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Per Magnus Johansson & Elisabeth Punzi

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## Jewishness and psychoanalysis - the relationship to identity, trauma and exile. An interview study

Per Magnus Johansson  and Elisabeth Punzi

Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

### ABSTRACT

The relationship between psychoanalysis and Jewishness has been debated for over one hundred years and the derogatory term “Jewish science” has been used to describe psychoanalysis. Because of the Nazi regime both Jewish and non-Jewish psychoanalysts left their homelands. In this study, aging Jewish individuals born in Central Europe and forced into exile were interviewed concerning their perceptions of psychoanalysis and Jewishness, of Jewish identity and exile. Anti-Semitism had influenced their perceptions of their work in the psychoanalytic field. The findings are discussed in relation to the current position of psychoanalysis as well as to questions of trauma and exile.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Anti-Semitism; exile; Jewish science; psychoanalysis; Sigmund Freud

The term psychoanalysis was coined by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) in 1896. For more than a hundred years, the relationship between Jewishness and psychoanalysis has been more or less salient and debated. Sigmund Freud and the majority of the early analysts were male physicians of Jewish origin. Psychoanalysis was described as a ‘Jewish science’ by critics and anti-Semitism was a part of Freud’s life. Freud stated that psychoanalysis must be protected from becoming a Jewish science, and he considered non-Jewish psychoanalysts important for the development and the acceptance of psychoanalysis.<sup>1</sup> Freud is also reported as telling his Jewish psychoanalytic colleagues that the non-Jewish, Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) ‘will save us’. We know that Jung and Freud broke with each other in 1913, and that the former later expressed anti-Semitic opinions.<sup>2</sup> Freud’s strivings to avoid the term “Jewish science” have sometimes been taken as an indication that he wanted to distance himself and psychoanalysis from any Jewish heritage, which is an oversimplification, since Freud explicitly as well as implicitly expressed appreciation of his Jewish identity and the Jewish heritage.<sup>3</sup> However, Freud also repeatedly stated that psychoanalysis belonged to the scientific community. To identify psychoanalysis with Science was one of his main preoccupations.

One of Freud’s key contributions was the way he analyzed and understood the unconscious. From his perspective, the human being, irrespective of his or her place in the world, was influenced by the unconscious, and the relevance of psychoanalysis was universal. In the early 20th century, psychoanalysis became an international intellectual

**CONTACT** Elisabeth Punzi  [elisabeth.punzi@psy.gu.se](mailto:elisabeth.punzi@psy.gu.se)  Department of Psychology, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

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movement and psychoanalysis awoke increasing interest in a range of disciplines, among non-Jews and Jews. As a result of the Nazi movement, and the persecution and murder of the European Jews, both Jewish and non-Jewish psychoanalysts left Europe. In this way, psychoanalysts spread throughout the world and lived in exile. It was not uncommon that they avoided connections to their own Jewish heritage and identity, as well as the relationships between Jewishness and psychoanalysis (Kuriloff 2014).<sup>4</sup>

In his work, *Die Zukunft einer Illusion*, published in 1927, Freud<sup>5</sup> came to the conclusion that religion must be regarded as an illusion. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that Freud was opposed to all forms of religion. However, Jewish religion and a Jewish identity cannot be equated with each other, and Freud expressed a positive view of Jewry and Jewishness, as well as Jewish identity. The positive sides of his Jewish identity were often expressed in his letters to colleagues and intellectual friends, rather than in his theoretical writings. For example in a letter to B'nai Brith, Freud (1926–1959c) underlined his attraction to Jewry, and in a letter to his non-Jewish friend Oskar Pfister (1873–1956) (Freud, 1963),<sup>6</sup> he contemplated the relationship between Jewishness and psychoanalysis and described himself as a 'godless Jew'. There are, as we know, many other examples.

Freud's Jewish identity and attraction to Jewry were always more present and became more important in critical situations. Having a Jewish identity and being an atheist was not a contradiction for him. Furthermore, even though Freud was opposed to religious observance, he throughout his life acknowledged the influence of religion both on the cultural and on the individual level.<sup>7</sup> He was aware of how important the influence of religion was in society and for individuals in general.

