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Memory Unchanged.

Redefinition of Identities in Post-War Hungary

Andrea Petó

Schumpeter said that the good side of democracy was that political leaders resign without having their blood spilled.¹ In the case of Hungary after the Second World War a lot of blood was spilled for democracy – during the period when the democratic institutions were being established and in the process whereby these institutions were taken over by the Communist Party. I do not want to present Hungarian history as a history of bloodshed, even if reality is not far from that. Instead, I should like to show how claims and counter claims concerning the past were constructed.² The construction starts with a remembering of the past, a remembering of the actions and events which occurred during the war. I would like to analyse the various interpretations of truth and acknowledgement of truth – the latter not always being the same as justice. Following an analysis of the new significance of justice in exceptional times and the means by which such justice was effected, I will look at some questions concerning national identities.

Acknowledgement and Punishment

Géza Ottlik, a placid writer recalled legacy and punishment after 1945:

It is very typical of our age, that one of our good friends, a gentle poet, who otherwise could not harm a fly, risked his life in order to copy and steal lists of Arrow Cross Party workers with the aim of having these men and women

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hanged later on. A bunch of names, places of birth, the names of the mothers. For a while we moved the list around from one place to another. With all those names of their mothers. Then Gyöngyi [his wife-AP] took the list, looked at us, to the left and to the right, like somebody who is disturbed by an unpleasant smell. She looked at the poet with a question in her eyes, who immediately nodded in agreement. Yes! Put it on the fire, burn it. No matter that he had risked his life for this list. But we felt no pity for the mothers.³

The conscious forgetting of individuals, who sought to escape from their unbearable pain, was one part of the basis of another form of forgetting and amnesia which characterises post-war Hungarian history.

“Writers, write the Truth!” – this encouraging suggestion was made by Stalin at one of the crowded meetings of Soviet writers. His words were repeated by György Lukács during the post-war debates on the role of writers in the ‘New Hungary’. As his biographer pointed out, Lukács really was of this view, for in his opinion only ‘the Truth’ was able to protect real democracy.⁴ As we know from Foucault “each society has its regime of truth” so a comparative analysis of the constructions and deconstructions of this network of truths might bring us closer to the different representations.

There is no other period in history for which the lucky survivors and succeeding generations have more and different types of sources than the post-war period (1945–1955). Moreover there is no other period which has been so often evaluated and reevaluated in different periods by different, sometimes changing elite groups, who sought to establish their own ‘regime of truth’. In some cases all we know is that what we were told before is not true (Burawoy). The actors in the public discourse after 1945 were very successful at turning lies into truth, as defined by them.

Specialists of *Zeitgeschichte* also have to wrestle with their “perceptual disadvantage” (Furet), i.e. that they are analysing the very recent past, of which nearly all of us have our own ‘original’ memory. The public in this region is still hungry for books which promise to reveal the narrative of the story in such a way that the reader might have some hope of recovering his or her personal history. These elements do not promote the application of different and new approaches to the analysis of Communist discourse, but they do raise the question of the moral responsibility of those historians who are working on this period.

The period of post-war reconstruction in Central Europe began

with the struggle to control memories of the war. The origins and forms of “mis-memoires” (Tony Judt) rebound the reflecting images of the past. Personal identities were constructed by a nominalist tradition of memory. In the period after 1945 we see parallel traditions in interaction, constructing each other with the weapon of forced memory and party controlled amnesia, with rivalries of representations authorised by different social actors.

The debated concepts of democracy, people’s democracy, and crises of democracy (Bibó) were partly analysed recently by various historians who sought to examine them within the framework of ideological streams rather than in the cultural and personal content of their construction. Identifying the personal destiny of ‘the people’ with the lack of traditions of democracy gave an extraordinary role and responsibility to the academics and scholars who were presenting that heritage to the ‘public’.

