

# Biography and Society

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**BIOGRAPHY AND SOCIETY**  
RESEARCH COMMITTEE 38 OF THE ISA

NEWSLETTER / DECEMBER 2011

**LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT  
DECEMBER 2011**

Dear colleagues,

The ISA Forum Conference in Buenos Aires is now approaching fast. In a couple of days, after the deadline for submitting abstracts on December 15, session organisers start compiling papers for each session. The session programmes shall be completed until end of January. In our next newsletter we will present you the full conference agenda including the time schedule.

In the discussion part of this newsletter, Susan E. Bell offers insights into how she started and continued to include visual material into her narration based biographical research. She explores the benefits and challenges when working on visual and material dimensions of biographies and social life, making the increasing relevance of these topics in the context of developing social sciences evident.

With this contribution we would like to start a discussion on new perspectives in biographical research, and encourage everyone to contribute with thoughts on either the sensual dimensions of biographies or other special aspects not yet widely discussed.

Julia Vajda and Anna Szász have written an extensive report on the socio-historical background of biographical research in Hungary. This kind of article has been initiated by Gerhard Riemann while he chaired the Biographical Research Section by the German Sociological Association (DGS), in whose newsletter it also will appear. For the future, we would like to establish regular reports about biographical research activities all over the world.

You also get informed about two important projects: a new Holocaust archive in Hungary (Julia Vajda) and a project situated in the Department of Applied Linguistics in Vienna (Brigitta Busch and team) which deals with language practices in public administration and judiciary areas also from a biographical perspective, exploring experiences of migrants coming from African countries to Vienna.

During the last months a couple of conferences and workshops relevant to biographical research took place. You find some short notes in this newsletter.

Last not least I would like to draw your attention to three new books authored by members of our RC. For the next newsletters, let us know about your publication activities.

Meanwhile, enjoy reading!

Season's Greetings and best wishes for a relaxing time during coming holidays, and a Happy New Year!

Roswitha Breckner  
[www.soz.univie.ac.at/roswitha-breckner/](http://www.soz.univie.ac.at/roswitha-breckner/)  
President of the RC Biography & Society

**Some further important topics:**

We ask all of you to inform us about a change in your address, and in particular in your e-mail address.

**# Membership fees**

Please remember to pay your membership fee:

Regular members	US\$ 40
Students and members from countries B and C (see ISA regulations)	US\$ 20

**Bank account:** Michaela Koettig  
Sparda-Bank-Hessen, Germany  
bank code: 500 905 00  
account number: 101 548 312

For bank transfer of members from European countries  
IBAN: 13 500 905 000 101 548 312  
BIC: GEN ODE F1 S12

**# The deadline for the next newsletter is April 2012**

You can send us

- a short paper (3-7 pages) on a topic you are currently working on
- a presentation of your current project
- some reflection on your experiences of teaching biographical approaches and methods
- reports or some notes about conferences you have attended
- general reports about activities in the field of biographical research in your institution, university, country, continent
- interesting call for papers for conferences, workshops, summer schools
- new publications from you, also in your respective native language
- any other thought or information you like to share.

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**SECOND ISA FORUM OF SOCIOLOGY**  
 SOCIAL JUSTICE AND DEMOCRATIZATION  
 JUSTICE SOCIALE ET DÉMOCRATISATION  
 JUSTICIA SOCIAL Y DEMOCRATIZACIÓN  
 AUGUST 1-4, 2012  
 BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

**Research Committee on Biography & Society – RC38**

Program (<http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/rc/rc.php?n=RC38>)

### **Last Chance – DEADLINE for submitting abstracts is December 15, 2011 !**

**There are still a couple of days to submit an abstract for the RC 38 programme at the Second ISA Forum in Buenos Aires in August 2012.**

We have already got lots of interesting and inspiring paper proposals. However, in many sessions there is still space to present a paper. We are looking forward to your paper proposal, and to lively discussions in Buenos Aires!

#### **Our programme includes 12 sessions with the following topics:**

- Session A: Where are you from? Experiences of Exclusion, Marginalisation and Racism (Joint session with the RC 05)
- Session B: Victims and Perpetrators in Socio-Political (Post)Conflict Settings
- Session C: Biography and Experience with Violence
- Session D: Biography, Biographical Research and Politics
- Session E: Social Organisation and Counselling Services
- Session F: Transnational Family Migrations
- Session G: Food as a Special Symbol in the Migration Process
- Session H: Bodies in Motion
- Session I: Pictures, Biographies and Families
- Session J: Biography and Ethnography
- Session K: The Foundation of Professional Identities in Life Experiences
- Session L: Teaching Biographical Methods

**You can find detailed abstracts of the sessions on our conference webpage [www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/rc/rc.php?n=RC38](http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/rc/rc.php?n=RC38)**

**For further information concerning guidelines for presenters, please contact the ISA conference website (<http://www.isa-sociology.org/buenos-aires-2012/guidelines-for-presenters.htm>)**

**By January 31 all those who have submitted an abstract will get informed whether and how their paper could be included in the programme.**

In case you attend the Conference as presenter, chair or discussant, do not forget to register until April 10, 2012, the latest. If not registered, your name will not appear in the Programme or Abstracts Book.

## PAPER FOR DISCUSSION

### Picturing research

Susan E. Bell, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Bowdoin College, Brunswick, ME  
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In the early 1980s I interviewed women about their experiences of living with risk and medical problems that resulted from an anti-miscarriage medication their mothers had taken during pregnancy. One of the women, who had had a hysterectomy when she as a teenager, told me that she had a copy of a photograph taken by her surgeon after he had opened up her belly and offered to show it to me. I wasn't interested in the photo and I didn't look at it because it seemed to me at the time that a photograph was not necessary to understanding her experience. Not until many years later did I come to understand the importance of pictures in making sense of illness, and to wonder what I had missed in this woman's story by attending only to what she said and how she said it (the tones, hesitations, gaps, repetitions, and nonlexical utterances, as well as the gestures she used). What would I have learned had I looked at the picture with her? What might she have told me about her experience if she had held the picture while she talked with me?

In many years of narrative research since then, I have learned to incorporate visual materials into my work and thus to deepen my understanding of the connection between biography and society, of the intimate connection between the lives of individuals and larger social structures. At first I studied images in order to study lives and more recently I have been studying lives with visual evidence.

Social scientists have employed many different kinds of visual evidence on and off for over a century, including maps, drawings, diagrams, plans, tables and charts, films, paintings, and photographs (Harrison, 2002). Narrative scholars began doing so only recently. My turn to the incorporation of visual evidence into research began with the study of how a British feminist photographer, Jo Spence, lived with breast cancer. In 1998 at the ISA in Montreal, I gave a paper that explored the intimate connection between Spence's life-with-cancer and the society in which she lived by interpreting a series of three photographs I selected from hundreds she made of herself from the time of her diagnosis during a routine check-up in 1982 to the last days of life in a hospice in 1992 (Bell, 2002). With photographs, Spence explored her life before and after the diagnosis, as well as the disruptions and continuities between her identities as photographer, activist, feminist, cancer patient, and woman living with illness. Although I never looked at pictures with her, I benefitted from her multilayered commentary that often accompanied them. Spence wrote extensive captions for her photographs and frequently incorporated text into the images themselves. She blurred the line between text and image, a collapse that is ubiquitous in social life and social science.

The narratives Spence constructed photographically were similar in some respects to narratives produced in research or oral history interviews, but they raise different questions and problematics. For example in the first of series I interpreted - a photograph documenting the mammogram that detected a lump in her breast - Spence's huge breast squeezed between two glass plates is at the center. This image brings the body into social science research in an immediate and perhaps shocking way. Seeing her breast and responding to this image brings audiences into a qualitatively different relationship to

Spence and to the experiences she is documenting than would listening to her describe the mammogram or reading her description of her mammogram. The photograph of her huge, squeezed breast compels viewers, especially women, to respond in a visceral way to the image by putting themselves into the picture and one of their own breasts into the space occupied by Spence's breast. The image alternately compels and repels. It creates a space for seeing-as Spence sees.

