

SPECTRUM HUNGAROLOGICUM

Cultic Revelations:

Studies in Modern Historical
Cult Personalities and Phenomena

Edited by Anssi Halmesvirta

Spectrum Hungarologicum
Vol. 4.
2010

JYVÄSKYLÄ – PÉCS

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Publisher: University of Jyväskylä, Faculty of Humanities,
Hungarian Studies (www.jyu.fi/hungarologia)

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PREFACE

This collection of articles contains history papers of the third conference of the joint project of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Finland titled 'Cult and Community', held in Jyväskylä, 6–7 September, 2007. They are complemented by a couple of specialized, independent contributions by scholars working in the field of cults. It may be noted that the Finnish participants were newcomers in the cult research group since the Hungarian cult studies draw on traditions in the history of literature (e.g. Péter Dávidházi on Shakespeare-cult, the publications of the Petőfi Museum of Literature, Budapest and the Déri Múzeum, Debrecen) and critical studies. Also studies in personality cults of the Communist leaders in the Eastern Europe have been launched there.

In Finland the situation has been different. There have been lively cults of J. L. Runeberg (national poet), J. V. Snellman (philosopher for the *Finnish* nation) and other luminaries but genuine political cults have been relatively rare and ambiguous. In such a legalist country as Finland has been, revolutionary popular movements imitating National Socialism and Fascism impregnated by obsessive cultic practices, could not gain long-standing, firm foothold. That Vihtori Kosola, the leader of the 'fascismo of Finland' – the label of a British contemporary correspondent – could call almost 13,000 peasants to demonstrate in 1930 at the main square in Helsinki, was the utmost he could manage and it was not enough to transform his popularity into a personality cult. And that he was donated a bust of Mussolini by the Italian Embassy rather was a symbolic diplomatic gesture not prone to elevate Kosola's figure to wider public acceptance. Nevertheless, usually in times of crisis, some strong men have been promoted to represent the 'ability to defend' the country. One of them was, for example, President P.E. Svinhufvud for the White Finland in the early 1930s. In contrast, the feminine symbol of Finland, the white-dressed virgin, was a rather fragile figure but all the same

politically utilized. Lenin and Mannerheim are exceptional types as they represent the heroism of the opposing political camps.

It has been a great intellectual pleasure and refreshment to the Finnish participants to get acquainted with the Hungarian insights and methods to study cults during the project. Hopefully, the impact has been mutual. The Finnish contingent wishes to thank the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Finland for their support.

Anssi Halmesvirta

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power and (cultic) representation. Her article "Private, Public and Historical Sphere in Kate Atkinson's 'Behind the Scenes at the Museum'". *Nordisk Museologi* (2002) deals with these issues. E-mail: verautav@jyu.fi

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szerepe a kultúra, a nép és a nemzet azonosságtudatának alakításában” (The role of language in the process of the formation of a people’s and a nation’s self-consciousness). In S. Maticsák et al. (eds.), *Nyelv, nemzet, identitás. (Language, nation, identity)*, Budapest, Debrecen, Magyarságtudományi Társaság, 2007 125-139; 2006. “Riflessioni sulla classificazione dei suffissi nominali in ungherese. Indagine morfologica” (On the classification of nominal suffixes in Hungarian. A morphological study), Padua Working Papers, N. uno, <http://www.maldura.unipd.it/ddlcs/>; “The Holocaust in Hungary”. In WEBFU [Wiener elektronische Beiträge des Instituts für Finno-Ugristik], 16 (2003) <http://webfu.univie.ac.at/themen.php?rid=2&nam=Kulturwissenschaften>. E-mail: edit.r@unipd.it

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EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

The Spartan *Weltanschauung* – building a ‘pure’ character with military virtues – has fascinated many a European intellectual. Variations of its ideals could be found in the *Wanderfögel*, the Hungarian *levente*, in the scout movement, and many others which had their own cult symbols and figures (St George et al). Usually they were geared to national defense, fitness and character-building whereas National Socialism and Fascism set out to be offensive, at first against their own societies, dismantling the representative institutions and the remnants of the state of justice by arbitrary and violent means.¹ The personality and other cults analyzed in this book show how they variously functioned in camouflaging repression and making people forget their rights or turn away from social realities. The often aggressive and militaristic images teeming in cult symbolism and practices were not foreign in Eastern and Northern Europe either. In contrast, feminine cult figures represented purity and virginity.

This volume contains a selection of some obvious (Hitler) as well as less-known cult-figures mainly from Central-Eastern Europe, a less-charted territory in this respect. We also purport to present theoretical insights into cult-studies in order to mark the essential conceptual boundaries. The first two articles in this volume are historical-theoretical, purporting from different angles to throw light on the recent developments in cult studies. Gábor Gyáni looks at cults from the angle of (bourgeois) identity or self-definition reflected in ‘national identity’. As he sees it, it comes close to being almost ‘liquid’, in dual process of (unconscious) becoming and (conscious) choosing. In cultic acts and spectacles the identities of the participants are reproduced and enhanced. The leap from traditional, communal memories to the level of modern historical consciousness makes nations see teleological horizons – our history continues and brings us either happiness or ruin – manifested, for instance, in such

¹ For one contemporary, incisive Finnish criticism of Nazism and Fascism, see: Y. Ruutu, “Nykyajan diktatuurijärjestelmät”. In: *Historian diktaattori-tyyppejä*. Historian Aitta VII. Gummerus: Jyväskylä, Helsinki, 1937, 73-84.

national cult practices as celebrations of independence days or other nationally fixed moments of commemoration. The illuminating example of such a point for the Hungarians has been the battle of Mohács (1526) which marked the beginning of a tragic narrative of decline for them, culminating in the Peace Treaty of Trianon in which Hungary was shrunk to one third of its Dual Monarchy existence. The mission of the Hungarians between West and East as the Guardians of the Western, Christian values and justice in this respect resembled in the interwar years that of the Finns who also thought they had suffered from the wrongs of geography and history (the Peace Treaty of Dorpat, 1920). What makes the difference between the two nations is that the Finns have been able to forge from it a 'success story', inventing cultic symbols from the twentieth century and contemporary history thus fostering their 'progressive' identity whereas the Hungarians still stick to historicizing their European legacies.

Balázs Apor reassesses the power of the key-concepts used in analyzing ideas and practices of personality cults of the communist leaders. As he repeatedly warns us, the concepts of charisma, personality cult and political religion should be utilized cautiously to describe and explain the cult phenomena. First, Weber's 'charisma' may gain more explanatory power if one could determine to what extent constructed and manipulated 'charismas' were accepted and believed by wider public (if any) in different communist political cultures. What comes to the concept of 'personality cult' itself, much room is left for studies in its meanings disseminated by leading thinkers and ideologues vis-à-vis the attitudes of the man of the street towards megalomaniac propaganda. Special skepticism seems to be in place in using the concept of 'political religion' in the context of communist systems. Outwardly the myths and beliefs may sound similar and the rituals of different systems (Nazi, Soviet) display similar religious features but their ideological messages and political goals were even antagonistic. History defies even the best of concepts.

It is the image of Lajos Kossuth that has carried the idea of 'liberation' furthest in Hungary and no wonder why recent cultic representations of him point to more westernized foundations of the

Hungarian democracy. In his article Árpád Welker tackles the post-modern Kossuth cult, manifested especially in commemorations celebrating him and his heritage. It becomes clear that although Széchenyi's cult was quite lavishly financed and utilized by the party in power (FIDESZ), Kossuth-cult did not receive such extensive backing. It was the Free Democrats (SZDSZ) who wanted to 'own' Kossuth as the historic harbinger of an ultra-liberal political message but they run out of steam. The historians chosen to write up-to-date interpretations of Kossuth's life were not receptive to this political demand, rather they stuck to traditional ones: hundreds of Kossuth statues had already been erected all around in Hungary. Given the enthusiastic and rather productive times for historiography since the change of the system, it is amazing that no scholarly biographies of him have been published. The commemorative, jubilee pictorial publications, however well-edited and hard-covered they were, remained rather neutral probably because there was no concrete political demand of Kossuth's utilization, Deák and Széchenyi were more usable in that sense.

The conservative counter-figure to the liberal Kossuth was (and is) Miklós Horthy, whose image, as Ignác Romsics shows in his analysis in ample detail, was captured in Hungary by opposing political ideologies in opposing terms. For the conservative Right he was the Savior and to the revolutionary Left the Murderer in the 1920-30s. For the legalists hoping to restore monarchy, he was the Traitor. During the World War II he was for most of the Hungarians the Enlarger of the Country but since the end of the war he became a Fascist Dictator which he still is for the Hungarian Left. After the change of the system (after 1989) the bourgeois found in him a real Hungarian patriot. Thus he remains a controversial personality to whom attach identities build from selected historical materials. In post-modern public and popular history he has at times become an object of glorification but the present evaluation seems - thanks to sharp scholarly criticism - to be very negative. The vicissitudes of Horthy's legacy may be compared to the ones of Mannerheim or Pilsudski, the two obvious military parallels. The cultural agreement between Hungary and

Finland (1937) allowed room for mutual cult-building: Horthy-propaganda reached Finland in October 1943 when a film celebrating his achievements in revision of the Trianon was shown in Helsinki for 160 members of the Finnish-Hungarian Society.

In his section, the editor analyses the Nazi-cult with the “politics of the eye”-method. It transpires that the Nazis developed the new Spartan cult to its most complete fruition in the European culture. They made a magnificent but deceptive spectacle of it.

A quite different analysis of cult is the one of the Queen Elizabeth of the Habsburg Dual Monarchy for the Hungarians pursued by Orsolya Rákai. The image of ‘Sissi’ was to change from a patriarchal, national and feminine incarnation of Hungarian virtues (cf. St. Stephen’s masculine cult) to a post-modern, commercialized product-image, to an image used for quite individualistic, intimate purposes in small net-forum communities. This is what Anthony Giddens would call ‘transformation of intimacy’, a process in which individuals, in this case women, develop their identities in such (closet) intimacy which has no connection to nationalistic imagery of the ‘outer world’. In the nineteenth and twentieth century Hungarian nationalism, Elizabeth was made by her admirers become one with them, no longer representing the German-Austrian alterity (versus Hungarian identity) in any way. This identification was a general feature of all such nationalistic cult figures. In this way, the cult-builders enhanced their hegemony which has not been easy to break. But, as Rákai suggests, the materials of Elizabeth cult are nowadays so fragmented that even subversive and hidden cult practices may crop up. One may point to Sweden where the cult of Princess Victoria has become quite an addiction to some female fans.

One can sense that György Tverdota’s contribution touches one historical sore point of the French who were in the nineteenth century famous for their national sensitivity, jealousy and pride. The cult of Napoleon marks the beginning in the long series of personality cults and remains as such a kind of paragon for the rest. Nevertheless, the cults connected to (re)burials of great persons constitute a distinct variation, and the reburial of the ashes of Napoleon is a sub-variation because of its international and

internal, party political dimensions. The foreign politically touchy point was whether the British would concede to handing over the ashes of Napoleon to their 'rightful owner', the French nation. The identity of the French challenged the alterity of the British, and the issue had to be duly negotiated. Finally, the moderate British would not reject a request appealing to Christian values and traditions, although the exhumed was a 'child of anti-Christian Revolution'. On domestic front, the contention raged about who owns the remains of the Emperor and who can accrue political points from the reburial's cult-proceedings. However, the memory of the Emperor appeared to be so 'great' that it could cover all Frenchmen. This episode reminds the editor of the people who nowadays rebury the remains of their kin in foreign countries (Hungarians in Poland and Russia, Finns in Karelia) or carry them back home to be reburied. This is one of the ways to put one's mind at rest and forget, as Paul Ricoeur in his *Memory, History, Forgetting* (2004) recommends. It may also give consolation prone to enhance one's identity

Veera Rautavuoma's article leads us back to Hungarian settings of commemoration and in midst of strictly controlled, peculiar 'cultic projections', the liberation exhibitions. They could be seen as memorial museum exhibitions specifically designed to make people remember the defeat of Nazism by the Red Army (1945). They marked also the starting-point of domestic(ated) socialism and the 'road' from it via various 'progressive steps' to the present (successively 1960, 1965, 1970, 1975, 1980 and 1985), the point of time which in itself was just another signpost leading to socialism's earthly paradise in the unspecified future. As such the exhibitions offered possibly a too rigid and ready-made schema to remember a past and review contemporary history, and it transpires from Rautavuoma's analysis that also the organizers and evaluators of the exhibitions were worried about whether the show would backfire in being too serious. The achievements of Socialism may have appeared incontestable in the 1960s and 1970s but as time went on they appeared rather pale in comparison to what people already knew from capitalist ware-houses and consumption. This was the fate of the socialist exhibitions brought from Soviet Union

to Finland, too. The purpose of the designers to make exhibitions sites of cult of secular religion finally failed, inspiring nowadays only romantic nostalgia. Something that was made unquestionable was revealed to be construed, more so since the socialist reality betrayed the idealized message. Would it be amiss to set up an exhibition of those liberation exhibitions in order to show the utopian self-image of Hungarian Socialism? In Finland, this purpose is obliquely fulfilled by the Lenin museum in Tampere.

A more concrete example of a socialist wonderland is depicted to us by Zsuzsanna Varga. With the help of capitalist technical expertise and machinery ('production line') a model farm, Bábolna, was transformed from an Austro-Hungarian stud-farm to a streamlined chicken factory. It received wide international interest and fame, and was visited by high-level statesmen also from the West, among them President Kekkonen in 1969. Usually cults are about personalities and their superhuman qualities but in socialism material objects - achievements of all sorts from best-bred animals to colossal industrial plants - could assume cultic propensities, inspire wonderment, admiration and awe. Certainly, this was in accordance with the logic of historical materialism which explained change in history basically in terms of innovations in forces of production (the means of production, capital and labour force). From the 1960s on it seemed that socialism could harness them more efficiently to production than capitalism and soon overtake it. Socialist science had already excelled in certain inventions and innovations. If Sputnik could arouse fear of socialist superiority in the West, Bábolna could become as a shock for such Western observers who had doubted the capacities of socialized agriculture. What is remarkable and basically contradictory to socialist ideology in Bábolna is that without capitalist money and know-how it could not have been a success, a fact which was not common knowledge of the time.

In Rózsavölgyi's essay we come across with the experiences of contemporaries of the critical years of 1989-1990 during which the socialist cult personalities and phenomena collapsed. It shows the frame of mind of the protagonists who have already turned against the system: freedom was their cult.

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**Cultic Revelations: Studies in Modern Historical
Cult Personalities and Phenomena**

Gábor Gyáni

THE CREATION OF IDENTITY THROUGH CULTS

The concept of identity in the sense both of sameness and selfhood, a distinction made by Paul Ricoeur,¹ came in vogue as a social science term as late as the 1950s.² Historians started to use the term identity as an analytical category only after the collapse of the class theory. According to the “strong class idiom”, deduced from the works of Marx and Engels, the economic relations of production are held to permeate all segments of social life, including politics and culture. Accordingly, not a specific group identity, but the total realisation of collective (the so called class) interests and historical mission is playing decisive role in history.³

In dealing with social history of the middle classes, however, it turned out that the notion of class consciousness is unsuitable for grasping and interpreting a group, the existence of which rests more on identity, since the middle class or bourgeoisie was not a class grounded on common economic position assumed by the Marxist theory, but on “an amorphous space between notables on the one side and the mass of manual workers on the other”.⁴ In

¹ “The problem of personal identity constitutes, in my opinion, a privileged place of confrontation between the two major uses of the concept of identity [...]. Let me recall the terms of the confrontation: on one side, identity as *sameness* (Latin *idem*, German *Gleichheit*, French *mêmeté*); on the other, identity as *selfhood* (Latin *ipse*, German *Selbtheit*, French *ipséité*.” Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago&London, 1992, 115-116.

² Richard Handler, “Is ‘Identity’ a Useful Cross-Cultural Concept?”. In: John R. Gillis (Ed.), *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*. Princeton, N.J., 1996, 27-40.

³ For more about this see Patrick Joyce (Ed.), *Class*. Oxford–New York, 1995.

⁴ Simon Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory*. Harlow, 2006, 140.

seeking the social facts giving cohesion to the cluster of people labelled as bourgeoisie, historians realized that the category of identity positing that culture is the main basis of a middle-class membership was of paramount importance. As Peter Gay has expressed the view in focusing on the European middle-classes: "Coalescing under external pressure, the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie generated common styles of thinking about love and aggression. It was, without metaphysical implications, at once one and many."⁵ The bourgeois culture providing the middle classes with unity was both anticipation and result of a self-identification process. The common styles of thinking and feeling, Gay adds, "greatly mattered to the self-definition of the middle class". True, however is, that the social history definition through self-identification contains a number of ideological distortions. "It would be too easy to assert that a bourgeois was someone who considered himself or herself a bourgeois, ideological self-deception, whether conscious or unconscious". But, Gay remarks: "Still, the historian dares not ignore these self-definitions; they rested on consistent, really profound perceptions".⁶

Unlike many or most analytical categories applied in social sciences and humanities, the notion of identity is not meant to relate to a totalized or essentialized social entity. The same is true for the bourgeois identity, as the bourgeois values, attitudes and acts of identification have not been bourgeois alone. Since "other classes could also claim at least some of them as their own", it might in part become later on "the common denominator of the ambitions of their time". Theodore Zeldin finally concludes, "The phrase, *la France bourgeoisie* was thus a tautology in that, to be a bourgeois meant to subscribe to the most general national aspirations."⁷

Even in such countries like Germany or Hungary where the local bourgeoisie could not claim with any confidence to represent the nation as a whole, there also were definite efforts of making

⁵ Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience. Victoria to Freud. Vol. I. Education of the Senses*. New York–Oxford, 1984, 43.

⁶ Peter Gay, *Schnitzler's Century. The Making of Middle-Class Culture 1815-1914*. New York–London, 2002, 32.

⁷ Theodore Zeldin, *France 1848-1945. Ambition and Love*. Oxford, 1979, 19.

explicit the chain of linked loyalties and affections with bourgeois identity on the one hand, and national one on the other.

This carries us further towards the problem of national identity. Beside the multiple identity constructions like that of the sex and gender, race, or confessional and ethnic, the national identity has an unambiguous central place both in personal and collective life. According to theories elaborated by Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner, the cultural factors fulfilled may play the greatest role in the modern nation-building process.⁸ The western model of a national identity is held to characterize or even define the modern European nations, which are “seen as culture communities, whose members were united, if not made homogeneous, by common historical memories, myths, symbols and traditions”.⁹ The nation, Anthony D. Smith says, as “a type of identity whose meaning and priority is presupposed by this form of culture” is always produced by the nationalist middle classes (including the bourgeoisie) which closely cooperate in this project with the intellectuals, professionals and artists. “Who, more than poets, musicians, painters and sculptors, could bring the national ideal to life and disseminate it among the people?”¹⁰ And, one may add, who else if not the historians could bring the idea of national affinity to life and disseminate it by the aid of the school curriculum as a “unitary idiom”¹¹ in order to establish an identity-conferring culture.¹²

Therefore the category called identity is used here to refer to something which needs constantly be asserted, constructed and imposed, and not simply being given. It is not a fixed entity as being always put to changes. The great advance of using the notion identity in social analysis has a lot to do with the anti-essentialism inherent in the notion of *gender* identity. Judith Butler stated that

⁸ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London–New York, 1991; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford, 1983.

⁹ Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*. London, 1991, 11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 91-92.

¹¹ The phrase is to be found in Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 21.

¹² The role that the historian regularly plays in the process of creating a national identity will later be discussed in a detailed way.

the sex is no longer the invariant biological base of gender, but something that is enacted, not given, since “gender is a kind of persistent impersonation that passes as the real”.¹³ The *performativity theory* of (gender) identity elaborated by Butler cannot, alas, directly be applied to any other form of identity. Still, it may prove helpful in analysing a wide range of discursive or non-discursive human practices, rituals and symbolic events which are active in creating and maintaining the differences among various categories of people.

One may conclude that identity as an analytical category implies at least two basic traits: first, it is subject to choice; second, it is open to change and subversion. The term thus pertains to a process of doing as “identities are formed in action through repeated patterns of behaviour, physical practices such as gesture and cultural forms such as masquerade and drama”, and of course acts of cults.¹⁴ This implies that one cannot be committed in historicizing identity together with experience as its foundation to any kind of essentialism. Since individual and group identity based on experience is also produced and constituted by “changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted and embraced”.¹⁵

The bourgeois identity linked to the sense of the abstract solidarity of a modern nation, i.e. nationalism, *per se* may manifest itself in a great variety of ways. In such a nation-state-less country like the nineteenth-century Germany the *Heimat* movement sustained by associations could play a decisive role both in constructing and stabilizing the “inclusivity of the cultural nation” on the one hand, and “the exclusivity of a social elite, the local notables”, the provincial bourgeoisie on the other. The movement arising in the late 19th century with the definite aim of facilitating the cult of certain local values, past and present, much contributed to the construction of collective identity, the sense being both of German and bourgeois. In holding that history is the common

¹³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London, 1990, x.

¹⁴ Gunn, *History and Cultural*, 152.

¹⁵ Joan W. Scott, “The Evidence of Experience”. *Critical Inquiry*, 17 (Summer 1991), 792.

heritage, folklore is the common life and the natural world is the common good for the entire local community, the *Heimat* associations were busily engaged in inventing traditions via establishing museums, or publishing popular history textbooks and organizing hikes in the countryside.¹⁶

The term tradition as we use it now amounts to the *mélange* of a mindset and set of social practices (institutions) primarily produced not by rational experience or cognition, but by the unreflective process of inheritance or bequeathing. The word 'legacy' occurring in this context pertains to the underlying attribute of tradition, the one conceptualized as *effective-history*.¹⁷ This implies that there is no clear distinction made in tradition between past and present, and that the collective memory derives not from *accumulation*, but *reconstruction*; eventually the interest towards the past is permeated and informed wholly by identification. Tradition when it is acted out is thus the outcome of an incessant canonization process, based upon selection, discrimination and fixation. As canonization is to produce an established tradition, some portion of the past has always been left to remain latent waiting for its later possible invention in the course of the reconstruction.¹⁸

A new, almost revolutionary mode of collective memory was brought about by emergence of the modern historical consciousness. Replacing tradition by history is anticipated by the separation of the temporal horizon of what is possible in the future ("horizon of expectation") from the spatial realm of past possibilities ("space of experience"). These epistemological

¹⁶ Celia Applegate, "Localism and the German Bourgeoisie: the 'Heimat' Movement in the Rhenish Palatinate before 1914". In: David Blackbourn and Richard J. Evans (Eds.), *The German Bourgeoisie. Essays on the Social History of the German Middle Class from the Late Eighteenth to the Early Twentieth Century*. London–New York, 1993, 231, 240.

¹⁷ Cf. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*. Ttrans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall. New York, 1997.

¹⁸ The whole argument advanced goes back to, Aleida Assmann–Jan Assmann, "Kanon und Zensur". In: Aleida Assmann–Jan Assmann (Hrsg.), *Kanon und Zensur*. München, 1987, 72.

categories coming into existence in the 18th century are not just counterconcepts, but rather “dissimilar modes of existence” assisting us in the foundation of a history. The main difference between history and tradition in the light of the divergence of experience and expectation is that (1) unlike tradition distinction is made in history between past and present; (2) tradition is no longer able to carry the true sense of the image of the past when historical consciousness emerges; (3) historians writing history are expected to return to the past for gaining (and widening) their knowledge on the other, the alien, not merely creating and maintaining identity. Or putting it the other way, birth of a modern historical consciousness implies the recognition that history as well as the future is unique, because “In history, what happens is always more or less than what is contained by the given conditions.”¹⁹

The thesis relating to the duality of tradition and history is, indeed, well-established and first advanced by Maurice Halbwachs: “We might perhaps be led to distinguish two kinds of activities within social thought: on the one hand a memory, that is, a framework made out of notions that serve as landmarks for us and that refer exclusively to the past; on the other hand a rational activity that takes its point of departure in the conditions in which the society at the moment finds itself, in other words, in the present.”²⁰ His ideas were further developed by Pierre Nora in his well-known undertaking, *Lieux de memoire*.

In spite of all the apparent differences between tradition and history, there are still some striking commonalities or parallelisms. The question at that point is: how is it possible at all? The convergence assumed between tradition and history may be explained both by the basically narrative form of history writing and the ideological function that any historical scholarship

¹⁹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past. On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Trans. with an intr. Keith Tribe. New York, 2004, 262, 268; see also Reinhart Koselleck, “Erfahrungswandel und Methodenwechsel. Eine historische antropologische Skizze”. In: Reinhart Koselleck, *Zeitschichten*. Frankfurt am Main, 2000, 27-77.

²⁰ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*: Ed., trans. and intr. Lewis A. Coser. Chicago, 1992, 183.

regularly fulfills. The narratives of historians are usually chronologically based linear accounts of the past which are necessarily informed by a teleological horizon. Every historical description is made retrospectively at a moment when the historian is already aware of some of the implications (including the unintended consequences) of past actions. In this sense, history is always *our* history as the past events and processes connected causally to each other may only be comprehended by knowing an after-history accessible to us. That is the main (regularly hidden) reason why historical narratives representing the past of a modern nation-state resemble so much the past image emerging and incarnating through tradition.

Amidst the special setting of market economy and bourgeois society in the 19th and early 20th century the need felt by many for inner social integration, and outward national distinctiveness, paves the way for historicization. Accordingly, at the very moment when a historian goes into the archives to research the written sources as genuine traces of the past, and produces in the long run a neutral and non-partisan account of the world we have lost, he/she at once is expected to contribute to the construction of a national identity. In doing this the historian is unconsciously ready to create the image of a national past with which the citizens may easily identify themselves. Professional historians are thus not just meant to be patriots, and still worse nationalists or sometimes even chauvinists. They, in addition, are fully involved in "the representational practice best suited to the production of the »law-abiding« citizen", because the historical narrative is "especially well suited to the production of notions of continuity, wholeness, closure, and individuality that every »civilized« society wishes to see itself as incarnating, against the chaos of a merely »natural« way of life." In the process of creating the mental categories best suited to the conceptualization of "reality" modern historical scholarship tends to become a "representational practice which has the effect of constituting an image of a current social praxis as the criterion of plausibility by reference to which any given institution,

activity, thought, or even a life can be endowed with the aspect of »reality«".²¹

This special way of engendering and sustaining collective memory is there to account for the final merger of memory and identity. Pierre Nora also observes that the norm of acquiring an (ethnic or national) identity lies behind any approach towards the past grounding a self-awareness: "So identity, like memory, becomes a form of *duty*. I am asked to become what I am: a Corsican, a Jew, a worker, an Algerian, a Black."²² The academic practitioners of modern memory, the historians in contributing to identity politics regularly do their best to make their own versions of the representation of the past, serving the creation of a national identity. The end-product is that history resulting from a rationally based recognition also creates the image of the past resembling or even amounting to tradition based on identification.

What this all implies may abundantly be evidenced by examples taken from the historians' texts. But before looking at them, a general remark is still needed. A historian as a story-teller usually needs a guideline, and one or two dramatic turning points to make the story *followable*, that is intelligible, plausible and emotionally persuasive. According to William B. Gallie, followability of a narrative is always indispensable to the full historical understanding of an account of the past. Since, the argument says "history, like all stories and all imaginative literature, is as much a journey as an arrival, as much an approach as a result"; consequently "every genuine work of history is read in this way because its subject-matter is felt to be worth following-through contingencies, accidents, set-backs, and all the multifarious details of its development".²³

Historical narrative as satisfying the requirement of followability makes and allows us to embrace the past as our own

²¹ Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*. Baltimore, 1978, 87, 102.

²² Pierre Nora, "The Tidal Wave of Memory". *IWM Newsletter* 72 (Spring 2001), 26-27.

²³ W. B. Gallie, "The Historical Understanding,". *History and Theory*, 3, 2 (1963), 169.

through understanding the story that has been told about it. This, however, necessarily engenders the sense of identity the same way as it has usually been fulfilled by the perpetual reconstruction of the past through tradition.

Now I am going to take a short look at some of the main characteristic narrative techniques regularly applied by historians when giving an account of the past. The textual examples cited derive from the Hungarian historiography and refer to the same historical event, the battle of Mohács in 1526. This historical event is seen as a turning point in the course of our past pointing to the “end of the medieval history of Hungary”.²⁴

The two armies clashing in the battleground of Mohács in 1526 were the Hungarian one, commanded by the king, Louis II, and the Ottoman one, commanded by the sultan Soliman. The battle ended up with the defeat of the Hungarian troops, and the death of the young Hungarian king. Overall, the battle at Mohács is or has permanently been seen and assessed to have been the primary cause of the Turkish occupation of considerable part of the country, and as well as the dismemberment of Hungary into three distinct units: the Ottoman ruled middle part, the Habsburg ruled northern and western part and the southeast Principality of Transylvania.

Maintenance of collective memory of the event was, however, not continuous at all over the succeeding centuries.²⁵ The episode began to gain its today’s meaning and significance since as late as the end of the 18th and early 19th century; this had a lot to do with the then obvious ascendancy of a historically rooted modern national consciousness. Mohács came to signify or symbolize since that time the outset of a long term process of decay of the country, a development determined and accompanied by recurring catastrophes and tragical events. It was especially fit for this role, since the military defeat on the battleground of Mohács had broken the territorial integrity of a continuously existing Hungarian state sovereignty, dated back to the Middle Ages.

²⁴ Peter F. Sugar (Ed.), *A History of Hungary*. Bloomington, 1990, 82.

²⁵ More recently, see Zsombor Tóth, *A történelmem terhe. Antropológiai szempontok a kora újkori magyar írásbeliség textusainak értelmezéséhez*. Kolozsvár, 2006, 22., 37–41.

The image of the medieval kingdom ruled by the Hungarians had a specifically central place in the national self-consciousness of the 19th century, the heroic age of the Hungarian nation-building process defined by an extremely heterogeneous ethnic composition of the country. The argument then stressing the historical permanency of the Hungarian statehood as against the absence of any similar state autonomy among the ethnic minorities living in the area of the country, was designed to underpin the claims of the Hungarian national supremacy over the ethnically non-Hungarian citizens. Hungarian nationalism in that sense was, however, in harmony with the general European pattern in which the membership of a historic state, the potential popular appeal of a strong state tradition for modern nationalism was also obvious at that time.²⁶ So, Mohács by becoming the point of departure for a national historical narrative loaded with a peculiarly tragic perspective may even be looked at from this European perspective.

The historical image Mohács then had acquired, was produced mainly by poets, painters and finally by historians; they were who made the event a piece of historical evidence by reference to which any claims for the national self-identification could be endowed with the aspect of reality and historical justification. The list of the poets writing poems titled Mohács in the first half of the 19th century is long indeed, including Károly Kisfaludy, Mihály Vörösmarty, József Eötvös or Gergely Czuczor. It is not an accident, however, that the cult of Mohács began to flourish especially after the surrender at Világos, the victory of the Habsburgs over the Kossuth led War of Independence in 1849, and not less in the aftermath of Trianon, the collapse and disintegration of the Hungarian Kingdom following 1918. The unambiguously vivid memory of Mohács was updated in these days for the explicit end of emplotting the story of the Hungarian national past in the modality of Tragedy. May I cite two striking, but typical evidences, one taken from the interwar period and the other one from the current Hungarian historiography.

²⁶ Cf. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality*. Cambridge, 1990, esp. 80-100.

In showing how authoritative historians have depicted the time period preceding and following the so called Mohács Disaster, as the episode was called since the beginning of the 19th century, first I cite the master narrative, titled *Magyar történet* (Hungarian History) written by Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű, an undertaking published in the interwar period by the two most eminent historians of the day. When the interim years falling between King Matthias' Renaissance State in the second half of the 15th century, and the defeat on the battleground of Mohács was discussed, Bálint Hóman, author of that part of the work, made his best to metaphorically prepare the reader for the necessarily tragical end or dénouement of the story. "It is not an optical illusion that following the death of King Mathias, [...] we see an uninterrupted decline in the Hungarian public realm [...]. Longer period than that of a generation passed without a king during which the estates were to rule in the absence of an organically indispensable counterbalance; duality of the ruler and estates was thus fatally interrupted, and the estates, without a ruler of their own, tortured themselves and blindly staggered towards Mohács."²⁷

The following textual evidence chosen in order to show the rhetorical base of any historical account is taken from the master narrative, titled *Magyarok Európában* (Hungarians in Europe), the volumes of which have been published in the 1990s. The second volume, written by Ferenc Szakály covered the time period between the mid-15th and the early 18th century. Even the title of the book itself was envisaged to suitably express the dominant modality of Tragedy into which the whole story was moulded: *Golden Age and Decline*.²⁸ And the same is true for the titles of each of the chapters intended rhetorically to articulate the notion that the trajectory of the Hungarian past in these centuries was shaped and determined by a continuous and irresistible deterioration in sharp contrast with the basically positive European (Western) patterns of historical development. The first chapter titled, *Europe: Getting out of the State of Disintegration* is followed by a section

²⁷ Bálint Hóman – Gyula Szekfű, *Magyar történet*, vol. 2. Budapest, 1939, 564.

²⁸ Ferenc Szakály, *Virágkor és hanyatlás 1440-1711*. Budapest, 1990.

titled, *Hungary on the Road towards the Ottoman Expansion*. Or: the fourth chapter titled, *Changing Europe in the Centre of a Widening World* is plainly contrasted with the a section titled, *Hungary as Staggering towards the Fall (1490-1526)*. Finally, the seventh chapter titled, *The Birth of a New State Form in Europe (1560-1600)* is placed opposite to the following section titled, *Fate of the Country being Sealed. "The War of Fifteen Years" (1593-1606)*.

Mohács, one the most important Hungarian places of memory, gained an even higher prominence when the battleground was finally identified and recently yielded to the purpose of public memory as a memorial park. The opening of the Mohács Memorial Place in 1976 was preceded in the sixties by a wide-scale public discourse started by a semi- or quasi-historian, István Nemeskürty on the exact historical meaning of the episode.²⁹ The decision of establishing the Memorial Place showed that the Kádárist political elite was ready, two decades after the 1956 revolution, to make some concession to the suppressed national historical consciousness, the last open manifestation of which had been the 1956 revolution. The official policy to eradicate the memory of the revolution resulting in an "enforced historical amnesia" followed from the fact that 1956 was in some sense the "grounding narrative" for the Kádár regime.³⁰ By allowing resurrection of the Mohács cult always carrying a deeply national, and especially tragical historical feeling and spirit, the regime made an effort to neutralize the tragical image or connotation of this symbolic historical date.

In viewing the rhetoric of the official speaker, Gyula Ortutay, an ethnographer and leading public personality of the age, in the speech he delivered at the opening ceremony of the Memorial Place, this endeavour may easily be shown. The main focus of the speech was on the possible and wished new meaning what Mohács should acquire when approached from the perspective of a promising future rather than the tragical and nationalist mood turning back to the past. "The Hungarian national consciousness

²⁹ István Nemeskürty, *Ez történt Mohács után*. Budapest, 1966.

³⁰ See Gábor Gyáni, "Memory and Discourse on the 1956 Hungarian Revolution". *Europe-Asia Studies*, 58, 8 (December 2006), 1199–1208.

retains the name of Mohács as one of the most serious days of mourning [...] Well, here is the site of remembering, we, however, do not want to adhere to a worthless celebration..., but not even the lament is justified now." The main lesson to be drawn from Mohács, Ortutay says, is that the communist party is the single force striving in close cooperation with the working class, the peasantry and the intellectuals recruited from both of them for genuine national ends.³¹

Seen from a wider perspective Mohács was meant for long to symbolize the national fall caused by the imperial submission of the country, first to the Ottoman and the Habsburg, later to the Habsburg Empire alone. The historical experience placed in that specific interpretive framework caused a duplication of traditions; from at least the outset of the 18th century there were the historically based Hungarian sense of tradition, with the cult of successive insurrections, the varied forms of uprising and revolutionary movements on one hand, and the tradition of negotiation and compromise on the other. The sense of historical tradition linked to the independence ideal which manifested itself first through the Rákóczi uprising, later the 1848-49 War of Independence and finally by the outbreak of the 1956 revolution, showed the vitality of the potential for unrest in a country permanently surrendered to the changing imperial rules. The opposite or alternative kind of tradition also influencing the course of Hungary's history and the way it may be read suggested that the various outbursts of unrest prepared the way only for compromises aimed at resolving the recurrent tensions and conflicts in the country.

The competing images of history as accounting for many internal contradictions of the Hungarian self-perception had established two diametrical opposite concepts of the Hungarian nation differing greatly from each other both in terms of inclusion and exclusion of canonization. The alternative historical notions or lines of argument were also committed to the confessional

³¹ Gábor Kovács, "A mohácsi történelmi emlékhely. Szimbolikus harc a történelmi emlékezetért". In: Tamás Hofer (Szerk.), *Magyarok Kelet és Nyugat közt. A nemzetudat változó jelképei*. Budapest, 1996, 29-300.

separation between Catholicism and Protestantism, as the former cherished a pro-Habsburg image of history, and the latter being engaged in envisaging the independence ideals.

In trying to demonstrate the way how this divide has practically manifested itself by choosing between the accessible historical traditions, one may mention the example of the cult of Lajos Kossuth; his image embodying and articulating the independence ideal stood from the beginning in sharp contrast with that of István Széchenyi's, representing and expressing the negotiation type political culture. The history writing of the first decades of the 20th century in particular was prone to use both of them for personifying the "usable past" serving highly acute present-day political ends. And today's historical scholarship has too often been informed by this conceptual framing, when coming to a close contact with producing public history.³²

Lajos Kossuth, amounting to an emblematic figure of insurrections or uprisings in the course of Hungary's modern history, always made a much greater impact on the popular image of history than anything and anybody else including Széchenyi. He could have been therefore the historical personality, the eternal merits and remembrance of whom was even codified by the Parliament in the interwar period in 1927. The then ruling Horthy regime was not an enthusiastic supporter of the revolutionary and liberal ideas, the assertion of which Kossuth had strived for in the 1840s. Kossuth's cult, however, remained unchallenged up to the second half of the 20th century; it was first sustained by the Stalinist communist regime in the 1950s, and was later cherished by those intellectuals, historians in particular, who persistently adhered to the dream of liberating the country from the Soviet imperial domination.³³

Beside Kossuth's nationally approved cult, the worship felt towards the ideals incarnated by Széchenyi who until recently had some potential for an alternative way of national identification also.

