

# A NON-REPRESSING MODEL OF IDENTITY GROUNDED IN THE GENRE OF ORAL AUTO/BIOGRAPHY BY WOMEN

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## Abstract

My paper is an attempt at the theorisation of identity from a materialist feminist perspective, drawing on the oral life narratives of Hungarian women. I would like to contribute to the ongoing debates on the limits and value of identity politics for feminist political and ethical objectives. In my view identity is a discursive construct that is never finished but aspires to momentary cohesion. The basic social conditions for such a Self is multiplicity and equivalent relations of power. Such a non-repressive model entails two major changes to exclusionary conceptualisations of identity. One is the recognition of the connectedness of the Self to the Other, that is the intersubjective nature of the Self. The other is difference, heterogeneity within the Self that is the condition for the former.

As a discursively mediated practice of telling a life, auto/biography is understood to be the narrative site for making sense of the Self. Its major function is to construct a coherent Self out of the heterogeneous socio-cultural positionings available at any particular moment of telling. This sense of temporary coherence is achieved through the articulatory practices of the genre, that is, through the narrative device of emplotment.

My data consists of eight life-span narratives shared with me by eight woman friends of mine. I analyse one of them, the life narrative by Adél, in detail for a case study. I shall focus on the analysis of the dilemma of a relational identity which all these narratives are re/constructing as their central theme. The dilemmas are all formulated from a gendered position problematising the limits of being a woman in contemporary Hungarian society. My major interest in the analysis is to see whether it is possible for Adél, to subvert, or transform even, the dominant hegemonic relations of power.

## Key words

Discourse, identity, gender, auto/biography, power.

This paper is based on my PhD research that focuses on the discursive practices of selfhood in my Hungarian female friends' oral re-construction

of their lifespan. This analytical focus on the construction of identity positions my work within the current feminist/queer debates on the gains and limits of 'identity politics'. Rosemary Hennessy (1993) formulates this problematic for materialist feminist practice as a struggle to maintain the critique of social totalities like patriarchy, capitalism, racism and heterosexism *without* overlooking the differential positionings of women within these totalities. Recontextualized within such a politics of discourse, my interest in the discursively constructed subject should be considered as a potentially powerful intervention in the existing assumptions about 'women' in Hungary, for and of whom a feminist theory should speak.

Reading through and through the transcripts of the nine interviews I made with my woman friends, I have identified two salient features of these lifespan narratives. First, I understood that my friends strategically appropriated the interview situation for their own purposes. They all tried to resolve a dilemma<sup>1</sup> that was pulling them in opposing directions in the course of the recollection of their life stories. The other recognition came much later, a year or so afterwards. Namely, that these women are telling their lives through their relationships to/with other people around them. They do not draw a sharp boundary between their self and the other/s.

Both features seem to call for a concept of identity that is not achieved at the expense of the exclusion of difference, the other but, rather, built upon it in a dialectical and dynamic way. As long as I was focusing on these women's story as a struggle to forge a unified self out of a fixed set of heterogeneous discursive positionings, I was operating by an *exclusionary* model of the self. As soon as I 'heard' that their actual dilemmas are in fact recounted with a very strong sense of the interests of the Other, the unity of the self took on a very different meaning. Namely, that the recognition of the Other should not necessarily mean a mutually exclusive choice between either one's own interest or those of the Other but an understanding that the self is not possible without the other. So the vexed question informing the women's wish to resolve their respective dilemma may be reformulated as how to achieve a sense of a coherent self that is not constructed at the expense of the other<sup>2</sup> but one that recognizes the indispensable necessity of the other for the self to come to be. In discourse analytical terms, these women's endeavour may consist in a departure

from the available discourses of the self as a unified negativity and open them up to the expression of difference, to an intersubjective recognition of multiplicity without abandoning an autonomous self.<sup>3</sup> For me this has the analytical insight that, instead of focusing on the auto/biographies as closed textual units, I should open up the apparent boundaries of the self/genre and relocate them in the dynamic negotiation of an intersubjective multiplicity. Instead of focusing on the multiple discursive positionings of the female subject as distinct fixities and thus explaining the achieved unity through the construction of a homogeneous dominant subject position out of this heterogeneity of the self/genre from within the representation, I should understand these contesting discourses as emerging in relation to an other or others in the course of the re/constructing, achieving a momentary cohesion in a chain of re/articulations (Laclau and Mouffe, 1984).

I have found a feminist conceptualization of identity that allows for this intersubjective recognition of the other in Alison Weir's (1996) model. This model draws upon the heterogeneity of identity both within as well as outside the self in relation to the other. Instead of taking for granted that identity is necessarily a negativity, a product of the repression of difference achieved via the negation of non-identity and thereby reducing identity to the repression, exclusion of the other (meaning either the other self or otherness), she tries to provide an alternative ethical model that offers a set of distinctions drawn between various forms of identity and exclusion. She contends that not every form of distinction is an instance of violence. Consequently, the separation of the other from one's sense of self should not invariably be reduced to an act of domination. In other words, she is arguing against J. Butler's (1990) claim that every form of identity is inevitably the effect of the workings of *a masculinist sacrificial logic*: one that always sacrifices the female other/difference for the suppressed unity of the male self/same. This argument leads us, says Weir, to "a simplistic equation of capacities for individual autonomy [individual identity] and collective solidarity [collective identity] with repression, and hence, with domination" (8). Identity would be reduced to an inherently *painful* process of violation of multiplicity and would leave feminist politics with no grounds for a mobilizing solidarity. Instead, she proposes a theory of identity formation as a partly *pleasurable*

process based on the acceptance of the non-identity of the other and the non-identity within the self. This model presupposes two major shifts from a sacrificial model. On the one hand, instead of a preoccupation with separation from the other, it emphasizes an affective connection, an intersubjective connectedness to the other. On the other, instead of a preoccupation with the repression of the other, Weir's model emphasizes *the recognition and acceptance of otherness as a capacity for participation in the social world of contested meanings*. As a result, the exclusionary logic of the same/different, self/other binarism can be escaped through the recognition of connectedness of the self to the other. Identity comes to be defined as "a capacity for coherent expression of non-identity" (1996:12). In the field of political practice, this reformulation opens up the possibility for a politics of identity that can escape the submission/resistance realization of a sacrificial logic.

Now if I reformulate my major research objective within this non-sacrificial logic of identity, my aim is to show that what is at stake for my friends when recounting their life story to me is whether they can transcend, escape the self-centredness of the binary logic of the Same. Therefore, the question is to see whether there can emerge a discourse coherent with a non-exclusionary, relational model of identity and if so in what particular ways.

Taking up the theme from the point of view of the genre of auto/biography, the task is to conceptualize the genre in a way that is congruent with the acceptance of the non-repressive model of identity. The narrative genre of auto/biography then cannot be seen as an end product, as a structure of a set of generic features it possesses, but one that is emerging in the course of a dynamic negotiation process and one that achieves only a temporary fixity. Therefore, I see autobiography at the intersection of a narrated and a narrating event<sup>4</sup>. Retrospectively, from the point of view of the narrative closure, it is a more or less coherent story of the narrator's life, a narrated structure of the self. On the other hand, this story is emerging in the course of an interview, in relation to a listener-researcher, and as such, it is a narrating event. The distinction between these two dimensions, in my opinion, serves as the corresponding aspects

of identity mapped onto narration. On the one hand, the heterogeneity of the various events articulated – in Laclau & Mouffe’s (1985) sense of the word – into a temporarily fixed coherence, providing a sufficient sense of closure through the narrative device of emplotment (Ricoeur, 1991), should correspond to the multiplicity, the non-identity *within* the self. Whereas the claim that this emplotment is taking place intersubjectively, in view of a listener, informed by the narrator’s assumption that her story should be found to be an adequate approximation of her past not only by herself but also by the listener, should correspond to the non-exclusion of the other *outside* the self.

The picture is more complex, though. With regard to the narrated events, the stories emerging in the course of the emplotment have their own implied listeners, narratees (see Genettes’ 1980 concept of voice) within the recounted stories themselves, which multiplies the relational nature of the genre. From this point of view, each story implies an other (individual or collective), a listener. The task of the analysis is to show how non-identity of the Narrator is accommodated through the recognition of this listening, evaluating Narratee-other. Similarly, with regard to the actual listener in the narrating event, the interviewer is not the only possible listener that the Narrator-Author may have in mind. The very fact that my friends are told in advance that the recording is going to be analysed as part of a PhD thesis may open up the possibility of multiple prospective ‘listeners’(readers) with their own criteria of adequacy. In both cases, the ultimate evaluation is beyond the control of the Narrator. To the extent that she is not in control of her story’s interpretation she cannot be in control of her emerging identity either, precisely because it is oriented inevitably towards the other/s. The task of the analysis is to separate the listeners in the narrated and narrating events to show how the emerging life story is re-constructed in view of the implied and actual listeners/readers.

