”WE’RE IN BETWEEN”

MULTIREKLÁM
EUvolucio

- AN ANALYSIS OF YOUNG HUNGARIANS’ RELATIONS TO NATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IDENTITY

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1 INTRODUCTION: GETTING TO KNOW THE FIELD 3
1.1 Defining the field 3
1.2 The thesis 5
1.3 Budapest 7
1.4 Introducing my informants 10
1.4.1 Zoltán 11
1.4.2 Tamás 13
1.4.3 Dóra 15
1.5 Horizontal and vertical coherence 18
1.6 A popular characterization: To be in between 19

2 FIELDWORK AND ANALYSING THE FIELD 22
2.1 Being in the field 22
2.2 The settings 23
2.2.1 Collecting data 24
2.3 Being part of the field 26
2.4 A note on validity 27
2.5 Anthropology and the aftermath of Communism 28
2.6 The inevitable road to transition? 30
2.7 After transition? 32
2.7.1 Social conditions 35
2.8 Europeanization 36

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK 38
3.1 Imagined Communities 39
3.2 Hungary and Europe as symbols 41
3.3 Boundaries 43
3.4 Habitus – practice as embodied knowledge 44

4 LANGUAGE SKILLS AS SYMBOLIC CAPITAL 46
4.1 Europeanization and foreign language skills 46
4.2 An alien in Budapest - My interaction with Hungarians 47
4.3 Learning languages 48
4.4 Symbolic capital: pride and embarrassment 51
4.5 Status in language skills 53
4.6 Symbolic capital for whom? 54
4.7 Being a European Hungarian 56

5 SOCIAL RELATIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE 59
5.1 *SO* Hungarian 59
5.2 Criticising service 60
5.3 A subtle duel – an example 61
5.4 Protecting Islands 62
5.5 Historical conditions 64
5.5.1 From socialist to capitalist rationale 65

5.6 'In Europe they have better service' 67

6 IMAGES OF HUNGARY 69
6.1 Social memory and belonging 70
6.1.1 Hungary in 'headlines' 72
6.1.2 'Hungarians are pessimistic' 75
6.1.3 Hungary as historical nation 79
6.1.4 Hungary as 'in between' 82
6.2 Summing up 84

7 BETWEEN EAST AND WEST 88
7.1 The Symbolic Landscape of Europe 88
7.2 Europe as symbol 89
7.2.1 Their Europe 91
7.3 The regions of Europe 96
7.3.1 Their view of the regional division 98
7.4 The European Union – a formalized ideology 104
7.4.1 Their view of the EU 106

8 CONCLUSION 112
8.1 Social change during transition 112
8.2 Europeanization and new expectations 114
8.3 The 'European Hungarians' 116
8.4 Being European the Hungarian way 118

9 BIBLIOGRAPHY 120

10 ABSTRACT 126

1 INTRODUCTION: GETTING TO KNOW THE FIELD

1.1 Defining the field

How do changes at the level of politics, economics and international relations affect people at the level of everyday life? This rather broad and general question has intrigued me throughout my anthropological studies. The developments taking place in the post-socialist[1] countries the last 15 years, of which eight recently accessed the European Union, are examples of such fundamental changes, necessitating the 'remaking of cultural identities' (Kürti & Langman 1997:1). The fall of the Iron Curtain dividing Europe into Eastern and Western Europe caused a 'remapping of the contours of Europe' (ibid) and opened up for new identifications and relations between citizens, countries and regions of Europe. I chose to study how these changes affected young Hungarians and their relation to national and European identity. How do these young well-educated people see themselves in the midst of the changes Hungary is seeing? And how do they perceive Hungary's position in a Europe that is restructuring itself?

Why Hungary? This was a question I heard countless times during my 4½ months stay in Budapest, Hungary, between August and December 2004. I developed a standard answer: 1) it is one of the new EU-countries, 2) it belongs to the post-socialist sphere, and thus I assumed 'more changes' would take place here. Besides, I had been in Hungary and

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[1] I follow anthropologist Katherine Verdery in her distinction between socialism and communism. She writes: "Because none of the countries of the former Soviet bloc claimed to have reached the stage of 'communism', calling themselves 'socialist republics', I generally use the term 'socialist', alternating on occasion with 'communist' either for stylistic reasons or to signal specifically the Communist Party element of those regimes." (1999:3, footnote 14)

Budapest before and had some prior knowledge about the country. I found Hungary interesting in many ways: the Magyar people and language is distinctively different from its regional neighbours in origin[2]; the Hungarians are very aware of the nation's history that goes a thousand years back, a history closely intermingled with the history of the great empires of European history (e.g. the Mongols, the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg monarchy of Austria-Hungary, and the Soviet Union). Now the country is a member of the EU with more borders to non-EU-countries than any other EU-country[3]. Simultaneously, Hungary's population is more ethnically homogenous than most other Eastern Central European countries because the Hungarian territory was reduced drastically after World War I.

Hungary's official EU-accession on 1 May 2004 was the climax of 15 years of striving for recognition in Western Europe. The membership of NATO – the trans-Atlantic defence alliance - became a fact in 1999 and Hungary applied for EU-membership in 1994. The road to membership included many preconditions with adjustments in legal, practical and political fields. This process has consequently created high expectations among Hungarians of material improvements and a reconfiguration of positions in Europe.

This thesis is concerned with the question of positions and images of communities. Labels are attached with meaning and interpretation. When speaking about 'Europe' or

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[2] Hungarian belongs to the Finnish-Ugric family of languages which originated somewhere in Central Asia. Traces of Indian and Iranian words can be found in the languages (which apart from Hungarian includes Finnish, Estonian, Lappish and other smaller and lesser known dialects along the Volga). The Magyars migrated from their original location to the Carpathian Basin during the 9th century, settling between Slavs in the Balkans and Slavs in the North (Pedersen 1924 (1978):93ff). Pedersen's book about the history of languages is quite old, but it is still compulsory reading for students of linguistics and Hungarian at Danish Universities.

[3] Hungary shares border with Slovenia, Austria and Slovakia, all EU member countries and with Ukraine, Romania, Serbia-Montenegro, and Croatia, all of them not (yet) members of the EU.

'Hungary', the terms evoke emotions, evaluations and images in our minds. And these images influence the way we think of ourselves and each other (Kürti & Langman 1997:1).

Thus, my cardinal question addressed in this thesis will be:

HOW DO YOUNG WELL EDUCATED HUNGARIANS RELATE TO HUNGARY AND EUROPE AS IMAGINED COMMUNITIES IN LIGHT OF EU ACCESSION?

By 'relate to' I do not simply mean 'think about', but equally important is the way Hungarian-ness and European-ness comes to expression in my informants' practices and ways of behaviour. So I will discuss how their actions and interactions can illuminate the way they think of Hungary and Europe separately and especially in relation to each other.

The addition 'in the light of the EU accession' serves as a reminder of the political and historical context in which the social processes take place. Hungary's EU-accession is the latest in a series of significant developments the last 15 years, starting in 1989 with the breakdown of the Berlin Wall. But historical legacies from socialist and pre-socialist time will also be included in the analysis.

Before proceeding, I will sketch out the composition of this thesis.

1.2 The thesis

In chapter one I will introduce the field and my informants; I will point to the importance of looking at them and their practices in relation to the Hungarian population in general, introducing HORIZONTAL and VERTICAL COHERENCE as analytical terms.

In chapter two I will discuss methodology, introduce the anthropological literature of post-socialist studies and discuss ‘transition’ in a Hungarian context and what it means to my informants.

In chapter three I will introduce the theoretical framework of the thesis, discussing theoretical concepts such as IMAGINED COMMUNITY, SYMBOLISM, BOUNDARIES and HABITUS.

In chapter four I will analyse the significance my informants attributed to foreign language skills as a resource in Hungary and Europe. I will apply the concept of SYMBOLIC CAPITAL in terms of ‘embarrassment’ and ‘pride’ and argue that to my informants, foreign language skills was a mean to appear as European Hungarians as opposed to just Hungarian.

In chapter five I will analyse social relations in public space which are shaped by HABITUS. I will discuss my informants’ criticism of service in Hungary, which I partly view as a reaction to Europeanization.

In chapter six I will analyse my informants’ images of Hungary, drawing on theories of symbolism, social memory and rituals. I will discuss how my informants’ characterisation of Hungary as being ‘in between’ can be seen as an expression of LIMINALITY. And I will also argue that they draw on VERTICAL COHERENCE when characterising Hungary as a historical nation, while simultaneously stressing the importance of looking ahead to Europe, thereby drawing on HORIZONTAL COHERENCE.

In chapter seven I will turn to my informants’ images of Europe, the regions of Europe and the European Union. I will analyse their interpretations of these labels and discuss how transition has opened up for new possible identities. I will argue that my informants actively deploy in remaking identities, striving to become European Hungarians.

In chapter eight I will conclude on the analyses and discussions of the thesis, and point to answers of the cardinal question. I will also discuss the conclusions in a larger perspective including recent debates within the EU and come with suggestions for further research.

1.3 Budapest

On my way down from my apartment to the metro station Déli pályáudvár on 'the Buda side' of the Danube I meet people on their way to work and to school. Passing the greengrocer I greet him with a "Szía", and he replies. I buy vegetables and fruit there quite often and I am sure they talk about me, 'the stranger who tries to speak Hungarian'.

The Déli train station is as usual full of life and bustle. Passengers run to catch a train. The shops along the platform are opening. The city wakes up, just like the homeless people who have spent the night on a few pieces of cardboard at the foot of the stairs or inside a phone booth. People rush up and down the escalators to the metro; running to catch a bus, or grabbing a newspaper on their way.

We stand close together in the metro swaying back and forth as the train moves, all preparing ourselves for a new day: school children, youngsters, grown ups, and elderly people on their way to the market to get the freshest vegetables. As I get off at the other end of the line on Örs vezér tere I am approached by one of those many people who make a sort of living by handing out flyers. Today's offer is from a language school.

Budapesti Kommunikációs Föiskola (BKF), where I am heading, looks modern compared to the boring, identical blocks of flats surrounding it. The students are standing outside the building smoking and chatting before class. I greet a couple of them and they greet back. They are getting used to me following their classes and asking strange questions.

Today's class is Journalism, and we will be discussing the latest issues in the media. Their American teacher, Jay – who was the one who introduced me to the college – involves me by asking my opinion or by comparing Hungary to Denmark. Despite a slow beginning we end up having a class discussion. Jay is happy with today's class and I promise him I will join tomorrow's on Canada and the UK.

I have arranged an interview with a student and we meet downstairs in the canteen. The other students are noisy, but as soon as the next lesson begins most of them leave. From where I sit I cannot help noticing two huge billboards outside. One of them shows a fancy new car on a blue background; its price is surrounded by twelve yellow stars which reminds me of the EU-flag. I ask the student for his impression of the bill board, and we talk about symbolism and propaganda. The interview takes about 90 minutes and after that I leave BKF and take the metro back to the city centre.

Walking away from the touristy areas around the cathedral, the ostentatious boulevard Andrássy út, and Váci utca, I come to the Central European University. Many of the buildings in the city centre are being restored to their former glory during the Golden Age of Hungary around 1900. Next to CEU is Szabadság tér [Freedom Square], another park in Budapest, with a huge statue commemorating the Soviet liberation of Hungary from the Nazis in 1945. Not far away stands the statue of Imre Nagy, the Communist who tried to free Hungary of its trammels with the Soviet Union in 1956 and was murdered for that in 1958. His statue stands looking out on Kossuth Lajos tér, a square named after one of the leaders of the Hungarian revolt against the Habsburg rule in 1848. Here, thousands of people in 1956 demonstrated in front of the Parliament demanding a more human version of communism. The holes from bullets fired by the Soviet army in the suppression of the demonstration are today marked by iron balls. In front of the magnificent Parliament building hang the Hungarian and the EU flags on equal basis.

The newly renovated Kossuth Lajos tér metro station is a busy place: male and female business people and diplomats in suits rush past me; an elderly woman dressed in traditional clothing - pleated skirt, black shirt and a scarf covering her hair - is selling flowers; students, extremely aware of their looks with trendy clothing and mobile phones hanging in a strap around their neck and fancy sunglasses, are chatting and laughing. I take the metro home to the Buda side.

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Budapest is a city that reflects historical and contemporary changes in Hungary. Many streets and squares are named after national heroes or events, and like statues and monuments, serve as visible manifestations of the past[4]. Today, buildings are being renovated and modernized; shopping malls pop up around the city.

Simultaneously, Budapest is a city where you can still experience pockets of the ‘old days’: elderly women dressed in traditional clothes, shops with window decorations that look as if they have not been changed for the last 30 years, scavengers with their small wagons and worn brooms.

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[4] See also Yampolsky (1995), Grant (2001), and Verdery (1999) for analysis of statues as national symbols.

It was to this city and this context I moved in August 2004 in order to carry out fieldwork for 4½ months. After a while I became familiar with Budapest, but this thesis is a result of the questions that still intrigued me when I left in December 2004. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who helped me before, during and after the fieldwork.

1.4 Introducing my informants

My initial contacts in Budapest all knew Danish people or had been in Denmark; this was how I came to know them. Initial contacts were very important in order to get in contact with more Hungarians and to open up my network, by what Hammersley and Atkinson describe as the 'snowball method' (1995:135). I was consciously trying to get to know young people with different social, educational and geographical backgrounds, but the snowball method does not always you allow you to decide the direction or the speed of the snowball. It was not until one month before departure that I got the possibility to meet and speak with young people who lived outside Budapest, even though I had tried before[5]. I met them in their home towns and cities but I did not have sufficient time to follow their everyday life like I did with the young people in Budapest, which is why I will concentrate on Budapest youth.

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[5] The major difficulty in getting in contact with young people living outside of Budapest seemed to be the language barrier; the people I contacted were nervous about talking to a foreigner, even though I offered to do the interview with an interpreter.

My informants[6] did not all know each other, though a majority of them studied at the same college. They did not belong to a coherent group or network, but they are individuals with common features and it gradually turned out that people I knew through different contacts knew each other. I will therefore say that I moved within a circle of people who had a number of common features: they were young (aged 17-30), urban, well-educated and internationally oriented. This makes it possible to suggest some, although limited, conclusions and generalisations. In the following I will introduce three of my informants: Zoltán, Tamás and Dóra[7].

I met Zoltán, Tamás and Dóra on multiple occasions in Budapest and I interviewed all three of them. I have chosen to introduce these three in more detail than others because in my opinion their lives and attitudes give a useful impression of the young people I met and talked to in Hungary. They have some things in common (e.g. tertiary education) and they differ in some areas (e.g. the number and length of travels, still studying or finished with studies). Each of them contributes in their own way to a picture of the segment of the Hungarian population which I am concerned with.

1.4.1 Zoltán

Some informants had lived outside Hungary for an extended period; Zoltán was one of them. His father got a job at a tourist agency in Köln in West Germany and the family lived there from Zoltán was 3 till he was 6 years old (approximately 1987-1991). He still has good memories from that time and he found that the time in West Germany has affected his worldview of today; for example he was very up-to-date with news in Germany and other Western European countries, and he was still in contact with some of his German friends from that time.

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[6] The people I call my informants are both people I interviewed and other Hungarians I met, observed and interacted with.

[7] The names of my informants have been changed. I promised them anonymous participation in my fieldwork because it benefited their reliance on me and enhanced the chances of their participation in interviews. Some topics concerning national and religious identity were sensitive and were only talked about on condition of anonymity.

When the family returned to Hungary in 1991 they got satellite TV in order to watch the German programs they were used to. "*I always watched German TV. When I watched Hungarian TV is was boring, I could feel the distance.*" Zoltán felt disconnected from the Hungarian way of doing things, and during the interview he criticised the "Eastern mentality" which lagged behind Western Europe in areas such as e.g. corruption.

After finishing high school Zoltán recalled: "*I had no faintest idea of what I should do with myself*", but his parents persuaded him to study foreign trade at BKF for one year. The course was in English, and after completing that year, he decided to study communications at BKF.

Most of the young Hungarians I met moved directly from high school to higher education, and most of them planned to take a diploma of three years, followed by a second diploma. In 2004/2005 3.8 % of the total Hungarian population of about 11 million were studying at university or college level[8]. There is big competition between colleges (föiskola) and universities (egyetem) in Hungary; universities being big and conservative, and colleges being younger and more flexible. Several of the students at BKF had applied for admission at universities, but had failed the entrance exams, thereafter applying at colleges.

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[8] Source: Data of Education (Preliminary data, 2005), a report from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office. The numbers include full-time and part-time students.

When I asked Zoltán what kind of job he would like to have, he was not sure: "*Time will tell.*" Many of the students I spoke with identified 'a good job', 'a family', and maybe 'children' as the most important elements in their future, and very few had concrete plans for jobs and careers, except for one female student, who simply stated: "*I want to be the Minister of Foreign Affairs.*"

Zoltán is typical of a certain segment of my informants who had been living outside Hungary for a longer period, usually in Western Europe. This experience had given him a different approach to Hungary in the sense that he was very explicit and personal when comparing Hungary to countries in Western Europe. A feature about Zoltán's example, general for most of my informants, was the clear expressions of doubts, reflections and insecurity regarding the future.

1.4.2 Tamás

Tamás was 20 years old and in his second year of International Communication at BKF. He was one of the students I noticed during classes, because he was not afraid to speak up and disagree openly with the teacher. He also volunteered for the interview. Most of the students were rather quiet and shy in class, partly because the classes I attended were in English and they were not used to expressing themselves in a foreign language, and partly due to the Hungarian school system which does not promote students' participation.

One of the topics Tamás and the American teacher Jay discussed vivaciously was national identity and nationalism. Tamás explained to me that he was not a nationalist, but "*I believe in a very strong nationality*", as he said. He was also very open to the possibilities offered by Hungary's EU-membership: to travel, study and work abroad. He spoke German and English, and he was learning Czech because the language and the country fascinated him. He had not yet been there because such a trip was too expensive.

Like most Hungarians in their teens and twenties Tamás lived with his family. His parents were artists, and he worked both to supplement the household income and earn pocket money for himself. At the time of the interview he was working at an office two or three days per week. Almost all of the students I talked to had jobs in addition to studying for two reasons: earning money for personal expenses, and making contacts with a view to later employment.

Tamás and I discussed political life in Hungary extensively. He told me that many young people support the parties on the right of the political spectrum because "*They don't want more foreigners and Jews.*" Tamás was more moderate in his views but not the only person who mentioned this attitude. He added: "*I think in every country there is this kind of thinking. It's not only Hungarian.*" Like many of my informants he was concerned about the continuous influx of immigrants but he expressed hopes for the future of Hungary. "*I think the whole living standard will be better. And political life will change.*" But "*Hungary will never be one of the rich countries in Europe.*"

Tamás exemplifies the group of informants which showed a profound interest in learning languages in order to explore other countries. Like most of the students I spoke with, Tamás considered language to be one of the most important resources for future possibilities in Hungary as well as in Europe. For Tamás, believing in strong national identity was not in opposition to being open to the possibilities offered by a more integrated Europe.

1.4.3 Dóra

Dóra was one of the first persons I interviewed. The interview took place in her apartment in central Budapest. It was a mutual friend who established the contact between Dóra and me.

Dóra was in many ways different from the rest of my informants. She was 28 at the time of the interview, and worked as an assistant for an international NGO, which made her more settled than other informants.

She grew up in Budapest as an only child with her mother, an accountant, and her father, who was an electrician. During university Dóra got involved in a youth organization organizing voluntary work camps for youths all over the world. She herself travelled many times in this way, but she was also involved in the administration of the organization. The involvement had many advantages, she told me: learning English properly, meeting people from different countries, exchanging cultural knowledge, travelling, and widening your perspective. What Dóra experienced through her involvement in voluntary work was that many young people were hesitant to work as a volunteer because of the challenge of speaking a foreign language. *"But I think that if they tried they would think: Oh it works! Then they can give it through to their kids, to their children. But I really think that it's like fifteen-twenty years ahead."*

After finishing communication and Spanish studies at the University of Pécs she moved back to Budapest and have since been working in different NGO's, also abroad for shorter periods: in Bulgaria and in the USA. As she admits, *"I'm not this general example,"* in the sense that she took a break between high school and further education and that she has spent a lot of time working as a volunteer.