But just what photographs mean, and the work they do, is complicated. Images draw from complexes of codes. Unpacking how images persuade and what the consequences of this persuasion are is a key task for those of us who incorporate pictures into our research: 'doing visual analysis requires us to stop and stare trebly hard in order to rupture the taken-for-grantedness of "good looking" ', to learn how to decode the images (Clarke, 2005: 223). Visual materials do many kinds of work – and multiple and contradictory kinds of work simultaneously – and analysts need to be alert to this. Sociologist Adele Clarke writes that visual materials can be "colonizing, racializing, gendering, sexing, classifying, stratifying, fetishizing, deceiving, authenticating, mesmerizing, transgressing, clarifying, stunning, muting, distracting, subjecting, cherishing, preserving, cluttering, and so on (Clarke, 2005: 218). We have yet to develop ethical guidelines. Whether researchers make images or interpret found images made by others, anonymity and confidentiality are highly problematic, especially in the digital age. We do not yet have a standard system for sampling and transcribing visual and tactile conduct.

Scholars working with visual materials continue to expand the range of materials incorporated into the field. In addition to photographs I have explored the narrative production of biography in an extended autobiographical documentation of a mother-child relationship that consisted of 135 objects by the artist Mary Kelly (Bell, 2004), in artist books (Bell, 2006; Radley and Bell, 2007), an autobiographical documentary film (Bell, 2009), and public art (Bell, 2011).

Anthropologist Daniel Miller (2010: 4) provides a framework for expanding the range of visual materials with his argument that 'the best way to understand, convey, and appreciate our humanity is through attention to our fundamental materiality.' 'Stuff' does not merely reflect who we are, but in many respects it 'actually creates us in the first place.' Using the example of clothing, Miller demonstrates that what people wear is not merely or simply a form of representation or a semiotic sign or symbol of whom they are. Clothes produce people – 'the concept of the person, the sense of the self, the experience of being an individual, are radically different at different times and in different places, partly in relation to different clothing' (Miller, 2010: 40). More generally, the study of material culture involves immersion 'in the sensuality of touch, colour and flow' and an invocation of 'the tactile, emotional intimate world of feelings' (Miller, 2010: 40).

Currently, I am studying lives with visual evidence. I am working on a project that employs a range of visual materials to explore memory, family, and autobiography. These materials include photographs, an antique gold pocket watch, and a scrapbook culled from the mountain of stuff collected by my parents' families over the past century. In a written dialogue, my sister Mary Ellen and I reflect on each of the objects separately and then together. We use this format – of a written dialogue about each of the objects – to make sense of our family in the past and to consider how objects make family memories. Our process is iterative. First one of us writes a description of and response to an object, and then the other responds to the object and the other's written text. We follow each of the written dialogues by working together. Through our dialogue with objects, first in writing and then face-to-face, we tap into and recover individual memories, new understandings, and ways our personal experiences reflect cultural, historical, and institutional currents in the twentieth century U.S. Our methodology in this

project is similar to one employed by scholars interested in a grounded approach to cultural memory or 'memory work' that 'carefully builds up explanations from clues and traces extracted from readings of objects of study' (Kuhn, 2007: 283). In the sensuality of its materiality, the photographs, pocket watch, and scrapbook become 'literal presences' and 'voices' in our written dialogue (Banks, 2001:86). Along with the challenge of unpacking the social origins of sensuality, the social construction of memory, and the need to rupture the taken-for-grantedness of visual materials, as well as the potential sources of meaningfulness, visual materials can add fruitful lines of inquiry to twenty-first century scholars of biography and society and deepen our understanding of the intimate connection between individual lives and social structure.

These types of visual projects, and the challenges posed by them for scholarship in biography and society, provide the inspiration for the panel organized by Roswitha Breckner and me, "Pictures, Biographies, and Families," for the Second ISA Forum in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH IN HUNGARY<sup>1</sup>

Julia Vajda ([h13073vaj@ella.hu](mailto:h13073vaj@ella.hu)) and Anna Szász ([szasz.anna@gmail.com](mailto:szasz.anna@gmail.com))

### Introduction in a personal manner

First we have to say that we only focus on the Hungarian development of the method that we define along with the approach of Fritz Schütze and Gabriele Rosenthal. Since we would like to understand its spread and biased process of institutionalisation we shall have a close look at the history of the more general qualitative research including also sociography, the oral history and sociology from a broader perspective. Considering the need to divide our perspective into those aforementioned three disciplines the emergence of biographical research is not the result of the softening of qualitative research, neither is it the consequence of the change of direction of oral history, but might be rather a reaction against the growing dominance of quantitative research. This is, however, a point which is so strongly related to the personal experience and participation of Júlia Vajda that makes it hard for us to decide how to interpret the process at this point.

### The first attempts of qualitative thinking

Searching for the origin of biographical research in Hungary we cannot only take into account sociology or the works done by sociologists. Sociology in an institutionalised form was born in this country not just later than in the main Western centres of the discipline but also later than in some other countries of Eastern Europe (i.e. Poland and Czechoslovakia). However, at the time when Thomas and Znaniecki's book about the Polish peasants was published even the first thinkers that we are used to take into account when talking about qualitative research in a broader sense are not yet present in Hungary.

Nonetheless, "everyday life of everyday people" is a topic that is present in Hungarian literature already at that time. No wonder that the firsts who have started writing somewhat systematic about problems of this social segment rather come from this background, though their interest is influenced not just by the wish to "change the world" but also by their political standpoint.

In the 1930-ies there was a group among them, coming mainly from a village background and having professions rather different from social sciences, who became interested in the life of people in the agrarian sector. They started writing about their problems and got also strongly involved in political movements or became members of parties in order to solve what they considered as an issue. These people, who called themselves „populist writers”<sup>2</sup> had become a loosely organized group of (in that field self-educated) writers and ethnographers, focused on closed rural communities and made their reputation as both fighters for urban renewal and the critique of urban elite. They picked up stories of the poor, in other words, of the lowest and the weakest of the society not only to depict them but also for raising public awareness to their problems and for advocating social change. As a matter of the latter many of the „populist writers” were politically active which both produced and provoked several internal divisions, since even if there was a basis of collective thinking, their solutions to trigger change

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1 We would like to thank Gerhard Riemann who initiated this article, and the permission of the German Section of Biographical Research to publish it also in this newsletter.

2 There is no adequate translation of the Hungarian term „népi író” as they call themselves. The German term „Volk” is closer to the Hungarian meaning of „népi”.

were diverse, sometimes conflicting. Besides some twenty years later not just both the effects of the war and Hungary being an ally with Nazi Germany but also the new communist dictatorship had diverse influence on them. Believing in socialistic ideas there were some among them who could accept also National Socialism (some even to the most radical extreme, i.e. Péter Veres) and others, or sometimes the same people, followed the communist ideology and then accommodated to the new regime. However there were people who changed position easily on the basis of political conformism.

One of the most prominent figures among them was *Ferenc Erdei* (1910 –1971) who was born into a peasant family, obtained a degree in law from Szeged University, started his political career at an early age and became professionally recognized as a social scientist when in 1937 he published his descriptive work *Futóhomok* [Windblown Sand] on the peasant society of the town Makó. Considering his work Erdei identified in the peasantry the potency for social change, since as an effect of the modern era it replaced the feudal social status with bourgeois class positions and bourgeois cultural ideals and became more and more a factor in a national society. He, who though having socialistic ideas, was a politician of the agrarian party before 1945 and later came to terms also with the new political power and has become Minister of Agriculture in the most violent period of the regime, between 1949 and 1953. Alongside this we could not disclaim that he was also responsible for the government's policy hostile towards both the newly born small holders, who just got their lands and also the traditionally existing and richer peasantry. Later in other positions he remained a cadre of the regime until the revolution of 1956 when he became one of the leaders of the Hungarian delegation to negotiate with the Soviet Union. Only János Kádár's personal intervention could later save him from the death sentence that killed his fellow combatants. Almost until his death he not just had become an awarded scientist of the regime but took up roles in politics, too.<sup>3</sup>

László Németh (1901 – 1975) started his professional carrier as a dentist in Nagybánya, a town belonging to Romania after the Trianon treatise. Besides working in his profession he wrote novels, articles and book reviews for *Nyugat* (lit. "West" in English) journal, the most influential Hungarian literary journal in the first half of the 20th century that, according to its name, was receptive and inspired by the styles and philosophies then current in Western Europe. He, who belonged to the so called third generation of *Nyugat*, in his early period, won even a prize from the magazine and later also a Baumgarten prize, later deterred from these circles and in 1931 he founded his own journal *Tanú* [Witness]). Later he got nearer to the group of „populist writers” and was one of the lecturers at a conference in 1943 in Szárszó where he commented negatively on Judaism, which later had a strong influence on others' attitude towards his works. From 1944 giving the same lecture again he omitted this statement. After the Soviet occupation of Budapest he moved to the countryside and lived there the rest of his life though being respected and given tasks not within but near to politics by the regime.

