excuse herself and she tries to give a reason why she was unable to help. She could only witness the horrors, the horrors that were happening to her very good friend and the family where she had found a father figure that was missing from her life. With that, she – unintentionally – admits to be a passive bystander who did not help.

Despite all, Livi and Ágnes are still in contact, which means that even though Livi “fled” Budapest after the war, and settled in the countryside, she could never escape the memories of her childhood friend and the persecutions she witnessed as a bystander. Ágnes is therefore the association in Livi’s recollections which association is a reminder of the repressed memories that are recurrently making Livi face her past.

FOUR BYSTANDERS, FOUR LIFE STORIES

In the previous chapter I introduced four life stories of elderly bystanders of the Holocaust in Budapest. Their stories allowed for a closer look at the individual processes of remembering, recollection and the agents of memories, which alter the outcomes of how one remembers the Jewish persecutions. Each of the four interviewees came from a different

¹⁰⁴ These were „protecting” letters written by neutral countries as an initiative to save Jews

¹⁰⁵ és hát az ember=az ember úgy volt ő tanúja, hogy közben nem tudott tenni.+ csak hát ha éppen úgy adódott valami, akkor tudott segíteni, de ő a lényegen - - csak - - kevesen tudtak segíteni, akiknek volt=volt módjuk elrejtteni 10 embert vagy 100 embert, vagy=vagy olyan menleveleket írni, vagy lehetőséget biztosítani hogy=hogy élve, hogy egészségesen megússzák ezeket az éveket.

background and a different social class. Two of them lived in yellow-star houses, and two of them lived in the territory of the designated Pest ghetto. Their stories however meet in one point: all four were passive bystanders during the Holocaust.

I have created a typology in order to give a frame in which not only my interviews would fit, but other bystander stories would potentially fit too. Anna's life story is the case study for the first type, which I have called "Transcending past, replacing tragedy." The communist regime broke the continuity of Anna's life path and she replaced the Jewish tragedy with her own struggles during communism. With that, she portrays herself as a member of another victim group, and she eventually could blame the Jews for her difficulties because by that, Jews became members of an out-group from her perspective¹⁰⁶.

In contrast to Anna's, Mihály's story reflected less on the larger political influences than on the importance of social interactions within his community. The Holocaust was such a powerful fate-event¹⁰⁷ in his life that he had to rewrite his inner narrative and work on how to face his past. Seemingly he found a way to deal with these memories: he initiated the placing of a commemorative plaque for Jews whom he saw being killed on the street. With that Mihály fits the second type that I call "Self-exculpation".

The third story was Viktor's, and the construct he fits into is the "Socially Jewish" construct. Deriving from his origins, namely that his mother was French and German, he has been an outsider in Hungarian society during his childhood, similarly to the Jews. Because of that, he could establish a closer relationship with his Jewish peers, which has remained the same during the rest of his life as well.

The last case study was Livi's, the best friend of a Jewish girl in a yellow-star house before and during WW2. Her type is called "Associative recollection". In her case, Ágnes, her best Jewish friend is a constant reminder of the repressed memories she tried to avoid facing

¹⁰⁶ Bilewicz, "Can a Victim Be Responsible?"

¹⁰⁷ Tengelyi, *Élettörténet és sorseseemény [Life story and fate event]*.

after the Holocaust. They are still friends and still in contact, and consequently she is pushed to literally face the responsibilities and the guilt that her childhood friend represents.

With these four typologies I intended to further explain the bystander phenomenon and I aimed to contrast the existing literature on that. Every individual however, has a unique life history and a very different understanding of the past. Therefore, my typology does not seek to create a set categorization of bystanders, but rather serves as a guideline for researchers to see the complexities of a phenomenon that is deeply rooted in historical, social and psychological determinants.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the present thesis was to investigate the bystander phenomenon in light of the Second World War and to find out how non-Jews perceived the *othering* of the Jewish citizens during this period of time. To ensure that bystanders witnessed the entire process of discrimination that targeted their friends, acquaintances and neighbors, the spatial focus of my research was Budapest, where the majority of the Jewish population survived the persecutions. I maintained that in order to better understand the victimization process, one should look at how individuals remember and reflect on the Holocaust past. I also argued that the “undocumented experiences”¹⁰⁸ help nuance the historical narrative that has been constructed and reconstructed during the last 70 years.