Interestingly, Freud consistently used the category 'science' as a concept that is possible to situate in opposition to the concept 'religion'. Science and psychoanalysis are the same in this respect. They have common methods and common interests, he writes. This appreciation of science should be understood in the context of the times in which psychoanalysis emerged. In Europe in general, and in Vienna specifically, process of integration and assimilation, and the simultaneous anti-Semitism, had an inescapable influence on European Jewry, regardless of whether they advocated or opposed assimilation and/or integration.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, 'Bildung' and academic achievement in for example medical science were important opportunities for Jews to counteract marginalization and discrimination, and become part of society.<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that in some periods, authorities regarded Jewish individuals as genetically prone to mental illnesses.<sup>10</sup> It should also be noted that, by definition, the term 'Jewish science' was not neutral, but derogatory, implying that the science concerned lacked significance for anyone who was not Jewish, that it was sectarian, and that its practitioners were conspiratorial and presented a neutral façade while secretly trying to gain control over others and over the discipline. Moreover, the term implied that the science concerned was unscientific and even a fraud.<sup>11</sup> As we see, derogatory statements concerning Jewish sciences, including psychoanalysis, are clearly anti-Semitic statements. Jews are frequently looked upon as sectarian, seemingly neutral but secretly conspiring to gain control over media, money, or even the whole world.<sup>12</sup> In sum, Jewish scientists met considerable resistance. Such attitudes towards Jews involved in medical science, for example, implied a contradictory approach among psychoanalysts towards Jewishness and psychoanalysis.<sup>13</sup> On one hand, it became important to present psychoanalysis as

detached from Jewishness in order to avoid being marginalized. On the other hand, it was obvious that the majority of the psychoanalysts in the beginning of the 20th century were of Jewish origin. Moreover, anyone with any knowledge of traditional Jewish thinking can trace the similarities between the Jewish tradition and psychoanalysis. For example, the hermeneutical tradition that is central to the Jewish tradition of thinking, and the dialogic relationship to the text, has become inscribed in psychoanalytic theory and praxis.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, in the Jewish tradition, which permeated the Jewish context in which Freud was brought up,<sup>15</sup> knowledge is transmitted orally, from one person to another,<sup>16</sup> a tradition that has become central in the training of psychoanalysts. The importance of 'Bildung' among central-European Jews at the birth of psychoanalysis was considerable.<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that in the Jewish tradition, knowledge and insight are often sought by examining a unique case; deconstructing it and taking alternative perspectives that require the use of the imagination. It is reasonable to assume that this practice is reflected in the preference for case studies and the use of the imagination in the psychoanalytic tradition.

The investigation of the relationship between psychoanalysis and Jewishness is a sensitive topic. Anti-Semitic statements and derogatory opinions of psychoanalysis are still underlying issues.<sup>18</sup> One important question is whether the relationship between psychoanalysis and Jewishness was a historical phenomenon connected to the birth of psychoanalysis, or to what extent it continued and continues to be significant. Do contemporary psychoanalysts, as well as scholars and clinicians working in the psychoanalytic tradition perceive a close relationship between psychoanalysis and Jewishness, and if so, do they think that this relationship should be acknowledged? Is the relationship forgotten or repressed? Or do they think that any relationship, current or historical, should be neglected, hidden, or downplayed? Do they sense that acknowledgement of such a relationship might invoke anti-Semitism?

We are currently interviewing practicing psychoanalysts as well as researchers, psychologists, psychotherapists, and physicians, working in the psychoanalytic tradition, about their perception of Jewishness and psychoanalysis, the influence of anti-Semitism, and how they perceive themselves and their work. In this specific paper, we present interviews with four elderly individuals of Jewish origin who were forced to flee their European country during the Nazi regime.

## Materials and methods

### *Participants*

The individuals who we interviewed were all born during the first decades of the 20th century. They were Jewish and, just like Sigmund Freud in June 1938, had been forced to leave their European countries because of the increasing anti-Semitism and discrimination towards Jewish citizens during the Nazi regime. Being refugees, the individuals we interviewed are able to bear witness to the historical circumstances, how these circumstances influenced them as unique individuals, and how psychoanalysis, and their own work, has been influenced by attitudes towards Jewishness and Jewry.

