Social Memory in the Transformational Process of East-Central Europe

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Preliminary Remarks

Five years after the breakdown of the real-socialist system, it is finally possible to distinguish how collectivities and individuals have come to terms with their involvement in the old regime. The governments of the newly created democracies are endeavoring to solve the problem of responsibility among the members of the former political elite as well as restitution to former victims by means of a "policy of the past" (see Offe 1993). Meanwhile, each individual is met with the personal task of reconciling objectively experienced historical discontinuity with subjectively perceived identity which represents "a sense of sameness and continuity as an individual" (Erickson 1968: 61).

The attempt to master the communist past requires as a process of selective remembering. Its analysis must first aim at the individual and collective forms of the policy of the past. Secondly, it must review the conditions under which individuals or collectivities are ready, willing or able to face their own history without shrinking away from its inherent contradictions, ambivalence and/or multiple meaning.

This article intends to discuss these issues in the light of the findings of an explorative study that the author conducted in Prague and Budapest in early 1993. The investigation is based on a series of 120 interviews. The subjects were chosen according to age, education and sex. Three age groups were established with the aim to cover as completely as possible the socially communicated memory of the period dominated by communism. The interviewees over 65 represent the generation who experienced the Second World War and national-socialist terror, and who also experienced the beginning of communist domination and the revolutionary hope to alleviate that historical fate at the outset of adulthood (1956, 1968). Alternately, today's 50 to 55-year old people represent a generation whose biographies were fully seized and extensively determined by the communist and real-socialist domination. The focal point for the first group is the year 1948, and 1968 for the second. Their children in the age group of 20 to 30 grew up
during the stagnancy period of the 70s and 80s and had not yet left themselves in the hands of the compromising system, e.g. by means of their educational or professional orientation, when the far-reaching transition occurred in 1989.

Under the heading of Vergangenheitsbewältigung, mastering the past, the study focused on how citizens of the countries involved perceive and assess the radical ideological, political and social changes occurring in East-Central Europe and the ways they take them into account when projecting into the future, How can the processes of general reorientation triggered by the downfall of real-socialism in 1989 be connected both to a reevaluation of personal experience and the historically transmitted past? And how does this affect plans and perspectives for the future? Are there any essential differences between the representatives of different generations?

The Double Crisis of History

Attempts to master the past are commonly motivated by the wish for autonomy against the inertial strength of history. Mastering the past requires being conscious of individual involvement in that history and, though painfully at times, setting oneself at a distance both from the collectively and individually recorded experience of history, or, in the words of the French historian Jacques Le Goff, "to look one's own history in the face is an obligation for nations as for individuals. Amnesia is a tragedy; self-imposed amnesia is a serious offense (Le Goff 1992: 7)."

However, it soon became evident after the fall of communism that elements of the old times remained active through the change. These elements were recalled together with older, submerged experiences whose roots date back to different periods of history. Likewise, Adorno's statement concerning the period of post-fascism, that the continued existence of National Socialism within democracy (is) potentially more threatening than the continued existence of fascist tendencies against democracy, gained a new relevancy. "Infiltration designates something objective; dubious figures make their comeback into positions of power only because present conditions favor them (Adorno 1986: 115)." How can it be avoided that the old persists disintegratively in the new? To what extent are people able to resist the temptation of "rescuing" themselves when threatened by a massive outbreak of historical events by reverting to supposedly meaningful elements of the past? How can a frame derived from the conditions in the
East-Central European societies be established for a rational adjustment of remembrance and identity that withstands the rebirth of national resentment?

The particular relevancy of this question results from the "double crisis of history" (Judt 1992: 101) which is haunting the formerly real-socialist states of East-Central Europe. In the course of their "return to history", the countries concerned clearly had considerable difficulties in regulating anew their reference to the past without giving in to the temptation of mystifying the old times nor "extraterritorializing" the period of communist rule, i.e. putting aside or even erasing from collective memory this period as one of foreign domination. As much as historical breakdowns offer a chance to critically recall one's own involvement in history, they at once encourage the emergence of new legends and myths.

