SEXUAL TRANSITIONS: BIOGRAPHICAL BISEXUALITY IN POST-SOCIALIST HUNGARY

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DECLARATIONS

I hereby declare that this dissertation contains no materials previously accepted for any other degree in any other institution and no materials previously written and/or published by another person, except where the appropriate acknowledgement is made in the form of bibliographical reference.

Ráhel Katalin Turai

ABSTRACT

My research investigates 'biographical bisexuality': personal narratives on multiple sexual desires characterized by shifts in the gender of object choice, in the context of contemporary Hungary. I ask what the organization of sexual experiences into life stories in the Central-Eastern European (CEE) region tells us about their formation *vis-à-vis* broader social discourses, of homo-/heterosexual and inter-/national, Eastern/Western belongings specifically. My analysis is based on the 26 biographical interviews I conducted with people in Budapest who report desires for both women and men over their life span. I show how their narratives constitute desires through the negotiation with ideas of 'transitional' trajectories, ideas which imply a normative scale of progress, rendering both bisexuality a phase and CEE catching up with the West.

I argue that Hungarian biographical bisexualities anchor temporal sexual experiences in post-socialist oscillating dynamics of spatial categories on different scales from macro- to micro-levels. Narratives of hetero- and homosexuality as two separate life phases map onto the idea of Hungary shifting between binary inter-/national powers. Moreover, alternating sexual attractions, parallel relationships and sex, are interpreted through their connections to Hungarian LGBTQ and straight groups, notions of home, and the gendered-desiring body, respectively. Through pointing at the connection between ideas of geo-temporal and sexual trajectories in personal narrative experience, my research contributes to the rethinking of 'sexual orientation' and 'sexual fluidity' as fundamentally social. I suggest the introduction of 'transition' as a key term of queer temporality, the logic of which ultimately informs the ranking of all sexual and geospatial categories.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATIONS ii
ABSTRACT iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS v
LIST OF FIGURES vii
1. Chapter. Introduction: Imagining bisexuality as a life story about gender 1
1.1. Questions and significance of biographical bisexuality in Central-Eastern Europe 1
1.2. Gender and (bi)sexual relations in post-socialist Hungary 8
1.3. Language and terminology 20
1.3.1. My approach to (bi)sexualities 22
1.3.2. Transcription conventions 26
1.4. Chapter outline 27
2. Chapter. Biographical Bisexualities: Theories and Literature 30
2.1. Introduction: key terms and positions 30
2.2. Sexual orientation and sexual fluidity 32
2.3. Performativity 38
2.4. Queer temporality 44
2.4.1. Life narrative 45
2.4.2. Post-socialist geo-temporalities 49
2.4.3. Transition 53
2.5. Bisexual biography analyses in the region 59
3. Chapter. Narrated Truths and Narrative Methods – Methodological Concerns 65
3.1. What (sexual) truth is the biographical method after? 65
3.1.1. A theoretical introduction 65
3.1.2. Approaching bisexuality biographically – and *vice versa* 68
3.2. The interviewing process 70
3.2.1. Sampling: challenging bisexualities and social inequalities 70
3.2.2. Interview situations 77
3.2.3. Thematic-biographical analysis 80
3.3. Bisexual performativity as a question of method 84
3.3.1. My position as in interaction with interviewees 85
3.3.2. Performing gender-sexual power 88
3.4. Conclusion 92
Section I. Serial connections 94
4. Chapter. Hetero-homosexual and post-/socialist transitions: a language for change .. 94
4.1. Introduction: personal and national periodizations in serially changing sexuality 94
4.2. A post-socialist transition to homosexuality – gayness as mother tongue 99
4.3. New visibility of gayness: sexuality as foreign language 112
4.4. Conclusion 122
5. Chapter. Alternating currents of sexual attraction and community belonging 127
5.1. Introduction: communities of sexual belonging and the question of identification 127
5.2. Heteronormative (Catholic) spaces 133
5.3. LGBTQ spaces 139
5.4. Progressive mostly straight (university) spaces 143
5.5. Conclusion 152

Section II. Parallel connections **156**
6. Chapter. Parallel relationships negotiating "home" **156**
6.1. Introduction: accommodating bisexual non-monogamy 156
6.2. The heteronormative home: separating relationships 164
6.3. Alternative private spaces uniting relationships 172
6.4. Conclusions 180
7. Chapter. Women's and men's bodies in the social context of threesomes **184**
7.1. Introduction: Meanings of threesome sex 184
7.2. Imagining threesomes in post-socialism 191
7.3. Socially gendered bodies 195
7.4. Women's desires in transition 200
7.5. Conclusion 210
8. Chapter. Conclusions: Towards a transitional understanding of sexual and social spatio-temporalities **215**
Appendices **224**
Appendix I: Interviewees 224
Appendix II: Interview Questions and Project Description 225
English 225
Hungarian 226
Bibliography **228**

LIST OF FIGURES

1-1. Figure. “Please, choose” – election poster, 1990. 13

1-2. Figure. Online ad for a “Bi Party”, 2014. 18

6-1. Figure. Three in bed – author’s illustration, 2015 179

1. Chapter. Introduction: Imagining bisexuality as a life story about gender

1.1. Questions and significance of biographical bisexuality in Central-Eastern Europe

There are people who have always desired members of one gender. For many others though, who are the subjects of this research, same-sex relationships followed heterosexual ones, or the other way round, or they might be attracted to both women and men. Focusing on such complex life stories, I have been less interested in these subjects' sexual identities than in how they narrate their changing desires, and how this can make us think about the relation between sexuality and its social formation in novel ways. In the interview I conducted with the 39 year-old Juli,[1] she expressed a sense of ambiguity about her sexuality and connected it to divisions in Hungarian society, which a new friend helped her overcome.

> **On the one hand, there is this classic conservative, family expectation**. This doesn't mean that **my parents** are conservative, but there is this **countryside attitude** that (…) it doesn't matter whom, but I shall just **marry** him the day after tomorrow and **give birth to a child**. And whether this **marriage** is good or not good, or if it suits me, nobody cares about that at all, until this shows on the scenery**. Or**, [according to certain **friends**], I shall be **gay, and go party, and date women**, and belong to this **great elite** who are gay. Because it also carries the explanation that this makes us **different, a bit unique**, the way we are and live. (…) [My new friend] does not think in the usual **clique** attitudes, and he didn't behave like that**. In Hungary, it is so typical now that if one thinks a certain way, then they vote only for this party, make friends only with these people, and meet only with them. And if they vote for the other party, then they make friends only with those people, meet only with them, and the others are silly.** Whatever, this is a quite familiar way of thinking or attitude. And this guy basically, compared to the **circles** I had been in, I think, was way more **conservative**, but at the same time in several things he was terribly **open**. And then I've started to view a lot of things differently.

With the words in bold I highlight how Juli characterizes her sexual needs in a binary framework of sexuality, juxtaposing the ideal of the reproductive heteronormative family with an urban gay life. With this binary, she describes her difficulties in finding her own sexual

[1] I use pseudonyms for my interviewees. See more on anonimization and transcription in 1.3.2.

needs, which, directed at both women and men during her life, apparently go beyond the assumptions she experienced from both sides. This way, the quote illustrates cultural-political-spatial divisions in Hungary, between the capital Budapest and the countryside, between spaces of the family and parties, between the conservative right and the liberal-left. It highlights how much the biographical sexual experience with both women and men in Hungary, as in many Central-Eastern European countries, reflect, employ, and reproduce contemporary social tensions. These divisions are also embedded in temporal ideas about the life course (see 2.4.), with a heteronormative linear/teleological trajectory of family as untruthful "scenery", and a seemingly atemporal gay lifestyle with "going party and dating". As obvious from the bitter tone of Juli's quote, the complex and conflictual social hierarchies in Hungary include an image of gayness as both condemned and "elite", as well as women's constrained opportunities. This latter aspect has gradually emerged during my analytical process, as in the beginning of my research I did not think this would be a major thread.

When I first became engaged with bisexuality for my MA project in gender studies, what intrigued me was the apparent discrepancy between its scholarly neglect and its representation as a form of conspicuous ambiguity. While conducting and analysing interviews with people attracted to both women and men in my home city, Budapest (Turai 2010), I realized the significance of the social context, in this case, Hungarian belonging, in how certain sexual experiences are given meaning in the first place, which implies a complex interplay between subjectivity and the micro- and macro social environment. Furthermore, the interviews and my readings in critical bisexuality studies (first of all, Hemmings 2002) turned my attention to the temporal changes in bisexual experiences, and the significance of the life story, which integrates them. This made me see similar narrative operations in bisexuals' and those people's narratives who never experienced bisexual desires, but only hetero- and homosexuality one after the other.

I thus started to conduct interviews with Hungarians of any age whose life stories were characterized by such dynamics of sexual orientation, focusing on the whole life trajectory instead of bisexual identities or attractions as constants at a given moment. The 24 interviewees, whose voices are thus heard in this dissertation through quotes and interpretations, have similarities in their sexual histories, where same-sex and opposite-sex attractions followed one other. However, their sexual identities and relationship conditions at the time of interviews range enormously, and they are not in direct relation to their past and present, same- and opposite-sex attractions. In the absence of a given descriptive term – while keeping in mind their own self-identifications –, I have decided to refer to my respondents' experiences as "biographical bisexuality", to point at the life stories produced through narrative processes which give meaning to opposite- and same-sex experiences (see more in 1.3.1. on terminology).

Consequently, the present dissertation is a rare exploration of sexual experiences over the life course, achieving this contribution through the analytics of "biographical bisexuality". With the term, I also want to point out that sexuality in general is always biographical,[2] because it encompasses all past sexual histories of the person. However, I underline the specificity of bisexuality in the biographical approach to sexuality, and contend that bisexuality specifically invites a biographical view because of its contested temporality. Clare Hemmings (2002, 42-43) argues that "bisexual subjectivity is formed *through* its partiality" and it is exactly what "makes visible the process by which we all become sexual and gendered subjects". My biographical definition of bisexuality departs from hers, as I aim to tackle exactly this "becoming" of sexual and gendered subjects. Bisexuality in the sense of past (compulsory) heterosexuality forms a conflictual part of homosexuality. Annamarie Jagose argues (2002, ix-x) that the figure of the lesbian is "most comprehensively worked over by

[2] I thank Eszter Timár for her comments clarifying this aspect.

sequence" and derivation, eventually revealing the general derivative logics of all sexual categories. Similarly, bisexual biographies can make us better see the conflictual narrative meaning-making operations in *all* sexual life stories, but they *form the basis* of how sexual identities are narratively constructed in life stories which contain both homo- and heterosexuality. Biographical bisexual practice thus specifically requires narrative organizing in ways exclusive heterosexuality does not.[3]

Instead of reducing bisexuality to "at the same time" attraction, I underline that sequence is just as constitutive in its experience. As I will detail in Chapter 2, in this respect I follow the strand of post-structuralist critical bisexuality studies, which points at a sense of subjectivity fragmented in time as constitutional in bisexual experience (see Hemmings 2002). I combine this approach with scholarship on narrative biography construction and queer linguistics (2.4.1.). Hence, I reframe and expand the examination of bisexuality, termed now as "biographical bisexuality", as the biographical project to produce sexual selves through the narrative organization of same- and opposite-sex experiences, even if separated in time.[4]

Juli's interview visibly raises the question of the biographical-narrative integration of the temporal changes of sexual attraction into a coherent sense of self. A concept of language as constitutive in subjectivity (2.3., 3.1.) has influenced both the social theoretical approaches and qualitative methodologies I engage with. As narrativity theories argue, stories can be told in many ways, and a specific narrative refers to how one formulates their experiences reflect their conceptualizations, even if they do not articulate those (see Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 2003, 307; and 2.4.1., e.g. Linde 1993; Eakin 1999; Kovács and Vajda 2002). Experiences are

[3] Those who uphold a bisexual subjectivity (conscious of their continuous transitions, as defined by Hemmings 2002, 43-44) embody a second meaning of this specificity, different from the narrative identity constructions of lesbian and gay subjects, who are nevertheless included in my investigations. I am indebted to Jane Ward for helping me formulate this idea.

[4] I owe a debt of gratitude to Francesca Stella for her comments and suggestions on the concept of 'biographical bisexuality'.

thus social constructs that negotiate with broader discourses (Scott 1992). In the same constructivist spirit, I take off from the feminist and post-structuralist starting point that sexual desires, as any affect, are not only internal but indeed, very much embedded in sociality, creating subjectivities (see 2.2. and 2.3.). Combined with critical post-socialist studies, this allows me to interrogate sexuality in relation to contemporary Hungary and its position as envisioned in the web of global relations (see Renkin 2007a and 2.4.).

This project is therefore interdisciplinary as both engaging in the traditions of literary studies (in textual analysis) and social sciences (in socially situating the interviews), hence also talking to my own educational background in sociology, aesthetics, and gender studies. Asking what helps narratives organize temporal sexual experiences of biographical bisexuality into life stories in the contemporary Hungarian context, my further research questions are the following:

- How do Hungarian bisexual biographies interpret and construct the experiences of sexual desires as changing over time, as well as co-existing with each other?
- To which spatial-social phenomena do these narrative interpretations connect the changes and multiplicities of sexuality? How are they made sense of through broader geospatial discourses like that of inter-/national belonging, East/West, and post-/socialist distinctions?
- How do then such links between society and sexuality in the self-construction of subjects help us rethink the social formation of sexual experiences and identities, as well as the connections between experiences of spatiality and temporality?

The significance of the examination of bisexuality, just like Central-Eastern Europe, lies in their very constitution as border zones where definitional processes and contested meanings become visible (Hemmings 2002; Valentine 2007; Sushytska 2010; Suchland 2011). This enables the interrogation of the categories of hetero- and homosexuality (in relation to each other and to ideas of bisexuality), of ‘First and Third Worlds’, but even of

their fundamental concepts like 'sexual orientation', 'gender', 'belonging' and 'nation'. Following Hemmings (2002), who highlights bisexual meaning as structural to spaces where it might not be visible, I suggest that we need to look at understandings of both temporality and spatiality to examine the particular context, discussed in the next section, with which Hungarian biographical bisexuality negotiates. I will argue that sexual desire is being narratively constructed *vis-à-vis* images of personal, as well as social-spatial trajectories. My interviewees negotiate with broader discourses about Hungary as a nation embedded in transnational histories, defined by East-West and EUropean hierarchies which rely on visions of development and backwardness, including sexuality (see 2.4., incl. Gal 1991; Böröcz 2006; Chari and Verdery 2009; Gagyi 2012).

In the process of interview analysis (see Chapter 3), I looked for the narrative framing of different temporal experiences of biographical bisexuality: serial ones, where hetero- and homosexual attractions either follow each other in two life periods (Chapter 4), or alternate (Chapter 5); as well as parallel ones, where people engage in parallel partnerships (Chapter 6) or in threesome sex (Chapter 7) with both men and women. I found that the dominant organizing themes in these narratives cover spatial categories that are framed in dialogue with the post-socialist meanings of sexual gender preference as reflecting East-West historical hierarchies of 'transition'. Relying on Francesca Stella's (2015) and Hemmings's (2002) arguments for spatio-temporal investigations of (bi)sexuality, I underline the connections between the spatial and temporal aspects of Hungarian biographical bisexuality. Stella examines post-/Soviet lesbian lives historically, as well as along different scales from the body to communities, cities, countries, the nation and the post-socialist region (2015, 141). I will argue that temporal experiences of Central-Eastern European biographical bisexuality are narrated through their interrelatedness to similar scales of spatial categories. These bear specific, also temporally changing, social meanings in contemporary Hungary: the post-

/socialist regime of the country, its LGBTQ[5] and straight communities, the private spaces of the home, and the gendered-sexual body. Interrogating how my interviewees integrate bisexual experiences into their sense of self through these structuring elements in storytelling leads me to highlight processes where the personal is interwoven with the social, making sexual desire a social phenomenon embedded in personal and historical temporality.

Apart from doing rare bisexual research in the Central-Eastern European context of Hungary, my approach is exceptional for locating sexual changes in social transitions (see 2.4.3.). My case study suggests that the ambiguities of sexual belonging are constituted along ambiguities of inter-/national belonging (Renkin 2007a), and sexual and social transitions are mapped onto each other in personal narratives. Therefore, I argue for the critical re-claiming of the concept of transition, which helps us better understand sexuality as a dynamic, socially formed issue, and geopolitical and sexual categories as in mutual interaction in lived experiences (see 2.4.3. and the concluding Chapter 8). My focus on sexuality as desire contributes to our understanding of subjectivity (and communities of belonging) as emerging from everyday practices (see de Certeau 1984), and ideas of social and sexual trajectories as central to its constitution. Through my narrative-temporal focus which brings the macro- and micro levels of queer temporality – queer globalization and life course perspectives – into conversation (like Stella 2015), this dissertation makes visible the connections between biographical, sexual, and socio-political temporalities as interrelated and mutually informing each other, based on discourses of the East-West, modernization-backwardness, in/authenticity, among others. As a general theoretical implication, I show that sexual desires and subjectivities take shape through meaning-making processes of narrating, in interaction with socially meaningful spatial categories.

[5] For my use and definition of the acronym, see note 8 on page 15.

In the next section, I outline an overview of the contemporary Hungarian context and its gender and sexual relations, which provide an interpretative horizon for my interviewees. Then, my use of terms and transcription conventions follows, which describes my conceptualization of desire, bisexuality, biography, and post-socialist transition. Finally, I provide a chapter outline and introduce the arguments of each chapter, which build together the main argument of the dissertation about the narrative organization of changing sexual experiences along social spatio-temporalities.

1.2. Gender and (bi)sexual relations in post-socialist Hungary

As signposts to the recent Hungarian conceptualizations of non-normative sexualities as embedded in political changes and wider cultural processes, first I discuss two episodes from my fieldwork, the implications of which are questioned in Juli's (39, f) opening quote and frame all my interviewees' narratives. Contemporary sexual conceptualizations include several conflictual representations of bisexuality from dating sites to the cases that follow. These representations of Hungarian LGBTQ issues by two men, gay and straight popular intellectual figures above 60, did not voice official statements of activism, but reached a wide audience beyond LGBTQ groups. They made me feel ambiguous and frustrated, because they are symptomatic to significant contemporary tensions around sexuality as well as other social questions in Hungary.

On July 11, 2015, I was listening to the sympathetic and celebratory opening speech for the Budapest Pride March delivered by the renowned heterosexual conductor Iván Fischer from the back of a music truck to thousands of participants in the heart of Budapest downtown, sealed from non-participants with police and security bars. Fischer warned homophobes that homosexuality is an "inborn trait", and asked for acceptance for those who "feel attracted to same-sex people in adolescence" and "are just as the members of society as we all, with the only distinction that they choose someone of the same sex as the partner for

their whole life", advocating for coming out and equal marriage (see *szinhaz.hu* 2015). To me this, soon after the US marriage equality campaign spreading to Hungary through Facebook, expressed the globally shared reduction of LGBTQ agenda to "gay love" (see Ward 2015), with the unconcern about people with bisexual or later-realizing homosexual trajectories. Despite its references to "colourful, not black-and-white world and people", the speech divided society into clear hetero- and homosexual clusters, obviously from an outsider ally's assimilationist position. Just a month earlier, a gay insider's public utterance displayed another attitude to bisexualities. Ádám Nádasdy openly gay literary scholar celebrated in both gay and mainstream circles, in an interview arguing for "bourgeois gayness" (2015),[6] questioned bisexuality as "infidelity" and as only claimed by "gays who are ashamed of it". Referring to the expectation of an either-or self-identification between Hungarian and Romanian ethnicities in multi-ethnic Transylvania, Romania, Nádasdy stated that in sexuality "there cannot be transition either". He added that in contrast to men, alternating homo- and heterosexual relationships do happen in women's lives, because they "more easily give themselves to someone who doesn't make them hot-blooded".

Appreciating his work and person, just as Fischer's, I was nevertheless even more disappointed about the direction Nádasdy's statements pointed at. Beyond reinforcing general biphobic stereotypes, the erasure of bisexuality also discursively accomplished the shaming of the closeted gay person. The transfer of stigma from homosexuality to bisexuality by gays and lesbians (blaming bisexuals with promiscuous sexual practice, cowardice, inauthenticity and fraud) can be understood as stemming from the same homophobic views (Takács 2004, 209-211; see also Turai 2011). Yet, the condemnation of the closet ignores those geographical and classed differences which make coming out unrealistic for many people with same-sex desires (see 2.4.1.). Also, Nádasdy's claims perpetuate images of women (as in contrast to men) as

[6] "*Be akarom lopni a melegeket a polgári társadalomba*" ('I want to shuffle gays into bourgeois society').

driven by emotions and engaging in sex irrespective of their sexual desires, an idea which stems from women's sexual objectification and can be traced in all my chapters (see also Ward 2015). This way, he reinforces the boundaries between non-heterosexual people, rejecting notions of bisexuality which actually dominate many other bisexual representations which I will introduce in the second half of this section.

Nádasdy's Transylvanian example indexes the significance of national-ethnic parallels in the conceptualization of sexuality in Hungary, and his negation of 'transition' refers to shades between ethnic and sexual binary categories (rather than a temporary developmental, see the next section). In scholarship however, the case of Transylvania is used exactly for the opposite argument: that ethnic-national group boundaries are more ambiguous and porous than it is widely assumed, and a rigorous categorical code is more constitutive, rather than descriptive, of social relations (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 27). Both public statements show the operation of sexual identity politics in Central-Eastern Europe, relying on international discourses and reinforced through the application of a national parallel. LGBTQ discourses are supported by the leftist-liberal strata of educated Budapest middle-class, in a politically-socially-culturally divided Hungary ruled by a homophobic right-wing government. The very context of these utterances – an online newspaper and a Budapest Pride March – makes visible the class breach among various representations of non-normative sexualities, as well as among the entire Hungarian society.

In the following, I provide an outline of the conceptualizations of non-normative sexualities since the end of state socialism, embedded in political changes and wider cultural processes, including sharpening power relations of class, gender, and heteronormativity. I then show how complex processes of gay visibility and sexual commercialization affected the recent circulation of various depictions of bisexuality and changing desire, both in mainstream straight and LGBTQ discourses. Juli's (39, f) quote in the previous section illustrates that my

interviewees' narratives to be analysed in the following chapters, on the one hand, testify the prescriptive impact of these discourses on their personal experiences. On the other hand, they also perform the questionability of identity as the result of identification (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). I will thus argue that the manoeuvring of personal stories of biographical bisexuality in these fields make the divisions in contemporary Hungarian society visible.

The political and economic system of Hungary has undergone significant changes after 1989. Nevertheless, the 40 years of state socialism was just one historical period; in this respect, it is also a 'post-autocratic' society with the traces of the Horthy regime before WWII, as well as 'post-Monarchic'. Indeed, the cultural-social traditions of these periods reinforced after 1989 (Balibar [1992] 2004, 79; Fehérváry 2013, 190). Moreover, 'post-socialism' indexes another, more spatial than temporal line of comparison, which positions the Central-Eastern European region 'secondary' *vis-à-vis* what is understood as the West, whereas still belonging to the wealthier, Global Nordic part of the world compared to the 'Third World'. These geo-temporal relations play out in the competition of discourses over the meaning of 1989, diversely understood as the expression of centuries-old fights for national-political freedom; or as the emancipation by Western capitalist democracy; as well as betrayal, surrender to Western political and economic colonization (Mark *et al.* 2015).

Such discursive interpretations are important for the personal conceptualizations of the changes of sexual lives, with implications on how sexual subjectivity could be imagined and where sex and desire come from. Being subjected to the influence of powerful foreign states and authoritarian national regimes results in concerns about in-/authenticity and choice/constraint (Moss 1995; Nadkarni 2010). Consequently, homosexual attractions and sex in general are experienced in Hungary as both in-/authentic in relation to inter-/national influences, either as the inner truth, to be emancipated or preserved, or as another product

imposed by external, foreign forces.[7] In post-socialist times, in the understanding of many, sexual freedom, both natural and modern, is enhanced by Western-led capitalist democracy; therefore, it embodies ideas of modernity (Renkin 2007a, 298). This prompts people in Hungary to take side *vis-á-vis* sexual meanings in the framework of East-West geo-temporalities, which I point out in each analytical chapter.

As I show especially in Chapter 4, for many people, opportunities opened up for the realization of same-sex desires after 1989. Nevertheless, homosexual relations, networks and subcultures were identified already during state socialism (Borneman 1991; Stella 2015; Szulc 2017), including Hungary (Tóth 1995; Renkin 2007a; Borgos *et al.* 2011). Further, public discourse on both men's and women's homosexuality was present, as shown in criminal news, gossips on celebrities, as well as cultural products and research (Riszovannij 2001; Borgos 2014; Takács 2015). Terms like gay ('*meleg*' in Hungarian, literally "warm", keeping this dual meaning till today), bisexual ('*biszexuális*') and lesbian ('*leszbikus*') were circulating before 1989. During the first democratic elections in 1990, the then liberal *Fidesz*, the party which has become conservative and governs since 2010, used an advertisement in the campaign which relied on a specific image of homosexuality, illustrating, as Hadley Z. Renkin (2007a, 299-300) argues, another side of post-socialist heteronormative sexualization of the Hungarian public space besides visible highly-sexualized images of women in advertising.

[7] I am grateful for the formulation of this ambiguity to my supervisor Hadley Z. Renkin.

1-1. Figure. "Please, choose" – election poster, 1990.

The caption "Please, choose" plays on the polysemy of the Hungarian verb '*választani*' which also denotes 'to elect', this way evoking the democratic idea of choice (and its intended obviousness) in both sexual and political life (Renkin 2007a, 300). The traditional Russian-Soviet kiss on the lips between Brezhnev and Honecker, foreign and old communist male politicians (see Schimmel 1998 and Baer 2002) is put in contrast with a kissing unknown, young, casually dressed heterosexual couple. This illustrates how political transition was thematized through sexuality (Renkin 2007a, 299 and 2.4.3.), and, I would add, through concerns about the authenticity of the expressions of desires against the background of repressive social power. In this case, intriguingly, the socialist past is identified as homosexual, symbolized with a partly unerotic kiss, which seems inauthentic due to the unequal power relations between the Soviet Union and its insider colonies. In contrast, the healthily heterosexual couple symbolizes the new era with honesty and intimacy, promising a democratic and nationalist near future implying notions of equality, free will, as well as

authentic desires and pleasures. At the same time, it precludes the possibility of authentic same-sex desire.

In Central-Eastern Europe, sexuality thus has become a core issue around which post-socialist discourses and politics define themselves and each other (Renkin 2007a, 2009), and 'transition' has entailed a re-strengthening of patriarchal heteronormativity (Kašić 2005; Imre 2009, 130). The post-socialist region is affected by capitalist nationalisms (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Balibar [1992] 2004) and has seen a sharpening of dichotomies in terms of gender relations as well. On the one hand, the national reproductive, sexually constraining family-centric policies re-strengthened, drawing their legitimacy to pre-socialist traditions. On the other hand, due to the tighter connection into global capitalist markets, the eroticization of the public sphere and the objectification of women's bodies increased, including their same-sex erotic (Baer 2005; Renkin 2007a; Borgos 2014).

The same processeses of liberalization and marketization though, together with the opening up of legal opportunities for civic movements since the late 1980s, have brought in the biggest cities of the region lively LGBTQ activism and subcultures (Renkin 2007a; Stella 2015). In terms of legal recognition, in Hungary, registered partnership for same-sex couples since 2009 and anti-discrimination policies co-exists with the Basic Law of 2011 defining marriage and family in heteronormative terms (Béres-Deák 2016a, 10). Despite rights granted by legislation, homophobic attitudes permeate public and personal discourses. I cited above a speech from the annual Budapest Pride March, because the contested nature of the publicity of LGBTQ issues is most obvious around it, increasingly standing in the focus of activism and frequented by masses, but regularly attacked and policed by the right since 2007. What first, in the early 1990s, was called "Gay and Lesbian" Festival and March, gradually became

"Budapest Pride LMBTQ"[8]. More and more groups and activities employ the acronym, but colloquially they are referred to as 'gay' with the traditionally Hungarian term '*meleg'*, and most people, including those concerned, are often ignorant about much of the other terms. Importantly, many people with non-normative sexualities object the March and hence activism, which reflects conflicts about representation and strategies (Renkin 2015).

In the mid-1990s, discussions about the political outcomes of sexual identity categories led to the formation of a 'Group for People without Sexual Identity'[9] (Renkin 2007a, 56). One of their leaflets parodied the stereotypes of sexual identification through a fictional bisexual character (Borgos 2007, 181). Nevertheless, as my two fieldwork examples showed above, the feminist or queer critique of identity categories remains limited, due to recent developments of LGBTQ activism in Hungary and across the region (Kašić 2005; Barát 2008) and even Budapest does not have offline bisexual groups.[10] Some activities and publications of Hungarian LGBTQ non-profit organizations (NGOs), in contrast to Fischer's and Nádasdy's claims, seek to be attentive to diversity inside the community, and a few events on bisexuality were organized by women activists. Yet, reference to bisexuality often remains an empty phrase without community self-organizing, since in the region, following international NGO discourses, the inclusion of bisexual and transgender into organizations' statements had shortly followed their formation (Borgos 2007, 170; Binnie and Klesse 2011).

As the two cases above illustrated, among Budapest educated middle-class there is a growing tendency to support a specific, normative form of same-sex sexualities, due to both the efforts of LGBTQ activists and the sharpening political-cultural divide where anti-homophobia is associated with the leftist-liberal "package" (Zimmermann 2008; Renkin

[8] *Leszbikus, Meleg* (Gay), *Biszexuális, Transznemű és Queer,* previously *Meleg és Leszbikus Fesztivál.* Because of this official use, I use the same when talking in general about (Hungarian and other) LGBTQ activism and circles; with the few references to 'LGBT' I will stress tensions with queer activism or politics.

[9] '*Nemi Identitás Nélküliek Csoportja';* its short, '*NINCS*' literally means "there isn't any".

[10] In contrast to both Hungarian transgender organizations that became active by the 2010s, but also to various forms of bisexual organizing elsewhere (see Ritter 2014 on Germany; Monro 2015 on US, UK, India and Colombia; and Hura 2016 on Serbia) where thus a sense of community belonging can add to self-conceptions.

2015). However, such gay-friendly voices of the cultural elite contribute to the marginalization of a significant non-straight population. Worldwide, homonormativity goes together with essentialist arguments about sexual orientation, as well as a reinforcement of hierarchical normative gender roles (see Klesse 2007; Ward 2015). However, in Central-Eastern Europe, homonationalism provides a background of Western modernity against which the nation state defines itself (Puar 2017). Instead, it is mostly donors from the Global North, including the European Union, who are the defenders of LGBTQ rights, in return reinforcing both national homophobia and undoubtedly existing normative discourses of local LGBTQ groups (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014; Bilić and Kajinić 2016). Hungarian LGBTQ activism, responding to international trends and financial constraints which favour same-sex marriage to community building or psychological support, is in fact losing base with those whose needs and priorities lie elsewhere, including bisexuals for whom it is even more difficult to find community, or for community to reach out to them (Woltersdorff 2007; Butterfield 2016; Hura 2016). This breach inside an illusionary "LGBTQ community" is obviously a class issue, where the vocal support of the liberal-leftist middle-class of higher education results in great numbers of straight and NGO allies (Renkin 2015), but also in a growing distance from people outside of these social strata and Budapest activism. In sum, the two main discursive directions which shape the notion of bisexuality either stem from general LGBTQ activism, or, from the widening opportunities for sexual experimentation as well as objectification in mainstream straight sexual subcultures.

Alongside of the developments of Hungarian LGBTQ activism, other sources provide often more widely accessible narratives for bisexuality and sexual non-normativity, which need to be taken into account in the examination of personal narratives. Already from the 1980s, a new wave of popular sociographic literature began getting published, expanding on also fields of sexuality deemed deviant (Sándor 1999; Riszovannij 2001). Connecting back to

the sociographical tradition of the 1930s in Hungary, these works also broke ground for social scientific interest in sexualities in the form of long verbatim quotes of life course interviews. They drew public attention to marginalized people (including the homeless and prisoner), both men (Géczi [1987] 1990) and women, including references to bisexuality (Czére 1989), but their pseudo-scientific tone was judgemental, sexist and homophobic.

From the 2000s, further media sources like tabloid or online articles, films and series emerged, reaching an even wider range of people, mediating to them a new set of non-hostile meanings of same-sex sexuality from normalization to sensationalization and exploitation (see Kis 2012). Notably, the only one openly bisexual figure, the dissident émigré poet and writer György Faludy (1910-2006) was widely known across Hungary, due to his appearance in both tabloid newspapers and high-culture products.[11] The statement "I might be Faludy" by one of my interviewees, Tibor (51, m), proves that the intellectual Faludy might be the only bisexual figure with which educated middle-class men can identify with.

Addressing a similarly wide social range of audience, bisexuality is hugely visible on Hungarian LGBTQ dating sites since the early 2000s and most recently, dating smart phone applications. What 'bisexual' here connotes is very different from the human rights identity politics discourse mostly employed by Hungarian LGBTQ activism with its ties to Budapest middle-class. It is rather descriptive about people's sexual interest in and initiation towards both men and women, most often characterizing men in heterosexual relationships from various social-spatial locations who seek out same-sex sexual encounters in secret. On these sites then, bisexuality connotes closet, secrecy, sexual desire and pleasure, non-monogamy, threesomes and group sex, sexual practice versus (homosexual) identification – something which Nádasdy distanced himself from. These representations thus reveal geographical and

[11] Despite a few gay, and more rarely, lesbian public coming out, its culture has not taken root in Hungary (Timár 2013). Faludy's bisexuality is widely known due to his marriage after a long-term same-sex relationship, at the age of 92 to a 27-year-old woman, with whom they were photographed naked in the erotic magazine *Penthouse*. For more, see Turai (forthcoming), and on his work Csiszár (2008).

cultural-classed divisions, as well as sexualisation of women. As I myself also experienced, women, especially if registered as bisexual, frequently receive unwanted approach from men tantamount to sexual harassment on dating sites with both straight and LGBTQ-focus. Women do in fact approach other women to invite them into threesomes with their male partner; therefore lesbians contact bisexuals to a small extent. These dynamics show how female bisexuality is being absorbed into male-centred sexual cultures. Women's position and the breaches in LGBTQ life through bisexuality can be illustrated by the online advertisement from 2014 for a "Bi Party".

1-2. Figure. Online ad for a "Bi Party", 2014.

The caption says, "A night for men and women", marking the speciality of the event in the presence of women, as Magnum Sauna is a commercial institution for men's casual sexual encounters. Despite its gay context, the image follows the visualization of (non-monogamous) bisexuality in heteronormative contexts from mainstream porn to popular music media (Wilkinson 2010; Eisner 2013, 159). It depicts a man in the centre, embraced by two conventionally feminine women's standard bodies. What makes this photo possibly non-heterosexual is the man – conventionally masculine, muscular, young, with no body hair –, who is objectified by an assumed male sexual desire, owing to the gay market context. Therefore, the event addresses at men, rather than women, and precludes any subversive queer, let alone feminist atmosphere, being further from LGBTQ activism than from mainstream heteronormative culture.

As my interviews also testify, both men and women with bisexual desires and identities live in straight spaces, even without any connection to LGBTQ groups. While female bisexuality is publicly visible, exploited, even pushed, male bisexuality belongs to private "double lives" or to anonymous online spaces (see Fahs 2009, also Chapter 2 and 7). This explains why I could not access male respondents who do not belong to LGBTQ circles (see the next section and Chapter 3). In contrast to the polite silence in LGBTQ activism about sexual orientation possibly changing, in mainstream sexist heteronormative popular discourses it is widely addressed, from folk psychological online articles to tabloid news on international celebrities. Illustrative of these is the Hungarian movie with the original title *Coming Out* from 2013, a romantic popular comedy about a gay activist who miraculously turns straight after a crash with a woman. People in LGBTQ organizations were understandably mad at the assumptions the movie implied, starting from the stereotypical depiction of gay men as a source of humour to the lesson that turning straight is both desirable and possible (see Béres-Deák 2016b). I felt ambivalent, because I sensed the highly problematic assumptions the film was based on, but I also regretted that so many people's experiences, including my own interviewees, are struck in the false dilemma of being represented in heteronormative framework or not represented at all. Finally, having watched the film, what I found especially outrageous was the depiction of conventional femininity, as something not only a man should get rid of but also a woman (here the protagonist's love) should acquire, parallel to the formation of their heterosexual relationship. Consequently, I consider the discussions around the movie symptomatic not only of the competition between heteronormative and gay discourses over the interpretation of biographical bisexualities, but also of normative understandings of gender as at their core.

In my investigations in the following, therefore, I keep both sexual and gender hierarchies in the foreground. I argue that contemporary Hungarian representations of

biographical bisexuality highlight the processes of gay visibility and sexual commercialization, which stem from the country's connection into global market- and discourse-based inequalities (see 2.4.). These result in a gap among various groups of people with non-normative sexualities based on class and gender power differences, as well as in acute dilemmas for people with fluid sexuality to take a side in political-cultural divisions. The next section on my chosen terminology concludes on this outlined context.

1.3. Language and terminology

The terminologies I employ throughout this dissertation highlight the problematics of the analytical work I pursue on my data, as eventually I am also telling a narrative here. Starting from the examination of 'bisexual attractions', I have arrived at critically investigating the fundamental terms of sexual orientation (2.2.), whereas I keep working with deconstructed and re-defined concepts of 'bisexuality', 'desire', and 'transition' (2.4.3.). Echoing David Valentine's reflections about how his own work on transgender contributes to consolidating it as a category as well as a disciplinary field (2007, 18, 165, 243), with my questions and terminology, I also want to keep visible their operations together with their moving and contested boundaries. Therefore, my terms as such, from the 'West' to 'bisexual' to 'heterosexual', are always understood as in quotation marks. Although my work does not even attempt to provide definitions, it might inevitably reproduce some hierarchical binary meanings. With Valentine (2007, 26), I "am not so much interested in resolving this tension as I am using it as a productive mode through which the workings" of such socially meaningful distinctions based on inequalities.

In my usage of 'narrative', it concerns my interviewees' life stories, which I consider sites where the mutual construction of the social and the personal plays out, displaying both structure and agency. They (re)produce discourses, which I understand as the language mediated by institutions of power (Foucault [1977] 1991; 1978), which certainly have their

own ‘narratives’ such as the story of coming out or of Westernized development. As speech is framed in the grammatical structures of language, personal narratives reflect, and eventually both reinforce and alter, discourses that are contradictory even in themselves (see Certeau 1984; Hall 1996; Weedon 1997; see 2.2., 2.4.). The life story is an eminent site where we can see sexuality at the intersection of these dynamics producing subjectivities. Therefore, I understand ‘experience’ as the linguistic formulation – and hence interpretation – of historical and deeply affective events, with the help of culturally available narrative means, in processes of “fashioning selves” (Wilton 2004; see also Scott 1992; Cerwonka 2011).

My other terminological choices are also based on theoretical considerations, which I extensively discuss in the next chapter. Just to briefly note, I decided to use the debated ‘post-socialist’ term exactly because of its reference to a socialist past and hence to a difference from (as well as some sameness to) countries without such a past. “Core countries of globalism” (Kopeček and Wciślik 2015, 12) are usually referred to as the ‘West’, which I use especially when talking about discourses. ‘Central-Eastern Europe’ (CEE) is contested as reflexing some of the liberal disidentification with the ‘East’ (see Gal 1991; Wolff 1994, 15; Krausz 2012; Navickaitė 2013, 84). Talking about Hungary, most but not all of my conclusions would apply to other Central-Eastern European countries (see Chapter 4 on the specificity of Hungary as a once relatively progressive society currently lagging behind its neighbours); similarly, conducting the interviews in Budapest brings a specific perspective on Hungarian country-capital relations (see more in 3.2.1.).

Still, I keep ‘CEE’ not only to follow most gender studies works in the region, but also because it makes visible the parallels between sexual and geographical hierarchizations, both operating in a binary system with ambiguous positions in the middle. As I elaborate in 2.3., I similarly find the concept of ‘transition’ useful to the extent that it applies to both sexual and social-political development trajectories, implying a beginning and end state with the

hierarchical relation between the two. Eventually, I suggest reclaiming the term, arguing with post-structuralism that every subjectivity, just as every society, is under continuous transformation. However, in the following I work with 'transition' as an analytical, and not an emic category. First, in colloquial Hungarian, '*átmenet*' is not often used for the transformations around 1989, which are commonly referred to as regime or system *change* ('*rendszerváltás'* or *'rendszerváltozás'*). Most importantly, as I demonstrated in the previous section, even if 'transition' is used (including my interviews), it refers to the shade grades between two oppositional categories, and not in the temporal sense of transitioning from one state to another.[12]

1.3.1. My approach to (bi)sexualities

'Bisexuality' is one of the main notions this dissertation seeks to methodologically explore and theoretically deconstruct. I argued in the beginning of this chapter that multiplicity of sexual attractions also characterize life stories in the long run, while keeping in the foreground the fact that this use of 'bisexuality' in many cases does not correspond to people's self-identifications (see 3.2.1.). Following Hemmings in her opposition to the agenda to define bisexuality (1993, 124-127), with that move I suggest that we start thinking about bisexualities in the plural, and about homo- and heterosexualities alike. The first part of the title of this chapter "Imagining bisexuality" is taken from Valentine's *Imagining Transgender* (2007), implying the anthropological investigation of the cultural meanings the term carries (see also Geertz [1973] 1993). However, in the spirit of critiquing the shortcomings of identity politics, my research deliberately avoids focusing only on sexualities where bisexuality as a term is visible (Hemmings 2002). Rather, I am investigating the meaning proposed in the second half of the title: biographical bisexuality "as a life story about gender",

[12] Also, 'transition', also in Hungarian discourses, is more widespread in regards to transgender than bisexuality.

in order to point at that such a bisexual research is able to highlight how understandings of sexual orientation and gender difference operate in the particular social context of Hungary.

My argument about the social reproduction of sexual desires engages with the critical works about the fixing and essentialising assumptions – similar to teleological ideas of 'transition' – inherent in the "sexual orientationalist discourse" (see Wilton 2004 in 2.2.). However, the broad terms of "sexualities" or "sexual preference" suggested by some (Stein 1992; Richardson and Monro 2012, 7) miss the important reference to gender as the core of contemporary sexual categorization. Although 'gender of sexual object choice' would be the most precise description, I rarely use it because it hinders easy readability and implies a mechanistic-rationalistic view of human sexuality. As I discussed in 1.1., I refer to my respondents' sexual trajectories as displaying biographical bisexuality. By the use of "biographical", I keep reminding myself and the reader of the specific, sequential temporalities of these life stories.[13] Using any term as descriptive to lives of people who would not necessarily identify as such has its own risks and limitations (see 3.2.1.), but I contend that my use of the term serves analytical purposes. Referring back to Valentine's (2007, 26) argument above, paying attention to this tension through the whole analytical process is theoretically fruitful. Both keeping as well as omitting the word "bisexual" in my research risks certain reductions, and by now I consider the use of 'biographical bisexuality' the optimal solution.

Distancing myself from the tendencies of some bisexual scholarship which homogenize heterosexuality and homosexuality as both displaying "monosexual" biphobia (for their sound critique see Hemmings 2002, 28; Eisner 2013, 94), I state that especially from a bisexual point of view, their power asymmetry could be highlighted (see Kitzinger and Wilkinson 1993, 8). Therefore, even if I draw parallels throughout the whole dissertation, I

[13] Also, I follow those scholars of narrativity (incl. Ritter 2012 on bisexuality), who avoid the use of the "auto-" in "autobiographical" to draw attention to the social, interrelational constitution of these narratives.

always note the hierarchical and structural differences between the two categories; similarly, I keep gender asymmetry and inequality in the foreground when talking about women's and men's sexual relation to men and women.

Breaking down various temporal experiences of biographical bisexuality for each analytical chapter, I arrived to focus on life moments when either a turn is taking place, between sequences of differently gendered attractions after one another, or they co-exist throughout some time. I follow an electric metaphor, calling the latter experiences those of *parallel connections,* and the former *serial connections,* which form the two sections of the analytical chapters.[14] Although not completely accurate in terms of physics, what the use of these widely used sexual metaphors accomplishes in my study is the reference to relationality and sociality through the double meaning of "connection", as well as the emphasis on the dynamic biographical movement of temporal experiences, contrary to static positions (of the subject and its sexuality). Seriality also evokes the term "serial monogamy" which makes cases of "serial monosexism" (in Chapter 4) meaningful. Further, inside seriality, I distinguish between experiences of alternation between same- and opposite-sex attractions, and the experiences of switching from one to the other once and for all. This metaphor is not only used for bisexuality – characterized as "dual current" (Hemmings 2002, 23) –, but also for queer temporality. According to Tom Boellstorff's understanding, it is "oscillating in time, like alternating current in an electric wire" (2007, 28). Adding to the variety of bisexual meanings in contemporary Hungary as well as globally outlined in the previous section, we will see in the chapters that each specific temporal experience of multiple desires I examine is referred to as bisexual by some of my interviewees, and rejected as such by others. This illuminates how conceptualizations of bisexuality are always contested, tied to its temporal features.

[14] I owe a debt of gratitude to Hadley Z. Renkin and Eszter Timár for their thought-provoking ideas on the electric metaphor.

My interviewees have various sexual identities: bisexual, lesbian, "basically straight", heterosexual, unlabelled, "bisexual while turning gay", just to mention a few (see Appendix I). Bisexuality, just as most social categories, "happens" in various ways. In sampling, I followed the most widespread concept of bisexuality (see Eisner 2013, 13) which refers to people who are *sexually attracted* to both women and men. Without specifically looking for bisexually *identified* people, I focus on 'sexual attraction' and 'desire' as deliberately open, even interchangeable terms, with meanings defined by each interviewee, in order to ultimately interrogate them.[15] Keeping in mind the significance of identities, I examine them as always in interaction with attractions in socially embedded situational-relational processes of identification (see 2.2.). Therefore, I use 'bisexual' (as well as 'hetero- and homosexual', 'opposite- and same-sex') as descriptive adjectives for relationships and encounters; for individuals, I stick to the term they identify with. I try to restrict my use of 'gay' to the latter and to stress specifically male homosexual aspects of LGBTQ life, with the exception of some colloquial adjective compounds like 'ex-gay', which include reference to lesbian relationships (see especially Chapter 4 and 5). By 'queer', I mostly refer to theoretical and activist positions critical of assumptions about LGBT identities (noted above and elaborated in 2.4.).

Following from these theoretical considerations, my sample to be analysed (see Chapter 3 and Appendix I) consists of life story interviews with 12-12 men and women who confirm having had attractions toward both women and men during their life span. Their age range between 18 and 64 at the time of the interviews, recorded between 2010 and 2013 in Hungarian in Budapest. Although my sample is very diverse in terms of age, sexual-relationship history and identity, my interviewees could be said to belong to the middle-class of the capital, even if with great internal differences in terms of finances and social prestige, and even if some are originally from the countryside or have moved there.

[15] 'Attraction' ('*vonzalom*') works better in eliciting life stories in the Hungarian context, where it is used more colloquially in general terms than 'desire' ('*vágy*'), which is typically used as directing a specific person in a specific sexual situation. Still, I keep 'desire' as an analytical term.

1.3.2. Transcription conventions

As in my whole methodology (see Chapter 3), I represent a middle ground in the presentation of my interview material. The transcription conventions widespread in linguistic scholarship (numbering lines, complex indexing of non-verbal characteristics) tend to hamper readability and thus the comprehension of the text. On the other hand, I find it reductionist when interviews are presented edited, in grammatically correct and complete form, as it happens the more the author is less interested in the "form" of the interview. Thus, I most often quote my interviewees word-by-word, including repetitions and non-verbal elements (hesitations, pauses, laughs), presented via in-text textual insertions, as they are informative about the formation of the narrative (see Duranti 1997; Peebles 2004). This includes sexually explicit language and full words in general, also worth of social scientific investigation. I add my own utterances as interviewer, as I am unavoidably complicit in the co-construction of the situation (Grenz 2014). I mark the words uttered with emphasis with *italics* and those my analysis underlines with **bold**. In [square brackets], I insert non-verbal reactions, contextual information and the Hungarian original at places where it is necessary to get the whole meaning and cultural references (see Boellstorff 2005, 5; Stella 2015, 6).[16]

In order to secure anonymity, I note my interviewees' approximate age at the time of the interview, a (mostly Hungarian) pseudonym, which they could choose by themselves, and their gender.[17] All the proper nouns mentioned in the interview, as well as any other specific data available for identification, got modified. In presenting the interview extracts in the dissertation text one has to find the balance between "giving voice" to (especially less privileged) respondents and the researcher's own analysis. Following a linguistic perspective, at points I quote the interviewees at length to show the textual context, but it is essential for me to give extensive analysis, as quotes do not talk for themselves (Cerwonka 2004).

[16] Especially given the significance of the native language in Hungarian identity. Although translation can be reductive, it itself can illuminate certain textual operations. (see Chapter 4)

[17] Every interviewee, including the two non-binary ones, identifies more with one of the two sexes (see 3.2.).