Two of the interviewed individuals, Lajos and Edith Székely, are presented with their full names and detailed information concerning their life and work is provided. The two

other individuals requested to be anonymous. They were born in German speaking parts of central Europe and have been given the assumed names Joseph and Walter. In order to safeguard their privacy, personal characteristics are not presented in detail. With respect to the topic of this paper it would have been appropriate to provide more detailed information about their prior and current experiences, work, and life conditions. However, methodological and ethical considerations need to be balanced, and in this specific case, priority was given to protecting the privacy of the interviewed individuals.

### ***Interview and analysis***

The interview with Joseph was performed on two occasions, using Skype. The other three individuals were interviewed face-to-face in their homes. During the interviews, notes were taken. Each interview was performed as an open conversation with the aim to encourage the interviewed individuals to describe their experiences and perceptions in their own words, and in an order each individual found appropriate and comfortable. The comprehensive theme of the interview was the relationship between Jewishness and psychoanalysis. During the interviews attention was paid to questions of anti-Semitism, exile, the interviewed individuals' work in the psychoanalytic tradition, and how they perceived Jewishness and the relationship between psychoanalysis and Jewishness.

During the analysis of the interviews, priority was given to the narrative themes of each interview, and what each interviewed individual emphasized. First the results from the interviews with Lajos and Edith Székely will be presented and thereafter the results from the interviews with Joseph and Walter will be presented. The structure of the presentations will differ somewhat, since the narrative themes of the interviews varied.

### **Results**

In 1944, the married couple Lajos and Edith Székely arrived in Sweden. Edith (1909–2009), of Jewish heritage and born in Germany, was a doctor and a psychoanalyst. Lajos (1904–1995), born in Hungary, had a Ph.D. in psychology and was a trained psychoanalyst. Like his wife, he was Jewish. They met in Hungary and became a couple in the beginning of the 1930s. By the same time, Anti-Semitism forced them into exile. Initially they went from Hungary to Germany and from there to Holland. From Holland they went on to Russia and from there to Finland. Finally they ended up in Sweden. In 1951 they settled down in Nacka, outside Stockholm, where they stayed to the end of their days.

Exiled, they lived in fear for almost 15 years, between 1930 and 1944. The fear reappeared regularly for the whole of their lives and the fear was related to personal or political conflicts. The Székelys could never forget the persecution; 15 years as fugitives had marked them for life. 'What have we done as Jews to deserve being persecuted wherever we are,' Edith asked herself during one interview. Even in Sweden, where anti-Semitism finds other expressions than the horrendously inhuman forms that the Jewish couple had encountered during their 15 years of exile, they lived with the feeling of being exposed and at times having to struggle against hostility, due to their Jewish heritage. They both felt threatened by the critical attitude of Swedish

social democracy towards the state of Israel. They found the generally pro-Arabic attitude that reigned in Sweden equally threatening. For them, it was a part of a threatening renewal of anti-Semitism, of violence and of the feeling of being outsiders. In spite of this, and in comparison to what they had experienced, they felt that their home in Nacka was 'paradise on earth'. There, they were better protected than they had been anywhere else. But they felt that there was a lack of understanding of their experiences and the hate they had been exposed to.

When the Swedish translator of Martin Heidegger's writings, Richard Matz (1920–1992), was invited to the Swedish Psychoanalytical Association (*Svenska psykoanalytiska föreningen*) in the beginning of the 1990s, Edith and Lajos Székely were worried. Were their Swedish colleagues, psychoanalysts belonging to the Swedish Psychoanalytical Association, going to invite a person who had translated Martin Heidegger, who had had a dubious relation to Nazism, when, as they saw it, the decisive factor for all psychoanalysts ought to be that Sigmund Freud was of Jewish ancestry and that his family, like all other Jewish families in Europe, had suffered under the Nazi terror? Their anxiety surfaced again. Has anti-Semitism insinuated itself into our psychoanalytic association, they asked themselves. Don't we have a home, a safe place anymore? Not even in this new democratic country and in our psychoanalytical institution? Are the psychoanalytical friends we have in Sweden not capable of understanding our painful history and what it meant to be in a terrifying exile for almost 20 years? Do our friends try to forget what is unforgettable for us? In their eyes, this invitation was wrong, threatening. Nevertheless, they stayed in Sweden, attached to their home in Nacka, their safest place; the house in Nacka became their haven, which they could – in all sincerity – call 'home'. They lived between fear and a longing for protection. They tried to find shelter from the past, but the protection was never solid enough.