³² On the notion of public history, see Jeremy Black, *Using History*. Hodder Arnold, London, 2005.

³³ György Gyarmati, "Kossuth kultusza–post mortem". *Korunk*, 2003. december, 35-50; 2004. január, 101-108.

This was the case with the conservative government in power between 1998 and 2002, which, despite stressing its own historically-rooted national orientation, obviously preferred Széchenyi's cult to Kossuth's one. Although, Kossuth as a common national historical idol was not disputed either, the cult of him still had more supporters among the liberal than the conservative political and intellectual forces.

The obvious split of the Hungarian national self-identification by history was articulated through the East/West conceptual opposition, a construction always used in creating a national self-image.³⁴ The vision advocating the oriental origins of the Hungarian tribes arriving to the Carpathian Basin in the 9th century from the areas of inner Asia, had been articulated before the ascendancy of the modern Hungarian nationalism in the 1830s and 1840s. Both the motif of the Scythian origins linked to the ancient Hungarians,³⁵ and the recurrent mentioning of the kinship between the Huns and the Hungarians are indicative of the enduring relevance of a self-identification guided by the idea of uniqueness and distinctiveness of the Hungarian nation among the European people.

The dual character of the national consciousness lays behind the divergent and opposing cults of chieftain Árpád, who brought the Hungarians to the Carpathian Basin, and that of Saint Stephen, establishing the Christian Kingdom of Hungary a century later. Árpád's cult, that of a pagan hero, clearly representing the oriental origins of the Hungarians, began as late as in the first half of the 19th century. Some time later it came to express in symbolic form the political values attached to the protestant-based Independence Party of the late 19th century. Saint Stephen, the Christian proselytizer, however, who was not even admitted in the pantheon

³⁴ Gábor Gyáni, "European identity, modernisation and national self-determination in Hungary". In: Alberto Tonini (Ed.), *Towards a New Europe: Identity, Economics, Institutions. Different Experiences*. Florence, 2003, 31–42.

³⁵ The poetic expression of the notion is discussed in Zsolt Aczél, "Közösség és ítélet. Kísérlet a nemzeti identitás elbeszélésre Berzsenyi Dániel *A magyarokhoz* című ódája alapján". *Forrás*, 2007. július-augusztus, 68–85.

of the Protestant's own historical heroes, necessarily became the idol for the Catholic pro-Habsburg political establishment of the turn of the 19th and 20th century.

The Millennial Monument erected at that time at the Heroes' Square in Budapest clearly testified to the great popular appeal that chieftain Árpád then enjoyed in comparison to king Saint Stephen. This was evident "not only from the central position assigned to Árpád [at the Monument], but also from the spatial separation of the crown from the kings".³⁶ Likewise, the Panorama of the Conquest (exhibited in 1894) was exclusively dedicated to the personality of Árpád, not to Saint Stephen. However, following Trianon in 1920, Saint Stephen started immediately to replace Árpád as the founding father of a country, the historical Hungary that was then partitioned by the Western powers.

To conclude, the various representations of the two eminent historical figures in the public imagery (as exemplified at least in the visual arts) were devised to symbolize two sets of ideas necessarily coming into conflict in the course of their history. Árpád expressed the following values or meanings: (1) a pagan princehood coming to power *through the will of the nation* (see the motif of the blood contract at Pusztaszer), not through the creation of the clergy; (2) a legitimacy obtained *through his arms, paganism, the East*, representing the continuity of Hungarian cultural traditions rooted in the ancient Asian homeland; (3) *cohesion within the nation* not comprising any minorities at that time (unlike the dualistic Hungary); (4) *the national independence*, viewed as the product of the Hungarians' self-reliance and perseverance in defending their own.

Saint Stephen, on the contrary, was assessed in the interwar period as an outstanding historical personality giving birth to the so called Saint Stephen-thought, the ideological guideline of the counterrevolutionary regime. His flourishing cult between 1920

³⁶ Katalin Sinkó, "Árpád versus Saint István. Competing heroes and competing interests in the figurative representation of Hungarian history". In: Tamás Hofer (Ed.), *Hungarian Between "East" and "West". Three Essays on National Myths and Symbols*. Budapest, 1994, 21.

and 1945 symbolized and expressed the main tenets of *Catholicism* and *universalism, royalty, multinationalism, imperialism, sainthood* and *legislation*.

The divergent political cults of the two mentioned historical heroes throughout the whole of the 19th and first half of the 20th century formed an integral part of the ideological, political or cultural development of Hungary. Following the 1989 political change the widely shared cultic attitude towards the past seems not to lose much of its previous weight. Still, the almost simultaneous cults of Árpád and Saint Stephen, or Kossuth and Széchenyi clearly show the potential for plurality of choice among the diverse historical *locii* with the definite aim of constructing a national identity. It also appears as a confusion in present-day political discourse seeking ways how to historicize the national past.

SPECTRUM HUNGAROLOGICUM Vol. 4.
**Cultic Revelations: Studies in Modern Historical
Cult Personalities and Phenomena**

Balázs Apor

**COMMUNIST LEADER CULTS IN EASTERN
EUROPE: CONCEPTS AND RECENT DEBATES**

The study of communist leader cults in Eastern Europe has received remarkable scholarly attention recently. In the past few years several publications have come to light that focused on different aspects of the phenomenon and interpreted cults from different perspectives. Such studies generally revolve around three key-concepts: Max Weber's concept of charisma, the 'cult of personality' as defined by Nikita Khrushchev, and the concept of 'political religions' developed by Emilio Gentile. This article is meant to provide an overview as well as a critical assessment of these concepts and their relevance to the study of communist leader cults.

Charisma and Max Weber

The leader cult should be understood as a system of rituals and myths that were meant to bolster symbolic and affective attachment to the regime and thereby to widen the social base of communist rule. The conceptual set that was first used to describe and represent the phenomenon in academic texts was borrowed from Max Weber's sociology. In fact, it has almost become an academic ritual to refer to Max Weber's concept of charisma in the beginning of a study that concentrates on the cult of a prominent personality.¹ Weber's typology of legitimate rule – legal/rational,

¹ Max Weber, "The Types of Legitimate Domination". In Weber, *Economy and Society. An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, Vol. 1, Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1978. 212-301; "Charisma and Its Transformation". *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, 1111-1157.

traditional, charismatic – has been criticized, complemented and abandoned by scholars during the 20th century, his definition of charisma, however, has displayed an enduring relevance and still serves as the basis of current academic debates on the nature of dictatorships.² What was most often applied to the Soviet context was Weber's idea of the routinisation of charisma. The Soviet regime sought to sustain the extraordinary situation in order to preserve the legitimacy capital that had been gained at the time of the revolution. This was in accordance with the party's self perception, since it considered itself to be an extraordinary institution, consisting of extraordinary people.

An important amendment to Weber's theory claimed that charisma was not necessarily inherent in a personality, but could also be constructed.³ The efforts of the party state to manufacture charisma for its leaders manifested in the development of the system of Soviet leader cults that gradually emerged from the mid-1930s. The cases of Stalin, Mátyás Rákosi in Hungary and most of the Eastern European satellite leaders show the desperate attempt of communist propaganda to confer an aura of charisma upon the regime's leaders. Manufactured charisma was not only applied to political figures, but also characterised the whole system of rule. Communist systems displayed a certain obsession with conferring

² See, for example Luciano Cavalli, *Charisma, Dictatorship and Plebiscitary Democracy*. Florence, 1984; E. A. Rees, "Leader Cults: Varieties, Preconditions and Functions". In Balázs Apór, Jan C. Behrends, Polly Jones and E. A. Rees (Eds.), *The Leader Cult in Communist Dictatorships. Stalin and the Eastern Bloc*. Basingstoke, 2004, 3-26, Edward Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology*. Chicago, 1975; Aristotle A. Kallis, "Fascism, 'Charisma', and 'Charismatisation': Weber's Model of 'Charismatic Domination' and Interwar European Fascism". *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2006, 25-43. See also the special issue of *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 7, No. 2, 2006.

³ Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power". In Sean Wilentz (Ed.), *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages*. Philadelphia, 1985, pp. 13-38. See also Shils, *Center and Periphery* and Jan Pakulski, "Legitimacy and Mass Compliance: Reflections on Max Weber and Soviet-Type Societies". *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 16, No. 1, 1986, 35-56.

charismatic qualities on institutions, organisations, the party, and certain political measures or historical events, besides the leaders of the party.⁴ In communist regimes, the entire regime and not only one individual were dressed up in the costume of charisma. Such political systems aimed at something similar to what Weber characterised as charismatic rule, but since the whole system bore charismatic traits besides the actual leader, communist propaganda could be viewed as an overall attempt to manufacture a certain collective charisma that applied to the whole establishment.

Weber's concept of charisma has initially been adopted by political scientists to describe the emergence of communist leader cults. Their approach, however, was equally influenced by the Cold War totalitarian-model, emblematised by Zbigniew Brzezinski, as well as Khrushchev's Secret Speech, that associated the cult's development with Stalin's rise to power. Therefore, such approaches linked the notion of 'cult of personality' to the establishment of the party's authority in the Soviet Union, and Stalin's achievement of dictatorial power.⁵ Most of these works focused on the cult's genesis, which was usually linked to the changes in the organisational basis of the party. The 'cult of personality' was equated with one-man rule (Stalin or Mao) and all its attributes. The unnatural exaltation of the leader and the flow of eulogies were considered to stem from Stalin's psychological

⁴ Rees, 'Leader Cults', 22.

⁵ Graeme Gill, "Personality Cult, Political Culture and Party Structure". *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1984, 111-121; Gill, "Political Myth and Stalin's Quest for Authority in the Party". In T. H. Rigby, Archie Brown and Peter Reddaway (Eds.), *Authority, Power and Policy in the USSR. Essays dedicated to Leonard Schapiro*. London, 1983, 98-117; Gill, "Personal dominance and the collective principle: individual legitimacy in Marxist-Leninist systems". In T. H. Rigby and Ferenc Fehér (Eds), *Political Legitimation in Communist States*. London, 1982, 94-110; Jeremy T. Paltiel, "The Cult of Personality: Some Comparative Reflections on Political Culture in Leninist Regimes". *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 16, Nos. 1-2, 1983, 49-64; Robert J. Thompson, "Reassessing Personality Cults. The Case of Stalin and Mao". *Studies in Comparative Communism*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1988, 99-128.

predisposition to accept and promote eulogies of his persona.⁶ The explanation of the cult's origins with structural preconditions and authority relations, however, did not account for the hierarchical nature of the cult, and the multiplication of mini-Stalins in the peripheries, not to mention the export of the Stalin-cult to Central and Eastern Europe. It has also failed to explain the semi-spontaneous emergence of the Lenin-cult in the early-1920s. Little attention has been paid by the authors to the ritual nature of the cult, the role of institutions in constructing the leader's charisma, popular reaction to the worship of leaders, or the cult's functions in Soviet society. The spiritual, mystical aspects of the cult have also been ignored.

Although the focus on structural changes and authority relations certainly had its advantages, recent developments in studies of communist leader cults have demonstrated that the Stalin-cult was far more complex than a megalomaniacal campaign of self-aggrandisement by a communist despot.⁷ (This is not to say of course that Stalin discouraged the veneration of himself.) Scholars have pointed out the importance of social and cultural factors in the development of the cult: the role of intellectual traditions and social interactions, and the impact of pre-revolutionary myths and discourses. In the mirror of historiographical findings, it seems well-grounded to posit that the complexity of the cult can only be grasped through the assistance of a wide variety of approaches. It needs social history to determine the social basis of the cult, anthropology to analyse the cult's ritual functions, art history to assess the cult's aesthetic dimensions, political history to outline its development, and discourse analysis to establish historical analogies with the language of leader veneration in different societies and different time periods.

The concept of charisma, despite its ability to essentialize the nature of totalitarian regimes remains a little intangible. In Weber's

⁶ Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power. The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941*. New York, 1990.

⁷ The most recent approaches to communist leader cults include Klaus Heller and Jan Plamper (Eds.), *Personality Cults in Stalinism – Personenkulte im Stalinismus*, Göttingen, 2004.

definition, the attribution of charismatic qualities to personalities is dependent on the attitude of the following to the political leader in question. Thus, the concept of charisma is a little elusive and subjective. The preconditions of charisma in this sense are the assumption of power by an individual in an extraordinary situation, and the acknowledgement of his (or her) charismatic qualities by the following. This definition, however, ignores the actual size of the following and thus does not pay attention to the extent of social support for a charismatic leader. The concept of charisma is also incapable of incorporating the diversity of popular attitudes towards a particular leader. Many people, who supported the leader and dictatorial regimes, for example, did so out of pragmatic considerations, not necessarily because they considered the leader a charismatic personality. Strategic flattery was usually applied when trying to achieve material advantages or career goals, but the reiteration of the conceptual constituents of the leader cult discourse could also be interpreted as a survival tactic that could help someone avoid the attention of the authorities. Irrespective of the many possible reasons why people supported and hailed the leader – whether the reason was calculation, coercion, fear, the desire to socialise with the community, or interest in the radio set – a substantial part of societies under dictatorial rule became aware of the practices and the rhetoric of the leader cult. Whether whole-heartedly, or hypocritically, a significant part of such people participated in the cult's rituals, and appealed to the leader cult discourse when communicating with state and party authorities. Consequently, they also contributed to the party's attempt to construct the charisma of the leader, even if they actually retained a critical or sceptical attitude towards the leader's qualities.

In order to be able to apply Weber's concept of charisma to the communist example, one should study the popular reception of the cult of party leaders. Such an approach would help to determine whether these leaders were truly considered charismatic by the people who supported them, or whether they only had the image of being charismatic created for them by official propaganda.

‘Cult of Personality’: Meanings and Functions

The use of the phrase ‘cult of personality’ as an analytical concept is not without problems either. As several historians have shown recently, the term was rarely used with regard to the cults of communist party leaders in the Soviet bloc at the time when these cults actually flourished.⁸ Such cults were never defined officially as ‘cults of personality’, and whenever the concept was used at the time, it usually appeared in a context in which it was abused and criticised. Thus the construction of one of the most pervasive cults in history – the Stalin-cult – was never acknowledged in the cult-building phase. The Stalin-cult was never defined as an example of the ‘cult of personality’, only after the collapse of the Stalin-myth, in 1956. After Khrushchev’s Secret Speech at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, however, the Stalin-cult became *the* synonym of ‘cult of personality’.

The fact that the construction of the Stalin-cult was characterised by the denial of the ‘cult of personality’, however, was not necessarily the sign of hypocrisy or cynicism from the part of the cult-builders. It seems that socialist political movements before Stalin had also struggled with the negative connotations attached to the concept. As Boldizsár Vörös has shown, the Hungarian social democrats of the late 19th-early 20th centuries also rejected the notion of ‘cult of personality’ while they were eager to build up a pantheon of heroes and forefathers. The same attitude was also characteristic to the leaders of the Hungarian Republic of Councils of 1919, including Béla Kun.⁹

The semantic ambiguities concerning the concept ‘cult of personality’ have been recognised and commented upon by several scholars. In the Hungarian context, historians before 1989

⁸ Jan Plamper, ‘Introduction: Modern Personality Cults’, in *Personality Cults*, 13-42; Yves Cohen, ‘The Cult of Number One in an Age of Leaders’, *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Summer 2007), 597-634.

⁹ Boldizsár Vörös, *“A múltat végképp eltörölni”? Történelmi személyiségek a magyarországi szociáldemokrata és kommunista propagandában 1890-1919.* Budapest, 2004.

used the term in a narrow, strict sense as well as in a very general one. It was narrow in the sense that contemporaries – including politicians and historians of the Kádár-era – only used it in connection with a particular leader at the top of the party leadership – the General or the First Secretariat – who was the most representative figure of the whole phenomenon. On the other hand, the concept ‘personality cult’ was frequently adopted to refer to the whole period of High Stalinism in Hungary, until 1956. The semantic field of the notion could cover the deification of party leaders, the abuse of power by a small group, the purges and the show-trials, the terror of the Secret Police, forced industrialisation, and so on. It seems that communist historians, as well as many historians after 1989, continued to use ‘personality cult’ similar to the way Khrushchev had used it in his Secret Speech at the 20th Congress. Therefore, the concept ‘cult of personality’ appears in historical works as a mere cover-term that is usually applied as a metaphor to describe the period of Stalinism in Hungary. Such a superficial treatment of the term also contributed to the scholarly ignorance towards the phenomenon.

In his introduction to a volume on Stalinist leader cults, Jan Plamper has attempted to sketch an outline of the history of the concept ‘cult of the individual’ in Marxist tradition. Considering the methodological findings of *Begriffsgeschichte*, he has followed the philosophical assessments of the role of great individuals in Marxist writings, from Karl Kautsky onwards, to Plekhanov, Lenin, Stalin and finally Khrushchev.¹⁰ In a similar way, Yves Cohen also tried to outline the history of the concept ‘cult of personality’ in a recent article.¹¹ Both authors focus on the semantic changes of the concept in ideological/philosophical texts, but they both tend to overlook the use of the concept in party-speak, not to mention the vernacular. For this reason, they – similarly to the majority of sovietologists – link the rise of the term ‘cult of personality’ to

¹⁰ Plamper, “Introduction”. An attempt to outline the perception of the role of great individuals in Marxist tradition is provided by Erik van Ree, *The Political Thought of Joseph Stalin. A Study in Twentieth-Century Revolutionary Patriotism*, London, New York, 2002.

¹¹ Cohen, “The Cult of Number One”, 598-605.

Khrushchev's Secret Speech, which makes perfect sense in the Western European context. It has to be emphasized, however, that the concept had already been an essential constituent of the party language before 1956 and the 20th Congress. Moreover, one might suggest that the way the term was used in party language had a much greater impact on our present understanding of the cult phenomenon than the way the concept was used in ideological or philosophical texts.

Despite the frequency of the term in contemporary sources (especially in 1956), the definition of what constituted the 'cult of personality' remained vague in the post-Stalin period. The vagueness of the term was apparent also to many Hungarian contemporaries, especially to members of the party leadership. A member of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Worker's Party (MDP), Mária Nagy, for example, already demanded a clear definition of the term at the meeting of the Central Committee in March 1956, where Rákosi presented his official report of the 20th Congress.¹² Imre Nagy, who had been excluded from the party in 1955, also criticised Rákosi for defining the 'cult of personality' in a very general and impersonal way after the Secret Speech. In his notes, Nagy expressed the need for a detailed analysis of the complex relationship between the emergence of the cult, the evolution of a one-man leadership, the 'oppression of party democracy', the terror, and the show trials.¹³ Likewise, at one of the meetings of the Petőfi-circle in June 1956, Tibor Déry pointed out the insufficient explanation of how the 'cult of personality' had evolved.¹⁴ Even Rákosi admitted in his memoirs that the party had used the term in a general sense, 'without a definition of the

¹² Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL), 276. fond 52/33.

¹³ Imre Nagy, "A K.V. ülése után (Jegyzetek)". *Irodalmi Újság*, Vol. 34, No. 2, 1983, 3-4. Nagy was extremely critical of Rákosi and his report on the 20th congress. He described the report as being a 'pathetic mendacity', and called the leadership a 'complete failure', and identified Rákosi as 'the main sinner', and a 'sycophant careerist'. Nagy even described the purges of the 1950s in Hungary as 'genocide'.

¹⁴ András Hegedüs B., "'Beszédemet mégsem vonom vissza': Déry Tibor felszólalása a Petőfi Kör vitáján". *Világosság*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 1989, 132.

concept “personality cult” and the reasons for its rise’.¹⁵ A certain semantic uncertainty also characterised the use of the concept by communist politicians beyond the borders of Hungary. The Italian communist leader, Palmiro Togliatti, for example, when asked in an interview in 1956 of what the Soviet leadership had meant by ‘personality cult,’ refused to give a straightforward answer,¹⁶ but the Polish and the Romanian leaders also remained somewhat uncertain as to the proper explanation of the cult after the 20th Congress.¹⁷ Apart from contemporaries, historians have also commented upon the semantic inconsistencies of the concept on several occasions.¹⁸ One Hungarian scholar of the Kádár-era remarked that the evolution of the ‘personality cult’ ‘has not been clarified in concrete terms’, and that attention was only paid to ‘its secondary features’.¹⁹

The question may arise as to whether the semantic obscurity that surrounded the term ‘personality cult’ was a unique phenomenon, particular to that notion alone, or whether the vagueness of its meaning reflects a more general feature of contemporary language use. One aspect of the Sovietisation project in Eastern Europe was the ritualisation of political language that was provoked by the intense transmission of the party’s

¹⁵ Mátyás Rákosi, *Visszaemlékezések 1940-1956*, Vol. 2. Budapest, 1997, 748-749.

¹⁶ “The criticism of Stalin and his personality cult by the Soviet comrades means exactly what it has meant before.’ Palmiro Togliatti, *A demokrácia és a szocializmus problémái. Válogatott írások és beszédek*. Budapest, 1965, 195.

¹⁷ J. Berman in Poland admitted in front of a party action in March 1956: “Before the XVII Congress (1934), the cult had not appeared in a clear form; it became fully apparent only afterwards. At the moment, I can’t explain its appearance.’ Quoted in Tony Kemp-Welch, “Khrushchev’s ‘Secret Speech’ and Polish Politics: The Spring of 1956”. *Europa-Asia Studies*, Vol. 48, No. 2, 1996, 185. For the Romanian case see Alice Mocanescu, “Surviving 1956: Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the ‘Cult of Personality’ in Romania”. In: *The Leader Cult*, 246-260.

¹⁸ Nina Tumarkin, *Lenin lives! The Lenin Cult in Soviet Russia*. Cambridge, Mass. 1997; Olga Velikanova, *Making of an Idol: On Uses of Lenin*, Göttingen, 1996, 11.

¹⁹ Sándor Balogh et al., *Magyarország a XX. Században*. Budapest, 1986, 347.

ideological messages towards the population. The complexities of Marxist vocabulary, that was held sacred by the regime, caused difficulties in understanding the party's announcements and led to the incoherent use of the key-concepts of party life by various segments of the society, including party functionaries. The inconsistent use of political language, as spoken by party bureaucrats, and the tendency to perceive ideological pronouncements in slogans was recognised by various commentators of the time. Stalin at the 17th Congress of the CPSU in 1934, for example, condemned the way party officials spoke, emphasizing their tendency to overuse certain words, without possessing a genuine grasp of their real meaning. He illustrated his critique with an anecdote.

I : How are you getting on with the sowing?

He : With the sowing, Comrade Stalin? We have mobilized ourselves.

(Laughter.)

I : Well, and what then?

He : We have put the question squarely. *(Laughter.)*

I : And what next?

He : There is a turn, Comrade Stalin; soon there will be a turn. *(Laughter.)*

I : But still?

He : We can see an indication of some improvement. *(Laughter.)*

I : But still, how are you getting on with the sowing?

He : So far, Comrade Stalin, we have not made any headway with the sowing. *(General laughter.)*

There you have the portrait of the windbag. They have mobilized themselves, they have put the question squarely, they have a turn and some improvement, but things remain as they were.²⁰

The existence of a popular semantic chaos with regard to the key-concepts of Marxist vocabulary was also recognised by Georgii Dimitrov. In his concluding speech at the 7th Congress of the Comintern in 1935, he criticised the inclination of party functionaries to use impressive abstract formulas instead of

²⁰ <http://www.marx2mao.org//Stalin/SPC34.html> (date of access: 20 April 2002)

concrete terms, and expressed his dissatisfaction concerning the generally turgid style of communist propagandist material such as leaflets, newspapers, party resolutions, and so on.²¹ Dimitrov advocated the simplification of party language, and called for the clarification of key-concepts, which he thought would eventually lead to the popular understanding of the intentions and aims of the communist movement.

In Hungary the first to criticise the way the party communicated with the population was József Révai, the chief communist ideologue of the 1950s. In his contribution to the 2nd Congress of the MDP (26 February 1951) he bitterly remarked:

We often speak a specific, imaginary and spoiled language, when we are talking to the people. A specific 'party-language' or more precisely a 'bureaucratic cant' is evolving here, which is toneless and odourless, intricate and lifeless and breaks our links with the masses.²²

The jargon-like character of political language and the ritualisation of linguistic formulas during the period of High Stalinism in Hungary have also been observed by several linguists of the time.²³ Such authors usually highlighted the tendency towards the devaluation, or inflation of words, originating in the 'conspicuous and unnecessary' overuse of certain words and phrases.²⁴ The monotonous and mechanic repetition of certain expressions rendered the meaning of such expressions vague and obscure and contributed to their general deflation in terms of

²¹ <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/dimitrov/works/1935/unity.htm> (date of access: 20 April 2002)

²² Révai József *elvtárs felszólalása a Magyar Dolgozók Pártja II. Kongresszusán 1951. február 26-án*. MDP KV Agitációs és Propaganda Osztály, Budapest, 1951, 7.

²³ Iván Fónagy and Katalin Soltész, *A mozgalmi nyelvről*. Budapest, 1954; Lajos Lőrincze, "A 'Tartós békéért, népi demokráciáért nyelvért'". In: Lőrincze, *Nyelv és élet*. Budapest, 1953, 61-75, and Lőrincze, "Mozgalmi nyelvünk kérdései és a jó magyar nyelv". In: *Nyelv és élet*, 79-99; Szergej Tóth, "A szovjet birodalmi nyelv, avagy a totalitarizmus grammatikája". *Aetas*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1991, 5-39.

²⁴ *A mozgalmi nyelvről*. 21.

'linguistic currency'. There was also the problem of overusing ready-made – often trivialised – set phrases. The frequent and tendentious misuse of such phrases would lead to conceptual laxity eventually resulting in meaningless speech. The linguists have pointed out that the increased number of hollow set-phrases and generalities had triggered the rise of a jargon-like party language. The absence of creativity and inventiveness in language use prevented users from grasping the essence of what a particular concept had originally signified, and contributed to the formulation of empty and obscure remarks. The use of empty phrases and fixed formulas buttressed the ritual character of standard party practices such as criticism/self-criticism rituals, and ensured that acts of (self)criticism remained within the realm of obscure generality.²⁵

The tendency of 'Soviet Imperial Language', as one scholar has labelled Soviet political language, to denote generalities instead of concrete referents, provoked the proliferation of semantic ambiguities and eventually resulted in the failure of party language to fulfil its communicative functions.²⁶ Since the ideological discourse was full of difficult and complex notions, which even agitators and party functionaries had often failed to understand, the transmission of ideological messages between the party and the masses remained superficial, and revolved around various key-concepts and slogans.

²⁵ On the role and interpretations of the notions of criticism and self-criticism see Michael Waller, *The Language of Communism. A Commentary*. London, 1972, 55-57.

²⁶ Tóth, "A szovjet birodalmi nyelv". Tóth's work was largely influenced by Victor Klemperer's study on the language of the Nazi party. See Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii: A Philologist's Notebook*. London, 1999. On the usage of 'Bolshevik-speak' by the Soviet population see Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1995, 198-237.



Rákosi, the Father figure.
(Hurrah! The 2nd Congress of
the Hungarian Workers' Party)

Due to the pervasiveness of 'semantic splodgeing'²⁷(i.e. the blurring of meanings), and the inadequacy of presenting the otherwise complicated Marxist terminology to the population had resulted in the popular misperception of concepts and notions of the essential Marxist vocabulary.²⁸ The semantic uncertainty and the tendency to perceive political pronouncements in terms of slogans contributed inevitably to the ritualisation of political language.

It seems that the obscure nature of the concept 'personality cult' was but one example of the general semantic vagueness that characterised the parti-

cular language variant spoken by the party elite and the party bureaucracy. When the general features of the linguistic environment are taken into consideration, however, the unclear, ambiguous character of the notion is not at all surprising. The semantic haziness of certain words or expressions could be exploited during rituals of criticism or self-criticism, for example, because the empty nature of phrases and formulas could contribute to the formulation of a general, meaningless - and at the same time harmless - critique. Since the concept 'personality cult' most often appeared in the context of criticism/self-criticism acts, its obscure character is not remarkably striking.

²⁷ Lóránt Czigány, "Államosított szavaink átvilágítása, avagy szótáríróink diszkrét bája". *Kortárs*, Vol. 44, No. 7, 1999, 1-32.

²⁸ On the difficulties of transmitting Bolshevik terminology at the time of the Russian revolution see Orlando Figes and Boris Kolonitskii, *Interpreting the Russian Revolution. The Language and Symbols of 1917*. New Haven and London, 1999.



Rákosi having his head portrayed – on the wall ‘the Founding Fathers’ look on him.

Probably the first occurrence of the term in Hungary after the war was in 1948, when the Politburo of the MDP criticised the Congress of Trade Unions for overemphasising the significance of the unions and overshadowing the leading role of the party. The leaders of the unions were condemned for establishing a certain ‘personality cult’ around themselves, which ‘totally underplayed [the authority of] Comrade Rákosi.’²⁹ The resolution emphasized that there were no portraits of Rákosi in the hall where the congress took place, and that more pictures of István Kossa (prominent trade union leader) were circulated than that of the MDP leader. The concept ‘personality cult’ reappeared a year later in the party resolution, which excluded the previous Minister of

²⁹ Péter Sipos, “Mikor kezdődött Magyarországon...”. *História*, Vol. 9, Nos. 5-6, 1987, 12.

Home Affairs, László Rajk, from the MDP (11 June 1949).³⁰ Both denunciations preceded a political campaign against the personalities mentioned in the documents. The decree condemning trade union leaders was the warning signal before the propaganda campaign against the Social Democrats, whereas the exclusion of Rajk was followed by his arrest in September 1949, and one of the biggest show trials in the Soviet bloc. The term 'cult of personality' resurfaced in June 1953, when the Presidium of the CPSU stigmatised Rákosi for promoting the cult of his person, but it was also used before the denunciation of Nagy and his eventual exclusion from the ranks of the MDP in 1955. The same charge was reheated and was connected to Rákosi again after the 20th Congress and Khrushchev's Secret Speech, when the party secretary was finally removed from the party leadership. The Kádár-regime continued to use the term in reference to Rákosi only, with the intention of distancing itself from the misdeeds of the pre-1956 era. In the Soviet Union the concept was picked up by the heirs of Stalin after the death of the dictator, culminating in Khrushchev's dramatic speech at the 20th Congress denouncing Stalin's sins. Paradoxically enough Khrushchev was also accused of having established his own 'personality cult', when he was removed from the party leadership in 1964 by the Brezhnev group.³¹

It can be concluded that the term 'cult of personality' functioned as a general term of condemnation in Stalinist political culture. The accusation either preceded the removal of a rival, as in the case of Rajk for example, or followed the displacement or the demise of a leader, when the denunciation of the predecessor was exploited in order to confer legitimacy onto the successors. Therefore, the term

³⁰ "Vigilance should be intensified. We should watch out for every sign of deviation from the party line, for every clap-trap, self-glorification, personality cult and for the pushers". "A Központi Vezetőség és a Központi Ellenőrző Bizottság közös határozata Rajk László és Szőnyi Tibor kizárásáról a pártból". In: Lajos Izsák (Ed.), *A Magyar Dolgozók Pártja határozatai, 1948-195.*, Budapest, 1998, 70-71.

³¹ On the emerging cult of Khrushchev see James George Boylan, "The Development of the Khrushchev "Cult of Personality": A Survey and Interpretation of Pravda and Izvestia", Unpubl. M.A. Thesis, University of Washington, 1961.

'cult of personality' should be interpreted as an essential verbal requisite of Bolshevik denunciation rituals, rather than as a key-concept of Marxist philosophy. With the ritualisation of political language in the age of High Stalinism, the usage of the concept 'cult of personality' also became ritualised, which eclipsed its semantic qualities. For this reason, an approach that focuses on its function in party rituals rather than on its meaning in ideological texts would prove to be more fruitful in attempting to reveal the characteristics of the notion and its actual relationship to the cult phenomenon.

Irrespective of the problematic nature of the concept 'personality cult', it can still be regarded as a key-symbol of the 1950s in Koselleckian terms, because Hungarian academics as well as contemporary Hungarian society perceives the period between 1949 and 1953 (sometimes up to 1956) as the 'era of personality cult'.³² The concept, which nowadays can equally refer to the glorification of Rákosi, the show trials, the purges and so on, turned into a verbal symbol of the 1950s, denoting the party leader, Rákosi. Consequently, the term retains strong semantic connotations, due to the complexity of its meaning and the wide range of associations it may evoke.

Yves Cohen was right in pointing out that when historians and political scientists define Stalinist leader cults as examples of the 'cult of personality' they use a concept that was not used to denote the phenomenon in the past.³³ Thus, historians of our times should be careful when using the concept with regard to Soviet-type leader cults in order to avoid methodological mistakes. The semantic ambiguities related to the concept as well as its ritual use in party-speak – as outlined above – also make a strong case for a cautious use of the phrase in an academic context. One might even

³² For Koselleck's understanding of key-concepts Reinhart Koselleck, "Einleitung". In: Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, Reinhart Koselleck (Eds.), *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe. Historisches Lexikon zur politischen-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland*. Stuttgart, 1974-1997, Band I., XIII-XXVII; Koselleck, "Begriffsgeschichte and Social History". In Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. Cambridge, 1985, 73-91; *The Practice of Conceptual History. Timing History, Spacing Concepts*. Stanford, 2002.

³³ Cohen, "The Cult of Number One", 599.

suggest abandoning the term and replacing it with other concepts that are more suitable for analytical purposes. The alternative suggested by Cohen is the Koestlerian 'cult of the number one'. This concept, however, overlooks the hierarchical nature of the cult phenomenon and thus ignores the dynamics of the dissemination of the cult at lower levels of party and state administration. From this point of view, the term leader cult seems to be more fitting to describe the cult in the Soviet context. Since the word 'leader' could equally refer to high-ranking party officials as well as to local/regional party secretaries, the phrase leader cult also indicates the hierarchical nature of the cult. Nevertheless, it has to be acknowledged that this concept only signifies cults in the political sphere, and thus fails to denote general cultic behaviour and other cultic practices (such as intellectual traditions and so on) in the society. Therefore, one should also consider using the expression 'cult of the individual' as a more general term that equally refers to political cults and other cultic social practices in dictatorial, but also in democratic regimes. The use of the term is also justified by the fact that the Russian phrase *kult lichnosti* has a double meaning: it equally means 'cult of personality' and 'cult of the individual'. Moreover, the concept is less politically laden than its semi-equivalent, i.e. 'cult of personality'.

Irrespective of the possible alternative concepts to be used in place of 'cult of personality', a full *Begriffsgeschichte* of the expression still needs to be written. Such a study should focus on the way the concept was used by political thinkers and party ideologues of the time, but also on the way it was used in party-speak and by the population of the respective countries.

Rituals, Myths and Political Religions

The Soviet project was for the most part an offensive for the occupation of the symbolic field and the conquest of symbolic space.³⁴ It was also a utopian, millenarian – and militant – venture to remould society and create the socialist New Man. The Bolsheviks created a new system of myths and cults and introduced a new set of symbols (hammer and the sickle, red star, etc.), celebrations and rituals. The attempt to realise socialist utopia on earth also manifested in the formulation of a master narrative, which permeated novels, political biographies, historical works, and newspaper articles. The aesthetic-discursive framework of the regime that is usually labelled as Socialist Realism was also represented through visual means: on paintings, photos, posters or statues. Besides the implementation of a new symbolism, the Soviet regime often recycled old symbols and traditions, but also appealed to religious sentiments.

At the centre of Soviet myths stood the myth of the party and the myth of the revolution, complemented after 1945 by the myth of the Great Patriotic War. Soviet mythology was crammed with all sorts of heroes. The apogee of Soviet heroic culture was the Stalin period that elevated revolutionary heroes, Stakhanovites, stock workers, aviators, partisans, or those who denounced their relatives, to a hero status.³⁵ The multiplication of everyday supermen was complemented with the cult of martyrs and the heroic dead.

The cult of the party secretary was an integral component of Soviet mythology. He was the super-hero of the heroic age, and the

³⁴ For the concept of symbolic field Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, 1977; *Language and Symbolic Power*. Oxford, 1991; "Social Space and Symbolic Space". In: Bourdieu, *Practical reason: on the theory of action*. Cambridge, 1998, 1-18.

³⁵ For the multiplication of socialist heroes Silke Satjukow and Rainer Gries (Eds.), *Sozialistische Helden. Eine Kulturgeschichte von Propagandafiguren in Osteuropa und der DDR*. Berlin, 2002; Miklós Kun, "Hőskultusz és deheroizáció a szovjet rendszerven". *Café Babel*, No. 3, 1994, 87-90. For the cult of Pavlik Morozov see Catriona Kelly, *Comrade Pavlik: The Rise and Fall of a Soviet Boy Hero*. London, 2004.

super-symbol that absorbed all symbols of Soviet power. The myth of the leader was summarised in his biographies that cemented the leader-myth to the system of myths promoted by the regime. In the case of Stalin, his figure was linked to the founding myths of the regime: the revolution, Lenin, and later on, World War II. The leader cult with its routinised practices – letter-writing, expressions of gratitude, applause, the offering of pledges, and so on – should also be interpreted in the context of the complex system of rituals that had been implemented in Soviet-type societies during the Stalin-era. Stalinist culture was, in fact, characterised by a high degree of ritualisation of state-societal relations. Due to the existential uncertainty that saturated the regime, rituals of expressing loyalty, or expressing penitence when stigmatised, became common practices through which the individual attempted to improve his/her social position, avoid arrest, or survive in case of mortal threat.³⁶ Denunciation, criticism, self-criticism and other ways of public confession – confession of convicts at show trials, for example – became widespread social practices that spread through the structure of Soviet society from top to bottom, and involved prominent members of the party elite and politically impoverished individuals alike. The high level of routinisation of these practises led to the ritualisation of the use of language, resulting in the semantic emptiness of certain concepts, expressions and linguistic formula. Apart from the spontaneous ritualisation of social relations, the regime also promoted a set of ritual practices to celebrate itself and to re-enact authority relations in the society. Mass demonstrations

³⁶ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Applicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s". *Slavic Review*, Vol. 55, No. 1, 1996, 78-105; Sheila Fitzpatrick and Robert Gellately (Eds.), *Practices of Denunciation in Modern European History, 1789-1989. The Journal of Modern History*, Special Issue, Vol. 68, No. 4, 1996; J. Arch Getty, "Samokritika Rituals in the Stalinist Central Committee, 1933-38". *The Russian Review*, Vol. 58, No. 1, 1999, 49-70; J. Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-Destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*. New Haven and London, 1999, 23-24 and 78-79; Alexei Kojevnikov, "Rituals of Stalinist Culture at Work: Science and the Games of Intraparty Democracy circa 1948". *Russian Review*, Vol. 57, No. 1, 1998, 25-52.

and party meetings at various levels gradually took a standardised format and turned into routine activities.