Certainly, there is a subjective element in what I present, but it goes along the logic of my argument and themes, which arise from the examination of the interview texts themselves. In the analytical text, the expressions in "quotation marks" refer to the interviewee's own wording, and the present tense refers to the time of the interview.[18]

1.4. Chapter outline

Throughout the chapters, I present what we can learn more specifically about how social construction of sexuality happens, including how desires are performed through narrative-linguistic practices. I zoom in on specific temporal (serial and parallel) experiences of Hungarian biographical bisexuality, and show which binary and changing spatial-social categories they typically connect in the interview narratives, illuminating their interaction with post-socialist socio-historical positions. First, in the following theoretical chapter, I combine scholarship that critically examines the notion of sexual fluidity with constructivist and performativity literature, and through the critical post-socialist understanding of queer temporalities, I suggest a re-consideration of 'transition' as an analytical tool to locate the spatio-temporal performative connections between desires and the Hungarian social context. Turning to biographical bisexual work in the Central-Eastern European region, I propose a direction that locates such research in the histories of transformations of the region and in its ambiguous positions in global and local hierarchies. Stemming from the same theoretical considerations and employing performativity as a methodological tool, Chapter 3 argues for thematic-biographical interview analysis as best enabling for the examination of interactively constructed experiences and meanings of biographical bisexualities.

The four analytical chapters are divided into two sections, examining "serial" and "parallel" sexual experiences with men and women. However, these are not exclusive

[18] Narrated identities and gender preferences could have, and in some cases indeed did change since the time of interviews. Still, I do not include in my analysis further information about these changes, because the interview relationship had ended between me and my respondents before.

subcategories of biographical bisexuality: first, many interviewees reported both types of experiences and thus will be discussed in more than one chapter. Second, even if homo- and heterosexual attractions follow each other in sequence, they both appear in the life course as a whole, and parallel relations are also embedded in experiences of sequence. Section I. discusses biographical bisexuality experienced as serial: as either two separate phases of hetero- and homosexuality or alternating between the two, and will show how these experiences reflect divisions of cultural-political belonging in Hungarian society. In Section II., I show sexual parallels in terms of partnership as well as sexual activity, where the post-socialist condition frames these experiences through understandings of the home and the body.

Chapter 4 shows that the experiences of biographical bisexuality as serial monosexuality especially highlight how the change of 'sexual orientation' is experienced along the recent social-political changes of Hungary. Sexual turning points are located in the narratives in the 1989 transition, but in the 2000s, with its visible international gay discourse as well as global trends of repatriarchalization. I show that the use of (native or foreign) language analogies helps my interviewees interpret the switch in their desires as impacted by inter-/national influences.

What the experiences of alternating bisexuality underline in Chapter 5 is how it is understood in terms of vacillation between belonging to straight and LGBTQ communities. These spaces help people make sense of their changing desires, but at the same time, they reinforce sexual binaries of hetero- and homosexuality. Even sexually permissive straight spaces like Budapest university circles rely on understandings of sexual fluidity (e.g., bisexuality as exact middle) which feels more limiting than liberating for some interviewees.

My analysis in Chapter 6 shows that notions of the home help my respondents locate bisexual parallel relationships in their lives: either through their spatial separation with the

primacy of heterosexual partnership, or, through spatial unification, which necessitates a reconfiguration of the hetero-homo hierarchy. Although post-socialist capitalism has economicly and discursively reaffirmed the family home, a few years around 1989 allowed for alternatives.

In Chapter 7, I employ an understanding of the body as social-spatial category in contemporary Budapest. Stories of bisexual threesomes reveal the ways their experience is constructed along binary understandings of gendered desiring bodies, which nevertheless appear as malleable in sexual situations, transforming through intention, by chance, or by external forces. This suggests female sexual openness as the sign of belonging to Western capitalist-consumerist modernity, equally featuring Hungary from the 1990s to the 2010s.

I will thus argue, as I conclude in Chapter 8, that human sexual desire is meaningless without seeing it as in interaction with social spatio-temporalities, which are just as transitional as subjectivities. The national-political sphere; belonging to LGBTQ, conservative and progressive straight communities; understandings of home and living together; as well as the sexed and gendered, transformable body in themselves imply temporal changes. They are also concepts with changing meanings, connected to each other and to understandings of sexuality, which will be apparent through my interviewees' negotiations of them. These spatio-temporalities are able to show that sexual attraction is based on what gender represents in the specific social context, in this case, in contemporary Hungary. My work, eventually, shows the multiple and mutual construction of social, sexual, and gender categories. The following chapter will address the theoretical questions of geo-temporal and sexual categorizations as the basis of my argument.

2. Chapter. Biographical Bisexualities: Theories and Literature

2.1. Introduction: key terms and positions

The theoretical position of my research is best described as critical bisexuality studies with a critical post-socialist focus on the sociolinguistic-performative construction of desire. To engage with the specific topic of bisexual biographies in the Central-Eastern European context, in this chapter I suggest combining the focus of sexualities scholarship on temporally changing subjectivities (2.2.) with performativity perspective of queer linguistics (2.3.), narrative theories of (auto)biographies, and critical post-socialist studies. Through the examination of queer temporalities and concepts of transition (2.4.), I propose linking bisexuality and Central-Eastern European geo-temporalities, more tightly than it has been done. Critical post-socialist scholarship, I show, offers us conceptual tools to re-think spatio-temporal differentiations inside and beyond Europe, playing out in sexuality discourses, including personal experiences. Finally, situating my project among the scarce bisexual biographic literature in Hungary, Serbia and Germany (2.5.) brings together my insights drawn from the theoretical debates. My research contributes to these fields not only by filling the gaps of each with the insights of the other, but also by weaving together their theoretical threads to argue for a rethinking of 'sexual orientation' as fundamentally social through the acknowledgement of the interrelatedness of the ideas of geo-temporal and sexual trajectories in personal narrative experience.

Every theoretical field discussed here, except for the obvious case of post-socialist studies, examines Western regions, and in case they move beyond that, it is always a Third World-context. In general, international comparisons often remain underdeveloped in bisexual literature, primarily concerning sexual politics and LGBTQ identities, with blunt comparisons involving a few countries from the Global South (e.g., Monro 2015, comparing US, UK,

Colombian and Indian research). My research contributes to refining this picture with Central-Eastern European accounts. At the same time, queer linguistics, even if focusing on desires instead of identities, overlooks bisexual and temporally changing desires, similarly to the unconcern of narrative-biographical analyses about them, even if they address sexuality (e.g., Warhol and Lanser 2015). Located in the classical debates on social constructivism and performativity, my research sheds new light on the connection between sexual subjectivity, practice, and desire. In contrast to a linear link between them, I suggest viewing desire as itself a sexual practice, not necessarily preceding acts and identity, as these are all mutually constitutive of each other (2.2.). In Hungarian post-socialism, specific 'transitional' geo-temporalities shape how these life story processes are experienced, where, in turn, understandings of sexuality are key to belongings to inter-/national hierarchized systems (Renkin 2007a, 2009). Those post-socialist studies which discuss sexuality, predominantly do so from the aspect of activism, even if engaging with bisexuality (Borgos 2007; Hura 2016) or with unequal European relations (Ayoub and Paternotte 2014; Bilić and Kajinić 2016), therefore they do not focus on the interaction between discourses on the region and personal experience as narrated. Monographs (like Stella 2015) mostly deal with Russia – which is, however, also posited as east of Hungary, contrasted to the discursive West embodied by "EUropeanization", as I show in 2.4.2.

Distilled from the debates to be sketched below around the main concepts of sexual orientation, sexual fluidity, performativity, and queer temporality, I will argue that the connection between the post-structuralist and post-socialist aspects of queer temporality through 'transition' reveals how sexual subjectivity develops in mutual interaction with geo-temporal global hierarchies.

2.2. Sexual orientation and sexual fluidity

My research, examining changing sexual desires over the lifetime, is a part of the scholarly debate over questions of sexual orientation and fluidity with a critical stance towards the assumptions of identity politics. In deconstructing 'identity', scholarship points at its processual, situational, and relational nature (Fuss 1990; Hall 1996; Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 493), which some authors underline with the use of 'identification' (Hall 1996; Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Identification by oneself and by others are in dialectic affective interplay with each other, and they do not even necessarily result in a consciously claimed identity (Brubaker and Cooper 2000, 16, 26; Cameron and Kulick 2003, 138). On the other hand, the processual aspect of identification can foreground the boundaries that form identities, and their exclusionary effects in erasing certain unfitting social experiences (Fuss 1990, 1991; Weeks 1995; Valentine 2007, 131). A few studies (e.g., Whisman 1996) connect bisexuality to questions of choice, but my aim is different. As many (e.g., Butler 1993; Tiefer 1995; Vance 2005) argue, understanding sexuality as social means seeing different, limiting and enabling, frameworks for people to navigate their lives. The queer anthropologist Tom Boellstorff proposes a conceptualization of sexual agency as similar to language use, responding to debates on social construction, biology, and choice in sexuality.

> As someone originally trained as a linguist, I find anxieties over agency quite odd (…); my speech takes place within a horizon of language. Similarly, my agency is produced through (not "constrained by") culture. (2005, 6)

Relying on the concept of language which characterizes the performativity approach to structure and agency (see the next sections), Boellstorff compares sexuality and gender categories to specific languages as cultural-historical, stable and changing entities, where individuals can create sentences which have never been created, but only constrained by grammar. It makes the question of social embeddedness more visible than the popular appetite/food taste analogies (see eg., Padgug 1979, 10; Halperin 1993, 423-424; Cameron and Kulick 2003, 119). I advocate for viewing desire as language also because it highlights

how sexual experiences connect to inter-/national political-historical spaces, like those in Central-Eastern Europe, where language significantly represents and expresses national belonging. At times, references to language learning even supports the contestation of essential, biology-anchored understandings of both ethnicity and sexuality (see Tobin 2005; Timár 2013; 2.4.2. and Chapter 4).

Taking the approach of critical bisexuality studies, informed by post-structuralist theory and radical, feminist politics (Fraser 1999; Hemmings 1993, 2002; Eisner 2013), my research focuses on the question of temporality. Embedded in questions of sexual identity as the result of processes of (self-)identification loaded with politics and power, the question of temporality concerns both personal and historical narratives of development (see 2.4.). The former aspect of bisexual temporality is most elaborated in Clare Hemmings' comprehensive volume *Bisexual Spaces* (2002). It highlights the understanding of bisexual subject position as by definition transitory, partial and fragmented in time, always including desires that are rendered inauthentic at the moment, therefore putting constant re-definition and re-constitution at the centre of sexual self (Hemmings 2002, 25-27; see also Dollimore 1996; du Plessis 1996; Fraser 1999, 12-24; Young 1997; Angelides 2006; Eisner 2013, 128-136). This allows space for the deconstruction of stable categories of sexual orientation and identity, as well as for various meanings of bisexuality in changing contexts.

Bisexual theories informed by post-structuralism (Young 1997; Hemmings 1993, 2002; Angelides 2006) point out the omissions of bisexuality in queer theory, despite its stated aim to deconstruct the hetero-/homosexual binary, including questioning the gender of object choice as the basis of sexuality. Arguing for interrogating bisexual meanings instead of subjectivities, Hemmings (2002, 37-43) shows how bisexuality is implicated in any sexuality even if unnamed, thus it is both part and outside, of dominant binary regimes of sexuality and gender. Therefore, normative-rehabilitative views of bisexuality as inherently overriding

binary sexual and gender hierarchies are also challenged in this scholarship, which instead argues for viewing it as both a complicit and transgressive part of contemporary gender and sexuality regimes, including LGBT normativity (du Plessis 1996; Dollimore 1996; Weiss 2003; Fritzsche 2007; Ritter 2012). Although Sedgwick's bisexual erasure is rightly critiqued (see Hemmings 2002, 7-9), her insights are significant points of departure also for my research, as she points at the diverse meanings of sex in and beyond the gender of object choice (1990, 25-26). As an alternative to the constructivist-essentialist binary (see later), she discusses conceptualizations of homosexuality as both distinct from heterosexuality (the "minoritizing view") and at the same time as closely filtering in it, overlapping with it (the "universalizing view") (1990, 40-44). This suggests to me that bisexuality indeed sheds light on the difficulty in defining "hetero- and heterosexuality".

The definitional complexities emerging from theorizing bisexuality are informed by the modern Western distinction between sexual acts and identities, and the politicization of the latter, also in Central-Eastern Europe (see 2.5.). With some exceptions like the emblematic Kinsey reports (1999 [1948], 1965 [1953]), the academic perspective on sexual practices has been increasingly shifting to that on gay and lesbian subjects since the 19th century (Foucault 1978; Oosterhuis 2000). Still, I assert that the sexual practice aspect is fruitful and worth to examine, and a (re)turn to the social investigation of desire is necessary so that we do not miss an important part of human sexuality beyond identity (see Kulick and Cameron 2003 in the next section). One of the earliest comprehensive research of bisexuality by Philip W. Blumstein and Pepper Schwartz discusses the life stories of both men and women in the US (1976a, 1976b). Their work is important for my purposes primarily because they examine the twists and turns in personal lives, defining bisexuality in terms of sexual behaviour, hence including all kinds of sexual identifications. They also demonstrate that present identities are in no way coherently connected to the actual biographical homo- and heterosexual

experiences (1976a, 171; 1976b, 342; see also Weeks 1995, 42; Murphy 1997, 52). In their article on women (1976a), they use a temporal approach, drawing patterns of the movements between same- and opposite-sex relations, and acknowledging the significance of the subjective meanings attached to those. This method interrogating categories themselves was replaced by a more fixed one in their article on men (1976b), defining bisexual behaviour as "more than incidental sexual experience" with both sexes. This formulation is often used (incl. Kemler *et al*. 2013) and implies an understanding of the "incidental" as less valid and as more subject to the influences of social forces, compared to assumingly inherent recurrent experiences.

More recent empirical bisexual literature examine subjects with bisexual identity, usually women in the context of UK and US lesbian communities[19] (Rust 1993; Ault 1996; Esterberg 1997; and Hura 2016 in the CEE context), highlighting many aspects of identity negotiations, from the experience of a split subjectivity, community conflicts to "conversion narratives" of change, and to rejection of identity labels. Moreover, some works imply the deconstruction of the non-/normative divide, which I find crucial. They show the construction of bisexual identity as resting upon the exclusion of other, 'not queer or not normative enough' bisexuals (Ault 1996), and offer a critique of both gay homonational identity politics as well as queer celebrations of transgression (Klesse 2007).

As bisexuality studies are sometimes less concerned with detecting the socially formative elements in the changes of sexual desire, my work also connects to a smaller thread in sexuality research: those focusing on sexual fluidity, while avoiding the term 'bisexuality', which also meant a great challenge to me to locate such work. As I show below, these works expand their scope beyond LGBTQ communities and identities, and highlight the social conditions of sexual desires and orientation, this way critiquing the essentialist assumptions of

[19] Christian Klesse's work (2007) focusing on men is an exception, although it also remains in an LGBTQ context, in the UK. A German himself, he engages with CEE sexualities topics (see in Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011), but he does not connect that field with bisexuality.

those (Whisman 1996; Stein 1997; Peebles 2004; Diamond 2006, 2008; Wilton 2004; Fahs 2009). A narrow slice of literature even discusses formerly lesbian women and gay men, which question I touch upon in Chapters 4 and 5. Stein (1997) in lesbian-feminist, and Peebles (2004) in Christian ex-gay communities document similar dilemmas of double belonging to oppositional identities.

Some authors of sexual fluidity, however, tend to marginalize social explanations of the phenomenon of sexual fluidity in favour of psychological, even biological ones (most prominently, Diamond 2006, 2008, inspiring others, e.g. Morgan and Morgan 2011). They succeed in mapping out the dynamics of changing sexual labels, inherent in bisexual practice over a life span. Nevertheless, their presentation of sexual fluidity as a distinctively female phenomenon reaffirms the widespread notion (both in popular discourses and scholarship) of women's universal bisexuality in contrast to men's assumed fix and stable (mono)sexuality. Such a limited approach fails to account for the social context shaping the experience of actual sexual practices through power relations and ideas of gender and sexuality. As I elaborate in 2.4.2., Stella (2013, 2015) offers a geo-temporal critique of the idea of sexual fluidity as specific to non-Western regions like Soviet Russia. She underscores the significance of compulsory heterosexuality and the gender contract in women's "fluid" sexual behaviour. Contesting the notion of women's sexuality as fluid, others (Wilton 2004, 82; Fahs 2009) argue that this idea actually hinders women from naming and acting on their desires for each other, supported by my data as well (see Chapter 4 and 7). I agree with critics who point out how this conceptualization entails biologically fixed gender differences, making men's sexual fluidity invisible, and paradoxically maintaining the idea of sexual orientation as a congenital and core condition (Ward 2015, 12).

The essentialist "born this way" idea is widely contested beyond bisexuality studies (Halley 1994, 1995; Whisman 1996; Wilton 2004; Ahmed 2004a, 2006; Richardson and

Monro 2012; Ward 2015). Albeit with different emphases in the arguments, this contestation can challenge the concept of sexual orientation itself. Compulsory heterosexuality, as Rich's (1980) well-known argument goes, denies and blocks the development of same-sex desires by pressing heterosexual patterns of romance and sex, in combination with the subordination of women; therefore sexuality is hardly a question of innate "orientation" (see also Ahmed 2004a, 145, 2006). Empirical studies point out gender difference in the extent to which the notion of same-sex desires as congenital make sense for individuals' experiences, arguing that it speaks more to gay men, and can undermine women's self-realization (Halley 1994, 1995; Whisman 1996; Wilton 2004). Wilton concludes that "orientationalist" discourses are "largely inadequate to the task of making sense of women's experiences" (2004, 185-186), as her interviewing results do not show any substantial difference between the past experiences of previously heterosexual lesbians and always-heterosexual women. Others suggest an overall re-evaluation of the notions of sexual fluidity and orientation, arguing that the idea of men's fixed sexuality stems from misogyny and homophobia. In contrast to Wilton's omission of bisexuality, some critique sexual orientation as devoid of unambiguous meaning exactly by means of the example of bisexuality (Halley 1994, 1995; Whisman 1996). Pro-gay essentialism, writes Halley (1994, 526) is explicitly contested by bisexuals' narratives, which combine and blur the essentialist-constructivist binary, and only "makes autobiographical sense to a significant number of gay men and to many, though perhaps fewer, lesbians".

Instead of drawing on sexual experiences as pointing at a sexual orientation, a wide range of scholars examine the context of sexual encounters, including how identities impact them, which I also do. Jane Ward in her book on male sexual fluidity (the same-sex acts of straight-identified white men) argues that "bodies desire other bodies and particular sexual acts *in their social context*; we desire what those body parts *represent*" (2015, 34, her emphasis). In a similar vein, Penelope Eckert claims that engaging in sex is not "only out of

the desire for a particular physiological object, but for a social object" (2001, 109). In the next section, I will argue that a performativity lens helps us see this operation of sexual desire in the social space. Shifting the focus away from identity, I would say that desire is a form of sexual practice, which contributes to the constitution of sexual and other social meanings in the specific context, of contemporary Hungary in this case.

2.3. Performativity

My approach to sexual biographies is informed by theories that understand language as constructive of the realities of subjectivities and 'experiences' (see 1.1., 1.3.). In the following, I show how the concept of performativity is shaping our understanding of sexual orientation and desire, from Butler's (1993) gender performativity theory to affect theories and contemporary queer linguistic debates. I compare and contrast these insights with the discussions on "bisexual performativity" which I see as limited, and I instead suggest a new understanding of performativity in studying bisexuality, which the methodological section 3.3. will complete.

The Butlerian (1993) concept of performativity is embedded in the examinations of language as productive of social reality, including subjectivities as well as the reinforcement and contestations of norms (Austin 1962; Foucault [1977] 1991; 1978; Derrida 1982; Certeau 1984; Parker and Sedgwick 1995; Martin 1996, 81). Through performativity, the gendered body is repeatedly represented as if expressing an inner sex and its desires, whereas in fact it only exists via these enactments of regulatory categories of the shared, intelligible "reality". Therefore, performativity highlights complex temporal relations of repetition and retrospective interpretation,[20] the derivative logic of which renders all sexual identities belated (Jagose 2002, x).

[20] I thank Sanna Karhu for reminding me of the temporal aspect of Butler's performativity.

The post-structuralist concept of performativity also highlights and overcomes the false dichotomy of the constructivist-essentialist binary. Most of social constructivist approaches too deterministically presuppose an imposition of social norms on the individual (Ahmed 2004a, 10-13),[21] without seeing their active, even if not intentional reproduction and reworking through individual practices. For example, the constructivist focus on homosexual identity neglects the social functioning of the hetero/homosexual binary itself (Fuss 1991; Sedgwick 1990; Seidman 1996). Following a fixed understanding of 'identity' delineated in the previous section, it fails to acknowledge the illusion of a stable and unified subjectivity, and hence power as productive of it, even in sites of resistance (Fuss 1990; Butler 1993, 4-15). However, the insights of sociological constructivist literature – from the script theories of Laumann and Gagnon (1995; see also Kimmel 2007) to media analyses (Tiefer 1995) and anthropology (Vance 2005) – have shaped my thinking on the social character of sexuality fundamentally, and I view them as rather refined, not entirely disclaimed, by the performative turn.

Performativity theories arrive from diverse directions at viewing inner psychological phenomena, like sexual desire, as social products, critiquing a long tradition dating back to Freud. Affect theories (Sedgwick 2002; Ahmed 2004a, b) show that affects like shame or depression are "formed and organized around various historical and material contingencies that include race, gender, and sex" (Muñoz 2006, 675). Similarly, they argue for considering sexual desire as itself an affect, a capacity of bodies, not originating in the subject but constructing those bodies through its sociability (Eckert 2001, 104; Sedgwick 2002, 17-20; Ahmed 2004a, 10, 84; Puar 2007; Fox and Alldred 2013, 770-773). Linguistic analyses of sexual desire follow rather the insights of discursive psychology (Billig 1997) to argue, "desire is materialized and conveyed through semiotic resources" (Cameron and Kulick 2003,

[21] I am grateful for this formulation for Adriana Qubaia-ova.

140), suggesting the critical investigation of discursive interactional processes which produce sexual bodies, desires, and relations. As my project focuses on desire, I argue that this performative approach serves best my purposes. However, together with distancing my approach from psychoanalysis, I agree with those who are in general critical of an exclusive focus on desire, as sexuality consists of many other important components, from identity to violence (see Eckert 2001; Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Barát 2008; and my methodological decisions outlined in Chapter 3).

This performative strand in the queer linguistic-anthropological debate on "gay language" is represented by Deborah Cameron and Don Kulick (2003; see also Kulick 2000, 2001; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Campbell-Kibler *et al.* 2002). While earlier scholarship examined the language use of gay men (and in a few cases, lesbians), and presented linguistic features characteristic to their groups (e.g., Leap 1996; Livia 2001), their critics argue that asking, "How do gays talk?" assumes gayness as a given (identity or group), as if language purely expresses this belonging. In contrast, they suggest understanding the relation between sexual desire, identity, and language in mutual co-construction, with the effects of language as constitutive of both the social and the psychic life. As Ahmed (2004a, 4) asks, "What do emotions do?", Cameron and Kulick (2003, 123) suggest asking "What does (not) saying it produce?". Consequently, this strand aims to give more attention to the linguistic construction of desires in general, including the previously neglected examination of straight-identified people's same-sex desires (Kulick 2001, 67; see more in Ward 2015). Although it suggests a less "orientationalist" approach to sexuality, bisexuality or sexual fluidity is again missing even from this new focus on sexual desire. Kulick (2000, 272) blames the earlier focus on gay (lesbian) subjects for the fact that

> the language of bisexuals has not been studied at all – researchers seem to have little consensus about what a bisexual identity actually entails; hence they have no idea what they would study if they were to look for "bisexual language".

My project exactly endeavours in the direction they only proposed: extending the examination of the role of language in the performative construction of desires to bisexual experiences. As Valentine argues, desires beyond sexual identity, "which fail to make sense in terms of [the] basic logic of binary gender, are rendered unintelligible" (2006, 245), and they therefore present unique opportunity for research, including the complication of these categories. Interestingly enough, although this group of 'linguists of desire' do research on the complex interplay between gender and desire among transgender people (Kulick 1996; Valentine 2006), heterosexual men (Cameron 1998) and women (Eckert 2001), they do not engage with questions of bisexual or changing desire. The only linguistic study on bisexuality I have found (Murphy 1997) exclusively focuses on the use of the category 'bisexual' in the power systems of hetero- and homosexuality, showing that it has a broader meaning in the understandings of self-defined bisexuals than in those of lesbians and gays. Notwithstanding its insights, such an approach misses an opportunity to account for experiences of changing desire beyond the identity label of bisexuality, which a temporal focus on life story could illuminate.

There is research seemingly filling this gap; however, it tends to use a different understanding of 'performative'. Strikingly, "bisexual performativity" has become a term dominating much writing in a reductive and misleading sense which is radically different from my Butlerian (1993) understanding of performativity, and that of 'orientation' in Ahmed (2006). The term is widely employed with respect to same-sex practices among young, mostly heterosexually identified/partnered women in front of straight men (Fahs 2009, Eisner 2013, 181, Monro 2015, 32), a phenomenon several of my interviewees also reported. I find it symptomatic to the scholarly trend how a recent volume on bisexuality claims, "Butler's notion of performativity is highly relevant to certain types of bisexuality such as the phenomenon of girls kissing in front of their boyfriends" (Monro 2015, 32). Such usage conflates the Butlerian notion of 'performativity' – as fundamentally applicable to questions

of sexuality – with the concept of 'performance' as acting, even as fake behaviour or false consciousness (see Parker and Sedgwick 1995).[22] A few authors argue though that this approach blames women for their co-optation by cishetero men's sexual needs, and they even question that such kissings would only reproduce sexism and heteronormativity (Apple 2013, Eisner 2013, 142-185). As Eisner (2013, 151) states, the phenomenon of 'performative bisexuality', including the heated debates around it, might be viewed not as an exception from what bisexuality "really is", but as in fact inherent in the anxieties about it in general. Moreover, I assert that implying normative notions of inauthenticity, passing and coercion, such an approach misunderstands or ignores the insights performativity theory offers for analysis, namely, about the construction of desire in specific social contexts through repeated practices.

I consider the introduction of performativity as approached by Ahmed (2004a; 2006) and Ward (2015) into discussions of sexual orientation and fluidity crucial, even if they are primarily concerned with "disorientations" from the heterosexual trajectory and not with other aspects of biographical bisexuality. Building upon the affective aspect of desire as something that requires distance to be wanted to be undone and "pulls us towards objects, and opens us up to the bodies of others" (2004a, 84), Ahmed accounts for the spatial (and interconnected temporal) implications of the term "orientation". In it, through the "repetition of bodily actions over time" a horizon, a space for action is produced (2006, 66), which includes reach, proximity and seeking contact:

> Sexual orientations are also performative: in directing one's desire toward certain others and not other others, bodies in turn acquire their shape. (2006, 86)

Relying on Ahmed's concept of performativity, Ward (2015, 31-34) emphasizes the cultural domains of sexuality, arguing that being straight or gay tells much more about the cultures where a person wishes to belong than about their sexual desires and practices, which can be

[22] I thank Rasa Navickaitė for this formulation.

integrated into both. This latter strand of scholarship critical of "sexual orientation" is extremely useful for me in re-thinking the (trans)formation of sexual desire in interaction with social spaces, and I consider it more linked to critical bisexuality studies than it is suggested by its avoidance of the bisexual label. Ultimately, my research offers new understandings for performativity on three levels:

1) gender performativity: Agreeing with queer linguistic analyses of sexuality, I show that bodily experiences are also made sense of through linguistic practices, which are prominent sites of producing the relational meanings of wo/-man.
2) bisexual performativity: Contrary to the widespread understanding of the term as denoting the inauthentic performance of same-sex femininity for the heterosexual male gaze, I suggest to view performativity as illuminating the concern of inauthenticity and transition in bisexuality.
3) performative life story: I thus contend that embracing performativity theories help us see biographies (including narrative interviews) as expanding beyond the textual level, and as constructed through interactions and non-verbal processes of signification (see also my Methodology). Language in this broader sense is itself performative of the gender-sexual meanings the interviewee conveys, intentionally or not.

I argue that a performative aspect could best unify linguistic anthropological approaches and biographical analysis (a sociological method in close dialogue with psychology, see the next chapter), especially if the inquiry is aimed at sexual subjectivity-constructions like in my research. In order to get a full account on sexual performativity, I therefore propose to read linguistics and bisexuality studies onto each other. For this, the aspect of queer temporality in life courses and in post-socialist 'transition' will provide great help.

2.4. Queer temporality

This section covers two main areas of "queer temporality" scholarship, which I suggest bringing together in the examination of Central-Eastern European biographical bisexuality: on the one hand, narrative-biographical theories especially concerning sexual life story constructions, and on the other hand, post-socialist (sexualities) scholarship with the spatio-temporal differentiations shaping understandings of the region. By introducing the concept of 'transition' as key in both post-socialist and sexuality studies "queer temporal" point of view, I will suggest mapping ideas of sexual and national-political transitions onto each other. Francesca Stella (2015, 16) and Tom Boellstorff (2007, 22) are among the few sexuality scholars who explicitly discuss 'queer temporality' in this double sense: as concerning both the narratives of queer globalisation as well as life course perspectives. Claiming that the two rarely overlap in scholarship, and underlining the significance of post-socialist epistemologies, Stella in her investigation of lesbian lives in post-Soviet Russia brings the macro- and micro levels into conversation upon which my argument builds. She briefly links narratives on Soviet fluidity/bisexuality to ideas about un-modernity and social-political development (see also Baer 2002), without making this a main thread in her book. In contrast to her generational comparison though, I highlight the ideas of social and sexual trajectories as central to individuals' subjectivity constitution. In this endeavour, I rely on the multiple and interrelated meanings of 'transition' as key to queer temporality, hence showing how people's own understandings of sexual desire are framed in terms of such concepts of temporality, spatiality, and relationality. Boellstorff defines queer temporality as oscillating between sameness and difference, diverting from as well as coinciding with normative, teleological ideas of time (2007, 22-30). This definition reminds me of Central-Eastern Europe as the embodiment of the spatio-temporal 'almost-similar', oscillating in its relationship towards the 'East' or the 'West' (Iveković 2012). Consequently, I contend that

post-socialism could be useful for bisexuality studies in addressing sameness-difference dynamics.

2.4.1. Life narrative

The approach to sexual life stories as sites of experiencing/performing the temporality of subjectivity, together with an image of its trajectories, changes, and multiplicities, is essential to my research framework, and also informs my method (next chapter). The understanding of language as constitutive in social and personal realities connects theories of performativity and narrativity. Crucially, following the Saussurean distinction of *langue* and *parole*, language figures as both a system and the ways its rules are used in everyday practices, which then are able to alter the normative framework of discourses (Certeau 1984, 20-32; see the similar argument by Boellstorff 2005, discussed in 2.2.). It is also the sense in which Foucault ([1977] 1991; 1978) and Butler (1990, 1993) argue for understanding the power of discourse as which creates subjectivities and their agency exactly through constraining them. Hence, individuals by employing the tools of the discursive system both reproduce and alter it by their repeated practices. In this framework, the life narrative does not only reflect but also performs these practices as one of them, and contributes to the circulation of discourses.

As I mentioned in 2.2., the analysis of temporality as a key concept in bisexuality concerns both the personal level of life course and historical global discourses of development. However, although bisexuality is widely suggested to be viewed as inherently narrative (Wolff 1981, 80-81; Garber 1996, 47; Fraser 1999; Fritzsche 2007, 128), most bisexual theories do not engage in the analysis of personal life story narratives (2.2.). In the same vein, even most recent queer-feminist works on narratology (like Warhol and Lanser 2015) dismiss bisexuality as a distinguished case of biographical temporality (let alone European non-Western cases). By illuminating bisexuality in a narrative light, I propose to put more emphasis on the temporality of subjectivity formation, a process marginalized in

linguistics, but key to the temporal focus of bisexuality, narrativity, as well as post-socialist theories.

Following from the distinction between plot and story, what life narratives tell us is precisely the meaning of events for the subjects, who are also formed through their own stories, experiencing their selves in ways particular to the narratives of their culture (Rosenthal 1991; Tengelyi 1998; Eakin 1999). The temporality of self is the core experience of narration, necessary for understanding ourselves as beings in "human time" who change and yet still remain themselves (Ricoeur 1992; Linde 1993). Even if narrative subjects rarely see themselves as products of social circumstances, but often as fighting against those, we have to look at how the context operates and how the individuals (as complex mix of public and personal themselves) are navigating in it (Eakin 1999). Biographies therefore are always historical products re-producing history, as well as the self (see Kovács and Vajda 2002 on Jewish Hungarian life narratives after 1989). In the context of personal narratives on the Czech 1989 revolution, Andrew Lass remarks how the (public) place situates the individual into history: "From the very beginning, the historical individual's biography has historical significance", embodied in collective-personal memory (1994, 89).

Life stories inherently change *vis-à-vis* experiences, and therefore critical situations inescapably occur when narrative identity gets in conflict with new events or acts of the self (e.g., a realized conflict between sexual acts and identities, which happens in my interviews), when one needs to revise their stories and find new interpretations for their past experiences (Rosenthal 1991; Ricoeur 1992; Tengelyi 1998). Linde (1993) offers an overview on the narrative ways in which coherency is created when people talk about their professional trajectories and argue about change very similarly to my interviewees, seeking the roots in innate characteristics or situational opportunities. In contrast to her implicit argument that people necessarily strive for coherency, I rather agree with authors who see narratives, either

as inherently or a newly emerging trend, as representing a decentring of life, a blurring of identities, and the playful role of language (Eakin 1999; Radstone 2000). Ken Plummer (1997) locates such a shift in how lives are narrated in the social changes of the 1990s. They led to new contents, forms, and kinds of stories of sexuality as fluid and changeable product of human action and history, including sociological strands which "all throw into doubt grand stories of sexuality" (Plummer 1997, 133; see also Vance 2005). This approach opens space for acknowledging bisexuality and questioning concepts like sexual orientation (Esterberg 1997; Fraser 1999; Diamond 2006), rejecting normative ideas of linear sexual and self-development, embracing instead heterogeneity and multiplicity, embodying queer temporality (Dinshaw *et al.* 2007; Freccero 2007). However, the insights of critical post-socialism which I discuss in the next sections provides us theoretical and historical tools to be wary of such celebratory characterizations of historical changes like that of the 1989 'transitions', which, on the contrary, brought about a solidifying of sexual and gender categories in the life worlds of many, beyond the "Second World" (see 1.2. and the next sections).

The major genre of sexual biographies is the coming out narrative. The focus of sexology (born in Central Europe in the 19th century) became more and more psychological, viewing sexual identity as defined by inner personality formation. In this process, the (allegedly pervert and mostly middle-class) subjects' confessions and autobiographies played a great role, being predecessors of the genre of the coming out (Foucault 1978; Oosterhuis 2000). Until today, that is articulated *vis-à-vis* sexual communities and thus also forms the latter through shared experiences and identities (Esterberg 1997; Plummer 1997). With the help of these narratives, past experiences can be given meaning from the perspective of the present homosexual identity, and people can find answers to their "whys". However, coming out narratives also tend to operate through continuous exclusions, restricting the complexity and diversity of lived realities, complicated by religious, class, racial-ethnic and national (self-

)identifications (Sedgwick 1990, 67; Butler 1993, 309; Manalansan 1997; Saxey 2008; Timár 2013). Importantly, sexual narratives not only represent, but re-enact, reproduce, *perform* coming out (Plummer 1997; Wood 1997; Cvetkovich 2003; Kong *et al.* 2003; Peebles 2004). As Jagose (2002, xiv) considers lesbian "belatedness", together with the efforts to restore an original visibility, as the symptom of the general logic to narrativize sexuality in sequence, I understand bisexuality as which can be subsumed in dominant homosexual coming out narratives (most often as a phase), but similarly able to question and expose the teleology and linearity implied in them (Whisman 1996; Esterberg 1997; Hemmings 2002, 26; Saxey 2008).

Curiously, I found the most challenging account against the implied teleology in Plummer's approach to sexual biographies in a psychologist's text in the *Bisexualities* collection (Haeberle and Gindorf 1998), a great example of questioning orientationalist approaches based on bisexual biographies. Alex van Naerssen (1998), based on his counselling work with adolescents of "confused sexual identity" proposes that seeking the appropriate label and frame for life coherency is a therapeutical, as well as theoretical, dead end. Here he critiques Plummer (1997) for prioritizing how one recalls and organizes past experiences into the adult "life to come" over pleasures and desires of the present (1998, 231). In contrast, van Naerssen favours focusing on the person's present preferences, taking confusion seriously. As he puts it, fantasies and other sexual experiences "don't tell you who you are; you are your fantasies, relationships, cognitions and emotions." (1998, 232). Following the understanding of sexuality as a social script (Laumann and Gagnon 1995, Kimmel 2007), he asserts that what happens in sex is not simply the outcome of desires, which "making love constitutes" (1998, 232). Although there is obviously desire without actual practice, and as some (Bucholtz and Hall 2004; Beaulieu-Prévost 2017) convincingly argue, our desires are also governed by our identities, I find his arguments important for rethinking the relation between life story and sexual orientation. Moreover, the normativities

in the classical model of coming out could be questioned from several other aspects, for instance in their interaction with narratives of the country/society (see Tobin's 2005; Timár 2013), to which I now turn.

2.4.2. Post-socialist geo-temporalities

Post-colonial accounts of non-Western bisexualities, as I showed in 2.2, demonstrate the link between global and psychosexual developmental ideas and hierarchies, but without evoking the concept of queer temporality and touching upon the post-socialist "Second World". Therefore, they miss the opportunity to relate the trinary systems, which I am suggesting through the concept of transition in the next section. As critical scholars (Storr 1997; Angelides 2006; Hemmings 2007; Eisner 2013, 272) point out, discussions about the contrast between bisexuality and gay/lesbian identities imply temporal distinctions based on post-colonial racist-global hierarchies. Bisexuality traditionally appears in anthropological work on the Global South as behaviour, characteristic of "undifferentiated civilizations", mirroring their Freudian understanding as a not-yet developed, transitory phase in identity formation (Hemmings 2007). Ideas about backward bisexuality also prevail as domestic racist-nationalist differentiations, for instance in the US in discourses about HIV among bisexual men (MSM), especially men of colour "on the down low" (Hoy 2007; Watkins 2009; Ward 2015). In the Israeli/Palestine context, Eisner relates bisexuality to the three-level racialization of Arabic Jews (2013, 260). Compared to US-focused accounts, I find this a more relevant parallel in the Central-Eastern European context, where, on the one hand, the region itself plays out as invisible middle ground in binary global differentiations (see later). On the other hand, urban-educated gay men as representatives of the LGBTQ movement, similarly to Jews, are figures of national othering (see Bunzl 2004), whereas in a socially privileged position in many other aspects (unlike the Roma, see Woodcock 2011).

As I will argue in the next section, the ambiguous, liminal and uncertain position in relation to (Eastern-Western, past-future) polarities can be most adequately encompassed by the concept of 'transition'. The same position in nevertheless reflected in other debated concepts from '(Central)-Eastern Europe' to the 'Second World', all of which can be analytically fruitful exactly due to their ambiguity (see Kovačević 2008; Suchland 2011; Tlostanova 2012; Stella 2015; Frederiksen and Knudsen 2015). For me, 'Second World' especially keeps the parallels and connections between sexual and social developmental binary and trinary categorizations visible. 'Post-socialism' can be considered a new, third or second category – second in the sense as mediating between the two poles of First and Third Worlds; third in the sense that it represents a "third way" (see Balibar [1992] 2004, 96). Therefore, it does not only add to post-colonial theories or represents their subcategory, but even informs them; for instance, the Cold War logic gave birth to the category of the Third World (Hann *et al.* 2002, 18; Chari and Verdery 2009). I thus agree that post-socialism is not only relevant in its specific spatio-temporal location, but for example in the crises of the Left across the globe (Fraser 1995; Iveković 2012; Stella 2015, 152).

Crucially, the term 'post-socialism' points at how a past world order is reproduced in contemporary power relations, resting on discursive traditions dating back well before socialist regimes, deeming the region as the *internal* Other to the 'West' in a developmental scale (Wolff 1994; Janos 2000; Melegh 2006; Böröcz 2006; Chari and Verdery 2009; Sushytska 2010). This narrative of difference and "lagging behind" suggests a temporal gap, entailing the never accomplishable imperative of "catching up", understood in terms of deficit (Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Melegh 2006; Renkin 2007a). As my interviews on Hungarian sexualities also demonstrate (especially in Chapter 4 and 5), this differentiation is reproduced in domestic discourses. On the one hand, it happens in the form of "voluntary self-colonizing" (Imre 2009, 163), with further internal hierarchical oppositions according to the logic of

"nesting orientalisms" (Bakić-Hayden 1995) valorizing 'Westernness'. On the other hand, others in the name of nationalist "colonial self-love" reject 'Westernness' as imperialism (Gagyi 2012; see also Gal 1991; Gille 2010; Woodcock 2011).

Literature suggesting new sites of knowledge production, which I find the most fruitful to think about bisexual and Central-Eastern European experiences as mapped onto each other, do so through the concept of queer temporalities. I argue, however, that the notion of post-socialist queer temporality could be of more theoretical power if bisexualities, including biographically changing sexual attractions, would be taken into account, which would highlight social-personal interactions. Intriguingly, bisexuality is conspicuously absent from discussions of queer temporalities, both in terms of life course as well as geo-temporal power relations in respect to the "Second-World" – although complex temporal relations, with questions of transition implying progress, sameness/difference and in-/authenticity, obviously form the core characteristics of bisexuality.

Queer temporality is understood by Robert Kulpa and Joanna Mizielińska (2011) as characteristic of the multiple "co-existence" of sexuality discourses in the Central-Eastern European region. The separation between "the West" and the "Second World" meant that gradually developing ("linear") Western capitalist ideas (including identity and queer politics) were not a part of culture in socialist countries. However, the 1990s opened up space at once for all these discourses, including LGBT identity politics, its queer challenges, as well as homophobic nationalisms, which are believed to belong to different periods in Western societies. This has potentially a great contribution to sexuality studies with the conceptualization of queer (and post-socialism) as "co-existence", as well as underlining the normative assumptions and ignorance when "Second World" sexualities would come into question.

Yet, although reflexive of the geo-temporalities of sexual discourses in/of the "Second World", Kulpa and Mizielińska's argument (2011) obviously gives a reductive picture of both Western and Eastern histories, discourses, and everyday lives, assuming inside homogeneity.[23] The way they handle post-socialism as part of post-colonialism is critiqued for being insufficient as reproducing binaries and erasing regional specificities (Navickaitė 2013, 87; Stella 2015, 148). As Stella argues, this could be overcome if they embraced post-socialism as a critical concept which "clearly designates the region as a cultural and geopolitical construct" and not a bounded region (2015, 150). Stella in her empirically grounded writing on post/-socialist Russian lesbian relationships understands queer temporalities as interwoven with generational sexualities. She questions polarizations between 'modern' Western and 'Other' Eastern sexualities, which are based on the assumption that in the West, the "normalisation" of same-sex experiences happened with an outcome of less bisexual fluidity (2015, 18-19; also 46, 58-59, 136-137).

Here Stella refers to the scholarly debate on Russian/Eastern European sexual fluidity, the only one on post-socialist spatio-temporal differentiations related to the bisexual perspective. Revolving around the queer-identity tension in the Eastern European context, the sides are represented by Laurie Essig (1999) and her critics (Baer 2002, Stella 2013, 2015). For Essig (1999), the sexual fluidity of bisexual behaviour in Russia signals a unique Eastern, post-identitarian, queer state, where she argues against the historical conceptualization of bisexuality as the sign of primitivity of non-Western societies, represented on the temporal scale as premodern, not yet embraced by identity politics (see 2.2.). However, critics (Baer 2002, Stella 2013, 2015, 136-137) argue that Essig's approach rests upon the conflation of the historical specificities of Russia and the US. Stella (2015, 58) stresses that heterosexual relationships "among Soviet queers" are falsely interpreted as

[23] I also thank Judit Takács for this critique.

> evidence of the exceptional fluidity of Russian sexual practices and identities vis-á-vis binary 'western' constructs of sexuality as either heterosexual or homosexual.

This, Stella continues, symptomatic to the "excessive explanatory power accorded to sexual identities" (2015, 58), which I discussed in 2.2. and 2.3. Instead, she asserts, such sexual practices are not unique, and among (post-)socialist women they can be explained by the notions of marriage and motherhood as fundamentally shaping their subjectivities. Consequently, I follow those who, even if passingly, situate bisexuality (mostly as behaviour) in the region as part of global political discourses. Bisexuality is both viewed as sexual availability by (for) Western gay tourists (Bunzl 2000), as practical difficulty by international LGBTQ NGOs for their educative agenda (Woodcock 2004), as well as the epitome of social constraints of normative femininities and masculinities characterizing these countries (Stella 2015, 18). Stella's work (2015) is then exceptional in linking bisexuality (as behaviour) and the temporal changes of attractions to questions of the social formation in the personal. She points out the sexist norms of heterofemininity as a strong condition, which might even question essential views on (lesbian) orientation (see 2.2. and Hennessy 2000, 202). I suggest that the concept of transition could enable a fuller understanding of the links between post-socialist hierarchies and biographical bisexuality.

2.4.3. Transition

I consider 'transition' the concept that best merges the two, bisexual and post-socialist meanings of queer temporality through understandings of normative development, and therefore illuminates the fundamental connection between the two.[24] The idea of transition, relying on both meanings of "temporariness", implies the present condition of what is deemed backward (geographically or sexually) as a transitory phase, as well as developing towards a norm, a better and final stage.[25] Critical bisexuality scholarship, instead of the assertion of a

[24] Here I am not expanding on to transgender studies, I just note that 'transition' is their central – and also debated – concept (on bi and trans connections and alliances see Hemmings 2002, Chapter 3 and Weiss 2013).
[25] I am indebted to Hadley Z. Renkin for the clarification of these multiple meanings.

stable bisexual identity (Hura 2016), views bisexual subject positions as by definition transitory, split in time, always including past desires which are rendered inauthentic at the moment (see my discussion on Hemmings 2002, 25-27 and others in 2.2). Hemmings (2002) affirmatively links both the temporality and spatiality of bisexuality to 'transition' – without specific social-historical references – when she argues that for bisexuality to make sense for subjectivity,

> a history of *transition* and difference from herself (…), partiality and *transition* (and therefore translation of one culture into another) must be placed at the center of subjective meaning. (…) the nuances of bisexual experience can best be glimpsed through a spatial, or cartographic approach that prioritizes juxtaposition over displacement, genealogy over linear history, difference over sameness, *transition* over permanence or indeed, systematic, progressive agendas. (43-44, my emphases)

In contrast, typically, 'transition' in post-socialist scholarship is either used uncritically, together with its teleological, Western-centric implications, or avoided precisely because of this history (see the recent scholarship summary by Kopeček and Wciślik's in *Thinking through Transition* (2015) including the "transitology paradigm" and its critiques). Nonetheless, I argue for critically engaging with the term, relying on literature viewing CEE as epistemology *within*, and not completely outside of, Western hegemony (Cerwonka 2008; Navickaitė 2013). Following this critical line of argument, my aim is not to prove that either bisexuality or post-socialist societies are *not* in transition; on the contrary, I suggest that all societies and (sexual) subjectivities are transitory. Anyhow, some are more easily conceptualized as lagging behind, compared to others (see Jagose 2002) – and research, including this one, can reveal the power-laden processes by which these differentiations happen (see Chapter 8). I suggest that in order to fully account for post-socialist bisexualities, we should engage in broader post-socialist discussions about the concept of transition.

Critical post-socialist scholarship critiques 'transitological' works for using unreflectively the notion in descriptions of the rapid political, economic, and social transformations of Central-Eastern European countries of the former socialist block (Burawoy

and Verdery 1999; Berdahl 2000; Hann *et al*. 2002; Melegh 2006; Chari and Verdery 2009; Tlostanova 2012; Stella 2015; Frederiksen and Knudsen 2015). 'Transitology' ignores historical-structural contextual forces when attributing too much significance to individual actors of the elite, and implies either a revolutionary discontinuity or a gradual evolution towards the ideal capitalist democracy. It therefore reinforces European West-East hierarchies through older ideas of backwardness (Gal 1991; Wolff 1994; Gagyi 2012). Viewing instead post-socialism as a multilinear, combined, and uneven process with inside differences, critics suggest attention to everyday and material processes, instead of forcing grand narratives. Balibar notes ([1992] 2004, 93) that the term 'transition' itself in a Western perspective has evolved from visions of optimistic "return to democracy" to fatalistic accounts of new nationalisms and "slipping into barbarism", which suggests that the normative teleology of the term is inherently questionable.

Most of these studies, however, focus on the political-economic sphere, ignoring gender and sexuality as formative in negotiating discourses of trans-/national belonging. In more recent endeavours of critical post-socialism, therefore, a gender (and sexual) perspective gained more emphasis (see Berdahl 2000; Renkin 2007a, 2009, 2016; Stella 2015, 135). As these authors argue, the dynamics in Central-Eastern Europe are impossible to grasp by simple concepts of re-/progression, but can be understood by taking into account East-West geo-temporal relations (see the previous section). This would include the acknowledgement of the historical political-economic dependence on the Soviet Union and the present one on the West, which both pursued modernizing projects (Iveković 2012; Stella 2015). In Hungary of the '80s, the opposition to state socialism included both the cosmopolitan evocation of European civil rights and national-traditional discourses (Gal 1991, 448). Due to these roots, in recent right-wing discourses in Hungary and elsewhere, the European Union is represented as similar to state socialism, since they both stand for "homogenizing domination from afar"

(Fehérváry 2013, 243). I would add that this "afar" in the post-socialist context is always tied together with the notion of "neighbouring", in contrast to postcolonial discourses (Chari and Verdery 2009; Suchland 2011; Tlostanova 2012), where ideas of the self as Other in a temporal "perpetual promise" also appear (Puar 2007). In thinking about post-socialism, the element of the "middle ground" is formative, which posits the Third World inferior in discourses of self-colonization (Gagyi 2012). Also, state socialist nations can be perceived as both victims and perpetrators in European history (Balibar [1992] 2004, 89).