Gyula Illyés (1902–1983), poet and novelist, was born on a Transdanubian farmstead, in a family with a mixed socio-economic background. His father was from a rich gentry's family while his mother had an agricultural servant background. He completed his studies in Budapest and then, due to his involvement in the revolutionary movements, he was forced to leave the country and went to Paris. After a long emigration in Paris where he became engaged with avantgarde, socialist and left-wing movements, he started his writing career in Budapest. Illyés enjoyed the support of *Nyugat*, and later, almost parallel being a founding member of the anti-Fascist March Front in 1937, he became the editor

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<sup>3</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferenc\\_Erdei](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ferenc_Erdei)

of it transforming the journal into a platform of anti-fascist intellectual ideas. However he also expressed deep concerns about the deteriorating conditions in the rural areas and felt obliged to call attention to social justice, inequality and poverty that made him also being on friendly terms with some of the populist writers. One could hear out this dualism from his voice: vivid participation in public affairs on the one hand, while on the other thinking in terms of national interest and becoming the manifestation of the nation.<sup>4</sup> After the war this mentality brought him into the democratically elected parliament as one of the leaders of the left-wing National Peasant Party. However the approaching of communist takeover made him withdraw from politics in 1947 and since then on he lived a reclusive life and produced a mainly non-political literature in Tihany and Budapest until the early 1960s. However, on November 2, 1956 he published his famous poem of the Hungarian revolution "Egy mondat a szabadságról" [One sentence on tyranny] which was not allowed to be republished in Hungary until 1986.

Though not totally without antecedents it was almost parallel in time to the sociographies of the populist writers when a real research interest in the very young Hungarian working class was born; in the 1930s a new generation of intellectuals paid attention to their problems. They, in contrast to their forbearers have realised and been interested in its inner divisions and stratification. As their interest in this segment of the society was parallel to their affinity to social democratic, communist ideologies it is no surprise that later history shows some of them also in political roles under the communist rule (i.e. Erik Molnár). However, not just their research interest was different: many times they had a different background: they did not come from an agrarian background but from bigger cities, they were close to the so called and in many cases were of Jewish origin which could lead not just to their deportation but also to their death (Ferenc Földes).

One of the best sociographers born in this group was Zoltán Szabó's *Cifra nyomorúság* (1938) on the living conditions of people in Northern-Hungary's coal-mining and industrial region. His earlier book (*Tardi helyzet* [Situation in Tard]) dealt also with the problems of the rural society. However, the urban-populist debate was strongly decisive not just in general for the period but also had its benchmark on these thinkers we are talking about; with these books Zoltán Szabó is an exception that for him both, the problems of the agrarian society and also that of the industry are interesting.

However the first systematically-scientific study on working people was conducted by Gyula Rézler who captured and depicted the process of working-class development, analyzed working-class relations as well as produced a sociography on the Kammer textile factory in Kőbánya, Budapest. In his pamphlet on the village researchers he also criticizes the above mentioned populist writers for just being advocates of the group they write about without a real scientific depth and methodological correctness. He put together the first volume on socio-graphical works on the working class already in the 1940-ies. He, however, later in 1948 had to escape KGB and after migrating to the US has become an important figure of dispute resolution and arbitration techniques.<sup>5</sup>

### **Institutionalization of sociology from the 1940-ies**

One could see sociology was strongly connected to politics in Hungary right from its appearance. It

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4 <http://mek.niif.hu/02000/02042/html/61.html>;

[www.rev.hu/portal/page/portal/rev/tanulmanyok/kadarrendszer/harmas\\_tukor](http://www.rev.hu/portal/page/portal/rev/tanulmanyok/kadarrendszer/harmas_tukor)

5 [http://www.rezler-foundation.hu/index\\_en.html](http://www.rezler-foundation.hu/index_en.html)

might of course seem obvious, that following the communist takeover it has become even more clear and one could assume the influence being unilateral, however “this connection was not exhausted by the influence of politics on sociology, for sociology also had an impact on the transformation of the structure of Hungarian society” states Vera Szabari talking about the history of Hungarian sociology in the period 1945-1989.<sup>6</sup> Though her text does not touch on qualitative methods and sociology using it, even less is her interest in sociography, this statement is righteous just the same for this field and is maybe growing as time is passing and we get nearer to the period forestalling transition. Still, should the influence of sociology and sociography be as strong on the changes or the abandonment of the system as it just can be, we might not forget that throughout this whole period of 1948-1989 the power of the police state is stronger than any inner resistance and it is that designates the borders what it advocates, tolerates or forbid. The disciplines we are talking about and the figures which stand for them have to search all the time for their position on this scale that fits their standpoint and political position. As trying to understand the world around us naturally results the realisation of its issues which contradict to certain ideologies. In the case of the communist ideology sociologists might easily get into a situation that challenges not just their temper but also their personal braveness and moral. Still, being the critique step by step stronger and appearing it also overtly both in the “official” publications and even more in the illegal one authorities cannot – or do not want – to neglect it totally. This is but a later part of the story.

The first period following the moment when communists come into power brings a total silencing for sociology as for a while similarly to other disciplines it also was regarded “bourgeois pseudoscience”<sup>7</sup> and was not recognized as an academic discipline, consequently, the development of sociology was either slowed down or stopped or shifted towards Marxist sociology and historical materialism.<sup>8</sup>

However, parallel to the loosening of the overall repression this total silencing has slowly also started to cease. The theoretical background of getting the regime across accepting sociology was bit by bit erected through a debate whether there is a need at all for sociology besides scientific socialism and historical materialism; the idea that sociology is the empirical realisation of these theories has been accepted. This of course did not mean a total freedom for research, still, as it will be visible in the slow process of the erection of institutions dealing with sociological research an some insight into the main figures working in them will show how this field, within of course the limits the regime accepts, starts to thrive slowly. Nonetheless, it probably could not have been so if one of the main figures trying to achieve the goal of bringing into existence this science would not have been not much earlier an important figure in politics itself, András Hegedűs, whose person we will introduce more detailed in the latter.

Being the empirical realisation of Marxist theories obliged sociology to prove itself being highly scientific which in the sixties, considering the strength of positivism at the time not just in a socialist or communist country, meant that it had to work with numbers: qualitative approach in itself could not gain an accepted position could but serve as a support or starting point for quantitative research.

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6 Vera Szabari: *Sociology Done by Socialists: Brief History of Hungarian Sociology Between 1948-1989*,

7 Tamás Kolosi and Iván Szelényi, “Social change and research on social structure in Hungary, 1960-1990,” in. Birgitta Nedelmann and Piotr Sztompka (eds), *Sociology in Europe* (Berlin- New York: de Gruyter, 1993), p.146.

8 Vera Szabari, *A társadalmi struktúra és mobilitás kutatása Magyarorszáon az 1960-as években.*

<http://www.szazadveg.hu/files/kiadoarchivum/23szabari.pdf>

In 1942 a Chair of Social Philosophy and Sociology was founded at one of the top universities in Hungary – Pázmány Péter University, in 1950 renamed Eötvös Loránd University – which was called Institute of Social Sciences from 1946 under its new head, Sándor Szalai. Szalai (1912 – 1983) spent his childhood in an intellectually stimulating atmosphere since his father had connections with the progressive circle of intellectuals in the interwar period. He did his university studies in Leipzig, Frankfurt and Zurich, graduated in Zurich in 1934 from psychology and psychopathology. He came back to Hungary in 1935 and worked for various publisher houses, than in 1944, due to his Jewish origin, he was taken to forced labour. After his return he immediately got engaged with the Socialdemocratic Party. His appointment to the Head of the Institute of Social Sciences could not be attributed to his teaching experience neither to his professional skills but rather was the sign of the “marriage” between politics and sociology.<sup>9</sup> In the end, due to various political interests and moves, such as the imprisonment of Szalai on the basis of fake accusations, the Department failed to develop and achieve prestigious positions as a research centre and dissolved in 1949. “It was not before the mid-sixties that Sociology was re-institutionalized in Hungary, when a Sociology Research Group, headed by Tibor Huszár, was created at Eötvös Loránd University, Faculty of Humanities. In 1970, the Research Group was transformed into a teaching Department.”<sup>10</sup>

