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**Changing Ethics of Consumption in
Hungary**

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Abstract

The thesis looks at changing everyday normative distinctions between consumption practices in three generations of Hungarian families and explores the ethical and practical beliefs that these distinctions are based on. It builds on the one hand on material culture studies, Miller's work in particular, which sees consumption as a realm objectifying relationships and cosmologies. On the other hand it takes up Slater's argument that different notions of needs mediate normative visions of how to live; hence people's diverse definitions of needs have to be taken seriously as a basis of a political debate.

The fieldwork that forms the basis of the thesis was carried out in Budapest in 2005–2006 with eight families of two or three generations from different class backgrounds. The oldest generation grew up during pre-socialist times; the middle generation was born under socialism; while those in the youngest generation started their adult life under capitalism. The methods included individual and joint family interviews with observations in everyday contexts.

First, the thesis investigates ethical and practical concerns that definitions of needs and 'appropriate' practices draw on in different generations. Second, by comparing different generations of the same families, it maps the way practices and the concerns underlying them are appropriated and changed. Finally, it looks at links between private and public moralizing discourses on consumption, drawing on the existing literature and participants' own accounts and practices.

The theoretical argument I put forward is that normative distinctions between practices draw on relatively coherent personal cosmologies that include on the one hand practical wisdom, on the other hand ethical visions of how to live, who to be and entitlement, which are bound up with particular self-understandings, social and personal relationships and visions of a good life. Furthermore, the thesis shows that public discourse and previous practices are not simply adopted, but incorporated into personal ideas *through* these cosmologies.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The thesis looks at changing everyday normative distinctions between consumption practices in three generations of Hungarian families and explores the ethical and practical beliefs that these distinctions are based on. Through tracing notions of approvable, normal and necessary practices, it explores shifting notions of how to live and who to be, and addresses the broader relationship between ethics and consumption.

The thesis builds on developments in the sociology of consumption, material culture and cultural studies that see consumption as a realm objectifying relationships and values (Gullestad 1995; Miller 1995; Wilk 2001; Shove, Watson et al. 2007). These approaches were largely formulated against theories that considered consumption as the opposite of culture and ethics, a realm of false aims, identities and values that conform to the logic of capitalist production or are driven by immoral motives of competition and materialism. In these accounts consumption was the subject of heavy moral criticism pronounced from seemingly unquestionable moral standpoints, as humans – seen as either passive and manipulated or inherently immoral – were considered unable or unwilling to articulate any kind of alternative ethics, let alone in the realm of consumption.

The first wave of criticism of these approaches redeemed consumption as generally ‘good’ rather than generally ‘bad’ (Miller 1995), but left the external moral vantage points for assessing the ‘goodness’ of consumption largely unquestioned. For example, consumption was claimed to be good because it had been proved to be resistant to manipulation (De Certeau 1984; Fiske 1989) or because it was found not to be competitive or self-indulgent.

What I see as the second wave of criticism treats consumption as a necessary part of every practice (Warde 2005) or as a field of objectification, that is, a domain through which subjectivity develops dialectically (Miller 1987). In this context, as Miller (1995) points out, the question whether consumption *as such* is good or bad becomes nonsensical: general judgement cannot be passed as practices simply objectify different subjectivities. More importantly, this approach acknowledges that consumers themselves apply normative distinctions between practices, which renders the

superiority of external moral standpoints questionable. These developments have led to a new political and empirical agenda, which this research follows.

The political agenda centres on the argument that social production and culture cannot be judged by reference to external moral standpoints or objective notions of needs. Instead, as argued by Slater (1997a, 1997b), moral judgement should be restricted to *how democratically* different views on needs are given a voice in an open debate. The implication of this argument is that people's different notions of needs, and more generally their normative ideas, have to be taken seriously as a basis of a political debate.

Empirically, the implication is to investigate everyday practices and studying 'consumers themselves and their struggles to discriminate between the positive and negative consequences of commodities' (Miller 1995: 30) as opposed to asking whether a particular practice is good or bad according to predefined standards.

This research builds on this second wave and attempts to give a more systematic understanding – both conceptually and empirically – of the ethical ideas everyday normative distinctions between practices are based on. By ethics I mean particular ways of living, being and relationships that – unlike preferences – are experienced as not simply different, but as *higher* according to standards independent of personal desire.

The method of studying ethics through empirical inquiry as opposed to the abstract logic of moral theory is shared by a number of recent works focusing on fields outside consumption. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) looked at political philosophers, ethicists and the business world to identify different principles of value and valuation ('grandeurs'). Charles Taylor (1989) focused on philosophers and theorists to identify the modern moral goods as part of the larger project on morality and identity. In a more practical context, Slater (2008) discussed the ethical visions development projects based on ICTs draw on.

What is common in these projects and mine is the interest in understanding ethics empirically, that is, asking what ways of living and being people or institutions treat as 'higher'. However, unlike Boltanski and Thévenot and Taylor – who focused on texts written by intellectual elites, largely in isolation from everyday experiences – this project focuses on ethics objectified in everyday practices and traces links with both public discourse and the socio-economic context. Therefore the research draws on the material culture approach rather than following a textual analysis, and combines interviews with observations in everyday contexts.

However, unlike most projects in material culture studies that concentrate on values internal to *distinct* practices, which are often treated as disaggregated, this project looks at ethics across different practices *of the same people*. This approach allows for exploring ethical visions of how to live, who to be and entire cosmologies, rather than distinct values, which the disaggregated treatment of practices does not allow for either empirically or theoretically.

The thesis develops these themes by looking at changing normative distinctions of consumption practices of the members of three generations of Hungarian families. The oldest generation of the families grew up during pre-socialist times; the middle generation was born under socialism; and those in the youngest generation started their adult life under capitalism. Each system involved changes in social hierarchy, political system, access to goods and public ideology on consumption.

The thesis does not intend to give an explanation of why particular practices and normative distinctions are developed and why they change. Changing practices, as Shove's (2003) work demonstrates, are inseparable from a complex set of institutional, technological and material processes, which are only partially touched on in this research. The aim here is limited to understanding the changing cosmologies people draw on in making sense of practices in normative terms, and the way they incorporate diverse sources of ethical ideas and practices in the process. To trace this process, beyond exploring participants' own accounts, I compare different generations of the same families and map the way practices and cosmologies are appropriated and change.

The central theoretical argument I put forward is that normative distinctions between practices – or more generally, the sense that some practices are of higher value or more legitimate than others – draw on particular ethical visions of how to live, who to be and entitlements that are bound up with particular self-understandings, social and personal relationships and visions of a good life. These visions draw on diverse sources including family background, work, public ideologies and practices of previous generations; however, none of these is simply adopted, but they are incorporated through appropriation into personal ethical visions.

These ethical visions together with practical wisdom form relatively coherent personal cosmologies. It is with reference to these cosmologies that normative distinctions between practices are made, which allow for understanding practices not as disaggregated with distinct logics and values internal to them, but as connected through ethical and practical world views.

This is not to suggest that all practices are motivated by an *explicit and conscious* pursuit of normative ideals. On the one hand cosmologies are often simply taken for granted as the ‘normal’ thing to do (Shove 2003), or as the unquestioned ethical background of action (Miller 1999). On the other hand, most everyday ethical ideas of how to live and who to be exist and are transmitted in objectified and embodied forms rather than as abstract principles, which I capture through the concept of ‘practical ethics’.

Furthermore, the argument does not apply to *all* consumption, as there are practices that are understood as preferences; that is, they are not made sense of as better or higher than others, but simply as different.

The thesis consists of five parts. The theoretical chapter introduces the concept of ethics and discusses the theoretical approach of the research. The third chapter looks at the methods used, then Chapter 4 describes the Hungarian context of the study, with a particular focus on public versions of approvable consumption. This is followed by three empirical chapters focusing on the three generations. The last chapter summarizes the findings and situates the argument in relation to Bourdieu’s theory of distinction, which is discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 Ethics and consumption

This chapter focuses on the way different theoretical traditions allow or foreclose the study of normative distinctions people draw between consumption practices (the sense that some practices are more approvable than others) on the one hand; and the acknowledgment of values and ethics objectified through consumption on the other. These aspects – the normative capacity of agents and the potential of consumption to objectify ethics – are often studied separately, yet I treat them as intimately related. As I will argue in subsequent chapters, normative distinctions always draw on particular ethical visions of how to live and who to be.

The aim of the discussion is to evaluate existing theories and present my own approach in terms of theory, concepts and research approach. In the first part I critically review four approaches that traditionally addressed consumption – status competition theory, critical theory, Bourdieu's theory of distinction and liberal economics – and explain the way they foreclosed questions of ethics both theoretically and empirically. In the second part I present the political, historical and empirical critique of these theories. Followed by insights from historical studies and Slater's political argument, in this part I discuss four approaches – consumer behaviour, Mary Douglas's anthropological approach, cultural studies and material culture studies – that see consumption as a realm mediating values or moral cosmologies.

The discussion concentrates on three aspects of different theories that I consider central to the relationship between consumption and ethics. The first is the conceptualization of ethics, values and normative judgements – if any – underlying consumption. I will argue that such conceptualizations are either limited in scope or theoretically weak and will develop the concepts used in this project based on Charles Taylor's (1989) and Habermas's (1993) notions of ethics. Second, I focus on how coherence – if any – of beliefs and values across practices is established, and call this 'cosmology'. I will suggest that coherence was either attributed to external structuring forces, or was largely left out of the research agenda due to a methodological focus on distinct practices. Finally, in each case I evaluate research agendas and present my own approach, which draws on material culture studies.

Consumption as inherently immoral

The study of modern consumption was traditionally subsumed by the critical analysis of modern society and culture. One of the most longstanding traditions is represented by theories that attribute all motivations to consume to universal immoral drives. Based on the motives they assert that two types of theories can be distinguished, with similar theoretical and research implications.

First, theories of insatiable appetites suppose an immoral, non-reflected, homogeneous, innate drive to consume. This assumption underlies many of the anti-materialist arguments favoured, ironically, by marketing scholars (Belk 1985; Richins and Dawson 1992; Ahuvia and Wong 2002). In these accounts *any* desire to consume – ignoring normative distinctions between different practices – is seen as a sign of materialism. For example, ‘materialism research’ aims at revealing to what extent people share the ‘belief that possessions will bring happiness’, measuring agreement with assertions like ‘Buying things gives me a lot of pleasure’ – plainly assuming that desire for *any* object is a symptom of materialism (Belk 1984). The implication of this view is that values are only imaginable outside consumption; what is more, that people can only be considered moral agents as long as they enact values that are in opposition to consumption as such.

Second, status competition theories assume a similarly universal human motivation to consume; however, in this case it is the drive of social competition (Schor 2000). As Campbell (1987) points out, although this theory attributes a crucial role to people in the production of their own consumptive desires, and motives – pride and the desire to acquire honour – are social in their origin, they seem to apply universally to everybody and so are inescapable, in a similar way to innate drives. The key author of this theory is Veblen (1924), who argues that goods signal status and people desire them because they intend to use them to demonstrate their status or relative success.

These theories foreclose the investigation of ethics in the context of consumption both theoretically and empirically. Theoretically, they see all pursuits, even values, as instrumental to given, immoral ends rather than constituting substantive aims themselves. Consider for example Gronow’s interpretation of the consumption of

the new middle class in the Stalin era, where even the desire to have ‘a happy and harmonious life’ is only pursued as a symbol of higher status:

These newcomers adopted light classical art as their status symbol, together with an eclectic collection of symbols of middle-class normality, such as happy and harmonious family life (...).

(2003: 149)

Empirically, reaching alternative interpretations is impossible as both the quantitative increase of consumption and the desire to consume are treated as *evidence* of immoral drives, and ultimately of moral decline. The rare studies that look at people’s own accounts handle them as mere ‘rationalizations’ used to mask their ‘real’ motives (Ger and Belk 1999).

The illusion of values

The Marxist tradition

The other approach that traditionally saw consumption as a realm opposed to values draws on Marx and critical theory. The theories discussed here share the assumption that consumption is dominated by overpowering structures of capitalism and therefore cannot be seen as a possible realm of agency, let alone moral agency.

This tradition, unlike the previous one, does not refuse the possibility that goods could be part of an authentic cultural and self-development (Miller 1987; Slater 1997b). The starting point here is the Hegelian idea of dialectic: subjects develop and become conscious through objectification, while the material world in turn shapes their subjectivity.

In this approach the primary site for the dialectical process is the *production* of material culture; consumption in this line is secondary. This implies that whether material culture is part of a dialectical, authentic self-development depends exclusively on the circumstances of production. The central argument is that capitalist relations of production do not allow for a dialectical development. Goods produced under alienating conditions, purchased through impersonal money relations – where they appear to have no connection with subjective contents, work relations and practice – result in alienation

and dominate rather than express consciousness. As a result, instead of autonomous development of subjects and objects through praxis in full consciousness – captured by the notion of ‘real needs’ and leading to real happiness and freedom – we pursue false needs that are functional to the interests of the capital.

These arguments do not (always) mean that theorists are ignorant of the fact that people experience commodities as conveying certain meanings or even values. Yet starting from the above assumptions, these meanings and values are classified as false and inauthentic. Marcuse for example, remarks with discontent that

[T]he extent to which this civilization transforms the object world into an extension of man’s mind and body makes the very notion of alienation questionable. The people recognize themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobile, hi-fi set, split-level home, kitchen equipment. The very mechanism which ties the individual to his society has changed, and social control is anchored in the new needs which it has produced.

(Marcuse 2003:145)

In Marcuse’s view, what may appear to consumers as values – their ‘soul’ found in capitalist commodities – are in fact empty ideas of values attached to commodities by capitalist producers. For him, this process plays a central role in maintaining the system: false needs dominate individual subjectivity and culture and through them people do not only accept, but willingly reproduce, the conditions of their own subordination.

The same underlying assumption can be traced in different theories suggesting a link between capitalist interests on the one hand and values and identities expressed by commodities on the other. For example, Bauman suggests that contemporary self-expression is limited to the choice between easily updated, ‘ready-made identity’ choices manufactured by the market (Bauman 1988) that do not simply express false values but lose all reference to values (Bauman 2001b: 12–14). He traces back this ‘preordained harmony or resonance between the qualities of consumer goods and the ambivalence endemic to contemporary consumer identities’ (ibid.: 29) to the ‘needs of a consumer society’ and the ‘production of ideal consumers’ (ibid.: 25). He does not assume there is a conscious capitalist interest group pulling the strings behind the

scenes, but considers the current conditions as the ‘unanticipated consequences of the more than two centuries-long history of modern capitalism’ (Bauman 2001a:18).¹

A similar link is established even more strongly and deterministically by Baudrillard (1983). He argues that goods have lost all relationship with practice and reality; his argument does not stop at alienation, but he goes on to suggest that objects *mask* the disappearance of all content, becoming sheer signs that only relate to each other. Objects gain their meaning from their relation to other objects, forming a semiotic system orchestrated according to capitalist interest. This logic dominates society and consciousness, ‘drawing the consumer into a series of more complex motivations’, locking people into actions dictated by the ‘calculus of objects’ (Baudrillard 1998:27).

Regarding my second focus, the coherence across practices, according to these theories if there is a *consistency* within material culture, it is only a semiotic one and guaranteed only by the fact that objects conform to a logic that can be traced back to capitalist interest.

This theoretical framework has two implications for research. First, people’s own accounts cannot be credited, as they by definition only express manipulated ideas of needs functional to capitalism; hence these accounts are excluded in the name of people’s own liberation: ‘as long as they are kept incapable of being autonomous, as long as they are indoctrinated and manipulated (down to their very instincts), their answer to the question [of what are true and false needs] cannot be taken as their own.’ (Marcuse 2003: 144). In fact, the theory develops *against* all empirical evidence of personal accounts: the fact that people experience their own practices as guided by ethical concerns is not seen as counterevidence to the argument that capitalism dominates consciousness, but as a sign of being even more deeply dominated by it.

Second, as people are not seen as agents but as mere perpetrators of imperatives dictated by the interest of capitalism carried by its commodities, the research focus shifts to these commodities. This is what happens in the semiotic analysis of Barthes (1993), Baudrillard (1998), and the media analysis of Goldman (1992), which focus on systems of commodities to unveil the assumed capitalist ideology behind them by concentrating on the symbolic meanings of goods. As Slater (1997b) notes, what is apparent in these approaches is the idea that the relationship between objects can be analysed independently of practice as if it would be a text with its own semiotic logic.

¹ Featherstone’s (1990) argument follows a similar logic when he attributes the ‘new morality’ of being responsible for appearances to consumer culture and producers’ interests.

Evaluation as distinction

Bourdieu's position on values is similar to the logic of Marxist accounts in that people's own ideas are seen to be formed by and functional to maintaining larger structures of social domination. In his account, however, these objective structures are not exclusively capitalist production relations, but different capital compositions characteristic of specific social fields that delimit strategies of domination. Furthermore, unlike the Marxist accounts that see consumption as secondary to production, for Bourdieu consumption is the primary site through which domination is legitimized.

In Bourdieu's account normative distinctions of practices are of central importance, yet they are investigated from the point of view of their role in the reproduction of social hierarchy and power relations. This is achieved by the separation of subjective experiences and objective patterns of action. At the subjective level, Bourdieu remains open to the fact that practices are *experienced* not necessarily as competitive, but as constitutive of particular 'world views', 'philosophies of life' (Bourdieu 1984:292) or even values:

Family heirlooms not only bear witness to the age and the continuity of the lineage and so consecrate its social identity... they also contribute in a practical way to its spiritual reproduction, that is, to transmitting the values, virtues and competences which are the basis of legitimate membership in bourgeois dynasties. What is acquired in daily contact with ancient objects, by regular visits to antique dealers... is of course a certain 'taste', which is nothing other than a relation to immediate familiarity with the things of taste. But it is also the sense of belonging to a more polished, more polite, better policed world, a world which is justified in existing by its perfection, its harmony and beauty, a world, which has produced Beethoven and Mozart and continues to produce people capable of playing and appreciating them.

(ibid.: 76)

Bourdieu implicitly acknowledges that from the subjective point of view normative taste distinctions may be closely connected to ethical ideas of what the valuable ways of being and living are. However, from the objective point of view, Bourdieu argues, practices are delimited by the objective conditions in which they have developed and follow the logic of social competition for power and domination (Bourdieu 1990).

The way Bourdieu bridges the gap between the subjective and objective view of action is by introducing the notion of the habitus. The habitus is a set of dispositions, perception schemes and practical customs that does not determine, but delimits tastes, ethics and bodily gestures, ways of eating, sitting and talking; in short, everything we think and do. Bourdieu's central argument is that the habitus is formed in accordance with the constraints and possibilities inherent in the objective conditions during its acquisition in childhood and follows their logic despite changing circumstances, hence guides subjective action according to the objective pattern. This argument is made in three different ways.

First, Bourdieu suggests there is a direct causal relationship between the habitus and objective conditions, reduced to plain economic possibilities: the distance from necessity. Objective conditions create a specific, automatic response: the stronger the necessity, the more focused one is on substance rather than form, may it be in the field of art (1984:5), food (Bourdieu 1984:177- 208) or manners. In this context the normative distinction of seeing small portions as 'refined' or an art piece centring on form as 'high art' becomes a means of social competition, as it involves attaching higher *subjective* value to practices stemming from more abundant *objective* conditions.

This deterministic argument can easily be falsified. Historical studies, such as the one conducted by Elias (2000), show that 'civilized' table manners emphasizing self-restraint and form have not always characterized the behaviour of those who were distant from necessity. It is a relatively new phenomenon, which Elias traces back to a cultural transformation in which external prohibitions have become gradually internalized. This means that what Bourdieu considers a causal link between necessity vs. abundance and substance vs. form is in fact the product of particular historical, cultural and social processes rather than a universal causal link.

The second, more complex explanation suggests that practices and taste are governed by the best way to use one's capital – determined by one's position in the field – at maximum efficiency, that is, realizing the maximum 'profit' at the lowest cost. It is in this logic that he explains for example the different taste of the intellectuals vs. the bourgeoisie in theatre. The preference of intellectuals – characterized by low economic and high cultural capital – for cheaper, avant-garde art theatre is 'governed by the pursuit of maximum "cultural profit" for minimum economic cost', expecting 'the symbolic profit of their practice from the work itself, from its rarity and from the discourse about it (after the show, over a drink, or in their lectures, their articles or their

books) through which they will endeavour to appropriate part of its distinctive value' (1984: 270). In contrast, for the bourgeoisie – having both high cultural and economic capital – the theatre is 'an occasion for conspicuous spending' (ibid.: 270), a 'pretext for social ceremonies enabling a select audience to demonstrate and experience its membership of high society' (ibid.: 270). Given that capitals and 'profits' for Bourdieu are always dependent on the field this explanation is much more open to the historically specific conditions and dynamics of the society in question than the previous one. (In the conclusion of this thesis I will give a critique of this argument.)

The third and most convincing explanation of the formation of the habitus suggests that it is acquired and works primarily through practice. For Bourdieu, this explanation is part of the other two, however, I think it can be applied separately from them without presupposing an objective pattern of action guided by competition for domination; in this reinterpreted way I find his argument very insightful for conceptualizing ethics and use it in my own research.

Bourdieu suggests that it is through taking part in practices that the socialization into the symbolic, meaningful world takes place. This includes a sense of right and wrong that does not operate as a set of theoretical rules, or abstract values followed and consciously put into practice by actors; but through a *practical* sense of what it is right to do. This practical sense is inscribed into perception schemes, 'bodily postures and stances' and everyday practices, which are constantly reinforced by other members of the group and material culture itself (Bourdieu 1977:13-15). This makes it possible for the habitus to be transmitted and operate *in practice* without explicit, consciously held and intentionally followed rules and values. For example, honour refers to a deeply ethical sense of how a man of virtue should behave, yet it is learnt and acted upon primarily through a range of practices:

the sense of honour, a disposition inculcated in the earliest years of life and constantly reinforced by calls to order from the group ...*Nif*, literally nose, is very closely associated with virility and with all dispositions, incorporated in the form of bodily schemes, which are held to manifest virility; the verb *qabel*, commonly used to designate the fundamental virtues of the man of honour, the man who faces, outfaces, stands up to others... [T]he point of honour is a permanent disposition, embedded in the agents' very bodies in the form of mental dispositions, schemes of perception and thought, extremely general in application... the *sense of honour* is nothing other than the cultivated disposition, inscribed in the bodily schema and in the scheme of thought, which enables each agent to engender all the practices consistent

with the logic of challenge and riposte, and only such practice, by means of countless inventions...

(ibid.: 15)

In this explanation, ethics are no longer seen in the traditional sense as being abstract ideals, but instead as a practical sense of ethics, which guides action at an unintentional level. It does not mean that people cannot verbalize or consciously follow these ideas; however, it stresses practice as a primary field of learning and application.

In Bourdieu's theory, these three explanations are intertwined and form part of the core argument according to which objective conditions provide the 'generative formulae' to normative distinctions and practices. This means that ideas and practices form coherent patterns, but not because agents hold a coherent value system or cosmology, but because they are all formed by the same habitus reflecting specific objective conditions (Bourdieu 1984:126).

For Bourdieu, the contradiction between the subjective experience of innate, autonomous taste and objectively competitive patterns of social action plays a central role in reproducing domination. Bourdieu argues that the widely held idea of taste as innate is an *ideology* favouring the dominant classes, because it makes the effect of objective inequalities inherent in social conditions – taste – appear as a personal choice, a matter of individual virtues and shortcoming. This ideology naturalizes and legitimizes domination as it makes social divisions appear as if they would be based on innate personal merit.

In Bourdieu's theory, then, people's normative distinctions are discounted first by proving that they are just consequences of objective relations, and second by seeing them as instrumental to domination. Therefore the primary focus of the research is objective capital relations, which being the real explanatory factors, give clues to the *true* interpretation of practices and personal accounts – not in their own terms, but from the point of view of the objective relations and strategies of domination allowed by them.

The liberal approach to preferences

The third approach traditionally used to analyse consumption is liberalism and microeconomics. In economics people have preferences (Kopányi 1999) and act according to them by the principle of utility maximization; a concept that dates back to the ‘felicific calculus’ that Bentham envisaged as the maximization of pleasures and avoidance of pain (Slater and Tonkiss 2001).

The founding idea of liberalism is the conceptualization of the human subject as an active, powerful, autonomous agent, who is able to judge and develop her (but mainly his) own needs; an ideal which can be traced back to Enlightenment ideas from which liberalism originally emerged (Slater 1997b). Liberalism, unlike previous approaches, insists that consumption cannot be accountable to any external value principle; the substance of choice is a private matter and any interference is an infringement of personal freedom: *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Despite this tenet, however, I argue that the theory does not allow for moral agency to be fully acknowledged, either theoretically or empirically.

First, the notion of preferences excludes the possibility of higher ethical principles that are experienced as compelling or binding independently of one’s desires or that serve as normative standards by which actions can be judged. This erases all difference between ethics and simple liking, leaving no conceptual place for ethics and moral agency.

Second, although the basic tenet only says that maximization takes place through the rational calculation of costs and benefits (utility), the actual analysis of economics all too often assumes not only utility-maximizing *means*, but particular ‘economically rational’ substantive *aims* as well, which are egoistic and materialistic. Consider the following argument by which Lazear (following Becker) explains the lower fertility rates in high income households:

Children produce a stream of services over time, much like an automobile, so one could talk about population growth in terms of consumption and demand curves. (...) Since child services (the commodity produced with children) is a time intensive commodity, high wage women face a higher price of children than do low wage women.

(Lazear 2000:11)

Here the discussion of ‘rational means’ is based on the assumption of a specific end, which is the maximization of *money* as opposed to, say, independence, or achievement of other (artistic, charitable, scientific, religious) aims. In this context the argument seems to become that the *real* aims behind apparently ethical actions are in fact egoistic and calculative.

Third, as Slater (1997b) pointed out, liberalism is not entirely value-free, but relies on a funding value of liberty that is seen as a prerequisite of autonomous choice. This liberty is ‘defined as the individual’s freedom from social interference’ (1997b: 39), which implies a *substantive* conception of the individual that is free from the distorting influences of social or cultural factors (Slater 1997b).

Empirically, the liberal tradition, in the name of assuring this personal freedom and autonomy, is not concerned with what individuals choose to do with their freedom and autonomy. The inquiry can only focus on how given aims are achieved; the substantive aims and the way they are linked – that is, the focus of this project – are outside the analysis (Slater 1997b).

Acknowledging ethics

The theories this research builds on question these traditions on three grounds. Empirically, they argue that the external explanations of consumption as dictated by immoral drives, dominated by capitalist interest, objective positions in the struggle within a field, and the idea of self-defined, merely calculative preferences, are falsified by empirical research findings. They suggest an alternative view of consumption as an entry point to subject-object relationships and see it as realm mediating social relations, values and moral projects. In this critique, the values behind everyday consumption are to be taken seriously, simply because they constitute an empirical reality that has to be acknowledged for understanding contemporary subject-object relationships.

Politically, the argument for acknowledging everyday normative ideas in general – and with reference to consumption in particular – is based on different grounds. The point here is that people’s normative ideas of consumption – often captured through the notion of ‘needs’ – reflect different ideas of valuable aims, approvable ways of living and relationships. If we are to decide these aims democratically *as a society*, we need a political sphere that enables people’s normative visions to be articulated and debated.

Here normative ideas have to be acknowledged not only because they give a better theory of consumption, but because it is a prerequisite of an open political debate (Slater 1997a).

Finally, historical studies on the moral debate on consumption represent an implicit challenge to the above theories by showing that throughout history consumption has been the medium through which value debates – in many cases moral panics – were articulated. These findings make the value-judgement inherent in seemingly objective theories explicit, which contributes to seeing competing ethical ideas behind different normative judgements on consumption.

In this part I look at these arguments in turn, starting with the historical one, followed by the political and empirical challenges.

Moralizing on consumption in a historical perspective

Historical studies on the moral worries surrounding consumption (Sekora 1977; Horowitz 1985; Schama 1987; Appelby 2001; Hilton 2001; Dombos 2004; Horowitz 2004) demonstrate that the moral discourse on consumption since ancient times has reflected the social and cultural concerns that were central to a given society at the time, rather than inherent features of the consumer or consumption as such. In his influential works on the changing discourse of consumption morality Horowitz (1985; 2004) gives evidence of the embeddedness of the issue: both the subjects of the debate (changing from the poor and immigrants to the middle class) and the arguments deployed (the threat to social order to cultural issues and to democratic possibilities of consumption) changed according to the social and economic concerns of a given period. Hilton's (2001) study on the luxury debates from the 18th century points to the same conclusion. Hilton shows that in the debates about luxury the focus shifted from the worries of the 'control of the liberal self' to the cultural field as an opposition between the elites and the masses and finally centred on health concerns.

These studies indicate that through specific normative models of consumption and the criticism of particular practices proponents of the debate developed or questioned certain ways of living, put forward claims on the right values to be enacted in (consumption) practices, and on how social order should look like. Sekora's discussion of Cato provides a good illustration:

[A] long oration of Cato against the extravagance of women, many of whom were demanding repeal of several sumptuary laws. To capitulate to the demands, Cato declaims, would be to allow the passions to rule over reason, to abandon masculinity, and to relinquish proper subordination in society – themes to be reiterated for the next eighteen century.

(Sekora 2001: 25)

In a different, yet related argument, Trentman points out the ‘centrality of political tradition, civil society and ethics’ (Trentmann 2006:21) in historically contingent configurations of the category of the consumer. His work makes it clear that consumption and the very category of the consumer has been embedded in historically specific understandings of accountability, social identities and political projects that were interwoven with different understandings of freedom and social and personal ethics.

The implication of these arguments is threefold. First and most importantly, they point to the fact that consumption is an ‘an essential and ancient part of human politics’(Wilk 2001:246); it is an inherently political issue that is inevitably bound up with questions about how people should live, social values and order. Second, they situate the above theories as historically specific moralizing discourses that can be analysed according to the underlying value assumptions. Finally, by making these assumptions explicit, historical studies allow for seeing them as *one of the possible* opinions as opposed to unquestionable and generally valid standards, which opens up the field to debate. These findings raise the question of whether everyday moralizing on consumption draws on similar ethical visions as the writings of central intellectual figures of the moral debate analysed by them; and if so what should the status of these visions be in relation to each other in a democratic political sphere? These everyday moralizing discourses are precisely the focus of this project.

Political challenges

The political line of reasoning – that this project draws on – put forward by Don Slater is coherent with the historical findings, yet puts them into a wider perspective of the political questions of accountability of social production to social values and democratic debate.

According to Slater (1997b), modernity marks a substantial change with respect to the principles by which society is judged. At the heart of the change lies the transformation of the ideas of what is the appropriate source of legitimacy and social order. Before modernity, the moral classification of consumption was strongly linked to the idea of social hierarchy as reflecting a natural, moral, even godly arrangement. In ancient Greece 'Plato and Aristotle grounded their attack on luxury in what they considered the universal norms of nature, which they associated with origin and birth as well as the presumptive primeval state' (Sekora 2001:20). In pre-modern Europe the concept of the 'Great chain of being' traced back the origins and claimed the legitimacy of actual social order with reference to God. Social hierarchy was conceptualized as a divine arrangement, hence any form of revolting against the fixed status order was seen as morally condemnable, even, a personal – political or religious – sin. Consumption was considered a sphere which should reflect the same cosmic order: sumptuary laws regulated the kind of consumption that was allowed for people of different social standing, including the kind of clothes that they could wear, the length of their sword, food and so on (1997a; 1997b; 1998).

According to Slater (1997b), modernity brought an end to the idea of society as construed according to divine order and the acceptance of subordination as moral duty. While in the pre-modern period social order, legitimacy and allocation were judged from the point of view of the cosmic, divine laws, the Enlightenment posited a new ideal of society, based on *rights to* justice, freedom and individual autonomy. The central change is that it is no longer the people who are judged by meeting the objective ideal of the 'Great chain of being', but it is society that is to be judged by meeting the ideal *of people*:

Throughout the modern period the assumption has been that social production should ultimately be accountable to social values. Different ideologies derive these values in different way: liberalism treats the individual as a sovereign authority; conservatives have deified tradition, historicity and culture; Marxism has an ethical commitment to human creative powers. What they share is a sense that consumer culture stands judged by its ability to sustain desired ways of life – to meet needs.

(Slater, 1997b: 2–3)

The opinion that society is to be judged by its ability to meet needs, instead of an outer ideal people in society should comply with (such as the ‘Great chain of being’) makes *needs* the viewpoint from which the organization of resources is to be judged, and consequently, the only legitimate basis of claims to resources:

[T]o say ‘I (...) need something’ is to make a claim on social resources, to claim entitlement. Needs are both social and political in this respect too: they are statements which question whether material and symbolic resources, labour, power are being allocated by contemporary social processes and institutions in such a way as to sustain the kinds of lives that people want to live.

(ibid.: 2–3)

The accountability to social values raises the fundamental question of how they are to be defined. Slater’s central point is that they can only be defined in an open debate, which, in his view is foreclosed by the traditions discussed up to now. Marxist thought solves the question by referring to the notion of real needs that are seen as objectively defined. However, as Slater points out, ‘needs’ is a normative concept; classifying something as a need – as opposed to let’s say a whim – always relies on a specific assumption as to what constitutes a meaningful, normal or at least human existence:

[I] am saying that I ‘need’ this thing *in order to* live a certain kind of life, have certain kinds of relationships with others (...), be a certain kind of person, carry out certain kind of actions or achieve certain aims. Statements of needs are by their very nature profoundly bound up with assumptions about how people would, could or should live in the society: needs are not only social but political, in that they involve statements about social interests and projects.

(Slater, 1997b: 2–3)

This means that needs are never objective, but always imply certain normative ideas; hence they cannot be defined outside people’s lives (Soper 1981; Slater 1997a; 1997b; 1998). The assumption of objective needs, however, mutes these competing ideas and replaces the debate with an ideal that stands beyond discussion. Although not expressed by Slater, the same criticism can be extended to approaches suggesting there are universal immoral drives behind consumption: by denoting which drives are immoral and which are approvable, they put forward a similar, externally established and unquestionable moral standard of human action.

The liberal solution, according to Slater, also forecloses the open debate, albeit in a different way. The liberal concept of 'preferences' implies that needs are private and unquestionable and excludes them from public discussion, leaving only the means of achieving them to be raised in the public sphere (Slater 1997a, 2000).

The solution Slater proposes – based on the open speech situation elaborated by Habermas – is

a commitment to a political sphere in which all participants are able to articulate – through plural and competing statements of needs – their various and differing senses of how social life should be best lived. (...) [T]he fundamental criterion of social critique should not be the society's capacity for need-satisfaction *per se*, (because definitions of need are part of the debate and cannot be assumed), but rather a society's realization of its potential to maintain an open, reflexive, democratic and consequential discourse on needs.

(Slater 1997a: 55)

This approach, which informs this research, requires acknowledging people's ideas of needs and the everyday normative operations in general as a prerequisite of a democratic debate.

Interestingly, Bourdieu's position from this point of view is close to Slater's. Bourdieu's starting point is the issue of *distinction* in a broader sense, understood as a particular classification (distinction as making differentiations) and attaching value (distinction as attributing merit). He suggests that the dominant classes maintain their dominance by imposing valuations based on their own standards on the entire society. The aim of political agenda Bourdieu suggests is to empower people to autonomous self-definition and to formulate competing valuations (Bourdieu 1991). Similarly to Slater, he sees this realized in a space of competing opinions, where arguments rule over taken-for-granted laws, in the form of the 'field of opinion, the locus of the confrontation of competing discourses' (Bourdieu 1977:168).

However, he is sceptical about the potential of the Habermasian open speech situation Slater builds on. The essence of the open speech situation is precisely that the force of the better, rational argument wins, while for Bourdieu the central point is the unconscious, practical acceptance of domination, which he calls *doxa*:

The social world doesn't work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms and so forth. By using doxa we accept many things without knowing them, and that is what is called ideology.

(Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992 :113)

The question, then, is how to encourage a more reflexive debate, how to open up competing opinions (Bourdieu 1977). The route Bourdieu seems to choose in *Distinction* is to give credit to working-class values and simultaneously expose the calculative logic behind the seemingly higher, more sophisticated practices of the dominant classes. This results in an account in which the only positive, authentic figures are the workers, who unlike the other classes enact 'real' values in their practices (Slater 1997a). Groups, who intend to break out from the working-class position through mobility, or even challenge the actual order of classification as the new petit-bourgeoisie, are seen with deep criticism, as they seem to enter to the (unethical) game of competition.

The problem with this strategy is that instead of opening up competing valuations, it simply reverses the existing values; namely that working-class practices are in fact good and express values, while the practices of the dominant class are bad and calculative. This is a similar classism that Bourdieu wished to reject in the first place and does not result in a field of competing valuations. If we are to pursue the democratic programme Bourdieu and Slater set out, the aim should be to give voice to different valuations. In my opinion the open space of discussion is best pursued by taking people's ideas seriously, rather than discounting them, as Bourdieu does; if anything, Bourdieu's style is disempowering.

Instead of this strategy I agree with the argument of Boltanski and Thévenot, according to which any social theory that aims to liberate and empower people should not refuse people's own normative judgements as its starting point, but find a way to incorporate them:

The main problem of critical sociology is its inability to understand the critical operations undertaken by the actors. A sociology which wants to study the critical operations performed by actors – a sociology of criticism taken as a specific object – must therefore give up (if only temporarily) the critical stance, in order to recognize the normative principles which underlie the critical activity of ordinary persons. If we want to take seriously the claims of actors when they denounce social injustice, criticize power

relationships or unveil their foes' hidden motives, we must conceive of them as endowed with an ability to differentiate legitimate and illegitimate ways of rendering criticisms and justifications.

(Boltanski and Thévenot 1999:364)

This, admittedly, is not a perfect solution; we can never be sure that people are 'really' free. Yet between the Marxist solution of objectively defined standards (and Bourdieu's solution of romanticizing working-class values as the only 'real' ones, with a similar effect) and the liberal solution of getting rid of all standards, for me this seems to be the only tenable position. This position, again, is not a claim on unlimited agency, but the recognition that without acknowledging agency and normative capacity, competing definitions of the good are simply thrown out of the political – and research – agenda, foreclosing the democratic debate between different ethics, aims and projects.

Empirical challenges

The implication of these arguments, pursued in this project, is a new approach to ethics: the aim is to understand competing ideals through a bottom-up approach starting from everyday normative ideas and practices. In this part I evaluate theoretical and empirical approaches that acknowledge values in everyday consumption – consumer behaviour, Mary Douglas's anthropological theory, cultural studies and material culture studies. Just as in the previous part, my focus will be on conceptualization of values and ethics underling consumption, how coherence of values across practices is established, and research agendas.

Marketing and consumer behaviour

One of the first empirical challenges to liberal theory was formulated within the economic discipline itself: in marketing and its subfield, consumer behaviour. Marketing situates itself as part of 'business studies' and relies largely on economic models, but its birth arose from the recognition that consumers are much less sovereign than standard economics suggests. Furthermore, marketing set out to understand, predict

and influence preferences – the precise opposite of the liberal refusal to look at, let alone interfere in, preference-formation.

The early enthusiasm over finding the secret potion to fully manipulate consumers came to an end after repeated failures of marketing campaigns built on general formulas. This early period is today considered – at least in academic marketing – as the past era of ‘production-driven theory’ as opposed to the current ‘consumer-led’ approach, which focuses on understanding consumers and developing goods accordingly (Kotler 2003).

This understanding involves looking at the link between values and consumption practices. The most widely used approach is ‘value research’. This includes first studies that look at links between distinct values and products, assuming there is an instrumental connection between them. This is the idea underlying the technique called laddering, which is to explore the link between product characteristics to higher level values by using interviews. For example in Gutman’s (1982) means-end chain laddering method, the interview starts with a product characteristic and goes on asking ‘Why is it important for you?’ until a higher level value level is reached.

Second, techniques mainly used by market research companies look at the link between personal value profiles and consumption patterns. In the simple version of value surveys (Rokeach 1973), ranks of values are cross analysed with buyer behaviour questions. A much more complex approach is applied in lifestyle surveys – such as the VALS (Values and Lifestyle), AIOs (Activities, Interests, Opinions) or brand and self-image surveys (Roland Berger Strategy Consultants 2009) – that use huge, extremely detailed databases on media use, opinions, values, leisure activity and consumption. This strand, contrary to the idea of atomized preferences in liberal economics, aims to establish coherence across values and practices. This intention derives from the aim of building identifiable consumer segments that are large and stable enough to be targeted by marketing. In practice, it takes the form of developing lifestyle groups, value profiles or psychographic segments using cluster analysis.

These studies produced a remarkable number of empirical findings that suggest connections not only between particular practices and values but also across different practices and ideas. The problem with this strand is the weakness of its theoretical underpinnings. First, in most cases, the correlation is the main argument, complemented with brief, often inconsistent theoretical ornaments attached to the elaborate empirical data. For example, a Young and Rubicam survey (Young and Rubicam 2007) using

VALS briefly mentions Maslow's hierarchy of needs as its founding theory, without providing much information on how the extremely complex data could be explained through the rather simplistic theory. This weakness – from the sociological point of view – is largely due to the fact that these studies are conducted in order to give up-to-date guidelines to marketing rather than explaining why connections exist and how they relate to social structure.

Second, the notion of value is problematic. The definition of value varies, but there is a tendency to emphasize the enduring nature of values rather than their normative aspects. For example, Solomon et al. defines value as 'a belief about some desirable end-state that transcends specific situations and guides selection of behaviour' (Solomon, Bamossy et al. 2006 :113). Another widely used definition adopted from Rokeach defines value as 'an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence' (Rokeach 1973:5). The problem with this formulation is that values seem to be nothing more than enduring preferences or meta-preferences that underlie more volatile everyday choices, hence do not provide an alternative theory to them.

To sum up, consumer behaviour studies – being interested in what and how people consume – show stable consistencies between ideas and practices and across different practices. Yet the explanation behind the findings either relies on the extension of the original economic theory – as in the case of values – or refrains from making a consistent theoretical analysis altogether.

Agency as resistance

In sociology, largely against the pessimistic views on manipulated consumers and inescapable ideologies, new lines of studies have emerged that argue for an acknowledgement of creative meanings through everyday practices. Studies of cross-cultural consumption and cultural studies revealed the new meanings goods take on in different contexts and subcultures, which fuelled a re-evaluation of models that saw consumers as passive, manipulated, and simply accepting meanings produced by the capitalist system. In this view, consumers have the power to impose their own, creative meanings on the world, and these meanings can even go against the ones intended by

advertisers or common ideas (Hebdige 1988; Fiske 1989; Willis 1990). The argument to a large extent orients itself against the Marxist claim that genuine self-development is only possible in the realm of work. Contrary to this idea, Willis (1990) for example, argues that symbolic work in consumption is equally necessary and it provides a creative basis of identity, practice and consciousness: '[H]uman consumption does not simply repeat the relations of production – and whatever cynical motives lie behind them. Interpretation, symbolic action and creativity are *part* of consumption' (ibid.: 21).

Different authors within cultural studies understand this creative potential in diverse ways that have profound implications to acknowledging and studying moral agency in practice. The strand that is closest to my approach is that of Willis, who puts the emphasis on practice and proposes the concept of 'grounded aesthetics' to suggest that through the creative process of selecting, appropriating and particularizing meanings we are in fact producing a common *culture*.

The advantages of this approach are two. First, its central claim is to take everyday culture, the ways people make sense of their actions, the struggles they deem relevant, into account. These struggles are to be taken into account in their own terms – not as manifestations of something bigger or as rationalizations. This means breaking with critical theories that saw meaning predetermined by capitalist interest and with status-competition theories that equated it with symbols of social status. Second, unlike in previous accounts, here meaning is seen as constituted through practice in the processes through which we appropriate the material world as subjects (through 'living symbolic mediation', which 'work through the senses' (Willis 1990: 25). The research implication of these arguments is to study people themselves and try to understand them through their own accounts and practices.

The problem with this approach, however, is that the majority of the authors – in their dedication to falsify manipulation theories – limit the analysis to potentially subversive practices that go against established or intended meanings. In the work of de Certeau (1984), the emphasis is on the 'tactics of the weak', while for Fiske (1989) consumption is often reduced to a site of subversive political action. This ambiguity can be discovered, although to a much lesser extent, in Willis' work too. On the one hand, he asserts that symbolic creativity is 'an integral ("ordinary") part of the human condition', a 'necessary work', which would imply that *any* practice is to be understood in these terms. (This is the approach I take in my work.) On the other hand, he also suggests the primacy of *change*:

To know the cultural world, our relationship in it, and ultimately to know ourselves, it is necessary to change – however minutely – that cultural world. (...) Grounded aesthetics produce an edge on meaning which not only reflects or repeats what exists, but transforms what exists.

(Willis 1990:245)

The danger of focusing only on those acts that go against meanings intended by capitalist production or established ideas is that the acknowledgement of agency is limited to those identities and projects that are politically subversive, creative and ironic, that is, deemed valuable by the theory. The conclusion is either that all consumption is potentially subversive or that one can only see those consumption practices that carry an element of subversion as valuable. In either case, moral agency is reduced to a particular kind of agency: that of resistance. This does not allow for the acknowledgment of the different projects people engage in through practice, as many of them objectify aims that have nothing to do with revolutionary potential.

The world of goods

In anthropology the idea that practices and moral cosmology are intertwined has a long tradition. As Buchli (2002:4) points out, the study of ‘material culture’ originally started as a means of ‘reading’ social progress and social organization from the objects used in non-European cultures. Although the technique of reading artefacts as primary texts was later abandoned in favour of participant observation, the idea that practices – in particular, the circulation and exchange of objects – are central to understanding kinship, social organization, world view and moral order of a culture remained of central importance (cf. Appadurai 1986; Kopytoff 1986; Mauss 1990). Here I focus on the arguments of Mary Douglas, whose work pioneered the application of the anthropological conceptual tools to Western society.

According to Douglas, goods make visible, accessible and enduring the social, cognitive and moral order and categories of a given culture (Douglas and Isherwood 1996). The strength of this approach is that it sees moral and social order as inseparable from material culture; it is through participating in practices – the ‘ritual’ of

consumption – that the shared meaningful social and moral order is reproduced, transmitted and becomes effective.

For Douglas the cultural categories that underlie consumption are never distinct, but part of a coherent, closely connected set of values and beliefs that she calls a ‘philosophy of life’, ‘more or less coherent world-view’ (Douglas 1997:20) or ‘cosmology’. The term cosmology originally means ‘the word or universe as an ordered system’ (Shorter Oxford Dictionary) and traditionally has been applied to religion, but Douglas uses it in a much broader sense. Sometimes it refers to a coherent set of ‘ultimate justifying ideas’ (Douglas 2003a:6) to a ‘hierarchy of values and upholding a particular pattern of behaviour’ (Douglas 2003c:36); at other places it is used more generally as a ‘set of categories that are in use’ (Douglas 2003c:151). In my research I use the term *cosmology* in both senses to capture ethical ideas and practical beliefs that form a relatively coherent and ordered moral and practical worldview.

Throughout her work Douglas stresses that her argument is dialectical (Douglas 1997) in that social relationships and world views are maintained and negotiated in the field of consumption; which is an approach that promises to overcome the pitfalls of deterministic accounts on the one hand, and theories of unconstrained agency on the other. The reasons why I do not use Douglas’s theory as a whole despite these strengths is that in the actual analysis the argument seems to oscillate between these explanations, without providing a common, dialectical framework.

On the one hand, following the Durkheimian approach Douglas suggests that cosmologies are determined by social environments or relations (which she captures in four categories using a group/grid diagram). ‘Cosmological values’ and ‘belief systems’ here are seen to ‘provide justifications for the actions expected from a person by the constraints of his social environment’ (Douglas 2003b:247). In this account cosmologies enacted through practice seem to be determined by pre-existing social relations that operate as unconscious guiding principles behind people’s acts. This leads to an overdeterministic, passive account of consumption (Slater 1997b:152-153), which reduces agents’ views to justification of action required by particular social environments; and throws agency off the theoretical and empirical agenda once again.

On the other hand, elsewhere Douglas argues that people *choose* between world view options and the kind of society they would like to live in through their shopping choices (Douglas 1997). Yet in describing the choice of world views, she proposes the

same typology that she derived from structural explanation, which implies that these options are treated as already given, existing independently of everyday practice.

The actual research agenda of this approach focuses on directly mapping differences in cognitive categories to physical differences in goods and on linking them to particular social environments. Even though this analysis concentrates on everyday practices, it often seem to turn into one of 'syntagmatic' relations between taxonomies of goods, which carry meaning in practice, but without agency, only mediating an overarching structure of meaning (Sahlins 1976; Douglas 1999).

Material culture studies

The material culture approach that my research largely builds on consists of many different strands; here I only discuss the version used by Daniel Miller, whose work has been the most influential for this project. First Miller's theoretical argument on objectification and the connected empirical agenda will be outlined. Then I discuss the way ethics are treated in Miller's empirical work and propose a conceptual clarification.

Consumption as objectification

Miller's starting point is similar to that of Douglas: that material culture is a realm through which social relations and moral cosmologies are made visible, transmitted and negotiated. Also, like Douglas, he extends the concept of consumption in the material culture sense as a necessary realm of all material objectifications: from hedonistic ideals involving abundance of objects to the most ascetic ones involving a monk's garment and a piece of bread; all objectifications entail the material realm (Miller 2005).

The major difference is that Miller considers material culture not as a realm *reflecting* static 'social relations' or a 'cultural system', but as a dynamic realm through which relationships and culture are *constituted* through practice. This dialectical relationship between subjects and objects is captured through the notion of *objectification* (Miller 1987).

Miller's theory of objectification draws on the Hegelian dialectic, according to which subjectivity does not exist independently from objects nor do subjects express

pre-existing ideas, but subjectivity is developed and explored through external forms at the same time as being delimited by them. Objectification refers to the process through which subjects and objects mutually constitute each other through practice:

the critical point about dialectical theory such as objectification is that this is *not* a theory of the mutual constitution of prior forms, such as subjects and objects. It is entirely distinct from representation. In objectification all we have is a process in time by which the very act of creating form creates consciousness. (...) What is prior is the process of objectification that gives form and that produces in its wake what appears to us as both autonomous subjects and autonomous objects (...).

(Miller 2005 :9-11)

This formulation on the one hand keeps the insight of Bourdieu's idea of practice – in the sense of my modified reading offered above – in that it treats 'culture' not as an abstraction, but locates it at the level of practices that simultaneously involve subjectivity and practical action. On the other hand there is a substantial difference compared with Bourdieu and Douglas. For Miller, engaging in practices does not simply mean participating in unconsciously internalized structures, but it is a process through which consciousness can potentially develop: people appropriate, negotiate and make sense of their relationships with each other and the world around them through practices.

For Hegel, these objectifications encompass a broad range of forms from law to language and objects. Miller, in contrast, developed his theory specifically to describe ways in which subjects and *material objects* mutually constitute each other in order to develop a general theory of consumption as objectification:

Consumption is simply the process of objectification – that is, the use of goods and services in which the object or activity becomes simultaneously a practice in the world and a form in which we construct our understanding of ourselves in the world.

(Miller 1995:30)

This way of looking at consumption shares the cultural studies idea that goods produced in alienated circumstances can be appropriated to very different aims. However, for Miller, consumption can be interpreted in dialectical terms – as objectifying and constituting a range of subjectivities and social relations – not because consumers

consciously revolt against the producers' intentions, but because goods are appropriated to and recontextualized as part of meaningful projects in practice. For example, a table that I bought on e-Bay becomes meaningful by forming part of our family dinners, or my professional aspirations by studying on it, or occasionally dancing on it. This meaning has not so much to do with either the intention of the producer (if there was any), or my resistance to it; rather it stems from the meaningful practices the table forms part of.

This does not mean that Miller finds capitalist production relations unproblematic. Instead, he suggests replacing the manipulated vs. subversive classification of consumption with a more general view that sees consumption as a realm of potential struggle where both forces are present at the same time:

One of the main imperatives behind modern consumption (...) is an attempt by people to extract their own humanity through the use of consumption as the creation of a specificity, which is held to negate the generality and alienatory scale of the institutions from which they receive goods and services.

(Miller 1995:31)

Material culture as a research programme

The research agenda stemming from the theory of objectification is made especially clear in *Consumption as the Vanguard of History* (Miller 1995). Miller starts by empirically challenging the stereotypical myths that seem to characterize all consumption regardless of time and space: (1) that 'mass consumption causes global homogenization or global heterogenization'; (2) that 'consumption is opposed to sociality' (3) or to authenticity; (4) and that it involves particular – competitive, greedy, individualistic, etc. – social beings (1995: 21–23). Instead of these empirically untenable general arguments on consumption *as such*, Miller suggests the empirical study of specific consumption practices not as a means of learning something about consumption in general, but as an entry point to study diverse subject–object relations and culture.

Furthermore, Miller argues that consumption studies need to break free not only from these untenable myths, but also from normative judgements on consumption. He positions himself both against traditions discussed in the first part of this chapter that

see consumption as generally bad and cultural studies that argue that it is generally good. Following the theory of objectification the very possibility of pronouncing moral judgements on consumption *as such* disappears, as it is simply a practice that can mediate any kind of subjectivity. Hence rather than prioritizing certain moral standpoints Miller argues for ‘studying consumers themselves and their struggles to discriminate between the positive and negative consequences of commodities’ (1995: 30). This suggestion is entirely compatible with Slater’s political argument, which I intend to follow, according to which consumption should not be judged from external standpoints, but an open debate is necessary among competing normative ideas. The empirical agenda that follows uses a bottom-up approach that focuses on ‘the manner by which both individuals and groups objectify themselves and their values through their material culture and consumption acts’ (Miller 1995:48) through the observation of everyday practices.

Many of the researches in the field of material culture studies deal with the connection between practices and what can be seen as a different aspects of moral cosmologies – ideas of who to be, how to live, what kind of relationships to be in. The focus, however, has largely been on values internal to *distinct* practices, which are treated as disaggregated:

[T]he traditional consumer is disaggregated as they are found not to comprise some clear coherent cultural imperatives, but often partially connected, partially formulated, and quite contradictory sources of value and desire. What an individual consumer creates through clothing may be quite inconsistent with their expressive desire of the car.

(Miller 1995: 53)

Focusing on a limited set of practices facilitates the combination of the analysis of *production* – technological, institutional, retail and production forces that shape a particular practice – with the analysis of *consumption* – the diverse subjectivities, values that are objectified by it (Harvey, McMeekin et al. 2001; Shove and Hand 2003). This way, the full production and consumption analysis of one practice allows one on the one hand to look at consumption as a site of struggle between alienatory scales of macro forces of production, the state and politics, and subjects’ own efforts of objectification (Miller 1988; Miller 1997b; Miller, Thrift et al. 1998:185); on the other hand it enables

one to enquire *why* certain practices are adopted instead of others and why they change over time (Shove 2003).

However, this focus makes it impossible to map connections between the subjectivities objectified in different practices, that is, to explore cosmologies in the full sense of the term. These limitations are pointed out by Miller himself in the *A Theory of shopping* (cf. 1999: 65)) and in *The Comfort of Things* (Miller 2008) he takes a different approach that is much more similar to the strategy applied in this research. Rather than focusing on the production and consumption related to one practice, he looks at households as a whole and situates practices in relation to other practices, life stories and everyday relationships.

In my project, I follow a similar approach in that I focus on particular people and households and investigate the ways ethics and beliefs are mediated by different practices. This allows for revealing ethics underlying different consumption practices and mapping personal cosmologies; yet the trade-off is that due to the exclusive focus on consumption, I cannot answer *why* cosmologies are developed and changed and how they relate to production.

Ethics and morality in Miller's work

At the general level, treating material culture as objectification implies that values and cosmologies – just like any other subjective content – are co-existent with material forms; hence material culture is an entry point to understand them:

[T]he anthropologist may transfer an ability to take some particular practice of another society, such as canoe building or marital alliances, as the basis for understanding comparative cosmology and philosophy and apply the same procedure to the mundane practices of the anthropologist's own society, such as shopping.

(Miller 1995: 177)

This position does not imply that *every* practice objectifies a moral content; simply that moral contents – like any other content – are knowable through practices; it is an entirely different argument to claim that a specific practice does indeed objectify specific values.

Miller makes this latter argument through a series of empirical projects focusing on different practices and showing how they objectify specific relationships and cosmologies. I will explore his notions of morality, ethics and cosmology by looking at his work on shopping, which is probably the most prominent in this regard.

In *The Comfort of Things* (Miller 2008), Miller uses the term cosmology in a broad sense, denoting relatively connected beliefs, world views and values. These cosmologies, as the cases in the book show, are related to personal life stories, experiences and relationships:

The point is that household material culture may express an order which in each case seems equivalent to what one might term a social cosmology, if this was the order of things, values and relationships of society. A very little cosmology perhaps, when it pertains only to one person or household, and one that will only in a few cases ever develop into an abstract philosophy or system of belief both to legitimate and to explain itself. Most people are not called upon to explain themselves with this degree of consistency, even to themselves. Nevertheless, such a cosmology is holistic, rather than fragmented, and though holistic may include contradictions.

(2008: 294)

In the *A Theory of shopping* (1999), in contrast, the notion of cosmology is linked to transcendent values. Miller focuses on the practice of shopping, in particular grocery shopping. He argues that rather than being an individual, self-directed act, shopping is 'the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted by practice' (Miller 1999:18). 'Love' here is not simply a personal value expressed in specific practices, but is seen to constitute a 'generalizable cosmology' (ibid.: 39). Moral cosmology in this book is a shared and long-lasting moral idea that denotes on the one hand people's 'understanding of this world and their place in it' (ibid.: 149) and on the other hand the values – here love – 'to which life is life is properly devoted' (ibid.: 149). Furthermore, Miller emphasizes that cosmology transcends in some sense personal utilitarian choices:

the term 'love' ... will become used to represent a value that leads us towards the problems of cosmology and transcendence. They [these terms] merely remind us that within a largely secular society almost all of us still see ourselves as living lives directed to goals and values which remain in some sense higher than the mere dictates of instrumentality. Daily decisions are constantly weighted in terms of moral questions about good and bad action... Though these may not be made explicit, the accounts we use to

understand each others' actions depend on the continued existence of cosmology as a realm of transcendent value.

The terms 'cosmology' and 'transcendent' suggest values that are long lasting and opposed to the contingency of everyday life. They are intended to imply that although we focus upon the particular persons, children, partners and friends who occupy our concerns at a given moment of time, the way we relate to them is much influenced by more general beliefs about what social relations should look like and how they should be carried out.

(Miller 1999: 19-20)

This formulation implies that the concerns captured by the term cosmology are in some sense higher than simple preferences. Miller suggests that the moral cosmology of love derives its higher nature from its links to religious cosmology and the central argument of the book is that shopping can be seen as a devotional rite. First, Miller suggests an analogy between the phases of a religious sacrifice and shopping and argues that in both cases mundane consumption acts are 'transmuted into a higher regime of value' (1999: 151). Second, he shows that similarly to traditional religious rituals, shopping is directed at the creation of particular subjects and relationships with them. Third, he historically traces the roots of the moral cosmology of contemporary love to devotional rituals. This makes it possible to argue that 'Shopping so far from being, as it is inevitably portrayed, the essence of ungodliness, becomes as a ritual the vestigial search for a relationship with God.' (ibid.: 150).

In the *Dialectics of Shopping* (Miller 2001) morality is less connected to religion, but used more generally to refer to activities involving 'general questions of good versus bad, or right versus wrong behaviour by the social actors themselves'. This is contrasted to 'ethics', which – in harmony with the use of ethical shopping – means 'direct involvement of altruistic concern for others and, in particular, distant others' (2001a: 133). The main difference here seems to be the range of people taken into consideration: while morality is exercised with reference to one's own household, ethics are directed at distant others in general.

While in this interpretation ethics and morality are opposed to each other positing contradictory claims, at other places both appear to be culture and time-specific versions of a more universal moral concern:

[T]here are many cosmologies and regions of the world where consumption is seen as intrinsically evil and destructive. I have argued that much of the logic of traditional sacrifice and exchange is itself an attempt to avoid these dangerous and immoral consequences of consumption as an act that uses up resources. So the specific concerns fostered by Green consciousness have become wedded to much deeper and long-standing fears about the evils of consumption more generally. Where in other societies aspects of sacrifice and exchange are employed to prevent the realization of these imminent evils of consumption, in our society the practice of consumption is itself turned into a three-stage ritual that has the same effect of negating what is seen as destructive nature.

(Miller 2001a: 132)

I think these inconsistencies stem from the fact that Miller admittedly does not intend to formulate an academic argument on ethics and morality, but sticks to their colloquial usage. I think that while retaining insights from the colloquial it is important to clarify these terms analytically, for two reasons.

First, terms of 'right' and 'godliness' are unable to encompass the normative level between neutral preferences and the Good or Right of moral philosophy, at stake in everyday ideals such as artistic inspiration, the family, beauty or fame, which are experienced as *higher*, yet bear no relation to moral philosophy or religion. As a result, this level is often either reduced to preferences (as it happens with the notion of 'values' in consumer behaviour), seeing them as arbitrary, personal inclinations; or, when it is important to emphasize the 'higher' nature of these ideals, their connection with the Good or the Right seems to be necessary. I think to capture this normative level adequately, an analytical concept is needed that can be clearly distinguished from preferences, without having to be connected to Morality.