What I have said about the genre so far has been focused on the specificities of the narrative from within the interview situation, theorizing from the point of view of the Narrator/Author only. This approach recognizes only an autobiography and leaves the moment of the actual analysis sealed off. In other words, such an approach would make me,

the analyst 'absent', albeit my active presence as the reader/biographer of these life stories. This analytical practice would implicate the relationship between the reader/analyst and text as binary opposites of each other, where reading/analysing is a passive, self-evident, transparent practice in relation to a completely active text which is apparently productive of one and only one obvious reading, that of mine. However, as McHoul (1983) has defined practices of reading, they are active, interpretative engagements with texts, contingent upon the discursively mediated social and cultural positionings of a reader and thereby of her/his own autobiography.

The intersubjective model of identity, however, necessitates the insertion of the listening/reading other in the narrating event. This will open up the boundaries of the narrated autobiography and recognize its intersection with the biography it is turned into in the course of the analytical dialogue I, as the reader/biographer, am engaging with it. I find Liz Stanley's (1992) theorization of auto/biography instructive about this problematic of the reader/biographer. She contends that the majority of feminist retheorizations of auto/biographical writings have focused on the genre of autobiography only. This critique has deconstructed the canonized perception of the genre, epitomized in Philippe Lejeune's concept of 'the autobiographical pact' by focusing on the intertextuality of the texts. According to them, life and constructed accounts of life are related intertextually and not via the unique mind of a human subject, thus enunciated by no one and everyone. The constituent multiple discourses speak referentially to and about one another only. Stanley warns against this unconditioned embrace of the Foucauldian "death of the author" (Foucault, 1972). She argues that what the denial of authorship does is "a very convenient death" at the historic moment when the various authoritative sources of exclusion, discrimination are named as "white middle-class male first World elite" (1992: 17). What this theoretical denial does is silence the authorial presence in the activity of theorizing. This is all the more problematic, as the alleged gain of this denial is supposedly the empowerment of the excluded. However, there are no means theorized for the emergence of this empowerment, other than that it is. Also, argues Stanley, the 'suicide' of the author precludes any accountability on behalf of the analyst, and thereby maintains the powerful position of the authorial self

as the hidden inscriber of 'the' truth. (See Frazer, 1988, and Ramazanoglu *et al.*, 1993, critiquing Foucault's concept of power).

This second point of critique takes me back to the problematic of the reader/analyst, which Stanley addresses in terms of the practical means of empowerment. Once she puts the biographer on equal ontological grounds with the autobiographer, their ways of knowing are not in a hierarchical division any longer. She claims that the relationship of/between biographer to/and the life of her subject is the same as the relationship of autobiographer to her own self: "[The auto/biographer] can exist only through [the] others, and as 'they' do not exist except through him/[her], 'he/[she] as an essential self does not exist either" (70). Consequently, either can be known only partially, depending on the socio-cultural situatedness of the auto/biographer. This inscription of the reader/biographer in the analytical discourse will locate the product, the auto/ biographical text within the process of its production, in agreement with what I have said about the intersubjective nature of the interview situation itself as the intersection of the narrated and narrating event. The central question therefore for a feminist research on auto/biography is "How is 'life' as it is lived in its complexities reduced into the 'life of 'X' ?" (*ibid.*: 26) The slash in the name of auto/biography (*'a form of life writing'*) denotes this conjunction, the generic similarity in the ontological status of autobiography and biography, requiring the same analytical apparatuses.

The dynamics of this process like approach to the genre exposes a dialectic embeddedness of the moment both of the telling and the analysis. The actual text of the analysis can be redefined then as follows: The autobiography of Friend as constructed by her, the autobiographer in the course of the interview, in relation to the listener/researcher, from within the contingencies of her life is then re-constructed by Researcher, the biographer into Friend's biography from within the contingencies of Researcher's own life in the course of the analysis, thereby writing her own, the researcher's autobiography in the form of the analysis as well. Furthermore, to the extent one's life is intersubjective, i.e. in and through the life of others, her autobiography is inevitably a complex of these others' biographies, and, in turn, her life is inscribed in the autobiography

of those others as well. Therefore, in the former relay of the dynamism of the analysis, there should be a slash inserted in both occurrences of 'autobiography', emphasizing the momentary articulation of intersubjective multiplicity of the self/genre. I define (oral) auto/biography then as a narrative site for constructions of identity depending upon the social/cultural situatedness of the auto/biographer.

The problem with a deconstructionist approach to the auto/biographical writing/reading self can be reformulated from the point of view of the non-materiality of 'discourse'. In order to keep the insight gained through a concept of the subject-in-difference, a discursively constructed identity, as well as to theorize the condition for empowerment, what is necessary to develop is a social theory of discourse. That I have found in R. Hennessy's (1993) conceptualization of discourse as ideological practices. According to her (1993: 14), ideology is an "array of sense-making practices which constitute what counts as 'the way things are' in any historical moment".

As Hennessy puts it, "From the vantage point of ideology, the material can be understood as that which intervenes in the production of the social real by being made intelligible. At the same time, the discourses that constitute the material structures through which ideology works are shaped by the material relations which comprise economic and political practices" (75). This means that 'reality' whether in the forms of 'women's lives' or 'the feminist standpoint' is always social. Reality is inescapably an ideological construct that is unevenly and contradictorily shaped "at particular historic moments by divisions of labour and relations between state and civil society" (75).<sup>5</sup> This materialist understanding implies that the discursive activities of sense-making are the effect of struggles over "the truth". From this follows, that autobiography as a particular way of knowing is ideologically situated within a social and historical context, and as such have a materiality in a twofold way. On the one hand, it helps to shape the formation of the social subjects as well as what comes to count as the 'real self'. In this sense, auto/biographical writings are discursive sites of struggle over shared social meanings of what gets indorsed as truth about the self. On the other hand, auto/biographical texts are also



material as effects of struggle over the modes of reading they allow. As Hennessy puts it, “Reading[/writing] is the ideological practice of making a text intelligible” (1993: 14), practices of making sense “of and through the systems of difference available at any historical moment” (15). Once meaning is defined as the effect of social struggle, any theory becomes only one specific discursive mode of knowing, whose specificity, when compared with other forms of cultural narratives, consists in a “more direct inquiry into the conditions of possibility of knowledge” (7) but cannot, precisely for that reason, provide a non-biased position outside the existing discourses of a particular culture. This way the criterion of assessment of the various theories is not grounded in an unmediated referential ‘truth’ but in terms of legitimacy, that is on the basis of insight, the explanatory power and commitment to empowerment. From this also follows that a materialist feminist theory should be an ideology critique, one whose only means to make its own partiality visible is explicit accountability.

Seen in terms of an ideology critique, Stanley’s aim is precisely to provide an *accountable* perception of the genre. She argues for a middle ground between the two major ideological positions pure referentiality and deconstruction. Her argument is that the intersubjective and intertextual nature of the self/genre excludes a referential ontological stance, where selves are unified, essential, and therefore fully knowable, consequently, auto/biographies should be looked upon as recollections, descriptions of the actual lives of such selves. That is the relationship between life/reality and the text, the account of life as referential. Stanley sees this referential approach as the expression of a traditional Western “realist ideology” (62). On the other hand, the socio-cultural locatedness, the contingency of the self/genre, and thus that of knowledge, excludes a feminist deconstructionist position (See Stanton, 1984) as well as recognizes a purely inter/textual ontology, where life/self is exhausted by representation, resulting in the erasure of the morpheme ‘bio’ in the name of the genre, “auto/graph” (93). Although she does not give any name to this ideology, I would like to call it an ‘ideology of the fictive’, which would be in agreement with Stanley’s distinction between a fictive vs. a fictional self when addressing the constructed nature of the self.

I would like to claim that any form of auto/biographical writings (i.e. auto/biographies and theorizations of auto/biographies) functions ideologically to the extent they inscribe our understanding of what selves should be, and how auto/biographies should be read/written. Any auto/biography is the interpretation from within the available conventions, as such the particular effect of 'an ideology of the self'. These conventions are discursive practices of telling/writing of 'one's life'/'self'.

