

# Jewish Identity in Hungary

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## A Narrative Model Suggested\*

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Research on Jewish identity in Hungary started in the late seventies and the early eighties – at the time when the ‘second generation’ of post-Holocaust Hungarian Jewry<sup>1</sup> began to think seriously about themselves as a relatively distinct social group. During the work of our research team,<sup>2</sup> we decided not to restrict our investigations to a purely theoretical, academic inquiry and started to make in-depth interviews with our peers. The result is a unique collection of oral history texts, amounting to over ten thousand pages. This compendium offers an inexhaustible textual treasury of the family histories, the generational problems, and the mentality of post-Holocaust Hungarian Jewry.

The social psychological aspects of Jewish identity, and identity in general have been thoroughly discussed ever since. During the recent years, three important developments seem to have framed our

research. The first is the emergence of various ‘narrative approaches’ in the social sciences and humanities. The second is a marked improvement in the techniques of computer-aided text analysis, which allows us now to do more systematic research on our earlier material. The third development is that an enthusiastic group of third generation students joined our research project – which not only has resulted in the broadening of our earlier database with third generation interviews, but also seems to promise new insights into the similarities and dissimilarities between the two subsequent generations and address the problematic connection between them.

## THE SOCIETAL BACKGROUND OF JEWISH IDENTITY RESEARCH IN HUNGARY

The question of Jewish identity, which reemerged during the past two decades in Hungary, has its own history which goes back to the second half of the nineteenth century. In this historical process,<sup>3</sup> definitions of Jewish identity have become more

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1 The term ‘second generation’ here and throughout the article refers to the children of Holocaust survivors.

2 See the following articles and volumes: Erős 1988, Erős and A. Kovács 1988; Erős, A. Kovács and Lévai 1985, 1988; Kashti, Erős, Schers, and Zisenswine eds. 1996; M. Kovács, Kashti, and Erős eds. 1992.

3 On this historical process see, for example, Raphaël Patai’s comprehensive study (Patai 1996).

vague, ambiguous, and flexible. It is the consequence of secularization, the erosion or dissolution of traditional communities, and the rapid assimilation processes that followed the social and political transformation of the Hungarian Jewry and the society in general. The answers to the question 'What makes one a Jew?' are multiple and relativized: the various Jewish identities can be conceived as different points on a scale ranging from belonging to groups (ritual and religious communities, distinct ethnic and linguistic groups), through accepting and practicing more or less well defined (sub)cultural traditions, to having no Jewish identity at all.<sup>4</sup>

After the Holocaust, the problems concerning Jewish identity were exiled from public discussions. During the late seventies and early eighties, however, when social, ideological and political conditions radically changed in Hungary, a series of historical, sociological, literary, and cinematographic works cracked the wall of silence. These publications and films gave the public access to the history of the Hungarian Jewry, to the discussion of the roots of anti-semitism and certain topics related to the Holocaust. As long-hidden memories surfaced, silence was replaced by remembering, reworking, and healing. Retrospectively, it seems to be a problem of narrative and discourse: a *new language had to be found for the 'new' phenomenon of the second generation*. This new discourse seemed to evolve in two separate fields – at the level of the *community* and at the level of the *individual*. As we see it now, one and a half decades later, it was actually two different discourses: one historical and political, the other psychological and individual.

An early point of common reference was István Bibó's celebrated study on the 'Jewish problem' in Hungary (Bibó 1984). This seminal work on the political and historical discussion of the subject was originally published in 1948, but, for various political reasons, became accessible to the larger public only in the eighties. Other important publications also reached a wider audience in those years: these works discussed the role of the Jewry in the establishment of modern Hungary and in the development of a Hungarian bourgeois culture; the contradictory processes of assimilation and the tragic dilemmas related to them; the morals of the 'populist-urbanite' debate;<sup>5</sup> and the emergence of modern anti-semitism and its radicalization, including detailed research into the history of the Hungarian Holocaust (see for example Brahm 1990; Hanák 1984; Vágó 1981; A. Kovács 1984; and McCagg 1989). Further topics of discussion were the place of the Jewry as a social group under the 'hard' and 'soft' versions of the state-socialist regimes<sup>6</sup> and the multifaceted relationship between Jews and non-Jews in general (see for example Karády 1984; A. Kovács 1984; and Várdy 1984).