However, the double crisis of history is also the result of one specific structural feature of real-socialist rule and economy: familialism. This term designates a social structure bearing strong, particularistic features and being largely determined by the "social capital" (in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu) The two most important representative forms of familialism are the complexly organized economy of exchange alongside distinct hierarchies and status trajectories, and the informalization of social relationships. Familialism is structurally rooted in shortage economy which has made it necessary to locate channels of supply and distribution other than the official ones. However, it is also based on what Habermas (1992: 446) once called a bureaucratic desiccation of the public, by which different communication processes - and thus the transmission of historical experience and knowledge - were forced into private and informal connections. It is frequently emphasized that the internal logic governing the distribution networks that were set up to meet the people's basic needs corresponds to the principles of archaic exchange economy (see Srubar 1991, Mozny 1991).

At this point, it seems essential to mention the fact that the preconditions for a general public sense of morality were gradually undermined - along with the development of informalized exchange relations and commercial transactions, and the concomitant dismembering of society into informal and frequent distributive and communicative networks, though not necessarily in conjunction with the family or kin. While an increasing valuational orientation developed toward the primary group or similar relationship networks, the "volanté générale" came to be terminated. Five years after the collapse of real-socialism, the crisis of
social integration then triggered still represents one of the most important problems facing the societies under transformation in East-Central Europe.

The consequences of familialism are momentous within any critical analysis of historical experience. On the one hand, as the American historian Tony Judt remarks, "cynicism and mistrust pervade all social, cultural, and even personal exchanges, so that the construction of civil society, much less civil memory, is very, very difficult. On the other hand, there are multiple memories and historical myths, each of which has learned to think of itself as legitimate simply by virtue of being private and unofficial. Where these private or tribal versions come together, they form powerful counterhistories of a mutually antagonistic and divisive nature" (Judt 1992: 101).

In all previously real-socialist countries, the extent to which this communication crisis has impeded efforts to critically discuss the past can be observed. This is particularly the case for the official policy of the past. But it is also important to notice that the communication crisis has had an impact on the society as well as on families and informal networks.

In essence, this finding contradicts the myth of the "subversive family" (Mount 1982) as gravedigger of totalitarianism. Our investigation indicates that in spite of the generally powerful orientation towards private domains, a communicative blockade prevails, strongly pronounced at times, in place of a bustling stream of communication. Very little can be confirmed of the proposition expressed by Michael Walzer and others that "tens of thousands of old men and women (are) whispering to their grandchildren, singing folk songs and lullabies, repeating ancient stories" (Walzer 1992s 164). Family networks continue to set up memory communities only in very limited numbers. The members of the old generation rarely complied with their function as transmitters of historical knowledge, while those of the young generation are trying to break away from the "interior worlds", their upholders and destinies. Even the experiences acquired under the communist regime now prove apparently and increasingly worth-less, the communist past turning out to be a largely evacuated reservoir of experience. Young people especially are seized by some sort of ahistoricity. Analogues to the period of postfacism involuntarily come to mind: the second generation is better capable of coming to terms with the past than the first "silent" generation.

In this connection, there is every reason to believe that we are dealing with a system effect. This does not only apply to Czechoslovakia where a "world without memory" (Milan
Kundera) was established in more than metaphorical terms by calling in a policy of normalization after the suppression of the Prague Spring. Inspired by the writings of Jan Patocvka, Václav Havel's "Letter to Dr. Gustáv Husák (1975) insistently castigated the social remoteness and amorality of Czechoslovak society and pointed to its loss of time and historicity: "Under such a regime, the elimination of life in the proper sense brings social time to a halt, so that history disappears from its purview. In our own country, too, one has the impression that for some time there has been no history. Slowly but surely, we are losing the sense of time. We begin to forget what happened when, what came earlier and what later, and the feeling that it really doesn't matter overwhelms us. As uniqueness disappears from the flow of events, so does continuity; everything merges into the single gray image of one and the same cycle and we say, 'There is nothing happening.' Here, too, a deadly order has been imposed: all activity is completely organized and so completely deadened. The deadening of the sense of the time sequence in society inevitably kills it in private life as well. No longer backed by social history or the history of the individual position within it, private life declines to a prehistoric level where time derives its only rhythm from such events as birth, marriage and death" (Havel 1990: 26).