The other individuals we interviewed, Joseph and Walter, were both born in Germany, and 92 years old at the time of the interview. They had both been forced to leave Germany during the 1930s. In early adulthood they had studied to become social workers and later on engaged in further education to become licensed psychoanalytic psychotherapists. They had thereafter achieved academic careers, one of them was an associate professor and the other one was a full time professor. They both still had clients in psychotherapy.

There the similarities stop. The man who we gave the assumed name Joseph, lived in Israel, and the other one, with the assumed name Walter, lived in Europe. Joseph's family had moved to Israel in the 1930s, a preferred choice since his father was a convinced Zionist. Walter on the other hand was sent abroad, rescued, while the rest of his family and relatives remained in Germany where they were murdered. During his childhood, his parents had him baptized and the family distanced itself from Jewishness. Walter related that they did not celebrate Jewish holidays, did not take part in congregational life or any Jewish traditions, and he did not sense that Jewish identity was a relevant term for describing himself or his family. In contrast, Joseph's family was described as deeply involved in Jewish life and traditions, both religious and cultural. Their social life was predominantly Jewish and they were Zionists. For them Jewish identity had been self-evident.

As elderly men, they took opposite stands toward Jewishness and Jewish identity; Walter said that he never thought about being Jewish, and that on the few occasions

when he had been involved with other Jews he perceived Jewishness as limiting. Nevertheless, he had been engaged in voluntary work with survivors who came to Sweden in 1945. Joseph, on the other hand, said that being Jewish was the major part of his identity. Living in Israel, he felt comfortable with his Jewish identity and sensed that he could be true to himself and his heritage.

Concerning the relationship between Jewishness and psychoanalysis, Joseph and Walter both perceived that such a relationship existed, but also in this question they took opposite stands. Walter perceived Jewishness and psychoanalysis as sectarian. He sensed that any sectarian tendencies were limiting for humanity and for knowledge, and he therefore distanced himself from both Jewishness and psychoanalysis, even though he had been working as a psychoanalytic psychotherapist and many of his writings were rooted in the psychoanalytic tradition. He further described this approach by saying that he sensed that there were elements of psychoanalytic theory and practice that were important to psychotherapy but that he rejected psychoanalysis and its associations because they were sectarian.

Joseph perceived Jewishness and psychoanalysis as inherently intertwined. During his childhood, his family socialized with people of Jewish origin; some of them were psychoanalysts. During the 1920s, his mother underwent psychoanalysis, and their home was filled with literature and discussions about Judaism, Jewishness, Zionism and Jewry, as well as psychoanalysis. He sensed that the continual reading, questioning, and interpreting, and especially perpetual learning, was central to psychoanalysis and that this was a heritage from Jewishness, which outsiders could perceive as sectarian and difficult to understand, and perhaps therefore as threatening.

## Discussion

The perceptions of Jewishness, Jewish identity, and psychoanalysis presented by Joseph and Walter illustrate two paradoxical, and rather typical attitudes that European Jews could adapt during the late 19th and early 20th century. There were strivings toward integration in the majority society and especially the Jewish middle class was attracted to the Reform institutions.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, striving towards assimilation could influence Jews to abandon their Jewish identity and their connection to Jewishness completely.<sup>20</sup> Those who abandoned their Jewishness sensed that their vulnerability could be diminished, and the exposure to anti-Semitism and discrimination could be avoided, if they became a part of the majority. Tragically, this often proved not to be the case. Some years later, it did not matter if you, as a Jew, were baptized, assimilated and/or totally ignorant of Jewish traditions, you were murdered anyway.<sup>21</sup> Walter was not the only one who disconnected from his Jewishness. According to Kuriloff, who investigated the experiences of Jewish psychoanalysts who lived in exile in the US, it was not uncommon for those who escaped the persecutions in Europe to hide their Jewishness.<sup>22</sup>