4 International literature on the problem of Jewish identity provides detailed analysis of changes and problems of the phenomenon in the past one and a half centuries (see, for example, Herman 1974).

5 'Populism' and 'urbanism' were influential intellectual currents among Hungarian literati and political thinkers between the two world wars. Populists advocated poor peasantry and demanded radical social reforms to change their desperate living conditions in a semi-feudal, rural Hungary. Many of the 'populists' despised 'the city', 'the sinful town', and the bourgeoisie (including the Jews), who, according to them, were insensitive to the sufferings of poor people. They also regarded the socialist and communist working class movement with suspicion; in their romantic anti-capitalism, they prophetically advertised a 'third way', a 'Hungarian way' between capitalism and socialism. Their opponents, the 'urbanites' were Jewish or non-Jewish intellectuals who advocated, by and large, a Western-type modernization in the country. Populism was not free of a 'völkisch', anti-bourgeois anti-Semitism, and quite a few representatives of the movement landed at the extreme right of the political spectrum, especially during the World War II.

6 The phrase 'hard dictatorship' denotes the Stalinist regime in the fifties, while 'soft dictatorship' has been a common reference to the relatively liberal era of the Kádár regime from the sixties on.

The 'other' discourse was that of the private world, it gave voice to the individual. After the long silence, this 'new' language started to evolve in the framework of *psycho-therapeutic* narratives. In the following, we comment on the nature of this particular kind of discourse, since it is the dominant framework in which fundamental questions of post-Holocaust Jewish identity are discussed.

## THE MEDICAL MODEL OF JEWISH IDENTITY

It seems to be a commonplace by now that the events during the period between 1938 and 1945 – discrimination, various forms of persecution, and most significantly, the Holocaust itself – had a decisive impact not only on the life histories and mental conditions of the first generation, but also on the life of their children: parents unwillingly passed on their traumas to the subsequent generation. The transmission of the trauma, however, was not always a taken-for-granted fact; it had to be recognized and disseminated among a wider public. This recognition was the merit of psychiatric and psychoanalytic case histories which, from the sixties on<sup>7</sup> (in Hungary since the eighties, by the pioneering work of Teréz Virág, György Vikár and other psychotherapists<sup>8</sup>) systematically revealed the mechanisms, conditions, and varieties of the transmission of the trauma. These studies also explored how the trauma itself and its repercussions in the next generation might become bases for *identity formation*.

In this therapeutic discourse the problem of Jewish identity was postulated as *massive pathology*, in which the Holocaust experience, direct or indirect, leads to serious psychic crises. The resulting symptoms and syndromes defy comparison, they are unique manifestations of a Self that is severely injured and permanently jeopardized, and consequently left groundless, laden with anxiety, fear, guilt, depression, and aggression. The massive psychological violence that the survivors had to endure became the starting point for the identity-pathology of the offspring as well: it indirectly deprived the second generation of early identification patterns, attachments and object relations that are indispensable to normal identity formation and development. The aim of psychotherapeutic studies is to reconstruct each individual case by penetrating into the deepest possible layers of a life history, and to find similarities and dissimilarities between the cases. Nonetheless, there is a long debate as to what extent the results of such an investigation can be generalized to a population as a whole – to the majority who never go to therapy, or to cases never 'compiled' into a case history. Of course, the issue cannot be decided on an empirical basis, though evidence from the international literature suggests that it would be a bold overstatement to label the whole second generation as 'sick'.<sup>9</sup> Opinions also vary on the specificity of the post-Holocaust symptoms. We now have abundant literature on the 'Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder' syndrome that suggests that the psychic aftermath of the most diverse disasters, wars, deportations, massacres, ethnic cleanings and genocides show structural similarities (Eitinger and Major 1993). The trauma of the Shoah, however, seems to be beyond comparison in the profound and long-term nature of its overall psychic consequences.

7 From the vast literature, see such comprehensive works as Bergman and Jucovy 1982; Daneli 1980; Kestenberg 1972; Krystal 1968; Wardi 1992.

8 See Virág 1984, 1988, 1994; Cserne et al. 1992; Mészáros 1990, 1992; Pető 1992; Szilágyi 1994; Várnai 1994; Virág and Vikár 1985; Vikár 1994.