What follows from the feminist objective of accountability for my own research? Firstly, the conceptualization of identity as an intersubjective, retrospective textual construction from within the existing discursively mediated practices of writing/telling-a-life 'now'. The ontological stance informing my definition is the following. There is no self without a representation of self, that is living as a human being entails reflexivity. Human understanding is narrative in nature. As Charles Taylor (1985) contends, we make sense of the world and ourselves in it from within the stories we tell. Therefore, the major function of the auto/biographical story is to be the means for a reflexive understanding of the self. Furthermore, representation is always intersubjective, and therefore it is necessarily located within a social relation to the other. Consequently, no human activity, including telling/writing a life, is possible except within a social relation. In this sense, auto/biography is a form of discursive practice of re/construction of the past as the major means of self-understanding.

Secondly, this stance, which I would call, after Rosemary Hennessy (1993), 'postmodernist materialist feminist', opens up two possibilities of accountability in the actual linguistic analysis. On the one hand, my major contribution to a feminist auto/biographical research could be by breaking down the boundary between the oral autobiography of my friends and that of my own implicated in my analysis. This would recognize that my theoretical analysis is only a particular form of reading, a highly formalised engagement with the text, and as such, only one interpretation of the autobiographies competing for recognition as an adequate approximation. My research objective thus should be to foreground the immediate ways the autobiography of my friends engages me, hails me: Whether I accept the implied reader positions of their texts or resist and deconstruct them. I am

going to make my reading/analysis of these reader positions accountable through access to my own auto/biography in two ways. First, by way of focusing on the construction of events shared by my friends and me. Second, and more importantly, to accentuate the inherent situatedness of reading/telling an auto/biography I will give voice to my friends' own interpretation of their autobiography. To achieve this, I will have a second round of interviews. I will give my friends the recording and the transcript prior to the interview and then discuss how they see it from the 'now' of this second interview.

On the other hand, the contingency of auto/biography, the intertwined dialectical relationship between memory and fiction, life and auto/biography both in auto/biography and in lives as they are lived, requires that my textual analysis should focus on the linguistic means which imply referentiality. They can be identified by way of the following research questions: To what extent is the narrator constructed as an authorial author through the production of facts, dates, quotations or reporting from written or oral sources, in order to signal her competence as a reliable narrator? To what extent is the text told as if an inevitable product of those announced facts, how is the chronological ordering of the narration implicated in the construction of causality?

These linguistic means of referentiality in turn, to the extent they implicate an other, the actual listener who is there to be persuaded, are the linguistic ways of intersubjectivity. On the one hand, details like dates, specific venues, names of participants, historic events, may construct a relationship between the Author-Narrator and the Researcher-Listener as ones tracing down the 'facts' of a 'life'. On the other hand, there can be details that pertain to images invoking atmospheres, emotional dispositions. Deborah Tannen (1992:32), when establishing the similarity of literary and non-literary conversations, explores the role of the latter type of details and establishes it as "creating interpersonal [emotional] involvement" through the particular images they invoke. I would say these images will function as fictional sites of the intersection of the narrator and the listener's emerging identities. To the extent the listener enters the images, the constructed parts of the narrator's emerging self, the images will become part of the listener's

self as well: Narrator and Listener come to be through and through each other.<sup>6</sup>

### **Analysis of the intersubjective nature of the auto/biographer's identity in a first interview made with Adél**

For the current analytical purposes, I have chosen a three-hour long interview from the first round of interviews. This is a recording of the life span of Adel, a middle-aged dentist, married with three children, who are studying at university. Born in 1946, she represents in my data the generation of Hungarian women born after the Second World War. There are three generations represented in my recordings: one born between the two wars, one right after the Second World War, and one born in the late 1950s, after the 1956 uprising, where I myself belong. The motivation behind this categorization is to see if these three major important historical changes in the Hungarian socio-cultural context have any bearings on the specific ways women can see themselves. As I have mentioned at the beginning of this paper, each woman friend identifies a central dilemma of her life in the course of the first interview. Although the dilemmas themselves are different in terms of their specific ideational contents, the social dimension informing the construction as well as the temporary resolution of them, regardless the women's generational differences, is the same: that of gender. In other words, to the extent a woman can achieve an acceptable temporary resolution in the course of the interview she has achieved a sense of personal integrity, and to the extent the construction of the dilemma is from within her gendered social existence, the emerging identity is a gendered one, whatever gender gets constructed to mean. As long as they succeed in resolving their dilemma, they will have succeeded in re/constructing a coherent gendered self.

In Adel's auto/biographical re/construction, the dilemma is formulated explicitly twice as follows:

In Structural Unit 6:

Dilemma:

The thing that has meant or caused a big big trouble in my life is the state of my career and my family. Right from the first moment on.

That is, how can you do them both right? My father, when he told me how delighted he was that I was to become a dentist, because that is a very good profession, and I would be good at it, that's what he said. I don't know, the only thing he didn't take into consideration is that one needs such physical strength and condition so that one ... to do it on and on throughout the years, always with a lot of patients is a tormenting effort... So that is my problem: where can I make concessions, after all it's impossible to do everything. To do my best here [=in the surgery] as well as at home. Since bringing up three children is a tough job, mainly the first ten years, when you can't sleep all night long, what's more, you have to get up at least five times so that in the morning ... Then I thought that I ... in the family ... **[can't keep from crying]** I don't want to cry now but, you know, I must hold my ground there to a maximum extent. **Switch it off.** [A few minutes' break until Adél calms down].

Resolution:

I have told you about this before, that that ... in theory a lot of things, that is whatever in the theory could be learnt beside it [her family commitments], and and to participate in retraining, to go to conferences, and to exhibitions. So whatever could be soaked up I did but I didn't have the opportunity to practice them. And ... I've had the role of a kind of fellow traveller.[...]

And I practice this profession on an average level but very conscientiously. Oh, so I try to make no mistakes. At least never deliberately. I don't think I've made any except for those, you know, people make many mistakes at work. But in the family, in my family life, I've tried to hold out perfectly. [...] And I don't know if I could manage to do it but I think that the human aspect, that in my opinion, is very good, the way I do that. At least I think so. In the technical part, I suppose there must be a lot of mistakes but as in the course of years the patients return, I think that is also a relatively acceptable level. But the work I feel I'm good at is, is the human relationship, the human attitude, the...

In Structural Unit 8:

Dilemma:

Oh, he's very meticulous. He's very accurate in everything [he=Kálmán, the husband]. Well, I'm not like him, simply not, I think it's impossible. You can do only one certain thing accurately. You simply can't do so many things with such precision. So I do lots of things. [She laughs] Oh, my God!

Resolution:

With us, for example that was a very big thing that Kalman was so talented in his own profession. And this satisfied me. That he could do so beautiful things. It is as if I had made them. [...] But for me ... anyway I liked it. I liked that he was so skillful. And I've always praised him because it's very important for him to be, to be at least praised by someone, if nobody else then me .... 'cause every one of us needs that.

The dilemma is openly centered around the retrospective self-evaluation of her lifespan. What is at stake for her is whether she made the right decision between her career and her family ultimately in favour of the latter at various decisive points of her lifespan that get selected and therefore relevant. These nodal points of decision making are related to "choosing" to have a prospective career within medicine as a dentist because that was judged by her father to be 'managable' by a prospective wife and mother; to "choosing" her various workplaces depending on either her husband's career constraints or that of her motherly commitments; to "choosing" to be a full-time dentist as well as a full-time working wife and mother of eventually three children. Her re-emerging dilemma then can be reformulated as the extent to which she sees herself as one who has had to make a decision in a structurally prefigured, decided way, in which case it was never a 'choice'. To put it in intersubjective terms: whether this exclusion in the interests of some other has been acceptable, and if so how much, or not.

The analysis I am going to do cannot be exhaustive. I will address only three questions. Two will focus on the construction of the selfhood in relation to the emergences of the dilemma, and this way on the Narrator, while one question will focus on the details of the imaginary evoking an emotional bonding, and this way implicating me, the analyst, as a step towards accountability, opening up the closed boundaries of the autobiography. First, I want to identify how the flow of the biography gets

structured as a piece of narrative into smaller constitutive units and see where the dilemma emerges and what relevance the locations may have for the process of constructing selfhood. As part of the narrative structuration of the emerging life span I will focus on the importance of the non-verbal communication of crying and laughing, as the modality that opens up for the need for a non-repressive intersubjectivity. Second, I wish to analyse the central metaphor of ‘the fellow traveller’ and interpret it as the linguistic device for constructing a discursive site where – as a result of its intersection at the boundaries of various discourses – it can locate the discontinuous self into a temporary cohesion of identity. Finally, I will explore the imagery of the emerging constituent stories: the significance of their location and the kind of relationship they set up between narrator and listener.