With the spread of apathy, Milan Simecka indicates, all positive feelings referring to communality died off, including national feelings. The policy of normalization after 1968 thus proved to be not only a collective trauma, but also an individually experienced "traumatic humiliation" (Simecka 1992: 100).

Though divergent, the situation in Hungary brought no lesser results. As György Litván pointed out; a series of generations grew up under Kádárism "lacking any knowledge of the events and prominent actors of the Revolution (of 1956). They were given distorted and hypocritical information. This issue was not only a taboo in the media or in school - where that situation is only too easily arrived at through coercion and censorship but in most families as well. This happened firstly because parents and relatives had been involved in one way or another and secondly on the simple grounds of the general socializing role of the family" (quoted by Varga 1991: 172f). The strategy of silence was to protect both parents and children, as Lászlo Varga remarked (idem). The consequence of this strategy was not apathy like in Czechoslovakia, but strongly marked atomistic individualism and privatism. 2 One question certainly arising at this point is: Will the radical change toward democracy in Central-Eastern Europe now lead to an end of collective repression?
"Getting Even" with the Communist Past

With regard to social memory in the postcommunist era, the Polish historian Marcin Król defined three types of approaches to the communist past: he speaks of evolutionary, restorative and amnesic types of revolution (Król 1991: 330). This distinction is very helpful to our discussion. Thus, a comparison between the Czech Republic and Hungary shows that the Former corresponds rather to the restorative, and Hungary rather to the evolutionary type. In what was once Czechoslovakia, the Velvet Revolution brought an "end to immovability" (Milan Simecka), the downfall of regime amounting to capitulation. In Hungary, the transition to post-totalitarianism was sealed by running elections called in by the upholders of the old regime. Communism collapsed in Czechoslovakia but in Hungary, it abdicated by ways of negotiation processes. While the latter is faced with continuity in transition, the Czech Republic is going through a restorative revolution with the aim of returning "to capitalism in economic, and to democracy in political terms (Goldstücker 1992: 62). In either case, corresponding historical references are missing in Hungary.

The difference between restorative and evolutionary variants of the 1989 democratic change is given expression to in dealing with the past, either publicly or in private. In Czechoslovakia, the moral pressure upon former communists is so strong that even activists of the Prague Spring, and "Charterists" themselves, are discredited. The law of "lustration", adopted in October 1991 by the Czechoslovak parliament then in office, is designed to outlaw the former members of the State Security Service. In Hungary, the defeated conservative government exhibited clear reserve on this question ("igazsagtetel").

A series of interviews conducted in Prague and Budapest brought the same results: the Prague interviewees were in favor of official ostracism to be declared upon the old regime and its supporters, despite their possible professional competence or merits. In Budapest, our informants recommended that the members of the former system elite be judged on their performance and not on their functions, except if convicted of a criminal offense. This result reflects the different roles played by each elite under the old regime and, at the same time, signals divergent experiences with two different systems of rule, i.e. the totalitarian and the paternalistic types of communism. The old regime in Prague is generally judged with stronger criticism, and the 1989 advent of democracy in unanimously more positive and optimistic terms than in Budapest, where
the young generation keeps a positive memory of the Kádár regime and pleads for leniency towards its former officials. Our investigation thus supports the hypothesis forwarded by Szelenyi and Treiman (1991) that the Hungarian elite stands better chance of retaining a weighty share of power and influence and maneuver its bureaucratic privileges into a good position on the market, while in the former Czechoslovakia (as well as in Poland), a greater circulation of the elite is to be expected. 4

Whether the change of regime is supported or rejected depends both on the severe or lenient downfall of the system and on the costs involved in the transformation. The revolutionary changes in Hungary were gradually prepared from within and they were additionally accompanied by a dramatic deterioration of living conditions for many, not only for elderly people. Ever since the early 80s and repeatedly thereafter, the economic crisis experienced in Hungary brought the country to the verge of insolvency and in this respect, it cannot be seen as a result of the regime change, it was indeed amplified by the latter. Moreover, political liberalism - permissiveness as to setting up small business enterprises, the freedom to travel and partial voting rights - furnished the Hungarian regime with a certain basis of legitimation up to the end. In the Czech Republic, it is those who belonged to the favorites of the old regime and experienced its breakdown together with that of their own careers who reject the transition explicitly. The former regime was too discredited in every respect to remain attractive today, and this situation is of benefit to the desire on the part of the new regime for legitimacy. Richard Rose's (1992) hypothesis, according to which the virtually complete dissatisfaction with the former communist regime provided a wide scope for strategies, applies to a far greater extent to the Czech Republic than to Hungary.