9 For some of the comparative studies, see Dasberg 1987; Major 1991; Russel, Plotkin, and Heapy 1985.

However debatable the validity criteria of the case history approach are, psychotherapeutic discourse has engendered a paradigm shift in mainstream psychological research on the Holocaust and significantly changed its language. This new language was then found to offer a viable means of conceptualization and interpretation of the Holocaust syndrome, and in this respect, it contributed largely to the process in which the concept of a real, diagnosable and classifiable disease had itself grown into an almighty *metaphor*. 'Holocaust as a disease' thus became a component of a peculiar 'biopolitics': the Holocaust victim, with a tormented, humiliated, and stigmatized body and endlessly tortured psyche, loses his/her human identity in the same way as the offspring who is born into this transgenerational trauma. Even if s/he denies or ignores it, or if s/he tries to find some kind of compensation for her/his situation, the person's whole effort will be labeled as pathological and thus s/he will find herself/himself in an endless "psychological labyrinth".<sup>10</sup>

Although psychotherapeutic discourse offers a reasonable, rational, and causal explanation for all sufferings and crises of the patient, *it somehow lacks the 'community quality' of healing*. It postulates the 'disease' first as a *private* issue of the individual, then as a *dyadic/dialogic* issue between the therapist and the patient. The community aspect emerges only at some later phases: first, when the patient himself is represented as a case study, and to a certain extent he becomes 'the voice of the therapist' within the *professional community of therapists*; and second, when the case study is *published* and becomes available for a larger public. This is the point where the medical model becomes situated in a social psychological perspective.

The medical model of psychotherapeutic discourse has and will always have its merits in the postulation of the transgenerational problems of post-Holocaust Jewish identity. It is no accident that when we started to study Jewish identity fifteen years ago, even in our – non-therapeutical – in-depth interviews, we had eagerly 'hunted' for symptoms classified as components of the Holocaust syndrome, such as object relational problems, anxiety, persecution dreams and fantasies, and so on, and our results were in agreement with those revealed in the studies applying the therapeutic discourse. Nevertheless, we maintain that the widespread medical model has not only *created* the psychotherapeutic discourse on the second generation, but has also put a *challenge* to it. It seems that an overall paradigmatic change can be witnessed nowadays: distinct narratives of the dyadic therapy are gradually grouping into a common pool. Therapeutic results with second generation patients are abundantly published by now even in Hungarian, and the 'naive patient', the 'unexperienced' patient, who has no previous ideas about the concepts of pathology and its treatment, seems to disappear. A further contribution to this 'extraclinical effect' was that many new documents have been published in the past ten years, and the process was 'capped' by a series of events connected to the fiftieth anniversary of the Holocaust. A multitude of autobiographies, memories, recollections and analyses on behalf of first generation survivors surfaced. This kind of 'narrative self-healing' seems to have become a new social phenomenon, which cannot be neglected by the 'medical model' any more.

## THE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF HUNGARIAN JEWISH IDENTITY: THE NARRATIVE MODEL

Literary works, interviews, spontaneous autobiographies and psychotherapy are all composed of words, stories, and narratives. The common feature in all autobiographic recollections is the movement toward coherence, the organizing force inherent in the story itself. In-depth interviews dwell on the boundary between therapeutic conversation and autobiographic literature. They are not as secret as therapy, and their form and content are not as organized as published autobiographic works. The written text carries the same motives and defense mechanisms of the subject that can be revealed in therapy; breaks, denials, and hidden, concealed textual layers can also be identified and exposed to view by qualitative data analysis. In-depth interviews, however, carry the dual tragedy of all autobiographies: they are helplessly subjected to the curious eyes and the multiple interpretations of subsequent ages, and a great many things that are omitted from them are lost without a trace.

Our interviews always started with questions about the very beginning of the interviewee's family history, that is, earlier than the subject's childhood. The interviews focused on Jewish identity, but – as a by-product – the questions linked the individual, with all of his or her traumas, to the endless string of generations, nesting him or her in a broader historical context. We found that despite our efforts to get the subjects to adhere to a linear time line, the narrative created a chronology of its own. The text was not linear, but neither was it chaotic: it created its own 'meta-chronology', subordinated to the strict laws of the organization of personal life history. Our subjects showed some marked analogies: their history was a road from a fragmented representation of Jewishness to a more or less complete, sophisticated entity. As the hidden secrets of family history, persecution, loss, and trauma became easier to verbalize in the course of the interview process, to the surprise of both the interviewer and interviewee, a coherent story took shape in front of our eyes. Something new was created. The language allowed for conceptualizing the deficiency, and the 'unspeakable' became *the story itself*, ready to enter public discourse.

