

Sailing through the high waters of current public debates and politics of memory

Reflections on the new monograph published by Catherine Horel on the Horthy-era in the context of the current debates on the contemporary history of Hungary.

The “fall of the idols” of the Marxist-Leninist world view cleared the scene which had a referential role to public actors in a need for sources and means of symbolic legitimating. In the process of delegitimizing of the Communist system, an important role has been played by the hyphening of the scarcity of resources and the growing scale of poverty at the societal level, as the discourse on the eradication of poverty was of a referential value of the Communist political identity – of an ever-higher value for the János Kádár-led Hungarian regime. The issue of Hungarian minorities’ gradually worsening situation in the neighbouring states, as part of a generally growing referential value of the ethno-culturally defined national agenda, including national sovereignty and independence, in a state which remained attached to a Soviet Union oriented loyalty up to the late 1980’s, were part of a new, alternative set of referential values which played an important symbolic role also in legitimating regime change. The need for a new symbolic figure for “the father of the nation” with a referential role for an ever larger solidarity, challenging and uprooting the compromised solution-based Kádár regime’s symbolic hegemony (which tried to build up its symbolical reference to the era of long peace and welfare between 1867 and 1918, attached to the father figure of Franz Joseph), had led to a revival of the cult of historical personalities identified with nationalism, independence and sovereignty, motivated by political legitimating. In that struggle for symbolic reference, the political actors had tried several strategies which after all had not succeeded entirely neither to eradicate the symbolic capital of Kádár (as in the early 2000’s still had held an essential public presence as one of the most referential Hungarian figures of the 20th Century, with a strong nostalgic background for its economically based, socially appeasing policies), neither to build up a symbolic consensus around any other historical or public personality of the same century. Symptomatic for the current situation is that the main symbolic place of the capital city of Hungary is still a scenery of an ongoing “battle” of the politics of memory, which was gradually reshaped by restated statues of

pre-20th century leaders, and also not assumed entirely by the public. The symbolic capital of leaders which marked the Hungarian 20th Century seems to be eroded by the ever-louder political fight for imposing each side's hegemonic view on the other side's responsibilities for the tragedies of the last century.

In the meantime, the post-1989 public debates on the contemporary history of Hungary had resettled the stage for a plurality of discourse, which also used references to a new historiography that revisited and reinterpreted the sources, hyphenated by the opening of archives and the build-up of oral history. It had gradually resulted in different approaches to issues of contemporary history, which in the Communist era were addressed as part of the ideologically dictated hegemonic discourse. That hegemonic discourse for half a century had set the official politics of memory, disseminated through the setting of public symbolic places, media references, also as part of the educational curricula, of manuals and text books, made for public schools and universities. The rewriting of manuals and textbooks, the reshaping of public symbolic places, new media references had been structured in parallel, as the re-evaluation by professional historians of contemporary history had just started, without reaching a consensus about the referential set of values that have to meet the main end of a new, democratic and pluralistic setting of the post-1989 Hungarian society. The politically biased public discourse had reached an overwhelming media presence, as the professional historiography was gradually overshadowed and drawn to the periphery of the main core of the debate. The historians and their work were mainly referred (with some notable exceptions) only if they could be used as an argument for an already set political positioning. There was not a lot of interest for detailed views and assuming paradoxical truths. History, as represented in the public media, was seen as a tool for un-equivocal positioning in the battle for hegemonic expressing of truth. Paradoxically, modern and contemporary history was very much frequented and historical reference was fashionable, but with very little respect to the inner logical built-up and the value of historical enquiry and knowledge. A historical discourse which assumed complexity and filled with contradictory realities of a past era or of a historical personality, as assumed by someone who was not sensible to the use of discourse with historical references present in the current public debates, and not looking for presenting a new argument favouring any of the politically biased actors of the public media was to get very little if any attention, subsidies or public reckoning.

As history became fashionable, historians who remained faithful to their vocation became less frequented.

The politics of memory had been an important tool of the current political establishment all along the 20th Century and beyond, as history had represented a referential value for the modern nation-building process, especially in East-Central Europe. The late or belated modernity, marked by a very ethno-centric view on constructing the nation, and the nation states of this region, explains also the ever-important role assigned to intellectuals engaged in the study of humanities, including history, which served as a referential field of ideas used for political legitimating discourse. The struggle for imposing its own hegemonic view about the symbolic figure of the “father of the nation” has been used both by the political left, as by the political right-wing discourse in contemporary Hungary. At the turn between the 19th and 20th centuries, the discursive building of the nation had not lacked the very frequented instrument of reburial of historic personalities¹: In 1870, it was the moment of the first prime minister of 1848 revolutionary Hungary’s reburial, which had symbolized the appeasing of king and country, only three years since the crowning of the Habsburg emperor Franz Joseph as also king of Hungary, part of a political process that led to the establishment of parliamentary monarchy and a specific devolution of government; Then in 1894, it was followed by the reburial of Lajos Kossuth, leader of the national revolution and fight for independent Hungary, and in 1906 of Ferenc Rákóczi II, leading figure of the anti-Habsburg national uprising in the early 18th Century of the Hungarians, whom since that historic moment had been symbolically separated in “kuruc” (used as synonym for radical nationalists, up for total independence and free-electing of a national dynasty), and “labanc” (moderate conservatives, dedicated for a compromise solution with the Habsburg dynasty, evaluated as a tool for modernizing and synchronizing with Western Europe of Hungary, but evaluated as “traitors of nation” by the other group). Then it was the moment of 1938, celebrated as the year of King Saint Stephen of Hungary (together with the Eucharistic Congress held that year in Hungary), when in the former medieval capital Székesfehérvár a complex symbolic place had been structured as a main scenery of the celebrations, and the embalmed right hand of the medieval founder of Hungary (which is