A doctoral thesis on “Constitutionality in Hungary 1945–1948”, which was recently defended, provoked great interest among historians concerned with Hungarian history in the post-war period. One reader of the thesis, a well-know specialist of this period, criticised the author because she had used the recorded memories of one of the participants of the “Conspiracy Against the Hungarian Republic” with careful consideration. This critical reader of the thesis argued that the fact that the ‘conspirator’ was given a suspiciously mild sentence during the trial is not enough to justify a critical standpoint being made against him. The well-known historian said that he had taken advantage of an opportunity to interview the ‘conspirator’ personally in the US, where the gentleman concerned had explained to him his real role and motives in this plot. ‘The Conspiracy of the Hungarian Community’ [*Magyar Közösség*] was used by the Communist Party as a match over a gas tap to start purges against ‘the Enemies of the Republic’, and Hungarian historians are still debating whether and to what extent this was a dress rehearsal for subsequent show trials. To the greatest surprise of the audience, another different truth soon emerged. From the floor of the hall a former typist of the Political Police, who later became a very powerful historian in the Communist period, stood up and recalled the process whereby she had been forced to retype again and again the modified interrogation minutes of the ‘Hungarian Community’ trial according to the changing needs and concepts of the Police and the decisions coming from the Communist Party headquarters by phone.

With this brief remembrance I would like to illustrate that the usage of sources for historical analysis first demands an exact definition of our expectations with regard to the historical sources. In the 'Rankean tradition' of history the definition of science is that documents are used as sources. Even the 'New History' did not give up entirely the 'source-bound nature' and rationalistic idealism of history writing. In Central and Eastern Europe the function of history has been even more problematic. History was defined in a framework through which one sought to find out or to recover entirely how actually an event happened. The event shaped the collective memory and in some cases even legitimised political structures. During the period of Communism in Central and Eastern Europe, the past was distorted to legitimise Communist rule, and history was narrowed down to an enforced forgetting. It is crucial to search for the origins and forms of the "mis-memoires" (Tony Judt) of this period.⁵ The greatest danger for historical research today can be found in its unchangeable character, which was illustrated by this story. G. M. Travelyan's well-known definition is "history with the politics left out." In Central and Eastern Europe I would say that an extra amount of politics was brought in, thereby adding to the traditional perception of history. If the historians of the region are still caught in the trap of believing that they must find the 'truer' history, there will always be a group of historians who are ready to produce history with the label "this is the 'truest' history."

After 1989 and the collapse of Communism, the forgotten past was used as a basis of a new legitimacy, which has nowadays become a history itself. If we analyse the process whereby the past was revealed or partly revealed in different Central and Eastern European countries, we might establish the common characteristics of Communist history writing with the aid of a comparative method. The films, reburials, and recorded memories of the survivors of trials and deportations offered to the wider public, are all important aspects of analysing the different mirrors in which history can be viewed. The unauthorised forms of representations and everyday forms of resistance need to be placed under the focus of a comparative perspective. Private knowledge and private histories were used to challenge official representations. The revision of history is a permanent process in which only the groups change, and it is these groups which revise memories and rewrite history. The varying techniques with which war crimes and collaboration were handled right after the war, during communism and

during the rebirth of the national states are also worth analysing in a comparative perspective. Also of interest is the extent to which amnesia functioned in the formation of collective and personal memories.⁶

Following the typology of Cohen, after finding out the truth, the next phase is the different levels of accountability.⁷

Punishment via criminal trial, compensation and lustration. I would add to Cohen's typology in order to colour the Hungarian case: forced migration; either inside the country to internment or to detention camps, or resettlement – the expulsion of a certain minority who were held responsible for the war, i.e. the Germans. According to the census of 1920, 552,221 Germans were living in Hungary at that time. The discussion is still going on concerning how many were actually forced to leave Hungary. The number must be around 230,000.⁸ A common characteristic of the punishment phase was the use of the juridical means of the previous, despised regime or those means imposed on the country by the Paris peace treaty. But these means were used not only, or not exclusively, for punishing war criminals. They were also employed against the whole pre-war elite in order to justify an exchange of the elite, which was deemed necessary for the new beginning. Since the last case to be heard by the people's court was the Rajk trial, there is no need for further explanation of how the various juridical frameworks were used. A case in point is that of internment, where the Internment Act in force after 1945 was based on the juridical processes of 1920, 1922, which had sought to isolate those who were "enemies of social order, dangerous and suspicious for public safety, or harmful for economic reasons" – these were the arguments in 1920, and they remained unchanged after 1945. The framework was used in 1945 for investigating war criminals, but it was also misused for party political purposes, and later in (1946/47) in the Communists' struggle to achieve hegemonic power. Internment was also used as a control weapon; if the people's court found somebody innocent, there was always the possibility of having him or her interned by the Police⁹. Those who were the targets of internment were the members of radical parties and/or those accused of vagrancy. Interned people of working-class or peasant background were liberated for political reasons, and yet the procedure of internment was a continuous topic of debate in Parliament. According to some estimates there were as many as 30,000 interned persons in Budapest in the period 1945–1949. In the provinces their number was 5–10,000 in 1945/47 and 40,000 by 1949. 25,000 per-