In Hungary, on the other hand, the transformation costs increasing prices and insecurity, dismantling of social support, unemployment, etc. - are perceived not in contrast with an objectionable regime, but a steady downhill tendency and genuine deterioration of living conditions without corresponding compensation. It is little wonder, then, that we found more widespread fear of losing one's social security and seeing political instability increase among our Hungarian interviewees than those in Prague. In Hungary, the political force of one generation, i.e. the youth party FIDESZ (Fiatal Demokratik Szövetsege, Union of Young Democrats, founded at the end of March 1988), turned out to be the main impetus within the systemic transformation at the end of the 806. The presence of FIDESZ can be identified as the expression
of the civil-societal potential in Hungary. Its historical significance, however, should not obscure the fact that the young Hungarians perceive the "soft" transition from a totalitarian single-party regime to a multiple-party democracy as a continuity within transition rather than as a historical rupture encouraging a final stroke or an inevitable "Stunde Null".

The tensions resulting from this state of affairs are obvious: they usher in dissatisfaction with postcommunist politics which cuts social and economic matters without bringing about immediately discernible benefits. Political strategies that recommend to postpone the satisfaction of human needs or refer to society's self-involvement run a risk of falling flat particularly if, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it, the people are overburdened with appeals to defer the satisfaction of their needs (Bauman 1993: 170). Economic deprivation is the base for positive identification with the old regime all the more when the old regime is not so easily identified with "evil" characteristics, as in Hungary. The latter is the case in the Czech Republic where the mass media tend to transmit an exaggeratedly black-and-white portrayal of the old regime and thus to "extraterritorialize" the past (see Nekvapil 1992: 371). Is the Past Threatened by "Extraterritorialization"?

The concept of "extraterritorialization of the past" is meant to describe the attempt to resolve the tension resulting from the social collapse of 1989 by an act of external shifting. Such displacement is made possible by a disorder and change of the references drawn upon by the social memory in East-Central Europe. The new element in today's situation is not only that the social memory has been enriched by an important reference point, i.e. the 1989 events, but that it also relates to a general shift of the historical-societal coordinate system relevant to the social memory and, along with it, of the evaluative view upon the past. This is evident in the expression "return to Europe". There is a change of perspective connected with this return: the communist past is no longer seen as a part of one's own history calling for confrontation; it is considered "from without"- from an imaginary Europe - and thus extraterritorialized, i.e. shifted to external factors, such as the "Barbarian East". Europe is an equivalent for civility, the "evil" of communism or fascism being considered the product of forces engaged against civilization acting from outside and incessantly trying to subjugate the "good".

At the social-actors level, the extraterritorialization of the past corresponds to the subjective need to come to terms with one's own involvement in the old regime. With the radical social change of 1989, the dichotomization of "we" and "they" so typical of real-socialism
transformed itself and a clearer light fell on perpetrators and victims alike, and also on the participation of fellow travelers. What was a strategy of survival, and once enabled the totalitarian structures to persist, now takes the appearance of entanglement, or even collaboration, under this new perspective. This relationship is thought to be eradicable by extraterritorializing history. In this sense, the former elite interest in an exonerative interpretation of history is analogous to many people's need to straighten their biographical background in order to bring their personal identity (in terms of biographical consistency) into line with their social identity (in terms of social roles). There is much that testifies to the statement put forward by Tony Judt: "The new Europe is thus being built upon historical sands at least as shifty in nature as those upon which the postwar edifice was mounted (Judt 1992: 113).

However, we should beware of an all too gloomy scenario. The Prague survey demonstrated that the elderly feel jointly responsible for the late aftermath of communism, because they were either too passive, submitted to authoritative politics, or practiced opportunism that they now perceive as problematic. The same goes for all citizens who were asked how they felt about the joint responsibility of their parents' generation. In Budapest, this idea of shared responsibility is found in the middle and younger generation. The younger the respondents were, the more aware and critical they seemed to be of each individual's involvement in the historical events.