¹ For a short but very relevant analysis see: Horel, Catherine, *Amiralul Horthy, regentul Ungariei*, (București: Editura Humanitas, 2019), pp. 378-384. For a more detailed analysis, with strong references to the Romanian cases, see: Verdery, Katherine: *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Post-Socialist Change*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), *passim*.

assumed also by the Roman-Catholic Church as a religious relic) had been carried across the whole country of a specially designed train – as a strong references of the then current political regime to the medieval kingdom of Hungary established as part of the Western Christianity. Then in 1956 it was the symbolic moment of the reburial of László Rajk, then presented as a victim of Hungarian Stalinist brutality (he was the minister of interior in the first period of the most aggressive repressions' times, which was shadowed by the show trial he was victimized by in 1949), which was an important part of a re-legitimizing effort of post-Stalinist Hungarian Communism, followed by the Hungarian Revolution that year, and then still assumed as a symbolic source of legitimating by János Kádár (who was the minister of interior back in 1949, playing a certain role in the liquidation of Rajk, then being imprisoned in 1951, and became the new ruling figure after restoring Communist rule in late 1956), as delimitating itself also from the Stalinist legacy, as stating the legacy of a martyrdom for the Communist idea. 1989 was a momentum marked by the reburial of Imre Nagy, evaluated then as the martyr prime minister, who was identified with the 1956 revolution's idea, the statue of whom was recently removed from the vicinity of the Parliament in Budapest. 1991 was symbolically marked by the reburial of Roman-Catholic cardinal József Mindszenty, a very strong symbol of anti-Communism and conservatism, a symbolic act which also defied post-modern liberalism as a statement. That was followed in 1993 by the reburial of Miklós Horthy, regent of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1919 and 1944 – in a moment when the first post-1989 prime minister of Hungary, József Antall's illness (soon after he died of cancer) was publicly assumed, and the ruling political coalition was heading to an election without a strong leader figure. It was the moment when the act of symbolic reburial lacked the consensus that was part of the scenery in most of the cases presented before. After a short period of relative silence, as in Hungary, a coalition of the post-communist Socialist Party and the Free Liberal Alliance had their moment between 1994 and 1998, followed by the enactment of the first FIDESZ-led government in 1998, and the reburial of Attila József, Béla Bartók, as also István Bethlen (prime minister, the most important political figure of the Horthy-era), Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer and Domokos Szent-Iványi (both part of the late Horthy-era government, playing a role in the efforts of Hungary to depart from the German wartime alliance), István Barankovics (anti-Communist political figure deported to the Soviet Union) occurred without stirring an important debate – the symbolic colluding on the ground of historical personalities assumed by one part, as loudly refused through symbolic

gestures by the other part of the political scenery had been restarted with the moment of the reburial of Bálint Hóman, himself a historian, leading personality of the Hungarian Academy of Science and minister of culture in the Horthy-era.

In parallel, the symbolic places of Budapest became once again subject of the politically biased public debate, which was fuelled by the continuously changing politics of memory: In 1919, the Soviet Council's rule had erected only temporary statues and symbolic figures, mainly on May, 1st, of which remained no trace after the regime's downfall. In the interwar era, first the figure of István Tisza (1926), then the symbolic representation of Ferenc Rákóczi II, and the Kossuth-led 1848 revolutions' government (which contained mainly of aristocratic figures) had been built up, followed by the four statues of the Trianon Memorial, memorial of the victims of the Soviet Councils Republic of 1919, and the later erected statue of the belated prime-minister Gyula Gömbös (which was destroyed as an act of defiance by the wartime resistance in 1944), and a symbolic memorial for the belated son of the Regent, István Horthy, victim of a plane crash at the Eastern War Front in 1942, which was re-established as a monument of Liberty after 1945, under Communist rule. In 1945, already a memorial for the Soviet Liberators had been erected in the close nearby of the Parliament, as the Kossuth-led 1848 revolution's government was replaced by a new representation of Lajos Kossuth surrounded by symbolic figures of the people (peasants, workers, etc.) for the People's Republic of Hungary the main symbolic reference was to be tied with the 1848 revolution, the memory of the 1919 Soviet Council's rule being overwhelmingly negative. The statues of Gyula Andrassy, István Tisza, the Trianon Memorial, the Memorial of the 1919 Soviet Republic's victims were all cleared from the scenery. Any reference in the Stalinist era to the previous era marked by the regency of Miklós Horthy was anathema, the entire period being demonized as the era of fascism, reactionarism and revisionism which led to war and crimes against humanity, from which only the Soviet Army had "liberated" Hungary – any act against Soviet hegemony being out ruled as Fascism. Then it was the statue of Stalin erected in 1951 – followed in 1956 by its tearing down as an important symbolic act of the anti-Communist revolution. Only after 1959 there are the first symbolic references to the 1919 Soviet Council's Republic, and in the second half of the 1960's the representations of symbolic references to that moment of history were placed in the public spaces of Budapest. In the 1970's and 1980's, a widening of symbolic legitimating discourse is established by the Kádár regime, as the compromise solution and economic reforms founded on

social welfare was to be anchored in a historical symbolic reference to the era of Franz Joseph's compromise started in 1867 and lasted to 1918, which led also to a turn in the Hungarian historiography, re-evaluating the last half of the 19th Century, beginning of the 20th Century in positive terms. The symbolic figure of Mihály Károlyi and the episode of the 1918 to 1919 republic was also re-evaluated, and a statue of the first president of republican Hungary was erected near the Parliament. In the first decade after 1989, the statues representing the Communist regime's symbolic figures were removed to a Statue Park, outside of Budapest. It was the first time after 1956 that symbolic references to the Soviet Republic of 1919, and of the 1945 to 1989 Communist rule were cleared from the public spaces of Hungary. A statue dedicated to Imre Nagy, and the one dedicated to István Bibó was placed in the nearby of the Parliament, as several symbolic references to the 1956 Revolution had appeared in the public space.