It is exactly this multiplicity and ambiguity of sameness and difference, which makes me re-consider the use of 'transition' as an analytical category, especially in its connections to ideas of bisexuality. For it similarly gains its ambiguous meaning (including privilege and subordination) from the relationship between its two, asymmetrically positioned Others. Therefore, I combine the insights of post-colonial bisexuality studies discussed above, as well as post-socialist sexuality studies, which point at how ideas about the backwardness of the region have been supported by Freudian ideas about the parallel between political-cultural and psychosexual development. These contribute to today's conceptualizations of 'Eastern homophobia' as a tool of geographical differentiation (Renkin 2016; see also Wolff 1994). Consequently, I suggest that a critical use of 'transition' helps us see Central-Eastern European transformations specifically loaded with tensions between East/West, past/present, all embedded in ideas of proper sexual citizenship.

I suggest that sexuality research should rely on feminist work which questions post-socialist 'transition' in relation to the gender regime and its transformations in the region (see Kašić 2005; Renkin 2009; Bilić and Kajinić 2016, and 1.2.). Peggy Watson seems to suggest a reclaiming of the term by "adapt[ing] a feminist approach to 'transition' that departs from the abstract ideology of transition discourse" (2001, 39), but she does not elaborate on that. I noticed that several critical feminist writings, without making the connection, describe post-

socialist experience as a standpoint by employing the very same theoretical concepts that are also core to bisexual epistemologies (2.2.). They argue that the neglect of post-socialism as *ambiguous borderland* (Sushytska 2010) *difficult to define* (Frederiksen and Knudsen 2015) as not fitting the *black-and-white schemes* of West/East, capitalist/socialist (Iveković 2012, 25; Tlostanova 2012, 54), is integral to hegemonic knowledge production (Suchland 2011). Its theoretical inclusion would not only problematize the *dichotomous* post-colonial picture (Tlostanova 2012, 59), but also the "*three-worlds metageography*" (Suchland 2011, 838). Past socialist experience is often characterized by *double consciousness* as well as *passing* (Tlostanova 2012). The present post-socialist one is described by feelings of *displacement, inauthenticity* (Melegh 2006, 112), by *flexibility, "lack of constancy"*, and the "existence of the other inside the self" (Sushytska 2010), even by "*betrayal syndrome*" due to *conversions* (Bakić-Hayden 1995, 927). The dilemma of "*vacillating*" means either claiming a second-class European identity or embracing a secondary colonial difference (Tlostanova 2012, 59).

Although to my knowledge, there is no work that would connect the bisexual and post-socialist meanings of transition, some suggest certain links in the chain. Heather Love (2009, 151) argues that backwardness is queer, referencing Freccero's queer temporalities (2007, see 2.4.1.) and Muñoz's (1999, 111) suggestion for a Gay Shame Parade. However, Love does not mention backwardness as an operational concept of intra-European geo-temporal hierarchies, even though her starting point is Walter Benjamin, whose political philosophy reflects the history of the region. Biljana Kašić in the volume *Sexuality and Gender in Postcommunist Eastern Europe and Russia* (2005) suggests that 'transition' is challenging only if it goes together with queer discussions of ambiguity of hetero- and homosexual desires (without clarifying how this would support women and everyone to get more in touch with their sexual needs). Their argument goes against celebratory progress narratives in scholarship that imply the parallels of sexual freedom and Western political systems (see Manalansan

1997). Illustrative of it is Plummer's early work welcoming the social transitions of the 1990s, less bothered by the expansion of capitalist sex consumerism (1997, 132; see 2.4.1.). He suggests "to see a parallel development between the biographical history of a gay identity and the social history of a gay culture" (87), as each "passes through complementary stages" in "Europe and America" (89), culminating in coming-out. With Stella (2015, 17-18), I consider this typology ahistorical, US-centric and normative, and I instead suggest to pay attention to such parallels as narrative-normative constructions which frame personal and social, as well as scholarly, discourses.

Literature on Central-Eastern European sexualities engage with critical post-socialism to various extents, and both (self-)colonizing and critical, post-colonial approaches are tangible, often even in the same edited volume (e.g., Štulhofer and Sandfort 2005; Kuhar and Takács 2007; see also their critique in Navickaitė 2013). According to Hadley Z. Renkin's comprehensive review (2007a, 6), works implying a failure of LGBTQ movements compared to the West mostly rely on a "lagging behind" discourse, assuming a basic similarity to the West as the norm, which I view as embedded in transitology. Alternatively, to a smaller extent, they employ discourses of "difference", depicting the region as lacking something. A recently growing number of writings challenge the universalizing and normative assumptions beyond the developmental ideas of international LGBTQ movements, emblemized by the simplified and imperative notion of coming out (Kuhar and Takács 2007) or ideas of a "global Stonewall" (Baer 2002; Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011). Instead, the new starting point for investigation has become the very question of sameness/difference and its reproductive effects in terms of geographical hierarchies (Bunzl 2004; Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011; Bilić 2016).

Domestic nationalistic discourses, negotiating the dominant notions of "West" as the role model, represent LGBTQ people as foreign (and neoliberal consumerist), even if they locate themselves in national histories (see Renkin 2007a, 2015; Kulpa and Mizielińska

2011). The cosmopolitan/nationalist divide, with historical roots in the culture of Hungary and other countries of the region, is reinforced by the recent processes of accession to the European Union. Thematized as "EUropeanization" in literature (Woltersdorff 2007; Woodcock 2011; Ayoub and Paternotte 2014; Bilić 2016; Butterfield 2016), coming together with an intensified NGOization, both activists and EU officials see LGBTQ rights as if reflecting European values, thus as a measurement for "maturity" for being an EU member.

This strand of scholarship, critical with neoliberal capitalist hierarchies, makes the class aspects of Western-Eastern sexual relations explicit, highlighting the cultural, political, and economic distance between those identifying with EUropean, urban-middle class, activist discourses and those who do not (see 1.2. and Stychin 2001, 296; Woodcock 2004, 2011; Bilić 2016; Bilić and Kajinić 2016). Due to EUropeanization and professionalization, NGOs in Central-Eastern Europe in general risks weakening contact with their constituency and lacking national credibility (Butterfield 2016, 28) when conforming to donors' standards (Mandel 2002). It is the case with LGBTQ NGOs, as the system of European project-based funding prioritizes specific, mostly legal-based project activities to (grassroots) community building (Butterfield 2016), typically not in line with the needs of bisexual activism (Hura 2016), let alone of those who keep a distance from public visibility. In the following section, I show how the few studies on bisexuality in the Central-European region could go further if they employed the perspective of 'transition' that I suggest.

2.5. Bisexual biography analyses in the region

Although bisexual research is scarce in Hungary and in the Central-Eastern European region, the few existing works are usually informed by biographical approaches, which might be explained by the influence of the continental philosophical tradition in the region, which has led to the engagement with hermeneutic/linguistic/narrative qualitative methodologies in sociology. In the following literature review, I discuss work on bisexuality and changing

sexual desire, examined through interviewing in the Central-Eastern European context. Their arguments mostly revolve around questions of identity, and show a lack in a critical lens regarding either post-socialism or sexual orientation.

In her unique article focusing on bisexuality in Hungarian LGBTQ spaces, Anna Borgos (2007) examines the status of bisexuality in the queer versus identity politics framework, using small-scale research in LGBTQ online forums, activist circles, and in two sexual life story interviews of bisexuals. The short interview analysis though can only flag the complexities of bisexual experiences. Moreover, Borgos almost exclusively focuses on the constitution of the bisexual label, interrogating its place in sexual politics (see 2.2.), therefore she does not include people who keep a distance from LGBTQ circles. Very importantly though, she points out that identity labels are employed by individuals with bisexual histories differently in different social contexts, noting the potential deconstruction of the categories of sexual orientation through bisexuality (see 2.2.).

What Borgos's article misses is the post-socialist contextualization of Hungarian LGT-B relations, as it speaks more to universalist theoretical debates – in contrast to Radica Hura (2016, esp. 62), who connects the state of bisexuality and biphobia in Serbia to the socio-history of the society, to the "intense re-patriarchalisation" in the 1990s, which strives towards ethnic exclusivity, and is sceptical of difference and alterity. Hura's article in the critical post-socialist volume *Intersectionality and LGBT Activist Politics. Multiple Others in Croatia and Serbia* (Bilić and Kajinić 2016) is the only one which locates discourses on post-socialist (Serbian) bisexuality in the framework of global LGBTQ discourses and their Eastern pedagogy. She argues that bisexuality in Serbia is considered backward by Western-European gay and lesbian organizations, on the support of which local sexual movements depend. However, Hura's approach of bisexuality as a stable sexual identity or orientation prevents the explicit connection between sexual and geospatial trajectories in personal experience

(although non-identitarian practices of sexual fluidity are traced in the post-socialist Belgrade context by Popović 2015).

Although Borgos does not draw upon geo-temporal relations, showing bisexuality as articulated in both identitarian and queer terms reminds me of the Russian sexual fluidity debate, sketched out in 2.4.2. Even if identitarian approaches dominate, some people in Hungary do identify as bisexual as a form of political statement (rather than describing a sexual practice), which, argues Borgos, designates potentiality and contingency of sexual orientations and practices, being

> close to a *post-identical*, queer state that imagines sexuality in much more complex ways, along much more diverse axes than sex or sexual orientation. (2007, 179)

This approach was represented by the flyers of the group NINCS in the mid-nineties (see 1.2.), who argue against ideas of "sexual orientation" as reductive and manipulative of people's loving capacities, which are not directed at "genitals but the whole person" (180-181). Borgos conceptualizes bisexuality as pointing at the social construction of sexual orientation, although her reference to love as gender-blind (see also Hura 2016, 58) is problematically evokes essentialized concepts of sexual desire and orientation, and obscures gender hierarchies. More importantly, I consider her conclusion that identity in general is "just a stage", a post-structuralist take on subjectivity which my research speaks to. Nevertheless, her formulation of "post-identical" suggests as if a queer state should be necessarily preceded by an identitarian one, an assumption maintaining Western sexual developments as the model, which I showed in section 2.4.2. as challenged by critical post-socialist studies.

Texts that include what I call biographical bisexuality put a relatively greater emphasis on the ambiguity and multiplicity of sexuality, as well as the national-historical constitution of experience (see 2.4.1.). However, Barbara Németh's short Hungarian piece (2008) is an example of how this promising attitude can end up in solidifying categories of sexual

orientation, not to mention bisexual erasure (Young 1997; Hemmings 2002; Angelides 2006). Although the article includes personal narratives outside of LGBTQ communities and identities, it in fact narrows sexual life trajectories down into an essential notion of sexual identity. It shows three Hungarian women's temporally unfolding lives with same-sex experiences in a detailed classical narrative-biographical analysis. Németh considers the historical changes impacting on women's life choices and opportunities in socialist and post-socialist Hungary, from gender-segregated spaces to new forms of gay visibility and social atomization. However, her contextualization of sexual temporalities proves to be insufficient when she labels 'lesbian' a self-identified heterosexual woman in a relationship with another woman, calling this fact "identity denial". With this move, Németh fails to interrogate self-definition as in interaction with socially informed processes that make the person's choice meaningful.

A recent German research by a team led by Martina Löw (Kemler *et al*. 2012; Ritter 2012, 2014), in contrast, combines the focus on life stories as methodological-theoretical starting point with bisexual critical reflexivity on changing desires, albeit focusing on bisexual identity. The long tradition of (bi)sexuality research in Germany, from Magnus Hirschfeld (see Haeberle and Gindorf 1998) to Charlotte Wolff (1981) and Christian Klesse (2007) might explain why the only specifically bisexual biographical research in the Central-Eastern European region I found was carried out there. Still, I would not call it a post-socialist research, as none of the respondents had a background in former East Germany,[26] neither does Germany's location along global power axes play out in the analyses. Beyond its biographical focus, one of the greatest strength of the research is that it expands to circles understudied in LGBTQ studies in general: to people living outside of LGBTQ communities, in the countryside, and in straight relationships. As a result, the authors point at contemporary

[26] Personal communication with Martina Löw, 8th June 2016.

sexual relations as, despite a widening of rights, still heavily contained in gender and sexual hierarchies. They also present bisexuality as both "component and at the same time excess of the heterosexual matrix" (Fritzsche 2007, 127; Ritter's [2012, 30, n] translation): being part of it and outside of it, both potentially normative and radical. The paradoxical position of bisexuality is thus located in the heteronormative-queer fields, expressed in different narrative strategies in life stories, which leads to a different angle from Borgos's (2007) location of bisexuality in the LGBT identitarian–queer field, although both research ask "whether bisexuality should be established as a recognized identity category or to insist on the narrative and processual nature of bisexuality" (Ritter 2012, 32).

Similarly to my research questions, this research asks how bisexuality can be integrated into the life story. They show that bisexual identity is either presented as an immovable "fact" of life or as a temporal process with changing relevance, as exemplary of its paradoxical position "within the bi-gender and monosexually based sexual order" (Ritter 2012, 30). They present "stable identity" narratives as embedding bisexuality in the life story in two ways: as either continuously being in the body, or as suddenly breaking into life with a force of instinct, presenting a "biographical break" (Kemler *et al.* 2012; Ritter 2012, 2014). This suggests to me a temporally uneven process even in cases labelled as "non-processual, factual" presentations of bisexuality, similarly to my understanding of co-existing experiences of the parallels and seriality of desires. The authors show that for many individuals, spatial (and temporal) separation of homosexual and heterosexual relationships is necessary for integrating them into their lives (Kemler *et al.* 2012, see Chapter 6). Bisexuality might be nowadays more freely lived as *sexual* practice, but, they argue, as a non-monogamous *lifestyle* it is precarious. This leads them to the materiality of gender differences, an aspect missing from much bisexual research: that women are especially vulnerable in negotiating the

economic security of heterosexual marriage *vis-à-vis* the realization of their bisexual desires (Ritter 2014).

My research draws on the insights of these pioneering studies on bisexuality in the Central-Eastern European region, but it takes a different direction following the critical theories of post-socialist and queer temporalities as well as linguistic and bisexual performativity, to direct the focus onto narrative practices, which employ, establish, and re-interpret the connection between personal and social development trajectories. I argued that these theoretical threads together are able to shed light on the temporality of sexuality through the examination of various 'transitions' in bisexual biographies in post-socialist Hungary, which will help us rethink basic concepts of the sexual as it comes into being in specific social-historical contexts. With this, I offer a new frame to combine and link the terms of performativity (as essential to account for the social aspects of experiencing desire), linked to sexual fluidity, and integrated into queer geo-temporalities. As Stella (2015, 18) argues, a post-socialist perspective, including both generational and global differences, highlights many other aspects of sexual practices in contrast to assuming gay or lesbian identities as the only source of sexualities. Following Ward (2015), I underline the many, context-dependent social meanings of sex surfacing in the interviews, which allow for the reconciliation of multiple temporalities of bisexual biographies. I show the experience of sexual temporality as always embedded in various social binaries, first and foremost in understandings of personal-historical times, then of group belongings, of private spaces, and of the sexual body. Before moving to these analytical chapters, I discuss my methodological considerations, which are based on my theoretical positions I have outlined in this chapter.

3. Chapter. Narrated Truths and Narrative Methods – Methodological Concerns

3.1. What (sexual) truth is the biographical method after?

3.1.1. A theoretical introduction

In the method chapter of *The spectre of promiscuity. Gay male and bisexual non-monogamies and polyamories,* Christian Klesse addresses the power relations inherent in the "intersubjective dynamics between me as a researcher and the research participants" (2007, 39), exactly because power is the main concept of his book. Similarly, my methods stem from my arguments about biographical narrativity and gender/sexual performativity discussed in the previous chapter. Here therefore I outline the (feminist and post-structuralist) ways I as a social science researcher relate to my topic and my respondents, and how they relate to it, as these relationalities eventually form part of my data.

I argue that investigating sexual life stories in general, and Hungarian biographical bisexuality in particular, profits the most from the combination of biographical and ethnographic methods, which together reveal the performative construction of sexual experiences in interaction with the specific social context, including the interview situation. Combined, they are able to present the mutual constitution of personal and social narratives in the continuous process of re-interpretation and creation of experience. I thus propose to view life story as the central site of this operation, framing and framed by ideas about the subject and its trajectory, which are profoundly sexual. Building on performative and affective approaches (see 2.3.), I argue that understanding sexuality as performative biography enables us to see the re-/production of bisexual desires in exchange with social relations, in my case, with discourses on the spatio-temporal position of Hungary. In the following sections I will show with what twists I use the classical biographic method and how my approach increased the comparative strength of this method by the application of thematic sampling and analysis.

Furthermore, my sociolinguistic emphasis enables me to focus on the metaphorical and material parallels employed in the narratives; I will therefore also include a few case analyses.

The 26 narrative interviews recorded in Budapest in Hungarian serve as the main source of my data, discussed in detail in the following analytical chapters. Following theoretical sampling and snowball method with the help of my acquaintances, I interviewed 12 women and 12 men of greatly varying sexual identities and ages about their lives containing sexual attraction toward both men and women (see in detail in 3.2.; also 1.3.1. and Appendix I). Besides, I gathered secondary data to complete the ethnographical aspects of my study, primarily for the context of Hungarian sexual politics (see 1.2.). I consider media articles, forum discussions, LGBTQ dating sites, events and group discussions I took part in, and even some off-record interviews. As I argue in Chapter 1, various (bi)sexual meanings are produced in all these sites, which are tied together, reflected on, reproduced and questioned in personal narrated experiences.

The title of this chapter evokes Gadamer's classic hermeneutical work *Truth and Method* (1984), which views texts as getting their meaning through a dialogue with their recipients in the interpretative situation. I apply this approach, which expands beyond literary studies, to my interviews to argue for the co-construction of sexual meanings by all social actors. Also, I underline the Foucauldian argument (1978, see also Oosterhuis 2000; Grenz 2014) that sexuality in most contemporary societies has become perceived as expressing the truth about the individual, the confession of which hence being constitutive in sexual experience (see 2.4.1.). Sexual interviews create such a confessional discursive space. Consequently, according to the understanding of subjectivity in post-structuralist feminist thinking (Butler 1990, 1993; Scott 1993; Fraser 1999; Puar 2007), the interview is one of the narrative sites where this experiential "truth" is repeatedly produced as the effect of linguistic constructions. As Sabine Grenz (2014, 66) put it:

> neither sexual or gender identity is to be seen as the 'real' or 'inner' truth of interviewees but as something constantly reproduced in the interview setting through the content of their stories, their silences and the interaction between researcher and researched.

To follow the path of methodological literature with a theoretically embedded practical focus (Gubrium and Holstein 2003, Czarniawska 2004), first I present the most important characteristics of biographical interviewing and argue why this approach fits my theoretical research aims the best. The second part of the chapter discusses the actual process and context of how I made the interviews, with all the practicalities, from finding potential respondents to analyzing material, including the ethical questions that emerged. Finally, based on these insights, I elaborate on the performative-ethnographic aspects of my method to argue that sexualities, including experiences of biographical bisexuality, are constructed right there in the interview interaction. This further illustrates that they are anchored in social relations and categories both in the micro and macro (Hungarian, Central-Eastern European, as well as global) levels.

The frame my methodology follows is variously referred to as narrative, reconstructive, hermeneutic interview, or biographical/life story analysis *(Lebensgeschichte* in the formative German tradition, see 2.4.1.). It is based on the idea that we can reach knowledge about people as social beings if we let them speak in their own terms and pace, since the logic of their own narrative is revealing about how they construct their selves as in relation to the topic. In contrast to quantitative data collection methods as well as interviewing practices with a more structured series of questions-answers, the narrative interviewer seeks to minimize her own intervention into the narration of the respondent, in order not to impose much structure on them, because she is interested in exactly the constructive work performed in the interview situation (Rosenthal 1991, Riessman 1993). Notwithstanding, what we get in these interviews is not the "truth" already existing out there, neither the respondent's "authentic" story. Rather, it is co-constructed with the interviewer and with others' stories around, as feminist literature argues for knowledge as always situated and partial, entailing

the social constitution of "experience" (see Haraway 1988; Scott 1992; Cerwonka 2011, and the discussions in 1.3., 2.3., 2.4.1.). Thus, a narrative interview analysis incorporates the "facts" of one's life, the narration, and the connections of the two, in a way that illuminates how those negotiate (shape and are shaped by) wider social discourses, norms, and contexts. Feminist research warns us to recognize power relations inherent in interview situations as well, and seeks to reflect on and respect people's own ways of giving accounts (Riessman 2003, Grenz 2014). I thus consider the ethical aspects of my research as inherent to every methodological step I am describing in the following, and they will be especially important in sections 3.2.2. and 3.3.

3.1.2. Approaching bisexuality biographically – and *vice versa*

The way the story of a "life" is told tells us a lot about the social embeddedness of understandings of sexuality – exactly because there are so many ways to it. Thus, sexuality is also a story (Plummer 1997), always negotiated with the specific discourses and codes of the given social-cultural context (Tiefer 1995), which my research aims to grasp. The processes of defining and experiencing sexual categories, the personal understandings of each sexual event, the uncertainties and multiplicities, the diachronic shifts and twists in the life story can all be addressed by qualitative methodologies (see Kovács and Vajda 2002, 25-27). Consequently, biographical interviewing suits my research questions the best, since I am interested in how one's life unfolds in a story told about that life in a particular moment of time and space. Such an approach is still largely missing from bisexual research, which, as part of a trend in social scientific interviewing, typically favours the collection of explicit statements without integrating those into the frame of the respondents' life stories (see e.g., Ault 1996 and 2.4.1.). An interviewee, hesitating to identify as bisexual, addresses the question marks, which multiple sexual desires generate in a coherent, united line of sexual identity and identification:

> It doesn't just occur to me to say in such an interview that I'm bisexual. If… Yes. So if I have to answer that, let's say, in a chat, than I am not. Because then I have to… because it's hard to tell in one word, and there isn't place for a long explanation. And then who means what by 'bisexual'. Hell knows. And if I tell it about myself, everyone thinks something different. So I don't know. (Hanna, 35)

The quote voices the concern that bisexuality can only be told in its temporality, which supports the need for a method, which opens up space for narration (see Turai 2010). In fact, every sexual subjectivity has its own history, but the connotations of the bisexual label are more ambiguous than that of the "monosexual" categories. This is why I argue that the study of biographical bisexuality in particular gains the most from a narrative perspective which foregrounds various sexual events, among which self-identification is one (see 2.2. and 2.3.).

My argument for narrative method also stems from the critique of quantitative methods approaching sexuality, often stemming from the researchers' psychological-medical disciplinary perspective. Sexual orientation grids (see Kinsey *et al.* [1948] 1999; [1953] 1965; Robinson 1976; Storr 1999; Irvine 2005) fail to describe the variety and dynamics of human sexuality, no matter how complex an image they are trying to draw. Fritz Klein, a psychiatrist himself, in *The Bisexual Option* ([1978] 2014) builds up an elaborated raster system (KSOG) to categorize individuals according to past, present, and envisioned future relationships, including sexual acts, relationships, fantasies, and identities. The KSOG seems to be trying to capture exactly what life stories could more organically tell. Besides, its practical usage remains questionable, as the meaning of a certain category, combined from several values, gets lost if put in quantitative comparisons. No wonder that complex grids like KSOG are mostly used as educational tools to illuminate sexual complexities. (see Beaulieu-Prévost 2017). Looking at the issues of the *Journal of Bisexuality*, launched by Klein, it seems to be still a powerful trend. Lisa Diamond, who did a theoretically and methodologically inspiring research interviewing women repeatedly about their experiences with bisexuality (2006), increasingly uses quantitative methods (eg. 2008). The latter revolve around identity labels, even if focusing on their changes, probably because categorization makes quantification

easier. However, they fail to address the socially formed personal experiences behind such changes (e.g., role of actual partnerships or sexual communities, which my research considers). In the spirit of queer methodologies highlighting how categorizations operate (Kong *et al*. 2003, see the following section), I argue that we learn more if respondents are allowed to reflect on categories and the process of categorization through their stories, which gives further space for other aspects of sexuality to come to the fore (see the queer linguistic debates on identity and desire in 2.2.).

My method, from interviewing to analysis, is a combination of a few types of qualitative interview analyses (see Czarniawska 2004; Riessman 2003). The reasons why I devised this specific method, as I am demonstrating in the following sections, are informed by my research questions and theoretical framework. My approach is positioned between classical narrative biographical approach (emblemized by Rosenthal 1991, Riessman 1993, Kovács and Vajda 2002, Kovács 2007) and semi-structured thematic social-anthropological analysis (see e.g., Denzin and Lincoln 2003, Gubrium and Holstein 2003), in terms of the length and number of interviews, the (non-)intervention by me as the interviewer, the depth and process of analysis, as well as notation style (see also 1.3.2.). My way of conducting the interviews followed the classical method more closely (as I asked for a life story and elicited it with internal questions) than the analysis process, but in the way it is presented, I relied more on the thematic analysis approach (see 3.2.3).

3.2. The interviewing process

3.2.1. Sampling: challenging bisexualities and social inequalities

Here I address the specific methodological questions I faced during my sampling, as well as the processes by which I handled those questions and built them into my understanding of a queer-feminist biographic research. In order to reveal the diversity of the ways biographical bisexuality is made sense of, I needed many interviews, covering a wide range of

biographical, identity, and social positions that enables multidirectional comparison. However, it means a too big number of interviews to analyze in such a detail that classical life course interview analysis would do (Kovács and Vajda 2002). At the same time, my sample consists of a smaller number of interviews than in the case of many qualitative studies, which allows me to go deeper in their analysis than they tend to, following a close reading approach (see Melegh 2006; Ritter 2014). My 26 interviews are from 24 people who identify as Hungarian, and variously as bisexual, lesbian, straight, heterosexual, unlabelled, "bisexual while turning gay" etc. (see 1.3.1. and Appendix I). They all reported attractions toward both women and men during their life span. Their age ranged between 18 and 64 at the time of the interviews, which ran between 60 and 140 minutes, and were made in Hungarian in Budapest between 2010 and 2013.[27]

Sexuality and LGBTQ issues are always very sensitive, so I assured my potential respondents of anonymity and transformed the texts to be unidentifiable. Additionally, what is theoretically attractive in my approach, at the same time is the source of another methodological challenge: my respondents are not necessarily identified with bisexual desires (understood as "overlapping" interest for both sexes), let alone bisexual identities. On the one hand, this made sampling difficult, because I also wanted to access people who are outside of bisexual networks or do not feel addressed by a call with the term "bisexual", including those not engaged in LGBTQ scenes at all. To solve these dilemmas of "interpellation" and confidentiality, I was exclusively looking for interviewees through my acquaintances, asking if they know someone who would fit my sample (see Appendix II for the short project description I sent both the mediating acquaintances and the potential interviewees, explaining

[27] I use the 13 interviews of people with parallel attraction towards men and women made for my MA research (Turai 2010), together with the other 13, made between 2011 and 2013 with people who could also have monosexual lives. Including my MA interviews in the present project is methodologically justified, especially that I am the interviewer and analyzer in both cases, and owing to the unstructured life narrative interviewing, the questions remained similar (on the second analysis of qualitative data, see Gárdos 2011).

the objectives and terms of the research).[28] Then, via snowball or chain-referral method, I accessed acquaintances of my interviewees as well. This method effectively resulted in a diverse sample in many ways, but also had some significant limitations, as I discuss below.

My sampling followed a similar understanding to the theoretical sampling method of grounded theory where, instead of representativity, conceptual emphasis drives data selection (Corbin and Strauss 1990; Charmaz 2014). I thus aimed to get people with various sexual experiences, including parallel relationships, "incidental" same-sex interest, long quitted heterosexual past, etc. Such a diverse sample is not easy to handle in itself, since it makes any comparison very complex. Usually, young people are not interviewed for biographical research, simply because they have lived a shorter span of historical-personal time. Interviewing only people above 30 in bisexual biographical research (Kemler *et al.* 2012, Ritter 2014) is legitimate, but it nevertheless reinforces ideas about youth's chaotic, experimental, or transitory bisexuality. Further, given the public image of (both female and male) bisexuality as very much embedded in youth culture, especially in Central-Eastern Europe (see 1.2.), I found it important to get to know how people at this age (or "stage") experience their multiple desires. It also allows for a generational comparison, striking in terms of living/being young in socialism or post-socialism in the Hungarian context. I also suggest we revise our ideas of the narratives "worth analyzing", since fragmented materials (as that of Bob, 18) are just as informative as more coherently structured ones (see Valentine 2007, 122).

The broad definition of sexual attraction, however, allows the greatest space for the interviewees to define what they consider 'sexual' at all, and themselves in dynamic relation to it; consequently, it also highlights what conceptual meanings are attached to 'attraction'

[28] This way of contacting the respondents also served my security, as topics of sexuality might be interpreted by respondents to allow for sexual harassment (Klesse 2007). Doing research in tight Hungarian LGBTQ circles can nevertheless increase worries about recognizability (see Grenz 2014), which I tried to prevent with careful anonimization. Even if we had known each other before, or maintained personal connection after the interview, our interview relationship has in all cases remained detached from other types of contact.

and ‘sexuality’ in contemporary Budapest. This is also why I find it problematic to sample people with “more than incidental sexual experience with members of both sexes” (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976, 342), since events considered incidental could bear great significance in self- and life conceptions. Following a “queer methodology” (Kong *et al.* 2003), my research is aimed at the processes of the construction and deconstruction of sexual identity categories *vis-à-vis* experiences, for which the first step is not to assume or take for granted any identity. The analysis of bisexuality as questioned identity reveals that it is impossible to set up a system of criteria, according to which each and every person could be classified in one of the categories – even in the case of identities perceived as not *per definitionem* transitory (see Weeks 1995, 42; Murphy 1997 in 2.2.). Let us have a snapshot on Márk (36): he regularly engages in sexual threesomes with a man and a woman; identifies as gay; has a female partner; does not feel attracted to other women; is disenchanted about male-to-male relationships. Though tempting for many to ask, “What is Márk for real?”, I suggest another direction and ask instead, “How does Márk, as well as others, narratively build up their sexual lives? Through what narrative links do they arrange all these experiences in a meaningful narrative biography?”

Despite these theoretical considerations, using the term ‘bisexual’ in any form is risky, thus it needed careful attention during the whole research process. The term triggers self-differentiation and self-distancing on the side of many, regardless of their experiences with both sexes. These considerations led me finally to leave out an interview from my analysis, where the person was clearly offended by my use of ‘bisexuality’ and it seemed that I cannot bring the two of us on the same page. The fact that her narrative was revolving around why she is *not* bisexual could still be analysed, as it perfectly reflects her own journey to finally realize herself as gay (‘*meleg*’ in her words). But it also raised ethical questions, as I wanted nothing less than reproducing the homophobic arguments which she had encountered,

inherent for her in the assumptions about her bisexuality. Finally, I ended up questioning if she had been attracted to men at all. Even if she had had sexual and emotional relationships with men, her narrative on those did not include any reference to sexual desire or attraction. It is again feminist principles which keep reminding us that "sexual" experience, especially for women, is so often not based on their desires (Hennessy 2000, 202; Eckert 2001, 104; Stella 2015, 18). However broad I had defined biographical bisexuality in my method, as the element of attraction was questioned, I decided not to include her case in any of my further analysis.

Having interviewed 12 men and 12 women, I have a basis for gender comparison in bisexual biographies. Trans aspects, understood broadly and theoretically, have nevertheless surfaced, as two of my interviewees have non-binary gender identities. Máté (43) identifies as "biologically male" non-binary, and Dioram (33) as androgynous, and for both, gender identity is closely linked to their bisexual desires. Éva (26, f) mentions with contempt a person "who alternates annually" between men, women, and transvestites. The transvestite here, following some discourses on transgender, represents the absolute middle ground between men and women, and hence is able to embody the object of (also despised) bisexual desire (see Hemmings 2002, Chapter 3 on bisexual-transgender alliances). This indicates how many theoretical questions bisexuality is capable of generating if examined through the lenses of gender/sexuality power relations. Also, gender was constantly questioned and negotiated in all the interviews, as everybody reflected on their own gender and that of their partners, and on their ideas and experiences about femininity and masculinity (see esp. Chapter 7).

From several aspects, my sample is restricted, and it does not even claim to cover the whole LGBTQ-spectrum, let alone represent Hungarian society. There is, however, one aspect from which it covers a way broader group of people than most of LGBTQ research: namely, many are ambiguous about their participation in the Hungarian LGBTQ scene, and some do

not have anything to do with it (see Chapter 5). Kulick (2003, with Cameron 2005) underlines the importance of reaching out to such people, and thus, of not viewing "gays" as a homogeneous and clearly defined group at all. In this sense, my method does justice to this lack characterizing sexuality studies, as well as to the examination of heterosexualities which might include same-sex erotic (see Ward 2015). Still, there are people with certain combinations of sexual identities and experiences whom I could not get access to: namely, closeted bisexual men or straight men with a homosexual past (contrary to heterosexual women with same-sex experiences, see Chapter 1). Although many of my interviewees mentioned such men and even tried to convince them, they were not willing to participate (see more in Turai, forthcoming). Perhaps with a different methodology they could be accessed.[29] As it is, their absence from my sample is telling about contemporary gender-sexual relations: they probably felt uncomfortable talking about same-sex experiences which they would like to hide; or, they definitely did not want to be associated with homosexuality as represented by me: connected to research, connected to activism, connected to women (see Ward 2015). Their absence thus reveals the divergent ways same-sex sexuality intersects with perceptions of femininity and masculinity.

Concluding on the question of representation, I am also making here a methodological argument about the characteristics and limitations of sampling. Obviously, every sample is limited in some ways, and mine does not cover a lot of important social inequalities. All of my interviewees are well educated, semi-middle-class, able-bodied people living or having lived in the capital, and to my knowledge, none of them is of Roma origin. Everyone who is not a student has white-collar jobs, including high status ones, though their financial situations and social statuses are very diverse. This middle-class profile of my sample is in a great part an effect of my chain-referral method which stemmed from my own circle of acquaintances.

[29] For example, by a male interviewer, or through dating sites – a path I have decided not to take, partly because finding a safe space for interviewing a stranger man would have been extremely difficult. Martina Löw and her team (Kemler *et al.* 2012) did manage to get access to married men with secret same-sex relationships.

Probably, it is also symptomatic to Hungarian sexual discourses where non-normative sexualities are more easily identified with in this social stratum (see 1.2.). All of my interviewees identify as Hungarian – although not everyone was born in Hungary, including Tony (53, m) who moved to Hungary from Bulgaria around the fall of socialism (see the next chapter). He identifies as both Bulgarian and Hungarian, although his Hungarian knowledge is far from the native level, which makes linguistic comparison different in his case; still, I included him, because his presence illuminates the functioning of national categorizations and their moving boundaries. As in Hungary in general, among my interviewees a background of Christian discourses is dominant: they were baptized as children and then either followed or not family traditions of mostly Catholic faith; or they engaged in novel Protestant communities as a youngster (on the significance of faith see esp. Chapter 4 and 5). A few of them had Jewish origin, which never explicitly came up in the interviews.

I did not make efforts to have representatives of each social category significant in contemporary Hungary, and I contend that this in itself does not mark a deficit in my sampling. I do not only state that my results are restricted to the special circles my interviewees are from; I also argue that the inequalities between Hungarian social strata are nevertheless present in my data in other ways, and therefore can and need to be discussed. First of all, as I noted, the fact that I did not have access to certain people is worth examining. Second, otherwise marginalized identities could nevertheless emerge during interviewing, as it happened in the case of Máté and Dioram with (non-binary) transgender, and also in Tamás's (42, m) or Juli's (39, f) case, who said they might count as asexual. Thirdly, I argue that social inequalities are necessarily present in the interviews as elements of background discourses. For instance, although none of them is of Roma origin, they do talk about the Roma, just like about transvestites or the Budapest-countryside contrast – and these all are related to their own identificatory work. The researcher's responsibility is thus to include such

aspects into her analysis.[30] For example, Nana (22, f) told me a story in which, as a reaction to anti-Roma racist comments, she stated she was of Roma origin. For her in that situation this seemed as a convincing argument to elicit PC language from the others; she once used the same strategy defending gays (not identifying as one). Many others in my sample also drew parallels between gays and Roma, which clearly indicates that in the perception of many in contemporary Hungary these are the two minorities against whom most prejudices are directed – and thus, a liberal idea of tolerance includes both groups (obscuring their differences, as well as overlaps, see Woodcock 2004).

3.2.2. Interview situations

The discussion in this section aims to illustrate the circumstances under which the specific interview stories got formed. With it I aim to show the mutual impact which social relations, including that of between researcher and respondent, and sexual meanings have on each other even on this micro level (Grenz 2014). In accordance with the classic narrative method, I tried to intervene the least in the interviewees' narratives, asking about the already mentioned life events only after having listened to the first, uninterrupted main narrative. However, I was also open to more conversational communication, not only because the interviewees often needed them, but mainly because their sexual subjectivities were constructed through social dialogues, which included our very interaction (Scholz 2004). Minimalizing communication before the interview was not always feasible: Juli (39, f) only agreed to be interviewed after significant correspondence, because she had assumed I shared the neoliberal views and politics associated with CEU, including "PC-ness", and she was afraid that I would condemn her for being uncertain about her same-sex desires and for being critical of gay culture. This highlights that the leftist-liberal human rights discourse, dominant in Hungarian LGBTQ politics is problematic for some, whose sexual identities are being formed outside of this

[30] 'White' in the Hungarian context, until the recent migration crises, mostly means non-Roma (see Rédai 2015, 26). Following the CEE tradition, I prefer to speak about people's ethnicity, rather than race, which I keep as an analytical category. I am grateful for Adriana Qubaia-ova and Rena Onat for reminding me of this complexity.

binary model where all "minorities" belong to one political side (see 1.1. and Zimmermann 2008). Juli's concerns about giving an interview and our negotiations are thus constitutive of how she conceptualizes sexual multiplicity and change.

Sexuality in itself is an intimate topic, challenging for people to be open about and to find the appropriate linguistic register. For some, it was helpful that we did not know each other at all, while others could open up because we did, or because I was willing to tell about myself, as it happened upon Juli's request. With every interviewee we talked in places comfortable for them, for the most part in their homes, which I preferred as their private space reflected their way of living (see Chapter 6) – but also in their workplaces, or in silent areas of university and park settings of Budapest. On the spot, after a short explanation of my research interest, I asked the same general question from everyone: *"Could you tell me your life story in terms of your attractions to women and men?"* Owing to the bisexual topic (see 2.2, 2.4.1.), many expressed uncertainties about what and how to tell, which the narrative interview format enhanced. After the first uninterrupted narrative of the sexual life story, I asked questions about the life events mentioned, and finally a few external questions (see the interview guide skeleton in the Appendix II, both in English and Hungarian).[31] I recorded all the interviews and took notes. After stopping the recorder, I made sure to chat a bit, which I consider an ethically necessary component, because interviewees might need to reflect on the whole interview situation and the feelings it induced in them; for instance one of them stated that she felt like with a counsellor, and acknowledged that many hurtful memories came up.

As the ethnographical aspects of interviewing are important for an encompassing account of the social process of making sense of sexual experiences, I took field notes on the unrecorded information and about my impressions, together with some insights on method or

[31] There was one exception in terms of the opening question: as Máté (43) identifies as a non-binary biologically male, I started with a question about that, before turning to his sexual life history. (The latter also included references to his gender identity, see 4.3, so my decision turned out to be unnecessary.) As for the external questions: since the topic of sexual threesomes came up in the first couple of interviews by itself, I made sure to ask about it later from everyone, to make thematic comparison easier, see Chapter 7.

analysis. Talking to Tony's (53, m) boyfriend after the interview in their home was crucial to me in terms of including the context into analysis, specifically illuminating the tensions between sexual and other politics. As he jokingly mentioned Gypsies, I suspected he has anti-Roma prejudices and felt a bit uncomfortable. I was already putting my shoes on in the hall, when he asked me if I was lesbian. After hearing that I live in a heterosexual relationship, he, probably taking it as encouragement for critiquing LGBTQ activism, stated that they were not the kind who would kiss each other in the street, let alone participating in the Pride March. He added that he was a voter of *Jobbik* for their anti-Roma attitude, and acknowledged this position was not easy for him as a homosexual. This extreme right-wing party gained high popularity after the 2008 economic crisis with their homophobic, anti-Roma, and anti-Semitic rhetoric – supporting, at the same time, the non-Roma working class and the retired poor of the countryside. I was afraid to get into a debate, and felt vulnerable as a perceived activist, leftist, maybe even a Jew (see Grenz 2014, 71).[32] Realizing I was alone in two men's home whom I have never seen before, I also felt threatened as a woman. Klesse argues that "processes of ethnicisation and sexualisation may also be at work in white interethnic relationships in an intra-European context" (2007, 53), upon his experiences as a non-Jewish German interviewing UK gay and bisexual men. His nationality played out in their sexualized projections and thus influenced the whole interview situation. Therefore, although scary, it was nevertheless theoretically intriguing for me to experience the combination of (perceived) difference and sameness we shared with Tony's boyfriend and to see his dilemma of sexual-political self-identification. Apparently, I had assumed before that I would not face such great differences between the interviewees and myself.

Of course, as in every research, I also encountered failures. This method of finding interviewees inevitably leads to deadlocks, i.e., people who never respond or are always too

[32] Although I am not of Jewish origin, I was still scared as a Jew, even if in this case I was not perceived as one; which often happens, due to the Jewish name Ráhel and my urban-educated-liberal background.

busy. Some other meetings did not become proper interviews or had to be excluded from the comparative analysis, see the example in the previous section.[33] After interviewing Bob (18, m), I had thought I could not use that material, because it was so fragmented – however, during transcription so many micro-narratives and interesting argumentative parts showed up that I decided to keep it. I partly attributed the fragmented characteristics to his age – however, interviewing Dioram (32, f) I experienced the same. I encountered the dilemma Scholz (2004, 72) discussed: namely, that the broad questions of narrative interviewing did not always result in a long main narrative. I later tried to elicit Dioram's storytelling by frequent questions, but in vain: her longest account consisted of 12 lines. This was the least successful interview, because she just shortly summarized her general opinion on men and women. Interestingly, she noted at the end, "I could talk about myself for hours". Although I was not sure what went wrong, I decided to repeat the interview with her, especially because her Facebook-wall – another extra-interview source of information – suggested some major changes in her love life since we had met. Our second interview 9 months later did not go much better in terms of narrative structure, but contained more specificities. Eventually, the differences in what and how she told and withheld in the two interviews proved how much the perspective of the present forms the stories, hence the great value of repeated interviews (see Diamond 2006). This is why I also interviewed Vera for the second time, after I learnt about the changes in her sexuality (see more about those in Chapters 4 and 5).

3.2.3. Thematic-biographical analysis

In my interview analysis, I again combine biographical, thematic, grounded theory, and linguistic perspectives. I argue that they allow me to most effectively address experiences of biographical bisexuality in Hungary with combining the foci on individual life course, on the variety of bisexual meanings inviting comparative analysis, as well as on discourses about the

[33] Also, I interviewed a woman who frequented swinger clubs, understanding from our previous chat that there she engaged in sex with both men and women. During the interview it turned out that her practice is exclusively heterosexual; still, it can serve as background material about swinger clubs, identified by many with bisexuality.

spatio-temporal position of Hungary. Consequently, my approach incorporates most of the aspects and concerns of the classical narrative model, to the extent to which it enables me to reconstruct sexual life courses as narrative units. In the case of each interview, I reconstruct the chronological biography to compare it with the narrated life story. I also rely on the sequencing of the latter according to the changes of its discussed topics and employed genres (Kovács 2007). However, in contrast to the classical method, I did not move along the hypotheses concerning the course of the chronological and narrated life story. Instead, I used a thematic analytic approach to narrow down my focus on the different temporal experiences of biographical bisexuality. This allowed me to provide a comparison between these experiences, and also between narratives which address the same bisexual temporality through different narrative means. I thus examined and compared specific sequences of several interviews, exactly because I needed to address and find the connections between specific temporalities of bisexualities and contemporary Hungarian social discourses.

On the first level of one-to-one case analysis, I thus worked with the interviews one-by-one, contextualizing, looking for organizing themes and narrative genres. The elements of the analysing process are not isolated steps one after the other; storytelling – audio recording – transcription – coding – translation from Hungarian to English – and analysis are all intertwined according to theoretical propositions (Charmaz 2003; Peebles 2004, 49). They represent a multiplicity of translations and interpretations, contributing to the co-production of meanings, characteristic to every story (Duranti 1997, 154), including analysis itself which also involves making a narrative (see 1.3.).[34] Thus, already parallel to transcription (see 1.3.2.), I opened a biographical and a context section in the same document. A chronological biography is an essential part of every narrative life course analysis, primarily to be put against the narrative about the same life (see Riessman 1993). Besides, I do manual coding in

[34] I thank Hadley Z. Renkin for this formulation.

the transcript, marking the main elements which connect to my research questions (e.g., moments of change/overlap, ideas of Hungarian temporality, impact of social forces). I also make a rough sequencing of the narrative, according to the changes of topics as well as storytelling genres, based on the most striking narrative aspects (e.g., length of uninterrupted sequences, main organizing elements). The context section of my case studies, on the other hand, seemed more and more important, parallel to my growing conviction to view interviewing as performative ethnography. To better understand my interviewees' words, I had to take into account the setting of the interview and our interaction as well (see Scholz 2004, Grenz 2014).

Second, in the comparative analysis I relied on the insights of grounded theory, which sees the interview as a collective story, and organizes its analysis around concepts that enable theoretical statements (Charmaz 2003, 2014). According to my coding, I defined patterns and connections between approaches through creating groups of individuals to show what features can link together so diverse life stories. I grouped the interviews according to the specific temporalities of biographical bisexuality, as this focus guided my research questions. I examined to what extent each of them contains seriality, parallelism, and alternation of bisexual desires, as the basis for my chapter division. As a non-formal way of coding, I examined where these specific temporal experiences were located in the narrative and to what other spatio-temporal social categorizations they were connected to. After examining recurrent themes and patterns of association, I identified spatial categorizations of Hungarian post-/socialism, LGBTQ and straight communities, private spaces of the home, and the transformable body as the main organizing themes in the narrations of the respective temporal experiences.

Finally then, in preparing for each comparative thematic investigation in the chapters, informed by thematic analysis and grounded theory, I employed a deep-focused micro-

analysis, similar to the thematic field analysis practiced by narrative-hermeneutic researchers (Riessman 1993; Kovács 2007). I chose smaller segments from the interviews which were illustrative of the connections between the personal sexual meanings and the social-political context. My interdisciplinary analysis inevitably contains linguistic, rhetorical, discursive, and literary aspects as well. I gave a deep sequential analysis of the examined excerpts, always interpreting them in their textual context, in light of what was said before and after, as well as in the context of the whole biography. It is exactly the diversity and dynamics of narratives that requires us to provide a deep and detailed textual analysis, illuminating potential meanings beyond stated contents, in the *social* context of both experience and storytelling (Kovács 2007, 378). This sociological focus assured that my analysis would not slip into a psychoanalytic interpretation. As I argued especially in 2.3., I suggest looking for how the social enacts even in the most intimate/emotional/individualistic accounts (Billig 1997; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Ahmed 2004a,b; Boellstorff 2005). For example, as I will discuss in the next chapter, Paula's (64, f) earlier intensive dreams of women gained new interpretation once, towards the end of socialism, she gained information on lesbian desires. Thus, I finally identify the ways in which the spatial focus of each temporal experience connects to ideas about the position of Hungary as in continuous movement on the slope between the East and West (Melegh 2006; see 2.4.3.), being in-/authentic *vis-á-vis* axes of global and national power.

Locating my analysis in the contemporary Hungarian social situation, I shall also be attentive to and reflexive about all the political-theoretical-ethical consequences of my claims, e.g., the potential reproduction of the East/West binary, or the argument for the mutability of sexual orientation. Therefore, and also in order to avoid over-interpretation, every statement is anchored in a supportive textual reference (see Fontana and Prokos 2007). To assure my interviewees of their agency and keep them engaged in our common project, I offered them to

have the audio file, see the transcript, and have a say in the final product (especially when I published in Hungarian, on a free-access site, see Turai 2015). It is an ethical demand to be careful to avoid being condescending or arrogant when I notice something implicit in the interview which the interviewee did not say explicitly, and might not even agree with: for example when I detect elements of sexism, homo- or biphobia. Accounts are usually not completely coherent, and they can be at least party interpreted as potentially subversive, just as partially normative. In the following, I challenge the ways Pennington (2009) and others conceived performativity in the bisexual context reductively as gender conformity, and I suggest an approach that would overcome the non-/normative binary.

3.3. Bisexual performativity as a question of method

Building upon the significance of the technical details I have outlined above, in this section I propose a novel understanding of "bisexual performativity" as a methodological approach which helps us better see sexual and gendered meaning-making practices in interviews on multiple and changing desires. As I already emphasized, I focus on what my interviews tell about society, and this, I argue, makes addressing the ethnographic aspects of interviewing inevitable. This was evident in the above mentioned interview situations when the rules of classical narrative interviewing could not be followed and the story telling was fragmented. Upon similar interviewing experiences, Scholz (2004, 72) suggests considering alternative types of questioning, as it may be more effective with some individuals. Apart from that, in such impeded interview situations I saw other forms of interactions being just as informative about the person as their monologue would have been. For example, Juli (39, f) did not only insist on me also talking about myself, but in the middle of the interview, she had two friends unexpectedly visiting her. I thus stopped the recorder and tried to observe their interaction, although necessarily as part of it.