Geller<sup>23</sup> however describes a simultaneous, opposite movement among European Jews – towards Zionism. Zionism might be thought of as a vehicle for creating and developing a proud Jewish identity. The need for such an identity was fueled by anti-Semitism and discrimination.<sup>24</sup> Simultaneously, Zionism should be regarded in the context of the formation of national states during this era.<sup>25</sup> Zionism might be seen as parallel to the strivings to identify as say Swedish, German, or Italian, and to

create national identities connected to specific geographic areas and ethnic groups with shared characteristics and a shared history.<sup>26</sup> Those who were committed to Zionism expressed a profound Jewish identity that nonetheless was not necessarily connected to religion, but rather to a sense of shared identity, heritage, and history, as well as a shared exposure to discrimination and persecution. For them, a Jewish state was an assurance of a geographic area in which Jewish identity was self-evident, and where Jews as individuals were protected from anti-Semitism in its various expressions.<sup>27</sup>

Edith Székely posed the question of whether there was a safe haven anywhere. It should be acknowledged that the intuitive fear that the Székelys felt when Heidegger's translator, Richard Matz, was invited to the Swedish Psychoanalytical Association was not groundless. During his speech, Matz provoked several members of the association when he described 'The racial doctrines of the Nazi movement as an extension of the Jewish self-aggrandizing perception of being God's chosen people'. Moreover, he stated that 'Freud was obsessed with Jewishness'.<sup>28</sup> Edith and Lajos Székely were always sensible to psychoanalysts and intellectuals who did not understand what it meant to be a Jew during all those horrifying and terrifying years. What had happened could happen again, was what they felt and thought. On one level, the Swedish home of the Székelys was described as safe, whereas on another level, anxiety and fear of persecution were regular companions for Edith and Lajos Székely. Their feelings and thoughts exemplifies how refugees tend to experience their existence in the new country; a sense of being safe co-exists with a sense of still being subject to persecution and threat. The continuing experience of persecution and threat could be real as well as imagined and needs to be understood and worked through, but also recognized by others, so that the refugee is able to heal and live a reasonably satisfying life.<sup>29</sup> Traumatic experiences, persecution, and exile are existential experiences that concern identity, meaning making, and sense of continuity – the losses of loved ones, of cultural heritage, of belongings, places, and language should be acknowledged and permitted to mourn.<sup>30</sup> In our current world, with anti-semitism, refugee crisis, and xenophobia,<sup>31</sup> it is also important to acknowledge that the need for shelter, recognition, and continuity is universally human and has to be protected.

Like Freud, Edith asked herself how anti-Semitism came to be a constant companion to Jewry. In his work *Moses und Monotheism* (1939), Freud<sup>32</sup> described that the subtle differences between Jews and the majority invoke anti-Semitism. The difference between Jews and those who belong to the majority is difficult to define. The presence of the Jews might therefore be perceived as uncanny and lead to experiences of insecurity among the majority. Moreover, Freud described that since Jewry has survived despite being subjected to persecution, their very survival might be regarded as provocative. In our opinion, one could add that the survival of Jewry against all odds, among suspicious non-Jews, could foster the illusion that conspiracies are the reason for this survival. Freud (1939)<sup>33</sup> came to the conclusion that anti-Semitism, in addition, is a reaction to the epithet the 'chosen' people. This epithet invokes conscious as well as unconscious hate and a desire to degrade the Jews, and the hate could even be rationalized as a legitimate response to a people perceived as inappropriately proud and even ascendant.