A similar impression was obtained on the question about the presence of shame or pride in one's own nation. We found a feeling of shame in the Prague respondents, at times clearly articulated, in the face of certain historical events - e.g. submission to the dictates of communism, collaboration with the Nazi occupants or expulsion of the Germans after 1945. In the Budapest interviewees, however, we noticed a rather indiscriminate and uncritical national pride: these informants admitted that they were proud of Hungarianness "itself", i.e. of the ability demonstrated by the Hungarian people to survive even through hard times. In contrast, our Prague respondents brought comments on both the positive and negative qualities or performance of the nation or individuals.

Although many Prague interviewees were much more critical in evaluating their national history and their personal involvement the strong desire to avert, even to disconnect themselves from history is remarkable. They quite apparently perceived the encumbrance of the past as too oppressive. In contrast, the Hungarians interviewed shared a need to define a new sense of
national identity through history Consequently, the feelings of shame and joint responsibility recorded in Prague are not associated with an interest in exposing the context of nationwide involvement, but with the desire to forget or throw off the burden. The radical disclosure to the new is linked to noticeable indifference within present-day perceptions of social and political conflicts. Alternately, young people in the Budapest survey exhibited national self-confidence beyond any doubt. Here, the skeptical evaluation of the change of system goes along with a need to historicize the present which appears more insecure and full of tension. In other words: whereas in Prague, the Velvet Revolution of 1989 is often seen as a break, as an opportunity for a new beginning, which can easily lead to extraterritorialize the past, the experience of a more liberal, paternalistic type of communist rule in Budapest did not lead to a more open and critical perception of the past and to confrontation with one's own entanglement therein, but rather to a historicization of the present.

Redefining history

What can we draw from our results? Can we conclude that the Hungarians are more nationalist than the Czechs? It is obvious that we are in the presence of two different way of referring to national history. This has come out of the answers concerning the present-day meaning of experiences stored in the collective memory. In our investigation, we have dealt with this problem at two levels: firstly, we asked the interviewees about the attractiveness of several historical personalities and about the "golden" and "gloomy" periods of their respective national history. Secondly, we had them give their opinion concerning certain events and/or personalities of contemporary history.

The historical patterns considered as relevant for the present have been chosen according to the ongoing process of social democratization, as performed along Western standards, and transformation of economic structures towards a market economy. The range of possible patterns is limited to those periods of history in which the present can be legitimized. On the other hand, models of the past are scrutinized under the pressure of the new situation. The importance of constructing new versions of history derives from the integrative function of historical images. The narrative character of such images reveals itself as one of the consolidating elements for the community.

The question relating to the historical character that would represent a model for the present revealed an interesting difference between the two cities. In Prague, especially the young interviewees indicated that they were unable to give an answer as to whether they would like to
see one historical figure solve the current problems. This result is all the more significant in view of our proposal that relations to the past in the Czech Republic are marked, particularly in young people, by ambivalence and aversion from the past, whereas in Budapest, the respondents show a tendency to historicize the present and thus give a meaning by the agency of references to the past.

With regard to the personality question in the Czech Republic, Tomás G. Masaryk is attributed widest significance. The second personality is Charles IV, followed by Jan Bus and the educational reformer J. A. Komenský. The results coincide with the number of representative surveys on this topic. For example, in a Czech survey of 1992, T. G. Masaryk (47 percent), Charles IV (26 per cent), J. A. Komenský (124 per cent) and Jan Hus (18 per cent) were indicated as most prominent historical personalities (Misovic 1992). A survey conducted two years earlier had produced results of another order, giving Masaryk 46 per cent, Charles IV 13 per cent, Eduard Benes - the Czechoslovak Head of State between 1945 and 1948 and instigator of the deportation of the German-speaking population 12 per cent and Jan Hus 10 per cent (Belica et. al 1990). In this context, Benes' degradation and the corresponding evaluative upgrading of national-historical figures such as Charles IV or J. A. Komenský is attributable to the criticism, pronounced by the new government and especially Vaclav Havel, of the conflicting role played by Benes after 1945.