Dóra was one of the only people I interviewed who had finished her education and was working. In this perspective she is not an appropriate representative for my entire informant group, but can rather be utilised as an example for comparison. Dóra was older than most of my informants and she had many international and personal experiences with the Hungarian civil society. These features became apparent in the interview in the sense that she replied more confident and reflected; her answers were more like a discussion as she saw the issues from two sides.

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Zoltán, Tamás and Dóra are three examples from my informant group. Each of them represents certain features, which are general and in some cases more specific. Whereas Zoltán represents the young well educated Hungarians, who have been living outside Hungary for a longer period, Tamás had only visited Hungary's neighbouring countries. Dóra represents an even smaller segment of the young people I met as she had finished her studies and had experiences with an independent life e.g. her own apartment and job.

I will refer to these three informants in my analysis, but they will not be the only informants to be quoted or introduced. I also interviewed people working with young people (teachers and Socrates[9] exchange coordinators). I interviewed an equal number of male and female, more due to coincidence rather than calculation, and I did not notice any significant differences in their attitudes and behaviour which is why the question of gender will not be elaborated on. Almost all of my informants spoke English or another foreign language.

The number of students taking tertiary education (university and college) has quadrupled since 1990 in order to meet government policies of improving labour market opportunities for youth[10]. As a consequence, many young people feel under pressure to study even more and longer because of the intense competition on the labour market, according to what they told me. Tamás said: "*Since 1989 everything became more… competitive. There are higher expectations of young people to take higher education.*"

I will characterize the majority of my informants as internationally oriented as they speak one or two foreign languages, they are mobile – they have been travelling (mostly in Europe but also in Asia or South America) and some have considered working outside Hungary. Many had foreign friends living in Budapest or outside Hungary, so contact with foreigners was not something new which is probably one of the reasons why they agreed to talk to me.

These young people were generally privileged economically and/or socially. Most of them grew up in upper middle class families, although some were dependent on state scholarships to finance their education. They were socially privileged in the sense that they were getting a good education, and they had moral support to do so from their family. My informants were aware of their privileged situation. They often pointed out the differences between themselves and other groups of their generation: differences in opportunities, in international experiences, in worldview, and in future perspectives[11].

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[9] Socrates is an EU-financed exchange program targeting college and university students. I talked to the Socrates coordinators because of my initial ambition of studying the effects on attitudes towards national and European identity among students who had studied abroad. This focus was later changed due to more substantial data on young well-educated Hungarians in Budapest and because the questions of national and European identity were equally present in this group.

[10] From 108,400 students taking tertiary education in 1990/1991 to 421,500 in 2004/2005. Source: Data of Education (Preliminary data, 2005), a report from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office.

1.5 Horizontal and vertical coherence

Studying young people in post-socialist societies is deeply related to the question of transition. Generally speaking, *"youth provide an interesting group to test the climate of a particular location, as they reflect ideas of both their parents and themselves, and represent the future of a particular community."* (Langman 1997:128, footnote 6) In post-socialist societies 1989 constitutes a shift of practices and experiences. Most of my informants were too young to have personal memories from before 1989, whereas their parents have vivid memories from that time.

My informants described themselves and were described by older people – as 'the new generation', i.e. the first generation to grow up without personal memories of socialism. This creates high expectations as Tamás expresses above. Some memories, like attending the Pioneers' Camp, watching a particular children's program on the television or wearing clothes of a certain style and colour are connected to being a member of a certain generation which older and younger generations cannot relate to. The common memories creates a feeling of coherence between contemporaries (Skultans 1998:XIII), which I will call HORIZONTAL COHERENCE. Other memories, 'social memories', are transmitted from one generation to another, creating a sense of historical belonging through a specific perception of the world (Fentress & Wickham 1992:88). I will call this national solidarity and sense of belonging VERTICAL COHERENCE. Hungarians – young as well as old – expressed great awareness of the history of Hungary and it played a significant role in the way my informants related to Hungary.

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[11] See László Kürti: *Youth and the state in Hungary. Capitalism, Communism and Class* (2002) for a historical account of a very different segment of the Hungarian youth: the working class youth.

I do not agree with Michal Buchowski's assumption that the young people in post-socialist societies are not marked by the legacies of socialism and that their worlds are 'relatively still and stable, secure and predictable' (Buchowski 2001:18). If possible their worlds are even more unstable and unpredictable than their parents' as a result of the remaking of cultural identities.

1.6 A popular characterization: To be in between

Questioning and talking about relations to national and European identity was not unfamiliar to Hungarians. In addition to the substantial public manifestations of Hungarian and European images (flags, statues, social practice, etc.) the topic was readily discussed and contested amongst my informants, other Hungarians I spoke with and within the media[12].

Hungary, like other Eastern and Central European countries, is in a process of redefining its position in Europe after the fall of the Iron Curtain. The opening towards Western

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[12] I was able to follow news and debates which were taking place in Hungary during my fieldwork in the English Budapest-based weekly newspaper "The Budapest Sun" and the monthly intellectual magazine "The Hungarian Quarterly". Furthermore, as I learned more Hungarian, I was able to read and understand headlines of the Hungarian newspapers.

Europe made it possible for Hungarians to aspire to recognition in Western Europe, and this aspiration has been supported by the EU-accession which was an official recognition of Hungary.

Anthropologist Susan Gal (1991) has analysed how the meaning of the terms 'Hungary' and 'Europe' has changed historically in Hungary. She lists a number of dichotomies which have been attributed to Europe and Hungary: West/East, civilised/backwards, effective/bureaucratic, ethic/corrupt, alienation/community, superficial/authentic (Gal 1991:444). A categorization of Hungary which I repeatedly encountered was 'in between' – Hungary was described as 'in between' East and West, traditional and modern, Asia and Europe. And it is within this spectrum I will move in my analysis of young well-educated Hungarians' relations to Hungary and Europe. Central Europe as a possible identification has come to play an important part in this process of redefinition, because it functions as a 'steppingstone' in the process of returning to Europe.

My informants engaged in this process, often by defining themselves as more European than other groups in Hungary, for example older generations or young people from the countryside.

Discussing the process of redefining national and European identities is relevant because my informants constitute part of a generation on their way to the labour market, and the ballot boxes, and many of them are not limited by country borders in their future dreams; they are mobile and eager to show the rest of Europe what Hungary is all about.

On a more analytical level, the questions touch upon anthropological terms such as 'imagined communities', negotiated and contested 'boundaries' between 'us' and 'them', social change, 'symbolic struggles' and 'symbolic landscapes'. Before proceeding in detail with these questions it is necessary to examine field and the methodological considerations concerning my fieldwork.

2 FIELDWORK AND ANALYSING THE FIELD

Fieldwork, the core of anthropological research, implies an engagement in and commitment to the field on the part of the anthropologist. We go there as scientists and individuals with expectations and, ideally, open minds. As Hastrup describes it, we are two persons in the field: the anthropologist and a young woman who people relate to like any other woman. This position is what Kirsten Hastrup calls 'the 3rd person' (Hastrup 1988:212-213). Changing between these positions affected the way Hungarians related to me and thus my observations and experiences in the field.

This chapter will first explore some considerations concerning fieldwork and then introduce the settings of my specific fieldwork providing context for subsequent analysis and conclusions.

2.1 Being in the field

I lived in Budapest for a total of 4½ months, two in a flat by myself, and 2½ months in a shared flat with two young Hungarians, a boy and a girl. I consciously chose to stay in the capital because of my focus on young people. Many young people move to Budapest to study, thus the number of English or German speaking people is higher in Budapest than other big cities in Hungary. I had no prior knowledge of Hungarian, so this was an important factor, and one which had an impact on my findings, as I will show in chapter 3.

When encountering new people I was always open about my reasons for being in Hungary. In general, most found my research interesting and had an opinion of the topic. In this way I was able to collect substantial information on recent political and cultural events through informal conversations. I met most of my informants several times which gave me the possibility of asking for elaborations on subjects and discussing my findings.

I mainly met my informants at educational institutions such as colleges and universities, and in public venues like cafés. My interaction with my informants was limited to these places and thus, my data does not contain information from first hand research in home, family or professional environments. The circumstances did not give me access to these significant spheres of social life, but a major part of young people's everyday life in Budapest takes place in public space and so did mine during the fieldwork.

2.2 The settings

I spent a lot of time at Budapesti Kommunikaciós Föiskola (BKF) following classes taught in English and getting to know the students. Opened in 2000, BKF is a private college, located in Budapest and specialising in business and communication. It was one of the first private colleges to open in Hungary and has been widely recognized for its modern facilities and teaching methods. A large proportion of the students pay students fees while others are subsidised by state scholarships.

My contacts at BKF were arranged by Jay[13], whom I met at my language course. He invited me to follow his Journalism and Public Speech classes, which were taught in

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[13] Jay has agreed to be called by his real name.

English, which enabled me to also meet his students. This invitation was a unique chance to make contact with young Hungarians. I attended classes and interviewed students throughout my entire field stay.

Initially I attended classes to get to know the students and introduce myself to them. Simultaneously, I gained insight into the students' attitudes and behaviour in a college setting. Jay expected the students to participate in class discussions and would often provoke discussions on foreign policy, the EU, Hungarian national identity and morality; and he expected the students to participate in class discussions. Of course, participation was very much dependent on the students' ability to speak English and desire for academic success.

My interviews with BKF students usually took place in the canteen. It was a convenient place to meet, even though other students sometimes created disturbance or distraction.

Of my 30 interviews, half were conducted with students from BKF, while the other half were with other young people. These interviews usually took place in cafés or in their homes. Conducting interviews in private homes gives a more coherent picture of the informant, but many young people still lived with their parents and they were somewhat reluctant to invite me to their home.

2.2.1 Collecting data

Participating in classes at BKF and conducting interviews predominantly in public spaces made it possible for me to take notes while participating and observing. Discussions and conversations taking place in the class room could be jotted down in my field notes while occurring or immediately after class. In public space I would usually take a break in order to write down observations and episodes.

I carried out 30 semi-structured interviews with individuals or in some cases groups. Interviews generally lasted from 60 to 120 minutes and they were recorded and then transcribed. Most of the interviews took place in English, just one interview was carried out in Hungarian with a translator, and two interviews took place in Danish with Danish language students. The English skills of the informants who agreed on interviews were generally good. The language barrier sometimes created minor misunderstandings, but it is my impression that the interviewees were able to express their thoughts and opinions.

I also made a few shorter interviews with persons working in EU-information offices or tourist information offices. The purpose of these interviews was to gather concise information on the number of people using the information office, frequently asked questions, etc.

Writing fieldnotes became both a methodological and at times ethical problem as I built friendships with some of my informants and spent leisure time with them; when I became the 3rd person (Hastrup 1988): going to the cinema or meeting at a cafe conversing as friends. On the other hand these relationships gave me insight of the 'unsaid' (ibid:213) and I would usually write down a few words about relevant discussions or information afterwards unless the topic was too sensitive or personal. These conversations compose an important part of my data and my internalised knowledge, and some of the statements cited within this thesis come from informal information. That said, I should assert that the main substance of my data comes from formal interviews, my participation in life at BKF or in public space.

2.3 Being part of the field

As previously noted, my relationship with informants unavoidably influenced my data. I was often explicitly included in class discussion, where I represented 'the other side of the story' and was asked to compare Denmark to Hungary.

On the other hand, I often appeared as 3rd person; people approached me in Hungarian, yet as soon as I spoke 'revealing' myself as a foreigner, our relations changed. One such example occurred in a class at BKF when a female student asked me a question in Hungarian. While I was trying to understand what she had said, another student said: "*She doesn't speak Hungarian*". The student, who approached me, gave me an apologetic smile and turned away. As soon as she discovered I was not 'just another girl' my position switched back to 'the Danish anthropologist'.

However, being a foreigner was not always a liability. By some I was perceived as the 'exotic' visitor. As a result, I was contacted several times by students who wanted to learn more about Denmark in addition to my impressions of their country. In response to this curiosity, I also encouraged informants to ask me questions after interviews, which was a way of returning the favour of the interview[14] - but also an alternative method for learning more about them and their relation to foreigners. It soon became clear to me that young Hungarians (and other Hungarians) viewed me as a representation of Western

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[14] In fieldwork situations and especially during interviews you feel 'in debt' to the people who give their time, and share their knowledge and often personal feelings about the topics you study. An optimal interview situation should be an exchange where the person interviewed gives trust, openness and his/her story, and the interviewer gives attention, respect and a positive reflection of the person sitting opposite (Horsbøl 1999:105). I felt the best way I could 'return' some of this 'debt' was to let them ask me questions. Many of the informants, I am sure, agreed to participate in the interview because they were interested in meeting 'the Danish girl'. The least I could do, I felt, was to give them some of my time and share my knowledge and sometimes personal feelings on different topics.

Europe. Without pre-empting the conclusions, I contend that to some degree, I represented the Europe of which they wanted to become a recognised part.

Another example of how the relations between my informants and me were influenced by our respective positions is the way they tended to define Hungary in opposition to Europe e.g. 'that is how they do it in Europe – it's not like that here', 'the European way of doing things' vs. 'the Hungarian way of doing things'. Of course, this is not unusual as both the Danes and the British or any other nationality compare themselves to Europe too. However, it is important to remember that each country does so differently, on its own terms. What I observed was that informants often compared Hungary to Europe in terms of 'pride' and 'embarrassment'. These are emic categories which I will return to in subsequent chapters in order to develop an understanding of the young Hungarians' relationship to Hungary and Europe.

2.4 A note on validity

Before proceeding, it is necessary to make a short note on anthropological method and the question of representativity here. Unlike scientists from other, more quantitative fields of sciences, anthropologists do not, in Roger Sanjek's words "*expect and [..] hope that another investigator will repeat the fieldwork and confirm the results before they are published.*" (1990:394) Anthropologists do not make a sample of a certain group of people in order to prove objective truths. Rather than reliability, anthropologists strive for validity, i.e. "*the degree to which scientific observations actually measure or record what they purport to measure.*" (Pelto and Pelto in Sanjek 1990:394-395) My analysis of young Hungarians' relationship to Hungary and Europe is a result of interaction with informants as an anthropologist, Dane and friend and of my interpretations of these interactions. Anthropological methods of participant observation and open interviews make the anthropologist herself an important part of the analysis, rendering position, intersubjective relations, and personal circumstances as relevant considerations. The data from my fieldwork is mediated by me as an individual with subjective experiences of events and conversations. It is not possible to repeat my fieldwork, yet according to Sanjek, validity can nevertheless be realised by theoretical candor, laying open the ethnographer's path, and by showing fieldnote evidence (1990:395). Therefore, openness about the anthropologist's approach, inspiration and experience is vital in establishing anthropology as a science.

When anthropologists enter their field, they do so with expectations and ideas which are to a high degree results of the education and the literature related to this particular field. The anthropology of 'post-socialism' is a recent but growing field of studies, consisting of research and analysis in the region, but even more importantly, shaping the future research and analysis, including mine.

2.5 Anthropology and the aftermath of Communism

Above I have presented some methodological considerations concerning my fieldwork. When you engage in fieldwork you bring not only methodological bias but also an empirical and theoretical bias shaped by the literature and prior knowledge concerning the field. Studies of the developments taking place in post-socialist countries form a 'post-socialist field of literature'. This thesis naturally relates to this field of literature and I will therefore briefly introduce it and the inspiration it has provided.

I follow Katherine Verdery, a prominent anthropologist within post-socialist studies, in her description of the uncertainty and 'conceptual vacuum' which prevails in the post-socialist countries (1996:3). Verdery has among other subjects been concerned with rituals, symbols and NATIONAL IDENTITY (1999) like several other scholars[15]. I will primarily look at the triangular relationship between young Hungarians, Hungary and Europe, but this also entails looking at the parts themselves.

An aspect of my informants' lives which I found influenced their relation to Hungary is their sense of political participation, including rights and obligations between state and citizen. But since it is not my focus, I have not gone into details with this as have others, who studied CIVIL SOCIETY in post-socialist countries[16].

A third field which has been central in the field of post-socialist literature is CONSUMPTION STUDIES studying consumption as a mean to define and express identity, but also questions of property have been debated[17]. A major concern in this field of studies has been people's adaptation to new realities in markets and in relations between people. I will use this approach in later chapters about the symbolic value of foreign language skills and social relations in public space.

The collapse of socialist rule led to massive changes in these societies economically, politically and socially, each country experiencing 'their own version' of change[18]. This assumption implies treating each case on its own terms and being specific about the developments in each country. How did the transition from socialism to democracy and capitalism take place? And what are the consequences of the transition? How has it affected people and how do they talk about it?

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[15] See for example Kürti & Langman (1997), Verdery (1991, 1996, 1999), Feldman (2000), Roszkowski (1995), Schöpflin (2000)

[16] See for example Hann (1993), Larsson (2004), Linnet (2002)

[17] See for example Fehérváry (2002), Sampson (1994), Humphrey (2002), Verdery (1996), Patico & Caldwell (2002)

[18] The political transformations taking place in Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990 were quickly labeled 'revolutions' by contemporary Western politicians and the media. Even though the events were remarkable and radical, they are rarely referred to as such in conversations with people from Central and Eastern European countries. My Romanian friends usually refer to the uprising and political changes in Romania as 'the

2.6 The inevitable road to transition?

Very few could have foreseen the outcome of the development which the socialist countries experienced in the 1980's. But growing tension and unrest within the countries due to worsened living standards and macro-political displacements led to cracks in the facade of Communism and eventually the collapse of Communist rule starting with the breakdown of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and reaching a climax in 1991 with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

During the 1970's and 1980's Hungary's foreign debt increased dramatically as a direct consequence of the NEW ECONOMIC MECHANISM introduced by Prime Minister Kádár in 1968. The economic reforms resulted to begin with in higher salaries, higher productivity, and a higher general standard of living in Hungary compared to the other socialist countries (Lendvai 1988:70). By the mid-1980's, however, "*the economic difficulties, and the stagnation of living standards resulted in an erosion of public support for the Communist regime*" (Sajó 1996:69).

The transition to multiparty democracy and capitalism was not solely an outcome of developments within Hungary. A general loosening of ties took place during the 1980's,

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make up' indicating that no substantial changes took place. In Hungary, most people simply called the events of 1989 and 1990 'the Change' in English. For similar observations see Preuss 1996:100.

especially spurred by Soviet Prime Minister Mikhail Gorbachev who openly supported reforms. In 1985 he introduced the policies of glasnost and perestroika, encouraging a restructuring of the political systems in terms of transparency and democracy. Poor economic performance in the socialist countries, social unrest in China and Poland convinced governments and oppositions in European Soviet satellite countries that time was up for reform talks (Elster 1996:5, Sajó 1996:71). The point of no return was reached when Hungary decided to open the borders to Austria allowing East Germans to flee from the oppressing system. The images of these migrants attracted the attention of the rest of the world.

Hungarian roundtable talks between the Communist Party and a composite opposition delegation began in March 1989. The roundtable talks took place within the context of historical references and contemporary demonstrations, but neither the opposition, nor the Communist Party could claim any mass support (Sajó 1996:77, 90). Ultimately, negotiations resulted in an obligation on the part of the Parliament to pass constitutional amendments to be passed by the Parliament as well as a call of free parliamentary elections on 25 March 1990.