My ultimate objective is to see whether Adel feels qualified to have her own voice heard as a member of the various social collectives or rather feels obliged to justify her right to have an autonomous voice, an identity of her own at any point of the re-construction. In other words: Can she feel a legitimate member as a woman of her communities or not?<sup>7</sup>

### *The narrative structure of the auto/biography*

Let me start the analysis by establishing the narrative structure of the auto/biographical text in order to locate the formulations of the dilemma within.

Adel, like most of my interviewees, tries to follow a roughly chronological coverage of her lifespan. To that extent, the text is a narrative: it observes the linear order of temporal sequencing of events. What is different in the nine narratives is the textual means of patterning into bigger textual structural units. In case of the Adel text, it is possible to identify two different principles structuring the chronological rendering of Adel’s life events into meaningful narrative units. One structuring device is provided by her strategic use of the evaluative passages inscribed into the chronological relay of the reconstruction of her lifespan, thus referring the listener to her parents’ life. These moments emerge systemically, dividing up the flow of events into developmental stages, in fact into eight units where the emergence of the

parental model will always indicate the end/beginning of the developmental stages: little childhood/end of primary school/graduation/maternity leave with the first children/nine years of work in the region called Jaszszag/dilemma & resolution/current life in Szolnok/recount of the resolution. For example, Unit 1 starts with “My hands were withered [when I was born] like hers [mother’s] from doing a lot of washing.” (*Ki volt azva a kezem [mikor megszülettem] mint neki a sok mosasba*); and ends with “So, they [parents] were very good people. We had a very beautiful childhood, indeed. It was when we learnt about my father that he is seriously ill that my brother said that as of now in this house there won’t be any laughing but crying. Well, ...it was,...well, it wasn’t quite like that, but nevertheless, indeed, we had a very beautiful family life. [CRYING]” (*Hat nagyon jó emberek voltak. Nagyon szép gyerekkorunk volt, tenyleg. Akkor, amikor edesapamról megtudtuk, hogy nagyon súlyos beteg, akkor mondta a batyám, hogy ezután ebben a házban már nem lesz nevetés, csak sírás. Hat, ... úgy is, ... hat nem egészen így volt, de azért tenyleg, nagyon szép családi életünk volt. [SIR]*) The parental model indicates the first stage of Adel’s life from birth to the end of her little childhood.

The implied comparison between the childhood happiness as provided by her parents and that of her own nuclear family is elevated into an absolute, timeless and thus mythical measure through the strategic reemergence of these passages. However, there is some tension here. On the one hand, this childhood happiness is constructed as one provided by the two parents in the Narrator’s voice. On the other hand, this happiness, the laughing is declared to have come to an end, to constant crying with the father’s illness. In my reading three things should be mentioned here. First of all, there is the degree adverb “indeed” (*tenyleg*) at the end of the sentence evaluating her childhood favourably (“very beautiful”/*nagyon szép*). This is a metatextual device doing the intersubjective act of convincing, constructing the listener or the narrator, or both as one in need of persuasion. Perhaps it is only the listener, me who needs this device of referentiality, after all I was not there, and also this is only the fourth minute of the recording, so the Narrator-Author is at the very beginning of the process of constructing herself as an authorial, thus ‘reliable’ narrator, not that I can recollect any sign of disbelief on my part either. The second peculiarity has got to do with the vocabulary



used here: the telling absence of any lexical item in the semantic field of death. Instead, it is the definitive change in the emotional state of the family from laughing to constant crying that implicates the “serious illness” as terminal without explicitly saying so. Since the father is dead for years at the time of the recording, and this I was also aware of through Adel, this lexical suppression of his death I don’t think is motivated by the maintenance of some narrative suspense for the sake of the listener. So the non-lexicalization of the death is pointing in the direction of the Narrator, it is her who may be in need of persuasion. Taken together with the other two linguistic devices, the third specificity, namely the voice presentation technique, may provide an insightful interpretation that can explain why the Narrator-Author is in need of the persuasion so much so that she is broken down into unexpected tears in the course of the narrating. The death of the father, unlike the absolute happiness, is not recounted through the Narrator’s voice at the time of the narrating but through that of the brother’s only reported by the Narrator, this way evoking a past time belonging to the narrated event then and there. The corollary of this is that the Narrator gets constructed as one of the characters listening to the brother’s gloomy prediction at the time back in the family house. The voice presentation and the choice of words have the combined effect of a subtle distancing: the Narrator tries to stay outside the discourse of death. Consequently, to the extent the current tears are triggered by the old emotional disposition as evoked by the Adel-character at the time they are intertextualized. However, to the extent the old tears are recontextualized within the favourable discourse of the evaluation of the narrating event ‘now’ they are a kind of meta-text, commenting on the lifespan retrospectively. But why is this evaluation in tears? This non-verbal communication inscribes an unfavourable question in the temporary equilibrium played out by the voice presentation techniques, implicating some unfavourable self-evaluation. As the re/construction goes on, I, the listener will learn in Unit 6 that the first tears were pointing in the direction of the tension caused by the dilemma regarding the acceptability of the decisions Adels is constructed to have made. That is, the first instance of crying is related intertextually to the second, and only other instance of crying that coincides with the first explicit because self-reflexive wording of the evaluation crisis.

As the few quotes in the evaluation passage above may indicate, Adel is very reluctant to speak explicitly on her own behalf. It is not the voice of a self-reflexive 'I' assuming the responsibility of making the value judgements. The closest we can get to an 'I' is in the protective community of the inclusive 'we' constructing her as either one of the four children ("We had a very beautiful childhood, indeed.") or as a member of the whole of her family, parents included ("We had a very beautiful family life."). Later on, in the course of these evaluative passages the other reference to herself is through the generic use of "a person" (*az ember*). Take, for example, the very next evaluative passage, which introduces the second structural unit, that of the childhood years in terms of the existence of her own memories not just ones told to her, like the ones reconstructed in the first unit. The referent of the generic 'person' is established as 'I' through the possessive suffix *-m* (equivalent of English 'my') and the possessive pronoun *sajat* ('own') in the PP "from my own life" ('a *sajat* *eletembol*'). "Well I can see from my own life, that this is so. That a person works from morning till night so that s/he<sup>8</sup> can live. But this [work all day] did keep them [the parents] busy." (*Hat most a saját eletembol latom, hogy ez így van. Hogy reggeltől estig dolgozik az ember ahhoz, hogy meg tudja elni, de ez [az egész napos munka] lekötötte őket [a szülőket]*). These linguistic choices are constructing a person who has been forced to submit herself to the needs of her two families and by implication to her father and her husband. When I analyze her dilemma in terms of non-verbal communication, I'll point out that it is precisely this 'willing' submission she cannot help crying about in the course of the narrating.

The other equally possible interpretation for the domination of an inclusive 'we' is her strategy to use the occasion of the interview for writing the history of the life of her extended family; to use it as a tribute, an unexpected chance to give voice to her gratitude in public. Hence the predominance of the inclusive 'we', the focus on the parents, even the grandparents and her four siblings, then on her husband and the three children. In fact 70 % of the interview time is dedicated to this oral family photograph.<sup>9</sup>

This reluctance to construct the life story centered upon the 'I' takes us to the other possible structuring of the narrative, to a *hierarchy* of the structures themselves. As I have shown, the chronological ordering of the

numerous life events are structured into eight units measured against the norm of the parental model. There is another possible structure principle: the emergence of the autonomous voice of the self in and through the emergence of the dilemma. Here, there are only three units. The first comprises the first five developmental stages of Adel's life, covering all the events of her life from birth to the moment of the actual recording, right before the beginning of the explicit formulation of her dilemma: "Well, I was born in 45." / "So that now we are doing that more peaceful everyday routine, ... and in the meantime my children are growing. So that we have reached the stage where they are completely grown up." ( From: *Hat '45-ben szulettem. To: Ugyhogy aztan azt akis nyogodtabb mindennapi munkankat csináljuk, ... es kozben nonek a gyerekeink. Ugye, mostmar ott avgyunk, hogy egészen felnottek, ...*) All this is Adel's life always through a relation to some other/s. Then comes the eruption of the so far repressed voice of the self-reflexive 'I' formulating her dilemma and the resolution; a unit dominated by the pronoun 'I'. This takes up the whole of Unit 6. Finally there comes the third one, a return to the submitted/submissive voice of the 'we'—comprising Unit 7 & 8 . This last unit closes on the resigned tone of a brief recontextualization of the dilemma and resolution. That is, the narrating comes to an end that emphasises the acceptance of her life as submitted.