After the turn of the 21st Century a new agenda of reshaping the symbolism of public spaces had made itself gradually visible, referring to a different set of values: The setting of the House of Terror (Terror Háza) as a museum representing the totalitarian downturn and the horror of repressive political regime had already stirred a very animated debate and established an important divide in the public sphere – as one side assumed its discourse as a clear delimitating of the post-1989 era from any common ground with the 1944 to 1989 totalitarian regimes, as putting on its agenda the naming of perpetrators, hyphening the responsibilities, and praising for all victims of totalitarian regime, and as the other side claiming that it had not emphasized the entire history of totalitarianism, but only the Communist past which is not properly represented, as the repressive dimension was overstretched way beyond its historic boundaries, without emphasizing enough the right wing totalitarian era, and the Holocaust. As the prime minister of the post-2002 government, which was led by the Hungarian Socialist Party, had visited the museum and had approved it symbolically, there was a short period of relative peace. Than with the post-2006 crisis of political legitimating of the then elected government, followed up by public demonstrations and violence, as also a downturn of symbolic authority, the symbolic places, the plural discourse on the politics of memory became just another scenery of deep conflict which mirrors the great divide that defined the Hungarian society. There was not ever again a consensual moment, no discourse of pacifying, but hegemonic discourses which cleared the scenery for their own symbolic representation without any concern for the other side's sensibilities or values. The plurality of values faded as the plurality of

discourse led to virtually impossible to appease positioning. That had been gradually built up as the main scenery of any situation of assuming the legitimacy of different interpreting of the historical past, as it carries certain relevance for politically legitimating discourse. That was the historic moment in which Gábor Koltay's film was made about Miklós Horthy - *A Kormányzó* (2006) - contested as representing a unilateral discourse without any criticism of the sources assumed, a film which was a follow-up to an also debated movie dedicated to Trianon (2004), which was also presented in Romania, and had led to a very animated debate².

In the 2010's, the FIDESZ-led, government had been legitimated three times by the Hungarian electorate, and the plural landscape of the political scenery became unbalanced as the political opposition lacked the ability to build any public support for the challenging ruling party for a decade, which is an unprecedented situation in East-Central Europe after 1989, the public symbolism of the new politics of memory had already a decade to be stated. It was marked by reerected statues like those of István, Tisza, Gyula, Andrássy, and the Kossuth-led 1848 revolution government's statue as established in the Horthy-era, etc. and by the removal of the statues of Mihály Károlyi, Imre Nagy, etc., and also by the erecting of new memorials as the one dedicated to the German occupying of Hungary in 1944. In parallel, the public opinion was once more divided by new statues representing Miklós Horthy - as, the one erected in Gyömrő (Pest county) in 2011, and the one in Kereki (Somogy county) in 2012³ - which led to tribunal cases and acts of public defying. The two historic themes of debate which appeared in the public debate as attached to the contested memory of Miklós Horthy and the era of his regency, and which both contain a very dividing nature, are the politically motivated terror of 1919 - the "white terror" of the second half of 1919, which was always carrying references to the "red terror" perpetrated by the Soviet Republic in the first half of 1919 that the other one followed - , and the Holocaust carried out in Hungary in 1944. These themes had mobilized also the public debate in the post-1989 period of time, which had referred only in a few moments to the historiography of those issues that had been professionally addressed by the current Hungarian historical writing.

These are the main defining elements of the wider context of the current historical debate on Miklós Horthy's role as a personality of the 20th Century, and of the era marked by the period of his regency,

² Also presented in: Horel, Catherine, *Amiralul Horthy...*, pp. 393-394.

³ Both cases are discussed in the monography written by Horel, Catherine, *Amiralul Horthy...*, pp. 394-395.

prolonged as a chronological unit, mainly for the years 1919 to 1944. This post-1989 debate has a different setting to the previous historiography, which is still sometimes used as a reference to differentiate from, sometimes to use parts of it, without the context severely polluted by political demands. One of the still used patterns is the “neo-baroque”, set by Gyula Szekfű’s 1934 edition of the referential work on Hungarian modern nation-building process, titled *Három nemzedék és ami utána következik* [Three Generations and What Came After]⁴, reprinted in 1989 with an introduction by Ferenc Glatz. That was followed by a less remarkable, but written with more attention to the formulated politically demands in 1947 entitled *Forrádalom után* [After Revolution], in which the author tried to delimitate itself in absolute terms from his former views, not much of the analysis to be the case. The defining works of the era were signed by Erzsébet Andics⁵ in 1945, then followed up to 1959 by Dezső Nemes⁶, all defining the interwar period as fascism, the main element of which was counter-revolutionary motivation, repression, the class war against the workers, a regime set as ideologically related directly to Hitler-led political regime *avant la lettre*. In the second half of the 1960’s and the beginning of the 1970’s, Lackó Miklós, György Ránki, Iván T. Berend, Zsuzsa L. Nagy had integrated some of the recently published historiography which appeared in the Western European states, admitting that fascism was not the sole root, indicating a strong conservative and “bourgeois” line into the regime’s ideological references, but still evaluating it as authoritarian, reactionary system, built on repression of the working class, and comparable with the corporative states of the era (Poland after 1926, Portugal after 1926, Austria after 1932, Spain after the Civil War)⁷. In the early 1980’s, some of

⁴ Szekfű, Gyula: *Három nemzedék és ami utána következik*, (Budapest: Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, 1934).