The processes of change which took place in the level of politics manifested themselves as insecurity and confusion in the level of individuals. Katherine Verdery describes the process of social change in post-socialist Europe, calling it a 'reordering of meaningful worlds' (Verdery 1999a:50). The fall of the Communist Party and the communist society raised fundamental questions: *"How should we position ourselves relative to other people – who, that is, are our kin and trusted associates? How can we reset our moral compass? Who is to blame for what has happened, and how should they be punished?"* (Verdery 1999a:50)

2.7 After transition?

Since the first free parliamentary elections in 1990 the Hungarian government has consisted of changing coalitions with MSZP and Fidesz[19] as the biggest and leading parties. The changing coalitions have caused discontinuity, especially because the two sides have worked against each other instead of cooperating for a common, progressive development in Hungary. My informants expressed discontent and mistrust of politicians and authorities. Ferenc, a student at BKF, said:

> *"In Hungary the people who were in power before [the Change] are the people in power now. Because the politicians took advantage of their position in the former system to gain power and be ready for the change, so they bought newspapers, companies and factories. They knew what was going to happen and they had the money to consolidate their power. So these people still have the power. For example the biggest newspaper during Communist times in Hungary is also the biggest newspaper today, while in the surrounding countries the biggest newspapers is from the opposition. The same people own the TV channels. There are two big newspapers and they disagree, but they argue against each other, and blame each other. It takes time to change things in Hungary. It takes time for people to die."*

Other informants pointed to the media in order to explain the mistrust. Zoltán told me how the media is closely connected to the biggest political parties saying: "*The Hungarian Televisions news and radio are close to the Fidesz. You know, it's one company but they are all right wing and sheltered by Fidesz.*" And Zita, a female informant from BKF, told me how she experienced the media as partial, here illustrated through information about the EU:

> *"Our journals and newspapers are mostly right or left sided, but no central. It was always contrary things. The newspapers often only had half information*

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[19] Fidesz is the "Federation of Young Democrats", a conservative party; MSZP is the Hungarian Socialist Party.

> *and they made it into one whole thing so something you had news that was not right. For example they said according to the EU you can't make cucumbers bigger than 6 centimetres. Or you can't make poppy seeds. You know we have so many national meals and things made from poppy seeds, so they can't say that. Most people in the countryside outside Budapest who are not as educated, they believed that news, and they were afraid. And those people who were afraid, they believed the things Fidesz said, and they mostly said bad things about the EU and didn't believe the rational things."*

Many of my informants read at least two newspapers in order to get multiple sides of the story, demonstrating their awareness of the biased media and responses in reaction to this. But they were also concerned about the big part of the Hungarian population who – in their view – was not as informed and thus made opinions on the wrong groundings.

I believe the mistrust and suspicion concerning the politicians' moral and commitment is part of the explanation why public participation in political life is relatively low: only 46 % of the population voted in the referendum about EU accession (84 % of them voted in favour)[20]. Moreover, a referendum in December 2004 concerning dual citizenship to Hungarians living outside Hungary – a very sensitive issue – was declared void because of the low participation.

However, one should be careful evaluating the transition of post-socialist countries according to Western standards. As Polish anthropologist Michal Buchowski warns, transition is too often considered as a one-way process from 'authoritarian regimes to democracy', from 'commanded economy to free market', and from 'communist to capitalist' social mentalities (Buchowski 2001:9-10). 'Transformation' would maybe serve as a better term, but there seems to be general acceptance of the term 'transition', which is why I will

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[20] Source: the European Union's homepage about the enlargement process http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/hungary/index.htm

use it here (Larsson 2004:8) Transition should be treated as an 'unrehearsed process of social events', whose outcome can go in different directions (Buchowski 2001:9-10).
Chris Hann, an academic primarily interested in the concept of 'civil society', also warns against applying Western concepts to post-socialist realities (2002:9-10). Even so, my informants, though, reproduced these concepts and compared Hungarian realities to Western realities and ideals when talking about 'democracy', 'civil society', or 'living standards'. Without concepts to describe the new realities they apply understandings and terms from the Western setting. Dóra was aware of this reproduction as she showed in the interview; we were talking about civil society when she said: *"It's changing now… After the transition then of course the model was more Western European because we somehow have to follow something*." As Dóra exemplifies, some of my informants were aware of the fact that the course that Hungary took immediately after the fall of Communism was directed by a 'Western European model'. But even though the transition in Hungary and other post-socialist countries has been principally shaped by the EU-accession process, it cannot be viewed as identical.

Even though many of the European post-socialist countries aimed for EU-accession, and most of them have now accomplished that aim, the transition is not finished. The transition is still taking place in many areas as a 're-ordering of meaningful worlds' and adaptation to the new circumstances. Recalling Ferenc' statement above: "*It takes time to change things in Hungary. It takes time for people to die*." Many informants identified that the old generation has to die before significant changes in people's attitudes and behaviour can take place.

2.7.1 Social conditions

Since 1989 the Hungarian state has changed its role towards its citizens: from 'socialist paternalism', which justified Party rule with a claim that the Party would take care of everyone's needs (Verdery 1996:24) to a more liberal welfare system based on market principles (Haney 1999:153). Medical care is free for Hungarian citizens though many informants told me that 'gratitude money' to the doctors is expected. This change influences the way my informants perceive the state apparatus. Many told me that they did not feel obliged to pay full taxes since they did not feel that got anything in return.

A significant concern to my informants was unemployment. Unemployment was officially a non-existent phenomenon during Communism: 0.3 percent in 1987 (Haney 1999:166). In 1993 the unemployment rate was 11 percent (ibid), while it decreased the following years. From 8.1 percent in 1997 the unemployment rate was down to 6.6 percent in 2000. Contemporaneously 12.3 percent of young people under 25 were unemployed (1997: 13.9 percent)[21]. The latest statistics show an unemployment rate of 7.1 percent in 2nd quarter of 2005[22].

In comparison with other European countries, Hungary's unemployment rate is amongst the lowest (in percentage of the total population): Denmark 5.4, Hungary 5.9, Romania 7.1, the Czech Republic 8.3, Lithuania 10.8, and Poland 18.8[23]. But my informants expressed anxiety about their future situations which tell me that they were not confident of the promises from the state that Hungary would benefit economically from the EU-accession.

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[21] The information about unemployment in 1997 and 2000 are from statistics provided by the EU www.europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement

[22] Source: Hungarian Central Statistical Office, www.ksh.hu

[23] I have selected these countries because they are those countries which Hungarians themselves mention when comparing Hungary to other European countries. There seems to be a bit of inconsistency between the figures from this source (the European Union's statistical office, Eurostat) and the figures from the Hungarian Central Statistical Office concerning the Hungarian unemployment rate. For my purposes, I consider this difference rather insignificant because the figures are shown for comparison. Source: http://www.epp.eurostat.cec.eu.int

The anticipations and promises adduced by the Hungarian politicians previous to 1 May 2004 have far from all been redeemed. But I think the integration with Europe can be seen as taking place on many levels, not only economically, politically or socially, but also culturally.

2.8 Europeanization

For Hungary, EU accession has been a process of political, legislative and economical integration with 'old' European Union members and Western Europe. The country has been subject to major changes in order to meet the criteria of the EU. One sign of this integration which I encountered on visits to universities and colleges in Hungary concerns education. In order to enter into exchange agreements with other European educational institutions, courses must be taught in English, schedules must be changed, and, not least, recognition of the importance of these changes must be reached among professors and students.

Not only procedural, Europeanization also takes place on a cultural level, as John Borneman and Nick Fowler have pointed out in their article *Europeanization* (1997). Cultural interaction between the European countries, such as in the European media, face-to-face encounters, during travels and European sport and music events, affects people's identification with territory and place in the nation state and in Europe (ibid:488; see also Lass 1999). Also Europeans' growing interest in learning foreign languages can be seen as an aspect of Europeanization as I will show in chapter four (Borneman & Fowler 1997:499-500). My informants characterised themselves as European Hungarians, as I will show later. The Europeanization is 'largely, but not exclusively' driven by the EU (Shore 2000:27).

What we see is that Europe is a powerful symbol in the sense that many people identify themselves as Europeans or non-Europeans, but nation states are still a superior form of group identification (Borneman & Fowler 1997:493). Europeanization challenges the sovereignty of the nation state, while reaffirming the differences between the nation states (ibid).

I will now turn to the theoretical framework, defining the terms used in the analysis.

3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

> Pia: *What does Hungary have in common with the other Central European countries? What makes it Central European?*
>
> Zoltán: *I think it's because we are in between. I consider us more to the West than to the East. Of course we are not to the West, not only geographically, but economically, mentally, so we are not the place mentality that it's just a question of… take a look at the map: Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania, Russia, Belarus, the whole block and this sort of Eastern economic surroundings. Surely they affect us in the language or behaviour but we always define ourselves something else. Not against them, but you know what I mean…*

What struck me most when I talked to my informants about Hungary and Europe, was the deeply rooted emotions and simultaneous ambiguity embedded in their statements. Above Zoltán categorises Hungary as Western, but not completely Western, but 'more' Western than the Eastern countries surrounding Hungary. Yet these countries are not Eastern and Hungary not Western in a geographical sense. Zoltán's categorisations are based on his impressions of the countries more than facts or place on the map. Terms like 'Hungary' and 'Europe' are not empty categories; they inhabit symbolic meanings (Cohen 1985).

The theoretical approach I am taking here is inspired by a number of theories which I have brought together in order to analyse my data.

I consider large communities including nations to be imagined in the sense that the community feeling and sense of belonging is imagined (Anderson 1983 (1991)). Hungarians are not a priori Hungarians – they grow up to be Hungarians through social memories transmitted from generation to generation (Fentress & Wickham 1992) and through interpretations of symbols in similar ways among Hungarians (Cohen 1985).

Imagined communities are limited and the sense of belonging and the meanings stand strongest when they are contested – at the boundaries of the community (ibid; Barth 1969). Growing up to be Hungarian entails a certain HABITUS – a Hungarian way of acting and relating to others (Bourdieu 1979, 1990). In the following I will briefly introduce these theories and relate them to my data.

3.1 Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson was concerned with the way communities are imagined. His influential book *Imagined Communities* (1983 (1991)) was based on a set of questions which included: why do people, who never meet, feel connected through nationality? And why does national identity still have such importance that people are willing to kill and die for it? Anderson defined the nation as *"an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign."* (ibid:6). And he takes *"all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these)"* to be imagined communities (ibid:6). Communities and feelings of belonging to a community should be distinguished by *"the style in which they are imagined"*, not *"by their falsity/genuineness"* (ibid:6).

Imagining of communities on a national scale became possible with print-capitalism - the development of print techniques, the distribution of printed products and an increasing vernacularization of print-languages. This development was in Anderson's view essential in shaping people's idea of the nation state (ibid:44-45). The novel and the newspaper – today complemented by radio, television and not least the internet – provided means for representing the nation as an IMAGINED COMMUNITY for millions of people (ibid:25); it created a feeling of 'simultaneity' across the nation (ibid), i.e. HORIZONTAL COHERENCE.

But why is it necessary to imagine the nation? The idea of the nation, of being part of imagined communities, transformed 'fatality into continuity', since nations "*loom out of an immemorial past, and [..] glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into destiny.*" (1983 (1991):11-12) The nation "*as a deep, horizontal comradeship*" (ibid:7) correlates to the notion of VERTICAL COHERENCE. Nationalism offered explanation to the big questions of past, present and future, and gave people a sense of security and belonging; a course to follow; something to live and die for.

An vital part of my informants' imaginations of Hungary and Europe as communities drew on historical elements. Their accounts of Hungary often explained Hungarian-ness in terms of the historical past, such as when Dóra said: "*Hungary has a history that is like more than a thousand years old.*" Or when I asked Ferenc: "*You said Hungarians are more European [than other nationalities], what do you mean?*" And he replied: "*Because of the long history of Hungary.*" And Hungary's symbolic position in Europe was also often legitimated through history. As Dóra told me: "*I believe that we are more connected to Europe than to any other part of the world, I mean, we are theoretically closer to other parts of the world but still… also because of the history of Europe. This region was always part of Europe, why should we consider being anything else?*" In their view the history of Hungary constitutes Hungary as a nation – an IMAGINED COMMUNITY – and legitimizes its European-ness.

Print-languages gave fixity to vernaculars that "*helped to build that image of antiquity so central to the subjective idea of the nation*" (1983 (1991):44-45), and vernaculars as print-languages in turn became languages of power (ibid). This development took place in Hungary in the 18th century, as in other European nations, when Hungarian nobility opposed the Habsburg Emperor's attempts to introduce German as language-of-state. Instead, they promoted Magyarization, i.e. Hungarianization, and after the Revolution in 1848 "*it was decided that all Hungarian-speakers should be Hungarian and every Hungarian should speak Magyar*", as Anderson phrases it (ibid:103). Thus, language became an important factor in the definition of the nation – something that is still very present, also in Hungary. Hungarian national identity includes the Hungarian minorities in the surrounding countries who maintain their Hungarian-ness by speaking Hungarian, distribution of Hungarian media and Hungarian education.

I will address the way my informants related to Hungary and Europe as imagined communities. The images of these communities were formed by the personal experiences of my informants and they came to expression through their practices and their interpretations of Hungary and Europe as symbols.

3.2 Hungary and Europe as symbols

My informants related to Hungary and Europe as symbols, more than as geographical and political entities, though geography and economic and political conditions influence the way the symbols are perceived. Their statements referred to the meanings of Hungary and Europe rather than the factual circumstances, as when Zoltán in the above quotation defines Hungary as Western, Central and Eastern European. He is not referring to the geographical location, but the symbolic location of Hungary.

In his book *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (1985) Anthony P. Cohen addresses symbolism as a tool in the creation of community, an instructive basis for analytical purposes in relation to my data. He asserts that social categories have different symbolic meanings (ibid:15). People can share a symbol (e.g. the term 'Europe'), but they do not necessarily share the meanings of the symbol (ibid)[24]. Symbols do not express meaning, i.e. the meanings of a symbol are not inherent in the symbols themselves, but they provide the capacity to make meaning (ibid:15). The interpretation of them are mediated by the experience of the individual and thus interpreted from a variety of positions (ibid:14). For Cohen, culture and communities can be studied by capturing members' experience of these (ibid:20), since "*members make, or believe they make, a similar sense of things [..], and, further, [..] they think that that sense may differ from one made elsewhere.*" (ibid:16) According to this notion of culture, Hungarians can be distinguished from Slovakians or Danes, and young well-educated Hungarians from elderly Hungarians residing in the countryside by the meaning they attach to symbols like Hungary and Europe. The IMAGINED COMMUNITY provides the foundation for the consciousness of similarity between interpretations of certain symbols, i.e. coherence and a sense of belonging. But what happens with the meanings defined during periods of social change, namely the fall of socialism and transition?

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[24] By interpreting symbols in this way Cohen differs from Victor Turner, known for his analyses of symbolism. Turner argues that rituals and symbols create 'communitas' and coherence in societies, while Cohen emphasises the relational aspect of symbolic interactions creating similarity but also differences (see discussion in Cohen 1985:53ff).

I will discuss the way my informants as a group interpreted Hungary and Europe: I will also be concerned with the way they presented their interpretations as opposing interpretations made by other social groups in Hungary, e.g. the older generations and young people living in rural areas.

3.3 Boundaries

Opposing interpretations of symbols constitute a boundary. In this thesis I will be concerned with boundaries between regional, national and social groups with emphasis on the symbolic boundaries constituted by my informants' interpretations of Hungary and Europe. My informants presented themselves as European Hungarians by opposing themselves to other groups of Hungarians and Eastern Europeans as I intend to show.

Cohen is concerned with the boundary-making processes of symbolic construction of communities: "*Boundaries are marked because communities interact in some way or other with entities from which they are, or wish to be distinguished*" (1985:12). This understanding of boundaries is highly influenced by Fredrik Barth's seminal volume from 1969, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Barth's theory emphasized the social processes taking place within and across boundaries. Barth suggested anthropologists to study these processes because boundaries mark insiders from outsiders through incorporation and exclusion (ibid:257). Cultural differences between groups are marked and reinforced in boundary-zones (ibid). Or as Pierre Bourdieu writes: "*social identity lies in difference.*" (1979:418)

Both Barth and Cohen are concerned with boundaries, but while Barth is primarily concerned with the social processes taking place in boundary-zones, Cohen focuses on the interpretations which people make – the symbolic processes.

To sum up, communities are imagined and negotiated by insiders and outsiders. The negotiated images form symbolic landscapes, which represent people's interpretations of the world around them. Boundaries and imagined communities are very much in question in Hungary because of Europeanization. The growing integration between European countries has opened up for re-positioning and re-thinking cultural identities. Young Hungarians – and Hungarians in general – were engaged in negotiations of defining Hungary in relation to Europe. The arguments of these negotiations are relevant to a wider audience in Europe because of the EU's intentions of further enlargement and the relationship between Europe and other continents.

3.4 Habitus – practice as embodied knowledge

My view of social practice is inspired by French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu's notion of HABITUS (esp. 1979, 1990). A central concept in his theories is HABITUS, "*the system of structured, structuring dispositions [..] which is constituted in practice and is always oriented towards practical functions.*" (Bourdieu 1990:52) HABITUS is 'structured' by 'historically and socially situated conditions', and it is 'structuring' as 'principles which generate and organize practices and representations (1990:55).

Dispositions shape the way people perceive their position and possible actions; it is because of the dispositions that people usually perceive the world as 'meaningful' (1979:408) and are enacted as a specific kind of practice: habits of eating, walking, speaking, etc.

Another of Bourdieu's concepts which I will apply in this thesis is SYMBOLIC CAPITAL. Individuals' positions in relation to each other depend on their relative capital (1979:249-250). SYMBOLIC CAPITAL can be defined as desired resources or abilities, which can be transferred into other kinds of capitals. Possessing SYMBOLIC CAPITAL allows the holder to define the desired capitals of a particular field (ibid).

With these definitions in place I will proceed to the analysis of my data concerning the significance and SYMBOLIC CAPITAL attributed to foreign language skills.

4 LANGUAGE SKILLS AS SYMBOLIC CAPITAL

4.1 Europeanization and foreign language skills

Europeanization, understood as increasing integration between the European countries (Borneman & Fowler 1997), was a development I experienced affected my informants in many ways. They were acutely aware of practices of for example service and education in other European countries, most of them had visited many European countries and considered Europe a ground of possibilities for them concerning education, travels and work. A necessary and indispensable tool to access this ground was foreign language skills as they were told from many sides. An international coordinator at a college told me:

> *"The EU gives the young Hungarians new job opportunities. And that's why I keep telling them to know two foreign languages, either English with combination French or German, then they have much better chance to find a good job, a good, interesting and well paid job."*

Learning foreign languages was recommended and recognized for practical reasons, but there were also symbolic reasons connected this.

In the following, I will describe and analyze how knowledge of foreign languages was used as an instrument by my informants to be – and appear as – European Hungarians. It is important to emphasize that learning foreign languages does not oppose being Hungarian in my informants' view. Rather, these skills should be seen as a way to build and strengthen an image of their generation and social group as belonging to Europe and being able to manoeuvre within the Europeanized Europe. Simultaneously, their practices and statements concerning foreign language skills show how they relate to Europe and what it means to them to be European.

I view foreign language skills as SYMBOLIC CAPITAL in Bourdieu's sense (Bourdieu 1979:249-250). Having knowledge of foreign languages was recognized among my informants as desirable and valuable in order to achieve something from the possibilities offered in the EU, like this quotation from the interview with Zoltán shows: "*Language is really important! Especially for such a small country like ours, we are the union [EU] and nobody will learn Hungarian just because of us…*" SYMBOLIC CAPITAL can be converted into other forms of capital, e.g. economical capital, if for example foreign language skills enable an attractive job. Both aspects were significant in my informants' reasons.

Some of the examples I will analyse involved me as a foreigner. My interaction with Hungarians was usually dependent on their foreign language skills, and in these situations I represented 'Europe' thereby affecting their practices. I will begin with an elaboration of this aspect.

4.2 An alien in Budapest - My interaction with Hungarians

A significant factor affecting my interaction with Hungarians was the knowledge of language. I have travelled extensively and have been able to both speak with and understand people througout Europe and in Africa, in local or foreign languages. Yet coming to Budapest I felt lost. The Hungarian language has very few words in common with other European languages and I immediately felt alienated from my surroundings. Before I came to Budapest I had been in doubt whether to follow a language course or not[25]. Five days after arrival I signed up for one!

After a few weeks of language school I felt much better prepared. I did not know many words yet, but I was getting the feeling of pronunciation and vocabulary, and felt more at home in Budapest. With time, I learned enough Hungarian to handle everyday situations like shopping, asking for assistance and buying tickets. Because of my pronunciation and grammatical mistakes I was easily spotted as a foreigner and related to as such. But most Hungarians expressed surprise and gratitude that I – an alien – made an effort to learn their language, viewed by them as a marginalised and threatened language.