On the Hungarian side, the most frequent entries went to Count István Széchenyi, King Matthias and Lajos Kossuth, the leader of the Hungarian Liberal movement in 1848/49. The rest of the votes were shared by various historical personalities. In general, it is remarkable that personalities of the postwar period were mentioned occasionally: in the Czech Republic, the choice went to Eduard Benes and Alexander Dubcek, and in Hungary, mostly to the two opponents of the 1956 revolution, Imre Nagy and János Kádár. This confirms that Kádár represents a central focal figure both in positive and negative evaluations, as other Hungarian surveys have also substantiated. The results concerning the question about the most blissful and darkest chapters of history indicate that Czech historical consciousness is marked by the years between the two world wars, whereas the period of national-socialist foreign domination, together with some sections of communist supremacy, exert a negative influence. The time horizon shifted according to the respondents age. The members of the young generation mentioned the Nazi period as the darkest division of their country's history less often than their
parents' or grandparents' generations, while the historical memory in the 50 year-old and above has established itself in the year 1968. The lack of positive aspects in recent history also determined the responsive behavior, as to the question of the golden period, among the young who for the most part mention the First Republic under T. G. Masaryk.

The results obtained in the Czech Republic mirror those of Hungary in most respects. Unlike the former, the answer to the question concerning the most fortunate chapter of Hungarian history more frequently referred to earlier times, e.g. the period following the Austro-Hungarian Settlement of 1867, or to moments of the more recent past, like the "golden decade" of the 70s under János Kádár. Without doubt, this is in part attributable to the lack of positive attitudes toward the developments after World War I. The darkest chapter also recedes further into the past, for example to the foreign occupation by the Ottoman Empire.

The second set of questions concerning the evaluation of contemporary historical events reveals a desire to revise individual conceptions of history. The fact that this is more strongly expressed in Budapest may be correlated to some extent with our choice of topics. The questions there dealt with the import of the Peace Treaties of Trianon, the Reichs Deputy Miklós Horthy and the events of 1956. In Prague, the interviewees were asked to give answers concerning Jan Masaryk (son of the founder of the Republic T. G. Masaryk, Secretary of State after 1945, suicide in 1948), the role of the year 1948 (coup d' état or people 5 will), and the significance of the Prague Spring.

Almost all respondents in Budapest were of the opinion that the Horthy regime requires reevaluation. A variety of answers ranged from "it cannot have been that bad", to the affirmation that under Horthy, it "was not as bad as all that" or that "it was better than under the communists". There is a general consensus on the need for a revision of the historical record, put aside some occasional criticism of the Horthy regime. Those who pronounced themselves against such reinterpretation are almost always supporters of the old regime. In this context, it is important to realize that we are here dealing neither with an affirmation nor a rejection of Horthy himself - all surveys show an evidently negative evaluation of this historical personality. However, the ideological instrumentalization of history put to work by the communists provokes an act of defiance: was the period of the Horthy regime in fact as terrible as the communists propagated?
These results can be interpreted to show that, in spite of the esteem attested to the Kádár regime even by the young, the "unconscious" filtering effect of the new system is effectively at work. To a certain extent, this bears out Maurice Halbwachs' hypothesis that the historical can only be recalled from the standpoint of the present, and that the selection process virtually takes place behind the backs of social actors. Along Marcin Król's line of thought, then, we could speak of a restorative element present in the process of evolutionary revolution. In fact, the current difficulties in Hungary also reside in the absence of adequate links with the pr communist past. The efforts to "cleanse" the authoritarian, anti-Semitic and Hitler-collaborating Horthy regime fulfills a specific function for the post-totalitarian regime, even though the latter started on a claim to self-critically examine the past. Hungarian historians get bitter when they realize that they are accused of disloyalty in the course of their attempts to make a critical review of Hungarians' involvement in the national-socialist policies of Jewish extermination, whereas at the same time there is surprisingly little resistance, while critically dealing with communism, to the rehabilitation of questionable anti-Communist coalition partners. This also holds for historians who confront opinion with discomforting questions concerning the communist past. The evaluation of our data reinforces the concept of a selective nature of social remembering and shows that the revision of history is catching hold of the anti-Communist national myth of 1956. Our respondents actually continue to grant particular importance to the 1956 Revolution while implying in many ways that it is better "to let history rest as it is." The events of that year occupy only a marginal role in today's Hungary. Again, it is merely a point of reference for an atomized intelligentsia.