Anti-Semitism, and negative attitudes toward Jews, invoked different reactions toward Jewish identity and Jewishness among Jews themselves; should one abandon the Jewish heritage and assimilate to the majority society, or should one strive to create one's own contexts, spaces, and associations?<sup>34</sup> These reactions seem to have been inscribed, not only in Jewishness and Jewish identity, but also in psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a minority discipline that has to relate to a scientific majority society. Psychoanalysis has other traditions and other assumptions about human life and science than those of for example mainstream psychology and psychiatry. Some practitioners and researchers in the psychoanalytic field strive to incorporate the psychoanalytic assumptions into the positivistic scientific tradition, sometimes working inside of and applying a medical discourse. For example, researchers such as Mark Solms<sup>35</sup> and Allan Schore<sup>36</sup> connect psychoanalytic constructs and findings with neurobiological research, findings from brain imaging technics, and/or studies in the experimental tradition. Jaak Panksepp and Mark Solms<sup>37</sup> relate neurobiological findings to psychoanalytic psychotherapy, thereby connecting the psychoanalytic tradition with so-called evidence-based practice. Other scholars lean towards the hermeneutic scientific tradition and connect psychoanalytic constructs and findings with for example semiotics and linguistics. One example is Julia Kristeva, who describes the inherent symbolic nature of human life and accordingly emphasizes language and communication, verbal as well as non-verbal, as the key to understanding humanity and individual development. Psychoanalysis has, according to Kristeva, in this sense a close relationship to the Jewish oral tradition.<sup>38</sup>

Psychoanalytic theory, research, and practice are thus not homogenous. And perhaps they never have been. In *Zur Geschichte der psychoanalytischen Bewegung* (1914)<sup>39</sup> as well as in *Selbstdarstellung* (1925),<sup>40</sup> Freud described psychoanalysis as both connected to the humanities as well as to the natural sciences. In *Konstruktionen in der Analyse* (1937),<sup>41</sup> Freud wrote that clinical psychoanalytic work concerns the construction of the repressed, and Freud compares the work of the psychoanalyst to the work of an archeologist who uses traces and pieces to construct the past. Moreover, Freud describes psychoanalysis as a hermeneutic discipline in which the clinician strives to reveal the hidden personal meaning of the client's symptoms (1923).<sup>42</sup> Even though Freud repeatedly presents psychoanalysis as connected to the natural sciences, he thus posits the subjective and unique experience of the individual as the center of attention.

When psychoanalysis and psychoanalysts were faced with Nazi terror, Freud's response was indeed rooted in historical circumstances as well as subjective experience, namely the historical Jewish experience of exile. When he and the other Jewish psychoanalysts were forced to flee from central Europe, he, in his last talk to the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, encouraged the group to act like Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai.<sup>43</sup> After the destruction of the temple, when the Jews were forced to live in exile, it has been described that Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai asked for permission to open a school in Jabne for studying the Torah. Freud describe the Jews as being used to persecution and psychoanalysts should under these historical circumstances follow the example of Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai and open schools and continue studying.<sup>44</sup>

Whether psychoanalytic researchers, scholars, and practitioners should strive to assimilate into a positivist scientific majority or create their own associations in which

they can refine and develop their thinking is an ever-present question and an ongoing discussion. Can marginalization be avoided through adapting to the thinking of the majority, or does adapting to the majority mean that psychoanalysis becomes diluted or even abandoned? If specific psychoanalytical associations are created; is it possible to develop an alternative to the positivistic scientific majority, the medical discourse, and mainstream psychology? Or does this lead to marginalization and perhaps accusations of being unscientific, false, sectarian, or even conspiratorial? And thus to elimination?

Just as Jewishness and Jewry has been, and is, connected to questions of how to survive and how to identify, psychoanalysis might be seen as a discipline that grapples with questions of how to survive and how to identify. So, the historical and ongoing struggle of Jewishness and Jewry seems to have been inscribed in psychoanalysis. A tentative, and indeed uncanny thought is that anti-Semitic reactions have been inscribed in reactions towards psychoanalysis. The anti-Semitist denies the Jews the right to exist; ranging from the demand that Jewry should abandon everything that has to do with Jewishness in order to be accepted, to the conviction that Jewry should be eliminated. In mainstream psychology, there is a tendency to deny psychoanalysis the right to exist. One example of this is that there are clinical psychology programs at universities, in which no psychoanalytic or psychodynamic theory or practice is included in the syllabus. Moreover, in the age of managed care, treatment interventions with associations to psychoanalytic theory might be discouraged or even counteracted, in a variety of public health care settings.<sup>45</sup>