When we started to conduct these interviews more than a decade ago, we had no intention of 'creating' a narrative model of Jewish identity in Hungary, nor did we want to 'contribute' to the later narrative turn in identity research and social psychology in general. It was our good luck that not only the narrative approach has grown into a new methodological paradigm of our time, but a technological innovation, namely the availability of CAQDAS (Computer Aided Qualitative Data Analysing Softwares), also came to our help. This has been beneficial not only because the softwares enabled us to mark, encode, 'cut and paste', and rearrange huge volumes of texts, but also because they had a new impact on the methodology of handling large databases simultaneously (see Denzin and Lincoln 1996; Miles and Huberman 1994; Weitzman and Miles 1994).

On these grounds, we suggest a new framework for narrative analysis. In the following, we present the layers of Hungarian Jewish identity as we excavated them from our oral history basis. A new feature of our narrative model is that the 'symptoms' are postulated not as end points of a causal scheme, but as starting points – in the sense that within a dialogue, the 'symptom', the life crisis, is organized into a story, and as such, enters the sphere of public remembering, discussion, and testimony.

10 A term used by the Hungarian social psychologist Ferenc Mérei to describe pathological "detours" in psychic life (Mérei 1989a).

Our most important finding was that the 'thickest' and 'deepest' layer of Jewish identity was 'belonging' to a persecuted group. The 'children of the Holocaust syndrome' meant that in the eighties, in Hungary, the main reason our interview subjects considered themselves as Jews was that their parents had suffered for their Jewishness, and the experience of persecution was imprinted 'in their genes'. The Holocaust, in this sense, was a primary constituent of identity, as illustrated by the following dream report:

The most menacing was when I dreamt that some junta was ruling Hungary, and they decided to kill all the Jews. Though the fact that they wanted to kill the Jews came up only at the end of the dream. The dream started with the announcement of a great folk festival through loudspeakers on the streets, promising that all kinds of candy, games, music, entertainment would be available along the Danube bank, and everybody was to go there. And when everybody was there, large watering-carts started to work and a huge water jet washed the people into the Danube. And then, when I saw this – because I was not carried away by the water –, I learnt that they wanted to kill the Jews, and that was why they organized the folk festival. This was horrible, and then I woke up and heard a watering-cart working on the street. Obviously, this mode of killing came from an external stimulus. I very often dream that I am personally persecuted and on the run throughout the town, hiding in back-streets and gateways, and when the events are culminating, I suddenly wake up.

A great many sources – such as interviews, case reports, or literary works – reveal the difficulties of speaking about the traumas survived. We also discovered that first generation survivors could hardly recall any stories of their suffering – of course, by this, they tried to protect both themselves and their offspring –, but remarks, involuntary allusions, sudden silences, tears, and other responses made the children figure out the existence of a formidable family secret.

My parents have always tried to forget those years. And since they also wanted to forget the years of their young adulthood, that is the war years, their earlier years were also washed away, and they did not tell me about those years, either.

In an earlier publication (Erős and Ehmann 1996b), we reported several types of first generation Holocaust narratives recalled by our second generation subjects. They can be roughly categorized into *loss stories* and *survival stories*; none of which are complete narratives with all the necessary features of a story. Real names are mentioned rarely in these fragmented narratives: roles like 'the father', 'the mother', 'a woman', and so on, appear in these 'second-hand' legends, and this out-of-time, out-of-place nature gives the stories a color of some eternal, surrealistic absurdity:

I was told a story that someone reprimanded the wife for giving her baby to the grandma; then she took the baby back into her lap, and then a soldier pushed her into the group that marched then to the gas chamber."

In many cases, these unrevealable, mysterious secrets channelled family communication in a specific manner, and the children may have found themselves among ever more impenetrable walls of silence. Nevertheless, in the human psyche, there seems to be an inborn need for perceiving the world through stories and their interpretations, and this way, with years passing, these non-stories, half-stories and fragmented legends slowly but steadily become integrated into the six-thousand-year-old 'great narrative' of Judaism, into the endless line of stories concerning historical affliction. The latter seems to be an integral part of the mentality of almost all groups

of Jewry all over the world – to some extent even those American Jews whose families were not closely affected by the Shoah.