The results of our Prague interviews point to similar aspects of "mis-memory". The communist takeover of 1948 is generally regarded as a coup d' état without any support by the people, as an act of imposition on the part of foreign, Soviet interests. The events of the Prague Spring of 1968 do not appear relevant, especially to the young respondents. With regard to Jan Masaryk, the interviewees had no opinion at all. Is this mis-memory to be interpreted as a late after-effect of a social amnesia dominant under communism? At any rate, the results of our investigation give clues for a deep breakage in historical consciousness. As to 1968 and the period of stagnancy, particularly the relationship of young Czechs to history seems to be torn in spite of, or perhaps because of, their strong involvement in the recent history of their country.
Social memory and national identity

In conclusion, let us discuss the two different approaches to national history in connection with the specific problems of national identity in the Czech Republic and Hungary. There can be no doubt that these approaches not only result from the exposure to different types of communism and specific circumstances of the democratic revolution of 1989, but that they also result from previous historical experiences. Hungary, not only the experiences with the "Goulash Archipelago" (György Dalos) have created identity, but also its situation as a small and linguistically isolated nation that could survive the disorders of the century is certainly perceived as one of the prime patterns of collective self-conception. National myths, such as that of Trianon, acquired central value, as we have clearly determine by our investigation. In this respect, the Hungarian national sentiment appears to resist conscious analysis. Hungarian nationalism typically polarizes societal forces along the differentiation between town and country. Patriotism as democratic virtue and fact of urbanity diverges from nationalism as an ethnocentric resentment and rural, quasi-religious phenomenon.

In the Czech Republic, we found too little patriotism or national self-assurance, rather than too much. Here again, the "broken" national consciousness is not merely the product of national feelings strangulated during the period of normalization, as described by Simecka, but it reflects inter alia the historical experience of repeated and long-lasting losses of national independence. The post-1968 policy of normalization, felt to be an act of "colonization" by many Czechs, could be perceived as a reiteration of their national fate. An element of danger and of opportunity is embedded in the lagging or "remedial" shaping of national consciousness. The opportunity exists because any construction of identity implies the possibility of its reflective "refraction." The risk exists as an historic tendency toward claiming the role of victim and thus deflecting culpability for taking the necessary remedial action. As Istvan Bibó observed shortly after the Second World War, both the democratic Czechoslovakia between the two World Wars and the revived Republic between 1945 and 1948 consciously took on the role of a humiliated country abandoned by all powers and thus blameless for its fate. The expulsion of the German-speaking population after 1945, a twisted expression of "remedial nationalism", is a historical burden for all Czechs. The fact that even young respondents of our survey expressed a feeling of shame in this regard (if only inspired by President Havel's remarks to that effect) may be
interpreted as an encouraging signal. However, there are also indications that the construction of national identity in the sense of "democratic patriotism", of necessity linked to any increase in self-critical historical consciousness, tends toward a process where opposing positions are taken. The inclination to evacuate history and to shift evil to a generalizing concept of communism should be sufficient to point this out.

The problem of such "remedial patriotism", on the one hand, and of nationalism depending on the historization of the present, on the other, directly touches upon the question of political identity. Our discussion should make it clear that it would be short-sighted to equate the need for positively evaluated national affiliation with a manifestation of simplified identity or regression. The particular problem of nationalism in the former Eastern bloc countries can be grasped in its specific composition and explosiveness only if we are ready to recognize various layers and overlappings. In the light of the findings obtained from our investigation, we can try to emphasize the different tracks and contradictions involved. Thus, firstly, we are able to identify the legacy of communism. The communist regimes were based on an ideological discrimination of national feelings of belonging, on a simultaneous repression of national ties by "privatizing" or "stabilizing" society within the monopolistic mechanism of the communist party, and on the instrumentalization of deeper-rooted national resentment.