sons were interned for their war-time activity; these were mostly former members of the Fascist parties (those who had been members for a period of two or more months) and enemies of the illegal Communist movement. The most feared enemies of the new democracy seemed to be the tobacco shop owners and the barbers, who were accused of spreading Fascist propaganda.

The Preliminary Hungarian government already in Debrecen began preparations for the anti-Fascist juridical process, and a young communist lawyer was asked to prepare the 'price list', as they called it. The people's court was established by decree, and this action was legitimised by Act VII of 1945. The purpose of the court was to shape a new historical knowledge; transcripts of the popular trials were to be published so that they could serve as textbooks for future generations. But only selected parts were in fact published; they were entitled 'people's judgments'. The participation of young, dedicated Communists in the juridical process served the need for a change in the elite. As one key figure remembered, they were only handling the eggs, and it was not their responsibility what hatched out from the eggs.¹⁰ Among the 90,551 individuals who were investigated, 59,429 were put in front of the people's court: 45% of these individuals were sentenced, and 25% were acquitted. 477 people were sentenced to death and 189 were executed.¹¹ A majority of the trials took place in Budapest, where the most severe sentences were delivered. In the trials, the 'nation' faced her 'contaminators'.

Lustration was an important part in the effort to change the elite, to control and transform social structures, and to use powers derived from the victors outside the law to create both law and a legislative system. Reform of the old fashioned and outdated system of Hungarian public administration was a clear necessity, and thus all reform planners tended to stress this argument and hide the fact that at the same time they wanted to occupy all the important power positions. All Hungarian political parties agreed that lustration was needed in order to secure a loyal and faithful core of administrators. But, at the same time, there was a continuous struggle between the parties over the distribution of positions. From the very beginning, the Hungarian Communist Party was over-represented in the power structures – in relation to the number of votes that it had received. The lustration process became a manifestation of a sloppy juridical process and the strong desire of the various political parties to secure reliable co-workers. Although public opinion was demanding a state

administration that was cheaper and reduced in size, in reality the number of state employees increased three-fold in comparison with the 1938 figures; but due to the general decrease of wages even this increased number was cheaper. In 1938, 48% of the state budget was spent on the state administration, while in 1950 this amount was just 26% of the total. The representatives of the ancien régime were portrayed either as cowards who had fled from the country or as those who were rotting the machine from within. In the course of the lustration of 1946, more than 100,000 public and private employees were ousted from their previous positions.¹²

As a part of the purge, the 'compromised' members of the pervious régime were not allowed to vote. One political force which raised its voice against the sometimes ad-hoc compilation of lists of voters was the Feminist Association, which argued for the rights of women. This less than tactical public action led to the ensuing isolation of the Association.¹³

The concept of compensation was an even more delicate issue. Financial compensation in Hungary in the period 1945–1947 was defined as compensation for the nationalised mines, factories, and land etc., and thus it was labelled as a demand of the enemies of democracy and progress. During the social transformation the issue of compensation was a backward demand. As far as compensation for the loss of life or liberty was concerned, the Hungarian Parliament, which had ratified the Paris Peace Treaty, was under an obligation to award compensation. The Cold War prevented implementation of the plan until 1972, when West Germany paid some compensation, and this story is not finished yet.