Second, the fuzziness of these terms makes it difficult to articulate and resolve tensions between different normative levels and ideals. This problem is especially stringent in the context of current concerns relating to the environment and global inequality that involve conflicting demands of common humanity and solidarity – that is closer to the claims of Morality in moral philosophy – on the one hand, and the demands of everyday ideals – such as decency or care for the family – on the other. To understand these tensions the blurred concepts of colloquial use are not suitable.

In the last section of this chapter I propose a more analytical understanding of ethics and morality drawing on Habermas (1993) and Charles Taylor (1989).

A conceptual clarification of ethics

In philosophy the conceptual discussion on ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ largely unfolds against the background of the debate between so-called ‘analytical’ and ‘continental’ moral philosophy. Analytical philosophy is concerned with questions of justice, that is, what it is right to do; and elaborates general, abstract principles – external to culture – of morality based on *logic*. Continental philosophy in contrast emphasizes the embeddedness of normative principles in culture, society and everyday life, which often (but not always) means addressing the question ‘How to live?’ as opposed to ‘What is it right to do?’. Morality in this context is often used to describe the pursuit of analytical philosophy, and ethics to describe the pursuit of continental philosophy. This debate is partly reflected in the way ethics and morality are distinguished; here I look at three authors’ definitions that help to elaborate my use of the terms.

First, Habermas distinguishes between *pragmatic* questions of how to achieve given goals, *moral* questions that are concerned with principles of justice, and *ethical* questions that are seen as a ‘matter of what life one would like to lead, and that means what kind of person one is and would like to be’ (1993: 24).

Moral questions of justice are to be addressed in an ‘open speech situation’, which is guided by procedural rules and aimed at reaching principles that are universally valid for *everyone*: ‘all those possibly affected’. Ethical questions in contrast are tied to particular cultural horizons, and can be answered with reference to ‘a goal posited absolutely for me, that is, from the highest good of a self-sufficient form of life that has its value in itself’ (ibid.: 24). Ethical questions therefore can only be answered based on introspection, ‘through hermeneutic self-clarification’ (ibid.: 25).

Habermas emphasizes that the distinction between pragmatic, moral and ethical choice is based *on the way* a question is posed: as a matter of how to reach an aim (pragmatic), of what kind of life to live (ethical), or of what could be acceptable for everyone (moral). To take an example from consumption, the question ‘Which coffee should I choose?’ can be a pragmatic question if I am only concerned with how to get my favourite brand, a moral question if I pose it as a matter of generalizable principles as in ‘ethical consumption’ lamenting about environmental protection and global

inequality,² or an ethical question if it relates to my understanding of an unfailed life (for example, by choosing the coffee my mother likes as part of my project of being a good daughter).

Although this approach is helpful in separating different normative levels, it involves a substantive definition of ethics as pursuits directed at finding one's true calling or real aim in life. The problem with this view is that it seems to rely on a modern notion of the romantic self that finds his or her inner calling through self-clarification, which makes it difficult to interpret ethics based on other visions – for example, on a sense of self-repressing, religious duty – in these terms. On the other hand, this definition cannot easily accommodate more mundane normative ideals, such as the imperative of being clean, which are by no means value-neutral preferences, yet are customarily followed through a sense of what it is normal to do as opposed to as part of answering the question of what constitutes an unfailed life.

Lakoff and Collier's notion of 'regimes of living' (2004) seems to offer a similar, yet more flexible, understanding of ethics. They define the broader sense of ethics they wish to use – against abstract moral rules – as a 'form of reflection and *practice* concerned with the question of how a particular kind of ethical subject, society, *should live*' (ibid.: 421). They emphasize that ethics focus on ordinary life, that is, on 'the social and biological life of individuals and collectivities' (ibid.: 420).

Similarly to Habermas' view, regimes of living involve 'constituting the self, constituting a certain kind of subject' (ibid.: 424). However, their emphasis is not on self-clarification, but on 'regimes of living' – such as the protestant ascetics – that are culturally specific sets of practices and ethical reasoning, which people can adopt without *conscious* embracement and understanding.

The advantage of this definition is that it locates ethics in practices, and does not rely on conscious embracement. The point I am uncertain about is whether ethics are defined by being normative or being 'good'. I find this clarification important, because everyday actions are abundant with reasons that are normative, yet do not easily fit into the concept of the 'good' (such as being cool, beautiful or wealthy); and an analytical concept of ordinary ethics must make the status of these ideas clear.

² For Habermas *moral* questions on the good for all of 'us' cannot be decided unilaterally, only in an open political debate on social values. Hence the example stands for the kind of mindset that is required in the open speech situation, but not as a description of moral deliberation, which by definition requires a debate.

I find this clarification particularly important, because whether or not we acknowledge particular ideas as ethical depends on the definition of ethics we use. As the empirical chapters will show, in harmony with Bourdieu's observations, the language of ethics in the traditional understanding of *specific* 'higher ideals' or 'good' life in the narrow sense of the word are customarily put forward mainly by intellectuals and the educated elite. This means that the traditional understanding of ethics favours better educated groups, and excludes certain visions that are either not articulate enough, or do not conform to the legitimate definition. It is therefore important to use a definition that does not prioritize specific legitimate understandings.

In the remaining part of this section I will focus on the work of Charles Taylor to elaborate a concept of ethics that retains the focus on everyday practice and questions on how to live, yet provides not only a clearer conceptual tool, but also one that is open to different interpretations by defining ethics not substantively, but as a normative relation.

Strong evaluations and identity

Taylor does not distinguish between morality and ethics, because according to him *all* normative ideals, including a sense of justice, arise from particular cultural traditions. He suggests that general agreement in modernity on universal justice, freedom and self-rule can be traced back to religious and philosophical moral sources that we forgot about, and therefore we – and Habermas in particular – see them as ahistorically universal and beyond debate. He therefore uses the terms ethics and morality interchangeably, in order to generalize the model of ethics to morality as well.

Taylor defines ethics/morality in opposition to preferences. Unlike preferences, ethics/morality refer to evaluations – that he calls 'strong evaluations' (1989: 20) – that are experienced as higher and independent of personal inclination, constituting outer standards by which our very desires can be judged:³ 'We sense in the very experience of being moved by some higher good that we are moved by what is good in it rather than that it is valuable because of our reaction' (ibid.: 74).

³ Saying that strong evaluations are felt as independent from our desire is not to say that they are external to us; Taylor insists that they are 'grounded on our strongest intuition' (ibid.: 75).

$\chi^2_{0.01/2}$ / persistence of
path dependency
resilience / continuity

This formulation allows for a more open interpretation of ethics, which I will use in this project. What makes an idea ‘ethical’ is the fact that for particular people it represents a way of living or being that they consider higher as opposed to being simply different or more desirable. In other words ‘ethical’ does not refer to a given *substantive* value, but to the *relation* to the subject; namely that a particular mode of existence or conduct is seen as higher. This formulation allows for looking at *what* are the ideals, ways of living and being that people hold as higher in their own life. This is a conscious agenda of Taylor, too: he wants to emphasise the diversity of strong evaluations and situates his argument against analytical moral philosophy that acknowledges only a single criterion of the Right or the Good, hence cannot even take notice of the diversity and possible conflict between strong evaluations (ibid.: 101). For him, it is part of this agenda to emphasize that people do not always consciously follow or express ethics, yet a ‘sense of value and meaning’ may be ‘well integrated into what they live’ (ibid.: 44) even in an unreflected manner.

Simply introducing the notion of ‘strong evaluation’ could still allow for seeing ethics as optional, deliberately chosen or refused; some people following their preferences, while the ‘better’ people following higher goods. This avenue is closed down by Taylor’s argument on the link drawn between ethics and identity. For him, identity is much more than a sheer performance, a mask, a persona to be worn, or a playful image; it is instead the very essence of being human, therefore an *inescapable* human condition. He argues that modern identity is defined by answers given to questions of good and bad in terms of ‘strong evaluations’:

Living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood... To know *who you are* is to be oriented in the moral space, a space in which questions *arise* about good or bad, what is worth doing and what is not, what has meaning for you, and what is trivial and secondary.

(1989: 27–28, my emphasis)

This implies that moral agency is the basis of identity; in other words, taking a position with respect to strong evaluations is not an option, but an imperative of being human.

'Affirmation of ordinary life'

Taylor further distinguishes 'hypergoods' among strong evaluations that are of 'supreme importance relative to others' (1989: 62). Hypergoods are incomparably higher, worthwhile and are in the same relation to lower-level goods as morals/ethics are to preferences: standards by which to judge them:

Each of the goods I am talking about here is defined in a qualitative contrast, but some people live according to higher-order contrast between such goods as well. They recognize the value of self-expression, of justice, of family life, of the worship of God, of ordinary decency, of sensitivity, and of host of others; but they consider one of these – perhaps their dedication to God, or perhaps justice – as of overriding importance.

(ibid.: 62)

One way of connecting Taylor's theory to the distinction between morality and ethics discussed above is to see hypergoods as morals, while ordinary concerns arising from lower-level goods as ethics. This is not what Taylor suggests, however; he sees the concern with ordinary life on the one hand and freedom, justice and solidarity on the other as diverse, conflicting hypergoods of modernity.

Through a historical inquiry into the development of hypergoods, Taylor traces the rise of the characteristically modern hypergood of 'affirmation of ordinary life'. He uses the term first for *everyday* strong evaluations, for the way that people actually define their identity and see their life as fulfilled by pursuing aims related to family and work (ordinary life): 'The householder's sense of value of what I have been calling ordinary life is woven through the emotions and concerns of his everyday existence' (Taylor 1989: 44).

Second, he uses the term to describe a view in philosophy and social sciences that appreciates the value and dignity inherent in everyday life, which can be clearly linked to Slater's argument on the changing basis of accountability in modernity. He suggests that this hypergood is formulated against the original Aristotelian thought that draws a distinction between the spheres of politics vs. the household economy and restricts the pursuit of the good life in the former, after the needs of sheer existence are satisfied in the latter. The modern 'affirmation of ordinary life', in contrast, locates the 'higher' precisely in the terrain of everyday life. The 'affirmation of ordinary life' in

this light seems to be the underlying value-assumption behind projects – including Lakoff and Collier and certainly this one – that put a higher value on everyday practice and aims.

The implication of this argument is that what others treat as a distinct *level* of ‘ethics’ (understood as questions of how to live in everyday contexts) vs. ‘morality’ – can be related to different hypergoods of modernity. By seeing them as different sources at the same level, it becomes possible to understand conflicts between them, as opposed to simply seeing them on the same continuum (moral being higher than ethics). Based on this idea Taylor suggests that in modernity there is a conflict between the hypergood of ‘universal and equal respect and of modern self-determining freedom’ and the hypergood of the affirmation of ordinary life, ‘which sees the kind of sacrifice of other, “lower” goods which this entails as utterly unacceptable’ (1989: 101).

I find this approach useful because it redefines morality/ethics as referring to *all* normative visions that are experienced as higher (as opposed to preferences that have no normative dimension). By doing so, first, the ‘Right’ and the ‘Good’ become as equally historically situated and subjectively experienced qualities as any other, which makes it possible to subject them to empirical inquiry. Second, it avoids seeing only the ‘legitimate’ visions as ethical by using the notion of ethics not to denote a specific substantive quality, but a normative relation. Finally, rather than imposing a pre-defined rank, the approach allows for looking at connections and rankings between different strong evaluations.

Conclusion

In this chapter I critically evaluated the way different theories relate to normative distinctions and ethics in the context of consumption. My objective was threefold.

First, I aimed to clarify and develop the concepts that I use in this project. The first concept is *ethics*, which I appropriated from Taylor’s and Habermas’s work. The term ethics is used to describe decisions that are taken in the light of strong evaluations denoting particular normative visions of how to live and who to be. This notion of ethics does not deduce the ethical nature of an act from a pre-defined set of values, but from the fact that certain ways of living and being are held to be superior and as standards that are experienced as independent from the subject. In other words, ethics

denotes more a normative relation than a substantive quality, which allows for asking what those ideas are that we hold as superior and binding. The second concept I focused on is the term *cosmology*. Building on Douglas's and Miller's work I explained that I use the term to denote relatively coherent and stable sets of ethical and practical beliefs.

Second, I looked for a theoretical framework that allows for studying ethics in the context of consumption. I had two standards for evaluating existing theories. On the one hand, I needed a theory that starts from empirically tenable assumptions. On the other hand, based on the political argument put forward by Slater, I looked for a theory that allows for acknowledging everyday evaluations and values, without assuming unlimited agency. I have shown that the material culture approach, Miller's theory of objectification in particular, provides such a theoretical and empirical framework.

Finally, my objective was to elaborate my research strategy corresponding to the theoretical framework and research question. I explained my modified version of material culture approach that focuses on diverse practices of particular people as opposed to looking at a particular practice across different people or as a site connecting production and consumption.

Chapter 3 Methodology

This chapter gives an overview of the research process and methods. It starts with a description of the research questions followed by an explanation of the data collection. In the last part questions of interpretation and ethical issues are considered.

Research questions

This research was originally motivated by an annoyance with consumer culture critiques pronouncing evaluative stances on people's practices from seemingly unquestionable moral standpoints. The initial aim was to understand evaluations used by ordinary people who are customarily treated as mere objects of such moral pronouncements. In particular, I was interested in the ways people distinguish between appropriate and condemnable, necessary and wasteful, normal and extravagant – in short 'good' and 'bad' – consumption practices and in the way these evaluations change from one generation to the other. My starting questions were:

1. What kinds of issues are articulated through ideas of appropriate consumption? This question aimed to identify the ethical and practical concerns that underline different definitions of needs and 'approvable' practices.
2. How do these personal accounts and practices relate to public discourse and official accounts? This question aimed to understand how discourses, in particular public moralizing on consumption, identified by existing studies are related to personal accounts and practices.
3. How do personal accounts and practices relate to those of previous generations? This question aimed to understand how ideas and practices of previous generations are adopted, reinterpreted or ignored by the next generations.

When doing the research these questions served as a point of orientation rather than strict guidelines; I tried to keep an open mind to findings that might not conform to my original questions and assumptions. The analysis of the data suggested that evaluations were not formulated according to distinct principles I expected to find along lines of my initial assumptions, but with reference to ethical views of who to be, how to live, what kind of relationships to have and views on social justice that were deeply embedded in people's self-understanding and world view. It also became clear that public discourse and previous practices are not simply adopted, but incorporated into personal ideas *through* these visions. These findings shifted the focus to exploring the connections between cosmologies and consumption rather than extracting clear-cut principles.

Fieldwork site

I chose to do fieldwork in Budapest, my home town. Apart from the obvious advantages of being a local in the field – understanding subtleties of language, finding participants, accessing original literature – Hungary is an ideal field to investigate changing ethics of consumption. People who were born in the 1920s and 30s grew up during pre-socialist times; their children were born under socialism, while the youngest generation started their adult life under capitalism. Each system involved changes in social hierarchy, in access to goods, in public ideology on consumption and in ideals of appropriate behaviour. The transformation provided an extremely helpful terrain to explore links between cosmologies, practices and public discourse by allowing me to look at how changes are negotiated by people who lived through the transformations, and to compare cosmologies of different generations.

Research participants

Family, household, individual

I conducted fieldwork in Budapest, from July 2005 to May 2006. The participants were members of two or three-generational families. The research involved different generations of the same families as well as members of the same household (see family

trees in Appendix 4). Looking at different generations of families allowed for cross-generational comparisons, while studying households rather than individuals was based on two considerations. First, it allowed for observation of discussions over consumption, giving a perspective to ideas on consumption in the making (Allan 1980; Nyman 1999).

Second, most consumption practices take place in the context of other people, households being one of the prominent contexts. The standard definition of the household is 'one person or a group of people who have the accommodation as their only or main residence; and for a group: either share at least one meal a day or share the living accommodation, that is, a living room or sitting room' (National Statistics 2002:58). In my research, I developed a different characterization that puts the emphasis on the specific interdependencies entailed by the household. The household in my view is a community of people who are to some extent in the same *life, resource* and *home material culture* field. Being in the same *life* field means that the others have a role in the life we plan, that is, our plans are dependent on their agreement. For example, we would like to dine out, go on holiday, eat breakfast *together* or simply read *alone* – all being activities that depend on others in the same life sphere. Being in the same *resource* field means that the decision on resources (mainly time and money) has a direct influence on the freedom of choice of others. For example, if one member of the household spends his or her or the common budget on a car, others might not be able to afford a new dishwasher or go on holiday together. Finally, being in the same *home material culture* field means that the others' decisions on material culture restrict our choices. For example, if someone buys a sofa, that will be The Sofa, and I cannot buy another one. These three dependencies together constitute, in my opinion, the household. Friends and relatives, even strangers, can be in the same life field; other relatives are often also in the same resource field; and usually we share parts of our material culture field with neighbours, but all the three together is characteristic of the household. Consumption is therefore best understood in these contexts of other people, as a process of negotiation rather than making isolated, individual choices.

Choosing participants

Participants were chosen to get a sample as diverse as possible from the point of view of their ideas on and actual consumption practices. Since I did not know in advance what produces these differences, I used a step-by-step strategy to choose participants. The initial dimensions were generation, gender (assured by choosing families of two or three generations) and social position. After the first round of interviews I introduced two further aspects: conscious consumption and social categorizations based on everyday use rather than traditional classifications, such as *nouveau riche* (see the column 'Description' in the 'Sample overview' table in Appendix 1). I decided to limit the participants geographically to Budapest, as the rural–urban differences if I had gone further afield would have made the already complex study excessively complicated. Altogether, eight families (20 households) participated (see Appendix 1).

In the final writing-up process I became aware that taking into consideration further aspects – in particular, cultural capital and political orientation – could have made my sample more diverse. As these findings were made after the fieldwork, the sample is slightly biased towards my own political orientation (socialist/liberal) and towards people of higher cultural capital.

Regarding the generational dimension, my original aim was to select families in which the three generations grew up in different historical periods: the first generation born in the 1920s (in order to be in their 20s at the beginning of socialism), the second generation in the 1950s or early 60s, while the last generation was born in the 1970s. Here I run into the problem that the pattern of childbirth that would have suited my generational research plan does not correspond to the one that exists in most families in Hungary. Most women of the first and second generation had their babies in their late teens and early 20s, which means that their grandchildren were born in the 1960s rather than in the 70s. This was especially the case with lower-class families as the age of pregnancy declines with class background (Valuch 2005).

These problems meant that there was a trade-off between different aspects: I could not find working-class families where the first generation was old enough and there was a sufficient age gap between generations, so the oldest participants are from middle and upper classes.

Getting in contact

I got in contact with the families via acquaintances. I could not interview complete strangers, as the research involved touchy questions of personal life and money matters. In addition, as participation required a lot of time and the involvement of more than one generation, ringing doorbells at random was not feasible.

I was careful only to include people who hardly knew me. Strangers, unlike friends, take much less common knowledge for granted, which makes it easier to encourage them to explain their views in interviews. Also, I excluded interviewees who were directly dependent on the contact person (for example his or her direct employees). I made this restriction after a failed interview: when discussing excessive consumption, I felt that one of my interviewees was not open with me, because I was a friend of his boss (who might be an example of a person of excessive consumption in his eyes).

The advantage of this contact method was that participants were open in the interviews, talking freely about money and personal relationships. Furthermore, the participation of two and three generations required a commitment that I could not expect from strangers. Even with this method, some families backed out before and even after the first interview, simply because they found that the research required too much of their time. The disadvantage of this contact method was that I could only include people to whom I managed to get a connection through my acquaintances (although as I am from an upwardly mobile working-class–lower-middle-class family, my contacts come from a wide range of social strata). Also, I specified in my sample plan in advance the kind of families I wanted to include and asked a wide circle of acquaintances to get in contact.

Only in the case of the poorest family in my research, whose members spent their last years in a shelter, did my method fail. Even though I got in contact with families that became homeless or had serious financial or alcohol problems, setting up an interview with them proved impossible. I think this is because my contacts did not want me to learn more details about their messy relatives or friends. Even when these problems occurred in a family I interviewed (for example, a sister was an alcoholic), my intention to include them in the research was blocked. To find participants whose finances had become out of control, I eventually visited a homeless charity, which helped me to get in contact with one of the families they worked with.

On every visit I brought a small present (box of chocolate or flowers) to my participants, except for the poor family mentioned above, which I gave money. Studying different concepts of needs made me aware of the very diverse ideas about what ‘basic needs’ are, and buying this family something that I considered they *needed* in their extreme poverty felt awkward and patronizing. To have bought chocolate when they can hardly afford bread would have been even more bizarre.

Data collection

I used three different methods: individual interviews, joint interviews and observations. Since I was interested in evaluations and cosmologies, and the ways in which people establish connections between different practices and ethics objectified by them, I did not specify a particular product or retail environment, but looked at different practices of the same person.

It is important to note that this research intended to uncover normative distinctions between practices, which places a larger emphasis on verbal accounts than ethnographies do. This emphasis, however, did not mean I elicited abstract opinions on consumption. My own experience confirms Miller’s observation that when asked about consumption in general, people express moral condemnation of the consumer society and hedonism (1999: 65–67). However, when practices are talked about as part of a life story or in everyday situations – such as arguing about which TV to buy – verbal accounts are far from the stereotypical condemnation of consumption. Therefore instead of asking about consumption in general or about isolated goods, I tried to create interview situations in which particular consumption practices came up naturally as part of life narratives and projects rather than as a separate realm divorced from these contexts. For example, in the individual interviews I initially conducted a narrative interview of people’s life story and asked them further questions about the details of the way they lived. These details contained references to material culture that I analysed later. Or I asked them about the principles according to which their parents raised them, and as part of these topics budgeting and material practices were discussed. The joint family interviews (described below) were easier to conduct in this respect, as discussions between members were easily triggered and flowed when I simply asked

about common decisions and differences (see the interview guides in Appendices 2 and 3).

The advantage of this approach is that it allows for understanding how people make sense of their own consumption and exploring connection between different practices, ethics and cosmologies. The disadvantage, however, is that focusing on 'making sense' does not bring out normative distinctions that people take for granted. For example, for the poorest participants in my research, being clean is a central issue, while for others it is so much taken for granted that it is never even mentioned, but simply assumed as part of what is 'normal'. These are the practices that Shove (2003) describes – drawing on Kaufmann – as 'perfect injunction' to refer to the type of actions that people consider as having to be done without 'further thought or reflection' (ibid.: 161). She suggests, following Giddens, that 'social norms and conventions are... sustained and recreated through practices like these' (ibid.: 161). As I explain shortly, I used a number of techniques to make these assumptions explicit, yet I am aware that the research does not reveal *all* normative distinctions, but only those that people see at least partially as a terrain of *choice*.

Individual interviews

The individual interviews combined narrative elements (life history related to consumption), descriptions of everyday practices and opinions about other people's consumption.

Most interviews took place in the participant's home, with four exceptions (two in a café/pub of the participant's choice, two in another family member's home). I conducted 27 individual interviews of 2–3 hours' length, which were recorded and transcribed. In addition, I talked to participants after the formal interview, and when organizing and conducting interviews with their parents or partners, travelling together to their home, or meeting them for a coffee. These informal 'small talks' (Flick 2006) were documented in field notes.

Joint family interviews

This method is based on the ‘joint narratives’ technique that was developed to study the common construction of reality in the family (Flick 2006). These interviews were more focused on everyday practices and decisions, such as planning, acquiring and using various objects. The aim was to find out about conflicting views between family members on what is ‘reasonable’ to have and why, and to reveal differences – within the family and in comparison with others – as perceived by participants. These interviews were very helpful in revealing negotiations and the grounds on which people defend particular practices. They took place in the family’s home with 2–4 members of the family. Some of them included different generations of the same family (child and/or father or mother with his or her parents), others only members of the same household. I conducted 15 joint interviews, of 30 minutes to 3.5 hours in length.

Observations

I made observations about the material surroundings of the participants I had access to during the interviews (furnishing of the home, the way interviewees were dressed, etc.) and during two shopping trips, and noted the non-verbal communication that took place during the interviews (frowning, nodding, etc.). I made notes about my observations immediately after every interview. (It was relatively easy to make observations about participants’ homes, as it is a widespread custom in Hungary to show guests around the apartment, giving an explanation of why things are arranged the way they are and how they came to be that way.)

Doing the interviews

The two types of interviews were designed to explore different aspects of the ethics of consumption. My participants, however, sometimes perceived the two methods as potentially contradictory, as interviews involved opinions about other family members’ consumption, discussions of money and disagreements, which participants often confided in private yet hid in joint interviews.

To overcome this problem I preferred to carry out joint interviews first. After having been involved in a joint discussion, participants did not feel that they were criticizing others 'behind their back'. Furthermore, joint interviews need much less guidance, and brought up many topics that I would not have thought of and that could be followed up in individual interviews.

Still, in some cases I could not carry out individual interviews, as the family insisted that they had 'nothing to hide from each other'. In other cases joint interviews were impossible: in one of the families relationships were so hostile that informants refused to talk together as 'it would only end up in fighting'.

Considerations relating to the interview guides

The step-by-step research method allowed me to reflect on problems with formulating interview questions and correct them for later rounds. Apart from the sequence of the interviews the following issues turned out to be important:

1. Intimate questions

The research covered intimate issues, such as negotiations over money and generational conflicts, which are not easily discussed with a stranger (Wilson 1995:71). The first round of interviews was full of half-finished stories when participants started to talk about differences, but changed their mind, as they found it inappropriate to 'show the family's laundry to a stranger'.

The way to overcome this difficulty was to reformulate questions. I avoided using the words 'conflict' and 'argument', and replaced them with 'differences' and 'change'. Furthermore, I started with questions on gender and generational differences in general and then moved to instances of personal experiences. For example, I might ask: 'Some people think there are generational differences in the way people consume. Do you agree? Could you give an example from your own experience of what that might mean?' By framing differences as natural instead of signs of conflict and disruption of family harmony I got much more informative answers, leaving open the possibility of people saying that they do not agree with my suggestions.

2. Money matters

The specific Hungarian context of my research posed further obstacles to discussing money. As will be explained in Chapter 4, in Hungary being rich is widely seen as a sign of conducting illegal activities: according to socialist common sense it is not possible for someone to get ‘that rich’ from ‘honest work’. Also, in Hungary it is considered polite not to talk about success and achievement, as it is seen as boasting. Instead, people tend to emphasize the negative aspects of their life, including pretending to be poorer and less successful than they actually are. This is done partly to avoid envy and suspicion of illegitimate activities, and partly out of empathy and consideration for others who might be less fortunate. This attitude broke down to a certain extent through the discussion of the concrete details of the participants’ lives and aims, where pride and self-respect related to achievement came out very clearly. Another part of this attitude did not break down, as it does not form part of the legitimate vocabulary – however, I do not consider it a problem, as what counts as a legitimate account is the very focus of this study.

3. It is a sign of envy to criticize other people’s consumption practices

The original interview guideline tried to map ethical judgements with direct questions such as: ‘Is there anybody, or a social group, whose consumption you condemn?’ I got two types of answers to this question: ‘I do not condemn anybody’s consumption, I am not envious.’ Or ‘It is not my business what others consume.’ I was surprised by the lack of criticism, because when I even just vaguely mentioned to anybody that I am doing a study on consumption, it triggered an unstoppable flow of criticism.

I realized that negative opinions about others’ consumption are similar to prejudices: while people feel comfortable to voice them in everyday contexts with friends and even acquaintances, they tend to hide them in interviews. To overcome this problem, I modified my interview guide, building on methods originally developed for revealing hidden prejudices (Bogardus 1933; Triandis 1995). I have included some descriptions of people and their consumption habits based on instances of behaviour that were discussed in other interviews, as well as of characteristic figures taken from the public discourse, such as the young ‘mall rat’. After reading out the short text I

asked participants to tell me their opinion about the person in question (see Appendix 3).

This method also helped to trigger explanations. I intentionally included some cases that contained very little information to encourage participants to set up various situations in which they would condemn or agree with the behaviour. These ambiguities and ways of solving them were very useful for my research, as they showed how people draw the conceptual borders of legitimate consumption and negotiate ethics objectified in practices. (See Appendices 2–3.)

4. Going from broad to specific questions

When I started fieldwork, I used unstructured narrative interviews combined with a set of questions referring to judgements and differences. My aim was to keep my mind open to new directions and connections drawn by the participants. As the fieldwork proceeded the interview guideline became more and more structured and focused. I found that more focused questions do not only result in more valuable data, but they are also easier to answer. I therefore divided up big broad questions into smaller ones that related to particular experiences.

Data analysis

Interpreting and presenting data

The aim of the research, as described above, was to understand the issues participants articulated through ideas of appropriate consumption. The findings suggested that these issues can be best understood not as clear-cut principles, but as complex personal cosmologies, that involve connections across belief and practices. I found case studies to be the best method of presenting these findings as they make clear the cosmologies with reference to which evaluations are made sense of and through which different practices are connected. The analysis closely follows the accounts of participants as the primary aim is to trace how people make sense of their own practices.

In writing up the case studies I emphasized what participants deemed to be important. This method implied that particular practices have a different weight in each

account; for example, some participants being pretty is of central importance, while others' concerns centre on the house or the car.

Furthermore, the analysis establishes connections or contradictions between what I consider the two most important sources that these cosmologies and the practices objectifying them draw on. First, I look at the relation between personal cosmologies on the one hand and the 'official' versions of approvable consumption – and the ethical visions these versions imply – on the other, based on existing studies to be described in Chapter 4. Second, different generations of the same family are contrasted in order to understand the way cosmologies and practices draw on the ones learned at home. These comparisons do not serve to *explain* cosmologies; what I am interested in is their connections.

The case studies do not include all participants. The principle of selection was to cover the biggest variety of cosmologies and practices, so when two cases were similar, I only included the one that I considered more fruitful for understanding a particular cosmology. Participants not included are mentioned alongside the case studies with which they show the most similarities.

Cohort effect vs. age effect

This strategy of looking at three generations raises two questions. First, people, unlike relics and newspaper articles used for historical analysis, age and evolve through time. A grandmother born in the 1920s cannot be treated as a representative of pre-socialist views, or as a source of data on how things used to be, from which previous periods can be reconstructed. She also lived through socialism and capitalism, which she very likely understands through a narrative that provides particular ways of making sense of change and establishing a relatively coherent understanding of her life and of who she is. In other words, participants today live by a particular self, ethics and practices that do not exist in separation from previous periods of their life, but form part of the same intelligible story. I therefore use these accounts as an insight to understand how change is made sense of, rather than as relics of a past mentality.

At the same time accounts of different generations exhibit striking differences that can be linked to particular socio-political changes, which brings up a second question. To what extent can these differences be attributed to the different ages of the

participants (age affect) and to what extent to the historical periods in which they lived (cohort effect)? For example, is the irresponsible behaviour of a 20-year-old simply part of the recklessness of the youth (which will pass with time), or is it something related to capitalism (and be characteristic of him even when he is older)? I am unable to provide a clear-cut answer to this question. It could only be given if I repeated the research over time either with the same people (to see if they changed) or with other people of the same age as my original participants (to separate the age effect). My admittedly imperfect solution is based on the accounts people provided about how they changed over their life and what they themselves attributed to different effects.

Ethical considerations

I have followed the guidelines in the Statement of Ethical Practice published by the British Sociological Association (1992). I explained to participants the aims of the research and the way data would be used. Each participant was given a statement about my responsibilities, including ensuring their anonymity; secure handling of the interviews and their right to stop participating at any time. Names have been changed in order to protect anonymity.

Still, the research process raised some ethical issues. As Valentine noted, family interviews are 'ethical minefields': tensions in the relationships become exposed, and the researcher's role can be very problematic (Valentine 1999). In joint interviews, I often felt that I was seen as an 'objective' judge in family conflicts. I tried to avoid this role and emphasizing that I am not there to judge different opinions.

Chapter 4 The field: consumption, ethics and historical change in 20th-century Hungary

In the following chapters I look at changing cosmologies (ethical and practical beliefs) that normative distinctions of practices draw on in three generations of Hungarian families. These distinctions and cosmologies selectively appropriate elements of and position themselves in relation to what I see as the ‘official’ version of appropriate practices and ethical ideas, and ‘objective’ economic, social and political conditions. The aim of this chapter is to give a background about the field and to reconstruct these ‘official versions’ based on existing studies. These ‘official versions’ are hardly ever embraced fully and are often challenged by participants, yet they provide a useful reference point in relation to which the positions explored in the subsequent chapters can be placed.

The chapter’s structure is chronological, following a widely accepted division of 20th-century Hungarian history into three major periods (Eyal, Szelényi et al. 1998; Valuch 2005): the pre-socialist period before World War 2; socialism 1949–1989 (which can be further divided into two sub-periods, the hard-line ‘classical socialism’ until the early 1960s and the ‘soft dictatorship’ until the 1980s); and finally the capitalist era, which officially started from 1989 (Image 1).

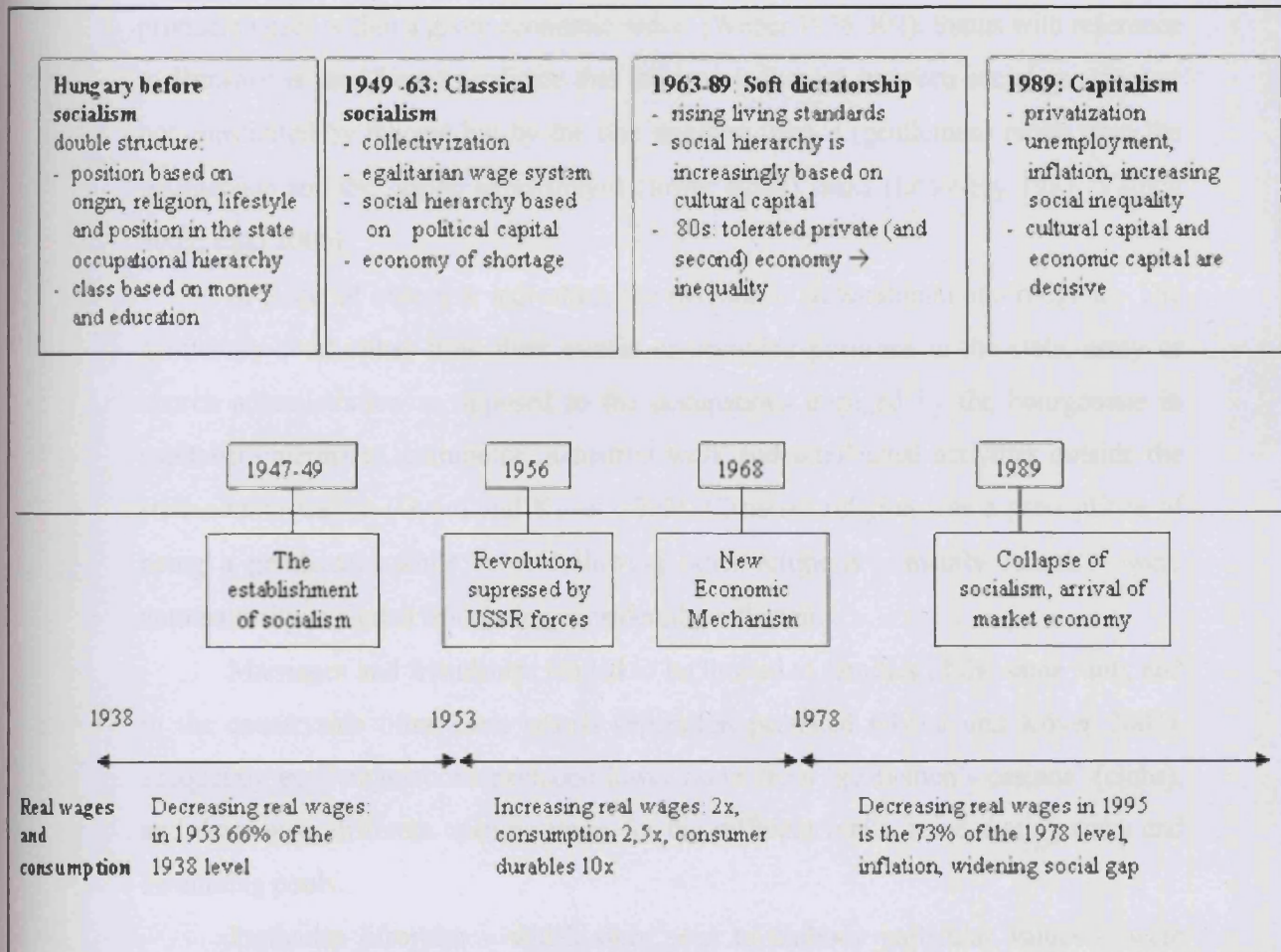


Image 1. Overview of socio-political changes in 20th-century Hungary

Pre-socialist Hungary

The statistical indicators of occupation, income/wealth and education of pre-socialist Hungary show a predominantly agrarian, unequal and poor society. In 1941 half of the population lived from agricultural activity, mainly as wage labourers, or owned a small amount of land that was not enough even for self-sustainment, and starvation was frequent experience (Gyáni and Kövér 2003:218).

To describe stratification of pre-socialist Hungary most commentators (Szabó 1991; Utasi 1995; Gyáni and Kövér 2003) use Max Weber's notion of *status* – an 'effective claim to social esteem based on positive or negative privileges, founded on

lifestyle, hereditary prestige, formal education and occupational prestige’ as opposed to *class* – deriving from ‘the relative control over goods and skills and from their income-producing uses within a given economic order’ (Weber 1978:302). Status with reference to Hungary is used here to indicate that the major division between social groups was not constituted by income but by the line dividing the *úri* (gentlemen) ranks from the bourgeoisie and the *alsóbb néposztályok* (lower strata) ranks (Losonczy 1977; Valuch 2005; Laki 2006).

In terms of objective indicators, the division is occupational and religious. The gentlemen lived either from their estates or occupied positions in the state, army or church administration as opposed to the occupations engaged by the bourgeoisie in capitalist enterprises, commerce, industrial work and intellectual activities outside the state administration (Gyáni and Kövér 2003). Christian religion was a prerequisite of being a gentleman, while those following other religions – mainly Jewish – were automatically excluded from being considered gentlemen.

Marriages and friendships tended to be limited to families of the same rank, and in the countryside often even spatial separation persisted (Gyáni and Kövér 2003). Frequently entry regulations excluded lower ranks from ‘gentlemen’s casinos’ (clubs), and there were different opening times for the different ranks in ice-skating rinks and swimming pools.

Particular lifestyles – which were seen to embody particular values – were considered as appropriate for different ranks. From historical studies an ‘official version’ of distinctively gentlemanly ethics can be reconstructed (even if most of these studies do not see these as values or ethics). Gentlemen demonstrated the norms and values of the historical aristocracy in their behaviour; they were calm and dignified – according to a Hungarian proverb ‘The gentleman is in no hurry, never asks questions and is never surprised’ (Gyáni 2003: 24). Furthermore, the capability to engage in a duel – seen as the ultimate proof of dignity – was also the privilege only of gentleman. Other sources emphasize that the norms of a gentleman’s manners – such as following etiquettes and customs in behaviour, clothing and eating – were seen to represent particular values of tradition, dignity, pride and patriotism (Losonczy 1977; Gyáni 2006).

Practices seen as gentlemanly, in short, did not only denote activities appropriate to the ‘gentlemen’s rank’, but were also seen to objectify particular, rank-specific ethics. This close connection between practices and ethics can be observed in one of the books

of the time for impoverished gentlemen, which claims: ‘even if [the gentleman] could not stay elegant in clothing, [he] remained elegant in its morals’ (quoted in Gyáni 2003: 28), suggesting that elegance – which was considered a prime indicator of the ‘real’ gentleman – was both an ethical and a practical quality. The following quote, from a juridical document from 1927, provides a further illustration of the connection between practices and ethics. In a trial one of the witnesses questioned the credibility of the defendant by arguing that his behaviour was not that of a gentleman:

[once when he had honourable guests at his house] he asked permission to inviting over the nursery governess who worked with his children and whom he described as an intelligent *úri lány* [lady] and his wife nearly considered her as her friend. (...) She came over, but judging from her rough hands and her flirty behaviour towards the male guests, we immediately guessed that she is an ordinary maid.

(Budapest Főváros Levéltára, juridical document 1410.d.1927.
in Gyáni 2003: 217, my translation)

The quote suggests on the one hand that failing to keep social distance from the lower stratum is in itself unworthy of a gentleman. On the other hand, it indicates that behaviour, understood as an expression of moral worthiness, played a crucial role in distinguishing the different strata.

It is through this ethical vision focusing on traditional respectability that ‘objective’ division lines in terms of occupation between gentlemen and the lower classes can be understood. The positions in the state, army or church administration are the *traditional* basis of prestige, not only because they have a long history as the basis of power and respect, but also because they are themselves organizations based on hierarchy and tradition. In contrast, bourgeois occupations involving entrepreneurship and innovation are against the whole ethical vision of tradition and hierarchy on the one hand, and the dignified restraint from engaging in hasty money matters on the other (Gyáni 2001).

The key point is that the distinction between ranks was not based on wealth: a wealthy state officer and an impoverished aristocrat shared the common identity of being ‘gentlemen’ and distinguished themselves from rich craftsmen, Jewish industrialists and poor agricultural workers. This pattern largely survived despite the rise of new bourgeois groups and the financial decline of gentlemen, captured in the

notion of a 'double hierarchy' of traditional ranks and newly forming classes. Although the separation of the 'gentlemen's elite' from the bourgeois elite started to be less significant, this was because the bourgeoisie was accepted into 'gentlemen's circles'. This phenomenon is related to the survival of the feudalist value system – based on the honour of rank, land and aristocratic virtues – which is often described by commentators as 'feudal capitalism'. The term refers to the fact that the nascent capitalism – unlike in Western Europe – was not accompanied by a parallel political change. The surviving status hierarchy was hardly changed by an alternative bourgeois value system; rather, members of the rising bourgeoisie tried to integrate into the feudal status hierarchy. As Laki puts it: 'People having acquired substantial economic potential and position could only become socially accepted if their career was legitimized by aristocratic titles and statuses' (Laki 2006:45).

This phenomenon was reflected in the consumption of the new economic elite as well. Gyáni's work (1991; 1999 ; 2006) is based on the analysis of diaries, inventories and photographs, and he points out that the aristocrats and the grand bourgeoisie followed a very similar lifestyle as far as consumption was concerned, though differences were observable in the field of work (aristocrats often refrained from work, while the bourgeoisie fostered a hard-working ethic).

According to most studies (Losonczy 1977; S. Nagy 1987 ; Gyáni and Kövér 2003; Gyáni 2006), the same can be said of the behaviour and lifestyle of the two middle strata – bourgeois and gentleman – which largely followed that of the aristocracy. Gyáni notes that the main difference in lifestyle between the elite and the middle strata was a quantitative not a qualitative one: they had the same style of furniture, dresses, meals and so on, but their income limited the amount they could afford (Gyáni and Kövér 2003).

Losonczy (1977) and Gyáni (2003) distinguish the group of petit-bourgeoisie consisting of urban craftsmen, shop owners, lower rank officers and agrarian small land owners from the middle strata, not only by their low income but also by their distinct manners and ethics. Losonczy suggests that unlike the higher strata, the petit-bourgeoisie was characterized by a work ethic associated with diligent, honest, arduous work. In this stratum the pride of hard work was seen as the ultimate value, the basis of self-esteem and social position. Furthermore, according to Losonczy's study, petit-bourgeois ethics centred on sobriety, decency, conformity and risk-avoidance, and embraced a conservative outlook centring on the values of family, religion and the

nation. These concerns were objectified in the preoccupation of the petit-bourgeoisie with a decent – clean and tidy – home, clean and simple dresses, and behaving in a well-mannered, conforming way. Losonczy points out the virtue of modesty – understood as ‘being satisfied with what you have’ – among this stratum, which she interprets as the consequence of a constant struggle to stay on the surface.

In pre-socialist Hungary more than half of the population lived from agricultural work. Gyáni (2003: 322) estimates that in the 1930s 40–50% of agricultural workers lived below the minimum standard of living. Poverty particularly affected agricultural wage-labourers who had neither stable income nor any sort of social security. According to Losonczy’s analysis (1977), the work ethic and conservative outlook described above of the petit-bourgeoisie was even stronger among peasants. Social status in agrarian communities depended on owning land and diligence. The strict conservative value system, rigid internal hierarchy and compulsory conformity were reinforced by face-to-face relations in the village, and traditions and rites, allowing little place for any kind of deviation from tradition.

In the pre-war period 10% of the population were workers, with only 2% belonging to the category of blue-collar, industrial labourer (Gyáni and Kövér 2003; Gyáni 2006). There were large inequalities among workers; some were even able to afford the lifestyle of the middle strata of the petit-bourgeois.

The socialist era

Between 1947 and 1949 the Communist Party⁴ took power in Hungary and the regime remained in power until 1989. The era can be divided into two major periods. The period of *classical socialism* between 1949 and the mid 60s was characterized by hard-line socialist measures – nationalization and forced industrialization – implemented by dictatorial means. The slogan of the first period was ‘Who is not with us, is against us’ and in these years politics invaded most spheres of everyday life, and there were political trials, imprisonments, executions and an extended network of the secret police.

⁴ The official name of the ruling party during socialism was ‘Communist Party of Hungary’ until 1948, ‘Hungarian Working People’s Party’ between 1948-1956 and ‘Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party’ between 1956-1989. The present day leftist party is called ‘Hungarian Socialist Party’. In text I will refer to the ruling party during socialism as the ‘Communist Party’ and the contemporary leftist party as the ‘Socialist Party’.

In 1956 a revolution took place in Hungary, which was suppressed with the help of Russian troops. The revolution was followed by strict retaliations, but at the same time brought about a change in politics. The regime intended to restore its questioned legitimacy through what is often described as a ‘negative compromise’: the government loosened its political control over everyday life, increased wages and consumption opportunities, and gradually allowed people to travel abroad from the 1970s and private enterprises to be established from the 1980s, in exchange for acceptance. The approach could be summed up in the less demanding slogan ‘Who is not against us, is with us.’

In this part I first summarize some of the major social and economic changes that are selectively incorporated into practical beliefs of participants in the following chapters; in the second part I look at elements of the public discourse on consumption that I will link later to participants’ ethical ideas.

Little data is available on actual practices and experiences of different groups or even on the new social groups that were formed during socialism. Until the 1960s, conducting empirical research on the differences between social groups would have been an implicit denial of the official ideology of there being ‘two allied classes and one stratum’ – supposedly achieved at the time. This Stalinist model distinguished two classes based on their relation to productive forces: the working class owned the means of production through state ownership, and the class of the peasantry through the state cooperatives. The stratum of the intelligentsia was based on the distinction between manual and non-manual labour (Kolosi 1988). These distinctions, however, were not supposed to create inequalities in terms of lifestyle, access to goods or income. The ideological control over social research eased after the 1960s, yet the studies that were conducted since then are mainly quantitative and do not shed light on subjective experiences.

Supply, shortage and predictability

The key defining feature of socialism in terms of consumption is the introduction of central planning, which despite the gradual expansion of the black market remained the central mechanism deciding and allocating consumption:

What the needs of the individuals are, and how and to what extent they ought to be gratified, is decided by the political state, and acted upon by bureaucracy; the individuals whose needs are determined in such a way have little if any say in the matters of either the state or bureaucracy.

(Bauman 1988:87)

The political priority until the 1960s was forced industrialization. It was financed by redistributing funds from consumption and agricultural production to industrial development, which resulted in a general scarcity of consumer goods and food shortages. Severe economic shortage and low incomes were central characteristics of life until the 1960s (between 1938 and 1946 real wages decreased by 44%). Until the 1960s the standard of living remained very low, with 30% of the population suffering from frequent food shortages (Ferge 1979; 2002). Supply was insufficient in other essential fields as well: housing was limited, of low quality and mostly damaged in the war.

After the 1956 revolution, the priorities changed as the 'negative compromise' brought about a steady increase in the standard of living. Right after the revolution the government implemented a 20% increase in real wages and kept it growing by 3–4% every year until the end of the 1970s (Hammer and Dessewffy 1997). Between 1957 and 1978 real wages doubled, consumption multiplied by 2.5 times, and the supply of consumer durables grew 10 times. In the 1960s for the first time in history the general population enjoyed abundant nutritious meals every day. Between 1958 and 1962 television subscriptions multiplied by 20; between 1960 and 1970 car ownership multiplied by 11; between 1960 and 1980 the number of flats increased by 50%, and new, bigger and more modern dwellings were built (Ferge 1979; Hammer and Dessewffy 1997; Valuch 2005, 2006).

Besides providing cheap 'basic necessities', the range of non-essential products widened as well. In 1963 the Luxus department store opened in downtown Budapest, offering high-priced, exceptional quality goods, such as fur coats and elegant clothes (Valuch 2006). In 1968 the Coca-Cola Company (www.coca-cola.hu 2007) opened a factory in Hungary providing the third fizzy drink brand in the market. The first economy was supplemented by the expanding illegal black market of goods smuggled from abroad, received in packages sent by relatives living abroad, or manufactured at home from raw materials – largely stolen – from the company.

Long but predictable queues formed for major consumer durables: on average seven years of waiting for a telephone, five years for a flat, four years for a car, three years for a trip to a Western country (Hammer and Dessewffy 1997). Hammer and Dessewffy point out that beyond being the annoying symptoms of shortages, queues brought a sense of stability and predictability. They signified that even if an item is not available now, in a predictable amount of time it will be and it is worth waiting for it. Hammer and Dessewffy suggest that this predictability extended not only to consumption but also to the entire system: people were able to make long-term plans in which they could precisely plan their future career, the kind of position and wages they would have, their wage increases and the kind of goods they would be able to buy. They argue that this stability carried a legitimating power: people could plan desirable futures and it gave the impression that ‘change and achievement was only a matter of will, patience and time’ (Hammer and Dessewffy 1997: 38).

Consumption and social hierarchy

As part of the first measures of the socialist regime, the two most important organizing principles of economy and society were abolished: private properties (including land, small shops and larger flats) were nationalized (Kolosi 1988) and noble privileges, such as titles, were eradicated (Valuch 2005). The socialist regime set out to turn social hierarchy upside down. The new determinants of success became political loyalty and lower-class origin (Losonczy 1977). By the end of the 1950s, 60% of the state bureaucracy had been replaced by proletarians, while the former elite – estimated at between 100 000 and 300 000 people – faced the confiscation of their wealth, deportation or displacement to rural villages as agricultural labourers (Valuch 2005).

From the mid 1960s the negative compromise meant that the importance of political loyalty decreased and the positions were increasingly distributed according to an applicant’s qualifications rather than solely their political connections. On the one hand cadres who were promoted for political reasons had to acquire qualifications to remain and advance their position; on the other hand, groups of ‘class alien origin’ – lawyers, doctors of the pre-socialist middle class – gradually gained back their previous positions because of their high educational credentials.

The rare qualitative studies of this time focus on pre-socialist middle-class families and give an insight into the way pre-socialist ethics and self-understanding was affected by socialism. According to Utasi's (1995) study with participants who regained their position in the 1960s after the years of 'internal exile' in the 1950s, these families retained strong social ties – friendships, marriages – with other 'class alien' families during their outcast years and paid extra attention to keep their gentleman culture and ethics alive.

Mark's oral history study (2005) in contrast suggests that despite the official discourse of exclusion, numerous members of the pre-socialist middle strata already achieved a successful professional career in the 1950s due to the regime's need for expertise in the accelerated modernization project. His participants did not maintain their gentleman ethics, but re-wrote their autobiography to 'construct politically appropriate public personas' and 'took the semi-official opportunities to remake themselves into acceptable Communist citizens' (Mark 2005:499).

For other social groups little qualitative data is available, so only differences in material possibilities can be established. In this respect, most studies point out that social differences were not directly translated into differences in consumption. On the one hand, many services – such as health care, crèches and education – became free and universal or virtually free thanks to heavy subsidies (for example, on food, rents, public transport, books and cinema tickets). On the other hand, in the 1950s a centrally controlled system of wages was introduced with the explicit aim of reducing inequality. The system maintained income differences based on skill and responsibility to a minor extent; however, wage differences decreased significantly compared with pre-socialist times.

Implicitly, however, working and political position determined one's consumption possibilities as many goods were allocated directly through the state or the union (Hammer and Dessewffy 1997; Valuch 2005; Történelem munkaközösség 2009). Some of the major goods were provided directly by the union or the party. In the 1950s larger flats confiscated from the bourgeoisie were allocated to the new political elite (Ferge 2004:999). Throughout the socialist era most holiday resorts belonged to state companies and access to them depended on the union; special food and clothing could only be acquired through the union's food offers and clothing fare organized by the union. In addition, the union allocated the flats built by the company as well as the low-rate loans to buy flats in general.

One's connections in the working union and the party ultimately determined one's access to goods even in the case of goods that were not directly distributed by them but were available for purchase. Special shops – with shop windows hidden by curtains in the 1950s – were maintained for the cadres that were not accessible for others (Ferge 2004: 999). A workplace recommendation letter was a prerequisite of most high-value purchases: until the mid 1960s it was a precondition of buying any consumer durable; later it was 'only' necessary to buy a car, get a telephone line, library membership or passport and to buy consumer durables on instalment (Hammer and Dessewffy 1997). Informal connections regulated access to the scarcer goods; to better, larger flats assigned by the local council; or to a more advantageous position in the year-long queues for a car. This means that a person's position in the political hierarchy determined their access to consumption, without necessarily being mediated by wage differences (Szabó 1991: 29).

These trends are reflected in the first stratification survey based on empirical research carried out in 1963 by Ferge (1969). She found inequalities along the *type of work done* – including distinctions based on manual or non-manual jobs and position in the work hierarchy. Consistent with the levelled wages, work-type groups hardly determined differences in income; what they primarily accounted for were the quality of a person's flat – which could be acquired through personal connections – and differences in cultural consumption.

This phenomenon has been further verified and elaborated by other studies, which have established the view that cultural inequality was the most dominant form of inequality in socialism and served as the key determinant of lifestyle (Utasi 1984; Róbert 1986; Kolosi 1987). Commentators (Valuch 2005; Bukodi 2007), using a Bourdieusque analysis, suggest that cultural capital had a pre-eminent role because other forms of capitals were repressed, so cultural capital remained the only source of distinction. Furthermore, given the restriction on wealth and inheritance, cultural capital became the key means of accumulating capital that could be passed over to the next generation.

Yet there is another way of interpreting this phenomenon, which will be suggested in the following chapters: as an emergence of a new ethics centred on the idea of a 'cultured way of living', favoured by and accessible to the socialist elite. A similar sort of ethics is captured by the concept of *kulturnost* used by Gronow (2003:147) in the

Soviet context to describe a 'special cultural consciousness' encompassing a wide range of practices from theatre-going and music to good manners.

This 'cultured way of living' and, more generally, the cult of the intellect in my view can be traced back to the central characteristics of the socialist system. First, they can be related to the socialist idea – to be discussed in the next section – that assumed that the 'real needs' to emerge once the socialist base structure is in place are essentially 'cultural' rather than materialistic. Second, the intellect – regarded both as a gift and as a matter of personal inclination to better oneself – could be seen as 'what is in the inside' as opposed to inherited position and wealth, hence the only legitimate basis of hierarchy. Finally, as Konrád and Szelényi (1985) suggest, fundamental to the mechanism of planning is its claim to *rationality*, which according to their argument forms the basis of the rise of the intellectuals – as people capable of rational design – to become the ruling class. (In their book *Dictatorship over needs* Fehér, Heller et al. (1991) offer a different perspective, according to which the socialist central planning was *functional* to the bureaucratic administrative centre's effort to extend and maintain its power over society.)

From the 1970s onwards income differences gradually increased, due to the New Economic Mechanism introduced in 1968 – that implemented the new wage system of incentives (Ferge 1979)- , more lenient restrictions on private entrepreneurial activities (Valuch 2005), and the expansion of the 'second economy' (Kolosi 1988). As a result, position in the second economy and new private enterprises became an important factor in stratification besides position in the socialist division of labour, this time affecting income as well.

Most studies on social structure in the 1980s document a dual social structure (Szelényi 1992; Kolosi 2000). They suggest on the one hand a hierarchy 'of political power based on redistribution' structured by the official hierarchy based on education and work, allowing access to state benefits and privileges. On the other hand, they note a parallel hierarchy 'depending on the market' (Kolosi 1988), with an elite getting richer from a grey zone of semi-legal activities. This elite was more heterogeneous in terms of education and background, and certainly more adventurous when it came to obeying the law than the first elite. These hierarchies existed alongside each other, but with an important overlap in the case of groups benefiting or depending on both spheres.

Public discourse on consumption

Central planning implied that the political discourse of moralizing about consumption during socialism was not only *one* of the discourses, but the discourse that determined the actual supply of goods. In this section I look at the public moralizing about consumption, paying particular attention to underlying normative and ethical visions of how to live and what kind of person to be.

Public discourse of the 1950s

According to Ferge's book on socialist public policy – written in 1979, from a socialist point of view – the first task of the regime was to satisfy the 'real' and 'basic' needs of the population. Beyond the needs recognized by the population for food, shelter and clothing, the 'real needs' envisaged by the system included the 'non-material basic need' for culture that had to be awoken:

these goods and services, however, never occurred to people as elementary needs or basic priorities because the majority was forcefully discouraged from using them before the Second World War. (...) Therefore all those goods and services where equal accessibility was considered desirable had to be made practically free or at least inexpensive to stimulate utilization and awaken the need in question.

(Ferge 1979: 278)

The 'basic need' of culture draws on an ethical vision of the ideal socialist person: one who engages in non-material, cultural sophistication as opposed to materialistic pursuits. This vision can partly be connected to the fact that – as Ferge (1979) and Valuch (2004) note – the socialist regime defined real needs largely as the opposite of the practices of the pre-socialist elite. Ferge explains that the only forms of material well-being known at the time were those associated with the pre-socialist bourgeoisie and aristocrats; hence the definition of 'real needs', understood as proper, socialist needs, tended to a certain asceticism. This way asceticism became identified with the true socialist ethics, and manifestations of material well-being with anti-socialist ideas (Ferge 1979: 308–309). According to her account, every act that could be classified as continuity with the earlier period – from hats to ties, nail varnish, frills and décolleté –

was seen as a manifestation of the 'bourgeois' (referring to the entire pre-socialist elite) mentality and hence a sign of disloyalty to the system.

Valuch (2004) comes to a similar conclusion by looking at the Clothing Design Company set up in 1950, which was responsible for the design and production of clothing in Hungary. He points out that the new clothing lines were designed according to the socialist ethic, corresponding to the assumed ascetic needs of the true workers (to be comfortable and simple).

These accounts suggest that socialist ideology promoted not only equality, but also an ethical vision, based on a new idea of how people should live and the kind of values they should embrace. In promoting these new visions, the regime took the embeddedness of ethics in practice extremely seriously: according to the official ideology, the new ethics required a new material culture and the abandonment of the former one, which was seen as unambiguously objectifying pre-socialist ethics.

Public discourse after the negative compromise

The informal negative compromise of the 1960s brought about a change in the official approach to consumption. On the one hand, relative freedom in the private sphere meant there was less interference with private consumption (Hammer 2006); on the other hand, the increasing standard of living became one of the prime bases for legitimacy. As Dessewffy points out, a shift in world politics also promoted the authorization of a higher consumption level. Unlike Stalin, Khrushchev chose to prove the superiority of the socialist system over capitalism in the standard of living, formulated in the *dognaty I peregnaty* (catching up and taking over) programme in the 1959 and 1961 party congresses (Dessewffy 2002b).

As the standard of living grew, the 'basic needs' treated as evident at the beginning of the 1950s were satisfied and the 'higher level needs' socialism should meet became somewhat uncertain. Ferge (1979) explains that perplexity surrounded these issues for two reasons. First, the prevailing assumption was that in harmony with the basic tenets of Marxism, after changing the means of production and ownership the 'only possible outcome was an entirely new way of life' (Ferge 1979: 308–309). She notes that in reality, however, people's desires were still influenced by old customs,

traditions and models of Western consumerism. The regime was puzzled by the fact that real needs did not emerge as predicted.

Second, as mentioned above, no known socialist models of affluence existed; in fact the first years of socialism were marked by scarcity and egalitarianism and the idea that it is ascetics that distinguishes the true socialist ethics from the bourgeois mentality. In this context, the way an affluent *socialist* society should develop was ambiguous. Partly as a result of these ambiguities, from the 1960s onwards more and more debates took place about the socialist lifestyle and which needs are to be considered legitimate.

An analysis of party communications of the time (Dessewffy 2002b) shows that the official solution to the problem of legitimate needs was to draw a line between the promoted satisfaction of 'real needs' and the condemned 'false needs'. The line between the two was drawn partly through an ethical distinction between valuable aims. Money earned and spent as a by-product of labour was seen as approvable, but if the focus shifted from the pleasure and respect gained by work to the money earned by it, consumption was denounced as 'senseless accumulation'.

Some items – such as a second flat – were unambiguously considered as 'senseless accumulation' and prohibited by law; however, the distinction was far from clear. This ambiguity can be traced in a Planning Commission's debate, the 'Hypotheses of the Commission of Perspective Planning and Standard of Living' in 1969, which concerned the direction of development for the next 15 years. The uncertainty about what kind of needs should be satisfied is well illustrated by one of the opinions voiced in the debate:

It is somewhat disheartening that the forecasts of a socialist country up to 1985... do not say much more than that the structure of consumption will follow a pattern very similar to that of more developed countries... If we want more than just to create a kind of bourgeois welfare, then we have to take into account more seriously the specific nature of a socialist country.