The year 1961 is a milestone in our story. With the leadership of Imre Szabó, the Deputy Secretary-General of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, submitted a report on the current situation of sociology researches in Hungary, written by colleagues of the Institute of Philosophy.<sup>11</sup> The report outlined necessary steps for the future institutionalization of sociology: establishment of both an autonomous department and research team as well as the launch of an independent journal. The report also implied integration into the institutional establishment of already existing social sciences in which process the Departments of Philosophy and Sociology of Law took the leading roles. Indeed, according to the memories of András Hegedűs of the time one could have witnessed around the 1960’s in Hungary the need and then the attempt to create the space for a new social science that would operate with a radically different approach and methodology that of the sociology of law but would be in the position of official state advisor (which never really happened), as it was envisioned in 1966: the establishment of „manager-sociology”.<sup>12</sup> The research team formed in 1963 under the auspices of the Institute of Philosophy became autonomous as the Institute of Sociology, in 1965 with the leadership of András Hegedűs. We shall note that since Hegedűs (1922 – 1999) was a Communist politician who served as a Chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1955 till the Hungarian 1956 Revolution the operation of the Institute of Sociology was highly influenced as well as controlled by politics.

Hereby shall we say a few words about Zsuzsa Ferge who started her career as a university student in the Central Statistical Office and took the leading role in exploring social stratification and as a consequence, significantly transforming the discourse on social structures. Her book, *Társadalmunk rétegződése* [The Stratification of Our Society]<sup>13</sup>, published in 1969, raises the question “why social ine-

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9 Szabari, V. A szociológia magyarországi kiépülése és megszilárdulása (1942-1963). p.77-78., [Hungarian Sociology in building up and stabilising]

10 <http://www.tatk.elte.hu/about-the-faculty-english-1083/short-history-english-1084>

11 László Gábor, *A szociológia a politika felvonulási területe*, (Budapest: MTA Szociológiai Kutató Intézet, 1990) [Sociology is the building site of politics]

12 András Hegedűs, *A szociológiáról. Egy tudomány lehetőségei és korlátai*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1966) [On Sociology. The Possibilities and Limits of a Science]

13 Zsuzsa Ferge, *The Stratification of Our Society* (Budapest: Publishing House of Law and Economics, 1969)

qualities were larger than they should be by the declared ideology of the regime, by its self-image, and also by a sense of justice.”<sup>14</sup> However, Ferge’s encounter with French sociology during her stay in France shifted her towards sociology therefore she made a move from the Central Statistical Office to the Institute of Sociology in 1969. The department which Ferge established focusing on problems of social stratification and social policy initiated research with social policy implications from the 1980’s.

Under the auspices of the Institute of Sociology in the beginning of the 1970’s István Kemény did the first research (questionnaire) on the situation of Roma based on representative sampling. As a matter of fact after WWII the Roma emancipatory movement remained isolated and ephemeral<sup>15</sup>. Furthermore on 20 June 1961, the Political Committee - adopting the assimilationist policy through labour - defined Roma not in ethnic or national but in social terms, stripping them from the possibility to be recognized as a community as such but a social problem, i.e. “Gypsy problem”. Therefore Kemény’s research seemed to swim against the current in recognizing Roma as a population and defining them as relying on ascription by outsiders. Interestingly enough, in 1970 Kemény already went against the dominant ideology which denied the existence of poverty and claimed in his speech given at the Institute of Sociology that poverty and unemployment were structuring factors of the society. The interviews conducted behind the big representative survey<sup>16</sup> fit into our theme since however they did not have an elaborated methodology they realised and also taught their assistants, later disciples, the importance of letting the interviewee talk freely.<sup>17</sup>

Tibor Huszár (1930-) is a contradictory figure of our scenery. As a young communist, already a member of the Hungarian Working People’s Party, he studied in the International Lenin School in Moscow he studied pedagogy, psychology and logics from 1949. After finishing his studies in 1953 he got a position at the soviet type Union of Working Youth. However, as being one of the leaders of Petőfi Circle the public disputes of which played an important role in the break out of the revolution in 1956, following the revolution he could only work as a secondary school teacher. However, in 1959 he joined the communist party again and could quickly start an academic career at the Philosophy Department of the Faculty of Humanities of University ELTE, where in 1969 he got the position of the head of the Sociology Department. He, who avowed himself similar to a door frame for being outside from inside and inside from outside, returned to politics just for a short while as an MP of the new Socialist Party and was always cautious not to step across the boundaries designated by the regime, but touched upon topics quickly when they were not forbidden anymore.

The department that at first under Huszár’s ruling got the right to teach later, partly still under his leadership, expanded and as the subject after the transition became very popular was slowly turned into a complete faculty that affiliated political sciences and anthropology as well.

Considering the methodology of the above mentioned slowly growing research group of Zsuzsa Ferge at the Institute of Sociology they used mainly big questioners fundamentally different in character from the surveys that are common nowadays in Hungary. The methodological difference is conspicu-

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14 [www.fergezszusa.hu/docs/social\\_structure\\_and\\_inequalities\\_in\\_old\\_socialism\\_and\\_new\\_capitalism\\_in\\_hungary.pdf](http://www.fergezszusa.hu/docs/social_structure_and_inequalities_in_old_socialism_and_new_capitalism_in_hungary.pdf)

15 Mária László was the founder of the Hungarian Gypsy Cultural Association (1957-1959).

16 Kemény, István (et al), Beszámoló a magyarországi cigányok helyzetével foglalkozó 1971-ben végzett kutatásokról, (Budapest: MTA Szociológiai Intézet Kiadványai, 1976), p.53. [Report on the research of the situation of Roma in 1971]

17 Solt Otília, Interjúzni muszáj, in: Solt Otília: Méltóságot mindenkinek : összegyűjtött írások, Budapest, Beszélő, 1998 [We must conduct interviews]

ous. They not jut conducted - mainly semi-structured – interviews, their questionnaires were of the same manner: just halfway between semi-structured interview and a survey of our days; most of the questions are open ended and the typography gives the space also for longer answers. It also happened in this group that researchers (i.e. László Gábor) realising the difficulties of the statistical analysis of these questionnaires based their analysis on “reading” the individual questionnaires and based their texts on their research of that sort on the understanding this reading (and the typology they could build on their impressions) provided.

Should it be hard enough to analyse these questionnaires this methodological difficulty was not immense enough to make them vanish. They hold such a strong position and characterized empirical research so much until the end of the eighties, that even the slowly starting public opinion polls used some open-ended questions. Still, looking back onto the 1980-ies, we can clearly see the slow partition of two different methodological approaches, quantitative and qualitative, even more the break away of quantitative research, whereas qualitative research characterised decreasingly research that called itself sociology, instead newly awakening sociography and upcoming anthropology kept firmly to qualitative approach. From the public opinion poll questionnaires done from 1985 by a newly born or at least from the Hungarian Radio newly separated institution Mass Communication Research Centre (1969)<sup>18</sup> applied for example open-ended questions in a decreasing number, whilst the staff of Népművelési Intézet (1946)<sup>19</sup> approached the subject matter from a qualitative perspective.

Though being the latter an institution directly under control of the communist Party its staff using this position balanced so carefully that it was them who from the middle of 1980-ies could proceed with collecting interviews with important figures of 1956 revolution or the New Economic Mechanism of 1968 that András B. Hegedűs (not to be mixed with András Hegedűs above) and Gyula Kozák. Hegedűs and Kozák, the first an economist with a background of being in overt opposition already in the time of the 1956 revolution himself, the second an engineer, originally started conducting interviews on 1956 and the life-story of its important figures as early as 1981 not just “privately”, but definitely, whereas their common project on leading figures in economy, politics and finance they coordinated from the Institute of Economics. Their interview collection was assimilated by Művelődéskutató Intézet and denominated Oral History Archive in 1986 and the project was supported also by George Soros.<sup>20</sup> Considering the future of the Institute we shall mention a few words about its life after the political transition. A group under the name Selyemgombolyító continued to care for folk culture, folk-dance and – music while the collection of Hegedűs and Kozák and some members of its staff served as the basis of the Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution that considers itself the successor of the Imre Nagy Institute of Sociology and Politics, which operated in Brussels between 1959 and 1963 and was founded on 16<sup>th</sup> of June 1989 right after the ceremonious re-burial of Imre Nagy. However the rest of the researchers got positions in the Institute of Sociology at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and in the State Educational Institution (Országos Közművelődési Intézet) where they managed to continue empirical and theoretical research on cultural issues.