⁵ Andics, Erzsébet: *Fasizmus és reakció Magyarországon*. Budapest: Magyar Kommunista Párt Központi Vezetősége, Propaganda Osztály, 1945.

⁶ Nemes, Dezső (ed.): *Az ellenforradalom hatalomra jutása és rémuralma Magyarországon 1919-1921*. Budapest: Szikra Kiadó, 1953. Idem (ed.) *Iratok az ellenforradalom történetéhez*. Vol. I-III. Budapest, 1953-1959.

⁷ A representative volume as a synthesis for that evaluation of the interwar era in Hungary is: Ránki, György et al. (eds.): *Magyarország története*. Vol. VIII: 1918-1945, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976). See also: Lackó, Miklós: “A fasizmus Kelet-Közép-Európában”. In: Idem: *Válságok-választások*, (Budapest: Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1975), pp. 298-317. Hanák, Péter, Lackó, Miklós, Ránki, György: “Gazdaság, társadalom, társadalmi-politikai gondolkodás Magyarországon a kapitalizmus korában”. In: Spira György (ed.): *Vita Magyarország kapitalizmuskori fejlődéséről*, (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1971). For an evaluation of the historiography of that era on the interwar period of time, see: Romsics, Ignác: *A Horthy-korszak. Válogatott tanulmányok*, (Budapest: Helikon Kiadó, 2017), pp. 369-372.

the analysis emphasized the importance of the existing parliamentary structures of the legal opposition, as traces of plural political structuring between the cadres of a conservative authoritarian mainstream, which had eroded in the 1930's towards similarities with a fascist authoritarianism, announced by the political rhetoric of the Gyula Gömbös led movement, but used as a clear political motivation in part only in the times marked by the government led by Béla Imrédy, then clearly turned towards a totalitarian outcome only after the end of Miklós Horthy's rule in late 1944, as Hungary was led by Ferenc Szálasi, imposed by the German occupier⁸. This was the setting for Ignác Romsics's first monographic analysis of the first decade of the Horthy-era, published in 1982⁹, which followed a short János C. Andrew's main approach¹⁰, edited as a professor of the University of California (Berkeley). That was to be followed by a comparative perspective built up by Iván T. Berend¹¹, which in a revised form was reedited also under the aegis of the Cambridge University Press. Then it was once again re-evaluated by Peter F. Sugar (University of Washington, Seattle) as an authoritarian regime, with conservative liberal ideological backgrounds, eroded to the end of the era mainly by outer sources of pressure¹². In this way, the debate has passed over the Hungarian national frontiers and became a part of a wider approach on the interwar period in East-Central Europe. The Communist regime's cultural hegemony was challenged, so the party had to respond – and that was made through the articles published in the main newspaper “Népszabadság” in 1985, under the signatures of Mihály András Rónai, János Berecz, etc.¹³. However, it was too late, as at that moment the main course of historiography had concluded as the Horthy-era to be evaluated in terms of an parliamentary monarchy with authoritarian limits that had been hyphenated by the general eroding of parliamentarism in Europe at the end of the 1930's and the new decade of 1940's, evolving to totalitarian regime under the aegis of the Second

⁸ A representative monograph for that approach is: Balogh, Sándor - Gergely, Jenő - Izsák, Lajos - Jakab, Sándor - Pritz, Pál - Romsics, Ignác: *Magyarország a XX. Században*, (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1985).

⁹ Romsics, Ignác: *Ellenforradalom és konszolidáció. A Horthy-rendszer első tíz éve*, (Budapest: Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1982).

¹⁰ Andrew C. János: *The Politics of Backwardness in Hungary 1825-1945*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

¹¹ Berend T., Iván: *Válságos évtizedek. A 20. század első fele közép- és kelet-európai történetének interpretációja*, (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1987).

¹² Sugar, Peter F.: “Continuity and Change in Eastern European Authoritarianism: Autocracy, Fascism and Communism.” In: *East European Quarterly*, 1984/1, pp. 2-23.

¹³ See: Romsics, Ignác: *A Horthy-korszak...op.cit.*, pp. 374-375.

World War and its aftermaths. And that was publicly stated as in 1986 the Historikerstreit had its moment marked by the dispute between Jürgen Habermas and then by the very different approach held by Ernst Nolte¹⁴.

That discourse was represented in the early 1990's in the works signed by Ignác Romsics, Jenő Gergely, Pál Pritz, Mária Ormos, Zsuzsa L. Nagy, considered as a representative generation of the Hungarian historiography, mainly related to the Eötvös Lóránd University of Budapest, the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Science¹⁵. That academic institutional framework had edited the monthly review named "História", which in the same period of early 1990's had sustained the editing of historical memoirs of defining personalities of the interwar period in Hungary – such as György Barcza, Gusztáv Henneyey, Miklós Kállay, István Kertész, Géza Lakatos, Ferenc Nagy, Vince Nagy, Antal Ullein-Reviczky – a series named "Extra Hungariam", as most of them had lived and died outside the boundaries of Hungary after 1945. In that series had been reedited for the first time in Hungary, the memoirs of Miklós Horthy in 1990¹⁶. It was doubled by an editorial effort signed by the Zrínyi Editing House, which had published the memories of Béla Bethlen, István Bethlen, Mihály Jungerth-Arnóthy, Árpád Lajtos, Antal Náray, Cardinal Jusztinán Serédi, Ferenc Szombathelyi – volumes that were part of a critical edition series edited by professional historians as Dániel Csatári, Péter Gosztonyi, Sándor Orbán, Ignác Romsics, Péter Sipos, Péter Szabó, Sándor Szakály, László Szűcs, István Vida.