The dominant presence of the 'I' in Unit 6 is preceded though on two occasions, in Unit 4 and 5. The difference is that these previous contexts are more mediated in the sense that it is the Character-Adel that comes to be centered on in two stories related to her work experience, and thus the 'I' belongs in the narrated event. Whereas the context of the dilemma is more immediate in the sense that it is the Narrator-Adel who gets foregrounded as the self-evaluating 'I', and thus belongs in the narrating event. What is noteworthy about the two stories is that they both construct the adel-Character as succesful negotiator with the hostile public institutions: first with the local council in her first work place then with the staff of the local primary schools in the Jaszszag region, where she and her husband moved into after three years in their careers. This time I would like to explore the first story in order to reveal the contradictory positions Adel takes up when evaluating her lifespan.

This story is embedded in the context of how she got her first job after graduation and marriage, which were on the same day, observing her father's demand not to marry before graduation. The contextualization of the decision making is as follows: "We ended up in Dunaujvaros, because my husband had a scholarship. [...] and then his scholarship was for Fejer County. And it had the condition reading that [he] had to spend as many years in the county as many years they helped. [...] To Nagykata [her parents' place] we couldn't go because, because, because, mmm, well as for me, in any case I wanted to get married at the time. My father said though that it would not be that important [Laughs], but this I did not want, this ...[...] That is I would have liked to go home otherwise, because my father had a complete [surgery] equipment, so I would have been able to work there, or we would have been able to work there ...So we got to Dunaujvaros." (*Dunaujvarosba kerultunk, mert a ferjemnek osztondija volt [...] es akkor Fejer megyebe szolt az osztondija. Es ugy szolt az osztondija, hogy ahany evet segitettek, annyi evet ott kellett tolni abban a megyeben. [...]Nagykatara [szulok lakhelye] azert nem mehettunk, mert , mert, mert , oo ugye en mindenkeppen akkor mar ferjhez akartam menni. edesapam mondta ugyan, hogy nem lenne a olyan fontos [nevet], de en nem akartam, ezt a ...[...] Ugyhogy en szerettem volna egyebkent hazamenni, mert edesapamnak egy teljes felszerese volt, tehat en tudtam volna ott dolgozni, vagy tudtunk volna ott dolgozni , ... Nahat elkerultunk Dunaujvarosba.*)

What I would like to analyse here is the absence of self-reflexivity regarding the decision making itself. The extremely contradictory interests she had to negotiate across at the time are not commented on now. To this extent the Narrator is not questioning the Character's 'decision'. Nevertheless, the contradictory discourses expose the conflicting positions themselves across the various social dimensions of the character's life at the moment of embarking on a supposedly autonomous life. To the extent the contradictions are exposed the multiple positionings call for the listener's evaluation of the decision for herself, thereby functioning as a key narrative device for creating intersubjective involvement on behalf of the listener/analyst. I can identify the following positions: there is the young woman whose wish to get married constructs a female character as a wife in relation to a prospective husband whose job options are limited by his scholarship;

there is the young dentist that constructs a character as the prospective employee at the job market eager to find a promising job; and there is also the daughter that constructs a female character in relation to her father as the prospective inheritor of the father's dentistry equipment, as well as the grown up woman whose implied desire to practice sex constructs her as the non-submitting sexed female character, who cannot be the obedient because sexless girl/daughter of her father any more. Once these positions are teased out, Adel's decision to follow her prospective husband comes to be constructed from within the discourse of sexual pleasure; the one that is not spoken but implicated only by the anaphora 'this' (*ez*) that which without a referent becomes an indexical pronoun, inviting the listener to find a referent for herself. The highly concealed 'presence' of the discourse of sexuality is a conspicuous feature of the whole narrative. This constructs the interview situation to count as a non-appropriate domain for sexual practices.

The actual story of success at work is forged from within the above context and starts like a disaster. Not only did she have no job in town, but in a nearby village which meant commuting. Furthermore, the job was imposed on the local community, in fact because of Kalman's scholraship. The authorities were obliged to give a job to the grantee and a dentist wife was only an extra burden. This way Adel gets constructed as the dependent wife in the public domain of economy. She counts as a labour force in her husband's rights only: even her degree comes to be engendered. But the story continues evoking an ardent, determined professional and a successful negotiator, who manages to win the appreciation of the local authorities and gets the money to furnish her own surgery.

"Whereas I got a job in a nearby village. After all, my job was better than his [Kálmán's], but I had the problem that I had been appointed. And at the time there was this shire municipality. I turned up to report and they informed me that, well, I had got the job but there is no place for me to work, because there is no surgery. No equipment, no surgery. Well at this I got very desperate. Because, you see, I thought if I am appointed to a place, and if I get a salary, then somewhere I must commute every day. So that I bought a travel pass and every day I did go out to this nowhere

and was there in snow, and in rain. And at the municipality they told me after I had reported every day throughout a week that they are very fed up with me going there. Because they had not applied for this status. From here everybody commuted to Dunaujvaros for dentistry. They did not want a surgeon. If I want something then I should do it. Well this, this-, this was horrible. [...] Then the principal trusted me so much that I was given a stamp, as well as a check, and I commuted to Pest [Budapest, the capital] to find the equipment.”

*(“En pedig egy kozeli faluban kaptam allast, vegulis az en allasom meg jobb volt, mint az ove [Kalmane], csak nekem az volt a gondom, hogy kineveztek, es akkor meg jarasi hivatal volt, bementem jelentkezni, es kozoltek velem, hogy hat az allast elnyretem, de nincs ahol dolgozzam, mert nincs rendelo. Nincs berendezes, nincs rendelo. Hat ezen en teljesen ketsegbesetm. Mert ugye en ugy gondoltam, hogyha en ki vagyok nevezve valahova, es hogyha en fiztest kapok, akkor nekem valahova minden nap ki kell jarni. Ugyhogy en megvettem a buszberletet es minden nap ki is mentem a semmibe es ott voltam a hoban es a vizben es a tanacson kozoltek velem, miutan mar minden nap megjelentem egy heten keresztul, hogy ok mar nagyon unjak azt, hogy en odajarak, mert ok nem kertek ezt az allast, innen miondenki bejart Dunaujvarosba fogaszatra, ok nem akartak ide fogaszatot, ha akarok valamit, csinaljam. [...] Aztan a jarasi vezeto ugy megbizott bennem, ugyhogy pecsetet kaptam, meg csekket kaptam, es Pestre jartam fol muszereket keresni”)*

The more of the specific details of the first week in the Adel-Character’s work-place, the greater the impossibility of the situation becomes. In this sense, the means of referentiality, creating a trustworthy Adel-Narrator could be counter-effective, had it not been for the imaginary of the winter scene in this unnamed vilage, this ‘nowhereland’. I can see the fragile figure struggling with the severe whether condtions, making her way in the deep snow on an early freezing winter morning, tired with the early morning wake-up and bus journey, as if going nowhere in the strange village, ending up in fact in the office of the local authorities. This spatial continuity constructed between the winter street and the office implicates another continuity, that of the severe climate of the forthcoming negotiations. All these details are there to invite me, the listener to sympathize with this hero fighting with the snow and the authorities. And

I do. I am concerned about the outcome.