(unnamed party cadre quoted in Ferge 1979: 306)

Intellectual discussions or the so-called 'life-style' debates unfolding in the columns of national newspapers addressed similar issues. The first debate that became titled 'fridge socialism' was initiated by the poet Mihály Váci in 1961. In his article criticizing the new economic program he wonders if 'the relaxing, cheerful coasts of communism' will

not become the 'lukewarm dunes of material well-being' where efforts towards the community will be hindered by personal satisfaction (Váci 1961: 580 in Vörös 1997). The article was followed by 130 replies out of which 25 were published (Dombos 2004). The discussion involved issues about whether material well-being is the prerequisite or the enemy of cultural consumption, and what – if anything – distinguishes private consumption in communist Hungary from the bourgeois, nihilist, hedonistic consumerist mentality (Vörös 1997; Dombos 2004). Vörös suggests that the stake of the debate became the legitimate level of socialist consumption, and the distinction – and hence the supremacy – of the moderate socialist lifestyle as opposed to the wasteful capitalist society.

Heller points out that because it was not possible to pass open judgement on the regime, the discussion remained strictly in the socialist framework claiming to exercise a critique in order to improve the existing system. If something was 'socialist' it was considered 'good', so the typical means of criticism was to redefine the 'real socialism' (Heller, Némedi et al. 1992). In practice this meant to prove that one's point of view was closer to the 'real sense of socialism' than the others.

Dombos's (2004) content analysis of Hungarian newspapers suggests that in socialist times consumerism was seen as an individual weakness, a deviation from the ethos of the socialist society. He cites the editorial closing of the 'fridge socialism' debate:

It is possible that a doctor or an artist, or even a miner imagines to rise above the society by having a car, and he hurls the world on the roads of bourgeois illusions. But on this road he bumps into the ethical iron-wall of the community... and in that clash, there can be only one loser.

(Dombos 2004: 44)

He points out that the problems of materialism, turning away from public life, laziness and inauthenticity, were seen as individual fallibility stemming from either old customs or Western capitalist influences, which tempt individuals to go against socialist ethics and the community.

Unfortunately, no research is available on the public discourse outside these explicitly political debates. From the few materials cited in other projects, however, it seems that the intellectual vision of a new socialist way of life was not unanimously shared. For example, Valuch's study on clothing uses sources outside the political

discourse, from which a different approach to socialism emerges, which is vehemently opposed in the public political debates. In this approach, socialism is not seen as a new ideal way of life, rather as a more open and equal access to already existing practices. A household manual from 1961, for example, states:

It used to be the problem of only a couple of hundred thousand women what it is decent to wear for different occasions; today it is a question of interest for millions. Because if we have the money and occasion to go out, it is right to dress according to every occasion and entertainment. (...) At work and at home the skirt-blouse, the skirt-jumper combination is well accommodated wear. One who goes out frequently is right to buy or get tailored casual dresses.

(Pataki-Kelemen et al., quoted in Valuch 2005: 316, my translation)

In this quote, socialism is presented as opening up for the masses the once privileged possibility of being tidy and elegant and having tailored dresses, rather than proposing a new socialist ideal of a worker who should not even desire these goods.

Unofficial discourses and Western goods

There has also been no systematic study on private discourses and practices, yet a large body of research on the uses of Western consumer goods offers some insights into the sources on alternative visions of the good life during socialism. These consumer goods arrived in the country either through smuggling or tourism, which increased substantially from the 1960s as a result of the eased bureaucratic barriers. Analysts (Barlett 2000; Hammer 2002; Wessely 2002) point out that more than simply complementing choice, Western goods played an important role in developing particular images of modernity and progress. According to Barlett (2000) the attraction of these objects was only partly due to the relative poverty of the socialist countries compared with the West; rather they represented the 'myth of the West', which – according to him – has been proven to be a more powerful ideology than the socialist one. The socialist ideology neglected the needs for identity formation and 'everyday sacrality', while Western ideology offered abundance and symbolic seduction (Hammer and Dessewffy 1997). Similar arguments are put forward by Bauman (1988), suggesting that the symbolic seduction of Western goods had a much stronger impact on socialist citizens

than on Westerners, because the latter could easily buy the goods offered, while for the former they represented a dream that could never come true.

The emphasis on the symbolic seduction of Western goods is reinforced by Dessewffy's (2002a) study on the most commonly smuggled items, based on crime statistics. The majority of the people smuggled not goods that were in short supply in Hungary (such as spare parts), but branded versions of products that already existed in Hungary (such as the Austrian *Milka* chocolate, jeans, trainers, etc.) Dessewffy suggests that these goods – alongside the most common objects of Western culture such as the refrigerator and the vacuum cleaner – were mystified in socialist countries as symbols of modernity.

My own study on Coca-Cola in socialist Hungary suggests that although the West was used often as a key concept in defining desirable ways of living, this did not lead to people adopting Western ideals. Rather, the idea of the West was employed as an imaginary terrain of projection through which Hungarians could express their ideals about how life should be lived, as opposed to how it actually was under the constraints of the socialism system (Simányi 2004). These findings suggest that Western objects and images mediated alternative visions of a good life, by being both the sources of these visions and a terrain where visions could be projected.

Capitalism

In Hungary the change from socialism to a market economy was a gradual process. As noted in the previous section, vanguards of capitalist social hierarchy and consumption were already relevant in the last decades of socialism. Yet comparing present day Hungary to the 1980s shows there has been striking change.

After 1989, market economy was implemented with a rapid privatization, the liberation of the market and opening of the borders. Supply dramatically increased and diversified. Although many of the Western brands were already present in Hungary (Benetton from 1986, McDonald's from 1988) during socialism, these were exceptions rather than a rule. Today, in contrast, the main shopping street of Budapest is hardly any different from a shopping street in London. The greater amount of choice was complemented by the emergence of sophisticated marketing tools, shopping centres and

price competition, which was very different from the fixed price system and the limited and stable range of goods of socialism.

The central wage system and subsidies for the goods that were considered as basic necessities were abolished and social expenses were cut. Real wages decreased, and income inequality increased. The withdrawal of the price subsidies affected those in the poorest section of society the most, as they had spent most of their income on subsidized basic goods.

The major trend is towards a more polarized society – a small upper class, a shrinking middle class and a widening lower class (Kolosi 2000). Studies looking at social *transformation* emphasize that well-educated technocrats are the winners of the change, while high cadres based solely on political connections, less educated second-economy entrepreneurs and people already poor under socialism have become impoverished under capitalism (Utasi 1984; Kovách 1995; Eyal, Szelényi et al. 1998).

Studies looking at the relationship between consumption and social groups show a fuzzy picture. Sociological studies use very few broad quantitative variables on consumption – such as number of books read per year, number of household durables, size of the flat (Fábián, Kolosi et al. 2000; Bukodi 2006) – which are too general to establish any qualitative distinction that could hint at different cosmologies. These studies suggest on the one hand the existence of a coherent elite class – with high income, education and occupation – engaging in the highest level of both ‘material consumption’ (consumer durables and the flat) and cultural consumption, and on the other, the existence of a relatively coherent lower class – low income, education and occupation – of low cultural and material consumption (yet with varying standards of flat).

In the case of the middle classes, most studies document ‘status inconsistency’ – disparity between income, education and occupation – and generally fail to establish connections with consumption patterns. Although most studies divide people of middle income into two lifestyle groups – those oriented towards cultural consumption vs. ‘material consumption’ – there is no clear-cut connection with education and occupation. For example, even in the most culture-oriented group, the proportion of degree holders is only 40% (Bukodi 2006), which means that high level of cultural consumption is followed by people of different levels of education. This means that ‘consumer groups’ cannot be established along the lines of income, education and occupation.

Marketing life-style studies, in contrast, look at intricate details of consumption, including brand and media usage as well as ‘attitude’ questions that cover a wide range of topics from gender roles to ‘adventure-seeking’. These studies have identified a number of ‘consumer groups’ that include people who not only consume but also *think* in similar ways on the topics covered. The results hint at the existence of groups of similar cosmological beliefs objectified in particular practices; yet these findings are not elaborated or linked to sociological factors as these studies are limited to identifying efficient marketing messages and target groups. One of the few exceptions is the TGI company, which conducts lifestyle and class analysis. Image 2 shows how extremely heterogeneous the lifestyle groups are in terms of class (‘status’) – measured by education and occupation – as soon as a more detailed analysis on consumption and ideas is conducted (TGI).

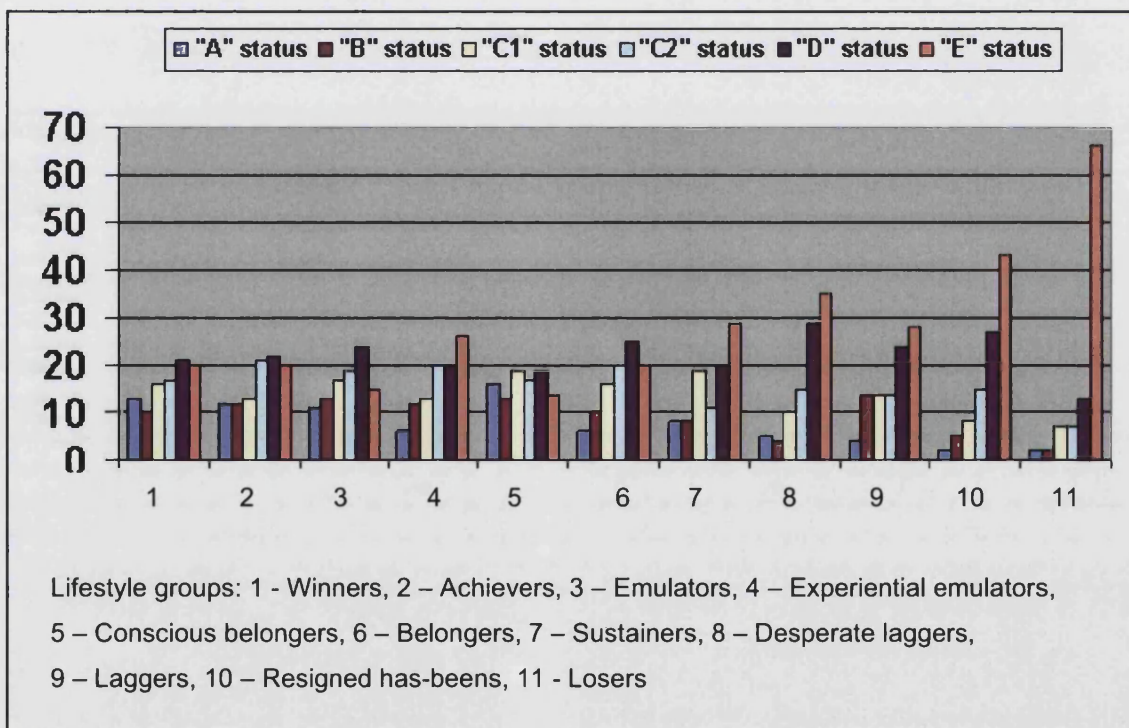


Image 2. Lifestyle groups by status

According to the chart only the consumer groups characterized by very limited consumption (sustainers, desperate laggards, laggards, resigned has-beens, losers) have a somewhat homogenous, low educational and occupational profile. The rest of the groups consist of very heterogeneous people from the point of view of education and occupation. This indicates that we cannot distinguish clear classes of education and

occupation following homogenous lifestyle patterns; consumer groups are formed along different lines, however, we do not know exactly what those are.

Public discourse on consumption under capitalism

According to Dombos's (2004) content analysis of newspapers, under capitalism the moralizing public discourse on consumption persists, but it has become more diverse. He distinguishes the conservative and the leftist-liberal ideological camps (ibid.:17), yet suggests that both of them attack consumer society and that important overlaps exist between the two critical discourses.

First, consumer culture is linked to the loss of values, expressed by both conservative and leftist critiques. In conservative accounts this argument is formulated as the 'utopistic presupposition that the past is the era of a value-driven golden age' (ibid.:35), closely linked to the critique of socialism as a period of departure from a traditional, family-centred religious life. This return of pre-socialist models manifested in the revival of 'gentlemen's values', conservative rhetoric and society based on respect for hierarchy and status is what Szelényi calls 'class archaeology' (Eyal, Szelényi et al. 1998). Dombos (2004) points out that in claiming that 'materialism of global consumerism is a natural continuation of the materialism of communism' (ibid.: 40) these critiques blame socialism for the debased culture that centres on the worship of the market and consumption.

The leftist argument resonates with critical theory and focuses on the loss of solidarity and creativity. In both the leftist and conservative accounts the individualized, anomic society is linked to materialism, hedonism and egoism on the one hand, and lack of interest in politics on the other. The critique emphasizes the new 'Seize the day mentality', which results in a general disinterestedness in the future.

The second common concern is the fear of the uniformizing effect of consumption. In conservative accounts it appears as a tendency of globalization, Americanization in particular, which leads to the loss of national culture; while the leftist critique emphasizes the 'loss of personality and cultural variety' (ibid.: 34). The problem is connected to the third group of concerns centring on the idea of the 'consumer idiot' (ibid.: 40). This idea encompasses the fear of the manipulation of the advertising industry, creating primitive and duped consumers. Similarly to the

arguments of the Frankfurt School, this concern focuses on inauthenticity, claiming that the new consumer culture caters for the false needs, 'pseudo-desires' created by the system itself. Finally, Dombos notes the growing environmentalist concern emerging recently as a topic for discussion.

Looking at the typical targets of criticism, Dombos suggests that in present day discourses the primary carriers of consumerism are seen to be the nouveaux riches, who are depicted as 'hick, uneducated, indecent, tasteless and thoughtless' living in their 'huge palaces with swimming pools', driving 'big cars that are worth millions' and who are 'only occupied with their own richness' showing no sign of social responsibility (ibid.: 41–42).

Dombos concludes his study by suggesting that the distinguishing feature of present day moralizers is that they see consumerism as a 'social pathology' as opposed to the socialist discourses that posited it as an individual weakness. This means that moral problems are considered to be inherent parts of the system – of 'consumer society' – and discourse is used as a means to express criticism towards the system as a whole.

Conclusion

In this chapter I reviewed the major social, political and economic changes in Hungary in the 20th century and discussed official versions of appropriate consumption and the ethical visions underlying them. I started by the caste-like, hierarchical and unequal society of the pre-socialist period structured along traditional ranks, which beyond being occupational categories denoted particular norms of consumption, behaviour and values. The period of early socialism, marked by deep economic shortage and an egalitarian policy, positioned itself against the traditional, aristocratic ideal of life and hierarchy and promoted an egalitarian, ascetic, modest, anti-materialistic, culture-orientated and hard-working ethics. In the second phase of socialism centrally planned needs became increasingly subject to debate as the standard of living rose and political control over the private sphere eased. The debate can be grasped as a conflict between views over socialism as a substantively different vision of a good life vs. one of more equal allocation of goods, with less emphasis on what kind of life is being realized. I have concluded my discussion by presenting capitalism, in which the public moralizing

discourse on consumption is equally forceful, yet much more diverse and most importantly less consequential: it is an intellectual debate that has hardly any consequences for the actual supply of consumer goods.

Chapter 5 The first generation

In this chapter I explore the issues articulated through ideas of appropriate consumption and the sources they draw on of the ‘first generation’. Participants of this generation grew up during pre-socialist times, experienced socialism as teenagers or adults and entered capitalism as pensioners. As noted in Chapter 3, the accounts of earlier periods cannot be treated as conserved relics; memories are part of a narrative understanding of life, which involves particular ways of re-writing, selecting and interpreting events.

The argument I will put forward is that normative distinctions between consumption practices draw on particular ethical visions of what it means to be a proper man or woman, how to live a life in a decent way and ideas of entitlement. These ethical visions are largely understood not as abstract ideas, but as practical ethics, visions of a good life and identity objectified in specific practices. I will suggest that these ethical visions together with practical wisdom form personal cosmologies through which practices can be understood as relatively coherent rather than disaggregated.

In tracing cosmologies of this generation, I will argue that participants mainly draw on the pre-socialist period in defining their ethical standards and views on entitlement, yet the pre-socialist ethics explored in Chapter 4 is reworked differently by each participant, combining elements of both socialist and present day discourses.

One of the central normative principles of consumption in this generation is the appropriateness of practices in relation to social position, which is understood through ethics centring on having a backbone and being respectable. Dignity is understood as living up to a social position – through practical ethics, such as ‘elegance’ – while modesty is understood as not exceeding it (by avoiding being pretentious).

The second common normative principle distinguishes between long-lasting goods as approvable vs. ephemeral goods as a ‘waste’. I will suggest that these principles draw on ethics of respectability and on a long-term vision of the family, centring on maintaining and increasing respectability for future generations.

These ethical ideas guiding appropriate practices are pursued through strategies allowed by what participants see as objective conditions. These practical wisdoms largely draw on the one hand on the unpredictability of events – based on past

experiences of war, shortages, regime changes, etc. – and on the other hand involve a beliefs in the stability of the financial and symbolic value of objects over time.

The chapter looks at three cases that illustrate different relations to similar ethical and practical concerns. The differences, in harmony with the norm of appropriateness to social position, are largely connected to positions in the pre-socialist social hierarchy; hence the three cases include people who started from different ranks in pre-socialism. The gentlemen Bernáts' ideals draw largely on the pre-socialist 'gentlemen's ethics'. The bourgeois Kovács's ideas of modesty and contentment both incorporate and challenge elements of 'gentlemen's ethics'. Finally, the lower-rank Rigó case study illustrates that practices originally objectifying 'gentlemen's ethics' can be adopted as part of a socialist career route, without embracing any of the underlying ideas of social hierarchy.

The gentlemen Bernáts: Sándor and Magda

In pre-socialist Hungary Sándor (born in 1923) and Magda (born in 1927) belonged to the 'gentlemen's society'. Magda is from a rich land-owner family. In socialism the land of Magda's family was confiscated and she moved into a co-tenancy in Budapest with her mother and Sándor.

Sándor is from a poor peasant family, who entered the 'gentlemen's society' through qualifications that would have led to positions in the state hierarchy if the pre-socialist system remained. He courted Magda for seven years – 'as in a fairy tale' as they put it – using his educational achievements and immaculate elegance to prove to her that he was worthy of her despite his lower origin. Shortly after he graduated and became accepted in the 'gentlemen's club', the socialist regime got to power. He recalls that his expertise was appreciated, but he had to omit the title 'Dr' from his name in order to avoid being seen as 'class-alien'. After the initial ambivalence Sándor made a successful career in the Planning Bureau; however, this was never explicitly mentioned, I could only reconstruct it from interviews with his family members and some hints he made himself.

In the Bernáts' narrative, which draws on contemporary conservative and pre-socialist discourse, priority is given to pre-socialism. In explaining their views and practices they customarily draw a reference to the pre-socialist world, tracing back their

ethical ideals by which they define who they are and what they consider a proper, decent life and the legitimate hierarchy to that period.

Magda's narrative centres on injustice and decline of traditional values and religion during socialism. She sees capitalism as the era of liberty, in which she can freely practise her Christian religion and revive the traditions suppressed by socialism. Sándor's narrative is more ambiguous. On the one hand, he is very proud of having become a gentleman in the pre-socialist era and emphasizes how socialism suppressed religion; on the other hand he was promoted during socialism and his and Magda's current high standard of living is the result of his hard work. Yet he does not see himself as socialist; he mentions the compromises he had to make in order to continue his career during socialism and he uses a mocking tone when talking about the regime. Also, Sándor would never risk domestic harmony or his loving relationship for the sake of a political argument with his wife. He never contradicts Magda's criticism of socialism and frequently even joins in.

Today the couple lives in a green suburb of Budapest of detached family houses with gardens, in some of which hens run around. Their house is furnished with old, ornamented wooden furniture, Persian carpets, and lots of old-style decorative objects, such as china, crystal glass and embroidery. Some of these objects are family heirlooms; others were accumulated during the socialist period, but were of the same style despite the socialist disdain that labelled this taste as the survival of the 'petit-bourgeois mentality'. The couple's appearance at home is characterized by demure, faded elegance; both of them wear old-fashioned, pretty but worn clothes. Magda wears light make-up and her hair is nicely combed. She said that she wears more elegant outfits outside the house, but in order to protect them, at home she uses worn-out ones.

The major principle the Bernáts applied in most fields of consumption is to prioritize long-lasting, 'beautiful' items; while they see 'ephemeral' goods – such as food, going out to restaurants, or buying low quality goods – as senseless waste. In the following section I explore what these principles mean in practice and show the way they draw on an ethical vision centred on respectability, dignity and cross-generational care for the future of the family.

Elegance, social position and respectability

One of the fields where principles of longevity and ‘beauty’ are most prominent is clothing. ‘Beauty’ here is equated with a particular style that Sándor and Magda simply refer to as ‘elegant’. In this part, I will suggest that elegance, far from being a simple taste, draws on a cosmology incorporating ethical visions of how one should live and what society should look like as well as practical wisdom about goods, the market and society itself.

When discussing consumption, Sándor and Magda frequently talk about social hierarchy and evaluate practices as being appropriate with reference to one’s social position. They recall that in pre-socialist times social hierarchy was clearly defined and consumption practices belonged unambiguously to particular ranks:⁵

Sándor: As far as needs were concerned, it depended on which caste one belonged to. Even if one was a peasant one had two sets of dresses. The peasant wore the cheapest one to work, and the other one – which was usually dark or black – to church, weddings and baptisms. It was the most natural thing that **there were two dance schools in Nyíregyháza. One was called Szentecki; the craftsmen and others in that stratum went there. For the peasant children there was the ball, called *bursza*, in one of the homesteads, and there were folk musicians... And there was the Maresi dance school; the secondary school students, those with a baccalaureate and the army officers went there.** It was on the first floor of the Korona hotel, which was the most elegant place. I remember that it was 35 degrees Centigrade, and we went there in our dark blue striped suit. Mrs Maresi pointed us out and said: “Boys, it’s not compulsory; you can come in white trousers, or in anything.” And my friend said very seriously: “No, we follow the etiquette.” When we came out, he said: “If she knew that we have no other outfits!”

Different sections of society go to different dance schools, which vary in elegance, music and dress code. Sándor, having gained access to ‘gentlemen’s society’ by studying, considers it natural that he went to the Maresi dance school and dressed elegantly. Consistently with the studies on ranks discussed in the previous chapter, being a ‘gentleman’ did not imply being rich; as the quote shows, Sándor had only one suit.

In Sándor’s account elegance was unquestionably associated with a gentleman’s position. Elegance here is seen as denoting a very clearly defined set of material practices that can be decoded the same way by everyone. Elegant people are not only

⁵ Bold characters are my emphasis, italics are Hungarian words, simple brackets () include explanations, while squared brackets [] are my additions to the text. Also note that in Hungarian there is no linguistic distinction between he and she.

clean and tidy, but dress in good quality clothes made by a tailor with a high reputation. Sándor sees some materials as having inscribed elegance, depending on their delicacy and closely related to price; for example, real fur is elegant, while fake is not; velvet is elegant, while cotton is not. Therefore some categories of clothing – labelled as elegant – can be associated with a well-defined set of people: ‘gentlemen’.

The link between elegance and position is not only a symbolic one, constituted by customs and norms, but also a material one: those in lower positions or (blue collar) jobs will get dirty, while those in white collar jobs will stay clean and tidy:

Sándor: My father, used to say: “If you study, you will sit in a nice, elegant office, you will dress cleanly, and you will not lie under the car, like the car mechanic or the locksmith.”

The importance attributed by Sándor to elegance could be interpreted as a desire for signalling upper-class standing; yet the relationship in his account appears to be more complex. First, for him it is not being upper class *per se* that is at stake, but predominantly the *respect* that is paid to the holder of a respectable occupation:

Sándor: I wanted to become a car mechanic; I became so crazy about it in the third grade of *polgár*⁶ that I stopped studying and applied to Sándor Szilágyi to become a car mechanic. I am convinced that it was my father who discouraged me [from becoming a car mechanic]. He ran out of arguments, and then he said – my brother was studying to become a teacher – “If you join up to the army, your brother will be *Úr*⁷ (Sir) Corporal, or second lieutenant and you will be a private.⁸ If it’s good for you that when you come home you will bow to your brother – because he will be an officer – then fine.” This bothered my vanity, and [I thought] how the girls would look at me and how they would look at my brother and things like that.

Sándor experienced the choice of aiming to belong to the ‘gentlemen’s society’ by opting for further education and a prestigious job over a well-paid lower rank occupation through everyday issues of pride, respect and popularity. Apparently, girls of the time preferred a prestigious officer over a wealthy mechanic and he would have felt humiliated if he had to bow to his brother. The main attraction of becoming a gentleman, in other words, was to become more respectable and popular through everyday interactions. In this context, elegance is important, because it is seen as inseparable from being respectable:

⁶ The *polgári* was secondary education after the four years of primary school (from age 6 to 10). It consisted of four years for girls and six for boys.

⁷ The Hungarian term *Úr* literally means gentleman as a social position, but it is also used to address people in the sense of Mr or Sir. During socialism the term was abolished; however, it tellingly survived in addressing doctors, lawyers and people in high hierarchical positions.

⁸ At the time army service was compulsory and army ranks were distributed according to education.

Sándor: The one who finished the *polgári* went on to work at the council. He would be a lower rank officer, but **will wear a tie, and a hard collar shirt. And he would be looked up to.** (...) When I was courting her, I had a suit **I was very proud of**, it was grey, tailor-made. And when visiting her on the train I would never sit down, so there wouldn't be a single crease on my trousers. Because otherwise they would have said in the village: "Who is this, courting this daughter?" (and laugh). That time people placed great stress on that. If you watch old movies, you can see it.

The 'others' classifying people according to their practices are constantly present in these accounts. They read where you stand and how to relate to you from the way you are dressed and behave. This, however, does not reduce the values identified above simply to the drive to meet expectations; the point is rather that in this ethic self-respect and being respected by others is almost inseparable. Sándor sees being elegant not as a choice between a range of possible options but as the way a respectable and *self-respecting* person in his position appears in public. In fact, ethical ideas of respectability and pride are seen as in essence relational: being respectable means effectively commanding the respect of others. This ethics implies engaging the social at its very core; it centres on particular relations with others, these others being wider society – not only friends and family but also strangers.

This is the underlying idea that appears in nearly all spheres of Sándor and Magda's practices, constituting a substantial difference between practices in private and those in public occasions, which are seen as the prime fields of respectability. For example, at home shabbier clothes are worn, in order to save the good ones for public appearances, and furniture is covered during everyday use but uncovered when guests arrive.

Magda places an even bigger emphasis on elegance:

Magda: This is the kind of behaviour [dressing in an elegant way] that one doesn't ever want to [be without]. Well, I have always thought that one has to have a **backbone (moral fibre, dignity) towards oneself. Not in order that others honour me; it's for me...** I like it that way.

Sándor: In the 50 years [of marriage] she never ever went to the baker without having dressed up.

M: Look, now I am old as well. At least I dress up.

S: It's in vain that I always say that she is still beautiful.

M: Well, I say, at least I dress up. If you are old, at least don't be tatty, so wilted, or how can I put it? So the two [dressing and meeting expectations] have nothing to do with each other. This is like that in one's life as well. When I was young my mother used to tell me: "My daughter, your hair, your shoes, your hands are most important. Because your hands will be looked at. They will look at your shoes, unintentionally. And your hair is important, for your face." She thought that **this is the way it's right, not for anything else's sake, but for her own sake!** It's not important what others are, what they are not; no: **for your sake.**

S: She was a very well mannered woman.

For Magda, the importance of elegance as an appropriate style draws on ethical visions of ‘having a backbone’, self-respect and dignity. For her, ethical ideas of respectability and being a proper woman are inseparable from their embodiment in an elegant person; respectability is experienced and transmitted through the practice of elegance. This means that here ethics and practices, subjects and objects are inseparable from each other, similarly to the mutually co-constitutive relationships of objectification described by Miller. Therefore it is more adequate to talk about *practical ethics*, to emphasize that a particular idea of how to live and who to be exists primarily in its practical, embodied form. This is why Magda’s mother does not *explain* to her what respectability *abstractly* means but transmits it – in harmony with Bourdieu’s theory of practice – through its embodied form: teaching her proper, elegant behaviour.

For Magda elegance objectifies respectability, pride and dignity, which are inseparable from the social reality of ranks, yet her wish to be elegant cannot be reduced simply to a motive to demonstrate social standing. Being elegant is not experienced simply as ‘keeping up’, but as living by an ideal – a virtue that is consistent with ‘gentlemen’s ethics’ discussed in the previous chapter – that is culturally shared and hence interpreted by others. This is why, in Magda’s view, you should not dress in an elegant way only *to gain* the respect of others. Instead, if you are a respectable person, you will by definition want to dress in a decent way, which rightfully commands respect and honour.

This idea forms part of a larger vision of society structured along what can be called a rank-based idea of entitlement: people are entitled to more and better goods based on where they stand in the hierarchy of ranks. In the Bernáts’ interpretation, this idea of entitlement is rooted in the strong connection between respectability and social position, allocating goods to those more ‘worthy’ of them. This notion of entitlement comes out very clearly in the opinion they expressed about new consumption tendencies in the 1950s, following the socialist measures – discussed in the previous chapter – directed at making high culture accessible to all:

Léna: Why do you think that style has changed since you were young? Is it a matter of fashion?
Magda: No, not only fashion. I tell you why it has changed. Because once it used to be, when I was young, that going to the opera, to the vaudeville, to the theatre, and to such places it was decent to go only in...

Sándor: ... dark clothes.

M: **You had to be very elegant.** Men used to wear a tuxedo or something like that, so very elegantly. But after the war, the Russians came in, and the style changed. Everybody wanted to be a homeless peasant...

S: If one had something one hid it!

M: One hid it, and everybody claimed that "My father brought me up under terribly difficult circumstances, I am miserable, deprived, from such a peasant family."

S: (laughing) "My mom was a washerwoman!"

M: So everybody like that! But really! The ancestors disappeared, the old ones, and new ancestors replaced them. **So to make it real, so that it looked real, people started to wear... tracksuits!** When was it? Women didn't wear trousers [before], no way! No one! The tracksuits arrived. They bought them in Czechoslovakia. **And in those tracksuits s/he went to the opera, s/he went everywhere! Because s/he said, "I'm a worker, I must go there, because (irritated voice), the opera is mine, the factory is mine, everything is mine!"** That was the slogan. So everybody tried to be like that, because if one had dressed up too much, they would have said: "How did he become like that?" Everybody wanted to adjust themselves to the Russian peasant, because one had to be like that.

The quote makes it clear that the importance of elegance draws on an entire ethical vision of society based on honour, pride, respecting ancestors, social relationships and the rightful social hierarchy. The tracksuit of the new socialist elite is criticized based on this view: those who wear tracksuits are not decent, not true to their ancestors and not respectable enough. By seeing elegance as the natural embodiment of a respectable person, it is possible to establish the connection between social position – understood as pre-socialist ranks – and the entitlement to go to the opera through the notion of respectability: one is legitimately entitled to go to the opera if one is a respectable person of dignity.

This idea is behind the apparent contradiction between the fact that elegance – the most expensive style – was the style of 'gentlemen's rank', despite the fact that gentlemen were often poorer than the bourgeois middle class. It is not simply that richer people adopt more expensive styles, the link relies rather on an ethical sense of entitlement. The more *respectable* people are worthy of the highest valued goods, and if others had them it would be seen as a pretension (even if they could afford them; I will return to this point in my analysis of the next case study). In this context the worker going to the opera is out of place, as he claims access to goods which he is not legitimately entitled to. This way, the normative distinction of appropriate wear to the opera involves ethical understandings of what it means to be a proper person and what the basis of legitimate entitlement is.

This connection explains why despite the fact that socialism largely erased the political and economic basis of the pre-socialist social hierarchy, ideas objectified in the expensive, elegant, aristocratic material culture kept guiding the Bernáts' ideas and

practices. For them, more than being an instrumental means to signal position, these practices are objectifications of ethical ideals along which they defined who they are and what they consider a proper, decent life. During socialism, as with other 'gentlemen's families' studied by Utasi (1995), adhering to 'gentlemen's practices' was understood by the Bernáts as keeping to their ethical vision. This is why as soon as the political climate allowed for it, once goods become available in the 1960s and they could afford them, Magda and Sándor returned to the elegant material culture. The following quote sheds light on the way the couple understands this in the context of the opposing socialist public discourse:

Sándor: **I liked to dress elegantly**, but I was not keen on looking around.

M: I always wanted that he would be like that (elegant). It was a must, it was a must. Because he had to go to meetings, and I don't know where. True, it's not the most important, but still, it's not exactly that way. Because it's important as well, your appearance. I know it. I always thought so. **Even if they said it all the time, that it didn't count, it did matter. And I wanted him to go neatly, elegantly, to work.** This is natural.

Magda here formulates her opinion about the importance of elegance in opposition to 'what they said all the time', suggesting that, contrary to public discourse, elegance was still considered important even during socialism. Sándor recalled a shopping trip he made when he received a Reward for Excellent Work, which was accompanied by a non-monetary reward of his choice. He chose to be given a pair of shoes and described how he went shoe-shopping with four party officers and ended up buying an elegant pair of brown shoes. These memories suggest there was a gap between the anti-consumerist public discourse and actual practices in the 1960s, in which elements of pre-socialist material culture were more tolerated to return at least at in its material form.

Preserving china, preserving respectability

Magda and Sándor followed similar principles in buying home decoration as they did in clothing: they saved up for expensive, long-lasting quality goods, which met their ideal of beauty, and were in an elegant, ornamented, crafted style that today counts as antique. A large number of the decorative items and pieces of furniture came from Magda's mother, and the Bernáts placed much emphasis on accumulating expensive items in the same style. Often they purchased 'beautiful' items beyond their means by

cutting down on food and entertainment. They took enormous care of these objects, maintained them in perfect condition and most of them were hardly actually used – unless on special occasions. The couple have detailed and vivid memories of when and how particular objects were damaged – ink spilt on the lace tablecloth, etc. – and recounted how these events were characteristically followed by punishment, penitence and crying.

The key criterion they mention is longevity: ‘durable’ goods are seen as sensible and approvable purchases; if goods are not durable it would be considered reckless to buy them. Longevity can be interpreted at three levels. First, physical longevity is the extent to which an object keeps its original material form: it does not fall apart; it does not dilapidate but maintains its original pomp. Second, financial longevity is the extent to which the object keeps and increases its value over time. Finally, what I would like to call symbolic longevity guarantees that the object will be considered beautiful and prestigious over time, uninfluenced by changing fashions.

The emphasis on longevity draws on *practical* wisdom and a number of *ethical* concerns that are connected to the points explored through the case of elegance. Practical wisdom is experienced by participants as objective givens and often incorporates elements of what studies refer to as objective conditions. I use the term ‘practical wisdom’ to indicate that objective conditions described by sociological and economic studies do not directly produce effects, but are mediated through personal understandings of how the world is.

In terms of *practical wisdom*, longevity relies on a belief in the relative stability and definite value of objectively measurable features that guarantee that physical longevity is accompanied by symbolic longevity. This belief is the basis of what I would like to call the objective beauty regime. Unlike ideas of subjective liking, or beauty in the eye of the beholder, *beauty*, just like elegance, is rather seen by the Bernáts as a set of objective features, rather than being related solely to subjective tastes. Criteria of the objective ideal of beauty include primarily the price of the material and the amount of work invested in the object. A mahogany wardrobe will always be considered more beautiful than an oak one, which in turn is more beautiful than a plastic one. Ornamented furniture is more beautiful than plain furniture, detailed embroidery more beautiful than simple stitching. The essence of this regime is that it is not dependent on ad-hoc taste and temporarily changing fashions, but based on physical features that are assessed according to standards that are seen as objective and eternal.

Buying, let's say, a plastic vase, just because you personally find it beautiful, would be considered senseless by the Bernáts, even if it lasts forever; in contrast, a crystal vase is seen as eternally beautiful, similarly to the 'eternally' elegant clothes that fill their wardrobes.

It appears that the features seen as the criteria of beauty mark out expensive objects because of the cost of their raw materials and the labour involved in making them. This link, however, is far from evident. Consider, for example, that today it is possible that a piece of minimalist kitchen furniture will be sold at a higher price than an ornamented one, simply because minimalism is fashionable at the moment. Thus the objective beauty regime is founded on the belief that this cannot happen: the material and work invested in an item must be reflected in its price and desirability, regardless of changing times and fashions. It is this idea that makes the belief in the stability of financial value possible, not the other way round (that items are more desirable because they are more expensive).

Second, the emphasis on longevity partly draws on the practical belief that the world is an unpredictable place. Magda accounts for this approach by listing a number of unforeseeable possibilities that occurred in their lives: unpredictability of the weather influencing farming during her childhood, unforeseen illnesses not covered by insurance, or the unexpected political imprisonments of friends. Magda and Sándor believe that their care to make savings and invest in securities – often in the form of durable consumer goods - is a practical strategy of coping with unpredictability.

These practical beliefs do not explain *why* buying long-lasting goods is the right thing to do; they only constitute the background against which strategies for achieving aims can be formulated. These aims, which draw on particular ethical visions of how to live and be, are often taken for granted; participants in my research do not find it necessary to explain that being a respectable person, creating a sense of security or caring for the family is important for them. In fact, it is the most binding and powerful ethical ideas that can be taken for granted; they are no longer seen as a matter of choice in any way, simply the normal thing that everyone should do. Despite the lack of articulation, it is in these beliefs that ethical standards – understood as normative standards experienced as independent from one's desire – are the most salient.

In terms of *ethical ideas*, the emphasis on longevity draws first on the same concern with respectability that I traced in the case of clothing. This concern forms the underlying assumption in the light of which longevity makes sense. Although it is

hardly ever explicitly articulated, this concern can be observed clearly in the use made of furniture. The Bernáts, just like most participants of their generation, use varied, shabby, inexpensive garments to cover their beautiful sofas and armchairs for everyday use. These covers are only removed on special occasions when guests visit. Just as Magda wears elegant clothes in public but changes to shabbier garments at home – in order to maintain the elegant pieces in good condition – the use of the furniture changes according to the domestic or public nature of the occasion, based on the same consideration. This means that the furniture too has to live up to specific ideas of decency – being tidy, clean, impeccable or beautiful – although its public appearances are much more limited than those of clothing.

These concerns, then, not only delimit what it is appropriate to acquire, but also how it is appropriate to use items, implying there are specific ways of interacting with objects. Objects are to be preserved, not to be enjoyed in a hedonistic way at any time. The china-headed dolls are not to be used in carefree play, but should be handled with a lot of care (even better if they are not touched at all). A simplified interpretation would be that objects do not serve people, but the other way round: people are to take care of, maintain and guard objects. It is a simplification first because in fact here too objects are ‘for their owners’ sake’; however, they fulfil their aim of being beautiful on public occasions and are preserved – as opposed to providing fun and comfort – most efficiently by *not* being used in everyday contexts.

Second, the criteria of longevity draw on the ethical concern of care for the family. In the following quote Sándor recalls the way they accumulated decorative items for their daughters even beyond their budget, talking about these objects as essential, almost basic goods:

Sándor: For our daughters we always bought gifts with the aim that by the time they get married they would have a **sufficient amount of china and embroidery**: a *stafírung* (marriage pack). They took such care of these gifts, always, and put them away properly. But we found these items a **useful** present, even though we could hardly afford them, because they were not cheap. **But we never bought useless things that they would throw away later.** I hope they still have them. This appeared to be a **luxury considering our income**, but we knew that we were buying these items **very consciously, so that when they grow up, all of them would have 15–20 pieces** [of china]. They always received something like that.

Having the sufficient amount of china and embroidery was seen by the Bernáts as an unquestionable aim; this was something that they should give to their daughters even if it was beyond their financial means. One way of interpreting this effort is seeing these

items as means of preserving and transmitting financial value for the next generation. This interpretation is part of the Bernáts' reasoning, as they recall that objects could be converted into money in case of emergency. In this sense the consumption of decorative items is appropriate also because it is not seen as 'consuming', rather as an alternative form of saving. The emphasis on longevity is partly to apply the principles of savings to the field of consumption: maintaining and increasing its value and the ability of being convertible to money when necessary.

Yet for financial accumulation establishing a bank account for their daughters would have been equally good. What I see in this is more the effort of the Bernáts to transmit not only financial value but also a certain practical ethics, providing the basis of a good life for their daughters as well, according to their ideas of how that a good life should look like. Similarly to Miller's (1999) observations of shopping in North London, these items objectify not only care for their children, but also a particular vision of how the children should live and be. As Miller points out, care is normative, in that it does not simply mean buying the receivers what they want, but buying goods that they *should* want if the relationship would be as the shopper imagines it. Applying Miller's observation to this case, 'love' and the relationship it entails is the long-term vision of a cross-generational ideal of the family, which draws on a particular ethical stance centring on maintaining and expanding the parents' ideal of respectability.

Longevity in this context not only guarantees that the home will live up to the standard of respectability appropriate to their social standing when guests arrive, but that the next generations will also be able to adhere to the same standard of respectability. The crucial question is then inheritability, as shown clearly in the Bernáts' comments on 'transient' goods their children buy today:

Magda: Even if **I despise** these things, the children don't. These things, the computer, the laptop, these things they change every half year, don't they? They are always different, so **they will not go far with them, they can't even inherit them.**

The reason why the laptop is useless compared with the little china spaniel, is that the latter *can be and is worth being inherited*, and hence one can *get further* with it. What makes china and lace so important in this light is their ability to form part of this cross-generational accumulation project of respectability and security.

It is important to see, however, that the entire idea of inheritability and the prospect of financial accumulation *depends* on the ethical idea of respectability and the

vision of how to live that is objectified in these objects. Even if this generation sees these objects as being of *objectively* higher value, their value is maintained only while the underlying ethical idea is maintained. As soon as these ethical ideas fade – as happens in later generations where a unique ‘subjective’ taste becomes important – so does the objective regime of beauty, and the stability of financial value. This means that practical and ethical elements of the cosmology are co-dependent and mutually reinforce each other (Image 3).

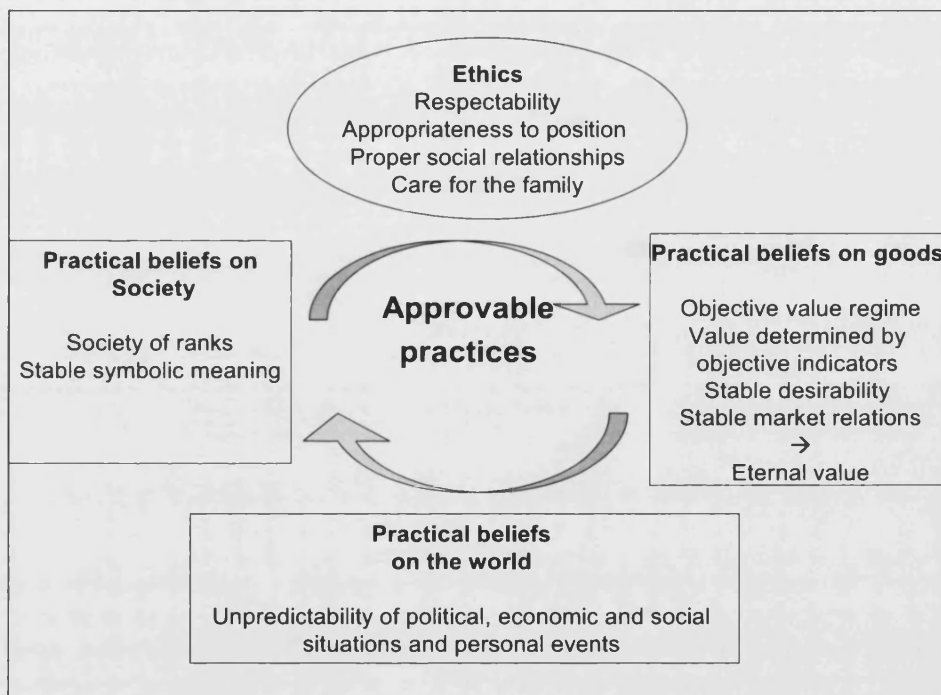


Image 3. Overview of the cosmology of the first generation of the Bernát family

This cosmology provides an overarching ethical and practical background against which different practices can be made sense of in normative terms. It is in this context that seemingly disconnected practices, such as economizing on food, become understandable. The Bernáts see food as both transient and private, so subject to strict budgeting, in harmony with the old saying ‘You can economize on food, because no-one can see what is inside your tummy.’ The exceptions are public occasions of eating, that is, receiving guests or showing relatives around in Budapest, which they consider the only instances where the ‘waste’ of going to restaurants is acceptable.

Summary

In this part I explored the cosmology consisting of the ethical ideas and practical beliefs that the Bernáts' distinctions of approvable practices draw on. I have suggested that these distinctions mediate a coherent idea of how to live, who to be and entitlement. This vision incorporates elements of the pre-socialist 'gentlemen's ethics', with which continuity is established through appropriating present-day conservative views.

One of the central criteria of approvable practices is that they have to be appropriate to social position. I have suggested that the Bernáts understand the social hierarchy of rank as a hierarchy of more and less respectable people that forms the basis of legitimate entitlement based on social position. At the same time the 'gentlemen's position' is experienced as demarking a set of ethical standards to be met, in particular respectability and dignity, which are not simply about meeting expectations but also a source of self-respect and pride. These concerns can be detected in the particular form the other major ethical imperative of care for family takes: providing the next generation with objects suitable for a respectable life. I have also suggested that these ethical ideas of respectability are seen to be objectified in a set of concrete practices, forming standards of *practical* ethics.

Beyond ethical considerations, this cosmology draws on a set of practical beliefs. First, it incorporates a practical understanding of the pre-socialist hierarchy of ranks, in which the Bernáts own original position is situated. Second, it involves the practical belief in the stability of financial and symbolic value, which in turn relies on an understanding of goods as endowed with stable value and meaning in terms appropriate to particular positions. Finally, it is linked to experiences of unpredictability and insecurity. Distinctions of approvable practices denote ways of living by ethical visions given these constraints and possibilities posed by the objective conditions (captured through practical beliefs).

The Bernáts' views drew explicitly on their ideas of social hierarchy and their position within it; the next case study represents a different social position, and helps to explore the differences and similarities in practices and the underlying cosmology between participants of different social standing.

The wealthy bourgeois: Ágota Kovács

Ágota (born in 1920) is from a skilled-worker family that lived in Budapest. Her family used to be richer than the Bernáts; however, as she was 'lower class', Ágota was not allowed to enter the 'gentlemen's casino', where Sándor and Magda went, nor could she ever marry a 'gentleman'. Unlike Magda, who would not have expected to work as a decent lady if it had not been for socialism, Ágota prepared for a working life. She had secondary education, and obtained a basic accounting qualification.

Ágota married a hairdresser, and hairdressing was a profitable private business before socialism. In the 1950s the couple's successful hairdressing saloon was collectivized. Her husband moved into the two-bedroom flat in the elegant Rosehill where Ágota lived with her parents, and they raised their two children there. From the 1960s the salon was going so well that the couple was the first in the neighbourhood to buy a car and a weekend house. As soon as regulations allowed they became *maszek* (private entrepreneurs during socialism), which brought a relatively high income, but was politically suspect.

From Ágota's account it is almost impossible to notice that radical political changes took place over her life in Hungary. She hardly mentions the changes of regimes, and even when she does she refers to small annoyances rather than exercising any real criticism. This may be because the new hierarchy introduced by socialism brought much less radical change for her than it did for Magda; already in pre-socialist times she envisaged her life to be based on hard work and education, and respected people along these achievements.

Comparing Ágota's practices and ideas of appropriate consumption with the views of the Bernáts, both similarities and differences can be observed. Ágota seems to acknowledge the existence of very similar social groups to those mentioned by the Bernáts, yet she fosters a certain 'bourgeois pride' and does not believe that 'gentlemen' are in any ethical sense higher than people in her class or should be emulated. She is concerned not to be associated with the ladies of 'gentleman rank', evident mostly through publicly visible consumption; clothing in particular, where she consciously avoids being associated with the 'ladies'. This finding contradicts the view discussed in the previous chapter, according to which the bourgeoisie uncritically tried to integrate into the system of rank.

However, in more ‘private’ fields, such as home decoration or food, Ágota’s accounts and practices are very similar to those of the Bernáts, despite their different social background. I will first analyse clothing to explore differences between the views of the Bernáts and Ágota, then move on to home decoration about which they have similar opinions.

Social position, English style and contentment

Ágota defines the kind of clothing she has found appropriate as ‘demure English style’. Here I will suggest that this style – and more broadly the principles denoting the upper and lower level of acceptable consumption – draws on an ethical vision of modesty, decency and contentment.

First, English style is more demure than the ‘lady’s way’ of dressing. Ágota explained that she ‘never wanted to surpass’ herself and she was ‘always satisfied’ with what she had. A Bourdieusque analysis of this stance would suggest that the dominated classes develop subjective ideas that are appropriate to their objective condition and do not feel to be *entitled* to better goods. This explanation, however, does not apply to Ágota.

Although Ágota largely defines modesty in contrast to specific social groups, she does not consider their practices as enviable or better. Talking about pre-socialism, she mentions in a despising tone the ‘so-called ladies’ and *puccos dámas*; *puccos* means dolled-up, flashy, while *dáma* literally means lady, but with a mocking tone, indicating pretension and arrogance. She proudly states that she was not a *puccos dáma*, and did not partake in flamboyant practices, such as wearing expensive perfume or face powder.

Ágota takes notice of the hierarchy the Bernáts referred to, knows that there were people who consider themselves higher because they were ‘ladies’ and ‘gentlemen’, and attend dance clubs where she would not be admitted. Yet she sees this separation as nothing more than being showy:

Ágota: A colleague of mine rushed up to me and says: “Listen, Ágota, does your husband have a tuxedo?” I said yes, he does. “I beg you, lend it to me, eventually Imre marries me!” She suffered from bragging mania; she would only marry a doctor. So, she ceaselessly pursued poor Imre. And she was ugly, the poor thing, very ugly, but Imre was not a Clark Gable either. But still, for a man it’s enough if he is just slightly more handsome than the devil. And I told her “Camilla, we have a tuxedo, it’s at home.” “All right”, she says, “I come and pick it up

tomorrow. My wedding will be next week in the countryside, and, you know, I want the peasants to be envious of me! That finally I am marrying a doctor and we wed in a tuxedo." I said, "All right. Your dress belongs to you?" She borrowed it from another woman. I never liked such a thing. I have always **contented myself with what I had**.

Ágota could afford 'lady's dresses', yet modesty and contentment is precisely about the refusal to emulate the pretentious gentlemen.

This view, however, does not mean Ágota completely refused this hierarchy in favour of another, bourgeois vision. She frequently talks about highly respectable people, who are invariably army officers, professors, opera stars. Yet the people she holds in the highest esteem are those who *despite* being upper class are as *modest* and demure in style as she is:

Ágota: Zoltán, the brain surgeon, was the loveliest person! He was such a simple [modest] man. Once after he had been in the shop one of the guests asked me: "Who was that man, what a baggy pair of trousers he was wearing!" I said: "Who? That is professor Zoltán, the brain surgeon." He says: "It's not possible, Ágota." Look, he was such a puritan, simple man. That was fantastic! But he could do so much good for people!

Although there is a sense of appropriateness of consumption with reference to position (Zoltán is modest *despite* being a doctor, suggesting that doctors could consume in a less puritan way), Ágota does not think that those who have high status are justified in consuming more than others. She believes that the ethical value of modesty is a dividing line between those who brag – such as her colleague who borrowed the tuxedo for her doctor fiancée – and the *really* respectable people. This suggests that position is not treated as given: the choice of hierarchy in which you place yourself socially – as a doctor, you can choose to see yourself as a 'gentleman' or as an ordinary person – is itself understood as an ethical choice. Therefore Ágota does not see modesty as a class or rank-specific virtue; modesty primarily is an ethical quality, which makes it universal: the same level of modesty should be displayed by everyone, of whatever class.

The following quote, in which Ágota criticizes the showy nouveaux riches of the 1970s, sheds further light on Ágota's views about modesty and its links to legitimate entitlement. It is important to keep in mind that in Hungary the 'old rich' lost their wealth with the socialist takeover, so everybody who was rich in the 1970s was by definition 'new rich'. The term nouveau riche therefore does not denote a well-defined

group, but is used differently to express criticism of a set of practices and the entitlement of the people it is applied to:

Ágota: These post-revolution parents... and mainly in the shop I learnt a lot about the wasteful behaviour of women. I had a guest, who asked: "Ilona (her daughter) is going to graduate now?" I said yes. "And what will you give her?" Well, I said, "She will get two kisses, and we will take her to the Rozsadomb restaurant, and she will get a great dinner." "And?!" "Well, what should I buy for her?" "Well, Ágota, don't be offended, but I had supposed that your family would give her a flat!" "Why? She has a flat." And then another woman comes and says: "My son has just graduated, it's true that **he only got a pass, but I have promised him a car.**" Well, it started to begin, that one had to **exceed one's colleagues at any rate**, in the 1970s, I think. If one **used to be poor, but became successful, then one would demonstrate it that one then stood above everybody. The counterexample is Professor Zoltán, the world famous brain surgeon. If you saw his wife, you could not believe that she was the professor's wife. She always dressed English style, delicately, never boasted.** And once she came in and said "Come Ágota **to the back of the shop**, I show you something. I have brought you this to show you, I am not bragging, just that you know who my husband is." And she opened it, there was a rose in the box, made of gold, entirely, stalks and leaves. She said that her husband got it from a patient from abroad.

The nouveaux riches do not seem to buy anything particularly outrageous: a car or a flat for their children, just like Ágota. (In fact, if anyone, Ágota is conspicuous: her family was the first in the posh Bimbó road in the most expensive district of Rosehill to buy a car in 1961, when no-one else owned one!) She considers the nouveaux riches showy for two reasons. First, she attributes them the intention of showing off – as opposed to the legitimate reasons she uses to account for her own practices – because she does not see these people as *entitled* to behave like this, but as nouveaux riches. In Ágota's account the nouveaux riches are those who have poor academic achievements (the son only got a pass) and became successful in the 1970s – as opposed to the long-established world-famous professor. From this view an education and occupation-based notion of rightful hierarchy emerges, which can be traced back to the development of the bourgeoisie during pre-socialism on the one hand, and to the hierarchy during socialism from the 1960s onwards on the other. This idea makes it possible for Ágota to hold a continuous view of pre-socialism and socialism and to look up to the same people, such as the professor (despite the fact that in pre-socialism professors were considered higher according to ranks, while in socialism according to education and occupation).

The second point of criticism sheds light on the nature of modesty. The problem with the nouveaux riches is not only that they are not entitled to wealth, but that they fail to hide it. Unlike Mrs Zoltán, who pulls Ágota to the back of the shop to show her

the golden rose *in secret*, the nouveaux riches talk openly about what they buy and even interrogate each other over prospective purchases. It is not the act of buying something per se that is condemnable, but the failure to keep it secret.

In tracing the roots of this view of modesty, it is again difficult to separate pre-socialist and socialist ideas. On the one hand, modesty is in line with the pre-socialist idea of appropriateness to social position, the idea of ‘not wanting to surpass oneself’, for Ágota, not engaging in ‘lady’s practices’ even if she could afford to. On the other hand, the socialist emphasis on hiding inequalities and restrained consumption can also be traced in this idea. Ágota did not comment on these different sources; for her modesty is a general ethical stance that is applied in every period, no matter whether those of ‘bragging mania’ are the gentlemen and ladies of pre-socialism or the nouveaux riches of socialism.

Being elegant, being a decent person

Contentment and modesty relate only to the upper limits of appropriate consumption. There are lower ethical limits, too, and within the space marked out by the two is the ethical vision of a decent person embodied in appropriate, demure, elegant English style. This lower limit is marked by clothing that objectifies self-respect and decency (compared with shabby and dirty looks):

Ágota: I have always seen this at home, because my father went to work dressed very nicely. Always, and his old boss loved him, “It’s good to look at you, you are so pretty (well dressed). It can be seen that **your wife is a proper [decent, tidy] women.**”

(...)

I am thankful forever to my mother, because she brought up both my children [while I was working], to above the average standard. **And she has taught them how to live, so, how to dress and be *igényes*** [demanding, be of high standard].

Ágota uses the word *igényes*, which literally means someone with requirements or higher needs. In Hungarian, *igény* is synonymous with ‘need’, but conveys a positive meaning of having higher standards. Unlike the concept of *szükséglet* (need), which implies biological determination, an *igény* arises from the person as a personal virtue. For example, in Hungarian one can say that ‘people need (*szükségük van*) food’, but not that ‘People have the *igény* for food’, because an *igény* is something one has depending on how sophisticated one is (one can have an *igény* for sophisticated dishes). An *igény*

is also different from desire (*vágy*): a desire is rather whimsical while an *igény* imply an exigency of valuable and positive things. The term *igényes* can be translated as ‘one who has the inner need for the better’, one who is sophisticated or demanding.

In the quote above dressing prettily is considered a matter of being *igényes* for one’s appearance, ‘knowing how to live’ and being a decent person. This connection is very similar to the one drawn by Magda and Sándor. It is not about showing to other people that you are a decent person, by dressing decently; if you are a decent person, you naturally have the *igény* to look decent. A particular look, again, is experienced as practical ethics: the way a decent person exists in practice. It means that for Ágota, too, clothing has meaning and importance as the objectification of a particular ethical idea relating to what it means to live in a decent way and hence be a respectable person.

In this respect different standards apply for men and woman. For a man ‘it is enough if he is just slightly more handsome than the devil’ and the baggy trousers are part of the loveliness of the professor, but a ‘proper’ woman has to be beautiful. Being a beautiful woman is not an ‘ethical’ idea in the traditional sense; in fact most critiques of consumer society see the preoccupation with appearance as a sign of superficiality. However, according to my definition of ethics - that denotes simply a higher standard by which practices are judged -, dress and behave beautifully is certainly one of the central principles of Ágota.

Which concrete practices are seen as appropriate depends on these ethical visions of modesty and what it means to be decent women, and on the practical beliefs against which particular acts are made sense of. The practical beliefs Ágota draws on are very similar to those explored above when describing the views of the Bernáts. Ágota also recalls a series of unexpected events when her father was ill, which left the family without income, and shortages during the war and nationalization, underlining the importance of providence. Also, she understands beauty as inscribed into goods, and sees certain styles as eternally elegant, in harmony with the objective regime of beauty. (“I wore my old garments for a long time, because I always dressed in the English style, which was an eternal fashion.”) These ethical and practical concerns together explain why English style is seen as appropriate:

Léna: I don’t quite understand what your father meant by budgeting.

Ágota: Well, that I can handle money well, that I can budget. Because whenever I bought something, I brought it home, showed my father and told him that I may have paid more than I needed to for it, and my father said: "Haven’t I always told you, that the **more expensive is**

cheaper? If you buy yourself something in a very beautiful material, that is expensive, it will be tailor-made and at a higher price. But if you buy something in a cheap material, it will look shabby already next winter." And I always remembered this and thought that he was right. This expensive coat, for example, was just as elegant after ten years. And look, after the war I still had three, four, five brand new dresses. Ilona was born, when I still had a very nice coat, a light blue coat. Wait, I can show you. (She shows me the coat, bought before World War 2, worn for decades and still in good condition.)

L: And at that time there was no question that it would go out of fashion? I consider that if I buy a coat now, in a year it's [already out of style]...

Á: I have always worn **English style**, and these are like that too. If I wear them even today, it's still fashionable now.

(...)

L: And if you had wasted the money?

Á: Then I would have had to... pay it back [to my father].

L: What would it mean to 'waste' money?

Á: I don't know, let's say, if I go to the patisserie, or I buy something for myself, I don't know, like a cheap textile, **I get bored with** it after wearing it a couple times and **then I buy myself another cheap one**.

'Budgeting well' means buying expensive goods that last a long time, both in the physical sense and in the subjective sense of not getting bored with them; in contrast, being thrifty is considered wasteful behaviour. Ágota recalled that she often spent more on textiles than she could afford and gradually paid off her debt. Spending more than one's salary on clothes would be considered compulsive behaviour by contemporary critics of consumer culture, but in the light of a different cosmology it is a responsible and provident choice, showing long-term thinking to be proud of, in contrast with the reckless practice of thrift, resulting in the withdrawal of the right to a separate budget.

The point is that longevity is not a value per se; it is approvable only in the taken-for-granted context of the ethical idea of a proper, decent woman *and* the practical belief in eternal elegance. It is only in this context that people buying cheap goods are condemned as reckless, and short-sighted – unable to become and remain decent.

The relationship between the ethical ideas and practical beliefs can be grasped analytically by seeing ethics as denoting aims, and seeing practical beliefs as delimiting strategies of achieving those aims. This does not exclude the possibility that a particular way of spending may become a substantive value in itself, for example, thrift being associated with restraint, or extravagance with sophistication and hedonism. Yet in this case, I think longevity is better understood as an instrumental strategy to long-term respectability. Ágota emphasizes that her efforts paid off: she no longer needs to buy clothes as her wardrobes are crammed with 'eternally elegant' clothes, napkins and bags, which are 'still in perfect condition'. This is not to suggest that Ágota consciously sets these ethics as aims and calculates the best strategy to achieve them in the light of

objective constraints. Rather, that this entire cosmology of ethical and practical beliefs has been mediated through the advice of her parents about what and how she *should* buy, without being explicitly elaborated.

Objective beauty and accumulation

Unlike Ágota's clothing choices, which were explicitly made sense of against the aristocratic style, her two-bedroom flat in the aristocratic district of Rosehill is furnished in a very similar way to the Bernáts' flat. Just as at the Bernáts, the flat gives the impression of being a nicely preserved museum, consisting of expensive, ornamented, old wooden furniture, paintings, china and crystal glass. Ágota explained, just like the Bernáts, that buying expensive, 'beautiful' home decorations is sensible, especially long-lasting goods that keep their value and are still used by her children and grandchildren.