My own linguistic difficulties reminded me of the importance of foreign language skills enabling people to communicate with foreigners and I subsequently made many observations about when and why foreign language skills became significant and asked about it in interviews. This thesis is based in the answers and my observations.

4.3 Learning languages

During Communism, the first foreign language pupils learnt in school was Russian and the second language was German. Few people speak Russian anymore, and most are proud to announce that they do not remember a word of it.

When Communism collapsed in 1989, the primary foreign language was changed to English (Borneman & Fowler 1997:500). My informants describe how the same teacher who taught them Russian from one day to another had to teach them English (even though not all teachers had any prior knowledge of English). These young people were caught in between two systems and many of them ended up without proper knowledge of either language. Zita explained:

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[25] I had originally applied for a language course scholarship at the renowned language school in Debrecen, but I was turned down because of too many applicants from Denmark (4). And since I was not sure if I could learn enough to make myself understandable in the short time available, I was not sure if taking a language course was worth the effort.

> *"You have to know, there is a cut since 1990. Before you had to learn Russian and nothing else, but after no Russian but everything else. The generation of 24 and up they learned some years Russian and then some years English and German or both and they don't know Russian, English or German. And you have the older generation they learned Russian for a long time but they don't know it because they had to learn it and then you learn it and then forget it."*

The majority of my informants were younger than 24 and they belonged to the generation who learned English and German or French. But I also talked to Hungarians who, like Zita describes, had learned a bit of Russian and a bit of other languages. Most of them had taken special measures like private teachers or going on exchange in order to learn English. They saw it as an investment in their own future, improving their chances of getting a good job in Hungary or abroad. But also younger informants who had learned English all years in school told me they took extra language classes with private teachers in order to learn the languages properly.

Some languages were more popular than others and it was possible to make a provisional hierarchy of foreign languages according to their popularity.

No. 1 English – the global language, useful in many contexts, encountered in television, on the internet, etc.

No. 2 German – Germany and Austria are important co-operation partners; older generations know German, some were exchange students in DDR during Communism. German is also of the more prominent EU-languages and many German-speaking tourists visit Hungary every year.

No. 3 Spanish and French – they are both EU-languages. French is also useful if travelling to Canada, where some have relatives. Spanish is considered an exotic language and useful if travelling in Europe and Latin America.

No. 4 Russian – I observed an emerging, yet less significant, interest in learning Russian among young people, mostly for job qualification reasons. As Hungary still has business partnerships with Ukraine and Russia, learning Russian was mostly for job qualification reasons.

No. 5 Other languages – mostly for individual reasons: the female student who wanted to learn Danish because of a Danish boyfriend; the male student who studied Czech because of his family's Czech origin, etc.

When I talked to exchange students who had studied abroad, they described their initial embarrassment when arriving to a new country and having to speak a foreign language[26]. Zita explained this embarrassment as a result of poor Hungarian education methods, and as such she saw it as a specifically Hungarian problem. The exchange students told me they felt relieved and encouraged to continue as they realized that 'they do actually understand me, even though I made mistakes'. Their embarrassment had been turned to pride: they were able to make themselves understood!

Several informants explained this insecurity of speaking foreign languages with bad teaching methods. Hungarian students are brought up with teachers, who expect them to sit still, take notes and listen without too many questions. According to my informants the teaching methods of Hungarian schools are the reasons for Hungarians' reluctance to speak foreign languages because they do not encourage students' efforts to speak and practice the languages. Róbert, a male informant, simply stated: "*The teachers don't know anything. They are not open-minded and you cannot really learn from them.*" He had lived in Turkey with his family for one year where he had experienced different teaching methods. The classes I followed at BKF were very different: the American teachers encouraged the students to speak up, to say their opinion, to practice their English, but most of them were reluctant to do so. I noticed a clear difference between 1st year students and 2nd year students at BKF. 2nd year students were obviously accustomed to the new demands and therefore more outspoken. Accordingly, most of the students who agreed to let me interview them were 2nd year students; they were more confident of their skills.

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[26] The exchange students went to universities and colleges in many different European countries. Most of them took classes in English aimed at exchange students. Likewise, many Hungarian universities and colleges were in the process of establishing courses in English for incoming exchange students. This happens as part of EU's educational programme.

4.4 Symbolic capital: pride and embarrassment

I argued earlier that foreign language skills can be seen as SYMBOLIC CAPITAL; it is invested in relation to others in order to establish positions between individuals and groups (Bourdieu 1979:249-250). The field in which these skills represented SYMBOLIC CAPITAL was the question of Hungarian-ness and European-ness. To my informants foreign language skills represented a European way of being Hungarian, as opposed to the 'old-fashioned' and conservative Hungarian-ness.

My informants often used the terms 'embarrassment' and 'pride' to describe feelings concerning speaking foreign languages, and my observations can be related to these sentiments. Embarrassment and pride can be interpreted in terms of SYMBOLIC CAPITAL: embarrassment of not possessing the SYMBOLIC CAPITAL in question – in this case foreign language skills – or embarrassment on behalf of others' lack of foreign language skills. On the other hand pride of possessing and being able to invest the foreign language skills in negotiations of European-ness.

Pride and embarrassment should not be seen as each other's opposites, but rather as two sides of the same discussion; they represent a spectrum. It is possible to be proud and embarrassed at the same time, in the same situation, but in relation to different things.

That knowing foreign languages was a desired SYMBOLIC CAPITAL invoking pride among my informants can be exemplified by the following episode. I was interviewing Tamás in English in the canteen of BKF when a girl sitting nearby suddenly interrupted saying in Hungarian to the boy: 'Oh, I wish I knew English as well as you'. Her admiration was explicit; for her, speaking English was an attractive resource. Tamás showed surprise but he also straightened himself and looked happy; he was proud that somebody recognized his skills.

The first time I encountered embarrassment of lack of foreign language skills was on one of my first days in Budapest; I went to buy a cell phone in a shopping mall close to the Buda Castle, an area often visited by tourists. The shop assistant was a young girl, maybe 19 years old, and I asked her if she spoke English or German. She smiled nervously, looked down and shook her head. I explained with very simple words and gestures what I wanted and she mostly shook her head or nodded; she did not say a word. We managed to complete the transaction, but I was puzzled why she did not try to speak since she obviously understood what I said.

Most of the young people I contacted in shops or in public space were reluctant to speak English or German. According to their age, they have learned English to some extent in school and they usually knew enough to understand me, because they often replied or assisted with gestures, but they were embarrassed to speak. At least, that was how my informants would explain it: 'People are afraid to make mistakes' or 'They are embarrassed because they don't speak very well'. Embarrassment was not just a term I attributed to Hungarians' behaviour; it was also used by my informants.

But pride and embarrassment of foreign language skills was not confined to my informants, i.e. young well-educated Hungarians, as the following example will show.

4.5 Status in language skills

> *I leave BKF around one. The sun is shining; it is hot. I go to Széchenyi [thermal bath] to check out prices before I go home.*
> *Walking from Déli [train station] to my home I decide – after some consideration – to buy fruit at the green grocer's store. As soon as he recognizes me, he calls for his wife. She enters the shop from the street, where she was talking to a customer. She asks me in English: "Can I help you?"*
> *I answer in Hungarian: "Kérek almát" [I would like some apples]*
> *- "Apples, how much? Half a kilo? One kilo?"*
> *- "Félkilo" [Half a kilo]*
> *- "Anything else? (I look at the bananas) Bananas?"*
> *- "Banánt"*
> *- "Two, three?"*
> *- "Három" [three]*
> *As the green grocer gives me the change he counts very articulately in Hungarian. I leave with a "Kösszi szépen" [Thank you very much].*
> *(Fieldnotes 8 October 2004)*

The incident at the green grocer's shop took place in October. The shop is located on an approach road to Budapest, a road rarely visited by foreigners, but it was where I lived for three months. At that time I knew enough Hungarian to manage everyday situations, and I was consciously trying to do so. Still, as we see, it was a challenge to communicate with Hungarians; while I tried to use my Hungarian, some locals were very eager to speak

English with me[27]. In other cases communications was rendered difficult by lack of foreign language skills on both sides or by embarrassment (cf. SYMBOLIC CAPITAL).

I had been buying vegetables and fruits at the green grocer's before, mostly by pointing and saying a few words in Hungarian. But this time was different. I had not met the green grocer's wife before and it seemed to me that he called her because he wanted me to hear her foreign language skills; he was proud of her. Her English language skills represented a SYMBOLIC CAPITAL invested in the situation which positioned the green grocer's wife, and maybe even himself, as a European Hungarian in relation to me.

This example shows that not only young well-educated Hungarians who recognises foreign language skills as SYMBOLIC CAPITAL and actually pursue this 'resource'. The green grocer's wife, who was around 40 years old, could very well be one of the many Hungarians who invested in a language course for practical and symbolic reasons. The green grocer's expression when his wife approached me in English tells me that he was proud of her skills. She appeared as a skilled European Hungarian to me and to others.

4.6 Symbolic capital for whom?

Young well-educated Hungarians found foreign language skills necessary and important in order to get a good job and 'survive' in Hungary and Europe of today. But the extents to which most Hungarians actually use these skills are limited. Few Hungarians speak English or other foreign languages in their everyday lives and there are few signs, titles or advertisements in English[28] in the public sphere. Likewise, movies and TV programmes are dubbed into Hungarian.

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[27] Or to a minor degree: German.

On the other hand, many and large billboards advertising for language schools sought to inspire people to learn languages with slogans like: “Be prepared for Europe!” The advertisements often included the yellow EU-stars on a blue background or pictures from European capitals implying a direct connection between learning languages and becoming European.

An increasing number of tourists also create a growing demand for foreign language skills among people working in shops, restaurants, tourist attractions or hotels in the centre of Budapest or other bigger cities. But there are still many who do not encounter foreigners in their everyday life and even less who engage in conversation if they meet them.

According to my informants, a growing number of jobs require foreign language skills because of increasing international trade and communication, but it was my impression that relatively few actually used their foreign language skills in job situations. But the job opportunities recently achieved with the EU-accession represent a new incentive for learning languages according to the ‘most frequently asked questions’ at the EU Info Points in Hungary[29]: they concern language skills and working abroad.

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[28] I refer to English here because it is most commonly used as international communication language.

[29] EU Info Points are offices giving information about the European Union to citizens. I visited two such offices in Budapest, and the offices in Kecskemét, Miskolc and Nyíregyháza (cities in Central and Eastern Hungary). I interviewed the staff in three of the offices about the number of people using the service, the frequently asked questions, etc.

My informants represent, as I have mentioned earlier, a segment of the Hungarian population who are internationally oriented. Many followed classes in English at BKF. Dóra worked in an international NGO and her working language was English.

In this sense my informants differ from the general picture of the Hungarian population. They stated that *"people in the countryside don't speak very well English"* (Éva) or *"But the generations of my parents, they don't speak anything."* (Zita) They identify themselves and create HORIZONTAL COHERENCE by stressing differences between themselves and others. Their statements support their image of an old-fashioned Hungary constituted by the other social groups versus a modern European Hungary, which they represent. The European Hungarians are learning languages in order to participate practically and symbolically in Europe. In this sense, they can be seen as 'cultural innovators' who reduce their cultural 'disabilities', lack of foreign language skills, as a way to access the concrete and imagined community of (Barth 1969:274).

The SYMBOLIC CAPITAL attributed to foreign language skills was not only recognized by young well-educated Hungarians. The previous example from my neighbourhood green grocer showed me that it could also be recognized among older Hungarians working in low education jobs.

4.7 Being a European Hungarian

I have argued that knowing foreign languages represents SYMBOLIC CAPITAL to my informants and other groups of Hungarians. Language skills are by them recognized as modern and necessary and a way to become and be accepted as Europeans. My informants were very concerned with others' image of Hungary. Dóra illustrated this concern with an example:

> *"The people who came from Western Europe, they didn't know so many things. A girl, a volunteer from France, came to Hungary and said: 'Oh my God'. She thought that in Hungary you get no food and there is no shop, there are no commercials, there is nothing. I have this impression that in Western Europe, especially like, I would say ten years ago, people really didn't have too much knowledge about this part [of Europe] and they connected it to Communism."*

In order to invert this image my informants valued appearing modern and internationally minded – the characteristics attributed to Western Europe by my informants. By showing motivation to engage with the surrounding world they revert the labels of 'backwards' and 'old-fashioned', as Dóra did when she engaged herself in voluntary work and met hundreds of foreigners; she appeared as a modern and internationally minded Hungarian, thus representing a 'European Hungary'. Therefore, she can be seen as a cultural innovator pursuing access and participation in Europe (Barth 1969:274). Being able to communicate with other Europeans is a way to improve job chances in Hungary and Europe, but it is also a way to become part of the IMAGINED COMMUNITY of Europe.

It is important to emphasise that this struggle is not about becoming solely 'European'. In terms of languages, speaking Hungarian is a fundamental aspect of national identity, an inseparable part of being Hungarian. It was several times pointed out to me that the Hungarian language and the Hungarian mentality are closely connected; I was for example told that the grammatical structure of the language is an important reason for the high number of Hungarian Nobel Prize-winners[30] - it has taught them to think logically. They do not want to abandon their national background. Hungarian-ness is thus the basis for becoming European – it is a Hungarian way of becoming European.

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[30] That Hungary has the highest number of Nobel Prize-winners per capita was pointed out to me several times. It is also a fact that is mentioned in tourist brochures. Many of the Nobel Prize-winners were not Hungarian citizens when they received the honour because they had left Hungary, but "They learned what

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they know in Hungary, but produced what gave them the Nobel Prize somewhere else", as one student argued.

5 SOCIAL RELATIONS IN PUBLIC SPACE

5.1 *SO* Hungarian

> *For homework the students were asked to contact their local municipal representatives and interview them about their policies. One male student had called the mayor's office and asked for the most important political issues at the moment. He explained what happened: 'The secretary got angry, yelled at me and hung up.' All the other students laugh as he explains. The teacher [who is American] asked: 'Why are you laughing?' Several students simultaneously reply: 'It's just so Hungarian!' The student elaborates: 'In the public sector it's already a penalty that they [the employees] have to work there, so everybody else can go to hell.' A female student: 'They are 'busy' [she shows the inverted commas with her hands]. I try to avoid any personal contact – it's much easier.'*
> *(Fieldnotes 7 October 2004)*

This episode took place in a Civic Communications-class at BKF. In the students' view the assignment of engaging in dialogue with the local authorities was 'impossible' because people in those places did not want to interact with citizens. Personal contact was avoided, as the female student said. In a chapter focusing on social relations this might seem as an odd example to emphasize – here the social relation is virtually preferred to be non-existent. But why did the students characterise the episode as 'so Hungarian'? What is typically Hungarian about it and why do they present such a – in my eyes – negative behaviour as typically Hungarian?

What the students are expressing here is dissatisfaction with the treatment they receive from public authorities; they describe the social structure, the social relations, as inappropriate, thereby challenging the culture inherent in this behaviour. This discontinuity is a sign of social change.

By emphasizing that this kind of behaviour is ‘so Hungarian’, they make a comparison between Hungary and not-Hungary, in the case of service usually Western Europe.

5.2 Criticising service

I heard many complaints from my informants concerning the level of service and efficiency in Hungary. They described the service as ‘rude’ and ‘old-fashioned’ and compared it to Western European standards. Tamás’ impression of neighbouring Austria was: “*It was different, more modern, but also the mentality, the service was a bit friendlier.*” They criticised the Hungarian way of doing things, implying expectations of a different kind of social relation – with a degree of respect and involvement. International influences and experiences have sparked the dissatisfaction by showing other ways of doing things. When I talked to my informants about the social relations in public space in Hungary, many compared explicitly to Western Europe: ‘they have much better service there’, ‘people are not as rude’, etc.

I did not experience significant examples of young people challenging this distancing and ‘rude’ kind of interactions, by for example insisting on reply or respect from the side of the office or shop assistants. Most of them waited and kept silent. My informants’ complaints were not directed at the persons involved but more generally an expression of their attitudes towards the Hungarian way of doing things. I will elaborate on this argument in the following. Before proceeding, some guiding questions: Firstly, I will exemplify this ‘typical Hungarian’ way of behaviour from my own experience. Secondly, I will discuss the background, the reasons for this kind of behaviour, using the notion of

HABITUS. Thirdly, how can my informants' attitudes and statements concerning service and social relations in public space illuminate their relations to Hungary and Europe?

5.3 A subtle duel – an example

In order to picture and understand the kind of social relations which my informants criticised I will describe an episode that equally intrigued and annoyed me. It took place when I went to the ticket sales desk at Kossuth Lajos metro station to buy a month card for public transport:

> *I approached the desk where a lady of 40-50 years sat behind a window screen. I waited for a while in front of the window before she turned on the microphone and asked in a nonchalant and arrogant tone if she could help me. I explained what I wanted in my stumbling Hungarian, and she gave me a tired look and sighed. Do you have a photo, she asked. I was prepared for this, took out my photo and shoved it to her between the screen and the desk. She sighed again, looked at the photo, then looked at me, then looked at the photo again. I could see that she was not satisfied with the photo (it had been used previously in a student card and had some marks but nothing was wrong with it as such). She shook her head, looked at me, looked at the photo, sighed, and slowly started to make the ticket. Even though I was growing impatient on the inside, I just waited. After a silent and subtle duel of patience – me just standing there looking, and her sighing –, she finished the travel card, I paid and got the card, but without a plastic cover which I had to ask for at another metro station.*
> *(Fieldnotes 16 September 2004)*

At this point I had lived in Budapest for nearly 1½ months. The lady appeared to me as rejecting and arrogant, but when I subsequently reflected on the episode, I saw it more like a 'duel' of positions and domains.

Living in Budapest I contracted in social relations varying from long term friendships to momentary encounters in public space connected to exchange of goods, services or information. Here, I will focus on the latter.

Not all social relations in public space were like the above. One of the first things I noticed during fieldwork was that Hungarians greet each other a lot; when you enter and exit a shop, when you pay at the checkout in the supermarket, when you pass the local green grocer - even when entering the sauna in one of the thermal baths - it is polite and expected to say “Jó reggelt” (lit. good morning), “Jó nápot” (good day), “Jó estét” (good evening), etc. And the butcher or the checkout assistant usually had time to chitchat with regular customers. The ‘intimate feeling’ mostly known from local communities existed, also in central Budapest. But the episodes I will discuss concerns relations where the persons involved do not know each other beforehand; when the relation is of a formal kind. The episodes in question entailed defined roles of customer and assistant, or citizen and clerk. The roles were defined by the formality inhabited in the situations, and I think this formality or ‘insisting on the rules’ is an important aspect of the discussion.

People’s actions are structured by HABITUS, i.e. embodied dispositions inculcated by ‘possibilities and impossibilities, opportunities and prohibitions inhabited in the context’ (Bourdieu 1990:54). In other words, dispositions of probable and improbable practices are internalised in HABITUS (ibid) and people act within this framework. In the following I will look at social relations in public space as a reaction to the context. How does it influence the interactions?

5.4 Protecting Islands

My experiences of social relations in Hungarian public space tell me that individuals are very protective of their domains. In the above example the woman in the ticket office seems to me to be simultaneously rejecting me and protective of her person and position as if she felt threatened. My request from her was not extraordinary or threatening and yet she showed reluctance to accommodate it. Why?

Anthropologist Finn Sivert Nielsen discusses social relations in public space in his dissertation *The Eye of the Whirlwind* (1987a) and develops a conceptual framework for interpreting the Soviet reality he encountered. I find some of his concepts applicable to the Hungarian way of behaviour which I experienced and which my informants described. Nielsen describes the Soviet society as Limbo, i.e. a state of uncertainty, insecurity and lurking chaos (1987a:28) – from which people try to protect themselves. In order to do this they erect Barriers, creating safe, stable and more predictable Islands (ibid:29). One of the ways to protect an Island is formality and insisting on the rules (ibid:85). In this perspective, the ticket sales assistant's behaviour can be interpreted as an act of self-defence. Accepting my photo as it was, she did not follow the rules exactly and she risked being held responsible for that sidestep afterwards. Rejecting it, she could protect her ISLAND. An episode from BKF supports this argument: that by insisting on the rules a receptionist can protect her position, her Island.