The future of psychoanalysis is a debated topic and psychoanalysis has often been described as outdated. Even though there is resistance toward psychoanalysis, the rumor about its death is exaggerated. The view of psychoanalysis as a humanistic discipline, connected to literature and linguistics seems to reinvigorate the interest in psychoanalysis.<sup>46</sup> There is also a renewed interest in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy as clinical methods and practices. Investigations of structured psychoanalytic psychotherapy in psychiatric settings are one example of this current clinical interest.<sup>47</sup> An interest in the relationship between Jewishness and psychoanalysis might also revitalize psychoanalysis.<sup>48</sup> Through investigating the historical roots of psychoanalysis, its relevance for today and tomorrow might paradoxically increase. In 'Becoming Freud. The making of a psychoanalyst', Adam Philips<sup>49</sup> describes psychoanalysis as a discipline that grapples with questions of exclusions and inclusion, of exile and belonging, and therefore portrays psychoanalysis as highly relevant in our current transcultural world in which migration and exile are of concern. In order to understand experiences of trauma and exile, questions of context, cultural heritage, and meaning making need to be at the forefront.<sup>50</sup> Psychoanalysis is one example of a discipline that is capable of integrating human diversity and contextual factors into the understanding of experiences of trauma and exile. Moreover, the experiences of Jews who were forced into migration due to their Jewish heritage, involving non-predictable emotional reactions and negotiations of one's identity,<sup>51</sup> could reasonably support understanding of those individuals and minorities who are currently forced to live in exile.

Moreover, in the social sciences, such as psychology, social work, and sociology, there is an increasing interest in how to understand human experiences from a narrative perspective. For example, it is acknowledged that identity evolves through the personal narrative that the individual consciously and unconsciously creates, thereby binding

together different aspects of the self.<sup>52</sup> Psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the personal narrative, as well as the cultural context, might contribute to and also become reinvigorated by this narrative turn in the social sciences.<sup>53</sup> We would like to share a final remark concerning the struggle for identity and survival. Walter related that he was distanced from Jewishness, did not feel connected to Jewry, and expressed no sense of Jewish identity. Yet, some rooms in his house were covered with pictures by Chagall, showing religious motives, and traditional Jewish life in a world of the past. We sense that Walter's detachment from Jewishness must be understood in the context of his fate in life; to be the family's sole survivor. Moreover, he was the sole survivor from a family in which the striving to assimilate and become accepted by, and adapted to, the majority became so strong that their connections to the past were erased. Nonetheless, their lack of connectedness to Jewry and Jewish heritage could not protect them from being murdered. For many a European Jew during the 20th century, to be Jewish meant to be denied the right to exist.<sup>54</sup> During such historical circumstances it is deeply tragic, but not surprising that some survivors, such as Walter, came to deny their Jewish heritage, thereby surviving as individuals but not as Jewish individuals.

## Final reflections

Readers may ask themselves whether these examples are representative with regard to the complexity that marks an individual who is forced to leave his or her native country, and whether they are representative for individuals who have been working in the psychoanalytic field for a major part of the 20th century. The Székelys, Walter, and Joseph, what do they have in common? What makes their fates in life stand apart from the majority? What is the common denominator? In what way are their experiences of living in exile the same and how are they different? They are only four individuals but, and this is the most important thing; they are living and expressing the history of millions of other Jews.

A common theme in the narratives of our participants is that the relationship between Jewishness and psychoanalysis explicitly as well as implicitly has become intertwined with anti-Semitism. The importance of understanding the past in order to understand the current status and the future of psychoanalysis should not be exaggerated. Psychoanalysis is a discipline that develops and intersects with other disciplines. Nevertheless we sense that, psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy, and its practitioners, as the Székelys suggested, need to be understood with respect to the historical fact that Sigmund Freud was of Jewish ancestry and that his family, like all other Jewish families in Europe, became victims of the Nazi terror.

## Notes

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## Disclosure statement

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## Notes on contributors

*Per Magnus Johansson*, is a licensed psychologist, psychoanalyst, PhD and Associate professor in History of Ideas at the University of Gothenburg. He writes about the history of psychoanalysis and teaches psychoanalytic theory.

*Elisabeth Punzi*, is a licensed psychologist, PhD and Associate professor of Psychology at the University of Gothenburg. She works with Center for Critical Heritage Studies, University of Gothenburg, and teaches humanistic psychology.

## ORCID

Per Magnus Johansson  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6440-8353>