Reconstruction and Identities

Reconstruction of femininity went paralely with reconstruction of Hungary.¹⁴ Reconstruction and production are traditionally female duties. And yet these issues were usually both deliberated and decided upon by men. Politics and reconstruction were defined as noble and masculine duties.

After 1945 several new and previously accomplished female artists started a 'new' life. I will look at their works within the framework of how the work of artists fitted into the formulation or non-formulation of the new Hungarian national identity. The duty of artists, and this is especially true in the Hungarian political tradition, is to formu-

late the consciousness of the Age, which is itself a definition of time and space. Since a new era was dawning, the importance of female artists increased a lot.

In the framework of the different systems of truth a new culture was defined. The new culture was wide in scope; it included the *nationalisation and standardisation* of the educational system and the redefinition of the content of culture, in the course of which new elements were selected and added in. As Lukács said this new culture should leave out the provincialism of the peasant culture and the sectarianism of the workers' movement. From this cocktail, socialist realism was expected to shape out, where everything is politics and no differentiation is made between private and public spheres.

After the Germans were whipped out of the country, Hungary had to face her divided reality. The division can be defined in the example of attitudes towards collaboration. As we know from Stanley Hoffmann, collaboration can be defined from the point of view of the actors and their aspirations.¹⁵

According to Bibó, Hungary's land reform and the political collapse of the previous governmental administration were important preconditions for reconstruction.¹⁶ But he also pointed out that there was a strong division between those who labelled these events as liberation and those who saw them as resulting from the occupation and siege. Surprisingly, the Smallholders' Party received the votes of the non-reformers and were charged with controlling the process of reforms. The formulation of a new national identity was prevented by a pathetic penitence and the exertion of criticism from outside. I will look at the gender dimension in the formulation of the new national identity.¹⁷

After 1945, for a period of three years at least, the unity of Europe was complete. The dismantling of the previous boundaries in Europe became a point of reference: "We wanted to look to Europe, because we had been cut off from her for such a long time" recalled Piroska Szántó as she explained why she and a group of fellow avant-garde artists had called themselves the European School.¹⁸

Contemporaries recall the feeling of the moment in their memory of liberty. To quote Szántó again:

Those who were liberated from the tremendous pressure of such a deep sea, which had paralysed us, took a breath so quickly and so deeply that they were able to live on this for a long time. Even if somebody wanted to take this memory away from us, it had really happened.¹⁹

Hungarian identity is based on the belief that the Hungarian nation has a very special mission: to act as a bridge between East and West. Under this mission redemption may provide moral solution.

The forgetting, the amnesia, and the mis-memoires served this function well. After 1945 the revolutionary feeling supported discontinuity, a discontinuity which on the one hand was a necessity, since the previous system had collapsed, but which was also a systematically promoted political action. The cult of discontinuity legitimised the change of the elite and nationalisation, and it also served as a justification for uncontrolled police actions.

The formation of the new elite was a part of the opening up of channels permitting upward mobility. Among the students of the people's college, which later on became the source of a lot of nostalgia for those wearing red shirts, only 15% were women. The names given to the colleges reflected the patriotic tradition of the Hungarian liberation struggle: heroes of the anti-Habsburg and anti-Turkish struggles found their place peacefully with more recent heroes, the Communist martyrs.

Personal continuity and intellectual semi-discontinuity were some of the most challenging questions of post-war reconstruction. "Only the castrated are innocent" as Géza Juhász said,²⁰ and only the innocent, untouched youth could secure that innocence. Such beliefs led to a total change in the profession of historian. The topic of discussion was the responsibility of writers in the Second World War. The role of the 'national' writers, who supported the 'third way' type of social development as far as the future of Hungary was concerned, fell under especially close scrutiny. These were not debates but severe political fights, a war between political actors waged with the full armoury of politics: the language and the concepts were all very political. As Lukács very often reminded people, according to Gottfried Keller "everything is politics", so the discourse on morality and responsibility was a reconstruction, a reevaluation of their previous roles, and a legitimisation of their new orientations. However, to regard these debates only as political history would also be misleading and open to misinterpretation, since its content would be reduced to the level of 'purely, clean' literature. These debates had no literary character at all since no literary works were published due to the paper shortage, and it is only from late 1946 that we can talk about a revival of a kind of literary life. Lukács rejected the concept of 'internal resistance' espoused by the urban writers, since he was aware that such covert resistance could easily be transformed into overt

resistance against the Communists. The urban writers were those among whom the national feeling of guilt and shame was mostly lacking, while it was the national writers and especially Illyés who were advising that Hungarians should not be pushed into a feeling of collective guilt, which might cause inferiority complexes.