> *A teacher wanted to collect clothes among the students by putting up a box in the entrance hall of the college; the clothes would be sent to young people in need. The receptionist turned his initiative down; she supported the idea but the box could not be put in the hall 'because of the rules'. After a while he was allowed to place it in the basement of the college.*
> *(Fieldnotes 2 November 2004)*

Why did the receptionist not allow a collection box with a good purpose in the entrance hall? Why did she not allow a little flexibility in the rules? According to Nielsen's argument she was protecting her Island from the Limbo. But what is Limbo in a Hungarian context? I will argue that Hungarian Limbo is a feeling of instability caused by the social changes taking place today, e.g. fear of unemployment or weakening of national identity.

But Limbo is also constituted by historical factors such as hierarchical structures which do not offer adequate protection or solidarity.

5.5 Historical conditions

Limbo and rules are oppositional conditions which circumscribe the reality which people act within. In this section I will discuss the historical constitution of these concepts in a Hungarian context and how they influence formal relations in public space. HABITUS, and thus social interaction, is structured by 'historical conditions', as argued by Bourdieu (1990:55), and in order to understand people's behaviour we have to look at these.

Anthropologist Andrew Lass is in his article *Portable Worlds* (1999) concerned with the problems of transferring institutional and bureaucratic procedures from an American to a Czech/Slovak context. His case-study of the implementation of a new cataloguing system in Czech and Slovak libraries can be seen as an example of the transfer of operational standards in many fields: authorities' interaction with citizens, shop assistants' service towards customers, etc. Lass' point is that these operational standards are shaped by past political history, institutional practices as well as micropolitical agendas (ibid:279). He emphasises that historical legacies include both pre-Communist histories and Communist practices and ideas; the latter is only the most recent layer of influence (ibid:282).

The Hungarian nation state has been characterised by elitist domination over political, economical and cultural domains. Danish sociologist Susanne Klausen argues that after the 'Ausgleich' of 1867, Hungarian aristocracy constituted a centralized state bureaucracy and ruled their citizens relentlessly (Klausen 1993:48ff). The static social hierarchy with hereditary titles and privileges created a stratified society, where loyalty and orthodox behaviour was appreciated and awarded (Klausen 1993:65).

The bureaucratic systems of the modern state were to a high degree established when this region was part of the Habsburg Empire (1999:296), which makes it possible to compare the countries. But this is not the whole explanation: Tamás noted a difference in mentality and service between Hungary and Austria, once the heart of the Habsburg Empire, so there must be differentiating circumstances. One such difference between the countries is the fifty years of socialist practice and ideas from 1947 to 1989 which influenced the centralist bureaucracy. Party clerks took over the role of the aristocracy, and the hierarchical society was reproduced, although with new persons in leading roles (Klausen 1993:54; Gal 1991:441). How has socialism affected social relations in public space?

5.5.1 From socialist to capitalist rationale

The transition and Europeanization has influenced the practices in public space concerning service and formal relations. In Budapest city centre where tourists are frequent customers, waiters and shop assistants are smiling and on their feet to help you. They will greet you with a "Hello, can I help you?" sometimes even in English. In accordance with capitalist rationale they befriend the customer in order to gain profit. This is different from the socialist rationale which did not see economical gain as an objective (Verdery 1996:22). As Verdery points out, goods were not produced in socialist societies to be sold competitively, but to be redistributed (ibid:26). In socialist societies, firms competed to maximise their bargaining power which was necessary because of shortages of everything from labour force to raw material for production. To obtain these resources, companies and individuals would befriend those higher in the hierarchy and not the customer (ibid:22).

Because of the transition new operational standards and new systems have been introduced (cf. Lass 1999). But as Lass notes, systems are introduced into an established world of HABITUS: particular ways of doing things (1999:296), and it takes time to change such fundamental things; the transition is still taking place and practices representing the whole spectrum of capitalism to socialist can be observed in post-socialist countries.

An example of this is Széchenyi, a thermal bath located in the city park equally popular among tourists and locals. Here, modern 'entrance equipment' had been installed: a turnstile and electronic chips registering visitors' entrance and exit. I assume this was done in order to streamline the entrance and exit of the many visitors, and, in a longer perspective, to save money on salaries since it would no longer be necessary to have people sitting receiving tickets. Today, though, one or two employees sit by the turnstile to instruct and watch people when they enter and exit – a task that could have been solved with a written sign.

My point here is that historical conditions and systems such as social stratification and socialist rational are embodied as dispositions which invoke specific ways of doing things, such as formality and protecting Islands. But even though these are internalised in their HABITUS my informants criticised the service and treatment they were given by authorities and shop assistants. I think the complaints can be seen in several perspectives: firstly, lamenting can be seen as a self-confirmatory ritual which maintain and reinforce coherence (I will treat this more thoroughly in chapter 6; see Ries 1997). Secondly, their discontent with the practices can be spurred by Europeanization. Many of the students have experienced different social relations in Western Europe, with which they now compare social relations in Hungary. Thirdly, students' complaints can be seen as a way to demonstrate their discontent with 'old-fashioned' practices to Westerners – in the episode from BKF, me and the American teacher.

5.6 'In Europe they have better service'

How can these arguments tell us something about the way my informants relate to Hungary and Europe? The social relations in public space as defined in the introduction to this chapter are shaped by people's HABITUS, which is structured by historical conditions as sketched out above.

The young, well-educated, urban and internationally oriented Hungarians I spoke with often complained to me about the lack of service or the rudeness of the people working with authorities. They explicitly compared it to 'Europe' or 'Western Europe' where they found the level of service and respect to be higher. As earlier mentioned, most of them had travelled widely in Europe and they could refer to personal experiences.

Tamás' statement about the better and friendlier service in neighbouring Austria suggests that the legacy of socialism has influenced the way people relate to each other in public space, but also that the perceived difference between Hungarian and Austrian practices is connected to the fact that Austria belongs to Western Europe being an 'old' member of the EU[31]. The critique and complaints are then more of an ideological and symbolic kind pointing at my informants' interest in distancing themselves from Hungarian practices that would be characterised as 'old-fashioned' and 'socialist' by foreigners. The comparisons between Hungary and Europe made them appear to me and others as internationally oriented; and by complaining about the low level of service in Hungary they could present themselves as more European than the Hungarians who actually practiced this kind of social relations.

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[31] Austria became a member of the EU in 1995, and entered the Economic and Monetary Union (the Euro) in 1999.

6 IMAGES OF HUNGARY

In the previous chapters I have analysed the way social practices can tell us something about how young well-educated Hungarians relate to Hungary and Europe. What we saw was that my informants' actions and attitudes to action can be seen as constituting a relation to Hungary and Europe. In this way they relate to the two communities as symbols – the terms 'Hungary' and 'Europe' are attributed with a variety of meanings which are open for interpretation (Cohen 1985:15). Individuals' interpretations and understandings of symbols are mediated by personal experience, and communities are developed and maintained by similarity or a consciousness of a similarity between people's interpretations (ibid:15f). In this sense, symbolism creates a sense of belonging to a community because people perceive a coherence, but it also creates differences between communities (ibid:53). The IMAGINED COMMUNITY makes it possible to see an agreement of interpretations of symbols.

In this chapter I will analyse my informants' interpretations of Hungary, mostly as they were expressed in interviews[32]. When talking about Hungary and Hungarian-ness with my informants different topics and images were expressed. As such Hungary was interpreted as a symbol from different angles. In the following I will discuss four predominant themes or clusters of themes: *Hungary in headlines*, *Hungarians are pessimistic*, *Hungary as historical nation* and *Hungary as 'in between'*. The four themes are ways in which Hungary was presented by my informants and analysis of these: what relation to Hungary do they represent? How is Hungarian-ness expressed in these descriptions?

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[32] I have chosen not to use the term 'narratives' about my informants' accounts. The answers and accounts are not coherent tellings as such but rather 'fragments of narratives'. But I will treat them as resembling to narratives, which structure and mediate individuals' involvement in the world (Ochs & Capps 1996:20-21). Like narratives, the statements are told from a certain position and with a certain intention and must be analysed accordingly (Skultans 1998:XXI).

The latter three themes represent larger discourses which were present and presented by my informants as well as in public space. The statements discussed in these sections draw on common memories and heritage such as literature, media and art (e.g. statues). The first is more immediate answers to my question and therefore situational. Together, the themes draw on the resources which constitute IMAGINED COMMUNITIES, such as social memory (Fentress & Wickham 1992).

Before proceeding with the themes I will introduce the theories relevant to the discussions.

6.1 Social memory and belonging

According to Cohen, symbols are held in common by a community's members. They all know the symbol, but its meanings vary from individual to individual (Cohen 1985:15). What creates coherence in a community is a similarity or the consciousness of a similarity between the members' interpretations of the symbol (ibid:16). But as I have argued earlier, similarity and coherence can be invoked and enacted both vertically and horizontally. Social memory is passed on from generation to generation transmitting worldviews and ways of interpreting the surroundings (Fentress & Wickham 1992:XI). It constitutes the IMAGINED COMMUNITY which Anderson defines as a "*deep, horizontal comradeship.*" (1983 (1991):7). 'Deep' because of the creation of a connection of the nation's past and present which makes it appear as a community with an 'immemorial past' and a 'limitless future' (ibid:10f). It creates an awareness of the nation's continuity as I will show (Connerton

1989:12). This is what I called VERTICAL COHERENCE. Simultaneously, HABITUS of embodied dispositions ensures a reproduction of practical knowledge of the world (Bourdieu 1990:64).

The IMAGINED COMMUNITY is 'horizontal' because of the feeling of simultaneity especially created by media (Anderson 1983 (1991):24-25) which is today also radio, television and not least the internet. I will argue that HORIZONTAL COHERENCE also can be confined to a generational group, such as the one my informants belong to. Difference age groups have different points of reference, which is particularly the case in post-socialist societies. Most of my informants did not have personal memories of life during socialism which makes their worldview different from their parents' generation. I will argue that HORIZONTAL COHERENCE does not necessarily include the whole Hungarian population, but can include a segment of it. This generational HORIZONTAL COHERENCE which implies a generational gap was deployed by my informants. The feeling of simultaneity invoked by media and similar experiences affects the 'style in which the community is imagined' (ibid:6). Consequently, if my informants' images of the Hungarian community is based on media, information or experiences which their parents do not get, they will create different 'styles' of imagining, thereby maintaining or even deepen the gap between the generations.

What we then have is both the invocation of historical roots and discontinuity.

I will now proceed to the five themes identified above. The first is 'Hungary in headlines', which refers to the short, traditional and almost stereotypic answers I got when asking my informants to mention some Hungarian characteristics.

6.1.1 Hungary in 'headlines'

The question concerning Hungarian characteristics was introductory to the part of the interview concerning national and European identity. My intention was to get an impression of what was considered 'typically Hungarian' by the informants. "*Hungarian kitchen, folk dances, language, mentality of people*"; "*Very spicy food, wine, beautiful women, and the beautiful Parliament*"; "*Pessimism, history (we never won a war)*" or "*Paprika! Family solidarity*" are examples of answers.

When looking at these answers, most of them sound as if they were headlines from a tourist brochure about Hungary, except maybe 'pessimism', 'mentality' and 'family solidarity' which stands out because they are personal notions. The answers were often followed by a laugh as if the informants could see the 'touristy' and self-ironic picture they were painting of their country.

Generally speaking, we can differentiate between external characteristics such as food, language, wine, traditional dances, buildings and places, and internal characteristics such as mentality and family relations. The majority of mentioned characteristics belong to the external group. When I asked Éva about Hungarian characteristics she said:

> *"For example there are very nice places which are not really clean but you can go to the mountains hiking and there are really nice places in the northern part. And somehow beside this very bad things and the government and the poor people there are really nice things in Hungary, for example there are wines, the hot springs, the culture, the people."*

The external characteristics can be treated as a way of communicating across boundaries, between 'us' and 'them'. By describing Hungary to me in terms of paprika and goulash they were sure that I could recognize and thereby relate to what they said. They were describing their nation as they expected me to see it – as I would know it from guidebooks and tourist brochures. Visitors from Western Europe usually know about these characteristics and recognise them as 'typically Hungarian'. The emphasis on 'typically Hungarian' things would assure a mutual understanding of Hungary as an IMAGINED COMMUNITY, it is a simple way to answer my question and give me an image of Hungary.

A different kind of answers to the same question – 'Can you mention some Hungarian characteristics?' – was given by informants who had lived abroad for a longer period, e.g. as exchange students. The time spent in a different country influenced the way these informants related to Hungary. Zita expressed this most explicitly. I asked for Hungarian characteristics, and she answered:

> *"I can only tell what is Hungarian to me, so what I missed from Hungary when I was in Germany, why I said 'I want to come back, I can't live in Germany'*[33]*. Firstly, the mentality here, not the thing that everybody is pessimists. But the mentality that they are loving and they will help you and they like you and they give you a chance to be a good person. And secondly, if you spend the summer in Hungary you will know what I mean, it is hot, the sun is shining, everybody is happy, everybody is in short skirts and t-shirts."*

Zita clearly expresses pride and good memories of Hungary, the climate, the people, the mentality, and the atmosphere. This was her personal memory of Hungary and it was what she missed when away.

But the informants who had lived abroad did not only have rosy images of Hungary. They were often more reflected about Hungary and saw the characteristics from different perspectives. Péter, who had been an exchange student in Copenhagen, compared the Hungarian and the Danish education systems and concluded that they complemented each other. The Hungarian system was to him primarily theoretically minded, whereas the Danish system was more practically minded. He found that the time as an exchange student in Denmark had given him new experiences which he could use in Hungary, seeing that things could be done differently than what he was used to. But he appreciated the Hungarian education system with its high demands and theoretical focus. Living in a different country gave the exchange students experiences with which to compare the Hungarian way of doing things. Many of the former exchange students told me that they felt 'more Hungarian' when living in a foreign country, but also after their return to Hungary. Their experiences had illuminated the things about Hungary that were important to them as persons: relations to family and friends, familiar practices and ways of thinking, cf. the above quotation from the interview with Zita.

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[33] Zita had spent three years in Germany studying in high school before she decided to return to Hungary.

This experience prevailed among the former exchange students I interviewed: living away from family, friends, and the familiar way of life influenced their images of Hungary[34].

Whereas the external characteristics can be said to maintain external relations, the internal characteristics can be seen as reinforcing the internal identity. Mentality and moods can be difficult to describe, but when I asked them to elaborate on these, the majority of answers were similar, almost identical. They did not concern family solidarity but pessimism.

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[34] The book "Siting Culture" (Hastrup & Olwig 1997) provides examples of the importance of locality and the connection between place and identity of individuals and groups. Skultans talks of the 'memories of place' playing a significant role especially for people living away from home (1998:31).

6.1.2 'Hungarians are pessimistic'

In a small survey I conducted among 45 young Hungarians from different settings in Budapest, I asked them to write down some Hungarian characteristics. Eight respondents wrote pessimism, or 'national depression' as one respondent phrased it.

Another example showing the frequency of seeing pessimism as a Hungarian characteristic was from a class at BKF which I visited together with a Columbian woman. We were discussing the differences between our respective countries with the students. At some point the Columbian and I were reassuring the students that we did not find Hungarians particularly pessimistic, when a female student exclaimed: "*But we are pessimistic!*" Her insistence on pessimism as part of Hungarian-ness, which was supported by other students, seems irrational to me. Why would she insist on being recognized by a negative characteristic?

I was surprised to notice that the descriptions of Hungary as a modern nation state were often complaints: the Hungarian economy was not good, the politicians were corrupt, the unemployment rate was high, and improvements in infrastructure were non-existent due to administrative incompetence. For example Zoltán said: "*People vote, but don't trust the people they vote for… Politicians in Hungary are corrupt and people in Hungary don't vote for something, but vote against the parties, they define themselves against some things.*" I was intrigued by the number and frequency of such statements and many of them were related to Hungary's position in relation to Europe and to other European countries. It was my impression that the statements were triggered by the expectations and disappointments connected to Hungary's EU-accession.

One of the crucial steps towards this goal was the EU-accession 1 May 2004. Before this date 15 years of integration had taken place: the former socialist countries have received support from the EU (formerly the EC) since 1989. The adaptation process has had concrete consequences for Hungarian citizens, and my informants as well as journalists and politicians saw them as sacrifices given by Hungarians in return for the much-praised EU-membership. As a result, the promises of improvements were many and the expectations high before accession 1 May 2004.

There was a feeling of disappointment with the actual changes among Hungarians. I asked Zoltán if there had been any changes since the EU-accession and he told me that his father recently had been writing an e-mail to a friend in Brazil concerning this:

> *"He wrote: nothing has changed. The roads are still bad and the infrastructure is still not working properly. And I agree with him."*

Zita said:

> *"I don't feel anything happening. I hear and I read in the newspapers that we get help with money to social development, I read it but I don't see it. The earliest time we will see anything will be 2005. The only thing that has changed is that you can go to schools outside, so many schools made new relations to schools in the union."*

The repetition and frequency of the negative descriptions convinced me that they served a purpose other than actual complaining, and I will argue that they constituted coherence and a sense of belonging among Hungarians; it was a way to express and enact Hungarian-ness.

My approach is inspired by the American anthropologist Nancy Ries and her book *Russian Talk* (1997). From a Russian context she sees the continuous complaints of 'disintegration', 'collapse', and 'degradation' among Russians as LITANIES (ibid:46). She compares the LITANIES to rituals with a particular structure and focus on certain objects (ibid). Moreover, the LITANIES as rituals "*helped to fabricate a sense of shared experience and destiny*", as Ries writes (ibid). Her emphasis on the connecting aspect of rituals and memories is shared by Paul Connerton, who argues that a community is reminded of its identity through a shared image of the past; an image which in "*conveyed and sustained by ritual performances.*" (Connerton 1989:70).

My informants' characterisations of Hungarians as pessimistic can be seen in a similar light. The repetition and emphasis on the pessimism as inherent in Hungarian-ness supports this arguments. But what were the reasons for the pessimism? How did my informants explain it? Zita said

> *"The Hungarians are pessimistic because we always made bad choices: when we joined the monarchy, when we joined the First World War to the losers side and the Second World War to the losers side. And since that time we were on the losers side with the socialists and now we have capitalism and this is only corruption and no capitalism, so I think the Hungarians see more the negative sides of things than the positive. I don't know why, I think it's coming from that time. And the parents give that to their children and they give it to their grandchildren and it will only change when they learn or see another way."*

And Zoltán added:

> *"We have a quite sick self-definition, we Hungarians. There are a lot of things we could be proud of but I can't feel it like 'Wow, being Hungarian is super!' Torn apart because of the past and that's quite sad."*

So the pessimism was explained in terms of negative historical experiences; a consequence of all the suffering the Hungarians feel they have been subjected to. Firstly the 150 years under Ottoman rule, thereafter centuries of Habsburg superiority which ended with the Trianon Treaty, which deprived Hungary of two thirds of its territory, followed by periods with fascism and Communism. The LITANIES created a community of shared suffering and thereby created a sense of belonging (Ries 1997:87). In BKF class discussions when 'pessimism' came up students would often confirm each other of the importance of pessimism in Hungarian-ness. It was a self-confirmatory and self-reinforcing ritual which maintained and reinforced the coherence.

Returning to the introductory question, how do these points illuminate my informants' relations to Hungary? Firstly, the external characteristics mentioned above can be seen as their way to present Hungary as meaningful and understandable to me as a foreigner. I assume these simple 'headlines' do not represent their own comprehensive image of Hungary, but they create a partial image of a symbol on which we – Hungarians as well as foreigners – can agree. The meanings of the symbol are varied and open for individual and contextual interpretations.

Secondly, internal characteristics were dominated by 'pessimism' which most of the Hungarians I talked to found 'typically Hungarian'. Following Ries, the repeated use of 'pessimism' can be seen as a ritual which reinforces the sense of belonging among members of the Hungarian community. The shared feeling of suffering and victimisation constitutes and reproduces the IMAGINED COMMUNITY.

My informants were deeply aware of the history of Hungary and its significance for Hungary of today. Memories of history are passed on from generation to generation as narratives, i.e. as positioned and structuring accounts. Anthropologist James Fentress and historian Chris Wickham defines this kind of memory as 'social memory' (1992), and I will use this concept in order to analyse the role of history in national identity among my informants. In their view narratives are the narrator's interpretations of events and not a historically accurate account. As anthropologists we have to interpret the meaning of the narratives (ibid:XI).