The story, to my engaged self's relief, ends in the self-reflexive voice of the Narrator-Author making an unconditioned favourable evaluation of her first job, the first three years of her career: "So that I ran a very good school dentistry. I looked after the children while I had no equipment to work with. And also the usual enlightenment activities, talks, practicing, everything. So that in the end I loved to be there a lot. And, ... It was good to be there. I was by myself. it was good to be there. And then, in the meantime kalam finished his military service, and we moved from rents to rents. And every weekend we rushed home to my parents." (*Ugyhogy, nagyon jó iskolafogaszatot csináltam. Szurtem a gyerekeket addig, amíg nem volt mivel dolgoznom. Meg a szokásos felvilágosító munka, előadás, gyakorlás, minden. Ugyhogy végülis nagyon szerettem ott lenni. Es ... jó jó volt ott lenni. Egyedül voltam, jó volt ott lenni. Aztán Kalman leduta közben a katonaságot, közben egyik alberletből mentünk a másikba. Es minden hetvegen úgy rohantunk haza a szüleimhez.*)

What is most relevant to me in this self-evaluation is the emphasis on an existence that is lonesome and this loneliness is evaluated absolutely positive. This successful negotiator and dentist is in fact an autonomous being, who is able to get her professional interests, values recognized by the state apparatuses. What's more, who is also autonomous in relation to her husband. The loneliness is not that of the lonely wife since Kalman is said to return in the middle of all these fights to bring about a decent school dentistry. The 'loneliness' means that she has the space to make all sorts of decisions and very important ones, for that matter, by herself, there is no need for a 'mutual decision making' (see Unit 7 & 8). In fact, later on she adds that this was the only time when they were not employed by the same authorities or firms. That is, this is the only point in the auto/biographical narrative when she comes to be the autonomous being who does not (have to) feel obliged first to justify her right to have her own voice in order to have it heard. And also, she can achieve it without any tedious structurally prefigured exlusions, which are otherwise at the expense of her own interests. Whatever exlusions she had to make in the course of her decisions about the surgery as long as there are no discourses undermining the equilibrium of this non-repressive identity, she is construced as a self

who does not have to differentiate her own interests from those of the others at the expense of repression: exclusion, delineating a difference, is not intertwined with repression. However, this period must come to an end, precisely when she becomes pregnant with the first child. At that point, the father reappears in the scene and gets a job for Kalman in the Jaszrag region, in Adel's, homeplace. And this pregnancy 'happens' to coincide with the end of the three years Kalman had to stay in Dunaujvaros. Adel is said to have come to love her job while Kalman is said to be unhappy about his. So Adel's chances to stay in the job are undermined twice, and in each case the division is gendered: the mother and the wife set against the dentist.

If I take into consideration this unique story of success, which is successful precisely because it is constructed from within the position of the autonomous being, I claim that the complex structural hierarchy of the life span narrative implies a reformulation of Adel's dilemma from an openly critical stance. Instead of the less political, less self-reflexive question 'Did I make the right decision between my career and family?' we may have the unequivocal formulation: 'Is it right to accept one's submission to the patriarchal order?', which is implicated by the structural hierarchy of the embeddedness and by the story of relational self-autonomy.

However, the formulation of the dilemma is from within a discourse of crisis over the non-availability of a non-repressive, inclusionary relation. The pattern of Adel's life is informed by a sacrificial logic. The actual hegemonic relationships she is constructed to be in are such that in the course of struggle over what counts as an acceptable or an unacceptable exclusion she can never forge a position from where she could achieve that to make a decision which inevitably implicates the exclusion of certain other interests, this exclusion should not be conflated with oppression/suppression of the other interests. To the extent the self is constructed through these decision making practices, she can never achieve an autonomous identity where the differentiation from the other would not have to be automatically threatening and thus to be 'legitimately' suppressed. That is to the extent her self is enmeshed within a dominantly heterosexual patriarchal hegemonic



society her chances to escape it are extremely low. So the only story of escape when it comes to the overall estimation of the lifespan through the dilemma is suppressed by the dominant hegemonic discourse. All she can do is cry about the lost chance. Lost because now she is all too tired and exhausted. In the last two minutes of the recording, her life is reconstructed as a long and continuous caring for the others at the expense of her self. The only effort she sees herself to be able to do is to carry on within the same constraints, to keep looking after the children till they finish their university studies and hopefully leave at least her weekends available for rest.

“But big wishes like that,... well, for me, ... to travel I liked very much. That I did with great pleasure, things like that I was very happy to do with him [Kalman]. But great wishes I did not have any because on the one hand,... well, you see, I tried to look after my family, my own family, and then the bigger family, my mother and, and, then, my mother-in-law. All these duties we gradually also took on us because, ‘cause we had to. It was imperative. And from a distance it is difficult to do. And often I had the energy left only to have a rest. To sleep. ... And it is like that to date. Since the children are not home any more, only at the weekends, so after a very demanding week one has a very demanding weekend as well. One that is spent on doing household duties.”

*(De olyan nagy vagyaim, ... úgy engem, .. utazni nagyon szerettem, azt nagyon szívesen, szóval ezeket nagyon szívesen csináltam vele együtt [Kalmannal]. ... De olyan nagy vagyaim nem voltak, mert egyrészt a ... hat hogy a családomat igyekeztem ügye, a saját családomat, és akkor utána a nagyobb családot, az edesanyamnak az ellátását, az a, a, a, anyosomnak is az ellátását. ezeket is lassan, lassan a nyakunkba vettük, mert, mert kellett. Azt muszáj volt. És távolságból azt nehéz. És úgy, sokszor már csak arra volt eröm, hogy egy kicsit pihanjek is. Aludhassak. ... És ez a mai napig is így van. Mert, hogy a gyerekek már nincsenek idehaza, hetvegeken vannak, valójában egy elég nehéz het után, az embernek van egy nagyon nehéz hetvegeje. Ami kimondottan hazimunkával telik el. [...]).*

The first explicit and only elaboration of the dilemma, as I have shown, is very belated. It emerges in Unit 6 with the ‘resolution’ following immediately. Then it returns in Unit 8, right before the end

of the interview, but very briefly, in fact only implicated by the explicit reformulation of the resolution. What is worth analysing about Adel's formulation of the dilemma is the non-verbal element, her dramatic break down in tears. The tears are revealing her resentment, her disappointment over her decisions, exposing them as structurally imposed upon her and as such not choices of her own. As effects of disappointment, the tears are working against the resolution anchored in the metaphor of the "fellow traveller". She has two reference points for the bitter comparison at this point. One is the husband, Kalman, about whom what has been worthy of mention before is that he is also a dentist and of the same age and they met at university and spent the five years of study together. Through this comparison they are constructed as equal at the start but through the series of changes of jobs in the course of their marital years she is constructed as the one left behind. Which is all the more painful for her from the point of view of her other reference point, that of her father. Adel has considered him as a husband and father with absolute power in the family and as her ultimate 'judge': "That my father was an absolute directing person./When my father died it was such a blow for our family that, that we simply didn't recover from it at all. We did not know what to do./It is fantastic how much she [my mother] learnt from my father's skills and how much, how well she could direct us." (*Hogy edesapam egy teljesen irányító ember volt.;/ Ahogy edesapam maghalt, hat ez olyan csapás volt a családunknak, hogy, hogy egyszeruen ezt, hat nem is hevertuk ki egyáltalán, ...nem tudtuk, hogy mit kell csinálni; /fantasztikus, hogy [edesanaym] milyen sokat atvett edesapam tudományabol es hogy milyen sokat, hogy szoval milyen jól tudott bennünket irányítani*). His unquestioned role as the head of the family was further supported by his excellent performance in his profession as a surgeon. Adel described him earlier on as a dedicated, excellent professional: "Well, my father was a very good professional and dedicated his life entirely to it [his profession]." (*Na most, az en edesapam nagyon jó szakember volt es es teljesen ennek elt.*)

In the course of the self-reflexive retrospective evaluation then the above passages from previous points of the narrative will intertextually reinforce the father's presence as the ultimate judge over her engendered choice between a good dentist or a caring mother, daughter, daughter-in-law and a wife in the

family. This intertextual reference inscribed in the decision making scene of the dilemma erases a differentiation on the verbal level between the voice of the father and that of the Character-Adel: she is fully submitting herself to his patriarchal will. She must have a degree, yes, but one that will not impede her 'female duties'. But the voice presentation technique makes way for the critiquing voice of the Narrator-Adel. First this critique is partial when done in the free indirect speech – through the quasi-anaphora status of 'I' in the last clause, the presence of the future tense forms, and the disappearance of the reporting clause from before the last clause. This partiality opens up the boundary between the Character-Adel and the Narrator-Adel and thereby giving way to an implied critique of the authoritative father and herself. After all, it was the father who made the choice on behalf of her, and she submitted herself to his will. In the next step then this partiality gives way to a fully critiqueing Narrator-Adel via the direct speech of the self-reflexive evaluation of the Narrator. In this context then the father's expectation of her to make an good job is weighing down on her now and comes to be critiqued as the unbearable because impossible imperative.

The free indirect presentation of the Character-Adel in the decision making scene: "When he said, my Father that he is very happy that I am going to be a dentist, because it is a very good profession, and that I will do this[the profession of a dentist] well.' (*Edesapam mikor azt mondta, hogy nagyon orul, hogy fogorvos leszek, mert ez egy nagyon jó szakma, és hogy én ezt jól fogom csinálni.*)

The direct speech presentation of the speaking Narrator-Author 'here' and 'now' explicitly critiquing her father: "I don't know, but he did not take into consideration that how insensibly much of physical energy is needed for this." (*Nem tudom, csak azt nem vette figyelembe, hogy azért ehhez milyen eszmeletlen fizikai erő kell.*)

I would say that it is this twofold measure represented by the two male figures, Kalman, the dentist husband and the surgeon father against which the assessment of her professional performance counts as a practical 'failure'. Therefore her conscious, i.e. verbal assessment of her decision for excellent performance in the family, the justifying reason/s for her decision cannot suppress the unverballed emotional resentment and pain: Why were not they forced to make such a decision between career and family?