Although the leader cult had its own distinct set of rites, the person of the party secretary was usually placed in the centre of distinct rituals that were not directly linked to the worship of leaders. During demonstrations, public holidays and festivities, when Soviet social relations were remodelled by the participants, the leader (or an image of him) generally occupied the centre of all celebration activities, which provided symbolic support for his unquestionable position in society.³⁷ In the case of denunciations or practices of self-criticism the leader's name was frequently invoked, with the hope of providing absolute credibility to the confession ritual. Cultic practices often merged with more traditional – usually religious – everyday rituals. Instances of prayers to the leader, and the images of Lenin and Stalin replacing icons, were clear examples of the amalgamation of orthodox religious practices and rituals of leader worship. In general, orientation towards the leader was an essential characteristic element of socialist rituals. Consequently, the persona of the party secretary became the focal point of the great majority of routinised social practices in the culture of Stalinism. Socialist rituals of the Stalin era thus provided a ritualised remodelling of the practice of 'working towards the *vozhd'* [leader]' in Soviet-type societies.³⁸

The Soviet-type consecration of politics had its roots in the writings of utopian socialist authors but it was also an emphatic element of late 19th century Russian intellectual traditions. Saint-Simon, the God-builder movement (especially Maxim Gorky and Anatolii Lunacharskii), and even Stalin contributed to transferring

³⁷ For the analysis of rituals in the Soviet Union James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917-1920*. Berkeley, 1993; Christel Lane, *The Rites of Rulers. Ritual in Industrial Society – the Soviet Case*. Cambridge, 1981; Karen Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades. Celebrations in the Time of Stalin*. Bloomington, Indianapolis, 2000.

³⁸ The expression 'working towards the Führer' has been coined by Ian Kershaw. It has been adopted to the Soviet context by several authors. See for example, Ennker, 'The Stalin Cult', and Malte Rolf, "Working Towards the Centre: Leader Cults and Spatial Politics in Pre-war Stalinism". *The Leader Cult*, 141-157.

of religious sentiments into the political arena. The God-builders, who wanted to replace the God of Christianity with a human deity, were mostly responsible for the foundation of the Lenin-cult, which eventually became the core myth of the Soviet Union.³⁹ The aim of the Soviet-type regimes was to excise the dominant religions from the spiritual sphere – Orthodoxy in Russia, Orthodoxy and Catholicism in Central and Eastern Europe – and to exercise full control over the minds of citizens. The offensive against the Church involved the elimination of priests, the weakening of religious institutions and the punishment of those who continued to participate in religious rituals. The Sovietisation of religious holidays was one of the more sophisticated strategies of the party. Despite the antagonism of the Church and the party, however, the Soviet regime acquired a strongly religious character. The reconciliation of the Lenin-cult with Orthodox beliefs was one of the most spectacular signifiers of the return of the sacred to politics.

Communism is often regarded as a sort of secular or political religion; a dogma that superseded traditional beliefs.⁴⁰ The sacred

³⁹ Ferenc Tallár, “Sztálinizmus és reszakralizáció”. *Valóság*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 1989, 32-51; Nina Tumarkin, “Religion, Bolshevism and the Origins of the Lenin Cult”. *Russian Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1, 1981, 35-46; George Louis Kline, “The “God-Builders’: Gorky and Lunacharsky”. In: Kline, *Religious and Anti-Religious Thought in Russia*. Chicago, 1968, 103-126.

⁴⁰ The subject of political religion has a substantial literature. See for example Philippe Burrin, “Political Religion: The Relevance of a Concept”. *History and Memory*, Vol. 9, Nos. 1-2, 1997, 321-349; Richard Faber (Ed.), *Politische Religion – religiöse Politik*. Würzburg, 1997; Emilio Gentile, “Fascism as Political Religion”. *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 25, Nos. 2-3, 1990, 229-251; “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation”. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 2004, 326-375; Marcin Kula, “Communism as Religion”. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2005, 371-381; Hermann Lübke (Ed.), *Heilserwartung und Terror: Politische Religionen des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Düsseldorf, 1995; Hans Maier (Ed.), *“Totalitarismus und “Politische Religionen’: Konzepte des Diktaturvergleichs*. Paderborn, 1996; Stanley G. Payne, “On the Heuristic Value of the Concept of Political Religion and its Application”. *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2005, 163-174; Ákos Szilágyi, “Istenek, cárok, főitkárok. A Sztálin-vallás eredete”. *Rubicon*, Vol. 3, No. 7, 1992, 23-26.

position of Marxist-Leninist writings in the Soviet empire was safeguarded by the Communist Party that also defined the only possible interpretation of these texts. Those who deviated from the official interpretation were treated as heretics: they were stigmatised and often perished in Stalin's prisons. Besides the centrality of the dogma, Soviet-type regimes resembled religious belief systems in many other ways. The universal claim of the doctrine, the attempt to create the socialist New Man by promoting exemplary behavioural patterns, the teleological view of history, that envisaged the struggle between the forces of good and evil, and the paternalistic perception of community all made communist ideology look similar to traditional religions. Communism also had its collective rituals (such as party meetings), public confessions during self-criticism rituals, procession-like mass demonstrations, shrines (the red corners) and holy places (such as the Mausoleum of Lenin, for example). Certain relics, and sometimes dead bodies, were also surrounded by an aura of holiness. Communist faith assembled a remarkable pantheon of heroes and deities, who were presented to the population like Christian saints: in hagiographic terms or on icon-like images. The defenders of the faith were the members of the party, who became the priests of the new religion. Stephen Kotkin goes as far as to describe the Soviet regime as a theocratic system of rule, where governance fell under the authority of governmental organs, whilst the party's role was to provide spiritual guidance to the population.⁴¹ Therefore, the organisation and the functions of the party were similar to those of the Church in institutionalised religions. Besides the ranks of priests, apostles, saints and ardent believers, the new religion also had apostates and dissidents, who became disillusioned by the dissonance of reality and the way communist propaganda described it.

The first secretary of the party played a central role in the semi-religious system. His biography was the story of the nation's redemption, and the leader was portrayed as the terminus of history. Through his portraits, which often functioned as icons, he

⁴¹ Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain*, 286-293.

became literally omnipresent in the public as well as in the private sphere.⁴² Likenesses of the leader were also used during ritual communications with the party secretary; during the submission of oaths or pledges, for example. There were other rituals of the leader



Rákosi, the First Secretary of the Party.

cult, however, that resembled religious practices. Leaving an empty seat for him during the meetings of party cells, rhythmic applause, chanting, letters of gratitude, hymns to the leader or poetic appraisals of his persona, and lofty vows all had their equivalents in traditional religions. The communist party secretaries, in fact, were in the focus of all ritual activities of the regime that contributed to the emergence of the image of the party leader as a creator and an all-powerful deity.⁴³

Such rituals aimed to realise unity between the leader and the led, in a similar way Orthodox rituals attempted to realise unity between men and God.⁴⁴ The spatial organisation of the leader cult was also somewhat similar to universal belief systems. By virtue of being portrayed as the centre of Sovietised symbolic space, an additional element of sacredness was conferred upon the figure of the party leader.⁴⁵

⁴² For the icon like representations of the leader Victoria E. Bonnell, *Iconography of Power. Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin*. Berkeley, 1997.

⁴³ Lane, *The Rites of Rulers*, Petrone, *Life Has Become More Joyous, Comrades*.

⁴⁴ Lars Erik Blomqvist, "Introduction". In: Claes Arvidsson and Lars Erik Blomqvist (Eds.), *Symbols of Power. The Esthetics of Political Legitimation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*. Stockholm, 1987, 14.

⁴⁵ Jan Plamper, "The Stalin Cult in the Visual Arts, 1929-1953". PhD Dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 2001. See also Malte Rolf, "Working Towards the Centre".



One of the most glorious chapters of the defensive war waged by the Hungarian Soviet Republic was the defence of Salgótarján. This battle was also commanded by Comrade Rákosi, who everywhere undertook the direction of the most dangerous military tasks. This picture shows Comrade Rákosi at the head of a detachment on its way to Salgótarján. (Painting by Sándor Ék)

Rákosi, the Military Leader and Hero.

The religious character of the communist leader cult has often been compared to the mysticism of the worship of medieval kings. Ernst Kantorowicz's famous theory of the king's two bodies has inspired several scholars to describe the adulation of communist leaders with the vocabulary of political theology.⁴⁶ The proposition holds that party secretaries, similarly to medieval kings, had an immortal, mystical body (the body politic), besides their physical body. The mystical body was, in fact, the embodiment of the community, which allowed the Soviet citizens to imagine themselves as members of the Soviet society. Due to the

⁴⁶ Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*. Princeton, 1957. For the use of the theory in the Soviet context Bonnell, *Iconography of Power*; Katalin Sinkó, "A politika rítusai: emlékműállítás, szobordöntés". In: Péter György and Hedvig Turai (Eds.), *A művészet katonái. Sztálinizmus és kultúra*. Budapest, 1992, 67-79; Malte Rolf, "The Leader's Many Bodies: Leader Cults and Mass Festivals in Voronezh, Novosibirsk, and Kemerovo in the 1930s". *Personality Cults in Stalinism*, 197-206.

problematic nature of succession in the leadership of communist parties, however, the idea of the leader's immortal body seems problematic. Since the cult of leaders varied in intensity over time and in different countries of the Soviet Bloc, the idea of immortality was conveyed not so much by the person, but by the party. With the exception of the Lenin-Stalin succession and the period of Stalinism, when Stalin came to symbolise the continuity of Soviet power and Soviet community, it was the party that was represented as a collective immortal body, which constantly reproduced itself through the physical bodies of party members.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, the typical first secretary of the Stalin-era was portrayed as the symbol of the party's authority, and his figure provided the medium through which the citizens joined the community of the Stalinist 'great family'. Moreover, the symbolic surplus of the leader's persona remained powerful enough to overshadow the physical aspects of the leader's body that eventually resulted in a largely impersonal imagery.

Similarly to Kantorowicz's idea, the theory of political religions as outlined in the works of Emilio Gentile and Christel Lane – not to mention the journal *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* – as well as its application to communist regimes, remains somewhat problematic. However, the advantages of viewing the cult through the prism of political religions should be acknowledged first. Whereas earlier, mostly political scientists' approaches could not account for certain aspects of the communist leader worship, the theory of political religions provided a broader framework of interpretation. This made it possible to explain those features of the cult that had been ignored before, such as the ritual character of the leader's representations, and the connection of the language of the leader cult to the master narrative of the communist regime. The theory of political religions, on the other hand, enables the interpretation of the cult as part of a system of myths and rituals that characterised the regime as a whole, and accounts for the fact

⁴⁷ Péter Apor, "The Eternal Body: The Birth of the Pantheon of the Labor Movement in Budapest". *East Central Europe/L'Europe du centre est*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 2004, 23-42.

that the cultic perception of leaders had been to some extent inherent in the ideology of the movement before the takeover.

The analytical value of the concept political religion however, is to be questioned. There is a tendency to use it as a certain meta-concept, which is equally used to describe Italian fascism, Nazism, Soviet communism, the (semi-)authoritarian regimes of Portugal and Spain in the inter-war period, and even political correctness of our times.⁴⁸ The jamming of the concept's semantic field with a diversity of meanings has contributed to the substantial inflation of the phrase in academic texts, and therefore one should have serious concerns about its applicability to the Soviet context in general. The analytical defects of the term in this cases are manifested in a tendency to ignore the substantial political and ideological differences between the 20th century authoritarian political regimes. It has to be emphasised, however, that communist regimes displayed a remarkable religious appeal, and there were clear attempts to make the leader cult appear religious. Nevertheless, the fact that the cult emerged as part of a system of myths, beliefs and rituals that were implemented in Soviet-type regimes does not necessarily mean that it emerged as an essential part of a certain communist political religion. Even if the term political religion is not the most suitable term to essentialize Soviet-type regimes, it should be emphasised that the cult was not simply the product of the self-aggrandisement of communist leaders, but was an integral part of the Soviet project and served a multiplicity of functions. Therefore, it should not be interpreted as a separate phenomenon that emerged as an excessive feature of communist rule, but rather as an essential component of the system of myths and rituals implemented in Soviet-type regimes.

⁴⁸ See for example, Payne, 'On the Heuristic Value...'

Árpád Welker

THE KOSSUTH COMMEMORATION YEAR AND ITS IMPACT ON HUNGARIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

The present article concentrates on analyzing the so called Kossuth¹ commemoration year, a form of modern cults, held in Hungary in 2002, and its impact on historiography in Hungary. To put it bluntly, the main question is how political commemoration, and financial support generated by it, affected historiography. Commemoration years are not a rarity in Hungary nowadays, and the Kossuth-year was not either. The Kossuth-year has been chosen because of its significance both in terms of national mythology and in terms of scholarly interest. Of the many, the Deák-year² seems comparable to the present theme in many ways. However, its impact on historiography – meaning by historiography here publications written by professional historians or publications that qualify as scholarly works – has been evaluated thoroughly by one of the most meritorious researchers of nineteenth century Hungary, Gábor Pajkossy.³ Consequently, the Deák-year was included here as an equal part but, relying on Pajkossy's work, it is

¹ Lajos Kossuth (1802–1894) was a lawyer, politician, journalist, regent-President of Hungary in 1849, to say the least. Even a brief summary of his life, numerous roles and achievements would require a lengthy article. This article, however, focuses on the various interpretations and representations of Kossuth's life.

² Ferenc Deák (1803–1876), the other most prominent representative of nineteenth-century Hungarian liberal nobility, was a politician, minister of justice in the first Hungarian parliamentary government in 1848 (in which Kossuth served as minister of finance), and the main organizer of the Austrian-Hungarian settlement (the Compromise) in 1867.

³ Gábor Pajkossy, "Deák-émlékév". *BUKSZ* (Budapesti Könyvszemle) 2004/2, 144-158.

a mirror which serves as the basis of comparison while the focus remains on the Kossuth commemoration year.

Commemoration years, by are by definition calendar years dedicated to the commemoration of great historical events or figures whose anniversary happen to be a centennial, or quartercentennial, or even millennial anniversary, are not Hungarian specialties. The two hundred years anniversary of the French Revolution may be one of the best known examples but the very expression, commemoration year, is used, for instance, in connection with the abolition of slavery by the UNESCO while another French example, the Verne year, could serve as a parallel to the one under study. Also the Finnish Snellman 200-year scheme seems a very interesting case in this respect.⁴ While the purpose and the content of such undertakings may vary to a large extent according to local political culture and traditions, they are illuminating examples of political commemoration.

In case of Hungary, commemoration years are not specific to the post-socialist era either. Not forgetting the ‘mother of all commemoration years’, the Millennial festivities in 1896, such forms of political use of history were employed also during the state socialist era. Amongst others the series of events belonging to the initiative called ‘Petőfi ’73⁵ probably made their impact on contemporaries. However, the chain of commemoration years, to which the Kossuth year belongs, are seen as a distinct phenomenon which has more to do with the activity of

⁴ Just like his Hungarian counterpart, Snellman was a theorist of national politics, a practicing statesman, pioneer of modern political journalism in his country. Taking into account the central role of the respective heroes in the narrative of “national awakening” or “struggle for independence”, which are both possible – nationalist – interpretations of nineteenth century history, it could be even the subject of a distinct study based on a comparison with the Kossuth year.

⁵ Sándor Petőfi (1823–1849) was a poet, one of the leading figures of national romanticism. His role in the revolution of 1848 and his plebeian attitude made him especially usable for socialist cultural politics.

democratically elected governments and post-socialist political culture than with earlier traditions.

The first occasion when a commemoration year had been established by a formal decision of the government was the series of festivities, exhibitions and publications called millicentennial anniversary. Millicentennial, that is the one thousandth and one hundredth, is a word that can be found on the Internet only referring to this specific series of events, and only on Hungarian sites, underlining the fact that something specifically Hungarian is in question.⁶ It was organized in 1996 to commemorate the “1100th anniversary of the Magyar's settling in the Carpathian Basin, and the 100th anniversary of the grandiose millennial celebrations” as one source put it,⁷ or “the millicentennial anniversary of the Magyar conquest of the Hungarian basin” to quote another one.⁸ The citations probably tell how ambiguous the historical background of the subject of commemoration was. “Settling” is quite a neutral term, but “conquest” is much closer to the Hungarian language. The celebration of a nineteenth century myth seems inevitably problematic. This might be a possible reason for the relative lack of enthusiasm it seemed to generate on the one hand, and the relatively low frequency of attempts to exploit it in terms of daily politics, on the other. According to Éva Kovács, the Millicentennial commemorated as much the Millennial festivities as it commemorated the conquest or settling.⁹ Lővei's point that

⁶ 1896 saw a great festival representing Hungarian state and culture together with a great number of ‘civilizing’ investments. A good number of schools were established, museums and other institutions founded, not forgetting the first underground of the Continent built in Budapest. Cf. András Gerő, “Két millennium Magyarországon”. *Mozgó Világ*, 8/2004.

⁷ Cf. Pál Lővei, “Millennium plus. Hungary 1100 – Austria 1000”. *Buksz*, Spring/1997.

⁸ From a speech held in the opening ceremony of an exhibition in 1996: <http://www.c3.hu/~bartok32/millicen.htm>.

⁹ Éva Kovács, *From the Turul Bird to the Image of the Finance Minister: The Role of Myths in the Post-Communist Transition, Hungary 1988-1996* <http://www.ssees.ucl.ac.uk/kovacs1.htm>

the commemoration year was a substitute for the failure of the Expo, seems to hold explanatory power in this context.

The next similar undertaking was the series of Millennial festivities in 2000, which connected the turn of the Millennium with the one thousandth anniversary of the establishment of the Hungarian Kingdom, or the coronation of the first Christian king, Stephen. The cult of St Stephen, the 'Apostolic King', offered several possible points of identification, which were exploited to differing extents. He was the one who gave constitution to Hungary, being at the same time the founder of the 'national' Royal house, the one who 'led Hungarians to Europe', just to mention a few. One of the peculiarities of the Millennial festivities among commemoration years was that it lasted longer than a single year, a total of twenty months. According to András Gerő, as opposed to the Millennial one hundred years earlier, politics and words had a determining role.¹⁰ The law passed on the historical relevance of 'the Holy Crown' seems to be an outstanding example of this tendency.¹¹ The anniversaries of these kinds of events are regarded as the most significant ones in Hungarian history, including evidently the fiftieth anniversary of the Revolution and War of Independence in 2006. It has evoked a historicizing manner of discussion in Hungary, but is known in Finland as the Uprising. They tend to involve more money and more mass celebrations than the ones discussed here.

The commemoration of the bicentenary of Lajos Kossuth's birth was the first occasion in the history of political commemoration after the system change which focused on the anniversary of any historical figure. Soon it became a habit since after the Kossuth year was over, the Prime Minister himself announced the Deák

¹⁰ Gerő, "Két millennium Magyarországon". Interestingly, Gerő considered the relevance of the comparison between the two Milleniums rather than a comparison of two consecutive commemoration years (the Millecentennial in 1996 and the Millennial around 2000).

¹¹ Act no. 1/2000, which among others ordered the Holy Crown to be moved from the National Museum to the House of Parliament.

year in 2003, and now Hungary is having two anniversaries of great men a year on average. However, in the name of correctness and punctuality one should not forget the fact that, while a straightforward “commemoration year” was not established, the Fidesz-led government, across and over the emphasis on the Millennium, used the name and the image of István Széchenyi¹² very heavily in its communication. The use of Széchenyi’s name to cover a program to subsidize small enterprises, which was a central element of the government's election campaign in 2002, was only one part of this development. Just to give a hint about the phenomenon, it may be useful to recall that a movie on the life of Széchenyi was supported from governmental funds up to an amount, which at least equaled the total sum of governmental support for filmmakers in the given year.

One of the most important aspects of organizing commemoration years is the administrative staging of the celebrations. On the first occasions *ad hoc* organs were established to run the celebrations and events, and naturally to raise funds to the given project. A High Commissioner (*kormánybiztos*) and his office run the organization and administrative tasks in those cases. As commemoration years were made regular, a distinct office was established for their administration. It is called the ‘Secretariat of National Anniversaries’ (or ‘Jubilees’), the *Nemzeti Évfordulók Titkársága*, founded in February 2003. The Secretariat belongs administratively to the Ministry of Culture, which at the moment of the establishment of the secretariat was called the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage. To have a separate Ministry for cultural heritage appears to have been a curiosity, as no other of its

¹² Count István Széchenyi (1791–1860) was a leading liberal aristocrat who actively participated in the creation of modern Hungary and its national institutions (like the Academy of Sciences), political forums (like the National Casino) and infrastructure (like the Chain Bridge named after him). His heated journalistic debate with Kossuth contributed to a large extent to the crystallization of liberal standpoints in the early 1840s.

kind existed at the time.¹³ As it is explained on the web-site of the secretariat,

The existence of a permanent secretariat ensures the organized and high-level mediation of those messages of moral nature and relevant for the public debate embedded in anniversaries.¹⁴

It is very vague what moral messages the anniversaries might contain by nature, which should be communicated or mediated but that is not the main point here. A more important aspect is probably that through this pathetic act the question of commemoration years was factually depoliticized, as from that moment on no distinct governmental decision was required to organize a commemoration year.¹⁵

The Secretariat also participated in working out the document titled 'Program of National Memory for the Republic of Hungary'. The latter served as the basis for the government decision on the program of national memory for the years 2004–2010 in December 2003. According to the decision, the purpose of the Program was to achieve certain goals, which were

¹³ Cf. Heino Nyyssönen, "Metsoja, peikkoja ja vampyyrejä. Poliittinen kulttuuri ja stereotypiat". In: Sakari Hänninen, Kari Palonen (Eds.), *Lue poliittisesti: profiileja politiikan tutkimukseen*, Jyväskylä, 2004, 185.

¹⁴ "The existence of the permanent Secretariat guarantees a well-organized and high-level communication of the moral and communal messages of the anniversaries" reads the official translation: <http://en.emlekev.hu/secretariat/index.html>.

¹⁵ "Thus there is no need to adopt a separate government decree for each anniversary, as an opportunity is now presented to celebrate them on the basis of the memorial years in the programme." However, the decision also specified the individuals to be commemorated through the next six years, while on long run the Secretariat is dependent financially on political decisions.

considered by the government to be of central importance, namely:¹⁶

[...] to present both in our home country and abroad A, the historical and cultural values of the Republic of Hungary about to join the European Union; B, the links and common features of Hungarian and European history and culture; C, the role of local communities in national culture.

In order to achieve these goals, the Secretariat has prepared nine anniversaries for the seven-year period. If the 50th anniversary of the uprising is not counted, we have three composers, three poets and writers (or at least figures, who had an impact on Hungarian literature), a medieval king and only one politician. This only politician happens to be Lajos Batthyány, the first person in Hungarian history to bear the title of Prime Minister who actually completes the series of great figures of the first half of the nineteenth century which started with Széchenyi and was followed by Kossuth and Deák. Batthyány's commemoration had its political message also, as his figure could be linked to the highly valued 'Reform era' of the nineteenth century and 'Progress' and the government deliberately tried in 2007 to sell its own 'reform' policies – widely understood as mere austerity policy – in the spirit of a 'new era of Reforms'. However, the other figures selected for commemoration do not seem to hold similar political connotations. On the whole it seems that the establishment of the Program of National Memory has led to the de-politicization of state-funded commemoration in Hungary. An analysis of the images, ideological links and myths these historical figures embody would be a tempting task even if it seems doubtful whether there was any straightforward political/cultural will behind the selection of these very figures. The most probable criteria of the selection might have

¹⁶ Decision of government no. 1127/2003. Interestingly, the establishment of the Snellman-year was justified using similar arguments referring to national and European identity:

<http://www.snellman200.fi/juhlahanke/fi.jsp>

been the urge to find anyone mentioned in the secondary school history books who happened to be born or die in a specific year, which involves an anniversary of 'round' years in the near future. However, this analysis would lead too far from the actual topic of this article.

The Kossuth year seems irregular if one compares it with other commemoration years organized or planned, be it earlier or later. The most important difference is the lack of governmental support both in ideational and material terms. The fate of the Kossuth year was in fact very peculiar. While the government made a decision to commemorate the bicentennial of Lajos Kossuth, no funds was made available from the budget in order to finance the festivities and programs related to it. In fact, the announcement of the Kossuth-year was quite spectacular and entailed glorious festivities. The government did not simply declare the organization of a commemoration year, or the will to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Kossuth's birth, but announced the establishment of a Memorial Committee, which would consist of several ministers and which would have as its chairmen jointly the Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán and the President of the Hungarian Republic, Ferenc Mádl. At the same time the historian, and the leader of the Institute for Military history, Róbert Hermann was appointed the secretary of the Committee, who would lead the operational tasks attached to the commemoration year.¹⁷ However, the commemoration year was not mentioned in the budget for 2001–2002 which made the implementation of the great plans practically impossible. This was

¹⁷ The publicly available information concerning the Kossuth-year is extremely scarce. My description of the events relies heavily on the article by Endre Babus: "Kossuth (mostoha)apánk" (the title revokes a special element of the popular Kossuth-cult, namely that he was referred to as "father", while making a verbal joke out of it using the term "stepfather", which carries the connotation of "badly treated" in Hungarian). It was originally published in the economic weekly *Heti Világgazdaság* in August 2002, and is accessible on the Internet as <http://www.multkor.hu/cikk.php?article=5285>. The article is to a large extent based on interview(s) with Róbert Hermann.

not the only peculiarity. The Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ), an opposition party, which tended to identify itself with Hungarian liberalism, declared a commemoration year of its own, referring to the fact that “no sign of willingness to commemorate Kossuth in a worthy way could be traced on the side of the government.”¹⁸ It is actually even difficult to follow how ‘official’ and ‘alternative’ versions of the commemoration year existed together, especially, since SZDSZ became a coalition member after the elections held in the middle of the Kossuth year, and the separation of Kossuth-years was not maintained.

While the Deák year had a clear political message,¹⁹ and Széchenyi acquired a central role in the message of the previous government’s election campaign, Kossuth did not seem to arouse similar interest. At the same time, Széchenyi’s semi-official cult seems to have brought his one and a half century old quarrel with Kossuth again to the fore. During the 1830’s and 1840’s Széchenyi increasingly felt that Kossuth’s struggle against the barriers of censorship and his aspirations to make new social groups interested in the politics of the liberal opposition endangered his own achievements in the modernisation of the country. This anxiety led to a public attack on Kossuth’s style of politics, accusing him of irresponsibility and instigation of revolt. The above mentioned movie on Széchenyi’s life presented Kossuth

¹⁸ <http://kossuth.szdsz.hu/>. SZDSZ made a strong opening move when Árpád Göncz, the popular former President, was announced to be the patron of the initiative.

¹⁹ The central achievement of Deák’s career was the Hungarian-Austrian Compromise which could be interpreted as ‘reconciliation’ between the Emperor and his nation. At the same time, one of the central messages of the government was the aspiration to achieve a settlement in the country after very bitter battles of political campaign, pointing to an emphasis on consensual politics. Also a connection between the Compromise and the approaching EU-accession was established to utilize Deák’s commemoration for the present. On the political aspects of the Deák-commemoration, see Pajkossy, “Deák-emléké”, 144; Endre Babus, “Finisben a Deák-emléké”. *Heti Világgazdaság* 42/2003, 101-103.

according to this image. Babus wrote half-seriously that the film, which had gained unprecedented governmental support, made an impact on the governments', or actually the Prime Minister's image of Kossuth in that it influenced the financial support of the Kossuth commemoration year.²⁰

In terms of material support, while the millennial festivities were supported with a total of two hundred and fifty million Euros,²¹ the Széchenyi film with another seven million, the Kossuth year got the moderate sum of 1 200 000. In practice, somewhat more than half of the sum proved to be available. The new government made additional funds available at the last moment in order to make the year-ending festivals and celebrations possible the planned way. However, several momentous schemes had to be canceled because of the lack of funding: a Kossuth-exhibition in the Risorgimento Museum in Rome and a statue in London. No monuments could be funded inside Hungary either, while the Millennial year's budget financed four hundred statues and monuments. The financial support of the Deák year was similar to the Kossuth year in order of magnitude. The whole budget of the Deák year was slightly less than one million Euros but the actual governmental spending was some 15% more. Most of the money went to renovations and advertising costs, while one hundred thousand Euros were allotted to the support of different publications and conferences. The sum in the case of the Kossuth year was one hundred and fifty thousand, which is clearly higher but comparable.²²

At the beginning of the article a claim concerning the significance of Kossuth was made. It can be argued for in several ways. Kossuth's cult is possibly the best known example of cults of historical figures in Hungary. It has been strongly supported by

²⁰ Cf. footnote 17.

²¹ The figure (calculated at a 250 forint rate) contains all costs including the yearly costs of the renovation of the Hungarian royal residences in Visegrád etc.

²² Cf. the articles by Pajkossy, Gerő and Babus.

politicians during the last 150 years²³, and during this period a genuine grass-root Kossuth-cult also used to be a vivid phenomenon.²⁴ The number of Kossuth monuments is very high in the country, and according to several accounts, Kossuth has more public monuments than all other Hungarian historical figures put together. Most probably every single town and village has a street or square named after him, and one can find fourteen of them in Budapest even now, after some of them had been abolished for the sake of coherence of street names. According to an official announcement, with the first Hungarian King, István, Kossuth was the most popular and widely known figure of Hungarian history, and he was the only one of the great figures of nineteenth century Hungary who had become a part of the folklore. He was also one of the most known Hungarians on earth since he had a monument both in the Capitolium and in New York.²⁵

²³ András Geró, "A Kossuth-kultusz". *Mozgó Világ* 2003/4. Geró presents Kossuth as a sacral figure of the secular religion, i.e. nationalism. Kossuth's name and image have been used by very different political groups and in extremely divergent ideological contexts. It all started with Independence Party nationalists, and democrats when Kossuth was still alive and did not end with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Horthy's Hungary, the system which defined itself as 'counter-revolutionary, made March 15th, the day of the 1848 revolution, a national holiday and erected Kossuth's statue in front of the House of Parliament. However, Kossuth's cult took also an anti-Fascist dimension in the 1940s. Paradoxically, Kossuth also 'achieved' a central position in the communist hall of fame.

²⁴ One of the bicentenary publications contains an article on Kossuth as the hero of folk songs: Lujza Tari, "Kossuth Lajos, a népdalok hőse". In: *Kossuth Lajos 1802-1894. Kossuth Lajos és kortársai*. Kossuth, Budapest, 2002, 131-145.

²⁵ Cf. <http://kossuth.szdsz.hu/>

This also means that the literature on Kossuth's life, his ideas and his cult is extremely voluminous.²⁶ The list of historians who wrote about him includes almost all the great names of Hungarian historiography – excluding medievalists and sorts – from Gyula Szekfű to Elemér Mályusz and Domokos Kosáry, just to mention a few. Besides the fact that his described popularity generated a continuous interest and flow of publications, the various anniversaries of not just his birth and death, but of the particular events and historical epochs he has been associated with, like the “revolution and war of independence of 1848/49”, also meant certain peaks in the production of Kossuth-literature. A recent list of the Kossuth-literature published between 1992–2006 contains more than six hundred entries, most of which were published before 2002.²⁷ Contrasted with this background, surprisingly enough, at the moment of the announcement of the Kossuth-year, virtually no scholarly Kossuth-biography existed.

In his essay on the results of historiography of the Deák-year, Gábor Pajkossy concluded that “the commemoration year, together with the funds available in the form of governmental and municipal support, inspired two- or three dozens of researchers to deepen or summarize their own research on Deák's life, or, linking with the advantages the Deák year offered, to utilize their expertise and interest”.²⁸ Pajkossy underlined the fact that the commemoration

²⁶ Not totally independently from the Kossuth-year, a group of researchers collected a volume on the different Kossuth-images from the history of Hungarian historiography: Zoltán Iván Dénes (Ed.), *A bűnbaktól a realista lényeglátóig. A magyar politikai és tudományos diskurzusok Kossuth-képei 1849-2002*. Argumentum, Budapest, 2004. The book seems the most illuminating to read together with its critique, especially the rich essay by Ambrus Miskolczy, “A Kossuth-ábrázolás technikái. Szubjektív historiográfiai széljegyzetek A bűnbaktól a realista lényeglátóig című gyűjteményes munka kapcsán”. *Korall* 2005/November, pp. 124-160.

²⁷ Róbert Hermann, “Az 1992-2006 között megjelent Kossuth-irodalom válogatott bibliográfiája”. In: Róbert Hermann (Ed.), *Kossuth Lajos, “a magyarok Mózesé”*. Osiris, Budapest, 2006, 252-294.

²⁸ Pajkossy, “Deák-emléké”, 157.

year did not generate change in the paradigm or new approaches. However, three historians published some sort of political biography about Ferenc Deák, and several compilations of his work appeared including also a cd-rom with almost all his writings.

The case was not radically different with the Kossuth year. As the focus here is on the Kossuth year as a state- or government-funded case of political commemoration, the article deals with those events and publications that were actually funded officially by the commemoration year's organization.²⁹ However, even some significant publications did not belong to this group but still deserve mention. The most notable is probably the book by György Szabad, which is especially important for two reasons. Szabad has been considered at least one of the leading experts of Kossuth's life, and he was almost considered at the heavily historicizing times of the system change as the reincarnation of Kossuth. Additionally, his book appears to be the most ideologically oriented, with a seeming intention to present Kossuth as a mythical figure (the one who has the answers), which is accentuated by its title: *Kossuth's Directions*.³⁰

²⁹ There is no publicly accessible information available about the Kossuth-year. The Secretary, however, kindly gave a list of subsidized publications and events to the author of this article.

³⁰ György Szabad, *Kossuth irányadása* (Válasz, 2002: Budapest). The translation of the word, which Szabad uses here, is not an easy task; even the interpretation of the original might be problematic. However, it seems quite clear that it was meant to say that Kossuth was exemplary for the present. Szabad has published on Kossuth extensively, but it is exactly the reconstruction of Kossuth's political work through his ideas and texts that seems central. One of Szabad's most influential works is *Kossuth politikai pályája ismert és ismeretlen megnyilatkozásai tükrében* (Budapest, 1977), ie., Kossuth's political career in the mirror of his known and unknown utterances. He also published a compilation of Kossuth's texts in 1994 (the one hundredth anniversary of Kossuth's death) under the title *Kossuth Lajos üzenetei*, that is, Kossuth's messages. Ferenc Kulín also noticed the author's intention to present Kossuth's ideas as being "guiding" for the present day reader in everyday politics: Ferenc Kulín, 'Az időszerű Kossuth. Gondolatok Szabad György könyvéről'. In: *Magyar Szemle*, 2002/October.

There were 78 different publications and events which gained financial support from the commemoration year organization. The organs which applied successfully for funding were typically organizations of public memory, like museums and archives or professional publishing houses. The former group consists of publicly (state or municipal) funded agencies, while in the latter case the commemoration year supported profit-oriented activity. The more numerous of the two is the group of public institutions including universities. Other publicly funded bodies and organizations like municipalities and different types of foundations make up another third of the whole; however, these are not easily discernible from the first group.³¹ The list also includes several surprises in this respect, like the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and a local TV-channel. Another interesting feature is the remarkable presence of extra-Hungarian applicants representing various countries and various purposes. Looking at the various types of publications and events the commemoration year funded, two basic aims seem to have guided the decision-makers. One was the intention to offer a helping hand for non-governmental attempts to popularize Kossuth locally, while the other might have been to complement the budget-based subsidy of scientific publications as far as it has to do with Kossuth's life or his contemporaries. However, based on the information available it is not clear what the agenda was in these cases. One might have the impression that neither political nor scientific goals were set.

Most of the support went for three basic commemorative acts. There are eight conferences on the list together with eleven exhibitions, the rest being various forms of scholarly and popularizing publications from books to thematic issues of periodicals and journals including a cd-rom containing the already published works of Kossuth, not to forget a comic strip presenting Kossuth's life on 24 pages. Somewhat surprisingly, some of the

³¹ The mentioned list of supported initiatives does not contain information concerning the amount of support the individual applicants gained through the commemoration year competition.

supported events and publications were not linked directly to the personality or life of Kossuth. These were, as a rule connected to the events of the 'revolution and war of independence, which apparently was seen as the most important period of Kossuth's life, or it might have been the other way around, i.e. the Kossuth year was perceived as the extension of the one hundred and fifty year anniversary of 1848-49. The list includes, but is not limited to a book on a single battle of the war,³² a book on the history of a diocese in 1848-49,³³ and collected sources concerning a specific division of the army.³⁴

Some of the projects do not seem to have realized, i.e. there are neither signs of them in the database of the Hungarian National Library, nor on the world-wide-web. The most regrettable among these is surely a planned book on Kossuth's life by three experts, László Csorba, Gábor Erdődy and Gábor Pajkossy.³⁵ On the other hand a book concerning Kossuth's relations to freemasonry, which is successfully published, does not meet the standards of a scholarly publication.³⁶

Summarizing the results of making special funds available for the publication of literature on Kossuth, the most striking feature is probably the lack of a comprehensive scholarly biography. While

³² Tamás Csikány, *Csata Komáromnál, 1849. július 2-án*. Hadimúzeum Alapítvány, Budapest, 2003.