The Holocaust layer of Jewish identity is composed of imaginary identification with those who perished, as well as alternating between the roles of the passive victim and the revenging hero. The phenomenon is well described in *Le Juif imaginaire*, a book by the French philosopher Alain Finkielkraut:

Jewry to me was the most precious present a post-Holocaust child can ever dream of. I inherited sufferings I had not gone through; I was subject to persecution that never happened to me. I was invited to play a star in an extraordinary movie: I become a hero without enduring real danger. The mere fact that I was a Jew helped me to avoid the anonymity of an accidental existence, the plain boredom of an uneventful life. Not, of course, was I protected against melancholy, but there was something in which I was superior to my peers: I had the skill to dramatize my life. ... Judaism was a redemption from the ordinary. How did my life come to be a trifle? My banal gestures were mere camouflage: I was a wandering nomad, an armchair Ahasverus, I was a scared philistine, but in my daydreams I took heroic revenge for the horror of the pogroms (Finkielkraut 1980).

#### THE STRATEGY OF SILENCE CREATES THE LANGUAGE OF ALLUSIONS

Latent or marked Holocaust identity affected communication not only within the family but also beyond its boundaries. One had to cope with this mysterious experience of 'otherness' outside the family; however, for societal reasons, this was almost impossible or at least difficult and not without social and political risks.

The main goal of the official 'identity politics' of the post-war era was, in Hungary as well as in other Communist countries, to deprive people of their multifaceted individual identities and to force a uniform identity pattern onto them. This goal, however, was actually impossible to realize, since this would always remain a mere ideological, utopian objective even in the most extreme totalitarian dictatorships. Nonetheless, it had a bitter consequence in that a wide gap opened between public and private forms of identity.<sup>11</sup> Of course, administrative and informal pressure aimed at the annihilation of group specificities could not foreclose the possibility of publicly manifesting Jewish identity. The historical and sociological literature on the post-war situation of the Jewry in Hungary, such as the aforementioned writings by Viktor Karády, András Kovács, and Péter Várdy, give a detailed description of the forced assimilation policy of the Rákosi regime in the fifties.

While secondary traumatization means the unconscious transmission of the trauma suffered by the parents, there was a more or less conscious effort on the parents behalf to conceal their belonging to the once-persecuted group: *the strategy of silence*. Children in these families were socialized in an environment where tradition was more or less eliminated and the generational continuity of the family history was broken. When facing the question 'How did you come to realize that you are Jewish?', many respondents in our interviews admitted that learning that they were Jewish proved to be an extremely conflict-ridden emotional experience. Often they had been 'enlightened' by strangers, and even when the information was revealed in the family, it was typically

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see Erős 1994.

a reaction to a painful situation experienced by the child or adolescent outside the family (see Erős, Kovács, and Lévai 1985). A respondent told us:

At the age of 13, I didn't know what it meant to be Jewish. I didn't even know the word. This may sound funny, but at that time, when I first heard the word, it was not from them [the parents], but from a friend four years older than myself. He told me that we were Jews and told me all about what had happened to the Jews. It was then that I learned for the first time what had happened to us, and I became very frightened, and ever since I haven't been able to accept these facts. The truth of the matter is that I have never been particularly willing or able to deal with it, believing, as a matter of principle, that if I close my eyes they cannot see me. In short, if I don't deal with the problem, then there won't be any, just there won't be any anti-Semitism.

In some families – for some reason or other – the parents were loyal to the Communist regime. An alternative to deny Jewish background completely was to find a brand new, a 'progressive', and a viable narrative instead of the lost and banned one. The 'we are not Jews, we are Communists' type of strategy seemed to be a good solution; a Hungarian counterpart to the narrative strategy widespread at the neighboring Big Brother: 'We are not Russians, Kazakhs or Lithuanians, we are citizens of the Soviet Union.'

It was not an easy narrative game, however, as illustrated by the following interview fragment:

My parents thought that in this new system Jews would not be persecuted, and in return, they would have to act as if they were not Jews. ... I think they believed that the Jewish past had to be repressed, had to be forgotten. ... There was constant debate about this between my parents and my grandma. Granny had the idea that I should be educated as a Jewish child, including the knowledge of religion, Hebrew language and prayers, and she wanted to tell me about Jewish mythology and history, the Passover, the Egyptian calamities, and so on. But my mom wanted to educate me in a Communist way. ... Granny also wanted me to like the regime, to like Communism ... but she wanted me to remain a good little Jewish boy at the same time. ... My mom blindly trusted Communism, but she accepted granny as a bourgeois relic. My mom believed in the world-wide victory of Communism. ... My granny has always been a little bit reserved as to the outcome of this grandiose plan, the only thing she did was to pay the annual three-Forint membership fee to the Hungarian-Soviet Friendship Society, and kept the membership card in her prayer book.