Given that in other fields Ágota emphasised that she avoided the 'gentlemen's style' as pretentious, how does she make sense of her home, which is decorated with furniture that has gentlemanly patterns? Part of the answer to this question lies in the fact that furniture, being in the private sphere – like the golden rose shown at the back of the shop – is not subjected to public scrutiny; hence modesty – understood as avoiding showing off – does not apply to it.

However, the real answer is that Ágota does not see this furniture as gentlemanly, simply as being unquestionably the most beautiful style. She does not even experience this style as a matter of choice: it is treated as the taken-for-granted style for any beautiful home, and other options are thought only to be chosen out of necessity. This suggests that behind the similarity of home decoration is much more than what analysts customarily interpret as emulating 'gentlemen's lifestyle'. It seems rather that practices originating in the 'gentlemen's lifestyle' became the norm of a beautiful home, even among people who do not otherwise identify with the 'gentlemen's outlook'.

Furthermore, buying this type of beautiful furniture appears in Ágota's accounts to be an aim that stands beyond question; the only question seems to be how to acquire it. For example, she accounts for buying the dining furniture – in the flat where she was living with her parents till they died – by saying that they had enough money for it:

Ágota: For example we bought this dining furniture for my 14th birthday. Once my father said, "Come a little bit my Ágota, we go for a little walk, we look around." In Nagymező Street there were many furniture shops. And my father walked along it, chose one and said: "Well, my little Ágota, which dining furniture do you like?" And I was astonished: "Why?" And he said: "Look, from now on, we are already collecting for you, because you are getting older." And I chose this.

Léna: But how come, that you have already received this furniture?

A: Apparently, **we had enough money for it.**

Similarly, Ágota recalls that she spent her first wage on 'a wonderfully beautiful crystal' that her daughter is still using today, without even considering other possible options. When dealing with such taken for granted pursuits, it is difficult to show discursively that these choices draw on 'ethical' visions, because they are so unquestionable that participants no longer articulate them. Ágota does not feel the need and probably would find it absurd to explain that having a beautiful home according to a particular aesthetic vision, and the ability to pass beautiful objects over to the next generation, was important for her.

Yet it would be a mistake to treat these practices as value-neutral preferences. What we are dealing with here is not the lack of evaluation, rather that a particular evaluation is so pervasive that any other seems to be out of question. Ágota is unable to give an explanation, precisely because she does not see her practices as choices, let alone preferences. For her, this is not just a piece of furniture that 'she likes', or that she chose to have, as opposed to another style, but one of incontestable beauty; it is the norm compared with which the idea of any alternative practices (assuming she had the same amount of spending money) would be incomprehensible. It is difficult to isolate an abstract value such as 'respectability' behind the evaluation based on verbal accounts, yet this fact does not indicate that seeing this style as appropriate would not draw on a particular vision of how to live. Rather, as Bourdieu's theory of practice suggests, this vision is so embedded in practice, that such a construct can no longer be abstracted from it. It works entirely as practical ethics, a normative practice that objectifies a vision of how to live.

Summary

The cosmology that Ágota's normative distinctions and practices draw on shows both similarities and differences with the Bernáts. Ágota's public practices are informed by respectability, yet are further constrained by modesty and contentment. This vision demarks the lower limit of appropriate practices by seeing them as a matter of backbone and pride, and the upper limits posited by modesty and contentment objectified in demure practices. Ágota's 'middle-class' position is mediated by these ethical stances, yet they are not simply internalizations of a dominated position within the same idea of hierarchy. Instead, they draw on a different idea, in which different discourses – such as pre-socialist bourgeois pride and contentment and socialist work-based entitlement and modesty – are moulded together.

According to this idea modesty makes one respectable. This view is connected to a sense of just hierarchy based on education and hard work, in which pre-socialist aristocrats and uneducated socialist nouveaux riches are classified as non-entitled and, unless engaging in modest practices, seen as pretentious. This means that in Ágota's cosmology a different ethical outlook is connected to a different view on hierarchy, respect and entitlement. In this light the importance of English style can be fully grasped: English style objectifies ethical ideas of being a beautiful woman, modesty and decency; at the same time, in view of the practical belief in timeless styles and value, it is responsible to choose an eternally elegant garment.

The same differences cannot be observed in the area of home decoration, where the ethical idea of caring for the next generation by accumulating cross-generational items and normative visions of how a proper home should look like played an equally significant role for Ágota as for the Bernáts. This vision, however, is not understood as 'gentlemanly' by Ágota, simply a taken-for-granted norm about the proper home and her care for future generations.

Up to now, I have explored the moral cosmologies objectified through consumption of participants belonging to a gentleman (Bernáts) and bourgeois (Ágota) social position. The next case study extends the analysis by looking at someone from the pre-socialist 'lower stratum'.

The 'lower stratum' Szilvia Rigó

Szilvia (born in 1932) is from a family of poor agricultural wage labourers. She received primary education and worked as a cashier. Her husband, Endre, grew up in an orphanage. He entered the Communist Party and was sent to the Soviet Union to study. He returned with a degree and acquired a high position in an army academy. The Rigós earned much less than the two families described above, however, thanks to careful budgeting and to Endre's connections they could acquire a one-bedroom flat in a socialist housing estate. Szilvia recalls that after starting in very poor circumstances, the situation got better, although 'not even to middle standard'.

When their grandchildren grew up, Endre and Szilvia gave them their Budapest apartment and moved to the countryside into a small holiday house. At the time of the research, Endre became seriously ill and in need of constant medical care. The Rigós were using up the last bits of their savings to pay for a specially equipped old people's home. I interviewed Szilvia during one of her stays at her daughter's place; hence I cannot observe the furnishings in her own home.

Unlike previous participants, Szilvia's narrative is centred on her work. She kept returning to her job, and the fact that she worked very hard and scarcely had any free time. She only talked about consumption when I asked her about it, and it was obvious that she did not see it as a realm of choice. Her emphasis on work and her matter of fact approach to consumption are very similar to the viewpoint of another participant in my research, of a similar social position: Gizi Gárdos, a low-level office clerk, from a similar background.

'Wanting better'

Szilvia describes her family as *egyszerű*, which means humble, simple with undertones of poor, unsophisticated:

Léna: Could you recall an occasion from your childhood when you really wanted to get something?

Szilvia: To be honest, I don't recall that such a thing could happen to me. I had three siblings and we were a very *egyszerű* (humble) family. My father had sciatica, my mother was just a housewife; there were four children. We got hoeing jobs and harvesting, so we lived very simply.

According to Szilvia, her family was so *egyszerű* that even the idea of wanting something was out of question. Her family could not afford anything but the most simple, basic standard: they sewed their own clothes, grew their own food and survived on seasonal agricultural jobs.

Consumption for most of Szilvia's life was so restricted by her financial situation that she saw most spending as pre-determined, dictated by needs. This is how she accounts for paying the bills, buying her first home, food and clothing. These purchases are hardly ever explained further; they are treated as self-evident aims. Yet it is important to see that defining something as a 'need' is where ethics are most at play. The term 'need', as Slater points out, describes the strongest normative sense that a particular way of living is not only more desirable but essential for human existence. This phenomenon can be observed in the account of Gizi Gárdos, a participant of Szilvia's age and similar financial background, explaining the need for a flat:

Gizi Gárdos: So the flat was a terribly big problem, because it's with a flat that normal life and normal family harmony and everything begins – when one has an appropriate flat.

Although Szilvia did not formulate it explicitly, it was clear from her account, too, that she saw a flat as essential for having a normal life. Thus in situations closer to necessity, the language of ethics is gradually replaced by the language of needs – yet these two do not constitute a different quality, rather a different intensity of the same sense that certain ways of living are unquestionably higher than others.

It is related to this sense of necessity that Szilvia, unlike the two previous participants, finds nothing wrong with expressing a desire to emulate people who have more than she does. For her, what analysts see as a drive to social competition is simply striving for a better life:

Szilvia: I was very different from my parents, already as a child, my dad used to say, because **I loved beautiful (nice) things, I loved good things**, and I paid a lot of attention to the flat and in general to the standard of living. At home, at my parents, we had a soil-floored flat. The rooms had wooden floor, but the floor in the kitchen, the summer kitchen and the corridor was made of mud. Already as a girl, I longed so much to have a nice flat, because I often went to relatives in Budapest, and saw how people lived, that they had everything, and I longed so much for it... thought how good it would be, if I could have one like that.

Szilvia sees the desire for a nicer flat as a love for ‘beauty and the good’. She treats it as self-evident that trying to create a nice home and ‘standard of living’ is an aim that needs no further explanation. Aspirations to have a nice family home instead of an uncomfortable, mud-floored house may be inspired by upper-class ways of living, but it does not discount the fact that it also *actually* means a different life, which she sees as incomparably richer and better. From Szilvia’s point of view, the fact that these culturally specific forms of a good life are analogous to the class divisions does not mean that they are only *signs* of status, rather that upper classes are ‘upper’ precisely because they have more access to these better lives.

For the Rigós, it was socialism that allowed them to afford this better life. Szilvia is extremely proud of her husband’s career, which started in the Soviet Union. She holds hard work as a central virtue and talks about benefits they received during socialism with nostalgia. This hard work ethic, however, is not seen by her as a *socialist* vision and elements of the socialist public discourse are hardly observable in it. Rather, she emphasises the continuity with her hard-working parents, which suggests that this ethic draws on the pre-socialist petit-bourgeois and peasant ethical concern with diligence and hard work.

This is probably why, contrary to expectations expressed in intellectuals’ public debates analysed in Chapter 4, Szilvia did not endorse a substantially new socialist ethical outlook, nor favoured the functionalist socialist design that was supposed to objectify it. Quite the opposite. Rather than rejecting the old-fashioned style as petit-bourgeois, she realized the good life she always dreamed of according to same ideal of beauty as the Bernáts and Ágota applied in home decoration. The functionalist socialist style, designed to meet the supposed needs of the new, modern socialist people, was her first choice from necessity; she replaced the objects she bought once she could afford something ‘better’. For Szilvia the ornamented, carved, *koloniál* furniture inspired by the pre-socialist style was her ultimate aim, the ultimate beauty. (See Image 4 for illustrations of the furniture styles.) Similarly to Ágota, her vision of a good life took the form of the ‘gentlemen’s furniture’, without embracing ‘gentlemen’s ethics’. In this sense socialism opened a route for her to realize a good life lived by pre-socialist practices:

Szilvia: We always had to economize, all my life. This is what I saw my parents do, and so did I. Because that was the only way we could get on, because we didn’t have wealth, so I could only save from my wages. The wage was good, but it was not even middle class level, because

we did not own anything when we got together with my husband and everything had to be bought. Well, we could have kept the first furniture that we bought, but I wanted to have nicer, or better furniture once I had saved up for it. True, we didn't go out much, I have to tell frankly (...) [at the end] I used to have very nice furniture, that kind of Yugoslavian *koloniál* furniture, I don't even remember after how many furniture changes, but every time we moved we changed. Firstly we had to change because the furniture was not appropriate, it was not good. Secondly, because I saw something nicer, something better, **but every time I succeeded in selling what I had. I took care of the pieces of furniture, looking after them, so I could always sell them.**

Image 4 Furniture styles



I have suggested earlier that buying expensive, long-lasting goods is seen as approvable by drawing simultaneously on visions of how to live and on the practical belief that these items will be eternally desirable and will keep their value over time, which I called the objective beauty regime. This is not to say that furniture is bought merely as an investment; but to emphasize that without this practical wisdom, the choice would objectify a completely different ethic, that would have nothing to do with providence and cross-generational accumulation projects. Szilvia's case study gives a good illustration of this point.

As opposed to pre-socialism and socialism, when furniture kept its value and could be converted into money at any given time, today Szilvia realizes with disappointment that the once expensive furniture she bought has lost both its symbolic and financial value:

Szilvia: We moved to the countryside, **but we could not sell the *koloniál* furniture, they wouldn't pay anything for it even in the pawn shop.** All the crystal glass and china stayed here (in the Budapest flat). I gave it to my daughter; she said, "I don't need it, mum." I gave it to my grandson, but he didn't need it either. I gave it to my son; he didn't need it either. (...) I keep telling my daughter, "My little daughter, don't buy so many foolish things." I get a nervous breakdown for example from the fact that the windowsill is full [of decorative knick-knacks]. "It's nice," she says, and that my sense of beauty is not developed. We have quarrels on that sometimes. I tell her: "Me too, I should have kept the money I spent on my furniture, because now nobody needs it!" I should have put that money into a savings account, then I would have more now. That money would be needed now. She says: "And what would you do with the money?" [and I say]: "You see, my little daughter, what I would do with it. Now it would be needed. One can't know where one ends up when one becomes old."

Szilvia's furnishings failed the most important tests. They did not maintain their value, so cannot be converted into money today; thus they failed to provide the security they had originally promised. Not only the market, but also Szilvia's family members refused the *koloniál* furniture (the most beautiful she ever had, the culmination of her efforts!), the crystal glass and the china. These furnishings will not be preserved by future generations of the family, shattering Szilvia's accumulation plan, envisaged according to her idea of living a good and respectable life. This means that the practical belief in symbolic and financial longevity turned out to be false. In the light of the new practical wisdom, the entire meaning of Szilvia's practice changes: it becomes a self-indulgent, irresponsible caprice, as opposed to the project of building opportunities for a more respectable life for future generations.

Being clean and decent

Szilvia explained that creating a nice home has always been the prime focus of her efforts. She strictly budgeted on food, never went out or travelled and only bought clothes that were 'needed' until the flat was finished. Looking at what kind of clothes Szilvia 'needed', reveals again that needs refer to a particular vision of what is seen as the basic standard of decency, envisaged according to culturally specific ideals:

Szilvia: My husband at the beginning had one or two suits. He used to wear uniform, very pretty, very nicely, the way he liked to be, clean. He *adott magára* (**carried himself with style, dignity**). And then when we had everything, furniture, everything, then we could dress nicely.

Szilvia: My son's sons buy all kinds of things from the clothing point of view. When those down-bottom trousers were in fashion, those jeans, well, when I saw him wearing them, **I thought I would faint!** ...But my (other) grandchild dresses **nicely, delicately, nicely.** (...) **Most of**

the young people today don't dress in an elegant way, but rather in a *trehány* (messy, imperfect and careless) way. The clothes just hang on them. And I am happy if I see a young man, young people dressed neatly, nicely; my soul is happy, that there are decent ones among them, not only those dressed flagrantly, but that there are humble ones, delicately dressed. And there are neat young people as well, but there are *trehány*s among them, *slendrián* (non-ambitious, not demanding).

Szilvia establishes a similar connection between looks and ethical composure observed in the Bernáts and Ágota, this time between being pretty, tidy and clean on the one hand and a sense of dignity, decency and humbleness on the other. She uses the term *ad magára*, which stands for being demanding with yourself, referring both to outer appearances – being tidy, neat and polished – and to an inner pride, esteem and dignity. In the material sense, *csinos* is very similar to elegant in style, but involves less expensive garments. The word *csinos* [*chinosh*] (pretty), unlike elegant, refers essentially to cleanliness: impeccable clothing, shiny shoes, clean hands and nails, without oil or coal stains. Besides being clean, clothes should not have any crease or tear. One can be *csinos* even if one is poor, and the clothes are old and low quality. Being *csinos*, in short, is associated with the *efforts* invested into one's appearance: the cleaning, polishing, ironing and mending; which again suggests the same ethical responsibility for one's appearance as observed before.

The quote above also shows that Szilvia and her husband moved from wearing 'tidy' to wearing 'nice' clothes only once the flat was furnished to a certain standard. This suggests that not only the definition of needs, but also their rank, depends on particular ethical visions; in this case a good life centred on the family and home is more important than ethics objectified in elegant possessions.

Summary

Szilvia's account was dominated by what she saw as unquestionable needs. These needs were formulated according to ideals of material culture that show important similarities to the previous participants in terms of emphasis on decency and care for the family, and in their actual form. The accumulation of china and *koloniál* furniture, as well as the completion of the pretty wardrobe was carried out in her case to a large extent during socialism as soon as goods became available and affordable.

Although it is understandable that continuity of material culture for the Bernáts drew on pre-socialist ideals, Szilvia's choices cannot be described as the survival of pre-socialist ethics, nor as an endorsement of previous ideals of social hierarchy. Instead, Szilvia saw socialism as an opportunity to participate in ways of living that she was previously excluded from. This means that she did not experience socialism as a new, ideal way of life contrary to the intellectual views on consumption outlined in Chapter 4, but as giving her more open and equal access to already existing ideals that survived as standards of aesthetics and practical visions of a good life even after their social and economic basis was erased.

Conclusion

In this conclusion I first formulate the theoretical arguments that will be exemplified throughout the substantive chapters. Then I discuss the way cases are connected and differ from each other, which I capture as different relations to and mediations of similar pre-socialist ethical and practical concerns that are partly reinterpreted by incorporating elements of socialist and present-day discourses.

The central theoretical point is that normative distinctions of consumption practice were formulated with reference to specific everyday ethics, ideas of a good life and notions of desirable identities that were seen as higher standards independent of personal desires. For example, Magda and Sándor considered elegance as a matter of 'having a backbone', being respectable; Ágota saw English style as a matter of being *igényes* and living in a proper way; while Szilvia considered being tidy and clean as a matter of being decent and having dignity. Similarly, what makes the accumulation of furniture an approvable aim is that it is seen as objectifying similar ethical ideas of respectability on the one hand and care for future generations on the other.

These ethics were not simply 'expressed' through arbitrary consumer goods; but were seen to exist primarily in their embodied, material form in particular practices. This observation confirms the idea of objectification developed by Miller: subjects and objects are simultaneously co-constituted through the process of objectification. This is especially observable in the way these ethics were transmitted (from Ágota's father, from the professor's wife, etc.): not through words or concepts, but through practices that are in fact very difficult to translate into language. To describe this sense that

certain ideas of how to live and who to be are experienced, transmitted and negotiated primarily through material culture practices rather than as abstract concepts that are to be expressed in an ad-hoc set of goods, I use the term *practical ethics*.

The concept of *practical ethics* is comparable to Bourdieu's argument that emphasizes the practical sense of the world and its reproduction and transmission at a practical level. Yet unlike Bourdieu, who sees the sense of normative distinctions as functional to domination, the term *practical ethics* accentuates *ethics* as a central element, which cannot be reduced to mere competitiveness. (I will give a more systematic explanation of this point in the conclusion of the thesis.)

The concept of practical ethics explains why despite the radical social, political and economic changes, practices objectifying a desired way of living and being drew largely on pre-socialist forms. For the Bernáts it represented an explicit strategy of being true to the pre-socialist values that they saw threatened by socialism. Among the participants they seem to be most aware of the socialist attempt to give rise to new practices objectifying a different *socialist* ethic, against which they took a firm position. Yet for Ágota and Szilvia, who were by no means attached to the pre-socialist rank hierarchy, pre-socialist practices – such as prettiness and elegance or classical furniture – objectified a desirable life that did not correspond to the acceptance of pre-socialist hierarchy. In Ágota's case continuity was made sense in an account that described modest choices during socialism as the continuation of an ethics of contentment corresponding to her pre-socialist bourgeois position. For Szilvia, continuity is based on a view of socialism as a more egalitarian access to a 'good life', envisaged according to pre-socialist valued ways of living.

Furthermore, I suggested these ethics together with practical beliefs form relatively coherent personal cosmologies, which allow one to see people's practices not as disaggregated but connected. Personal cosmologies analysed in this chapter draw predominantly on different elements of pre-socialist ethical ideals, practical beliefs and practices described in Chapter 4, yet combined them with elements of both socialist and contemporary discourses.

First, in terms of ethical ideas, the 'gentlemen's version' of respectability, dignity and hierarchical view of society is endorsed most explicitly by the Bernáts, which is made sense of today through drawing on the conservative public discourse. In their cosmology the pre-socialist system of ranks is legitimate, as it differentiates people according to their respectability. They defined and pursued their own ethical vision of

respectability within this framework and were proud to be part of the ‘gentlemen’s society’. For them, being a ‘gentleman’ is bound up with the ethical idea of dignity and pride. This ethics is founded on the connection between being respected and self-respect; its core is a particular relationship to others in wider society. The practices they consider legitimate and appropriate are seen to objectify this ethical idea in all fields of visible consumption, from dresses to furniture presented on public occasions.

Ágota appropriates elements that originally belonged to ‘gentlemen’s ethics’, but also situates herself against it. Her ethics focuses on modesty, contentment and opposition to flamboyant showing off. Thus it is similar to both pre-socialist and socialist discourse; but today these elements are impossible to separate as they form a relatively unified view of the past. At the same time, her cosmology appropriates pre-socialist ideas – such as respectability, pride, appropriateness of practices in relation to position and care for the family according to a long-term vision of respectability – objectified in practices conforming to pre-socialist norms (elegance, classical furniture, etc.).

In Szilvia’s case, practices following pre-socialist patterns are seen to belong to an unquestionably better way of life. She no longer sees these practices as connected to the pre-socialist hierarchy, but favours them as one of the benefits of more egalitarian access to goods provided by the socialist system, which resonates with non-official discourses explained in Chapter 4.

Second, cosmologies included practical beliefs that appropriated elements of ‘official’ objective conditions. This practical wisdom denotes possibilities and constraints against which particular actions can be seen as sensible, approvable or necessary. Among participants analysed here two sets of beliefs were referred to most frequently as the objective conditions in relation to which agency can be understood: unpredictability of life and stability of value. Unpredictability of life is underlined by a number of unforeseen events participants experienced or witnessed during their life – including the 32–33 economic crises, the war, collectivization, political police and illnesses.

The belief in the stability of value – in terms of price and style – provides the other practical element of cosmologies observed here. On the one hand, financial value is seen to be determined by specific qualities – such as rarity of the material, amount of craftsmanship – rather than changing fashions. On the other hand, its appropriateness to

social position is also seen as stable and objective; goods are seen to have a specific style and status inscribed to them.

These beliefs together with ethical ideas determine whether participants in this research see particular practices as appropriate, legitimate and necessary. The connection between normative distinctions on the one hand and practical and ethical beliefs on the other is often less evident because these ethical and practical beliefs are frequently taken for granted, and no longer reflected on, or are intertwined with each other in practical ethics. For example, the emphasis on longevity involves both an ethical vision of respectability and care family *and* the practical belief that objective, immanent value in the monetary and symbolic sense enables goods to serve as a form of value accumulation and preservation and as a long-term investment in respectability.

Chapter 6 The second generation

This chapter looks at the second generation: people who grew up and lived the predominant part of their life during socialism. The analysis focuses on the cosmologies that distinctions between consumption practices draw on and looks at the way these cosmologies are related to what I consider their two most important sources: socialist and present day public discourse on the one hand, and cosmologies and practices of the previous generation on the other (see family trees in Appendix 4).

Personal ethics mapped in this chapter can be best grasped through their relation to the socialist public ethic – which promoted modesty, ascetism, egalitarianism and hard work – and the way this relationship is negotiated with reference to present-day discourses. First, the ‘socialist elite ethics’ involving ascetism and intellectual sophistication as ethical virtues and a work-based ideal of entitlement shows the most similarities with this public ethic and can be linked to current leftist discourse. Second, the working-class version of the socialist ethic promotes socialism not as a new ideal of an ascetic way of life, but as a more egalitarian system that is instrumentally better for achieving what participants see as a decent life defined along traditional ideas of the home and family. Third, the contrasting anti-socialist ethics, formulated along current conservative lines, focuses on maintaining a pre-socialist aristocratic or bourgeois practices and ethical orientation against the socialist doctrine. Finally, the position characterized by ‘ignorance and distance’ involves a hedonistic approach, which treats socialist slogans as empty propaganda and promotes the liberal view of consumer freedom.

These views cannot be understood along the simple lines of resistance vs. acceptance of socialism. Despite the apparent antagonism between the views, I will suggest that all of them involve socialist elements – such as solidarity, work-based entitlement and a focus on the domestic sphere as opposed to public display – therefore they form a continuum rather than a dichotomy, on which many different positions, combinations and reinterpretations prevail.

Different ethics can be linked to social trajectories in socialism, in particular to first economy vs. second economy careers.⁹ The ‘socialist elite’ cosmology is explored through two families who followed first economy socialist career routes through education and occupational hierarchy: the Bernáts – who belong to the middle class today – and the Kovács – who became upper-class corporate executives under capitalism. The ‘working-class socialist cosmology’ is traced through the working-class Téglási case study; today this family lives in poverty on the lowest pension. The anti-socialist ethics is explored through the lower-middle-class Rigós, who did not pursue socialist careers and today live as entrepreneurs. Finally, the position of ignorance and distance is described through two participants working in the second economy during socialism: Olga, who has used up her earnings and struggles today, and the entrepreneur Miklós, who is desperately trying to get rid of his *nouveau riche* label.

This chapter explores on the one hand these different relations and shows the multiple ways in which ‘socialism’ has been made sense of, reworked and became integrated into personal cosmologies; on the other hand it looks at how these cosmologies and practices relate to those of the previous generation.

The middle-class intellectuals: Zsuzsa and Ede Bernát

Zsuzsa Bernát (born in 1950) pursued what can be termed a socialist-style first economy career route: she acquired a university degree, became a researcher and gradually moved up in the work hierarchy. Ede (born in 1952), her husband, is an engineer, who followed the same route, but after the fall of socialism started working for a multinational company. The Bernáts started relatively poor and gradually achieved a standard of living that counts as middle class. Today they live in a one-bedroom flat in a socialist-style terraced house in the green belt of Budapest, have been able to travel abroad, buy expensive consumer electronic goods and art works and support their daughter by gradually paying off the mortgage on her first flat.

Today the Bernáts vote for the Socialist Party and embrace a largely leftist interpretation of the past, which is subject to heated debate with the older Bernáts. They

⁹ In harmony with Chapter 4, I call careers leading through gradual advancement in the educational and occupational hierarchy in state companies a ‘first economy career’. Second economy carriers, in contrast, involve earning money partly or entirely from illegal or semi-legal private activities.

are aware that ‘socialism was not perfect’, yet suggest that contemporary conservative accounts are unjustifiably negative. They emphasize that they never entered the party, yet could achieve a successful career; which they see as evidence that the system provided opportunities for those who refused to participate in the political manoeuvres.

Appropriating home decoration: from ‘gentlemen’s respectability’ to socialist intellectual ascetism

The Bernáts’ flat demonstrates a striking continuity with that of Sándor and Magda. The small flat is crammed with expensive, antique objects: paintings, *koloniál* furniture, carpets, flower stands, ceramics and embroidery. The windows contain tinted glass inlays, which creates a castle-like stylistic impression in the externally modern, socialist-style modular apartment house. During the interview we could not sit down in a circle, because the armchairs are too big to be placed next to each other; there is only room for them when they are in separate corners. In addition there are four chairs around the walls with huge decorated cushions, which have to be removed before one can sit down. The wooden floor is covered with Persian carpets. The walls are ornamented with paintings and bookshelves full of books and beautiful china vases. I learned that there are some more vases in the cellar, as they have no more space in the room. They still keep buying expensive decorations although – as they admit – space now restricts their passion:

Zsuzsa: Well, the flat is quite small. We have moved to this smaller one from a bigger one, so it can be seen that it’s a bit overcrowded. It’s full of objects, so I can’t buy any more objects, even those that I like, because simply there is no more space. Nevertheless, I still buy objects, if I really like something, but now I am restricted by the fact that we have already bought a lot of things.

One way of interpreting the continuity between the old Bernáts’ and young Bernáts’ material culture would be to follow Bourdieu’s (1977) theory of practice that argues for the unreflected transmission of cosmologies through practices. In this interpretation the continuity of the first generation’s practices would mean a continuity of the cosmologies objectified by it. This only stands, however, as Bourdieu too points out, in situations when hierarchy and practices are largely unquestioned – dominated by the *doxa*, as Bourdieu calls it. Hungary, in contrast, was characterized by a radical

questioning and reorganization of hierarchy, distribution and practices from one regime to another. The question, then, is how to interpret this continuity *despite* all the changes.

In analysing this case study I will take a slightly different route from others and explore the new cosmology through contrasting it to the one objectified in practices of the first generation. This aim of this strategy is to show that the new cosmology cannot be understood through the simple dichotomy of continuity and change but as a constellation of particular ethical visions, practical beliefs and practices that draw both on the older Bernáts' *and* the new socialist visions.

Domestic and aesthetic harmony

When the younger Bernáts account for their home decoration, they draw on both similar and substantially different ethical visions and practical beliefs from the old Bernáts. In terms of ethical ideas, while Sándor and Magda saw valuable furniture as a means of maintaining practices appropriate to their position in the pre-socialist hierarchy, in Ede and Zsuzsa's account the emphasis shifts to their desire for everyday domestic harmony and aesthetic sophistication:

Zsuzsa: [What is important] first of all is **quality** and **what I like**, so I don't buy fashion objects, just because it's in fashion, it's not characteristic of me. It should **be lasting, valuable, good...** It's very important **that I like it**. So in the flat I can't stand an object that I don't like. (...) For me [what is important] is that **when I come home I feel good at home** and that I am among such objects [that make me feel good]. If I don't like the look of something, I remove it sooner or later; there **must be harmony** in the flat. If I like something in itself I will not buy it, because I know that it doesn't fit the flat. **I like many things, modern things, but if I know that it doesn't fit my flat**, then no, because I will not put it out anyway, so there must be harmony in the flat, the objects should go well with each other.

While the same principles of longevity, quality and value observed at her parents are present in Zsuzsa's account (I will return to this), the emphasis is on a very different vision: objects have to make her feel good at home and be in harmony with each other. Zsuzsa does not value an object if it does not pass her subjective aesthetic judgement or fails to create a harmonious atmosphere; while for her parents, the value of an object was something objective, inscribed. This is why for Zsuzsa the flat objectifies *one* of the aesthetic styles she likes; however, as she puts it, she likes modern style too. While her parents would have rejected an item in a modern style on the basis that it does not fit the ideal of a respectable home, would not keep its value and hence cannot be inherited,

Zsuzsa refuses it on the basis that it would not fit into the harmony of her flat. (It is not impossible that it is partly the objects gifted by her parents that generated this material culture by obeying to the rule of harmony.¹⁰) This difference is clearly reflected in the way furniture is used, too. While her parents carefully cover the furniture except for special occasions when receiving visitors, for Zsuzsa such a practice would be out of the question. For the younger Bernáts, then, the same material culture objectifies a different ethical idea that centres on a very private, domestic, everyday harmony and subjective aesthetic experience, which involves a very different ideal of everyday life implied by the older Bernáts cosmology.

The ideal of the home as a realm of aesthetic sophistication is embedded in a larger ethical stance of what I would like to call *socialist intellectual ascetism*. I call this ethic ‘socialist’, because it is in harmony with the official socialist ideal explained in Chapter 4. This ethical stance is centred on ideals of intellectual development, aesthetic refinement, and also on a broader, everyday vision of living in a ‘cultured way’:

Zsuzsa: We went to Italy in the 1980s; we took my daughter with us. She was 4–5 years old and we went to **all the museums** in Rome, including the Vatican. All credit to her for having walked the entire day. When we are abroad we are out all day – we get up in the morning, and fall into bed in the evening and walk the whole day. We never go to restaurants; sometimes I eat an ice-cream on the street, but I consider it a waste of money because it’s expensive. We always go to youth hostels, which is much cheaper, or with a bag pack, but always to the simplest, most...

Léna: Is it because you can’t afford to spend more?

Zs: No! It’s because for me it’s a bigger pleasure – we always buy objects abroad – that I go into the room, and then I see that I bought this vase in Venice, that one in Munich. I have calculated that if I go to sit three times in a cafeteria to have a cup of coffee, for the same money I can buy a vase. So we prefer to go to a shop and buy refreshment there, because I would regret spending money on cafeterias, because it is expensive everywhere. Not **because I can’t afford it** in principle, but because I **feel bad about spending money on it**. **According to my value system**, I buy an object, I like objects that give me pleasure, but to sit in a cafeteria doesn’t give me any pleasure at all. I never begrudge money spent on entry tickets and things like that, but I would prefer to walk two kilometres to avoid spending on expensive transport.

The quote suggests that the normative distinction between practices is based on the extent to which they contribute to cultural sophistication and to an aesthetic domestic experience. Practices that are seen as part of the ‘cultured way of living’ – spending money on museum tickets and artistic home decoration – are justified, as opposed to the sphere of wasteful spending – on public transport, hotels and cafeterias – that is guided by an ascetic, down to earth, modest and rational ethics. Zsuzsa emphasizes that she

¹⁰ For a description of a similar phenomenon see Clarke (2002) and McCracken (2001).

could have afforded them, but to have spent money in this way would have contradicted her *value system*, clearly suggesting an ethical rather than practical consideration.

Beyond the emphasis on intellectual sophistication, the distinction draws on an ideal of a down-to-earth, rational person. Rationality – in the economic sense of calculating costs and benefits – is not only seen as instrumental to saving money, but as an ethical virtue of not being prone to manipulation, being down-to-earth and sensible: guided by reason as opposed to passion or fashion. The importance of being down-to-earth in turn can be observed in Zsuzsa's ascetism relating to 'self-indulgent' activities such as taking a bus rather than walking, going to restaurants rather than cooking, and hiring a cleaning lady instead of cleaning yourself, etc. These are refused not only because they are expensive, but also because they contradict the ideal of the practical, down-to-earth person who is able and willing to do their own domestic work.

Useless frills

Distinctions between practices draw on socialist intellectual ascetism in other domains, too. Depending on whether a domain is classified as 'aesthetic or intellectual sophistication' it is seen as legitimate, otherwise it is seen as simply materialistic *consumption*:

Zsuzsa: So, with clothes, again, **I hardly care about** them.

Léna: Could you recall your latest purchase?

Zs: I bought a little jacket, which looked, I thought, very pretty on me. It was reduced, on sale, and I bought it. I am happy after all that I bought it. I bought a shirt as well, I have altered it; it's a habit of mine that I buy something but intend to alter it. **I have removed these [beads] because I didn't like them on it, and also removed the decoration from the jacket.** (...)

Léna: How would you describe your taste?

Zs: Well, it's difficult put like that... as good, according to me (laughs). **Practical.**

Clothing does not belong to the field of 'aesthetic sophistication', hence decoration is seen not as approvable 'beauty' but as useless frill. In the name of a particular functional aesthetics Zsuzsa even invests effort into removing decorations to achieve the required 'no-frill', austere look.

As the quote suggests, socialist ascetism also involves different ideals from those of Zsuzsa's mother about how a proper woman should dress, which centred on investing effort into looking elegant. Zsuzsa's version of gender in contrast stresses lack

of effort and a refusal to buy expensive clothes with feminine details. I only observed this sort of self-image among women who had undergone the socialist career route of high educational and occupational achievement.

This can be related to the socialist ideological approach of eradicating gender discrimination, and the ideal of the somewhat asexual, detached, intellectually sophisticated comrade. Yet as Fodor argues, ‘while on the surface genderless, the ideal communist subject had distinctly masculine features’ and parallels can be drawn to its ‘counterpart, the rational individual under liberal capitalism’ (Fodor 2002:241).

The other field where socialist intellectual ascetism can be observed is the practices of parental care and love for their children. This love has never been objectified in what the parents see as senseless waste of spending money on large family lunches; as Zsuzsa and Ede admit, they begrudge money spent on food and spend less on it than ‘average’. This phenomenon was clearly observable when I was introduced to them by their daughter, who invited me for a Sunday lunch. Unlike that of most other families, the Bernáts’ Sunday lunch lacked all formality and festive atmosphere. They ate only one course of simple meat and steamed vegetables, while usually Sunday lunch consists of three courses. Also, family members did not eat lunch at the same time; the father arrived half an hour after others had begun, and a cousin staying at their place did not eat at all. I was asked to start the interview already during the lunch; there was no special feeling of festivity at this Sunday lunch.

This is not to say, however, that family ties are less important to the Bernáts. It is rather that the Bernáts prefer to support their children in a way that suits their ethics – for example, by helping with their mortgage and buying them long-lasting valuable goods.

Public vs. private spheres

Beyond their reference to socialist intellectual ascetism, these practices show a further similarity with official socialist ethics, which involves the inversion of the principles referring to the private–public domains. For the first generation public fields were dominated by the imperative to live up to social position, while private fields were characterized by modest consumption in order to save up for public appearances. Here, in contrast, visible, public consumption is modest, while private domains are less

restricted by the norms of modesty. Analysts explain this, first, by the fact that socialism promoted an egalitarian view of society and repressed visible social differences both institutionally (by limiting consumption by law and central planning) and ideologically (by condemning the desire to stand out). Second, the growing emphasis on the private sphere is linked to the fact that after the 1956 revolution, political stability was maintained by relative freedom in the private domain (Hammer and Dessewffy 1997; Vörös 1997; Bauman 2001b).

However, the Bernáts do not simply adopt these trends; but practices conforming to them are mediated through personal cosmologies. The emphasis on private practices and modesty in public consumption is understood as part of the ethical vision of a good life centring on domestic harmony and socialist intellectual ascetism, and is embedded in particular ideas of gender. It is in view of this ethics that public consumption – seen as superficial and materialistic – is guided by ascetism, as opposed to the private domains, which are seen as the domain of aesthetic sophistication and a cultured way of living.

Work-based entitlement, equal society and aesthetic sophistication

For the older Bernáts, objects and people belonged to unambiguous hierarchical categories and appropriateness of practices was inseparable from the concern of living up to a particular position. This hierarchical view is not shared at all by Zsuzsa and Ede. They never refer to well-defined, hierarchical social group, let alone to the idea of living up to a particular social position. Their ideal of society is essentially egalitarian, and inequality is criticised when it is discussed:

Léna: In your opinion who deserves goods more and who less?

Ede: In the change of the regime many people got rich without working. Many people became losers, which was not their fault, and many people don't have a choice. People didn't used to be that rich and that poor as they are today, although social differences have always existed. **In financial terms there are now big differences, which hurts one's sense of justice.**

Ede finds social differences unjust per se – an idea very far from the caste-like society with reference to which the older Bernáts oriented themselves. At the same time this

egalitarian idea, just like socialist ideology itself, is combined with a strong conviction that hard work and skills form the basis of entitlement to goods.

This egalitarianism is also connected to the ‘ascetic’ side of socialist intellectual ascetism in the form of contentment and self-imposed limits to spending based on principle rather than financial constraints:

Ede: The flat is small, but I wouldn't need a luxury house anyway. For two people, 1.5 rooms are enough. I don't even really long to have a big luxury house; I don't find it necessary.

The relation of the expensive *koloniál* furniture to social position in this context is ambiguous, as shown in the following quote:

Zsuzsa: When I was a university student, **I worked already from the age of 16 every summer**. So, the point is that I earned very well, I worked 14–16 hours a day and didn't take holidays. Others worked three days, then took three days off but I thought that I could survive a month with my husband without holidays. The others were happy, because they could go to visit the family; on the other hand, we had much more money. So we had much more money at that time for furniture and we planned and chose it together. Then the *koloniál* style was cool and we chose *koloniál* furniture and we wanted paintings and *majolinka* vases and all that. So I bought many times in the pawn shops in the 1970s and we frequented the pawn shops all the time; we always visited all of them, to see if we liked something. The aim was always to buy something.

Léna: The way you furnished the flat, did it count as special?

Zs: Yes. The kitchen-living¹¹ room [where we were living] was shabby and the house itself, **but when we wanted to sell it and they [potential buyers] came in and saw the room, usually they remarked "wow!", because at that time it was cool, this oak *koloniál* furniture. And obviously, these buyers didn't expect to see it there.** Especially in those times.

The status of the furniture is hinted at by the fact that the visitors are surprised: one does not expect to see *koloniál* furniture in a poor, kitchen-living room environment, but rather in a bigger, richer home. Acquiring ‘cool’ pieces, as opposed to mass-produced, modern items manufactured in socialist factories, as Zsuzsa recalls, required money, extensive searching as well as taste and sophistication. She cannot ignore the fact that *koloniál* furniture was special and expensive, and could only be bought by a few people, which contradicts their usual account that avoids the distinction between groups. In this sense, then, *koloniál* furniture represents continuity in terms of its relation to status with pre-socialist times.

¹¹ Flat consisting of one room and a kitchen.

What is important, however, is that there was a radical change in what status and hierarchy meant during socialism. The system was built on the idea of a classless society and set out to eradicate inequalities based on capital ownership. Zsuzsa and Ede achieved their aims by playing according to the rules of the socialist system in the first economy, which rewarded hard work and gradual advances in the occupational hierarchy. While the older Bernáts see the basis of entitlement in one's rank, Ede and Zsuzsa do not share this view, probably do not even know about the caste-like hierarchy in which this material culture originally developed.

It is in this context of the socialist ideology that Zsuzsa's long explanation of how she worked hard to be able to buy *koloniál* furniture can be made sense of. *Koloniál* furniture is only a legitimate purchase *because Zsuzsa and Ede worked harder than others*; therefore they earned the right and deserved to have the best furniture available. In this way *koloniál* furniture is associated with 'higher' lifestyle, and in fact the very idea of having a 'higher' lifestyle becomes possible and legitimate – and deserved by people who are the most hard-working and ambitious in *socialist* terms.

Longevity and the economy of shortage

To fully understand why certain practices are seen as more approvable than others, we have to look at not only the ethical visions but also the practical wisdom participants simultaneously draw on (Image 5). Like most participants, the Bernáts' central practical wisdom relates to the economy of shortage in two respects. First, they recall that they acquired their furniture gradually, waiting years for matching pieces. In this context, the principle of longevity is a viable and necessary strategy to accomplish furnishing projects for a home of perfect aesthetic harmony – which often extended over 20–30 years.

Second, the Bernáts recall that there was little furniture and home decoration available during socialism. As also confirmed by other studies (S. Nagy 1987 ; Hammer and Dessewffy 1997; Gecser and Kitzinger 2002), the only options beside the 'modern', uniform, mass-produced furniture were items in pawn shops, exhibition pieces from the annual trade expos and made-to-order items from craftsmen. In most accounts by the second generation, supply was completely knowable; people knew what could be bought, where, at what price.

The shortage of furniture guaranteed that objects maintained their value over time. These characteristics allowed the Bernáts to perceive a similar uniformity and stability of value during socialism that formed the basis of the long-term, ‘objective aesthetics’ discussed in the previous chapter. Here, however, the consensus over beauty is based on an economy of shortage (and therefore it breaks down, as we shall see later in other cases, as soon as others styles become available).

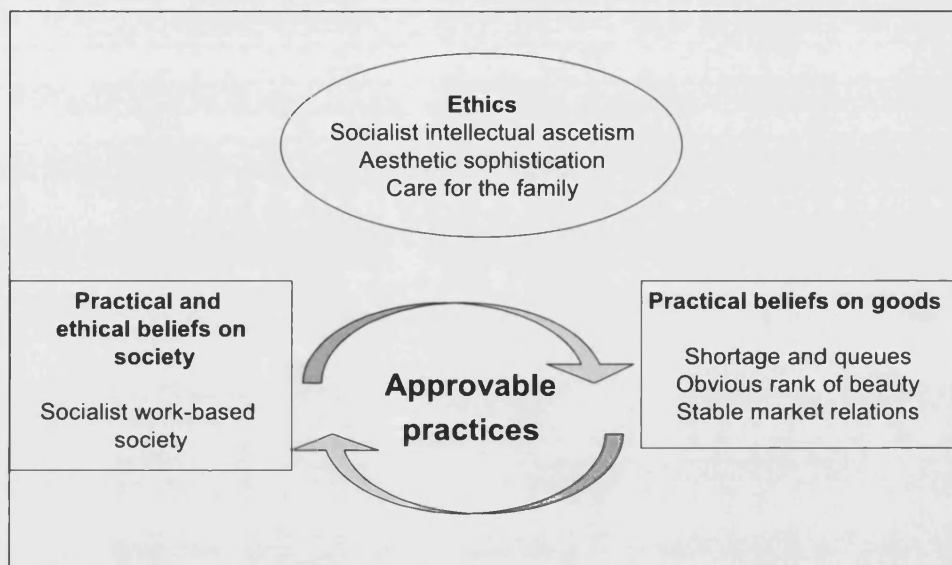


Image 5. Overview of the cosmology of the second generation of the Bernát family

Summary

The Bernáts’ ideas of approvable practices drew on a cosmology involving new ethical and practical beliefs. The analysis identified a new, in many respects socialist, ethic that involves an egalitarian view of society, work-based entitlement, and a focus on domestic harmony and on what I called a socialist intellectual ascetism. The ethical stance of socialist intellectual ascetism involves a ‘cultured’ way of living as an ideal of life, and an emphasis on cultural sophistication, rationality and modesty. It also entails a new idea of what it means to be a proper woman that is more egalitarian, yet also less ‘feminine’. This ethics can be linked to socialism by its correspondence to the socialist ideals apparent in public discourse; yet the Bernáts do not endorse these ideals as a

conscious political choice, but as general ethical stance that they believe should be pursued by everyone who has the right value system.

The practical beliefs in their cosmology appropriated elements of the socialist economy of shortage, involving long waiting times for particular items, predictability and stability of value and styles, which resulted in a view similar to the objective value regime observed in the previous generation.

This cosmology is objectified in practices that incorporate elements of the older Bernáts material culture in reinterpreted, appropriated ways that cannot be described by a simple dichotomy of continuity vs. change. The pre-war principles of longevity were founded on the ethical idea of accumulating family heirlooms and living up to the 'gentlemen's position'; in the light of practical beliefs in the stability of value based on a stability of social hierarchy as well as the enduring and clear-cut relationship between goods with particular ranks. In contrast, the same material culture for Zsuzsa and Ede objectifies a subjective sense of aesthetic sophistication, a 'cultured way of living' and domestic harmony that is embedded in a socialist ascetic outlook and practical considerations of the shortage economy. Furthermore, although the furniture did maintain its link with social position, the hierarchy in terms of which these positions are made sense of completely changed; its 'high status' could only be preserved by being reinterpreted as something legitimately deserved by hard work. These findings suggest that the new cosmologies can be objectified in practices that originally involved very different ideals, and that change takes place through a gradual process of re-appropriation of material culture practices.

The socialist upper class: Ilona and János Kovács

Ilona (born 1947) and János (born 1940) followed a similar career route to the Bernáts. They went to university and gradually moved up the hierarchy in state-owned companies. János made a successful career and after the change became the CEO of the company he managed during socialism. Ilona interrupted her career to take care of her disabled son. The Kovács were members of the Communist Party, yet they do not attribute much significance to this membership; they see it as something that was natural at the time. Today they consistently vote for the socialists.

The Kovács belong to the elite from the financial, educational and occupational point of view. After moving to bigger and better flats four times, today they live in a six-bedroom villa with a huge garden in Rosehill, the most prestigious area of Budapest. The house is furnished mainly with the simple furniture they bought together during socialism and with some of the decorative items, including the famous crystal liquor set bought by Ágota from her first wage. The villa is built in a simple but old-fashioned style, with columns and round balconies, which is in contrast with the modest furniture and down to earth décor inside. Many of the couple's consumption choices are unassuming compared with their financial situation: Ilona dresses in clothes bought from inexpensive shops; János drives a Volvo and Ilona an Opel; and they only eat out in simple, mid-category restaurants.

What I consider to be at the centre of their ethics and practices is the tension between their largely socialist self-understanding and their actual family history and life story. The essence of the problem is that the standard, legitimate socialist narrative starts from poor origin, achievement through hard work and a modest standard of living, which contrasts with their actual life of starting from a wealthy background and ending up extremely rich. I think looking at their accounts through this lens of negotiating the contradiction between what they see as a legitimate narrative and actual life gives the right clue to understand their cosmology and practices. Ilona and János deal with the situation in characteristically different ways, hence I analyse them separately to show the different sources they draw on.

Ilona, the dedicated housewife

Even though today the Kovács have much more money than they actually spend, Ilona carries on budgeting, bargaining in the market and keeping rigorous track of expenses ('I have always done it very rationally and I was always able to save. I pay a lot of attention [to budgeting] even now because money doesn't grow on trees'). The exceptions to this strict budgeting are goods she buys for her family and, to a lesser extent, expenses related to 'culture'. Here I will show the way these distinctions are embedded in Ilona's cosmology of self-understanding, ethical ideas, views on entitlement and practical wisdom.

Achieving something from zero

Ilona's narrative centres on having achieved a harmonious family life – including its material basis – 'from zero', under her own force through hard work and thrifty, even self-sacrificing, budgeting. In this narrative the poverty of the 1950s is not seen as a mere unfortunate circumstance, but as an educational environment that contributed to the development of her values:

Ilona: I was born after the war. **All the hardship is there in me, in my subconscious...** not my subconscious, rather on its surface... no, somewhere between. So, I remember that we could only heat one room, and that kind of thing. And that the butter and the marmalade sandwich was the absolute best, the butter and mustard sandwich not so good. There was no ham... these were the 1950s. (...) For us it was very natural, and in fact I think that for my entire generation, that if life is like that that we have to tighten the purse-strings we will not get depressed. As far I am concerned I won't. **We have learned well how to live on pennies. And to get somewhere from there.**

It is through experiencing hardship that Ilona learnt some of her most important insights about life. These insights taught her the ability to give up material desires and make sacrifices, which is seen as the basis of achieving valuable goals in life ('to get somewhere from there').

It is important to point out, however, that the poverty of the 1950s was the common experience of this generation, yet it did not 'produce' a thrifty down-to-earth ethics in everyone. What I am reconstructing here is how Ilona makes sense of her acts and defines herself through the process, not an inevitable causal relationship. In reality, of all the participants, Ilona grew up in the best financial circumstances. In the 1950s her family was poor, just like everyone else; however, from the 1960s onwards her parents' hairdressing salon was very profitable. Her mother bought clothes for Ilona already as a child in the most expensive Luxus department store, which is mostly mentioned by other participants of her age as a never achievable dream. This contradiction comes out in a joint interview with her mother, Ágota, who remembers their life together in a very different way:

Ilona: When I lived at home, it was a completely different world, **because the possibilities were limited.** And at that time I couldn't have started stamping that I wanted new trousers, because I knew that we have to pay taxes and so on. And mother knew that I would like new trousers, I knew that I would like them, and later, in two or three weeks, mother told me, "Here is the money, buy the trousers." **So that time there were only these small things. So it was a different world. So I wouldn't start stamping, saying that I wanted shoes**

from the Luxus department store, because I knew that even if they were great and nice, I wouldn't get them.

Ágota: **We bought things from the Luxus as well...**

I: Of course mum, don't misunderstand me. Only that at that time it didn't work like that.

A: Those times there was the formal dress, which was for the theatre, or if you went out in company. Maybe it was good, maybe it was stupid, but it didn't always depend on money. This was a custom everywhere, that you had a formal dress, formal shoes, formal coat, hat.

I: At that time all the clothes of the family fitted into one wardrobe. Because it was like that, you see? Because why the hell would you have three dresses for the theatre when one is more than enough?

Ágota and Ilona tell two completely different stories: Ilona's is about scarcity and modesty, Ágota's is about the importance of having elegant clothes acquired from the Luxus store. In this light, the idea that objective circumstances *determined* Ilona's current ethics is all the more questionable. It appears to be a 'reflexive narrative of the self' (Giddens 1991), which selectively draws on different experiences in a way that forms a meaningful story with a moral end. This narrative draws selectively on events in the light of Ilona's current ethics and self-understanding, highlighting decisive events more, others – for example, shameful ones – less.

This narrative of starting from zero and achieving everything through hard work – which is very similar to the Bernáts' narrative – corresponds to the official legitimate socialist life story of achieving everything under one's own power, solely through hard work as opposed to the pre-socialist hierarchy based on inherited privileges. The crucial point is that Ilona does not adopt this narrative *in order to* construct a legitimate story: she understands who she is through this narrative and builds her cosmology around it.

The central element of this cosmology is the emphasis on modesty, which is seen as an ethical value in itself, and as characteristic of someone who achieved everything under their own force. Ilona makes the link explicit in the following comment on the Sándor case¹² suggesting that the way money was earned determines the way it is spent:

Léna: Do you think you could be friends?

Ilona: No. If somebody tears about in Váci street and is the sort of person who can buy something there all of a sudden, he is not my friend. Not because of the 1.5 million Ft,¹³ **but because... his personality, his identity, his view of life, everything would be very**

¹²As mentioned in Chapter 3, participants were asked to comment on particular cases. The Sándor case goes as follows: 'One day Sándor was walking in Váci street and saw a golden watch that he liked in a shop window. He went in, tried it on and bought it. The watch cost 1.5 million Forints.' (Váci street is the major, posh shopping street of Budapest.)

¹³ Forint (Ft) is the Hungarian currency. £1 equals 360 Ft; 1 penny is approximately 6 Ft.

alien to me. This Sándor is a typical nouveau riche guy, new car, Armani suit, you know, **so that everybody can see what he has.** I could not have anything to do with him.

L: In what way would you be different?

I: In everything. In everything. **My dear if someone gets somewhere under his own power, he is not like that. I hate such things, because if somebody tears about in Váci street with 1.5 million Fts instead of working somewhere and... [instead of] having aims, he must either steal or cheat, or live on daddy's money, who either steals or cheats, because this [wealth] is not attainable through honest work.**

The quote makes it clear that modesty is not simply a preference for Ilona, but an ethical stance: excessive practices objectify a condemnable way of life, values and identity. Furthermore, she suggests that if Sándor had achieved his money in a legitimate way, that is, under *his own power*, he would spend it differently; implying that the legitimacy of the way Sándor *earned* money is directly related to the appropriateness of how he *spends* it. According to Ilona, a decent, hard-working ethics can only be objectified in considerate and modest choices. At the same time she implies that she shares the view put forward by the Bernáts, according to which only hard work and gradual achievement makes somebody entitled to consume. These ideas link the socialist narrative and career route directly to entitlement and ethics objectified through consumption.

It is important to see that it is not simply that Ilona adopts or believes clichés of the socialist public discourse; socialism also created the institutional circumstances under which many people could actually experience that their hard work and budgeting leads to gradual advancement. For Ilona, then, it is not only an external discourse, but her own life, the way she defined her aims and achieved them, which is the foundation of her self-respect. This way the socialist asceticism promoted by socialist public discourse is understood and adopted through her own self-understanding and ethics.

The problem, however, is that in the socialist repertoire there is no legitimate framing for a story in which a bourgeois became a successful comrade and there are no guidelines for what practices are appropriate in financial abundance without breaking with the ascetic ethic and being expelled to a nouveau riche outcast position. In this context thrift is not an instrumental strategy, but understood as remaining the same and true to her ethics: she does not spend beyond a certain limit as this behaviour would be alien to her modest outlook and would put her entitlement into question:

Ilona: I like to pick and choose at the market. I like to bargain, go around six times. Where is the nicest produce, where is the cheapest, the best value...? Not because it would destroy me if I bought something for 5 Fts more, just that it feels better. **It feels better too,** if I buy six

bunches of spring onions and the seller says that they cost 100 Ft, and I say 'I'm buying six bunches, sell them for 90!', and she says okay. It's not the 6 Ft that makes me happy, only that I have made a good deal, you see?

In these practices thrift is more about objectifying modesty and being down-to-earth than the actual savings which it allows. A similar experience of thrift is captured by Miller (1999) in *A Theory of shopping*: 'The pride in thrift is rarely merely an instrumental measurement of savings. It is also about the reticence towards expenditure in general with connotations of restraint, sobriety and respectability' (1999: 56). In Miller's view, shopping is often motivated by the aim of experiencing oneself as a modest, sober, respectable person through the practice of thrift: 'It is just as reasonable to see thrift as the end in itself, that is, people are going shopping in order to have the experience of saving money' (1999: 61). In the case of Ilona, bargaining for pennies with the old lady is certainly not about the financial difference those pennies make. What makes bargaining important is to re-enforce Ilona's view of herself as a practical woman who could remain the same person despite her new situation and whose achievements are well deserved and legitimate.

Thrift, however, is only partially explained by being connected to entitlement and remaining the same person; what is more important is the aim in the name of all the hardship and sacrifice was carried out: the family's happiness.

Thrift and the family

Within the general stance of being modest and thrifty, Ilona distinguishes two fields that draw on the ethical ideal of being a good mother and wife: legitimate purchases directed at her family and condemnable purchases directed at herself. The major element of the 'legitimate' field is food that she buys and prepares every day. The central role of food is apparent in the family's material surroundings as well. There is an internal elevator between the garage and the kitchen, especially designed to lift Ilona's baskets when she comes home from the market (she goes every day, except the weekends). In addition, there are four big fridges at different points of the house, all full, each with its own history ('This is from our flat in the housing block...' etc.):¹⁴

¹⁴ Shevchenko (2002) describes a similar phenomenon in Russia.

Léna: And why do you like it [shopping] in the market?

I: Because it's different! It has atmosphere, I buy things there **that make sense**, things that at home I can [prepare], being creative, I love cooking! So, that I like very much.

In this field of 'sensible purchases', Ilona never trades off quality for price, as she would think that was budgeting on her family. What she does instead is try to get the best quality at a lower price by bargaining and getting the best offer. This preoccupation relates to another part of Miller's (1999) argument according to which shopping is 'the primary means by which relationships of love and care are constituted by practice' (Miller 1999:18). Ilona's major mission in life is working for the happiness of her family, being a good mother, which is objectified on a daily basis in caring about them, mainly through cooking for them.

It is important to emphasize that what Ilona talks about is not 'expressing' a well-defined, abstract idea. In fact, throughout the interview she never mentioned that she wanted to be a *good mother* – it is a term I am using to describe her. For her, what I call the 'good mother identity' primarily exists in practical responsibilities, actual practices of care. Identity, ethics and practices here again are profoundly interwoven through *practical ethics*.

The ethics of being a good mother informs the normative distinction between self and other-directed purchases, which in Miller's account appears through the distinction between the field of thrift and treat. Thrift is the normative ethos of shopping while treat is an extravagance directed towards a specific family member, or it is a 'hedonistic act of materialistic self-indulgence' (1999: 48). In Ilona's case, however, self-directed purchases belong to the field of selfish, condemnable activities hence do not come into consideration as a treat:

Léna: Could you give more examples of goods other people spend on, but you wouldn't?

Ilona: For example, I wouldn't spend money, because it would **irritate me**, on going five times a week for massage, cosmetics and pedicure, manicure, bath, underwater gymnastics, all that... well, not that I have time for it! But if, let's say, I had a lot of time, it would still irritate me to death, that I am always **occupied only with myself**. When I go for acupuncture and medical massage it's **absolutely for my health**, because I can't move otherwise, I go once a week... but it's already too often for me. And you know these kinds of things, the half days spent in a beauty salon five times a week... well, I would never spend money on that! Not because I am untidy, because I will go now to the cosmetician and for a manicure, because I must go, but these things belong to **bodily hygiene**. But I would certainly never perform these things every day.

What Ilona denounces is spending time and money on things that involve being occupied with only herself. In her ethics there is no place for self-indulgence: she

cannot see shopping directed at herself as legitimate, as a 'treat', and the only exceptions she allows are posited as basic necessities: health and 'bodily hygiene' (classifying tidiness as belonging to the latter).

'I am not a typical woman'

The two central ethical concerns of caring for the family and socialist asceticism that underlie Ilona's practices, as the previous quote partly showed, are tied into a particular understanding of what it means to Ilona to be a proper woman. These concerns can be observed in other fields as well; a typical example is her restraint in clothing:

Ilona: Of course, everything changed when I moved away from home, because then we become self-supporting earners. And then we saved for a flat for years, and then we were very poor for years, because the children arrived, maternity benefit, and so on. And then, when we started working, well, then our income slowly started to go up. So in effect, it was a long time ago... well, yes... well... that... well... that there were things that I couldn't buy if I really wanted to. But the truth is that **it is ingrained into me that I should not buy clothes for the design alone**. And only because, you know – I don't even know these fashion dictators – only because it's an Armani – no, not Armani, it's for men... or does it exist for women? I have no idea. So, only because it's that, and it cost six times more than the one I see in another shop only without the label – well, that has never attracted me. I could buy it, but I don't. **It could not fit into my soul, into my ideas**, that, oh my goodness, why have I done such a silly thing? No. So these things have never attracted me, as they do many 20–30 year olds of today.

L: What do you mean?

I: This! This snobbish way of dressing. They don't buy any kind of shirt, only those that have the name of some designer I have never heard of, and ties, and wallets only if it's a – I don't know the names. One must be pretty, fashionable according to one's age, tidy.

Ilona explained that she 'gets sick' if she has to buy clothes and considers shopping for or wearing expensive clothes as contrary to her ethics; she cannot buy or wear expensive clothes as that would contradict her principles of unpretentiousness, and the very act of purchasing them is seen as a sinful, self-directed activity. Just like Zsuzsa, Ilona does not consider herself a 'typical woman', which she explains by the fact that she does not enjoy spending money on clothes and make-up, or dressing up in a feminine way.

This approach is usually commented on by her mother Ágota with astonishment:

Ágota: Look, Ilona lives very, very objectively. And Ilona has always made two Forints out of one, really. She doesn't spend even now, although she could afford to. A couple of years ago, they went to the countryside, and there was a big shopping centre. And they come home, and I asked: "What did you buy?" And she goes: "Oh, mom, **János is insane; imagine what he**

has bought for me! A mink fur coat!" I said: **"So be happy about it!"** "But what can I do with it?" **I am telling you, it's true!**

Ágota does not understand why Ilona is not happy with the new coat: it is elegant, a long-term investment, so she tells the story as an instance of Ilona's funny peculiarities. For her, the fact that Ilona is rich yet refuses to dress elegantly is a contradiction that does not make sense. However, it does make sense from Ilona's point of view: being rich is only legitimate as long as one remains humble, and her ethical condemnation of self-directed expenditure.