All that effort of memorialistic literature had completed the new series of critical editing and publishing sources for the history of the interwar period of Hungary, which was in parallel addressed by the publishing effort of archival materials regarding the foreign policy of the Miklós Horthy led Hungary by Gyula Juhász and László Zsigmond, consisting of more than 10 000 pages in 7 volumes¹⁷. That came to the complete publishing of archival materials of great value for insight to the Horthy-led political regime, began back in 1963 with the documents from

¹⁴ See: Nolte, Ernst: "Cartea de față și »disputa istoricilor«. Un bilanț după zece ani (În loc de prefață la ediția a 5-a". In: Idem: *Războiul civil european 1917-1945. Național-socialism și bolșevism*, (București: Runa, Grupul Editorial Corint, 2005), pp. 477-502.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 378.

¹⁶ Horthy, Miklós: *Emlékirataim*, (Budapest: Európa Kiadó- História, 1990). That edition appeared after the first in Buenos Aires (1953), and second in Toronto (1974), with a critical apparatus and introduction, as also appendix made by Péter Sipos and László Antal, as part of a series which had been under the patronage of Ferenc Glatz, presiding the Hungarian Academy of Science.

¹⁷ *Diplomáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához 1936-1945. Vol. I-VII. Budapest: Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete, Akadémiai Kiadó, 1978-1986.*

the so-called “secret archives” of Miklós Horthy¹⁸, followed up in 1972 by a volume published from similar archival sources titled to the name of the former prime minister and defining personality of the entire period István Bethlen¹⁹. The programs of all political parties of the interwar period had been published as part of a series coordinated by Ferenc Glatz in 1991, signed together as editors with Jenő Gergely and Ferenc Pölöskei²⁰. As a conclusion, one can state that a wide range of sources were out of reach and use for the historians who proposed a political history-based analysis of the period of time marked by Miklós Horthy.

The results were shown first as a series of historical biographies, which had treated the carriers, motivation, results and afterlife of the Horthy-era's prime ministers as István Bethlen (Ignác Romsics²¹), Gyula Gömbös (Jenő Gergely²², József Vonyó²³), Pál Teleki (Antal Czettler²⁴), László Bárdossy (Pál Pritz²⁵), Miklós Kállay (Antal Czettler²⁶), as also of those active in the second line of decision making as for example Miklós Kozma (Mária Ormos²⁷). Then in parallel appeared little monographs dedicated to three major issues: the revisionist policy of the political regime – the issue of explaining the roots of that led to the Peace Treaty of Trianon and its aftermath were treated by the works of Mária Ormos²⁸ and József Galántai²⁹, then the revisionist policy was addressed in a monograph written by Miklós Zeidler³⁰; the relation between state and church – it was the major theme of a volume of studies edited by István Zombori³¹, then the themes of political Catholicism, Christian Socialism,

¹⁸ Szinai, Miklós - Szűcs, László: *Horthy Miklós titkos iratai*. Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár - Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1963.

¹⁹ Szinai, Miklós - Szűcs, László: *Bethlen István titkos iratai*. Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár - Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1972.

²⁰ Gergely, Jenő - Glatz, Ferenc - Pölöskei, Ferenc: *Magyarországi pártprogramok 1919-1944*, (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1991).

²¹ Romsics, Ignác: *Bethlen István. Politikai életrajz*, (Budapest: Magyarországi Kutató Intézet, 1991).

²² Gergely, Jenő: *Gömbös Gyula. Politikai Pályakép*, (Budapest: Vince Kiadó, 2001).

²³ Vonyó, József: *Gömbös Gyula*. Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2014.

²⁴ Czettler, Antal: *Teleki Pál és a magyar külpolitika 1939-1941*, (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1997).

²⁵ Pritz, Pál: *Bárdossy László*, (Budapest: Elektra Könyvkiadó, 2001).

²⁶ Czettler, Antal: *A mi kis élethalál kérdéseink. A magyar külpolitika a hadba lépéstől a német megszállásig*, (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 2000).

²⁷ Ormos, Mária: *Egy magyar médiavezér: Kozma Miklós*. Vol. I-II, (Budapest: PolgArt Könyvkiadó, 2000).

²⁸ Idem: *Pádovától Trianonig 1918-1920*, (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1984).

²⁹ Galántai, József: *A trianoni békekötés 1920*, (Budapest: Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1990).

³⁰ Zeidler, Miklós: *A revíziós gondolat*, (Budapest: Osiris Könyvkiadó, 2001).

³¹ Zombori, István (ed.): *Magyarország és a Szentszék kapcsolatának ezer éve*, (Budapest: Magyar Egyháztörténeti Enciklopédia Munkaközösség, 1996).

social movements and organization of political participation were addressed by several monographs signed by Jenő Gergely³²; the anti-Semitism of the political regime - it was addressed by several studies of Viktor Karády³³, László Karsai³⁴. After 2010, signalled by a series of monographs dedicated to the metamorphosis of the anti-Semitic ideology since the 1910's, through the two decades marked by the Regency of Miklós Horthy until the period of the Second World War and the Holocaust - historical monographs signed by János Gyurgyák³⁵, Rudolf Paksa³⁶, Róbert Kerepeszki³⁷ and Áron Máthé³⁸ - a new discourse appeared which was sensible to inner differentiations of radical right-wing ideologies and doctrines, of group structuring and elites, of inner roots and external influences, of media strategies and proliferation of ideas, as well as of analogies in a wider European frame of the interwar and Second World War era. And there were also volumes referring to the ethnic minorities and the impact of radical right-wing ideologies on interethnic relations - analysing the German minority and the Volksbund (Norbert Spannenberger³⁹) and the Gypsies of Hungary in the times between 1919 and 1944 (László Karsai⁴⁰). For this reason, also, but not only, it was rather surprising the politically motivated statements of some public intellectuals as Mária Schmidt, director of the Terror Háza Múzeum, and Gábor Koltay, director of the film dedicated to Regent Miklós Horthy, in the same decade which were trying to clear the elites of that political regime of anti-Semitic motivations and responsibilities, which led to the Holocaust in Hungary, projecting as the main factor for

³² As a synthesis of his work, see: Gergely, Jenő: *A Katolikus Egyház története Magyarországon 1919-1945*, (Budapest: Pannonica Kiadó, 1999).