The above examples may offer some insight into identity conflicts and identity strategies common to adolescent and young Jews within and outside the family. Toward the outgroup, the primary strategies are stigma-handling techniques, such as concealing, hiding, and information control in the sense of Erving Goffman's theory of stigma management.<sup>12</sup> An example of this phenomenon was related to the 'double mentality' common to the gentile Hungarian population (the secret observance of Catholic holidays while pretending to be loyal to the regime) during the years of 'hard Communism' in the fifties and even later. Our subjects had to handle this situation in their school years:

Christmas was always a difficult situation. I was in constant fear of it. In school I had to say something about the presents I got. ... Of course, I did not get anything, since we were not the type to observe gentile holidays, and I had to lie, I mean I said I got, for example, very nice pyjamas. But I felt it was not too convincing to my classmates. ... So I was a Christmas-liar, and so was my sister..."

Identity problems abounded even in families where some elements of Jewish traditions were preserved. Another 'assimilation strategy', a typical solution for the problem, was the observance of some 'Jewish Christmas', or 'ChannuChristmas', to create some workable holiday, given the fact that Jewish traditions seemed to sink into oblivion in those years:

My mom just explicitly declared she was going to celebrate Christmas, because she did not get anything when she was a child, and she had envied her gentile peers. So we would get a huge pile of presents. ... But the whole thing was a bit silly ... because the food was matzoth dumplings ... prepared by grandma, who was otherwise sick, but this time healthy and enthusiastic about making it herself. So we ate a huge pile of matzoth dumplings under the lights of the Christmas tree...

A Hungarian social psychologist, Ferenc Mérei, though in another context, proposed the term *allusion* in characterizing the language of groups sharing common experience (see for example Mérei 1989b). In both verbal and non-verbal communication, this tool has developed into a kind of a 'mother tongue' in which the precarious nature of Holocaust-laden Jewish identity was easier to share and speak about. The positive contents of social identity in terms of classic social psychology were, at least partially, replaced by a diffuse *negative* or *marginal social identity* ('There is no group I really belong to'). Though growing into a substantial domain of personal identity, the awareness of this marginality was kept dormant in everyday public communication. As an open response, it was activated either in hostile social situations ("I am a Jew only in cases when I am called a 'Jew'"), or in cases when similar marginal identities were thematized ("Both of us knew we were Jews, but it was not discussed in an explicit manner. In the context of connection or relatedness, the word 'Jew' was not even uttered.")

The strategy of silence and the language of allusions in the family had their counterpart in the social sphere. The topic of Jewishness, as a whole, was taboo, or at least *unheimlich* for discussion, and this often led to awkward situations.

I created the image of the Jew from various information circulating at the university. To me this was absolutely new, and I slowly learnt what Jewish hair, Jewish nose, Jewish mouth, Jewish behavior, and so on, were like. So there was a fellow in our group who was permanently mocked for being a Jew. Not malignantly, only in an innocent way. Because he scanned and bowed when reading, and spoke in a chanting manner, so he was like the Rabbi of Bacherach. He was mocked behind his back, people whispered among each other: He is Jewish, isn't he? Rumors came to me about that. I myself have never been mocked. I think in the end they knew I was Jewish, but no one has ever mentioned it to me. People say that I do not look like a Jew.

Another respondent recalled a story where hostility was communicated in the language of allusions:

I was in love with a gentile guy and he took me to his mother because he wanted to introduce me to her. And the mother looked at me, and asked about my religion. I said I was not religious, but my parents are Jewish. I was embarrassed and stuttered a bit. And then the mother, a high school teacher, yawned at me in a way that I could see her tonsils, took a women's magazine, and lay down to read. By this I understood I had to leave. And then the boy was about to come with me, and the mother looked at him with astonished eyes: 'You are not going to escort her down, are you?'