³³ Péter Zakar, "*Hazám sorsa az én sorsom*" az Esztergomi Érsekség 1848/49-ben. Belvedere Meridionale, Szeged, 2003.

³⁴ *Az 1848-49-es I. magyar hadtest iratai*. Heves Megyei Levéltár, Eger, 2002.

³⁵ The application was handed in by the Argumentum publishing house. The planned book divided the study of Kossuth's life to three historians according to their strongest period. Erdődy, whose share was the shortest but dealt with the most intensive two years of Kossuth's life - 1848-1849 - published his part separately: *Kossuth Lajos a demokratikus polgári átalakulásért és a nemzeti önrendelkezés kivívásáért folytatott küzdelem vezéralakja*. Magyar Mezőgazdasági Múzeum. Budapest, 2002.

³⁶ Zsuzsanna Ágnes Berényi, *Kossuth és a szabadkőművesek*. Argumentum, Budapest, 2002.

the Deák year produced a book which covered his whole life even if not especially extensively, the Kossuth year brought only partial accounts, which include the re-publication of Domokos Kosáry's book on Kossuth's youth,³⁷ and a good deal of articles. A number of researchers contributed with several articles into conference publications and thematic issues of journals. The periodicals dedicated to the popularization of historical research published their own special issues.³⁸ Besides the several collections of conference papers, the thematic issue of the *Századok*,³⁹ the journal of the Hungarian historical society, seems especially rich. Some thematically focused collections of articles, like those concentrating on the political ideas of Kossuth and their relation to issues like nationality and religion, brought some new aspects of Kossuth's history to light.⁴⁰

One of the beautiful popular picture-books on Kossuth's life deserves some attention as the only conscious attempt to influence the perception and image of Kossuth. Róbert Hermann, the secretary of the Kossuth Memorial Committee, worked very actively throughout the year presenting papers, writing prefaces and articles. He participated in one way or another in a good share of the publications of the commemoration year. He published his text on the extremely disputed relation between Kossuth and general Görgey at least three times. Of the two representative picture books, he was the author of one⁴¹ and wrote the preface to

³⁷ Domokos Kosáry, *Kossuth Lajos a reformkorban*. Osiris, Budapest, 2002. The late grand old man of Hungarian historiography accomplished something quite unusual by publishing his own book's second edition (almost) sixty years later. The book contains only minor corrections in comparison to the first edition published in 1943.

³⁸ *História* 2002/9-10; *Rubicon* 2002/8.

³⁹ *Századok* 2002/4.

⁴⁰ *Kossuth és az egyházak* by Botond Kertész (Ed.). Evangélikus Gyülekezeti Kiadványok I. Budapest, 2004; *A nemzetiségi kérdés Kossuth és kortársai szemében*. (Eds.) Kiss Gábor Ferenc és Zakar Péter. Belvedere Meridionale, Szeged, 2003.

⁴¹ Róbert Hermann, *Kossuth Lajos élete és kora*. Pannonica, Budapest 2002.

the other together with the mentioned article on Görgey.⁴² The former, the more important one from our point of view, appears to be a conservative political biography going through the major stories related to Kossuth the politician. The author himself, however, while denying that he would attempt the de-heroization of Kossuth, explained that his intention was to present Kossuth, the person (or human being). In his preface, he also underlines that Kossuth's life's work is so extensive and that Kossuth created such an enormous amount of texts and gave such an amount of speeches that no lifetime could be long enough transform his contribution into a comprehensive biography.⁴³ The question arises how on earth biographies of internationally remarkable figures could be written this proviso in mind. Hermann also stated that he did not intend to describe Kossuth in a radically different way from the traditional images, nor did he want to say anything new forcedly, at all costs (*mindenárón*)⁴⁴.

The result does not seem to match what Hermann wrote in his preface and on the cover of the book. One might conclude that the genre and the occasion, together with the attitudes of the author, determined the outcome to a great extent, and it is not quite clear that a 'traditional image' of Kossuth does really exist. Actually, even if one does not take into account the politically-ideologically motivated characterizations, it is exactly the complexity of his activities and character which allows a wide range of possible interpretations. However, at least the detailed description of Kossuth's relation to Görgey, settling the long and heated dispute about the responsibility for the loss in 1849, seems 'new', at least

⁴² *Kossuth Lajos 1802–1894. Kossuth Lajos és kortársai.* (editor not mentioned). Kossuth, Budapest, 2002. The book is especially beautiful, illustrated by a remarkable set of paintings and an additional audio-cd with material related to Kossuth and his cult. The book consists of articles which describe Kossuth in relation to other remarkable figures of the nineteenth century, comrades and enemies.

⁴³ *Kossuth Lajos élete és kora*, 7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

for the wider public. Hermann produced an especially enjoyable description of the main events of nineteenth century Hungarian history and Kossuth's role in them. Funnily, while one cannot be quite convinced about the author's intentions not to de-heroize Kossuth, the outcome appears to be an epic. The struggle for liberal reforms –the abolishment of the feudal barriers which prevented the unification of the Hungarian nation – and the war for independence are so heroic, and Kossuth's role is so central in them that one cannot describe the former as a great, heroic drama without presenting the latter as almost supernatural.

Hermann presents Kossuth in interaction and conflict with other key-figures, however, mostly following a favorable, or at least not negative, interpretation from Kossuth's point of view. The author, as a rule, does not reflect on his choices among the possible interpretations of the various details of Kossuth's life, however, there are certain accusations, against which he feels it important to defend the hero. One of these was a possible accusation of Kossuth not being 'genuine Hungarian' or 'Magyar'. At the beginning of the book, Hermann apparently refers to earlier debates concerning the origins of the Kossuth family. Here he points out that it could have been also of Slavic origin which explains also the etymology of its name which means buck in Slovak, but it is also very possible that the first Kossuth was "regarding his ethnicity Hungarian", who adopted the name of the village he possessed.⁴⁵ It is not necessarily easy to comprehend the meaning of ethnicity in a thirteenth century environment. The next sentence, in which we are guided further to understand the relevance of that information by laying down the fact that "Slavic, Polish or German origin did not influence the national self-consciousness developed in the nineteenth century", does not make it clearer either. The author probably makes an attempt to defend the nineteenth century concept of the Hungarian nation as a political entity against racism

⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

but fails to impose the modernist understanding of nationalism on the whole story.

Although Kossuth was to be presented as 'human being', the book does not tell much e.g. about his family-relations. Hermann makes statements occasionally about the supposed negative sides of Kossuth's character. Taking an example from the rare occasions when Kossuth's personal life is mentioned telling about the close relations of Kossuth with the wife of a Major which developed during the months of internment, the author describes Kossuth as a person who happily got rid of the control of his wife. However, the contemporary accusation that Kossuth would have been led and governed by his strong-willed wife was something he feels important to deny explicitly.⁴⁶ Hermann's approach is ambiguous, however, because while he is ready to 'de-heroize' the person, he is not ready for the 'de-heroization' of the great deeds of Hungarians during the heroic times of the nineteenth century. His style of describing the historical events is so high that it raises the central figure of the story with it. It must be difficult to write a representative biography, an act of commemoration itself, attempting at a less heroic presentation of the hero.

The Kossuth commemoration year, thus, was not typical in the series of commemoration years in post-Socialist Hungary for two reasons. It was the first one in the series of commemoration years, which focused on a single historical figure, but it was the only one, which suffered from the lack of financial support. At the same time one must remember that of all possible historical figures Kossuth generated the widest interest among historians, and his popular image rested on the strongest tradition of historical cults. The main question of this article was, whether and how this commemoration year affected historiography, the output of the history profession, and how this was related to the result of the Deák-year. Despite the dissimilarities in terms of political support and financial background, the outcome appears to be quite similar. There was no

⁴⁶ Ibid., 23.

discernible attempt to redraw Kossuth's image, and no biography exploiting new research or covering his whole life was published. On the whole, however, despite the lack of a comprehensive biography, the Kossuth year produced several important publications, and it seems that it has enriched the research on Kossuth as well as has generated a wide range of activities related to him. At the same time, much of the subsidies went to re-publishing earlier research and overlapping publications which together with the high proportion of projects that served only representative purposes raise questions concerning the purposefulness of such commemoration seen solely from the point of view of historiography. However, one should mention that the uncertainty concerning the availability of funds might have affected the results to a great extent. The Kossuth-year can also be interpreted as the first step to a direction which weakens the political aspects of commemoration. Time will show, whether this is only a temporary development, or a change in Hungarian political culture.

SPECTRUM HUNGAROLOGICUM VOL. 4.
**Cultic Revelations: Studies in Modern Historical
Cult Personalities and Phenomena**

Orsolya Rákai

**CHAMELEON CULT: THE HISTORY OF CULT OF QUEEN
ELIZABETH**

“Do we know what we want to forget or are we simply forgetting? Do we now what we want to remember or are we remembering only what others want us to remember?”

Tjebbe van Tijen: *Ars Obliviendi*

Introduction

The observation and analyzing of a society's mechanism of power is a difficult task, perhaps because we can fall into the trap of *prosopopeia*, i.e. we “give a face”¹ to something, and so the grammatical subject of the examination (the power) imperceptibly extends to the deficient place of meanings that are implied there. This way the problem either becomes one that “we won't name” the subject to which we give a face, and so we do not oblige to the conditions of concretism or almost in a paranoid way we make others see an actor, an agent behind the different movements and events of society. This double trap is almost impossible to avoid since the main element of the semantic domain of the power is indeed the initiation, the activity (moreover, it can be aggression) which points to the ‘giving a face’. This force of impersonation can make it difficult to define where, how and with what kind of means we can start the examination of the power mechanism. This power characterizes a given society in its base, dispersion and intensity of which is *per definitionem* always uneven. Consequently, it always reproduces the conceptual or legal equality that can never be realized.

¹ See Cynthia Chase, *Giving a Face to a Name = Decomposing Figures*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, 82-113.

The developing of identity happens in a space inside the society through which the power passes. Moreover, identity is often the result or the purpose of a power struggle. For the examination of the microdynamics of power and identity is worthwhile to evoke the definition of hegemony of the critical culture research borrowed from Antonio Gramsci as "it serves to discuss such ruling relations that don't look like rulings: they are based not on the constraining of the oppressed (or dependants), but on their consent."² Basically the cult in this interpretation is nothing else but one of the most effective tools of developing and maintaining hegemony.

It is generally believed that the main task of the ritual social practice named cult is to form, strengthen and sustain collective identity. This is on the whole right: there is a close connection of many aspects between cult, canon and collective identity and this connection plays a great part in wielding power as hegemony. Cults connected to the notion of nation are very significant from this point of view, for they can make functioning of hegemony almost smooth, and make the differences inside society or between minorities defined on a basis (e.g. ethnic minority, religion or gender) which is invisible, inapprehendable and incommunicable. Concomitantly, there are some forms of cult, especially after the introduction of internet and net-forums, which contribute to drawing of the pictures of personal identity and to separating these from the 'crowd' (in smaller groups). The aim of these apolitical forum-communities is not to shape and sustain a collective identity but they have only their subject of cult and their relation to it in common. This phenomenon reminds us of a paradox of the individual born in the consumer society who is only one of countless copies. The individual is always the target of advertisements and a person's individuality or uniqueness remains illusory. This tells of the outstanding role of mass media in the twentieth century history of collective identity-forming.

² Simon During, *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Routledge, London and New York, 1993, 1-25.

The cult of the Franz Joseph's wife, Queen Elizabeth of the Dual Monarchy, illustrates this transformation and the unbelievable adaptive capacity of cult. The cult of Elizabeth changed from a rite serving Hungarian collective identity (cf. other patriarchal female-stereotypes) into a cult of 'modern woman' who seeks independence and tries to regain command over her own body. Furthermore, her cult continuously served as an advertisement to sell different ideas, political programs or ideologies. But these ideologies are qualified to form the individual identity coming into existence in the course of commercialization.

The Mirrors Of Hungarian Virtue

The development of the cult of Queen Elizabeth began from two directions: from the Habsburg and from the Hungarian. On the Hungarian side it began as a political image to arouse interest, and the Court in Vienna reacted to it because it recognized in it a perfect tool for strengthening their sovereignty. Nothing proves it better that the cult is all about interpretation than this duality – neither of the parties had interest in the 'reality' – what Elisabeth really was – and both parties created an icon according to their own needs. The image of the 'Queen of the Hungarians' was useful for both, though for different reasons. The Hungarians expected the reorganizing of the power relations within the Austro-Hungarian Empire while the Court believed that it strengthened the status quo. This is how Kálmán Mikszáth summoned it:

That ardent hope heated the simpletons who beheld that the long-awaited days of [glory to] Hungary have thus arrived and the centre of power of the Empire was going to shift to Hungary. That was the prelude to everything. And because it seemed plausible that Franz Joseph made Hungary great and lovable. [...] The love, which first belonged only to our Royal Lady grew so large that it covered the King itself and his family too.³

³ Kálmán Mikszáth, "Cseh földön a király". In: Kálmán Mikszáth, *Cikkek és karcolatok*. Akadémiai, Budapest, 1960, vol. IX, 93-94.

The scholars of the Elizabeth cult emphasize that the Queen's figure was integrated to the particular image gallery of Hungarian nationalism.

First, following the logic of representation of the Hungarian nobility's concept of the nation, Elizabeth was made the personification of Hungary. This becomes clear in the political scandals which erupted in connection with her funeral. The newspapers of the time stated that originally only the sign of the Empress of Austria was placed on the Queen's catafalque, and that the delegation of the Hungarian Parliament did not have a suitable place to watch, and that for the sake of the procession they were pushed back.⁴ Secondly, and this is the most interesting part, the icon of Elizabeth gave a perfect medium to define and strengthen the particular Hungarian national characteristics. One of the articles about the funeral points out the following:

In Vienna the mourning was not as general as in Budapest where everyone practised the right to mourn, and the wealthy and the poor participated equally. The Hungarian, not only in his love, but also in his sorrow is honest, enthusiastic and devoted. Nobody loved her as much as we did and nobody mourned her as much as we did.⁵

The queen, according to the logic of the cult perfectly became one with the Hungarian national ambitions:

[...] with the ideal of the Hungarian Queen, after a long period she was the first one who learned, loved and used our national language with love. She understood the grievances and sufferings of the nation which was devoted to its rights to freedom and history, the fight for its national independence,

⁴ See Eszter Virág Vér, "Erzsébet királyné magyarországi kultusza emlékezhelyei tükrében 1898-1914 között". *Budapest Negyed*, vol. XIV. nos. 2-3 (2006).

⁵ *Vasárnapi Ujság*, no. 25. September 1898, 667.

understood our rightful efforts, became one with our aspirations and she was the inspired interpreter and benefactor of all these things with her anointed husband.⁶

This was written in the Parliamentary proposition to enact a law to the memory of Queen Elizabeth. And it continued stating why she loved Hungarians and Hungary: "Here she finally found what she was searching for in the Court in vain: freedom, honesty, life without acting. She found herself [...]". The rest of the quotation points out a distinct quality in the collective national identity: "Here she could be what she was, not an Empress, not a superior person, but only a woman".⁷ A particular factor in the nineteenth century Hungarian nationalism was this strange resentment which attached emotional charge to the struggle for independence. Namely, that the 'nation which was born to rule' groaned under the yoke of a foreign ruler who was not elected, and who did not oblige to the general laws, but forced his own laws on the nation. This resentment have been the reason why already from the beginning of the eighteenth century the determining man/woman-dualism emerged. That is why 'manliness' has become emphasized in everything that is in connection with Hungarian essence, Hungarian culture, language, morality and tradition, and that is why everything that reveals 'soft' womanliness was pungently condemned as dangerous and stigmatized as breathing the 'death of the nation'.

For the collective national identity Queen Elizabeth was useful mainly as an oxymoron, by being a woman who practically invalidated the ruler:

⁶ Az igazságügyi bizottság jelentése Erzsébet királyné emlékének törvénybeiktatásáról szóló törvényjavaslathoz (Report of the judicial committee for enacting the law about the memory of Queen Elizabeth). In: *Képviselőházi irományok 1896-190*, vol. 18, no. 464, 220.

⁷ Pál Gerhard Zeidler, *Erzsébet királyné mártíromsága*. Pantheon, Budapest, [1924]. p. 18.

In her we do not see the zealous consort of a reigning princess who untangles the intrigues of the court, [...] but the true wife and mother who does not want to influence her husband and her children, rather she worries about them, she wants to dispel the clouds from above them. She was not lead by diplomatic cunning when she helped the policy of rapprochement between the King and the Hungarian nation, she did not want any one to feel her power or to organize a party to reach her own goals. She had no private motives. She only realized that the oppressed Hungary could not wear her chains calmly and that how much uneasiness it causes to her princely husband, how strongly it disables the King to function and how much pain his soul suffers because of it; so he realized that the love of a woman can play a part in solving this problem too [...] In her we have found that ideal which Hungarian thinking created about a good woman and that is why every Hungarian heart and love have attracted to her because she embodied the ideal of every one.⁸

In order to reach her goals with the manly Hungarians she used the 'female power':

Every one looked at her with silent amasement, in a happy daze. Then she said:-I love you my nation because you suffer. I love my husband and I want you to love him too. Forget what is impossible to forget for my sake. Give me your hand, here is his. Such thing cannot be said by a statesman only a woman can do that. And miracle happened. King and nation became one [...]⁹

Well, only a woman, called forth by Gyula Krúdy, knew how to handle the Hungarians:

There wasn't one man in Hungary who wouldn't give an arm for Elizabeth. Our men who respect woman and love horses wait for their new queen with hats in hand. Thank God, a pretty young woman shall sit on the throne whom we can fall in love with again, who we can indulge and we hope she'll like Buda and with womanly heart she'll read her husband and children the memoirs of those Habsburgs who became unfortunate when they turned their backs to us after the coronation [...]¹⁰

⁸ Ferenc Herczeg, "Temetés után". *Uj Idők* (25 September, 1898), 267.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Gyula Krúdy, "Egy királyné albumába". In: Gyula Krúdy, *Erzsébet királyné*. Palatinus, Budapest, 1998, 152.

And in another occasion: “in the idea of a respectful nation there is no better notion than a young and lovable queen. A manly country more heartily bends its stiff knees before a young woman than the legs of old Emperors”.

‘Yesterday I Tried That Nettle Recipe She Wrote In The Book’

Elizabeth's biographers who have attempted historical interpretation of her cult emphasize that the motives of the Queen were often distanced from the role that was attributed to her, and many times she had no connection with it. Eszter Virág Vér states that in the eyes of the Austrian public Elizabeth: “Lives as one of the first representatives of the modern female ideal: an image is outlined of a woman who is searching herself, who emphasizes her sovereignty, who made an effort to vindicate her liberalism and wished for her freedom in every circumstance”.¹¹ We must add here that this can largely be attributed to her extremely popular Austrian biographer Brigitte Hamann. Remarkably, this image appears also in the Hungarian cult around the turn of the twentieth century. The yearning for freedom will be the Queen’s ‘most Hungarian’ quality, and yet at the same time, freedom is the least characteristic of the female figure in the Hungarian cult since it embodies the patriarchal ideal which does not carry with it independent will or independent desire, and has no independent thoughts either.

The woman who emphasizes ‘the search and sovereignty of herself’ is also a stereotype: it resembles the literary manifestations of early feminism which can be taken further and developed also as examples of the female individual. Hamann states that the body cult of Elizabeth organically fitted her strategy she developed towards the outside world. Her diets and rituals to maintain her beauty seemed extremely unusual in that period and her sport activities were considered unwomanly and did not serve the

¹¹ Ibid.

connection with the outside world but separation from it since she very rarely appeared before the public even in her youth. She rather wanted to secure and demonstrate the sovereign rule over her own body. In those times and taking no account her situation Elizabeth's narcissism was her only way to attain her individuality. This is what secures the characteristic foundation of today's Elizabeth – or Sisi, as she is called nowadays – cult: many fans of her take up the subject of anorexia as psychiatric diagnosis on the net¹² which is the most important way to demonstrate the exclusive and complete rule over one's own body as the final 'property' or as the final shelter of individuality.

The cult manifesting itself on fan forums reveal mania for collecting (books, pictures, souvenirs, etc.) and imitation as important aspects in it. One participant of a fan forum explains: "You think it's possible to have a fifty cm waist without corset or something like that. I'd love to achieve a waist like that or almost like that because then the size of my body would be totally similar to Sisi's. I'm fighting for it now, I don't see the end of it yet, but I will still write about it". Another fan on the same forum writes about her trip to Corfu (where the main attraction was the palace of Elizabeth): "What I also liked very much was the Kaizer Bridge! That's the bridge where the Miramare reached the port, and Sisi walked in on it. It was great to walk on those stones her foot touched too:)". When Elizabeth's 'beauty recipes' were published in a book, they were tried by several fans: "Lately I washed my hair with nettle, yesterday I tried the nettle recipe she wrote in the book [...] it's totally different, yet its effect is pretty close to the simple nettle + distilled water method [..]".

Although the members of the forums established a strong communal feeling and often meet, they do not become a collective by frequently participating in the cult: their collective is the 'collective' of those who by their knowledge of the subject and

¹² The exact places of the forums and quotes cannot be given because of the personal rights of the quoted persons.

their emotional relation separate themselves from the masses of the inexperienced. This duality can be observed at several thematic Internet forum. The last quotation is a very good example of how controlled this modern cult is since the marketing strategies for the selective memory fragments and cult elements which became commodities can be important initiatives in shaping the cult. However, it seems that it is not possible to develop modern cults in a more direct way than this. The reason might be that the memory structure of ruling, 'classic' cults which strengthens and shapes the collective identity is a collective memory secured from above with the help of institutions. And yet, the cults that function on the forums are rather a cultural memory¹³ which ensures the possibility of criticism. Thus they actualize and monopolize memory for the sake of establishing individual identity. This kind of individual dispossession might be able to create a possibility to challenge hegemony.

¹³ Aleida Assmann, 'Von individuellen zu kollektiven Konstruktionen von Vergangenheit'. www.univie.ac.at/zeitgeschichte/veranstaltungen/a-05-06-3.rtf

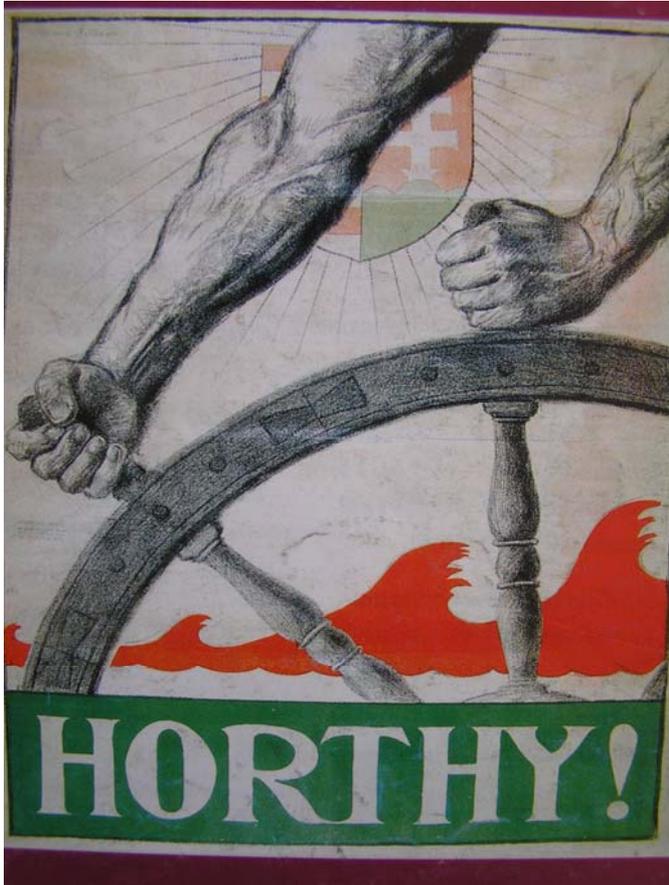
Ignác Romsics

CHANGING IMAGES OF MIKLÓS HORTHY

Miklós Horthy, Regent of Hungary from 1920 to 1944, has been a subject of heated debates ever since he entered the counterrevolutionary government in Szeged in 1919, and started organizing the National Army as part of the efforts to overthrow the Hungarian Soviet Republic. As a direct reaction to his activities, the early 1920s saw three distinct images of Horthy emerge: that of the savior of the country, that of the murderer with blood on his hand, and that of the traitor of the throne who stripped the Habsburgs of their title and the right to the Hungarian crown.

Horthy's image as a savior was largely received in groups of the propertied classes and certain elite groups, the strata of society who saw their assets nationalized during the Soviet Republic. In addition, he also had a fair number of supporters from the lower middle classes, notably citizens who had come into conflict – for one reason or another – with the Communist rule. For them, the propaganda materials which interpreted the Soviet of 1919 as a national catastrophe equal to the defeat of the medieval Hungarian kingdom to the Mongols in 1241 and by Ottoman arms in 1526 seemed real and acceptable. Horthy himself was likened to the greatest figures of Hungarian history, notably to Árpád, who led the conquest of the Carpathian basin, and to Saint Stephen, founder of the medieval Christian kingdom of Hungary, and Béla IV, re-builder of the country after the Mongol invasion. Further parallels included János and Mátyás Hunyadi, who distinguished themselves in the Ottoman wars, and leaders of anti-Habsburg independence movements such as Ferenc Rákóczi II and Lajos Kossuth. There can be little doubt that Horthy himself sought to cement such an image of the savior about himself. He depicted himself as a leader above parties and taking his inspiration from

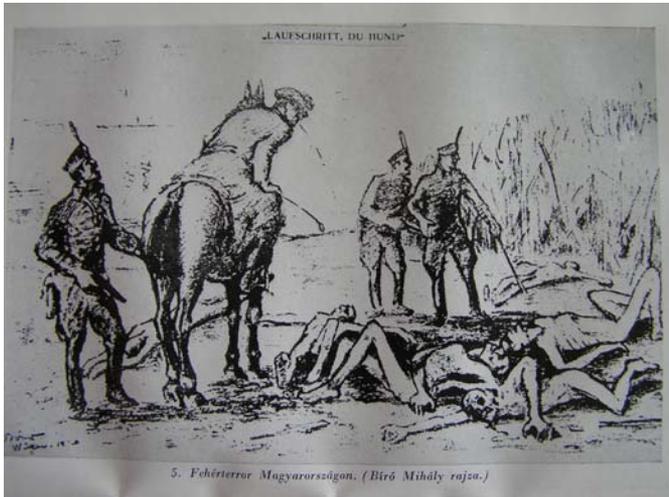
the national idea and Christian morality, most famously so in his speech delivered on 16 November 1919, during his entry to the capital. This image was also conveyed by a series of printed matters, most famously by the poster which showed strong arms holding the pilot wheel of a ship over a stormy red-colored sea. (Picture 1.) In a green field with bold white print the poster said merely one word, Horthy, with an exclamation mark added for emphasis.¹



Picture 1: Horthy steering the wheel in storms.

¹ Jenő Pilch, *Horthy Miklós*. Athenaeum, Budapest, 1928, 241-286, 358-392.

Parallel to the conscious image-building around Horthy, images promoted by his opposition, both democratic-progressive and communist crystallized around the theme of the savage murderer. This pattern of representation was rooted in the memory of the 1919–1920 reprisals which targeted both revolutionaries and the not implicated Jewish citizens. The so called White Terror cost the lives of hundreds and hundreds of people, even moderate estimates estimate over 1000 victims (no document has ever been



Picture 2: White terror in Hungary.

found that showed Horthy as having issued a direct order to commit the atrocities, especially executions). Yet it could not be doubted that he had been aware of the murders and showed a great degree of leniency towards the perpetrators, officers of his very own National Army. It was therefore hardly surprising that political opponents capitalized on his involvement in the criminal acts of the counterrevolutionary period, even if the exact measure of his personal responsibility for these crimes was not clear.

This veritably counter-cult, constructed in opposition to the cult of the nation's savior, was first promoted by left-wing Budapest dailies. Articles titled 'The horrible crimes of the Horthy-boys', 'The prison-guard of the white terrorists of Siófok', 'The persecution of Jews in Transdanubia', 'Prison Hell' and 'The Bloodbath of Kecskemét' barely required the reader to read the

actual article in order to reckon the message of the author. Space for such criticism, however, became very narrow after Horthy's election to the office of Regent in March 1920. (Picture 3.) Following this, the counter-cult lived on primarily in periodicals and memoirs published abroad by exiled leaders of the 1918-1919



Picture 3: Regent with his papers.

revolutions. According to Social Democrat and one-time people's commissar for war, Vilmos Böhm the rampage of Horthy's war-bands will rank among the darkest pages in Hungarian history forever. The number of murdered people reached hundreds as there had been "shooting unarmed citizens, hangings, castrations, copping off limbs, poking out eyeballs, rape, child murder" - these were the military actions of the 'glorious' Transdanubian campaign.

In a reversal of the received pro-Horthy imagery, Böhm summed up the activities of the National Army neither as the

saving of the country, nor as the new founding of the realm, but as a second Ottoman invasion.²

Oszkár Jászi, one-time Minister of Mihály Károlyi's October government also concentrated his criticism of Horthy and his regime on the war crimes committed by his troops. The dictatorship of Horthy, he argued, may have raised Christianity to state doctrine, but Hungarian public life has nevertheless been "symbolized by the gallows and torture" since his rise to power.³

Elite groups loyal to the Habsburgs, including sections of aristocratic and bourgeois upper classes, the Catholic high clergy and some officer groups, as well as segments of the middle classes, held a similarly negative image of Horthy – although for reasons quite different. Their dismay sprang from Horthy's checking of Charles's return attempts in 1921, followed by the formal dethronement of the Habsburg dynasty on 6 November. When Horthy had been elected governor or regent, these pro-Habsburg groups viewed the situation as a temporary one, to be replaced by the 'legal' rule of the crowned king upon his expected return. Once the treaty of Trianon had been signed on June 4th, and then subsequently ratified in November 1920, many felt that the time for restoration had come. In the two return attempts that followed, Horthy did in fact declare Charles IV to be the legitimate ruler of Hungary. At the same time, however, he insisted that the international environment did not permit an immediate restoration. In March 1921, he used merely words to convince Charles to leave the country but in October he ordered armed force to evict the king from the country. Following the failure of Charles's second return attempt, Horthy also conceded to the dethronement act and to the short-term imprisonment of a few leading royalists.

The Regent's behavior in 1921 was never forgiven by the royalist camp. In such circles, he was routinely referred to as an upstart and a worthless man whose word meant nothing. Socially this entailed that some sections of the traditional elite sought to evade contact

² Vilmos Böhm, *Két forradalom tüzeiben*. Verlag für Kulturpolitik, München, 1923, 477-479.

³ Oszkár Jászi, *Magyar kálvária – magyar föltámadás*. Magyar Hírlap Könyvek, Budapest, 1989, 152-161.

with Horthy. They found numerous ways to express their contempt for him and their devotion to Charles, his wife and, after the king's death in 1922, to his son Otto. These groups, however, lacked the means to launch a propaganda campaign against the Regent. So, their influence on public opinion decreased year by year.



Picture 4: Horthy with regalia.

As we have shown, in the early 1920s it was hard to predict which of the competing images of Horthy would emerge dominant. Once the consolidation of the new regime got underway after 1921, this issue became settled in a few years. The negative image shaped by the leftists and the progressives, as well as that of the royalists did persist, but rapidly lost their relevance for the greater part of society. The strong military man, who had saved the country was the image being projected by the whole of the state apparatus and gained increasing acceptance. (Picture 4.) This was especially true for the younger age groups who had little in terms of personal experiences of the past eras and relied largely on

information gained during their schooling. Their vision of the events of 1919–1921 was based mostly on the official interpretation.

The peak of Horthy's cult, however, came much later, during the years 1938–1943. In these six years, according to the catalogue of the Hungarian National Library, 28 Hungarian and foreign-language volumes dedicated to Horthy appeared in print.⁴ This is especially significant in light of the output of the preceding 18 years: from 1920 to 1937 only 17 such books had been published. The series of books of the late 1930s was opened by the biography of the journalist Baroness Lily Doblhoff. The 300 pages long biography, which was timed to coincide with the Regent's 70th birthday, was the first one to provide a detailed account of Horthy's family and his childhood years, his service in the Austro-Hungarian navy and at court, as well as of the years of the World War and the events that followed. Doblhoff did address the alleged "overreactions" of the National Army in her book, but merely stated that "a civil war was underway in the country, and these private acts of vengeance are inseparable from civil wars." Also, she intimated that random acts of violence were necessary to reestablish order and rule of law. As far as the other chief accusation directed against Horthy was concerned, Doblhoff left no doubt as to her conviction that Horthy made the right choice in resisting Charles's return attempts. She conceded that "both parties were led by their patriotism", but only Horthy had a realistic perception of the situation.⁵

In the same year, a huge genealogical synthesis, almost 600 pages thick, was also published. It attempted to prove that the Horthy family had acquired its nobility long before the 17th century (as it had been thought), linking the Regent's ancestry to

⁴ Ed. note: It may be added that in Finland Horthy was celebrated with pictures and all as "a thoroughly refined personality who had risen to the highest level of European civilization and who could really be a paragon to the youth of the new, young Europe just about to be born". See: Arvi Sovijärvi in *Heimotyö* V (1941–1942), 23–32. Cf. "Unkarin valtionhoitaja". *Suomen Heimo*, no. 3–4 (1940), 31.

⁵ Lily Doblhoff, *Horthy Miklós*. Athenaeum, Budapest, 1939, 243–244, 283–284, 290, 321.

the “world of the free Seklers” and also succeeding in posing him as a descendant of the House of Árpád.⁶ This perfectly unfounded statement aimed at providing an ancestry for Horthy that matched the already accepted greatness of his deeds, an undertaking which may have been motivated by the desire to furnish the Regent with an appropriate lineage for the founding of a dynasty by making his position hereditary.



Picture 5: Horthy arriving horseback from Szeged to Budapest.

The year 1940 saw another anniversary: that of Horthy’s appointment to the regency in 1920. Of the numerous publications from this period a photographically richly ornamented volume written by several authors stands out. It was edited and introduced by Ferenc Herczeg, the leading conservative writer of the day. He conjured up – highly ritualized – memories of the turbulent years 1918–1919, when “the flood of corruption had infected the souls.” The memory of this most unhappy period was contrasted with the march into Budapest on 16 November 1919 (Picture 5.), which he likened to the return of the Hun army of Prince Csaba, Attila’s son, returning from the Milky Way itself to rescue the Seklers – a story captured in a popular and ancient folk myth known to most

⁶ József Sándor, *Vitéz nagybányai Horthy Miklós, Magyarország kormányzója és népe az Árpád-házi királyok vérében*. Szerző: Budapest, 1938,5-13.

Hungarians. "Like Prince Csaba and his horsemen had descended from the Milky Way, Herczeg wrote, Horthy's men came to help the orphaned country." Herczeg went on to describe the rebuilding of the country in similar terms: "As after the Mongols and after the Ottomans, the miraculous regenerative powers of Saint Stephen's realm triumphed in the end". In the present, he saw the Regent as the very core of the "central power around which the thousand year old machinery of the state revolves". In fact, he used the metaphor of a "diamond axis" to describe Horthy's role in the machinery.

The working man sees in him the greatest guardian of law and order. The patriot hopes of him the fulfillment of the nation's desires. Every soldier in the army holds an allegiance to him unto the death. Even the faithless have no choice but to have faith in him, even the inconstant has to find constancy in his person. Without him, the masses of Hungarians can imagine neither their present, nor their future.⁷

Beyond the two anniversaries, a further cause of the peaking Horthy cult in the later 1930s and early 1940s was the partial success of Hungarian revisionism. The reoccupation of Southern Slovakia and Northern Transylvania following the two Vienna Decisions in 1938 and 1940 were both commemorated in feature-length documentaries, while the newspapers published ecstatic reports on the re-conquering of the historically significant townships. The central figure in all of the reports was that of Miklós Horthy. On a white horse, reminiscent of the one he rode in 1919, Horthy often chose to lead the parade of Hungarian troops into the city (Picture 6-7.), at other times he looked on from a tribune as the troops defiled. In the process of reoccupation, he delivered scores of short speeches and listened to many, many more from speakers often in tears. Accordingly, Horthy the savior of the nation received a further epithet, that of the enlarger of the country.

⁷ *Horthy Miklós*. Singer and Wolfner, Budapest, 1939, 7-11.



Picture 6: Horthy riding to upper Hungary.



Picture 7: Horthy again on horseback somewhere in a reconquered country.

Attested by scores of historical examples, living persons who became subjects of a cult tend to increasingly believe in their own exceptional abilities and their greatness. Well-known examples include 20th century dictators such as Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin. Horthy, for one, never developed ambitions like the former – he was too much of a 19th century traditionalist and conservative for that. But he did undertake to expand his powers, and did develop an ambition to prepare the ground for a family succession upon his eventual demise. The founding of a dynasty was also suggested by members of his personal network. (Picture 8.) Such plans were vehemently opposed, as could be predicted, by royalists attached to the Habsburgs – a small platform but not without considerable influence. Similarly, the extreme right rejected such plans, albeit for different reasons: they found the Regent and his family too much embedded in the conservative tradition of anglophilia. The end result of these opposing preferences was the election of Horthy's elder son to the post of vice-Regent in February 1942. Just how significant a step in the realization of Horthy's plans this could have become we will never be able to ascertain, because the

fighter pilot István Horthy died shortly thereafter in a plane crash on the Russian front. (Picture 9.) The tragic event, however, led to renewed debates about succession. It was proposed, that the two year old son of the deceased Vice-Regent should be either crowned or made Vice-Regent, cementing the power of the family over Hungarian politics. Very significant groups of the social and political elite, however, opposed all such designs. Royalists and conservatives pushed for adjourning the whole issue. Ideally, they were envisioning to offer the crown to Otto of Austria after the war, or, alternatively, to a member of Italy's royal dynasty. They inclined, only as a third option, to consider the Regent and his family.⁸



Picture 8: Horthy: happy family.



Picture 9: Horthy's son.