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18 <http://communicatio.hu/mktt/dokumentumok/konferenciak/2009/tk40/nyitoeloadas.htm>

19 A. Gergely András, *Kultúra, közösség, társadalom: A Népművelési intézet és a Művelődéskutató* (Budapest: MTA PTI Etno-regionális Kutatóközpont, 1997)

20 <http://www.rev.hu/portal/page/portal/rev/kiadvanyok/evkonyv03/kozak>

### Critical approaches

The strong influence of politics in the history of sociology must be visible. Still, there is a point in the story where criticism was not overtly handled but present in what thinkers chose to be their topics for research. Here we speak again about thinkers and not just about sociologists as these changes happen not just parallel but also in connection with the emergence of a new and at the same time old approach, where not just theory and mainly positivistic quantitative research exists. From the very end of the 1960-ies and even stronger in the 1970-ies and very strong in the middle of the 1980-ies, where the last can already be seen as an influence of social thinking on politics and political changes that of course on the bases of Gorbachev's "Perestrojka" at the end led to the fall of the regime, literature and sociographies based on social problems and research on similar topics that have a qualitative preponderance appear again.

The first novel of the later world known writer and sociologist György Konrád (1933, Debrecen -), *Látogató* [The Case Worker], published in 1969, is on the edge of fiction and sociography and based on Konrád's own experience tells the story of a case worker and a poor family. The book talks about the desolated life of a man who is living his everyday boring life when, after a double suicide, he is left alone with a mentally disabled child. He himself the only survivor of his Jewish family not just had problems being accepted at the university, for coming from a bourgeois family, had already political conflicts with the regime from his studies at the Faculty of Arts of ELTE University in 1956. His carrier continued in the same manner and after some research on the dwellers of the new block houses that was tolerated and the result of which was also published, writing their famous book *Az értelmiség útja az osztályhatalomhoz* [The Intellectual on the Road to Class Power] with Iván Szelényi resulted again in conflicts with the regime and his loss of job in *Városépítési Tudományos és Tervező Intézet*, the Institute for Scientific and Urban Planning. After several years spent abroad he took part in politics after transition again as a founding member of SzDSz, Alliance of Free Democrats.

What makes Konrád's above mentioned works worth to mention in this context is, just on the one hand that it deals overtly with the problems of the poor in a period when facing society with any sort of social problems, especially of poverty and inequality was a taboo. His novel, on the other, was in style near to sociography. From the middle of the 70-ties more and more sociological researches and researchers touched similarly "hot topics" and the number of sociographers was also growing. Interestingly enough, (rather quantitative) sociological research on inequalities in school system, or problems of distribution of (state owned) flats or even on deprivation (a word used to masking speech on poverty) caused less conflicts than the works of sociographers who did not veil their empirical results neither behind the special language of science nor cover it by turning it into fiction and who because of their texts got in many cases into conflict with the system. By the middle of the eighties this loosening arrived even to the Social Science Institute of the Party itself where a big project dealt with the inner stratification and problems of working class. However, most of these basically quantitative research projects used qualitative methods not just as a background for their questionnaires and in many cases also published their results gained this way partially separately.<sup>21</sup> Even text-analysis "arrived" to soci-

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21 To mention some names: Gábor Csanádi, János Ladányi, Ilona Liskó wrote books on inequalities in schools, Judit Háber on the problems of teachers based on interviews with them, Gábor Havas on poverty, Ágnes Losonci on disfunctions in the health system



ology: Judit H. Sas and Judit Háber analysed school text-books to show their ethos and view of man.<sup>22</sup>

Zsolt Csalog (1935, Szekszárd – 1997, Budapest) a person in constant fight for freedom and for the right of minority groups that brought him constantly into conflicts with the regime. He published his first sociography on Roma in 1976 (*Kilenc cigány* [Nine gypsies]) and touched later on several sensitive topics, i.e. the miner riot in Zsil-valley, Romania in 1977 which was just published in 1989 (*Börtön volt a hazám* [My country was a jail]). It is enigmatic in his style that he not only writes in the name of his story-tellers who are coming from different social and ethnic backgrounds, but also tells these stories in a first person narration based on life-story interviews. János Géczy's sociography *Wild-oranges* [*Vadnarancsok*] (1982) is based on four life story interviews of drug addicts of the time using various chemicals (such as glue, for example) coming mostly from upper class, sometimes cadre families. In Pál Závada's *Kulak-squeeze* [*Kulákprés*] (1986) through the story of a family the writer explores the events and changes in the society in between 1945-1956. Ambrus Péter's sociography *Alkohol in life-style. The life of a poor colony* [*Alkohol az életmódban, Egy szegénytelep élete*] (1985)<sup>23</sup> describes the life of a ghetto for the poor in the outskirts of Budapest.

Evoking the spirit of village research traditions, *Korunk*, a Transylvanian journal, raised attention again to the village and triggered the production of researches and sociographies. This type of research was founded around the idea of the nation and was committed to search for the roots and key values of it, further, in Hungary it was linked to youth movements organized around universities and supported by either religious or political ideologies. From the end of the 1960's for example *Ifjúmunkás*, a periodical in Romania published the sociography of county Ciuk in Romania, or the Philosophy Department of Babes-Bolyai University initiated a village research in Csákigorbó, Romania. "Village research" and the research of agrarian society started also in Hungary again, but not in the institutions being definitely institutionalises for doing sociology.<sup>24</sup>

Samizdat was a key form of dissident activity across the Soviet bloc in which individuals reproduced censored publications by different techniques and passed the documents from reader to reader. Hungarian samizdat is discussed here not just or not mainly because of being a more strongly critical voice of the intellectuals of the country, but as in many cases the form their critique took was also sociographical. Already the first samizdat volume, the so called *Profil* (referring to the general phrasing of official Journals when not accepting the texts as not fitting into their profile) contained writings of that sort (i.e. an interview with a gay person and another with a prostitute on their lives, or the first sociographies of Sándor Tar, that time still a worker himself, later on a well known writer<sup>25</sup>), and there were also books of this style published partly abroad (i.e. János Kenedi: "The country is yours, you build it for yourself [*Tiéd az ország, magadnak építéd*], on corruption related to building one's own house in the period and Miklós Haraszti: *Piece-wage* [*Darabbér*] on the working conditions of a tractor factory). It was also in samizdat where Ottilia Solt<sup>26</sup> first published her writings on poverty. The above

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22 Háber Judit-H. Sas Judit: *Tankönyvszagú világ*, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980 [Schoolbook Smelling World]

23 Ambrus Péter, *Alkohol az életmódban*, Budapest, Művelődéskutató Intézet, 1985

24 Pál Juhász and his students, Mónika Váradi and Katalin Kovács to mention some example.

25 It is a sad point of his story that because of publishing in samizdat secret police „asked” him to work for them. He, being yet a worker without a real network among dissidents could not resist. 10 years after transition his story though he regreted it came up and in a highly contradicting manner.

26 SZETA stands for Szegényeket Támogató Alap [Fund to Support the Poor]. It was established in 1979 as an illegal institution in the Kádár regime among whom many contribute later to founding the forerunner of the Alliance of Free Democrats, a leading opposition force in the first free Parliament in 1990. It was initiated by Ottilia Solt and András Nagy by the idea that

mentioned Zsolt Csalog also published some of his writings in samizdat.

A different genre but equally powerful is film, more precisely feature films and documentaries which attempted to formulate and channel social critique. Due to spatial limitations let us only list a few directors whom we consider to belong to this wave of thinking, filmmaking: Sándor Sára (A stone thrown up [Feldobott kő], 1968 on gipsy hygiene); Pál Schiffer (Black train [Fekete vonat], 1970 on commuters, Cséplő Gyuri, 1978, on a gipsy boy's aspiration to social mobility); Judit Ember (Pócspetri, 1982, on a village conflict around the nationalisation of the local school and the state punishment following it); János and Gyula Gulyás, two brothers (I have also been at Isonzo! [Én is jártam Isonzónál!], on Hungarian soldiers at the Isonzo battle, 1982-86, Without offence against law [Törvénysértés nélkül], 1988, on internal deportation to a labour camp in Hortobágy, Málenkij robot, 1987-89, on Forced labour of Hungarians in the Soviet Union in the aftermath of WW II.).