My research adds to the existing approaches and theories concerning the passive bystanders of the Holocaust with a typology that I have constructed based on the academic literature and on my oral history research. I explained these constructs through the analysis of four narrative life-history interviews. My typology is based on the following findings: bystanders of the first type are those who avoid facing the Holocaust past by replacing the Jewish tragedy with their own tragedies during communism. They feel that they belong to another victim group that is, the victims of the Soviet oppression. Thereby they create a “*competitive victimhood*,” and they attempt to prove that their in-group suffered more than the out-group”¹⁰⁹, namely, the Jews. I called this construct: “Transcending past, replacing tragedy”.

The second finding was that there is a type of bystanders who had close relationships with Jews before the war but lost these acquaintances during the Holocaust. They have difficulties processing the past, their traumatic memories and their guilt for not helping. To overcome these feelings they make compensations to the Jews and with that they compensate

¹⁰⁸ Thomson, “Fifty Years On.”

¹⁰⁹ Bilewicz, “Can a Victim Be Responsible?,” 2.

for themselves too. This compensation can be a gesture, an object, or simply the acknowledgment of their complicity and guilt. I called this construct “Self-exculpation”.

My third finding that is reflected in the third construct describes those bystanders who felt closer to the Jewish cultural environment before and after the war as well. Bystanders of the “Socially Jewish” construct portray themselves not only as philo-Semites, but as almost Jewish themselves. They seek to surround themselves with Jews and Gentiles alike who share cultural and ideological beliefs similar to the pre-war Jewish environment.

The last, fourth construct covers those bystanders who, even though they have tried to overlook the Holocaust past and their complicity, are constantly reminded of it. Their memories are associated with and recalled by friends who survived, objects they kept, or the feelings of gratitude towards the Jews who might have helped them before the war. I called the last type “Associative recollection.”

In my thesis, I highlighted the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to describe bystanders and bystanding behavior. Based on the literature and the above-presented constructs, one can certainly assume that the bystander phenomenon is very diverse and complex and cannot be explained through one single definition. My typology is proof of that as well: however, these constructs did not intend to suggest a set categorization. Rather, these are guidelines to nuance and understand how bystanders perceived the persecutions of Jews and how they construct their narratives about the past from the perspective of the present. The typology can be extended and further explained.

More than seventy years have passed since the end of the Second World War. Nonetheless, the memories of the war are still vividly present in the recollections of the elderly bystanders. However, as Halbwachs claimed, the images of the past are not recurring

but “reconstructed on the bases of the present”¹¹⁰. Deriving from this notion, what we learn from the bystanders today is informed by the present and altered by the many years that have passed. We are living the last moments in which there will be a chance to ask those who witnessed the darkest times of history and who can reflect on how they experienced and how they explain the *othering* of Jews from an eye-witness’s perspective. At the same time, the importance of understanding how ordinary bystanders reflect on the Holocaust past can have further implications and relevance for the future. It teaches us about the social dynamics of violent actions or victimization processes and helps to recognize that activating bystanders is the key for intervention, and ultimately prevention.

¹¹⁰ Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A. Coser, *On Collective Memory*, The Heritage of Sociology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 40.

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APPENDIX

SIGNS USED IN THE TRANSCRIPTIONS

* short break

(10) seconds, when shorter than 10, every second is signed with –

((laughing)) meta-communicative sign

/commented text by the ((laughing)) meta-communicative sign

louder or accentuated words

›silently‹ said words

yes=yes words connected faster than normally