Socialist intellectual ascetism, home decoration and the nouveaux riches

Another field where Ilona is more generous is spending money on high cultural activities. Yet her socialist intellectual ascetism is always subordinated to her care for the family; although she frequently goes to classical music concerts, she told me that these visits are restricted by her worries of leaving her disabled son at home.

Interestingly, in contrast to the Bernáts, home decoration does not constitute a field of cultural sophistication for Ilona; in this area she displays the same concerns of modesty and putting her family first as in others. This is why furnishing the flat was seen as a task to be accomplished, and once it was 'ready' she stopped buying new furniture. In her home, old furniture from her mother and pieces bought during socialism are placed alongside the newer, but similarly demure pieces that she chose when the family moved into their new house:

Ilona: I find it superfluous that... for example some people move house a lot and every time they do, they never take a single piece of furniture from the old home to the new home, they always buy new items. This applies to everything. He throws away half of the books, because he doesn't need them, he buys new ones; the glasses are not needed, he buys new ones... **Me, the opposite, I cling to (I am attached to) everything. I cling to the glass my grandmother drunk from.** I cling to the damask tablecloth that used to belong to my great-grandmother. Imagine, mum told me that it used to be her great-grandmother's! So you can imagine, for me it's great-great-great. And it's there, it's beautiful. And I cling to the embroidery my grandmother made, and in general, to everything. So, I find it an absolutely **primitive nouveau riche thing that all the time they replace everything, so that everything is trendy**, and than they throw things away... I don't throw away anything. No. I don't like it. This (replacing the furniture), I find an excessive, snobbish, idiotically stupid thing.

Decorations and furnishings objectify Ilona's love for her ancestors on the one hand, and show her modesty on the other. This means that, unlike her mother, Ilona does not see these objects as related to status, let alone as financial investments; they give her nostalgic memories. In her cosmology, updating the flat would be unacceptable *nouveau riche* behaviour, lacking modesty and tradition. Ironically, her principles of preserving objects only make sense if there is anything worth preserving – having ancestors who could afford the damask tablecloths. In this sense, Ilona is critical of the *nouveaux riches* on ethical grounds for something that stems *practically* from them not being rich before. The paradox of her view is that her behaviour is allowed for by her higher pre-socialist class background, yet it is understood in the framework of a socialist ideal of modesty and contentment.

Summary

Ilona's case provided a different insight to understanding change and the development of what can be seen as a socialist ethic. Ilona's practices objectify an ethics of modesty and self-achievement, but also her prime concern of care for her family. Ilona's socialist ascetism is embedded in these concerns as an ethics of sacrifice and self-denial in the name of a higher aim of looking after her family and remaining the same person despite changing circumstances. Furthermore, her modesty is connected to work-based entitlement by suggesting that the legitimate way of earning money – gradual accumulation through hard work – can only be objectified in a restrained way of spending.

I have argued that there is a contradiction between the legitimate narrative of a socialist life progressing from a poor background to moderately wealthy circumstances deserved by hard work and the actual life of Ilona, whose middle-class background led to upper-class wealth through a socialist career route. In this light, maintaining practices objectifying modesty and socialist ascetism are part of an attempt to remain the same person despite changing circumstances, and can be partly seen as an attempt to solve this ambiguity.

János: CEO from the natural countryside

Ilona's husband, János, was born in a wealthy farmer family in the countryside and today works as CEO of an agricultural company. Similarly to Ilona, for János the family is of utmost priority, however, unlike her, he considers buying expensive, quality goods as the right thing to do, in particular those that relate to the house. This difference in outlook is a source of frequent clashes between them. Ilona accuses János of being snob and materialistic, while he mocks Ilona for her lack of high quality standards. Here I look at the cosmology these practices draw on, and the way the socialist outlook is incorporated into a very different ethics.

Expertise and being 'natural'

Despite having lived most of his life in Budapest, János's narrative centres on his origins, and even today he considers himself a 'country boy'. For him the countryside represents an ethical idea of the right way of living and certain values: he associates it with a simple, 'natural' life, where money is secondary and human relationships and hard work are at the centre of life.

A central aspect of the 'natural' countryside ethics is the value put on expertise, which more than being an expert, involves a larger ethical vision of being in contact with 'real life' and a sense of mastery over one's surroundings. This ethical vision informs his preoccupation and pride with practical skills and hands-on activities in consumption – in the form of DIY – and in his work. János is content that he not only leads an agricultural company but also completely masters the everyday details of production and is able to discuss daily, practical matters with agricultural workers.

At home, János prides himself on being able to fix everything around the house, which was constructed under his supervision with some parts built personally by him. He regularly buys the best quality tools and machines available in DIY stores. The garden is absolutely his territory, and he keeps it very tidy and beautiful. This is quite unusual in the area where he lives: it is the poshest in Budapest (and his house – with a lot of land – is probably one of the most expensive in the neighbourhood) and most gardens are maintained by gardeners. He often trims not only his bushes, but also the

ones outside his house on the street, wearing shabby gardening outfits; once a neighbour mistook him for a gardener and asked János how much he would ask for mowing his lawn.

For János these practices are important because the natural ethic of his parents is objectified to a large extent *in doing the same practical activities* his parents undertook. We have to keep in mind, however, that his parents *really* lived in the countryside, and *really had to* build their own house. In János's case it was not necessary to do this, as he has a well-paid job, and could perfectly afford to hire craftsmen. For him the continuity of these practices are important beyond their functional, practical purpose. They objectify a loyalty to his roots and to an ethical outlook centred on an ideal of a good life inspired by the countryside.

The other important aspect of the 'natural ethics' that his emphasis on DIY draws on is its connection to an ideal of masculinity based on the mastery over the material world:

János: In fact, I feel in my soul that I am the same (as my parents). Well, let's say in spending I have a rather free spending attitude, but it doesn't mean that I have no restraints. In fact I spend little on pleasure goods. I am also like them in that I buy everything that I need. So I am pleased if I can add to the flat, or to the garden, or to the workshop and I always have good quality things [tools]. My father, too, he always wanted his tools, **his things to be very *rendben* (tidy, being in order)** you know? And I think, **I inherited from him that everything has to be very much *rendben* around me. So it's never ever possible with me that something doesn't work. It only happens for half an hour, or an hour, or three days, but than I am so nervous that something doesn't work, or is not good, that I would take a craftsman even from the moon, only that it's *rendben*, you see?** And then I don't begrudge spending no matter what amount of money for getting it *rendben*.

L: And what have you changed? For example, when bringing up your children?

J: In fact I haven't changed, **I have rather softened**. In fact, my standard of life is higher, and accordingly **have I softened and become less tough**, but this is because my financial situation is better than it used to be let's say in 1950 or 52, when I was a child.

The practical mastery of tools is associated with 'natural values' and the ability to keep things *rendben*. *Rendben* means tidy, literally to 'be in order' – to be neatly arranged, to be in a controlled state, to be correct, to be alright in general and also orderly. It is difficult to formulate this urge to fix everything around the house and master the practical details in conventional, abstract ethical terms, without becoming too psychoanalytical. The point is that this urge constitutes a very embodied and objectified, practical ethics. What makes it ethical is that it has the same compelling power and that it stands as an unquestionable standard in János's everyday life.

Furthermore, the quote above hints at a concern that János expressed throughout the interview: the ambiguity of making sense and adapting to his financial success. This financial success created a situation in which he can and does afford more; yet he considers his increased standard of living as something that made him less tough, less manly, than his father was. This suggests that the same conflict Ilona experienced, for János is partly framed as a problem of masculinity.

In this context, János's emphasis on natural values and practices that objectify them is a means of solving this ambiguity. These practices keep him 'the man of the house' through his mastery of practical jobs, which at the same time objectify a relationship in which he is the caring father who is able to provide and maintain a perfect home for his family. He likes to think that he has not changed his pattern of consumption, but spends more on the *same* goods: he buys the best tools he needs, the best quality wine and the clothes that he finds comfortable without paying much attention to their price. In the interview I summed up my interpretation of his habits as 'a simple way of living at luxury level' with which he completely agreed.

'Creating value': restraint and expertise

Practical activities need to be of high quality and contribute to the creation of long-lasting goods for János to value them. These considerations draw on the third aspect of his natural outlook, which János summarizes as the principle of 'creating value':

János: Value has to be created, values should be bought; valuable things should be bought, even if they are more expensive, but always items that are long-lasting. So if one creates something, one creates it **in order to have long-lasting things**.

The idea of creating value in the form of long-lasting goods is similar to the concern with longevity observed in the Bernáts case. Unlike the Bernáts, however, where it was linked to aesthetics, for János longevity is part of the 'natural' ethic of the countryside and relates to a complex principle that draws on the ideal of expertise – which involves high quality workmanship and high quality materials expertly chosen – self-restraint and specific ways of living that are seen as valuable. Here I address these ethical visions in turn.

First, 'creating value' involves expertise, which is one of the most important ethical ideas that János pursues and on which he prides himself. In this sense it is related to a certain perfectionism: he is proud of the expertise manifested in the quality of the goods he buys or uses; 'value-creation' in this sense refers to a high standard of mastery of skills and knowledge.

Second, creating value involves the ability to exercise self-restraint:

Lena: What is that outlook in fact?

János: Well, that one must always be thrifty, one must always save up; **so that one mustn't waste money, mustn't spend it foolishly, and always value has to be created.**

Contrary to Ilona's cosmology where thrift was seen as the prime objectification of restraint, for János, the dialectic of restraint and value-creation is what makes this view entirely different from reckless and limitless expenditure on expensive goods.

This version of restraint constitutes a particular reinterpretation and incorporation of the socialist ascetic ethics through a narrative that is very different from the one constructed by Ilona and from official socialist narratives in general. Unlike Ilona, who reinvented her origins as poor, János suggests that his wealthy background allowed him to retain the same degree of modesty throughout his life:

János: So, **aristocratic allures** are characteristic of children who are of awfully poor origin. I am not... I am from a well-off family; I am from a wealthy background. **This is why I can remain natural under the given consumption circumstances.** But it's very dangerous, if someone comes from far away, you know, who didn't have 50 *Fillér*,¹⁵ nor did his family. So this [acquaintance of us] was from a broken family, and somehow he managed to get rich and then it was terrible! So he wanted the entire world. **He wants to loot, gobble up everything...** he sees everything **enviously**, although he doesn't know what to do with himself he has so much money. This happened in front of our eyes, over a period of 20 years. **A lovely boy turned into a man of completely corrupted soul and outlook.**

János believes in the socialist virtues of modesty, refusing 'aristocratic allures' and resisting the corrupting forces of money not as a socialist outlook, but as part of the 'natural outlook'. Contrary to the socialist ideology, which saw these virtues as embedded in a socialist narrative starting from a poor background and achievement through hard work, János suggests that a wealthy origin provides a better basis to engage in the – characteristically socialist – ethics of staying sober and down to earth. This way, interestingly, János arrives at the very socialist virtue of restraint through a

¹⁵ Old Hungarian currency. 1 Forint = 100 Fillér.

narrative that is the complete opposite of the official discourse. For him, then, the same concern of remaining modest despite the changing circumstances observed in Ilona is embedded in a completely different self-understanding and narrative.

The other way in which János's view is similar to the socialist one is that he believes his self-restraint and expertise are virtues that distinguish him from both the pre-socialist and capitalist nouveau riche elite:

Léna: And what kind of consumption habits do you disagree with?

János: Well, in fact, the kinds of things that are trendy now, for example, hunting today. Not hunting as such, because **there are professional hunters**, people who work in the hunting branch, take care of the wild stock and nurture it, weed it out by shooting and other methods. **I mean occasional hunters... those dressed up... they are typically as they used to be in the old aristocratic world; when the monkey (vain) count came, he could hardly speak he was so stupid, but still he was the count and he was dressed up in pomp and came on a pompous horse-carrier.** So these young flops today are the same. That is why they keep shooting each other, because they **don't even know what hunting is.**

Expertise – which is a central element of János's self-esteem and one of the ethical values connected to the natural outlook that defines his everyday activities – is not labelled as socialist, yet through it a critique of the pre-socialist aristocratic rank and the capitalist money-based hierarchy is articulated. In his interpretation, implicitly, the socialist work-based view of entitlement is understood as expertise-based entitlement, which allows him to incorporate elements of the socialist public discourse through his own ethics and self-understanding, without consciously embracing socialist ethics.

János, similarly to Ilona, through this connection is able to establish a link between the way money is earned and the way it is spent: if you were a real hunter (an expert) you would not want pomp. This way, the refusal of 'pomp' can be seen as the objectification of ethics of expertise and restraint and a particular view on entitlement.

Family and creating value

The third meaning of 'value-creation' is a more general one that in some sense underlies and dominates all other concerns: it is used by János to mean efforts directed at valuable aims. For János these aims are those that centre on his family and close circle of friends:

János: I don't consider it to be a **value creating activity**, these deep sea diving kinds of excursions that cost 1.5 million Ft, and the Safari parks in Africa, for 3 million Ft for two people. I turn on the National Geographic channel and can see the same landscape there. So, for me,

these are not attractive. One can go away, and all that, but I don't like this pomp. So, I consider this an unnecessary thing... so all this... **it is not necessary to travel the world in order to feel good, for one's well-being, nor to feel like a human being.** I have the best time at home. I would gladly go anywhere; I just don't like this showing off. I **prefer a little family circle, one or two real friends, going somewhere together,** but for a short time, I don't like being away long.

János's idea of consumption as creating value is broader than the sheer distinction between tangible, long-lasting and non-tangible goods. The principle is rather a symbolic one: taking a holiday with a small circle of real friends or the family with the aim of being together is legitimate; he cannot imagine other legitimate aims, hence classifies the desire to travel as showing off. This concern is the most fundamental for him; the very definition of being a proper human being is understood as having deep human relationships with his real friends and his family.

It is this concern for the family that constitutes the taken-for-granted ultimate legitimate endpoint of his activities. When his wife, Ilona, reproached him for his expensive 'DIY hobby' – as she sees it – his defence made it clear that his practices are understood primarily not as an individual purchase, but for the family:

Ilona: He discovers the shops! Because he loves strolling, he loves looking around! I am purposeful in everything I do. He loves to stroll around slowly, looking around, me no...

Léna: What does he buy?

János: I buy machines! I buy them as soon as I see them!

I: You can't name a machine that we don't have... He loves DIY! He buys drills, grinding machines...

J: **But I don't spend money on myself!** That has never happened...

I: (jokingly): He buys them for me!

J: No. I mean that I don't spend money on women, cards, pubs, things for my own amusement... no, I don't waste money on that.

In this light, the aspects of natural outlook, expertise, value-creation and mastery can be best understood as forming part of János's larger concern with care for the family. More specifically, they are aspects through which he understands himself as a caring father, head of the family. This means that the same higher ethical concern is objectified differently in particular practices pertaining to different self-understandings and visions of what will be best for the family.

Without this overarching concern, all practices, no matter how expertly executed and how well they conform to the principle of creating value, are seen as unjustified waste:

János: **Well, for us [we are modest], apart from the house, which is an ultimate luxury, because – it occurred like that – we had the chance to make it, well, with a little... miscalculation... and not miscalculation, because we worried a lot about it, because at that time we thought that Tibor (my son) would need it as well, because he must live somewhere. Well, at that time we didn't imagine that it would be possible to buy a flat, and that he would work and earn, and you know. It used to be different in those times. My parents were alive, Ilona's as well, and at that time we always thought that we might need to move them to live with us, and so on. So if you have a chance to do something [build a house], you build one that is [big enough for that]. And eventually it was not needed. Because my mother was here only for a couple of months during a period of two or three years, because she preferred to live at my brother in Pécs. My mother-in-law is in a separate flat, Tibor moved away, so in fact the house remained big; it's too much for the three of us. But it doesn't mean [that we are posh]. This is the only thing; there is nothing apart from the house that is extravagant.**

János's arguments show very clearly that the distinction between waste and sensible spending crucially depends on *why* something is bought, the ideas, the way of life that is imagined to be lived with – in this case, the object. The couple's whole idea of the future and relationships are materialized in the family house: three generation living together, taking care of each other. This idea was a feasible and likely image of the future in the light of the practical beliefs of the time when the house was conceived: flats were difficult to acquire, and many households consisted of extended families. However, without the idea being realized, the house now is seen as oversized and unjustified – even though it is the highest quality expert work.

Summary

János's ideas of approvable consumption draw primarily on the ethical imperative of care for the family and deep human relationships. For him, care takes the form of practices that are embedded in his self-understanding as a 'natural' country boy, which at the same time involves a connection with his parents and more generally with his 'roots'. This vision of 'natural outlook' involves ethics of expertise, mastery and self-restraint. Drawing on these ethical sources János engages what looks like from the outside a socialist ethic: remaining modest despite being wealthy and hard working. Yet he does not see his own practices as socialist, but as part of remaining true to his roots, his own ethics of being a caring father, being an expert and remaining ethically the same person despite changing circumstances.

Reinvented tradition and *polgári* values – Sára Rigó

Szilvia's daughter, Sára (born in 1957) grew up with her parents in a socialist housing estate. She did a diploma in textile technology and became a textile quality controller, which meant she had a stable lower-mid-category income without the career opportunities in the occupational hierarchy that the Bernáts and the Kovács had. She married a car mechanic, but divorced him after a couple of years, according to Szilvia because he refused to study or to get a baccalaureate. Today she lives with her university-educated second husband, Otto (born 1934). They are poorer than the Bernáts, but still belong to the middle class; both of them can afford a car and they go on holiday in Europe, but this is only thanks to careful budgeting, for example not going to restaurants. The Rigós vehemently criticize socialism, vote for the conservative party and interpret the past in a framework that is apparent in conservative public discourse.

Sára and Otto live in a two-bedroom flat in a suburb of three-storey blocks of houses. Their flat is furnished with cheap, modern, slightly outdated furniture. Yet they clearly make an effort for their furnishings to be aesthetically pleasing, manifested in the harmony of the different colours: the blue walls in the corridor match the blue curtains in the kitchen and are in harmony with the tone of the flowers of the sofa. The most remarkable feature of the flat is the abundant decoration, which makes it cosy at the same time as resembling a knick-knack shop. The cheap table in the kitchen is covered with an ornamented tablecloth; flowers, pots and little statues cover the windowsills; and paper angels hang from the lamp even though Christmas was a month ago. (I observed a very similar home decoration style at Klára Gárdos, a cosmetician of secondary education.) The walls are covered with photos of the Rigós' children and 'art photos' taken by their son on the trips he has made to exotic places.

The Rigós have many fewer books than the two previous families and hardly ever go to the theatre, concerts or cinema. When they do they attend events that receive a lot of media attention – for example to *The Nutcracker* – and could be considered mainstream high culture. Yet in their accounts these rare occasions are particularly emphasized with pride as major family events.

Sára's and Otto's spending style and practices are very different. Otto is thrifty; he insists on buying the cheapest possible version of whatever he is buying.¹⁶ The couple has separate budgets, but Otto is responsible for the major purchases; his frugal outlook can be seen in the cheap furniture and electronics. He often criticizes Sára for being insatiable, a shopaholic, buying goods for the sake of having them. From Sára's point of view, however, her 'senseless accumulation' follows specific principles, which, as the analysis will show, are legitimate only in the light of particular ethical visions.

Everyday ceremonies and making life beautiful

Sára, unlike Otto, sees herself as thrifty; but this thrift is directed at being able to afford certain goods that she considers important. These goods, such as the decorations of the flat, or the special wine bought for an intimate evening with her husband, are seen as elements of a 'harmonious way of living', which she associates with 'everyday ceremonies' and a sense of beauty. A sense of beauty and nice way of living involves creating a cosy and harmonious atmosphere in the flat by matching tablecloths and napkins, eating breakfast and dinner in a ceremonial way around the impeccably laid table, and nicely arranged food. Sára is explicit about her opinion that this material culture plays an essential role in her ethical idea of how life should be lived:

Sára: We are typically the kind of family that budgets on the one hand, like having only one piece (of meat) per person, but I prepare more garnish, so that it's more filling, and I like to make things look nice. I spend more money on that. My mother, for example, she doesn't spend so much on napkins. For me the important thing is that there is decoration. And for sure it also depends on our financial situation, because it's expensive. I think that it's a luxury, indeed, but if I can't go to a restaurant – I have my own philosophy about it – then for me [it's important] that every day, in the morning, as well as in the evening, the table is nicely set, no matter how late it is. I set it for the two of us, too, or if we are four, for the four of us. Because in the morning, when one gets up, the whole intention or beginning (of the day) is different. The table is laid for everyone with a nice napkin. And there are flowers. If my husband doesn't buy flowers, I go and buy them for myself. For sure, I could spare that 5000 Ft; some say it's a waste of money. Or my mother always says: "It's very nice, but how much have you spent again?" (she laughs). And then I say, that I feel in a way that if I look at that vase of flowers, or at that little napkin, it makes me happy. **And it's a very good feeling that we sit down together, we have breakfast in a completely different way than if we didn't sit around a properly laid table. I think this is very important in the family.** And the

¹⁶ As he was born in 1934, Otto does not fit into my definition of being in the second generation, hence I do not analyse him here. I will use the case study of his son, in the next chapter, to show similarities and differences between son and father.

children, if they get used to it **they will have this *igény* (requirement) as well**. And then their children will get used to it as well...

Léna: In your opinion why is it important that they get used to it?

S: Because – I often say this – **if this is lacking for someone, then I say that one has no soul**. Because that is needed, even at work. If you have a quarrel, you can easily fall out with somebody. (...) If one doesn't have this good feeling inside, then one can't forgive. **And I think these small things are needed for me to be tolerant and generous in these kinds of things. (...) It's important that one has an inner (moral) backbone. If one doesn't have that background (of the home), as is often said, one doesn't have the fortress of one's home where one feels good, then one is left without a leg to stand on.**

The little decorations and formal practices are an essential part of Sára's ethical idea of the kind of life she wants to live and pass to the next generation. It is the attention to these small material details, little luxuries that make life full, that she calls the 'soul', the inner richness ('the good feeling inside') that enables someone to be generous and tolerant and provide the background necessary to have inner strength. This ideal is characterized by 'living in a nice way'; this is very apparent in early 20th-century Hungarian literature, especially in Sándor Márai's work. The principle is paying attention to details, and discovering happiness, beauty, depth and the meaning of life in its small, mundane events. The approach has a conservative touch as it focuses on keeping the 'good old traditions': the aim is to resist the rushing pace of the 20th century and alienation by turning every small event into a miniature ceremony, celebrating traditions and human relationships. The idea suggests that even if the world has speeded up and is unfavourable to traditional values one can preserve them by paying attention to and living out thoroughly everyday events. For Sára, the 'knick-knacks' – as described disapprovingly by her mother and husband – are the means to create these everyday ceremonies: to turn a morning rush into a family breakfast, celebrating togetherness and starting the day with the experience of fullness. In other words, these objects are not simply signs of values, but 'incorporated into practices associated with different visions of family life' (Shove, Watson et al. 2007:35).

These practices show continuity with Sára's mother's project of accumulating decorative items. However, as shown in the previous chapter, her mother considered these pieces partly as investments that are not justified unless they keep their value; as soon as it turned out that they were no longer sellable, she regretted investing in them. Having lost its original underlying ethical basis, the practice is no longer seen as reasonable by her, and she often criticizes her daughter's passion for decoration as a 'senseless' obsession. The continuity of this practice, under changing circumstances,

then, represents a *discontinuity* of the original ideas objectified by it, turning a provident practice into an ephemeral hobby.

Patriotism

Sára's conservative outlook is coupled with a sense of patriotism, which constitutes the second principle along which approvable purchases are distinguished. She buys Hungarian goods whenever possible. For her, it is not an environmental issue, but understood as an attempt to preserve the local cultural heritage and support the Hungarian industry:

Sára: This Christmas I could not find the little luxury I wanted and completely by accident I was in Szerencs. There is the Chocolate Factory of Szerencs which used to be part of Nestlé, but one of the directors made a little factory from one of the manufacturing parts where **they make hand-made** chocolates, truffles. **And it's a typical Hungarian enterprise, the chocolate is very tasty, but there is no marketing at all, no elegant packaging at all.** And I said, it doesn't matter, I will make nice packaging myself. And I bought all sorts of treats. (...) And I felt that this is a kind of little present, but **at least they are Hungarians and they saved a little part from Nestlé.** And the shop is beautiful! So even going to that shop was such a nice feeling!

Sára paints an almost pre-modern picture of the Hungarian factory that has been *saved* from the multinational corporation: chocolates are hand-made, the shop is beautiful, and they refrain from marketing and advertising.

Sára often explicitly makes reference to this conservative outlook by calling her own value system *polgári*. The word originally means citizen, and it has a long history of denoting ideas related to citizens' rights and duties as opposed to both the aristocratic and the socialist organization of society. The word also means bourgeois and during socialism it was used in a negative context to refer to pre-socialist ideas and lifestyle. In the recent decade the term has been appropriated by the conservative party, called *Fidesz (Party of Young Democrats) – Hungarian Polgári Party*, to emphasize continuity with pre-socialist Hungary and tradition as opposed to the Socialist Party. The word has anti-communist undertones, nostalgia for pre-socialist times and positive associations of peaceful bourgeois development.

Social position and the *polgári* value system

Even though Sára was born during socialism she often talks with nostalgia about pre-socialist times, which she sees as an era of *polgári* values of tradition, family bonds, mutual help, respect and everyday ceremonies. Sára's nostalgic view of the previous, respectable society forms the basis of her view of contemporary society and her position in it. Sára, unlike the two previous families discussed in this chapter, distinguishes between groups of different prestige and, similarly to the first generation Bernáts, sees consumption as delimited by what is appropriate in a given position:

Sára: For me [looks] are important. A **degree holder level of appearance** (a look appropriate to someone of a university degree) is necessary. So if one spends one's money on other things, because one considers other things more important than one's looks, then in my opinion that person's thinking is not in balance, because **a particular look also belongs to a *polgári* value system**. So, you should not buy all sorts of tawdry stuff at random, but a particular appearance... It gives me a good feeling if I buy myself a suit in the autumn, and then I buy one for Otto as well. Otherwise how would we look?!

Sára suggests that one has to live up to one's position by having a specific decent look and emphasizes the ethical basis of this view by linking it to a *polgári* value system. The explicit labelling of her value system as *polgári* emphasizes continuity with pre-socialist ideals. This reference and the argument itself carry conservative elements of a pre-socialist view, according to which people of different standing have to live up to that position ethically – by having the right value system – which is objectified in their respectable appearance.

This concern could be observed clearly in Sára's appearance, which is markedly prettier than that of the wealthier Zsuzsa and Ilona. On the four occasions I saw her, she always wore pretty, feminine clothes of perfectly matching colours, with matching shoes, bag and jewellery; her hair was seamlessly curled and dyed, her face impeccably made-up and her nails polished. (Eszter Ráder, Klára Gárdos and Mária Téglási had the same feminine ideal of beauty, though could not spend as much on it as Sára.) For Sára, dressing in a harmonious way, going to the hairdresser and to beauticians are essential elements of being a proper woman and living up to her diploma-holder position.

Sára judges other aspects of behaviour by the same standard. She prides herself on her lady-like behaviour and mastery of table manners, that is, the formalities associated with little luxuries and moral backbone:

Sára: When I graduated, some of us won an invitation to a reception in the Intercontinental Hotel. **I am not from a rich family, but my father was an army officer, so every Sunday we used to go for lunch in the Officer House and I learnt how to eat in a proper way.** My father was a strict man: "You can't eat like that; you have to eat like that." And there (at the reception) were three sets of cutlery and different kinds of glasses, and we were served by a waiter. And I was absolutely shocked that some of us at the table were making fun of it, and they said that they had never seen so much cutlery in their entire life, and that they didn't know how to use it, how to eat. And the waiters were standing behind us – it was a five-star hotel – and they served only two people (the two who knew the etiquette) out of eight exquisitely. And it bothered me so much that they (the ones ignorant of the etiquette) were telling it roaring with laughter how ignorant they were and that they had not been taught how to behave. **The training at home was missing,** they were not taught what cutlery to use for what dish, what to order, how to behave. And this is what I call that... **if you are not born into it at home, at least you should not attract attention to yourself** in a noisy way and you should not despise others and the whole ceremony, but rather should not go there at all. The others will think anyway that **you are out of place** in that company, but you think that you will make yourself liked by making fun of it and showing that you don't understand these things.

Sára's ideas and her nostalgic references to the old *polgári*-aristocratic system suggest a continuity of tradition. There are three problems with this interpretation, however. First, unlike the Bernáts and the Kovács, Sára is *not* from a 'gentleman' or 'bourgeois' middle strata background: her parents are from a peasant family and it was only during socialism that her father was given the opportunity to study. In other words, Sára draws on an existing tradition, but it is not *her* family tradition. Interestingly, the Bernáts and the Kovács, who were *really* from a gentleman and bourgeois family respectively, did not bring out this continuity. Being more highly educated than Sára and having achieved success in the socialist occupational hierarchy they instead drew on the socialist-style life narrative of having achieved everything from zero and embraced the socialist ascetic ethic. In contrast with Sára's view – in line with the socialist ascetic ethic – they saw the refusal of visible markers of distinction as the ethical behaviour and natural comportment of someone who is legitimately entitled to more.

Second, Sára attributes her dignified behaviour to her upbringing, for example her Sunday lunches in the Officer House. This Officer House is talked about as if it was a pre-socialist 'gentlemen's casino'; however, given that the period she talks about is the 1960s and that her father was a cadre, it is clearly the Communist Party Officer House. This seeming contradiction can be resolved by recalling Sára's mother's analysis in the previous chapter. She experienced socialism as having more equal access to previously privileged ways of living and pursued many practices of the pre-socialist middle strata. This means that, ironically, it was socialism that enabled the family to

learn gentlemanly table manners and ideals, which Sára refers to as a continuation of a pre-socialist tradition.

Finally, Sára's ideas of respect and social hierarchy only partially match those of the older generation, let alone the historical facts of the pre-socialist era. They are combined with *socialist* ideas of hard work and social responsibility, which Sára projects back to the idealized pre-socialist times – when in fact they did not exist. In the following quote she expresses a uniquely reformulated version of Marx's 'to each according to his need' argument: she suggests that the state should provide for the *needs* of every *worker*; however, she defines these needs according to what she sees as pre-socialist traditions of everyday luxuries and family ties:

Sára: In theory it's a luxury that I go to a spa and get myself massaged, because I can't afford it every day. Although it should be a normal thing that if one works hard, to be able to have a massage in order to keep healthy and prevent illness. If I could, I would go every week, but it costs a lot. So it counts as luxury. But when I go, I relax there. So I dedicate time to it, it's important, and it gives me energy and prevents me getting ill. And I am very angry that it has to be a luxury, that it's a luxury even at my level. So I think that everyone, **every worker, should be entitled to go to the spa and to have a massage**, but the social security doesn't pay for it, only when you are half dead, then they pay a lot for it, but I think at that time it's a waste of money. I think they should provide for this [need]. **Not only for that I reproduce my manpower**, and not only by food, like bread and fat and chicken stew, but also so I **can rest and help my children and take care of my parents. So all these things (providing for the needs of people) should be a duty of society**, so that a woman or a family is able to provide it physically. **So in my opinion it's a very big injustice.**

Sára smoothly combines elements of her idea of a nice way of having treatment at spas and a mutually caring family – which she associates with pre-socialist ideals – with the inherently socialist idea that every *worker* should be entitled to receive what is necessary to live a full life *from the state*. Also, she uses the term 'reproduce one's manpower' which used to be a common theme in socialist public discourse to refer to legitimate consumption that contributes to maintaining one's capacity to work. Manpower in Hungarian refers both to the workforce and to one's physical strength to work; in socialism the two were seen as intertwined as central planning was responsible for maintaining the country's workforce through taking care of the workers individual needs.

Summary

Sára's cosmology centres on a conservative view of creating everyday ceremonies that celebrate family connections and a 'beautiful way of living'. For Sára, beautifying the flat, preparing an attractive looking meal, eating it in a ceremonial way, and getting a new haircut or an elegant costume are all seen as part of this ideal of living a good life with beautiful and fully lived out details. This view is connected to a sense of patriotism and traditional outlook that she links to what she sees as pre-socialist ideals of respect, family harmony and manners. In her account, social hierarchy is reminiscent of the pre-socialist ranks: society is structured according to educational titles (degree-holders vs. others) to which one has to live up in terms of practices and ethical stands.

Controversially, coming from a peasant family that advanced through a political career, Sára has the least claim to this tradition. This means that here again we are dealing with a mismatch between a narrative – chosen from the anti-communist, conservative repertoire of public discourse – and actual life. In fact, this reinvented tradition has more to do with Sára's parents' and grandparents' aspirations and *ideas* of the 'gentlemen's society' than the actual reality of that lifestyle. The case further complicates what seemed to be the simple dichotomy of continuity and change: Sára's ideas of a good life and justice simultaneously draw on and combine elements of a socialist ideology and a nostalgic view of pre-socialist Hungary.

The workers of the classless society: Ábel and Mária Téglási

Ábel (born in 1939) and Mária (born in 1944) were born so close to the change in 1947–49 that they have few memories of pre-socialist times, so I decided to look at them as part of the second generation. Ábel's parents were landless peasants, and Mária's were unskilled industrial workers. They both have primary education, and worked from the age of 14 in various unskilled physical jobs from roadwork to cleaning.

After getting married, the couple lived in a one-bedroom stove-heated flat without hot water, which they shared with Mária's mother, three brothers and occasionally other relatives. In the busiest times the flat accommodated eight people,

who used the bathroom as an extra bedroom. In 1988 the Téglásis moved to a two-bedroom council flat with hot water and gas in a block of houses in one of the poorest suburbs of Budapest. This is where they live today with their eldest bachelor son, Ferenc (born in 1962). Their combined pension today is less than 100 000 Ft (£277) per month and if they didn't have their children's support they would not be able to pay the bills.

The tiny rooms of the flat are furnished with cheap socialist-style modular 'modern' furniture. Kitsch decoration, such as a mini fountain with plastic shells, is used to make the squared design cosier. The furniture has been accumulated gradually by buying pieces on special offer, which is reflected in the lack of stylistic harmony. (With time, it will be seen as harmoniously retro; at the moment it is rather a mismatch of outdated socialist pieces.) Choice, let alone aesthetic choice, was never a consideration when the items were bought as the Téglásis could only afford the cheapest pieces. The Téglásis make an effort to keeping it tidy and clean. Unlike in the previously described homes, no books are to be seen, only sports magazines.

The Téglásis have a pragmatic approach to politics: rather than identifying with one party in particular, they form their opinion based on the concrete measures that directly affect them – such as pension laws or electricity subsidies. They keep track of the changes brought to their life by different political parties; from this point of view, they have a positive opinion about socialism, but are ambiguous about present day parties as both passed measures that affected them negatively. Their voting plans change according to electoral promises, which are evaluated solely on the basis of their effect on the Téglásis' standard of living.

Family, sacrifices and thrift

The Téglásis' narrative centres on the couple having achieved the basics of a normal life from a background of near starvation and harsh living conditions thanks to hard work, self-sacrifice and the socialist state. In Mária's narrative the emphasis is on hard work and having been a great wife and mother. In her family, nearly all household chores, including cooking, cleaning and shopping, are seen as women's skills, for which Maria takes immense pride. Ábel, in contrast, sees himself primary as a worker: someone who can and likes to work hard, solve practical problems and earn money for his family.

Being a good husband is understood as working hard and giving the wage to his wife who manages the common budget.

Maria prides herself on her thrift. She knows all the prices by heart and if she finds a good deal on food she buys in large quantities and stores the food in the freezer. Thrift for the Tégglásis is instrumental to making ends meet. This behaviour is in sharp contrast with thrift informed by socialist ascetism exercised by participants of the socialist elite, who see it as a substantive value, the appropriate behaviour regardless of financial situation. Their reaction to the behaviour of a rich person who remains thrifty (the *IKEA case*) illustrates this difference clearly:

The owner of IKEA is one of the richest men in the world. Despite his wealth, he spends money carefully; for example he only goes to the market in the afternoon, when goods are cheaper.

Participants of the socialist first economy elite unanimously interpreted thrifty behaviour – *especially* when it is exercised without being forced to do it – as a virtue, as a sign of remaining the same modest person. In contrast, the idea of being thrifty unless out of necessity is quite unintelligible for the Tégglásis:

Ferenc (in a condemning tone): That is something!

Ábel (in a despising tone): Wow! **I wouldn't do that. I would do anything, but not that..**
I would afford at least that!

Mária: Why does he live like that?

Á: Because of habit.

F: One of the richest men in the world.

Á: He is thrifty, to put it clearly, we could call him **stingy**.

M: **He is stingy indeed, because he could afford to spend more! I am doing it, because I can't afford to spend more! But if somebody can afford it that is different!**

Being thrifty when somebody could afford the best quality is simply an irrational or stingy act in the Tégglásis' view. It does not occur to them that one might find it 'ethical' to refrain from spending, when one has no practical reason to do so. The Tégglásis are thrifty for a very different reason from the Kovács and the Bernáts: being thrifty is a strictly instrumental strategy to be able to afford necessary goods. In the following sections I focus on what these 'necessary' goods are.

Cleanliness, being decent and 'living up to the big world'

The Téglásis put a big emphasis on being tidy and clean, which involves personal hygiene and 'proper' clothing. It has been Mária's responsibility to make sure that the entire family is clean, clothes are tidy, nails and shoes are polished and hair is neat. Mária recalls that it was an enormous effort to dress the family decently and tidily without a washing machine, hot water and sufficient money and time; washing and ironing took up half the nights and weekends.

Cleanliness for the Téglásis objectifies a sense of self-respect, and is articulated as an ethical duty that is to be met despite poverty:

Mária: My mother always said that **poverty is not shameful, but if one is dirty, one should be ashamed of oneself. The ancestors of the past [held that],** and you take these things with you. And this remains in us as well, the way we live. That anyway poverty is not shameful, it's only inconvenient. But if one is dirty then one should be ashamed of oneself. Especially in today's world there are so modern things, and if one has money, one can be bright with cleanliness. **If one can afford it, then it's easy to shine** and be fragranced.

Mária suggests that poverty is no excuse for being dirty; cleanliness is an ethical virtue that one has to stick to regardless of circumstances. She presents this belief as wisdom that is passed over from generation to generation. This idea is very Bourdieusque: cleanliness *objectively* is dependent on financial situation, yet it forms the basis of ethical judgement, shared even by those who cannot afford it. Without accepting the competitive explanation linked to this argument by Bourdieu (1984), I think he is right in pointing out that this is an ideology that translates objective inequalities into subjective judgements, turning objective constraints into personal responsibility and feelings of inferiority. The second part of Mária's argument, however, suggests that she is aware that being clean is partly determined by financial situation, which puts into question Bourdieu's point. In fact, Mária's account constantly moves between these two arguments, without resolving the contradiction inherent in them.

Cleanliness is about being a decent person, which at the same time means belonging among decent people and being recognized as one. Mária often refers to the importance of 'living up to the big world' – the world of decent people – and 'that the neighbours can see that we are impeccably tidy and clean'. For them, cleanliness is about being decent as opposed to the equally poor, but drunken, dirty, irresponsible relatives living in their flat:

Ferenc: **And well, it's not a secret either, that then we had the kind of relatives – a couple of brothers of mom – who drank a bit more than they should have, and some of them were ill, they had tuberculosis.** (...) One of us would go to the toilet in the morning, for example my father, while we were sleeping, and he saw that during the night one of those relatives vomited all around the toilet, but wouldn't clean up after himself. So poor mum and dad had to start the day with [cleaning up] so that by the time the kids woke up the vomit was no longer there. (...) **But we always went to school immaculately clean, to the kindergarten, always the cleanliness, the hygiene.**

The Téglásis's cleanliness is contrasted with the extended family's irresponsible, unhygienic, uncivilized drunken behaviour. It is a major way of differentiating themselves from 'them', a means of staying in the 'normal', decent society; cleanliness in this sense is seen as an 'entry ticket to society itself' (Shove 2003:101). Aspirations to 'belong to a higher social group' or to a 'higher standard of living' labelled as competition by external analysis are interpreted by Mária as primarily ethical aspirations for living in a decent, less shameful way and as an act of care, saving her children from humiliation.

In this context it is difficult to envisage what those alternative principles of evaluation would be that Bourdieu calls for to emerge from the working-class experience to challenge the dominant system of evaluation. Being crammed with eight other relatives is far from the romanticized version of sociability Bourdieu considers as a working-class value, while it is questionable that the desperate hygiene situation would form any basis for challenging the 'dominant' ideals of cleanliness.

Food, family and being a good wife

The other field of 'righteous' purchases for the Téglásis is food. The emphasis they give food was apparent from the first moment of the interview. On my visits, I was offered different sorts of chocolates, snacks and soft drinks. As I learnt, it was not part of the special preparation for the interview: mineral water, soft drinks ('two types, one sweet and one bitter') are part of the family's everyday consumption. This was surprising for me, since soft drinks are quite expensive compared with the wages the Téglásis earned. First I suspected that they were not as poor as they told me they were, but in the course of the interview it turned out that food is an utmost priority for them, and they tried to keep a high standard even under the worst conditions. For example, they recall that as

soon as their financial situation got better in the 1970s they went to a restaurant once a month, even though they could only buy household durables on instalments.

The Téglásis' concern with food has three sources. First, Ábel explained the emphasis on the abundance of food as a compensation for the starvation he experienced in his childhood ('I have sworn that I will never again be on a diet, no matter how ill I am; I was on a diet, when there was not enough to eat').

Second, eating together and celebrating special occasions objectifies family cohesion:

Léna: And what are the things that are ultimately necessary?

Mária: Well, the bills have to be paid for and the medicines, otherwise we fall into bed.

Ábel: **We must have Sunday, weekend lunches, dinners, they have to be the best, Saturday, Sunday, and these occasions have to be the best.**

M: If the entire week we skimp, that works, but not on the weekends. It has been like this ever since I have been married. Maybe I have learned this from my parents, that on holidays and **weekends we are always together and then it has to be experienced like that.**

Therefore bouillon absolutely has to be on the table and meat on Sunday and holidays.

Ferenc: Luckily, as I think back over the last 40 years, it has never been that we wouldn't have had enough money to have a little bit better food on Sunday than on weekdays. So maybe not meat in breadcrumbs, but a slightly cheaper meal, but then during the week it was even worse than on Sunday; but then on Sunday there was always slightly better food.

Sunday lunches with 'better food' come right after the bills and the medicines, and the whole family agrees that it is worth sparing on daily food expenses in order to afford the 'best' meal at the weekend, even under the hardest conditions. Today, when their retirement income is so low, the Téglásis save up for birthday feasts and as a result often run out of money before the end of the month.

Family meals objectify the integrity of the family, not purely symbolically, but actually by bringing the family together. Eating together is a ritual of building and maintaining family relationships; not being invited to the Sunday lunch table equals exclusion from the family. For example, the Téglásis' daughter's alcoholic partner is not admitted to the family lunch, but other in-laws are integrated into the family through these lunches practically ('we keep in touch') and symbolically ('so that we are not enemies, but friends').

Finally, and related to this concern, for Mária food is central as a demonstration of her love and the basis of her pride in being a good housewife. As noted earlier, despite having worked her entire life, Mária is acknowledged in the family primarily for being a wonderful housewife. Most importantly, being a good housewife is the identity by which she defines herself, and she pays lot of attention to live up to it. She serves

different food every day for her family (including diverse breakfasts in terms of drinks – coffee, latte, chocolate, etc.), and she is reputed for serving food in an extremely refined way. She is an expert of surprise meals perfectly adjusted to the taste of her loved ones – for example, for her meat-lover son's birthday she prepared a birthday cake made of meat. Her skills are so highly esteemed that Ferenc, her son, even saved up for a video camera to record her in the kitchen, so that later he would be able to cook for himself the same tasty and economic way.

Mária considers women who expect their husband to participate in the household chores as 'terrible'. She sees it as a sign of lack of love, of being inappropriate for being a wife and later becoming a mother, that is, failing in performing the main activities that are the basis of her self-esteem and other's esteem for her:

Ferenc: Dad was in fact quite an ideal husband, because he took the **money home to mom...**
Mária: Well, but wait, it was the case that **I always created the atmosphere at home so he wouldn't wish to [go] anywhere!** He always had his little **drink**, what was affordable, it **was tidy**, and there was **food, so that he wouldn't wish to [go] anywhere else.** Otherwise I complained if he strolled away, but **rightfully, because at home everything was made, then one should not loiter.** (...) Today the little newly wed women say (in a mocking tone) that "He has two little hands, if he wants to eat, than he should get the plate, put it in the microwave, heat it up for himself!" (she laughs). Contrary to this when we got married, he sat down – I don't think that that was too good either – he was holy, he should not stand up! Spoon, fork, everything, glass in front of him, he didn't even have to stand up! But I could serve the meal on time. **He came home so punctually, so orderly, that I could serve the meal on time. Therefore I expected him to come home, not to loaf around, but I also did something for it. So I created an atmosphere at home so that he wouldn't want [to be] anywhere [else]. He rushed home; at home there were the kids, there was dinner, a tidy flat, what else can you wish for?** This is why I am saying, that one also **has to do something, not only complain, if the man loafs around here and there, because he obviously doesn't find it (what he needs) at home, but he prefers to be in another place, at somebody else.**

Mária suggests that only those women who meet the ideal of a good housewife are entitled to ask faithfulness from their husband (she 'rightfully' expected him to come home) and manage to keep the family together. From the point of view of this cosmology the new emancipated way of behaving is seen as breaking mutual duties and obligations, and women failing to do their duty *should not complain* if their husband looks for his rightful lot at another women.

For Mária, paying a lot of attention to her own looks – which at first glance contradicts the principle whereby she only makes purchases on behalf of her family – is made sense of in the same way. A woman has to be beautiful in order to keep her husband. (As another family member privately confided, she is very jealous and does

her best to keep her husband under her womanly spell.) It is in this context that curling her hair every Sunday and dressing in a pretty and womanly way – in contrast to the more austere ideal favoured by the socialist elite – makes sense.

Socialist nostalgia and work-based entitlement

Among all the participants the Téglásis express the clearest nostalgia for the past socialist regime. Despite the fact that they used to be very poor, they see socialist times as an era of security, when they could always find work, prices were stable, and the future was predictable. Security in socialism meant that they could take the basics – such as food, medicine and shelter – for granted. For them the fact that the state provided some of the major expenses, such as the flat and healthcare, meant that they did not have to worry about not being able to save up for these goods, but could build a relatively happy everyday life structured around Sunday lunches and holidays. Their own personal experiences match the picture painted by socialist public discourse of happy workers enjoying the Mayday celebration with their families and a calm everyday life:

Mária: Later there were these company Mayday celebrations, the workers went to the Népliget (People's Park), with their families, we got sausage and beer tickets for free; they encouraged the families with that, so that when there was a celebration we went to the Népliget. And we met colleagues there, everybody with their family, a little beer, a little sausage; these didn't cost money, but still, we relaxed there.

Current day Hungary is seen as a much sadder place, where basic necessities are uncertain. The Téglásis give examples of homelessness, unaffordable housing, bills, medicines and entertainment. What they are disappointed with in particular is the fact that they receive a low pension that does not even cover their medical bills, despite having worked their entire life. In their accounts a slightly different version of work-based entitlement is articulated from the one of the Bernát and Kovács family:

Mária: If someone gets old, they [the government] should not push one towards the coffin as soon as possible in order to save one's pension! It should not be like that! If one has worked **30–40 years for socialism, one was building the country**; one should grow old as **one deserves** it! For a long time and in comfort. It should be like that!

Ábel: And others, like policemen, captains, lieutenant colonels, I can't even imagine how high their retirement benefit can be. Half a million or hell knows. **Their pension should not be increased** the same way as ours, who worked to death. And they retired at the age of 40.

M: Yes, because they worked for the Home Office. These things should be revised! This world we are living in today! That [they take into account] **how one earned one's money!**

A: (they talk together, angry): Because it's not the same! Because the physical worker, retires at the age of 60 directly to the hospital!

This view of entitlement reflects the socialist public discourse that promised equality, appraised workers, and presented them as cornerstones of the socialist country. In this version of work-based entitlement the idea that one can achieve a superior position by climbing up the occupational hierarchy – fostered by the Kovács and Bernát families – is not seen as legitimate; manual work should be appreciated as equal or as higher than intellectual work. This means that socialism has been partly successful in breaking what Bourdieu calls the doxa of unquestioned hierarchy and legitimacy: the view expressed by the Téglási is based on a strong and proud worker identity that questions legitimacy and distribution based on an egalitarian view of society.

Summary

The centre of the Téglási family's cosmology – that normative distinctions between practices drew on – is family cohesion that is maintained by different members in a different way, defined by distinct gender roles. For Ábel, the father's duty as a good husband is earning money, while Mária's duty as a good wife and mother is to create a tidy, clean home, with nice meals and to make herself beautiful. Meeting these ideals in practice is seen on the one hand as a duty to the family, on the other hand as the basis of self and mutual respect.

Care for the family takes the form of practices that objectify what Maria and Abel see as a decent life. They emphasize two aspects of this decent life in particular. First, cleanliness and tidiness are seen as ethical virtues that qualify one as a decent person and form the basis of belonging among 'decent people'. Second, I pointed out the importance of intricate family meals in objectifying family cohesion and relationships.

I have suggested that the Téglási's view on how much it is appropriate to consume by whom draws on egalitarian socialist notions of work-based entitlement. This view, unlike that of the socialist elite, considers the amount and the difficulty of

work as the basis of entitlement and questions the legitimacy of inequalities based on education and occupational ranks.

These findings constitute an interesting contrast to the views of the socialist elite. What the socialist elite saw as a simple way of living and as working-class down-to-earth unpretentiousness is experienced by the Tégglásis – who were actually living it – as a miserable situation that one is proud to break out from and ashamed of if one cannot. The following story about a poor neighbour, whose son became a noted poet during socialism – told by another participant – captures this difference well:

Once [the neighbour] came home and said to his wife: "We will no longer close the attic door with a corn cob. I will buy a lock!" And for him this brought genuine happiness. He was very proud that he provided a lock. Later his son was boasting with that corn cob, that his father used to close the attic door with a corn cob. When this son received an award, Comrade Kádár¹⁷ said to the neighbour that he can be proud of his son. The neighbour answered, "I would be proud, but I wish he wouldn't emphasise that pitiful poverty all the time! I haven't been such a *rongy* (miserable, useless) man that I could not even provide for my family!" This was shameful for him. All he understood from this and tried to say was that he was not a *rongy* person, someone who could not even provide for the family!

Contrary to the socialist elite's romantic vision of working-class life, the Tégglásis find nothing uplifting in poverty; if anything it was experienced as shameful, a failure to live a decent life. For them, acquiring better standards – in terms of accommodation, clothing and food – are a taken-for granted unquestionable aim.

Connected to this phenomenon is the different approach to thrift: unlike the socialist elite, thrift for the Tégglásis is an instrumental practice that enables them to meet their priorities despite the tight budget. They do not condemn the desire to 'have more' or to keep up with others as immoral, as the socialist elite do: if they could afford they would not hesitate to spend more.

The private entrepreneur: Olga Keresztes

Olga (born in 1948) is an optician. She lives alone in a one-bedroom flat in a low-rise apartment block in a cheap suburb of Budapest. She is cheerful, funny and self-ironic, and one of the most open participants. My contact for her and her daughter told me that

¹⁷ General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party between 1956-1988.

Olga owed money to nearly everyone in her friends' circle, and is quite reluctant to pay her bills. It was difficult to keep track of her telephone number, as she tends to switch provider in order to avoid having to pay her ever accumulating telephone bills.

Olga's father was a Jewish engineer and her mother an impoverished Christian aristocratic woman. Soon after Olga's birth 'even what was left was taken away' by the state. After secondary school she became an optician, which was a profession that brought large unreported revenues in the second economy. Olga's shop was located in the heart of the downtown area, the centre of shopping until around ten years ago, and she earned incomparably more than the average Hungarian during socialism. However, capitalism brought increased competition from international optician firms, the downtown lost its appeal to shopping centres and today Olga's shop struggles for survival.

Olga's flat is comfortable and messy. For her it is a place where she can relax and feel at ease rather than one to be refined in the aesthetic sense or to be maintained in a tidy, organized state. The old crystal glass, china and furniture inherited from her parents is a reminder of the gentleman/bourgeois lifestyle her parents enjoyed before socialism. Unlike the Bernáts, she only keeps these items through nostalgia and she does not pay particular attention to preserving them: many of them have been lost or broken during use. The old furniture is complemented by decorations of a more modern, Western style.

Olga's look is also 'modern', which is different from the feminine looks of Sára and Mária but also from the modest look of Ilona and Zsuzsa; she usually wears jeans, a sporty t-shirt, has a short haircut and wears trendy leather shoes. Her sister has been living in the USA since the 1960s and used to send her huge packages of clothes. As soon as it became possible in the 1970s, Olga went on shopping trips to Vienna and even today she buys her clothes abroad.

The joy of spending

The dominant account Olga gives of her choices centres on the *pleasure* of buying, such as 'it was fantastic', 'I enjoyed it so much':

Olga: When I can afford it and can spend my money, it has **given me such a damn good feeling**, that I don't think about it (consider it); I do it without further ado.

Olga: For me the **basics** are, **rank no matter**, that I go by car, that I buy books, and, I don't know, my coffee is costly, because I drink special coffee. It is with hazelnuts, no, with hazelnut vanilla. **Very delicious.**

Olga: I have spent money on everything you can imagine. On clothes. I used to travel already then. Books, well, for me **they are an obsession**, and on what else? Later, when I really had money, I supported my parents with big sums and my sister because they were building a house and their daughter was born and my sister could not work, so they didn't have a lot of money and I clearly remember that in the 1970s I gave them 5000 Ft a month, which was an awful lot of money at that time. I also spent it on myself and my child.

What I find interesting in her accounts is that she talks so openly – shamelessly, I would say – about buying things because she *enjoys* them. Compared with other cases what is missing here is any attempt by Olga to ground her choices in a normative argument. The only idea of a good life she refers to is a 'happy life', which can be achieved by doing things that make one happy – without defining what *should* make one happy. Olga's approach in this sense implies a certain amorality, characteristic of the liberal model of the consumer.

It is not that Olga's actual practices do not lend themselves to normative visions or accepted justifications. She is a dedicated mother, who even from her decreasing wage supports her daughter. She also raised her nephew as her own child when her sister emigrated to the USA and generously helped her relatives without expecting (or receiving) anything in return. Yet these are still referred to not as a higher principle, but as simple 'liking'.

Formulating her choices as a matter of liking is not simply a sign of indifference. What I would like to suggest instead is that Olga's view is embedded in a larger ethical concern with tolerance and an emphasis on human relationships as opposed to the material world. Unlike previous participants who, for example, in commenting on the cases in the interview guide expressed ethical judgements about the people based on a brief description of their consumption practices, Olga consistently refrained from making any such judgement. Olga is the only participant who persistently stated the view that how one spends one's money is of secondary importance, says nothing about the person; what is really important has nothing to do with consumption, money or taste:

Olga: Léna, in my friendship relationships I have never been influenced by if someone liked stilettos or flat shoes. Relationships don't depend on this, in my opinion. For me it doesn't mean anything.

This view not only applies to friends, but also to people in general, and is translated into Olga's broader ethical concern about tolerance and freedom. This does not mean she does not have priorities in her own life. Yet formulating them in normative terms would mean to articulate a general normative principle, hence giving up the idea that everybody should be free to decide what he or she likes; this would contradict her idea of herself as a tolerant person. This view in some sense replicates the liberal idea that in order to take freedom seriously, normative judgement on how that freedom is exercised has to be given up. (I will explore this view more in detail in the next chapter.)

This means that, paradoxically, the behaviour seen by critics of the consumer society as being related to the idea that 'you are what you buy' and a general obsession with objects, for Olga is key in staying focused on relationships – as opposed to objects – and remaining tolerant.

Living from day to day

All her life Olga immediately spent all the money she earned. Even today when her business is struggling, as soon as she sells a pair of glasses (a 'good day') she buys an eclectic range of goods from cheap kitchenware to designer Fendi bags for her daughter. She has no savings, not even at the monthly level: if a bill happens to arrive on a 'bad day' (when she has not earned anything) she is not able to pay it. What makes her case particularly interesting is that she lived like this already during socialist times. Here I will look at how Olga makes sense of a behaviour so heavily criticized by the official discourse during socialism and even today.

Olga sees her behaviour partly as an outcome of objective constraints that constitutes the practical beliefs of her cosmology, against which her hedonistic choices could be pursued. First, she suggests that her working situation dictates a particular way of spending:

Léna: To what extent do you keep track of or plan your expenses and income? You said that your mother used to do daily book-keeping.

Olga: I never do that. **Well, in fact I can't plan my income, that is impossible, because I don't work for a fixed salary.** My dad, he used to bring his salary home. Secondly, **I can't plan my expenses either.** Well, there are the compulsory expenses, obviously you have to pay them, and the rest... Well, **I buy it if I have the money for it, and if I don't,** by now, I can say, I can give up anything without too much heart ache.

L: How do you know whether you can afford something? Do you have a look at your bank statement, or it's rather a feeling?

O: No. Well, Léna, you know... **How much I have earned today. Day-to-day. This is how it is. If I have a good day, I say: "Who cares?" I go and buy myself a pair of shoes. Sadly. It's certainly better, if one has a fixed salary and knows from what one can budget, but I never know from what I can budget. It becomes clear by the evening.**

L: I see. And according to what principles...?

O: **I have no principles. None. If I have [money], I spend it, if I don't, I don't.**

In this explanation 'working position' does not affect spending styles through symbolic distinctions, but through the very direct link with the lack of fixed salary. Olga acknowledges that budgeting would be practically better, but having a fluctuating income makes it impossible. This point is in an interesting harmony with Ilona's argument according to which if someone achieved what one has by gradual advancement – characteristic of the first economy based on the educational and occupational hierarchy – one spends it in a modest and considerate way. What Olga suggests here is that if your earnings are erratic – characteristic of those working in the private enterprises of the second economy – your spending will be erratic and short-termist as you have no other options. Following this logic, it is understandable that Olga owns relatively expensive clothes, but not real estate, which would have required long-term commitment, higher declared income to get loans and stable, predictable revenues.

Second, despite the evident match with current liberal public discourse, Olga sees her practices as a pragmatic response to *socialist* conditions, in particular, predictability and scarcity, which no longer apply today. First, Olga refers to the widespread conviction that socialism would last forever in explaining why it was reasonable at the time to spend her money although she had no savings:

Olga: Obviously, **I thought that it would always be that way,** that money just streams towards you. Well, now it's not like that any more. I tell you very sincerely, I never thought of saving, or that the shop's business wouldn't go that well or that I would get old and not be able to work. Well, look, if 20, 30, 25 years ago I had as much understanding (knowledge) as today – because now I see things differently – then maybe I could have followed mother's example. (...) But when one is young, it doesn't occur to one that one can become ill, or that something unexpected might happen. And one can't imagine that a busy shop can get less busy from one day to another. Because it had never occurred to me – and I am telling you very sincerely, because this is the only reason why I am saying that I can't be that stupid – and if someone had told me five years ago that Kossuth Lajos street (the downtown area) would turn into what it is now, well, I wouldn't have believed it. **When we started there was only the**

cooperative, where we belonged, and a couple of private shops – now there are 400 shops in Budapest.

Olga suggests that based on socialist practical wisdom adequate to socialist times it was reasonable to assume that she could afford her lifestyle in the long run, as it was impossible to predict that things could change, that her shop could *unexpectedly* decline. She implies that there is nothing wrong in essence with living from one day to another: if not for the changes that brought her shop bankrupt, it would have been a perfectly viable approach to spending money. The problem, in other words, is practical not ethical.

The other link Olga draws between socialist conditions and her impulsive shopping habits centres on scarcity. In the following quote she comments on the *case of Zsuzsi*:¹⁸

Olga: When I was young this happened to me too. I used to have many garments that I never wore. In fact, I experienced this when I divorced and we moved out of our former flat. And the majority of the things, furniture, books, kitchenware, we shipped over to the new flat over several weeks. Léna, I was putting the clothes that we had never ever worn in our entire life into bags. We hadn't even taken them out of the wardrobe! And it was not only clothes, but there were also pots which were not even unpacked. I distributed them in the house, the rest I put next to the garbage bin in a bag. **So, me too, I went through this. In my opinion, almost everybody did.** That you see something, and you want it immediately, you take it home, and you have a look at yourself in the mirror, and you say: "Jesus Christ! How is that possible?! I liked this?!" It happened. **And you know, earlier [during socialism] it was because you couldn't buy that many things, you know that as well.** And then I saw something of which I thought that this **is what I had been longing for since a thousand years**, I tried it, it was all right, I came home and... What could you do with it? You could not take it back. You put it into the wardrobe, and you thought that you would have a look at it in two years, maybe your taste would have changed by then. It didn't; it was just as ugly as before. Yes, it did happen to me as well.