Secondly, tremendous effectiveness can be observed on the part of national legends and myths which have gone through the real socialist system and are retaking hold of the people today. In this connection, historical phenomena of long duration have proven quite significant in the respective countries as set off in the Protestant tradition in the Czech Republic or in the historical and cultural antagonism, kept alive by tradition, town and country in Hungary. Finally, it must be taken into account that the manifold crisis of the post-totalitarian prevent - economic insecurity, social destabilization, cultural diffusion, political particularization - provides the search for new spheres of identification with a genuine foundation. The fact that this has been identified as a question of national affiliation is not the expression of an "inner", quasi-"natural" longing for primary ties in human beings, but rather the effect of damaged identity structures, highly conventionalized by the familialized social circumstances of the real-socialist system.
Notes

1. It is evident that an exploratively designed investigation can lay little claim to representativeness, even though the contract in statements as expressed by citizens of both cities and their reflection in the light of the findings obtained by representative surveys do partly support our interpretations. Our ambition was not, however, to formulate final answers, but to highlight the contradictory and complex nature of a problem, the unambiguousness of which is merely putative.

2. The problem connected with atomistic individualism and privates is also well documented in the social sciences. Thus, a European comparative study (see Hankiss 1990: 183ff.) going back to the early 80s dealt with the question "Is there anything outside your family for which you would be ready to sacrifice yourself?" and reported that 85 per cent of the Hungarian respondents answered negatively as against 38 per cent of the Spanish, 48 per cent of the Italian, 53 per cent of the West German and 60 per cent of the English. To the question "would you bring up your children to respect other people?", only 31 per cent of the Hungarian, 44 per cent of the Spanish, 43 per cent of the Italian, 52 per cent of the West German and 62 per cent of the English interviewees responded affirmatively. The following result also points out to a lack of altruism: the question as to whether parents should attend to their own lives rather than take care of their children was answered with "yes" by 44 per cent of the Hungarian as against 13 per cent of the Spanish, 27 per cent of the Italian, 28 per cent of the West German, and 18 per cent of the English respondents. The inclination to "familialist way of life was also confirmed by the answers to the question concerning leisure networks: 72 per cent of the Hungarians preferred to spend their leisure time with their family, and only 10 per cent with friends; the corresponding figures for the Spanish respondents were 53 to 23 per cent, for the Italian, 36 to 29 per cent, for the West German, 52 to 27 per cent, and for the English informants, 48 to 27 per cent.

3. The role played by the Czechoslovak "system elite" is widely determined by the politics after 1968: the suppression of the Prague Spring was accompanied by a massive cleansing of the elite ranks. The main criterion used to recruit the elite after 1968/69 was Communist party membership. Against this background, Szelenyi and Treiman have assumed that the proportion of the elite then lacking a corresponding level of education was much larger than in Hungary or Poland. In this respect, not only collaboration with the regime, but also the relatively limited degree of professionalism justified the dispensability of the old system elite in the minds of many. These posts are now taken by young and highly qualified specialists who were either apolitical in the old system, members of the opposition, or belong to a new generation altogether. Quite the reverse, the Hungarian bureaucratic elite was already able to acquire professional competence as of the mid-1960s. As a result, this elite was less discredited, but at the same time was provided with more 'cultural capital". The quasi-institutionalization of relationships between the heads of the party and/or government and the social-scientific intelligentsia is one of the more specific features of "Kádárism". The regime's openness to a certain degree of critical potential was undoubtedly directed at pacifying the intelligentsia and concurrently marginalizing the opposition. The "second economy" which allowed to differentiate somewhat among the elite, especially in the field of economy, becomes relevant at this point. Recognition of specialized competence regardless of possible involvement in the system, as could be found in our survey, is an expression of this particular situation.
4. In their comparative study of the structural effects of transformation in Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, Ivan Szelenyi and Donald Treiman stress higher social mobility and the increased value of cultural capital as the most important short and medium-term consequences of the systemic transformation. They firstly emphasize the meaning of "circulation mobility" prompted by the discrediting of the old elite. The decisive factor for the recruitment of elite members is cultural capital, foremost a high level of education. On this point, however, important differences have been noticed between the above-mentioned countries, especially between the Czech Republic and Hungary: while the authors expect a strong re-recruitment of the elite in the Czech Republic due to the extent of discredit and the low number of qualified post-1968 elite members, they foresee little change among the elite in Hungary where most of the members were highly educated. In general, the authors are of the opinion that in the longer term, the value of cultural capital will drop in relation to economic capital; and they base their prediction on an increased differentiation between those groups which dispose of economic capital as against cultural capital.

References Cited


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