The language of allusions, or 'double communication' as Júlia Vajda and Éva Kovács termed it in their study of the socialization patterns of children educated in the fifties

12 See Goffman 1968; on the application of Goffman's categories to our interview material, see A. Kovács 1992.

(Kovács and Vajda 1996), was an unavoidable result of the 'strategy of silence'. Double communication was the flip side of double silence, and the two reinforced each other. As one of our subjects expressed:

If I declare I am a Jew, then I make a covert situation open. They guess that I am a Jew, and I guess that they guess, but guessing and knowing are different. And I think this difference is better to preserve than to lose.

## THE ACHIEVED PRIVATE NARRATIVE

Laden with the Holocaust experience, with the strategy of silence and allusion, the issue of Jewish identity in Hungary is deeply intertwined with the problem of assimilation as well. Though the majority of our interviewees were assimilated to a great extent, the above illustrated layers of group narrative seemed to serve as common points of reference. They offered paths to a variety of identity-seeking processes. Recently, we began to analyze the outcomes of this process on a more systematic basis. In short, our findings seem to outline a continuum ranging from being trapped in some 'hypercathected' searching process to declaring an 'achieved personal narrative'.

Taken from different interviews, we illustrate some stages on this long road:

I am searching for my roots, and I hope to reach some time a normal plateau where I will be able to handle all of this confusing stuff. I am searching for Jewish traditions, and so on... But all this started only a couple of years ago.

The fact that my granny was religious and observed all kinds of holidays caused no conflict in me at all. And now I think this openly brutal double education has helped me to form a delicate, a highly differentiated mentality.

I think of myself as A. A., a Hungarian citizen, cursed with all the curses, and blessed with the blessings of my compatriots. Since I was not educated in a Jewish mentality, and the words, gestures, and everything that would refer to my being a Jew were exiled from my education, maybe I have very little in common with Jewish culture, with Jewish way of speaking, and so on. Maybe I have much more in common with a 'Jewish emotional world' – if we want to create something like that. ... To be a Jew – I think there are as many ways as there are people. To me it means a little bit of safety, I mean that I still belong somewhere, if not in effect, but somewhere in depth. And belonging somewhere is a very good thing.

To be a Jew – I am a Jew, but not in the same way as my brother-in-law, and not in the same way as the Schwartz or the Kohn or whosoever. I am myself, I am a Hungarian Jew, that's all.

Our most recent interviews, and other research (e.g., the study by Júlia Vajda and Éva Kovács of parents whose children attend Jewish school, Kovács and Vajda 1994, 1995) as well, confirm the idea that there is no singular or ubiquitous model of Jewish identity. On the other hand, the situation is not altogether clear. Let us quote the philosopher Ferenc Fehér in this context:

...the complete and neurotizing loss of identity, accompanied by the feeling of remaining a stranger forever – this 'Jewish' feeling now seems to emerge in some general form in the demands of a wide variety of groups in our 'post-modern' condition: in the offspring of former slaves, in ethnic minorities sentenced to death by the iron hand of centralizing governments, in native Indian populations in Latin-America, and so on. Fighting for the societal recognition of difference in its positive forms, is referred to as 'multiculturalism'. Multiculturalism, as a political and societal demand, now surfaces as the whole complexity and sophistication of the (post-modern) politics of difference (Fehér 1993).

In conclusion, we argue that even the most extravagant or seemingly rootless 'micro-narratives' are firmly anchored to various sets of community narratives. We think that the narrative approach is a promising contribution to the research of Jewish identity, and identity in general. Its primary theoretical yield is that it offers a useful method for the identification of different substrata of personal and societal identity even in cases where locating such an identity seems to be difficult or even impossible at first sight. As to our particular material, we think that the first two layers, namely the Holocaust and the six-thousand-year-old grand narrative, seem to be generally present in contemporary Jewish identity, while the strategies of silence and allusion, though also quite common, may show regional varieties between Jewish groups who live in different parts of the world. And, finally, the 'achieved private narrative' substratum, embedded in this multi-layered, 'higher-rank context', seems to be specific to each and every individual.

In the long run, this model may not only help to identify and interpret further identity strata of Jewish people in Israel and in the Galut, but may offer a methodological approach to the investigation of social and ethnic groups with injured, threatened identities, where transgenerational and/or massive, cumulative personal traumas seem to appear as either inextricably interwoven or just as poorly structured, rootless micro-narratives to the non-professional eye.

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