6.1.3 Hungary as historical nation

Young Hungarians were very explicit in their reference to history and its importance for Hungarian national identity. History plays a significant role in the Hungarian public space: historical sites, three annual celebrations of national holidays, frequent references to historical events or periods in politics, and in the media. Public memories are encountered and experienced in everyday life as you walk in the city. But personal memories of history also constitute my informants' awareness, memories passed on from generation to generation invoking emotional VERTICAL COHERENCE. Their description of the history of Hungary is not just a chronological account of factual events, but the verbalization of social involvement in the past: "*during the Middle Age we were knocked out three or four times*" (Zoltán), "*the painful Trianon Treaty when the country was cut*" (Dóra), "*in the two World Wars Hungary always decided to be on the wrong side*" (Dóra). Zoltán and Dóra relate to the past in a very personal way, like many of my informants, as if they had experienced these events themselves.

Memories constitute membership of social groups when it is shared (Fentress & Wickham 1992). "*[S]ocial groups construct their own images of the world by establishing an agreed version of the past*", and "*these versions are established by communication*" (ibid:X). Recalling past experience and sharing images of the historical past constitutes social groups in the present, and creates a sense of belonging (ibid:XI), or what I have called VERTICAL COHERENCE. An essential part of Anderson's definition of an IMAGINED COMMUNITY is the sense of belonging due to a feeling of shared history (Anderson 1983 (1991):11f).

Social memories are interpretations of the past and can be analysed as narratives which connect, clarify, and explain (Fentress & Wickham 1992:51, 88). The social memory consists of images and stories, which *"stabilize social memory, allowing it to be transmitted."* (1992:197) I encountered several shared images and accounts of the history of Hungary: 'the painful Trianon Treaty', 'Hungary as Europe's bulwark against the Ottomans', 'Hungarians as victims of history'. The uniformity of these images from person to person indicates that they are shared.

Simultaneously, *"social memory provide a grid through which the present can be understood in terms of the remembered past."* (1992:197). Social memory is not only an interpretation of the past; it also provides a grid or a frame for interpretation of the present. I will provide some examples of the way the social memories of the past are communicated in order to explain and legitimize the present.

One of the central images of Hungary recalls it as a great European nation: great in a geographical sense because of the Hungarian territory which in 19th century included most of Central Europe, and great in other senses because of cultural and scientific achievements. Zoltán considers the heterogeneity of past Hungary an asset:

> *"We have always had settlers coming in to repopulate the country and it's a bit idealistic or hard to say, but Hungary has a really huge pool [of genes and potentials] to work with or to grow from, than most of the nations."*

"*We are what we remember*", say Fentress and Wickham (1992:7). When my informants remember Hungary as a great European nation they emphasise the European-ness of the nation and thereby of them. Following this assumption, their interpretations of the past legitimises the present in terms of Hungary's position in Europe.

Following this statement, looking at the way people present and structure their memories and what they remember is a study of who they are (1992:7). In one class of Civic Communication, the teacher asked the students to name some Hungarian characteristics;

one of them was ‘pride’. “Pride of what?” the teacher asked and some suggestions came up on the blackboard: “*Pride of inventors, actors, people that went abroad [and became] notable Hungarians. Pride of history, survival and achievements. Pride of language.*”

On the other hand, another Hungarian characteristic which was listed at the blackboard was ‘lack of self-confidence’. For elaboration the students explained: “*We don’t believe in ourselves.*” “*The last 500 years we have lost [wars].*” “*My father used to say: the last time Hungary was free was in 1490, since then we have experienced 500 years of occupation.*” This is an image of Hungary which I have touched upon earlier concerning ‘pessimism’. The students remembered the defeats and oppression of Hungary, thereby presenting themselves as victims of history.

I did experience ‘counter-images’. Some of the young Hungarians protested against this negative image of Hungary. When the female student exclaimed “*we are pessimistic*” a male student added: ”*But now it is changing. We are young and we make plans.*” And in a conversation with a young working woman, she said: ”*There are many [Hungarians] who think that Hungary is a victim of history. But those who think like that focus on the past, which we cannot change, instead of thinking of the future, which is probably also more European.*” She linked the past with Hungary, and the future with Europe. I experienced this attitude in other episodes. When I was introduced to the headmaster of BKF he proudly described the college as “*probably the most Europeanized educational institution in Hungary*”. And he told me how they had manifested this aspiration during the official opening of the college in 2000:

> *“Normally ceremonies like this begin with the Hungarian anthem and closes with a traditional Hungarian song, which is very much about faith. It’s very emotional, traditional and nationalistic! And usually people stand while singing. We opened the ceremony with the national anthem as usual. But when*

> *closing the ceremony we played the EU anthem*[35] *instead of the traditional Hungarian song. The participants didn't know how to react, but generally they were standing when the piece was played. A representative from the Prime Minister's Department who participated was very offended and said: 'This is not proper!' But in my opinion we opened the ceremony with the past and closed it with the future."*

The headmaster was clearly proud of what he had accomplished and was very confident in the future of Hungary in the EU. But from his account it becomes clear that Europeanization is not necessarily accepted by everybody. Like the woman quoted above, he presents himself as a European Hungarian in relation to the people who did not understand or appreciate the symbolic act of adherence to the future. This division is parallel to the dichotomies of open/closed, active/passive used by Latvian EU-activists to describe the differences between themselves and 'ordinary people', who did not see the necessity and advantages of Latvia's EU-accession (Linnet 2002:22-24).

A popular characterisation of Hungarian was 'in between', which also refers to the differentiation between European Hungarians and 'old-fashioned' Hungarians. To be 'in between' implies at least two positions to be 'in between' and this characteristic emphasises the relational identification of my informants.

6.1.4 Hungary as 'in between'

In the introduction I mentioned that my informants' often referred to Hungary as 'in between'; this is the theme of the last section in chapter six. I will argue that being 'in between' is a description that captures young Hungarians' feelings of being Hungarian today very well. Hungary was described as being 'in between' in many ways: geographically between Eastern and Western Europe, politically between socialism and democracy, economically between socialism and capitalism, culturally between Europe and Asia. Zita described her generation 'in between' the older generation, who grew up during socialism and future generations, and who will grow up in a more globalised world: "*The generation of 24 and up they learned some years Russian and then some years English and German or both and they don't know neither Russian, English nor German.*" But what does the description 'in between' entail?

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[35] The prelude to the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven Ninth Symphony (Shore & Black 1994:286)

Following anthropologist Victor Turner in his ritual analysis, where he elaborates on Arnold van Gennep's theory of 'rites de passage' (1970), to be 'in between' is a state of uncertainty and ambiguity (1970:510). In transitions from one position to another, subjects or communities undergo a period of LIMINALITY, wherein they are neither the first state nor the second; they are 'in between' (1970:514).

This insight can help us interpret why Hungarians often characterise themselves as something 'in between'; by presenting themselves as 'in between' they indicate that they are 'on the way' to something else. They know the position they depart from; it is a turbulent past of victories and deficits. They have an image, or aspirations, of the position they are heading for: sovereignty, stability, democracy, economic and social welfare, etc. The transition from departure to destination is full of unknown factors and dangers. As the present affords insecurities and instability, Hungarians perceive themselves as 'in between' and thus on the way to a better future.

Characterising one's country or position as 'in between' is not particularly Hungarian; reading the literature from the post-socialist countries you find that the image of being in between is not exclusively Hungarian, it is present in most, if not all, post-socialist countries. It is part of their self-image, their self-understanding. They feel in between East and West, traditional and modern, past and future, but each on their own terms[36]. But isn't 'in between' a 'non-category' - something in between something else and thus nothing in itself? Why does it make sense to people to claim this position? Why do nations and their inhabitants insist that they are more in-between than the neighbouring country?

Anderson reminds us to study the 'styles' in which communities are imagined (1983 (1991):6). Imagining Hungary as 'in between' is a way of being Hungarian for my informants; it is a way to explain their own position in Hungary and to explain Hungary's position in Europe. It is a way of relating to Hungary and Europe. Claiming a position as 'in-between' is their way of finding a place in Europe: we are not Western European and we are not Eastern European, we are something in between. Turner's definition of LIMINALITY implies a temporary position; liminal people or societies are 'on the way' to a new position. Likewise, my informants emphasised the movement in Hungary's position: "*We are becoming like Western Europe*," or the other direction: "*Economically I think we are moving back to the East*". As long as Hungary is not considered either Western or East, it will stay neither/nor: 'in between'.

6.2 Summing up

In this chapter I have presented four different themes of relating to Hungary which I identified in my informants' accounts. I have discussed the way the informants created

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[36] See for example Nielsen (1987a:206ff, 1987b) and Neumann (1996) about Russians' relation to Europe, Mortensen (1999) and Linnet (2002) on Latvian relations to East and West, and Buchowski (2001:175) more generally of Central Europe's role in between East and West..

VERTICAL or HORIZONTAL COHERENCE through their images of Hungary. These images were not static but changing according to context and frames of reference. The four different themes presented are not mutually excluding as individuals talked about two or more of them during an interview. The analytical distinction between them is mine and I have done it in order to analyse their meaning.

Then what is the meaning of 'Hungary' as a symbol according to my informants? They interpret it as a historical nation, and the past glory legitimises the nation's position as part of Europe.

Hungary was often described in terms of stereotypes that served as common denominator to establish an understanding between my informants and others, including foreigners. I showed how Hungary was remembered as positive memories of the things closest to my informants: family, friends, sunshine, etc. This positive image was most prominent among Hungarians who had lived outside Hungary for a longer period. In this way my informants support the points of anthropologists who have insisted on the importance of place when discussing identity. Those of my informants who had lived abroad, related to Hungary as a locality which invoked emotional memories and feelings of belonging. The positive stereotypes often concerned external things (landscapes, buildings, food articles or drinks) and the most prominent negative stereotype of Hungarians concerned the Hungarian mentality, something internal, namely 'pessimism'.

My informants frequently described Hungary in terms of pessimism and victimisation, which can be interpreted as a sign of inferiority in relation to other European nations, especially those in Western Europe.

Complaints dominated my informants' descriptions of Hungary as present nation state: they were not satisfied with the Hungarian politicians and the results of the work of the Hungarian authorities. I contend that their negative representation of Hungary must be seen as an outcome of their conscious and unconscious comparisons with Western Europe. The expectations which were raised in connection with Hungary's EU accession have not been fulfilled, and many Hungarians – also besides my informants – expressed disappointment. But, as I argued, the litanies can also be seen as a ritual which confirms and reinforces the Hungarian community among Hungarians.

The 'social memories' of Hungary are changing as a new generation retells them. Large parts of the social memories remain unchanged, but I detected signs of new interpretations and attitudes towards them. The new attitudes divided Hungarians into those who focused on the past and those who were thinking of the future. Some of my informants were aware that focusing on the past was not a good way to integrate into Europe. Hungary has had many disagreements and strives with its neighbouring countries, but remembering and adorning these memories was by these informants considered backwards and not-European. I showed how Hungary for some, for example the rector of BKF, symbolised the past, while Europe represented the future. Denouncing Hungarian traditions, like the traditional song usually played at ceremonies, was seen as a way to 'become more European', to create Hungarian European traditions and habits. The widespread use of the EU flag can be interpreted in a similar way.

Hungary does not hold a clearly defined position in Europe – unless one considers being 'in between' a defined position, which would go against Turner's understanding of the term. Rather, my informants described Hungary as 'in between' in many ways. I argued that this characterisation is a way to insist on Hungary's development towards another position. But this movement was not limited to one direction: Hungary was moving in a liminal space, but moving both directions and this tension is expressed in the term 'being in between'. It expresses hopes for a future in a better position in the West, but also nervousness of falling back to the East. I have already pointed to some of the implications of the interplay between these symbolic categories, but they will become clearer in the next chapter, where I will analyse my informants' symbolic landscape of Europe: Firstly, I will analyse how my informants described Europe in terms of geography and values. What did Europe symbolise to them? And what does the term enclose? Secondly, I will go into detail with their view of the EU. How has the EU accession affected their view of Hungary and Europe? Does Hungary's membership of the EU change their views of the symbolic landscape of Europe? Thirdly, I will analyse my informants' view of the regions of Europe: Western, Central and Eastern Europe. How do they perceive these in terms of geography and meaning?

7 BETWEEN EAST AND WEST

7.1 The Symbolic Landscape of Europe

Social categories are symbols in the sense that they have a variety of meanings. The meanings are interpreted by individuals and mediated by personal experiences (Cohen 1985:14f). The individuals' consciousness of others' interpretations creates coherence and boundaries based on their sense of similarity and difference (ibid:16). Imagined communities are constituted by the consciousness of coherence.

In this chapter I will look at my informants' interpretations of 'Europe', 'the European Union', 'Western', 'Central' and 'Eastern Europe' as symbols. These entities are not a just treated as geographical categories, but are social categories attached with meanings and values – they invoke sentiments and attitudes among individuals. Together, the symbols form a symbolic landscape of Europe. But what meanings did my informants attach to these symbols? And how do their interpretations illuminate their view on Hungary's position in this landscape of symbols?

My informants have similar backgrounds in many ways (age, education, international orientation, middleclass families, living in Budapest) and there was clearly a similarity between their interpretations of the above symbols. But as I listened to their accounts and statements I found great variety in the way they related to 'Europe', 'the European Union', and not least 'Western', 'Central' and 'Eastern Europe', not from person to person, but from context to context.

I quoted Zoltán in the beginning of Chapter 3 saying: "*I consider us [Hungary] more to the West than to the East. Of course we are not to the West, not only geographically, but economically, mentally…*" What we see here is a differing between Eastern and Western Europe as symbols in a geographical, economical and mental sense, as if speaking of different symbols. This diversity of the meaning of the categories became explicit in many interviews and conversations and in this chapter I will go into detail with this variety of attached meanings. By doing this, we can learn how my informants interpreted their own and Hungary's position in Europe; how they related to Hungary and Europe, and how they perceived the relation between Hungary and Europe. Furthermore, I will look at the contexts for my informants' statements.

Firstly, I will discuss theories of the symbolic meaning of Europe. What have been said about this earlier? This is followed by an analysis of my informants' interpretations of 'Europe'. Secondly, I will discuss the construction of Europe as a symbol taking place according to EU-policies. How do EU-policymakers present Europe and how was this effort interpreted by my informants? Thirdly, I will turn to the regional labels of Europe: Western, Central and Eastern Europe. How have they been interpreted and attributed with meaning by scholars? And how do my informants interpret them as symbols and points of orientation?

7.2 Europe as symbol

Europe is a contested symbol; even though we share the symbol it represents different things to us (cf. Cohen 1985). Goddard, Llobera and Shore consider 'Europe' an "*icon that* *embraces a whole spectrum of different referents and meanings*" in the introduction to their book *The Anthropology of Europe* (1994:26). My informants unanimously stated that Hungary was part of Europe, but some expressed doubts if all Europeans agreed on this. Dóra said:

> *"I believe that we are more connected to Europe than to any other part of the world, I mean, we are theoretically closer to other parts of the world but still… also because of the history of Europe. This region was always part of Europe, why should we consider to another part?"*

I contend that Dóra would not ask herself this question unless she had experienced others questioning it.

On the other hand, I noticed how Europe was referred to by my informants as something external to Hungary when they used expressions like "the European way of doing things", "that's how it is in Europe", etc.

Looking at these apparently opposing relations to Europe it becomes clear that it is an 'elusive term' (Goddard et. al 1994:24) and 'polysemic' (Buchowski 2001:168). The different interpretations of Europe cannot be explained in terms of individual experiences (Cohen 1985:14), since they in some cases were expressed by the same persons. It is my contention that the transition and 're-ordering of worlds' (Verdery 1999:35) taking place in Hungary and other post-socialist countries in these years result in ambiguous interpretations of Europe, Western, Central and Eastern Europe. The 'conceptual vacuum' (Verdery 1996:38) causes doubts about how to interpret Europe as a category. In the following I will look at the values and meanings attached by my informants to Europe as a symbol, and I will discuss the negotiations taking place around the boundaries of Europe: what is at stake in this negotiation? And who is involved?

7.2.1 Their Europe

> Pia: *"And the last question: where do you see Europe in twenty years?"*
> Róbert: *"Europe? I don't see Europe now!"*
> Pia: *"You don't see Europe now?"*
> Róbert: *"Not really, I cannot tell you why. I cannot see Europe as such."*

Europe is an elusive term, as we see from Róbert's statement. By asking like I did I presumed Róbert and I related to the same symbol, to Europe as a geographical and political entity. But this was not the case. Róbert's statement can of course be seen as a provocation against my simplified question, since we had been discussing 'Europe' as a category earlier during the interview. But the example shows that the meaning of 'Europe' cannot be taken for granted.

One of the questions I asked my informants was: "How big is Europe?" The extent and boundaries of Europe are related to their understanding of 'Europe' as a symbol, and Hungary's position in Europe depends on where the boundaries of Europe are perceived to be. Boundaries are contested areas, because they demarcate the difference between 'us' and 'them' (Barth 1969:251; Cohen 1985:12).

My informants presented similar geographical definitions of Europe: it is a continent with a few (but rather big, in a geographical and political sense) contested areas to the east, namely Russia and Turkey. But the question is a complex one, as Zita showed:

> *"The biggest part of Turkey is inside Europe [sic!], and then I have a problem: the question is if the Russians are only a neighbour to Europe or if they are inside. I would say that Belarus is a part of Europe but I think Russia is just as big as Europe. So I think I would not say that it is Europe, I am in doubt whether Belarus is Europe and sometimes I am not sure if Turkey is in Europe [Sic!]."*

And later:

> *"Sometimes if you try to feel what is Europe or why are these states Europe, you would say because they are Christian, and they have mostly the same look, the same thinking, not in everything, but on the whole. And the temperament. But it's hard to say because we have so many Arabs and Turks and you have so many Soviet states inside Russia and they are orthodox, okay some are catholic, but they are orthodox. How can I say that Turkey is not European only because there are so many Arabs, it's the same with France and Spain, there are also many Arabs, but you are sure that France and Spain are European countries. It's really hard. I would not be Gunther Verheugen [EU Commissioner for Enlargement], because he has to decide is this a European state or not? I don't know how he can decide it. So this is Europe for me."*

Zita mentions religion as a boundary-making characteristic: Europe is Christian and Turkey is Islamic. Europe is predominantly Catholic and Protestant and Russia is predominantly Orthodox. But this characteristic is blurred by migration, as Zita pointed out, which makes it difficult to use as a defining characteristic.

Hungary's relationship with Russia is complicated and emotional, not least because of the 50 years as a Soviet satellite-state. Zita accentuated the Orthodox Church as a difference between Russia and Europe, but another reason for not seeing Russia as part of Europe is that 'Russia is too large'. This can be understood in two ways: geographically and in terms of power. Pan-Slavism, the idea of a united nation of all Slavs, was not explicitly mentioned by my informants, but some were concerned with Hungary's geographical position in the middle of Slavic nations, like Zoltán:

> *"We are surrounded by a Slavic block and we are not Slavic which is very interesting and a very important fact especially in the self-definition in the Southern part of Hungary."*[37]

The Southern part of Hungary borders Serbia and violent attacks on Hungarian minorities in the Serbian region of Vojvodina are regularly reported, also while I stayed in

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[37] Bulgarians, Serbians, Croatians, Slovenians, Slovaks, the Czechs, Poles, Russians, Belarussians, and Ukrainians are Slavic peoples. Romania, though, is not Slavic, so in an ethnical sense Hungary cannot be said to be surrounded by Slavic people.

Budapest. During the Balkan wars, this Hungarian minority in Serbia became pieces in the geopolitical puzzle influencing Hungarian politicians' decision that Hungary should stay neutral in the conflict to avoid assaults on the minority. Károly and I discussed Hungary's relations to foreign countries, when he said:

> *"Serbians fought the Moslems in their country ten years ago and Hungary didn't know what to think. But the Serbians had strong supporters in Russia and we were in the middle. What were we supposed to do? And a lot of Hungarians live in Serbia."*

He saw Hungary as caught in between Slavic countries and Russia as the 'big-brother' in that alliance.