Hungary's place in Soviet orbit after the Second World War made all dynastic plans illusory. Horthy had resigned from his post on German pressure on 16 October, 1944 (Picture 10.), and handed over power to the leader of the Hungarian extreme right,

⁸ *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*. Ed. by Miklós Szinai, László Szűcs. Kossuth, Budapest, 1972, 327-337; Hans Georg Lehman, *Der Reichsverweser-Stellvertreter*. Mainz, 1975, 48-49, 55, 92.

Ferenc Szálasi. German authorities had interned him in Bavaria, where he lived until 1949. He moved from there to Portugal as a permanent exile, where he stayed until his death in February 1957.



Picture 10: Troubled Horthy.

While Horthy was living the quiet life of a political exile without any concrete ambitions for the future, opinions about his role had undergone a Copernican change at home. With Soviet support, the very forces that had branded him as a murderer in 1919 and 1920 came to power in 1944–45. They had been the spearheads of resistance to the canonical image promoted by the political system in the interwar period. The Regent's role in the World War II provided them with more ammunition in their quest against Horthy. Social groups under the influence of their education prior to 1945 did not abandon their attachment to the Regent's figure, a phenomenon that propelled the new holders of power to engage in a vigorous and systematic effort to construct a counter-cult. In the socialist rhetoric of the new political power, the Horthy era became synonymous with the lowest point of Hungarian history, a

position which entailed stripping the Regent's memory of any positive features and accomplishments.

The first purportedly Marxist synthesis of Hungarian history, titled the *History of the Hungarian People* and published in 1951 (an extended version of the book was a textbook for secondary schools) presented the narrative of the counter-cult in its definitive version. According to it, the National Army of 1919 was a "band of mass murderers", which had emerged from the "reactionary officers, kulaks and the scum of society" that Austria-Hungary had left behind. Its leader, Miklós Horthy, a "one-time lackey to the Habsburgs", responsible for "putting down the rebellion of navy servicemen at Cattaro", spoke only a "broken Hungarian", and was known for "his hatred of workers and his opposition to the Soviet". In this reading, responsibility for the "terrible deeds committed during the White Terror" was borne collectively by Horthy, his clique and by entente-imperialism. The political system he shaped was described as "fascist from its inception", and his role in it as that of a "bloody military dictator" and responsible, among other things, for the attack on Yugoslavia in 1941, the invasion of the Soviet Union, for accepting the German occupation without having put up a fight, the deportation of the provincial Jewish population, the failure of the attempt to break with the Axis in October 1944 and for having legitimized the seizure of power by Szálasi and his Arrow-cross men.⁹

The re-professionalization of Hungarian historiography that had unfolded after 1956 failed to yield a more nuanced interpretation of Horthy's person in the short run. György Ránki, a prominent figure of this process, perpetuated the above schematic image in a synthesis on the interwar period published in 1964. A relatively more balanced evaluation of Horthy and his era did not appear until the mid-seventies. The 8th volume of a multi-volume synthesis of Hungarian history dealing with the interwar period had been published in 1976. This treatment omitted most of the previously customary accusations and overstatements. (Picture 11.) A short portrait of Horthy was also included in the book, authored

⁹ Gusztáv Heckenast, Miklós Incze, Béla Karácsonyi, Lajos Lukács, György Spira, *A magyar nép története*. Művelt Nép, Budapest, 1953, 552-558, 638.

by Zsuzsa L. Nagy. She argued that Horthy rose to prominence in 1919 because he was a well-known soldier, who impressed the officer in Szeged with his “determined countenance”. His election to the Regency was conditioned by, Nagy went on to explain, “the



Picture 11: Ludas-cartoon. “Cat: -Hey, Mickey! Have we not enlarged the country? Horthy: -Of course! We’ve even enlarged all the neighbouring countries.”

relative power relationships as they stood around 1920, including the support, domestically, of officer groups and, internationally, of Great Britain.” In her reading, Horthy managed to hold onto power for a quarter of a century primarily because “as Regent [...] he distanced himself from extreme rightist officers and [...] adopted the general views and interests of the ruling class.” Other authors argued convincingly in their respective chapters that Horthy did in fact expressly consent to the disarming of

rampaging officer detachments, that Charles's attempt to reclaim the Hungarian throne were doomed to fail and Horthy very much had the support of the entente powers in standing up to him. Even his role in the World War II received a more nuanced treatment. Gyula Juhász, for instance, mentioned in the same volume that the Hungarian participation in the war against Yugoslavia had not taken place upon a decision made by Horthy, but following the agreement of the Defense High Council and in accordance with the proposal from Prime Minister Pál Teleki. He also noted the Regent's opposition to and outrage over the German occupation of March 1944, which he accepted, allegedly, only after heated debates and long soul-searching. Finally, he noted that coming out of the passivity with which Horthy had tolerated the deportation of Hungarian Jews from the countryside, he intervened and "he stopped the deportations only" in early July 1944, saving the Jews of Budapest.¹⁰

The above professionalization of historiography had a beneficial effect also on textbook images of Horthy. Here, however, the shift to a more nuanced interpretation was slower and more fragmented. The new history textbook for Hungarian lyceums, published in 1982, still carried the old *topoi* concerning his person. It was highlighted that Horthy had been the one to "put down the Cattaro navy rebellion, wading in blood", and once more the textbook claimed that Horthy had been forced to relearn Hungarian in 1919, because "during the long service in the joint k.u.k (i.e. *kaiserliche und königliche*) forces he had all but forgotten his mother tongue."¹¹ On the same note, it has to be mentioned that while historians increasingly held the view that the Horthy regime had been neither a fascist system of government, nor a clear-cut dictatorship, the secretary for ideology of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party warned, as late as 1986, that "the fascistic character of the Horthy regime", as well as "the sometimes hidden, sometimes overt dictatorship" were undisputable facts, which yield, taken together, "a

¹⁰ *Magyarország története 1918-1919, 1919-1945*. Ed. by György Ránki. Akadémiai, Budapest, 1976, 305, 415-416, 431, 434, 1040, 1152-1153, 1162, 1188.

¹¹ Ágota, Szirtes Jóvérné, *Történelem IV*. Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest, 1982, 84.

reactionary politics [...] for which there can be no excuse and which does not deserve sympathetic interpretation".¹²

The change of system in 1989 and 1990 brought about, among other things, rapid and thorough loss of legitimacy for the old historical-political canon. The newly gained freedom of interpreting the national past, including also the recent past, made a series of reevaluations unavoidable. The wave of revisionist history reached the memory of Miklós Horthy with the Hungarian-language publication, in 1990, of Péter Gosztonyi's 1973 German-language biography of the Regent. Considering post-1945 Hungarian historiography, Gosztonyi was right to emphasize that during the regency, a conservative establishment had ruled the country, and that "corruption and abuse of power" was alien to Horthy's thinking. Among other things, "he did not consider his place in the state and the establishment – as circumscribed by legislation – a means to enrich himself". He also emphasized "the numerous signs" of Horthy's dislike of Hitler. While he was "an accomplice" in the deportation of Hungarian Jews from the countryside in spring 1944, he did "order to stop further deportations" in the wake of domestic and international protest. One may even argue that there is truth to such observations as the one explaining the White Terror as a "reaction to the terror perpetrated by the Hungarian Soviet Republic". On the other hand, Gosztonyi's claim according to which the source of the White Terror "was not the National Army" should be very difficult to support – unlike its opposite, for which historical evidence abounds. Other phrasings, for instance the argument that reprisals were not initiated or ordered by Horthy personally, do little more than go around the question of his responsibility. In view of what has been said above, it should be also evident that talking about "Horthy's lack of personal ambitions of power" also requires some stretch of imagination. Similarly, the view that "the Regent was respected and trusted by the greatest part of society" is based on selective evidence. In sum, Gosztonyi's legitimate attempt to counter the negative image of Horthy as present in much of the

¹² János Berecz, "Gondolatok a nemzet és a munkásmozgalom történetéről". *Társadalmi Szemle*, 1986/6, 3-13.

Hungarian historiography and public writing included also, to a degree, the evading of some problematic points. This undermined his enterprise. Willingly or unwillingly, the book idealized the image of Horthy.¹³

In the context of the ongoing historical-political debate about the role of Horthy and the necessary reevaluation of his actions, his reburial in 1993 represents a clear and predictable juncture. The series of books, articles and interviews which were printed during this period show the centre-rightist political parties seeking to rehabilitate Horthy's person and politics. One richly illustrated publication set for itself the goal of cleansing his image "from the layers of lies" smeared on it "by the propaganda and the courtly history of a regime which sought to banish him".¹⁴

Of all the opinions which were heard in 1993, the greatest significance can be attributed to the long interview given by Prime Minister József Antall. Attesting to the relatively rapid consolidation of the "rehabilitating" discourse about Horthy, Antall echoed much the same opinions that Gosztonyi had expressed in his book. Accordingly, he referred to the white terror as a reaction to Bolshevik acts of cruelty, which was neither instigated nor tolerated, but halted at least in part by Horthy. His rise to the office of the Regent had no alternative, as, according to Antall, "the republic of the October revolution [...] was simply unfit to be continued". The restoration plans entertained by Charles IV were equally unrealistic. In such a situation, the Prime Minister concluded, "the regency of Miklós Horthy became the only option which promised stability for the country both in domestic and in foreign policy." He also added that the Regent "never trespassed over the principles of constitutionalism and the order of the constitutional monarchy". Moreover, he "was simultaneously strongly opposed to both Bolshevism and Nazism". While many of these claims are debatable, Antall also added some remarks which can only be described as thoroughly unfounded. He argued for instance that

¹³ Péter Gosztonyi, *A kormányzó, Horthy Miklós*. Téka, Budapest, 1990, 30, 149, 161-164.

¹⁴ László Pusztaszeri, "Egy élet Magyarorszáért". In: *Vitéz nagybányai Horthy Miklós élete képekben*. Ed. by Vuray György. Faktor, Budapest, 1993.

“Horthy’s anti-Semitism simply did no exist after the World War I” and that Horthy had opposed the entry into the war in 1941. Antall made sure to emphasize the moral culpability for the deportations after the German occupation of 1944. He seemed to exclude Horthy from the circle of culprits, however, arguing that as soon as he “secured for himself the smallest room for maneuver [...] he saved the Jews of Budapest”. Concluding his narrative of Horthy, Antall labeled him a “Hungarian patriot”, and voiced his conviction that it was the task of politics “to accord him his rightful place in the continuity of the national history and in the mind of the people”.¹⁵ The final sentence of the Prime Minister stated overtly the desire on the part of resurgent Hungarian conservatism and centre-rightist thinking in general to make a break in all respects with the heritage of the communist period from 1949 to 1989, and, in doing so, simultaneously hark back to the interwar era, integrating its memory and its leaders into the historical canon of national identity.

Through the rediscovery of his person around 1993, Horthy became part of a debate on identity politics, one that has not subsided for 15 years. In the course of this time, Thomas Sakmyster’s biography of Horthy, originally published in 1994, appeared also in Hungarian. The professional political biography spanning the years from 1919 to 1944 painted a portrait of Horthy which was in accordance with that of Hungarian historiography in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁶ Gábor Bencsik’s wide-ranging journalistic analysis of Horthy, a further book from 2001, reiterated much the same opinions about Horthy. The author avoided both the revisionism of Communist authors and the apologetic twists employed by sympathizers. If anywhere, Bencsik was perhaps a little too exonerating in his evaluation of Horthy’s actions as Commander in Chief, yet in other aspects he retained a fortunate balance in his narrative.¹⁷

¹⁵ “Interjú Horthy temetéséről Antall József miniszterelnökkel”. In: *HIR-LAP melléklete*, Sept. 1993, 1-8.

¹⁶ Thomas Sakmyster, *Admirális fehér lovon*. Helikon, Budapest, 2001.

¹⁷ Gábor Bencsik, *Horthy Miklós. A kormányzó és kora*. Magyar Mercurius, Budapest, 2001.

The interest for these books was dwarfed, however, by the success of the memoirs of Countess Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai, the widow of Vice-Regent István Horthy. The first volume of the memoirs was published in 2000, with the second, and final, volume following in 2007. As she made clear in the introduction, her aim was to present “the truth” to Horthy’s “descendants” and the general public, so that they “need not ponder what grains of truth the sea of Nazi and Communist slanders published through the years may contain”. Of the episodes in Horthy life which are routinely addressed by historical narratives, the memoirs barely addressed the seminal 1918–1919 period. The virtually only key statement about this period concerned a parallel the author drew between the turbulent period after the Great War and the change of regime in 1989. In this, she set Horthy’s actions as an example in front of our generation: “He brought new energy into the scheme of things – something someone called a blood transfusion. Such energies are needed today, as well.”

Taking up the detailed course of events after 1930, the only really controversial period the Countess discussed in detail was the year 1944. She chose, however, to really focus only on one – if crucial – series of events: the tragedy of Jewish Hungarians. The text makes it clear that in the view of the writer, Horthy bears little responsibility for the fate of the Jews living in the countryside. Her second key statement is that Horthy’s decision to halt the transports to Auschwitz, saving many Budapest Jews, was made not as a concession to foreign and domestic pressure, but in response to having received the so-called Auschwitz-protocols on 3 July, 1944. The gist of this argument is that once the Regent found out that Jews were being exterminated rather than being taken to labor camps, he acted.¹⁸

These extremely popular memoirs, however, do not represent the last chapter in the ongoing story of symbolic politics and commemoration around Horthy. Just as the second volume of the Edelsheim memoirs hit the streets in spring 2007, a new documentary directed by Gábor Koltay about the person of Miklós

¹⁸ Ilona Edelsheim Gyulai, *Becsület és kötelesség*, vol. 1. Európa, Budapest, 2006, 257-264; vol. 2, 2007, 449.

Horthy was shown in a few cinemas. Of all attempts to revive the cult of Horthy characteristic of the interwar period, this film stands out as the most obvious example of glorification. As several critics were quick to point out, the documentary is not merely apologetic, but “makes false statements that go beyond mere apology”.¹⁹

The most recent chapter of identity politics involving Horthy concerns various plans to secure representation for his figure in public spaces. The apropos for these propositions was provided by the 50th anniversary of the Regent’s death in February 2007. One such initiative was launched by the president of the fringe party Movement For a Better Hungary (*Jobbik*), Gábor Vona, who, as he put it, saw the time fit to rehabilitate the Regent, “who is represented in public opinion, in politics and in the teaching of history in equally negative colors”. This could be remedied, he suggested, by removing the statue of Mihály Károlyi, leader of the October revolution in 1918 from Kossuth square by the Parliament building, and replacing it with that of Horthy.²⁰

A civic initiative and private persons proposed a similar commemoration of Horthy in Szeged at virtually the same time. In acknowledgment of the Regent’s deeds, this would have entailed setting up a statue of his figure in the city square, next to those of István Széchenyi and Ferenc Deák, two 19th century moderate progressives. The socialist mayor of the town reacted dismissively (as could be expected), stating that as long as he is “mayor of Szeged, neither János Kádár, nor Miklós Horthy will receive a statue.”²¹ The debate that has flared up in Szeged reflects the trauma of Hungarian collective memory and the lines of division which run through this memory.

At the same time, if a summary of the current situation is to be made, it has to be stated first and foremost that the persistent attempts since 1989 to reinstate the cult of Horthy in some form

¹⁹ Krisztián Ungváry, “A Kormányzó 139 éves”. *Népszabadság*, February 12, 2007.

²⁰ www.hirextra.hu/hirek/article.php?menu-id=1962 (Szoborcseré a Kossuth-téren?).

²¹ András Kő, “Horthy Miklós szobra Szegeden?”. *Magyar Nemzet*, June 18, 2007.

have failed to convince the majority in Hungarian society. According to Median, a leading polling agency, Miklós Horthy ranked third on the list of most negatively viewed 20th century public figures in 1999. He scored 20% on the cumulative index, preceded by Mátyás Rákosi (52%) and Ferenc Szálasi (35%), while János Kádár came in fourth with 12%. When interviewed, only a little more than 5% of the representative sample placed him among the three most positively viewed historical personalities of the century.²² Opinions may have shifted slightly since 1999. A fundamental change, however, is unlikely to have taken place. This seems to be confirmed by the non-representative survey of Hungary's largest popular historical periodical, *Rubicon*. According to *Rubicon* readers, Rákosi and Szálasi are the darkest personalities in Hungarian history, while Horthy ranked 5th on the negative list – after János Kádár and Béla Kun on the 3rd and 4th place, respectively. He failed, however, to make it to the top ten of most positively viewed historical figures.²³ All this suggests that it is only a small, if loud, minority that thinks of Horthy as a great patriot and statesman, while their numbers are far exceeded by those who hold a highly negative opinion of him.

²² Ignác Romsics, "Történelem és emlékezet". *Heti Világgazdaság*, July 10, 1999, 66-69.

²³ 'Szavaztak az olvasók'. *Rubicon*, 2006/10, 4-5.

György Tverdota

NAPOLÉON SEUL

One primary task of the French cult research should be the description and analysis of the Napoleon cult because there was no other French public figure except him who had such a cultic fame all over the world of which the imperial army could boast about. The book by J. Lucas-Dubreton already carries the title: *Le culte de Napoléon 1815–1848*.¹ It is a thick monograph which is especially useful and rich in information, and which deals with many important aspects of the Napoleon question. Yet, it did not utilize the approach and methods of cult research. French scholars have extensively analyzed the phenomena which pertain to the subject of cult but under different themes albeit in full proportions, variations and randomness. In this respect there is no reason to complain, and seen from the point of view of the relationships of cult and identity, the most illuminating phenomenon is the Napoleon cult even if we narrow the question of identity down to the aspect of national affiliation. And the examination of adoration of Napoleon makes it possible to look at more complicated connections with of the issue of identity.

Consciously narrowing the subject, only one series of events is highlighted here which led to the reburial of the Emperor in 1840. In French history these events are called “The Return of the Ashes”, and they are in the focus of this article since they serve as the model for modern reburials and for the relations between cult and identity.

The precondition for a reburial of someone is that the person to be reburied gained wide reputation among public by achieving

¹ J. Lucas-Dubreton, *Le culte de Napoléon*. Editions Albin Michel, Paris, 1960.

something remarkable. It is useless to waste words in proving how qualified Napoleon was in this respect. The other precondition is that the person had had to suffer a long-lasting and serious injustice which markedly bears on the burial. The lack of deserved honor can originate in the burial that takes place in exile on foreign soil, and which is not attended by public or is carried out without the proper burial ceremony. With the banishment of the defeated Emperor to live in exile on the Island of St Helen where he in 1821 died in English captivity, the second condition materialized. The third condition, i.e. that the public opinion which was earlier unsympathetic or silenced, turns sympathetic and is given freedom to loudly express its demand for rehabilitation. Between 1815 and 1840 this process took place which enables us to discuss the identity question in its frame.

Reburial of a person is one of the most effective means to create identity. Its intellectual seed is the radical revaluation which leads to the earlier dishonored person's public rehabilitation and condemnation of those who dishonored him. The reburial ceremony means, however, more than a radical change that affected the intellectual turnabout. The revaluation is necessarily accompanied by devotion and strong emphasis of confinement and other passionate feelings: mourning, satisfaction, hostile feelings which can transform into unstoppable and intense aversion towards the people who the ones who want a reburial regard as enemies or traitors. Neither should one forget the suppressed and slumbering emotions of the ones who opposed the reburial. In Napoleon's reburial all of these phenomena crop up in sharp outlines.

The initiators of the reburial are expecting general understanding from the public; their goal is mutual consensus. Their main interest is participation in the burial ceremony, fellowship with the dishonored person evoking people's feeling to identify themselves with the values the deceased person represented or what has been assigned to him and to demonstrate of him. The main danger in the venture is that the public's indifference, hostility or cautiousness would cause a total failure. It

is possible to count on the behavior of the public, and it can be assumed how the people will react but one can never be sure. The reburial is not a usual celebration, rather it is an exceptional event and that is why it can be hazardous. It is literally an event. It is the dramatic act of creating or strengthening communal identity. Its outcome is influenced by ephemeral actualities, the constellation of daily politics, moreover, also by the weather. Yet there is a component which depends on the dynamic of the development of communal identity. In Napoleon's case, this was rather complicated and unforeseeable.

The heroes of reburials are mostly politicians, soldiers and public figures who were active in shaping history. The identification with these people creates more complicated problems than a reburial of an artist or a scientist. For example, behind the latter (e.g. Attila József or Béla Bartók) stands memorable, verifiable, unquestionable, aesthetic and scientific value. In the case of Napoleon it is also easy to find the qualities which help people identify themselves with him: from humble origins Napoleon reached to the highest position to which a Frenchman could. He had a fantastic career. He made France great. He conquered most of Europe. He proved through several victorious battles how truly talented military leader he was. He laid the foundations of the modern judicial system of France.

However, these factors had their opposing ones, the factors that made people to keep distance and show contempt to him, even to hate him. His system could be seen as a tyranny from the inside. His military success was followed by the curses of mothers who waited in vain for their husbands and sons to return from the conquests. The marching of the *Grande Armée* was accompanied with enormous human suffering. He lost his key battles, he failed as a politician and the final balance of his endeavors was the conclusion of a peace treaty which was embarrassing to France and which shattered its international position. Moreover, the Bourbons regained power and reigned again. They tried with all their might to present the Emperor as the Antichrist, as the messenger of Satan, as a giant cannibal, as a usurper of the throne, as Nero's modern

embodiment, and last but not the least, as a foreign person who forced himself on France; they called him a “Corsican”, a “Bonaparte”. This campaign went on successfully for several years. The blood-drained, disappointed French people who became tired of the war had had enough of the Emperor. It can be said that the Napoleon cult sprang from of the Emperor’s anti-cult which, interestingly enough, elevated the figure of Napoleon. In order to develop the cult only the sign (-, +) had to be changed, though this seemed more than impossible.

Yet it happened. After Napoleon’s death in 1821 Talleyrand said: “The death of Napoleon is not an event, it is only a piece of news”, but with this statement he totally missed the point.² The news of the Emperor’s death shook not only France but the whole of Europe, and even the people in England who were Napoleon’s fiercest enemies. In France the scale dipped to the side of the positive identification. The enemies of the Emperor shrunk to two, each other hating groups, the intransigent republicans and the legitimists. Louis the XVIII was placed on the throne with the help of the country’s enemy, the Holy Alliance. During the reign of Louis and his successor Charles the X the humiliating international constellation remained intact. In comparison, the Napoleon era was positively remembered. Full employment had been achieved at home, mainly because of the lack of manpower in war. Moreover, because of intense demand incomes grew high. The rule of the Emperor had been the insurance for the peasants since the lands they occupied during the revolution remained in their possession and the aristocracy could not chase them away. The middle classes, the bourgeoisie, enjoyed economic boom thanks to export to the conquered lands. During the revolution the church lost its position, but Napoleon stabilized it. The emancipation of the Jews was also of Napoleon’s doing. The Emperor’s value was increased; from a dictator who committed serious crimes against

² Jean Tulard, “Le retour des Cendres”. In: *Les lieux de mémoire*, 2. [sous la direction de Pierre Nore]. Gallimard, Paris, 1997, 1733.

the revolution was transformed into the savior of the achievements of the revolution.

Compared to this, the present time seemed to be the age of decline. The loads of goods coming from the English market brought hard times to French industry. In the adapting process to the achievements of the industrial revolution, unemployment increased, high incomes became a memory of the past. Now the peasants had a reason to worry about restoration of their possession to the aristocrats. All of a sudden the years of the Empire seemed the 'Golden Age' compared to the devastating present. Moreover the *Gloire* (Glory), the assurance of the French power by arms, was on Napoleon's side. After all, the Napoleon cult was kept alive by the approval of some kind of modernization, by the demand for the society's mobility and, above all, by French nationalism and national self-interest. Laying the reburial on the agenda and voicing and repeatedly demanding it happened through this identical transformation.

Cult is a quasi-religious thinking and way of behaviour, and in keeping with it, the Napoleon cult had to utilize sacral images because the anti-cult against which it had to fight was couched in terms of hellish, devilish and demonic Buonaparte. This magnified Napoleon's worldly size. One of the cultic formulas was distributed by a book of propaganda, *Mémorial de Sainte-Hélène* published by Count Las Cases in 1823. In it Napoleon was pictured as chained Prometheus. It was based on Napoleon's diary written in St Helen and confiscated by the British Governor. The book had an enormous impact as it demolished the anti-cult and became the basis of forthcoming devotion to Napoleon. It was not an accident that it was secretly the favorite book of Julien Sorel. The Governor of Longwood, Hudson Lowe who was exiled to the far away tiny island, was mercilessly eager to spread several stories about the life and sufferings of the fallen Emperor made the French public stand by the undeservedly humiliated titan.

The second Christian cultic formula was shaped into classic form by the peculiar prediction of Heinrich Heine: “The nation of arrogance (England) falls into dust, the graves of Westminster lay in ruins and scattered all over, the royal dust, which they contain shall be the prey of the winds and fall into oblivion. And Saint Helen shall be the Saint Tomb where the people of East and West shall go to a pilgrimage with ships decorated with flags and they strengthen their hearts with the great memory of the Earthly Christ who suffered under Hudson Lowe as it is written in the gospels of Las Cases, O’Meara and Antommarch”.³ If the anti-cult presented Napoleon as the Anti-Christ, the cult wrote and shaped Christ’s suffering story in a way that it could now be applied to Napoleon in many different ways.

In the year of 1840 a ship named *Belle Poule* indeed appeared on the shores of St Helen. Her voyagers were not pilgrims but the exiled comrades of Napoleon who were brought there under the command of Count Joinville, the son of Louis Philippepe. They had come in the purpose to identify Napoleon’s earthly remains and place them in several coffins and bring them back to the shores of the Seine thus fulfilling the Emperor’s last will to rest among his beloved people.⁴ Who had asked Joinville to take this lengthy voyage, and for what (worldly) reasons did the voyagers participate in the series of reburial ceremonies and why they approved them?

The demand of the reburial began like an ancient tragedy. The intimate supporters of Napoleon appeared immediately after the Emperor’s death in 1821 in London and asked in the name of Madame Mere, the mother of the Emperor, and by referring to the ancient tradition, the King and the PM to deliver the corpse of the son. One year later the mother tried again. But from the very beginning, it was not only a simple family affair. The family, which

³ Gilbert Martineau, *Le Retour des Cendres*. Tallandier, Paris, 1990, 35.

⁴ André-Jean Tudesq, “Le reflet donné par la presse”. In: *Napoléon aux Invalides, 1840, Le Retour des Cendres*. Société Présencxe du Livre, Haute Savoie. Musée de l’Armée Paris, Fondation Napoléon, Paris, 1990, 86.

was sent to exile by the Bourbons, actually a dynasty, was well-connected from London to Rome, from Vienna to America. Most of the followers of course were waiting in France for the resurrection of the dead, or if he could not himself, then the Prince of Reischstadt, the son of Mary Louise, should march ahead and bring the imperial rule back to France. They were the Bonapartists. And behind them stood the soldiers and officers of the *Grande Armée* as well as the former officials of the Empire with masses of civilians, peasants and workers whose numbers is difficult to determine because they had no right to vote. The Government in London tended to oblige, but only if the lawful King of France and his cabinet would approach them with a request, for they knew that the embers of the revolution could be ignited from the ashes. Louis the XVIII certainly did not have the slightest intention to conjure up the soul of his mortal enemy, and so the great dead remained an English captive beyond his grave.

From that time on the spell of the great name, the conjuring up of the glorious memory of the Empire was necessarily associated with every Bonapartist attempt to takeover. The follower's place, after the early death of Napoleon the II was taken by Joseph, the oldest brother of the Emperor, but he, after a few failed attempts of grabbing the throne, gave up. Instead, the younger cousin of the Emperor, Louis Bonaparte, who later became Napoleon the III, zealously and stubbornly made efforts to gain power. After a failed coup d'état the judge told him sternly: "The greatness of the Empire is the glory of the Emperor, not an inheritance of the family." The claimant to the throne bravely replied in his defense: "The July monarchy had even less right to demand the inheritance".⁵ The argument over the inheritance of the Emperor makes the problem of appropriation the crux of the theme of reburial. It is one of the basic questions of identification in the reburial. It is not enough to label the enemies of the one who is

⁵ Martineau, *Le Retour des Cendres*, 99-100.

about to rehabilitated, one has to ask to whom does the deceased belong is who is going to be reburied? Count Rémusat, the Home Secretary of Thiers administration in his speech at the House of Commons gave a classic definition to the act of appropriation: “The 1830 monarchy is the only lawful heir of every memory of which France can boast about. It is undoubtedly that class of monarchy which first collected all our power and harmonized every wish of the French Revolution that can build a statue and a sepulchre for a national hero and honor him without fear”.⁶

The legal proceedings concerning the inheritance of the remains – “who owns the body of the emperor” – between two rival parties almost started military actions. During Joinville’s voyage back home on the *Belle Poule’s* deck with the Imperial bier (catafalque) ‘information’ went around that Louis Bonaparte, who lived in London, wanted to attack the ship carrying the ashes and rob the Emperor’s remains. The other adventurous idea of the Bonapartist exiles was that several rebellious, provincial Bonapartists would escort the ship that first anchored at Cherbourg and later at Le Havre, to the capital and with the help of the resurrected Emperor overthrow the rule of Louis Philippe. Few theorists state that in 1848, when Louis Philippe was driven away and Louis Bonaparte gained power, the harvest of the reburial of 1840 ripened.

Yet the immediate beneficiary of the homecoming of the ashes was the bourgeois monarchy which lived as a parasite on Napoleon’s remembrance. Already in 1830, during the July revolution, the supporters of Louis Philippe, the Orleanists made the Bonapartists, republicans and anarchists who hated the Bourbons the dupes of the power, and the bourgeois monarchy strived for the sake of its own legitimization and popularity to exploit the people worship of Napoleon from the beginning. It was Louis Philippe who replaced the statue of Napoleon on top of the Vendome column which had been taken down by the Bourbons.

⁶ Georges Poisson, *L’aventure du retour des cendres*. Tallandier, Paris, 2004, 37.

At the center of the *Étoile* the King had the uncompleted triumphal arch which served to glorify the Emperor finished. The third and most hazardous appropriation manoeuvre was to bring the ashes of Napoleon home. In the bourgeois monarchy the members of the Parliament, who most of the time run the country, bombarded the throne with masses of petitions but Louis Philippe objected to hold a cult ceremony since it may have been dangerous for his power. Finally, the efforts of PM Thiers, who turned from a Bonapartist to an Orleanist, brought success. The King allowed his Government to contact the British PM, Lord Palmerston, and demand the handing over of the ashes.

This took place in a very strained international situation. In the Middle East France found itself in a conflict with the powers of the Holly Alliance, especially with England. Because of the humiliation suffered in 1815, the French public zealously wanted *revanche*. The peace politics of Louis Philippe seemed to be a sign of cowardice to the revengeful nationalists. Thiers, by promoting the bringing of the ashes back home, consciously played with the fire. Militarist undertones around the reburial were rather strong. The great figure of the French glory, Napoleon had to be freed from English captivity so that the nation could regain its self esteem. Thus the events had an international dimension and the interests of England also had to be weighed. Its Government tried to dictate conditions for the burial in order to avoid damage to the prestige of the country, but when the question became internal affair of the French the British could not exert influence on them. Taking the risk, Lord Palmerston obviously did not realize that he undermined the position of Louis Philippe. His calculation worked well enough since no war ensued. France withdrew from the

Middle East conflict with a shameful failure.⁷ Louis Philippe yielded ground to England. He dismissed Thiers and the reburial took place during the reign of a Government which did not want to follow the offensive foreign politics of Napoleon. Consequently, the burial of the ashes remained a simple propaganda event, and was of the symbolic kind at that.

When the remains of the Emperor arrived in France, the walk on tightrope began. The members of the Bonaparte dynasty, the family heirs, were not allowed to be present at the funeral. The royal families of Europe and the historic aristocracy turned their hostile backs to the event during which one usurper elevated another to the pedestal. The republicans reluctantly, halfheartedly participated. Lamartine succeeded in persuading the Parliament to cut the funds that were intended for the expenses of the burial to half, an intervention which visibly affected the staging quality. The preparations started late and reluctantly. The final resting place, the Dome of *des Invalides* was chosen by the Government with extraordinary care and pettiness. The Vendome column and the Triumphal Arch were turned down because both of them could make a perfect ground for a Bonapartist mass demonstration. The Saint-Denis cathedral was not suitable either because a national hero did not deserve to rest among French kings. The main reasons why *des Invalides* was chosen were its relative closeness and difficulty to reach. The Emperor's catafalque was floated by boat on the Seine to Neuilly because the King wanted to avoid every possible encounter with the provincial masses who wished to honor the great man. The sailors were forbidden to make contact with the people who lived along the river. The organizers even thought of having the ceremony in winter hoping for bad weather.

⁷ Ed. note: This refers to the crisis in Levant in 1839-1840 when the Ottoman power was threatened from the south by Mehemet Ali, the Viceroy of Egypt. The French supported him but Lord Palmerston sent a fleet to demonstrate on the coast of Syria, letting the French know that he was ready to fight in order to keep the Ottoman Empire united. Louis Philippe pulled back and forced his Foreign Minister to resign.

Their wish was fulfilled because the ceremony took place on December 15th in freezing cold.

The mood of the mourners or rather the celebrators was not spoiled by the unusual cold. Frighteningly many people participated in the parade. The carts carrying the ashes were followed by the veterans of the *Grande Armée* who for the last time wore their carefully guarded uniforms on the occasion. They could do that freely because the organizers wanted to emphasize the General, the soldier in Napoleon and not the statesman and the Emperor. However, the military honor was now similarly displayed as in the traditional, feudal and royal ceremonial burials. There were not any new or original rituals followed which would have been proper to the heir of the Revolution and the Emperor. The sanctification of the ashes happened with the church's active co-operation.

Out of the slogans the celebrating crowd shouted "*Vive l'Empereur!*" was the loudest. Louis Philippe was not celebrated by anyone and Louis Bonaparte's name was not uttered either but the popular Joinville, the King's son who traveled to St. Helen received great welcome. Guizot, the most unpopular member of the new administration which replaced Thiers's government, and who was known as a fierce enemy of Napoleon encountered heavy verbal abuse by the crowd for the great pleasure of Thiers. Many times the people shouted the slogans: "Down with the traitors!", "Down with England!" The British Embassy advised Englishmen who stayed in Paris at that time to avoid going to the street. Heine, who was an advocate of the Napoleon cult, had become more reserved because of the French chauvinism that was shown during the funeral. After all, the chauvinists yearned for the territories beyond the Rhine. The King and his Government who had the police force ready calmly reported that serious incidents had not happened. It seemed that Bonaparte was successfully detached from the irritating movement of Bonapartism, and his heritage became a

treasure for whole French nation.⁸ Although the epitaph “*A Napoléon seul*” [...] which the republican Lamartine advised to be written on Napoleon’s tomb did not get there, it seems that during the reburial this formula was victorious.⁹ In this article it was not possible to do anything else but to reconstruct this story of cult and identity-building. The discussion on the development and consequences of such a process would demand further, independent elaboration of the theme.

⁸ Ed. note: Karl Marx insinuated that ‘summoning of the ghost of Bonaparte’ was an attempt to slow or reverse decline of France. The rise of the Second Empire of Napoleon III owed much to this nostalgic source. Cf. Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat. On National Trauma, Mourning and Recovery*. Transl. by Jefferson Chase. Granta Books, London, 2003, 106.

⁹ Martineau, *Le Retour des Cendres*, 93.

SPECTRUM HUNGAROLOGICUM VOL. 4.
**Cultic Revelations: Studies in Modern Historical
Cult Personalities and Phenomena**

Anssi Halmesvirta

**THE NEW SPARTANS: THE NAZI CULT AT THE
NUREMBERG PARTY CONGRESS IN 1936 SEEN
THROUGH FINNISH EYES**

The greatest political cult-spectacle of the twentieth century was the third congress of Hitler's Nazi Party, staged in Nuremberg from the 8th to the 14th of September, 1936. In that year Hitler, now the incontestable *Führer*, had made three decisive moves to restore the 'honour' of Germany. He had cancelled the treaty of Locarno, occupied the *Rheinland* and armed the *Wehrmacht* to formidable strength. Thus the title of the congress: "The Party Congress of Honour". In the very same year his leader cult started to ripen into a full-fledged one to reach its apogee in 1938-1940. And it was then that the cult no longer knew any bounds within the Party and the Germans could no longer avoid seeing and experiencing the '*Führer* myth' in every possible media. Hitler himself became convinced of his infallibility and began to believe in Providence that had called him to lead the German nation. In the process, he himself had become a prisoner of the '*Führer* myth' and, as Ian Kershaw has it, a victim of the Nazi propaganda¹.

In view of history of mass communication, it may not be inappropriate to analyze the impressions and experiences of a Finnish spectator, the radical writer and leading modernist critic, Mr Olavi Paavolainen (1903-1964), from the spot. They were published as a narrative of travel, titled *Kolmannen valtakunnan vieraa* (1936), a "rhapsody", as he called it, which exhibited an

¹ Kershaw, Ian, *The 'Hitler Myth'. Image and Reality in the Third Reich*. O.U.P., 2001, 82.

"apocalyptic"² approach to dictatorial power politics and German political mission in general that shocked the reading public not only in Finland but more widely also in other Nordic countries. At the time in Finland more people admired than criticized the Nazi achievements, and at least right-wing papers deemed the Western powers, especially England and France, weak and tame in comparison to the German might. As one later observer has neatly put it: their attitude towards the Third Reich was "like a sewing circle's towards a Panzer"³.

Paavolainen had got foretaste of Nuremberg in 1934 when Leni Riefensthal's film *Triumph des Willens* - censured as Nazi propaganda in many countries - was shown in Helsinki. He was truly shocked. Already the opening scenes of the film in which Hitler arrives at Nuremberg by plane descending from foggy morning clouds like "an Olympic God riding on an eagle" startled him.⁴ The following pandemonium of soldiers marching on and on lasted for three hours. Reminded by this experience Paavolainen started to describe what he saw in the 1936 spectacle.