Olga links her behaviour to the scarcity which meant for her – and in fact, for most people – 'longing since a thousand years' for specific goods and being in a constant state of searching. In this state, if one had the rare opportunity to buy something nice, one had to grasp it and acquire it immediately. This phenomenon is described by S. Nagy (1997) as the 'scarcity game of socialism', based on 'when, where, what can be bought at the moment', a consumer strategy based on rapidly recognizing and grasping unexpected and elusive consumption opportunities. Olga does not see her practices as in

¹⁸ The Zsuzsi case: 'Zsuzsi loves nice clothes and shoes, so when she gets her wage, her first trip is to the Westend mall, from where she returns home with five or six new pieces. Her wardrobe is full of items she once bought, but used only once, then discovered that she did not like them that much.'

any way irregular; in fact, she is convinced that everybody thought the same way as she did.

Olga's comments on the Zsuzsi case are in vivid contrast with the socialist ascetic ethic, which reveals that, more than different practical beliefs, a different ethics underlies her view. Ilona, for example, classified Zsuzsi as a shopaholic and a person of a corrupt value system. Olga, in contrast, finds nothing wrong with her behaviour; the problem is only that Zsuzsi does not really *enjoy* what she buys, which goes against the hedonistic ethics described above.

Finally, this way of spending gains an ethical significance by being seen as a personality trait of being 'easy-going', which she inherited from her father, whom she adores:

Olga: In my entire life I have always been like that, that it doesn't matter: today I have money, tomorrow I don't, there will be money the day after tomorrow. I have really been like that.

L: It doesn't come from your mother.

O: Well, definitely not from my mother. **But from dad, yes, it does, because he was a very easy-going man as well. I am so much like my father, indeed, this type 2 diabetes as well, and he was also like me, you could never see that he has a problem.** (...) They were like fire and water, my father and my mother. My mother was an exaggerated... she could have a tantrum in one second, but they loved each other terribly, and they were intelligent people. **Dad could handle mom very well. When she had the tantrum, and really, my mom was a big martyr sometimes, we always laughed at poor her.** Not in an offensive way, but **dad always said something apt and everybody was laughing, including mom.**

Here Olga characterizes her spending mentality as an innate feature, which she inherited from her father, just like the type 2 diabetes. In this context, living from day to day, rather than a pragmatic response to her circumstances, is seen as part of an easy-going mentality. Her thrifty mother is in turn depicted as the opposite of being easy, her concerns and worries classified as tantrums. In this story, the 'easy-going' father is the hero; he wins the arguments by making everybody laugh. In this light, living without worries – despite the threatening number of unpaid bills – is a virtue as it is being 'easy-going'.

I am worth it – because I worked so much

Interestingly, Olga does not notice the fact that her views are the radical opposite of the pronounced ideas of appropriate desires of socialism. Even more curiously, in justifying

her practices, she makes selective use of the socialist ideology and draws on the same idea of work-based entitlement as many other participants:

Olga: (When I go to Germany), then I have money on me, then I don't care, it costs what it costs, I'm there, I dedicated this money to it, I don't care. Then we spend it. (...) But during that (shopping) week, I really always say that **I work so much**, from ten till six, then let me spend, really, **without having a bad conscience**.

(...)

As a child I easily accepted that I could not have something. Today if I like something very much and I can't have it then I am sad. But obviously because I have changed a lot. My relationship to money as well, and... I don't know how to put it. **That I feel that I have worked my entire life** and if I can't get something now, then **I am sad, that I have spent my life with it [work], and not even that can be mine**.

Olga appropriates the socialist idea of work-based entitlement to make sense of her spendthrift practices. She interprets it in the context of some kind of *general justice*: she has worked hard her entire life, so she deserves to be able to buy the things she wants. The conviction that one has the right to spend if one has worked hard explains why she keeps on spending even now, when she cannot afford it. Work for Olga is seen as a token exchangeable for consumption, which can be seen as a version of the socialist idea that a certain amount of work *must* correspond to a certain amount of consumption. The fact that it is not the case fills her with a frustrating feeling of injustice. When she spends her money Olga overcomes the feeling of bad conscience – about spending although she cannot afford to – by thinking that she deserves it.

Summary

Olga, who earned her money in a semi-legal way in the second economy during socialism, expresses a hedonistic view, according to which consumption does not have to meet other principles than making one happy. Olga's practices show similarities with other participants in her priority to support her family; however, these practices are accounted for within a different framework of hedonistic spending. This hedonistic, somewhat amoral stance – in the sense of avoiding passing judgement on other people's practices – is embedded in a general view of tolerance that extends to most spheres of her life; with reference to consumption it is connected to an emphasis on 'inner values' and relationships beyond the superficiality of goods.

Olga's practices are in sharp contrast with the self-restrained ideal of consumption favoured by first economy participants. However, Olga interprets her practices not as oppositional to the socialist ideology; elements of the discourse that do not fit her experience are simply ignored, while others, such as work-based entitlement, are selectively appropriated to justify her practices. Furthermore, despite the evident harmony with present-day public discourse emphasizing consumer sovereignty and choice, Olga does not see her practices as capitalist in any sense; rather she emphasizes their continuity with socialist times, when everybody – in her view – tried to do the same.

Olga sees her spendthrift practices on the one hand a consequence of practical circumstances, in particular of her volatile earnings and scarcity during socialism. She emphasizes that in the light of her practical beliefs in the predictability and eternity of socialism self-restraint and security reserves for unforeseen events were seen as irrational, yet these practical beliefs turned out to be invalid. On the other hand, spendthrift and unplanned purchases are not simply a pragmatic response to circumstances but are associated with being easy-going; a feature that she admired in her father.

From nouveau riche to out of place intellectual: Miklós Fenyvesi

Miklós (born in 1963) is a rich entrepreneur of secondary education. He lives in a posh suburb of Budapest with his wife and son. His luxury house follows the latest minimalist style and it is furnished by expensive art pieces, designer furniture and antiques. Miklós drives a Mercedes and wears designer clothes.

His parents are from poor peasant families who became well-off through the second economy. His mother moved to Budapest when she was 18 and started to work as a seamstress. His father worked as a hotel receptionist; a profession which turned out to be a gateway to foreign goods and allowed the family to accumulate money on the black market. When private enterprises became tolerated in the 1970s, Miklós's parents bought their own knitting machine, worked around the clock and gradually got richer. For his parents thrift and planning led out of poverty and they stuck to these practices

even after becoming better off. Even today their consumption is modest, partly because they kept their original circle of friends of manual workers who, according to them, would consider buying expensive goods as showing off.

Miklós in contrast went through a number of stages struggling to find his place and negotiate his position with reference to different public and private discourses. I find this case study important because it shows particularly clearly that normative distinctions between practices are embedded in cosmologies; the change through which his view on practices changed is the same process through which his ethics, self-understanding and world view changed.

Becoming an intellectual, becoming a better person

Miklós's self-understanding and life story consists of three phases separated by radical ruptures: the phase of thrift and budgeting, followed by a *nouveau riche* phase, followed by the actual 'intellectual phase'. Each phase is marked by a different view about approvable practices.

In the first phase Miklós followed his parents' pattern of being thrifty and working hard, centring on his home and family. After finishing at a vocational technical school in hospitality Miklós joined his parents' flourishing knitting company. His parents gave him a house as a 'good start', he worked three shifts, budgeted carefully, saved up and planned his expenses.

He earned more and more and entered the second phase of what he sees today as an embarrassing '*nouveaux riche*' lifestyle, spending most of his income on expensive cars, jewellery and flashy clothing. This phase started in the early 1980s, when he moved in the emerging circle of second economy entrepreneurs:

Miklós: I didn't treat myself with my first wages. So it is typical that I had been earning markedly well for two years, but I was still driving a Zsiguli or a Wartburg. And now we come to what induced me to turn to status symbols. I remember that once I went to a knitting wool shop. Back then you could acquire anything worth having from under the counter. I was standing inside the wool shop for about five minutes; there were two or three employees but no-one greeted me, and they didn't return my greeting. They were busy with someone else. And in my resentment I assumed that this negative discrimination towards me compared with the other customer in the shop was due to the fact that this person had parked his gleaming Western car in front of the entrance. So I didn't attribute the fact that the employees had disregarded and despised me to my personality but to my poorer appearance, you know? And then I resolved that next time I would come with a good car and, if I can, I would park it in

their shop window. If this is what they need, if this is how it works, then I would give it to them and to myself.

In contrast with the first-economy ideal of gradual advancement this circle saw entrepreneurial skills and money as the basis of esteem, which – unlike the first economy elite restrained by socialist ascetism – was manifested in flamboyant practices.

The third, current, phase started in the late 1980s. Miklós turned his attention to high culture, changed his friends to (mainly poor) intellectuals and adopted less conspicuous patterns of consumption. Thanks to his clever financial steps the Fenyvesis no longer have to work and have no financial barriers restricting their spending: no matter how much they spend, it will not jeopardize their long term well-being; they have huge savings and their business¹⁹ is profitable and likely to continue to do well in the future. They spend money and time on travelling, enjoying a life of leisure and catching up with their lack of knowledge of high culture by systematically reading books from philosophy to sociology as well as getting to know the classics of music. (Miklós asked me to give him a book about sociology and I rewarded his participation in the research by giving him a copy of Giddens' *Introduction to Sociology*, which he very much appreciated. When I saw him a week later, he proudly reported that he had read a large part of it.)

A Bourdieusque analysis of Miklós's life would go like this: he acquired uniquely high financial capital; however, since it was not accompanied by cultural capital he was confined to the despised periphery of the nouveaux riches. He therefore decided to convert some of his economic capital into cultural capital and adopt legitimate practices in order to make his way into the respected elite.

This story, however, would not fit his own account: he sees his life as an ethical development, a journey to find his real self and live a fuller life. Changing evaluations of practices are experienced as reflecting this change in his ethical ideas of how life should be lived and who he should be:

Miklós: That activity, the knitwear market-vendor-producer circle counted as a quite prosaic bunch of people at that time.

Léna: What do you mean by that?

M: What I mean by it is that it was constituted by people **for whom culture, for example, was limited to watching an American action movie**. So for years, I was doing business among people who were not *igényes* (demanding, of high standard) or at least *értelmes*

¹⁹ Being a major entrepreneur in his business field, he asked me not to specify the business he is working in in order to protect his anonymity.

(lucid, knowledgeable). Of course now it again sounds as if I am looking for excuses for myself, but I am not; at that time it was my completely free decision to hang all sorts of glittery bling on myself. At that time it was not alien from us, I mean, from my age group. I am not saying, either, that I was moderate compared with them, because if I look at an old photo of myself today, when I had bracelets on my hands, rings, ostentatious necklaces, everything, I don't deny my earlier self, it's just that... I find it very ridiculous and **I put the photo at the bottom of the drawer.**

Previously appreciated practices of wearing visible, expensive jewellery today are seen as objectifying condemnable motives and, in general, poorer ethics, characteristic of 'someone who does not have an upright, good value system. (...) Someone who is not really interested in anything else but the omnipotence of money and the externals, has no other desires than the wealth of his immediate environment and his own family.'

Similarly, the appreciation of popular culture is seen today as not being *igényes* and *értelmes*. As analysed in the previous chapter, *igényes* means having higher, more valuable aims and requirements. *Értelmes* means lucid, sensible, reasonable and is generally used as the opposite of *primitív* or *bunkó* (primitive, base, uneducated), reflecting the distinction captured by the quantitative studies discussed in Chapter 3 between different levels of cultural capital.

Miklós's departure from his previous lifestyle and the change in the kind of practices he appreciates is experienced primarily as an ethical development from his shallow 'nouveau riche' personality marked by superficial aims, dependence on feedback, lack of self-understanding and adherence to an improper value system to become an *értelmes* person; or to put it more adequately, bringing out his innate *értelmes* nature. The appreciation of cultural practices is a direct consequence of this ethical development in which Miklós's attention turned from superficial concerns to deeper questions and culture, which are intimately linked to the meaning of life:

Miklós: Léna, look, the situation is this: a couple of years ago, I reached a stage in my life course that even people who are less receptive **to culture or to the big questions of life** reach to a varying extent. I was thinking of the big questions of life when I didn't have to struggle with daily breadwinning issues. Instead I asked myself who we are; where we are coming from and where do we go. My career is a reverse career in the sense that right after baccalaureate I got involved in the business life and missed out on any sort of higher education. And suddenly I got interested in the answer to these questions and I found the answers in the human sciences.

For Miklós the acquisition of ‘cultural capital’ and ‘legitimate practices’ is experienced as an ethical development, a process in which he became a better person, lives a fuller life and pursues deeper values.

‘I am not stupid any more, but I am not an “old rich”’

Miklós’s ideas of approvable practices are markedly more malleable and subject to questioning than any of the other participants. These questions over practices mediate complex ambiguities of social position, entitlement and ethics, which are solved through self-analysis, a conscious deliberation on new practices that would suit his new outlook and situation. The ambiguity partly stems from what can be seen as a lack of legitimate space and practices for people who became rich outside the first economy:

Miklós: I have thought a lot about the meaning of the term *nouveau riche*, because I have always felt it to be pejorative. But I felt that the wording didn’t matter, because when this term started to be used – around the change of the regime and in the couple of years preceding it – as far as I noticed, there were no ‘old rich’, or even if there were, their number was so limited and they were so invisible that it only made sense to talk about the rich in general. I considered myself a *nouveau riche* person even 6–8 years ago. But when I gave up my previous views, when I tore away my chains (he laughs), the definition was absolutely not fit for me, the pejorative definition. But I knew what it referred to and I could feel that I was not alone with this, that there must be other normal (sensible) well-off people for whom this pejorative description doesn’t fit. So I said that this description is imprecise. It’s can be misinterpreted if you want, and I reject it outright, the suggestion [it implies]. **I am not stupid any more, but I am not an ‘old rich’.** Who do we call an ‘old rich’ anyway? I have become rich over a generation and not earlier. So I am a ‘new rich’, but I reject the definition outright.

The situation Miklós describes is very characteristic of Hungary and the tensions of social transformations. As described in Chapter 4, there are no ‘old rich’ people in Hungary, as during socialism the old aristocracy was banished, properties were nationalized and wealth was strictly controlled by law, inheritance was restricted and wages were levelled. Socialism limited the actual emergence and display of financial inequalities, hence someone who is rich in Hungary is by definition a ‘*new rich*’. However, similarly to the findings of Humphrey (1995) in Russia, where the *nouveaux riches* of undeserved fortunes are defined against the former communist elite whose wealth is seen as legitimate, in Hungary the category *nouveaux riches* demarks rich people who lack the educational and occupational background characteristic of first economy carriers.

This vacuum of social space is translated into a vacuum of ethical space and mediated through ambivalence over the legitimate practices of a “new rich” who is not stupid’. The ambiguity of norms about what kind of practices would be appropriate in Miklós’s position – which, in turn, can be seen as the ambiguity of what that position is – causes anxiety and results in a search for reference points. Miklós told me that he had a ‘monthly limit of spending’ in his head and when he surpassed it he was ‘astonished and terrified’ and spent days with his family lamenting on it. This resulted in an explicit query into the proper norms that his family should establish in their position:

Miklós: After having calculated all our expenses last summer over three months, the aggregate of our expenses seemed to me very high. And that time I thought that it would be **good to get some help from somewhere**, it would be good to know how other people solve it, **to get some justification for our spending to find out if it’s normal, or whether it’s justifiable or a craziness**. So it bothers... bothered me, and seemed to me that we were spendthrifts.

Léna: Did you do it together...?

M: Together with my wife. We wrote down every single expense, every day [in a book]. And we tried... Well I was interested in the perspectives, **that if we wanted to sustain this style of life without limitations, for how long I would be able to afford it, how much it would cost**. (...) At any rate, I remember that, having no idea, I put questions to Dóra and to myself, like **how much do others spend? I tried to find comparable families that could be compared to us**, where the number of members and their style of life allowed us to suppose [that they are similar]. As an example we didn’t take deprived families, but families that seemed to us to live well, in a tolerable way. I was so keen to know how much they spent, because I felt that it would make me feel relaxed if it turned out that they only spent 10–20–30% more than us. I would have considered it an acceptable number. I was looking for that comforting [feeling], that information, because **I wanted to avoid finding out that we spend twice as much as a normal family**. (...) But I am not right. I was not interested in whether we spend double the amount that a **normal** family does, because from the beginning I was not looking for a family who had **normal** expenses, but a family who had very high standards of living.

L. And did you find any?

M: Yes. We found two.

L: And you discussed how much you spend?

M: Yes. And... well... it turned out that **we spent disproportionately more than the other families. Then obviously, it had to be examined, that, well... whether this is defensible through logical explanation. And it turned out that the majority of it’s defensible**, because my **son’s education** accounted for a substantial amount in our monthly expenses, for example.

L: And have you changed your expenses in any way, as a result?

Dóra: No. Absolutely, I can say for sure that we have not.

Miklós talks about a social and ethical vacuum, in which he and his wife were looking for reference points of what is a proper, normal way of living under their circumstances, which at the same time meant they wanted to search for reference points of where they are in social terms. They tried to find various points of orientation that would give them a new yardstick of normality, practice and a sense of place in the social world. The first reference point was financial sustainability: whether spending at this rate is sustainable

in the long term. The next point of orientation was comparing themselves to ‘normal’ families. At this point they immediately got caught up in the dilemma of what is normal and how far they are from the category of the normal. They then redefined the category as ‘like us’, but only through personally asking two other families could they get a picture of what the norm for people ‘like them’ was. This attempt, however, failed as Miklós and his wife turned out to spend more than double the amount that families who they thought would be ‘like us’ did. Finally, they analysed their spending according to whether the aim of the expenditure was ‘defendable’.

What counts as a ‘defendable’, legitimate aim, leads to formulating ethics relatively independently, without reference to ‘normal’ others. In defining these principles, Miklós tried to integrate aims of his new ethical development into the possibilities allowed by his financial position. In some cases – such as financing the cost of sending his son to a private school, or setting up a complete music studio in the basement where Miklós and his son play together – financial success and cultural sophistication do not clash. In other cases, however, contradictions arise between Miklós’s wealth and the practices that seem to be required if one has an ethically superior outlook, which means that he has to negotiate his own position in relation to public discourse.

The contradiction is similar to the one explored when discussing the Kovács between actual position and modest ethics. The problem, for Miklós, however, is a clash between the instrumental idea of thrift he followed in his life (observed in the Téglási family and also in Miklós’s mother); and the practices corresponding to his new ethical visions. According to the instrumental idea of thrift, it is unreasonable and avaricious to be thrifty when you have money to spend:

Miklós: We don’t begrudge spending money on culture or, I have to admit, on comfort. We don’t regret spending it on spoiling ourselves. So a couple of years ago I decided to act on that belief. When I reached the point when my financial situation could be classified in a way that would have **been ridiculous if I had restricted us from buying things that we could afford. I would have considered it avarice, covetous and unreal.**

Being modest is customarily considered by first-economy participants to be part of an ethical outlook, embedded in a life story, self-respect and career route; this explanation, however, is not open or not known to Miklós. He sees modesty in the framework of conformity:

Léna: You have mentioned that when you realized that you exceeded your 'mental limit' of spending than you had a feeling that you should be thriftier. Is it like a moral worry? There are anthropologists who say that there exists a moral fear of consumption, that people somehow have a feeling of anxiety, a feeling that it's somehow sinful to spend too much.

Miklós: How does that feeling develops in someone? I have some ideas based on my own experiences. Obviously, the environment to some extent influences one's opinion of oneself and one's habits. **The prejudices of society are in fact a very strong control.** For example, my wife said a couple of days ago that on the street many people relate to her in a negative way. She said: "I have often felt that they would like to spit at me." She is judged by her appearance, the kind of car she drives, her hair colour.

He does not even understand my question about ethically motivated thrift; for him thrift is logical only as an instrumental strategy. He sees modest consumption as motivated by the conscious avoidance of incurring negative judgement of others in the first place.

Conformity was one of the central concerns that I observed in Miklós's mother. Conformity – unlike intellectual ascetism, which sees excessive spending as inherently unethical – is based on taking others into consideration and avoiding judgement. (To contrast the views: Ilona will not wear a fur coat even when she is abroad and can be sure that none of her acquaintances sees her, because it is against her principles. In contrast, Miklós's mother gladly wears one, but makes sure to hide it when she meets poorer friends in order to 'avoid hurting their feelings' and 'losing their love'.)

The imperative of conformity seem to dominate Miklós's account; at the same time, defining his own values against conformity is the major step in his ethical development. He sees his departure from the nouveau riche circle as being able to break away from seeking external reinforcement. As he put it, these practices are induced by the fact that 'one experiences doubts concerning oneself' and one solves the question by a simple answer of calming himself by thinking: 'Voila, here I am! In this whole land as I look around, no-one has a chunkier necklace, nicer shoes than I do. So I am an agile, smart, cool person.' His central concern with devising the practices appropriate to his real self is not to make the same mistake again:

Miklós: The new practices I recently favour would fit much better with an ascetic lifestyle. I like to read about Buddhism, I try to master yoga – I am deliberately saying things which as we know centre on giving up desires and from which the materialistic view is alien – and, interestingly, **I try to combine these things in me. Yet it doesn't mean that I am willing to live like a hermit or an ascetic in a modest environment, to live, so to say, illogically, an ascetic way of life. That would be just another kind of conformity.**

Defining approvable practices for Miklós means overcoming his (ingrained) conformity and finding standards that fit his own personality and situation.

At the same time, in making sense of this negative judgement, ambiguities over entitlement are revealed that can be observed in accounting for the limited pocket money he gives to his son:

Miklós: From his point of view, there are many reasons why we find that this kind of upbringing [of having limited pocket money] is beneficial. **I imagine a situation that in his peer group, among his friends, this wealth would cause dissatisfaction...** not the wealth, but any kind of spoiled [behaviour], the situation of over-accumulation. **And in my experience, the environment is not always tolerant.** And we can't say "So what?" We would like to feel good in our environment. And there are exceptions for sure, but I don't see that people who have different financial means can overcome this problem easily. It is necessary to call his attention to the value of the things maybe for that reason. So when he meets people who live on a wage or just with people who are less well-off than we are, and when **he learns what an average wage in Hungary is today, then he will not have an identity crisis, or any kind of crisis, [questioning himself] whether he deserves his (higher standard of living);** (this way) he won't have these sorts of doubts.

Léna: Do you have these kinds of doubts?

M: The feeling is not alien from me, [but] with respect to myself I have to be a bit more generous. I don't mean that I don't control myself, but that it's a different situation, when I talk about an amount **created by me**, as an adult. Obviously, I have doubts more rarely, but he still has to be brought up.

Miklós limits his son's spending money in order to avoid exposing him to insults, which more than an unfair critique could cause 'identity crisis': the feeling that he does not *deserve* to have incomparably more than others. This suggests that these negative judgements resonate with Miklós's own ambiguity over entitlement. The strategy of imposing financial barriers on his son, that is, to live 'as if' they were not that rich, is an attempt to resolve this existing conflict.

At the end of the quote, however, Miklós hints at a basis of entitlement that is different from the socialist work-based ethics. He is entitled to what he has, because *he has created it*, which has nothing to do with hard work. He repeatedly made it clear that he does not have to work at all – let alone, hard – and his wealth is due to the fact the he astutely spotted the right time and place for his business.

Summary

Miklós's narrative centres on the ethical journey from being thrifty to become nouveau riche and finally a quasi-intellectual rich person. Normative distinctions between

practices for him are not only clearly embedded in different ethics, self-understanding and world views, but these distinctions are the prime site through which these changes are understood and negotiated: spending on his son's education and artistic projects as opposed to jewellery and cars, hiding one's wealth as opposed to dressing to impress, and valuing high culture as opposed to popular culture. Arriving at the definition of approvable practices, however, has not been an easy process. The practices that are held to correspond to his ethical views according to the public discourse seem to be compatible with much more limited financial possibilities and are based on intellectual ascetism that holds modesty and thrift as a substantive value. Miklós idea of instrumental thrift cannot be easily matched with these practices; yet his unique position of being an 'intelligent "new rich" person' seems to fall short of any other reference points. Miklós hence had to build his ethics and practices by combining and reinterpreting elements of his intellectual ascetic outlook with his understanding of instrumental thrift.

Conclusion

In this chapter I analysed the cosmologies that normative distinctions between practices of the second generation drew on. In exploring these personal cosmologies I looked at their possible connections with official discourses explored in Chapter 4 and with cosmologies and practices of the first generation. Here I summarize the key findings on cosmologies; I will discuss continuity and change in the practices through the members the three generations in the last chapter.

The cases analysed here reinforced the findings that consumption mediates cosmologies that include relatively coherent ethical ideas of who to be, how to live and notions of entitlement on the one hand, and practical beliefs about the material and social world on the other. Practical beliefs of this generation centred on the difference between what could be reasonably predicted in socialism and what followed under capitalism. In some cases the difference results in objects and practices that no longer make sense under the new conditions: a house planned for an entire family in view of shortages or earnings squandered on expensive items based on the beliefs that the system will provide security forever. In other cases the difference is made sense of through reinterpreting originally pragmatic considerations as ethical stances in the name

of ‘remaining the same’, for example by remaining thrifty even when one can afford more.

I have suggested that ethical elements of these cosmologies can be understood through their different relations to the official socialist ethics, which is linked to positions in relation to present day leftist vs. the conservative public discourse. This is not to suggest there is a simple dichotomy between positions supporting or opposing the system. There is a wide range of relations ranging from complete acceptance of the system to hatred and ignorance of it; most often some elements are welcomed – such as a work-based entitlement to goods – while others are refused.

Official discourse, however, is only one of the diverse sources cosmologies draw on; they include family genealogy, work, pre-socialist traditions and personal life stories, and are woven together in particular self-understandings and world views. These diverse sources are not always easily combined; in fact, what I consider to be the one of the central issues in most cases is the mismatch between family genealogy and actual trajectories on the one hand and legitimate narratives according to socialist vs. conservative lines on the other.

The legitimate socialist narrative centres on achieving something from nothing – having come from a poor background – through hard work; while the contrasting anti-socialist narrative focuses on maintaining an aristocratic or bourgeois lifestyle and ethical orientation despite the socialist doctrine. These narrative repertoires can be traced both through the public discourse – analysed in Chapter 4 – and in the narratives used by participants here. In making sense of their lives participants often draw on idealized visions of social trajectories, reinterpreting and constructing their narratives accordingly.

This mismatch between these narratives and actual family histories, in my view, constitutes one of the major ambiguities for this generation, and provides a useful angle to understand dynamics of continuity and change of cosmologies and practices. In Ilona’s case, the mismatch between a trajectory from a bourgeois background to a capitalist elite position and the socialist narrative of starting from zero and being modest constituted the central tension, which she solved through rewriting her family background and engaging in practices that corresponded to modest socialist ethics. János, her husband, solved a similar contradiction by reinterpreting the socialist outlook to focus on expertise, thereby reconciling it with his self-understanding, background and higher spending. Sára’s case study provides yet another example of the mismatch, this

time between the anti-socialist narrative drawing on the continuity with pre-socialist times and her trajectory from peasant background to lower middle class, which is solved through a narrative of continuity based on a reinvented tradition. The Téglásis, whose working-class background corresponds to the socialist narrative, have to work through the fact that the socialist dream of the rise of the working class did not actually come true; today they ask for a reward for their hard work in building socialism.

These are very likely not to be isolated cases; actual mobility data (Andorka 2004; Valuch 2005) shows that for the large majority of the population neither the socialist nor the anti-socialist narrative corresponded to their actual trajectory. The socialist narrative does not work because socialism did not bring about the rise of the working class to the extent it promised, that is, most of the socialist elite did not come from a working-class background, and most of the working class did not make it into the socialist elite. The anti-socialist, traditionalist narrative fails as well, because during socialism it was very difficult to maintain an anti-socialist view *and* a middle-class position; either the anti-socialist view or the middle-class position had to be compromised.

The analysis went into detail to explore the links people themselves draw between their behaviour and views and particular aspects of socialism as well as capitalism, and their position in these systems. Here I summarize the four major cosmological views – including ethics and closely connected visions of society and social justice – that distinction draw on according to their relation to official socialist ethics.

The socialist elite cosmology

The Bernát and Kovács families' views on appropriate practices draw on a cosmology that incorporates the most noticeably elements of socialist public discourse. They followed the promoted socialist career route, which meant acquiring education and moving up the occupational hierarchy. They both promoted socialism and even today – although not uncritically – talk favourably of the system, drawing on leftist public discourse. More than just a political opinion, the socialist ideology and public discourse form a central part of their ethics.

First, they rely on a view of egalitarian society and never refer to social hierarchy except when they disapprove of inequalities. The idea that one should consume according to one's position is entirely absent from their accounts. As a result, practices are seen as approvable not for a specific kind of person, but for people in general.

Second, strongly connected to this egalitarian view of society is the ethical idea of what I called 'socialist ascetism'. This ethic can be characterized by a modest, anti-materialist, egalitarian stance on one hand and an emphasis on culture and human relationships on the other. Being modest is objectified in practices that are self-restrained, unpretentious, down to earth and conceal one's wealth. This ethic has a strong egalitarian orientation: one should spend money frugally as if one were poor, as a matter of modesty, even if one could afford to spend more.

Furthermore, the 'rational' aspect of this ethic – objectified in choices based on careful deliberation, planning – draws on the socialist ideal of character that is not prone to manipulation. This idea is connected in turn to changing ideas of what it means to be a proper woman: both Ilona and Zsuzsa consider themselves as 'not a typical woman', but as more rational and focused less on outside appearances. Also, in these families 'gender' as a form of discourse is characteristically missing. Gender differences are never commented on and households operate in an egalitarian way (at least at the level of discourse).

The emphasis on culture and human relationships of socialist ascetism is illustrated in a different way in these two families. Zsuzsa and Ede, distinguishes practices belonging to the field of culture and aesthetic sophistication as approvable, which draws on the ideal of a 'cultured way of living'. For Ilona socialist ascetism was linked to a self-understanding based on hard work for the family and being true to her roots, while János understood modesty in the context of a 'natural value system' and expertise. Although the Kovács also engaged in high cultural activities, for them the emphasis on family was posited as the opposite of materialism, reflected in the ethical distinction between self-centred and family-centred practices.

These examples suggest that the connection between this outlook and socialist public discourse is not a clear-cut adaptation, but elements of the discourse are appropriated by being incorporated into personal narratives and ethics. This is why these participants do not see these views as 'political opinions', with particular practices 'expressing' them, but as inherent in their self-understanding and world view. In this

sense, they do not stand as separate ‘consumption ethics’ but guide every sphere of their life. Most notably, the same values – such as having expertise, working hard and having intellectual depth – are the same characteristic of their work as they are of their consumption. This means that rather than consciously or calculatively embracing socialist public discourse, they developed an ethical outlook that incorporates socialist ideas, by living through socialism, achieving success and self-respect by playing according to the socialist ‘rules of the game’.

The working-class socialist cosmology

The working-class Tégglásis – who were supposed to be at the centre of the classless society – draw on a different version of the socialist cosmology, which involves another relation to socialist public discourse, views on entitlement and ethics.

The most important difference compared with the ‘elite’ version of the socialist cosmology is that from the Tégglásis’ point of view socialism did not involve a substantially different ethical idea but a system that was instrumentally better for achieving what they saw as a decent life. This ‘decent life’ has very little to do with the elites’ idea of it, which is characterized by ascetics and cultural sophistication. The elites’ idea of thrift as an ascetic virtue is entirely missing here. Thrift is not an option but a necessity; it is an instrumental strategy to be able to afford more consumption, which is gladly abandoned as soon as the financial situation gets better. Also, there is no question that ‘having more’ is desirable; the ascetic, self-restrained stance cannot be detected.

Many of the ethical ideas of who to be and how to live expressed by the Tégglásis would be seen with contempt by the elite. Gender roles are strongly emphasized as part of a patriarchal cosmology, according to which serving her family is the ultimate role and duty of a woman. Also, there is a large emphasis on living up to expectations, which in the elite version of socialist cosmology would be seen as a superficial pursuit.

The reason why I still classify this cosmology as socialist is its clear endorsement of the socialist regime. This embracement is based on an understanding of socialism as a system that brought these participants closer to a decent life, where they could always find work and could rely on the state to provide a flat, health care and holidays.

Furthermore, this cosmology is socialist because of its strong emphasis on work-based entitlement, which participants repeatedly link to socialism. This idea of work-based entitlement, however, is different from the elite version as it suggests that entitlement should be based on the *amount* of work that is done, as opposed to gradual advancement in the educational and work hierarchy.

The conservative cosmology

The cosmology Zsuzsa Rigó's practices draw on is formulated along the lines of present-day conservative discourse, linked to a different relation to socialist public discourse during the previous regime. This cosmology involves an ideal of the good life that is seen as the continuation of the pre-socialist way of living of respect, family harmony, tradition, patriotism and ceremonies. Sára explicitly positions this ideal in opposition to socialism, which she considers to be hostile to tradition, respect and good manners. The *polgári* ideal is objectified – among others – in her ways of creating formal 'everyday ceremonies' that objectify family relationships based on respect and harmony.

These views are connected to more traditional gender roles and ideals of feminine beauty. Sára considers her efforts to be beautiful as part of the aesthetics of everyday life belonging to the *polgári* value system. Also, in the Rigós' discourse of framing differences as well as their actual budgeting, gender is much more emphasized than in the previous two families.

The hierarchy Sára places herself in can be considered a reinterpreted version of the pre-socialist hierarchy based on birth and educational title, and reflected in appropriate manners. Similarly to the first generation, Sára makes sense of practices in relation to social position; for example, she puts an emphasis on having a look appropriate to one's social standing (for example, having a 'degree-holder appearance') sees table manners as a clear sign of one's social background. In this context, everyday ceremonies are not simply objectifications of a view of a good life, but also of a particular position.

Yet despite these continuities, even this cosmology incorporates a number of socialist elements. For example, the idea of the paternalistic state providing for

everybody's needs or the hard-work ethic are equally relevant here, without being identified as 'socialist' stances.

Ignorance and distance

The fourth relation to socialist ideology can be described by a certain ignorance and distance, which can be seen as the vanguard of present-day liberal discourses centring on consumer freedom and sovereignty. However, those with these views do not see their ideas as specifically opposed to socialist ideology. They are probably aware of the socialist slogans; but they are almost entirely absent from their accounts, as for them they are nothing more than empty phrases. In fact these participants are convinced that *everybody* tried to navigate their way through socialism as best they could, without taking the slogans seriously.

Olga and Miklós realized most of their revenue from the second economy without following the standard path of gradually advancing through the educational and occupational hierarchy. Unlike in the case of the socialist elite, the idea of self-restraint is entirely missing from them; they are private entrepreneurs, often labelled by first economy participants and public discourse as *nouveau riche*, both for the way they earned their money – through their entrepreneurial skills – and the way they spend it – without self-restraint or concern for the socialist ascetic ethic.

This critical view is completely ignored by Olga. The only distinction she makes between practices is based on how happy they make her, drawing on a hedonistic ethic. I have shown that this view, similarly to the liberal one, is based on an ethical commitment to tolerance, freedom and, paradoxically, a sense of anti-materialism that sees consumption as secondary.

For Miklós, on the other hand, being criticized as *nouveau riche* constitutes a major challenge, and he negotiates his social and ethical position in relation to critical public discourse. For him, finding the appropriate standard of evaluating practices is bound up with questions of finding his own personality, his place in society and a change from a superficial value system towards a deeper, fuller life.

Despite the distance from both the present-day leftist and conservative discourses, these stances do not provide a coherent, alternative 'capitalist' view. Olga incorporates elements of socialist work-based entitlement into her hedonistic vision;

Miklós is struggling to make sense of his life along legitimate lines. In his account traces of an alternative idea of entitlement based on entrepreneurship appear very weakly, however, it is far from constitute an alternative vision.

Chapter 7 The third generation

In this chapter I look at the cosmologies that normative distinctions of consumption practices of the third generation draw on. Those in this generation were born in the late 1970s, and lived most of their adult life during capitalism. The analysis carries forward the issues addressed in the previous chapter, by mapping the new cosmologies and tracing their connections with previous generations and, when possible, elements of public discourses.

I will suggest that one of the most important differences compared with the previous generations is members of this generation's increased emphasis on personal choice and what they consider as self-defined standards of evaluating practices as opposed to generally applicable norms. These ideas could already be detected in the second generation, in the case of the politically neutral second-economy participant, Olga; yet in the third generation they become much more widespread. These standards take two forms of ethics that can be related to gender: a happiness-centred ethics (largely associated with women in this study) and an ethics centred on expertise, aesthetic sophistication and conscious choices (mainly expressed by men here).

The happiness-centred ethics involves both a substantive ethical distinction and a new general language of justification focusing on happiness, pleasure and fun. The reason why I see this view as ethical is because 'happiness' is a normative concept; it does not simply mean 'having anything you want' but denotes desires that authentically stem from one's own self as opposed to external expectations and obligations. This means that 'happiness' draws on a substantive vision of how to live that can be linked to the romantic idea that one's life is not to be formed by social norms, but by an adherence to one's unique self on the one hand and valuing one's own feeling, respecting one's emotions, as opposed to subordinating them to external pressures on the other.

'Happiness' is not only a substantive idea, but also a language that emphasises the personal, self-defined and authentic nature of actions and desires. This means that participants formulate even those visions of life that they – personally and subjectively – consider good, full and unfailed *as if* they are a simple preference, a matter of private happiness, which cannot be subject to any evaluation (other than being self-defined and

true to one's real feelings). For example, they account for their modest behaviour, or desire to have a family home or to live a sophisticated life by stating that these things make them happy, as opposed to previous generations who mainly spoke about these issues as a matter of having the right value system, which applied to other people as well.

Yet I will suggest that the seemingly amoral views break down as soon as different visions of life are contrasted or have to be defended. Participants acknowledge that different things make people happy, yet distinguish between these happinesses as having higher and lower value, more and less enriching. These reveal implicit norms and evaluations that cannot be explicitly articulated in the happiness discourse, as the notion of subjective happiness would go against general principles.

The emergence of happiness ethics has important implications also for the way the authenticity of desire is understood as assessed. A practice is seen as authentic – by all the generations – if the person engages in it with motives appropriate to the given practices. The reason why we are able to separate authentic motives from those that are seen as false is the assumption that there are motives and personal qualities that *genuinely* belong to specific practices. When there is a disparity between practice and subjectivity, it is considered dishonest and inauthentic – an anomaly.

Comparing the views of different generations, I will suggest that there is a change in how this authenticity of a practice is established. For the first generation, and for the conservatives of the second generation, authenticity of a practice is based on the way the good is acquired and rank: living in a castle is genuine if you have inherited it and were born as an aristocrat – otherwise you are simply showing off – and an opera ball genuinely belongs to people who are 'worthy' of it. In the socialist version of authenticity, practices do not genuinely belong to social groups; rather there is a set of legitimate motives that can be pursued *only* through a set of legitimate practices – which are treated as a standard for judging everybody.

These ideas bind authenticity of a practice to externally assessable standards; what is new in the third generation is that the standard of happiness for assessing authenticity is located *inside* the person. Happiness as standard only means that your pursuits should be true to your inner self and hence should *really* make you happy. This standard binds the rightness of action to an internally established criterion; and since there is no objective way to judge whether a practice *really* makes you happy, the

interpretation of motives and feelings becomes central to making sense of and judging practices, and at the same extremely difficult.

The ethics of conscious mastery, mainly observed among men, unlike happiness-centred ethics, treats material culture as a field where perfection can and should be achieved according to an external technological, aesthetic or environmental knowledge. Saying that these are external logics is not to suggest that consumption is accountable to external expectations; the emphasis is on the personal ability of choosing, knowing and mastering principles.

Principles of conscious mastery and versions of ‘happiness’ constitute normative standards that pertain to what participants refer to as particular ‘lifestyles’ chosen based on their ‘taste’ or ‘what you like’. I will suggest that these ‘lifestyles’ are more than a set of preferences implied by the notion; they denote ethical ideas of how to live and who to be. Furthermore, despite the emphasis on self-defined choice, ‘lifestyles’ show important continuities with the socialist social divisions and cosmologies.

In this chapter I look at six cases illustrating different ‘lifestyles’ – or, as I see them, cosmologies – that I will relate both to cosmologies of the previous generations, and to income inequalities that drastically increased after the change.

The first four cases are mid-income participants, embracing different ‘lifestyles’. Participants speak about the ‘alternative’ vs. the ‘disco’ lifestyle, which denotes an ethical distinction along lines of intellectual orientation vs. the new entrepreneur lifestyle, embracing consumption and business opportunities. In the first case study, Viola classifies herself as ‘alternative’, which involves an emphasis on intellectual activities and anti-materialism as opposed to the what she sees as the materialistic ‘discos’ group; a vision that carries traces of socialist intellectual ascetism. In the second case study, Géza illustrates a different sort of ‘alternative lifestyle’. His ideas of anti-materialism and intellectual life form part of his conscious consumption and show important continuities with the conservative cosmology, based on tradition, community and the *polgári* ideal. The third case study gives an insight into the ethics of the despised ‘disco’ group and how what Viola and Géza label as competition and materialism is experienced from the inside, while in the fourth case study Éva is an example of someone who is in transition from the disco towards the alternative lifestyle.

The last two case studies give an insight into the two extremes of social hierarchy. First, I look at the cosmology of a member of the new young, highly educated elite class, whose high earnings and cosmopolitan lifestyle allow him to use

Western European banking circles as reference points. In contrast, in the last case study, the Ráder couple is an example of the new poor: people struggling to make ends meet, putting into question the prevalent discourse of personal choice.

The 'alternative' intellectual: Viola Gárdos

Viola (born in 1977) is doing a PhD in international relations. She receives a scholarship of 80 000 Ft (£300) a month, which only covers her daily expenses and some weekend trips in Hungary. These daily expenses include the bills, and the cost of concerts, books, going out with friends for a drink and some clothes. She lives in a one-bedroom flat that she received from her parents, in a turn of the century apartment block in a cheaper part of downtown Budapest. Many young people from intellectual families who were given their first apartment by their parents live in this area.

Choosing ethics, choosing peers

One of the most marked differences between Viola and the previous generations is that she makes sense of her consumption in terms of *choices* as opposed to treating them as self-evident. For example, her parents took it for granted that the *koloniál* furniture is the best and the only reason why one would opt for something else is because one could not afford to buy it. Similarly, Viola's grandmother saw elegance as a universal ideal that is self-evidently pursued by anyone who had dignity and pride. These beliefs determined their behaviour, and although other ways of living were noted, these lifestyles were considered to have been made out of necessity or were outside the normal, something incomprehensible and not really a matter of choice.

Viola, in contrast, understands consumption to be a matter of making *choices* between lifestyles. She defines her style as 'alternative': she frequents non-mainstream rock concerts and art cinemas, reads high cultural literature, dates artists (her current boyfriend is an eccentric-looking bass guitarist of an indie band), and wears slightly shabby, unbranded clothes and unusual accessories that are the complete antithesis of conventional ideas of feminine prettiness.

More than simply denoting stylistic features, the practices constituting the 'alternative' way of living for Viola objectify a particular ethical vision. The 'alternative' outlook is markedly non-conformist, and carries a liberal outlook that rejects traditional hierarchy, expectations and norms. Furthermore, it shows important continuities with Viola's parents' socialist intellectual ascetism: it is associated with the appreciation of high culture, a sense of intellectual superiority and a despising of mainstream materialistic pursuits:

Viola: Our [income] stratum spends its money in very different ways. So, for example, we are sitting here in the Gödör bar,²⁰ but there are others clubbing in the Új Vár Club with three e-s [ecstasy tablets] inside them, you see? I think this is the consumer society: **you have what you need to budget from, but depending on how you spend it you get into a group, a different circle.** So in the past if you were rich you organized a ball in the same way, you ate the same food and had servants [as everybody of the same stratum]. Today if you are rich, one can't predict what you consume. **With the same income as mine many girls go to the solarium, have a manicure, get a tattoo or a piercing and that makes you think that she is *gáz* [uncool, embarrassing, disprovable]... well, you don't,²¹ but I do think she is *gáz*.** You see what I mean. It has widened up [the choice].

For Viola, the Új Vár guests are not simply different, but also ethically inferior: they pursue superficial aims, as opposed to the more refined and valuable pursuit of the 'alternatives'. The club Viola refers to is a place playing mainstream electronic and disco music and frequented by well-groomed girls (with a fake tan, push-up bras, lots of make-up, etc.) dressed in sexy clothes and muscular boys in tight shirts. In terms of income the guests of the two clubs are at the same level, but there is a divide in terms of intellectual orientation: the Gödör is frequented by artsy people interested and well informed in at least one area of high art or music who have an intellectual contempt for the pursuit of money (although not for wealth itself); while the Új Vár guests have more popular tastes and are more openly engaged in earning money. In both places educational levels vary: in the Gödör one finds people studying towards a degree in arts and humanities but also freelance artists of primary or secondary education, and even bicycle repairmen who simply have similar interests. In the Új Vár students of business-related subjects mix with secretaries and well-off manual workers.

The two groups tend to mutually despise one another: the Gödör people – considering themselves *értelmes* (sensible, intelligent) – find the Új Vár people

²⁰ I carried out my first interview with her in a bar of her choice, which hosts alternative concerts.

²¹ I am not sure why she thinks I don't. It might be because in the interviews I emphasised my impartiality or because I am somewhere in between these groups.

superficial and not intellectual enough – usually termed as *bunkó* (primitive) – which is coupled by an aesthetic dislike of their overtly sexy and trendy style. The Új Vár people find themselves more energetic, ready for life and, again, in the aesthetic sense, more beautiful. A well-groomed, muscular visitor of the Új Vár studying at the business faculty illustrated this contempt (not as part of this research) by saying, ‘If I went there, the arts faculty girls, I bet they would all go wild (sexually) about me’, implying that he is more manly than the intellectual boys they are used to. I doubt that this would be the case; however, this remark illustrates the opposition between the two groups in terms of different ideas of gender, sexiness and attractiveness. These differences also seem to carry continuity with the opposition between the conservative vs. the socialist intellectual ideal of female beauty.

The ‘alternative’ style is further linked to the intellectual ascetic tradition by its anti-materialist and egalitarian stances:

Léna: If you think back to high school, were there differences between the children?

Viola: Of course, there were. (...) I think I was in the upper segment of the school class. But it was not manifested directly in clothing. At high school there was a convention that **the shabbier you were the better it was**. So you can't really tell [who was richer]. You had these hand-dyed t-shirts, and both girls and boys wore torn jeans. So it was not manifested in that sense [wealth in consumption]. There was one girl who my friend and I hated, her dad was the first to get a mobile phone and I was outraged how *gáz* that was. Everyone was very outraged that it was embarrassing, snobbish, flashy, unnecessary. With my friend we were very rebellious and we were outraged by mobile phones for a while.

Viola was one of the wealthiest in her class, but she wore shabby clothes, which disguised this. Viola's mother was desperate to make her dress more decently, going as far as cutting her shabby sneakers to pieces with scissors. However, the two viewpoints are not so dissimilar in their underlying ideas. Viola's rebellious, ‘alternative’ style is anti-materialist and egalitarian, suggesting that her views are not very different from the socialist intellectual outlook her mother lives by.

In the 1980s Viola chose to dress shabbily, *despite* being well-off thanks to the fact that intellectuals – like her parents – were in the highest-earning strata of society. She leads an intellectual life, like her parents; however, the position of intellectuals is in decline. Under capitalism the people of the Új Vár are earning increasingly better than the people – often the children of intellectuals, like Viola – of the Gödör. In this context, Viola is ambiguous about the desirability of possessions that she could acquire by taking part in the ‘money race’. She looks down on the Új Vár people as *bunkó*

(primitive) and would expect that as she is intelligent, she would not have any 'materialistic' desire for goods; yet this is not the case:

Viola: It is probably a commonplace, but status symbols have become very much part of people's life. And it's very surprising that **even though I consider myself an *értelmes* person, I can see that some things have an effect on me.** At any rate, if I get to know a guy I can't say that it doesn't affect me if he has a damn good car and a terrific flat. I don't know many guys like that; for some reason these guys never have a crush on me... (self-ironic intonation). So these things like what you can afford become increasingly important.

Unlike in socialism where as an intellectual you could be both *értelmes* and rich, under capitalism there is a widening financial gap between the intellectuals and the business elite. As an intellectual, you no longer have to engage in ascetism as an *ethical* choice: it is increasingly a choice of necessity, which is entirely different from the self-imposed restraint of socialist intellectual ascetism.

Having a 'liveable home'

Viola's 'alternative' style also draws on visions of relationships, the home and the status of objects that are markedly different from those of her parents. These contrasting visions are best observed through the conflict over the *koloniál* heirloom.

When her parents moved flat they put the *koloniál* furniture they could not find room for in Viola's flat. This donation was hardly a kind offer: Viola hates the robust, dark, old-fashioned style and would love to get rid of it; however, her parents will not let her. In her own decorative efforts Viola has done her best to make the *koloniál* heritage more 'liveable'. Her bedroom is very cosy, with warm colours of yellow, orange and red, small lamps, rugs and covers giving an oriental impression. Although the bookshelf and her bed come from the *koloniál* family heirloom, she appropriated them by covering them with colourful bedcovers and personal objects. The room is scattered with lots of books, CDs, pictures and clothes.

The living room is entirely furnished with *koloniál* furniture, but she is planning to buy some IKEA furniture and accessories so that the depressing living room becomes more 'liveable'. At the moment she hates it so much that she never enters it and uses her small bedroom as a living, sleeping, studying and dining space.

Viola's dislike of *koloniál*-style furniture is rooted in her different vision of life, sociality and relation to objects implied by this vision compared with that of her parents. First, she thinks that *koloniál* furniture has a heavy appearance that commands solemn behaviour; 'you cannot plunge into a *koloniál* armchair', partly because you have to take care of it, partly because its serious style does not allow for it. In contrast to the formal, traditional way of behaving and interacting with others, when Viola have guests, they gather in her bedroom and sit or lie on the bed and the rugs, making themselves comfortable. This means that through the stylistic differences conflicting versions of sociability and behaviour are clashing.

Second, Viola wants the flat and furniture to make her feel at ease, be in harmony with her feelings and appropriated to her ideas, not the other way round where she feels she must adjust her way of living to the furniture. She considers the *koloniál* furniture cold and unapproachable and – partly because of its high value – not suitable to such appropriation; she recalls that when she was a child she wasn't even allowed to put a sticker on her furniture and remembers the rage over a broken vase from her mother's precious collection.

The requirement of 'making you feel good' in this context is formulated not simply as a preference, but as a substantive value in opposition to a life subordinated to a materialistic preoccupation with objects, social norms and financial accumulation. The strong evaluation – by Taylor's definition, the sense that 'we are moved by what is good in it rather than that it is valuable because of our reaction' (Taylor 1989:74) – here paradoxically is the normative criteria that you *should* value your reaction, that the object should make you feel good subjectively and even sensually as opposed to external norms.

The principle that objects do not have value in themselves, independently of Viola's relation to them, but are valuable by virtue of the fact that they correspond to her moods and make her feel good, describes her relation to objects and spending in general, as opposed to the long-term, self-disciplined consumption plans of her parents:

Viola: In fact what has been very characteristic [of my childhood] is that I have always received very few things from my parents. Because they preferred to spend money on big things, for example on a holiday, but as a child I didn't perceive that as consumption. **What I would have needed, for example on a holiday, was to have a 20-Ft hair clip from one of those seaside or Balaton-side kiosks.** But I never got that. (My parents) are able to buy a painting, for let's say 200–300 000 Ft, but they wouldn't have a coffee in a bar. What is central for them is their flat; it's full of antiques, very expensive things. And travelling, they spend a lot on it, to see the world. But on food, zero. My brother and I often tease them that in our

childhood we didn't see anything else apart from salami sandwiches. But really! In general, this everyday spending, that is missing from them. Really, things like candyfloss and ice-cream, no way!

For Viola a holiday where you have to be self-disciplined takes away the essence of it, of being at ease, having small pleasures. The difference here is not simply indulging in hedonistic joys as opposed to having long-term plans; Viola's mother also finds joy in her museum-like living room. What we have here is rather a different idea of what a happy and good life is. Viola's mother aims to have aesthetic refinement and harmony objectified in the *koloniál* furniture in her flat, while Viola values a carefree, relaxed life, where friends pop in and out and relax on her bed or carpet for a chat.

Furthermore, short vs. long-term consumption plans also depend on practical beliefs and factors delimiting possibilities materially. First, they depend on financial situation. Viola is poorer than her parents used to be: for her to buy a painting would mean reducing her expenses to the bare minimum for five years as opposed to the relative ease with which her parents can buy them.

Second, Viola's practical beliefs about the market are entirely different from those of her parents. Her parents furnished their flat when supply was limited and nearly unchanging, which made it possible and necessary to make long-term plans about accumulating objects; still today they believe that objects keep and increase their value over time. Viola in contrast sees the market as one of abundant choice, with goods that go out of fashion in a much shorter time. In the light of these practical and ethical beliefs, saving up for an expensive piece appears to her not only as not desirable but also unfeasible and unreasonable (Image 6.).

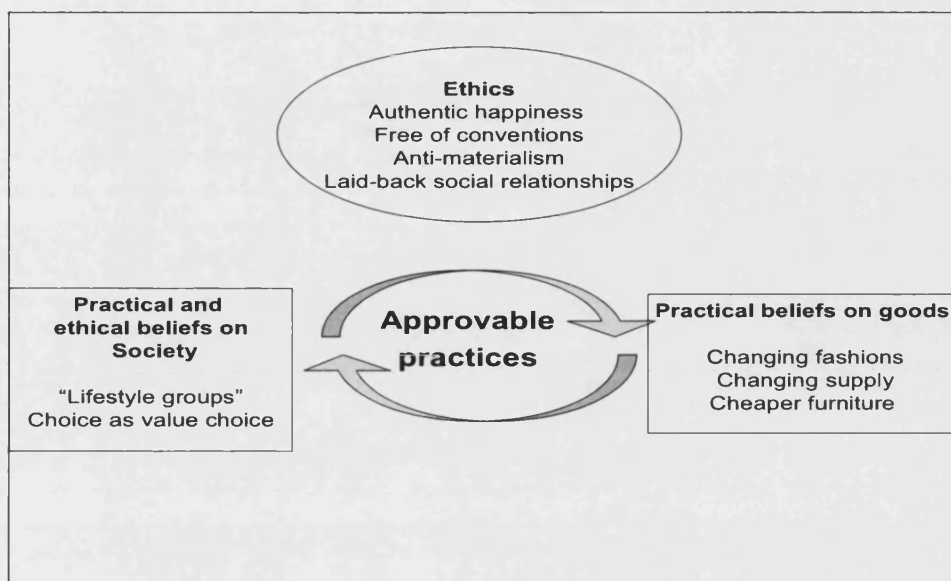


Image 6. Overview of the cosmology of the third generation of the Bernát family

Uncertainties of entitlement

Unlike in previous generations, Viola's ideas of entitlement are much less rooted in what can be seen as external factors of social position, work or education; instead she grounds ideas of what one deserves in personal situations that make consumption well deserved, based on a sort of 'happiness balance'.

At the social level, she expresses an opinion according to which under capitalism no external standards of entitlement can be established:

Léna: Are there groups in the society that don't deserve to consume more?

Viola: No, no, listen Léna, I really don't like this. And I really do think that this is a world where everything is possible, so to say. So this is modernity, this is a modern society where **everybody starts from the same point and I think that everybody has the same opportunity. You have the opportunity to steal, cheat, lie and it's your decision not to do it.** And I don't think it's fair to slate someone because of that. I don't know, maybe it's a good feature of mine, but I **never envied** these people, because I do think that you can do it too, everyone can do it, **there is no such thing that some deserve it and some don't.** Of course, I know what you mean, because I also see these horribly primitive people who get out of the Audi with a huge bling and things like that. But I really do say that everyone can do that, everyone has the opportunity. How he acquired it [is another matter], but in this society it's possible. Just because one hasn't had much education [doesn't influence how much one can earn].

Viola suggests on the one hand that entitlement should not be criticized; if you have money, you are entitled to spend it. At the same time, she suggest that having more money is likely to have been achieved by cheating, lying and stealing and that it is the

'horribly primitive' people who engage in both earning that much and spending excessively. This view is very close to her parents' work and education-based idea of entitlement, yet it constitutes appropriateness as an ethical choice, rather than an external standard of accountability: cheating is something that you can opt for, but if you are a good person you do not.

Connected to this idea of internal accountability is that fact that at the personal level Viola establishes principles about what she deserves, which bear no reference to external standards. This internal standard is only based on a subjective idea of what I call 'happiness balance':

Viola: I am the kind of person that **if I really covet something**, an ice-cream, a Milka chocolate, or a Chinese meal, then I don't really like to mull over it. And I can't. I usually don't mull over things that give me **momentous small satisfaction. For me it's compensation for a bad mood** if I decide that I will not eat in McDonald's but will buy the kind of food I feel like eating. A pizza for instance, which is more expensive. Or if I take an exam, then everything is allowed, so to say. That day I will not pay attention to buying a 2-litre mineral water just because it's cheaper. For me, **it's related to situations.**

L: Which situations?

V: Situations like when there is an exam, stress, a break-up, a holiday. For example, this weekend we went to Agárd. And then on a beach I thought: "I am here now, I hardly get out of the city the entire summer, I don't mull over whether I buy one or two *lángos* [salty waffles]". Also because I can easily afford them. **So these "coveting things", always, whenever I am in a stimulated mental state, either positively or negatively.**

Consumption is not regulated by external norms, but by Viola's emotional situation: you are entitled to indulge in a tastier meal if you are stressed, going through a break-up or had been confined to the city for a long time. In this idea of entitlement, one is only accountable to one's own principles. These principles relate to what can be vaguely termed the right to be happy, implying a balance of happiness – if for some reason you are less happy you are entitled to indulge.

Summary

Approvable practices for Viola draw on a cosmology that is characterized by an 'alternative' vision of life. This vision on the one hand shows important continuities with socialist intellectual ascetism – despite seeming discontinuities at the level of actual practices – in terms of anti-materialism, egalitarianism and versions of gender. I have pointed out that, unlike her parents, Viola sees this vision as a choice between

other lifestyle options – largely structured by cultural capital – that objectify different ethical stances.

On the other hand, unlike her parents, Viola does not engage in long-term self-sacrificing plans to accumulate goods, which reflects changing ethical and practical beliefs. First, she fosters a different relationship to objects, in which objects have to conform to her mood, ideas and allow for personal appropriation. Second, she believes in an anti-conformist, carefree vision of life of everyday joys and informal social relationships as opposed to the solemn vision of aesthetic sophistication, dignified social relations, and self-denying long-term aim of her parents. Finally, I discussed the emergence of a new notion of entitlement, which at the social level refuses all external standards of entitlement, yet at the personal level involves personal standards of considering herself deserving. This standard can be captured as a happiness balance, based on an idea of ‘right to happiness’. In terms of practical wisdom, this cosmology draws on the one hand on seeing supply as constantly changing, which questions symbolic and financial longevity of objects, on the other hand on Viola’s lower earnings, which do not allow her to buy expensive objects.

The next case study looks at a different variation of the anti-materialist cosmology, favoured by another highly educated participant, who –unlike Viola’s – draws largely on the conservative pre-socialist tradition.

The conscious consumer: Géza Rigó

Géza (born in 1979) is the son of Sára and Otto. He graduated in environmental economics and worked at an IT department. During the fieldwork he quitted his well-paid job to become a poorly paid teacher in a primary school specializing in student-centred play-based teaching. At the time of the first interview he lived with his girlfriend in a two-bedroom flat, which he received from his grandparents. They furnished it with modern, simple and cosy IKEA furniture and decorated it with objects acquired during their trips to Asia: photos, bedcovers and small sculptures. During the fieldwork the couple separated and Géza rented out the flat and moved to a smaller apartment.

You vote with every penny: vote for a bucolic life

The decisive principle of Géza's spending is his dedication to 'conscious' or 'ethical' consumption:

Géza: I think that with every Forint we spend we in fact vote. And this is a relatively big power that is in people's hands. If one makes use of this [power] in a smart and conscious way, one can move the world to be a better place. So if I eat in McDonald's it suggests that I find that type of world important or I support what McDonald's stands for. If I go to a vegetarian restaurant, then I support them with my money. And similarly, what I buy, where I buy, whether I buy a Hungarian product, a bio product...

Géza evaluates most consumption practices and justifies all his choices with reference to what he calls 'ethical consumer principles'. These principles do not only involve altruistic aims, but also form part of a substantive view on how people should be happy and the kind of values they should pursue:

Léna: What do you use this power for?

G: For shaping the world to one in which I would feel better, and the people would feel better too, (a world) which is maybe better and nicer.

L: I am interested in the details of this picture, what that world is like.

G: The principle is **sustainability**, which is a very broad topic. So a world where one is much more in **harmony with nature that surrounds one, where human relationships, community is much more important**, where one not only thinks about one's own short-term interests, but **about seven generations, where the future is important**. Towards a much more conscious, **self-conscious world**. For example, when I buy in the bio market, I do it primarily because by doing this I put a **smaller burden on nature** and I support the **farmer that farms in a much more harmonious, natural way**. And it's **healthier** too.

Similarly to Miller's (2001a) findings in London, the principle of sustainability is linked to various other concerns of health and 'lifestyle'. In particular, it draws on an essentially anti-materialistic, bucolic ideal of life in which people live in harmony with nature and each other and look for happiness in spirituality rather than tangible goods. This way the sustainability argument is embedded in an ethical vision about the nature of real happiness and values worth following:

Géza: The capacity of the Earth abundantly provides for the needs of six billion people. However, if we talk about desires, it turns out that not even two globes would be enough. (...) I think if you cover your needs, you realize after a while that **happiness is not to be found in material goods**. They can't provide it [happiness]. Clearly, desires can be generated by advertisements, like you need an MP3 player, everywhere these artificially induced desires. (...) So people should realize that happiness is not dependent on money and they should not look for it in material goods. Obviously, some people don't even have money hence the chance to find it [happiness] in them [goods]. **I have travelled in many places and usually we met**

the happiest people in the poorest countries. People in whom the joy of life and happiness can be seen. True, the rain leaks into their home, but that is the case with many of them [in the given country] so they don't feel left behind, segregated. Everyone helps one another the way one can and they are happy. And they don't pursue, I don't know, some kind of imaginary desire, rather they are happy that the sun shines, that they see you and these sorts of things.