In discourse analytical terms, through this non-verbal modality of crying the division of labour comes to be engendered.

The first moment of crying very early on in the interview by the force of intertextuality bears upon this second instance and to that extent is implicated in the process of the reconstruction of the self at this moment. What is also of importance here to know is that when Adel comes to the actual death of her father in the chronological relay of her life events (months after Adel's first child's birth) in Unit 5, she is not crying. Also, when she talks about the death of her mother and the consciencious and demanding caring – so much so that she even goes on an indefinite unpaid leave off work – she performs for three months at her bed, she does not cry either. So the tears are not attributable only to Adel's pain over the vacuum the father's death left behind. After all, that was not the case in the first instance either. The relationship between the tears and the father's death can be explained through the passages after the restart of the recording.

When I turn on the recorder again at Adel's request, she asks me to recontextualise, to relocate her in the flow of the auto/biography. So what does not get recorded in her voice is recalled in mine: "You said about your Dad that he asked you to take care of the children." (*Azt mondtad az apukadrol, hogy arra kert, vigyazzal a gyerekekre.*) That is, it was in actual fact her father's request on his death bed, only five months after her first child's birth, addressed to Adel to make the decision in favour of the family. The first occasion of her crying on the first mention of her father's death from this point of view then can be interpreted as the emergence of the dilemma but kept in control. There is the dutiful daughter's task yet to perform, that is first to pay tribute to the family with the overarching presence of the father and then she may dedicate some space to her own self.

On the level of her non-verbal communication, her retrospective evaluation of the decision is negative. Hence the crying. It is only on the verbal level where her "ultimate" assessment is favourable provided by the reconciliatory position of the metaphor of the self, the 'fellow-traveller'. The crying is the non-verbal answer to the unspelt questions addressed to herself: 'Is this what he meant by that last order for me? Did I get the priorities right? But then how could I expect myself to be a good

dentist as well? The crying is fusing the tension between the contradictory assessments.

The return of the dilemma at the end of the interview is also noteworthy for the non-verbal behaviour: for her laughter. The laughter, combined with an emotional exclamation constructing the speaker helpless: "Oh, my God!" (*Jaj, Istenem!*), is coreferential with the instances of crying. Here again, on the explicit level of verbal communication the Narrator-Author does not go back on her resolution. However, in terms of her emotional state she questions the validity of the reconciliation.

This is not the only instance of laughter. The emergences of 'laughing' (like that of crying) seems strategic. Their function is to avoid an open, explicit confrontation with a particular character. The laughter can achieve this avoidance by indicating the tension of the contradictory points of views through 'voicing' the narrator's less privileged position in comparison with a character constructed as the more powerful. For example, when telling the story of her elder sister, the only one of the four children who dared to fight with their father, the laughter works against the "tractable child", the Character-Adel. The validity of this self-categorization on the verbal level is played out through the fragmented time-shifts: First there is the university student willing with a bit of reluctance to accept her father's demand not to marry before graduation; then there is the little girl listening to the threatening row between her father and her big sister anchoring this obedience back in the early teens of age, functioning like the lesson to learn; and finally there is a shift in time back to the row between sister and father precisely about marriage which implicates Adel as the tractable child again but now near graduation. In the course of this shifting back and forth in time there is no verbalized time left for continuing the parallel between the sister's run-away and the Character-Adel's silent stay. What we have is the embarrassed retrospective laughter of the Narrator-Adel now. "Well, for me this [to get married after university as demanded by their father] was not that difficult for me to do because, because I was a fairly tractable child. Well, with my elder sister, shall we say, it was a conflict situation. Anyhow, she took after my father. I mean her nature. So they sometimes had awful fights, just for that reason. When she wanted to get married before graduation. Well the, it was ... that well, .... then you can go

out into the world. And then she even left (Laughing).’ (*Hat mondjuk, nekem nem volt olyan nehéz ezt [diploma után ferjhezmenni] megcsinalni, mert en elegge kezelhető gyerek voltam. Mondjuk a noveremmel az már konfliktus helyzet volt. Egyebkent is edesapamra hasonlított, már természetre. Es ezért ok nehanyszor úgy összeveszték, éppen ezért. Mikor ferjhez akart menni allamvizsga előtt. vagy-vagy egyebkent valami más miatt, hogy akkor ugye az volt, hogy na, akkor mehetsz vilagga! Es akkor meg el is ment [a noverem]! [Nevet]*)

In the light of this strategic, evaluative use of laughing in the course of the narrating, Adel’s laughter at the end of the interview is intertextualized as the non-verbal questioning of the value of her husband’s excellence, named as his ‘meticulousness’. I also argue that what is not spelt out here verbally is the price of his so called ‘excellence’: Adel’s self-sacrifice for him. In this sense, the final laughter is implicated as self-critique as well. If this reflexivity about the unequal share of duties should get verbalised, that would threaten the delicate equilibrium of the resolution of her dilemma recounted right here. It must get suppressed by the avoidance strategy of her embarrassed laughter.

### **Metaphors as devices for constructing a unified position of selfhood**

The exact formulation of the metaphor of the self is as follows: “And ... some road-companion role I filled in. = I fulfilled the role of some fellow-traveller”. (*Es ... olyan utitárs szerepet toltottem en be.*) The various discourses brought in by the metaphor are as follows. Partly it bears on the tourism discourse of travelling (see mention of their favourite activity of travelling all over Europe every summer in Unit 7). Furthermore, to the extent it is the trajectory of the whole of the lifespan the road comes to mean, it brings in the ethical discourse of existence. And read against the various instances of the physical demand this life is constructed to impose on the travellers, the metaphor brings in the economic discourse of hard labour. The self is constructed at the intersection of these differential discourses as a traveller embarking on a long and demanding journey about the destination of which there is only one thing to know, that it will

come to an end. “If either of us dies, then I don’t know how the other will ...[survive it]. Hmm. It’ll be hard, I think.” (*Hogyha valamilyikunk meghal, akkor nem is tudom, hogy a másik hogyan fogja ezt ... Hmmm megeleni.*), says Adel in Unit 8, towards the end of the recording.

There is one more discourse brought to bear intertextually on this metaphor, that of the discourse of gender. To the extent the difficulty, the demanding nature of life is constructed to mean a series of various degrees of repression as a woman, this road is engendered, and by implication, the self that is constructed at the intersection of these discourses comes to be engendered as well.

What is important to mention at this point is that the emergences of the dilemma are intertwined with a discourse of existence through the thematization of death as well. It is framing the auto/biographical discourse of selfhood. I have pointed out the implication of death as the inevitable destination at the end of the life narrative. It is also constructed as inseparable from the very beginning of Adel’s life. The recording starts like this: “Well, I was born in ’45. I was born in 1945, November 2nd. This was noteworthy, because I always added that I was born on ‘the dead’s day.” (*Hat ‘45-ben szulettem. 1945-ben szulettem, november 2-an. Ez azert volt erdekes, mert mindig hozzatettem, hogy halottak napjan szulettem.*) That is, she was born on November 2nd, when in Hungary people go to the cemetery to light a candle for the redemption of the souls of their beloved.

I would like you to explore the specific details in the subsequent passage before interpreting the relevance of the theme of death. She is described by the Narrator as a newly born baby as follows: (*Es megszulettem este, ... Nem, nem este. Valahogy masnap reggel hajnalba. Es akkor ugyanugy ki volt azva a kezem, mint az o keze a sok mosasba.*) The details regarding the exact timing of her birth are doing more than simply creating an authorial, reliable Narrator. Intertextualized by the subsequent detail of the withered hands, they are also establishing an intersubjective rapport between Narrator and Listener. The little folds in the hands become almost tactile. Their fragility when intersected by the image of the mother’s adult hands withered by the hard labour of washing some lamb’s wool is setting the moving, highly emotional atmosphere of the next three hours. I am

invited to relate to the painful hardship implied by the withered hands to come. As the prospective trajectory at the moment of birth is implied through the parallel imagery between the mother and the daughter, the Adel-Character's life is engendered and is to be full of hardships.