His point of view was that of communicative visualism⁵: as a spectator among the invited foreign audience he *saw* and *watched* it all while listening to cultic speeches and music. In order to describe the "elementary scenes" of National Socialism one had to use one's most acute senses, and concentrate on catching with eye and ear what may not normally have been relevant to a critical

² Paavolainen, Olavi, *Kolmannen valtakunnan vieraina* (1936). Otava, Helsinki, 2003, 11.

³ Kurjensaari, Matti, *Loistava Olavi Paavolainen*. Tammi, Helsinki, 1975, 163.

⁴ Paavolainen (1936) 2003, 149.

⁵ Kanerva, Jukka, An Eye Looking at the Masses. On Olavi Paavolainen's Method of Examining the Process of Politics. In. *Transformation of Ideas on a Periphery*. Ed. Jukka Kanerva - Kari Palonen. IL-MO: Ilmajoki, 1987, 133-150; Vitäri, Zsolt, A Führer mítosz: Adolf Hitler kultusza. *Rubicon*, 2007/9, 17-27; Paavolainen, Jaakko, *Olavi Paavolainen - keulakuva*. Tammi, Helsinki, 1991, 140-141. [Before Jukka's untimely death, I often debated with him over these issues and I have ever since remained grateful for his insights].

mind. With keen sense of sight the politics of the eye, machinated by the Nazi propaganda tricksters, could be analyzed, and the cultic rituals be intuitively comprehended. The flabbergasted spectator could not really explain them in a scholarly fashion. The

methods of intellectual history, political science⁶, theories of dialectical materialism, social psychology or party political analysis were all out of place since the spectacle in itself was illogical and irrational in its pseudo-religiousness or paganism. In an age when book had been replaced by picture – recall the *auto-da-fé* of books in May, 1933 – the pictures and images lied to one's face and only appearances counted. It was communication of illusions. If one believed that pictures (cameras) did not lie, in the Nazi cult-spectacle they created illusions in the similar way as did the pictures in German newspapers, magazines and films (news-reels) telling of the Nazi revolution. These pictures creating 'wonderful' images could be reckoned at a glance without any serious intellectual effort, and they excited the senses better than so many words. Nuremberg spectacle was the climax of this pictorial display as it was laid out in extraordinarily grand manner.

As Paavolainen in the beginning of his narrative observes, it was ultimately the de-eroticized male body that was the visual object in focus of communication. Realizing that the body and habitus of Hitler himself may have not been attractive to women as such, it naturally stood aloof from any sexual evaluation for him.⁷ Nevertheless, it was not Hitler's *body* as such that stood in the limelight because it communicated an altogether different

⁶ Leading Finnish political scientists denounced both Fascism and National Socialism as "despotism" (in Finnish: *mielivalta*), and especially Hitler's Germany had jettisoned the ideals and practices of a *Rechtsstaat*. See: Ruutu, Yrjö, Nykyajan diktatuurijärjestelmät. In: *Historian diktaattorityyppejä*. Historian Aitta VII. Gummerus, Jyväskylä - Helsinki, 1937, 74-76.

⁷ It may be added that most of the foreign observers who discussed with Hitler had great difficulties in bearing his attitude and posture for a longer time. So inhuman he appeared to be.

message, that of an ascetic Leader, about the special role of whom we have more to say later. The *ideal* body present at the Congress was the one of a young male, described and classified as 'racially'

(*Nordische Rasse*⁸) pure and superior to any other human 'race', incarnated in the healthy and fit German soldier or the half-naked worker in the *Arbeitsdienst*. Nazis apparently freed the male⁹ body from bourgeois privacy to become the public object of cult, making it a modern, heathen idol. It was not only an object of hope, experiment and belief for the future but it was given such rights and tasks of which it could not have earlier dreamt of. But all these hordes of male bodies belonged collectively to the state and were to serve its purposes in work and ultimately in war. They were meant to be heroes – cultic figures also in a classical sense – but remain puritan, corporeal, asking no questions. As Paavolainen recounted, altogether half a million of them had been commanded to appear in the Congress. With another half a million spectators, it was the largest political 'show' on earth so far. Everything in Germany pointed to it: at every railway station on his journey to the venue, Paavolainen saw the same poster: "*Ein Reich – ein Volk – ein Führer*"¹⁰. On the train he saw how SA-men played like school-children, ate sandwiches, polished their belts, played the

⁸ Paavolainen (1936) 2003, 86. In one of his earlier works Paavolainen had greatly admired how the Germans in the reconstruction after the defeat in the Great War had started to build also the bodies of their young (*Körperkultur*). See: Paavolainen, Olavi, *Nykyaikaa etsimässä* (1929). Otava, Keuruu, 1990, esp. 443.

⁹ It must be noted that one of the reasons why Paavolainen detested Nazi regime was its degrading treatment of women. See for details: Paavolainen (1936) 2003, 329-346. Cf. Kurjensaari 1975, 172-173. The other one was its blatant racism. Let it suffice here to recall how during his visit to Rome in 1937 Paavolainen was amazed by the despair with which the Pope called modern science to combat the Nazi 'racial' doctrines. See for this: Paavolainen, Olavi, *Risti ja hakaristi* (1937). Gummerus, Jyväskylä, 2005, 204-207.

¹⁰ Paavolainen (1936) 2003, 158.

harmonica and lute, and practiced new songs. And he recorded how one enthralled little boy watched these men mouth open and picked up the tune: “[...] *und Morgen die ganze Welt*”. On the arrival, the *Führer-Wetter*, lovely sunshine, set in as if Heaven itself had blessed the spectacle.¹¹ The conditions to communicate a collective message to the organized and disciplined *Massenmensch* were perfect.

As an honorary guest of the German Literary Society Paavolainen could watch at close range the opening speech of Alfred Rosenberg, whom he described as “a man with helpless and cynically benevolent smile hardened in an instant into a thin, malicious line of mouth showing what immense ambition fed by inferiority complex and perseverance [was] hidden in this former teacher of drawing from Tallinn”.¹² Hitler deserved a more positive summary: he is “[only] personally genius, he glows of prophecy and enormous will-power” hiding his otherwise “comical appearance” before he started to speak. Paavolainen emphasized that Hitler, who always spoke to tens of thousands, must be *seen* giving a speech since the radio transmitted his voice too loud which was highly disturbing and misleading.¹³ Hitler’s act of speech was simply phenomenal. Paavolainen did not want to polemize against his style of communication since its weaknesses – as Paavolainen had it: “...total ignorance of the nature of artistic creative work” – were too obvious and because the conclusion of all speeches in Nuremberg was the same: the war between National Socialism and Bolshevism was to be “greatest war of religion in history”.¹⁴ It could be seen and sensed that the greatest turning-point of European history was inevitably at hand, and there was no arguing against that.

¹¹ Ibid., 159.

¹² Ibid., 167.

¹³ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴ Ibid., 183, 188.

Paavolainen rather moved on to describing the Luitpold-Halle, the Congress Center, built to serve the 'God of Today' - the incarnation of modern Messianism - and to epitomize the momentary excitement and ecstasy prevailing in it. Its "tragic beauty" and "the loftiness of the *morituri*" - SA- and SS-men everywhere - told that the culture of National Socialism set out to a crusade of swastika, without knowing whether it would prevail or be utterly defeated.¹⁵ This was the essence of Nazi communication to Paavolainen: to create expectations of something really great to happen, not yet of achievement or fulfillment. The paradox for Paavolainen was: this ambiguity - to believe or not to believe - did not seem to awaken any doubts in anyone at the scene: the meaning of the cult was to augur the launching of the 'final solution' awaited for so long. Facing such a spectacle of power, could there remain any reasons to be suspicious?

Paavolainen was to remember all his life the sight of the prelude to Joseph Goebbels's speech in the Hall: hundreds of stiff SA-standards were carried in and placed behind the pulpit while military music was played. Before the speech-act a piece of C.M. Weber was sounded. Paavolainen was sitting dumbfounded and gazing eye to eye with the leaders of the Third Reich. There was this Goebbels, who declared that Hitler is "the best European"¹⁶. By his looks Goebbels was a diva who loved to stand in the spot-light and lift his hand at important moments if applause from the crowd was not spontaneous. This gesture communicated tacit power in the hands of Nazis.

The climax of Nuremberg was the muster of political leaders held during the night on the field of Zeppelin. There was staged the final display of the politics of the eye. There was the modern cult site of the revived German *Urgemeinschaft* communicated in all its might. Paavolainen confessed that no description could encompass it. Notwithstanding, he tried to tell what he saw. The

¹⁵ Ibid., 197-199.

¹⁶ Ibid., 199.

lighting and atmosphere in Nuremberg town in the evening was ominous: all lamps had been dimmed and the streets leading out to the field were bordered by SS-men in black uniforms as if they were in mourning communicating the seriousness and holiness of the occasion. Towards the main scene, gigantic black flags waved and large, hot red swastika clothes were ghostly hanging from the tribune. The field ahead was "terribly" alive, and only very slowly the 'eye' (Paavolainen) began to comprehend the expanse of the masses of men in straight lines. Their number was almost five times the size of the entire Finnish army¹⁷. The ensuing magic play, technically insuperable in the world at the time, was actually staged for them, the core of Hitler's most loyal soldier-bodies. Invisible spot-lights in between the spectators' balconies were lit, and 114 lamps shed flaming red light against the black sky. In front of the balconies, 250 meters away there was a stand on which the *Führer* suddenly, like a bolt from Heaven, appeared. This was a modern paragon of communication as revelation. Hitler was hailed, and as he took his first steps down, the whole field was surrounded by a "temple" formed of blue glaring columns of light issuing from 155 enormous spot-lights provided by the *Wehrmacht*. Colored by blue glass walls the parallel beams shot up to the cloudless, black sky reaching the stratosphere. To the eye of Paavolainen this sight was staggering.¹⁸ It communicated something superb and other-worldly while its immense power could be *seen* and felt. One million people stared up stunned and miraculously silent, their eyes nailed on the middle of the sky where the biggest semi-classical-style dome ever seen arched. Viewed as a whole, the united beams formed a formidable pagan temple, the dome of which could be seen as far as 250 kms away in Czechoslovakia. After a while the audience burst into ecstatic, childish joy. The message had gone through: the audience's "primitive", ritual senses were excited by the enormous visual

¹⁷ Ibid., 222.

¹⁸ Ibid., picture at page 225.

effect. In the meantime, Hitler, now eventually transformed into an idol, had reached the honorary tribune, and a fantastic tribute was staged for him, a march of 25.000 flags.¹⁹ Eight red and silver flows of SS-men men cut the standing lines of soldiers on the field. The eye of Paavolainen was unable to follow the entire movement as it was transforming into "a barbaric dream, a pagan nightmare" in his head. One well-informed guest standing behind him whispered in his ear: "This reminds me of Assyria and Babylon"²⁰. Paavolainen's ability to take more was undermined and his head was full of 'wild impressions' while Dr Robert Ley, the choreographer of the cult ceremony, announced: "You - Hitler - Hitler - Hitler - we hail, and believe in God who has sent You to us". And Hitler answered biblically: "I am with you and you are with me". The crux of the communication of politics of the eye followed: "All of you cannot see me, but I can see you and you know me! Now we are one"²¹. The warlord of the *Volksgemeinschaft* had landed. It was the apotheosis of a human god and the birth of the first originally European 'religion' was announced. Hitler's cult act sealed the German nation's belief in him, and the last, portentous scene enhanced the message: by a curious chance a bright star shone through a hole in the sky opposite Hitler's stand. Was it the planet Mars? The last impression Paavolainen caught was the excitement of the crowds which almost frightened him as he left the scene in a throng. Taking a look back he saw the "blood-red" flags reflected on the mirror of a river like "flames of a distant apocalypse"²².

Musing over what he had seen, Paavolainen remembered the tragic fate of ancient Sparta. The breakthrough of the Nazi masculine cult was bound to lead to disaster, terrible destruction. In the Nazis' image of the decadent Europe, there loomed the Jews,

¹⁹ Ibid., picture at page 253.

²⁰ Ibid., 224.

²¹ Ibid., 226.

²² Ibid., 227.

the Communists, the *corpulente Bierphilister* and other degenerates, all destined to death²³. The “educated”, dynamic youth (*Hitler Jugend*) were geared to wipe them away. And the older generation watched their swift manoeuvres with embarrassment and shy benevolence: “This child-youth [15 years of age] was full of self-confidence and self-esteem” bordering to arrogance. They behaved like “small, brown goblin Lords” flirting like adult soldiers with girls who offered flowers, but if commanded, they would in a second return to discipline. The sight of 45,000 such boys, many of them overstrained, behind the gates was repulsive to Paavolainen.²⁴ There was no idyll in it. It was very different with the SA and SS-men. They had lived through the rise of National Socialism: its victory was to be theirs, too. Now they seemed to be anxiously waiting for the decisive order. Further cultic acts were unnecessary for them; they knew what was waiting for them and they were mentally prepared. This expectation was so powerfully communicated at Nuremberg that it frightened most of the spectators as much as it enchanted them. For Paavolainen it was an ambivalent experience: the admiration for the Nazi achievement he had initially cherished was in the end transformed into sharp critical insights telling of the imminent dangers hidden in the regime’s show of power. Politics of spectacle of the Nazis was meant to assure that they knew what they were doing. But for Paavolainen it was too much to swallow.

No wonder Nazis did not like Paavolainen’s rhapsody and consequently he was never again allowed to enter the Third Reich. He had unveiled the mask of power by his penetrating gaze - exposed something which was not the normal politics of double

²³ Ibid., 245. Paavolainen would not directly comment on the future fate of Jews since he was not shown any concentration camps but it transpires from his rhapsody that he realized that they were to be exterminated, and not only by the Nazis.

²⁴ Ibid., 353.

hypocrisy²⁵ but grand seriousness bordering to satanic megalomania, i.e. preaching war for war's sake. For those who felt betrayed by the Versailles Peace treaties, e.g. the Hungarian revisionists or the dreamers of 'Greater Finland' in Finland, the Nazi message sounded promising but for those, e.g. the radical Left, who were horrified by it, it forebode yet another European catastrophe. To Paavolainen personally, the war came to his front door in three years time.

²⁵ Cf. Runciman, David, *Political Hypocrisy. The Mask of Power from Hobbes to Orwell and Beyond*. Princeton University Press, Princeton - Oxford, 2008, 21.

Veera Rautavuoma

**CULTIC PROJECTIONS OF THE SOCIALIST
HUNGARY: SOLEMNITY, HUMOR AND
IRONY IN THE LIBERATION EXHIBITIONS¹**

Cultic heritage narratives of the 'liberation'

This article deals with the interrelations of solemnity, seriousness, humor and irony in museum exhibitions, drawing on the case of the so-called 'liberation exhibitions' of socialist Hungary. I shall pose the question: Is the collective commemoration that takes place within the museum bound to be serious, and if so, what does this seriousness reveal as regards the institutional forms of remembering? I believe this question is especially interesting in the case of the 'liberation exhibitions' which were borne within a specific ideological framework with an attempt at exercising strict control over the meanings put forth in the exhibitions. Due to their controlled nature and cultural political mission of the Party, I regard the exhibitions as 'cultic projections' of the Hungarian society (1945–1985). First, I shall analyze the serious vs. playful nature of the exhibitions. With serious, I mean the attempt to control the meanings and taking oneself seriously – ('oneself' here referring to the representations of the socialist regime and the Hungarian society). Secondly, I shall reflect upon the possibilities of the realization of humor and irony within the context of the

¹ This paper is part of a broader study which analyses the changing historical representations created and upheld by the liberation exhibitions and which aims at explicating the role of the liberation exhibitions in the museological debates on the representation of recent history. The present article uses elements of a paper given in 'Cult and Memory' conference held in Debrecen, Hungary, in November, 2006.

museum exhibition. Finally, I shall suggest that the notions of cult and heritage are closely related and manifest similar mechanisms of selection and legitimization.

The term 'liberation exhibition'² refers to the festivities organized around the fourth of April, which took place in order to commemorate the "liberation" of Hungary by the Soviet troops from the Fascist-German occupation in 1945. As also reflected in the exhibitions, the "liberation" of 1945 served as a landmark event, the birth of the socialist Hungary, including a new chronology (as indicated by the anniversaries in the titles of the exhibitions). Further, the "liberation" of Hungary in 1945 was held as a dogma until the change of the regime around the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s.³ From the viewpoint of historical representation, the liberation exhibitions are interesting reflections of the official interpretations of history, though at the same time they manifest certain ideological tensions, which this article at least partially aims at explicating.

It would go beyond the scope of this article to go back to the cultic roots of the museum, the *museion* of Antiquity⁴, or to ponder over the function of culturally meaningful artefacts as 'relics' or the

² The analysis focuses on the central exhibitions organized every five years in various museums in Budapest: "Magyarország a szocializmus útján. 1945-1960" ("Hungary on the Road to Socialism. 1945-1960", Modern Historical Museum 1960), "A népi demokráciánk húsz esztendeje" ("The 20 years of our People's Democracy", National Museum 1965), "25 éves a szabad Magyarország" ("The Free Hungary is 25 years old", Museum of Fine Arts 1970), "Budapest felszabadítása és 30 éves fejlődése" ("The Liberation and the 30 years of development in the life of Budapest, Budapest History Museum 1975), "Művészet és társadalom 1945-1980" ("Art and Society 1945-1980", Műcsarnok 1980), "Utunk, életünk. Életmódbéli változások Magyarországon 1944-1985" ("Our Road, our Life. Life-style changes in Hungary 1944-1985", Museum of Ethnography 1985).

³ Ungváry, Krisztián, "Magyarország szovjetizálásának kérdései". In: Romsics, Ignác, (Ed.), *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi magyar történelemről*. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2002, 279-308. Also worth looking into is Ungváry's witty analysis of the notion of "liberation" including its over- and undertones (within the same article).

⁴ For an historical overview of museum, see Hooper-Greenhill, Eilean, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*. Routledge, London, 1992.

'resonance and wonder' that (cultic) objects housed in museums evoke⁵. In other words, museums – historically speaking – are impregnated with cultic meaning-making which even the 'postmodern museum' cannot escape. Suffice it to say that the museum as cultural practice feeds on this cultic dimension, and at the same time, the museum contributes to the (re)production of cults and cultic representations. In this respect, the liberation exhibitions can be approached as cultic representations of the Hungarian society. The exhibitions built around political anniversaries reflect a kind of 'cultic heritage narrative' constructed according to the official ideology of the era. Further, the collective celebration of anniversaries can be seen as ritual enacting of memory, which again bears close resemblance to cult-related practices. Viewing from a slightly different angle, the commemorative practises manifested in the exhibitions can be seen as ritual consumption of culturally meaningful artefacts, projected in a heritage-space which at least in part feeds on myths, legends and (deliberate) misconceptions of the past. This is not to say that cults would merely be a blend of the aforementioned elements, but, moreover, a symbolic source a given culture springs from. Therefore, if not cults *per se*, this article aims at exploring historical representations of the Hungarian society in a cult-related context, which draws on "compulsive anniversaryism"⁶ and repetitive use of cultural texts.

It is not by coincidence that the historical representations of the exhibitions are approached as 'cultic heritage narrative'. In his three-fold definition of cult, Péter Dávidházi distinguishes cult in

⁵ On the notions of resonance and wonder in relation to objects, see Greenblatt, Stephen J., *Learning to Curse. Essays on Early Modern Culture*. Routledge, New York, 1990.

⁶ The notion of 'anniversaryism' derives from Peter Fowler, which he elaborates in the following manner: "We celebrate ourselves, organizations, our places, our heroes, sometimes our authentic, significant history; we even celebrate celebrations and commemorate disasters. That deemed worthy of official national celebration comes from a very filtered sort of history." See Fowler, Peter J., *The Past in Contemporary Society. Then, now*. Routledge, London, 1992, 40.

terms of attitudes, ritual and language use.⁷ It would be bold to go as far as to claim that the phenomenon of the liberation exhibitions would be equal to a cult but it certainly manifests cultic aspects.⁸ Measuring against Dávidházi's definition, the ritual and behavioral aspect gains emphasis in the case of the exhibitions through the relic worship and jubilees (which the commemoration of anniversary is *par excellence*). Considering the aspect of language use of the exhibitions, leaving aside religious metaphors, what is evident are "statements with no claim to (empirical) verifiability".⁹ This bears curious resemblance to the tensions around the notion of 'heritage', which is prone to be uncritical and celebratory. Kevin Walsh¹⁰ claims that all nations and societies aim to produce a collective memory which is "founded on an idea of age-old organic traditions": "This tradition demands that history is placed in a past-pluperfect, and is therefore beyond question". This idea of "past beyond question" is related to Dávidházi's unquestionable value manifested in the core of cult, but at the same time, it bears resemblance to the notion of *doxa* in the Bourdieuan sense of the word as the experience by which "the natural and social world appears as self-evident", denoting thus what is taken for granted in any particular society.¹¹ Along this line of thought, "[Museums] are places for telling, and telling again, the stories of our time, ones

⁷ Dávidházi, Péter, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare. Literary Reception in Anthropological Perspective*. Plagrave, New York, 2002, 8.

⁸ In a similar fashion, Gyáni does *not* discuss the issues of commemorative memory and historical legitimatization under the subheading of 'Cultic Past' (*Kultikus múlt*) but as filed under "The collective memory of the past" (*A múlt kollektív emlékezete*), even though his considerations on commemorative practices and political holidays certainly are in approximation to the cultic dimension, not least through his explication of 'the rites of commemorative canon' (*emlékezeti kánon rítusai*). See Gyáni, Gábor, "Kommemoratív emlékezet és történelmi igazolás", *Relatív történelem*. Typotex, Budapest, 2007, 89-110.

⁹ Dávidházi, *The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare*, 8.

¹⁰ Walsh, Kevin, *The Representation of the Past. Museums and Heritage in the Post-modern World*. Routledge, London, 1992, 126-7.

¹¹ Bourdieu, Pierre, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Transl. R. Nice. C.U.P. 1977 [1972], 164.

which have become a doxa through their endless repetition. If the meaning of a museum artefact seems to go without saying, this is only because it has been said so many times."¹² Thus, from "past beyond question" and "compulsive anniversaryism" we do not need to take a giant leap to arrive at Gábor Gyáni's¹³ notion of "tradition-cult", with which he means the legitimization of political and cultural pursuits with a reference to the maintenance of traditions. Paradoxically, this results in active (re-)creation of tradition, manifested also by the appearance of new celebrations in the calendar of the Socialist Hungary.

Irony and humor – killers of solemn commemoration?

The collective, institutional commemoration may be characterized as solemn and serious. Exhibitions serve both the collective memory and the very act of commemoration. The liberation exhibitions were often referred to as jubilee exhibitions or memorial exhibitions (*jubileum kiállítás, emlékkiállítás*), of which the former highlights the ceremonial and celebratory nature of the exhibition, the latter its commemorating function. The festivities to commemorate the milestone of the liberation were to be "worthy of the festive occasion" (*méltó az ünnephez*), as echoed in the opening speeches, exhibition plans and the guestbook entries.¹⁴ Jubilee exhibitions, besides their role of providing the counterpart for the every-day and the mundane, underline the present moment: we are *here*, it is *now* that we remember. In addition, the highlighted present serves the symbolic act of returning to the point of departure, and while traversing again the road taken (cf. "Our road", "on the road" in the titles of the exhibitions), evaluating the achievements in the light of the present and the future.

¹² Bennet, Tony, *The Birth of the Museum. History, Theory, Politics*. Routledge, London and New York, 1995, 147.

¹³ Gyáni, Gábor, "A hagyomány mint politikai kultusz", 2000, (1992, 7.), 3-6.

¹⁴ On the ceremonial readings of the exhibitions, see Rautavuoma, Veera, "The Imagined Communities of a Guestbook", In. *Cult, Community, Identity*. Publication Series of the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture 97. University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, 2009, 209-218.

If commemorations are bound to take solemn and serious forms, where does humor or irony fit in? An even more complex issue is to try to find the loci of humor and irony in the exhibitions that now exist only through their textual remains. Above, "serious" was defined as discourse which takes itself seriously and attempts to control its meanings. Along these lines, humor can be defined as a form of non-serious discourse¹⁵ which to some extent is related to irony whose "meaning is always other than and more than the said".¹⁶ Humorous is often identical with witty, which often provides for solidarity but which at the same time can be exclusive and ridiculing - this is to say dangerous, both in social and ideological terms. Irony may be even more dangerous, in the sense that it often bears trans-ideological functions towards or against something or someone. What is more, irony in its self-reflexive and self-critical mode may challenge the discursive hierarchies¹⁷ which are all the more essential in view of strongly controlled ideological constructions. Neither humor nor irony can be separated from its discursive context, without which the meanings are very difficult, if not impossible to interpret.¹⁸ Further, both discursive phenomena may be approached from the viewpoint that - despite the fact that their meanings cannot be interpreted "as such" - they nevertheless reveal a great deal about the values and the possible ways of interpreting their social realities. Humor and irony can have similar effects, based as they are upon the incongruity between the usual and the unexpected, the said and the unsaid.¹⁹ In ideological terms, humor and irony can manifest critical positions and function as a tool to oppose the dominant discourse.

Another question, however, is where exactly the humor or irony can be found - especially afterwards - in the multidimensional

¹⁵ Mulkey, Michael, *On Humour. Its nature and place in modern society*. Cambridge, 1988, 22-38.

¹⁶ Hutcheon, Linda, *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*. Routledge, London & New York, 1994, 12-13.

¹⁷ Siegle, Robert, *The Politics of Reflexivity: Narrative and the Constitutive Poetics of Culture*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1986, 390.

¹⁸ Mulkey, *On Humour*, 57-92.

¹⁹ Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 62.

narrative of the exhibition.²⁰ This question is difficult to pin down for three reasons. First of all, humor and irony entails two actors: they are created in a specific discourse between the writer's intention and the individual readings of a certain text. In this sense, the only mode of finding out about the possible (implicit) ironizing intentions of the exhibition curators is through their own accounts (e.g. Péter Szuhay's account on a liberation exhibition in The Museum of Ethnography²¹). Equally scarce information is available concerning the visitors' interpretations of these exhibitions.²² The second problem has to do with the fragmentary character of the research material. Since the exhibition scripts contain only one level of the multilayered exhibition narrative which consists of visual elements and use of space, the entire exhibition narratives are no longer available for inspection. The third problem is connected to the time lapse between the exhibition and its interpretation in the present. It is worthwhile to ponder over the question: Do discourses born in a certain ideological and historical context inevitably become ironic as they are interpreted in the present, when the control of the previous regime no longer has a hold over the meanings?²³ This question is especially relevant in the case of totalitarian regimes, with regard to the symbolic order they

²⁰ On the challenges of reading museum exhibitions, see MacDonald, Sharon and Fyfe, Gordon (Eds.), *Theorizing Museums. Representing identity and diversity in a changing world*. Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, 1996, 1-14.

²¹ Szuhay, Péter, "Hagyományok és újítások a Néprajzi Múzeum kiállítási törekvéseiben 1980-2000". *Néprajzi Értesítő* 2002. Annales Musei Ethnographiae. Néprajzi Múzeum, Budapest, 2003, 77-96.

²² On the use of guest books as research material, see Rautavuoma, Veera, "The Imagined Communities of a Guestbook", In. *Cult, Community, Identity*. Publication Series of the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture 97. University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, 2009, 209-218.

²³ Also Gyáni takes up the question of irony in relation to the study of cults in his overview of the history the Hungarian study of cults which sprang among literary historians in their attempt to pin down the phenomena and processes in the history of literature that - strictly speaking - extend the scope of history of literature 'proper'. In part, this resulted in literary historians exchanging the dominant solemn academic tones with ironic tones. See, Gyáni, *Relatív történelem*, 21-36.

maintain. After the collapse of the socialist regime, it is difficult *not* to put such terms as “liberation” or “counterrevolution” into quotation marks, but by so doing, we not only refer to the language use of the former regime but also bring in an element of irony.²⁴

Staging the tragedies and comedies of history

The “liberation” of 1945 was inevitably one of the most important dates in the political calendar under the Hungarian socialism.²⁵ The exhibitions were first and foremost *jubilee* exhibitions, with the air of celebration encoded in their messages. According to the script, the aim of the exhibition curators in 1960 was to conclude the exhibition “with festive atmosphere”²⁶ (Figure 1),



Figure 1: AD-I-1691-80. Socialist perspectives in Budapest, Hungary and worldwide: the “festive atmosphere” of the 1960 exhibition.

²⁴ Hutcheon remarks that quotation marks can be used for the purpose of “framing with irony”. See Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 145.

²⁵ On communist political holidays, see Szabó Ildikó, *A pártállam gyermekei. Tanulmányok a magyar politikai szocializációról*. Új Mandátum Könyvkiadó, Budapest., 2000, 104-109; Gyáni, *Relatív történelem*, 96-97.

²⁶ The historical archive of the National Museum of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum Történeti Adattára, AD) AD-I-194-75/1

while in 1970, the aim was to create a “realistic, uplifting and inspiring effect”.²⁷ What was this festivity and ceremonial nature made of? Typically, descriptions of the losses of the Second World War, the admiration of the strenuous reconstruction and a look into the future perspectives, mostly with citations from major politicians or congresses of the Communist Party. However, while skimming through the exhibitions, it becomes evident that the ceremonious character was over the years modified in terms of style and content, so that the exhibitions gained a lighter and far less grave tone. The exhibition of 1970 had an epilogue-like caricature exhibition entitled “This is how we live”. According to the exhibition plan, the main idea behind this closing part of the exhibition was to give insights into the way the events of ever-day



Figure 2: AD-I-1690-80. Caricature exhibition for “relaxed and cheerful spirits”. “This is how we live” as an epilogue to the exhibition proper in 1970.

life are rooted in the history of the recent twenty-five years, along with the problems that have been faced, are being faced at the

²⁷ AD-I-367-75

moment and will have to be faced in the future.²⁸ At the same time, the caricature exhibition had been created in order to make sure the museum visitor leaves the museum in relaxed and cheerful spirits.²⁹ This can be interpreted as an attempt to “brush the museum visitor in” to the ideological message of the exhibition with the help of the relatively safe and politically correct humor of the caricature exhibition. Consequently, the humor applied in the exhibition was separated from the grave, ceremonious part of the exhibition (Figure 2), though there were counter-arguments against the inclusion of the caricatures in the exhibition, partly because the caricatures could endanger the seriousness of the exhibition as a whole.

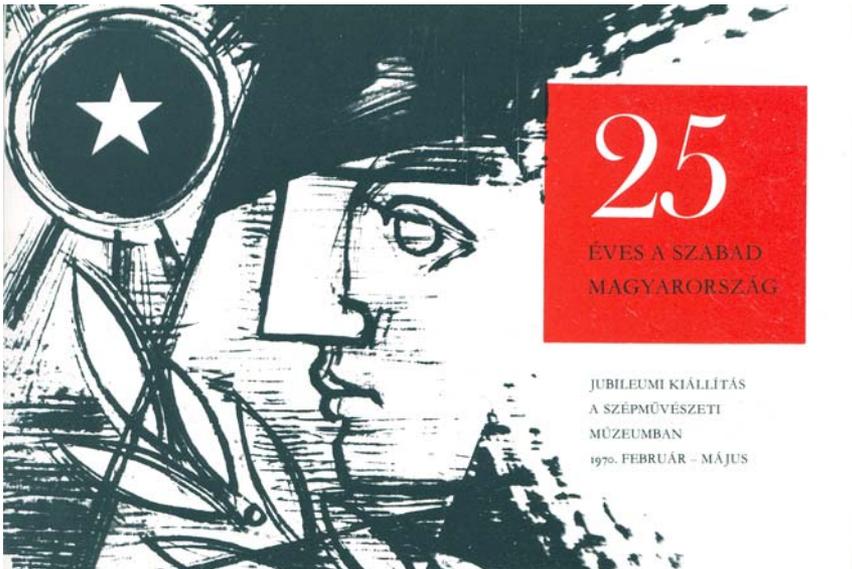
A different kind of modification of the solemn tones appears in the exhibition invitation of the liberation exhibition of 1970. The back-cover of the first version presents the Liberation Memorial³⁰ on top of the Gellert Hill. In the final version, however, this gloomy image has been replaced with the reproduction of Arnold Gross’s copper engraving entitled “The City of Blue Dreams” (*Kék álmok városa*). The message is clear: let us celebrate the liberation rather with dream-like images than in the shadow of the Soviet soldier’s machine-gun (Figures 3-6). Similar changes of tone seem to appear together with the more overt discussion on the role of humor in the exhibitions. In the memos of the exhibition of 1985, the absence of humor is criticized, along with the grave tones of the quotations from the congresses of the Socialist Party.³¹

²⁸ AD-I-387-75

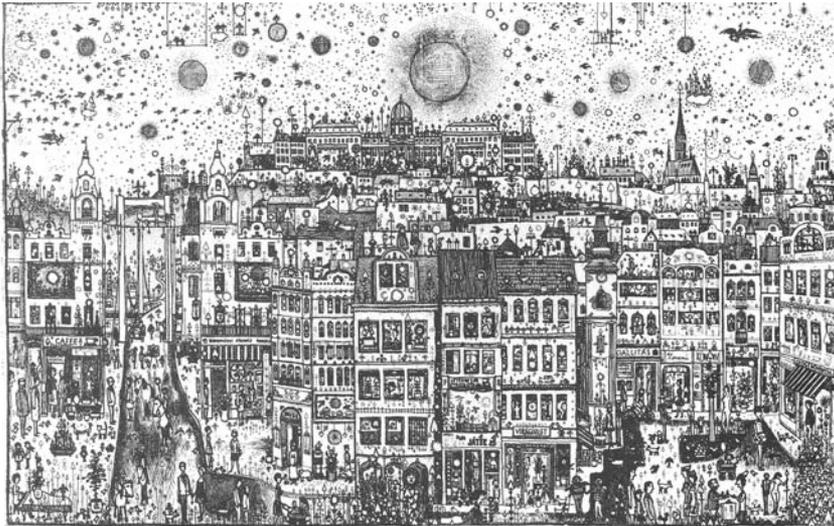
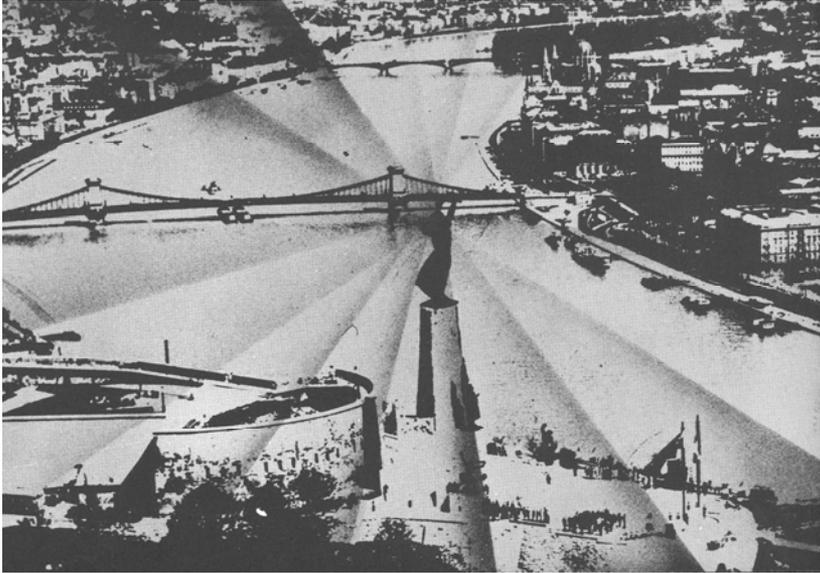
²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The memorial, designed by Zsigmond Kisfaludy Strobl in 1947, consists of a female figure holding a palm leaf above her head, a Soviet soldier and male figures killing a dragon. The memorial is still in its place, though several elements have been removed, including the memorial plate that spoke out the gratitude of the Hungarian nation to the liberators. The figure of the Soviet soldier is now in the Statue Park on the outskirts of Budapest, designed to house “the gigantic memorials from the communist dictatorship”, as is stated on the homepage of the Statue Park (<http://www.szoborpark.hu>).

³¹ The ethnographic archive of the Hungarian Museum of Ethnography (Néprajzi Múzeum Ethnológiai Adattár, EAD) EAD 17/1985



Figures 3.-4: AD-I.367-75 1. and 2. version of the exhibition invitation in 1970.



Figures 5.-6: AD-I.367-75. Blue dreams instead of the memory of the Soviet soldier: 1. and 2. version of the back-cover of the invitation.

There seems to be an interesting parallel between the historical representations and the display politics³² of the exhibition. According to current exhibition criticism, the excessive reduction of “historical facts” led into “anaemic” exhibitions.³³ As a result, the national history was narrowed down to the history of the Party.³⁴ While the mode of display of political history is “separate from life”³⁵ and the focus of the entire exhibition is on political history, it seems that the mode of display is rather grave and ceremonious, which leaves little space for emotions. Paradoxically, the aim was to achieve a ceremonious and festive effect, but on the level of the museum display this goal was not achieved. The same issue was brought up in a criticism by Károly Vörös³⁶ five years later, with a reference to the absence of conflicts and paradoxes³⁷ in the exhibition of 1970, though these are the elements a Marxist exhibition should draw on. Marxist political history, impregnated with an optimistic future-orientation, was set out to record and highlight the achievements on the road to the Paradise of Socialism.³⁸ Along these lines, the creation of binary oppositions between the sad past, the promising present and the glorious

³² Here, display politics is understood as the multiple consequences of displaying culturally significant artifacts, thus rendering them to the ‘museum gaze’, which in itself is a cultural artifact. For further discussion on the politics of display, see e.g. Karp & Lavin (Eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Smithsonian Institution Press: Washington DC and London, 1991.

³³ Gerelyes, Ede, “A felszabadulási kiállítások tanulságai”. *Legújabbkori Múzeumi Közlemények*, 1965:2-3. 12.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

³⁶ Historian, influential figure within Hungarian museology, who worked e.g. in the Budapest Museum of History, later in the Ministry of Education and the Historical Institute of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

³⁷ Vörös, Károly, “Jegyzetek a ‘25 éves a szabad Magyarország’ című kiállítás megtekintése után”. *Magyar Munkásmozgalmi Múzeumi Közlemények* 1970:1, 83-84.