The European-ness of Hungary's border country Ukraine was also doubted, while the Baltic countries were considered more Nordic, and thus European. Dóra said:

> *"I would put Ukraine on the other side. Ukraine is geographically close, but for me it's more connected to Russia, it's not Europe anymore. But there is still the Nordic countries: Estonia, Lithuania, I would put them more to Europe, I mean the mentality. I have never been there, but I have this imagination that the mentality of the people is more connected to Europe."*

Dóra did not define European mentality and she had not visited the countries mentioned, but she defined them as European according to her interpretation of the symbol 'Europe', which entails a certain kind of mentality. Even though Ukraine is geographically close to Hungary and Europe, it is closer to the Russian mentality, while the Baltic countries, though geographically close to Russia do not resemble Russian mentality. I think this interpretation refers to the question of Slavic people and that Ukrainians and Russians are perceived as resembling because of the Slavic ethnicity and language.

During socialism Hungarians learned Russian as second language, and most resented it as they resented Soviet superiority in other areas (Borneman & Fowler 1997:500). In this distancing they are together with many other Europeans who perceive Russia as too different from Europe to become part of it (Kundera 1984:33; Buchowski 2001:177ff). By defining Russia as not European, Hungarians can define themselves against this image and consequently confirm their European-ness (Cohen 1985: 53; Shore 1993:782).

The definition of Turkey as European or not was highly debated, while I was in Budapest. Simultaneously with my fieldwork, Turkey was subject to an extensive evaluation by the EU, and this spurred heated debate in Hungary, and other EU-countries, about Turkey's possibilities of membership of the EU.

To my informants Turkey was the 'land of origin' of the Ottoman Empire, the intruder and enemy of Europe from the middle of the 14th century and until World War 1 in 1918, when the Ottomans were forced back to the Bosporus Strait. The Ottoman expansion affected Hungary gravely because many battles between the Habsburg Emperor and the Ottomans took place on Hungarian soil until 1686 when Buda and Pest were re-taken. Even though the Balkans was occupied for two more centuries, in the memory of my informants and Hungarians in general, Hungary represented Europe's last bulwark against the Ottomans: they suffered to protect Europe. This image was expressed in cultural representations of Hungary: art, maps, statues and literature.

Europe was also defined in relation to America and Australia. In an interview, I asked Péter: "*Can you give me some examples of European culture?*" He mentioned food, historical background, language, and then added: "*Also habits, behaviour, because of the difference from the American, and difference from the Australian behaviour.*" Even though we look alike, 'we' in Europe have different eating habits, different values in life, than 'they' have. America may have big influence on European cultural life, but 'we' still have distinctive European habits and behaviour. For my informants, Europe was to a large degree defined by its relations to Others. But which meanings did they attribute to the symbol itself?

There was a discrepancy between the geographical meaning and the symbolic meaning which my informants attributed to Europe. My informants all agreed that Hungary belonged to Europe geographically. Simultaneously they described Hungary as 'returning to Europe', or becoming 'more European'. A prerequisite for these expressions is that Hungary is not at the moment considered to be inside Europe. How can it be inside and outside simultaneously?

Analysing the answers I got, it becomes clear that European identity is very often connected to what is considered Western European ideas and values: democracy, high moral standards in comparison with Eastern European standards. Zoltán said: "*Western Europe is where democracy has it's roots [..] There's also the big difference [between Eastern and Western Europe], one of the most significant differences – in moral*" In his opinion, democracy originated in Western Europe, and Western Europeans have higher moral standards than Eastern Europeans. These values correspond very well to the image of Europe which EU-policymakers and politicians are expressing in the draft of the Preamble to the Constitutional Treaty of Europe: a Europe building on the 'European heritage' of 'freedom', 'democracy', and 'tolerance'[38].

Zoltán considered Hungary 'more to the West than to the East', but not like the West in geographical, economical and mentality-wise sense. By phrasing it this way, he suggests an image of Western Europe as representing 'true Europe' and opens up for a definition of Hungary as European.

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[38] Source: Preamble to the Constitutional Treaty of Europe, drafted by the EU (http://www.europa.eu.int/constitution)

By defining Hungary as increasingly European, Zoltán and others related to Europe as an IMAGINED COMMUNITY. They perceived themselves to be part of the European community in some areas. Europe is an IMAGINED COMMUNITY in the sense that it has common media (primarily regional TV-channels and the possibility to watch TV-channels from other European countries) and events connecting the European peoples (sport events, cultural and political events), and English is increasingly becoming a lingua franca also in Eastern and Central Europe (Borneman & Fowler 1997:500). Before 1989, socialist countries could not take part in this community, but since the fall of Communism these countries have increasingly participated in the Europeanization and this development makes it possible for Zoltán to imagine himself as part of the European community. Transition and thereby the search for European identity and a position for each country within the community is still taking place. The above analysis is only a frozen picture of a process, but it indicates tendencies and attitudes.

7.3 The regions of Europe

I knew from conversations with people from Central and Eastern Europe and from visits to the region that identifying with regions was a sensitive and significant matter. The importance became clear with the firmness of Hungarians' voices when they corrected me, if I, by mistake, referred to Hungary as an Eastern European country: "*Hungary is Central European!*" The firmness of this statement shows the importance, saying: we are not Eastern Europeans; we are different from the East. Following this emphasis on Central

Europe I will focus on the meanings of this label. But Central Europe can only be understood in relation to Western and Eastern Europe, therefore these will also be included where relevant.

The names of the regions are geographical descriptions but they are also symbols in the sense that they are meaningful to people, they invoke sentiments. The term 'Central Europe' has been subject to contested interpretations and valuations. In the early 1980's intellectuals and dissidents from countries like Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, revived the idea of Central Europe (or Mitteleuropa, as it was called in German). Czech dissident writer Milan Kundera was among the first to publish his visions in *The Tragedy of Central Europe* (1984). To him, Central Europe represents not only the geographical centre, but also the cultural centre of Europe. Great European writers, composers and artists came from the Habsburg Empire, i.e. Central Europe, and while Western Europe had now forgotten the importance of culture, he argues, Central Europe can still present a number of them and they play an important role in society and civilization. But the Cold War divided Europe along ideological lines, and Central Europe found itself geographically in the centre, but culturally in the West and politically in the East (1984:33ff).

The purpose of the Central European movement was to reconstruct self-confidence in these countries in order to overcome the division of Europe between East and West. Kundera stresses the need for Central Europe, which he sees as a 'condensed version of Europe', a 'small arch-European Europe' (ibid:33). By reminding the world of Central Europe's glory he urges and encourages politicians and intellectuals to work for a unification of the region.

But Central Europe can also be seen as a category ‘in between’ similar to the way my informants characterised Hungary as being ‘in between’ – stressing the symbolic meaning of LIMINALITY in Turner’s sense (Turner 1970; see Buchowski 2001:175f). This is what I will be discussing in the following section.

7.3.1 Their view of the regional division

> Pia: *“What countries belong to Central Europe?”*
> Zoltán: *“It’s a hard thing to say, you have a geographical answer, economic answer, mental answer.”*

All of my informants defined Hungary as Central European. Or, at least, Central European in some respects, cf. the answer from Zoltán. Geographically, all agreed that Hungary was Central European. With variations from person to person the geographical Central Europe included: Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Austria, Poland, sometimes Croatia and Germany. As Dóra explained: *“I think Central Europe is Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia… but I mean these countries are like a line in Europe.”* She defined Croatia as Central European and not as Balkan as others did, as she saw the countries geographically forming ‘a line’ in Europe. Another reason for her inclusion of Croatia could be that large parts of Croatia belonged to the Hungarian territory until the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.

On the other hand, Slovakia was sometimes left out or forgotten when informants listed Central European countries in spite of its proximity to Hungary. Tamás’ statement may hint of an answer: *“Slovakia maybe belongs to Central Europe. Maybe, because it is not as developed as Hungary.”* When comparing Central European countries, my informants generally viewed Slovakia as poorer and less developed than Hungary, the Czech Republic and Poland, despite the fact that Poland usually ranks lowest on lists of economic performance[39]. Reasons for this could be that Slovakia is a young nation[40] and large parts of the country belonged to Hungary until 1918. The relation between Hungary and Slovakia has lately been disturbed by Slovakian authorities' discrimination of the Hungarian minority, which make up 11 percent of the population[41], but is now stabilized.

My informants' valuations of Croatia and Slovakia show that their classification of Central European-ness is not only dependent on economic performances or geographic locations. Several factors influence the value attached to countries, among them the experiences they have had with the country ('Slovakia discriminates ethnic Hungarians', 'Croatia is a nice place to go on holidays').

This distinction between geographical and symbolic categorizations was not unfamiliar to my informants. Actually Dóra said it explicitly:

> *"We still have the saying that 'Oh, they are from the Balkans'. I lived in Bulgaria for half a year, so for me Balkan is something good, and not like this dirty image of it. Because in the Hungarian mentality there is a kind of negative sense of the Balkan, so it's more like Bulgarians, Macedonians, Romanians… Balkan is a geographical definition, but in the use of language the Balkans is a negative word, it's more like 'the undeveloped', like a bit bad thing. Romania is not really the Balkans, it's more Bulgaria and maybe the southern part of Romania, but in people's head Romania is in the Balkans."*

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[39] Every year the European Union's Statistical Office, Eurostat, publishes a ranking list of EU Member States, Candidate and EFTA countries according to "GDP per capita in 2004 in PPS (Purchasing Power Standards)". All of the new EU-members are below the EU-average: With EU-25 as index 100, Slovenia has 78, the Czech Republic 72, Hungary 61, Slovakia 52, Poland 47, Croatia 46, Romania 32, and Bulgaria 30. Denmark and Austria both have 122.

[40] The 74-year-old federation between the Czech Republic and the Slovakian Republic was dissolved on 1 January 1993.

[41] The Slovak parliament denied recognizing the collective rights for minorities and a restrictive language law from 1996 gave primacy to the Slovak language. These policies were later abandoned to meet the political criteria for EU-membership. Source: http://www.europa.eu.int/comm./enlargement

We see how Romania is ascribed with the label 'Balkan' to describe its 'undevelopedness'[42].

The interpretations of Central Europe expressed in the interviews can be analysed in different ways, but I have chosen three approaches, which I have called the EVOLUTIONIST APPROACH, the CULTURALIST APPROACH and NOSTALGIC APPROACH. They do not represent specific groups of informants, but are tendencies which I have identified in their accounts. I have chosen these because they stress the relational aspects of 'Central Europe' as 'in between' Western and Eastern Europe.

The EVOLUTIONIST APPROACH groups the European countries according to economical and technical development. The countries were valuated and placed along a developmental parameter, from modern (West) to backwards (East); from highly developed to very poorly developed. Interestingly, this is not a one-way street: my informants explicitly described how countries can move back and forth; up and down according to development. Zoltán said:

> *"Being part of the European Union in this part [of Europe] is a good thing, just trying really to get better relations. But economically we are getting a bit behind and I have the feeling that we are getting back to the East, the Balkans."*

So in his opinion, politically Hungary is moving in the right direction, now being a member of the EU, but economically it is moving backwards, 'back to the East'.

In this approach Western Europe represents good economy, high living standards, and high technological skills. Hungarian performances, as described in 6.1.3, were compared to this ideal.

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[42] Maria Todorova has discussed the notion of 'Balkan' and its implicit meanings of backwardness and primordiality, but because of limited space I will not pursue this discussion further (see e.g. Todorova 1994 and 2005).

The symbolism of 'Western Europe' becomes clear in Tamás' reflection: "*If you say Western Europe you mean developed countries, but I'm not sure if Portugal is as developed as Austria?*" A high level of development was symbolised by Western Europe, and the terms 'Western' and 'Eastern' were applied to countries to describe their valuated position along the 'evolutionist axis'. In a previously quoted statement Zoltán describes Poland and Slovakia as Eastern, even though the countries are located north and west of Hungary. 'Eastern' is a symbol meaning 'less developed' to my informants and not explaining a factual connection. 'Central Europe' in the EVOLUTIONIST APPROACH means 'less developed' than Western and 'more developed' than Eastern Europe. It is not a good position in itself, but a position 'in between' in Turner's sense: it is a position 'underway'. As Zoltán said: 'with the EU-membership Hungary is getting better relations', but he feared that Hungary was going 'back to the East', in maybe would get stuck 'in between'.

The CULTURALIST APPROACH is inspired by Kundera's view of Central Europe as a 'condensed version of Europe' (1984:33); belonging to Central Europe is thus a source of pride. This view was expressed in my informants' emphasis on Hungary's historical importance and legacy and in their emphasis on the Central European-ness of Hungary as opposed to Eastern European-ness. Central Europe would not be Central without the Eastern counterpart; it is a relational term (Barth 1969:260; Cohen 1985:58). This contention is supported by my experiences when travelling in the summer of 2003; from Vienna, Austria, I went to Budapest, Hungary, and continued to Transylvania, Romania. In Vienna people said: "what do you want to do in Hungary? It's so dirty and people are poor." In Budapest, local people were disturbed when they heard I was going to Romania: "what is there to see? People are poor and they are stealing. It's dirty and depressing." In Transylvania, Romania, I stayed with a Hungarian family I know very well. When I talked about going to Bucharest, they strongly advised me not to go: "It's not interesting, and the people are not to be trusted." I did not go further East and nowhere did I meet the kind of people described; they were stereotypes.

The relational aspect of the West's image of the East has been treated thoroughly by Edward Said, who analysed the systems of representations of the East, or the Orient (primarily the Arab cultures) in the book *Orientalism* (1978). He argues that the Orient was constructed in relation to the West as a representation of the West's Other. The Orient became a mirror for the West, representing everything that the West was not.

Kundera creates the image of Central Europe in relation to the East, when he defines Russia as altogether different: "*Russia knows another dimension of disaster, another image of space, another sense of time, another way of laughing, living, dying.*" (1984:34) Russia is another - an 'Other'. And in relation to Russia, Central Europeans can define themselves as Europeans, and even 'arch-European' as Kundera writes (1984:33).

According to the CULTURALIST APPROACH Central Europe represents the centre, a 'condensed version of Europe'; it is the holder of true European values and gifts, while Western Europe has become poisoned by capitalism and Americanism.

The NOSTALGIST APPROACH is connected to the CULTURALIST APPROACH in the sense that they both are critical of Western Europe. It was not as prominent in my informants' accounts as the previous two approaches, but I mention it here because it opposes them and presents 'the East' in a more positive light by my informants.

Dóra told me she was worried that Hungarians were not yet ready to handle the consumption culture which she saw as coming from Western Europe. "*There are so many who buy things they don't need,*" she said with regret. She was not against Europeanization as such, but she was concerned that Hungarians were vulnerable and susceptible to Western influences, consumption and shallowness, which she did not appreciate all. This view of Western Europe can also be found in other places; Nielsen points out that Russians often characterised people from the West as 'cold, calculating and selfish' (1987b).

In relation to this view, I noticed that my informants in certain contexts considered Eastern Hungary, Transylvania, and sometimes other places East of Hungary more authentic and familiar. Many Hungarians visit Transylvania on holidays "*because it's beautiful, people are nice and many speak Hungarian*", as a female friend told me, and many have relatives living there.

A female student from BKF who was from the Hungarian minority in Transylvania said in a class discussion: "*I don't think many would like to move from Transylvania to Hungary. Transylvania is a strong cultural centre; they stick together. Hungarians in Transylvania have a stronger Hungarian identity than Hungarians in Hungary.*" The other students nodded and agreed with her. In a conversation with my friend András, he expressed sadness because Hungarians in his opinion had become too alienated and distanced from each other and from Hungarian identity. In order to preserve national identity and a good life, he said, people ought to move to the countryside, ideally living close to nature like in the old days, where they would be able to find their roots. András usually spoke very positively of Transylvania and was very interested in Hungarian folklore, and his suggestion indicates a link between solidarity, familiarity and the countryside, including Transylvania.

The three approaches described above each represent different views of Western, Central and Eastern Europe, respectively and in relation to each other. The EVOLUTIONIST APPROACH implies a valuation of countries and regions according to their level of political, economical and moralist development. Here, Central Europe was a category 'in between', and Hungary defined as Central European because it neither fitted in Western Europe nor in Eastern Europe, but was on the way in the space 'in between'.

The CULTURALIST APPROACH sees Central Europe as a condensed version of Europe (Kundera 1984:33) and it came to expression when my informants emphasised the proud cultural and historical legacies of Hungary. In order to be 'something in itself', and not just be 'in between' Central Europe is attributed with meanings, but looking at the accounts it becomes clear that this approach mostly was used as a way to underline the difference from the East and the growing integration with the West, an integration which was officially recognised by the EU-accession 1 May 2004. I will now proceed with a discussion of the influences of the EU-accession and symbolism.

7.4 The European Union – a formalized ideology

I have discussed Europe as an IMAGINED COMMUNITY above. The EU has actively promoted Europe as a single entity through policies of European identity – a term which is accepted and taken for granted in official EU-discourse (Shore & Black 1992:11)[43]. What was founded in 1951 as an economical co-operation between six countries in the aftermath of World War II has developed into a 'European Union' seeking not only economical, political and judicial co-operation between countries, but also to create a 'European cultural area' (ibid). In 1973 a *Declaration on the European identity* was signed, and in the 1980's initiatives were launched to transform the 'technocrats' Europe' into a 'People's Europe' (Shore 1993:787-788).

Anthropologist Chris Shore has shown how the 'European identity' promoted by the European Commission became reified, fixed and bounded – a stereotype – through promotion and implementation of the cultural policies. 'European identity' in the eyes of EU-officials draws on the 'European heritage': *"Judaeo-Christian religion, Greek-Hellenistic ideas of government, philosophy and art, Roman law, Renaissance humanism, the ideals of the Enlightenment and the Scientific Revolution, Social Democracy and the rule of law,"* as Shore lists (ibid:792). Or in short: 'from Plato to NATO' (McBride in Shore, ibid).

The initiatives launched to promote the 'People's Europe' included educational and cultural exchanges (cf. SOCRATES, which I introduced earlier), and abolition of barriers obstructing citizens' mobility between member countries. Furthermore, 'symbols of European identity' and 'initiatives of symbolic value' were created in order to facilitate the

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[43] 'The European Union' is not an empty category. It is necessary to stress that the EU administration consists of various groups and institutions, such as the Commission and the Parliament, which consist of changing groups and persons – thus they cannot be regarded as stable and unchangeable institutions, but are under influence of the people that works there.

European citizens' visualisations of the European community in their everyday life (Shore 1993:788-789)[44].

Especially the European flag, twelve yellow stars on a blue background, was often seen in Hungary. Every public building displayed the Hungarian and the European flag side by side: schools, town halls, the parliament and ministries. Most hotels and banks displayed the European flag too, next to other international flags. And interestingly, the twelve yellow stars on a blue background were frequently used in advertisements for supermarkets, taxi companies, language schools or cars. The purpose of the symbols is to remind people of their European identity and even to create an 'ever closer union among the peoples of Europe'[45].

Hungary's EU-accession process started in 1994 when the application for accession was accepted. Ten years of anticipating the final accession and display of EU-symbols in public space, especially the flag, have made Hungarians aware of their upcoming membership of the European Union. In this section I will analyse how my informants described the effects of the EU-membership, both in terms of concrete changes and changes in mentality and identity. Did they feel more European after Hungary's EU-accession?

7.4.1 Their view of the EU

One of the reasons for conducting fieldwork in Hungary in autumn 2004 was my initial interest in studying people's reactions to structural changes. Consequently, one of my questions during interviews was: "Have you felt any changes because of the EU membership?" This might sound like a naïve question considering the short time passed from 1 May to the interviews. But I was also interested in learning if they connected any changes in their everyday life before 1 may 2004 to the EU.

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[44] These symbols include a European flag, a standardized European passport, the harmonized European driving licence and number plate, and the European anthem (Shore 1993:788-789).

[45] The quotation is taken from the first sentence in the Preamble to the Constitutional Treaty of Europe. Source: http://www.europa.eu.int/constitution

The interpretations of symbols are mediated by individual experiences, as Cohen reminds us (1985:14). If my informants experienced changes in their everyday life as connected to the EU, this would affect their understanding and image of the EU.