One way of rationalising or forgetting the mystery of the past was to focus upon the untouched, pure 'national' values. According to Aladár Komlós, a leading publicist of the era, the desire for purity "orientated people towards items of the pre-civilisation period: mountains, trees, animals, plants and shepherds."²¹ The cult of the national served several purposes. First, it created a distance between the alien Fascist system and the real people. 'National writers' could be granted forgiveness because they had, after all, done nothing more than advocate respect for the Hungarian tradition. Secondly, the political and social vulnerability of the national could be misused by the Communist Party in its attempt to create what was really just a satellite party of the Communist Party in order to counterbalance the Smallholders' Party. The usage of time in the works of the national writers also fitted into the newly formed concept of time. Since they were devoid of the present, timeless national poems became the general form of 'government poetry'.

The memory of the Second World War was created by the lucky survivors of what had been a total war. A myriad of individual survival stories were put together as a part of the past. How did you manage to survive, was the first question people asked, which indicated that passive hiding was recognised as having been the only form of resistance. In her memoirs, Ágnes Nemes Nagy, the celebrated poetess anecdotally explains how twenty-one people spent the night in one flat, including a university professor who was walled into the toilet of the flat. There were several hundreds of thousands of people who had not been that lucky. The restart, as Hamvas states, was not necessarily a glorious process. The pains and the failures had to be digested, and individuals had to come to terms with their past. Common, collective suffering was the basis of the new national identity. The pushing away of the ghosts of the past offered penitence. One of the central figures of the new national identity was Miklós Radnóti, a poet of Jewish origin who had converted to Christianity and conveniently died in one of the camps. The Minister of Culture, Gyula Ortutay, who belonged to the national writers, in his speech at the unveiling of a memorial plaque for the poet, summarised this view:

This nation in 1944, besides innocent victims, demanded the blood of the best of Hungarian politics. The workers' parties and the party of the peasantry had their own martyrs from among the Hungarian poets and the intellectual elite. In this row of martyrs, Radnóti stands out for the pureness of his life and the purity of his poetry. If the Hungarian nation understands the teaching which is radiating towards her, she [the Hungarian nation] can be better.²²

Here the different elements of national forgetting can be identified. First, 'the nation' is declared responsible for the crimes which were committed in 1944, not earlier and not later. In addition, Ortutay speaks of one party of the peasantry, which is not the Smallholders' but obviously the Peasant Party, and he mentions two workers' parties, which establishes the continuity of the presence of the Communist Party. The religious sacrifice of Radnóti, as a Saint of the Hungarian nation, radiates heavenly feelings which will take away the sins of the Hungarians.

According to Bibó, it was fear – and not common and passive suffering and religious victimisation – which provided the common framework for the period. The concept which bound these three levels together was fear. Fear of finding 'the skeleton in the cupboard'; fear of previous writings being exposed; and fear of manipulated – or simply furious – witnesses. The post-war period is the period of defenceless fear, Bibó pointed out – thereby provoking a debate of the highest intellectual level during this period. The power of fear is that it might construct the subject of fear. The concept of Bibó, the double fear of the period; proletarian dictatorship and reaction (reconstruction of the previous regime) reflects on his sense of missing new concepts for this period. The unchangeable character of histories as reflected in the unchangeable character of history-writing in this period. Indeed, the subject-matter of this debate was an evaluation of previous Hungarian history and tradition. A power struggle for the past was a vital element in the battle for political power – a battle which was not independent of international events. Running forward because of fear explains how and why the political takeover took place in Hungary in 1947–48, to be followed by the cultural takeover in 1949–1950. This transition was not based on consensus. A definition of the various crimes, and even of justice based on knowledge, was missing. Not a single day passed without different lists of war criminals being produced, who then faced juridical process. In the case of the national writers obviously the sup-