In this sense, my method also belongs with ethnographic interviewing and linguistic anthropology (Duranti 1997). I argue for the necessary intertwining between anthropology and biographical analysis in methodology, upon my theoretical argument in Chapter 2, that a performative-affective aspect on language could best unify the two approaches, especially if the inquiry is aimed at sexual subjectivity-constructions. Storytelling itself is a site for performing identities (Scholz 2004, 22; Grenz 2014), including textual features and everything outside of the narrative text, such as body language and interactions between interviewee and interviewer. These insights led me to address shortly the ethnographic-performative aspects of my method, which emerge from viewing the interview as a specific, co-constructed situation out of which the actual narrative evolves.

3.3.1. My position as in interaction with interviewees

The insights of scholarship on coming out narratives which I delineated in 2.4.1. help us see the performative aspect of the interviews. They can be considered themselves acts of coming out, which do "not only reflect but create that change of state" what the person had undergone (Wood 1997, 265). This approach invites the question of what the interview gives the respondents, which can further highlight their position *vis-à-vis* mine. What are their motivations to talk, beyond helping me? People often rightly feel that their experience means knowledge they are able to share, and that I may be in a position to appreciate and mediate this knowledge. For many, talking about their sexual lives at length is in itself an exceptional opportunity, as they are finally allowed to express themselves. They might hope to convince someone, or are just enabled to organize their thoughts in the interview. The effects of such a life course interview can be similar to a psychological consultation and therefore require ethical handling. For instance, Éva's (26, f) main motivation to participate was to complain about her bisexual male ex: the whole narrative was structured around the difference between fe-/male bisexuality, with her own same-sex desires being less of a topic (see Turai 2011).

Moreover, performative perspectives to interviewing underline that talk does not only show the expressions of thoughts already "in there". It is illustrated by the fact that my interviewees often start a sentence and by the end they realize it is not entirely what they meant. Letting them talk may make people think about things they have not had thought before. It is especially so with questions which had not emerged before, as it is usually the case with heterosexuality, in contrast to same-sex interest, especially because the latter is formed against a heteronormative background and continuously has to be explained (Plummer 1997, Grenz 2005). Paradoxically though, same-sex interest can be taken for granted in specific social contexts as the public displays of feminine bisexuality, and the interview was a unique opportunity for some young heterosexually identified women to reflect on what they might actually want from women. Tekla (f, 22) mentioned two women she was recently interested in: "if she was a man", she would quickly have wild sex with one of them, and would be more affectionate with the other. Having said that, she adds:

> Now that I've just said that, uhm. That's weird that now I have these feelings, not only that she is a pretty woman but also what I could imagine with her, if it would happen. Whatever. Now we are just opening such new doors together, wow!

Here Tekla comments on the development of her own thinking over the course of the interview. Thus, it is not surprising that such an interview can eventually even transform the interviewees' actions and identities. It is also shown by Diamond's study (2006) on interviews repeated after some time with "bi-curious" women, where some interviewees asserted the role the first interview played in the steps they later made towards realizing same-sex desires.

Viewing the interview as the site where the respondent performatively constructs their gender, sexual, and other identities in interaction with the researcher (Grenz 2005, 2014) entails an acknowledgement of the interviewer's own involvement. Far from being an objective observer, I am not only perceived in certain ways and addressed accordingly by the interviewee, but I also contribute to the situation with my questions, reactions (or lack of thereof), not to mention my bodily presence and behaviour during our conversation. I laughed

a lot, I felt uncomfortable, aroused, and moved. The whole of my PhD research was fuelled by and influenced my own sexual self-questioning and exploration that was going on during the years of my research. Not only my choice of the research topic emerged from my own desires, experiences, and dilemmas, but interviewing people – similar to and different from me – continuously made me face the question how I would talk about myself. The process to realize my same-sex desires has been accompanied by this research process and I kept on asking myself the same questions I asked from my interviewees. It probably influenced my experiences and decisions in complex ways I am not even completely aware of.

The way an interviewee talks is influenced by their perception of the interviewer. Interestingly, in most cases, my interviewees saw me as someone very similar to themselves – they even assumed a similar constellation of experiences to theirs. Typically, it was the young, mostly straight-identified women who expressed this belief – together with their need for a shared talk, a common thinking about bisexual interest. This also indexes the relational, communal character of their experiences (experimenting with friends publicly). I would also conclude upon their behaviour towards me that they did not see me as someone potentially sexually interesting for them, nor as interested in them. They all mentioned they prefer "feminine" women, which I do not consider myself; and they all emphasized how situation- and context-bounded their homosexual interests were, with the interview situation apparently more similar to intimate friend-talk. Tekla (22, f) for example asked for my opinion time to time, which is often a conversational turn that facilitates moving on to the next topic, and hence I usually just expressed uncertainty when asked, to leave space for the interviewee to formulate even extreme views. I tried not to disclose many things about myself, only if it is necessary for establishing rapport, as it was in Juli's case.

Specifically, many asked me as the expert what the definition of bisexual (even lesbian) was, to see if they belonged to the category – such conversation turns are rich

accounts for a queer analysis aiming at the way categories are given meaning (see Geertz [1973] 1993; Kong et al. 2003). Without any definite answer, I encouraged my respondents to rely on their own experiences. Usually, my interviewees knew that I was a PhD-student at CEU's Department of Gender Studies. Even if they attended higher education, a PhD-program could be for most of them something remote, elite, with the gender content not entirely clear. CEU is also foreign, different from Hungarian universities, and for many, burdened with the liberal-leftist package (Zimmermann 2008).

Finally, I acknowledge that my own views, my power as a researcher, my analytical ideas, my various interests structured what questions I asked and how I presented the interview extracts (Kong *et al*. 2003). Thus, the voice of interviewees cannot ever be "purely" heard and I as a person and researcher cannot be left out from the interviews.[35]

3.3.2. Performing gender-sexual power

I elaborate here on the sexual-gender dynamics going on between me as a (bisexual? androgynous?) woman and the interviewees. If I am perceived as feminine/masculine, and – connectedly – lesbian/bisexual/straight (and activist), these all have an impact on how we interact; if the interaction can be flirtatious, or if they can allow homophobic remarks, or who would perform certain gender roles. For instance, Dioram (32, f) had talked about her androgynous persona, shifting to masculine roles in interactions with feminine women. After the interview, I noticed she left initiations to me (e.g., when to move from the balcony back to the room), so she probably positioned me as relatively masculine to her, although it was not tangible in her interview talk. Me being a woman visibly meant a challenge for some of the male interviewees in terms of power, because a woman interrogating a man on his private life could position her, in this case me, in power, as a reaction to which men might perform features culturally coded as masculine, that is, powerful (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2003,

[35] I thank Clare Hemmings for directing my attention to the importance of addressing these issues.

Scholz 2004, Grenz 2014). István (m, 38) frequently used second person plural not only when talking about women in comparison to men ("In terms of emotions, *you* are much simpler [than men]"), but also when talking about social scientists, considering me and his female partner, working in social service, similar ("*You* must learn in the school to 'place yourself on the [Kinsey] scale'"). In most cases, he did that with a derogatory irony, suggesting an opposition between himself and me, positioning me distinctively as a female researcher who thinks she knows more about sexuality than he does.

Sylka Scholz, interviewing Eastern German men, foregrounded masculinity reconstruction in interviewee-interviewer interaction, including all nonverbal aspects of gender embodiment – however, in her analysis, she focused only on verbal interactions (2004, 240-241). My analysis below on the interview with Szilárd (m, 45) aims to show that the nonverbal aspects also added to (our mutual) gender-sexuality performativity as both performance and constitution (see the theoretical discussion in 2.3.). Our common friend meant some sort of assurance for both of us about trust and security when entering into the interview situation without knowing each other; also, I had probably expected less normative displays of heteronormative sexism from men with same-sex desires. However, my field notes assert that I had had a slight sense of danger already when preparing for the interview with Szilárd in his home. During the interview, he drank a bottle of wine, which reminded me of a dating situation. I did not have a clear position on alcohol consumption, but agreed to it, given that I wanted him to feel cosy and be talkative.[36] I thus faced similar dilemmas to Grenz (2005) who had to weigh what kinds of requests to allow for (prostitutes' clients) interviewees, who were in an ambiguous power position *vis-à-vis* her as a woman and a researcher, vulnerable and at the same time powerful, with a similarly sexually explicit topic. After some time into the interview, I realized that Szilárd was performing sexual seduction

[36] Later another unknown male interviewee, Tamás (43) also drank wine during the interview, but sexualization was totally absent from that situation.

towards me – being the only case throughout my interviewing career. The more (we) he talked, the more personal he got with me as well and I felt a reserve I typically feel when men ask too intimate questions in order to create a flirting atmosphere. It confused and scared me a bit. Despite my anxieties, I managed to balance my reactions in a way that he did not cross more boundaries but continued to talk, and I remained fully attentive to what he is saying, but I never breached this topic with him.[37]

Following my position on sexual-gender identities as performed in the whole interview situation, I suggest including such experiences of the interviewer as interpretative of the interaction (see Grenz 2005). To examine interviewer-interviewee interactions, the insights of conversation analysis (see Eckert and McConnel-Ginet 2003, 76) shall be added to the classical biographical analysis. As gender researchers in conversation analysis and sociolinguistics pointed out, it is discursively impossible not to participate in a situation of sexual initiation, because culturally it also includes the 'no', the reserve from the woman's/'feminine' side (Cameron and Kulick 2003, 122). Although I tried to keep to my role of the researcher, I could not help but was involved – made apparent by my emotional discomfort – as a sexual being (object). The textual analysis of Szilárd's narrative (see Chapters 6 and 7) illuminates the complexity of his relation to me, and I suggest examining the textual and the contextual as complementing each other in the gender/sexual meaning of the whole interview. Eventually, for me the main question in the spirit of theories of affect and performativity (see 2.3. and Ahmed 2004a, 4), is what *effects* did these comments of his have? What image did he (seek to) evoke in me about him?

First of all, as the literature about (women) interviewing men (e.g., Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2003, Fontana and Prokos 2007, Grenz 2005, 2014) stresses, men often feel vulnerable in the position to be interrogated by a female researcher, and they look for

[37] I am grateful to the participants of my methodology seminar in Göttingen in 2016, who made me realize I could have told him off record that I believed he was flirting with me, and asked for his take.

different linguistic and non-verbal means to assure their masculinity defined as power over the woman. Sexualization is one means to perform and reproduce masculinity; some others being giving short answers, or expanding unnecessarily, as well as exaggerating rationality and control, see Grenz (2014, 68). Szilárd[38], therefore, performed as masculine in relation to me as a woman with his compliments, which also made me insecure and undermined my confidence as a professional as a consequence.

However, I argue that his masculinity performance got a twist by the specificity of bisexuality; the fact that his preferred lifestyle and identity is gay, whereas he has always been sexually interested in women as well. His flirting was an assertion of this latter side, possibly obscured due to his recent involvements with men only. This way, I argue, his performative courtship completed his narrated story to show his bisexual desires. He said he assumed I would expect a greater experience with women than what he can report. As Linde (1993, 90-94) shows, in biographical narratives those experiences are represented as something to be explained which are assumed to be outside of the normal course of things: uncomfortable, problematic, or challenged by the interviewer. Explanation is one of the main elements to create coherency of the self, uniting its past and present aspects. Accordingly, what a powerful social phenomenon the expectation for explanation of bisexuality is, almost by definition considered inauthentic (Hemmings 2002), is most visible in such situations where one feels compelled to show evidence of his interest in both sexes. Szilárd's behaviour was to convince me that apart from all, he *is* indeed interested in women – and our very interaction became the proof of it. I agree with Cameron and Kulick's (2003, 98) critique on the concern about the speaker's intention (Livia 2001) as irrelevant from a performativity perspective. The key is that Szilárd performed as both very gay *and* heterosexually active. Our interaction altogether revealed the complex relation between not only desire and gender in bisexuality,

[38] Even his name has connotations of masculinity, because '*szilárd*' in Hungarian denotes 'sturdy, solid, steady'.

but also how the power relations embedded in those differentiations intersect with the researcher-respondent power relations.

3.4. Conclusion

I showed in this chapter how the sexuality and gender of both the interviewees and myself as interviewer are given meaning in the interview context, through the intersections of various power axes. Through the reflection on the challenges I faced during sampling, interviewing, and analyzing, I argued that bisexual temporality can be best unfolded via narrative biographies combined with ethnographic analyses of the social context including the interview situation itself. This way attending to the affective-performative aspects of experiencing sexual desires, we can see that language and nonverbal signs together produce, rather than reflect, the gender-sexual meanings which mark the interviewees as subjects with a specific life history.

This chapter illuminated what performative theoretical and methodological considerations mean in practice, in the actual process of sexual interviewing. Relying on the literature about narrative methodologies, linguistic anthropology, affective and performative theories and sexual biographies on which I elaborated in Chapter 2, I showed my understanding of the whole of the sexual life story interview situation as a site for performing identities (Scholz 2004, 22, Grenz 2014). I view social interactions as communicative performance (2.3.), including gender as a repetitive, productive, and necessarily failing practice (Butler 1993). I agree with Cameron and Kulick that linguistic analyses of sexuality achieve the most with a focus on "codes of signification that underlie particular performances" (2003, 148). Therefore, I approach biographical bisexuality as performed and continuously re-produced even in the interview situation, in which process I as a researcher also play a role.

This has led me to eventually argue for "bisexual performativity" as a methodological concept, arguing with the typical short-sided usage of the term in previous literature, as I discussed in 2.3. Illustrative of this approach, Pennington's article (2009), "Bisexual 'doing gender' in romantic relationships" addresses the question of gender performativity in a bisexual context, asking bisexually identified women how they understand themselves as feminine/masculine in their relationships with women and men, respectively. What a huge lack is in her approach is that she solely highlights what her interviewees stated, often as general ideas, and does not examine how gender is performed either in the stories without explicit argumentations, or inside the interview situation itself. In contrast, I followed scholarship that is reflexive about the gender/sexual performances of and in interviews (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2003; Scholz 2004; Fontana and Prokos 2007; Grenz 2005, 2014). Consequently, my understanding of "bisexual performativity" includes all the ways in which the respondents perform specific gender-sexual relations, in interaction with the researcher, which therefore contribute to the gender-sexual meanings of the whole interview. In this sense, I suggest considering interactional behaviour as completing the narrated life story, which together show us a picture about the interviewee's specific bisexuality. This further allows us to better see complex relations between desire and gender in bisexuality, as Szilárd's (45, m) case demonstrated. Finally, this approach equips scholarship to address power relations imbricated in sexual-gender differentiations in their intersection with the researcher-respondent power relations. Understanding sexuality as biographical, as well as re-performed in interactions including that with the interviewer, enhances our understanding of subjectivity in general as unfolding over meaning-making practices.

Section I. Serial connections

4. Chapter. Hetero-homosexual and post-/socialist transitions: a language for change

4.1. Introduction: personal and national periodizations in serially changing sexuality

> [Heterosexuality] was coded in one's life. Plus, I was born in 1961, this means I had to wait till the change of the system [*'rendszerváltás'*] till I turned 30; till then, this being gay had been such a stigmatized state. Indeed, I think it was even after that, for long years. And probably not consciously, but I succeeded to completely repress these urges or desires in myself. (Tibor, 51, m)

For many like Tibor, homosexual and heterosexual attractions followed each other in sequence as two separate periods of time, with an identifiable turning point between the two (even if with some overlap). Before discussing "parallel" and "alternating" relationships with men and women (Chapter 5-7), this chapter examines how sexual attractions represent distinct phases in life stories, as a "serial" form of biographical bisexuality. The line between these phases is far from obvious, but the interviewees discussed in this chapter express the wish from one point on to seek and form relationships with members of one sex and not the other. By inquiring about the social-spatial parallels which these narratives draw with the shift between homo- and heterosexuality, I will highlight their connection to Hungarian post-socialism, to which Tibor's reference to the 1989 "change of the system" also alludes. Through this, I argue, we can better understand how developmental ideas of sexuality and of a post-socialist society are imbricated in each other through the idea of transition.

As I noted in the theoretical discussion of 'transition' (2.4.3.), little consideration has been given to the parallels between personal and socio-historical periodizations, let alone in the Central-Eastern European context. Although Plummer rightly remarks the significance of circulating stories which help 'finding a name' for what the person experiences, his parallel

between the stages of individual gay identity development and gay movements' self-organization, culminating in the "'coming out of gay culture'" (1997, 88-91) fails. As I discussed in 2.4.3., it highlights the problematic of Western-biased gay liberation narratives (see Stella 2015, 17-18); still, it does contain elements which make sense for my interviewees in Hungary. Central-Eastern Europeans like Tibor, who have experienced the regime change as adults themselves use a similar periodization and parallel between social-historical and personal changes (Lass 1994; Nadkarni 2010). I will show how these periodizations contribute to my respondents' conceptualization of their own desires, and also how these parallels transform through the life stories. For the examination of post-socialist narratives of homosexuality I find Biddy Martin's (1996) warning about experience as political and mediated important, which the illusionary image of one "language" in coming out narratives occludes. I argue that eventually, attractions and narratives mutually produce each other, for which I mostly rely on biographical analysis which combines the insights of critical post-socialist studies (2.4.) with those of affect and performativity theories (2.3.). Based on the frequently implied language metaphors, the following interview analyses illustrate, on the one hand, the significance of available discourses to put same-sex desires in words. On the other hand, they reveal narrative processes by which language constitutes those very desires, similarly to processes of subject-formation as based on the illusion of a truth to be confessed (see the discussions in 2.3. and 3.1.).

Furthermore, the periodizations of personal lives contribute to social discourses which characterize Hungary as "post-socialist" (see 2.4.): 1989 gets reproduced in the interviews as a fundamental change in society in terms of "sexual liberation", even if same-sex desires, relations, and subcultures did exist before, as I discussed in 1.2. (Renkin 2007c; Takács 2015; Szulc 2017), and as some interviews themselves demonstrate (see the next section). Additionally, other interviewees connect their sexual transitions to the contemporary

hierarchy binary between Central-Eastern European and Western societies (see 4.3.), which connections themselves can perpetuate ideas of Hungarian "backwardness". To connect back to the effects of my own language which I noted in 1.3., my discussion of sexual-political parallels could risk reproducing images of state socialism as completely silencing non-normative sexualities, or Hungary as fundamentally homophobic. To avoid that, beside highlighting such categorizations as meaningful for personal sexual constructions, I will make sure to point at experiences which contradict to these images. I will also argue that the discrepancy between the two can be explained by the explanatory force stereotypical social periodization bears for narrative constructions of sexual changes.

Andrew Lass on Czechoslovak personal remembering about participation in historical events in 1989 notes: "Part of the biographical narrative centers on this need to »find one's place« within the larger scheme of things" (1994, 96-97). Hungarian bisexual biographies embody such processes of self-quest and identification in the competition of contemporary discourses. Talking about post-socialist transformations, Peggy Watson warns us against the common idea that democracy means opportunity for people to be their 'true selves' – whereas what she sees happening is rather that democratic transformations involve a "process of redefinition, where a contest over identity transformation is central to the realization of change" (2001, 38). In this post-structuralist framework then, instead of showing how the interviews reflect and embody coming out discourses, I focus on their central idea of fundamental change in its relation to post-socialist transformations. To become meaningful, desire and especially its transformations, need a language; in this case, it is that of transition. The mutual production of personal (sexual) and social changes (of 1989 in Central-Eastern Europe) provides tools for my interviewees to understand their changing sexuality in later periods as well, employing as well as modifying this discourse by the very practices of storytelling (Certeau 1984). Hence, I examine the narrative ways by which these sexual

turning points are performed in relation to the idea of Hungary as a society in transition. Interrogating the performative work the language my interviewees use *does*, I argue that 'desire' is an affective experience, which is constituted through interpersonal practices (see the discussions of 2.3. incl. Sedgwick 2002; Ahmed 2004a; Fox and Allder 2013).

Based on the analogies my interviewees employ, I examine language as a metaphor for sexual preference, as it is able to illuminate narrative techniques of incorporating change into sexual life trajectories. I will argue that the examination of language can specifically highlight how sexual experiences connect to inter-/national political-historical spaces. It is especially significant in Hungary, a small non-English-speaking country with a language spoken by few, even foreign to the neighbouring national languages. Therefore, discourses on Hungarian language evoke anxieties about its disappearance, as infiltrated by imperial English. Debates on Hungarian thus often revolve around generational differences, many of the older (or the more educated) generation arguing for stricter rules to preserve previously dominant linguistic forms and to block the spreading of those associated with the global capitalist media. These phenomena evoke similar discourses about sexuality (see 1.2. and Chapter 7).

Eszter Timár (2013) and Robert Tobin (2005) remark a Hungarian language-sexuality parallel when presenting Kertbeny's argument for homosexuality as more cultural than biological (in contrast to his contemporary, Ulrichs). He supported his closeted sexual politics in general with reference to Hungarianness as less a question of ethnicity rather than that of language and culture. In those times of the 19th century, when Hungary was part of an empire and itself assimilating smaller nationalities, Hungarian language was conceptualized as something that can (and should) be learnt. In contrast, today, the position of the country has changed, including the loss of non-Hungarian speaking territories as well as the recent loss of its relatively "Western" position which the country enjoyed inside the socialist block (Fehérváry 2013, 27, 43). The interviews to be discussed here reflect these changes through

their references to the Hungarian language, which is seen so particular as an almost biologically given trait. This is how it becomes an analogy for the innateness of gay desires – even if, as Timár (2013) notes, ideas of homogenizing nationalism, including public display of cultural difference as unpatriotic, prevail. On the other hand, the possibility of learning a language only emerges in these personal narratives in reference to foreign languages (and supporting the argument for acquiring heterosexuality). We can thus see that even in a Central-European context, homonationalism provides a field where positive non-heterosexual (self-)identification is possible (Puar 2017). This roots in the nationalist traditions of Hungary and other countries in the region formed around linguistically embedded cultural products rather than political-economic progress (Imre 2009, 163-165), including the oppositions where Hungarian cultural-political life figures as more honest, profound, intense, and communal than that of 'Europe' (Gal 1991, 444).

In the following, first I analyse narratives which employ a connection between the respondent's switch from heterosexuality to homosexuality, and the social-political transformations in Hungary around 1989. These interviews use gay liberation narratives about a new world which offers opportunities and language for the articulation of desires (Plummer 1997). They posit the socialist past as silencing same-sex desires against post-socialism as the new world, suggesting the country has shifted also spatially to belong (again) to Western Europe (see Buchowski 2006). Then my analysis moves on to those narratives which complicate this periodization, as they locate the turning points of the respondents' sexual orientation in the 2000s. In this neoliberal capitalist era with widening class gaps and the cementing of the political right, further transformations occurred in terms of gay rights, together with an intensified resurrection of nationalisms and the global right. This new constellation of competing global discourses allows also in Hungary the articulation of same-sex desires through their visibility – but also for the articulation of heterosexuality as if it was

a threatened identity. The latter rhetoric also fits in the identity politics frame, and is similarly influenced by experiences with "abroad" (Fraser 1995; Kalocsai 1999; Renkin 2007a; Gille 2010).

The narrative tools used for interpreting sexual turning points therefore suggest that "post-socialist transition" can be understood as referring to at least two bases of comparison, depending on which empire Hungary gets contrasted with. In my interviews, with a shift of emphasis, talking about the early '90s, the comparison with the Soviet rule highlights present-day sexual freedom. Whereas about the 2000s, it is the comparison with the EU and global Western power in which Hungary seems either to lack sexual freedom or, for a few of my interviewees, to be forced to sexual openness alien to the nation. According to my data, this experience of serially changing sexual attraction toward women and men raises most visibly the question of the imposition of global political discourses on desires for the interviewees themselves, and thus enables us to theoretically examine the concept of sexual orientation, for which I recommend 'transition' as an analytical tool, as I argued in 2.4.3. As an important theoretical implication, these narrative constructions on sexuality and Hungarian society show the multiplicity of possible comparisons in the interrelational dynamics with other societies, moving as if on a scale (2.4.2.). This chapter thus illuminates one aspect of the spatial-temporal relational dynamics with which the post-socialist condition can contribute to our understanding of the experiential constitution of sexual fluidity.

4.2. A post-socialist transition to homosexuality – gayness as mother tongue

In this section I demonstrate the narrative structure of those interviews where the separation of heterosexual and homosexual life stages reflects the image of Hungary transitioning from state socialism to capitalist democracy. I argue that this provides a framework at hand for people to make sense of the turning point they experienced as a transition toward gayness, following the logic of gay liberation narratives outlined in the previous section and 2.4. Most

of my interviews which depict one sexual turning point reproduce the image of a repressive era of Central-Eastern European state socialism, which made it difficult even to be aware of one's same-sex desires. In contrast, others did manage to realize their desires before the 1989 system change – see Botond's case in Chapter 6, as well as the literature discussed in sections 1.2. and 2.4.2. My analysis will show that the interviews in this chapter also contain elements which reveal the formation of same-sex sexualities during state socialism, but the 'transitional' periodization offers adequate narrative tools to many who categorically switched from hetero- to homosexuality, to account for the lack of the latter in their past.

From many aspects, Tibor's (51, m) life trajectory followed similar lines to many who encountered homosexuality after a heterosexual life phase, which they then completely closed off. According to their experience, no other option was available in socialism than heterosexuality, and at the demise of the political system, homosexual opportunities started to flourish, allowing for a lifestyle change. As Tibor says, the possibility of being homosexual had not even occurred to him.

> My life started with hearing and experiencing at home that gay equals the old man ['*bácsi'*] who would show his penis to prepubescent children. In my family, that was a **strong taboo**. Actually, **it didn't even occur to me**. And probably it didn't occur to me because the world view mediated by my parents was about people turning to their own sex as **completely aberrant**. Therefore, it was **completely natural** in the beginning, around 16-17, that if you get in contact with someone, in an emotional-sexual contact, then that will be a woman. (…) That was **coded** in one's life. Plus, **I was born in 1961, this means I had to wait till the change of the system ['*rendszerváltás'*] till I turned 30; till then, this being gay had been such a stigmatized state.** Indeed, I think it was even after that, for long years. And probably not consciously, but **I succeeded to completely repress these urges or desires** in myself.

Tibor mentions not only "stigmatized" homosexuality but also the taken for granted, "coded nature" of heterosexual interest as explaining the absence of his homosexual desires (see Woodcock 2004 and Stella 2013, 2015 on the power of Soviet heteronormativity). This is why, Tibor says, he only "became gay" in the '90s, completely leaving not only his that-time female partner but heterosexuality in general. On the other hand, he refines the first claim by stating that he "successfully repressed" his same-sex desires. Do these two claims stand in contradiction with each other? Not necessarily; I rather suggest looking at them as the

employment of two linguistic tools to make sense of the change he underwent. Tibor acknowledges that the stigmatization of homosexuality went on for "long years" after the fall of socialism – still, it is the symbolic 1989 which helps him, as others, understand the changes in their sexual attractions. Perhaps, this periodization of the repressive regime also enables him to integrate his heterosexual past into his life story as a satisfying part back then. As a sign of it, he accepts the bisexual label to some extent: "I am bi in the sense that in the first part of my life I only had women [as partners, and in the second only men]".

Importantly, it is visible from the quote that the state socialist period is not narrated as a complete silence on homosexuality; rather, as silence on a *viable* one (see Stella 2013, 2015, 43), by means of stigmatization through the figure of the paedophile. In the interview narratives then, we can see both the employment of the 'silencing' narrative and its challenging modifications. As I mentioned in 1.2., in socialist Hungary, homosexuality was heard in gossips on male asocial deviants or privileged celebrities. This made it difficult for many to find ways (both linguistic and physical) to express or experience same-sex desires (see Borgos 2014; Takács 2015; Béres-Deák 2016b). It was even more the case for women, who often did not see even negative representations of lesbian desire. Paula's (64, f) interview, on the one hand, uses a similar narrative to that of Tibor, of a coded heterosexuality during socialist silence on homosexuality, and of and post-socialist lesbian liberation. On the other hand, her narrative also shows how gradual the process of separating these two phases can be, for women in particular. This, I argue, signals a gendered complication of the dominant post-socialist transition narrative.

Paula's story telling performs the periodization of her life trajectory, reflecting the important phases in her life: once she is done with one, she stops and asks for questions from me. The realization of desire towards women started already in her teenage years (back in the '70s), very unarticulated with slightly homoerotic dreams; her first pause in narration takes

place at the point in her story when she realized she was lesbian and decided to leave her husband in her thirties, towards the end of socialism. These socialist years form the longest part in Paula's interview. It took her another odd 10 years to take this step, and her second pause comes after the story of how she got into the lesbian community and formed her first same-sex relationship. Finally, she stops after telling me how she got to know her actual partner. In this narrative structure, Paula's lack of lesbian desires in socialist Hungary appears as a more significant question than their later realization. Talking about her teenage dreams about other girls, she comments:

> **There was absolutely no such information in my mind** which could have been connected with it, [which] could have connected at least in my dream. What isn't there, that cannot be connected by the dream either. So. **It wasn't even in my fantasies, because I didn't know such a thing existed, or what existed.**

Without knowledge on lesbian sexuality, Paula says that she could understand neither her own dreams, nor their potentially erotic content. In her experience, social repression does not manifest itself in the impossibility of realizing fantasies, but right in the impossibility of fantasies. Similarly, Vera (1 38, f) in the '80s had no idea that "a woman satisfying another woman" exists, therefore, she says, she could not even fantasize about it. "To breathe life into the imagination, a language must be found for it" – says Plummer (1997, 127), which I want to complete with a performative perspective about language as generating imagination; "social institutions pre-exist us, even defining what we think imaginable and not imaginable" in terms of lesbian subject positions (Sándor 1999, 27; see also 2.3.).

Vera's case is unique due to her "ex-gay" path she has been taking since 2010. She is one of the two interviewees with whom I conducted interviews twice, in order to document at least a small part of the temporal changes they were undergoing during my research period between 2010 and 2013 (3.2.2.). In the first interview, at the age of 38, Vera spoke from the position of a woman who "has always been gay ['*meleg*'] in her desires", only disturbed by her sexual dreams with men. However, not much after our first interview, she started to

undergo therapy in order to leave homosexuality behind, so I decided to ask her for a second interview, when she claimed to be "90 or 80% heterosexual". In the following, I present both of Vera's narratives (marking their order and Vera's respective ages after each quote), the differences of which illuminate her travel between sexual attractions and discourses. In particular, her first interview speaks to the post-socialist gay liberation narratives, which I am going to flag here; and her second "ex-gay" account to more recent developments in global discourses on homo- and heterosexuality, to be discussed in the next section.

In the first interview, gay-identified Vera upholds that homosexuality is "unhealthy", and as a believing Catholic, she still cannot decide who is right about it, "the Church or the liberals". This remark clearly locates her hesitation similar to that of Juli (1.1.), in the discursive field about homosexuality in Hungary, where two major opposing discourses compete for the dominant interpretation (Bourdieu 1968). Vera's choice of words reflects how much homophobia, right-wing politics and Hungarian Christianity are interconnected, as they both can be posited in contrast to "liberalism", which is meant to denote progressive politics and culture in general, characteristically in terms of human rights defence (Renkin 2007a, 2009).[39] Talking about the difficulties in transforming her intensive friendship with her first love into romantic-sexual partnership in the late '80s, she eventually refers to the constraints and lack of options in socialist times, linking alternative ways of sexuality to product supply.

> I was relatively young, compared to myself, or I dunno, others might have… **Today people are already more open. They dare more to talk about things. Back then, back then, it was still communism. One did not really say things like this. Or I myself did not dare to say things like this. So it was not so… The Russkis ['*ruszkik*'] were still here. For example, so. In this respect, it was a different world.** Sure, one could already buy everything, there was not only I dunno, cans of mincemeat on the shelves in the store. Still, it was a different world from today's, from the one I think you have got to know. (Vera 1, 38)

Food options are linked here with topics people can talk about – in her case, referring to the hegemony of heterosexuality, the invisibility of lesbian sexuality (see Stella 2013, 2015). The idea of options to choose tightly links together sexual alternatives and ideas of capitalist

[39] Economic neoliberalism is not questioned by either the ruling right-wing *Fidesz*, or the opposition usually named "liberal-left", only by the extreme right.

democracy (Urry 2000, 41-42.)[40]. Capitalism depends on the idea of the free individual, "individualistic notions of the mutable self have been another precondition for the emergence of gay culture", argues Plummer (1997, 92-93) about changing sexual narratives, and he even uses the same metaphor as Vera: "Modern identities (…) exist[ing] in a supermarket of choice." As Vera and Paula narrate their experiences, they could not choose that which was not offered as an option back in the '70-80s.

However, the collection of older Hungarian lesbians' life stories (Borgos *et al.* 2011) features several women who realized their homosexuality during state socialism. These differences prove Stella's (2015, 43) point that some were exposed to discourses on lesbian love and sex more than others, which explains the lack of lesbian fantasies in many women's lives, as the quotes above explain. Eventually, it was a lack of available language on lesbianism or the untranslatability of circulating codes into her own life, which disabled Paula to interpret her dreams as potentially sexual. Importantly, the limited scope of discourses of homosexuality in state socialism intersected with the trivialisation of physical and emotional intimacy between women (see Wilton 2014). With "absolutely no such information in my mind", says Paula, her desires did not manifest in fantasies, not even in her frequent dreams about walking with girls and holding their hands. In the Freudian framework, these are considered as the unconscious sites of repressed desires. However, in the perspective of discursive psychology or affect theory (see Billig 1997; Ahmed 2004a; Muñoz 2006 in 2.3.), which considers desires as constituted in interactions, I contend that Paula was not able to see her dreams as showing lesbian desires because she did not see connections between her experiences and the limited representations available. This is why later she needed to engage with various, semi-scientific and cultural sources on homosexuality which helped her

[40] I thank Aneta Dybska for the suggestion of this literature.

understand herself. This process is told in the framework of decoding or deciphering (for the latter concept as essential in socially shared meanings, see Bourdieu 1968 and Derrida 1995).

> And I was reflecting a lot, also on what I'm interested in and what I'm not interested in as a matter of fact, and eventually my desires showed more and more that I'm indeed interested in women. It was more and more unambiguous, more and more unambiguous. Since, **there had been signs a long time ago, too, I just simply couldn't interpret those signs, because I didn't have any kind of experience, I didn't read about it, I didn't hear about it**, I simply didn't have any kind of experience, so simply...

Paula does not claim that she views sexuality as language; however, I argue that the way she talks about the slow realization of her homosexual desires after a longer heterosexual life draws on images of language learning. Her concern about the "interpretation of signs" evokes a language metaphor and through that, suggests a more complicated concept of experience than that of a given, marginalized voice, sometimes characterizing feminist and sexuality studies (for critiques see Scott 1992; Martin 1996; Muñoz 2006; Cerwonka 2011, esp. in Chapter 1). As Paula says, without experience she could not interpret the signs that retrospectively she interprets as those of homosexuality. In this sense, I argue, desire does not necessarily come before experience; rather, desire is itself an experience for which a language is necessary, otherwise it is meaningless or at best, confusing for the individuals (see Vance 2005; Tiefer 1995). Paula herself includes "reading and hearing about it" into "experience". As Ahmed (2004a, 86, see 2.3.) says, "our relation to guts is not direct, but is mediated by ideas". Romantic fantasies, no matter how much gut reactions they seem to be, cannot count as experience without an interrelational discourse in the frames of which Paula could have given meaning to them.

Although the transition from heterosexuality to homosexuality was very painful and long for Paula, she presented her life trajectory as a whole, with heterosexual family life as an integral part to it, primarily because of having children. In her experience, the strong desire for children together with the difficulty of learning lesbianism explains why her life story consists of two separate phases. Not only had this directed her towards marriage, but having

children later also severely impeded her from divorce and moving. She basically physically did not have a place to go with the children, for whom she felt responsible and so dared not take too high risks. “I was at crossroads”, she says describing her dilemma of what to do. She did move out at the first opportunity she got – at the time her older children had moved out already. In contrast, when facing his same-sex desires, Tibor was financially and emotionally independent, with a stable income, without children. Although they share the experience of socialist silence on homosexuality, and both unambiguously identify as lesbian and gay, Tibor’s first meeting with gayness, presented as his turning point, illuminates the gender difference in the post-socialist economic conditions (see 1.2. in general and 6.1. for the housing situation in particular).

After a minute-long hesitation in the beginning of the interview about how to start and whether to include both his sexual and emotional life, Tibor responds to my clarifying initial question (“Tell me how you experienced the changes when you had relationships with both women and men”) with the following: “Well, actually I had only one change in my life. Which is bullshit, because there were changes inside this as well. Still.” The position of such a statement at the opening of the narrative, as well as making this change the organizing element in its structure shows a sharp separation of his life phases. After the 20th minute into his first main narrative, Tibor arrived at the point of “switch” or “change” he had indicated. After a house party consisting of intellectuals in Budapest, he spends the night there, sharing the bed with the male host, and “during that night everything happened that uhm quasi has to happen between two men if we, say, wander onto the fields of sexuality”. After this concise (and obscure) summary, he starts to evaluate it with expressions emphasizing the volume of change. He immediately realized this “was going to change my life totally”, “it was an emotional bomb, or emotional fireworks”, “which turned me upside down out of my whole previous life”, “my life completely changed”, “I found myself”. A variety of narrative

elements testify that the first sexual encounter with a man meant a turning point, the "real switch" in Tibor's life. When later in the interview I asked him to what extent he felt so after that night, he answered, "to the extent that I went home and told my quasi fiancée that it was over", showing that he immediately acted upon the fundamental change he experienced. Although many people experience the realization or discovery of their homosexuality as a once-and-for all experience, as a conversion or illumination/enlightenment (Plummer 1997; Esterberg 1997; Wilton 2004), this "switch" at one stroke is unique among my interviewees. When I asked Tibor to tell me more about how that night happened and how he reacted to it, metaphors of language came up.

> Regaining consciousness [in bed with the host], I realized that I was in a sexus ['*szexus*'], or in a sexual activity. I was quite drunk. So was he. He somehow **touched differently. It's like when... one lives abroad and speaks the language well and then once meets someone who speaks their own mother tongue. And even if others do speak in Hungarian, but this person can develop such shades, when words or phrases like "*pórul jár*", no foreigner will never ever say such in their life, because they don't know how to go as *pór* or with a *pór*. Or I don't even know. So, there are such wispy finenesses, which are fundamentally different from the usual or the average**. (…) So here is that invisible knowledge or invisible intuition that he might react better to the vibes the other gives. And this might be… or, rather, I think unequivocally – but perhaps, it just might be – that it indeed has some very deep genetic root. Or some primeval mind-set or I dunno.

In the above quote, he hopes to illuminate this unique experience of revelation, and through that, his inherent homosexuality through the analogy with Hungarian language. He connects the uniqueness and cosiness of same-sex physical intimacy to those of linguistic nativeness, contrasting the native with a learnt Hungarian, implying that this very first sexual encounter obviously showed that he was homosexual, as if by nature. It is a common view in Hungarian discourses that Hungarian, as a very unique language, cannot be learnt; the term '*édes anyanyelvünk*' ('our sweet mother tongue'), frequently used since the national romantic period in the 19th century, unifies references to blood heritage as well as taste. Tibor's references to the "deep genetic root" and "primeval mind-set" ('*őstudat'*) at the end of the quote confirm the idea of innateness of both language and homosexuality, invoking

conceptualizations of race.[41] I will further argue that the language metaphor can stand for both 'nature and nurture'.

Inevitably, such quotes in particular raise the question of language for me as the translator of these narratives told in native language. It is especially challenging because Tibor actually seeks to demonstrate untranslatability, through specific linguistic elements. His *'pórul járni'* example denotes 'get the worst of something', literally cca. 'go as peasant'. The expression is commonly used in Hungarian, but the term '*pór*' itself is outdated and rarely used; thus Tibor can also illustrate forgotten origins of both linguistic and sexual practices (etymology and etiology), again tying these two together with racial associations. In terms of methodology then, I do not only think full translation is impossible, but also that it is unnecessary, just like the separation of "formulation" and "content" (see Chapter 3, and Duranti 1997, 154; Boellstorff 2005, 5).

Sexuality is of course always mediated through and performed in language and discourse; however, I argue that the significance of the Hungarian language (and its presumed singularity and unattainability) is especially great in the contemporary Hungarian context. First, Finno-Ugric Hungarian is in fact linguistically "fundamentally different from the usual or the average" in Europe, which allows individuals to draw parallels with specificity and authenticity. The historical debates on the origin of the language as either Finno-Ugric or Turkish also touched on 'Eastern/Western' and 'tribal/imperial' self-identifications (Gal 1991, 445). Second, the meaning and significance of this linguistic peculiarity in the post-socialist context reflects the ideas of a small nation left alone or even attacked by more powerful ones. For many in this situation, cultural (linguistic) products mean the last source of Hungarian national pride (see Imre 2009, 163, and 1.2, 4.1.), invoking another saying from the romantic

[41] I am indebted to Hadley Z. Renkin for this idea.

period, "Nation lives in its language". With this strong connection to ethnicity, Hungarian language accomplishes to symbolize culture, race, as well as (a long repressed) sexual desire.

Wondering about the immediate nature of the change in his sexual orientation, one might ask, how come then did Tibor, exclusively heterosexual at the time, simply agree to share a bed with another man without any suspicion? He himself gives a reason apart from being drunk: the shared experience of being soldiers in the military service, compulsory for men from the end of the Second World War in socialist Central-Eastern European countries (in Hungary, till 2004). It was a widely hated, feared, but also despised institution embodying both the authoritarianism and incompetence of the socialist regime. The military service (in Tibor's time, 18 months) thus served as a specific site for young male homosociality and solidarity (see Scholz 2004 on its significance in East German masculinity). Tibor's remark testifies that physical intimacy even in the form of sharing a bed was acceptable as a necessity. For me, this shows a similar operation of men's homosociality, especially in such sites for performing masculinity (Sedgwick 1985; Ward 2015) to women's friendship intimacy, together with shared knowledges about the erotic un-/possibilities transforming into sexuality of each (see also Chapter 7).

It might be just as striking that especially in the light of Tibor being unsuspecting, once in bed, he agreed to have sex with the man. Although this might sound as an exceptional experience, it is far from being the case. Even in my small sample, there is another interviewee, the Bulgarian-Hungarian Tony (m, 53), whose first same-sex encounter happened in a similar context, just before the fall of socialism in Bulgaria.[42] After a detailed, chronologically ordered "disappointment narrative" (Wilton 2004) about how his marriage with his wife went totally wrong, he arrives to the point when he got engaged with homosexuality. In his narrative, moving out of the marriage through homosexuality is closely

[42] His interview also went in Hungarian which he only learned after having moved to Hungary. That is why his language is characterized by a heavy accent, broken grammar, and ignorance about some words – which I try to illustrate in my English translation.

interwoven with his move into Hungary in the "bad period of changes ['*váltások*']" in Bulgaria. He says, "everything had disappeared from inside me, I didn't love her anymore, I didn't really want to be with her", so he grabbed every opportunity to stay away from home, including his aunt's proposal for a job in Hungary.

> I didn't know a word in Hungarian. And when we left, I couldn't speak at all, I started learning here everything, in September… I arrived in 1989, for a three-month long quick course, and we started working in November. I found a job, first I spoke in Russian.

At this point, his narration switches back to his marriage, as they were divorcing around these times. Mentioning another fight they had before his move to Hungary, Tony's storytelling introduces the thread of homosexuality.

> I told her, "be happy", end of story. This is it. And after this, in the meantime, it happened, we didn't live together anymore, one evening I went to visit my friends and we drank, we had fun. And I left to home, and... How old was I? Twenty...seven, twenty-eight years old. And a man accosted me with what the time was. And there, I told him. And he asked from me if I drank. I told him, "of course I drink [*laughs*], I'm in a drunken state right now, too. But not too much". If I feel like going with him, to his place, because he is alone, and would like to drink, but doesn't want to drink alone. His wife is I dunno where, there isn't anybody at home with him. I said, "why not?" **And I went with him, we drank, I don't know what happened, but next morning I woke up being next to him, naked [*smiles*]. This is how it happened. He woke up as well, and crawled on me and... I like it, and... this is how the whole thing happened. Well, afterwards, I don't know why but I liked it better with men**.

Similarly to Tibor's case, it was probably a combination of limited discourse on homosexuality and widespread norms of heterosexual marriage (with the wife mentioned) in state socialist times (on Bulgaria see Pisankaneva 2005), as well as the norm of male socializing through drinking, which enabled Tony and his partner to engage in some form of intimacy without explicit sexual content in the beginning. Tony later adds that when he moved to Hungary, he started dating men only. Starting a new life in Hungary coincided with the social-political transformations, and meant an opportunity for him to shift to homosexuality and leave his heterosexual life in Bulgaria. According to his formulation, "afterwards he liked it better with men", which makes this event a narrative turning point indeed, relegating heterosexuality to (socialist) Bulgaria and homosexuality to (post-socialist) Hungary. In the constitution of his experience, it apparently matters less that the two countries shared cultural-political similarities, with gay subculture and relations existing also in

Bulgaria,[43] and that he had quit neither heterosexuality nor the country right upon the first gay encounter (as both he and his partner maintained their heterosexual family life for a while).

The narrative constitution of Tony's experiences of sexuality in relation to the cross-border move also highlights the importance of language in subjectivity formation. He does identify as Hungarian, although not exclusively: "depending on which situation I am in. But in most cases I identify as Bulgarian"[44]. He is by far not as articulated as Tibor was, due to the fact that he is not speaking in his mother tongue, but class difference might also be at play. Even though Tony has a university degree from Bulgaria, his administrative job and his accommodation in a socialist prefab housing block in the outskirts of Budapest signals lower social prestige than Tibor's (see Fehérváry 2013). Equally importantly, he does not take part in the Hungarian LGBTQ movement at all; indeed, he and his right-winger Hungarian boyfriend express distance from the Pride and activism (see 3.2.2.) In this sense, Tony is also trapped in between competing national and LGBTQ discourses, like Juli (see 1.1.), but his frequent use of the term "happened" and "I don't know" indicates that he cannot put his impressions into words, neither does he strive for that.

The verbal conversations of the family conflicts beforehand were more accessible for him to translate to me in lively dialogues than a homosexual act and the feelings, for which he would need more sophisticated language, in terms of Hungarian knowledge as well as discourses about sex and homosexuality. For him, homosexuality is less of a story (Abelove 2003); his relationships with men are only sketched out. His conflictual heterosexual marriage can be told more easily simply because of the cultural panels available for it, uniting heteronormative family narratives with his native Bulgarian life. He basically built up a totally new life in Hungary, in a foreign context. These two states of outsiderness, sexual and national, are linked, also reinforcing each other, in the lack of explicit narrative lines.

[43] Indeed, the Bulgarian sea coast was a popular target of socialist gay tourism in the 1980s (Szulc 2017, 74).
[44] '*Bolgárnak vallom magam*', literally 'I avow myself (to be Bulgarian/gay)', where the term '*vall*' has religious connotations as it also denotes 'to confess'.

Hungarian language figures as the symbol of finding oneself in gayness both for Tibor as native language and for Tony who learned Hungarian in his new gay post-socialist life. In this chapter I also argued that experiencing same-sex sexuality is translated through metaphors of language learning in those lesbian narratives where it took a long time to understand same-sex desires as such in the socialist atmosphere of silence not offering possible clues.

4.3. New visibility of gayness: sexuality as foreign language

Although linking the shift from hetero- to homosexuality to the transition of 1989 forms part of a very powerful gay liberationist narrative in contemporary Hungary, other interviews prove that another form of the post-socialist condition of the country is a basis of reference in the 2000s. These narratives reflect the dominant Hungarian discursive framework (see Renkin 2009), embraced by many and critiqued by a few of my interviewees, where the country figures as catching up with Western progress (together with its gay rights discourses) and leaving Eastern backwardness (including homophobia) behind. In contrast to the previous state-socialist period, the language of homosexuality now appears as an external discourse of appellation due to the visibility of global LGBTQ discourses. Moreover, the newly emerging ex-gay discourse enables this time *heterosexuality* to be seen as a reaction to "gay propaganda" (Peebles 2004), in Hungary also as resistance to Western imperialism (Renkin 2009): a new language to learn.

In this section, I devote a longer analysis to Vera's gay and ex-gay path as it unfolds in her two interviews, with the telling changing meaning of "gay", which therefore I will also use in the following. In the first interview, she expressed her preference for the term '*meleg*' (gay) as a Hungarian one, with which she can thus better identify with, to terms like '*leszbikus*' which are linguistically of recent foreign origin. According to her second interview however, "gay" encompasses foreignness and inauthenticity which she distances herself from.

To note, I find it theoretically important to analyse the self-construction processes of people who report their sexuality to be shifting from same-sex attractions towards opposite-sex ones. Keeping the asymmetry of hetero- and homosexuality, as well as of men and women in the foreground (se 1.3.1.), this completes the picture about the ways separate sexual life phases are being formed. The reasons for switching from a certain form of homosexuality to a certain form of heterosexuality vary a lot, thus the divergent nature of bisexualities allows us to see how divergent heterosexualities are as well. In fact, the impact of the "programmed default" (Whisman 1996, 56) "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich 1980), no one can entirely escape (see 2.2.). As my interviews also testify, women, whose sexuality is more policed in general, can do so even less than men (Rich 1980, Wilton 2004).