### **After communism – a partly personal epilogue**

By the time of the fall of communism sociology apparently stabilised its position both among academic disciplines and university subjects. In the new era under the intellectual freedom sociology raised the interest of the generation just growing up and having carried through the changes: the number of students of sociology was enormously growing. Besides, sociology caught the attention of politics, too. The second, being mostly interested in prospective results of elections and also in economic data, luckily enough not just for political purposes but for thinking of possible changes in social policy, turned its curiosity mostly to statistical data. This was, of course, in the forefront for the actors of the market, too. Besides, this happened at the same time when not just the price of personal computers has radically decreased but technology made possible to analyse big database. The demand for quick and statistically tangible results and the better financing ability of both market and politics led to a change of established sociology that we could call a quantitative turn. However, it happened almost at the same time when there was a slow breakthrough of the narrative turn in the “West”.

This does not mean of course that narrative turn would not have arrived at all; it just touched upon a much smaller group of researchers. The freedom in choosing ones identity the changes offered resulted in also a “boom in memory” meaning that all kinds of victims went public with their own stories and traumas. Ethnic identities, especially Jewish and on the other hand racism, anti-Semitism has become not just part of public debate, but arouse the interest of some sociologists (actually already from the middle of the 1980-ies). Luckily it happened at a time where there was also a growing freedom of research, i.e. bigger chance to get financing, too. These circumstances supported qualitative research since besides discourse analysis of public debates it was also possible to get support for research on questions of identity. Éva Kovács, a young sociologist that time and Júlia Vajda, one of the authors, another young sociologist and student of psycho-analysis at that time, both brought up on the tradition of interview-like questionnaires and semi-structured interviews could get easily support for their planned research on one of the topics this type: they decided to do research on Jewish identity. However transition brought changes inside as well as outside of the country and evoked the interest of countries on the other side of the recently collapsed iron curtain: grants were offered to young (and

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however the regime denied the existence of poverty consequently there was not any social policy targeting the poor, a large number of families and communities lived below the minimum. Among many other things, the Fund organized cloth-donations, charity events and prepared food packs.

also older) scholars. Thus Kovács and Vajda could take part in a seminar of Gabriele Rosenthal and Reinhard Sieder at the Summerschool of the Salzburg University where they conceived a passion for the method they have been taught. By the time they arrived home their decision was born: they cannot do anything else but do their research using narrative life story interviews and their hermeneutic reconstructions for their research.

In the freedom of the new era it was also not a problem to start shortly also to teach the method together at the Eötvös Loránd University where Júlia Vajda had a post as an assistant lecturer. Since then both of them have been teaching this method at different universities. Their curriculums are approved but not canonized. They also have students who apply the method for their final MA and/or Ph.D theses. At the same time in several cases these students have to fight a battle for being able to get good marks for their papers due to that belief, that is common to many faculties of sociology around the country, that only representative survey serves valid information on society. Still, there is no difficulty in publishing hermeneutic case studies: the book<sup>27</sup> of Kovács and Vajda and also a volume of that sort of them and their students<sup>28</sup> is also published and there is for example the other author of this text, Anna Lujza Szász, who was happy not just to learn the method but also to write a short book using this method with Julia Vajda. This pamphlet is under publication.

However, as the term “narrative” has become more and more popular there are various techniques which handle it quite paradoxical. As a matter of fact there is a book published by Imre Pászka, a sociologist migrated to Hungary from Transylvania, on the theory of the same sort of narrative life story interview<sup>29</sup>, but strangely enough he is the one who came up with the idea of doing quantitative analysis with narrative life story interviews.<sup>30</sup>

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27 Kovács Éva-Vajda Júlia: Mutatkozás. Zsidó Identitás Történetek, Budapest, Múlt és Jövő, 2003 [Presence. Jewish Identity Stories]

28 Éva Kovács (ed.) Tükörszilánkok - Kádár-korszakok a személyes emlékezetben, Budapest, MTA Szociológiai intézet, 1956-os Intézet, 2008 [Splinters of Mirror – Kádár-era in the Personal Rememberance]

29 Pászka Imre, A narratív történetformák a megértő szociológia nézőpontjából. Szeged. Belvedere. 2007., Imre Pászka, Teme de sociologia românească a modernităţii. Cluj-Napoca. Editura Grinta. 2008., Imre Pászka, Sociology of narrative story forms (life story, autobiography). Cluj. Presa Universitara Clujeana. 2010.

30 Pászka Imre, Elit, elitek a lokális kistérségi társadalomban. Szeged. Szegedi Egyetem Kiadó. 2010.

## PRESENTATION OF PROJECTS

### New Holocaust Archive in Budapest

The collection „Totalitarianism and Holocaust” consists of 334 narrative life story interviews conducted mostly with Hungarian survivors and, to a much smaller extent (less than 10% of the total), with eye-witnesses of the Shoah since 2004.

It would be difficult to tell when exactly the idea of the collection came up. Still, let me to tell its very personal story. Since the beginning of the 1990-ies, my colleague Éva Kovács and I spent about ten years to research the Jewish identity of the second generation of the survivors. The young scholar I was at that time did not realize how important this research was for her personal psychic development, understanding or working on her own Jewish identity. By the time we finished our book<sup>31</sup> based on the research and after having interviewed also one or two „real” survivors I understood that my somewhat perverse desire to read every memoir and see every film related to the Shoah is related to my personal story of having failed to ask my mother’s personal Shoah-story before she died.

So when Éva was invited to take part in collecting the interviews for the Mauthausen Survivors Documentation Project of the Austrian Ministry of Interior I was not just happy to participate in the project, but as soon as the project was over, wanted to continue the work immediately and ask each and every survivor who were available. This desire of mine led to establishing a subproject called „Totalitarianism and Holocaust” within my father’s (Mihály Vajda) big, mainly philosophical project „Totalitarianism and Europe” at the Department of Philosophy of the Debrecen University which received a fairly big grant for the years 2004-2007 to set up an archive<sup>32</sup>.

However, the collection compiled in those years is not closed: from time to time some of my young colleagues (mostly former students of mine) who took part in the original interviewing or I myself interview a new person – this time unpaid. Although the collection is currently deposited in the Open Society Archive (<http://www.osaarchivum.org/>) at the Central European University in Budapest, the agreement we will sign will allow us to add new interviews as long as there are survivors willing to tell us their life stories.

The interviewees were all living in Hungary at one point of time or another of the Hungarian Shoah and fell under the effect of the anti-Jewish laws. As the borders of Hungary were in move in this period we considered any person as having lived in Hungary who lived within the country’s borders, wherever these were, for any period of the persecution. As our funding was not sufficient to finance trips abroad, most of our interviews were taken in present day Hungary. If, however, a team member had the chance to interview a survivor of Hungarian origin abroad, we used the interview. Similarly, we interviewed emigrants visiting Hungary.

In the context of the project, we considered anyone as an eye-witness who had been „old enough” to be able to notice discrimination even if only on an infantile level and who had the chance to actually see it (i.e. lived in Hungary, defined the same as above, in the period).

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<sup>31</sup> Kovács Éva – Vajda Júlia: Mutatkozás. Zsidó Identitás Történetek, (Appearance. Jewish Identity Stories), Múlt és Jövő publishing house, Budapest, 2003

<sup>32</sup> The grant was given by the National Cultural Foundation (Nemzeti Kulturális Alap) of the Hungarian state.

The essence of the method of narrative life story interviews is that the interviewer tries to get a life narrative from the interviewee without influencing him/her. Hence, when conducting such an interview we only name the topic and ask our partner to tell his/her life story and then just listen to the story until the person indicates having finished it. Afterwards, based on the notes we took while he/she was talking, we ask our interviewee to talk in detail about events she/he has already mentioned. There is a systematic order in these questions. The interviewer must not bring up new topics or issues. The interviews are approximately 4 hours long on an average. They are recorded by digital dictaphones and are preserved in the collection as digital voice files. In addition, 65 of the interviews exist in a digitally saved typewritten form. To make search easier, there are two additional documents attached to each interview. The first is a personal description of the interview by the interviewer, the situation and the story heard; the second is a datasheet with the main personal data and information on the persecution. Furthermore, all the information gained from these documents is summarized in an excel spreadsheet. Also, whenever it was possible, we made copies of documents and photos related to the period our interviewees were willing to lend us.