porters of the Smallholders' Party and the Radical Party were the first against whom demands were raised. Some people wanted them banned from Hungarian intellectual life and sentenced to silence. And yet silence gradually took on a moral, aesthetic and juridical significance. Non-communication, non-writing, and the non-production of artefacts were praised by fellow artists as artistic achievements. It was Gyula Illyés who condemned the principle according to which the more talented a person the more punishment he/she should suffer. Thus, one night he went to the headquarters of the only political party which had an interest in making a deal with the national writers; during a night of informal talks an agreement was reached that writers and poets would not be put on trial.²³ The uncontrolled process of private negotiation started, which was a natural continuation of the individual survival strategies. Artistic achievement became a less important point. From the first issue of the 38th series of *'Nyugat'* ['West'], the leading literary journal of the Hungarian progressive artists – an issue which actually was never published – only one article remained in manuscript. The manifesto of Róbert Berény sought to prove why they were acceptable partners for the new Hungary. He stated: "Love flows from an artist, if it does not then it is not art." And yet it was others – and not Berény – who were in a position to judge who was a writer and who was not, and the command to love was not compatible with the command to struggle and to fight which had been issued by the Communist Party. Redemption was offered from several sides.

The penitence, the suffering of Mary, the Holy Virgin, the protector of Hungary was a well-conceived stereotype. This fitted into the poetry of Hungary's female poets. Penitence for two sins.

First, in the poetry of Nemes Nagy, who wrote a poem entitled "Elegy on a prisoner" to the memory of a murdered friend. Nemes accuses herself of managing to survive just because her friend was "a head taller" than she was.²⁴ The feelings of guilt were either very personal, talking about personal losses, or connected with humankind as such. The universalistic view covered the communication between the private and the universal level.

A second type of feeling of guilt was based on the class-war blindness. Eszter Tóth wrote a poem on "How should I have known?"²⁵ This feeling of guilt is close to redemption, the redemption granted to Hungary by the Soviet army. Several monuments were immediately erected in Budapest with the purpose of reminding everybody of this

fact. Redemption, no matter that it was a sacral, religious feeling, was de-sacralised, and liberty became filled with politics. Criticism formulated from outside could be based only on class consciousness, which nicely fitted into the de-sacralised version of redemption. This match was transformed into the sacral art of Communism. The few but dedicated Socialist artists observed this development with horror. Sarolta Lányi, a leading poet during 1919, who subsequently spent and survived 20 years of emigration in the Soviet Union, brought with her an image, the image of the Soviet woman who, according to her poem "Portrait", "can be trusted as if she were a man."²⁶ So this type of emancipation or redemption takes away the burden of being inferior or subordinated, since women are as good as – or even better than – men. From here it is only one step to giving a masculine meaning to modernisation. As Zsuzsa Gazda pointed out in her poem:

“Alongside the blonde strut
 Women are weeping white tears
 Does it hurt, comrade? You did volunteer for the job!
 Then lay track under the train
 Hammer strong steel from your words
 Your class increases your strength enormously”²⁷

Such a personal intellectual voyage was made by others, too, including Noémi Ferenczi, the first female artist to be awarded the Kossuth Prize, and Anna Hajnal, the most promising female poet. Hajnal arrived from the world of peace to publish on the front page of the magazine *Csillag* [Star], which announced that “he who protects peace and Stalin shall live”. The ideals of the age had been changed.²⁸ Tibor Tardos, who had just returned after a period of emigration in France, wrote an article on the New Woman of the New Hungary:²⁹

She intentionally wore a uniform, when I saw her, she undeniably took all necessary steps to cover her female identity. She wore a blue shirt, a blue cap as the others, and she knotted her tie in the regular male way so that it lay between her two breasts [...] and around her the scent was thicker and deeper [...]

But she represents the new modernity:

I have met enough militants in the resistance movement. Most of them were stronger, more educated and dedicated than their male colleagues. They did not consider the pistol more dangerous than a makeup set or a pocket mirror. The women of the group where I worked nearly all went as soldiers' whores in 1944 to get information of minor importance. They sent their children to nursemaids in the provinces, they had an ovary operation and were prepared for death, they were excellent comrades, sometimes better than their male colleagues.