³⁸ See Halmesvirta, Anssi, “Suomen historian roistot ja sankarit unkarilaisille tarjoiltuna”. In: Ahonen, Kalevi et al (Eds.), *Toivon historia*. Gummerus, University of Jyväskylä, 2003, 210.

future was a widely-accepted tool for promoting ideological and cultural political goals. As Sallay Ditróiné points out: "From a cultural political viewpoint, it is good to keep in mind the past, since by contrasting the new and the old system we can prove our progress".³⁹

An even greater problem according to Vörös is the omission of tragedy – and here Vörös means the personality cult of Mátyás Rákosi⁴⁰ that took place around the turn of 1940s and 1950s, which Vörös calls "the most tragic element of the time". Because of this omission, claims Vörös, the museum visitors are not able to experience the pathos embedded in the tragic events. If there is no tragedy, the "healthy forces" working behind the tragedy are left unnoticed. However, in Vörös's view, tragedy is not complete without comedy. What is more, Vörös calls for humor organically built into the exhibition; the caricature exhibition in the closing part of the exhibition is in itself insufficient. This is to say that according to his line of thought, the over-all image of the era is incomplete without both tragedy and comedy. Interestingly enough, Vörös calls for the kind of narration and plot-structure of Hungarian recent history that echoes the metahistorical elements of historiography that Hayden White criticizes. As White points out in his much-debated and polemical study, "to historicize any structure, to write its history, is to mythologize it".⁴¹ Even if we did not agree with White's extreme conceptions on the interrelatedness of fiction and historiography, we may for the moment turn into his famous categorization of nineteenth century history. White has identified features in the nineteenth century writing of history that remind of elements in fictive texts. He claims that historiography in the nineteenth century is a plotted spiral beginning and ending with irony, and in between there is romance, tragedy and comedy,

³⁹ See e.g. Ditróiné Sallay, Katalin, "Művelődéspolitikai és a múzeumok", *Déri Múzeum Évkönyve* 1972, Debrecen, 1972. 621.

⁴⁰ Cf. Apor's article in this volume and his "A Rákosi-kultusz" in *Rubicon*, 2007/9, passim.

⁴¹ White, Hayden, *Tropics of Discourse. Essays on Cultural Criticism*. The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1978 [1985], 104.

in this order.⁴² Although somewhat far-fetched, the parallels between White's categories and the elements that Vörös judged as missing from the exhibition may with further investigation prove telling. Whereas White's spiral begins and ends with irony, there is no mention of irony in Vörös's account. If we consider irony as being related to the notion of the "inadequacy of language to its full presentation of its object"⁴³, there are no doubts whatsoever in Vörös's criticism that would hint at any uncertainties as regards the possibilities of "truthful" representation. This is hardly surprising, since Marxist political history and historical materialism were prone to leave aside the considerations of the limits of representation.

Another 'tragic element', the dramatic power of which the exhibition had left unnoticed, were the tragic events of 1956, and – naturally – this has not been discussed in the memos, articles or exhibition criticism. However, this (dogmatic) omission is taken up in one guestbook entry of the 1970 exhibition. The entire entry is as follows: "1945 – 1970/1956 [signature]"⁴⁴ It is obvious that the benefits of the contrast and comparison of some 'gloomy past' and victorious present may be applied only if these tragic elements fall out of the historical era (1944/1945 – present) that is being celebrated in the exhibition.

Currently, what cultural critics and new historicists have emphasised is the "fact" that "Both history and fiction are discourses that constitute systems of signification by which we make sense of the past".⁴⁵ This "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" is what Hutcheon calls 'historiographic metafiction'.⁴⁶ Thus, to call for such metahistorical or metafictional elements in a museum exhibition is – in addition to highlighting certain elements of recent past – in fact a demand

⁴² White, Hayden, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1973, 8-10.

⁴³ White, *Tropics of Discourse*, 207.

⁴⁴ AD-I-133-75 A "25 éves a szabad Magyarország" vendégkönyve I-II.

⁴⁵ Hutcheon, Linda, *A Poetics of Postmodernism. History, Theory, Fiction*. Routledge, London, 1988, 89.

⁴⁶ Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 5.

to mythologize the past to some extent for the purpose of attaining a powerful representation in the heritage space.

To risk oversimplification, a more or less linear process can be traced in the liberation exhibitions over the years 1960-1985. The overtly controlled, ceremoniously grave political-history-driven representations evolve into wider displays, which combine societal representation and elements of every-day living, occasionally deploying lighter tones and humor. This change is reflected in the titles of the exhibitions. While in the 1960s and 1970s, titles such as "Free Hungary is 25 years old" were predominant, the working title of the exhibition of 1980 was "Generations" and the final title "Art and Society 1945-1980". The focus is clearly shifted towards the description of social processes. In a sense, this shift in focus seems inevitable: in 1980, there is much more "history" to choose from than there was in 1965, if the milepost of 1945 is the point of



Figure 7: AD-I-1727-80. The ceremonious meets the everyday on the grass-root level in 1980.

departure. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the earlier exhibitions had to constrain themselves to the political-ideological changes, since societal processes (as reflected in the material culture) are

much more gradual and rather invisible in the early years of socialism. These shifts in focus and style were not so clear-cut and



Figure 8: AD-I-1727-80. Detail of the “unaccustomed look” of the exhibition in 1980, which manifests “the power of evidence based on the parallel presence of separate collections” (Fodor 1980:43, 45).

linear, however. For instance, the exhibition of 1980 bears a great deal of inner tension, since it seems to be hovering between the

ceremonious and the mundane. On the one hand, the exhibition contained a vast number of works of art borne in the spirit of “liberation”, but on the other, there was an attempt to descend to the grass-root level (see the kindergarten-interior, Figure 7) or an attempt at creating surprising or humorous montages (Figure 8). The exhibition of 1985 follows this path, and as its sub-heading “Change of lifestyles” states, the presentation of the ideological milestones is followed by the fore-grounding of the everyday of the Hungarian society. The exhibition memos reveal that the original title would have been “the Hungarian everyday” (“*Magyar hétköznapok*”), which manifests intriguing tension in relation to the practice of celebrating the political anniversaries.

Laughing with or laughing at?

It could thus be concluded that the ceremonious character of institutional commemoration is primarily gravity. Or is it? In a heavily ideological context, which aims at control over the meanings and which turns non-ideological phenomena into ideological phenomena through its mode of presentation, gravity indeed seems to be a norm. The problem is that presenting the ideological-political changes with the help of the museum toolkit results in an inconsistent narrative, since making use of the museum apparatus in showing and telling entails using artifacts, most of which are non-ideological in their essence, to manifest ideological changes.⁴⁷ Thus, if we read the meanings as their ‘primary’ meanings in the exhibition, they easily acquire ironic tones. As Péter Szuhay⁴⁸ notes in his historical overview of the exhibitions in the Museum of Ethnography, the exhibition of 1985 can be read on two different levels. According to Szuhay, “the first

⁴⁷ On the issue of exhibitability, see Michael Baxandall, “Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects”. In: Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavin (Eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington DC and London, 1991).

⁴⁸ Szuhay, “Hagyományok és újítások a Néprajzi Múzeum kiállítási törekvéseiben 1980-2000”, 77-96.

level strives for a scientific guise. It is serious and takes itself seriously"⁴⁹, i.e. holds on to the ideological expectations. The other level is "airy and playful, at times witty and prone to self-irony", and it is in this respect that Szuhay sees the novelty of the exhibition weighed against the history of exhibition-making in the Museum of Ethnography. According to Szuhay, the message of the exhibition can be summarized in the following manner: "[W]e were liberated, and survived countless setbacks such as compulsory delivery, the shared rental flat and the "counter-revolution" just to jump into our Trabants from our tiny housing estate flats and leave behind the worries of the society and escape into our weekend places. Could this be Canaan?"⁵⁰ It is safe enough to say that this message is utterly ironic. Another question is what kind of reaction the irony arouses in the museum visitor, or whether it comes through in his or her reading. As Szuhay notes, the visitor is likely to read the messages put forth in the exhibition in a serious manner, applying the aforementioned, first level of interpretation.⁵¹ In this reading, it is rather the societal development and the rising of the standard of living that shifts into the focal point of the exhibition.

The possibility of ironic reading of the exhibition is not exclusive of the exhibition discussed above. Rather, all exhibitions can be read on either of the two levels, or possibly moving between them. Irony can appear in an exhibition through the ironizing intention of the museum curator(s), or on the visitor's behalf, or them both. Moreover, ironic readings are possible even if the museum curators had no ironic intention. As objects and documents obtain their places in the multidimensional museum display, ironic montages may be created also unintentionally.⁵² The museum text can gain ironic tones, for instance, due to some perceptible contradiction of incongruity but on this basis there is

⁴⁹ Translations by the present author.

⁵⁰ Szuhay, "Hagyományok és újítások a Néprajzi Múzeum kiállítási törekvéseiben 1980-2000", 84.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² On ironic montages in museum exhibition, see Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 176-178.

not much we can say about the intentions of the curator(s). Further, the visitor can also make up ironic montages through roaming around the exhibition and thus creating links and connections originally not contained in the exhibition narrative. It is obvious, however, that in the case of the liberation exhibitions, the irony could be present on the curators' behalf only covertly with no traces of it in the exhibition scripts or opening speeches. Hence, the attribution of irony was left to the visitors.⁵³ Indeed, traces of ironic readings of the exhibitions can be found in the guestbook entries of the exhibitions. These include, for instance, references to the exhibition as an impressive 'mausoleum' (with the entry signed by 'Lenin').⁵⁴ In another entry, the undersigned congratulates the curators on creating an exhibition of such high level that it remained beyond his reach, even if he used a ladder ("*A kiállításnak olyan magas a színvonal, hogy létrával sem értem föl.*")⁵⁵. This latter remark can be read as an ironic re-reading of the typical guestbook entries that first congratulated or thanked the curators, then included appreciative remarks on the success of the exhibition, for instance, the didactically and aesthetically 'high level' it had achieved.

Considering the aim of the present article to pin down the interplay of the ceremonious, the grave, the humorous and the ironic in the liberation exhibitions, the discussion of irony may appear overrepresented. This is hardly surprising, given the fact that we are dealing with a phenomenon that heavily draws on an official ideology, or moreover, can be seen as its reflection. Through the exhibitions, the regime attempted to put forth its own truth(s), and if someone was reluctant to accept them, one possible mode of opposition was the attribution of irony. Humor is often applied to achieve a feel-good effect (as in the case of the caricature exhibition in 1970), but at the same time it can be critical (as the

⁵³ See Rautavuoma, Veera, "The Imagined Communities of a Guestbook", In. *Cult, Community, Identity*. Publication Series of the Research Centre for Contemporary Culture 97. University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, 2009, 209-218.

⁵⁴ AD-I-133-75

⁵⁵ Ibid.

same example shows, since the caricatures illustrated problems of the Hungarian society). In a similar fashion, irony can take up many guises and functions, from the oppositional, trans-ideological function to distancing and mere playfulness.⁵⁶

In the light of the exhibition scripts, drafts, memos, and current museological writings⁵⁷, it seems that in 1960 and 1965 humor is not even mentioned, whereas in the exhibition of 1975, it became a theme both in the work process of creating the display and in the exhibition proper, in the form of caricatures. In 1965, the curators are warned about the dangers of humor⁵⁸, in 1970 its absence is criticized in the exhibition criticism, in the memos, and in the audit statements (*lektori vélemény*). However, in 1980, humor is not brought up in the discussions about the exhibition, and the exhibition criticism concentrates on the new concept of the simultaneous display of historical documents and elements of visual culture in order to evoke an era.⁵⁹ Then again, the exhibition continues the projection of the society and lifestyle, which is made all the more explicit in the last exhibition in 1985. With the last exhibition, Szuhay's account hints at the curators' awareness of the ironic reading and its possible consequences on the meanings but, at the same time, we have to ask to what extent this awareness is the product of hindsight, of looking back upon the exhibition from the framework of the present.

What can then be concluded about the appearance of humor and irony in the liberation exhibition, or in more general terms, on the role of humor and irony with regard to the collective memory

⁵⁶ On the functions of irony, see Hutcheon, *Irony's Edge*, 46-56.

⁵⁷ Conference papers and exhibition criticism and other debate within the museum profession, mostly published in the yearbooks or publication series of museums or in the *Múzeumi Közlemények*, published by the ministries responsible for the museum sector.

⁵⁸ In the overview of the 20th anniversary exhibitions, Gerelyes remarks on the potential "negative effect" of humor in the exhibitions, though does not explicate on the matter. Gerelyes, "A felszabadulási kiállítások tanulságai", 11.

⁵⁹ Fodor, Péter, "Művészet és társadalom 1945-1980. Rendhagyó tárlat a Múcsarnokban". *Múzeumi Közlemények* 1980/2, 43-47.

upheld in museums? One way of approaching the question is to claim that the realization, the happening of humor or irony in a museum exhibition works as a proof for the working of the collective memory. This is to say that the operability of collective memory is due to the amount and character of mutual knowledge a society has in its possession for the humor and the irony to function. Ceremonious commemoration may contain ironic and humorous tones, and thus, on a more general level, they may have contributed to humorous or ironic representations of the recent past. Another question is, however, what effects irony or humor has on memory?

Cultic heritage: enacting the past beyond question

Museum as a memory institution is designated for creating and maintaining memory and for preserving what is worthy of preservation. In contrast, most museum exhibitions, including the liberation exhibitions, do not exactly create enduring memory. Due to their anniversary commemorative function, the exhibitions were doomed to temporariness: they were created to celebrate and commemorate one moment in time, and with the passing of the anniversary, the exhibitions were pulled down. Despite their inherent temporariness, it is still worthwhile to approach these exhibitions from the viewpoint of memory. Despite the dogmatic (or cultic) frame of the commemoration as a collective ritual, the exhibition practices do contain ingredients that hint at dynamics and multiple voices, even if they did not leave permanent imprints on the collective memory.

According to Andreas Huyssen, "No matter how much the museum, consciously or unconsciously, produces and affirms the symbolic order, there is always a surplus of meaning that exceeds set ideological boundaries, opening spaces for reflection and counter-hegemonic memory".⁶⁰ Focusing on the issues of humor and irony may reveal tensions of alternative views and multiple voices in the heritage narrative that belong to the dynamics of

⁶⁰ Huyssen, Andreas, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. Routledge, New York, 1995, 15.

institutional memory and thus carry in them the potential for change. However, the tension of memory is not the only tension present in the exhibitions and their cultic or cult-like representations. Equally essential are the questions of heritage, and the tension that the notion of heritage is inherently grounded upon: it appears as constantly moving between the poles of authenticity and fabrication. The same is true for cults: they seem to manifest the unquestionable, the (god-)given but at the same time incorporate a critical edge, an in-built awareness of their constructed character. Much of the realm of what is commonly called "heritage", the ways history is used for different purposes, draws on this kind of mythologizing of the past, and indeed, the study of cults can be seen as shedding light on these processes and practices of mythologization.

Given the account above, the "cultic revelations" in the context of the liberation exhibitions (or the museum as a site for collective memory) are rather tentative, if not hypothetical. Still, it is my belief that the interrelatedness of memory, heritage and cult would deserve further investigation. It is unlikely that the relations between cult, memory, and canonical past with its dogmatic conceptions of history can somehow be unmasked. Anyhow, such investigations shed light on the birth and upholding of past-related canons manifested in the ritual enacting of memory actualized in political anniversaries. More specifically, taking a closer look at the commemorative exhibition practices may prove revealing, owing to the enhanced presence of events projected in the heritage-space of the museum.

Zsuzsanna Varga

BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: A CULTIC PLACE OF THE HUNGARIAN AGRICULTURE - BÁBOLNA FARM

During the course of history, mankind has produced numerous cultic places. Most of them, reminding us of the glorious past and strengthening our identity belong to a religious or war experiences. A place like Bábolna, where it is the successful performance in agricultural produce that provides the foundation for a cultic place, is a true rarity. As a clear indication of this, the State Farm had been a prominent locality for VIP guests to visit – such as kings, dukes, presidents, prime ministers, ministers of agriculture, secretary-generals of socialist countries.

Even a quick look into the visitors' book of Bábolna offers us a variegated and impressive list of visitors. N.S. Khrushchev, Secretary General of Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Haile



Photo 1: Kekkonen admires Hungarian agriculture. (Published with the courtesy of the Kekkonen Archives, Orimattila, Finland.)

Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia, both in 1964, Josef Klaus, Federal Chancellor of Austria in 1967, Dr. Urho Kekkonen, President of the Republic of Finland in 1963 and 1969¹ (Photo 1), Ib Frederiksen, Minister of Agriculture of Denmark in 1972, Philip, Royal Archduke of England in 1973, P. Bratelli, Prime Minister of the Republic of Norway in 1974, Al-Atiki, Minister of Financial and Oil Affairs of Kuwait in 1975, Earl L. Butz, Minister of Agriculture, US in 1975, Josef Ertl, Minister of Agriculture of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1977, Raul Castro Ruz, General of the Revolutionary Army of Cuba, Minister of Defense in 1977, Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran in 1978, R.S. Bergland, Minister of Agriculture, US, in 1978, Ramalho Eanes, President of the Republic of Portugal in 1978, E.A. Sevardnadze, member of the Political Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in 1981, M.S. Gorbachev, Secretary of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in 1983, John Block, Minister of Agriculture, US, in 1985.

Reading this list of exquisite visitors, which is no more than a brief sample makes you wonder about the secret of Bábolna's attraction. What were the special characteristics that aroused the interest of politicians coming not only from the socialist but also the top capitalist countries?

The formation and maintaining of Bábolna as a cultic place is tied to the Kádár-regime, it actually served as a national and international legitimation for it.² It is therefore interesting to learn

¹ Kekkonen was so impressed that he announced: "If all state farms were like this, Hungary would have the most developed agriculture in the world." Kekkonen to Kádár 29th of Sept. 1969. MOL. Finn-KÜM. Finn 44-131-XIX-J/-j-Finn1. 002242-1969.37d.

² For an introduction to the history of the Kádár-era in English see: Iván T. Berend - György Ránki, *The Hungarian Economy in the Twentieth Century*. Sydney, London, 1985; Lajos Izsák, *A Political History of Hungary 1944-1990*. Eötvös University Press, Budapest, 2002; Ignác Romsics: *Hungary in the Twentieth Century*. Corvina - Osiris, Budapest, 1999; Nigel Swain: *Hungary. The Rise and Fall of Feasible Socialism*. Verso, London & New York, 1992; Rudolf L. Tóké: *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution. Economic Reform, Social Change and Political Succession, 1957-1990*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.

about the history of this peculiar 'socialist creation', including the antecedents, since the selection of the place itself was no accident.³

After a short historical introduction, the first part of this paper – based on archival records and contemporary press releases – explores the process saw the former royal stud-farm become an exemplary state farm symbolizing the success of socialist agriculture. This process can only be truly examined as part of the construction of collective identities.⁴ In order to analyse the cult-making, special attention is paid to the political, economic, organizational and personal factors. The second part of the study focuses on the 'Golden Age' of Bábolna, with special emphasis laid on its cultic presentation i.e. cultic scenario of the VIP-visits, memorial of the Bábolna's stallion and the permanent exhibition in the Bábolna-museum.

The Historical Background

At the time when Bábolna was founded in 1789, Hungary belonged to Austria, a leading country of Europe with a well-organized army. In order to ensure mobility, high level stock of horses was indispensable. Hungary had long been famous for its horsemanship as well as of its first-rate horse-breeding. This had led to the Austrian generals to recommend that Bábolna and its surroundings should be developed into a state-owned, central stud-farm for the elite units of the army of the Emperor Joseph II.⁵

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of a further aspect apart from the one of the army. The demand for well-trained

³ For a wider background to the representation, meanings and uses of space in the socialist countries of Eastern Europe, see: *Socialist Spaces. Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc*. Ed. David Crowley, Susan E. Reid. Oxford, New York, 2002.

⁴ In thinking about the issues in this paper, I have been greatly benefited from results of the multidisciplinary research project organised by the University of Jyväskylä and Hungarian Academy of Sciences ('Cult, Community, Identity'. A Comparative Study on the Construction of Cults after World War II.)

⁵ Péter Gunst & Imre Wellmann, *A 200 éves Bábolna múltjából, 1789–1945*. Bábolna, 1989, 13-14.

racehorses was booming due to a growing popularity of equestrian sport. The leaders of the stud-farm turned to Arab horse-breeding which proved so successful that horses bred in Bábolna won one prestigious horse-race after the other. By this time, Bábolna had earned the title “the Mecca of horse-breeding”.⁶

Between the two world wars, the stud-farm had grown more significant and comprehensive.⁷ Functioning under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture, it was assigned the task of advancing the growth of agricultural produce. The scope of Bábolna’s activities had, thus, been extended to plant improvement, the production of seed-grain as well as the breeding of cattle, sheep and pigs.

Following the Second World War, the Bábolna Farm had been showing a long and marked decline. This is hardly surprising if we consider that the importance of cavalry had greatly decreased during the war. To make matters worse, the bulk of the horse stock was transported to the West for security reasons in late 1944. From there it was returned in reduced numbers and in a significantly worse condition. The true problem, however, was the decisive change in agrarian policy taking place in 1948–1949.⁸ The Hungarian communist party had assumed total power and, acting on instructions coming from the Soviet Union, began with the reorganisation of agriculture. In this process, on one hand, peasant farms were collectivized, and, on the other, state-owned stud-farms were reorganised.⁹

The former royal stud-farm had been transformed into a state farm and it was expected to play an active, exemplary role in

⁶ Ibid., 16-18.

⁷ András Klenczner, “Az állami gazdaságokról”. In: *Magyarország agrártörténete*. Szerk. Orosz István et. al. Mezőgazda Kiadó, Budapest, 1996, 697-698.

⁸ For recent writings on the agrarian policies of the 1950s in English see: Sándor Szakács, “From Land Reform to Collectivization (1945-1956)”. In: *Hungarian Agrarian Society from the Emancipation of Serfs (1848) to the Reprivatization of Land (1998)*. Ed. Péter Gunst. New York, 1998, 257-298; Zsuzsanna Varga, “Agrarian development from 1945 to the present day”. In: *History of Hungarian Agriculture and Rural Life, 1848–004*. Ed. János Estók. Budapest, 2004, 221-252.

⁹ In its decree of 23rd December, 1948, the government declared the establishment of the Bábolna National State Company. *Bábolna. Tények és adatok, 1945-1989. I.* Bábolna, 1989, 3.

agricultural development. As a state-owned company it had been integrated in the system of planned economy. According new regulations, Bábolna was obliged to deliver a prescribed output including the cultivation of some forty different kinds of plants and the breeding of new species of livestock.¹⁰ The farm was compelled to switch over from the former specialization to a mixed structure. Despite its significant tradition in large-scale production in the 1950s, Bábolna's performance had been characterised by low quality produce and negative balance.¹¹

As it is generally known, the revolution in 1956 was an important turning point in Hungary's political history. It is, however, by no means part of the common knowledge that, following the revolution, the agrarian policy had seen changes and corrections unprecedented within the socialist block.¹² The Kádár-regime, rising to power with Soviet military aid, had been compelled to take these measures. They wanted to make up for a lacking political legitimation by increasing the living standards. Fulfilling the aims living-standard policy at that time (and for a long time to come) depended mainly on food supplies, on which people spent a decisive proportion of their income.¹³

¹⁰ This had also sealed the fate of traditional horse-breeding. Firstly, under the spell of mechanization, a large number of horses had been slaughtered. Secondly, Hungary, being cut off from the Western markets, experienced great difficulties selling race horses. To make matters worse, horse-racing, was labelled as a relic of an aristocratic era, and was pushed into the background. Consequently, the underrating of horse-breeding had become inevitable. At a certain point, racehorses were used as draught animals.

¹¹ István Molnár – Éva Szabóné Medgyesi, *Az állami gazdaságok Magyarországon. Mezőgazdasági Kiadó, Budapest, 1987, 55.*

¹² See more on this: Zsuzsanna Varga, "The Impact of 1956 on the Relationship between the Kádár Regime and the peasantry, 1956-1966". *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XXXIV, Nos. 1-2. 2007, 155-176.

¹³ Demand for ample nutrition appeared with elemental force in the early Kádár period because in the first half of the 1950s private consumption had been held to a very low level as it was a way of paying for the forced development of heavy industry and military production. See: Tibor Valuch, "A bőséges ínségtől az ínséges bőségig – a fogyasztás változásai Magyarországon az 1956 utáni évtizedekben". In: *Magyarország a jelenkorban. Évkönyv 2003. 1956-os Intézet, Budapest, 2003, 51-78.*

Due to a violent introduction of the inappropriate Soviet kolkhoz model in the first half of the 1950s to Hungary, agrarian gross product had decreased dramatically. The primary goal of the correction launched after 1956 was, thus, to increase agrarian produce. Even in the course of collectivisation (1959–1961) this goal had priority. The reorganisation of peasant farms to socialist large farms (agricultural cooperatives), however, had turned the former agrarian structure upside down, which led to a further decline in produce.¹⁴ Hungary had to import corn and meat. The newly established cooperatives were clearly unable to produce the amount what had been planned for them for years to come.

Under such circumstances, the party leadership decided that the state-owned farms had to play a significant role in boosting agricultural produce. Their primary task was the application of the new methods of production and their spreading to cooperatives. Lajos Fehér¹⁵, secretary of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), responsible for agricultural matters, made the plans of the government clear to co-operatives at a session of the Central Committee held on 28 March 1962: "Cooperatives shall, like locomotives, pull the entire agriculture forward."¹⁶

¹⁴ Iván Pető – Sándor Szakács, *A hazai gazdaság négy évtizedének története 1945-1985. I. (Az újjáépítés és a terovutasításos irányítás időszaka 1945-1968.)* Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1985, 461-474.

¹⁵ Lajos Fehér (1917-1981), a former student of the Calvinist boarding-school in Debrecen, earned his educational degree in History and Latin. He joined the illegal communist movement before the Second World War. After 1945, he worked as a journalist, as the manager of a state farm and the head of the Party's Agricultural Department. He had worked as Deputy Prime Minister for years. Irrespective of the position he was holding, he had always been concerned about the situation of the agriculture and rural population. Lajos Fehér and the agrarian lobby emerging in the 1960s played a significant part in the realization and acceptance of the Hungarian model of socialist agriculture.

¹⁶ Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archive, hereafter MOL). MOL M-KS-288. f. 4/47-48. ő.e. Jegyzőkönyv a Központi Bizottság üléséről, 1962. március 28-30.

Bábolna's Progress

In the beginning of the 1960s, state farms were destined primarily for the production of cheap animal products. Statistics from the West had shown, for instance, that after the Second World War the production of poultry and eggs developed at a surprisingly quick rate. This was due to the first-time-ever application of an industrial-style production system.¹⁷ In general, this enabled the agricultural sector to continually produce a massive amount of meat.

The Hungarian party leadership that had previously undertaken the policy of improving living standards and was facing deficiencies in the performance of a newly collectivised agriculture needed this development very badly. The poultry project was launched due to a political decision made on the highest level.¹⁸ Bábolna had been chosen as the location of this experimental project. At first, it seemed quite like an abortive effort to convert a traditional stud farm into state ownership. The former manager of Bábolna went as far as declaring: "Nobody can expect the farmers of Bábolna who had made a name for themselves in horse-breeding now simply to switch over to poultry. Everyone knows that once you sat in a saddle and pulled at the reins you will have a hard time even driving a tractor after that, let alone breeding poultry. No way".¹⁹

It is therefore little wonder that a new manager was appointed soon. In the party-state system, appointing company managers fell entirely within the authority of the party. This means that in this special case, as usual, it was up to a party-organisation outside the

¹⁷ The system of large-scale production of poultry and eggs involved all biological, technical and organisational aspects of research to actual production. This is the so-called "closed production system" meaning the practical synthesis of biological and technical science. It aims at a fast, significant and economical increase in the specific output of cultivation and live stock farming. This required a close coordination and continuous updating of all factors of production.

¹⁸ MOL M-KS-288.f. 5/200. ő.e. Jegyzőkönyv a Politikai Bizottság üléséről, 1960. szeptember 14.

¹⁹ Dancs József, *Ez történt a kulisszák mögött*. Bábolna, 1983, 8.

sphere of economy to make the decision.²⁰ They chose Róbert Burgert²¹, a young (36 at the time) but already experienced manager filled with ambition and a need to prove his abilities. He was also very proud of the task he had been assigned. In addition to this, he was granted total freedom in his work, a gesture unprecedented in this era. This great advantage was far more than mere moral support, he was granted a remarkable capital to start with as well as relative freedom in international relations.²² Finally, the authorities provided 50 million forints for the three-year poultry project starting in 1960.²³ This remarkably generous amount was only one sign that the project was supported by the highest level of political decision-making. As a further step, Bábolna was allowed to import the required technology from the West. This became one of the most significant advantages, since Hungary, just like other socialist countries, had been ill-provided with convertible foreign currency. Therefore, it was considered a true privilege to buy Western technology.

²⁰ MOL M-KS-288.f. 17/5. ő.e. Feljegyzés Fehér Lajos részére a Bábolnai Állami gazdaság helyzetéről. 1960. február

²¹ Róbert Burgert (1924–1999) had been working in agriculture right from the start of his career. Between 1950 and 1960 he had worked as the leading agricultural engineer at the State Farm in Pécs of which he later became the manager. In the following three decades he had been the head manager of Bábolna State Farm and later Bábolna State Combine. It was under his management that industrial-style poultry-farming and egg-production was launched in Hungary. Furthermore, Bábolna successfully adopted professional production in pig- and sheep-farming and maize-production, the latter being essential for fodder supply. Róbert Burgert and his associates had showed entrepreneurship that brought products of Bábolna right to the highest ranks of international agriculture. In the 1970s and 1980s, the Bábolna State Combine had been one of the best known and most successful companies in Hungary.

²² The author's interview with Pál Romány (former head of Ministry of Agriculture). Budapest, 6 September, 2007.

²³ This amount was double the total subsidies of poultry-farming of all state farms in Hungary in the previous year. MOL M-KS-288.f. 28/1959/5. ő.e. A Mezőgazdasági Osztály előterjesztése a második öt éves terv mezőgazdasági beruházásairól. 1959. november.

Following this, the managers of Bábolna visited many of the top poultry-farms in the world. They finally signed a contract with the Lohmann Co. from West Germany.²⁴ It was from them that they bought breeding animals and entire poultry stables. Hungarian professionals (architects, machine operators, veterinarians, chemists, farmers, specialists of foraging) were also trained at the farms of the German company.

For those who know of the relationship between Eastern and Western-block countries at the beginning of the 1960s, it may come as quite a surprise to learn that Hungarian professionals had been allowed to make direct contact with Western Germany. This would have certainly been unthinkable without the permission of the Soviet Union. The reason why they accepted this contact can be explained with the exceptional position Hungary had taken after 1956. Following the suppression of the revolution, the leadership in Moscow had granted Hungary a wider scope for action so as to prove the superiority and constancy of the socialist system. "Khrushchev had the intention to make Hungary a kind of experimental laboratory for an attempt of a reform that would make communism more flexible to external conditions."²⁵

Beside Western technology, a new work ethic had to be adopted, too. Strict labour discipline and precision were not easily accepted, leading to the discharge of many workers. In this, in turn, the leaders of Bábolna state farm clashed with local party organisations. Nevertheless, due to the support from above, these conflicts were quickly settled.²⁶

²⁴ See the memoirs of the head of the delegation: János Keserű, *Parasztsorsfordítók között*. Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest, 2007, 111-114.

²⁵ Péter Kende, "Az engedményektől az érdekegyeztetésig. A kádári konszolidációról". In: Péter Kende, *A Párizsi toronyból*. Cserépfalvi, Budapest, 1991, 80.

²⁶ First, Burgert's supporters in the Political Committee of the HSWP (e.g. Lajos Fehér) played a significant part in settling these conflicts. Later, Burgert himself became member of the political leadership. As a first step, on the ninth congress of the HSWP held on the 3rd December 1966, he was elected member of the Central Committee of the HSWP. *Segédkönyv a Politikai Bizottság tanulmányozásához*. Szerk. Nyíró András. INTERART, Budapest, 1989, 197-198.

The three-year poultry project was successfully accomplished.²⁷ This was an absolutely necessary success for the Kádár-government, since by 1963–1964, the performance of Hungarian agriculture was far behind the expectations. It is therefore little wonder that when N. S. Khrushchev paid a visit to Hungary in spring 1964, the first place they took him was Bábolna.²⁸ As a special gift, the farm had offered Khrushchev a five-in-hand. As the manager Róbert Burgert recalls: “Khrushchev was a little surprised. Suddenly, the old man was not sure what to do. After a short pause, he said: Listen, if I accept this carriage, they are going to dismiss me. They are going to say that I have got five horses, so I am a kulak. Now our boss (János Kádár) says that we are going to protect you, comrade Khrushchev. This was followed by great laughter and Khrushchev finally did accept the gift.”²⁹ Khrushchev’s visit to Bábolna became subject to an entire newsreel that was later shown all over Hungary.

The Bábolna State Farm could utilize this popularity and its management started to spread its large-scale production system of poultry and eggs to other farms of less solid capital. As a firm responsible for production, it offered its own modern technology and exercised tight control over it in the associated farms.³⁰ This form of cooperation spread quite rapidly and soon made Bábolna known throughout the country.

The following phase of progress is connected to the New Economic Mechanism (1968) which was the most radical and theoretically most innovative reform in the region – not mentioning the one in Yugoslavia. The goal of the reform was to alleviate the problems of the planned economy, and to increase the efficiency of the economy. It was intended to achieve this partly by reducing the role of central planning, and partly by increasing

²⁷ In 1963, the poultry-farming sector produced a profit of 18 175 million forints. *Tények és adatok, 1945-1989. I.* Bábolna, 1989. 14.

²⁸ *Magyar Mezőgazdaság*, 1964/15, 1.

²⁹ *Jelenkor*, 1988/6, 1051-1052.

³⁰ Partner farms were provided not only with chickens but also with the tools, equipment and materials necessary for production. Continuous consultation was also made available, and producers were incorporated in the marketing chain.

companies' independence. Although one- and five-year plans were still made, they were not broken down to company level. There were no longer prescriptions as to what, and how much, companies should produce. Instead of compulsory directives, indirect economic regulators (taxes, credits, non-repayable subsidies etc.) were used. Company independence increased in terms of both production and investments. Elements of market mechanisms (price, profit, tax, credits etc.) were implemented in the planned economy system.³¹

It was the agricultural sector that was provided with the greatest opportunities in the reform. Also Bábolna attempted to make the most of the new opportunities, most importantly the reform of the system of currency credits. The reform enabled companies to buy modern machinery and know-how from abroad. The credit was only to be paid back later when it was covered mostly by the export of surplus product.³² This way Bábolna was able to modernise the production of maize, the main fodder for poultry, and therefore a key element of agriculture.

The establishment of a large-scale maize-cultivation system was preceded by years of preparation and experimentation since it required the application of western technology. In 1969, a delegation consisting of many Hungarian professionals, including Róbert Burgert and led by István Gergely, former Deputy Minister paid a visit to the United States. While there, the members of the delegation had the opportunity to study the various methods of maize cultivation on the spot. Due to the currency credit, Burgert

³¹ For more detailed information on the New Economic Mechanism, see: Iván T. Berend, *The Hungarian Economic Reforms, 1953-1988.*, New York 1990; *Hungary: A Decade of Economic Reform.* Eds. Paul G. Hare, Hugo K. Radice and Nigel Swain. London 1981; Zsuzsanna Varga, "Agriculture and the New Economic Mechanism". In: *Hungarologische Beiträge* 14. Ed. Anssi Halmesvirta. University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, 2002, 201-218.

³² Pál Izinger, "A harmadik évtized. Az állami gazdaságok 1968-1980 között". *Valóság*, 1983/3, 38-45.

bought a John Deere-production line for the cultivation of 6000 hectares of maize.³³

The establishment of the relations with the United States is also worth examination. It was partly due to the mentality of New Economic Mechanism that had urged opening to the West. The success Bábolna had previously achieved also played an important part. All of these factors enabled them to embark on a business venture that clearly had its political and economical risks. From 1970 on, they began spreading this form of production throughout Hungary as a forerunner.

“Babolna’s most notable achievement can be traced to a 1969 cooperation agreement it entered into with Corn Production Systems (Chicago, USA), on the basis of which American technology and know-how and local management and inputs were synthesized into a large-scale crop management model. This is the so-called “technically operated production system”, whose goal is to optimize yield, minimize costs, and maximize profits in specialized areas of production, such as corn, wheat, or livestock operations. In the case of corn, for example, the integrated system coordinates all areas of technology and know-how: genetics, plant protection, soil management (fertilizer, irrigation, drainage); specification of machinery and efficient handling of its maintenance and services; grain handling and storage; marketing; selection and training of all personnel; and financing and financial management.”³⁴

By the beginning of the new decade, the managers of Bábolna had the intention to spread not only within, but also outside Hungary. This had been enabled by the advantages granted from 1st January 1968 on, namely, that the farm was permitted to engage in foreign trade without the participation of state-owned trade companies. Thanks to these advantages, the export-import rights of the company involved the following products: poultry

³³ MOL XIX-K-9-ab 34. d. (1969) Tájékoztató jelentés a Magyar Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány részére a mezőgazdasági szakdelegáció amerikai tanulmányútjáról.

³⁴ Paul Marer, *East-West Technology Transfer. Study on Hungary 1968-1984*. OECD, Paris, 1986, 159-160.

(goose, duck, guinea-hen, etc.), stallions and racehorses. After a while the Minister of Foreign Trade extended the rights to the export of the system of poultry farming as well.³⁵

Independent farming and the organisation of foreign marketing proved very difficult in the first couple of years. Due to this fact, Bábolna established two joint ventures with western companies.³⁶ By means of its joint ventures with western companies, the Bábolna State Farm, on the one hand, received the very latest information on new scientific findings, and on the other, was continuously exposed to the evaluations of the world market.