I am not sure that repairing a leaking roof would be an imaginary, materialistic desire and that poverty is as much fun as Géza sees it; however, in his account this image is central to the anti-materialist argument that suggests that one is more likely to be happy without than with goods. At another time he explained that 'needs' include shelter, clothing, food, health care, public transport, social contacts and 'being part of or a founder of culture'. His reasoning is that if people lived ethically, that is, not pursuing artificial needs, but in a natural way – helping each other and finding joy in free goods, such as sunshine – and engaged in a more intellectual or spiritual life, it would automatically solve problems of sustainability. In evaluating concrete actions, he mainly condemns practices from the point of view of this bucolic, spiritual, anti-materialist view of the good life, while the sustainability argument often remains in the background. His comment on the Zsuzsi case²² illustrates this point:

Géza: In my opinion Zsuzsi is ill.

Léna: Why?

G: Because she suffers from consumption mania, a sort of compulsive buying. **She should be sent to Transylvania, where she goes on excursions, and talk to people, and [get to know] what life is about.**

Géza classifies Zsuzsi's behaviour as abnormal, an illness and suggests that Zsuzsi should be sent to Transylvania to get cured. There is a big Hungarian minority in Transylvania and the place is widely considered as having maintained the 'traditional', 'unspoiled' (Hungarian) way of life as opposed to the consumerist homeland Hungary. The cure for Zsuzsi in sending her to this innocent place would come from the fact that she would get to know *what life is really about*, as opposed to her current false sense of life.

The idea that 'ethical consumption' is not only more sustainable, but also ethical in my understanding of the word, is also reflected by Géza in other comments, where he

²² The case: Zsuzsi loves nice clothes and shoes, so when she gets her wage, her first trip is to the Westend mall, from where she returns home with five or six new pieces. Her wardrobe is full of items she once bought, but used only once, then discovered that she didn't like that much.

turns 'ethical principles' into aesthetic and cultural judgements, and uses the power of conscious consumer choice against producers of kitsch and popular culture:

Léna: Are there goods that people should not spend money on?

Géza: I think if we would go through the Mammut [shopping centre] there would be many things there. If we went to the Libri bookstore, 80% of the books on sale there **you wouldn't be able to resell, because no antiquarian would buy them, because they aren't valuable.** I think this is *gáz* (bad, uncool). You can also buy a glass that is *gáz*. A glass has two criteria. **One is the functional, the other is the aesthetic... I think it's *gáz* to spend on goods of bad taste. Because if you don't buy them, then producers of the goods of bad taste will go bankrupt. And they should go bankrupt.**

What I find interesting here is how easily Géza combines arguments on sustainability, a good life, high culture (literary value in books) and good taste in glasses without changing the framework of the conscious consumption argument. Producers of ugly glass should be driven bankrupt the same way as polluters.

Interestingly, it is through this aesthetic argument that Géza links his views on social responsibility with a critique of the *nouveaux riches* and entitlement:

Géza: Selfishness proliferates to such an extent that it hurts. I have the feeling that **if one is very rich one's social position implies social responsibility. I think that rich people should have an *igény* (requirement) to support the deprived,** or to support civil society, a foundation or an initiative. Maybe more and more people will start to think like that. I am saying this in the sense that **if the *nouveaux riches* can't do anything more [because they already have everything] they could adopt such a Western example a bit more.**

Léna: Could you give an example of wasteful or excessive practices?

G: **What really bothers me is bad taste.** I think that if someone has a lot of money and wants to make a castle, **he should make one that fits into the environment, one that is of a high standard, good.** But [if someone] just wants to make it expensive and doesn't care that it's **hideous** but he still builds it, I find it unnecessary. The furniture [in this café] must have been very expensive, but it's of a high standard and has a nice atmosphere. In other cafés there might be furniture that cost five times as much as this did, but you would feel that it's in **bad taste. And this bothers me more. (...) So in fact, if one has a lot of money, because let's say one deserved it or earned it or won it, one should be able to handle it. One has to appreciate its weight, its responsibility.**

Géza first claims that money and social position imply that one has a social responsibility towards the rest of the community as more money gives one more power and hence responsibility. In explaining what responsible behaviour would involve, he again combines charity with aesthetics. Importantly, what makes someone *nouveau riche* is precisely their inability to spend their money in a tasteful and altruistic way, not living up to the social position determined by their wealth. Here again Géza blurs the line between making a judgement on not living up to a certain standard of responsibility, on bad taste, and on valueless aims (to show off). This way he expresses

a social criticism and aesthetic judgement within the same framework of responsible spending choices. Furthermore, being charitable is seen as a *Western* behaviour, implying that it is a more developed, modern pattern to be followed.

If we look at Géza's own decisions as opposed to his abstract views and judgements on others, 'conscious consumption' appears even more as a vision of a good life than a rigorously followed strategy for sustainability. This finding is in harmony with Miller's (2001a), according to which ethical consumption often constitutes a distinct lifestyle rather than a principle applied to modify existing patterns.

Most of Géza's choices are made in accordance with his views on sustainability and he emphasizes this. He buys organic products from local producers and purchases few, very high-quality goods. For example, his hiking boots, mountain bike and jacket are all very expensive (they cost 45 000 Ft, 200 000 Ft and 70 000 Ft respectively) and hard-wearing. Géza finds this more sustainable than if he had bought cheaper items, as they last a long time and he hardly has to replace anything. He generally spends a lot of time gathering information not only about how responsible the manufacturers of goods are, but on the longevity and price of the items themselves.

At the same time Géza saves up money for 'getting to know the world', which means having month-long low budget trips to the Far East every year. On these trips he sleeps in a tent, on the train or in the cheapest accommodation possible, which he sees as a manifestation of his anti-materialism. In my opinion, the long-haul flights conflict with his stated dedication to reduce pollution, and by using a tent and trains he does not support local communities. Yet for Géza these practices, which objectively contradict the principles of ethical consumption, are completely in harmony with them, as objectifications of his anti-materialist ethic and interest in 'real', 'authentic' experiences.

It is in this context that Géza's everyday appearance, whereby he wears clothes usually meant for travelling, makes sense. The mountaineering bag pack, the heavy-duty explorer coat and leather tracking boots are not only 'ethical' in terms of objective indicators of sustainability, but more importantly in terms of his vision of the good life and who to be.

It's the Swabian mentality

Géza's practices and cosmology show both similarities to and differences from his parents. His vision of leading a traditional, bucolic life shows clear continuities with the patriotism and *polgári* ideal favoured by his mother, Sára. It carries a similar traditionalism, a patriotic touch, centred around Hungarian tradition as well as a focus on human relationships. Géza's vision, however, is a general ideal of the good life, which everybody should follow if they were more conscious and less reckless, unlike Sára, whose vision stemmed from her *polgári* family background. Despite these similarities, Géza plays down the link with his mother's practices:

Léna: To what extent do members of your family have different tastes?

Géza: This is very true [that they are different] for my parents. My mother spends on everything, she squanders money. Me, in contrast, I budget, I think very consciously, very responsibly. For her it's enough that one buys Hungarian products, she thinks one should support Hungarian farmers, while in me it's much more general, much broader.

The explanation for this denial lies partly in the gender dynamics between his parents. Géza's father, Otto, is very 'rational', makes only premeditated purchases. In their family, there is a very strong opposition between his choices and Sára's, which are often framed as a difference between the reasonable father who makes well-informed, considerate purchases and the capricious, impulsive mother. Even though Géza's actual practices are closer to his mother's (buying expensive, good quality, socially responsible goods), he prefers to see himself and makes sense of his choices in the framework of the ideal of the 'rational man', represented by his father. In his interpretation, his 'conscious' consumption draws to a large extent on his father's 'rational' mentality, despite being manifested in completely opposite spending patterns – Otto buys the cheapest while Géza buys the most expensive goods.

What provides a much clearer link with his father's practices is the anti-materialistic aspect of Géza's cosmology, which is not manifested in particular choices, but in the restraint from consumption altogether:

Géza: Imagine, I have discovered in the meantime [since the last interview] that, imagine, **I don't like spending money. That this whole outlook that I have talked about comes from my father. Spending money gives me a bad feeling, somewhere deep down.** At the same time, if I have decided that I want something I don't have a problem buying it, but [I wouldn't] spend for the sake of spending. In fact, many times I have to sort of **liberate**

myself [by telling myself] that it's part of life that we go to a pub, we chat there and so on, and that costs money.

Léna: Could you describe that feeling?

G: It's a very hidden feeling that is only manifested when I make decisions. That in reality you are stingy with yourself. That you could in fact afford it, nevertheless you decide not to, not to spend money on something. I know that for sure I have taken it with me from home. (...) **I think it's a Swabian mentality that I took from home.** That you have money, you work, but...

L: It's not normal to spend it?

G: No, it's normal, I do spend money, it's rather... For example, in Asia; when we are there obviously we go to the cheapest accommodation. Why should I spend more when I can get something for less? So for sure it lurks somehow in my choices, it manifests itself too. But when I know, when I have decided what I would like, then money doesn't bother me, **because I know that I am spending it for a good cause**, like what we talked about for example in the organic market. I know that prices aren't cheap, but I don't care. **So in fact I move usually between extremities. Either I don't care at all, or I care very much.** So I tend to the extremities.

Géza explains that the bad feeling accompanying spending comes from his father, a pattern of Swabian mentality he grew up with. (Swabians are a largely assimilated German minority who are stereotypically frugal and incur jokes similar to those made about the Scots in England.) This mentality in Géza's father's case drew on ideals of the rational man and experiences of shortages in the 1950s. Géza says that these ideas have been ingrained in him, lurking as a suppressed bad feeling of guilt over spending. These feelings are out of place with his actual situation: he earns very well, much more than he actually spends, and has a nice, big flat without a mortgage. He mentioned that his restraint in spending caused conflicts with his friends who – given Géza's financial situation – could not understand why he begrudges money spent on public transport, pubs and concerts, simply seeing him as a loner, stingy or a weirdo.

In this light, for Géza, the modest choices of ethical consumption are partly a way of resolving this contradiction between his ingrained feeling of guilt over spending and his healthy financial situation. On the one hand, being a conscious consumer translates Géza's guilt over spending money – which his friends classify as avarice – into a conscious choice of anti-materialism. On the other hand, buying ethically is a way of 'liberation' from this guilt: consumption stops being seen as spending and turns into charity, helping a good cause. This is not to suggest that conscious consumption is a mere pretext or rationalization for ingrained practices, only that part of its appeal comes from its consistency with ingrained patterns.

Summary

Géza's case gave an insight into a different version of intellectual anti-materialist cosmology, framed as 'conscious consumption'. For Géza sustainability is embedded in a substantive vision of the good life. This vision centres on spirituality, tradition and community, and at the same time draws on a high cultural version of ascetic and intellectual consumption. This way conscious consumption becomes an argument deployed equally to refuse wasteful practices, kitsch and books of low literary value. The comparison with his parents' practices suggested there were strong continuities both with his mother's *polgári* ideal of the good life and his father's frugal ethics. For Géza, 'conscious consumption' is not only a conscious strategy, but also a means of negotiating an ingrained frugality against his relatively healthy financial situation and pressures from his friends towards more consumption.

In the next section I look at the case of Zita, who belongs to the group attacked by both Viola and Géza as immoral villains of 'Új Vár people' or the 'mall' lifestyle.

The 'Replay fanatic': Zita Keresztes

Zita (born in 1977) is the daughter of Olga. She followed her mother's example and became an optician. At the time of the interview she was going through a separation from her entrepreneur boyfriend with whom she has a two-year-old son. Zita does not own a flat so soon after the fieldwork she moved in with Olga. Zita attends places similar to the Új Vár and would be classified by Viola as an 'Új Vár person' based on her looks. She has long dyed blond hair, which she washes and straightens every day, wears false nails, goes to the solarium every week and wears brand new, feminine, expensive brands. Her now ex-boyfriend is a muscular guy driving an old BMW, wearing a thick gold chain and clothes with huge brand logos.

Zita's life revolves around her child, her friends and her work. On one occasion she picked me up in her car after finishing work and collecting her son from the kindergarten. We dropped by her friends who work in a suburban hairdressing saloon in a run-down housing block. On the way there she called them to ask whether they needed anything and we stopped by at a McDonald's to get some food for them. To my

surprise, the saloon and her friends looked incredibly trendy; they were dressed and styled according to the latest Western fashion. We ate the burgers from McDonald's together – apart from Zita's child, for whom Zita cooks organic food – and they discussed their night out, hairstyles and common friends, while playing with Zita's son. It was clear that meeting, eating, going out together and playing with Zita's son was part of this group's everyday routine.

Living day-to-day

Zita's way of spending is very similar to Olga's: she has no savings, lives in a rented flat and has bought major goods, such as her car, on credit. She usually buys goods as soon as she realizes that she needs something, without much consideration of the future. She makes sense of this behaviour as part of the 'cool' outlook she adopted from her mother:

Zita: It's possible that we could save if we tightened the purse-strings when it comes to the supermarket, clothing, going out and so on. But I am not concerned about it, about being thrifty. I am not the thrifty type. I am not even able to be thrifty. As long as I have money, I spend it. (...) **Probably this comes from my mother; for sure, because I am the same as mum.** Money flows out of her hands, she can't be thrifty. For sure that this is what I saw at home and I am following in her footsteps.

Léna: Are there any generational differences between you?

Z: Well, you know, **my mom has a very young outlook. It's possible that if she was different and she was not that cool,** maybe there would be a bigger contrast between us, and it would be more obvious, but the way it is now there isn't any.

Zita, just like Olga, associates her lack of thrift, saving and long-term planning as being laid back. She feels no guilt over spending, and when I asked her, she could not recall any purchase that she thought of as having been unnecessary. She has the same mentality as Olga: money is to be spent; as long as you can afford something there is no problem with buying it.

Being a good mother

Zita recalls that this approach changed since the birth of her son as she became more concerned with to being a good mother. For Zita care for the family constitutes the only

strict normative standard that she considers binding and general. She does not talk to her father, because he failed to be a good parent when he refused to allow her to move into his house with her child. She does her best to be a good mother herself and since the birth of her child she has become more responsible: she keeps track of the bills and saves a small amount every month in case of emergencies or any unforeseen needs of her son, such as buying medicines:

Zita: Well, I became more responsible after I gave birth to my child. Now **I am responsible for him** and I can't run around with an empty purse. I might have to take him to the doctor and then I can't say to the doctor that, sorry, I spent [my money] on three tops. And then I started to consider that I must always have money on me. And I have given up a couple of things.

Zita's child is now a top priority for her, and expenses for him are the only field she considers an unquestionable 'need'. She pays for a private kindergarten, cooks everyday from expensive organic ingredients and makes sure her son gets all the toys and clothes he needs. She emphasizes that she puts her son's needs before hers:

Léna: What would be the last thing that you would give up if your income declined?

Zita: [Spending on] my son, for sure, **so that he doesn't suffer any necessity**. So that he has everything. He would be the last one; I would give up anything rather than cutting back on his standard of living.

Even though her son's needs are the ultimate priority, Zita is much more a trendy woman with a child than a stay at home, traditional mother. She is proud of having regained her shape after pregnancy and lives the same trendy young life as before, going out with friends. The fact that her care for her son constitutes the prime ethical principle of her life means that all other pursuits are subordinated to this one, but not that they are given up. In the next sections I look at these other pursuits.

Competition and happiness

In accounting for her practices, Zita draws a similar distinction between the 'shabby' 1980s and current 'competitive' Hungary as Viola. However, she sees the situation of the 1980s from a different perspective: she is the girl in nice clothes whose parents have a mobile phone. At that time her mother – from her second economy earnings – bought her everything she wanted; she received trendy clothes from her aunt living in the USA

and they frequently went with Olga to Vienna on shopping trips. (At the same time Viola's parents refused her requests for such things as superficial and saved up for a flat.) Zita had a vast number of clothes and remembers being much better dressed in school than her classmates:

Léna: Did it make you the 'ace' at school that you could go abroad and receive packs from the USA?

Zita: Yes, I was much [trendier]. I used to be taunted many times for it. **Because one used to be taunted for having a new dress back then. Today it is the complete opposite.** Today you are taunted like "God, how do you look?!". I used to have embarrassing moments many times.

Léna: Can you recall a particular instance?

Z: In primary school **I was constantly taunted like "You are so rich"**, I went "Oh, shut up!". So I didn't emphasize it, I was just dressed in a normal way; but this is what others immediately concluded from it.

In the 1980s far from making her the star, the nice clothes made her an outcast, mocked by the class. She found it 'natural' to wear the nice clothes her aunt sent her, not with the intention to show off (she did not 'emphasize' it); however in the context of her classroom it was seen as showy. Viola, in similar financial circumstances, dressed in shabby alternative clothes at that time. This suggests that in the late 1980s being rich, or at least not pretending to be poor, was the reason for exclusion; according to Zita's recollections even being called rich counted as an insult. This can be related to the socialist egalitarian idea that if you are richer than other people you are by definition a criminal (as wealth is not achievable by honest work) and immoral (by failing according to the ethics of socialist intellectual ascetism).

Zita points out that today the situation has changed to the opposite: you are an outcast – at least in her circles – if you do not keep up:

Léna: Do you personally feel this competition [you referred to]?

Zita: Terribly, in my opinion, terribly.

L: In the sense that you have to compete?

Z: I usually don't. Not so much the competition, just that, I don't know, if you go into a circle of people and you aren't dressed in the [appropriate, trendy] way that they are, you feel unwelcome. And then you feel so much like shit, and you start to think that, well, you should do something about looking or acting like them. This is kind of strange, but they influence you. So, it's unintentional, but you have to keep up with the flow.

When referring to others, Zita talks critically about competition and display, and often criticizes others for being snobbish and only buying branded goods in order to show off and overtake others. However, when she talks about her own practices she denies competing, despite the fact that her actual choices conform to the expectations of the

groups she belongs to. In these accounts, she refers to her 'happiness', avoiding boredom or choosing goods matching her personality, even when she talks about her preference for Replay, one of the most expensive brands:

Zita: I bought myself a top yesterday because I went to a birthday party. (...) I felt that I had nothing to wear and I went shopping and bought myself a top. These times I look at the wardrobe, see that there is nothing, **everything is boring and think that I will not wear that because I already wore that once** [on another occasion] and I felt that I should buy something. Not that it would make the evening better, but **for the sake of my happiness**. And then I went and bought myself a top in the Westend shopping centre.

Léna: Do you go to many shops?

Z: No, I don't. I am very particular about where I shop and usually shop exclusively there. I am a sort of Replay-fanatic, so I buy 99% of my clothes there. I can complete [the purchase] in five minutes. If I can't find [what I am looking for] there, I don't even go on, because I know that I wouldn't wear it anyway. (...) And I know that Replay might be more expensive, but **I know that it's very good quality**. So it will be very good in a year's time too. And I usually find stuff there. So, really, **stuff that is to my taste, sporty, elegant and always stuff that I feel, "Wow, this is really very good". So I try to buy things in which something grasps me and are special**.

Zita suggests that she buys new clothes because it makes her happy and in order to avoid boredom. (She also refers to longevity, which I consider a rationalization given the fact that she refused to wear one top because she had already worn it once (!) before; she gets bored with clothes well before they become worn out.) This account involves the 'right to happiness' idea put forward by Viola, too, according to which happiness is an ultimate justification principle.

This happiness-centred principle, as noted earlier, is entirely subjective and closer to the liberal notion of preferences in that – unlike standards used by most participants of other generations that were seen as universally valid and external to personal desires – it is defined precisely as personal and private. Yet as the following quote suggests, happiness is not necessarily related to 'whatever makes you feel good':

Léna: You mentioned that you disapprove of your ex because he thinks the externals are very important. But it seems to me that it also important for you.

Zita: Of course, my appearance is important for me too. But, how can I put it? He doesn't buy a top because it's very special, but he buys it because 'Ralph Lauren' is written on it. So he is more interested in the brand and [concerned] that the brand is written with block capitals. So I think that is snobbier. I buy a Replay shirt even if the brand is not written on it, but I know that it's good.

'Happiness' is an ethical standard as it relates to the normative distinction between acts that are motivated by self-defined authentic desires vs. those motivated by meeting norms and keeping up competition. This idea is not ethical in the sense of being

accountable to external standards, to one particular right way of living and being; yet it is ethical in the sense of denoting the right relationship to the self, desires and others in society. In fact, these personal standards of happiness by definition cannot apply to everybody, but have to stem from one's unique personality. This is why Zita explains her particular choice of buying at Replay by stating that the clothes matches her personal style and suit her, implying that the choice was motivated by her very personal desires, aesthetics and personality as opposed to condemnable external norms or 'keeping up'. The prime normative principle of happiness is bound up with the authenticity of motives, as happiness is defined by the extent to which motives are genuine, self-defined and free of external pressures.

If this ethic emphasizes self-defined desire as opposed to external norms, how can we – and Zita for that matter – resolve the contradiction that most of these personal desires involve the same goods and practices engaged by others in her circle? The following quote helps in untangling this contradiction:

Léna: In what situations might one feel this upward pressure?

Zita: Well, especially in circles of friends, and not only among friends, rather in circles of people, in the kind of gatherings. (...) [They look at] who wears what kind of clothes, and in the same way at the age of the cars. That it's embarrassing to drive an old car.

L: In front of whom? Strangers?

Z: Yes. In front of strangers.

L: Could you tell me about a situation when you felt embarrassed?

Z: Well, for example, recently. We changed my car and I wanted a fuel-efficient urban car. And we compared different cars and decided to buy a Suzuki. **And at first I had reservations at the thought that I would sit in a Suzuki?! Old men wearing hats sit in Suzukis, who have changed from Skodas and Trabants.** (...) Before I only had German cars, Volkswagens, SEATs and that sort.

L: Did you think about the situations in which it would be embarrassing?

Z: **Not so much about how it would look in front of other people; rather the kind of people who drive Suzukis [bothered me]. The idea that I would have a car like that old man has, who can't even get it started.** So these kinds of **stupid things**. But then I changed very much, completely, and it [the reservation] lasted for a week. But this is also about externals. (...) Well, **I don't care if I am ridiculed** for the car I have.

In the quote the connection between subjective desires and external expectations is established through shared ideas of the kind of people who engage in particular practices. On the one hand, consistent with the happiness standard, goods are approvable if they match your personal standard of happiness and your personality. On the other hand, goods are seen as being characteristic of particular people, particular personalities; the question is then whether or not the kind of personality and vision of happiness associated with a practice suits my personality and version of happiness.

At this point the non-normative idea of happiness suddenly becomes loaded with a great amount of evaluation between better and worse versions of what should make one happy, how one should be and live. The Suzuki vs. German car mediates this ethical choice between old-fashioned old men who do not even know how to start a car and the modern, young, dynamic drivers who feel completely at home in the modern world with all its technological advances. At the same time the choice mediates a sense of modernity and being part of the Western world vs. living a parochial Hungarian existence. Suzuki cars are made in Hungary and one of the company's first advertisements featured a middle-aged couple replacing their Trabant – an equally 'local' car – with a Suzuki.

These considerations do not appear abstractly, but through the gut-feeling of refusal of the real, embodied Suzuki drivers. This is why the option can be recontextualized as a matter of 'who I am' as opposed to issues of position and competition. This is only a seeming opposition, however. The very fact of perceiving something as *competition* rather than neutral difference is based on a sense of better and worse, which is grounded in the distinction between better and worse visions particular goods pertain to.

At the same time, all these concerns suddenly become 'stupid' as soon as Zita starts using the car, enjoys using it and *personally* likes it; from that point onwards these concerns become external pressures not her own feelings.

Summary

Zita represents an outlook against which Viola and Géza defined their own, seeing it as senseless, superficial and radically different from theirs. The analysis, in contrast, revealed a vision that is different, but not simply 'senseless' as they assumed.

I have identified two different ethical principles guiding Zita's practices. First, Zita's care for her son constitutes an ethical principle in the traditional sense of the word: representing a generally applicable, unquestionable standard of the good. Second, subordinated to the prime ethical concern of being a good mother, I identified a happiness-centred ethic that involves the normative distinction between self-defined desires and externally defined norms. This idea is related to a similar notion of the 'right to happiness' as the happiness-balance approach identified in the case study about

Viola. Furthermore, it draws on the practices and ideas of Zita's mother, identified as objectifying a laid-back, cool outlook.

In this ethics rightness of desire cannot be established by external norms; the point is precisely the opposite: a desire is right as long as it is not induced by external standards, but by internal, personal inclinations that match nothing else but one's personality. Consumption mediates different visions in this context, too, as different goods are seen to pertain to different visions of life and personality; yet these visions are evaluated as better or worse through the application of the central criteria of being more or less suitable for one's personality.

This case study also allowed me to trace shifting social hierarchies and evaluations from the 1980s to the present. The same expensive style that classified Zita in the socialist 1980s as a despised, rich outcast is seen by those in her circle today as desirable and openly embraced. Yet similarly to Viola, Zita only sees the centrality of 'status symbols' in other people's lives; her own acceptance of these choices is understood in terms of self-defined choices that suit her modern, dynamic, sporty and *igényes* personality.

Between groups: Éva Gárdos

Gizi, the grandmother of Éva (who was born in 1978), moved to Budapest from a small village. She acquired a baccalaureate by attending evening classes during socialism and become an accountant. Éva's mother Klára worked as a cosmetician after secondary school, then started up a private pet shop in the 1970s. She married a divorced doctor (aged 83 at the time of the research). Éva, Gizi and Klára live in a green-belt suburb of Budapest in their respective one-bedroom flats, which they received in exchange for their large detached house from a property developer.

When Éva was a teenager she was in a very similar situation to Zita. Her mother ran a lucrative private business and did her best to provide Éva with the trendiest clothes, toys and electronics. Unlike Zita, however, Éva's mother emphasised the importance of education and sent Éva to one of the elite high schools.²³ She was

²³ Schooling in Hungary is free, but subject to entry exams. Elite high schools are those where a high proportion of students go on to university.

admitted to university, studied business administration and fulfilled her mother's dream of her daughter having a high prestige job by working for a PR department of a bank.

The path of social mobility that led Éva from a lower-middle-class background, to study at an elite high school and university and then move on to a high prestige job resulted in a number of conflicts between what can be seen as the ideals stemming from Éva's original background and her new social environment. These conflicts are particularly important from the point of view of this study, as they make explicit ideas, values and beliefs of the two main 'lifestyle' groups, which in other cases remain implicit in practical ethics. Here I look at two characteristic fields, which are manifested through Éva's reoccurring conflicts with her mother and her boyfriend, mediating – what I see as – class-specific versions of what it means to be a proper woman and what a normal life should be like.

How to be a proper woman

Éva's mother Klára believes in the same idea of traditional, feminine beauty that I described when discussing working-class Mária and lower middle-class Sára in Chapter 5. She makes herself up every morning and carefully selects matching dresses and jewellery from her wardrobe even if she is not going out:

Klára: I think that **one must be born with a sense of beauty**. (...) My sense of beauty has been very developed; well, I always liked to be beautiful, you can't put it another way. I liked to be beautiful. And even today I find it important. Here I am, old me, and the first thing in the morning after the shower is to make myself up a bit, just like a man shaves himself.

For Klára, care for her daughter included trying to pass on her sense of beauty and buying Éva brand new, pretty, girly, colourful clothes from Western shops and expensive 'dollar shops' (selling Western goods for US dollars in Budapest), according to her ideals.

However, the elite high school where Klára sent Éva was predominantly attended by the children of intellectual families, where – just like Zita – Éva's trendy, sexy, feminine and blatantly expensive style and her loud, direct behaviour met harsh criticism. Éva explains that one of the factors determining her general behaviour today is the criticism that her looks attracted in high school. By the end of high school she

became more 'modest' in what she wore and in her behaviour as she realized that her previous style – taught to her by her mother – was associated in other circles with superficial, easy-to-get, materialistic, *bunkó* (primitive) girls:

Éva: In high school there were style groups. There was the *alternative* type of people, which was quite characteristic of our high school, the *elvonts* (abstract minded). Then there were the *diszkós* (disco-style) like me, who wore more colourful clothes, instead of black or brown, and wore no haversacks, but things like an Invicta bag pack. I classified myself in the *diszkós* category.

Léna: What does that mean?

É: What comes to my mind is [we wore] more colourful clothes. Let's say **more branded clothes**. Definitely more branded clothes. These two things.

L. What was each group's opinion of one another?

G: In my opinion it was antagonistic. We used to call them 'bundle-packs', so it was with them [the adversary]. We, the *diszkós*, were many fewer. (She laughs). It's so ridiculous this world! In my high school... if I had gone to another school, the numbers would have been the other way round. So they were very hostile towards us. Back then I used to be daring, I dressed in quite a daring way, too; I wore mini skirts, I wore knee-high boots, so this hostility was particularly directed at me. We used to call them 'haversacks' too, but we didn't really tease them, not really.

L: And what did they think of you?

G: Well, about me... **I went through this in a very hypersensitive way**, so I might distort it, but I think **they thought that we were richer, that we had a superiority complex and we were conceited**. I think in relation to me it was especially because of my appearance. Because I really dared to wear a mini skirt back then. And presumably because of the persistent hostility shown towards me, **I changed to such an extent** that I no longer wore anything like that, nothing daring, because an immense amount of negative stuff affected me in relation to that [experience].

L: Like?

G: Countless, not only related to clothing. For example, the first time I went to the high school my hair was straight. I wore it straight the whole week, and when I went the next week with [natural] curly hair, I heard one of my teachers say: "Look, she even permed her hair." Back then I wore make-up, too, to some extent. And I was full of self-confidence, I wasn't conceited, I just think that I *adtam magamra* [cared for myself/carried myself with pride]. Yes, I did wear mini skirt, I did wear a kind of top, but **not out of delusions of grandeur, I simply felt good in it. So, they succeeded very well in breaking me down. And I became complete low-key**. I remember once going to a disco and the girls stuck a piece of chewing gum in my hair and when I passed them they kept slapping their butts. So I was hit by a lot of crap in relation to that, so no wonder I am paranoid on this matter.

Éva went through a number of bullying experiences from fellow students (and teachers). Criticism of her practices was passed in the name of modesty and refusal of social competition, yet these pressures were no less aggressive and frustrating than the upward pressures Zita talked about. I see this as a conflict between social groups; the conflict between the children of intellectual families and those of less educated entrepreneurs is translated into a conflict between style groups. The 'alternatives' – as analysed when discussing Viola previously – prided themselves on their intellectual superiority, refusal of material goods and traditional gender roles. The intellectuals in her school were not

necessarily poorer than Éva – if anything, they were wealthier – however, just like Viola, they shared the idea that intellectual capacity can only be objectified in a particular (shabby) style. In their interpretation scheme, what I see as a lower-class ideal of feminine beauty was seen first as excessively sexy (that's why they were 'slapping their butts'), second as superficial (obsessed with the outside), and third as *nouveau riche* (in a typically socialist understanding). These criticisms, however, as Bourdieu suggests, were neither formulated, nor received in the framework of class conflict: they were expressed as ethical judgements on how one should be (shy, restrained, modest as opposed to outspoken, sexy, flamboyant and daring).

Éva today sees herself as modest and emphasises that she avoids being seen as *bunko* (primitive). Yet she went through this process not by simply adopting new practices, but by becoming more reflexive and aware of different interpretations of her previous practices. Due to her in-between position she is able to see her practices with her mother's eyes and also with the external eye of an (intellectual) interpreter. Given her transition between different practices she is somewhat dissociated from both worlds: she no longer sees her mother's practices as an unquestioned objectification of aesthetics and a normative ideal of femininity, yet she does not embrace the new ideal whole-heartedly either. She instead emphasises interpretation, which allows her to separate pragmatically practice from meaning. This is very different from the usual working of practical ethics, in which particular ethical ideas are experienced as naturally objectified in specific practices. This and the conflict of the two versions of femininity can be observed in the following dispute Éva had with her mother:

Klára: When I was her age I liked to dress much more. I talked to you about this... I don't know, **is it something that you are born with?**

Éva: **Mum's problem is that I don't *adok magamra* [care for myself/carry myself with pride].** While I feel that I do *adok magamra* in a different way. You can see that I don't dress conspicuously; I try to dress as discreetly as possible. This includes make-up too.

K: What make-up? You don't even make yourself up!

É: Every morning we have a row that I have no make-up on my face. If we go somewhere together we are especially likely to argue. "You don't put a bit of blusher on your face?" or "Are you made up?" "Yes I am, I have mascara on." "You could draw a line underneath too." Like that.

K: (laughs) Even though Éva knows and can confirm that external appearances aren't everything for me. Because, how can I put it, I have inner human values, too. **But I like it if a woman is beautiful and pretty.**

É: **I try to make myself more discreet,** so we are different in that. Also, mum makes sure that the bag matches the shoes...

K: **A normal woman pays attention to that.**

Éva's mother tries to direct her towards her ideal of a normal, proper woman, which is based on a non-intellectual ideal of beauty and gender. For Klára, this style works as practical ethics, objectifying dignity and a normative version of femininity (a 'normal' woman). Éva, in contrast – although remaining understanding of her mother's ideas and expectations – through the process of attending the elite intellectual school adopted a different, less feminine, demure ideal, which has its roots in the socialist intellectual ascetism. This means that the class difference between mother and daughter is mediated through different ethical visions of gender, in particular through ethical questions of what it means to be a proper woman.

Shirts for the theatre

A similar ambiguity of interpretation, social position and ethics mediated by consumption can be detected in another conflict that reoccurs with Éva's long-term boyfriend, Péter. Péter has primary education and works as a construction worker. He was born in a small village, in a poor family. He is very hard working and set up his own company specializing in building houses, with three – previously unemployed – friends from his home village. The company is small and does not make much money, but it is a huge achievement for someone coming from a poor village that has very high unemployment. He is very proud of having set up and run the company under his own force (unlike the spoiled Budapest kids): this is what freed him from the hopeless village, giving him access to a better life and earning him respect among his friends, whom he has 'saved' as well. In his life, work is a focal point and the success of the company is an aim for which he willingly sacrifices much of his time and money. He rents a flat in Budapest, but spends much of his time at Éva's.

Characteristic of their relationship is the doubt Éva has over whether Péter will eventually overcome aspects of his 'background', as she puts it, that she cannot identify with – like controlling his anger and jealousy, or not being able to make long-term financial plans and certain other features that she considers *bunko* (primitive) – and qualify as a potential future husband for her. These issues are reflected in most debates about what it is appropriate to consume, in which what is at stake is whether or not Péter is able to adopt more 'intelligent' practices:

Léna: On what do you disagree when you buy something?

Péter: I used to dress a bit more elegantly, shirts... Lately I have had a more easy style. Éva doesn't like that...

Éva: **I die if I see a t-shirt on him which shows his muscles.**

P: I don't like it either, but I have already bought that t-shirt!

É (laughing): These muscle-shirts!²⁴ I always say: "Don't buy such a muscle shirt!" and he goes: "You are stupid, the weather is hot.", and then I say: "OK, but nevertheless, don't buy a muscle shirt!"

L: What do you mean by muscle shirt?

É: **I make an immediate association with these prejudices, these body-builders.** You know! It's sleeveless, and then **those bold, body-building pigs** come into my mind.

P: **But I am not one of them.**

É: **I know, but still.**

L: Anything else?

P: You are always nagging me that I have to buy a suit.

É: **Yes, in Péter's life not even that was necessary, not even a theatre... There was nothing there (in the village).** And now that we are here and there could be more occasions to dress up...

P: I like to dress up too. (...) I don't dress that badly, do I?

É: No, you don't. I'd just say that you have **too few... elegant outfits are missing** [from your wardrobe].

P: What do you mean by elegant?

É: **Something that you could wear to the theatre.** But you know that.

P: Apart from that, I don't need elegant clothes.

É: Presumably it will stay that way, **since we hardly ever go there (to the theatre)**, that you will have one suit, and then when we go to a posh place, you will wear The Suit. (...) It's striking that apart from that, I like the way he dresses very much. He wears shirts, short-sleeved shirts, and **more intelligent t-shirts.**

This discussion is characterized on the one hand by the same concern on interpretation as the one noted above with Éva's mother. Éva's concern is not that Péter would be in any way similar to the despised body-builders. The point is to adopt practices that adequately objectify his virtues – hiding his muscles and dressing in more 'intelligent' style – and being read properly by external observers.

On the other hand, the question is whether Péter is able to turn his back on his background and adopt a more sophisticated way of life that Éva would like to live. The suit that allows someone to go to the theatre in this context is a *symbol* of this life for two reasons. First, Éva does not go to the theatre either, and did not go even before she met Péter. When she admitted this, she added 'Maybe it is shameful', which suggests that she considers going to the theatre as something that one *should* be doing. Second, in most theatres casual clothes are completely acceptable: half of the audience usually shows up in jeans. Being able and wanting to go to the theatre is meaningful not as an actual practice, but as a symbol of a more sophisticated, elegant and intelligent style of

²⁴ Muscle shirt refers to either sleeveless or very tight shirts that emphasize the muscles, usually associated with poorly educated, rather aggressive men.

life. This life is contrasted with the countryside (where ‘there was nothing’): a hopeless place, without opportunities; and people living it are contrasted with the narrow-minded, brutal, dumb body-builders.

All this could be interpreted as a matter of class position and aspirations; however, the point is that what analysts describe as class positions are experienced, valued or refused by Éva as different ways of living and being. In other words, the desirability of the ‘upper class’ as opposed to the ‘lower class’ is experienced as wanting to live a more open, eventful life as opposed to a narrow minded, dull one, and to be a sophisticated person as opposed to a narrow-minded one.

Happiness and being crazy

Despite the fact that Éva’s choices are taken and justified with reference to powerful normative visions of how to live and behave, she also often uses the same happiness justification – observed in Viola and Zita, that focuses on ‘feeling good’ – both *alongside* and *instead* of these visions. In this section I address the relationship between these two sets of justifications.

First, the happiness ethics, as noted earlier, involves a substantive principle that derives the rightness of an action from the fact that desire is self-defined as opposed to directed at external expectations:

Éva: I don’t like snobs, for example, if you buy an expensive car. Although I am not saying that everybody buys expensive cars out of snobbishness, because there are many who buy them because they really like them, and because they are really crazy about cars. And for those people it’s such an experience, an ecstasy that they sit in a car that they are crazy about, and drive it around for three hours a day. But of course there are those who don’t buy it for that reason, but in order to show off to people that they own such a car... So to abstract from this [concrete case], if someone has a lot of money, they can spend it freely – and **I don’t even find them appalling – as long as they do it for their own fun.** So if someone buys a car for 20 million, because they love it, and then they keep it in a garage, and go out alone, race around with it alone: fine. **What is repugnant to me,** and this is why I made a distinction, because I find it likely, is if they buy the car **to show off, not because it makes them feel good.**

The happiness principle rejects any standard that appears as external and binding, and considers only those desires as legitimate that match the criteria authenticity. This definition of happiness, in other words, relies on the ethical vision of respecting her own

feelings, moods and emotions, allowing herself to ‘be crazy’ as opposed to acting out of expectation or duty.

The same concern is expressed by Éva about nearly all spheres of consumption. She emphasises – just like Viola – that she wants her home to make her feel good; for example, she explains that she chose different colours for the walls, because she ‘gets filled with colours’ and wanted each room (living room, kitchen and bedroom) to correspond to different mood states. She explains why she buys many different shower gels using a similar argument:

Éva: I am crazy about them. This is something inexplicable. I love that they smell good, I can’t stand only having one, but **depending on my mood I like to use different ones – as my mood dictates.**

The point is not that liking different shower gels is in any sense more ethical than having a single one; what is ethical about this choice is the underlying idea that you should live following your inclinations, moods and passion as opposed to restricting them by an external norm.

Second, more than a substantive ethical principle emphasizing internally and intuitively defined aims, happiness is also a new language of justification that emphasizes the hedonistic aspect of practices over other concerns. It is used to describe even those actions that are taken in the light of strongly normative ethical visions as if they would be neutral preferences.

To illustrate the point, first let’s contrast two accounts Éva gives about how she decides on buying clothes. On the one hand, Éva’s clothing practices are guided by the normative ideal of modesty, which she is able to defend as soon as it is challenged by her mother; on the other hand, when explaining how she shops for clothes, she uses the non-normative happiness argument that downplays this normative aspect and explains her choice as if it was a mere passion:

Klára: The way I do it is when autumn comes I get out my winter clothes, throw away what I haven’t worn for a long time and start to speculate with the existing ones, what matches what in terms of colour, style and my shape. [So I calculate what is missing] and what I buy has to match what I imagine. For example, now I know exactly what I need, because I have checked what kind of tops I have. I can tell you: white and black I have, so I would like something in red and brown; I have trousers, so I am looking for these two tops now. And I close this in January and until April it doesn’t even occur to me to buy anything. Where does a need come from for you? You do it differently, don’t you? Not with this sorting method.

Éva: No, that drives me nuts. I don’t do...

K: This is not good like that. Isn’t it better if one does something in a systematic way?

E: The reason why I don't buy clothes systematically is that if I thought like this and decided '**I need a jumper**' then I would buy a jumper, **even if I wasn't crazy about it. The problem with me is that if I wasn't crazy about it, then I'd stop wearing it after a month. If I buy something I'm not crazy about I start feeling (she laughs) cognitive dissonance.**

In the quote Éva defends 'going crazy' in harmony with the happiness logic as opposed to the her mother's view, which is self-disciplined (as she describes a systematic method of sorting her clothes) and defined by a norm of what a normal woman should have in her wardrobe (checking what is missing from her wardrobe, which she sees as normal). From other parts of the interview, however, we know that this desire is much less 'crazy', unpredictable and self-defined than the quote suggests: those items induce the 'craze' that conform to the criteria of modesty, linked strongly to social norms. Also, Éva spends in a very thrifty way: she buys her clothes in the cheapest shops, and compares prices even before making minor purchases. Yet her emphasis on desire in the account is so central that it seem to overshadow all other considerations; it even masks normative principles by reconstituting them as sheer passion. This suggests that the happiness ethics is also a language in which all concerns are reformulated as personal passions in order to emphasize their self-defined nature. The same phenomenon appears in other fields as well, even when the discussion involves an entire vision of life. The next section looks at a discussion that illustrates this.

Escaping the grey everyday

Éva budgets in a very conscious way: she divides her wages into envelopes dedicated to different purposes and writes down all the expenses she makes. The point of this budgeting is to be able to save one-third of her wages for holidays, which she plans a year ahead. These holidays customarily include a skiing trip in Europe during the winter and a package holiday of two weeks during the summer to an exotic destination. For Éva these trips are the essence of a happy life, which she formulates following the usual hedonistic account:

Léna: Why do you like travelling?

Éva: **Experience. Recharging the batteries. I must go, otherwise I go mental.**

Péter: It's a good way to relax.

E: I feel that without it... I don't know but I think that travelling is the kind of thing that **one must spend money on**; otherwise one would become completely apathetic at home. I'd rather give up – I'm not saying everything – but many things, so that [I can go travelling and hence] I can withstand the problems of routine grey days... so that I can revive myself.

For Éva, life is divided between the grey everyday periods and ‘crazy’, fulfilling periods of holidays, where she feels that she is ‘alive’. Holiday is formulated almost as a basic need; passion for travelling and adventure for her is essential, something without which her life would be incomparably poorer and less meaningful: a ‘grey’ life of apathy on the daily treadmill. For her boyfriend, Péter, in contrast holidays are inessential, simply being times of relaxation that he could easily give up.

The difference is part of a larger conflict that often results in discussions between them. These conflicts usually remain unconcluded, which is in some sense characteristic of the happiness ethics: as soon as different versions of happiness have to be reconciled – here as part of a relationship – the simple standard of happiness can no longer be applied, as it does not provide a common ground to appeal to. (At a larger scale this is the problem with liberal theory as a basis of a democratic debate on common goals.) Finding a common ground would mean that Éva and Péter need to give reasons for different ideals of the good life apart from the ‘I like it’ argument. Their failure to do so results in a lack of negotiation and in putting forward two separate versions of the good life (with an invitation from both sides to the other to accept that version):

Léna: Do you have future plans?

Péter: That’s a good question (they are laughing). Sometimes yes, sometimes no.

Éva: It depends how we are with each other [whether we think we’ll stay together or we are about to split up]. When we plan, whether there is an agreement? I don’t think so. We are different from this point of view. But it’s because of our childhood, as Péter is from the countryside, has a completely different family background; he’s used to different stuff.

P: I was about to say the same. As for me, **I insist on having a house with garden.**

É: And he wants to move out of Budapest.

P: I don’t insist on that, [we can live] here as well. But it wouldn’t be possible here, because it’s expensive. And I need a house for my work.

É: I’d rather get along in a flat, but I **insist on travelling**. We are different in that.

L (to Péter): Why would you like to live in a detached house with a garden?

P: First, because of my job and because I would like to have a garden. For me it’s a hobby as well.

É: He likes gardening.

L: How will you be living, ideally, in 10 years?

P: **For me it would be ideal to have a house with a garden, kids. Two. Animals.**

É: **Pigs.** (She laughs)

P: No, I don’t want any pigs!

L: And for you, Éva?

É: I think we are different from this point of view. The problem is that I can’t get this bloody travelling out of my head. (...) Our habits are a bit different from that point of view. But this is to be expected, because we have grown up in completely different places, [we were brought up in] different environments, my friends... So, for Péter this is the ideal [plan], which doesn’t mean that he doesn’t like travelling for example, but for him...

P: I like travelling! Well, if you hadn’t showed me this life, then I wouldn’t be interested in it.

É: This is what I'm saying: that around me much more...

P: Almost nobody from my circle of friends has ever been abroad. **They aren't even interested [in going abroad].**

É: **Their *igénys* (requirements) are different.**

P: Because they don't know about them [about these requirements].

É: **So for me it's important [to travel]. For me... it's not adequate to say that 'it wouldn't be enough'...but you understand what I mean.**

P: It's also partly because I don't have time. I can go away for one week [maximum], because I don't have anybody yet to whom I can entrust the company.

É: All I am saying is that, I too, **I long for an idyllic family and that stuff, whatever; all I am saying is that it wouldn't fulfil my *igénys* (requirements) if I don't know, I was in a nice house and I worked around [the house] at the weekend.**

P: Neither would it fulfil mine. I like travelling too.

Péter's vision of the house with a huge garden and family weekends spent gardening captures his ideal of a life centred on domestic happiness. The house is of central importance for him by virtue of being the home of a loving family, a little community with two children, animals and plants. Beyond ideals of a traditional family, the house in his vision is a site where he could realize his aspirations related to his work as well. On the one hand, as he mentioned in another part of the interview, if he had such a house it would solve the problem of the lack of storage for his tools and building materials – which is the major obstacle to him being able to develop his company. On the other hand, Péter loves building and fixing things around the house, and is highly regarded for his taste and creativity by Éva. For him, building his *own* house is about much more than having somewhere to live; his skills in building and decorating are the basis of his self-esteem and pride. Although Péter formulates this vision by using the 'I like' argument, it is clear from the discussion that the house objectifies everything that is important for him in his life: his work, his family and domestic harmony. Even though Péter agrees with Éva's value hierarchy and therefore is willing to compromise, he imagines this compromise as part of his vision of life.

For Éva the ideal future would involve exploring the world, a life full of adventures with a limited domestic sphere (both spatially and emotionally) and travelling, as opposed to Péter's idea of the countryside idyll, with weekends spent at home and weekdays far from friends and the thrills of the city. She is aware that this vision only involves her personal idea of having a good life, and cannot be generalized and treated as an external principle. To circumvent this without abandoning the language of happiness, Éva defends her vision by reformulating the originally non-normative happiness standard as an *igény* (higher inner requirement). This implies that even though happiness is subjective, there are higher and lower versions of happiness,

and what makes you happy qualifies you as a person. She suggests the Péter's version of the good life is not exciting enough (quantitatively), but also qualitatively; it does not include substantively the kind of happiness she is after. This view is illustrated by her ironic joke that by 'animals' Péter means pigs for domestic production, which discredits Péter's vision by suggesting that his ideal future is in fact to live the same life as his parents live. This means that even if Éva uses the language of happiness and preferences, she does so to describe ethical visions of life that she considers substantively better, more fulfilling and meaningful.

Summary

Éva started from a very similar background to Zita, yet the practical ethics she adopted from her mother were radically challenged in the new intellectual environment in her elite high school and university. Interpreted according to the alternative outlook observed in Viola, Éva's practices were seen as showy, superficial and overtly sexy. The process made her aware of different interpretations and broke the connection between form and content taken for granted through practical ethics by other participants. As a result, she engages in practices much more reflexively, with an awareness of different interpretations and the conscious pursuit of forms that adequately reflect her modest personality.

Éva's ideas of necessary and important practices draw on a vision of living a fulfilling life that centres on having adventures and exploring the world, which is situated against more traditional ideas that centre on the family and domestic harmony. Furthermore, her ideas involve what can be described as an intellectual vision of a more cultured life and cultural sophistication, being open-minded, intelligent and sophisticated – reflected both in her choice of partner and her appreciation of the theatre.

These visions despite being normative are customarily formulated using the value-neutral language of happiness observed in Zita and Viola. I have shown that for Éva happiness is a substantive ethical principle, as well as a language that is used to describe all pursuits. Substantively, it stands for the self-defined desire and respect for one's own feeling and intuition as opposed to external expectations. As a language, it is

used to describe even those visions of life that Éva considers to be normatively better and more fulfilling.

Part of the West: Tibor Kovács

Tibor (born in 1976) is the older son of the Kovács couple. He graduated in finance and works in a high position in a bank. He is extremely busy, working until 9 p.m. almost every day, which is unusual in Budapest. At the time of the research he was living in a newly built three-bedroom flat on the top of Rosehill, with his girlfriend, Mia. The flat has two large balconies, a fantastic view and is situated in a new apartment block with a gardener-maintained garden.

Tibor works in an international company where the working language is English. He has Western clients, travels frequently in Western Europe, watches the Discovery channel and CNN and studies Western magazines before making major purchases. He buys many of his clothes abroad in shops that do not exist in Hungary. When I arrived at his home he was watching a programme on ocean yachts and even though Hungary is a landlocked country he expressed great enthusiasm for owning one. Also, he was hoping to move to Western Europe, and since the interview this wish has been fulfilled; today he lives in Kensington in London, in a two-bedroom flat rented by the investment bank he works for. Tibor sees and evaluates himself not in relation to Hungary but in relation to Western financial circles. His reference group is more bankers living in Chelsea than his neighbours on Rosehill, which means that even though he earns far more than the average employee in Hungary he does not see himself as rich or content. Similarly, his extravagant purchases by Hungarian standards are normal or even modest in relation to the City employees he meets.

From Tibor's perspective these aspirations are understood as perfectionism both in his work and in his consumption. He grew up at a time when new opportunities were opening and he was able to be the first to take them. He was among the first students to take an MBA course as soon as it was offered; he became an expert of the capitalist stock exchange as soon as he could study it in the first years of capitalism; he went to the UK to learn English as soon as it became possible; and today it just seems to be a natural next move to look for a job in the UK with more challenges and a higher salary.

Perfectionist expertise

In every sphere of his life Tibor aims at achieving the best. His standard of living is already far above the Hungarian average, but he still considers it only just acceptable and hopes that his wage will multiply in the near future. 'Achieving the best' is a principle guiding his professional career, which is very much at the centre of his life. Tibor extends this principle to the sphere of consumption; before making any shopping decisions he carefully considers the options and makes comparisons between goods. In particular Tibor prides himself in two areas: having a sophisticated aesthetic taste and being an up-to-date expert in technology:

Mia: Yes, Tibor buys in a very thorough way. He thinks it over ten times, gets information from everywhere, on the internet, days, weeks...

Tibor: But only when it's about bigger things.

Léna: Could you give an example?

T: I bought a video camera this summer. **It was a half year's research at least.** Well, it was not only research, **I was waiting for certain models to come out.** But the price was less important. In fact I had certain expectations (he lists a number of technical features). I have to admit sincerely that I over researched, I overanalyzed everything, I bought the German hyper-catalogues every month at the airports; I browsed through them until they were falling apart, I read them.

The same expertise and perfectionism are expressed regarding home decoration. Tibor's flat is furnished in the latest minimalist style, which is mainly known in Hungary from Western magazines and TV programmes. First, because most Hungarians cannot afford it: this furniture is very pricey and requires large open spaces, which cheaper flats do not have. Second, one of the main characteristics of socialism was the accumulation of objects (S. Nagy 1997), and this style requires people to throw away a large number of objects in order to make the living space airy, and to replace furniture altogether as the older objects do not match the minimalist style. Finally, most shops in Budapest – apart from IKEA and some cheaper stores – sell antique-looking furniture and finding furniture in the high-quality, Western minimalist style is still a challenge. Although the flat could easily be used on the cover of a home décor magazine, Tibor considers it imperfect compared with his ideal of having furniture that is pure, sophisticated and up to date:

Tibor: I furnished it, apart from the tiles and the doors; and I am aware that they don't fit well. Well, lots of things should have been replaced in the second bathroom, too, but these things were already here, when we bought it.

Mia: What is wrong with them?

T: To be perfectly honest, I would replace all the doors for sure. The windows should be replaced due to insulation problems, **it's 10-year old wood...** 15-year-old frames. The sliding doors need to be replaced. The tiles upstairs in the bathroom and the toilet **reflect the standard of the early nineties**. But these pieces [the living room furniture] correspond to contemporary taste.

M: I like it. I like the furnishing because it's airy. It's not crammed with all sorts of silliness.

T: Yup. Although some junk has made its way in here. (...) Yes, what you can see, it's all Mia's.

M: What?!

T: Isn't it? All the little... little potted flower...

M: Well, where should I put that flower?

T: Candles...

M: Well... Maybe... **For me it's important that there is harmony so that [the flat] is warm. So when you enter there is warmth.** It doesn't matter what style. Should I be honest, should I be critical? Then this flat seems cold to me. The walls are white and this drives me... I hate white walls. A little bit of beige, just a little bit of colour (would be good). **So this is cold for me. So you can see that it used to be a man's flat. I would have chosen warmer colours,** I would repaint the walls. So the tiles are grey in the kitchen... so somehow...

T: Why, don't you like it? **It doesn't match?**

M: I do, it's nice, there is consonance. Because everything is cold and sharp and in this minimalist kind of style.

T: It's true that the emphasis is on **consonance** here.

L: Do you think the flat reflects your personality?

T: **Well, I have no idea;** I don't know how the flat is.

M: I think so. When I first entered here...

T: It's tidy, isn't it?

M: It's tidy, it's clean, you can comprehend it, I think it reflects... [him].

T: **Yes, I hate kitsch. I hate kitsch and this gaudy [stuff]. I don't like cheap stuff. I like this pure, I love this minimalist style.**

Tibor's passion for quality shows continuity with his father's principles of 'creating value' and mastery, yet also involves radically different elements. First, the emphasis here is on aesthetic sophistication and being up to date as opposed to longevity. In 2006 when this interview took place Tibor already considered the style of the 1990s as outdated. The requirement to be up to date involves a practical belief that cancels previous ideas of stable value, as it implies that goods rapidly go out of fashion no matter how much they cost originally or how long they last physically. The criterion of longevity that both Tibor's grandmother and father believed in simply does not make sense in this context.

This logic would dictate purchasing cheaper objects; however, Tibor emphasizes that he hates 'cheap stuff', as he considers it tacky. For him the expensive furniture objectifies sophisticated taste, aesthetic harmony and knowledge of what is up to date, in contrast with members of previous generations who engaged in cross-generational accumulation projects. In other words, despite the similarities at the level of practices, Tibor's viewpoint is entirely different from that of his father, and even contradicts it.

Tibor's view is also different from Mia's. For Mia, objects are harmonious if they create a cosy, warm atmosphere that *makes her feel* relaxed and homey. In contrast with this idea of harmony between subjects and objects, Tibor puts the emphasis on harmony *between* objects. He relates to the flat as an external object of art. This approach, which I will call *aesthetic expertise*, focuses on the aesthetic perfection of the environment according to a standard of expert knowledge of style and fashion. Just as a wine expert can tell a good wine from a bad one, *even if he does not like it*, Tibor's relationship to the flat is one of an expert, rather than of a recipient subject. Although the small sample does not allow for generalizations, the difference seems to relate to gender; women embrace the former and men the latter notion of harmony.

Living a sophisticated life

Tibor only buys expensive designer goods, goes to posh restaurants and drives an expensive car. These practices are disapproved of by his parents, who are unostentatious consumers, especially in *publicly visible* fields, despite their current wealth. His mother, Ilona, whose ascetic socialist ethics dictate modesty even when her financial circumstances are extremely good, talks about her failure to pass on her principles:

Ilona: I tried to pass my principles on to him, but the **world today is so different, everything has changed**, I didn't always succeed in reinforcing what I wanted to. For example, [as a teenager] he said that he wanted a pair of shoes. [I said] "What kind of shoes? How much are they?" And he gave such a high price that I almost fainted. I said "I am sure that cheaper shoes exist." He answered that they did, but he didn't want those. (...) Many times I said to him, "If I've asked you once, I've asked you a thousand times, what will you do if you can't afford it [spending such a lot of money] any more? How will you be able to give it up?" And the answer was "When I will no longer have money, I will be able to give it up, but now I do have money."

Ilona questions Tibor's practices by relating them to one of her central considerations of socialist ascetism, but also acknowledges that changing practical beliefs might explain different practices. János, his father, approves of the expensive flat, as he sees it as 'value-creation', but sees most of Tibor's other practices with discontent:

János: So, [the young] are a little inclined to show off. **Compared with the other kids, by whom Tibor is surrounded, he is modest.** He is modest; he has always been modest, shy. (...) So, he likes nice things, the *igényes* things, he spends money on them...
Léna: So he is similar to you, isn't he?

J: Maybe yes. Maybe. But it's a **different age and different era**, there are different influences and fashions today. I wouldn't buy a €60 wine. I can't imagine buying wine for 15 000 Ft, I wouldn't even enter a restaurant like that (a flashy one). **Not because I don't have 15 000 Ft**, but I don't buy wine even for 5000 or 8000 Ft. I buy a bottle for 1500 Ft that is not a counterfeited one, but a nice wine that is not surrounded by hocus-pocus. **I don't buy the name [of the producer], but I know the regions and buy the wine based on that.**

L: So not because you couldn't afford...

J: No, of course not, of course not! **So I don't buy a bulb of 150W where a 25W is enough, you see.**

While János chooses goods based on his expertise – which might result in him buying an expensive DIY tool or a cheap wine – Tibor's choices don't fit into any notion of expertise or value creation and János is inclined to interpret them as showing off. János also acknowledges changing times and group pressures and defends Tibor by suggesting that compared with his peers he is modest.

For Tibor, in contrast, these choices objectify the same perfectionist standard that guides his other practices, which forms part of a larger vision of a sophisticated life, as illustrated by the following argument he had with his girlfriend over approvable outfits to wear:

Tibor: In fact on the whole I like the way she (Mia) dresses. Her style. Since you don't wear anything else, but jeans... Though if I were honest, it bothers me that she doesn't have a **normal skirt suit**.

Mia: Of course I do, it's just that by the time you come home in the evening I have already changed!

T: No, I see you every morning! You go to work, as if you were going to a club! This is another thing. With us, in the bank, the girls are so dressed up it's unbelievable.

M: Because you work in a bank and I work in an office.

T: The way they dress in the bank... She wears that stuff, a sort of parrot-green (he says it with contempt, but Mia laughs) whatever little top, torn, embroidered jeans. And she wears that sort of thing for work, you see... This, by the way, bothers me. Now, that we talk about it. Yes, **this does bother me, that you don't have a proper skirt suit.**

M: But...!

T: I have never seen you dressed up in my entire life. Even if we go to a wedding or the theatre, even then I haven't seen you dressed up the way I do. **I have to say that when it comes to your smart clothes, there is place for criticism. (...)**

M: Because you sit 12 hours in a bank. And I sit 8 hours in an office, a closed room.

T: Okay, but you don't even have the *igény* (requirement)!

M: (they talk together) I don't have to... I would be the odd one out, if I went to work every day in a skirt suit.

T: But you don't even have **the igény** for a suit! To have the *igény* for a wardrobe with at least two skirt suits.

M: But where would I wear a skirt suit? I have elegant dresses, which I can wear to wherever.

T: **Theatre... mmm... banquets**, or weddings.

M: Ouch, we never attend banquets, Tibor! But if we did, then I would have skirt suits for sure! (She laughs)

T: Well, yes, because up to now, I haven't taken you with me. But this doesn't mean that I don't...

M: Okay... (She laughs)

The discussion about the skirt suit rapidly develops into a debate on differing notions of what kind of requirements a normal woman should have and what kind of activities their common life should involve. To be more precise, these are the issues at stake for Tibor, less so for Mia. He repeatedly uses the word *igény*, which – as discussed previously – is synonymous to ‘need’, but conveys a very positive meaning of having higher requirements, a desire for the better, which depends on how sophisticated one is. By claiming that the need for an elegant dress should be an inner desire (*igény*), he constitutes it as a personal *virtue*, a sign of sophistication, rather than an instrumental response to outer expectations. This way the discussion is about whether or not a *proper* woman *should* have an *inner* desire (*igény*) to wear formal clothes or not. For Tibor, elegant dresses implicitly form part of the whole vision of life with banquets and bank clerks who engage in the same vision. In this regard, the discussion over elegant clothes mediates between two different ideas of how a proper woman should dress and what constitutes a better, fuller life.