The Archive will be ready for use after the contract between us, who collected the material, the Debrecen University and the Open Society Archive will be signed, hopefully before the end of this year. From then on, researchers can use it in OSA according to the stipulations made by the interviewees themselves.

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### **„PluS“. When Plurilingual Speakers Encounter Unilingual Environments. Migrants from African Countries in Vienna: Language Practices and Institutional Communication**

<http://www.univie.ac.at/ie/sprachmittlung/projekte.html>

“Transcultural communication in public administration and judiciary areas is associated with highly complex linguistic practices. In this specific environment, officials with unilingual, orthographic and normative communication skills often encounter speakers of a plurilingual, heterographic and dynamic background. Moreover, diversified ways of speaking and incongruent frames of reference may add to the complexity of this situation. Although required by law, authorities and courts often lack the expertise to establish *meaningful conversation with migrants from African countries*. In many cases the authorities have difficulty determining the correct designation for the languages in question in order to arrange for an interpreter. By an act of un-naming, i. e. literally "declassifying" them as "vernaculars", these languages are made virtually irrelevant. Migrants, too, are often unaware of the consequences when placed in situations where a restrictive alternative language (L2) is used. The results of both such behaviours are costly, time consuming, and detrimental to people and society.

The *issue of plurilingualism in public administration and judiciary areas* has to be approached from a linguistic rights angle. However, no such research has been conducted in Austria so far. This study has been designed to bridge this gap by making the plurilingual repertoires of these migrants visible (voic-

es heard), thus enabling authorities to comply with human rights by guaranteeing equal access to the law. Moreover, this project is of particular relevance to both social cohesion (inclusion) and economic performance (cost reduction). This area of research calls for the integration of a wide variety of perspectives and approaches. Therefore, this proposal bridges *applied linguistics, African studies and human rights research* in a transdisciplinary manner. The research questions to be addressed are: (1) What relevance do plurilingual repertoires have for functional communication with migrants from Africa in public administration and judiciary? (2) How do the participating agents assess this issue? (3) How and by what means can the topic of plurilingualism be promoted within the leading sociopolitical discourse in Vienna?

This project will apply educative methods of *action research* based on triangulation. A threefold approach has been adopted: establishing language biographies of the agents involved, participant observation through buddying schemes, and work with texts. The study is based on an innovative integrative approach of discourse analysis and biography research. It is centered on migrants from African countries who have been disproportionately represented in the public eye due to constant and excessive negative imagery in the media and in politics. The expertise gained can be integrated into *Vienna's diversity policy*, and by doing so raise awareness of existing plurilingual resources and contribute to improving communication in authorities and courts."

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## CONFERENCE AND WORKSHOP ANNOUNCEMENTS

### 40TH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SOCIOLOGY (IIS)

The conference will take place at India Habitat Centre in Delhi on 16-19 February, 2012. The theme of the congress is *After Western Hegemony: Social Science and Its Publics*. All regular sessions (including abstracts and contact details) are listed on the congress website: [www.iisoc.org/iis2012](http://www.iisoc.org/iis2012).

### "ORAL HISTORY: DIALOG WITH SOCIETY"

**Oral history conference in Riga (Latvia), March 29-30th, 2012.** The conference is hosted by the Latvian National Oral History Centre of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the University of Latvia in cooperation with the Association of Oral History Researchers of Latvia "Dzīvesstāsts" ("Life Story") and the department of History at Stockholm University.

**Proposal deadline: December 20, 2011.** To apply, please send a one-page proposal that includes an outline of your paper and the following details:- name (with your surname in CAPITAL letters) – affiliation - postal address - e-mail address - telephone and fax numbers. Proposals will be evaluated according to their relevance to the conference theme. Notification of acceptance or rejection will be announced by February 1, 2012. Please send your proposal as an e-mail attachment to Ieva Garda-Rozenberga: [ieva.garda@gmail.com](mailto:ieva.garda@gmail.com)

## NOTES ON PAST CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS

### "SOCIAL RELATIONS IN TURBULENT TIMES"

This year's **Conference of the European Sociological Association (ESA)** took place in Geneva from September 7 – 10. Catherine Delcroix and Roswitha Breckner had the chance to present papers in a semi-plenary session on 'Ethnic relations, Racism and Biographical Perspectives on Migration'. This semi-plenary was well-attended with about 120 listeners and the discussion showed that biographical perspectives in these highly relevant and virulent research areas are of great interest. The paper of Catherine Delcroix has been published in the recent *Global Dialogue. Newsletter for the International Sociological Association*. You can access it via [www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/2011/11/negotiating-islamophobia-exit-voice-and-loyalty/](http://www.isa-sociology.org/global-dialogue/2011/11/negotiating-islamophobia-exit-voice-and-loyalty/)

The **Research Network *Biographical Perspectives on European Societies***, chaired by Thea Boldt, organized nine regular and one poster session on the following topics: 'Biography and Theory' (Wolfram Fischer); 'European Identities and 'The Other'' (Robert Miller); 'Ethnic and Religious Identities' (Thea Boldt); 'Biographical Turbulence: Biography, Performance, Arts' (Brian Roberts & Maggie O'Neill); 'Applying Biographical and Performative Research' (John Given); 'Memory as Biographical and Collective Resource in Turbulent Times I + II' (Kaja Kazmierska; Victoria Semenova & Elena Rozhdestvenskaya);

'Migration and Biography I + II' (Thea Boldt & Baiba Bela; Elena Zdravomyslova).

The vivid participation in these regular sessions showed that issues of identity, migration and memory are still highly important in biographical research and in sociology in general. Besides, new perspectives e.g. by including performance and arts into biographical research continue to develop.

During the business meeting at the conference a new Chair and Vice Chair of the RN 03 within the ESA were voted: Prof. Maggie O'Neill from UK (Chair) and Prof. Kaja Kaźmierska from Poland (Vice Chair).

### **INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM TRANSNATIONAL LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRES: COMMUNICATION IN COURTS AND PUBLIC AGENCIES**

From 2-4 November an international Symposium took place at the University of Vienna, organized by Brigitta Busch and the team of the project „PluS“. When Plurilingual Speakers Encounter Unilingual Environments. Migrants from African Countries in Vienna: Language Practices and Institutional Communication" (see project presentation below). In three sessions on *Language and Law; Transcultural Communication & Interpreting; Biography, Narrative & Trauma*, papers were presented and discussed in a very inspiring and pleasant atmosphere. The public evening lecture, given by Tim McNamara (Melbourne) on *The Problem of being heard: Autobiographical Narrative, Multilingualism and Subjectivity*, discussed the problem of conveying personal experience through life narratives in multilingual contexts, especially if they have to be narrated in the language of the dominant group. The session on *Biography, Narrative & Trauma*, chaired by Karlheinz Spitzl, took up these issues and was one of the most ones. Here the problem of expressing traumatic experiences in asylum court cases was dealt with based in empirical experience and research. Christine Anthonissen (University of Stellenbosch, South Africa) talked about *When narrative memory is disrupted by traumatic experience*, referring to analysis of discourses on reconciliation in The South African Truth and Reconciliation Committee, as well as on analysis of discourses in health care – communication in HIV/AIDS consultation and treatment. Martin Aigner (Psychiatrist, University Hospital Vienna) informed about *Pain and language in the clinical context*. Barbara Preitler (Psychologist) talked about *Trauma: Narratives in Fragments* and offered insights from the difficulties of translation referring to her extended work with traumatized refugees and asylum seekers. Finally, Brigitta Busch (Sociolinguist, University of Vienna) presented a paper on „*When one does not have a language ...*“: *Language Choice in Therapeutic Settings and Asylum Procedures*. She critically revealing criteria used in court to judge if a narration is authentic or not. This knowledge is crucial also for biographical research since we increasingly deal with multilingual contexts.