³³ Karády, Viktor: *Önazonosítás, sorsválasztás. A zsidó csoportazonosság történeti alakváltozásai Magyarországon*, (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 2001).

³⁴ Karsai László: *Kirekesztők. Antiszemita írások 1881-1992*. Budapest: Aura, 1992. Idem: "A magyarországi zsidótörvények és rendeletek 1920-1944". In: Molnár Judit (ed.): *A holokauszt Magyarországon európai perspektívában*, (Budapest: Balassi Kiadó, 2005).

³⁵ Gyurgyák, János: *Magyar fajvédők. Ezméttörténeti tanulmány*, (Budapest: Osiris, 2012).

³⁶ Paksa, Rudolf: *Magyar nemzetiszocialisták. Az 1930-as évek új szélsőjobboldali mozgalma, pártjai, politikusai, sajtója*, (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó - MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Történettudományi Intézet, 2013).

³⁷ Kerepeszki, Róbert: *A Turul Szövetség 1919-1945. Egyetemi ifjúság és jobboldali radikalizmus a Horthy-korszakban*, (Máriabesnyő: Attraktor Kiadó, 2012).

³⁸ Máthé, Áron: *A nyilaskereszt árnyéka. A magyarországi nemzetiszocializmus elmélete és gyakorlata*, (Máriabesnyő: Attraktor Kiadó, 2019).

³⁹ Spannenberger, Norbert: *A magyarországi Volksbund Berlin és Budapest között*, (Budapest: Lucidus Kiadó, 2005).

⁴⁰ Karsai, László: *A cigánykérdés Magyarországon, 1919-1945 - Út a cigány Holocausthoz*, (Budapest: Cserépalvi, 1992).

that result the German occupier, and presenting an alternative chronology which abruptly began after March 19th, 1944, lacking any structural relations with the interwar political regime's own identifying, redefining it as a parliamentary and democratic pluralist regime⁴¹.

That discourse collided with a very different analysis, stated in a monograph signed and published by Krisztián Ungváry in 2012⁴², which had systematically addressed the political, cultural, social discourses and realities of the political regime under the aegis of the Miklós Horthy regency, concluding that its anti-Semitic identification had to be recognized and assumed, as itself the regime's elite did not deny it, but stated it in different ways and following different ends. That led to an ostracizing of that historian, member of the Hungarian Academy of Science, an institution which came under pressure gradually after the second part of the decade of 2010's. In the meantime, the debate was fuelled by new arguments, which were stated as a new generation had published its historical analysis – such as the new political biography of Pál Teleki signed by Balázs Ablonczy⁴³, the analysis of the 1918-1919 moment signed by Pál Hatos⁴⁴, a monograph dedicated to the cult of Miklós Horthy and the propaganda machine of that era signed by Dávid Turbucz⁴⁵, and the analysis of the Parliament of the Horthy-era published by Levente Püski⁴⁶. Three of the senior generation of historians had also edited monographs and volumes of studies dedicated to the analysis of the Horthy-era – Jenő Gergely and Pál Pritz in 2000⁴⁷, Ignác Romsics in 1998⁴⁸, 2017⁴⁹. The new historiography shows a gradually widening divide between politically motivated public acts structured as new

⁴¹ See also the critical statements toward that discourse in: Romsics, Ignác: *A Horthy-korszak...*op.cit., 379.

⁴² Ungváry, Krisztián: *A Horthy-rendszer mérlege. Diszkrimináció, szociálpolitika és antiszemitizmus Magyarországon*, (Pécs –Budapest: Jelenkor Kiadó – OSZK, 2012).

⁴³ Ablonczy, Balázs: *A miniszterelnök élete és halála, Teleki Pál (1879-1941)*, (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2018).

⁴⁴ Hatos, Pál: *Az elátkozott köztársaság. Az 1918-as összeomlás és forradalom története*, (Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2018).

⁴⁵ Turbucz, Dávid: *A Horthy-kultusz 1919-1944*, (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont, Történettudományi Intézet, 2015).

⁴⁶ Püski, Levente: *A Horthy-korszak Parlamentje*, (Budapest: Országgyűlés Hivatala, 2015).

⁴⁷ Gergely, Jenő – Pritz, Pál: *A trianoni Magyarország 1918-1945*, (Budapest: Vince Kladó, 2000).

⁴⁸ Romsics, Ignác (ed.): *Trianon és a magyar politikai gondolkodás 1920-1953*, (Budapest: Osiris Könyvkiadó, 1998). The volume publishes the studies signed by Balázs Ablonczy, Lóránt Péter, Iván Ifj. Bertényi, Miklós Zeidler, Attila Lengyel, Krisztián Ungváry, Gábor Richly, Piroska Balogh, Nándor Bárdi, Jiyoung Kim, Tibor Zs. Lukács, Ádám Szesztay.

⁴⁹ Romsics, Ignác: *A Horthy-korszak...*op.cit. passim.

politics of memory on the one hand, and academic history writing based on critical interpretation of sources on the other hand.