The narrative differences between Vera's first and second interviews are noteworthy: in the second at the age of 41, she summarizes her previous gay life in a quick chronological overview in the first 7 minutes, and then moves on to the "extremely huge change" which has happened and is still happening to her. From that point on, the chronological storytelling stops and the interview is technically about argumentations about this process of. The defining moment was a discussion she had with her uncle who gave her a documentary about ex-gays to watch. This made her look for a counsellor with the help of whom she would be able to "strengthen her heterosexual potentials", plus, socialize more with Christians and less with gays. Vera's story proves that what means a turning point in attractions depends very much on the individual's sexual concepts, impacted by their belonging to communities like the family and the church (see more in the next chapter). Thus, a turning point is not necessarily a sexual encounter with an attractive person (as for Tibor or Tony), but it can also be discussions outside of the erotic which make the interviewee re-evaluate her past, present, and future. Vera reports that afterwards, her attractions did start to change, too.

In Vera's second interview, the vocabulary of the transition is that of psychology, which she does not explicitly connect to Christianity – in contrast to the US ex-gay narratives examined by Amy Peebles (2004, 58), where the Christian narrative was more dominant than the psychological one. I suspect that Vera intended this disconnection of (reparative) therapy and Christianity, in order to make a better, more professional impression on me, presuming my critical stance. Through speeches, lectures, and the circulation of materials, US Evangelical Christian discourses of ex-gay psychotherapy get mediated into Hungary, like other countries in Central-Eastern Europe (Grunt-Meyer and Chańska 2017) and beyond, often through informal Catholic or Ecumenical networks, with slight modifications.[45]

Global travel thus equally characterizes gay and anti-gay discourses, even though more veiled through Hungarian nationalism in the case of the latter. Vera mentions that she visited a counsellor (and one of her former ex-gay clients) in France, which proves that she had access to many channels of the international ex-gay discourse, due to her Catholic networks, her education that included foreign languages, as well as her wealth affording abroad visits. Consequently, in this second interview, she sees her past through another lens. She mentions the new global right's term "gay propaganda" when asserting again the socialist silence on homosexuality – this time, not as in opposition to progressive, but a too pushy, gay visibility.

> **Back then there wasn't so much an influencing power**, because there weren't gays in our environment, in my environment, or there weren't gays *according to my knowledge*, there wasn't such a gay community, **there wasn't gay propaganda**, you couldn't hear about such things. (Vera 2, 41)

Also, in this reverse narrative which Vera employs, the ex-gay discourse, including reparative therapy, appears as something which has been silenced and repressed: "I feel sorry for those who do not hear about it, because I think it is not advertised enough". In this framework,

[45] During my background research, I learnt about connections between Hungarian churches, psychotherapists, and ex-gay activities, including from sites like exmeleg.info.hu (the term '*exmeleg'* ('ex-gay'), is not common at all in Hungarian, confirming its being English import). In order to protect confidentiality, I will not reference communities or individuals by name here.

"advertisement" is a positive activity for raising awareness, put in contrast with "propaganda". After the interview, she tells me about her plan to go to schools and talk about her life story just as the LGBTQ program '*Melegség és Megismerés*' (see Barát 2008) does. Having found a language, both in its abstract and literal sense, made Vera more comfortable with her changing sexuality, the therapy provided her with an adequate discourse (and also space and time to feel her transition authentic). Charlotte Linde calls expert theories like psychoanalysis, religion, or feminism as "coherence systems", the popular versions of which enable people to tell their life stories as meaningful and logical units (1993, 18). Trying to live as a gay Catholic, Vera had not found such a system due to Hungarian binary discourses as I outlined above; but as an ex-gay Christian, she has. The latter group in Peebles' US research emphasizes the importance of finding a vocabulary with which they can get a grasp on their experiences (Peebles 2004, 53). Vera also expresses the relief when given names for things she ambiguously felt: "I did know certain things about myself, I just didn't know the *technici termini* for them." She has found the language of transition in reparative therapy's discourse, therefore in the second interview she can perform the ability to speak. As Peebles puts it: "the repeated telling or »performing« of the conversion narrative brought about an efficacious and continued realization of the claimed conversion itself" (2004, 20, see also 2.4.1.). Further, the significance of language is also shown by Vera's analogy between the processes of language learning and becoming heterosexual, drawn in order to illustrate her argument convincingly to me (and hence to an imagined gay-friendly audience).

> **But this isn't a visible process, so. You know I teach language. People proceed very slowly.** But they always make progress, it's just a process. So let's say I recall that someone came here two years ago from the zero, and now they speak the language, then I say wow, that's super. But if I watch from class to class, from class to class I can't see it. (Vera 2, 41)

The second account of language learning in the same interview starts off from an argument with gay friends who rejected Vera's ideas on the mutability of homosexuality,

using the discourse of homophobia as backwardness (Renkin 2009) visible in the reference to earlier centuries, implying the necessity of "catching up" with progressive discourses.

> I talked about it in friendships, so to people whom I loved and whom I trusted more. They laughed at me a little bit. Like [*on lower pitch*] "Ah, come on! Stop kidding, **where do you live, in the 18th century? Everyone already knows that this is healthy** and so." (…) It doesn't matter at all if it's genetically determ… or not. We have an inclination. It might be an inclination that I'm becoming grey. So what? There must be such inclinations then. So it might be that, and it might be strong in a person. **Now if I say that someone can learn a language with much more difficulty, and others much more easily. But it's still possible that for whom it's difficult, they will also learn a foreign language and speak it relatively well. So they have eyes, a mouth, they can write with their hands and hear the texts with their ears. They will be able to learn, they aren't stupid.** Maybe it's not, it's easier for one and more difficult for the other, because one is, I dunno, inclined more to this, and the other to that. But I don't think that we are then *bekövesedve* ['*set in stone' or 'petrified'*] in that situation.

The language analogy in here serves as a justification for the view on heterosexuality as something which is not only mutable, but which can be consciously changed, arguing for the outside, intentional influences on sexual desires. In contrast to Vera's uncertainties about her sexuality in the first interview, outlined in the previous section, 'language' operates as a coherent analogy in the second. This signals Vera's shift in thinking about sexuality; with language learning also being a positive, productive, progressive concept, focusing more on what one is able to *do* (to become heterosexual, in this case). In this image, desires simply lose significance.

We remember that Tibor also used the language analogy – although it is a widespread analogy, it is probably related to both of them being intellectuals trained in the humanities. Interestingly, his use with its focus on *native language* versus a learnt one implied the innateness of desire: the language metaphor enables Tibor and Vera to emphasize different things, *innateness* and *learning*, respectively. Vera, proving her argument about the insignificance of desires, is not concerned about differentiating between learning a foreign language and one's native language. This was the primary focus for Tibor, in whose analogy however, the mother's tongue appears as coming from inside as an ethnic trait, totally detached from learning processes. Vera's omission of the specificity of the native Hungarian language is especially striking in light of her attachment to Christian, *therefore* right-wing,

therefore nationalistic discourses and communities, whereas Tibor identifies as leftist (including non-nationalistic) (see these links in 1.2.). But in Vera's case, the internationality of Christian (including ex-gay) discourses posits her in an international network. Therefore, through the examination of the language of the interviews we can better see the complexity of inter-/national belongings and their relation to sexuality, which has been shown in the anthropological work on Hungarian sexualities by Renkin (2007a, b, c; 2015).

The "born this way" or genetic argument, which Vera heard from gay friends – and what her own earlier food analogy and Tibor's language analogy referred to –, fails to be convincing for her, even if she acknowledges the existence of homosexual desires as "inclination". The self-knowledge work she is pursuing in reparative therapy offers her psychological means, including the acknowledgement of her childhood wounds from an abusive father. Apparently, she did not get this from celebratory gay discourses, which probably fear linking trauma to lesbianism (see Muñoz 1999; Cvetkovich 2003; Love 2009).

To counterpoint the older generation's experiences with someone younger, who realized her homosexual desires in the 2000s, let me briefly discuss Dorottya's (40, f) story, which demonstrates the visibility of homophobia and the trivialization of women's intimacy provides a context similar to state socialism, in which it is hard for women to be able to formulate their same-sex desires (see Woodcock 2004). Dorottya's account is nested in the same post-socialist global order as Vera's, with the new visibility of LGBTQ identities.

Dorottya's current (first lesbian) relationship with Livi guides the whole interview from the very first sentence. In this sense, there is not even a turning point in her narrative, since her disappointing experiences in heterosexual relationships are all embedded in and interwoven with the Livi-story. She starts the interview with "Well, in fact, my current partner, Livi is my first lesbian relationship, and I hope she is the last one, too", then, in a few

sentences, she summarizes her heterosexual marriage with two children, as well as a few men after that in the 1990s.

> The last guy before Livi, he asked me once, and that was the point when I was really stunned, he's like, "hey you, why are you watching women in the street?". And I didn't even notice till then. And then I became aware that I do, might really watch women, in fact.

Some women were told to be interested in women before they would have formulated it in themselves. This is not an isolated life experience: some of Stella's interviewees went through the same in Soviet Russia (2015, 42-43), which suggests this being a pattern in late socialist-early post-socialist countries. A similar second step in the 2000s, again upon a friend's comment, was necessary for Dorottya to be able to identify her desires towards a specific woman.

> And one of my friends told me the day after [a party], that **hey, is Livi lesbian? [*smiles*] I'm like, "are you stupid? of course not, she's married!" And so. But "yes, yes, Livi likes you". I'm like, "what are you talking about?" Well [I felt] very, very uncomfortable. I hadn't even thought, and not even. And then that she said this, this was also... and then I started watching our relationship. And then, and then this way I realized that... this is mutual.** Then... I dunno, then I don't even know, it was taking shape very-very slowly, because we were very... inhibited, because we didn't have any experience of this kind, and I also totally panicked after the first such... kissing, like my Lord, what's gonna happen now?!

Similarly to Paula, Dorottya tells a gradual process till she could come out to herself. Also, she faced a similar difficulty in proceeding on the physical level inside the relationship as well – in striking contrast with Tony's and Tibor's sudden, right away erotic homosexual experiences. Retrospectively though, Dorottya can identify thoughts back from her childhood as signs of her interest in women. But similarly to Tibor, she acknowledges the homophobia of her family, tangible in regular name-calling of "fags" (with the verb '*buzizik*'), as the main reason why

> **it couldn't occur as an alternative** that I could even live like that if I wanted. So **if such a concrete situation hadn't come**, I think I wouldn't... I dunno, of course, how life goes or would have gone, but I don't think I would have searched, just by myself.

Interestingly, homosexuality was not totally absent; she adds that she could see girls kissing in high school whom she envied. Yet, these phenomena were either rendered insignificant or negatively marked for her, which resulted in a similar unintelligibility of alternatives to

Paula's. Homosexuality for her was not an option or an alternative at all, to the extent that it took her a long time and others' reflective remarks to be aware of her feelings *and behaviour* (looking at women), and be able to interpret them in terms of attraction. Towards the end of the interview, she touches again upon why she would not date a man any more, even if she cannot claim that every man is as problematic as her husband was.

> There was a guy, already after my divorce, who even wanted to marry me [*laughs*], but then. He was **a dentist from Cyprus, and with him the same, you know, I was supposed to completely subordinate myself, and there it was even more difficult due to cultural differences.** But his parents were visiting, and then walking in Váci utca looked like the following: the father and Tom led the way, and behind them I and his mother, lagging behind. And we weren't allowed to catch up, because there this won't [work]. And I fucking didn't like this. And then, as we were moving into the relationship, more and more such hierarchical things emerged, which I didn't like at all. I think, as I'm originally not so self-subordinating, few men would tolerate that, I think.

The cultural difference Dorottya is talking about here, carefully avoiding xenophobic statements, enables her to formulate her stance towards patriarchy and sexism she had experienced in her heterosexual relationships, removed from the concrete example of her husband as the main generator of her disappointment narrative (Wilton 1994). Instead of social differences between political systems, which are not so much at hand for her as they were for the stories on around 1989, her narrative employs cultural difference between East and West. A re-strengthening "nesting orientalist" (Bakić-Hayden, 1995) discourse in Hungary of the 2000s, it positions Central-Eastern Europe at times as Western or genuinely European (Gal 1991; Todorova 1997; Böröcz 2006; Renkin 2009; Gagyi 2012). Cultural difference is illustrative of Dorottya's experiences of gender difference and sexual shift. In this framework, Cyprus with an either Greek Orthodox or Muslim religious culture, definitely represents east of Hungary. It stands for heterosexuality in the frame of "subordinating, hierarchical" gender roles which she no longer can identify with. To illuminate her preference to be on equal terms, she uses the terms "lagging behind" and "catching up" literally for the physical space in Budapest downtown, which are figuratively characteristic of post-socialist discourses on cultural-economic differences (2.4.2.).

Quitting patriarchal relationships which subordinate women appear in many women's narratives as contributing to their preference for women, to which my analysis in each chapter refers to (see also Turai 2010). Finally however in this section, I discuss a man, Máté (43), because the narrative turning point in his relationship choices echoes Dorottya's conceptualization of un-/equal gender roles on the East-West scale. The two interviews show what I elaborate on in Chapter 2: post-socialist countries figure both as progressive West and backward East, depending on the other element of comparison (Cyprus or Scandinavia, respectively). Importantly, although he speaks from the perspective of a different-sex relationship, his interpretation of Hungary's 'transitions' is the opposite of Vera's. His decision to quit unequal partnerships for good relies very much on his understanding of Hungary as patriarchal, in contrast to more progressive Western European ones. This is why he does not want to completely identify as a man (see 3.2.1.), according to Hungarian masculinity. In his narrative identity then, regional and national differences appear as formative in gender, completing his sexual trajectory which had followed a gay path till he became interested in women as well. Similarly to István (38), Máté and his woman friend from LGBTQ circles became partners (see more in 5.3.). Reasoning about the connection between his gender and sexuality identities, he explicitly situates his choices in contemporary Hungarian social relations.

> **Hungarian society still has this traditional male role**, I think, or at least it is a very few who doesn't think like that way. That's another question that **if, let's say, I was in Scandinavia, then there this attitude may be different, and there I might fit in the male role, so. Actually, this is such a [Hungarian] peculiarity. Although I think that the whole Central Europe is a bloc, uniform and the like**. (…) First I thought, "all right, I'm then bisexual". Actually, I've always had a problem with identifying as a man. Because **I don't bear those traits which, I'm stressing, which the Hungarian society thinks as of men**. (…) Probably, now I wouldn't [look for] a man, because he would be too dominant, therefore I think this is the key in this issue of whom I would date. So it doesn't matter if that person is a man or a woman, the point is that they shouldn't be dominant, and shouldn't be self-subordinating either.

Máté thus concludes that it is dominance that defines masculinity roles in Hungary, and he partly lacks traditional masculinity traits, partly rejects them. To use Muñoz's (1999)

terminology, his counter-identification with masculinity links to what he sees as typical to Hungary and the CEE region. Máté's logic highlights how much contemporary nationalistic Hungarian discourses rely on normative gender hierarchies, which LGBTQ discourses partly challenge, partly reproduce (Renkin 2007a,b,c; Imre 2009). As Máté says, the attention to partnership equality will determine his relationship choices, and this is why he "wouldn't look for a man" anymore. Interestingly then, his narrative performs a turning point towards different-sex relationships, even critiquing gay relationships, which makes his life trajectory seemingly similar to Vera's, but his feminist progress narrative is very different. At another place in the interview, Máté mentions the 1980s in Hungary as the site of his socialization for rigid hierarchical gender roles.

> These man-woman divisions (…), well, I was socialized in this. Starting from 1980, it was completely obvious. So back then I didn't even *think* about the possibility that why should we. **I didn't even know feminism and everything, so nothing pointed at the direction that I should question this**. Even if it's about two men.

The equality criterion thus also concerns gay relationships, as he had experienced a "dominant-subordinated" pattern in his former same-sex relationships. In contrast to Vera's idealization of heterosexuality, Máté attributes this to a general sexist socialization. Both a temporal and a spatial distinction play out in his narrative, mapping onto each other (2.4.1.), contrasting the 1980s with today, and Hungary (and the "whole Central Europe") with Scandinavia. His previous relationships with rigid oppositional gender roles stand in contrast with the present of his interview; the gender shift therefore embraces a feminist 'transition'. With the formulation about feminism "and everything", he refers to what I as an assumed insider could fill in (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003, 315). Such narrative elements signal that his feminist circles represent a small, imagined Scandinavia "nested" inside Hungary.

The narratives I quoted in this section reflect global and local sexuality discourses in Hungary of the 2000s, where gay rights discourse has gained voice and visibility, which also reinforced global differentiations between a progressive West and backward, homophobic

East (Renkin 2009). People in Hungary with serial sexual biographies interpret the transformations of their desires in this framework. The aspiration for a self-image as Western, in contrast to other Others (see Bakić-Hayden 1995, Buchowski 2006, Gagyi 2012 in 2.4.2) characterized all the narratives I discussed in the previous section and most in the present one as well. This narrative of gay emancipation gets questioned in two ways: on the one hand, Máté critiques gay lifestyle for reproducing sexist patterns and instead, identifies (Western) feminism as bringing the turning point in his love life. On the other hand, Vera's second interview refers to heteronormativity as a resistance to new Western semi-colonializing forces. Her narrative represents the discontents playing out in Central-Eastern Europe not towards domestic political regimes but towards the imperial power of Western institutions.

4.4. Conclusion

Analyzing the above Hungarian biographies where either homosexual or heterosexual attractions are narrated as closed off after a point, I have argued that these narrative constructions of "two phases" employ the national-political framework of the post-socialist condition of Central-Eastern Europe. The interview accounts often locate homosexual turning points in the time of the social transformations of 1989, even if they happened earlier or later, or even through a longer period of time. This shows how much same-sex attractions are understood in the framework of gay liberation narratives, applied on the specific Hungarian context with the region's historical turning points. In this conceptualization of experience, homosexuality is associated with democracy, capitalism, and Western-led progress. Interestingly however, when my respondents compared the discovery of their same-sex attractions to processes of finding a language, some employed an analogy between their native Hungarian and their gayness. This illuminates how (same-sex) sexuality is conceptualized as both the authentic inner truth, oppressed by external political forces (of Soviet socialism), consequently even ethnic-national (see Nadkarni 2010) – and also as

something supported, stimulated, or even pushed from outside, notably by Western capitalist discourses (Renkin 2007c, 2009).

The ambiguity of how Hungarians with bisexual biographies relate to Western-led global capitalist discourses is even more visible in those interviews which connect the changes in their "sexual orientation" not to the regime change of 1989, as these two did not coincide, but to the post-socialist condition of the 2000s. The linguistic means these respondents employ are less framed in temporal dichotomies. Rather, they are framed in the geospatial dichotomies of contemporary inter-/national political discourses with their temporal distinctions, where Hungary figures as both subordinated to global-Western influences and as itself Western compared to more Eastern cultures (see Gal 1991; Wolff 1994; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Chari and Verdery 2009; and 2.4.3.). These accounts highlight the visibility of the international gay discourse and its tensions with new global trends of repatriarchalization. Some women report being labelled as lesbian even before they themselves would have realized it. However, for Vera (2 41, f) who seeks to "become heterosexual", such a strengthening of the global LGBTQ discourse appears as dominating "gay propaganda", a means by which (foreign) society displays influence, silencing other voices. In all cases then, the shifts in sexual attraction are interpreted as influenced by international political forces and their dynamics; through metaphors of language, analogies are drawn between transitions of sexual and Central-Eastern European national histories. Furthermore, through the role that the language analogy plays in affective gay and ex-gay narratives, I could show the ambivalences around both essentialist LGBT *and* reparative constructivist arguments. Vera's case proves the general lack of discourses which would override the allegedly exclusionary ideas of innateness and homophobia (see Halley 1994; Whisman 1996).

The investigation of the language metaphor has led me to argue about language as a useful analytical tool in sexuality studies. First, the analogy of language stand out as a frequently used tool with which individuals make sense of the separation of hetero- and homosexual desires, either as a proof for innateness or for humans' learning capabilities. With the analogies they use (decoding signs for Paula, recognizing a native speaker for Tibor, as well as a ban on speech in Vera's first interview), my interviewees seek to explain the lack of their homosexual desires during state socialism, for which the image of "silence" proved helpful. Second, I suggested that the language metaphor particularly enables us to see the specificity of Hungary within the Central-European region through the idea of the Hungarian language as small, unique, non-learnable, without related neighbouring languages. Ultimately then, I argued, on the meta-level, language as a category of analysis illuminates the performative-affective processes of the constitution of sexuality, as shaping and shaped by national-political regimes (see Ahmed 2004a,b and Puar 2007 in 2.3.). In my respondents' quest for meaning in (re)interpreting and translating "signs", certain discourses (of LGBTQ; mental disease; Christianity; reparative therapy) provided them names and definitions. With these, they could not only express but also constitute those very desires as affective experiences (see 2.3., e.g., Butler 1993; Tiefer 1995; Cvetkovich 2003; Cameron and Kulick 2003; Ward 2015). I thus argue that the language analogy allows us to think about language as a general, theoretical framework for conceptualizing sexual desire and its changes, see Boellstorff's (2005, 6) metaphor in 2.2. about sexuality and language as cultural structures which constrain as well as produce agency.

Questions of silence, language, and the un-/intelligibility of same-sex desires in biographical bisexuality with two phases, I stress, also reflect age and gender differences. Note the striking contrast between Tibor, who unprecedentedly engaged in sex with a man and quit heterosexuality right after that, and the women who were having a hard and long time

figuring out and acting upon their homosexual desires. The un/intelligibility of certain forms of homosexual relations in socialism was strongly connected to social norms, including forms of friendships, and economic opportunities which put women in disadvantaged positions (Sedgwick 1985; Stella 2015). This explains why in my sample serial bisexuality characterizes more the older generation, in contrast to the young women who entertain the idea of same-sex encounters earlier (even if also in heteronormative terms, see Chapter 7). That Tibor would align his life trajectory with bisexuality in some ways, despite a strong gay identification, gives legitimation to my theoretically informed methodological choice of the descriptive term 'bisexual' including "serial monosexuality" (see 1.3.1. and 3.2.1. specifically). My analysis therefore illustrates the post-structuralist argument (see Hemmings 2002 esp. in 2.2.) that bisexuality is not necessarily about persistent parallel attractions, but it is history, expressing the temporality of one's sexual self. As such, it clashes and easily gets in tension with current self-identity,[46] most strikingly in the "monosexual" cases discussed in this chapter. Yet, my respondents performed narrative strategies with which these clashes can be smoothened: by the employment of 'transition' as tying together sexual and social-political shifts, or even Tibor's embracing attitude to the bisexual label. Beyond pointing out that some people experience their bisexual attractions serially, just as others in threesomes, I argue that more importantly, these images of bisexuality, and the questioning/delegitimization they entail, play a central role in how people conceptualize their sexual attractions. Further, these personal stories also contribute to ideas of transition in both sexual and social-political terms.

Consequently, my analysis highlights that experiencing sexuality and its changes is embedded in the ways people experience national politics and history as transitory. The post-socialist condition sketched out here plays out in all the upcoming chapters, not as an explicit parallel with the changes of "sexual orientation", but as informing ambiguous cultural

[46] I thank Christine Klapeer for the articulation of this idea. See also Hemmings 2002, 24.

belongings in communities, private spaces, and gendered bodies. In the following chapter, I show another form of temporal experience of serial biographical bisexuality, in which alternating sexual attractions are interpreted through the alternating belonging to heteronormative, LGBTQ, and progressive straight communities in Hungary.

5. Chapter. Alternating currents of sexual attraction and community belonging

5.1. Introduction: communities of sexual belonging and the question of identification

> In the Christian circles ['*közegek*'], when I was looking for a community ['*közösség*'] again (...), I looked up this [Catholic] person with whom I used to stay in touch. So she knew who I was. I reached out to her, saying that I would need some help. Help in the sense that I told her the whole thing: **I'm gay, I used to live in a gay milieu ['*közeg*'], and now I would like to break up with the gay milieu ['*közeg*'] in the sense that I don't want to go to such circles of friends ['*baráti körök'*] any more. So I would need a new community** ['*közösség*'], and I need her help. (Vera2, 41, f)

Describing her relation to gay and Christian communities, Vera employs an almost romantic vocabulary with phrases like "breaking up" and "looking for a new one". These signal the significance of community belonging in the narrative construction of alternating sexual attractions, which is the focus of this chapter. In the previous chapter I showed that for Vera, the transition from homo- to heterosexuality is framed within the discursive field about post-socialist Hungary as ruled by Western-led globalisation, including the gay rights discourse, against a more authentic heterosexuality represented by national Catholic Christianity. In the quote above, a further dimension of this division appears, namely at the level of group communities. We can also recall Juli's (39, f) account from Chapter 1, who talked about her frustration with the binary cultural-political division of Hungarian society, manifesting as a tension between her "cliques": her gay middle-class, liberal-leftist friends in Budapest on the one hand, and her conservative heteronormative family in the countryside on the other, both press her to make up her mind.

I link this chapter to the dissertation's main research questions and ask what these Hungarian bisexual biographies reveal about the connection of sexual trajectories to ideas about a transitional society (which I outlined in Chapter 1): Hungary as oscillating between East and West as two geopolitical poles and two ideological systems. To establish a further

connection between sexual and social 'transitions', I will discuss how my respondents locate their alternating sexualities within the frame of group belongings in the ideologically divided communities of an ideologically divided Hungary. As bisexual research reveals (2.2.), many people with alternating sexualities experience pressure to choose between spaces (and pick an adequate identity label) according to their changing desires. In their biographical research, Kemler *et al*. (2012) found that the separation of same-sex and opposite-sex relations in space is the main strategy with which people manage their bisexuality. However, in their framing separate spaces appear only as a solution to previously given attractions. In contrast, I will argue that these community belongings also structure the experiences of desire. Using Sara Ahmed's (2006) term, group narratives and identities "orient" the ways my respondents interpret their own sexual interests. I approach separate spaces as sites where the performative production of desires takes place, through their initiation or through "orienting" toward them (see Certeau 1984; Ahmed 2006; Ward 2015 and 2.3.).

In the interview accounts to be analyzed, the temporal separation of attractions towards women and men entails a spatial separation, and the influence of gay and straight communities on the formation of desires is acknowledged ("I would like to break up with the gay milieu"). Radica Hura (2016, 58-59) discusses the difficulty of alternating relations (living for three months as gay, for another three months as straight) as the result of a compromise that many undertake due to biphobic expectations of monosexuality in contemporary Serbia, accompanied by intensified heteronormativity and conflicts around sexual and gender roles. Hungary shares a similar post-socialist process of re-patriarchalization and sexual emancipation from the '90s onward, during which both the religious and the LGBTQ discourses strengthened thereby forming the bases of oppositional political-cultural fractions (see Kašić 2005; Renkin 2009; Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011, and 1.2., 2.4.3). Consequently, the relation between sexual categories and practices in Hungary is

structured according to group belonging either to heteronormative (politically conservative, religious or countryside) spaces, or to LGBTQ and gay-friendly straight spaces. It is the capital, Budapest where the latter are the most accessible, especially for younger middle-class men. In order to bridge these political gaps, small informal Christian LGBTQ communities have been operating since 1996 (see Renkin 2007a). However, there are no explicitly bisexual public-social spaces.

The term which my interviewees mostly use is '*közeg*', best translatable with 'milieu' or 'environment', which refers to the people, spaces, and discourses that surround a person's everyday moves. According to my interviewees' usage of these terms, '*közeg*' also implies a wider circle in contrast to the use of 'community' ('*közösség*'), as in Young (2004) where everyone knows everyone and they maintain a regular personal contact in specific spaces like church buildings, bars, or home parties. The interview narratives I analyse suggest that group belonging shapes sexual experiences in more complex ways than individuals following or rejecting its rules. As '*közeg*' literally means 'medium', I argue for understanding mediation between the person and the group not as a one-way "communication" of the ideas and impacts of the group onto the person's sexual subjectivity (see Derrida 1982). Rather, in Certeau's (1984) sense of performativity, the environment is created by the practices of its members, who navigate their lives inside its frames employing various temporal tactics. Community belonging is continuously performed through the individuals' repeated acts: going to certain places, talking to certain people, dressing up in a way (on its connections to Hungarian lesbian community see Béres-Deák 2007). Such everyday movements of subjects, including the invocation of their group belonging, further shape the systematic frames of the group, including how sexuality is represented in it.

I will argue that being affected by desires, the sense of community belonging also affects desires in ways which show the affective social construction of sexual subjectivity

through temporality (see Cvetkovich 2003). I will show that relegating their attractions to separate realms of Hungarian communities helps my interviewees make sense of the alternating feature of their bisexual desires. This way, the tensions of the constant transition they experience with regards to their sexual attractions get narratively both reinforced and reconciled through their similarly transitional belonging to communities. At the same time, I argue, this demonstrates how desires are (per)formed in interaction with the specific social context, embodied in a division of sexual spaces that reflect post-socialist Hungarian discourses.

Before moving to the analyses of these communities, I briefly address the ways alternating attractions raise the question of (self-)identification, and how deeply is sexual identity rooted in groups to which my interviewees belong in contemporary Budapest. Alternating experiences can be traced when they concern practice: sexual behaviour and relationships. The concept of alternation contains the absence of notions of parallels (which dominate the next two chapters) by drawing a line between desires towards women and men as separate periods in the life course. On the other hand, it also contains experiences of return of previous attractions (in contrast to the finalized "orientations" discussed in the previous chapter). The presence of these two sides thus requires from the interviewees an understanding of their sexual selves as both continuously transforming and persistently static through time, including its past as a possible present or future (see Hemmings 2002; Boellstorff 2007). Although it bears traces of inauthenticity due to the fluctuation of desire, "alternating connection" is also an experience often cast as "authentic" bisexuality, defined in terms of identity, romance, and monogamy (see Hemmings 2002 in Chapter 2). This is reflected in Tibor's (51) mother's understanding of bisexuality as usually equal to alternating connection with men and women:

> My mum was right, I am **bi in the sense** that in the first part of my life only women… She added, **that the way others do it is once this, once that, alternating ['*váltogatva*'] the two.**

At the same time, proving the ambiguous representations of bisexuality, this is an image of sexuality hardest to imagine for many, including prominent figures of the Hungarian LGBTQ community as we saw in 1.2., and including my own interviewees with simultaneous bisexual attractions:

> **I can't really imagine that someone is able to** fall in love once with a woman, they would date or be together for, say, two years, and then this person **shifts ['*vált*'] and falls in love with** a man, being with him, and then falls in love again with a woman, so that I can't imagine. (Kitti, f, 21)

In this understanding, the proper subject is characterized by constancy in time, also in regard to their relationships with members of one gender, following the logic of the heterosexual matrix (Butler 1990; Hemmings 2002). Indeed, some of my interviewees like Juli (39, f) find ways to re-think such split and 'transitional' subjectivity as neutral or even positive. Perhaps the same led authors such as Boellstorff (2007) to consider alternating desires ultimately queer. Referring to the notion of time in ancient Greece as the alternation between masculinity and femininity, Boellstorff characterizes queer time by "oscillating in time, like alternating current in an electric wire" (2007, 28; see 2.4.), using the electric metaphor of this chapter. Talking about the return of past desires in the interviews suggests that retrospectively, what used to count as an "exception", actually builds into the respondents' sense of self in the longer run. As I argued in 2.4., oscillation characterizes both alternating bisexualities as a form of sexual fluidity, as well as post-socialist countries; as a feature of 'transition', it appears on the level of communities as well.

I identify two reasons why the question of sexual identity is most prominent in these narratives of alternation, compared to biographical bisexualities which the other chapters focus on. First, the constellation of past and present attractions in a continuously transforming self often emerges in biographies as a kind of incoherency, which the respondent feels questionable and therefore addresses through narrative explanation (Linde 1993). In my sample, stories about alternating belonging to binary spheres, either as naturally occurring or

as something the person initiates, serve as such narrative explanation. Second, as I discussed in the theoretical Chapter 2 (Hall 1996; Brubaker and Cooper 2000), identification is a process, continuously carried out by the individuals themselves and by others about them in mutual interaction. Therefore, groups and communities are eminent sites for the creation, reproduction, as well as policing of identities (Esterberg 1993, Plummer 1997). Sexual identity also shapes sexual practice, as it is consequential to the articulation of desire, including which spaces one opts to go to meet others (see Bucholtz and Hall 2004, 507; Beaulieu-Prévost 2017). This chapter thus underlines the significance of identity categories in their relation to sexual practice, following the critics of the separation of these two domains of sexuality (see the discussion in 2.2. and 2.3., and on the Hungarian context, Barát 2008). I will nevertheless argue that for many people with alternating bisexuality, sexual identity categories are not experienced as relevant, adequate, or comfortable.

My interviews demonstrate how troubling the return of same-sex attractions can be for people regardless of their social positions: whether with a strict Catholic family background (Péter, Vera) or being embedded in alternative artist groups (Anna, Viktor), they had to face similar questions of inauthenticity and instability by themselves and from their environments. Perplexed by questions of sexual identity, they consider bisexuality a dilemma, compared to the ease of other interviewees whose desires do not alternate (see Chapter 7). Hura (2016) proposes bisexual self-identification as a solution to the tension of dual sexual belonging in such a polarized context. However, for most of my interviewees, that is not sufficient. As Blumstein and Schwartz assert (1976a), many women identify according to the gender of their actual partner, only embracing a bisexual identity when single. Juli (39) states: "if I live together with someone and respect that person, then I will anyway be one-sexual, the one of that person".[47] These perplexed respondents do not feel completely part of LGBTQ circles,

[47] In Dioram's (32, f) case, this even concern gender identification (see Pennington 2009): "If I'm partnered, then I [consider myself a woman or a man] according to the gender of that person. I'm telling you, next to a man my

which partly stems from the implication of fixed identities to which they cannot fully relate to.

As many queer scholars of sexuality have shown, the interpretation of sexual fluidity depends on group ideologies (see 2.2. and Sedgwick 1990; Rubin 1984; Ward 2015). In the Hungarian context, non-normative sexualities are identified as Western, and more specifically, sexual fluidity as recently coming from Western popular media culture, which entails the characterization of youth's same-sex sexuality as inauthentic, exceptional and foreign (see also Chapter 7). This, I argue, specifies sexual meanings as interrelated with ideas about the country's 'transitional' position as catching up with the West (on Hungary see Renkin 2007a, on Russia Baer 2002). My following analyses show that these debates are reproduced in the relation between these divided community spheres and people with alternating sexualities. 5.2. and 5.3. address heteronormative and LGBTQ spaces as formative of feelings of sexual attraction. In 5.4., I discuss permissive, mostly straight spaces like Budapest university communities, which encourage certain forms of homosexuality, while problematize some others, including bisexual and non-binary categorizations. Eventually, in these biographies, 'transition' as vacillations (2.4.3.) between wo-/men, homo-/heterosexuality, are interpreted together with vacillations between straight and LGBTQ communities – which themselves get constituted through their positioning in post-socialist inter-/national divisions described in the previous chapter.

5.2. Heteronormative (Catholic) spaces

Oftentimes, as my interviews also prove, there are no specific heterosexual spaces, as heteronormativity permeates all social institutions (see Rich 1984; Warner 1993; Bourdieu 2001). That is why its shaping power becomes mostly visible for my interviewees in the context of the family, as Juli's quote in 1.1. has shown; and for religious people, as Vera's

feminine qualities come out more." As she had a primary male partner at the time of both interviews, I refer to her by female pronouns.

quotes demonstrate, in the context of the (Catholic) Church. For many, obviously, same-sex desires emerged despite of institutional heteronormativity, or even as owing to its pressures, as several parts in the dissertation address such experiences (especially in the previous chapter but also in 6.2., 6.3., 7.3.). In this section however, I only examine how certain desires in alternating bisexuality are experienced as encouraged by heteronormative communities in Hungary.

Heteronormative groups can appear as enabling heterosexual desires to take shape amongst the specific constellation of Hungarian competing discourses of sexuality. In post-socialism, both LGBTQ and Christian communities began to flourish rapidly, in opposition to the (homophobic and atheist) state socialist era hindering civil collectives (see Erős 1994), but also as a compensation for some of the lost collective belongings which the era had in effect provided (see Fehérváry 2013). Post-socialist LGBTQ and Christian discourses usually stand in opposition to each other as inter/-national, as anti-/capitalist, or urban/rural. However, according to the logic Renkin (2007a,b,c) identifies, Hungarian LGBTQ activism presents itself as embedded in both international as well as national traditions and values. Since certain Christian agendas also receive Russian, Western-European or US support, the two sides also happen to accuse each other of inauthenticity and foreign back-up, which I touched upon in 4.3. These elements are all important building blocs in my interviewees' sense of alternating sexual transitions vis-á-vis heteronormative spaces.

Christian discourses are also familial discourses; the two appear together in the interviews as communities of heteronormativity. Péter (30, m), a practicing Catholic, had quit homosexuality when he was a teenager in the '90s due to the pressure from his religious family. The very start of his interview is characterized by the dilemma of self-identification vis-á-vis the return of homosexual desires. Upon the strong rejection of his homosexuality as "unnatural" by the "deeply religious" family, he says: "to some extent I accepted and believed

that yes, one had to get rid of this and this wasn't natural. And this is also why a partnership evolved between me and a woman." Péter's entire interview is characterized by the uncertainty about his feelings and acts, but this heterosexual relationship is so significant for him that he does not deny the authenticity of his feelings towards his female partner in the 10 years from the start of the relationship until the time of the interview. In this sense, the familial heteronormative milieu has brought something into his life, which he does not entirely reject even when his "homosexual desires have broken onto the surface again" after a few years into the relationship. The return of previous same-sex desires, as well as their co-existence with his heterosexual partnership love is what troubles him because these keep him in a sense of constant transition. As I will discuss more in detail in Chapter 6, the complex sequence of his desires and relationships is what he captures in his references to the bisexual label throughout the interview.

What is even more intriguing is that Vera's two interviews (38, 41) present Christianity less as a discursive vehicle mediating the heteronormative productive pressure of the family, but more as actual communities; a circle of friends with regular shared practices beyond family ties. Her opening quote suggests that she presents her journey towards heterosexuality as a mostly conscious transitional process, including her involvement in straight Catholic "Christian circles and community", and keeping distance from gay groups and interactions.

> I used to live in a gay milieu ['*közeg*'], and now I would like to break up with the gay milieu in the sense that I don't want to go to such circles of friends [*'baráti körök'*], so I would need a new community. (Vera 2, 41)

In this section I will show that those who employ less rationalizing narratives also connect the fluctuating separation of their attractions to changing social environments. For Vera, foregrounding her same-sex or opposite-sex desires clearly depended always on her actual communities, even if both desires were continuously present to some extent. Her sexual dreams about men did not really "return" – they simply received a different interpretation in

her different life periods. First, she just left gay spaces in order to "pay attention to the inner", that is, to watch if heterosexual desires surface in her more. As they did not, she returned to her gay and lesbian groups. Becoming heterosexual is for her not so much about sexual desires per se; it is about understanding her past and present personality, in which her groups play a central role.

For Vera, sexuality is not only about desires that reside in the body independently from ideas and communities, but it closely connects to communities. As the previous chapter showed, Vera in her first interview (38) compared her temporary distance from gay circles to a diet, or to switching the "menu" from homosexual to heterosexual. In her second interview (41), she narrates her life as one with a great turning point towards heterosexuality, in light of which her earlier attempt loses significance. During this second and greater turn toward heterosexuality, she actively looked for ways to help this process, engaging in reparative therapy. In this narrative then, the return to heterosexuality is the result of a conscious process. Albeit her constantly recurring sexual dreams about men motivate the process, in themselves they are not understood as sufficient for engaging in heterosexuality as a lifestyle practice. Vera's two interviews (separated by 3 years) describe the processes of returning to hetero- and homosexuality differently. The following two quotes are taken from her two interviews, describing the same period around 2008 when she had quit and then returned to gay places.

> I'd decided that I had to deal with the fact that I dreamt about men, and that these dreams have a sexual content. Thus there was a period when **I left my so far cherished gay relations, gay communities, gay movement in order to pay some attention to this**. And I didn't really have an idea how to pay attention to this, I didn't know what to do. Like, I dunno. **I didn't think that I was supposed to register on dating sites. And put on some advertisements. Only that I shouldn't meet gays, shouldn't keep contact with them**, and try to pay attention perhaps to why these dreams exist and how they do. But I have to tell you that **nothing happened during an odd year, and by now this has ended. So now I'm going again [small laugh] to the gay milieu ['*közeg*'].** (Vera 1, 38, 2010)
>
> I had dreams of a sexual character about guys. I hadn't attributed a great significance to it, but **there was a point when I was going to gay communities and then I said that I might not go for a while because I have to go after this. And then for a year, I didn't go to any gay places. But at the same time, I didn't do anything, I didn't go to a therapist and started**

> **talking to her, or I dunno, to a shaman or anyone. Or I dunno, to a spiritual leader, a priest, anyone.** So I didn't go anywhere, I just thought something might happen and then I might realize what these dreams are about. **But nothing happened and then I restarted my gay life. It was roughly a year of interruption.** (…) And then [recently] I consciously asked someone to get me a therapist who is willing to talk to me even if my aim was basically to perhaps strengthen my heterosexual potentials. (Vera 2, 41, 2013)

Through highlighting the differences and similarities between the two narratives, I argue that it is the perspective of the present (once with a gay, then with a straight identity) in light of which Vera interprets her first effort to leave gay spaces. In the second interview, she proposes a conscious pro-active attitude which would make her engagement with heterosexuality more effective; primarily not through establishing romantic partnerships but rather (reparative) therapy relations. In other words, the "not doing anything" during the "diet" from her gay life, mentioned in both quotes, is conceptualized differently each time: in the first interview it is conceptualized as "watching" in contrast with the more pro-active wording of "I have to go after" the dreams in the second. Additionally, in the first quote, what she says she missed out on doing during her heterosexual period is a conscious effort in looking for male partners (dating sites, ads) – with a tone suggesting that it would have been an irrational idea from the perspective of her gay identification. But when speaking about the same period, from the perspective of a later heterosexual identity, Vera conceptualizes this missed opportunity as a past mistake in terms of not looking for a helping or therapeutic figure. Thus, what she suggests is that she should have already found a therapist to help her towards heterosexuality. In short, Vera's second interview all together attributes greater significance to heterosexuality as psychological therapy rather than as simply a question of finding a male partner.

Vera's narratives demonstrate that for people with alternating biographical bisexuality in Budapest, experiencing their "heterosexual" side is deeply rooted in their participation in heteronormative environments, even if these do not have an explicit sexual focus as LGBTQ circles do. As her opening quote evidenced, in this journey, a Catholic religious life was

primary for her as she "was looking for a community ['*közösség*'] again" in "Christian circles ['*közegek*']". Interestingly however, she emphasizes (reparative) therapy several times without mentioning its evident Christian influences – this could have been a face-saving strategy in front of my presumed critical views of the Church, which may have led her to base her argument on the more scientific discourse of psychology instead. Later she adds:

> There are some milieux ['*közegek*'] where I go, recently rather Christian places, simply because I have known Christian milieux ['*közegek*'] from my earlier life. So I looked up communities ['*közösségek*'] which I have known from before. (Vera 2, 41)

On the one hand, this quote proves her Christian affiliation, and on the other, it again seems to strive for dissociating it from her reparative therapy ("simply because"). Nevertheless, what I find primary in contextualizing the changes in Vera's sexual attitudes is the recent strengthening of heteronormativity, which includes the post-socialist blossoming of new and traditional religious movements as well as the global circulation of reparative therapies. Both that and LGBTQ discourses became more vocal and visible during those few years that separate Vera's two interviews (2010-2013). The sharpening of discursive oppositions, increasing heteronormativity, together with the deepening political division of the country, puts a growing burden on Vera, a Catholic (ex-)gay person, to take sides. She is clearly repulsed by the growing visibility and influence of LGBTQ activism (see 4.3.), and feels that part of her sexual subjectivity, that is, her straight attractions, are not acknowledged by this circle, in which even expressing her religious self could be difficult.

My data show that although Christianity has great power in structuring alternating bisexual experiences with its firm push toward heterosexuality and with the sense of strong communal belonging it provides for people (see Peebles 2004), many families enact the heteronormative pressure without reference to religion. We could see in Juli's (39, f) opening quote that for her, this pressure is connected with her parents' life in the countryside. They are likely less educated, less well off, and obviously older than her "elite" gay friends in Budapest. We can thus see that alongside religion these are the main oppositions forming

various community belongings, which shape dichotomous sexual discourses in the frames of which my respondents experience their own alternating desires. They obviously feel loyal to their countryside/Christian/family background, and similarly, they experience their straight desires as deeply and genuinely connecting to these spheres.

5.3. LGBTQ spaces

The influence of LGBTQ spaces on the formation of same-sex desires is widely discussed in the scholarship (Esterberg 1993; Plummer 1997; Kuhar and Takács 2007; Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011). In this section, I rather underscore their influence on the transitional experience of alternating sexuality, as it was an important element in my interviews. I suggest the particular significance of sexual communities for people with bisexual desires, especially in cities like Budapest, where the post-socialist dichotomy of heteronormative and LGBTQ communities, and thus the transitions of belonging between them, are most visible.

It directly follows from Vera's understanding of Christian communities as fostering her heterosexuality that she similarly experienced her involvement in LGBTQ spaces as motivating her lesbianism and preventing her "heterosexual potentials" from realization. After an hour-long talk, Vera goes back to the story of leaving gay life for a year. Instead of detailed descriptions or storytelling, she again employs argumentative narrative elements, turning to the food analogy.

> So **I also didn't want to be among gays**, because if I want to pay attention to what these [heterosexual dreams] mean... then **I don't go among gays**. And if, I dunno, this might be a dumb analogy, but if let's say I'm on a **diet**, because this wasn't a diet eventually. But if, or I would like to **switch to another menu, let's say, I wanna eat less sweets, and rather, I dunno, fruit sugar. Then I won't watch the cakes in the pastry shop**. And this isn't a good example because it means that **cake is a delicious thing so that I left the delicious... women**. But this isn't correct. This isn't unambiguously the case, so it's not a good analogy, as they are usually not correct. (Vera 1, 38)

At pains to clarify why she avoided gay circles for a year, she employs the analogy of a diet. Note that 'diet' in Hungarian ['*diéta*'] always refers to restricted, reduced opportunities to eat (for a slimming cure or to overcome a disease, often intensively for a restricted period). Being

on a diet means a break-up with several shared community practices and spaces (in her example, the "pastry shop", '*cukrászda*') tied to eating. Perhaps, being aware that it invokes sacrifice, Vera feels the analogy is inadequate in this respect. What I suggest Vera is implying here with the food analogy is twofold: on the one hand, that there is an inner desire for women in her case, and on the other hand, that it can be overcome if contact situations of community practices are minimized. This is why I propose to apply Ahmed's (2006, 86) notion of the spatiality of sexuality as "orientation" toward certain people, onto the formative role which transitional Hungarian community belonging and interactions play in alternating bisexuality.

Furthermore, my analysis shows that the interrelated effect between LGBTQ spaces and the changes of sexual subjectivities are not one-directional but more complex; for some, these spaces are formative of gay or queer identifications, regardless of the gender of partners. Máté (43, m) and István (38, m) experienced desires for women when they had long been identifying as gay and embedded in various LGBTQ communities. Already when in straight relationships, they continued to identify as non-heterosexual. István, after the break-up of a serious gay relationship, met a straight woman in a Pride March, and they became good friends, and later a couple. As Blumstein and Schwartz (1976b) report, this is a usual pattern of how gay men engage in sexual relationships with women, as it also happened to Márk and Máté: in the frame of gay or gay-friendly spaces, through friendship. Although for István, finding a woman after a long period of gay relationships was not intended at all, in contrast to Vera's rational plans, his narrative does not present the features of surprise, but rather a "this is how it had to be" fatalism:

> It was just good to be with her, but in the beginning **it didn't start like "ah I want to date her", she was just good as a friend**. (…) **I didn't even think I would be in a relationship with a woman again. I didn't really miss it, and I was rather looking for a man.** But then we were on such good terms that I realized that she is my partner when she was already my partner. So **nothing had to be forced, we met regularly,** she also told me she felt I had **seduced** her, and from this, something had to come out. And then it did. I also felt she had **seduced** me. And then this is how we started being together. And we have been, for a long time now. **And now I do have plans with her**. (István, 38)

These are meaningful friendships based on shared pro-LGBTQ values and understandings of the men's gayness through community ties. Therefore, although there is the unexpectedness of sexuality, the emotional connection does not feel surprising, and actually this is what lays the foundations for the partnership as well (see Wolkomir 2009). In this sense, as we already saw in Vera's case, sexual attraction (and its absence) does not play a leading role in how people understand their changing desires, which are rather seen as unfolding due to contact with specific people, contact entailed by LGBTQ community relations. István's reference to a mutual "seduction" similarly demonstrates an understanding of sexual desire as interactional (see Billig 1997 in 2.3.): being induced due to others' push, which nevertheless is becoming strong, long-lasting, and authentic.[48] Questions of in-/authenticity haunt many quotes revolving around temporal change, and especially, around the return of past desires, the repeated occurrence of "exceptions", and the unintentionality (non-planning) of some relationships. "Seduction" emerges from my data as a concept which enables interviewees to overcome their narrative anxieties (Linde 1993) about explaining such complex relations, as it also appeared in the previous chapter (4.2.) in the form of an explanation for Tibor's and Tony's gay turns.