### **“WHERE DO YOU ACTUALLY COME FROM? IDENTITIES, POSITIONINGS, AND PERSPECTIVES IN IMMIGRATION SOCIETY”**

The one day conference was organized by Thomas Kunz, Lena Inowlocki, Margitta Kunert-Zier at the University of Applied Sciences in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, on November 8, 2011, in cooperation with Mechtild M. Jansen of the Hessian State Centre for Civic Education. The organizers and, additionally, Julia Bernstein presented short input-papers on processes of othering in everyday life communication, in educational intercultural encounters and in counseling with regard to discrimination experiences. The papers and workshop discussions centered on communication and interaction when ques-



tions and comments are posed, seemingly as a matter of course, to assign otherness and difference between 'natives' versus 'immigrants': "Where do you actually come from?", or: "You speak very good German". It was also discussed how unnoticed discursive practices of creating 'others' in exclusionary ways can occur in educational and in counseling settings. Ideas were exchanged of how to ask and how to respond in order to avoid dichotomous positions of 'us' and 'them'.

### **DIVERSE PRACTICES: BIOGRAPHICAL APPROACHES IN CULTURAL STUDIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES**

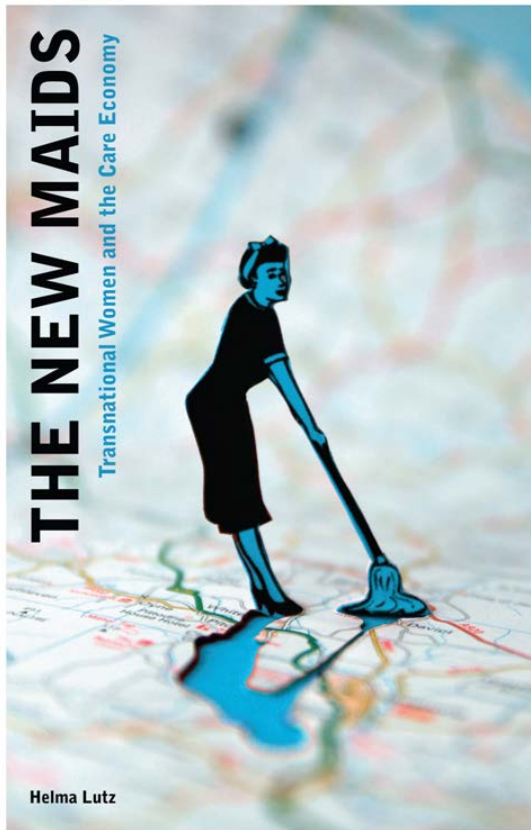
This workshop, organized by Klara Loeffler and Johanna Gehmacher (both University of Vienna), aimed at creating a forum for exchange and networking among biographical researchers across disciplines at the University of Vienna. More than twenty colleagues gathered for a whole day on November 11 at the Institute of European Ethnology / University of Vienna as to discuss different methodological and thematic approaches from historical, educational, literature, sociological, ethnographic and psychological perspectives. Impulse statements from Bettina Dausien (Educational Science), Maria Pohn-Weidinger (Sociology), Hannes Schweiger (Literary Science) and Reinhard Sieder (Contemporary History) were followed by well-prepared discussions based on a reader containing self-presentations of all participants about specific perspectives doing biographical research in the respective discipline and also general issues of theory, methodology and methods. During this day the variety of biographical research and its relevance in many scholarly contexts became impressively apparent. A follow up is planned for April 2012.

### **THE MEDIALIZATION OF AUTO/BIOGRAPHIES: DIFFERENT FORMS AND THEIR COMMUNICATIVE CONTEXTS**

The annual conference of the Biographical Research Section by the German Sociological Association (DGS) took place from December 2<sup>nd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> at the University of Hamburg, School of Business, Economics and Social Sciences. It was organised by Carsten Heinze (Hamburg), Jana Ballenthien (Hamburg), Hanna Haag (Hamburg), Monika Müller (Schwerin), Martina Schiebel (Bremen) und Elisabeth Tuidier (Kassel).

With seven keynote speakers (Fritz Schütze, Roswitha Breckner, Christian Moser, Alfred Hornung, Maggie O'Neill, Peter Alheit, Brigitta Busch), eleven sessions and two evening events, this was a quite big conference. Around fifty presentations touched a huge variety of biographical expression in the whole range of media: text, picture, voice, film, theater performance, language portraits. The impact of different genres on the creation of biographies and the Self in different audiences and socio-historical contexts was a recurring issue while reflecting on the narrative biographical interview, on social reports using biographical material, on novels, poems, photography, family photo albums, drawings, ethnographic videos, performative ethnography, documentary film, etc. In general, the conference showed us quite plainly how established biographical approaches can be further developed and how new research ground opens up when looking at the different media and modes of expression in which biographical experiences take shape and are formed. Thanks to the organizers for this impressive event! The only thing to regret was that due to the huge interest to actively participate, three sessions had to run parallel so that one could not attend and listen to all presentations.

**NEW PUBLICATIONS**



**Lutz, Helma (2011) The New Maids. Transnational Women and the Care Economy, London: Zed Books**

The New Maids is a pioneering book, grounded on rich, empirical evidence, which examines the relationship between globalization, transnationalism, gender and the care economy. Expertly addressing the thorny questions that surround the increasing number of migrant domestic workers and cleaners, child-carers and caregivers who maintain modern Western households, the author argues that domestic work plays the defining role in global ethnic and gender hierarchies.

Using a central ethnographic study of immigrant domestic workers and their German employees as its starting point, The New Maids uses the voices of such women themselves to provide unique conceptual and evidential support for this vital new approach argument. This exciting book will not only enhance the reader's understanding of the new care-economy, it also sets standards for feminist global methodology.



Gabriele Rosenthal, Viola Stephan  
Niklas Radenbach,

Rosenthal, G. / Stephan, V. / Radenbach, N. (2011): *Brüchige Zugehörigkeiten. Wie sich Familien von "Russlanddeutschen" ihre Geschichte erzählen.* Frankfurt a. M.: Campus.

*Fragile belongings: How families of Germans from Soviet Union tell their story*

Since 1989, more than two million people with a German family background have immigrated to Germany from the countries of the former Soviet Union. Their family histories are affected by changes which were partially traumatic – such as persecutions and deportations in the course of the Second World War. Amongst other things, this volume illustrates the influence of the past on the lives of successive generations. In addition, the members of these families often belong to different ethnic groupings: a Kazakh grandmother and a Russian father – what does this mean for the construction of we-images within the families? The images of self and others we encounter in this volume make the difficulties more understandable which particularly the younger of the so called Russian Germans are facing.

**BRÜCHIGE  
ZUGEHÖRIGKEITEN**

*Wie sich Familien von »Russlanddeutschen«  
ihre Geschichte erzählen*

campus



Thea D. Boldt



Thea D. Boldt (2011): Die stille Integration. Identitätskonstruktionen von polnischen Migranten in Deutschland, Frankfurt am Main: Campus

*The silent integration. Identity constructions of polish migrants in Germany*

Polish migrants rarely occur in the German public, and are hardly noticeable as a social group in everyday life. Also, the statistical accounting of the people of Polish origin in Germany is proving problematic. However, it is a matter of fact that they are the second largest immigrant group in Germany and that the migration waves from Poland to Germany contribute greatly to the German-Polish collective history since the End of the 18th century.

In her qualitative study Thea D. Boldt goes into biographical experiences of people of Polish origin in Germany and acknowledges their identity constructions. She also shows the importance of German-Polish collective past for the socio-historical present. With her book, she opens a new perspective on the multi-ethnic formation of German

society and thus makes a contribution to public debate on the multicultural German identity in progress.

## Articles

Breckner, Roswitha (2011) Kulturelle Vielfalt? Zur Konstruktion von Eigenheit und Fremdheit im öffentlichen Bilderraum (*Cultural Diversity? The Construction of ›We‹ and ›Others‹ in Public Pictures*), in: SWS Rundschau – Die Zeitschrift der Sozialwissenschaftlichen Studiengesellschaft, Jg. 51, Heft 4/2011

Schiebel, Martina/ Robel, Yvonne (2009): Limites d'un antifascisme interallemand pendant la Guerre Froide. L'«Association des persécutés du régime nazi» (VVN) en Allemagne de l'Est et de l'Ouest. In: Temoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire. Revue pluridisciplinaire de la Fondation Auschwitz, No. 104 L'Antifascisme Revisité: Histoire - Idéologie – Mémoire, S. 79-89.

Schiebel, Martina/ Robel, Yvonne (2011): Using Press Photographs in the Construction of Political Life Stories. In: Alexander Freund/ Alistair Thomson, (Eds.): Oral History and Photography. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 115-130.

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The **deadline** for the next newsletter is end of **April 2012**

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