The Hungarian language version of Catherine Horel's monograph⁵⁰ (originally published in French in 2014), dedicated to the subject of the historic figure of Miklós Horthy and the political regime of the first half of the 20th Century has been published in the midst of that debate in the new Hungarian historiography (in 2017), a very different context from the Romanian edition of the book⁵¹, as one can notice a general scarcity of Hungarian historical monographs translated and published in Romanian language (published in 2019). In both cases, a very positive event – in the Hungarian context brings a clarifying moment, and a detached perspective motivated by a critical evaluating and synthesizing of sources and recent historiography; in the Romanian context bringing an important amount of data and a general image of the main issues addressed by a current historiography of a neighbouring state, less known by the Romanian historians as a result of a very few translations of recent historical monographs of contemporary history of Hungary.

The introduction already emphasized the peculiar way in which the figures of Miklós Horthy – as well as of Mátyás Rákosi and János Kádár – were not addressed by several historical biographies, as the political regimes shaped by their personal involvement, as well as the biographies of other defining personalities of the Hungarian 20th Century were addressed in a very professional manner⁵². Moreover, it stated that the evaluating of the modern and contemporary eras of Hungarian history stood under the signed of the “kuruc” vs. “labanc” dichotomy, in which the Horthy-era is ambivalent also. The structure of the book – three main parts – is chronologically based on the three stages of Miklós Horthy's biography, divided by two main events: the first one is between 1868 and 1919, ended by the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the revolutions of 1918 and early 1919, and the restoring of the Hungarian Kingdom formally as a parliamentary monarchy without clarifying the issue of a ruling dynasty, which led to the instituting of Regency; the second is the period of time known as the Regency personified by Miklós Horthy since 1919 to 1944, the third one is the end of that political regime, followed by successive occupying by foreign armed forces and totalitarian downturn in Hungary, as Miklós Horthy is not only departed from power, but also forced to leave the territory of the Hungarian state,

⁵⁰ Horel, Catherine, *Horthy*, (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 2017).

⁵¹ Idem: *Amiralul Horthy, regentul Ungariei*, (București: Editura Humanitas, 2019).

⁵² See as best practice case for example: Rainer M. János: *Nagy Imre. Politikai életrajz*. Vol. I-II, (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 1996-1999).

ending up as a political emigré, a period of time beginning with the Fall of 1944 to his death in 1957. However, as a main view of Horthy's self-defining and positioning related to political power, the major divide came in his biography in 1918/1919 – all that happened before was related to his place and act as a subject of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and everything after that moment was a result of his redefining of relation with the centre of political power, embracing the role of Regent in the new Kingdom of Hungary, which also defined his post-1944 options and opportunities. And, that dividing line is seen in his habits, as before 1918/1919 Horthy is a very mobile person, motivated by personal career aims, as after that moment he is much wavering, gradually losing confidence and emphasizing a more conservative approach, then also hesitating, as ending up as an object of other actors' decisions and acts in 1944 and after. The main course of the narrative is also aimed to other different dimensions, which are not to be contained by that chronological aspect: the cult and propaganda image of Regent Miklós Horthy, which projected another Horthy which escaped the logical build-up as controlled by his decisions and will, and the afterlife (including the politically motivated use and misuse of his historical figure) less influenced by his direct acts and real historical self, than by the needs and aims of those who had built up and instrumented the symbolism, served also by his reburial and symbolism integrated in the ever changing politics of memory. All these aspects are addressed by Catherine Horel's monograph. It also formulated the main questions which were tried to be answered throughout the almost 400 pages volume: A. The generational aspect, as Miklós Horthy was part of the pre-1918 generation, having already 50 years from the debut of the Regency, and trying to shape a post WWI world measured by a very different generation at the end of that era. B. The continuously evolving relation of Miklos Horthy towards the Habsburg dynasty: marked by his loyalty declared to Franz Joseph, his positioning against restoring the Habsburg dynasty in 1921 as confronted with Charles IV, and his distancing of any official relation with the Habsburgs after 1922 to 1944, then, once again redefining his personal relating to representatives of the Habsburgs in emigration in the last decade of his life. All of that happened as he never wished to make any gesture towards a possible instituting of a dynasty, often misinterpreted by his contemporaries. C. The nature of the political regime – as the author applied a clear differentiation between fascism, corporatism, authoritarianism, dictatorship, and totalitarianism, referring also the thesis which regarded the political regime of the Horthy-era as a form of parliamentary democracy and genuine pluralism. D. The place of

revisionist policies and mobilizing discourse which touched the very heart of the regime self-projected image. E. relating to the anti-Semitic discourse and politics of a essential part of the regime's elite, analysing the motivation, the personal relation of Miklós Horthy to the phenomena of anti-Semitism and the later and gradual distancing from it. F. The post-WWII efforts of restructuring his identity narrative's relation with the historical past, as a very specific legitimating discourse was built by Miklós Horthy in the times of political enquiries as questioned by the Allied tribunal in Nürnberg, and in the last decade of his life spent in exile. G. private family relationships' a role in shaping the personality of Miklós Horthy. H. His referring to the official cult dedicated to him by the time of his Regency and after. I. The relation between the historical figure of Miklós Horthy and the image projected as part of the post-1989 politics of memory.