In contrast to the questioning of heterosexuality in heteronormative and, even in progressive straight spaces (as I will show in the next section), for some men like István who belong to the LGBTQ scene of Budapest, the return of previous heterosexual attractions does not cause a serious dilemma. It is not only the case with non-binary sexual identities like bisexual and queer, but also with gay identity. For them, gayness or non-heterosexuality is more of a question of values and community than a question of sexual practice (see Hemmings 2002; Ward 2015). Having led exclusively gay lives for years, they had found a place in the Budapest gay scene, when they met women inside this scene. The first realization

[48] I am grateful for Katalin Kis for suggesting this aspect.

of being sexually aroused by a woman is told in Máté's (43) narrative interchangeably as the end of his "gay life period" as well as just "a peep out during that period", suggesting that the link between his alternating desires and identities/lifestyles is not direct. Continuing with relationships with men, he gradually got acquainted with Hungarian LGBTQ activism and through it, with a variety of non-binary sexual and gender identities. As he says just before discussing his problematic identification with Hungarian masculinity (quoted in 4.3.),

> **I learnt about bisexuality in the gay world, in this milieu ['*közeg*'], where one actually absorbs all of these things, like queerness and what not**. And then first I thought, "all right, I'm then bisexual".

Máté talks about a "gay" world as which provides platform for bisexual and queer knowledges, as these are often subsumed under the meaning of 'gay' for people with bisexual desires (see Murphy 1997 in 2.3.), especially in Hungary where '*meleg*' is the only term which does not feel foreign (see 1.2. and 4.3.). Interestingly, Máté's experience of the "gay world" or "milieu" actually describes a narrow section even inside Hungarian LGBTQ activism, mostly consisting of educated NGO activists (see 1.2.). By the time of realizing his attractions for women for the second time, he already identified as bisexual. His identification process then, as many others', was influenced for a great part by his group belonging and familiarizing with official LGBTQ discourses. Towards the end of his interview, he underscores again his LGBTQ belonging, interchanging the terms 'gay', 'LGBTQ', and 'non-straight', in opposition to heterosexuality.

> It is important for me that **I still belong to the gays**, so it is not by accident that **I have these [*showing at his rainbow gadgets*] and I try to really visit the Pride and so on.** It's not that I try, but I in fact still identify as gay, you see. Gay is not the right term, *non*-straight [*'nemheteró'*] is the right term. (…) **I belong to this LGBTQ community, and I do not belong to the straight community. And I don't even want to belong there, indeed. I will not belong there**.

With the repeated expression of "belong", Máté reinforces his own sense of belonging (probably what he believes I might also question). Similarly, István's and Márk's (34, see more in Chapter 6 and 7) gay desires and identities did not disappear either when they formed a relationship with a woman ("I'm gay in my brain", "I notice men in the street", as István

says), but emotions are considered more important for them in their relationship choices. Ward (2015) argues that when straight-identified men have sex with each other, it is exactly their investment in heteronormativity which makes their relations in fact not queer but straight. Consequently, reversing Ward's argument, stories of gay men in straight relationships suggest that their embeddedness in LGBTQ circles and their conscious disinvestment in heteronormativity support their non-straight (self-)identification. Further, this also underlines the significance of Budapest LGBTQ communities in how these (self-)identifications are negotiated against alternating bisexual practices in contemporary Hungary.

5.4. Progressive mostly straight (university) spaces

Permissive-progressive and dominantly straight spaces are also discussed in interviews as eliciting and enabling the realization of same-sex attractions. As most of my interviewees mention specific circles which enhanced their desires in some direction or the other, it is even some straight spaces, the transitional (periodical or temporary) belonging to which helped them realize their same-sex desires, at least for the time being. This way, non-heterosexuality figures as imbricated in cultures which are not specifically LGBTQ-focused. Further, I will show that just as LGBTQ cultures feed a certain understanding of same-sex desires (that of immutable essential monosexual identities, as Vera's journey proves), permissive straight spaces also offer patterns for specific conceptualizations of (bi)sexuality.

My analysis shows that same-sex encounters in progressive, well-educated straight spaces of Budapest are often accepted as 'transitional', both in the sense of temporal and leading to a new category. However, although this opens up space for sexual experimentation, this understanding can also be restrictive to others, being greatly informed by ideas of 'exception', neat identity categories, and a definition of bisexuality as a 50-50% middle ground. Such notions of sexual fluidity and bisexuality are widespread in the Global North, but in Hungary they are always framed in relation to ideas of the West as more progressive,

democratic, market-capitalist, and/or foreign, aggressive, immoral and pretentious. The acceptant non-LGBTQ communities that my interviewees referred to, self-identify with a positive notion of what are considered "Western values". They are often embedded in international subcultures like that of Viktor's, or in liberal-left Budapest university communities, representing an inner "West" compared to a backward uneducated, homophobic, right-ruled Hungary (Böröcz 2006; Renkin 2009; Gagyi 2012; Fehérváry 2013, 238). As a result of activist strategies, LGBTQ issues became embraced by the cultural elite of the liberal-left which drew great numbers of straight allies in the Pride Marches in the last couple of years (see Renkin 2015), and strengthened ties to the NGO-sector in general, but also resulted in a widening the distance between non-heterosexual people outside of this social strata and Budapest activism.

As a counter-example, for Viktor (25, m) who was a teenager in the mid-2000s, it was a specific dark-gothic music subculture, without ties to the above described higher middle-class social strata, that contained allusions to drag performances which enabled him to discover his same-sex interest.

> I was around 15 when **I, let's say, got into a subcultural environment ['*közeg*'] where [gayness] is more acceptable, I concretely went to such goth-dark circles. And in fact it was there that my attraction towards boys could come out first.** Whatever, there was a guy who initiated, etc., and I was into it for a while, then I finally backed away.

Such music subcultures together with the androgynous attire and make-up they entail are also disdained by the older generation as the influence of Western-led global media on Hungarian youth. This is partly because rock/pop subcultures represented political opposition and Western orientation during state socialism (Szemere 2000; Imre 2009). Accordingly, gender and sexual non-normativity might seem consequential – but also temporal, confined to a certain age until the young person grows out of it. Viktor illustrates his dilemmas back then about his same-sex interest in terms such as being "a teenager" or having "hormonal silliness" which will eventually pass which reflect his own assumptions and that of his environment.

Falling in love with his male friends at the age of 17 already seemed too serious for him, because it happened for the third time, and outside of the context of his previous "dark-goth" period that was encouraging experimentation, therefore his experience could not fall under the category of "exceptionality". This oscillation between opposite- and same-sex desires over time questions the linear ideas of heteronormative development where same-sex attractions remain confined for a certain age and subculture. Furthermore, his "confusion got reinforced" by the fact that he fell in love with women, too. This implies that an exclusively homosexual interest would have offered him some certainty that he is in fact gay; whereas this transitional bisexuality, alternating in time, was even more confusing for him, because it did not provide him with clear patterns of identification, congruent with available narratives.

During the time of his interview, Viktor is a university student in Budapest, also embedded in alternative artist groups, and he claims to be slowly coming to terms with his sexuality. He acknowledges that

> **I'm lucky in the sense that I'm in such an environment ['*környezet*'] where it's not a problem to talk about such things, most of my friends, just as the professors, know about me.** Because, I dunno, if in relation to course tasks or art products the issue comes up, I comment, but if I comment, then I do it in a way to signal my perspective for those who don't know. Or it becomes obvious from what I say.

Viktor acknowledges the significance of his belonging into such progressive communities – as well as its exceptionalism in a generally hostile or immature society. At other points, he refers to contemporary Hungarian social relations with the same term '*környezet*' ('environment or surrounding') as preventing the realization of an LGBTQ movement similar to the West (see more in Turai 2010).

Tamás (46, m) similarly acknowledges his luck with his progressive environment, and even though he also receives various labels, he seems to care less about categorization and even relationship choices. Although he does not explicitly connect the alternating of his relationships to alternating involvement in certain sexual cultures or groups, his narrative is clearly informed by his belonging to both a permissive intellectual environment and the

LGBTQ scene. As a middle-aged liberal-leftist academic man in downtown Budapest, his bisexual behaviour is less susceptible to be perceived as an immature exception. His earlier conviction of being gay, reinforced by an unsatisfying straight relationship, was later overwritten by unsuccessful gay relationships and then good sexual experiences with another girlfriend, Janka. One of his two long-term woman partners told him he was bisexual, after they had talked with him about his gay desires and previous same-sex experiences:

> We talked about it, as she had also happened to be in love with one of her [female] friends, she had such an experience. Obviously, this also makes it easier, as probably not everyone could get on board with it if I told them such a thing. I also think that **in fact many more people than it is [believed], especially in such Budapest urban circles [‘*körök*’], could be ok with it.**

He acknowledges his luck with having found an understanding for sexual permissiveness in his mostly straight circles, which made it easier for him to tell his female partners about his gay desires, and for these women, to accept (and to relate to) that. What is more, he met his two main female partners precisely when he came to terms with his gay desires:

> Funnily, I had two periods in my life when I thought, what happened had happened, I shall think about having relationships in my life with men, perhaps. (…) I have a friend who is one of my “gay” friends, but if one made a sexual life story interview with him, several women would appear in it, but he is a gay guy and I’m not. [This is] what these boundaries are like. Twice; **intriguingly both of my long-term relationships with women developed when I decided that I was gay or would be gay.** (…) **Arbitrariness** is there, because if there was an **opportunity** for me, a gay relationship could have succeeded. When the inner determination, resolution, and acceptance appeared, then **not men appeared but women**. I’ve been thinking what this might have been; I was being concretely more **open** sexually, in terms of relationships. (…) **I had been waiting, for 2-3 years, when I was trying to find someone from the gay community. It didn’t succeed, and then Janka came**.

This unexpectedness echoes István’s and others’ experiences of finding a partner of a certain gender unintentionally, as a surprise for the people who thought about themselves as not attracted in that direction or precisely looking for people of the different gender. Some (like István and Dioram) did not want a relationship at all: “But after that I had formulated for myself that I liked women, a guy came”, says Dioram (32, f). What is exceptional in Tamás’s narrative, firstly, is that he uses the terms “coincidental, contingent, and arbitrary” retrospectively for the directions his life course was taking. He apparently likes this feature of a-linearity in his life and attitude, though I can see some difference in his narrative between

how straight relationships seem to happen to him as open but passive (note the expression "and then Janka came"), in contrast to how he was actively seeking gay relations. Second, importantly, much more than many of my interviewees in straight relationships, Tamás is reflective about the fact that the unexpected arrival of these relationships as well as the fact that gay relationships "didn't happen" both have a lot to do with the heteronormative environment in general (see Rich 1984). I argue that the relationships between social influences and personal desires are more complex than a simple idea of community attitudes blocking certain desires and enabling others. Tamás's case, for instance, highlights that his sexual openness for men could have had the effect of sexual openness in general, or, self-acceptance might have enabled forming interpersonal relationships in general in his urban intellectual environments where non-heterosexual aspects did have a place.

Tamás's story also proves that progressive liberal-left circles in Budapest can provide people who have alternating bisexual desire with the opportunity of *not* having to choose between communities according to sexual belonging. When in straight relationships, Tamás maintained his gay friendships and even attended gay events, and he could also afford coming out as non-heterosexual in his straight circles. I argue that it was made possible by his privileged position as a liberal-leftist academic intellectual in the capital, especially given that in contemporary Hungary, this social stratum embraces LGBTQ rights as an important part of their political-cultural statement. As I discuss in Chapters 4 and 6, many of my interviewees had to conceal their same-sex interest, and the present chapter also showed the push for maintaining separate spaces for separate sexualities. Moreover, there are some who seem to belong to similar progressive gay-friendly straight circles, but nevertheless suffer from dilemmas of identification much more: typically women younger than Tamás, with less professional prestige.

What counts as a dilemma of self-identification, just as is the case for sexual exception, depends on the interaction between a person's own understanding and others' evaluations and identifications, as the very same acts are given different meaning in different communities. Perhaps Anna's (23, f) story illustrates this point the best. In the early 2010s, as a straight woman in her twenties, she had same-sex affairs in similarly open-minded liberal-left university circles. In the first few minutes of her interview, Anna talks about the significance of her university groups where pro-LGBTQ attitudes are obvious, and where she had lesbian and gay friends even before realizing her own same-sex desires. However, I am going to point out elements of her uncertainty despite (or as part of) this acceptant atmosphere after her repeated sexual engagement with her lesbian friend, Magdi.

> It was actually difficult for me to acknowledge that "yes, this is then bisexuality" and **not because I would have a problem with it, because I've been for a long time in an environment ['*közeg*']…, well I think in fact this wasn't a huge crisis, I just didn't know what those boundaries were.** This will sound stupid, but from where on is a person bisexual. If she, let's say, sleeps with a woman, then she is probably, now I think so. But that was it. What was hard for me to accept, I think, was the box. Because otherwise everything came surprisingly naturally. And **I'm really in an environment ['*közeg*'] that it is not [a problem], so I didn't have a fear like "OMG, what's going on, what a degenerate person I am" [*we laugh*]**. So this is basically it.

Anna mentions twice "I'm in such an environment", arguing that she did not have internalized homophobic fears; she could have easily come out as lesbian (as her friend Magdi) or even as bisexual. However, it seems that this environment also assumes some criteria which make one "really" lesbian or gay, criteria that she herself accepted but could not see herself fitting in. In this excerpt the terms "problem", "crisis" and "fear" are put in the negative to express her ease, and only the expression "hard to accept" refers explicitly to her difficulties. At other points in her interview however, she says, "I've been suffering a bit about positioning and defining myself", "trying to make an order in my little chaos", "it's a great dilemma for me", "I don't understand till today", all referring to her sexual self-definition.

The discourse of this Budapest university environment for me thus shows similarities with the Hungarian LGBTQ discourse – there is a bigger overlap between the two than for

example between goth-dark subcultures that attract a more working-class audience, and LGBTQ activism. Anna mentions that they had gender courses, various events of "tolerance", even some activism against anti-Semitism in the campus. This general progressive and protective stance towards minorities, in line with the Hungarian political liberal-left discourse, is the "dominant atmosphere" at the university, which she has "been long socialized in", as she describes it. The dual division of Hungarian society is apparent in her remark that owing to this environment, she did not think that she "would go to hell", referring to the religious discourse, which was meaningful for Péter and Vera, as the far opposite of her world.

Interestingly, for Anna, it was her first, undoubtedly positive sexual experience with Magdi which let her conclude she is *heterosexual*: "after the first, my great conclusion was that this had been very good, but it reaffirmed me about my heterosexuality". She does not give an explanation even after my clarifying question, as if it was not a contradictory statement; she probably felt that this positive experience was an exception. Her experience demonstrates the gender difference in how same-sex experiences (and sexual satisfaction in general) are widely interpreted, allowing (even prescribing) women to continue a straight identification and lifestyle despite same-sex experiences (see e.g., Fachs 2009 and Chapter 7). The expression "I got reaffirmed" actually means an anticipation of the return of her previous opposite-sex attractions and a conviction about the temporariness of the present sexual relationship. Anna's conviction is gradually being overwritten till the present by the accumulation of lesbian encounters in a period between two committed relationships with men. It was the repeated nature of the sexual encounter with Magdi which made Anna experience a smaller crisis of identification. Despite the fact that her case can be most easily told in conventional gender and sexual frames (a straight woman in her twenties experimenting with another woman), still, she is facing a dilemma. She considers her same-sex attractions as serious, exactly because they happened more than once. She explains in

length her argumentation in several sequences, with the recurring theme of the definition of bisexuality in her whole interview:

> I talked to people about it and they face me with the idea: **"but someone who isn't bisexual wouldn't go to bed with a woman!"** [*we laugh*] Because this was what I had been saying myself for a very long time. I had said, "no, no, **I'm straight, I just had this little exception**". (…) Magdi would tell me after the third or fourth time [*smiling*] "but **you're bisexual**, no matter how much you deny it". And I think I tended to accept that more and more, and then Laci, my gay friend with whom I had talked about this, also said, "this means that **you're bisexual**", and also my boyfriend told me "this means that **you're bisexual**". And I was like, "all right".

As for Tamás and others, it also happened to Anna that others labelled them as bisexual, although they themselves were not sure or preferred another label. This typically comes from progressive gay-friendly circles and in opposition to the ruling conservative right. First, Anna did not feel that her same-sex interest was strong enough to legitimately claim a bisexual identity which she believed had to mean a "middle" between homo- and heterosexuality, a roughly 50-50% proportion of the two. Her notion of bisexuality is different from that of others like Kitti, who defines it in terms of (unemotional) sexual practice. Anna is more familiar with LGBTQ activist and even scholarly discourses like the Kinsey-scale, but finds that all this knowledge only makes her more confused when looking for categorizing criteria that reflect what "she is". Regardless of the rhetoric of sexual openness in her circle, Anna's (and her circle's) thinking is shaped by an understanding of sexual categories as realities, to one of which each person fits (see Ward 2015), and this causes her problems that she is at pains to resolve even in the lengthy argumentations in her interview narrative. Her case supports queer critiques of identity-focused assumptions that encourage people to conceptualize a coherent sexual trajectory, as in conflict with certain lived experiences. In the debate between Plummer (1997) and van Naerssen (1998) outlined in 2.4.1., the latter's approach, shared by me, rather supports a focus on present preferences and pleasures.

If Anna's story displays the contradictory effects of progressive environments, I consider Hanna (35, f) the example for their silencing effects. For many years now, she has

not formed relationships with women any more. She also underlined the significance of community spaces using the common word '*közeg*' ('environment') when I asked if she talked about her same-sex past experiences to others:

> To a very few, a very few. So in **environments where sexual openness is bigger or the repertoire [*we laugh*] is bigger, wider**, there I do. There it is easy for me to talk about it, but otherwise it's not. So something is still… even though I live in a… Anybody looking into our life with a telescope can see that we live a normal family life, I don't know, [*laughs a little*] a classic one, a little bit even appearing right-wing, so we have, we have these big Hungarian dogs, a big house, so the whole, the whole is very, I don't know, is just very fine. But not even together with that, or despite that, **I wouldn't be able to talk about this to someone, with such a naturalness like "by the way, actually"**.

In 6.2., through the same quote of Hanna's, I will discuss the heteronormative power of the family house and how these connect to contemporary Hungarian discourses of right-wing conservativism. What I want to highlight here is the difference in how Hanna relates to her own non-heterosexual self depending on the environment she is in. Further, the differentiation she employs in her narrative is not between straight and LGBTQ spaces, rather she describes spaces with a "bigger sexual openness and wider sexual repertoire" thus including sexually permissive straight spaces as well.

As an illustration following this quote, she tells me the story of a straight woman with whom they had become friends in LGBTQ circles when Hanna had lived with her girlfriend. This woman outed her to a common straight friend, Karola, who had not known about Hanna's past. In this story, LGBTQ circles appear as the obviously safe space for her non-heterosexual self, including heterosexual allies, who thus bear with that sexual openness. Interestingly though, Karola was also an open-minded straight woman, who did not understand why Hanna had not told her that before. They were colleagues and friends in an international human rights NGO in Budapest, which is the typical example of a progressive, mostly straight, space, with a similar atmosphere to the Budapest academic and university circles to which Tamás and Anna belong. These spheres are identified with sexual openness and LGBTQ rights as part of the "Western" and "European" value set, and in opposition to

the ruling right-wing party and its voters (Mandel 2002; Böröcz 2006). I cannot provide a clear-cut explanation for why Hanna wanted to keep her past lesbian experiences in secret in such a sexually progressive environment, but it nevertheless suggests the disciplinary power of sexual categorizations. According to what my other interviewees in similar environments told me, it seems that these circles – just as others – have their own ideas of who counts as heterosexual, homosexual, and bisexual, which easily makes my interviewees with complex sexual life histories uncomfortable.

A great number of bisexual studies, as Hemmings (2002) and Eisner (2013, esp. Chapter 2) critically discuss, tend to describe straight and lesbian-gay communities as equally hostile to bisexual people, or they even argue that bisexuals face more discrimination among lesbians (and to a smaller extent, gays) than among heterosexuals. As I mentioned in Chapter 2, critical bisexual scholars warn against such symmetrical characterization of biphobia or "monosexism", suggesting that we must always examine such experiences against the background of society-wide sexism and homophobia. Upon my analysis of the relationship between biographical bisexuality and sexual spaces, I can detect my interviewees' struggle in all environments, although on very different levels. I also underline that whereas LGBTQ circles allow for many to experiment with and engage in *heterosexual relationships* (Hanna, István, Márk, Máté), LGBTQ-friendly straight circles act with an almost strict prescriptiveness when it comes to category *labels and identification*. To what extent it is pursued and with what effect, depends on the person's position.

5.5. Conclusion

Through examining the ways in which the experiences of alternative connections figure in group belonging, I have argued that Hungarian bisexual biographies contextualize the changes of attractions in the frame of alternating belonging to straight and LGBTQ spaces. In contemporary Hungary, it is religious, most visibly Catholic communities that are formative

of explicitly heterosexual belonging, standing in strong contrast with Budapest's LGBTQ scene. However, in contrast to bisexual studies which underscore the exclusivity of such spaces and the challenges they mean to subjects from the Global North to Central Europe (e.g., Angelides 2006; Munro and Richardson 2012; Kemler *et al*. 2012; Hura 2016), my analysis reveals the significance of mostly-straight spaces which, identifying in opposition to the heteronormativity of the political right, are supportive of LGBTQ rights. LGBTQ-friendliness in Hungary is aligned not only with a liberal-leftist political attitude, but also with the cultural life of Budapest, as well as class and professional-educational privileges. This constellation in this respect cuts across the dual division of straight versus LGBTQ spaces in Hungary. Nevertheless, through the invocation of LGBTQ rights, it reinforces the political-cultural division of Hungarian society following "nested" Eastern-Western discourses (see Gal 1991; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Buchowski 2006 in 2.4.). As I have shown, progressive gay-friendly circles on the one hand encourage same-sex experimentation as well as solid non-heterosexual identifications, whereas at the same time they perform expectations especially about sexual identification, which are burdensome for many.

I used Ahmed's (2006) insights on 'sexual orientation' as which can lead us to see the performativity of sexual desire itself as constrained by social normativities. I thus suggest that sexual attractions are given meaning through the individuals' practices, which are "oriented" not only towards partners but also towards (homo- and heterosexual) community spaces. Neither of these is directly sexual, but through them, people "do" their sexual attractions: interpret and at the same time anticipate/orient toward them (Ahmed 2006). Community or group belonging, I argued, includes the everyday practices with which subjects perform their belonging as well as their dis-identifications (Certeau 1984; Muñoz 1999) and through which they invoke what they understand as the group narrative, hence also constituting what these groups represent in terms of sexuality. What these experiences tell us about the social aspect

of sexual desire is that it does not exist independently from belonging to smaller-scale group identities, but rather, desires, communities and identities are in constant multidirectional interaction, complexly resulting in what a person experiences as 'sexual orientation' or 'fluidity' or 'transition' (see 2.2.). Therefore, my analysis contributes empirically to how we understand social constructivism and performativity theories in sexuality studies. The alternating straight-LGBTQ community belonging which I have detected in these Hungarian bisexual biographies helps my respondents make sense of the transitional nature of their temporally changing sexual selves and thus negotiate, reconcile, or reject the demands of authenticity.

As the two chapters in the first section on "Serial connections" have argued, the temporal experience of changing sexuality is translated into questions of spatiality. Certeau (1984, 35) similarly argues that images of a "trajectory" translate temporal diachrony into a spatial line, read in a single moment, which he considers a reduction of productive performativities carried out by unifying systems. In these Hungarian narratives of alternating sexuality however, the transformations into spatiality appear to me more as tactics in themselves with which individuals organize their transitional experiences, necessarily entailing reductions, compromises, and internal conflicts. When Anna (23) referred to the Kinsey-scale, it showed a similar narrative strategy: the spatial metaphor of the "middle" of the scale helped her conceptualize bisexuality – although the temporal contingencies of bisexual attractions (namely, how many times she engaged in sex with women and men) confused her more. I consider the scale here as illustrative of how the temporal specificities of sexuality, both seriality and parallels, are experienced spatially. It is the same narrative strategy when "at the same time" attractions are translated as threesome sex (Chapter 7) or parallel relationships as sharing the same space, the bed or the home (see the next Chapter).

This implies a strong connection between spatial and temporal experiences of sexuality, and consequently a fundamental role of the subject's geo-social location.

In Serial connections, as I showed, temporality as change in sexual desires was experienced as connected to social changes, which then appeared to anchor in spatial differentiations. In the next Section on experiences of sexual parallels, I discuss how these narratives conceptualize more private spatialities (the home and the body) as constitutive of biographical bisexuality in Hungary, as these are also formed under the post-socialist position of the country. The following chapter will show how the experiences of multiple relationships are formed in interaction with experiences of the home.

Section II. Parallel connections

6. Chapter. Parallel relationships negotiating "home"

6.1. Introduction: accommodating bisexual non-monogamy

> For me, in my patterns of the times, ***I couldn't have even imagined*** **that you can even live together with a guy**. An interesting thing: I was roughly 25 years old when I started dating men and I was 35 years old when for the first time one asked me (…), **let's rent a flat together**. Till then, *it hadn't even crossed my mind*. (…) It was the first time it occurred to me that a guy can be a rival in the relationship, I mean, **he can be a rival to my marriage**. (Botond, 56, m)[49]

This excerpt describes the period between 1980 and 1990 when Botond, heterosexually married, dated men – which is an example of maintaining bisexual parallel relationships. This chapter, after examining narratives of seriality in Chapter 4 and 5, discusses narratives of experiences of such parallel connections. The quote illustrates that the difference between the conditions of same- and opposite-sex relationships is embodied (both as symbolized and materialized) in the private space, in questions of the home and living together. The spatial difference between hetero- and homosexual intimacy is central to how Botond conceptualizes these relationships; for a while, it even secured their parallel through the primacy of marriage. Later, by the emerging possibility of men living together, his understanding of parallel relationships has also changed with the notion of "rivalry". Various and changing ideas of private spaces and cohabitation have been central to his changing conceptualization of his bisexual desires, as they allow for certain sexual practices and intimacies and exclude others. I will show that not only for Botond, but for others as well, the understanding of 'home' is a main structural element in the interview narrative about the experience of parallel relationships. The spatial changes in their life stories and the temporality of parallel relationships impact on one another.

[49] As a reminder, *italics* in quotes denote the original linguistic emphasis by the respondent, and **bold** is my analytic emphasis.

In the following, I provide an analysis of interviews with four men and one woman, the ones in my sample who talked about what I call "bisexual parallel relationships", which they maintained with (at least one) woman and man at the same time. I discuss parallel sexual relationships in Chapter 7, and this chapter concerns partnerships involving non-sexual activities. It thus lies at the intersection of bisexuality and non-monogamies, showing how they are integrated in each other (see Klesse 2007). My analysis examines the interviews describing bisexual parallel relationships in light of the whole life narratives and the spatial categories of social belonging through which these relationships are made sense of. The previous chapters showed that serial experiences of biographical bisexuality are narrated through their interrelatedness to post-socialist Hungary and LGBTQ or straight group belongings. The present chapter argues that parallel relationships are narrated through images of the home, which are embedded in the social-economic transformations of Hungary of the past 30 years, evoking and at the same time overwriting the binary of the public and the private. I will show how various notions of home help my respondents locate bisexual parallel relationships in their lives. I argue that they are either spatially separated, with the primacy of the heterosexual partnership; or, they are united in alternative private spaces, which case necessitates a reconfiguration of both the 'home' and the hetero-homo hierarchy. We can thus better understand how sexual experiences are materially anchored, through the impact of Hungarian living conditions on biographical bisexuality, and how the interviews negotiate these through alternative understandings of the home to accommodate complex sexual arrangements.

As my analyses demonstrate throughout this dissertation, the temporality of both personal and social development closely connects to the experiences of spatial categories. Theories with a spatial focus argue for a conceptualization of sexuality as which is not simply happening in space but in which spatial categories are already inscribed (Hemmings 2002,

45), as "bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space" (Ahmed 2006, 67). Ahmed suggests that already the term "orientation" operates with spatial associations, exactly because it refers to specifically framed interactions between specific others (2006, 86, see 2.3.). Spatial proximity, she argues, is key to the "naturalisation of heterosexual love as a familial plot" (2004a, 128). As I demonstrated sexuality as gaining "meaning in relation to community" in the previous chapter, in the present one it will appear as "regulat[ing] public/private boundaries" (Hemmings 2002, 45) in terms of private cohabitation.

Ideas of the home, I argue, entail ideas of temporality in subjectivity development, providing another connection between experiences of parallel bisexual relationships, narratives of the self, and post-/socialist discursive and material opportunities. Establishing a home as coming-of-age is one of the main generic plots, informed by literary fictions and psychoanalysis, which structure sexual and other storytelling (Plummer 1997, 55; Abelove 2003). Home is a concept loaded with many different meanings:[50] in contrast to its ideal as representing comfort, authenticity, and ontological security, for many it entails scrutiny, discomfort, and violence (Stella 2015, 23). Especially in terms of non-normative sexuality, its reference expands beyond the familial house to (contrastingly) include urban sexual communities as "chosen home" (Weston 1998). "Home is not simply geographical, but a site of meaning within which one both recognizes oneself and is recognized in turn", writes Hemmings (2002, 169) about the efforts to establish specifically bisexual territories in the US. Here I only discuss home in the sense of private spaces where couples live, as this meaning dominated the Hungarian narratives of parallel bisexuality.

Importantly, the patriarchal, hetero- and mononormative implications of the 'home', together with its economic conditions, are pivotal in how parallel bisexual relationships are experienced in Hungary. Maintaining relationships with partners of both genders requires

[50] I am grateful to Ksenia Meshkova for drawing my attention to this aspect.

different and more radical strategies than engaging in sexual acts with them (see Ward 2015), due to the unavoidable negotiations with public visibility and sanctions. Literature on "bisexual" or "mixed-orientation marriages" illuminates how heteronormative ideas of romantic love and gender roles dominate the understandings of participants even in their alternative life styles (Garber 1996; Wolkomir 2009). However, these studies rarely connect heteronormativity to ideas and opportunities of private space creation. Yet, the norms of heterosexual coupledom guide social life and provide the basis for households through the norm of straight couples' living together (Stella 2015). Since parallel long-term relationships extend in time, the question of shared space (by three or more) becomes a crucial question, even more so if it includes same-sex partners. As the visibility of parallel relationships as partnerships increases, so does their maintenance require more and more negotiation with norms (Wilton 2004; Hoy 2007; Klesse 2007; Easton-Hardy 2009; Wilkinson 2010). The spaces granting privacy also increase visibility as a couple, which, in contrast to Western individualist notions of coming out, bears with homophobic threats to personal safety in most post-socialist spaces (Stella 2015, 128).

As my data will show, in Hungary, managing parallel relationships in shared spaces, which could allow for powerful alternatives to the hetero- and mononormative concepts of the public and private, is possible only under very specific social circumstances, just as embedded in space as in time. Moreover, some of these set-ups remain very sexist, as Klesse (2007a) showed how much non-monogamous gay relationship networks rely on power inequalities like women's subordination. The fact that only one woman among my interviewees reported parallel bisexual relationships illustrates that for women, sexual experiences are more bounded by various patriarchal normative and material restrictions. Investigating the viability of bisexual parallel connection in the specific spatio-temporal context of contemporary Hungary, I will show that it is alternatives of the 'home' which enable the formation of

parallel bisexual relationships, not only in terms of narrative constructions, but also materially. Focusing on the connection between the two, I explore how material conditions are negotiated through sexual experiences.

The time frame covered by the analysed interviews expands from the 1980s to the 2010s of Hungary, from the last decade of state socialism to the rise of the political right and the first decade of European Union membership. As Gal and Kligman (2002) show in their analysis of European post-/socialism, conceptualizations of the private and the public socio-historically changes, always displaying gendered hierarchies. According to my interviews, three phases appear to provide with different spatial opportunities for parallel bisexuality in Hungary. First, in state socialist countries, heterosexual marriage served as a social basis, paired with limited privacy. From the end of World War II till the 1980s, the number and early timing of marriages were on the rise – whereas many couples had to live together with parents, despite the widespread construction of housing blocks supported by the state (Valuch 2001, 41, 306-313). At the same time, the privacy of the family functioned as the shelter from state intrusion, the site for productive second economy and also for dissident political action (as a category of "private-public") (Gal and Kligman 2002; see also Stella 2015, 106). Connecting public-private dynamics to discourses of homosexuality, Stella notes that the constraints by the socialist state on the public sphere, influencing spatial experiences of sexuality till today, resulted in semi-private networks of lesbians and gay men, different from Western urban consumer subcultures. At the same time, the private home represented the expectations of heteronormative femininity based on motherhood (Stella 2015, 23-35). While living together for most same-sex attracted people was not an option to consider, Stella (2013, 2015, 53-56) asserts that even women in Soviet Russia did maintain parallel same-sex relationships besides marriage, sometimes with the partners' knowledge. In contrast to the restricted, "dissident" discourse on homosexuality (Moss 1995), in Hungary, the notion of

"open marriage", allowing for extramarital sexual relationships discussed and consented by all parts, became popular by the end of the 1980s through the works of sexologist Vilmos Szilágyi (1988).

As the second phase, the few years around the post-socialist transformations in Hungary, as Szilárd's story will show, offered a unique opportunity to some to form alternative configurations of private spaces, which has given space for parallel relationships, more than before or after. Social transformations in general enable the formation of new (and previously repressed) identities, but it was especially so in Central and Eastern Europe when associations became legal from the late '80s, opening up spaces for civil society (Erős 1994), accompanied by a sudden pluralisation of sexual and other discourses (Stella 2015, 37). The under-regulated new capitalist area of the regime change, together with privatization, provided opportunities for various activities, business, associations, and lifestyles, which had been strictly surveyed before. Due to the liberation and multiplication of social and economic norms in general, for a short period, some managed to make a living without being integrated into a hierarchical social stratification: as it happened to Szilárd's group of friends making a living through freelance entrepreneurship jobs.

I would define the third phase which provides the background for the narratives to be analysed as the solidified years of neoliberal capitalism in the 2000s, which has brought austerity measures, regulation, poverty, and the rise of the right, which cut the conditions of possibilities of non-conventional living arrangements. In general, processes of normalization have been taking place throughout post-socialist states (see 1.2., 6.3., and Kašić 2005, Renkin 2015). Fehérváry (2013) maps out how the living space (from panel block apartments to family houses) carried meanings of self-positioning after 1989, central to how Hungarians "negotiated the transformation of self" as they "positioned them in a shifting order" (197), vis-á-vis discourses of Western consumer capitalism/socialism, nationalism/cosmopolitanism,

and collectivism/individualism, all embedded in classed opportunities. The hierarchical stratification of Hungarian society has rapidly increased by privatization due to the widening gap between the middle-upper and lower classes as a result of unemployment and the weakening of social welfare networks. Employment in the institutions of the economic public sphere offers some safety paired with financial instability (Gal and Kligman 2002). In these spheres, as well as in rural and former industrial areas of the countryside hit by poverty, conventional housing and relationship arrangements could compensate for existential insecurities. In contrast, a visibly wealthy social layer enjoys their privileges in terms of housing (Fehérváry 2013, 212), which grants them respectability and the freedom to pursue non-conventional sexual practices. As I discussed in 1.2., same-sexual encounters are easily available especially for men in the 2000s Budapest; however, living together still means a very hard step to make for many, even if it is more widely considered among members of the more privileged, urban-educated strata. The intersection of all these inequalities also entail a sharp political-social division in Hungary, delegating homosexuality to images of the city, middle classes, and liberal-left, and homophobia and heterosexuality to the country, lower classes, and the right (Renkin 2009).

Literature on non-monogamies argues that maintaining polyamorous (ethical, sexually and emotionally non-monogamous) relationships in Western cultures is a privilege of the wealthy and those in the highest social strata (Wilkinson 2010). As Hoy (2007) observes in his discussion of "men on the down low", a derogatory term typically used for African American lower-class men in the US, it is constrained opportunities that limit such choices of sex, relationship, secrecy, and identity, which stem from the threat of losing social recognition (see also Ward 2015). Supported by stories by my interviewees on men they know about, it seems to be a wide-spread pattern that a man with bisexual desires has a stabile female co-habitant partner, and one or more male (mostly) sexual partners. This certainly is a

constellation for many men in which bisexual desires are most viable. Anglo-Saxon research on "mixed-orientation" marriages, however, rarely reflect on the gender difference in the opportunities to maintain both homo- and heterosexual relationships, although it is very visible in reference lists with titles exclusively on gay and bisexual men, or in the few lesbian cases in studies aiming at both women and men (as in Wolkomir 2009). In contrast, some European work on bisexual behaviour attentive to the material conditions of relationship choices (Kemler *et al.* 2012 on Germany, and Stella 2015 on Russia) underscores women's constrained opportunities in negotiating their non-heterosexual desires with men. Consequently, they also reveal that it is often physical distance which enables both men and women to reconcile their parallel relationships, being either open or secretive about one in front of the other.

My analysis will complete this analysis with pointing at the connections personal narratives make between the gender of partners (more precisely, between hetero- and homosexual relationships) and the spaces of being together. Moving away from Hemmings's (2002) spatial focus on (bi)sexual politics onto personal life stories, I argue that the spatial limitations of bisexuality are the most visible in the examination of parallel relationships. Three (or more) people in the same space results in special situations and conflicts, different from set-ups where people only meet in two. I will show that the various notions of home, which help my respondents locate bisexual parallel relationships in their lives, rely on the social primacy of heterosexuality, with specific situations where it gets challenged. Specifically, in the following section I show my interviewees' accounts on normative cohabitation which offer them opportunities, as well as constraints by the primacy of heterosexuality, throughout changing historical times from the end of socialism till the 2000s in Hungary. Then, the third section will show how narratives reconfigure normative images of both heterosexuality and the home by uniting parallel relationships in the same space. I finally

conclude that the space of home thus promises the reconciliation of multiple relationships by either unification or demarcation. At the same time, it appears as an ideal that is in fact hard to achieve or maintain, due to the social-historical-economic circumstances. Ideas of the home provide connection between experiences of parallel bisexual relationships, narratives of the self, and post-/socialist discursive and material opportunities. Sexual and post-socialist histories therefore interweave in the following narratives, which are themselves attempts to find and create space for sexual experiences hard to accommodate, both in space and in life trajectories.

6.2. The heteronormative home: separating relationships

This section discusses the narratives which evoke the normative images of the private space that provides a shared home for one heterosexual couple. Here, my interviewees' experiences of parallel relationships are structured along the hierarchical position which their cohabitational heterosexual partnership takes up. In this set-up centred on a heteronormative concept of home, the sexual narratives and their understandings of homo- and heterosexual attractions are centred on the physical distance between the respondents' two partners and the difference between the two forms of being together. The following analysis underlines the struggles with the confines of the socially sanctioned heterosexual home in Hungary between the 1980s and the 2000s, and locates the hierarchical experience of same-and opposite-sex relationships in the context of the taken-for-grantedness and social viability of heterosexual cohabitation.

Péter (30, m) expresses explicitly that he would appreciate such a constellation, he specifically seeks the chance of maintaining two parallel relationships. This is a central issue for him: after the second minute into the interview, he starts sketching out his current situation in a heterosexual relationship for 10 years, with frequent references to living together ('*együttélés*'). The term he uses for his female partner, '*élettárs*' (lit. "life partner") in

Hungarian refers to a partner with whom one lives together with, meaning both cohabitation and life-long commitment. In his whole interview, the question of shared private spaces is of primary significance when reasoning about his relationship choices and their constraints. Beside his woman life partner, he is looking for a man, either as sexual partner or friend, with whom he could form a second, emotionally just as committed relationship while maintaining the heterosexual one. Throughout the interview, connected to these desires, he is considering and wondering about the content and the most adequate label of his sexual identity: "This is why this ambiguity has evolved in me as to whether I am bisexual or not." He explicitly connects the question of his bisexuality to that of parallel relationships with men and women, which is an exceptional narrative in my sample. Nonetheless, Péter's attempts failed so far. He managed to have some shorter sexual relationships with men, but these all ended soon, because either the men or the woman could not accept it.

> For me, two long-term relationships would be reconcilable, having my [female] partner and having a same-sex partner, too – but this is up to two people and probably couldn't work out. (…) Through gay dating sites, I had some sexual relationships, but they ended either because I couldn't reconcile it with my present [straight] partnership, or because the person whom I met couldn't accept that. And so, actually **there wasn't even enough time for us to see whether there is a chance for two relationships**, two deeper relationships to evolve, or not.

His mention of the temporal aspect is noteworthy: without the partners' consent into the parallel and open set-up, there was no chance to try it, no chance for the casual relationships to turn committed – this way, even Péter himself does not know how it could have worked, if at all. This is why by now he trusts his friendships better and could imagine that a romantic bond might result from them: there exists already an emotional bond which is hard to formulate with a stranger under time constraints. Towards the half of the interview, Péter tells me a story about a same-sex (mostly sexual) relationship where he was closest to the chance of keeping it and making it long-term. He met a man who asked him to decide about their relationship after one and a half months dating.

> He put me in a decision situation, saying yes, **he would like to have a long-term relationship**. I would have liked it, and I fancied his courtship very-very much. He had a similar style to me. But I felt I would need time. **Back then we weren't so tied up with my**

> **[female] partner, because we had separate apartments, although shared a workplace. Back then, it would have been much easier to make that step that it was over, regarding the circumstances**. But this man was really pushy, in terms of forcing me to decide. I answered him that I needed a bit more time. And I think, had he given me more time then, I would have done it and I would be with him till today. Well, if that was all it was about; of course, it was about more things, but still. Afterwards, this kept hurting me for a good deal of time that I had said no to him then. **It was specifically about moving in together and about me breaking up with my [female] partner**. But back then I couldn't do it. Which I regret though.

The references to living together with a man and a woman, respectively, marked with bold, are crucial to Péter's experience of a pressing dilemma and a missed chance. His account testifies that time and space are inextricable in sexuality, since the stability of the heterosexual partnership is anchored into the shared spaces of life, be it a common workplace or a shared flat. The question of temporality painfully surfaces in this narrative. Clearly, time is crucial in his sexual identity, not simply because he is attracted to both men and women at the same time and would like to live with both. But, more importantly, because for him to figure this out, he needed more time than what was acceptable for the man in question. Through the access to dating sites, same-sex relationships represent short-term (mostly sexual) opportunities for him, where he is supposed to act quickly, whereas his heterosexual relationship stands still in time, often seeming to last forever. Living together with an opposite-sex partner is so much more reasonable, that moving together with a man meant a very hard step to make for Péter, who, similarly to Botond, did not want to leave her.

I would say, Péter needed more time because he did not have enough space. Note his (also spatial) expression "tied up" concerning the heterosexual partnership: even back then, they were spatially very close, sharing a workplace and living within a short distance. In addition, as it turns out at other points of the interview, all this happened in in a small town, being on low social worker wages, which allow for small room for manoeuvring divergent sexualities. In such a social context, Péter severely experienced the push to choose, the (biphobic and mononormative) logic of either-or, despite his preferences. With the man, "moving in together" was at stake, which is a huge step for two men in terms of homosexual

visibility. Retrospectively, Péter interprets this case as a turning point in his life, which he missed. Later he moved in with the same female partner, which in turn makes it even harder for him to form relationships with men. Péter acknowledges it as the power of "the circumstances". Settling down, finding a home in an emotionally close relationship, which has always been his aim, stands in opposition with his need for the same with men. Here, home in the normative sense thus closes off the chances for bi-/parallel sexuality: close means closed.

However, the idea of the home as the site for heterosexual partnership allows others to form and maintain same-sex relationships parallel, delegating them into another, subordinated place. Botond (56, m) dated men during his 15-years long marriage. His narrated story, which contains the opening quote above, shows the transformations of his understanding of cohabitation between 1980 and 1990, when he was 25 and 35 years old, respectively.

> I didn't want to leave my wife. Not because I was afraid of the outside world, but because I myself felt good in her company. […Another woman as a **lover**] would have been a rival, I thought so. But if I **start with a guy**, a guy won't be a rival, because… For me, in my patterns of the times, ***I couldn't have even imagined*** that you can even **live together** with a guy. An interesting thing: I was roughly 25 years old when I started **dating men**; and I was 35 years old when for the first time one asked me... Actually, the guy didn't even ask it as a question but as a possibility – after a **one-day meeting**, I have to add, after **being together on the first day** –, **let's rent a flat together**. And till then, ***it hadn't even crossed my mind***. And interestingly, when he said this like that, [for me] it was not like "well God forbid", but "wow, really, why not?". It was the first time it occurred to me that a guy can be a rival in the relationship, I mean, he can be a rival to the **marriage**.

The time span of Botond's story covers the last decade of state socialism in Hungary. Due to the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexual marriage, he could not even imagine (emphasized twice) that two men could live together and it could be a rival to heterosexual partnership. In contrast to the 2000s Budapest, when Péter and many other men would prefer to live together with their male partners, 20-25 years earlier this was not even an option to consider for most same-sex attracted people (see Béres-Deák 2016b). Botond's story contests the judgemental aspects of the "men on the down low" representation because at several points in the interview, he talks about how he had a real love towards his wife. Also, he and his wife talked about his same-sex experiences.

If we think about the spatial aspect, this quote is about cohabitation: whether and how it is possible, and what one can imagine at all. It is connected to a hierarchy of relationships, how to be together with men or women. Let us recall the words in bold from the excerpt which express forms of relationships, many connected to the level of sharing spaces. In Botond's text, the possible versions for being together with women and men, respectively, are:

start with a guy
one-day meeting
dating men
be together
rent a flat together
live together
relationship
wife
marriage

This is a hierarchical spectrum of relationships, displaying different versions and opportunities how one can be together with partners. In the above list, I ordered the terms according to that implied hierarchy, where the heterosexual marriage is the ultimate category in his life back then, and everything else with men that he is talking about are ranked much lower. Maintaining and making sense of bisexual non-monogamous relationships require a reconciliation of the various needs one can have in a relationship: the excitement of the new and transgressive, as well as the stability of the old and normative (Garber 1996, 419). The analytical focus on space in the narratives show how much this reconciliation revolves around understandings of home and living together.

We also see a similar kind of a hierarchy of relationships in the case of Hanna (35, f), the only woman among my interviewees who maintained bisexual parallel relationships. In the very beginning of her interview, she summarizes two significant relationships which started in the 1990s in her high school years and went on for a long time, "actually parallel, and well, a bit alternating each other". When she says that she lived together with both of them, she adds something like "well we didn't live together in three", with the exact wording

distorted by a laugh bursting out. This laugh marks the absurdity of the idea; she also repeats a few times that she had always pictured herself living with a man. Nevertheless, she had entertained the idea of parallel relationships, being among the one in my sample besides Péter who expressed a need for that.

Coming back to the period of parallel connections, full of dilemmas, struggles and pain for each participant, she sketches out what an ideal lifestyle for her would have been then. "Hypothetically, it could have worked for me parallel", having a "classic, man-woman partnership", which "would become marriage or something, so it proceeds somewhere", and a "very close" friendship with a woman, "flaming at a very, very high degree of emotional heat". For her the question is "to what extent sexuality can fit in with" the latter, because this is what "can stir a bit up everyone's feelings, and then decisions have to be made and boundaries have to be drawn, and then it is a difficult situation". Interestingly, she speaks in general, using present tense, although what she describes did indeed happen. Her female bond became sexual, enough to be inacceptable for her male partner – and did not become a monogamous partnership, enough to be acceptable for her female partner. Similar to Péter, Hanna also contrasts her desires with the lack of opportunities enabled by her partners. Wondering about bisexual identification, she reflects on the mononormative social-cultural constraints as well.

> If bisexual means that I dunno, that my whole life is complete if I have both... But this is silly, **we are not settled like that, for a threesome-life or so [*laughs*]. Not even our culture.**

The Hungarian term '*berendezkedve*' which I translated as "being settled" has multiple connotations. On the one hand, in its more literal meaning, it refers to the ways people arrange in their private spaces, typically in the process of furnishing an apartment. On the other hand, ('*politikai/társadalmi'*) '*berendezkedés*' can also refer to the ways a political system or a society functions, for example with respect to its state form, party system, or class

stratification.[51] Hanna underlines this latter meaning with her reference to "our culture". With a metonymy, the image of the furnished house symbolizes the cultural system where "threesome-life" does not have a place. The power of this cultural system on the temporal constructions of both relationships and subjectivities actually surfaces in the ways she narrates her relationship history. In the longer quote above, she makes the temporal difference between relationships with women and men explicit, with the atemporality of female bonds and the teleological trajectory of heterosexuality. Intriguingly, although these relationships went for a while parallel, Hanna does not narrate those periods as united stories with more main characters; after brief summaries, her narration mostly consists of argumentative sequences, focusing on specific dilemmas or people one after the other. This suggests that interweaving the complex web of parallel relationships into one, uniting narrative thread can be hard, given that dominant cultural scripts predominantly follow a hetero- and mononormative structure. Further, this narrative challenge reflects the difficulties of placing these relationships in the same space. That is, the form of Hanna's story displays her ideas of the linear temporality of a monosexual partnership, based on her experience of the failure of parallel bisexuality. She attributes this failure to the presence of sexuality in the female friendship, which then required "drawing boundaries": separation of the two parallel relationships had to be done.

Not much later in the interview, the spatial aspect of heterosexuality becomes important when she mentions her present life, living together with a man, without same-sex relationships. Hanna depicts their house as embodying the *sine qua non* of normativity in the contemporary Hungarian context: heterosexual and nationalistic. She talks about the difficulty of disclosing her homosexual past,

> even though I live in a… Anybody looking into our life with a spy glass can see that we live a **normal family life**, I don't know, a **classic** one, a little bit even **appearing right-wing**, so we have, we have these **big Hungarian dogs, a big house**, so the whole, the whole is very, I don't know, is just very **fine**. But not even together with that, or despite that, I wouldn't be able to talk about it to someone, with such naturalness like 'by the way, actually'.