How can I account for this intersection of the dimensions of existence and gender at the very beginning of the life in the light of the whole of it as it gets re/constructed? My explanation is that Adel is doing more than resolving an emerging current dilemma of her life. To the extent the dilemma is engendered and also constructed as one that can traverse the whole of the lifespan its resolution is an explicit retrospective evaluation of her 'lived life' as a 'woman', extrapolating her dilemma as one concerning the whole life of a female being. I would say therefore that Adel is using the recording situation in a strategic way as an occasion of the evaluation of her life from a gendered point of view: from her actual birth to the current moment of retrospective evaluation and through that, by implication, to her future death. The narrative is grappling with the questions of 'Has she lived her life successfully in terms of the gendered positions available for her against the abstract and absolute measure of death as well as against the specific end of her own life? How should she live it now that she has made the evaluation?'

Through the universal discourse of existence Adels gets constructed as the evaluator of her lifespan at the final moment of her death in the future. This existential position gets intersected by the discourse of gender at the moment of the now where the actual dilemma of an immediate concern gets sorted out with the help of the metaphor. This way the current moment of judgement of the narrating event gets extrapolated: if the immediate dilemma can be sorted out, that is, if the metaphor of the self can construct a position of resolution, then there is hope for Adel to be able to arrive at a favourable assessment at the end of her life as well, then reconstructed in the genre of an obituary.

Adel's dilemma in the course of the re-emergence in Unit 8 is not accompanied by any tears any more, the laughter's momentary disruption is resolved instantaneously. The peaceful equilibrium achieved through the metaphor is reinvoked here again through the happiness the other's achievement can bring for her: (*Nalunk peldaul az nekem nagyon nagy*



*dolog volt, hogy Kalman ilyen jó képességgel volt a maga szakmájában. és engem ez kielgített. Hogy ő olyan szép dolgokat tudott csinálni. Az olyan, mintha én csináltam volna.[...] Es en mindig is sokat dicseretem, mert az neki nagyon fontos, hogy valaki legalább dicserje, ha mes nem, akkor en.)* The journey, the road ahead of the couple, is going to be covered under the same pleasurable conditions; there is no need to change. She is going to continue to be the supporter, the care-giver of/for the husband through the spacial extrapolation of the metaphor: throughout the journey, by implication bringing in the traditional heterosexual discourse of marriage ceremony: 'till death us do depart'. And this is intersected with the explicit formulation of the theme of death again, matching the opening theme of death in relation to her birth. The family photograph is framed within ethical imperative of a life worthy of living: *(Es hogy olyan, olyan sok mindenben kiegecsítjük egymást, hogyha valamelyikünk meghal, akkor nem tudom, hogy a másik hogyan fogja ezt ... oo megelni.)*

The anxiety is constructed to be caused by the equal sense of loss the other should suffer from. We have the two apparently identical and so undistinguishable characters suffering from the loss of the partner. However, what I have explored before throughout the multiple positionings in the lifespan narrative should undermine this resigned favourable closure. The momentary cohesion of the self can immediately be shattered by asking the question: What exactly are they going to suffer once left by themselves, alone? Kalman to the extent he is dependent on Adel's unconditioned support for his social existence is going to suffer from all sorts of services. How is he going to secure another source? Whereas in Adel's case I cannot help intertextualizing the state of loneliness and ask: Might she be able to regain some autonomous existence again, like at the very beginning of her career? Or is her exhaustion unredeemable? Either way, this hypothetical extension of the reading process is here only to prove that the achieved cohesion at the end of the narrative is indeed momentary. In this sense, the whole process of the narrating event itself is only a contingent moment in Adel's life. Therefore, the emerging autobiographical text once reconstructed in/through the interview achieves only a temporary fixity, but as such it opens up infinite prospective re-readings and re-writings,

through which it can potentially reshape her life and that of any other reader/writer engaging with it, like myself, or you now.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> I am using 'dilemma' defined by Michael Billig *et al.* (1988:163) as "social situations in which people are pushed and pulled in opposing directions...[that] impose an assessment of conflicting values ... born out of a culture which produces more than one hierarchical arrangement of power, value and interest". In their example, gender in contemporary industrial society is a dilemma informed by the ideological dilemma of

the liberal individual evolving around the vexed question of how far to generalize in a 'fair' society. To the extent that human variation of the needs in the allocation of rights and resources as goal to be achieved in a 'fair' society can be seen to be obscured by gender categories they are considered to impede a 'fair' social structure. However, categorization in terms of gendered groups contravenes not only the value of individuality but that of human equality as well in so far as gender imposes differences between human beings and thus precludes human equality, the value on which the autonomy of the individual is based on.

<sup>2</sup> See the whole tradition of feminist thinking about the concept of 'identity' going back to Simone de Beauvoir's *The second sex*. There she argues that personal or collective identities are always achieved in opposition to, and therefore through an attempt at excluding an Other. That identity is a 'negativity' because it is necessarily the product of the hierarchical subject-object divide: the negation of the (female) object by the (male) subject.

<sup>3</sup> I am aware of a tradition in feminist writings on autobiography that assumes the differences of women's autobiographical writings from that of men instead of considering this difference as the objective of their research. These assumptions are summed up in Dona Stanton's (1984) critique in *The female autograph*. The so-called female qualities should be a fragmented, digressive narrative; a highly confessional mode through themes from the personal, private domain of life; and finally an emphasis on the relationship of the self to the other. Stanton's deconstruction of this latter 'feature' contends that this manifestation of difference may be interpreted in fact as a strategic conformation to propriety and thus not indicative of any 'real' difference. Instead, she theorizes women's autobiography as a source for changes in women's life, as "an act of self-assertion that denied and reversed women's status" (14).

I agree that no list of apparent 'features' can be the legitimate objective of a critical theorization. (See Foucault, 1991: 389, on the meaning of critical analysis: one tries to see how these different solutions to a problem have been constructed; but also how these different solutions result from a specific form of problematization). However,

Stanton's alternative interpretation of the salient presence of the other as well as the theorization of the genre is problematic to me on two accounts. Firstly, she fails to satisfy her own critical expectations when she does not problematize the contents of this 'propriety', leaving the dominant normative expectations regarding women's behaviour homogeneous. Secondly, what she in fact fails to provide is an explanation that escapes the binary essentializing logic of the dominant/resistant divide. As a result, against her best theoretical intentions, her alternative explanation enmeshes women's autobiographical practices further in a masculinist ideology. For the emphasis on propriety implicates women as enacting 'the' norm and leaving them with the only option of a resistance to it through the "therapeutic purpose" of self-assertion. What she fails to see from such a position is that this resistance is always already being presupposed by the norm, leaving women with the possibility of reaction, depriving them of any theorization of the chances of pro-action that should be informed by a non-hierarchical theorization of 'difference'.

<sup>4</sup> The distinction between the narrated and the narrating event for analytical purposes in oral history research was drawn by K. Borland's "*That's not what I said*": *interpretative conflict in oral narrative research*. In: S. B. Gluck & D. Patai (eds.): *Womens' words: the feminist practice of oral history*. Routledge, 1991. I think her distinction should be informed by the work of Gerard Genettes's (1980) *Narrative discourse*.

<sup>5</sup> Later on I should take this up and try to match this with the non-repressive model of identity.

<sup>6</sup> Deborah Tannen provides the following example at the beginning of her article: "I wish you were here *to see the sweetpeas coming up*" (*ibid.*: 31). She compares this with a version where the non-finite clause, which I underlined here, is missing and claims that the evocative force of the first version is provided but the detail of the sweetpeas through creating an image that can function as an emotional trigger against the second version's abstract idea of absence.

<sup>7</sup> This reformulation comes from John Shotter (1993:7), who provides a "rhetorical-responsive [conception of identity]" focusing on what it means to have one's own voice as a result of the discursive negotiations

we engage in in relation to others, and how that voice is revealing of our identity. The criterion for becoming a citizen of a community is to have a voice listened to as of right.

- <sup>8</sup> The Hungarian language does not differentiate amongst the personal pronouns in terms of gender. There is only one third person singular pronoun for human beings ‘\_’. The semantic distinction that is made is in terms of humanness. So all the referents that are non-human will be referred to as ‘az’, etimologically the same as the demonstrative pronoun ‘az’ (that). Therefore my choice with the slash inserted in ‘s/he’ is the representation of this non-existent distinction.
- <sup>9</sup> It would be interesting to see here the various explicit ways of self positionings as members of a social collective or through the attribution of a common feature to oneself or through the possession of a collective-typical referent. See my own analysis of this feature in Barát, 1997:141-144).