The most frequent answer to my question was 'no, nothing has changed'. Dóra said:

> *"I think in my life.. there is no change, because I could travel before and I worked abroad before so for me it was not like: Wauw! The gates are open! I know that many people have this kind of feeling. You know it's like in the Christmas that you are so excited to open the box and see what is inside? And then you can open it and then you are disappointed. And I think it was a big fuss over that: Oh we are joining the EU and then everything will be changed. And then we joined and nothing happened. At the political level I would say many things are changed but in the everyday life people don't really feel it".*

But what about the EU-symbols? Had my informants noticed them and what did they represent to them? The EU-flags in public space are supposed to remind Europeans of the European community which the EU is an outcome of. When I asked my informants about the EU-symbols most of them said they had not noticed them, but their interpretations of the symbolism were similar. Tamás said:

> *"I haven't noticed. Maybe they symbolize something new and modern. I wouldn't think of it myself. OK, we joined, I know it, but why should I see it everywhere?"*

And Zita:

> *"I haven't really thought about the EU-stars. I think many of the international companies used this as a new image so they can make a better export and import when they say 'we are from the EU, something modern'. It is something new, it is symbolizes hope, perhaps freedom and multiculturalism."*

My informants told me they did not notice the EU-symbols displayed many places in public space. But when asked, they were able to describe the symbolism of the flag and interpret it in ways closely resembling the intentions of their inventors. If we follow Raymond Firth's distinction between 'sign' and 'symbol', my informants unconsciously perceived the idea of the symbol, but they did not notice the sign itself (1973:63f). In order to understand this phenomenon I find Michael Billig's notion of 'banal nationalism' (1995) useful. Billig focuses on the dialectic of remembering and forgetting concerning national identity. The 'naturalization' of having a national identity enables people to 'forget' it (1995:37). In my opinion this approach can be applied to European identity as promoted by the EU. The EU-flags and signs have become part of everyday routines – to paraphrase Bourdieu (as Billig does), the signs and the symbolism of the signs have become embedded (Billig 1995:42; Bourdieu 1990:52).

They did not express enthusiasm for the symbolism, but were sceptic of it. One male informant even called it 'propaganda'. So far it sounds as if my informants did not feel affected by the EU.

But one thing was repeatedly mentioned, and that was mobility: the exchange programs and the possibility to cross borders without showing passports. Zita was very positive about the EU-membership in this respect:

> *"It's good that we join the European Union because we have more opportunities and possibilities to work in another country, to study in another country, so you learn about a new country. I think only some months or a whole year abroad will change the thinking or the belief of the people in that way. It's important to have these possibilities for scholarships abroad. This is our possibility to change things. And we have to learn to teach our children to see the positive sides."*

Zita saw mobility as a way to change people's ideas of themselves and of others. But not everybody would take up the challenge: *"I think modern people will, like the younger ages, like* *me and younger, they will use it. I think the others – like my boyfriend, he is 26 – he would never go.*" Róbert, who had lived in Istanbul with his family for a year, confirmed this: "*I think the people considering going abroad will go, because now it's easier. But there are so many people in Hungary who do not consider this possibility because they are afraid to go. Perhaps in twenty years the new generation will have a higher rate.*" Both Zita and Róbert had lived abroad and both agreed that this experience had influenced their understanding of other cultures in a positive way. They saw the exchange programs and working abroad as an opportunity. To them, the EU-membership symbolised a 'possibility to change things', to change Hungarians' view on and relation to other nationalities, maybe as a way to get behind the stereotypes.

Going abroad was apparently not perceived as an opportunity by everyone. 'Modern people' and the new generation will consider going abroad, according to Zita and Róbert, but others are 'afraid to go' – mostly those older than themselves. They see their own and coming generations in a VERTICAL COHERENCE as the generations who will be able to change things in Hungary. In these informants' opinion, it takes courage and self-confidence to go abroad, but the benefit is invaluable and will profit the Hungarian society.

It was also possible to study and work abroad before 1 May 2004. To my information, Hungary joined EU's exchange programs in 1998 and all of the exchange students I spoke with had studied abroad before Hungary's EU-accession or while it happened. So why was mobility so significant and mentioned by everyone I spoke with? I think we can find an answer if we look at this account from Zoltán. Before the actual interview he stated: "*noth-*

ing has changed since May 1st." Later during the interview he explained how he felt that the countries were getting closer:

> *"People are getting nearer. When I was smaller, ten or eight years old, I heard a lot of trouble between Slovakian and Hungarian people. And today some of my friends and I, we thought of just getting into a car and fly up to the Great Bend of the Danube and to the border, seeing Slovakia, just wave with our ID, drinking beer just paying a few koruna for it."*

I asked: "But weren't Slovakia and Hungary also close before?"

> *"It was, but there was a border separating it, using passports, and there was a lot of waiting. Now it's not a problem and physical things got nearer, I think. Subjectively it got nearer."*

After the EU-accession it became possible to cross borders without showing a passport. Many had personal experiences trying this since May 1st 2004. And for the citizens of a country that for 50 years during socialism used to have closed borders where people had to seek permission to go abroad, this represents a significant change. Very few of the Hungarians I talked to expressed ambitions or wishes to actually move abroad, but the possibility itself gave people a feeling of 'getting nearer', like Zoltán put it. The experience of open borders and possible mobility is seen as a positive consequence of the EU-membership and it forms people's perceptions of the EU.

Getting nearer to other nationalities does not entail abolishing or forgetting national identity. Ferenc did not support the attempts to construct a European identity:

> *"I don't think it is a good idea if countries give up their cultural identity just to become member of the EU. I think Turkey should remain the way it is. Turkey is Turkey. Why become something else? In the US people say 'I'm American' and then maybe from Utah, in Europe people say 'I'm from Denmark', 'I'm from Italy', none of them will say 'I'm from the European Union, I'm Spanish'. It's not going to work.""*

Dóra was more pragmatic and confident that national identity would continue being the most important point of reference for people in spite of higher mobility. But she stressed the importance of paying attention to national identities and languages, while a European identity develops:

> *"After the countries decided to make a union, I think in twenty years the borders will vanish, not totally, but how can I say it? I believe that in twenty years every single person in the European Union will speak English. And I feel it's a common language, but I hope that they will also pay attention to national languages. And it's the same thing with the culture so there will be a kind of European Union identity. But I don't think it will be like in the US. People will never say they are from the European Union. They will always say from the country."*

The Europeanization which Dóra and Ferenc mention is partly a result of the European cultural policy introduced above.

While the official EU-definition of European identity presents it as a fixed and static stereotype, my informants' varied and personal interpretations of 'European identity' points to the opposite. In spite of agreements and similarities in areas like the emphasis on Christianity, democracy and morality there were differences as to their opinions of the boundaries of Europe and thus what differentiates 'Europeans' from 'others'. Their personal experiences with other nationalities form their interpretation of the meaning of 'Europe' as a symbol.

I will now proceed to the conclusion where I will sum up my informants' interpretations of Hungary and Europe: how do their statements and practices tell us something of their relations to Hungary and Europe?

8 CONCLUSION

8.1 Social change during transition

Hungary and other countries in Eastern and Central Europe have experienced fundamental changes in all areas since 1989 necessitating what Verdery calls a 're-ordering of meaningful worlds' (Verdery 1999:35). Individuals and communities have been forced to rethink their identity and relations to each other (Kürti & Langman 1997). In Budapest, Hungary, this re-ordering was experienced in the way old and new ways of doing things intermingled with individuals' perceptions of it.

Modes of social relations between officials and customers in Hungary are characterised by discontinuity; the implementation of Western or capitalist structures and systems, such as the turnstiles in Széchenyi thermal bath, meets HABITUS as embodied practices and dispositions (Bourdieu 1990: 53; Lass 1999). These dispositions are not easily adjusted or changed, and many of the social relations in public space which I encountered were characterised by strict formality and distancing. The reasons for this can be found in historical conditions – social stratification and socialism – and I have interpreted this practice as a way to protect oneself from insecurity and instability, e.g. unemployment (Nielsen 1987a:28). In some places social relations were very friendly and forthcoming because of the absence of insecurity (personal relations) or because of influence of capitalist rationale which implies a good relation with the customer.

But the HABITUS of social relations in public space, the Hungarian way of doing things, reaffirms my informants' image of Hungary as 'old-fashioned' and 'backwards', especially when they see it in relation to Western Europe. Informants were not proud of this image but as we saw in the episode from BKF, they were also reluctant to challenge it. Instead they reproduced the distance between 'officials' and 'citizens' by avoiding personal contact.

Foreign language skills were another subject of self-criticism, when my informants expressed embarrassment of Hungarians' lack of them. But here my informants actually engaged in changing it. I observed a growing interest in learning foreign languages, at least in Budapest where I lived. I have argued that this change can be seen as a result of increasing contact with other nationalities and as a way to qualify for attractive jobs both inside and outside Hungary. But I also interpreted a symbolic pride of foreign language skills, and the admiration for people speaking foreign languages as SYMBOLIC CAPITAL. By learning foreign languages, individuals, and this not only included young, well-educated Hungarians, could appear more European and thus more modern. The people who learned foreign languages can be seen as cultural innovators (Barth 1969:274). In order to participate in the game, they play the game along the rules defined by others, and it allows participation in Europe as IMAGINED COMMUNITY.

I have argued that the changes can be seen as a reaction to Europeanization, i.e. an increasing level of cultural interaction between the countries (Borneman & Fowler 1997:488). Europeanization affects people's everyday lives to varying degrees and my informants were 'in the frontline' because they were travelling, speaking foreign languages and maybe having lived abroad for a longer period.

My informants stressed the differences between themselves and other, less Europeanised groups of the Hungarian society. They often defined the other Hungarians as 'old-fashioned', or 'backwards' which made themselves appear more modern, future-oriented and open for new challenges, i.e. European.

By looking specifically at the way my informants describe their experience of transition in Hungary, I have aimed at looking at this process on its own terms and not as a narrow path towards a Western model society. Yet many informants measured Hungary's achievements and developments proportional to Western Europe and expressed disappointments thereof especially in the light of the EU-accession.

8.2 Europeanization and new expectations

The last 15 years has seen a growing integration into Europe culturally, politically, economically and socially. The EU-accession is one step in the development, which started (or re-started) in 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell.

Transition and Europeanization has opened new possibilities and access to the IMAGINED COMMUNITY of Europe, but also a necessity to redefine Hungary's position within Europe and in relation to the regions of Europe. In order to understand this redefinition, it is necessary to examine the symbolic meanings of Europe as they were interpreted and expressed by my informants. 'Europe' was seen as modern, the cradle of democracy and high moral standards, but also higher living standards and prosperity. Being able to participate in the European IMAGINED COMMUNITY implied 'openness' and future-orientation. When my informants emphasised the importance of learning languages and not focusing on the past, it was done in an effort to apply to the rules of the 'European game' (Barth 1969:274).

The symbolic meaning of Europe is very much defined by Western Europeans. This makes it difficult for my informants (and other Eastern and Central Europeans) to feel completely part of it. Their participation in the game can be said to take place on somebody else's terms. But my informants were among the Hungarians who actively pursued participation in the game by learning foreign languages.

My informants were constructing new identities as European Hungarians, but did not characterise Hungary as fully European. Instead they characterised Hungary as 'in between', supported by the relational position of moving back and forth between East and West. Being 'in between' implies LIMINALITY, which is the process of moving from one position to another. Thus the notion Central Europe can be used as a stepping stone for becoming recognised as European.

The EU-accession 1 may 2004 was not in itself the cause for this process of re-ordering meaningful worlds, but it was a political recognition and economical boost of the post-socialist countries. Many of my informants were sceptical of the EU, especially because they said they did not see any significant changes resulting from the EU-accession. Yet there is also a symbolic meaning inherent in the EU-accession (partly promoted by EU-symbolism) because of the recognition and new possibilities available. This is exemplified by my informants' appreciation of easy mobility across borders. The EU-accession also provides grounds for creating a distance to Russia and the Balkans, thereby 'returning to Europe' (Kürti & Langman 1997:9).

Studying young Hungarians' relations to national and European identity is relevant because of the Europeanization – including the EU-symbolism and European identity promoted by the EU – and the present debate of 'widening' or 'deepening' the European integration. Most of my informants did not see Europe as a relevant category for identification and they expressed concerns that the EU-construction would collapse in case of further enlargement, especially if Turkey with its large Moslem population was accepted.

If one should deploy in further research of Europeanization-processes an interesting focus would be to follow exchange students in order to see over time how the experience of another European country influence their choices later in life: are they more open for working abroad? Are they more open to other cultures? Do they feel more European? Or more national?

8.3 The 'European Hungarians'

I have defined my informants as European Hungarians partly because they were internationally oriented and partly because they presented themselves as more European than other groups of the Hungarian society.

My informants' differentiation between themselves and other groups of Hungarians, constituted a boundary (Barth 1969). Interaction took place across that boundary of course (with family, friends and other people), but the image of the 'other' was characterised by stereotypes and importance of appearance. Simultaneously, they were cultural innovators in Barth's sense (1969:274) and mediators: connecting the less internationally oriented part of the population with the rest of Europe.

My relationship to the young Hungarians was also connected to their European-ness since I was dependent on their foreign language skills. Many of the young Hungarians who agreed to let me interview them had lived in another European country, and they were not embarrassed to speak English. Furthermore, they were used to interacting with foreigners and this to a higher degree allowed me to be the 3rd person – 'just another young woman' (Hastrup 1988:212-213).

I am aware that my conclusions cannot be said to represent a generation of Hungarians. My informants do not constitute a coherent group or network; they are individuals with common features: young, urban, well-educated and internationally oriented. But many of them will probably in the future occupy high-level positions in the Hungarian society within NGO's, media, diplomacy or business. As such they can be viewed as an up-coming part of the Hungarian elite which will influence general attitudes. Besides, they are part of a generation who grew up without direct personal experiences of socialism, and there are high expectations to them. They were the first to study abroad in the Western countries and to learn English as first foreign language. These expectations were also felt as a burden, and some informants were not convinced that major changes to the positive (living standards, mentality, etc.) would happen in their time. But their views are relevant and important because they give us an idea of the future developments among Hungarians and especially the Hungarians other Europeans will encounter.

Fieldwork is a unique experience and cannot be redone, yet one could approach the field differently by for example comparing groups of young people in different positions (geography, education, etc.) or by comparing other age groups to see how the personal experiences influence their attitudes and interpretations. I have primarily been concerned with the internal processes of the group of informants, but it could be fruitful to see how this particular group was perceived by other groups within the Hungarian society. An approach like this could illuminate the generational and social gap from a different perspective, which could indicate reasons for opposition against the EU and Europeanization.

My access to the young Hungarians' everyday life was in most cases limited to education and public sphere, and a more coherent and holistic impression could be obtained by including private spheres like for example friendship and family.

But similar research in Latvia points in the same directions as my conclusions: the young EU-NGO activists saw themselves as more European than 'ordinary people' advocating integration into Europe in order to avoid the country's isolation. Latvia is located in the brink of Europe and therefore fears of being forgotten (Linnet 2002). In comparison, Hungary is centrally located in relation to Europe, and the same concerns were not present. The concerns I heard from Hungarians was of being symbolically seen as East and thus not European.

8.4 Being European the Hungarian way

Though discussing European-ness and Europeanization it is crucial to remember the importance my informants attributed to national identity. From the above conclusion it might appear as if Hungary is split in two or more oppositional groups. This is not the case. The VERTICAL COHERENCE, the national sense of belonging based on social memory (Fentress & Wickham 1992) and historical roots, plays a central role in my informants' understanding of themselves and Hungary.

My informants appreciate and value Hungary as a historical national and location for personal relations to family and friends, and they are very committed to the future of Hungary (nobody expressed wishes to leave Hungary forever), but they were also convinced that in order to bring Hungary as a nation into the future, Hungarians have to become more European, more open to international influences (e.g. by learning languages), and not focus on the past as some Hungarians tend to do.

Their HABITUS is still very much structured according to a feeling of inferiority in Europe: victim of history, pessimism, complaints of ways of doing things that are SO Hungarian. But some Hungarians – the informants presented here - were eager to participate in European integration, as cultural innovators.

What I have identified is a particular way of interpreting and relating to symbols like Hungary and Europe which differs from other social groups' interpretations. My informants attributed new meanings and values to the symbols because of different personal experiences and attitudes and aspirations, and this encouraged them to act in accordance with these interpretations. In order to qualify for attractive job and to manage everyday life in a Europeanised Hungary, being open to new influences and managing them the Hungarian way was a strategy which my informants actively pursued.

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10 ABSTRACT

This thesis examines young Hungarians' relation to national and European identity in the light of transition from socialism to democracy and Europeanization. The young Hungarians in question are urban, well-educated and internationally oriented in the sense that most of them have travelled a lot or even lived abroad for a longer period, and they all speak one or two foreign languages. They are from many sides characterised as the 'new generation' who grow up in democracy and freedom without personal memories of socialism. This characterisation entails high expectations of their accomplishments – expectations which the informants reproduce in their aspirations for a good and secure life.

The fall of socialism caused a breakdown of a hitherto established division of Europe into East and West. Transition necessitated a restructuring of alliances and relations between the countries and regions of Europe, but it also opened a new room for identification and manoeuvring. Furthermore, Europeanization, i.e. growing cultural integration between the countries in Europe, and the anticipated accession to the European Union, allow for new interpretations of the meaning of Europe. The processes of remaking identities and how these take place among the informants are the focus of the thesis, which is based on participant observation and interviews with young Hungarians in the fall 2004.

In the analysis of practices and attitudes among the informants, foreign language skills are examined as a way to emphasise European-ness. It is argued that learning foreign languages is viewed by the informants as essential in Europe and Hungary today for both practical and symbolic reasons. Practical reasons include interactions with foreigners and abilities to find attractive jobs inside or outside Hungary. Simultaneously, it is argued, knowing foreign languages can be viewed as a symbolic capital and a recognised sign of European-ness.

Social relations in public space, as for example interacting with representatives of local authorities or people working in shops are treated as examples of how historical conditions influence present practices. The formality and distance inherent in the social relations are seen as legacies of 19th century social stratification and socialist rationale. The historical conditions are internalised in habitus, and the ways of doing things are changing slowly and locally in spite of the introduction of capitalist and Western systems and procedures many places.

Analysing the young Hungarians' statements and accounts a certain way of expressing Hungarian-ness was identified. The informants' complaints of the behaviour of people in public space and their characterisation of Hungarians as pessimistic and victims of history are examined as a ritualised expression of maintaining and reinforcing Hungarian-ness. The repetitions and emphasis put on the negative descriptions illuminates the way habitus structures perceptions and actions. Though wanting to leave the victimisation and per-

ceived suffering of Hungarians behind, the informants repeated it and thereby confirm the reproductive character of habitus.

The informants' relations to Hungary as they were expressed in interviews are treated in five different themes, showing this relation through different prisms. History, transmitted from generation to generation as social memories, plays a significant role in Hungarians' understanding of Hungarian-ness. Simultaneously, the history of Hungary legitimises the nation's European-ness. Without being able to claim full integration into Western Europe and on the other hand turning away from Eastern Europe, Hungary is characterised as 'in between' on many levels. The 'in between-ness' is analysed in terms of liminality, which implies a process of transition from one position to another. Hungary is neither West nor East and it is argued that identifying with Central Europe can be seen as a stepping stone on becoming fully European.

Distinguishing between vertical and horizontal coherence becomes crucial as it is argued that the informants identify themselves as European Hungarians by opposing their practices and attitudes to other social groups in Hungary, for example the older generations and people living in the countryside. The term horizontal coherence entails a feeling of commonality with contemporaries with similar backgrounds, while vertical coherence refers to the historical roots and social memories of an imagined community.

With prospect of EU-accession 1 May 2004, many Hungarians had high expectations of changes to the better in social, economical and political areas. But according to the informants these expectations have far from been fulfilled. The young Hungarians on the one hand expressed pessimism concerning Hungary's future development. But on the other hand, a feeling of freedom, mobility and opportunities could be identified among them.
They were striving to be recognised as European Hungarians and can as such be seen as cultural elites or innovators of Hungary, who aspire to represent their country in future Europe.