[51] I am grateful to Edit Jeges for noting this second meaning.

This account refers to the burden of a non-normative sexual past in a highly normative present, negotiating with normativity: she is talking about "leading a normal family life" in this "classical" kind of heterosexual partnership. In this negotiation, the physical space of the house where Hanna lives with her partner plays a central role; and its relevance extends beyond the practicalities of managing parallel relationships. Indeed, the house carries several additional meanings which place them inside the dichotomies of contemporary Hungarian political discourses. "We appear a bit right-wing", she says with an ironic smile, referring to the family house in the countryside as emblematic of a conservative belonging, distinct from the cosmopolitan urban life – with leftist connotations, of both socialism and post-socialism (Fehérváry 2013, 190-199) –, which they had left behind. In contemporary Hungary, especially in the intensifying nationalist rhetoric of the governing party *Fidesz* since 2010, the political right defines itself by Hungarianness ('*magyarság*'). The dogs of Hungarian breeds thus become another (potentially deceiving) sign of nationalist-conservative-familial attitudes. The discourses of national pride as distinctively heteronormative (Renkin 2015, Mosse 1985) would place their heterosexual partnership on one side, and their same-sex and polysexual relationships on the other. The falsity of this image is evident in her story and the irony in her tone.

Hanna's and others' narratives in this section offer elements which contest the heteronormative logic of settling down in a home – and at the same time, they remain bound by it. On the one hand, she contests the Hungarian political-cultural divisions (often appearing clear-cut) by crossing their boundaries with her biographical sexual practices. At the same time, she interiorizes the same national-familial normativity when she is talking about the possibilities these relationships can evolve into, concluding that a same-sex relationship would not be able to proceed anywhere. In this sense, for many, the façade of

heteronormativity embodied in the house offers some space for non-normative relationship structures, while subordinated to the linear temporality of heterosexuality.

6.3. Alternative private spaces uniting relationships

In contrast to these narratives, others' cases show alternatives to such a path, where the normative ideas of the public-private binary as structured by heterosexuality are re-worked in the life story. I show how interviewees' life stories, both as narration as well as practice, manage to reconfigure what (sexual, emotional, as well as other) relations cohabitation might entail. In the narratives which offer alternatives, parallel relationships appear as potentially united in shared spaces. Consequently, heteronormativity gets questioned and 'home' figures as re-created to accommodate complex webs of desire. These narratives reflect the challenge of such endeavours, as well as the social conditions dis- and enabling them. In Szilárd's (45, m) life story, bisexual parallel relationships emerge twice: once around the 1989 regime change in the form of triangular relationship (also discussed in the next chapter about threesomes); and then in the late 1990s. The comparison of these two stories through notions of the home and cohabitation reveals how the opportunities for alternative relationship structures opened up during the years of post-socialist transformation, just to soon close off again in the processes of normalization I outlined in 1.2. and 6.1. In Dávid's (34, m) narrative, we can also detect the power of post-socialist normalization, but his personal path shows a successful redefinition of the relationship between notions of home and partnership.

In 1989, Szilárd (45, m), originally from a rural area in Romania, met a small, commune-like community in Budapest, Hungary. First, spending his military service, he would visit them, and after the service ended, he moved in with them. The community was

headed by the middle-aged Géza who patronized teenagers seeking for a second home escaping time to time from the countryside or from abusive parents.[52]

> **This was the commune, whoever didn't have a place to overnight, could sleep at Géza's place, end of story**. (…) When I was let from the military service for a week, I would go to Budapest, and once I saw a bus parking in the street, and **Géza lived in that bus**. I think today it couldn't even park there. Around the change of the system ['*rendszerváltás*'], it was a great chaos in here; and a *wire* was led out from a house or an apartment [*laughs*] for the *gas heater* which was on, upon which the soy stew was being made. Because back then we were vegetarians. (…) After my military service, I lived at Géza's place for years, not much, for 3-4 years. I had packed my stuff in a travel bag and resigned from my job.

In Szilárd's life, this community is crucial in his move to Budapest. He depicts it as extraordinary and disintegrated in several respects, with the personal composition and material conditions of cohabitation being the most significant ones. His narrative builds on the contrast between "today" and "around the change of the system". Géza's place was also crucial for Szilárd in terms of his biographical bisexuality, as he was part of a loose web of relationships with a young woman (Lili) and man (Gyuri) in their late teens. He is the only one from among my interviewees who maintained parallel relationship with a woman and a man *in the same space*. It was not only the three of them, however, who shared the space; plus, the youngsters also lived partly with their families (Lili in the countryside), which means that this cohabitation differed in many non-sexual respects from the nuclear family-couple model.

I argue that this was possible only in that particular setting, in an alternative family (Weston 1998) complementing traditional ones, influenced by both communist and oppositional ideas of the commune, and provided with opportunities of the under-regulated ("chaotic") new capitalist area of the regime change. Indeed, the rapidly changing political, social, and cultural relations, deregulation of the new free market and the civil sphere probably all contributed to this "commune" to be born and maintained, functioning through small-scale entrepreneurship. As the quote shows, this group of people represented alternative

[52] In the late eighties, a similar move of (especially homosexual) youth to a more free Berlin (both East- and West-) resulted in increased squatting around areas known as gay (McLellan, 2015).

lifestyle in many respects, and notions of home, family, and love were being reworked in this setting. It was characterized by both the conceptualizations of family and work in socialist "second economies" (Gal and Kligman 2002), as well as by the new capitalist-liberal deregulation of labour, allowing for private businesses. In this specific context of Hungary of the early 1990s, a certain lax in social stratification enabled for people like them, not from the higher strata, to form alternative relationships. Szilárd and others in Géza's community worked independently from either state-owned or private institutions, and although at times they slept in a bus, they also regularly had dinner in restaurants. Thus, they definitely enjoyed a freer and wealthier life than Botond in the 1980s, just as both Péter and Dávid (see later) in the solidified years of neoliberal capitalism in the 2000s, who were more embedded in gendered social structures, struggling with necessities of finance and social recognition in low-paid public institutions.

However, despite the character of this arrangement as outside of many social-economic institutions, Szilárd and Lili married in order to get some of the social-economic advantages of heterosexual marriage – most importantly, Hungarian citizenship for Szilárd. Szilárd was aware of the temporary character of this spatial-relational setting. His narrative shows a threesome relationship transitory in the transitory historical time of post-socialist CEE, as the neoliberal processes of the following years hardly allowed for such living arrangements. Szilárd notes that the community started to dissolve because the participants started to form couples and left. To provide reasons why he left, he says:

> I felt I needed to leave; **this is no track, this doesn't have a future**, there won't be any company and we won't make the grade. (…) So I finally moved away from Géza, because I felt this **didn't have a future**. I thought I would like to stay and form my life **permanently** in Hungary, Budapest.

The quote shows that Szilárd actually was looking for something different from the lifestyle they were living in and considered that temporary – not in terms of heterosexual monogamy, as others who left when founded committed partnerships, but in terms of building a stable

existence and career, which for him also meant gaining Hungarian citizenship. We can thus see that in Szilárd's case, too, material opportunities form relationship opportunities and vice versa, through their spatio-temporal frameworks. 1989 was certainly a transitional time for Szilárd, as it opened up opportunities for him to move on, closer to his ideals, including a better integration into the newly forming social system. "Tracks", like 'transitions', lead to a defined future (see 2.4.), and Szilárd's story performs the shift from ateleological, 'queer' temporalities to developmental ideas of settling down, based on heteronormativity. He needed something more permanent, in terms of *residency* in its multiple meanings, as a Hungarian citizen, as finding accommodation, and as establishing a home. Soon, in the mid-nineties, Szilárd found all these needs by Pista, an older gay man who helped him find a job, and they lived together for 15 years in a stable open relationship. During this long-term relationship, around 2000, Szilárd had shorter affairs, including a young man and his mother, Klári. The two lived together in a huge two-floor house where Szilárd would often sleep over as the son's friend. One night he and Klári intimately talked and then went to bed together, and a dating relationship followed.

> It was good. She loved me. And it felt to me the same as when with Gyuri on my right and Lili on my left. (…) This is an **American-like house**, with the bedrooms upstairs, and the living room downstairs. And we would meet at breakfast, downstairs. Then nobody would be inquisitive about who slept in which room.

Here again, Szilárd experienced new forms of home, family, and love. Talking about being loved, differently by two people, he refers back to his earlier years with Lili and Gyuri. Although earlier in the interview, Szilárd did not picture the threesomes with Gyuri and Lili as laying between them (see the next chapter esp. 7.4.), that image seems to catch well his feelings. Also, it is not clear whom he identifies Lili and Gyuri with here and what this comparison exactly refers to. Parallel bisexuality is definitely evoked, as it appears in his life in these two moments. Another commonality is the space of a home, inhabited in ways alternative to the heterosexual couple-family norms, which enables these bisexual

relationships. Unlike in Géza's community, when the three of them shared common spaces in Klári's house, like the dining table in the morning, nobody acted as if in a relationship. The significant differences between the past and present parallel relationships suggest a process in which he manages his sexual life more in tune with normativities which provide him with social-economic privileges. I argue that a focus on his relation to private spaces reveals these tendencies.

Spatially, his need for a stable home was satisfied by the apartment and relationship of Pista; however, in his narrative Klári's house appears as the site where the complicated affectionate connections play out. I interpret his narrative as one about a second home and second family, as later he mentions that Klári was a mother-figure. In contrast to the intimacy of the small space which enabled Szilárd's relationship with Lili back then, forming and maintaining these two parallel relationships was enabled by the space of the house which separated sexual and non-sexual interactions. It was thus owing to the primary familial relationship between mother and son, their good financial situation, and the possibility of non-disclosure. Szilárd's narrative enthusiastically describes in detail Klári's two-floored, big house in an elegant district of the Buda side, with a garden where they would barbecue (he uses the English term). The term "American-like" refers to the set-up with one big shared space and several smaller private bedrooms upstairs. Such houses, in contrast to both the small apartments in the socialist panel blocks as well as the rural family houses of the earlier era, represent autonomy and individualism, values of Western capitalism, in contrast to the past collectivist rhetoric (Fehérváry 2013, 190-199).

Szilárd's narrative therefore expresses his identification with the lifestyle of the new wealthy social strata. Although for him, this house does not evoke the connotations of conservative nationalism which we saw in Hanna's narrative, in both cases it nevertheless represents middle-class respectability. This suggests to me that Szilárd opted to conform to

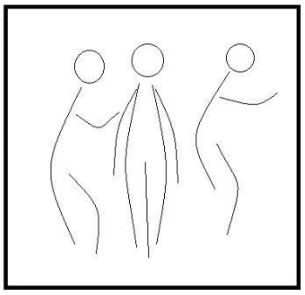
the consumerist bourgeois heteronormative norms of the solidifying post-socialist era, and tried to contain his sexuality among its frames. In the end, his sexual practice reinforces heteronormative ideas by the affective and material separation of hetero- and homosexual relationships (see Wolkomir 2009). Despite his non-normative (bisexual and non-monogamous) sexual practice, we can see a process of normalization in his narrative in the sense that he shifted from non-traditional web of relationships and cohabitation, to a combination of more traditional ones (of coupledom and of parenthood), embodied in conventional forms of home and maintaining discrete spaces inside them for each relationship.

Dávid (34, m), in contrast, took a path in the different direction, moving from heteronormative living arrangements towards bisexual parallel relationships united in a shared private space, till he finally quit the safety which opposite-sex relationships provide through spatialities and temporal trajectories. At first sight, he might seem similar to Péter: a bisexually identified man, who, after some same-sex experiences, lived for 15 years in a relationship with a woman, Mara, frequently referred to as '*élettársam*' ("my life partner"). Eventually, Mara, acknowledging Dávid's (as well as her own) desires for other men, offered him to open up their relationship. This way, Dávid, in contrast to Péter, managed to form and maintain bisexual parallel relationships for 5 years, while he lived together with Mara. As he says, it could have worked for him even longer, if the man had not been closeted, and they finally broke up. Dávid, unsatisfied with his primary relationship, attempted to break up with Mara several times, but she threatened with suicide so he would return to her. In Dávid's account, it was another attempt on Mara's side to keep him when she suggested that Dávid's boyfriend at the time (around 2009) move in with them. So they tried to *live together* in three – and Dávid's story shows that sharing space was crucial in their relationship dynamics. The first night, when the three were supposed to share the bed, it became obvious that sharing

space would not work. After the first 15 minutes in the interview, Dávid tells me the story which marked the end of the long-term heterosexual relationship.

> So I started dating a young, 24-year-old guy, who even **moved in with us.** At the first night I already knew it was over and I would leave her for good. Because my partner, let's call her Mara, she had been emotionally blackmailing me a lot, and she cannot be tender. At night, if she felt so, being tired, moody, etc., she would turn away from me (...) but my ideal is to cuddle up. (...) So in the first night when **the three of us went to bed**, we had had dinner together, the **three of us went to the [same] bed** [*we laugh*] – this is very nonsense, right? [-*Funny*.] And I, well **I have lived with her after all**, I snuggled up to her. She **turned away**. I'm like, all right. The guy snuggled up to me **from the other side**, that's fine. There was no question from that point on. And then I split up with her right away, but **I did not move out yet, because the problem is that the 15 years have tied us so much financially as well; shared house,** shared car, shared, everything shared. Shared bank account, indeed, everything.

I highlighted the spatial expressions in Dávid's account, which help us notice the important role of space on different scales. First, the shared bed symbolizes the extreme of spatial togetherness, after the also intimate and symbolic shared meal by the shared table. The bed here is not the space uniting the three participants for a limited time of sex as in Chapter 7 on threesomes; and it is not a symbol for idealizing parallel bisexuality as it was for Szilárd's; rather, for Dávid, the bed symbolizes the impossibility of the three of them living together, sharing space, or anything in general. The postures and movements of the bodies in the bed represents the process through which Dávid, in the middle, first initiates closeness with Mara, who turns the back to him, then he turns to the guy who responsively got closer to him. My sketch below serves to visualize his position. Although being *in the middle* in bed is a spatial trope of bisexuality, in his case, it actually embodies the failure of parallel bisexuality as sharing home. In the narrative, as in his experience, this image clearly marks what made him eventually *choose*, although he had not planned to: he wanted partners in emotional closeness, embodied in spatial closeness.



6-1. Figure. Three in bed – author's illustration, 2015

We can also see, secondly, that living together in three represents a second, more difficult step in forming parallel relationships: Dávid, Mara, and his first boyfriend had managed to maintain them for five years without living together; whereas living together (with the next boyfriend) set the triad apart on the first day. Shared lives, shared property, which made it difficult to break up, was an economic necessity as well, as it was already hard for Dávid and Mara to make a living from two early career teacher wages amidst the financial difficulties of the nineties in a Hungarian town. A third spatial aspect implied in this interview excerpt is therefore the broader social setting. In the sexually restrictive norms of the small town in Hungary, explicitly narrated in other parts of Dávid's interview, forming homosexual relationships meant risking social exclusion, even being fired. It is then visible in his and the others' narratives how much economics, norms and attitudes, as well as psychological dynamics are tied together in sexual experience, which the spatial focus highlighted.

Being in the same space of the bed with two partners made him realize that he had missed emotional closeness in the heterosexual home. I interpret the dynamics of his relationships as a continuous re-writing of the home: first as something which can include a triad, then as which is less defined by shared objects than emotions. Thus, Dávid embraces a dynamic and liminal, hence queer concept of home (Hwa 2010), in which he can reconcile his desires for both a man and a woman. He uses the same expression of "being tied" to heterosexuality by shared places ("the 15 years have tied us so much financially as well") as

Péter did ("back then we weren't so tied up with my partner, because we had separate apartments"). For both of them, these ties, though often out of financial and emotional necessity, mean less and less chance to form same-sex relationships which would not be subordinated to the hetero partnership. Dávid's narrative depicts the difficulty to move out, to untie straight relations even if he had made the choice to form same-sex relationships, and later, to split up with his female partner. Indeed, he managed. Dávid describes how much emotional work he invested in his heterosexual relationship, also later in his parallel bisexual life, and finally in his homosexual life. This effort is missing not only from Péter's narrative but also from Szilárd's, who took the opportunities of alternative living arrangements which emerged, but his interests were better met by the more normative ones later. The narratives of the section thus represent men's various strategies to create alternatives to the heteronormative "home" with which bisexual parallel relationships in Hungary could be managed, which always entail negotiating the loss of (social-economic-sexual-gender) privileges.

6.4. Conclusions

Space and time are interwoven in people's needs, experiences, and opportunities for maintaining parallel relationships with men and women. Heteronormativity and the extent to which it structures life are expressed in the easiness of shared spatial-social life with opposite-sex partners, and in addition to it, in the difficulty to form same-sex relationships parallel, or exclusively. I argued in this chapter with Stella (2015) that heteronormativity displays not so much in the ban of homosexuality but primarily through the push for heterosexual coupling, and I showed how conceptualizations of home and living together are crucial in it. The private space of cohabitation as an eminent site for reproducing heteronormativity restricts opportunities for same-sex relationships. At the same time, it allows for some hierarchical forms of parallel relationships by separating opposite and same-sex sexuality, relegating the

second into spaces outside of the home. Therefore, reconfigurating the home as uniting relationships in a shared space, which happens in some biographies, requires committed investment and exceptional social-economic conditions. The latter were inaccessible for many in Hungary both in socialist and post-socialist times of sexual (re-)normalization and financial constraints, with the exception of the few years of the political "transition" with economic-cultural deregulations and transforming social stratification.

As Botond's story showed, in the 1980s Hungary the concept of "home" could hardly be envisioned as other than securing the subordination of same-sex experiences to the heterosexual marriage. Till today, others cannot but put a primary heterosexual partnership on the top of the hierarchy of relationships, as they have a very similar experience of homosexual relationships having not much time, no future, as it is heterosexuality which has a future and a space to develop (Ahmed 2006). My interviews therefore highlight how much the temporality and spatiality of sexuality are tied together, and how they are negotiated with the material living conditions in the towns and capital of (post-)socialist Hungary. The difficulties of parallel bisexuality are embodied in the narrative negotiations of the concept of home, which unites dilemmas of financial constraints, sexual norms, and cultural belonging.

Despite the recent developments in LGBTQ lives in the last 30 years, especially among the middle class of Budapest, my interview analysis revealed the social pressure for heterosexuality, embodied in living conditions till the 2010s, which proves the post-socialist revival of sexual (and other) normativity. Negotiating the boundaries of friendship-partnership, as well as sexual-emotional-romantic relationships, my respondents also negotiate with the normal ("classical", "our culture"), partly reinforcing normative ideas, partly offering transgressive alternatives to it. Their imagination is often constrained by current social norms (see Sándor 1999), including understandings of the home; most people in Hungary are definitely not given the chance to form poly-bisexual lives.

"Bisexual marriages" are less about multiple sexual attractions than about the need for both stability and excitement, and their conflict (Garber 1996, 419). Indeed, even those of my respondents who identify as bisexual do not necessarily link their bisexuality to the experience of such relationships. Interestingly, after a period of parallel bisexuality, all my respondents with such an experience lead a monosexual (mostly non-monogamous) lifestyle in the present of the interview. The examination of narrative experiences of parallel connections thus reveals the dynamics behind bisexualities, as well as the specific spatio-temporal social constraints (like those of the home) framing them, which in turn can be potentially given new, queer meanings.

The house, embedded in discourses about Hungarian binary spaces like the capital and the country, figures as both private, enabling hiding, whereas at the same time offers a normative image of its habitants to the public eye. The analysis of personal narratives on forms of living together throughout 30 years also suggests the transformations of private spaces and their meanings – as in the state, so in private arrangements. Post-socialist capitalist and conservative normalization tendencies in Hungary have reinforced the familial and heteronormative ideas of the home together with social stratification and demarcations (Fehérváry 2013, 165, 212), disabling alternative cohabitation forms and only allowing the middle class to maintain external same-sex sexual relations outside of the home. I argued that the sustainability of bisexual parallel relationships is only realistic in some restricted spatio-temporal cases: either in the frames of a stable heterosexual relationship, in secret or openly involving same-sex encounters (Wilkinson 2010, Kemler *et al.* 2012); or in the unruly times of social transformation like the years of post-socialist transition in a non-traditional community. "Transition" as characterizing the transformations of social relations on all levels around 1989 in Hungary appeared, according to Szilárd's life story, as an exceptional period

where alternative relationship forms, including cohabitant parallel bisexuality could take up space, without the participants being either marginalized or extremely privileged.

This, I argue, suggests further significant links between experiences of multiple and fluid sexuality and of post-socialism as including periods of social transformations, which let social values and conditions pending till they get re-defined. Further then, subjectivities are not only transforming during these times according to the new elements of belonging (see Erős 1994), but this past experience of "transition" is eventually incorporated in them, also as part of the sexual narrative self. Spatial notions are thus shown as dynamically connected to the temporal experiences of (parallel) sexuality, which are also embedded in social change. Finally, the last analytical chapter will show how ideas of the sexual self reflect the meanings of sex as recently transformed in contemporary Budapest. In the following, I outline how experiences of parallel bisexual threesome encounters are narrated in relation to transformations of gendered bodies and desires. In the narratives, locating sexual desires in the body as the micro level of spatiality connects to the contested meanings of sex in Hungary as both foreign and imposed (primarily by Western media), as well as innate and authentic.

7. Chapter. Women's and men's bodies in the social context of threesomes

7.1. Introduction: Meanings of threesome sex

> **I don't know how much it concerns the topic [of bisexuality], but you hear a lot about such threesomes**. I personally haven't been in one, but people of my age, practically almost all, a lot of them have. I can also for instance imagine one guy and two girls, I mean, being with another girl beside me (…) And for instance **in such a situation, the presence of another woman absolutely wouldn't bother me, really**. I could even say I would like it. But then if it… If I actually get there, what it would be like I don't know, but I can absolutely imagine it. I see nothing repulsive about it, in fact it's definitely appealing. (Kitti, f, 21)
>
> It happens only in such threesomes that I form sexual connections with men. Well, **I don't know to what extent this is tantamount to the category of bisexuality**. (…) **I know her body, her smell is familiar, so in this way this encounter is cosy, and at the same time, there's always this novelty in it**. Or rather, not always, because we have our recurrent clients [*laughs*], but there is novelty in the sense that a new person comes, new smells come, new willy comes. (Márk, m, 34)

The quotes show a strong association between bisexuality and sexual threesomes; further, they point to divergent ways of how men's and women's bodies (including those of the interviewees' themselves) appear in narratives of threesomes. Whereas Kitti's imagination displays a flexible and uncertain desire for participation, Márk attributes binary qualities to the gendered bodies of his partners, which he identifies as the source of pleasure. Therefore, in this last analytical chapter I focus on the gendered and desiring body as a significant point of reference that emerges in threesome narratives. I map out the connections between this specific temporal form of biographical bisexuality and understandings of the body in contemporary Budapest.[53]

I consider the body a spatial category, belonging on the smallest scale among those discussed throughout this dissertation. Reflecting on her own bisexual positionality, Clare Hemmings uses Adrienne Rich's definition of location as not only equivalent "with a continent or a *country* or a *house*, but [also] with the geography closest in – the *body*" (Rich

[53] Parts of this chapter are based on a previously published Hungarian article (Turai 2015), which focused on the social implications of gender differences in the experience narratives of threesomes. I thank Andrea del Pilar Vargas Londono for making me think through the idea of "the body as in transition."

1986, 212, quoted in Hemmings 2002, 52).[54] The body is the focus of biographical continuity, which can be seen as a "court of judgement" in worries about sexual desires as unborn or acquired (Weeks 1995, 39). In the post-structuralist performative-affective framework, moreover, repeated bodily actions create a bodily horizon, and bodies become sexual through the ways they inhabit spaces (Ahmed 2006, 66-67; see 2.3.). Further developing this point, Stella (2015, 141) argues that a more nuanced analysis of Eastern European sexualities is enabled by the attention to intersections of different geographic scopes, from the body to the community to the nation. Susan Gal in her pioneering study on traditional Hungarian dualist divisions according to concepts of the nation and Europe (see sections 2.4.3. and 4.1.) notes that the "opposition may also be reproduced within the individual, who may at one time take the stand of the urban cosmopolite and at other times that of the authentic populist", dividing the body itself "in a structurally parallel way" (1991, 447).

Following these perspectives on the body, in this chapter I examine bodily experiences of Hungarian bisexual threesomes as sites where the division or the co-existence of dual belongings of sexuality, gender, and nation get negotiated, reproduced or negated. I will present how narratives of gendered bodies reveal the ways in which the social meanings of man and woman are co-constructed with their personal and material experiences within the specific social context which is characterized by 'transition'. I focus here only on narratives of "bisexual" threesomes, understood as sexual events of "parallel desires" constrained in time (parallel relationships, extending in time, were discussed in the previous chapter), in which the interviewee participates with a woman and a man.

The interview excerpts I analyse are either about threesome experiences that occurred in the past (Márk's narrative) or they are about fantasy accounts by those who, like Kitti, would like to participate in a threesome in the future. Without being explicitly asked, most

[54] My emphases. As a researcher, I am also bodily located at specific spatial axes which impact the perspective presented in this dissertation (see 3.3.1.).

interviewees told me on their own if they could imagine such a scenario.[55] In fact, it was those interviewees who related the idea of a threesome to the question of their (mostly same-sex) desires who have *not* experienced it, which signals the widespread circulation of its discourse. Completing and contrasting biographies of four people who participated in threesomes with the imaginaries of four others who want to experience it, the meanings of a threesome in relation to ideas of gendered bodies can be mapped out in both areas of sexual experience: desires and practices. The examination of the relationship between the bisexual narrative (as unfolding in biographies) and the image of the bisexual threesome (as experienced and imagined) reveals not only the differences between these two, but also the impact of inter/-national discourses on lived experience of the body. I will explore the ways in which real and imagined bisexual encounters are experienced with regard to femininity/masculinity, desires and pleasures, or the lack thereof, and how this leads to the body narratively becoming a carrier of post-socialist meanings of sex.

There is scarce scholarly literature on the bisexual threesome; it is typically discussed online in genres of folk psychology or infotainment. Within these, the bisexual threesome is most often discussed in terms of its visibility in international popular media, and these accounts reach Hungarian discourses as well (see Sándor 1999, 30). Mostly as "one guy and two girls", as Kitti says, and often as a straight couple's experiment with a woman, it is depicted in popular discourses as an exceptional moment in time that is not related to the participants' identities or even to their desires. Moreover, both in mainstream heterosexual and in LGBTQ popular discourses, non-monogamy appears as the symbol of authentic bisexuality (Garber 1996, 21; Hemmings 2002, 27; Klesse 2007b, 293), reflected in Márk's interview quote above. Since bisexuality can almost never fulfil expectations of stability,

[55] Since so many interviewees raised the topic, at the end of each interview where it has not come up, I also asked what they think of it, because I wanted a basis for comprehensive comparison. Out of my 24 interviewees, six men and two women participated in group sex events with men only; from the interviewees' point of view, I thus do not consider bisexual threesomes the latter either.

authenticity, and "50-50%" (Hemmings 2002, 27), the one and only fixed image which promises to capture it is that of the threesome, which for many epitomizes bisexuality as attraction towards women and men "at the same time" (Garber 1996, 478).

In bisexual theories – though often without focusing on personal experiences – the threesome is treated as a symbol of the complexity of sexuality (even subjectivity as such). It is argued to allow for the deconstruction of the relationship between identification and desire, both directed to both the opposite- and same-sex partners (Garber 1996, esp. Chapter 21; Dollimore 1996; Muñoz 1999). However, as Hemmings argues (2002, 21-22, 33-35), such discussions tend to omit social-historical contextualization in favour of locating sexual complexity in generalized psychological ideas of desire and identification. Building on this argument, I take a sexual-sociological approach (see Elliston 1995; Tiefer 1995; Eckert 2001; Cameron and Kulick 2003) to sexual threesomes as acquiring meaning dependent on specific social interactions, as in this case, in contemporary Budapest. Of course, how the threesome is experienced depends on broader ideas of sex (i.e., "sexual scripts", see Laumann and Gagnon 1995). The various changing subjective meanings of sex in Central and Eastern Europe are documented as in constant reference to ideas about free Western sexuality (Temkina 2003; Rotkirch 2004; Supeková *et al.* 2005).

In one of the early pieces on bisexual behaviour among women in the US context, Blumstein and Schwartz (1976a; see more in 2.2.) discuss threesome practices as a pattern for heterosexual women to engage in same-sex behaviour, supported by both libertarian sexual values and heterosexist male orchestrating. The women themselves often gave "relatively little prior thought to their own potential for homosexual responsiveness" (1976a, 176), which suggests to me that these potentials emerged performatively through the very act of sex (see 2.3.). Due to the increasing public appearance of a practice that previously happened almost exclusively in more private spaces (Fahs 2009, 431), both in the US and Europe the threesome

has become by now a visible and specific form (or, even representation) of female bisexuality. This is why most young women in my sample cannot anymore give "little prior thought" to their sexual involvement with another woman in the presence of a man. In the opening quote, Kitti (21, f) referred to threesomes with an obvious easiness. Later, talking about how – to her surprise - her mother is repulsed by seeing two women together, "to the same extent that she is by seeing two men," Kitti notes the recent rise in societal visibility of bisexuality.

> I think **in our generation it is more acceptable. Or our eyes are more used to it**. Although I think it was the same before, so I don't think bisexuality would be a new thing. Hell no, I'm sure there were people throughout history with such an attitude, it was just not **so in front of our eyes** as it is now.

Although Kitti does not explicitly say this, the proximity in her interview of this comment and her earlier comments on "beautiful women on TV" suggests that such conspicuous bisexuality refers to a specific representation. It is not connected to Hungarian LGBTQ activists' human rights and identity discourses which, as I delineated in 1.2., provide scarce and not widely accessible sources of bisexuality. Rather, in Central-Eastern Europe, such widely circulated images of gender normative women's same-sex eroticism are to a large extent known from international (mostly US) popular media (Garber 1996, 424–479; Eisner 2013, 144-164). Consequently, they are viewed as experimentations of a "trendy, Western-influenced," foreign urban subculture (Baer 2005; Kašić 2005). The new global sexual culture, which defines femininity as Western, modern, capitalist-consumerist, and sexually available, has been widely perceived as liberation in both many of the LGBTQ circles and in new global patriarchal heterosexist discourses. At the same time, national heteronormativity with its focus on reproduction, rejects this sexual culture as morally decadent and inauthentic. Finally, navigating in this binary discursive field, some leftist-lesbian-feminist groups critique both as sexist and objectifying (Nicolaescu 2001; Kašić 2005; Renkin 2009; Kulpa and Mizielińska 2011). I consider bisexuality, and in particular the threesome, to be ambiguously represented at the intersection of these competing sexual discourses (Turai, forthcoming). The idea of the

threesome as "just sex" implies notions of bisexuality as a "transitional stage," a "trendy excursion for straights," devoid of political commitment and related to promiscuity (Borgos 2007, 170-171). Further, "just sex" has specific post-socialist meanings as sign of a new generation's freedom and openness (see Rotkirch 2004), and more importantly, as participation in the Western-led global media culture, which Hungarian youth consider 'cool.'

Still today, these narrow frameworks of the cultural representations of lesbian sex make women navigate their same-sex encounters in complex interplay between agency and objectification (Borgos 2014; Stella 2015, 42). The "two women–one man" set up is a typical male heterosexual fantasy, one which all participants interpret as not reflective of any homosexual desire, but of male heterosexual desire (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976b, 351; Fahs 2009). For this reason, such threesomes allow women to participate in them without risking their heterofemininity to be questioned. Participation, however, puts them in a vulnerable position, which is particularly visible in Hungarian adolescent men's conversations, including jokes about rape if two women would not want to include them into their sexual act (Rédai 2015, 211). Such sexual objectification of bisexual women makes them the most prone to all sorts of intimate partner violence, including forced group sex (see Black *et al.* 2011 quoted in Hura 2016, 55-56; Fahs 2009; Eisner 2013, 80, 137-179; Viggiani 2016, 26, 44).

Highlighting the different conceptualizations of the sexual-gendered body in threesomes, my analysis will reveal that desires are not simply directed at female and male bodies; although understandings of bodily sexual difference manifest as binary, at the same time the body is malleable through its desires and acts in sexual situations, as it transforms either through intention or by chance or by external forces. The title of this chapter reflects my aim to argue that bodies are gendered through the social context, in which, as Ward wrote, "bodies desire other bodies" and "what those body parts *represent*" (2015, 34, her emphasis;

see more in 2.2.). The diversity of sexual meanings in Hungarian narratives about threesomes will show that rather than sexed bodies, participants seek opportunities for friendship, intimacy, experimentation, face-saving and access to other men and women. Through my analysis, social differences, including those of power, become manifest in gender differences. This, I argue, contributes to the conceptualization of sexual fluidity by challenging the role of anatomical bodily difference in sexual desires in general. Rather, as I discussed in 2.2., I consider desires as aimed at "social objects", what "bodies represent" (Eckert 2001, 109; Ward 2015, 34). Eventually then, bodies as sexual and gendered are constituted through such representational and affective work performed on/in/with them (see Butler 1993; Puar 2007).

In the following section, I discuss the threesome as the fantasy of bisexuality in post-socialist Hungary; these narratives underline the absence of actual bodies and highlight the associations between bisexuality and "Western modernity." In 7.3., I move on to the analysis of narratives depicting actual experiences of threesomes. I show how the difference between female and male bodies represents not just biological sex (perceived as anatomy or genitalia), but rather gender, through which bodies become "social objects" of desire (Eckert 2001, 109). In 7.4., I introduce accounts where gendered and desiring bodies are able to transform, suggesting complex relations between women's oppression and non-normative agency. Specifically, this lens reveals that in the early 1990s and 2000s Hungary similar operations of sex as a symbol of Western progress can be observed. Altogether, in Hungarian threesome experiences as a "parallel" form of biographical bisexuality, ideas of a transitional sexual subjectivity emerge, mapping onto each other understandings of desires as transformable, femininity/masculinity, bisexuality, and Western liberation. Post-socialist discourses about transition and in-/authenticity thus frame the understandings of the sexual body just as they framed the other spatial categories analysed in the previous three chapters.

7.2. Imagining threesomes in post-socialism

Regarding threesome fantasies, four women said they could imagine participating in a bisexual threesome; three of them raised this topic by themselves, and the fourth one, following my prompt, said that she and her boyfriend had already talked about it. In contrast to the women's longer discussions, which I name fantasy stories, there were two men who answered that they could imagine a threesome, but only in one-one sentence. All of these women are in their early twenties; they have only had heterosexual partnerships and significantly fewer same-sex than opposite-sex experiences. Their narratives reveal their scale of interest in the latter. For example, sometimes it was an aftermath of teenage kissing for fun (Kitti 21), or fantasies about actual women (Tekla 24), or making out once (Éva 26), or even repeated sex with a friend (Anna 23). The fact that the interviewees brought up the topic signals that they consider their interest in participating in a threesome as a sign of their bisexual desires; Anna calls it a "given perspective" that she, as a person who is interested in both men and women, would consider a bisexual threesome.

Although one may expect that their desires aim for the dually sexed male and female bodies, when we look at these fantasy narratives, interestingly, we cannot see any references to bodily features. The interviewees often use the term "imagine" ['*elképzel*'], but there are no detailed images or stories of their fantasies in which details of a threesome encounter are depicted, including a lack of specific discussions regarding what they would prefer to do with whom. Even later in the interview, for example, it seems hard for Kitti to formulate what she likes in women: apart from the general assertion that "it would turn me on," she only uses negatives ("I never think 'what a desirable mouth'," "it's not that I like a woman's back", "I wouldn't caress her hair") and struggles to specify her desires. Although Tekla (24), as I will show in 7.4., told me how she would have sex *in a couple* with women she likes, she did not describe anything like that when she was talking about the imagined threesome. Note the

expressions Kitti uses in the opening quote, which denote her indefiniteness: "I can imagine", "wouldn't bother me, really, I could even say I would like it", "what it would be like I don't know". It seems to me that imagination here operates as watching from distance – as if Kitti sees herself through the male gaze, rather than as originating from her being with another female body. As Eckert (2001, 108) notes in her analysis of a young woman's sexual narrative, the lack of "carnal pleasure" suggests that the "story was not about sexual desire or sensation", as sexuality can be about so many other social achievements than only about sex. Kitti's formulation, full of uncertainties and the negatives of pejorative terms ("wouldn't bother", "nothing repulsive"), appears defensive, to a greater extent reaffirming her openness to than her explicit desire for women. She, like most of my interviewees, later asserts that same-sex experiences are not a "requirement for sexual fulfilment" in her life.

I propose ways to re-imagine the relationship between discourses and desires as multidirectional through the examination of 'imagination' in the performative perspective of intelligibility. Intelligibility is which offers normative interpretative frames through defining what is possible, and hence precluding non-normative desires (see 2.3., esp. Butler 1993, 2-6, 22; Valentine 2006, 245). This perspective allows us to move beyond the conceptualization of imagination, represented by Plummer (1997, 127), as the first step in the process in which a story, stemming from inner desire, is becoming public and thus can lead to sexual practice. Moreover, he discusses power only in terms of silencing (1997, 126), without mentioning the productivity of discourses (Foucault 1978). In contrast, my analysis shows that imaginations grow from images already circulating within a society, which can, besides encouragement of their erotic capacities, impose sexual pressure on women to constantly consider things they might not want to experience. In particular, young women's sexual practices labelled as "fluid" or "heteroflexible" (see 2.2.) reflect both masculine domination *and* bodily agency to produce emerging desires and pleasures.

As usual, the women in my sample were also mostly encouraged by men to participate in a threesome in the first place, regardless of their straight, lesbian, or bisexual orientations (Eisner 2013, 181): Éva (26), Anna (23), and Dioram (32) were capacitated by their boyfriends, Dorottya and her lesbian partner by a colleague, and Kitti by a stranger. Their reactive "I could imagine" primarily expresses openness and anticipation of excitement, without necessarily taking into account pre-existing desires. I argue that this sexual attitude reflects several interconnected discourses, among which the popular pornographic imagery is one (Kašić 2005; Eisner 2013, 159-164). It also reflects general expectations of adaptability from women. Moreover, these expectations appear in new capitalist-individualist ideas of risk-taking and adjusting to changes through the production of consumerist desires – which in the Central-Eastern European context implies identification with Western wealth and modernity (Nicolaescu 2001). If, due to structural forces, for many women in state socialism lesbian encounters were not imaginable (see Chapter 4 and Sándor 1999), for young women today they cannot be *not* imaginable.

Yet, as I will elaborate in 7.4., this expected openness may bring women closer to their own sexual capacities (see Apple 2013). Some report to have considered bisexual threesomes before forming lesbian relationships; as Dorottya (40) says, she used to want to try a threesome, only until she had not yet acknowledged her same-sex desires. Many of my younger interviewees discovered pleasure and desire while engaging in same-sex erotic which they had agreed on "for fun". The view of sex as (unserious, easy and funny) game is tangible in fantasies about threesome, which my interviewees indexed by their use of expressions like "fun", "joke", "why not" and "I'm curious"[56]. These do not only refer to the liminality of same-sex desires and encounters (Ward 2015, 27) but also to spontaneity, given that some of them explicitly distanced themselves from the idea of planning such encounters. Kitti, who

[56] "Bi-curiosity", without a Hungarian equivalent, is not a known term, but my chapter discusses the phenomenon it aims to describe.

was enthusiastic about the idea of participating in a threesome, much later in the interview tells me a story about a situation where she refused the opportunity of a threesome. Once on a night bus in Budapest downtown (part of the city's party life crowded with drunken youth) a straight couple came up to her and invited her into a threesome, which she found funny and unimaginable. She later explains her idea about spontaneous same-sex sexuality:

> If one **spontaneously** gets into such a situation with their own sex, and they are attracted, then it can happen in that very moment. **Planning** it like »well today I want one then« and then I dunno, or **forcing** it to find someone just because I want to try this, this is not how it goes.

While fantasy narratives insist on the spontaneity of the situation in the name of some sort of authenticity, planning in advance characterized three of the four stories about actual experiences of threesomes. With dating sites becoming widespread in Hungary of the 2000s Hungary, it is often in threesomes where women without strong lesbian commitment can reach each other sexually, due to a number of different reasons (see 1.2.). For Emese (37), the threesome was a conscious decision, a compromise in order to engage in sex with women:

> Then next time when I started dating a woman, she was also this very feminine woman – **we met online**, but we saw each other a lot, and so we basically got to love each other as people. I could feel it was going to be better, not something *heartless*. But this time she was the shyer one, because she wasn't sure if she could do it, like the two of us, so **she insisted this happens in a threesome, that we have a third, a man, who would direct the whole thing. She was 22 years old, and maybe that's why I said, "all right, okay, if you need direction so much, let's do it".** And then in a threesome! [*laughs*] The point was that I was only dealing with the girl, so **luckily I didn't have to deal with the guy. Well this was the price, otherwise I couldn't get the woman**.

Emese's experience narrative reflects the societal framing of the fantasy narratives, from the uncertainties of sexual desires to the male gaze as orienting them. The presence of the man (and so of heterosexuality) in a threesome provides a safer frame, a known sexual script (Laumann and Gagnon 1995) both for those women who actively look for, and for those who "wouldn't be bothered", as Kitti put it, by another woman. Although Emese identifies as "unambiguously bi", her bisexual desires in this situation practically played out only to the extent that they helped her more easily accept the threesome set-up which was necessary for her to realize her same-sex desires. Yet, later she "didn't want to be in threesome at all and

the girl didn't want to be in twosome" with her, so their relationship did not continue. Turning now on to the experience narratives, I show how the body, including gender differences, operates in them, in contrast to the absence of "carnality" in the young "mostly straight" women's fantasies.

7.3. Socially gendered bodies

In the lived experiences, the bodies of the participants of the threesome appear as significant and distinctively male and female. However, before moving to more detailed analyses in 7.4., in this section I will briefly discuss that this difference is not about sex (in terms of anatomy or genitalia), but rather about gender as a social construct. I thus further enquire what social differentiations gender difference represents for the participants in these stories (Eckert 2001; Ward 2015) and what it tells us about post-socialist meanings of sex. As I will show, even in the accounts where gender difference seems to be the most corporeal, it actually represents social differences unrelated to bodies (but to the multiplicity of relationships and sensations). This, in turn, underpins the argument of this dissertation about how the social meanings of gender and sexuality are produced through personal practices, including narrated experience. Compared to the previous chapters, the connections to the post-socialist Hungarian context may be more difficult to see, but in my analysis I will frame these excerpts firstly into the whole personal life trajectories sketched out throughout this dissertation and secondly, into broader discourses about the various meanings sex carries in the post-socialist context, as it was outlined in 1.2. and 7.1.

To continue Emese's (37, f) account, which stopped at "this was the price, otherwise I couldn't get the woman", we can see that sexual details, including men's and women's role, are very important to her:

> It was a phenomenal experience. Really. But it was again one-sided, because **I was the active one** and this didn't come in return, because she made the guy come; so **I made her come and she made him come**. Actually I didn't mind it happening this way, because this was anyhow **a wonderful feeling, so this, that I took the men's role**, and perhaps that's why I'm saying,

> that's why it's worth going into sexual details, so that you know, **what drives women toward women**. It is a mind-blowing great feeling to take part in a sexual relation **as a man**.

Emese's narrative is exceptional because her emotion-laded positive evaluations suggest pleasure, and are standing in contrast to the previously described fantasy narratives. Most importantly however, she refers to herself as a "man" in that situation due to the one-sided "active" sexual role she took – interestingly, however, without describing bodily differences. This account shows that threesomes can be the site of both opportunities and compromises for women. Emese's chronological interview narrative combines the elements of gay coming out trajectories (e.g., with an arch of history of progress, see Plummer 1997, 81-96; Seidman 1996) with an affirmation of bisexual identity. Being teenagers in a Hungarian town, Emese and her female friend's homoerotic rapprochement had ended before it could have unfolded, "towards the end of communism, one or two years after that, well this wasn't widespread at all and we were very scared". In her thirties, after moving to Budapest, a world which she experiences as an already "free environment" and an "enlightened society" (see Turai 2010), she could finally form sexual relationships with women. Trapped in lesbian sexual opportunities of the 2000s, where, as we saw in 1.2. and 7.2., online dating forms are co-opted by male-centred encounters, she accepts the compromise of a threesome, where the woman represents her future and the man the conditions of the present. In 7.4., I will discuss how through her masculinity, she formed strategies to dis-identify (Muñoz 1999) with these representational dilemmas.

In contrast to Emese's narrative, in her concise narrative Juli (39, f) did not mention bodies or sexual acts at all; rather, she emphasized (the lack of) intimacy. After a brief report on the fact of a threesome with a straight couple she was friends with, she argumentatively expands on the reasons why the threesome could not work for her.

> **We have been on good terms** since then, too, so the thing didn't break me, I just don't think it's okay for me. So **for me sex cannot be only about sex**. Or I don't feel like it can be only about sex. I think that now, although this might as well change, but **intimacy** doesn't have a place in [threesomes], for me. (…) For me, **the beauty of sexuality, rather, of making love**,

> is the very **closeness between two people**. Just like a conversation in a group is different from a conversation in a pair, it's like, **my love** or my partner, or I dunno how else they call it with such a terminology, but the person **whom I love** very much, and we get even closer, I don't only hug them but there is this… fusion, I think that is what it is. This is about two people in my ideal case-thought. **And it doesn't matter what type of two people, I mean what gender, but two people.** [*11 sec break*]

Juli concludes that what makes sex great for her is the intimacy of a couple; therefore, underlining the significance of the number of people, she states that it does not depend on their gender. Although it cannot be known for sure what she was thinking, the silence of 11 seconds following her account, which is very long in live speech, gives weight and significance to what was said before. Knowing her dilemma-laden life trajectory, in her narrative there is competition between the oppositional meanings of sex as "just sex", celebrated by some of Budapest gay culture, as well as intimacy, elevated by restrained Hungarian hetero-(and homo-)normative discourses (see 1.1., 1.2., 7.1., 7.2.).

The two men who mentioned threesomes in their interviews emphasized that the presence of a man and a woman made it a great experience for them; but, as I will argue, a closer look at their narratives reveals that this was not due to bodily differences. Szilárd (45) does not even elaborate on gender difference, although sexual details had a large role in his narrative.

> So I just **saw them, together**, then I came right away [*laughs*]. It was an **interesting period, back then**. Although I can imagine such a thing now, I could do it only with certain people. But ***back then***, I was able to come five or six times a night. So it was a **Paradise. A boy on one side of mine, a girl on the other side** [*we laugh*]. And they both love me.

The only physical (non-emotional) aspect which he mentions as pleasurable is voyeuristic, seeing the two partners together. Although by mentioning "a boy on one side, a girl on the other," he alludes to a sense of completeness, i.e., gender complementarity, in his narration he avoids mentioning bodily features.

The exceptional idyll of the threesome – a lost Paradise of the "exceptional times" around 1989 in Hungary, which he also calls an "adventurous trip" – is an integral part of Szilárd's whole interview. It also means literal travel, as he started a new gay life in Budapest,

arriving from rural Romania in the beginning of his twenties, in the "chaotic" years of post-socialist transformation. His gayness is thus attached to urban life and the experience of "liberation" over the fall of socialism, which is similar to Emese's experience. They both activate gay coming out narratives using a developmental framework and connecting the realization of homosexual desires to the liberating atmosphere of post-socialist Budapest (see Plummer 1997; Weston 1998; and Chapter 4). However, while in the rural Hungary the years around 1990 were still "communism" for Emese in the countryside, they represented already the new world for Szilárd in Géza's community in Budapest, which offered an alternative home also to youngsters like Gyuri and Lili, Szilárd's partners (see 6.3.). At an earlier point of the interview, Szilárd tells me that he was in love with Gyuri, but their sexual relation was confined to occasional oral sex, which the "straight Gyuri" allowed Szilárd to perform "on the basis of their friendship". With Lili, however, it was different, because she was more emotionally attached to Szilárd. Consequently, the gender of his partners in the threesome for Szilárd represents the multiplicity of rewarding relationship forms, as well as a sense of exceptionally free and fulfilling times of Hungarian social transitions.

Although Márk's (34) story is the most corporeal, what seems to also matter to him is similarly the different social positions his female and male partners take on. Already at the start of the interview he tells me about his regular threesome experiences, which he considers being key elements and chronological end point of his "sexual career". Thinking about his connection with his male and female partners, he says he is "somewhat closer to homosexuality, but I don't claim I'm absolutely that". Before, he only had male partners, and he is not attracted to any woman other than Hanna, whom he lives in an open relationship with, while regularly engaging in threesomes with men contacted through dating sites.

> This is also more exciting [than only with another man], this kind of play, **because of its several factors**. Having Hanna there, who is also exciting and **familiar** in sex. I know **her body, her smell** is **familiar**, so this way this encounter is **cosy** and at the same time there's always this **novelty** in it. Or rather, not always, because we have our recurrent clients [*laughs*],

> but there is the novelty in it that a **new person comes, new smells come, new willy** comes. So this is good, exciting, more exciting, in my view.