Tardos diminishes the results of the sacrifice of women who served as the whores of German soldiers, and condemns them for not having the hands of workers. Not like Ilonka! She has the hands of a real worker and she is also an excellent dancer. She danced through the whole evening, obviously in a very moralistic respectable place, at the ball of the firm, and then spent the whole day driving a car around the villages with doctors and nurses to cure the previously neglected Hungarian provinces. And she was still on her feet the next evening as a celebrated actress of the theatre group at the factory. The next day, the second without sleeping, she went to work and under-achieved the norm by 10 pieces. Then the story takes a tragic turn. A worker came to visit the writer comrade. He, no mention is made of his name or any relevant details, was worried about what would happen if he and Ilonka got married – one of them would be lost for the Movement. The comrade writer attempted to reduce his anxiety by saying that by the time the two of them would have children a worker would earn enough to keep his family. So, that is the conclusion from the story, after such turbulent, extraordinary times, the order of nature would be restored. In a sense, the biologically determined features of the female body could be manipulated up to a certain point. Right after the war nobody was encouraged to have an ovary operation. Just the opposite. Zseni Várnai, the celebrated female poet of the social democratic movement from 1919, wrote the poem entitled "Blessed Women," which also became the title of a book of her poetry. In this poem she described giving birth to a child as a sacral offering of women which, although it gives only pain and sorrow, is still their duty:

"Blessed women got rounder and rounder
 They were trapped again by the Life
 Instead of torn babies
 they give birth, give birth to fresh infants."

The biological function is understood in natural economic terms, one infant per nine months.

Thanks to redemption, the definition of time and space was changed. Instead of the past the future became the centre of focus. That is one of the reasons why the *Századok*, the journal of the Hungarian Historical Association which had been founded in 1867, could publish already in 1953 the speeches and the resolutions of the annual general meeting of 1954. Space was also defined differently: artists were banned to the ivory towers since they were not dealing with the real problems of real people. The 'new harmony' and 'new culture', which was so adamantly demanded by Kassák, had to be internally critical.

Another form of redemption was female-centred redemption. Art and free creation are characteristically female activities. But creation is male and female at the same time, the harmony of elements. But a "man with power aspirations", to quote Béla Hamvas, mixed his masculinity with aggression. Where there is no social space for free self-definition and self-creation, there is no liberty, and thus there is no space for art at all. Male artists substitute aggression with an opening up, incorporation and meditation. As long as female artists try to picture man's image of women, searching for the unique and strange, they could be infertile only. Art is out of the framework of power, only politics of art belongs to that terrain. Hamvas considers the essential characteristic of artists a positive image of themselves, an image which radiates to the world as well. This is not valid for women who made their fame in the male world, but for the thousands of women who are ready to neglect their importance, which is characteristic only of great artists. As Sándor Weöres said:

The order of our world is one-sided and masculine. Our feminine character suffers in the shadow of a dispraised status, and the result is that we are driven between a lack of balance, strict principles, unchanging ideas, and incomprehensible wars. The feminine character is just stepping out from its shadow of more than one thousand years; our female poets, however, are beginning half-consciously to take possession of the labyrinth of their essence. Is there any hope that women will truly awake and occupy their place alongside men, and protect their families from murderous decline?³⁰

Notes

- 1 Stanley Cohen, "State Crimes of Previous Regimes: Knowledge, Accountability and the Policing of the Past", *Law and Social Inquiry*, 20 Winter 1995, p. 7.

- 2 István Rév, "Amnesia. The Revised Framework of Hungarian History", *Budapest Review of Books*, 1994, pp. 1–6.
- 3 Géza Ottlik, "A másik Magyarország" [The Other Hungary] *Kortárs*, June 1981), p. 391.
- 4 Imre Bata, "Lukács György népi demokrácia koncepciója" [The concept of people's democracy by György Lukács] in Szerdahelyi István, ed., *Lukács György és a magyar kultúra* (Budapest, 1982), p. 157.
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