Summary

Tibor is a part of the new Hungarian upper class, with a high level of education, income and a job at a multinational company. He is a perfectionist both in his work and in his consumption, and aims at achieving the best in every area. For him, the ‘best’ in consumption is a lifestyle inspired by his Western colleagues and media. He prides himself on his expert knowledge of style, aesthetics and quality in every field. For him, making expensive choices is understood as a personal *virtue*, a sign of sophistication.

The case study showed that despite apparent similarities between Tibor’s practices and the long-term, expensive, quality purchases characteristic of his grandmother and father, the underlying logic is different, partly because of their different practical beliefs. In Tibor’s case, these features objectify his expert knowledge of trends and innovations, which rather than being part of a long-term investment in ‘value-creation’ are inherently transitory.

The new poor: Kinga and Gyuri Ráder

In the 1920s the Ráder family lived a bourgeois lifestyle similar to Ágota Bernát's discussed in the Chapter 5. During World War 2, the male members of the family died, their flat was nationalized and co-tenants were moved in. Bea (born in 1937) married and had her child Eszter (in 1957) in this co-tenancy. Bea's husband emigrated soon after Eszter's birth, and the family has not heard from him ever since. Bea worked around the clock to take care of Eszter and her ill mother, Izabella, but the family became increasingly impoverished. Eszter remembers that they lived in great poverty; she shared a room and bed with her mother and could hardly afford any clothes. Izabella maintained her composure and some aspects of her previous lifestyle, and despite her poverty, she bought a season ticket for Eszter to go to the opera, and sent her to ballet lessons and high school.

After her baccalaureate Eszter started working as a secretary and married Rudi, a manual worker. The couple has two children: Kinga (born in 1984) and Anna (born in 1994). In the 1980s they were offered two flats by the council in exchange for their co-tenancy where they were living with Bea, with a minor additional charge. The couple accepted it; however, they had to take a loan from other family members to pay for the extra charge. In 1995 Rudi lost his job and, as Eszter was still on maternity leave, the family had no income. At the same time the family members who granted the loan got into difficulties as well, and asked for it back, which the Rádars could only afford to do by selling their flat and moving into a tenancy. They gradually used up their savings and eventually failed to pay the bills and the rent. They had no other option but to move into a shelter. By that time the relationship between Eszter and Rudi deteriorated, so Eszter moved into a single-mother shelter with her daughters. During the last decade they have lived in different single-mother and family shelters, and she has reunited and split up with Rudi over and over again. During these times Eszter could not find a secretarial job, so she worked as a cleaner for offices and hospitals.

In 2004 Eszter managed to rent a one-bedroom flat with the help of a homeless charity, and moved in with Anna, Kinga and Kinga's boyfriend Gyuri (born in 1984). Gyuri is also from a poor family; both his parents are unemployed and alcoholics. Kinga after her baccalaureate started working as a cashier in a supermarket, but later found her

current job in a baby orphanage. Gyuri has primary education and works as a cashier in night-shifts.

Autonomy, dignity and being able to live a normal life

The scarcity Kinga and Gyuri had to endure during their childhood and teenagerhood is of decisive importance for their current views on consumption and spending. Kinga spent years moving from shelter to shelter and she was unable to afford to spend more than a basic minimum on goods.

Kinga and Eszter remember these times as shameful, primarily characterized by the lack of autonomy, inability to take control of their lives and failure to lead what they see as a normal standard of life. For Kinga, the shelter represented an oppressive power that threatened their autonomy and self-respect. She explains that shelters exercised strict control over the inhabitants' money: 70–80% of their income had to be paid in, which partly covered the shelter's expenses, and partly went into a savings account, which they received back when they left. The shelter also controlled the minute details of inhabitants' lives, by imposing strict regulations and control over the way they spent their time and money. Kinga recalls these times as a continuous struggle to maintain a normal life and dignity against the shelter's regulations, which resulted in a number of conflicts between the Rádars and the shelter workers:

Kinga: They tried to interfere in everything. What mom should buy, how she should save money, bring us up, where I went to school, in everything. (...) They interfered in how much food she bought, what kind of food she bought, because according to them it was gratuitous, it was not necessary. Well, for example, they said that salami [typical Hungarian breakfast] was not necessary. **Mom always stood firm with regard to her habit that on Sundays – if nothing else [was possible] – she cooked in a normal (proper) way and that we sat down to eat. Even there, there was a table, and we sat down to eat.** For us Sunday consists of meat in breadcrumbs and French fries [a typical Hungarian dish]. She always insisted on that. If we ate twice a month, then we ate twice on Sundays. But according to them [the shelter workers] this was an unnecessary luxury. Me, I can't get going without hot chocolate in the morning; they used to ask why I had to drink that much milk. They used to say it for everything, for fruit, for everything.

Léna: According to them what would have been the proper [normal] way?

K: Well, in my opinion, for them [it would have been proper] to eat a loaf of bread for three days, butter, water, I don't know. Really, sometimes they used to say things that I couldn't believe they would do at home. For example, this food issue. Yeah, and also the clothing! **Mom never allowed us to look shabby. So, if we can't have anything at least [she stuck to] that.** I used to wear only one pair of trousers. But it was always clean, it was never ragged. Anna (her sister) never had ragged clothes on either. **So mom was criticized many times, because she insisted on what she thought, and she did it right.** Thank God, she always stood firm. (...) And mom cheated many times, she didn't always give them what she

ought to have given, rather she spent it on us. Mom had many quarrels with these people, but she did it right, in my opinion. Otherwise we wouldn't have got that far, if not for her perseverance and firmness. (...) [O]ther people, who used to work there, didn't treat us as people who had got into a bad situation, rather as if we were some kind of stupid people, and as if we **were too stupid to live in a normal way**. And they didn't help, in my opinion, that was my impression. Instead **they only wanted to emphasise that we were stupid and unable to live a normal life. But they were wrong, because we had ideas about what kind of life we wanted to lead, we just had to make them come real.**

In this quote the link between consumption and ethics – understood as a vision of how one should live – is in some sense even deeper than in any other case study. It is evident that the shelter's ideas of basic necessities did not cover what the Ráders considered to be indispensable elements of the minimum standards of proper human life. Kinga mentions the most stereotypically common mundane practices – having meat in breadcrumbs for Sunday lunch, drinking cacao for breakfasts – and having proper, clean clothes as the cornerstones of a normal life and dignity. She emphasizes that becoming homeless was a pitiful accident, not a sign of not having 'normal' aims, which was constantly denied at the shelter.

She recalls that poverty prevented many aspects of leading a normal life even outside the shelter. She could not afford to go out with fellow students; she was mocked in school for her looks and the shame she felt over their situation hindered her from making friends. She was constantly scared that her family's poverty would be revealed and she would be shamed ('I know that it was not my fault, but back then this is how I experienced it, that I had to feel ashamed').

For Kinga, having their own flat and being able to afford clothes and beauty care means the much longed for autonomy, dignity and ability to live a normal life again:

Kinga: We had a look at the flat; we liked it a lot, so we packed up everything and moved in two days. Wow, we were so happy; we had such a good time! **After so many years, finally a place where it's only us! We close the door, there is no-one else watching us, or what we are doing!**

Gyuri's childhood experiences are very similar, but for different reasons. His parents are alcoholics, and lost their jobs long ago. They live in a council flat and it is only thanks to the emergency help offered by relatives to pay their unpaid bills that they have not been expelled from it. Gyuri recalls that his parents often drank away their social benefits – and occasional wages – long before the next payday; and he had to go to his grandparents to get food to survive on or ask for small loans from his friends:

Gyuri: When I started at the elementary school, I started to be aware that we didn't live well. Well, there were frequently problems caused by the alcohol... And the money too was spent on alcohol. The bills weren't paid and often there was no food either. I went to school hungry, and the entire day I only had what was given [for free] at the school: a cacao and a roll. And I was friends with my classmates, so I always begged them for sandwiches in the canteen.

Gyuri began working at the age of 16, and started an independent life, which – similarly to Kinga – he makes sense of in contrast to the humiliation of poverty and lack of autonomy he endured while living with his parents. He remembers this change as 'starting to get civilized' and recalls that for the first time he could buy himself appropriate clothes and gained control over his life, without having to rely on others. These cases, in harmony with Slater's argument on needs, highlight the fact that what most participants take for granted as the minimum needs of a normal life involve the strongest normative claims of what it means to be human, to have dignity and autonomy.

These experiences affect Kinga's and Gyuri's actual practices in a somewhat contradictory way. On the one hand, they emphasize that they do not want to commit the mistakes of their parents, and the importance of budgeting, independence and making long-term plans. On the other hand, looking at their actual practices and accounts of the purchases they make a different trend emerges: that they feel a sense of compensation for what they could not enjoy before, which results in them spending beyond their means in areas such as clothing, electronics and entertainment. In the next sections I look at these aspects in turn.

Sharing and family

For the Ráders, deciding what it is right to buy draws explicitly on a vision of having a good life that is defined by being different from the one their parents led. The central feature of their spending is their emphasis on avoiding the same mistakes their parents made. This involves on the one hand budgeting and planning as opposed to living day-to-day, which is the basis of independence and having control over one's life:

Gyuri: I don't expect my grandparents to help me. They helped my parents a lot and **I would like to prove to them that I don't need it. (...) I have a different outlook on life than they [the parents] do. For example, my mother lives from one day to another.**

On the other hand, it involves sharing and common budgeting, which more than being a money management system entails a vision of a good family and relationships; sharing and taking decisions together are seen as a means of avoiding the selfishness and fights over money that have destroyed their families:

Léna: And what you would you like to avoid?

Kinga: Well, certainly, [I want us] **not to have fights about money**, because in my opinion that is a big mistake, but we will pool it, and we won't have... like "mine" and "yours", because it really results in quarrels. Because in my opinion when people fight a lot everything is [spoiled]. In my opinion this was a problem for us. (...) Dad liked to keep his own [salary], but in the end mom always asked him for it. I could see that dad was disappointed by that many times, because he wanted something for himself as well. He wanted the old-fashioned versions of everything for us, but at the same time the latest for himself. [Like a] new watch, he wanted to keep up to some extent, but at the same time he didn't accept that prices were going up. They frequently had a fight about why mom spent so much, because he didn't have the faintest idea about how much a loaf of bread costs, or a litre of milk, because he never entered a supermarket. But nevertheless, when mobile phones became available, he needed a telephone, and he needed a DVD, and I don't know what else; but why that much had to be spent on food, on meat, he could never understand. But food was needed at home, because if there wasn't [food at home], he complained.

The couple has an ideal of living as a cohesive family – rather than egoistically and engaged in ultimately self-destructive pursuits – that is realized by managing a common budget and subordinating their individual needs to common aims. Gyuri recalls that he has largely changed his previous 'reckless' habits and became a 'family-centred workaholic' since he met Kinga:

Gyuri: Since we met I go out less and don't spend so much on stupid things.

Léna: What are the stupid things?

Gy: For example, if I eat three cakes a day or drink a 0.5 litre coke. It's stupid, because I'd rather buy a two-litre bottle, I can bring it home and **we all drink it**. Or if I go McDonald's for 1000 Ft, it doesn't fill me up, while eating at home, **we can all get full** for 1000 Fts.

Elsewhere Gyuri suggested that he has always been 'family-centred'; since he has been working he has paid most of his parents' bills, and regularly shops for food for them to support them. Being with Kinga, this concern could be translated into working towards his *own* ideal family, which means that today he tries to subordinate even smaller 'pleasures' to common aims. In fact, their entire way of living can be seen as subordinating their own desires to the family's needs:

Kinga: Many people tell me that I shouldn't have moved in with my mother, because if Gyuri and I lived together, just the two of us, it would be much easier. But they don't understand that Anna (my sister) is very close to me, and mum wouldn't be able to raise her alone. She works a lot and so Anna would spend a lot of time alone. Poor child it wouldn't be good for her, and

anyway, I like to be here. Fortunately, Gyuri understands this and he doesn't ask questions like why do we have to be here. Otherwise we wouldn't be together, if he wouldn't accept this.

This 'togetherness' dominates most of their purchases, from the jointly selected and paid for furniture, to the monthly shopping trips carried out together – with Eszter and Anna – to Tesco. The exceptions to this spending behaviour are the goods that the couple buys in compensation for their sad childhood, which I look at in the next section.

Compensation

The Ráder family's budget is still very tight, and they have to manage several loans they took out earlier, including instalments on the cheapest IKEA furniture, a loan taken out before Christmas to buy presents and another they took for covering expenses related to moving into the flat. They had also taken out a number of loans earlier; it seems that they take out bigger and bigger loans to pay back previous ones and afford new expenses.

I was surprised to learn that even when the Ráders had some unexpected income – as presents or bonuses at work – they did not use it to pay off their debt, but purchased expensive goods, such as brand-name clothes, a digital camera and a car. These purchases were made in the name of family love – for example, Gyuri bought a Puma sweater to surprise Kinga, and the camera was bought to take family photos – yet given their financial situation, I found these practices somewhat contradictory. Furthermore, the small flat boasted two DVD players, which at the time were expensive and not common.

The reason behind the contradiction between the tight budget and – compared with it – excessive spending, is partly explained by a sense of compensation that Gyuri and Kinga feel when buying these objects:

Gyuri: I like brand-name goods, one of my favourites is Saxoo. I saw a coat in a Saxoo shop, I liked it, we were able to buy it and we bought it. (...) Earlier I couldn't have bought something like this, because I couldn't have afforded it. **I think for me having a good brand is important, because I had quite a shitty childhood**, if I can say so. And since **I have been working, I'm independent, I can do it**, I can buy it for myself. (...) We have a customer, a gipsy boy, but he is very nice. He always nags me, asking "What have you bought, have you bought a new Saxoo? Show me! What have you bought?" And I always show him something, and he is, like, "Wow, that is really cool, really cool." He too is a Saxoo maniac. (...) Also, I always have to have money on me. This too comes from the fact that I never had it in

my childhood, and now I like to have money on me. I can't go anywhere without having money on me. If I catch glance of something, I fancy a coke and I can't buy it, I freak out.

Léna: From my point of view, it's strange that you live well, you have nice clothes, a DVD; at the same time your debts are increasing.

Gy: Yes. Well, **we try to keep up the appearance of living well.**

L: Why do you say "appearance"?

Gy: Well, Kinga's friends and my friends know very well what kind of childhood we both had. **And when they come up here [they can see that we live well]. Not that it's specifically for them [so that they can see it], but they still see that we have put together something from nothing. So it's not for the outside world.**

Gyuri makes sense of being able to buy brand-name clothes or simply act on a sudden whim as part of his new-found autonomy and as a compensation for earlier scarcity. He is pleased that unlike earlier, where he was embarrassed and teased for his shabby looks, today he can even be a style model for others, admired for his trendy look. Also, he feels proud about what they have achieved and the admiration it induces in others. A similar explanation is offered by Kinga:

Kinga: If I had a bit more self-discipline, maybe we could save even more. So I feel that now we have a bit more money than we used to, so I can afford [to spend] more, for example on tops – which are criticized by Gyuri – but it feels so good (she laughs). So this is kind of strange, I feel a bit guilty about it. (...) It feels good that after so many years, really, for almost ten years it was quite bad, downs mainly, that from now on it will be good. We work for it, really, we work a lot, we budget as well, and it feels good.

The apparent contradiction between budgeting and high spending is further based on a mental dividing line between regular and irregular expenses. On the one hand, the couple try not to exceed their monthly budget, and calculate carefully what they can and cannot fit into it. On the other hand, some expenses are taken out of the budgeting plan. For example, the furniture instalments are handled as bills, which they never fail to pay, while other loans are simply ignored and keep accumulating. They hardly talk about these other loans, and it was only on one occasion that Gyuri privately mentioned them. Also, gifts are also handled as part of the 'irregular sphere', which constitutes a different area of indulgence outside budgeting. For example, when their grandparents ask them what they would like for Christmas, Kinga and Gyuri never choose an item that they would buy as part of the regular budgeting, but only pieces that constitute a luxury; this is how the DVDs were acquired.

Summary

The Ráder couple's choices have been delimited by their financial situation throughout their entire lives. This deprivation, the lack of control and freedom to decide about their needs was experienced as a failure to live a normal life, being part of the community and lacking even the most minimal level of autonomy. The case study suggests there is an even more profound connection between ethics and consumption than the ones based on choice analysed previously.

First, the ability to engage in what are seen as basic needs is in fact considered the very minimum of living humanly and having a sense of autonomy and dignity. Being able to afford to eat meat in breadcrumbs, a frizz-ease shampoo or a place where one can live undisturbed are seen as essential elements of being able to live a normal, human life, being part of a community and establishing a minimum amount of autonomy. These practices and questions of dignity and autonomy are not given more emphasis here than in other case studies because they are more important for the Rádars; rather, other participants take the material circumstances that allow for a human and dignified existence for granted. It is only in these situations of extreme scarcity that the very definition of what constitutes a human existence comes into question and has to be defended. This means that these ethical links become explicit in extreme poverty, but are implicitly assumed and taken for granted in more affluent situations as well.

Second, what seems to be at stake in the case study is not only the definition of what is human, but also the assertion of autonomy as a prerequisite of agency. This is a reminder to the fact that 'choice' taken for granted by other participants presupposes a minimum of resources, and itself constitutes an often taken-for-granted founding value underlying cosmologies.

In analysing the current practices of the Ráder couple, I pointed out two tendencies that both draw on their childhood experiences but with contradictory results. On the one hand, distinctions of approvable practices were formulated based on an ideal family life defined against the ones their own families led. With reference to these ideals the couple subsumes their own needs to the common goals and requirements of the family. On the other hand, as a compensation for previous deprivation and assertion of autonomy, they engage in relatively spendthrift practices.

Conclusion

In this chapter I looked at cosmologies that normative distinctions between practices of the third generation – born after 1976 – drew on. One of the most distinctive features of this generation is that they understand their practices as choices, unlike those in previous generations who applied norms in their consumption that they considered as generally applicable and self-evident, and saw their practices as the ‘normal’ or ‘right’ thing to do.

The emphasis on choice among those in the third generation is connected to the importance they attribute to self-defined standards as opposed to external norms. I identified two versions of this principle: happiness-centred ethics (mainly embraced by women) and ethics centred on expertise, mastery and conscious choices (mainly embraced by men).

The happiness-centred ethics involve on the one hand an ethical distinction between self-defined pleasures and adherence to norms, and they are linked to the imperative of respecting one’s own feelings and intuitions rather than subordinating them to external pressures. On the other hand, I suggested that happiness is a general language that participants habitually use, even when they describe visions of a good life that they hold to be normatively higher. Although the validity of a version of happiness for a particular person cannot be questioned in the framework of happiness ethics, participants do evaluate different visions of happiness as substantively more or less valuable.

Furthermore, the happiness standard changes the way the authenticity of a practice is understood as assessed. Unlike previous ideas that bind authenticity of a practice to externally assessable standards – such as to ranks in the pre-socialist cosmology assuming that only people of a specific social position will have a genuine relation to the object – the happiness-centred version of authenticity locates the standard *inside* the person. This implies that the ethical evaluation of practices centrally depends on interpretation and assuming motives.

The ethics of conscious mastery, in contrast to the personal interaction with goods implied by the happiness ethics, focuses on the proficiency of technological, aesthetic or environmental knowledge that can be abstracted from the particular situation and subject. The ethics of perfectionism (focused on complete mastery of

aesthetics and taste as knowledge) and the ethics of environmentalism (which subordinates desires to one conscious and rational principle) are similar in this sense, as they both involve mastery and adherence to external principles.

Despite the emphasis on self-defined desires and independent choice, the cosmologies that the happiness ethics or expert mastery form part of show important continuities with socialist social divisions and cosmologies of previous generations. As explained in the previous chapter, cosmologies of the second generation draw to a large extent on what I see as a public repertoire of legitimate narratives, which differed according to their relation to socialism. It was only in the case of participants working in the second economy – which can be seen as the vanguards of capitalist entrepreneurship – that an ignorance and distance from the socialist public discourse could be observed.

In the third generation, many of these cosmologies survived in reinterpreted versions. For example, the ‘alternative’ lifestyle embraced by Viola draws largely on socialist intellectual asceticism; Géza’s conscious consumption carries elements the *polgári* ideal; while Zita’s practices draw on her mother’s hedonistic views. Also, the opposition between groups suggested by participants – such as between the ‘disco’ and the ‘alternative’ – seem to be structured along cultural capital characteristic of socialist times.

Elements of previous cosmologies and practices are combined with what can be seen as components of the new capitalist discourses. The happiness ethics is in harmony with the liberal notion of self-defined needs and the idea that the prerequisite of freedom is abandoning generally applicable normative standards: *de gustibus non est disputandum*. Tibor and Gyuri’s ideas of autonomy understood as freedom to buy and perfectionism seen as mastery of fashion and aesthetic trends can also be linked to market economy. Viola’s and Géza’s principles in turn echo the anti-capitalist leftist and conservative critique of the system respectively, which Dombos (2004) traced in the intellectual public discourses on consumption. Yet similarly to socialist discourse in the previous generation, these sources are adopted through incorporation into personal cosmologies and through the process appropriated and modified to cohere to other ethical sources. Importantly, cosmologies observed here form much less identifiable patterns than in previous generations, where a set of legitimate narratives could be delineated. This diversity is probably due to the decline of an intense public discourse and regulation of consumption on the one hand, and the expansion of symbolic

resources – through the inflow of diverse media images and actual experiences with foreign lifestyles – on the other.

Normative distinctions, beyond drawing on ethical visions, involved new *practical wisdom* as well. The most important change compared with previous generations is the end of the taken-for-granted belief in the financial and symbolic longevity of goods and the stability of supply. Goods are experienced as constantly evolving and their evaluation in terms of style and price is seen as subject to change. The two main ethics can be linked to these practical beliefs in different ways. Happiness ethics overcome the ephemeral nature of goods by focusing on subjective experience, thereby establishing internal standards of appropriateness that do not have to keep track of changing goods. Ethics of mastery, in contrast, involve control over changing conditions through knowledge. Tibor's perfectionism is based on being up to date in the latest technological, aesthetic trends; while Géza's conscious consumption principles entail establishing general, unchanging 'objective conditions' – such as limited environmental resources – which introduce stable guidelines in a chaotic world of goods.

The diversity in ethical and practical beliefs is combined with uncertainty about the hierarchy of these practices. In previous generations, there was a higher consensus on the hierarchy of desirable practices; or at least, this is how participants experienced it. For example, for Sándor elegance was unquestionably more desirable than any other practice. In the third generation, in contrast, there is no clear hierarchy between these practices and visions; some of them are opposing, mutually claiming superiority over the other, while others simply ignore each other. Hierarchy and legitimate practices are under negotiation and subject to change.

This ambiguity over hierarchy and the new emphasis on personal standards are also reflected in ideas of entitlement. Unlike in the previous generations, where ideas of entitlement were linked either to rank – in the traditionalist version – or to work – in the socialist version – in the third generation ideas of entitlement appear as much more diverse and ambiguous.

First, new bases of entitlement can be observed, such as 'having a good sense of business' or even the very fact of having money. Yet the status of these new bases of entitlement is still ambiguous, bordering on illegitimate. There still is a widely held scepticism over the legality of large fortunes and conspicuous spending, which draws mainly on work- and education-based ideas of entitlement.

Second, there is a tendency to deny the very possibility of generally applicable principles of entitlement. Questioning entitlement is often considered an infringement of (capitalist) freedom to choose your own way of earning and spending money. In contrast, at the personal level, related to the happiness ethics is the emergence of what I called the personal ‘happiness balance’, which sees consumption as compensation that is deserved by negative experiences.

Finally, conscious consumption embraced by Géza represents an attempt to establish new, generally applicable principles of entitlement formulated with reference to sustainability, future generations and access to limited natural resources.

A new generation of hedonists?

In drawing conclusions based on these findings, we have to keep in mind the limitations caused by the fact that in the data cohort and age effects are intertwined. This means that the emphasis on hedonism does not necessarily indicate a generational change, but can be partly explained by the participants of this generation all being young. As the previous chapters showed, the ethical centre of most cosmologies is care for the family, while the participants here – apart from Zita – do not have children and most of them are either single or with a partner they do not yet consider final. This means that they are not at a stage of their life where they would be responsible for a family. Furthermore, consumption is often closely connected to a person’s field of work, which in their case is often only just emerging: some of them are still studying or have just started working, and – apart from Tibor – earn wages that are not sufficient for them to envisage making long-term plans. Whether the observations made here will characterize them at a later stage of their life as well, or will disappear, is an open question.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis looked at changing normative distinctions between consumption practices of three generations of Hungarians, who grew up in different historical periods of pre-socialism, socialism and capitalism. The analysis focused first on the ethical and practical beliefs participants draw on in distinguishing particular practices as approvable or necessary; second, it traced their connections with those of previous generations and finally with public discourse. Here I summarize the theoretical arguments relating to these three core areas, then situate the argument in relation to Bourdieu's theory of distinction.

Cosmologies and normative distinctions

The central theoretical point made throughout the cases is that normative distinctions between practices draw on a closely connected set of *ethical* and *practical* beliefs, which I called cosmologies.

I appropriated the term 'ethics' from philosophy to describe normative judgements that are taken in the light of questions of 'How should one live?' and 'Who should one be?'. This formulation involves a normative relation rather than a substantive quality; the ethical nature of an act does not stem from its conforming to a pre-defined set of values, but from the fact that agents consider it as right or good by standards that they see as independent from their desires. The use of ethics is different from (1) the liberal notion of 'preferences' that excludes the existence of values as external standards; (2) 'morals' that focus on abstract principles of the Right as opposed to standards of good action in the context of one's life and practice; and (3) critical discourses that equate the 'ethical' with specific pre-defined values. Defining ethics this way was important in order to allow for a space of studying how people articulate everyday, practical, normative standards and reflect on their practices in relation to them.

I argued that normative distinctions between practices draw on particular ethical visions of *who to be* – for example, on visions of what it means to be a proper man, a good mother and on notions of desirable identities more broadly –, *how to live* – visions of what constitutes a good life – and *ideas of entitlement*, including social justice, different views of social hierarchy and the basis of respect. This means that normative distinctions between consumption practices mediate ethical reasoning, in the sense that they are made sense of and held accountable to particular visions of a good life, character and society.

The discursive level of ethics is closely connected to the level of practice. The connection is not simply that the terrains to which ethics are applied are primarily everyday practices. More than that, I argued that ethics are so inseparable from practices that the very term ethical ‘ideas’ become questionable. Ethics more often primarily exist in practice, that is, denote specific practices of right behaviour, rather than abstract principles. To capture this emphasis I introduced the notion of *practical ethics*. The notion draws on Miller’s theory of objectification, which sees subjects and objects as mutually co-constitutive and serves to indicate that people do not *express* abstract values or ideas through goods. Ethics of how to live and who to be are understood primarily as embodied and objectified; and consequently are experienced, transmitted and negotiated principally through material culture practices rather than through abstract concepts. These arguments are in harmony with Bourdieu’s theory of practice that emphasizes that a *practical* sense of the world acquired through practical inculcation, guides action. Yet, as I will explain, unlike Bourdieu, who sees evaluations as functional to domination, the concept of practical ethics takes ethics seriously in *agents’ own terms*.

Normative distinctions between practices draw simultaneously on these ethical visions – or practical ethics – and *practical wisdom*, which includes a wide range of beliefs about the world, including society, supply, longevity of goods and so on. These ethical and practical beliefs are not specific to distinct practices, but form a relatively connected, larger personal cosmology that all normative distinctions draw on, although in diverse, sometimes contradictory, ways. This means that instead of seeing practices as disaggregated with values or logics internal to them, they are better understood as connected to each other through a personal cosmology. ‘Socialist ascetics’ for Ilona or ‘aristocratic respectability’ for Magda, for example, inform a wide range of practices,

providing an overarching ethics that is founded on an ethical vision of how to live and who to be.

These cosmologies extend beyond the domain of consumption, which because of the focus on 'consumption' could not be fully explored in the present study. The most obvious example is work: people repeatedly drew connections between work and consumption suggesting that the same values guiding consumption practices guide their work practices; even, that the logic of their consumption is to be derived from their work (although to a different degree depending on their self-understanding).

This means that for a fuller understanding of the connections people make across practices a more holistic view seems necessary, which should incorporate different material culture practices, or even extend beyond it. Although most practices have a material aspect, what people see as some of the most important fields of ethics – such as being honest or kind – can escape attention if the focus is on material practices. This means that material culture is a good entry point into a wide range of subjectivities, yet not to all of them; for a more thorough understanding of everyday ethics an even more comprehensive approach seems necessary.

Private and public cosmologies

The cosmologies normative distinctions bring into play are personal, yet they are not individual achievements; they are envisaged within an existing system of ideals, available visions of what constitutes a good, full or dignified life; what it means to be a respectable man or woman; as well as through historically specific practices that are seen to objectify these visions. The relationships between private and public practices and cosmologies, however, is not that of simple adaptation. As Shove suggests, 'people's routines are shaped and moulded by the collective conventions of the day', yet they do not '*simply* mirror' public ideologies and norms of practices; instead 'private habits are construed as people steer their own course through culturally and temporally specific landscape of legitimating discourse and classifications of ordinary and extraordinary behaviour' (2003:94).

In exploring the nature of this connection I looked at public discourse on approvable practices and compared them to personal accounts. The analysis of public discourse showed that – in harmony with historical studies and Slater's argument on

needs – these discourses imply particular ethical visions of how to live and what society should look like. People’s own accounts selectively draw on and appropriate elements of these visions into their own self-understanding, personal versions of a good life and ideas of society. To be appropriated, elements of different public discourses have to be woven together with other ethical sources, such as family traditions, elements of previously incorporated public discourses, a sense of what one has achieved in one’s life or personal definitions of happiness. Through this process elements of often contradictory public discourses are moulded into personal cosmologies and reinterpreted in unique ways. The important point is that through appropriating these ideals, people negotiate their own ethical positions with reference to which they envisage how they should live and what kind of person they should become.

The cases also showed that public discourses provide a set of legitimate narratives and ethical sources, which often shape how people relate to other sources in their own life or family background. For example, in the second generation most participants storied their life to a large extent according to legitimate socialist and conservative narratives, even if it involved *rewriting* actual family histories.

A similar point can be made not only about ethical, but also practical beliefs. What I described as the official version of ‘objective conditions’ in Chapter 4, did not produce particular strategies automatically, but through being incorporated into cosmologies as people’s own practical wisdom. These beliefs too are shaped by diverse sources including personal experiences and family induction, which result in different versions of what are taken as ‘objective constraints’ and sensible strategies to deal with them.

Shifting practices

As the notion of *practical* ethics – founded on the co-constitution of subjects and objects – suggests, the incorporation and appropriation of diverse sources of ethical and practical wisdom into cosmologies is largely played out through practices rather than abstract ideas. It therefore relies essentially on historically available practices, of which I only focused on those in the family context. The case studies showed that practices of previous generations are not simply adopted or abandoned but adapted and appropriated to objectify modified cosmologies.

This appropriation often involves the survival of form that comes to objectify new cosmologies, without participants reflecting on or being aware of the change. The most telling example for this pattern is the way different generations of the Bernáts family use furniture. The first generation of Bernáts valued *koloniál* furniture because it objectified ideas of respectability, preserving and transmitting status, drawing at the same time on practical beliefs in the objective value regime and a view of society structured along traditional lines of respect. This furniture in the second generation was appropriated to objectify ideals of aesthetic and domestic harmony as part of the socialist intellectual ascetic ethics, and involving practical beliefs relating to the socialist shortage economy. Another example is Géza Rigó's reinterpretation of thrift – that was originally embraced by his father as frugality and rationality – as anti-materialism, as part of his conscious consumer cosmology.

Interestingly, maintaining similar practices despite changing objective circumstances – captured in practical beliefs – can even go against the original cosmology they objectified. For example, although Szilvia's concern with home decoration was meaningful as part of an accumulation project in the financial and symbolic sense, in the light of the practical belief in the stability of value, under the new circumstances of unstable financial value, her daughter's continuation of the same practices – objectifying a sense of beauty and everyday ceremonies – is seen as the opposite of the original concern.

In these cases practices are not maintained as part of a conscious strategy of maintaining a tradition. Rather, ethical visions of how to live and who to be seem to be imagined in the form of *existing* practices; while change takes place through the reinterpretation of these practices rather than by abandoning them.

In other cases, however, the continuity of practices is often followed as a conscious ethical strategy as opposed to the largely unreflected processes of the previous case. The modest choices Ilona makes despite her wealth, and János' choice to engage in everyday manual activities, are formulated as ethical strategies of remaining the same *despite* changed circumstances. Here the continuity of practices – in terms of form and content – under new practical beliefs is only feasible through the reinterpretation of originally instrumental considerations into substantive ethical ideas.

The conscious emphasis on continuity in some cases involves projecting back practices and ethical ideas objectified by them to the past. Sára's emphasis on the continuity of *polgári* practices is an example for this. Here the point is not that these

practices necessarily represent continuity – as Sára’s case study showed, her idea of *polgári* practices involved both pre-socialist and socialist elements – rather that practices gain their legitimacy by being connected to a real or imaginary earlier period in time.

These findings suggest that transformation takes place gradually, through shifting practices and ethical ideas, constituting practical ethics. As Shove suggests, ‘values and purposes are actively constructed through use with the result that there is no simple continuum between tradition and innovation’ (Shove 2003: 153). The exceptions can be characteristically related to situations where the ethics objectified by a practice – that is customarily taken for granted – are radically questioned and made explicit; the most prominent examples of this are political change, social mobility and generational conflict.

The transition to socialism from pre-socialism presents an example of political change. Socialist public discourse explicitly criticized pre-socialist hierarchy and exposed its connections with pre-socialist material culture and ethics. A new ethical vision and corresponding material culture was explicitly promoted as a break with previous practices. This break can be observed in the striking differences between the sort of clothes Ágota and her daughter, Ilona, consider appropriate: Ágota is always elegantly dressed but Ilona dresses modestly, in accordance with her socialist ethic.

Social mobility, as illustrated by the case studies about Miklós and Éva, can lead to a similar break with and reflection on practices. Miklós and Éva were faced on the one hand by a different interpretation of their practices by other social groups, on the other hand by different practical ethics, which they were not able to incorporate through inoculation, but only through reflection. In these cases, change involves reflection on the form and content of practices that are customarily treated as self-evident and inseparable.

Generational conflict, often epitomized by ‘teenage rebellion’, constitutes the last example of such rupture. In this case, interestingly, the new practices often only involve a change of form, yet continuity of content. For example, Viola’s shabby, hippy clothes – despite upsetting her mother – objectify similar present-day concerns to the anti-materialist socialist ethics embraced by her mother. This means that in these cases the rupture of form, rather than constituting a change, is in fact the means of continuity, of the survival of cosmologies under new circumstances.

Bourdieu revisited

Suggesting that consumption mediates ethics rather than competitive motives, tastes, calculation and greed, based on people's own account of themselves, may well describe how people see their own actions, but can it provide a valid argument against theories that suggest an *objective* overarching logic of competition for domination behind consumption? Is this not a naïve argument that does more harm than good, by fostering the ideology that maintains domination, as Bourdieu suggests? In this part I put forward a critique of Bourdieu's theory of distinction based on Charles Taylor's work and argue that focusing on 'subjective' accounts rather than an 'objective' theory of distinction may provide a better understanding of these issues.

As described in Chapter 2, according to Bourdieu's theory of distinction, people may not experience their own actions as subjectively competitive, but looking at them objectively a different picture emerges. According to the theory, normative distinctions of practices are formed according to objective conditions and the possibilities allowed by them, and can be understood *objectively* as means of competition for domination.

In Chapter 2, I also discussed the two arguments by which Bourdieu ascertains this connection. The first argument establishes a direct causal relationship between economic conditions – the distance from necessity – and the habitus and suggests that competition involves attributing higher value to tastes that are objectively the result of particular objective conditions. I have suggested that this argument is deterministic and has been falsified by historical studies.

Here I would like to focus on the second argument, which suggests that the objective patterns that explain subjective ideas and practices are not simply economic conditions but the objective relations in a given field. According to this explanation, practices and ideas are determined by the best way to use one's capital at maximum efficiency, that is, realizing the maximum 'profit' at the lowest cost. The critique of this point that I will put forward here is that objective relations of the field cannot be established independently of the subjective evaluations of agents; and that these normative evaluations are not a result of or functional to a competitive logic, instead the very capacity to produce distinctions – which makes the notion of higher and lower possible at all – is dependent on having ethical ideas.

My starting point is that if, as Bourdieu suggests, subjective ideas can be explained by an objective analysis of relations, we need a method that can map these relations independently from subjective ideas. According to Bourdieu, relations between positions are objectively defined – independently of agent's intentions – by the amount and composition of the capitals current in the field (1989: 39). In his analysis he focuses on three sorts of capital: economic, social and cultural (I treat symbolic capital separately later).

There are two possible ways of interpreting these capitals. First, we can see them as denoting universally and objectively higher and lower positions in themselves: if you have more money, it means that you are in an objectively higher position than if you do not; similarly, if you are more educated, you are objectively in a better position than if you are not. This explanation would suggest, first, that these capital compositions denote relations regardless of social setting; and second, that they are in some sense the aims – such as being rich – that people can gain in every field, implying a substantive theory of human aims.

This is not what Bourdieu suggests, however. He emphasizes, first, that there are no universally valid interests, but it is the field that presupposes and creates interests in its specific stakes. He therefore prefers to use the term 'illusio' instead of interest to indicate that it is always dependent on the field, both in the sense that different fields imply different interests and in the broader sense that interests in specific stakes are always products of a field. Money, knowledge and connections are not universal aims of all fields; we cannot take it for granted that having more of them always means one is in a higher position.

Second, this explanation does not stand because for Bourdieu these capitals are not the stakes of the field but they denote the power by which the stakes of a specific field can be acquired. In this sense they are only *means*. This is why capital is never absolute – different features or possessions serve as a capital in different fields. In other words, in France these are capitals *because* stakes can be acquired by them – in another setting they would not be capitals. This means that objective relations can only be analyzed by looking at the stakes and *deducing* capitals from those stakes: through looking at how those stakes can be acquired.

Therefore for an objective analysis of relations, we need an objective analysis of capitals, for which we need an objective analysis of the stakes and how they are acquired. For Bourdieu, the prime stake of the social world is always power. Here it is

important to distinguish two sorts of power: one that is based on coercion and one that is based on acceptance. Bourdieu is interested in the latter: stakes are always some form of legitimate power (Bourdieu 1984: 251), that is, a symbolic power reinforced by authority and a sense of legitimate hierarchy (as opposed to, say, sheer military force):

the struggle to win everything which, in the social world, is of the order of belief, credit and discredit, perception and appreciation, knowledge and recognition – name, renown, prestige, honour, glory, authority, everything which constitutes symbolic power as recognized power

(Bourdieu 1984: 251)

This explanation means that we can only establish what capital is in the social world or in a subfield of it by looking at what grants authority. For example, we can talk about cultural *capital*, because in an intellectual circle talking about the latest avant-garde piece of theatre in a sophisticated way provides authority; if it did not, we could not define it as a capital.

At the same time, and this is what I see as a contradiction, Bourdieu suggests that the intellectual circle's taste for avant-garde theatre can be explained by the fact that intellectuals are characterized by low economic and high cultural capital: the preference for cheaper, avant-garde art theatre is 'governed by the pursuit of maximum "cultural profit" for minimum economic cost', expecting 'the symbolic profit of their practice from the work itself, from its rarity and from the discourse about it (after the show, over a drink, or in their lectures, their articles or their books) through which they will endeavour to appropriate part of its distinctive value' (ibid.: 270).

At this point the analysis becomes circular. Bourdieu explains subjective ideas and the basis of respect and authority in a given group by objective relations; yet these objective relations cannot be known objectively in advance, but can only be established by deducing them from the current capitals, which in turn can only be empirically established by looking at what grants authority in different circles.

Bourdieu bases the claim that there exists an objective competitive logic on the argument that agents' evaluations and actions are defined by their capitals; yet deduces those capitals from agents' evaluations and actions. This method does not prove the existence of an invisible logic that orchestrates agents towards acquiring power, or a competitive ontology with power as the ultimate guiding force of all actions; it takes it for granted as a background assumption behind a circular explanation. Once one takes

the competitive ontology for granted, the theory works; it works so well that it cannot possibly fail.

Here I would like to propose an alternative explanation of distinction that does not rely on a competitive ontology and circular explanation. My starting point will be a different ontology, put forward by Charles Taylor, explained in detail in Chapter 2.

According to Taylor, strong evaluations – that is, ideas of the good, meaningful life and self-respect – are an inescapable human condition. This means that having a sense of value and a vision of the good is something we cannot do without. I think that these strong evaluations – and versions of a good life formulated according to them – are the basis of subjective valuations and hence of normative distinctions that denote what one considers as better and worse, more or less valuable, hence form the basis of hierarchy between better and worse ways of living and being. Furthermore, I think they are also the basis of respect and authority; as any idea of respect is always rooted in subjective evaluations based on an idea of the good, that is, in an ethical idea of what features, achievements are worth our awe.

In Bourdieu's interpretation, these evaluations are always functional to achieving the *real* aim of the game, which is legitimate power; my point in contrast will be that authority and respect arise from having strong evaluations. In this sense, ethics are not means or products of a larger competitive force, but the other way round: ethics and normative evaluations give rise to hierarchy and to *legitimate* power.

To make my point clear let's take an extreme example: a researcher who dedicates his life to medical research, with the – according to him at least – genuine intention to save lives. For Bourdieu, the explanation for this act would go like this: given his position as a medical researcher, he promotes a valuation that rates saving lives high so that he can claim authority and acquire legitimate power. (Even if he does not think so personally, this is what the competitive logic of objective conditions reveals.) By doing so, Bourdieu ignores the fact that this achievement can claim authority and admiration precisely because there are other people who agree to the value according to which saving lives is a good, higher, admirable thing. For other doctors who genuinely engage in research, looking up at this medical researcher, wanting to become like him, is experienced primarily as wanting to become such a wise, competent or good person as he is. Also, he will *legitimately* acquire a higher position in the organizational hierarchy, because he is higher in the ethical hierarchy – he is better according to the values that others believe in the given community. This is not to say

that there is not anybody who would like to invent a medicine out of a sheer desire to get a higher position and power – but reducing all actions to a single competitive logic is highly misleading.

To take an example from this research, consider Ilona. For her, the ascetic, hard-working ethics and the dedication for her family that inform her consumption are strong evaluations that guide her entire life. She respects and holds in high esteem people who are equally down-to-earth and family-centred and despises those who are not. This is also the basis of her sense of entitlement: hard-working and modest people are legitimately entitled to a higher position, while others are despised *nouveaux riches*, who do not deserve their position. Similarly, for Sára, ‘living in a beautiful way’ is based on an ethical vision of a good life centred on aesthetics and traditional family relationships. She looks down on people who do not have a sense of beauty, and considers their life and personality poorer.

As these ethical ideas mostly do not operate at the abstract level, but in practice as objectified, practical ethics, certain practices that are seen to objectify different ethical visions are not experienced as simply different but normatively higher or lower. This means that distinction – in the sense of attributing higher and lower value to specific practices – arise from ethical ideas, visions of a good life, good character and rightness of action. In other words, it is the belief in these visions and qualities as valuable – based on subjectively held values – that generates a sense of better and worse – and admiration and respect is granted accordingly –, not the interest in acquiring authority or distinction *per se*. Respect, hierarchy and distinction are so to say the outcomes or side-effects of these strong evaluations, not the centre, let alone, the aim of them.

Inequality and distinction

This critique is not to suggest that the problem of exclusion and inequality noted by Bourdieu can be left aside. He correctly points out the fact that the conditions under which one is brought up and lives influence one’s ideas and practices; and that these ideas and practices are seen to have different degrees of legitimacy, which largely reflects the ideals of particular social groups. In this context, the view that ideas and practices are mere matters of individual virtue does indeed produce and maintain

inequality, as Bourdieu convincingly argues, by making people of different backgrounds appear as being ethically different out of mere personal choice. This legitimates classism, exclusion and maintains the existing hierarchy.

Bourdieu's (1984) solution in *Distinction* is to expose the underlying competitiveness behind practices by showing that they are mere reflections of the best strategies allowed by capital composition. In contrast, I think that it is not competitiveness, but ethics that is the foundation of evaluations; therefore distinction – in the sense of attaching value to certain ways of being and living as higher – is inevitable and not bad per se. It is a result of having ethical ideas, which distinguish between higher and lower, better and worse ways of being and living, which are – in harmony with the notion of practical ethics – always necessarily objectified in practices.

I agree with Bourdieu that people tend to be unaware of the effect their circumstances have had on their ethics, which ignorance contributes to maintaining inequality by legitimating classism on an ethical basis. Yet I think the solution does not lie in exposing competitiveness, that is, the evil behind others' actions, but – as this thesis intended to do – in exploring and making these connections explicit and visible, and thereby facilitating communication between different ethics. Learning that others are in fact competitive may give a comforting feeling to those excluded by them, but by no means helps inclusion; if anything, it contributes to even deeper exclusion – now on both sides. I think the agenda should not be turning one-sided hatred into a mutual one, but into mutual understanding, which can only be achieved by openness to different ethics.

This requires acknowledging that there are diverse ethics, which might not conform to the legitimate definition of ethics in the first place. My strategy of avoiding seeing only 'legitimate' visions as ethical was to use the notion of ethics not to denote a specific substantive quality, but to leave it open to serve for everything that people hold as having a compelling power.

Yet this strategy should always serve as a means of understanding rather than romanticizing particular ideals. This argument relates to the second point about which I disagree with Bourdieu. He correctly suggests that domination is often based on the fact that the 'dominated classes' are unable to formulate alternative evaluations and so base their sense of self-respect and their ideals on dominant ones – and by doing so accept domination. However, having the same evaluations does not automatically produce domination; it is only the case if access to the practices deemed as higher is limited in

an unfair way. Having the same evaluations can be the basis of a shared value system, shared vision of a good life and shared idea of legitimate hierarchy. The solution, therefore, is to be open not only to *different* value systems, but also to the *same* one, and enable people to access their vision by exposing and eliminating barriers. In other words, the solution is for the dominated classes not necessarily to learn to enjoy, appreciate and stand up for the joys of working-class life – as opposed to longing for a middle-class existence, labelled as the condemnable desire of emulation – but to open up opportunities of mobility, by making explicit the hidden barriers, say, for example, of university entry. This again is only possible if there is more understanding and more communication.

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Appendices

1. Sample overview

Family	Name	Gender	Year of birth	Occupation	Income	Education	Description
Bernát	Sándor	M	1923	Engineer	High	University	Lady and gentleman
	Magda	F	1927	Housewife, clerk		Primary	
	Ede	M	1950	Engineer	Middle	University	Intellectual middle class
	Zsuzsa	F	1952	Researcher	Middle	University	
	Viola	F	1977	University student	Low	University	Intellectual middle class
Kovács	Ágota	F	1920	Book-keeper assistant	Middle	Secondary	Bourgeois
	János	M	1940	CEO of agricultural company	High	University	Hard-working rich
	Ilona	F	1947	Biology engineer / housewife		University	
	Tibor	M	1974	Banker	High	University	Rich, cosmopolitan new generation
	Mia	F	1980	Real-estate manager		University	
Gárdos	Gizi	F	1924	Accountant	Low	Primary	Lower class
	Klára	F	1947	Cosmetician	Middle	Secondary	Middle class
	Éva	F	1978	Marketing expert	Middle	University	Middle class
	Péter	M	1978	Entrepreneur		Primary	Entrepreneur lower class
Keresztes	Olga	F	1948	Optician	Middle	Secondary	Second-economy nouveau riche
	Zita	F	1976	Optician	Middle	Secondary	'Solarium babe'
Rigó	Szilvia	F	1932	Cashier	Low	Primary	Socialist petit-bourgeois
	Otto	M	1934	Engineer	Middle	University	Conservative middle class
	Sára	F	1957	Quality controller		University	
	Géza	M	1978	Teacher	Middle	University	Conscious consumer
Fenyvesi	Zsófia	F	1942	Seamstress, entrepreneur	Low	Primary	Self-made man
	Miklós	M	1963	Entrepreneur	High	Secondary	Nouveaux riches
	Dóra	F	1963	Teacher		University	
	Krisztián	M	1989	Student		University	Odd intellectual
Téglási	Ábel	M	1939	Unskilled worker	Low	Primary	Hard working working-class
	Mária	F	1944	Unskilled worker		Primary	
	Ferenc	M	1962	Car mechanic		Secondary	

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Ráder	Eszter	F	1957	Cleaner	Low	Secondary	Declined middle class
	Gyuri	M	1982	Cashier		Primary	Struggling lower class, day-to-day existence
	Kinga	F	1984	Nanny		Secondary	

2. Interview guide, version I

I. Introduction

Thank you for taking part in the research and dedicating time to the interview. This interview will be used for my PhD research; no commercial use will be made of it. The aim of the research is to understand the principles on which different people spend and save their money, and do shopping, and what they think of such habits in other people. The interviews will be handled confidentially: nobody will get to know your name, and nobody can listen to the recorded interview, not even your family members. At the end of the research you will be given a copy of the recordings, which you may keep or throw away. What name would you like me use for you?

This interview is about consumption. I will ask you to recall situations when you bought or used goods and I will ask your opinion about the consumption of other people around you: your family, friends and people you just see on the streets or on TV. I am interested in your opinion, how you feel and think about consumption. There are no correct or false answers.

Please introduce yourself and tell me briefly about the story of your life.
(Questions during life story and after:)

II. Changes of moralities of consumption throughout the respondent's life

If you think back to your childhood, could you recall an experience when you got something you were really happy to get?

Did your parents buy everything for you that you really wanted? What kind of goods did they agree to buy and what did they refuse to buy? Were there any disputes about that?

Have/do/will you apply the same principles with your own children?

Which principles would you apply and which would you alter?

What can be the reason for the difference between you and your parents from this point of view?

Please think back to the first time that you got pocket money. How did you spend it? How did you feel?

If you think back to your childhood, did you have more or less consumer goods than other children? How did you feel about that?

2. Please think back to your life when you grew older and became a teenager.

Please recount an important event when you got or bought something for yourself!

What did you spend your pocket money on?

Did you have any conflicts with your parents about what to buy, wear, eat, etc.? And with other people (classmates, friends, etc.)?

Do/did you distinguish different style groups? To which style group do/did you belong?

What does this style mean in practice?

What do you think about other people belonging to other style groups?

In your opinion what do they think of you?

Since when have you (rather than your parents) bought most things for yourself? Do you think your ideas of what you need and want to spend money on has changed since then?

III. Transition to market economy

How do you think consumption has changed since the end of socialism?

IV. Shopping moralities

Please tell me about the last time when you bought something!

What form does a shopping trip usually take?

Is it different for different goods? (Specify)

(Or: On what kind of goods do you spend your money? Please describe a typical shopping situation for each category!)

Do you think you shop differently from your friends, acquaintances and other people? What are the differences?

Do you have priorities about what to spend your money on?

Are there situations in which you feel that you can spend more or when you are less considerate than on other occasions?

On what kind of goods do you save money?

Have you ever had a bad conscience after buying something?

V. Moralities and society

If you look around in contemporary Hungary, what kind of groups would you define in terms of what people buy for themselves?

Are there people who consume too much? Do you disagree with the way some people spend money?

Are there any people who save more money than they should?

What are the goods you would feel bad spending on, but you know other people spend money on these things?

Do you think that there are people who deserve to have more money to spend?

Do you think that there are people who deserve to have less money to spend?

VI. Moralities and change

We have talked about goods and what people buy. Do you think that the world has changed from this point of view since you were a child?

What are the main differences? What can be the reason(s) behind the change?

Do you think that the role of goods and shopping has changed in any respect?

In your own life, has it ever happened to you that your personal relationship with somebody has changed because buying things was more important for that person than it is for you? (Or because he or she was too tight-fisted?)

Have any of your relationships changed because somebody's style or financial situation has changed?

3. Interview guide, version II

Individual interview

I. Introduction

Thank you for taking part in the research and dedicating time to the interview. This interview will be used for my PhD research; no commercial use will be made of it. The aim of the research is to understand the principles on which different people spend and save their money, and do shopping, and what they think of such habits in other people. The interviews will be handled confidentially: nobody will get to know your name, and nobody can listen to the recorded interview, not even your family members. At the end of the research you will be given a copy of the recordings, which you may keep or throw away. What name would you like me use for you?

I will ask you to recall experiences and to tell me your opinion about the spending and shopping habits other people. You don't have to give me any data, there are no right and wrong answers; most of all I am interested in your opinion. If you don't want to answer a question, feel free to say so.

II. Please introduce yourself briefly!

III. In the first part of the interview I will ask you to think back to your childhood and the way your parents handled money and taught you to handle money.

Could you recall an experience when you really wanted something and you got it?

Could you recall an experience when you really wanted something but you did not get it?

What were the general principles of your parents concerning what they did and did not buy?

If you broaden this issue, what were the major points of view on which your parents decided on money matters? What were their priorities?

Do you think you will apply/do you apply/have you applied the same principles with your own children? Which ones would you change and why?

Tell me the about the first time you got pocket money!

IV. In the next part of the interview I will ask you to tell me according to which considerations and principles you spend your money and to compare yourself with other people.

1. Needs and *igénys*

In the interview I use the word igény.

In your opinion what are the needs that one should never give up? What does one definitely need?

When you decide what to spend your money on, what are your priorities?

If your income became slightly smaller, what would you give up spending money on? And next?... Why?

What do you consider to be unnecessary spending? What do you budget on?

“Sometimes, in order to fulfil specific needs, we have to give up others.” What does this mean in your case?

If your income became slightly greater, what would you buy? And if it increased again?... Why?

Could you tell me something that would make your life happier, if you could buy it?

In your opinion are your needs bigger or smaller than what you can afford?

2. Household economy

To what extent and how do you keep track of your expenses and income?

How do you know what you can afford? What are the principles?

3. Situations

Are there situations in which you pay less attention to money, when you are more generous?

Have you ever had a bad conscience after a purchase?

Tell me about the last time you bought something!

What form does a shopping trip usually take? What are the different kinds of shopping? Tell me a typical situation!

4. Relationships

Often, different members of a family spend their money in a different way, find different things important or have different tastes. To what extent is this the case in your family?

If you compare yourself to your parents, what are the differences in your needs?

If you compare yourself to your partner, what are the differences in your needs?

If you compare yourself to your friends, what are the differences in your needs?

How do these differences translate into the way you spend your money?

Do you buy things for other people? What? Why?

It often happens that when friends and partners have different financial means, or simply different needs, this generates conflict or lack of understanding between them. Have you ever experienced this?

Sometimes the relationship between people who used to understand each other very well deteriorates if the financial situation of one of them changes. Have you ever experienced this?

Is there anybody with whom you have had a discussion about shopping and money? (For example, if you thought that person spent too recklessly or was too tight-fisted?)

If you consider contemporary Hungary, are there people who spend too much or spend on unnecessary things in your opinion? Are there things that are inappropriate to buy, yet some people spend money on them?

Are there people who are too tight-fisted?

Are there people who have higher needs than you do? And lower? Who is 'needless' (in Hungarian somebody without needs is a negative word)?

In your opinion to what extent do needs depend on money? Do you know people who have a lot of needs despite not having much money, or who have few needs despite having a lot of money?

V. Situation game

In the next part I will describe some people to you, and ask your opinion about them based on the description.

Questions after all descriptions:

Tell me your opinion about this behaviour!

In your opinion, do you think that:

- you would have a good time together?
- you would become good friends?
- you would date him/her?
- you marry him/her (would be happy if his/her daughter/son did so)?
- you would admire his/her personality and ideas?
- you would be happy to have him/her as a neighbour?
- you would be happy to work alongside this person in a job?

Why do you think so? What would be the problem? What would you have in common?

Cases

1. The owner of IKEA is one of the richest men in the world. Despite his wealth, he spends money carefully, for example he only goes to the market in the afternoon, when goods are cheaper.
2. Betti works as a secretary and cares a lot about looking good. From her small salary she manages to go to the solarium and to have her nails done every week. Last summer she succeeded in saving money to get her name tattooed on her shoulder with Chinese characters in Siófok.²⁵
3. Mariann is a poet. Sometimes none of the newspapers buy her poems – then she has to take a lot of care to make ends meet from her unemployment benefit. At other times, when she finds a customer, she has more money, which she usually spends immediately on a trip, for example to Turkey. During the trip she stays at the cheapest hostels, and eats at the cheapest places.
4. The Varga family managed to get a glass factory at a very low price during the change of the regime. Since then business has been very good and they have

²⁵ The most popular (in both senses) holiday resort at Lake Balaton.

- become millionaires. The father surprised his daughter on her 18th birthday by giving her a Mercedes that was worth 20 million Fts.
5. Péter is a successful entrepreneur. Sometimes he earns a million Forint in a week. Then he goes out at the weekend and spends 400 000 Forints on cocktails and striptease girls.
 6. Miki is a telephone repairman, Helén is a cosmetician. The couple lives in the 8th district²⁶ in a one-room flat, but have the most up-to-date gadgets; they always have the latest cell phone hanging around their neck, and the best DVD player in their room. They do not have any spare money.
 7. Áron and Panna are a newly wed couple. They love each other, but they have a frequent topic of discussion. Áron works – often until late – for a multinational company; he would like to earn a lot of money. His dream is to buy an expensive car and a big detached house. He enjoys going to elegant restaurants and staying in four- or five-star hotels when travelling. Panna works for a non-profit foundation, goes to work by bicycle, is entirely satisfied with the self-service restaurant on the corner and the hostels where they stayed abroad up to now. She does not want a big house, and would be much happier if Áron spent more time with her, even to the detriment of his earnings.
 8. Gábor is in the mobile phone business. He lives alone in a one-room flat, which contains hardly any furniture apart from a red leather sofa. He is very proud of his wide golden necklace, which he got from his parents for his 18th birthday. After a long period of saving, now he seems to have a chance of buying a 20-year-old black BMW.
 9. For Anna the most important thing is that her children are always immaculately clean and tidy, therefore she often stays up late, doing the washing and ironing.
 10. Iván lives from one day to another and spends his money on going out drinking with his friends every evening.
 11. Niki and her friend Jenny usually go to the Duna Plaza mall after school, where they stay until the evening, doing some shopping.
 12. Péter and his fiancée, Bori, rent a villa near Budapest for their wedding, rent a limousine and invite 150 people for the dinner with caviar and champagne.
 13. One day Sándor was walking in Váci street²⁷ and saw a golden watch in the window, which he liked. He went in, tried it on and bought it. The watch cost 1,5 million Forints.
 14. Zsuzsi loves nice clothes and shoes, so when she gets her wages, she goes straight to the West End mall, from where she returns with five or six new pieces. Her wardrobe is full of items she has only worn once.
 15. After receiving her salary Bea gets 10 envelopes, and puts money into them for different purposes: bills, food, etc. In addition she has a book in which she notes her expenses and income in order to know how she spends her money.
 16. István and Angéla care a lot about their flat: they spend all their spare money on decorating it and making it look beautiful.

²⁶ The worst district of Budapest.

²⁷ The major shopping street of Budapest.

Joint interview with couples

Introduction

In this interview I am interested in how and according to what principles you spend and save your money. I will ask you to recall common experiences and discussions, and to tell me your opinion about your own and your partner's spending and shopping habits. You don't have to give me any data, there are no right and wrong answers; most of all I am interested in your opinion. If you don't want to answer a question, feel free to say so.

Discussion

How often do you go shopping together?

What do you buy and for whom do you buy them on these occasions?

According to some opinions people in a couple usually shop in a different way. To what extent does this apply to your case? For example:

- How do you usually shop?
- What kind of goods do you find useful/enjoyable to shop for?
- What style do you like?
- How often do you shop?
- Do you consider yourself thrifty or spendthrift?

In your opinion, what are the reasons for these differences?

When you shop together do you influence each other? If so, who is trying to influence the other? To what direction?

Are you on a common budget? If yes, how do you manage it? If no, what are your shared expenses?

Many couples, who are at least partially on the same budget, have some reoccurring points of disagreement. What are your most common points of disagreement? What would generate the most disagreement if you put all your earnings into a 'common purse'?

Are there any differences in the ways you manage your finances?

Who saves money on what? Are there any issues on which one of you is more thrifty than the other? Does one of you ever say: "There is no need to be being thrifty on this issue; we/you can afford it."?

Who is generous and in what areas? Are there any goods on which one of you spends more money than the other finds appropriate? When one of you says: "This is too much. It's stupid to spend money on this."?

What are the differences between your needs? Who has higher/lower needs and in what?

In your opinion are there any areas where you have adopted the other's ideas?

- You live together. To what extent does the flat reflect a common taste?

- Where do you enjoy going out to, travelling or spending your free time?

In your opinion does your partner's car, flat or clothing reflect their personality?

Are their common aims for which you save money together? Do you agree easily about these aims?

4. Family trees

Note: The names of participants analysed as case studies are in bold, those of people who were not analysed as case studies are in roman, those of non-participants are given in parentheses, and those who are not mentioned by name in the text are indicated using blank boxes.