Although it was often used, the adjective "exciting" in fantasy narratives lacked a specific content reference. Here, however, its meaning is substantial; it is the fleshiest account, with remarks about smells and willies. The terms in bold show what qualities Márk connects to the bodies: the sensual smell can be familiar in Hanna's case, but new in the male partners' case. These bisexual events thus enable him to positively experience multiplicity (of "several factors"). His narrative in fact stresses 'men' and 'women,' or specifically, several unnamed men and Hanna, together with whom in a shared project, a shared narrative even, he finds male partners ("clients"). Márk highlights the familiar-strange / established-new dichotomies and the excitement that rather than coming from having new sexual partners, builds from the *multiplicities* of these dichotomies. However, he does not particularly emphasize the difference between male and female bodies. The term "new willy" may signal the significance of the presence of male biological bodies, but what makes it exciting is not its difference from Hanna's body, but its distinctness with regard to other men's bodies. In Márk's sexual narrative, 'man' is defined by its multiplicity and variety, and 'woman' by its only-ness, uniqueness (and stability): these appear as two forms of relationships, different and existing in relation to each other (Radnóti 2007). What makes them different is Márk's relation to them, the emotions, life together/apart, and the frequency of meeting.

I quoted Garber (1996, 419) above on "bisexual marriages" which represent not the paradox of bisexuality, but the general tension between "stability of marriage and the unruliness of sexual desire." The open relationship offers a solution for Márk here, allowing him to both realize his homosexual desires and also to contain them inside the frame of heterosexual coupledom (see Wolkomir 2009). What Márk gets from the threesome is the opportunity for adventure in the safe, hidden space of home.[57] Since only two of his friends

[57] I thank the anonymous reviewer of *socio.hu* for formulating this idea.

know about these adventures, the interview I conducted with him was itself a confession narrative (see Grenz 2014 and 2.4.1, 3.1.). Thinking about how others may react, he believes that they would see that him and Hanna participate in threesomes with "sober minds and responsibility", unlike others whose experiences often follow harmful passions induced by alcohol and drugs. These metaphors evoke the lifestyle that actually characterizes my younger respondents. With that, he underlines how these sexual events could also be integrated into the frames of the normal, bourgeois, even conservative nationalist lifestyle they otherwise lead in a family house in the Hungarian countryside (see 6.2.). Furthermore, while resisting certain norms and reinforces others, the complexity of normativity and transgression in multiple relations (Klesse 2007a, 16-18) in the specific context of binary cultural divisions of Hungary becomes even more illuminated.

Another set of different meanings of the sexual body surfaced later in the interview. When I asked Márk if he knew any people that he would call bisexual, he mentioned sexual partners who during sex do with him everything they also do with Hanna, in contrast to those who do not kiss him. His observation suggests that men engage in same-sex acts in various forms and to various degrees. More importantly, however, it suggests that after such encounters participants make sense of their involvement in bisexual threesomes in terms of their desires, orientations, and emotions (see Ward 2015). In short, I want to conclude that it is these differentiations what highlights how performativity (2.3.) operates in practice: bodies are given gendered meanings by the very acts they perform and the social differences they represent.

7.4. Women's desires in transition

The prior discussion of women's threesome fantasies has already suggested that it is widely accepted in mainstream discourses that female sexual desire is changeable. Situating bisexuality in contemporary Hungarian conceptualizations of sex as a token of Western

modernity, in this section I argue that bisexual threesome situations, through the ideal of sexual freedom and fluidity, enable young women to experience some form of "bodily transition" in terms of the malleability of their desires. With this transition, they can negotiate their desires – sexual and other – with heteronormativity, which frames threesome situations through elements of re-patriarchalizing objectification. Furthermore, I show two accounts where it was the female body's *gender* that what was presented as if transforming in sex, thus implying complex ways in which normative hierarchies and empowerment interact. Finally, I demonstrate the similarities in the meanings of threesome sex that have to a large extent remained stable over decades' time in Hungarian post-socialism.

In young women's narratives discussed in 7.2, the reactive "Why not?" points to the transformability of female desires and is presented as a sign of openness and flexibility that signals their aspirations for images of modern women in the globalized Western media. In contrast to these narratives, however, Juli (39) talked about her threesome experience only after my prompt, which may indicate her unease which these situations. With disappointment and condemnation, she presented the malleability of her desires as affected by alcohol and others' initiation, as opposed to the young women such expressions of spontaneity and loss of control welcome as contributions to eroticization (Rust 1993). Although Juli took part in a threesome spontaneously, she tells her story as proof of her body's inauthentic participation, being able to transform by external forces. Here I quote her threesome account at length, emphasizing the expressions that refer to the transformations of desires.

> I tried [the threesome] once… [*small laugh*] And I think that it's not okay. **I dunno why I agreed, I was stupid and very… easily driven**. There was a friend and her boyfriend, and we were on very good terms, and it was right after a break-up, and **their care felt good**. And then **they contemplated it a bit** [*small laugh*]. We have been on good terms since then, too, so the thing **didn't break me, I just don't think it's okay for me.** (…) So **a threesome for me is more like an experiment, a transgression** in the sense of let's say, at least in my mind, as **taking drugs** is transgressive. For me that is like, I did try it. I dunno, maybe like trying some **weed** a long-long time ago. And **I hadn't particularly missed** that either. I didn't even try anything else. But **I don't desire the experience of experimenting** with it. So I think, especially as someone who is slowly turning 40, that I got or I get and I will probably get a lot

> of experiences, which I wouldn't have thought of. And if it's possible without it, then what for? **Why to force this in mechanic ways, or to put chemicals into your body?**

Instead of asking "Why not?", Juli asks "Why to?", evoking images of inauthenticity both with her use of the terms like "experiment, transgression, force, mechanics, drugs, chemicals" as well as with her characterization of herself as "being stupid and very easily driven", "not desiring", and "not missing something". As Eckert (2001, 104) warns, the study of sexuality should pay attention to un-desire as well, because for many of those under the "desire imperative," this is their basic experience; this is also Juli's experience, as she is not sure about her desires either for women or for men (see 1.1.). Later in the interview in fact, Juli's narration links back to the threesome when addressing the question of sexual self-identification. Instead of identity labels, she prioritizes the retrospective evaluation of each sexual event.

> Luckily, I haven't been often to situations where I should have categorized myself. I think if I now had to… Well, I have experiences about some things that had felt good, and remained good afterwards. (…) And there are things that were exciting, but then you realize that you haven't come out of them well. Your soul hurts or you feel here [*pointing at her heart*] that it's not in its place. For example, I had such a feeling that **I didn't do good to myself with the threesome**, for example. Or when someone for instance **gets drunk like an idiot and doesn't feel good the day after**. This is that feeling more or less what I'm talking about, that **alcohol** might bring out a lot of things, which are tensely suppressed, or I dunno, but probably it shouldn't have, because the day after they **puke their guts out**.

Unlike Emese's lively and colourful details, almost no specific facts could be extracted from these last two excerpts, which do not form a story but mainly consist of argumentations. I consider the interview itself as part of Juli's self-knowledge work that gave her space to re-formulate her narrative identity (Diamond 2006; Grenz 2014). The threesome seems to be at the centre of her dilemmas about her own life course that displays queer temporality (Dinshaw *et al.* 2007; Freccero 2007), as it is not integrated into (gay or straight) linear ideas of psychosexual development. As it was elaborated in 1.1., she does not feel like she belongs into either section of the culturally-politically divided Hungary. Depending on the interpretative frame she employs, same-sex desires appear as either inauthentic, unserious impositions of the Western youth culture of "experimentation and transgression" on the body

striving for intimacy, or, they are believed to carry the true meaning of self, which is repressed by conservative nationalist heteronormativity. With the images of regret after the alcohol-induced threesome, Juli formulates the general questions about her desires in the context of in/authenticity. The differences of fe-/male bodily presence were not important to her in this section, unlike later in the interview when she talked about differences in smell and skin texture.

Liking sexuality to alcohol and weed, Juli refers to the temporary transformations of the body (with the same judgemental tone as Márk did) that in her provoke feelings of discomfort after questionable sexual events and make her "puking the guts out". She seems to also engage with the implicit questions of authenticity (see Linde 1993). Although authenticity remains a central concern in sexuality in general, it is especially important in bisexual threesomes, where it is often questioned if desires are just a result of expectations (Hemmings 2002, 43; Fahs 2009). In the Central-Eastern European context, of course, the dilemmas of in/authenticity are even more present, as these societies are in general coping with accusations of force, imitation, and dissimulation (see e.g., Nadkarni in 2.4.2. and Turai 2010). Due to the recent visible transformations of ideas about the threesome I delineated in 7.1., young women do not think that the threesome embodies the push to choose between oppositional sexual cultures of LGBTQ and sexist heteronormativity. Unlike Juli, and in line with discourses of recreational sex as reflecting a modern, specifically Western individualistic subjectivity (see Rotkirch 2004), these women do not consider sex in general as something for which they *necessarily* need emotional attachment (Blumstein and Schwartz 1976a). In contrast to Emese and Juli who consider the threesome to be a compromise that stems from a wish for lesbian sex or friendly consolation, in these women's imagination it is the lack of emotional attachment that actually enables successful threesome situations.

Juli might want to position herself against such images of youth sexuality – however, she is faced with the fact that a similar situation also happened to her, as she retrospectively evaluates the event as stemming from her weakness and some kind of external push. In the context of the blurred boundaries between intimacies of friendship and romance that are less policed among women (Sedgwick 1985; on Hungary see Albert 2014), Juli's position apparently causes distress for her retrospectively. The expression "it didn't break me" implies that she sees the threesome in part as an uncomfortable experience, although there was also a positive, emotional basis ("their care felt good").

Although the malleability of women's desire in threesome stories may reveal their social position as subordinated to men's needs, I argue that sometimes, through an understanding of their gender as transformable in sex, women find opportunities in these potentially exploitative situations. As discussed before, Emese (37, f) presents her detailed threesome narrative as a necessary step towards creating fulfilling lesbian relationships. To shift the focus of 7.3., here I highlight the aspect of liberating gender transformation, which seems to be an easy, almost automatic consequence of occupying a sexual position associated with masculinity. Emese says, "I was the active one", satisfying the other woman, which was

> a wonderful feeling, so this, that I took the men's role, and perhaps that's why I'm saying, that's why it's worth going into sexual details, so that you know, what drives women toward women. It is a mind-blowing great feeling to take part in a sexual relation as a man.

In effect, she is not talking about the threesome, but about a paired experience, where the man has only a minor role, and with which she "luckily didn't have to deal with". Clearly, in contrast to expectations about threesomes where the man has sexual contact with both women (see 7.1.), this situation went on in the way that she preferred. Her experience of "being a man" in the threesome may complicate how the two other participants perceived the gendering of the encounter, since it is in contract to the popular imagery of the threesome. Furthermore, it also complicates concepts of masculinity, as prioritizing the pleasure of a

woman is to a larger extent associated with the butch than the cishetero masculine ethos[58]. Emese's story, including her own ambiguous evaluation of it, shows that the threesome allow for exploration of same-sex sexuality among women who are more embedded in straight culture (Apple 2013). Emese in fact used the threesome to explore her own desires, negotiating expectations about women's role in it. Similarly, Tekla (24, f) says that if she really wanted a woman sexually, she would not be afraid and it would not be risky for her;

> indeed, in some situations **I could even, in scare quotes, capitalize on it.** Because a guy must be into it even more. Definitely. He'll say for sure, "then what about a threesome" and I guarantee I'll say "of course".

What is implicated in this quote is that without her desires towards (and availability for) men being questioned, Tekla can feel protected against anti-lesbian homophobia and benefit from the heterosexist framework of the threesome, that allows both her and Emese's female partners to be more willing to engage in sexual acts with women. Tekla's formulation "in scare quotes, capitalize" is noteworthy, because unlike Kitti and Éva, she understands the threesome as an opportunity to engage with another woman more easily, in order to realize her *already existing* same-sex desires. Among all the young women I interviewed, who had reported same-sex experience to the extent of kissing as teenagers, Tekla was the only one to describe what she would like to do with specific women. Interestingly, in these accounts Tekla uses associations of masculinity that are similar to Emese's, as she repeatedly says "If I were a man", continued with "I would date her, talk and cuddle with her", "I would fuck her", "I would be a fucking machine". Her same-sex interest is thus connected to a fantasy about male sexuality as intense and active, one that can be used to stress the power and authenticity of her desires. However, it also implies the impossibility or illegibility to be sexual with other women as a woman (see Rédai 2015, 212). The conditional turns into indicative in Emese's narrative, testifying that such fantasies can come true: "It is a mind-blowing great feeling to

[58] I am indebted to Rita Béres-Deák for this point.

take part in a sexual relation as a man". After this sentence, Emese's narration goes on, integrating a previous sexual experience with a gay friend she mentioned earlier.

> I actually experienced this before, because going back to my gay friend, it turned out that he might not be that gay, because eventually he had sex with me [*laughs*]. And when it happened, indeed three times, so it wasn't by accident, **I was sticking the vibrator into his butts. And as he enjoyed this, it was mind-blowing, so I experienced *also then* what it's like to be the active one, quasi a man… so let's say, to fuck someone**. Even if just with a vibrator. But in this threesome situation **especially, I did it with such a strap-on vibrator, and it was a mind-blowing great feeling.**

The sexual experience with her gay (which she still views as questioning the gay partner's sexual orientation) friend stands here parallel to her lesbian experience, due to her role "as a man". The gender inversion she experienced in both cases concerns sexual acts irrespective of anatomical bodies. Importantly, it is not other elements of gender expression (e.g., body, hair, or attire) that would turn her and Tekla into a man – as they both emphasize a feminine identification – but sex, which open up new pleasures for them. Emese could in both situations penetrate and sexually satisfy her partner with a vibrator; her female partner "especially with such a strap-on". She does not elaborate on its significance, but perhaps, it was the experience of penetration by moving her hips that made her similar to men when they use their penis. Consequently, in her narrative, in particular with the repeated use of the evaluative adjective "mind-blowing," Emese puts a much greater emphasis on her own masculinity than on the gender of her partners.

Research has shown that women experience sexuality as a liberating field also due to an engagement with masculine forms of desiring women (on Hungary see Rédai 2015, 215; on bisexual women see Kemler *et al.* 2012, 329). I follow this further in arguing that the parallels invoked by Emese's narration actually point to similarities among sex between two women, two men, and a man and a woman. I do not question that Emese (or any of my interviewees) sexually wanted *women* or were turned on by particular body parts; but I show the components of their desires that might go beyond physical sex characteristics (Ward 2015, 35). To describe elements of sexual desire and pleasure in Emese's story using the categories

of hetero-, homo- and bisexuality would be a simplifying reduction (see Seidman 1996; Hemmings 2002, 113). This is why I argue that in her narrative the participants' gender is not as important as the modes of sex. Specifically, Emese experiences her gender as transformable into pleasurable masculinity, at the same time revealing the constraints of notions of femininity in women's sexuality.

In the final section of this chapter I will discuss the ways in which both the malleability of women's desire and the impact of masculine power in threesome stories bring to the fore both the shifts and continuities of sexual meanings in the post-socialist history of Hungary. The connection between non-monogamous experimentation in threesomes and Western capitalist democracy seems to be constant over the past two decades, with the only shift that recent ideas of individual flexibility and openness to opportunities have replaced the narrative of participating in more free and fair social relations. The latter is reflected in Szilárd's (45, m) story about the threesomes he participated in during the 1989 system change. Szilárd introduces the sequence with "and here comes an interesting story", using the Hungarian form, '*sztori'* of the English word, employing the linguistic register of Hungarian youth using foreign and sexually explicit expressions (see 4.1.) that portray their ease in sex. I am quoting his whole threesome story in order to show the workings of the simultaneous sexual-friendship-romantic relationships (delineated in 6.3.). In particular, I emphasize the woman's position and the post-socialist cultural associations with sex.

> Back then, Gyuri and I, how to say this nicely, we fucked with Lili [*smiles*], regularly, both of us. Gyuri was like 16-15, I was 21-22, Lili was 17. [*8 second break, continues with a little laugh*] It was an *interesting* thing. It is very, very good to recall. **We loved each other**, it was great together, there was a bit of naiveté in it, being amazed by the whole thing. When I see **porn films** and such certain films, **swinger parties** and everything upside down, this wasn't like that. This was **full of emotions. We loved each other**. And everyone, we didn't have secrets, everyone knew whom the others love, do you see? Lili knew I **adored** Gyuri. Actually the way it was, Lili and I had fucked. **Completely accidently**, once she slept over, because she was from the countryside and couldn't go home on time, so she spent the night there, and somehow there wasn't a place elsewhere and [*slowing down*] we lay in the bed together, but **without any big preparation, we even had our jeans on, so some unserious thing**. And then, this thing somehow happened out of **petting**, and I thought it was great. And we stayed like that and she came again in a week. After a while I could see that **she had fixated on me**,

> OMG, she shouldn't be so full of herself, I don't make promises to anyone. Because I know that we cannot do the **"till death us do part"**, then why to believe we can. And then Gyuri once lamented to me on how good it was for me to do it with Lili. And then, as serious as hell, I told him, "you know what [*laughs*], I'll see what I can do! I'll talk to her!" And I swear to you, I talked to Lili. We discussed it. **Over a coke or a hot-dog, we discussed, "look, this Gyuri is so nice. Well, he hasn't been with a woman yet. [*in low voice*] Little kid, hasn't been with a woman yet, only watching women from far. What if." Eventually, I don't know how much Lili liked this idea, if it turned her on or. How to say it. So if it was Gyuri who turned her on, if she went along with it because of Gyuri, or because she could think that this turns me on so much that she wanted to do good to me, I don't know.** In any case, I was completely done. So I just saw them, together, then I came right away [*laughs*]. **It was an interesting period, back then.** Although I can imagine such a thing now, I could do it only with certain people. But *back then*, I was able to come five or six times a night. So it was the Paradise. A boy on one side of mine, a girl on the other side [*we laugh*]. And they both love me.

This threesome is presented as an ideal state, a utopistic, unrealistic life situation in Paradise, but also as a lost and passé golden age. Szilárd calls Gyuri and Lili by their names, which indexes emotionality, individuality, and the equality of their relations (in contrast to Márk, for whom Hanna was obviously ranked above the anonymous men). With the emphasis on love and open communication, which he enacts using dialogue quotes and sexually explicit expressions, Szilárd's narrative performs a polyamorous ideal. Maintaining the emotion-"just sex" binary (see Turai 2010), he refers to dominant global media images of bisexual non-paired sex in porn and swinging, that flooded Hungary after 1989, as unemotional, non-genuine representations (see 1.2. and Klesse 2007a; Easton and Hardy 2009; Wilkinson 2010). At the first sight then, this story seems to be very different from the mainstream discourses of threesomes sketched out in 7.1: in the early 1990s, without the influence of today's objectifying media discourse; embedded in love relationships; and with a gay focus. However, I argue that upon a closer look, Szilárd's experience appears to operate according to a similar dynamics due to power relations, which put the woman in the scenario in a vulnerable position.

The sexual encounter only between Szilárd and Lili carved into the threesome story is the chronological antecedent. As the emphasized section suggests, Lili's vulnerability could also play a role in her agreement to participate in the threesome, as she wanted to satisfy

Szilárd's desires, directed toward both her and Gyuri. Therefore, also in this set-up, although there are claims of equality, the sexual use of women can be found in the form of a compromise. Unlike in Emese's story, where she could get access to a same-sex encounter only together with heterosexuality, here it is Lili's *hetero*sexual desires that get capitalized on. Through Lili, Szilárd could experience Gyuri in a way that he could not have when he was alone with him. As the encounter was also meant to help Gyuri gain heterosexual experience, even if it is not a usual heterosexist set-up Lili seems to serve as a triangulated object in a transaction between men's power and desire (Sedgwick 1985; Ward 2015, 110).Their threesome is similar to todays' pattern of a man orchestrating and watching. I therefore reiterate Klesse's (2007a, 14-18) idea that in non-normative (e.g., gay or polyamorous) relationships, power differences still play out. Here it is not only the difference in gender but also in age. Szilárd to an extent did influence the teenagers, who were dependent emotionally on him and economically on the whole community. This of course does not mean that it was not also love that which motivated the three of them to engage in sex; to the contrary, I assert that bonds of friendship, love and desire, all imbued with power, were in interaction. In contrast to Juli's experience, however, Szilárd used and gained multiplied pleasure from the interconnectedness of friendship, love and desire that marked his relationship with Gyuri and Lili.

Moreover, I argue that Szilárd's narrative highlights the continuity of discourses in the 1990s and 2010s of sex as freedom, nevertheless deeply informed by heteronormativity. First, Szilárd's narrative style is similar to that of the younger women, with the use of dialogues and sexually explicit terms. Second, the material elements of Szilárd's story also suggest this link. "Without any big preparation, we even had our jeans on, so some unserious thing" and "over a coke or a hot-dog, we discussed" depict an atmosphere of ease, fun, and a feeling of community. Szilárd presents these circumstances as a normality deemed abnormal by the

wider society (Fehérváry 2013) and mobilizes a meaning of sex as anchored in consumption. Examining sexual autobiographies until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Anna Rotkirch states that for the generation born in the 1970s, "commercialisation and the project of sexual enlightenment were the two driving forces behind the articulation of sexuality" (2004, 110), influenced by Western advertisements and Hollywood movies. In Central-Eastern Europe from the 1960s onward, Western products formed new bases of self and society, with the idea of the West as the standard for what is "classy" – despite, or because, products like coke, jeans, hot-dog being hardly accessible during socialism (Urry 2000, 41). The narrative and material environment of Szilárd's story thus marks a new, sexually liberated lifestyle that he was leading in those years. I go further and claim that Szilárd's lifestyle of that time is close to the environment in which young women's sexuality is discursively situated in contemporary Hungary. The image of sexual freedom and playfulness, including bisexuality and threesomes, is deeply embedded in ideas about a culturally new era (Baer 2005), bursting with opportunities for the youth and promising independency from previous constraints. This prevails as a characterization of both the early 1990s and of the late 2010s. These imageries differ though in two respects. First, some material elements like jeans and coke became widely available, while fast food still carries associations with a Western lifestyle.[59] More importantly, the rhetoric of free love has been replaced by the rhetoric of unemotional individual flexibility, as is shown by the recent publicly visible bisexual threesomes.

7.5. Conclusion

Through the examination of the ways in which gendered bodies structure imagined and experienced threesome narratives, in this chapter I argued that these are not stories of the physiology-based sexual binary, but of the social features of bodies in transformation, 'transitioning' under power-laden social situations of such sexual encounters. These stories

[59] I thank Dorottya Rédai for this insight.

reveal the complexities of what people look for in sex and what complex role the body plays in it. My analysis has shown that sex with a man and a woman is not narrated as a simple result of bisexual desires. Even when my interviewees talk about their dichotomous sexual needs, the experience of complementarity is not as much invoked by the bodily difference, as it is by the dichotomies of familiar/strange, usual/new, transitory/stable, loved/wanted, friendly/romantic, accepted/prohibited, and regulated/experimented. What my interviewees need or enjoy in threesomes, I argue, are social differences expressed through gender differences. Desire and pleasure are directed at what gendered bodies represent in the actual social context: opportunities for romantic and friendly intimacy, safety and adventure, play, different sexual roles, as well as access to men and women. The parallel, simultaneous experience of binary bodies is addressed through different types of social differentiations; between masculine and feminine roles as well as through differentiation between other types of relations (e.g., stability/novelty), with their transitory nature also being detectable.

I argued that threesome narratives reveal various potential meanings and sources of sex. In particular, this points to the need to rethink the social constitution of gender and sexuality through personal meaning-making, which connects temporal to spatial experiences. In post-socialist Hungary, in contrast to repressive nationalist cultures, ideas of sexual freedom and experimentation embodied in the threesome are linked to the image of the Western capitalist democracy as the facilitator of the realization of these meanings of sex. Although primarily in the context of young women's sexual fluidity, the flexible transition of bodies in sexual situations promises a self that has caught up with the ideal of the open individual. Transitional sexual desires, therefore, reflect the desire to catch up with the consumerist ideal of a self that is capable of 'transitions'.

My interviews, contextualized within the broader debates on sex, gender and power, reaffirm the queer and constructivist, affective-performative approach to sexuality (2.2., 2.3.):

the social meaning of man and woman reach far beyond bodily features, and, consequently, sexual desire is not "oriented" solely towards the body. Framing sexual desire as independent from social power relations would lessen personal experiences as much as it would conceal the social aspects of gender. The significance of gender in terms of power difference is visible both in the situation of the threesome and in female and male bisexuality in general. My data supports the argument that the notion of women's sexual fluidity is related to men's controlling expectations of transformable female desires. Importantly however, it is exactly inside this framing that women find ways to express their aspirations, desires, as well as to discover new desires and pleasures. The elements of both agency and exploitation could be traced in the narratives, and I consider these two as components of the performative production of desires by social discourses and personal practices, for which I have argued throughout this dissertation.

In line with literature suggesting that the growing public visibility of female same-sex eroticism makes today's women sexually more vulnerable (e.g., Fahs 2009), I also questioned the generational demarcation among various forms of threesomes. Specifically, my interviews showed that the exploitation of women's sexuality is not dependant on whether it happens in 1990 or 2010, privately or publicly, in a "just sex" or in a polyamorous framework. In terms of the objectification of women, or invoking heteronormative understandings of sexual acts and personality development, all my interviewees' narratives showed both normative and transgressive elements. Even if the younger women's same-sex engagements were less serious than Emese's desperate effort to find women, they are meaningful in so far that they are a part of their selves as although weak but still permanent interests. As Kitti asserts, "I haven't grown out of it". In light of the contemporary dynamics of female sexual fluidity and popular sexual cultures more generally, I suggested complicating the binaries of intimate/performative, in-/authentic, and hetero-/homosexual as well as refining our scholarly

concepts of imagination, fantasy, planning, and spontaneity. I argued that viewing threesomes as sites where gender is performatively re-constructed through practices (2.3.) allows us to see them as both being able to reaffirm women's subordination in heterofemininity, as well as enable empowering gender-bending.

Finally, the investigation of the complex interplay of power, objectification and agency in sexual practices opens up a space to question the meanings of the sexual/erotic as different from non-sexual desires and other social motivations (see Elliston 1995; Eckert 2001; Stella 2015; Ward 2015). The focus on the experience of temporality does not only help us see the dynamics and ambiguities of bisexuality, but also how gender and sexual categories are implied in broader discourses, including the ones that frame the alleged Western sexual liberation in Hungary. Even if it may reproduce patriarchal practices, I argue that for many, the transformability of desiring bodies in threesomes represents (not only sexual) opportunities of a "new" world in 1990 just as much as in the 2010s.

In many ways, this chapter functions as the conclusion of my dissertation. In it, I have drawn upon and incorporated all previous analyses. Moreover, following my aim to present biographical bisexuality as a story of hierarchical gender differences, already indicated in Chapter 1, in this last analytical chapter I have expanded on that aspect in most detail. Finally, as Stella (2015) rejected the idea that bisexual behaviour in Central-Eastern Europe is a marker of the region's backwardness, I also suggest considering threesome sex as pointing to the various sources of sexual practice that go beyond desire. Or, rather, as pointing to the various sources of desire itself, which may already be motivated by a series of considerations – in fact, in the global context (Eckert 2001; Vance 2005; Ward 2015). In the following Conclusions then, I am going to expand on this last point in interweaving the threads of the four analytical chapters, in which I had focused on four spatio-temporal aspects of biographical bisexuality on Hungary. In the narratives I presented, the parallel sexual

experience of the threesomes is related to bodily transitions. Since Hungarian biographical bisexualities all connect their temporal forms to local and global spatial categories, they further suggest novel ways of understanding the actual process of the construction of sexual subjectivities as being anchored in both temporal and in spatial differentiations, therefore revealing the specific significance of the social context in sexual meaning-making.

8. Chapter. Conclusions: Towards a transitional understanding of sexual and social spatio-temporalities

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that Hungarian 'biographical bisexualities' show that changing and multiple sexual desires are performatively constructed and narratively experienced through understandings of one's sexual trajectory, which understandings are embedded in broader spatio-temporal discourses like post-socialist 'transition". I highlighted these meaning-making processes through deep narrative analysis of the 26 life course interviews I conducted in Budapest with people who were attracted to both women and men over their life course. In the following, I summarize the relationships I delineated throughout the previous chapters between language and experience, spatiality and temporality, sexual desire–identity–practice, sexual fluidity, modernity and liberation, Hungarian cultural-political discourses, West and East. Within my discussion of the contributions my dissertation makes to different areas of scholarship, as illustration I insert references to the specific insights of the analytical chapters (for a detailed chapter outline, consult 1.4.). In the last part of this conclusion, I outline possible future research directions.

Through close examination of specific temporal forms of biographical bisexuality in my interviewees' life stories, I have shown how their experiences are narrated as informed by the specific post-socialist Hungarian context. The temporality of biographical bisexuality illuminates the processual character of sexuality, as in interaction with ideas of temporality embedded in spatial categorizations. These spatio-temporalities include: notions of Central-Eastern European post-socialist changes as mirrored in the narratives of heterosexual and homosexual phases one after the other (Chapter 4); life periods of alternating desires according to Hungarian LGBTQ and straight group belongings (Chapter 5); the transformation of homes ideally and materially in negotiating parallel relationships (Chapter

6); as well as of the transformations of sexual bodies in threesome stories (Chapter 7). In discussing these forms of biographical bisexuality, I do not only stress that some people experience their attractions in a certain way while others in another. Rather, I argue that these various images of bisexuality, and the questioning/delegitimization they entail for the ones with and without such experiences, play a central role in how people conceptualize their sexual attractions and identities. In turn, personal conceptualizations build into broader social ideas of sexuality; they do not only map onto ideas of social transition, but also eventually contribute to how those non-individual, non-sexual transitions, like that of 1989, become broadly understood, and accordingly, how spatial categorizations (like East/West) become discursively re-constituted (see Renkin 2007a).

My major theoretical contributions to the interrelated fields of scholarship that my work addressed (see Chapter 2) therefore lie in my approach to sexual subjectivity formation as a dynamic process. Conceptualizing this process as in constant interrelational dialogue with similarly dynamic geospatial temporalities, my approach accounts for both personal agency and social structure as producing meaning. In the following, I revisit the contributions of this dissertation to the fields of sexuality studies, post-socialist studies, bisexual and narrative theories. They include my proposal for a performative understanding of sexuality as language, by underlining agency in the re-/production of social frameworks. I also touch upon the specific contribution my 'transitional' approach offers for queer/feminist debates; which derives from my interrogation of gender hierarchies and non-/normative dynamics in bisexuality.

This research, in a post-structuralist spirit, departs from previous work on sexualities by broadening the scope of existing scholarship with the perspective focusing on 'desire' and 'attraction'. The general analytical tendencies, including self-proclaimed queer studies, to privilege sexual identities left the exploration of the complex interplay between desires,

practices and identities marginalized (see e.g. Cameron and Kulick 2003, 2.3.). Oddly enough, as I outlined in 2.2., bisexuality studies also tend to focus on bisexually identified subjects, and are typically not concerned with the social constitution of multiple sexual desires. However, I have highlighted the assumptions on sexual identities as worthy of questioning especially in light of alternating desires (Chapter 5), which are related to my interviewees' ambiguous belonging to Hungarian LGBTQ, straight progressive, and heteronormative communities. I thus also moved the focus away from activism to a less visibly politicized bisexuality, which consists of everyday practices including storytelling. Ultimately, bisexual narratives as personal practices are indeed fundamentally formative of and formed by understandings of broader social histories and hierarchies.

My research considered bisexuality as a distinctive biographical experience requiring narrative organization (see Hemmings 2002 and 2.2., 2.4.1., 3.1.). In this sense, narrative biography was not only a methodological but also a theoretical frame, which allowed me to see sexual subjectivity as processual and performed through practices informed by, and informing, the social world. Narrative sociology has done ground-breaking work in illuminating the complex interplay and mutual information of social discourses and personal narratives (see Kovács and Vajda 2002 in 2.4.1.), which any constructivist account could amply draw upon. However, sexuality is often marginalized in these analyses, similarly to how queer linguistics tends to overlook the construction of bisexual and temporally changing desires (2.3.). Hence, my contribution to these fields primarily lies in the attention drawn to the connection between biographical, sexual, and socio-political temporalities.

Due to the interweaving of bisexualities with narrative biographies, my analyses are also methodologically unique. First, by contrast to most interview-based sexuality studies, I carefully examined accounts in light of the respondent's whole life story. Second, reaching out to people with diverse sexual identitities, I focused on subjects who would not be included

in studies that only consider current sexual identity categories as starting points. Thus, the starting point of my research was experiences shared by people who belong to different spheres because of their varying investment in queer and heteronormative sexual cultures (see Ward 2015 and especially the analysis of communities in Chapter 5).

Post-socialist sexuality studies predominantly focus on activism, even if they consider bisexuality, as I discuss in 2.4. and 2.5. Monographs mostly deal with Russia – which is, however, actually posited as 'East' of Hungary, according to the logic of nesting orientalisms (Bakić-Hayden 1995; see 2.4.). Few international studies take post-socialist contextualization into consideration, let alone their simultaneous potential status of epistemologies. Bisexuality studies at best address the Third World (Hemmings 2007; Monro 2015), but still in the framework of sexual labels and identification. Apart from engaging in the rarely performed research on bisexuality in the Central-Eastern European context of Hungary, my approach is exceptional in that it locates sexual changes in a society conceptualized as in transition (see 2.3.2. and Chapter 4). In particular, critical post-socialism enables a focus on the materialities of individual experiences up to the micro perspectives of the everyday (see Stella 2015 in 2.4.2.). In the case of my research, this extends to such aspects as housing arrangements (Chapter 6) and bodily sensations (Chapter 7). Throughout the analytical chapters, I argued that spaces ranging on a scale from body to region represent and reflect ideas of a transitional society in the sense of ambiguous belongings.

I do not only suggest that we see post-socialism and bisexuality as displaying similar epistemologies, but also that we see them as interrelated and mutually informing. To my knowledge, social scientific scholarship has not established this link yet, but, as I discuss in 2.4., it has convincingly pointed at the implications of colonial hierarchies in the construction of sexual categories, as well as how homo- and heterosexual discourses are embedded in the cultural-political dynamics of the post-socialist region (Renkin 2007a,b,c; 2009, 2015).

Following Stella (2015), who brings the macro and micro levels of queer temporality – narratives of queer globalisation and life course perspectives – into conversation, my post-socialist bisexuality research highlights the ideas of social and sexual transitions as central in subjectivity constitution, providing a framework for examining how experiences of temporality and spatiality in general connect. In the same way that critical post-socialist theory reveals East-West dynamics of which the Central-Eastern European region is an inherent part (e.g., Cerwonka 2008), critical bisexual theory challenges how relations between hetero- and homosexuality as concepts, are understood (Hemmings 2002). This parallel enables me to show how categorizations operate in these binary-trinary hierarchies, and map them on each other. As I argued through excavating the polysemy of 'transition' in 2.4.3., sexual and geospatial hierarchies share the developmental assumptions of East/West, modernization/backwardness, in-/authenticity, sameness/difference, parallel/seriality and here-close-far dynamics.

Furthermore, I reframe 'transitology' debates by considering 'transition' something that characterizes all societies and subjectivities. At the same time, 'transition' highlights that due to power inequalities, some entities are more easily conceptualized as lagging behind or lacking something. Jagose (2002, xiv) argues that the heteronormative idea of lesbian 'belatedness' is symptomatic to the general logic of narrativizing sexuality in sequence. In a similar vein, bisexual post-structuralist theories suggest a move "toward a bi politics of inauthenticity" (Eisner 2013, 128; see also Hemmings 2002, 42). Hence, I propose a theoretical move towards a *transitional* understanding of both sexual and other social temporalities, foregrounding the interrelatedness of the two through geospatial categories. In both its political and sexual sense, 'transition' manifests in oscillating power relations and competing discourses (Iveković 2012), into which people are pushed when they want to forge a subjectivity and life story coherent for themselves and for others (Linde 1993). The concept

of transition, as my analyses showed, is especially useful analytically for uniting sameness/difference dynamics in the experiences of both parallels and sequence, proximity and distance. It is thus able to highlight dynamically changing relations; the operation and questioning of the boundaries between categories; hierarchical power dynamics through ideas of a development scale; as well as a biographical-historical view of identities and present-day power relations. Similarly to how Ahmed (2004a, b) have argued for the mobility of affect, a transitional concept of sexual desire can also help us see desire as inherently, *per definitionem,* on the move, constructed exactly on and between spatio-temporal sites, from the globe to the body.

My contribution to critical post-socialism studies includes viewing Central-Eastern Europe and sexual categorizations as linked not only in terms of social histories, but also in terms of contemporary global inequalities. The latter, in turn, inform how people think about time and change, including their own life trajectories, sexual or other. Similarly, the specificity of each Central-European country does not so much lie in differences perceived as merely cultural, rather in those differences that are the result of complex social-political-historical dynamics, including their position in the past and present global order. Hungary's specificity in the region, as I showed especially in Chapter 4, is reflected in my interviews through ideas about Hungarian language as a small and unique, which entails an affective relation. Expressing national (as well as intellectual) belonging and authenticity, these ideas also reflect a specific history compared to neighbouring countries, through the discourse of loss of territories, having been a greater nation with ethnicities (see e.g., Timár 2013).

The transitional and biographical view on sexual desire as embedded in social histories led me towards understanding sexuality in terms of language. The significance of linguistic formulations in experience constructions surfaced in the analyses of all the chapters. My respondents employed the analogy of language skills to describe new sexual experiences

(Chapter 4), and I underlined the productivity of discourses on imagination especially in Chapter 4, 6, and 7. As I discussed in 2.2., Boellstorff's (2005, 6) exceptional language metaphor is perfectly adequate in thinking about sexuality as practices taking place "within a horizon" of cultural structures, producing and not only constraining agency. I thus propose to think about language as a general, theoretical framework for conceptualizing sexual desire and its changes. Consequently, my analysis performed a deconstruction of 'experience' (Foucault 1978; Scott 1992; Butler 1993; Elliston 1995), as not taken for granted even for individuals, with interpretations of experience changing in retrospect (see esp. Chapter 7), and only made meaningful by an available language. With this performative perspective which keeps the social (re)production of attractions in the foreground, my work sheds new light on constructivism, beyond the debate with essentialism, as I elaborate in 2.3.

Importantly, to interweave my points about gender inequality in every chapter, I argue that the examination of bisexuality, as long as global culture defines sexual orientation according to a hierarchical opposition between women and men, underlines that the focus on gender and sexuality cannot be separated, and queer/LGBT studies and feminist studies should rely on each other (see Hemmings 2002, 39). I discussed, most detailed in the previous chapter, constructions of gender as different positionalities in power structures. On the one hand, my analyses revealed that for my respondents, the partners' gender represented different social opportunities and needs, more importantly than anatomical sexual differences. On the other hand, the interviewees' own gender also impacted on their sexual desires and practices, as well as got re-defined by them. I argued that the conceptualization of sexual fluidity, of young women in particular, enables both objectifying instrumentalization as well as opportunities to realize sexual potentials. I debated some feminist work which, on this issue in particular (e.g., Fahs 2009), sees a clear line between agency and heteronormative exploitation. Similarly, queer literature in general seems to be obsessed with classifying

certain sexual acts and subjectivities as either transgressive or normative (Klesse 2007a, 14-18). By contrast, employing a performative approach to productive power (Butler 1993, 9-15), I showed the intersections of containment in and resistance to unequal power relations – on the operation of heteronormativity in parallel relationships in Chapter 6, and on polyamorous rhetoric and women's "performative bisexuality" in Chapter 7.

Since I argued that Central-Eastern European biographical bisexualities could be a field that specifically offers us insight into the dynamics between the personal and the social, further research into the matter can develop in several directions in the future. Firstly, I am particularly interested in exploring conflictual intersections between feminist and queer perspectives. I would do this by foregrounding, for example, LGBTQ visibility as questionable from a lesbian or bisexual point of view (see Jagose 2002), or heterosexual women's and their same-sex attracted male partner's relationship negotiations (see Wolkomir 2009). Secondly, as I discussed in Chapter 3 with respect to the limitations of my sampling, with a different methodological approach, further social groups could be accessed who are also concerned by biographical bisexuality but live more closeted lives, far from my Budapest intellectual-activist radar. Thirdly, a comparative long-term analysis (to which my two repeated interviews point (see Chapter 4; and Diamonds 2006), would offer a fruitful basis to detect the points in life courses which move one person in a specific sexual direction and another in another direction. Finally, shifting the focus away from desire, it would be theoretically intriguing to look at other components of sexual practice.

As my interviewing period ended in 2013, it would be intriguing to interrogate how social-political changes in Hungary and globally since then shaped sexual narratives and were shaped by these in turn. The Hungarian ruling right wing party, *Fidesz*, re-elected in 2014, started to launch campaigns against new enemies, primarily migrants, but these also depict the European Union, NGOs, even Central European University and Gender Studies, where this

dissertation was produced, as against the nation by their alleged support for migrants. These became new elements of dis-/identification in the divided discursive field. Just as in the Roma's case, the figure of the Muslim migrant is parallel to gays for many, while embodying backward homophobia to others in the specific post-socialist constellation of world-wide homonationalism (Puar 2007, 2017). Hungary's position as Eastern or Western is negotiated around these questions of minorities, transnational bodies, and political oppositions with sexual implications in social and personal narratives, domestically and internationally – within the context of the emergence of the political right across the Global North as well. These political trends, as elsewhere in the region (Bilić 2016), intensify the engagement of the Hungarian political-cultural liberal-left opposition with a pro-EU, pro-capitalist discourse, including the glorifying of their sexual rights agenda, necessarily leaving less space for a leftist critical approach to these. This contributes to divisions inside Hungarian feminist and LGBTQ movements. The fact that the latter increasingly invests in equal marriage campaigns and the annual Pride March, widens the gap among people with same-sex desires according to their class status, geographical location, and connection to activism (1.2.). Those who belong to groups positioned on the oppositional side (conservative, religious, poor, Roma, from the country, undereducated) become alienated from LGBTQ communities. In sum, we could expect both the sharpening of and shifts in the trends that I indicated in Chapter 1.

I contend that the examination of Central-Eastern European biographical bisexualities, which my dissertation has accomplished can illuminate such complex social dynamics. Their interaction with the formation of sexual subjectivities points towards a transitional understanding of sexual and social spatio-temporalities.

Appendices

Appendix I: Interviewees

My respondents' basic data: pseudonym, approximate age at the time of the interview, gender and sexual self-identifications with their own terms; labour market status, date of interview(s)

Anna 23, f. ambiguously bisexual or unlabelled; student (2013)
Bob 18, m. bisexual; student (2010)
Botond 56, m. gay; social worker (2011)
Dávid 34, m. bisexual; teacher (2010)
Dioram 32, f. "androgynous"/unlabelled; public sector administrator (2013 February, November)
Dorottya 40, f. gay/unlabelled; public sector administrator (2013)
Emese 37, f. bisexual; private sector assistant (2010)
Éva 26, f. unstated straight "interested in women"; artist (2010)
Hanna 35, f. ambiguously bisexual or unlabelled; private sector administrator (2010)
István 38, m. gay; engineer (2010)
Juli 39, f. unlabelled and questioning; translator (2013)
Kitti 21, f. unstated straight, "sexually open to women'; student (2010)
Márk 34, m. ambiguously bisexual, "closer to homosexuality"; private sector manager (2010)
Máté 43, m, non-binary. non-straight/pansexual; private sector administrator (2013)
Nana 22, f. straight "with bisexual tendencies"; student (2010)
Paula 64, f. lesbian; retired artist (2013)
Péter 30, m. "between bisexual and gay" or unlabelled; social worker (2010)
Szilárd 45, m. (not entirely) gay; assistant in public cultural sector (2013)
Tamás 46, m. "bisexual living a heterosexual life"; academic (2013)
Tekla 24, f. "basically straight"; student (2010)
Tibor 51, m. gay; academic (2013)
Tony 53, m. gay; public sector administrator (2013)
Vera 38/41, f. gay / "80-90% heterosexual"; teacher (2010 April/2013 October)
Viktor 25, m. "bisexual turning gay"; artist (2010)

Appendix II: Interview Questions and Project Description

Project Description:

Versions of the following text were sent out in emails in order to approach acquaintances who could forward it to people they know are concerned. I usually also sent a similar text in the first contact with would-be interviewees.

I'm a doctoral student at CEU and I examine life stories where the sexual attraction and interest both for women and men appear. I'm interested in how these experiences are built into people's life stories, various sexual identities. The interview is not a series of question-answer, rather a conversation, because I'm interested in how you tell your life in this respect. I would like to find out your life story so far, how and when men and women appeared in it, and later how your relations were formed. What you think about them, how you feel about them now and felt about them before. It is up to you what you emphasize, and obviously nothing "must" be told. The interview usually takes 1,5 hours. If agreed, I record it. When I will write my thesis, all the personal data will be anonymized. My interviewees usually choose pseudonyms for themselves :)

English

The interview guide below is the outline I used for the interviews, but as they were life story narratives, many of the questions were not asked or not this way. The Hungarian guide below follows the same structure, showing some extra examples of additional questions.

On record:
Introduction: - *My research is focused on people who have felt attraction, sexual or love interest towards both women and men during their life span. Through these interviews, I hope I can get a picture of their sexualities, how they feel about such changes and so on.*
Feel free to talk about anything you think concerns this issue. I will ask more specific questions only at the end, on things that might be relevant. Of course, you don't have to answer questions which you don't want to.
Initial question: - ***Could you please tell me how your sexuality was forming in your life?***

Open-ended probing questions to elicit elaboration of stories briefly mentioned in the main narrative
External questions, only a few asked in each case and only if the life narrative does not touch upon them:
- *How would you identify now in terms of sexuality? And in the past? What does/did it mean to you?*
(If a definition of 'genuine' bisexuality is implied:) - *Do you have any ideas about who would qualify as „real" bisexual? (Have you heard about the term 'queer'?)*
- *To what extent do you think sex differs when you are with women or men?*
- *To what extent do you think the relationship differs when you are with women or men?*
- *Many of my previous interviewees reflected about being or not able to have a threesome with a man and a woman, that's why I ask everyone about it. What do you think?*

- Do you know people with a life story similar to yours?
- Have you told anyone about your attractions towards women and men? What kind of reactions have you experienced?
- How do you relate to the gay/LGBTQ movement?
Closing questions:
- Is there anything in your life that you would do differently now?
- How do you imagine your future in terms of sexuality?
- Is there anything you would like to add?

Off record:
- How did you feel during our conversation? Was there anything uncomfortable or something you think could be done differently?
Thank you very much. I will send you the audio record and the transcription. If you would prefer to have something omitted, you can request this at any point in time.

Hungarian

Bevezetés: - *Olyan emberekről kutatok, akik nők és férfiak iránt is éreztek vonzalmat, szerelmi vagy szexuális érdeklődést életük során. Remélem, hogy az interjúk segítségével képet kapok a szexualitásukról, hogy hogyan éreznek ezekkel a változásokkal kapcsolatban stb. Bármiről beszélhetsz, ami szerinted ehhez a témához tartozik, én csak a végén teszek majd fel konkrétabb kérdéseket, amit még relevánsnak érzek. Természetesen amire nem szeretnél, arra nem kell válaszolnod.*
Alapkérdés: - *Elmesélnéd, hogyan alakult életed során a szexualitásod?*

Szexualitás feltérképezése:
- Gondoltál arra, hogyan határoznád meg magad a szexualitás szempontjából?
- Gondoltál arra, hogy mások hogyan határoznának meg téged?
- Van olyan elnevezés, amit megfelelőnek érzel magadra most vagy akár a múltban? (Ha nincs, miért?)
- Korábban meghatároztad magad valahogyan? (Ha igen, hogyan? Ha nem, miért?)
- Mit jelentett akkor számodra, hogy [hetero-/homo-/biszexuális… etc.]? Mit jelent most?
- Hallottál már a queer-ről?[Ha igen:] Használnád magadra ezt az elnevezést?
- Szerinted ki (az igazi) biszexuális? Mi tesz valakit biszexuálissá?[ill. ugyanez más, említett szexuális kategóriákkal]
- Milyen szexuális tapasztalataid vannak férfiakkal és nőkkel? Mit szeretnél csinálni férfiakkal és nőkkel?
- Több korábbi interjúalanyom említette, hogy tudna/nem tudna egy férfival meg egy nővel hármasban lenni, ezért ezt is meg szoktam kérdezni. Te mit gondolsz?

- Szerinted mennyire különbözik a szex, ha nővel, illetve ha férfival vagy?
- Szerinted mennyire különbözik a kapcsolat, ha nővel, illetve ha férfival vagy?
Környezet:
- Hogy viszonyulsz a melegmozgalomhoz? Mennyire vagy benne?
[barátok, szórakozóhelyek, programok, fesztivál és felvonulás]
- Ismersz még olyanokat, akiknek a tiedhez hasonló élettörténetük van?
- Beszéltél valakinek a férfiak és nők iránti érdeklődésedről? Milyen reakciókat tapasztaltál? [család, barátok, munkatársak, párkapcsolat]
- Tud/tudott a párod ezekről, amiket nekem meséltél?

- Okoztak valamilyen nehézséget neked ezek a vonzalmak magadban vagy mások között?
- Tapasztaltál előítéletességet vagy diszkriminációt?
- Gondoltál már arra, hogy megházasodj, vagy regisztrálj [élettársként], vagy hogy gyereked legyen?

Záró kérdések:

- Van olyan az életedben, amit most másként tennél?
- Milyennek tudod elképzelni a jövődet a szexualitás szempontjából?
- A szexualitáson kívül mit emelnél ki, ami fontos neked, ami meghatároz téged?
- Van még valami, amit szeretnél elmondani?

Felvételen kívül:

- Hogy érezted magad a beszélgetés során?
- Volt valami kellemetlen, vagy amit szerinted legközelebb máshogy csináljak?

Nagyon köszönöm a beszélgetést. Elküldöm majd a hangfelvételt és a beírt szöveget. Ha bármit inkább ki szeretnél hagyni, bármikor megteheted.

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