The 'Golden Age'

Bábolna developed fast in the 1960s. In the beginning of the decade it was no more than yet another state farm showing a large deficit. Despite its long history and tradition, it had brought no significant returns. However, due to the radical change of the scope of its activities, it showed an unprecedented development. Its production value was about three to four times, its profit eight to ten times as big as farms of similar area and conditions, according to the evaluation of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food written at the end of 1968.³⁷ Even more importantly, Bábolna had grown to become an innovative agrarian centre. Firstly, this was due to its introductory role of western technology that was later applied in other farms. Secondly, it started to build its own basis of research.³⁸

The achievements of Bábolna, remarkable as they might be, would not have been sufficient to make it cultic place. Another precondition for this was that Hungarian agriculture as a whole

³⁵ MOL M-KS-288. f. 24/1968/11. ő.e. A Külkereskedelmi Minisztérium előterjesztése a Gazdaságpolitikai Osztálynak a mezőgazdasági vállalatok önálló külkereskedelmi tevékenységéről. 1968. május 10.

³⁶ One with the German company Lohmann (in 1968), the other with the company Protimas AG Friburg, Switzerland (in March 1969).

³⁷ MOL M-KS-288.f. 24/1969/2. ő.e. A Mezőgazdasági és Élelmezésügyi Minisztérium jelentése az állami gazdaságok 1968. évi gazdálkodásáról.

³⁸ *Modernizációs szigetek. A siker szerkezete a késői államszocializmusban.* Szerk. Pál Tamás. Budapest, 1992, 234-244.

showed an outstanding performance within the Socialist block. In the 1970s, politicians, diplomats and tourists from East and West alike were equally impressed by the food supply in the shops, halls and markets in Hungary. Their surprise was due to the fact that in other Eastern bloc countries the shortage economy was most dramatically apparent in agricultural production at the time. In Hungary, however, the quantitative satisfaction of the population's food demand was no longer a problem, and it was even becoming increasingly possible to meet demands of quality. Beside a high quality food supply, the Hungarian export in foodstuffs kept growing as well. In the 1970s Hungarian agriculture had been able to satisfy the needs of three different markets: the home market, the market of COMECON and that of capitalist countries.³⁹

As a special characteristic of Hungarian agriculture, the leadership of the communist party, as part of the policy of living standards undertaken after 1956, was compelled to make concessions on agricultural issues. These concessions led to that Hungarian agriculture gradually differed from the Soviet model resulting in the special Hungarian model.⁴⁰ This is what Bábolna essentially stood for.

The delegations from socialist countries visited Bábolna like a cultic place of pilgrimage. They hoped to discover its secret that would make their own agriculture work as well just by carefully observing it. Some delegations spent as much as weeks there.⁴¹ The

³⁹ *Mezőgazdasági Statisztikai Zsebkönyv, 1985*. Budapest, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1986, 136-140.

⁴⁰ This is explored in much greater depth in my study: "The 'Modernizing' Role of Agriculture in the Hungarian Economic Reforms". In: *Zur Physiognomie sozialistischer Wirtschaftsreformen. Die Sowjetunion, Polen, die Tschechoslowakei, Ungarn, die DDR und Jugoslawien im Vergleich*. Ed. Christoph Boyer. Frankfurt/Main: Max-Planck-Institut für Europäische Rechtsgeschichte, 2007, 201-218.

⁴¹ Several socialist countries bought the entire production system of poultry and eggs from Bábolna but unfortunately, it could not be put into operation everywhere. In the Soviet Union, for example, workers simply removed certain service parts like electric switches that were scarce at that time and took them home. See more on this: Pál Izinger, "A harmadik évtized. Az állami gazdaságok 1968-1980 között". *Valóság, 1983/3*, 38-45.

statements made by these visitors offer us a glimpse into their image of the cult of Bábolna. They admired its ever more awe-inspiring performance, its dynamic production and the surprising fact that whatever unusual activity they started it proved to work. For example, in 1970 Bábolna, first in Europe developed a method to transport pre-bred pullets by air. The first Hungarian cargo of pullets flew to the Middle East (Saudi-Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates).⁴²

From the beginning of the 1970s on, the results of Hungarian agriculture attracted the attention of markets not only in the socialist but also the capitalist countries. As an indication of this, the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) organised a comprehensive training between 4th and 18th July, 1971. Professionals from 37 different countries had been invited. This training was focussed on the issues of large-scale production.⁴³ During the two weeks of the training, participants got the chance to visit several farms, and Bábolna was the first on the list. This training proved very successful in attracting attention since many of the participants came back to Hungary in the following years.

A further indication of Bábolna's success were continuous visits from countries with highly developed agriculture starting from the middle of the 1970s.⁴⁴ The first one was by Ib Frederiksen, Minister of Agriculture of Denmark in July 1972. After the Austrian and Dutch delegations came the Minister from the United States with a staff of 27 people in 1975. The following year's major guest was the economic advisor of the President of the United States. 1977 saw the visit of the German and later the American Minister of Agriculture again. In May 1979, it was the staff of the World's Poultry Science Association (WPSA), consisting of no less than 44 people who came to survey Bábolna. The farm also received visitors from Canada, Australia, the Middle East, South America and Japan.

⁴² *Bábolna. Tények és adatok, 1945-1989. I.* Bábolna, 1989, 26.

⁴³ MOL XIX-K-9-e 133. d. Tájékoztató a FAO küldöttség magyarországi látogatásáról, 1971. július.

⁴⁴ On the chronology of these visits see: *Bábolna. Tények és adatok, 1945-1989. I.*, 25-85.

Analyses of the former visits from western capitalist countries show that the visitors' actual intention had been the observation of a potential or future competitor. This aspect had been apparent from the earliest visits on. As an example we can quote from the press release published after the visit paid by Frederiksen in 1972: "In the course of his visit to large farms and agricultural cooperatives in Hungary, the Minister has gained experience that prompts him to encourage Danish farmers to speed up and improve their productivity".⁴⁵

It would only be proper to ask what it was in Bábolna's performance that inspired awe and admiration in our Western guests. One answer might be that Bábolna did not merely buy and adopt western technology but went on to develop it. That enabled the farm to market their own, specifically manufactured products. The cooperation with the company Lohmann is a good example for this.⁴⁶ Bábolna had bought the system of large-scale poultry production from this company from Western Germany. Eight years later they broke up the cooperation and started their own poultry-project. This became so successful that their specifically produced hybrids soon ranked among the best in the world.⁴⁷

By representing among top international quality in poultry farming, Bábolna found access to markets not yet opened to many other countries. The Middle East would probably be the best example of this. Bábolna had been exporting broiler hatching eggs, poultry and even entire units to wealthy oil-producing Arabian countries like Saudi-Arabia and Iraq from 1968 on. Later, after assessing the local needs, Bábolna's management developed a large-scale sheep farming-system.⁴⁸ It had earned appreciation by manufacturing top quality products by impressive innovative

⁴⁵ *Magyar Mezőgazdaság*, 1972./30, 2.

⁴⁶ MOL XIX-K-9-e 743. d. A magyar – NSZK gazdasági kapcsolatok alakulása.

⁴⁷ In 1973, it was the TETRA-SL hybrid (layer) that produced the best results in international tests. According to a comparative broiler study conducted the same year in the Federal Republic of Germany, TETRA-B hybrid (meat) also ranked first.

⁴⁸ András Schlett, *Sziget a szárazföldön. A Bábolnai Állami Gazdaság története 1960 és 1990 között*. Budapest, 2007, 87-88.

capacity in socialist conditions of ownership. A further highly-valued aspect was the farm's wide-spread network of cooperation and its presence at international markets.

As a further boost, the local management took special care of Bábolna's cultic reputation. They recognised the farm's special conditions that were due to its impressive history. They restored horse-breeding. Stud-horses bred in Bábolna won one national and international prize after the other, very much to the farm's pride.⁴⁹ Horse-breeding, although taking up less than one percent of the company's total production, played a major representative role. VIP-guests from abroad, beside taking a view of the modern systems of production, also had the opportunity to see the Arabian herd of horses, the antique carriages and even a horse-show performed by buglers on horsebacks.

In order to retrace the rituals of the Bábolna visits, we first have to conjure up the environment itself. This is all the more important since most guests were quite astonished upon entering the center of the state farm to find a complex of well-preserved nineteenth-century buildings surrounded by old trees and flower-beds instead of modern economic facilities or offices. The delegations were received and greeted in the main building. This was followed by a brief introduction into the farm's history by the manager. After this, all the guests were invited to the upstairs balcony that offered a majestic view to the farmyard. The primary ornament of the yard was the statue of the Bábolna stallion. Back in the times of the Napoleon wars, when the French army had raided Western Hungary, this noble horse took part in one of the battles. The riding officer, having got a mortal wound, fell off his horse, while the animal, itself wounded, returned to the Bábolna farmyard before it finally perished. This "most faithful comrade" had thus become the very symbol of Bábolna: it represents loyalty to the region, the homeland and the past. As one sociographer writing on

⁴⁹ The most successful and well-known racehorse of Hungary, Imperiál was bred in Bábolna. It had an exceptional international career of 20 wins and two runner-ups from 25 starts.

Bábolna once aptly put it: "Here, all that was good and beautiful in the past has been preserved, yet expanded with something new".⁵⁰

Moreover, the locals had found a spectacular and fascinating way of presenting the old and the new, tradition as well as modernity to visitors. The guests, summoned on the main building balcony were first greeted by a group of buglers dressed in the traditional uniform of the Hungarian hussars. In the first part of the horse-show all the best stud horses, first the stallions and then the stock mares were shown all around the yard while concurrently their pedigrees were being described. Next came in the carriages. In case of a full show, all the one-, two- and three-in-hands came rolling in, followed by Bábolna's supreme pride, the four- and five-in-hands. All important guests were taken for a ride on the famous four- and five-in-hands, and the courageous ones were even allowed to ride it. If the members of the delegation showed particular interest in horses, there was the further opportunity to visit the indoor riding hall. In case the weather allowed it, some guests were even taken to a nearby stud-farm to see another horse-show.⁵¹

After conjuring up the past so dynamically, the guests were taken to the museum and introduced to the Bábolna state farm's history. The exhibition consisted, on one hand, of written documents of the glorious past: charters, documents of management, register-books and old paintings, sculptures, photographs and awards (medals, ribbons, trophies) as reminders of the success of horse-breeding, on the other.

The banquet was followed by a screening. The films featuring showed the most modern parts of the farm: the different phases of industrial-style poultry-farming, the system of maize-production, etc. The films gave an overview of the farm's national and foreign trade partners as well as its primary export markets. Afterwards, depending on the time left, the guests were given the opportunity to personally explore the farm's various departments to which they were taken by carriage and not by car.

⁵⁰ Féja Géza, "Új arcú mezőváros felé". *Bábolnai Híradó*, 1975. március 4.

⁵¹ The author's interview with János Pál (former President of Hungarian Horse-breeding Association). Budapest, 10 November 2007.

It was, thus, a unique blend of modernity and tradition that had given Bábolna its particular character. This speciality is reflected in the programs of each foreign delegation. The content of the show might have slightly differed according to the various interests of the visitors; a delegation of diplomats certainly required a different program than the one consisting of professionals in agriculture. The constant element, however, was the close relationship between past and present, illuminating the cultic significance of the place.

A Sad Prologue

Bábolna celebrated its bicentenary in 1989. This year, however, proved to become a landmark not only for Bábolna but for all of Hungary as well. After decades of a socialist regime, the establishment of democratic institutions and a market-oriented private economy began in Hungary in 1988–1989. At the time of the transition it seemed that agriculture would be the economical sector able to adapt most easily to the conditions of market economy. There was a significant amount of market experience gathered, not only from Hungary and the COMECON, but also from the Western countries. In several branches of production, the Hungarian agriculture was among the best in the world.⁵²

⁵² The achievements of the domestic large-farming system in terms of cereal farming and meat production were significant even by international standards. Measured in terms of per capita grain production, Hungary ranked fifth in the world in 1985. With a figure of 1,391 kilograms per person, it followed such extensive – with the exception of Denmark – grain-producing countries as the United States, Canada and Australia. In terms of wheat production Hungary came second only after Canada, and in terms of meat production it took fourth place after Denmark, The Netherlands and Australia. In the mass-scale production of hens' eggs, Hungary came second to The Netherlands. *A magyar mezőgazdaság hatékonysága nemzetközi összehasonlításban*. Budapest, Központi Statisztikai Hivatal, 1988, 7-18.

In reality, this was the sector that showed the most controversial and actually least successful adaptation after the change of system.⁵³ The parties of the first post-socialist government launched a radical transformation of the proprietorship and the entire system of the agrarian sector. The conversion of state and co-operative ownership into private one was at the centre of the drastic agricultural changes of the 1990s.⁵⁴ The politico-economic situation of the agrarian branch was also unfavourable. The traditional market of the COMECON had collapsed. The most serious problem was that the Soviet partner had become insolvent. The domestic market for this branch narrowed, since massive unemployment and the drastic decline in personal incomes led to a fall in food consumption.

Despite disadvantageous economic conditions, Bábolna seemed to have a fair chance of making the best of the political and economic transition due to its modern capacity for production and its widespread network of international relations. Bábolna, although surviving the forthcoming crisis, had used up all its reserves. By the second half of the 1990s, the farm got itself into a significant debt. The management's professional competence also showed a marked decline. After 1998, the privatisation of Bábolna was put on the agenda. Nowadays we can expect the privatisation of the basic unit after a highly unfavourable privatisation deal. The political and economic transition has not only had the cultic image of Bábolna fall to pieces but, due to a series of incompetent decisions, the 220-year-old farm itself.

⁵³ In the 1990s agricultural production was 20 to 30 per cent lower than in 1989–1991. While growth in industry began from 1994, and in other sectors of the national economy from 1996–1997, the agrarian sector faced a continuing and comprehensive crisis. See: *A mezőgazdaság strukturális változásai a kilencvenes években. Statisztikai áttekintés.* AKII, Budapest, 2003, 9-13.

⁵⁴ In 1990, some 121 state farms were in operation in Hungary, working on 11 to 12 per cent of the cultivation area. Twenty-five state farms (including Bábolna) were placed in permanent state ownership due to their role in the protection of biological resources and the supply of certified seeds. The other farms were earmarked for privatisation which usually took place in several phases.

SPECTRUM HUNGAROLOGICUM VOL. 4.
**Cultic Revelations: Studies in Modern Historical
Cult Personalities and Phenomena**

Edit Rózsavölgyi

**CHANGES IN THE HUNGARIAN POLITICAL
SYSTEM FROM 1988 TO 1990¹**

In this essay we intend to view the most important political and economic events of 1988-90, which played a crucial role in the change of regime in Hungary and outline them as if they were seen through several cameras at the same time. One of the lenses is that of the analyzing theoretician. The other one is that of an S-VHS camera held by the *Black Box*, the first Hungarian video magazine, the collaborators of which undertook the factual documentation of the events throughout these years. The third is one man's subjective camera, the reminiscences of László Pesty², a witness of history, who often risked serious danger to record the events of these years.

¹ Ed. note: This article does not directly deal with cults but it demonstrates the change of the system from a 'politics of the eye' perspective which defies cultic practices.

² Dr. László Pesty was born in Budapest, on 11 September 1964. He graduated from the University ELTE of Budapest, Faculty of Law and from ELTE, Media Faculty. He was a founder and collaborator of the *Black Box* in 1988-1990, a founding member of the *Pesty Black Box* in 1990. He has been a TV reporter and producer since 1998 and reporter of the *Pesty Black Box* television program since 1999. As a war correspondent and reporter he went to Cuba with the resistance movement, he visited the Russian prisons, witnessed the war in Groznyj, in Chechnia and in Kharabach during the Armenian-Azerbaijani war. He also went to the Balkans during the wars: in Osiek, in Sarajevo and Montenegro. He recorded the revolutionary changes in Czechoslovakia, in the GDR, Poland, in the Baltic States, in Moscow and in Romania. He produced several documentaries on different topics of social problems in various countries all over the world.

Illegal, banned press existed in Hungary from the early 1980s. It was called '*samizdat*' originating from the Russian expression '*sam iz daty*', in other words, the system in the USSR by which government-suppressed literature was clandestinely printed and distributed. The police chased and confiscated these publications which were printed in cellars and attics in limited editions and distributed among intellectuals.

In the spring of 1988 six intellectuals, all previously involved in the resistance movement, decided to establish the audiovisual *samizdat*. They were film directors András Lányi and Judit Ember, photographer István Jávör, producer Márta Elbert, sociologist Gábor Vági and cameraman László Pesty. They set up the *Black Box* video magazine. 'Video' because it was neither television nor film, as they did not broadcast or screen movies; 'magazine' because it came out as a periodical, with several copies issued. They recorded events, interviews, street demonstrations clandestinely, and then edited the material, making one and a half hour long documentary programmes. They produced from two to three hundred VHS copies and distributed them.

The Central European one party dictatorship during the 1970s and 1980s meant the following: no free elections, voting for one single person of one single party. One single ideology was hammered in at schools and universities. Bookshops and TV stations reflected the same ideology. It was not possible to travel freely from one country to another, nor to express one's opinions freely. The individuals who believed in and spoke out alternative ideas were punished with sanctions. These sanctions were very rigorous in Soviet Union and in Romania compared to Hungary but the system was basically identical. Orwell's book, *1984* was not published in these countries as their leaders knew that the readers would have recognized themselves between the lines. Pesty says³:

"In spring 1988, when we started to work [as the group of the Black Box], we did not see that the system might collapse. We could not hope this then. We

³ The deep interview with László Pesty some parts of which were incorporated into the text was made between the summer of 2000 and June 2001.

wanted to shoot long documentaries, analytical works about the existing situation. We had to accept the frame of an embarrassing clandestine activity having no idea for how long. We did not know that within a few months' time demonstrations would take place on the streets of Budapest and parties would be founded. Events speeded up two months after our establishing date. Thus we started to make action news as nobody else was recording the events of the change."

The year 1987 brought serious changes in Hungarian political and economic life. After 40 years establishing private economic enterprises was permitted for the first time. Tax legislation was introduced. One of the most astonishing economic demonstrations of Hungarian society in favor of the market economy and consumerism took place when thousands of people queued up in the stores of Vienna to buy different consumer goods, mostly technical. This shopping craze meant a significant flowing out of capital from the country. At the same time inflation and unemployment reached considerable proportions in Hungary. Among the events that forced the changes the following should be mentioned: economic crisis (inflation, unemployment), the strengthening of the reform wing of the State Party and *perestroika*.

In May 1988 the State Party was preparing for its congress. Shakiness and suspense preceded the event. As a result, important personal changes among the membership of the Central and Political Committee were effected. New watchwords appeared: "turn, reform, swerve". The world press welcomed the events with headlines like: "Hungarian perestroika", "Reformers Win", "A turn in Budapest". The May congress, however, made its most important impact on social self-organization. Several small opposition groups already existed, but in the spring and summer of 1988 the widespread social conflict exploded, mainly among the younger generation and the intellectuals. People, whenever they could, on the occasion of an anniversary, for example, went out on the streets and spoke out their opinions. The reaction to these demonstrations was still that of coshes and arrests. People were mobilized and kept together mostly by the following issues: the question of the building the Gabčíkovo dam, the situation of the

Hungarian minorities in Transylvania (Romania) and the judgment on the events of 1956.

Pesty and his colleagues recorded each important event and demonstration. Pesty recalls the demonstration of 16th June, 1988:

"This day is the anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy, prime minister of the government in charge during the anti-Soviet revolution in 1956. The opposition was gathering in the City Center, at the Batthányi sanctuary lamp, which is an important memorial place. Liveried or plain-clothes policemen were awaiting all around, nobody knew what would exactly happen. Gáspár Miklós Tamás philosopher marked out from the masses of the people and started to speak. The policemen were approaching him. In that very moment a short-haired, bearded young man, another leader of the opposition tightly clasped Gáspár Miklós Tamás' arm because two interlocked men can be dragged away with much more difficulty than single one.

Tear gas, cosh, police attack and arrests.

Police naturally did not like us shooting, I often managed to record the events only hanging the camera down or holding it under my armpit. The police wanted to confiscate the camera and the recorded tape but I did not give it to them and tried to run away. While I was running they hit me with the cosh in a way that I almost lost my eyesight."

1988 witnessed three police attacks against peaceful demonstrators: first on 16th June then on 23rd October, anniversary of the 1956 revolution, and finally on 15th November, when the Hungarian opposition organized a demonstration against Ceausescu as a proclamation of their solidarity with the Romanian opposition movement.

The Hungarian opposition saw that the *Black Box* people were always present and they were the only ones to record the events. So they became the media of the opposition. The state owned television did not show up at these historical events because they were forbidden to do so.

The functioning of the *Black Box* was basically ensured by two things: the financial support of the Soros Foundation, and the fact that the Béla Balázs Studio, the only independent film studio existing at the time, housed them, assuring a berth and an infrastructure for their activity. Pesty recalls:

"The members of the opposition regularly informed us about what was going to happen in Budapest and in the country. From the very beginning we went out for shooting almost everywhere, to flats, to the street, to cultural houses, anywhere where something happened and we knew that the official media would not be present. If an atrocity happened on the streets of Budapest we rushed many times to the place to document it."

As the reform objectives of the 1988 party conference got stuck at the level of rhetoric and as such at the level of a half turn, the tensions and unsolved problems led to the collapse of the MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party). It took from the end of January until the middle of February 1989 for the party crisis to explode, becoming obvious to the public as well. It ended with the Central Committee meeting on 10-11th February. The fight was primarily for the acceptance of the multiparty system and the declaration of 1956 as a popular uprising, which was urged on by the announcement of Imre Pozsgay⁴ at the end of January and was unambiguously refused by Károly Grósz⁵ response.

After heated debates, finally both the Central Committee and the Political Committee voted for the multiparty system and for the re-evaluation of 1956. Events speeded up, decisions made in response to pressure from the opposition initially led to the re-evaluation of several topics (for example, the impact of Imre Nagy's personality and activities) and finally to that of the whole of Hungarian history. By that time, substantial international attention and solidarity accompanied the Hungarian changes.

At first, the conservative wing of the state party believed that contacting the opposition parties one by one might lead to the

⁴ Imre Pozsgay was a key player in Hungary's transition to a western style democracy, in the fall of communism or as Hungarians call it "the change of the system" (*rendszer váltás*). With Kádár's removal in 1988 Pozsgay was promoted to Minister of State, a position equal in rank to that of Deputy Prime Minister.

⁵ Károly Grósz was Chairman of the Council of Ministers until October 7, 1989 when he was succeeded by Miklós Németh. In May 1988 Grósz was elected General Secretary of the MSZMP at Kádár's recommendation. He aimed at accomplishing a moderate and careful reform of socialism without touching its foundations.

division of the opposition. However, in March 1989, the Opposition Roundtable (OR) was formed and acted as the unified representative of the opposition, upsetting the expectations of the conservatives. The OR began bilateral negotiations and rejected all the bills which did not concern the setting up of a freely elected parliament, but were aimed at debating the current social affairs. During the negotiations, lasting for two months, the opposition managed to strengthen the demand that the country was in need of a legally and freely elected parliament which should be the one and only legitimate power in Hungary. In the course of the negotiations, the reform-communist wing of the state party gradually strengthened its position. Although the pro-Grósz line temporarily slowed the negotiations down, by the end of October it was once and for all disarmed. Through informal channels, the reform wing and the opposition increasingly and firmly isolated the conservative wing of the state party. This was also enhanced by the fact that in the course of the summer, on the occasion of Imre Nagy's reburial, 1956 gained an important role in public thinking and in the judgment of the political morals. The mood of compromise infused with transformation of history politics is depicted thus:

"First in February, when the re-evaluation of the revolution, previously just referred to as the events of 1956, took place, Imre Pozsgay proposed a compromise for the party apparatus. In the long run the message was rather simple: if the definition is counterrevolution, then there is no one to negotiate with and there is nothing to negotiate about. In this case "we" would sit down to come to an agreement with the descendants of the "counterrevolutionaries" spitting into our own eyes. If the definition is revolution, then again there is no one to negotiate with and there is nothing to negotiate about. In this case "we" served a counterrevolutionary regime for 35 years and will not be entitled to play any kind of role in a democratic regime. Therefore let us choose the middle road: let it be popular uprising. This at least allows for some kind of post-historical corrections, and more importantly, allows for a compromise. It was not "we" who defeated the uprising but "they" who did it, "we" did not impose this system on society but "they" did. "We" tried to take advantage of our power within the framework provided by "them" and now that we have the opportunity "we" return this power to the people. On the occasion of Imre Nagy's reburial, by May, it became clear that the burial, which had turned into a national issue,

would define the category of “us” and “them” for the first time in a long time. The burial was the burial of state socialism at the same time.” (László Bruszt 1990, p. 166.)

In the end, the negotiations began six days before the burial. Hence the borderline between “us” and “them” was not defined. But it seems that Hungarian society, and within it especially the intellectuals, were especially susceptible to such definitions. Until today, the intellectual, cultural, and even the scientific strata are strikingly politicized in Hungary. The intellectual circles continuously register and signal their political affiliation. Obviously, an important psychological reason for this is that the intellectuals undertook an extraordinarily important role in the Hungarian transformations. Only Pesty’s group was allowed to participate in the negotiations of the Opposition Roundtable. As László Pesty recalls:

“At the Opposition Roundtable the negotiations took place exclusively among the already existing opposition parties and the media was excluded. Only we could record them. The parties of the OR had to exclude the public in order to be able to negotiate in peace as the whole mechanism of the party state, including the media, the public administration, the police and the political nomenclature was against them. At least for these few hours they wanted to be alone and to talk in peace. We handed over the recorded material to the leader of the OR day after day, although after a few weeks trust had grown so strong that they did not expect us to do so any longer and the cassettes could stay with us. We hid them and the participating parties gave their consent to the release of the 165 hours long locked-up material only in 2000.”

By 1989 danger ceased to exist in Hungary, the police did not react violently to the street demonstrations any more, the party state slowly retreated, and the negotiating table overtook the role of the street. Street demonstrations were still going on and people were still frightened of reprisals but they were not subject to them any more.

At this time almost everything remained unchanged in the neighboring countries where the first demonstrations had begun and police terror was booming. The Hungarian opposition continued to take care of its contacts and expressed its solidarity

with the opposition groups of the neighboring countries. We should not forget that as a consequence of the Trianon Treaty after World War I many Hungarians reside in the neighboring countries as a substantial minority. Moreover, if changes were to take place in only one of the socialist countries, Hungary would be more likely to remain isolated in the course of democratic changes and reorganization could occur.

Therefore, in August 1989 a part of the Hungarian opposition decided to go to Prague. On behalf of the Hungarian nation they wanted to apologize to the Czechs for what had happened on August 21, 1968 when Hungarian tanks and soldiers crossed the Czechoslovakian border in order to participate in the Soviet invasion aimed at defeating the 'Prague spring', that is the 1968 revolution in Prague. The outcome of the event brought about an extraordinary reaction in the world media and was an extremely important chapter in the life of the *Black Box* as well:

"Already at the border the Czech secret police removed a substantial part of the Hungarian opposition from the train, I was among them. I claimed that I was not part of the Hungarian opposition movement any more, I was not an activist of the opposition, I just documented the events from outside, objectively. We were locked by the Czech authorities for one night, and then they made us return to Budapest. Fortunately we still had time. I designed a special plan to cross the border. In the end I walked to Czechoslovakia. In the morning of the demonstration we gathered at our hiding place in Prague where the opposition politicians, my friends, painted a huge transparent which said: "Now we've come with flowers, not with tanks." At noon the action began on Vencel square. They were demonstrating, making speeches, I was recording. The police devastated the Vencel square with unprecedented force and brutality. I was arrested first. I threw my camera with the precious recording in it over the head of the policemen. My assistant caught it and ran into the masses with it. The recording of me being dragged away was not only showed in the news of the free countries of the world but also in the news of the Hungarian State TV. It was the first time that the Hungarian public opinion heard that a video company called *Black Box* existed. We, arrested Hungarians, spent days in prison while in Budapest there were demonstrations in front of the Czechoslovakian embassy in order to demand our release."

The events followed each other at an increasing speed. At the same time as the exclusive negotiations of the OR went on, conciliatory meetings took place at the National Roundtable, where the groups of the state party, the opposition and civic organizations were represented. Both the Hungarian and the western media published information about the events.

As the parliament accepted the law on assembly at the beginning of 1989, the legal framework for the multiparty system was provided. However, the *de facto* multiparty system preceded the *de iure* stage which began only at the beginning of November when the party law came into effect. The formation of parties, the articulation of the different political interests were decisive in determining the dynamics of all political actors and political spheres. In 1989 the one-party-system ceased to exist, the state party disintegrated and was replaced by the MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) which was integrated into the multiparty system.

Social scientists divide the genealogy of appearance of the parties, into three phases:

1. The first generation of parties included the MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum), SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats) and FIDESZ (Alliance of Young Democrats). These parties were formed first, gathering the leaders of the opposition around them and they were formed by the opposition itself. Their aim was to criticize the state party and to counter the autocracy of the MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party).

2. The main characteristics of the second generation, the so-called historical or "nostalgia" parties were that they had lesser known leaders and they had to fight serious battles among their members, who belonged to the different generations (e.g. Hungarian Social-Democratic Party, Smallholder's Party, Christian-Democratic Popular Party).

3. The third generation was represented by the new-born small parties, which were formed as opposition to the opposition, and were usually issue-focused (e.g. Green Party, Health Party) or advocates of extremist trends (e.g. October Party, Radical Party, etc.).

The fact that by the end of 1989 almost 50 registered parties were operating in Hungary, reflected the favorable atmosphere for party formation and the desire for the expression of free thought.

Although the MSZMP announced the introduction of a multiparty system only in the spring of 1989, the Independent Smallholder's Party and the Hungarian Social-Democratic Party had already existed since January, 1989. Several other organizations had already had the means to turn into a party at short notice. At first, the FIDESZ, for example, recruited members through secret and/or informal ways among young people. Only the ones who were the most active and the most outspoken were able to appear regularly in public.

In addition to the appearance of the new parties, various civil initiatives such as the associations with political orientations, those referred to as alternative movements, those established for specific purposes, federations like alternative trade unions, youth and cultural organizations and societies also played an important role in the events. They did not aim at solving political and/or economic questions on a global level, with a program, nor at gaining power, but simply undertook the representation of the interests of different social groups. The scale of values transmitted by the parties made their appearance within these movements as well. Youth movements also acted as mediators of these values.

The so called alternative movements proclaimed the values of humanity, benevolence and solidarity, for example, the environmental protection movements (e.g. Danube Circle), the peace movements, human rights movements or those representing the rights of the Hungarian minorities in the neighboring countries, organizations of political prisoners, of prisoners of war, of minority groups. Cultural associations and corporations were established with similar principles.

Different professions established associations very swiftly. In Budapest the setting up of the OR was linked up with the name of the Independent Forum of Lawyers, while the so called Public Opinion Club organized regular discussions and debates raising political questions or problems related to public life. The

establishment of the *Black Box Independent Video Magazine* was opposed to the official electronic media, the only television.

Several trade unions were formed. Demand for disabled people's rights occurred for the first time in many decades. One of the most famous organizations SZETA (Fund in Aid of the Poor) was well ahead of the change of the regime, always bearing the risk of persecution, as notions like unemployment, poverty and any kind of deviation had officially been unknown in Hungary for 40 years. Everyone „lived in equality and happily ever after“. The foundation of new legal entities and a strong desire to establish new political parties were the main phenomena that accompanied the peaceful political changes of this era.

A more and more visible differentiation of the political and intellectual alignments took shape, alongside the polarization of the State Party. Right from the start, the parties which had their roots in the opposition life and fed on the soil of the 1980s detached themselves from the circle of parties with a great past but with a smaller base rooted in the present.

The formation of the OR played a crucial role for the opposition parties in gaining social reputation as well as getting to know and to accept one another better. The OR founding organizations were the following: FIDESZ, Christian-Democratic Popular Party, MDF, Hungarian Popular Party, Hungarian Social-Democratic Party, SZDSZ. The OR meetings, the tripartite then bilateral conciliatory meetings lined up the elite and the expert advisory panel of the parties. Signs of the cooperative ability and intentions of the parties were given and the opportunity was created for the parties and their leaders to make a name for themselves also ensuring the possibility of public appearance.

Before sitting at the table, the opposition parties were also active on the streets. They organized demonstrations, took an active role on the occasion of Imre Nagy's reburial, organized solidarity and charity actions and campaigns in the neighboring countries. The FIDESZ, MDF and SZDSZ acted the most efficiently in these fields.

While Hungary was preparing for the first free elections in the spring of 1990, the State Party trampled down the institution of

democracy. The outburst of the so-called "Duna-gate case" is connected with the name of the *Black Box*. Pesty recalls:

"I returned back from Romania in January 1990. We were only within a few months from the first free elections. The MSZMP made a promise that no secret police means or police measures would disturb the preparations of the opposition for the elections. The communists assured not to bug the opposition leaders during the campaign. One of the majors of the secret police showed up at the Black Box in January. He ran the risk to take us into a secret filing-cabinet where the still ongoing bugging reports were kept. We penetrated into the building under circumstances of a crime story and recorded the secret documents with our camera. We hid our collaborator for several months so that his colleagues could not take their revenge on him. The lie of the state party was revealed, the leaders of the opposition were bugged and scouted continuously. As a result of the scandal István Horváth, the last communist internal affairs' minister had no other choice but to resign two months before the first free elections. It was perhaps the biggest internal affairs' scandal of the decade, the so called 'Duna-gate case'."

Seemingly, the government tried to express its democratic intentions by voting a total of 100 million Forints' support to the parties before the elections, taking into account the number of their members. The parties who received the largest amount, 15 million Forints, were MDF (with 22,000 members), FKGP (with 23,000 members) and the Hungarian Social-Democratic Party (with 10,000 members); the smallest amount, assigned to the Hungarian Liberal Popular Party (with 1,600 members), was 2 million Forints. SZDSZ numbered 8,600, FIDESZ 3,500 members at that time. Party dues ranged from 10 to 150 Forints.

Some parties possessed their own publications. These were the following (data quoted from István Stumpf's article, 1990, pp. 389-390.):

MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party): *Népszabadság* (daily), *Újforum* (fortnightly), *Társadalmi Szemle* (monthly) and a regional newspaper.

MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum): *Magyar Fórum*, *Hitel* (both fortnightly).

SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats): *Beszélő* (weekly), *SZDSZ-bulletin*.

FIDESZ (Alliance of Young Democrats): *Magyar Narancs*, *FIDESZ Press*.

FKGP (Independent Smallholder's Party): *Kis Újság* (fortnightly).

Magyar Néppárt (Hungarian Popular Party): *Szabad Szó* (fortnightly).

MSZDP (Hungarian Social-Democratic Party): *Szociáldemokrata Népszava* (fortnightly).

MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party): *Szabadság* (fortnightly).

MSZP, the "new" MSZMP and the parties of the Opposition Roundtable (SZDSZ, MDF, FIDESZ and the so-called historical parties: MSZDP, FKGP, Hungarian Popular Party, Hungarian Christian-Democratic Popular Party) proclaimed their political programs. The large parties organized their congresses in the second half of the year, and these were covered by Hungarian Television news. Initiatives resulting in social movements increased the popularity of certain parties. In the case of FIDESZ, this happened with Viktor Orbán's speech at the reburial of Imre Nagy. The SZDSZ increased its popularity when campaigning for signatures for the plebiscitary initiation to elect the president of the republic, while those who opposed it, MDF and MSZP, leading the polls in close contest, lost some of their popularity in this campaign. The index of popularity took shape according to the data of the public opinion polls.

The parties seemed to be grouped around three main political streams:

1. a popular-national and Christian (its main parties were: MDF, FKGP, MKDNP),
2. a social-liberal (SZDSZ, FIDESZ),
3. a socialist, social-democratic (MSZP, MSZDP).

Disagreement among the opposition parties, beyond their proclaimed political and economic programs, became more and more obvious. Confrontation soon took place, on the occasion of campaigning for signature for the plebiscitary initiative or of the

formation of the Hungarian Television and Radio multiparty Board of Supervision.

The first free elections were over in the spring of 1990. The Hungarian Democratic Forum gained the credit for setting up the government. The first free local government elections were held in the autumn of the same year. László Pesty says:

„We believed that freedom would come from one day or another and market economy just be born. The pressure disappeared and the *Black Box* lost its strength in a second. There was no more cohesion among us; contradictions came to the fore. I wanted to establish a capitalist company on a market basis because there was market economy after all. Two older colleagues of mine were for the non-profit profile and for the foundation form. We had no political disagreement but we had different views concerning our economic operation and therefore we split into two. Under my leadership the *Pesty Black Box* was formed and the other half of the group continued its activities under the name of 'Black Box Foundation'. As the director of the *Pesty Black Box* I still considered the documentation of the continuously changing Hungary important. At the beginning of the 90s, while the old communists started to disappear, a new epidemic emerged: the extreme right. The number of skinhead and other right wing groups was increasing. We began documenting their activities. We started to make a social-documentary movie about the fall of the living standards and about the increasing unemployment. This kind of orientation and the highlighting of social problems characterize our work even today...

1990 is considered to be the year of the change of the system. I do not subscribe to this. People carried through the change of the system in the demonstrations of 1988 and the politicians of the opposition did the same at the negotiating table in 1989...

I have spoken about the most exciting period of my life. We were young, enthusiastic and in love. We were in love with the revolution because according to our Central-European standards this was a revolution. People were not hanged on the iron stalls of lamps on the streets, there was no shooting, we managed to change a political system without fight demanding the lives of people and we managed to sweep away the dictatorship. It was a beautiful period or rather it was so simple. Only two kind of people existed: one which defended the dictatorship – the communism, and another which stands on our side – the democrats. Everybody marched together on the side of the democrats: the right wing, the left wing, the Christian democrats, anarchists, radicals and social democrats were all represented among us. In one word: everybody who wanted to be a democrat. At that time everybody marched under one single flag.

By today, this is all gone. These people hate each other by now; they form different camps and do not communicate with one another.

This was a moment which cannot be repeated.

This was my youth.

What is left from the revolutionary spirit for today is the inner compulsion that under any circumstances we have to bring any event to light when human freedom is violated.

I am interested in one thing only - freedom."

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