The reality captured in the first main part of the monograph, covering the period between 1868 and 1918, are already offering a paradoxical image: the Miklós Horthy, that is a very mobile and adventurous person, is marked and driven towards a metamorphosis of the experience lived as part of Franz Joseph's inner circle of power related structures (1909-1914), then is once again translated as an active officer in the times of WWI through its interiorizing as absolute values of a sense of duty and of the patriarchal relations of the dual monarchy. The referential episode of that biographical sequence was a battle which was not turning the tides of the general evolving of the war, neither on that particular war front, but it was perceived and reconstructed in the public narrative as the founding moment for his identifying with the role of a saviour, of the loyal and always ready to act commander on whom the larger community can rely on, as also of the self-sacrificing as a way to react in moments of danger. This topics were re-activated in 1919 – presented in the second main part of this monograph signed by Catherine Horel –, as Miklós Horthy entered the second stage of his life at the age of 50, forced by the events neither he or anyone else around him could control, but his options are motivated by a self-projected image of his possible role as part of the community which does not evaluate the major transforming as an opportunity, but as a source of danger, feeling himself and his related under siege, which is the main source of his reactive way of building his strategy of life, aimed to resist any abrupt transforming, and the “restoring” of order of a patriarchal society, repressing of any source of any major change being perceived like the defining values for orienting itself. This conservatorism is motivating him to elude addressing the challenges of a new world by major reforms, neither wanted nor

understood, had driven him to the reactionary cause, genuinely anti-revolutionary (from where the self-assumed counterrevolutionary identifying emerged, perceiving all revolutions of 1918/1919 as the arch-enemy, sources of chaos and insecurity at societal level). In that approach, even the right-wing radicalism, which also embraced a revolutionizing agenda, was a strange and dangerous setting, from which Miklós, Horthy and his regime kept a well-calculated distance, never totally identifying with that group. However, it had tolerated at least if not sustained the “white terror”, later using the pressure created by the violence of those groups against any plan of genuine reform, be it an agrarian, left-wing or liberal project, and prioritizing stability against any dynamism that could be reached by positive transforming of the main political, economic or social setting.

The presence of personalities with identified Jewish background in the highest level decision making structures of the 1918/1919 revolutions, especially in the Soviet Republic experience in early 1919, had motivated the attaching of the symbolic Jew to the image of the arch-enemy - the disastrous radical revolutionary forces - as building the symbolic figure of the enemy as a stranger, or an inner ally of the outer enemy, which attempted against the security and welfare of the Hungarian society. That projection had nurtured the acceptance of politically motivated anti-Semitism, dissimulation, isolation, peripheralizing, and out casting of a part of Hungarian citizens of Jewish identity in the interwar period. It had conflicted with the personal experience of Miklós Horthy of a Jewish establishment well integrated in the Hungarian higher society, generating welfare, security and positive drives to the Hungarian society as a whole: the industrial, financial elite members were dissociated from the general image of the Jew, aimed primarily by the most aggressive anti-Semitic discourse. All that had led to an ambivalent relating of the Horthy-led establishment to the radical right-wing anti-Semitic ideology and aggressive acts. At the very end of the era, just after the tragedy was set already as a direct result of accepting that discourse as part of the political scenery, Miklós Horthy had actively tried to halt that phenomenon, but without real results. His emotional and ethical wavering was later explained and reinvested as proof of genuine resisting against political extreme right-wing anti-Semitism, but defeated by the greater force of Nazi Germany, the military occupying of Hungary was to serve as a post factum legitimating of a different political heritage, without assuming the responsibilities for the political regime's own deeds that led to the known tragic outcome. All responsibility was to be externalized on the one hand to the radical right-

wing political groups, on the other hand to the Nazi Germany, in which the military occupation became a referential moment, valorised like that in the post-1989 discourse of politics of memory.

The analysis of the main defining figures of the political elite of the Horthy-led regime also tries to shed a light to that technique of eluding responsibility, and creating the aura of a saviour which had to fight against overwhelming forces for the sake of the Hungarian society's security and welfare: the prime-ministers are – with the one exception of István Bethlen – represented as invested by the trust of the Regent with all powers and instruments, but then disappointing him by their agenda that dissociated from the genuinely positive project symbolized by order, security and peace as the main cornerstones of the conservative Horthy-regime. That kind of resetting of historical facts – as Catherine Horel draws our attention – is eluding the main element of Horthy's responsibility for the selection and investing with the power of all those personalities which at the end had failed to bring Hungary the much-awaited security and welfare. The active measures taken by Horthy to depart the one who failed to meet the national interest for political power, repeatedly lead to the investing power of one more leading figure which once again fails to meet his agenda. That have to bring the reader to a conclusion regarding the failing political management of Miklós Horthy, which is the inner core element as evaluating the direct results of his regency.

The analysis of the interacting of the Horthy-led political regime with the international system leads to the very idea that it had genuinely failed to break the isolation from which it started its evolution in 1919: the Italian, Austrian and Polish states were themselves evolving towards isolation as Hungary established a regional collaboration plan with them in the late 1920's and the first half of 1930's; that it had not succeeded in positively restructuring its relation neither with the neighbouring states, allied as the Little Entente, nor with the great powers that won WWI and structured the International System after 1919 and still played a major defining role at the end of the interwar era; and it had not successfully resisted the totalitarian powers which destroyed all elements of regional and national level independence or sovereignty at the end of the first half of the 20th Century. The lack of success of the international agenda of the Horthy-regime is once again argued by the dynamism of the revisionist discourse and policy: as one is to evaluate it in a larger context, it had to be observed that up to 1937 it had not met its main goal (defined as the peaceful resettlement of Hungary's post-1920 borders with its neighbouring states), and when territorial revisioning of the peace treaties happened, it led to the establishment of German hegemony to which

Hungary could not successfully relate to, illustrated by the growing frustration which led to the suicide of prime minister Pál Teleki, followed by Hungary entering WWII with its tragic outcome.

Revealing the way Miklós Horthy had projected and put in the act the strategy to be followed by Hungary in the times of prewar revisioning of borders, of WWII, as Catherine Horel has meticulously built up her analysis, is also offering a comparative perspective at European level, from which one can conclude, that the conservative approach followed by Horthy has much in common with the way Maréchal Pétain, Joseph Tiso and Emil Hachá⁵³ had tried to solve (and failed to do so) a very complex equation of safeguarding what remained of national independence and sovereignty, building a larger solidarity inside the national body, as also trying to minimize the conflictual nature of the relations with the hegemonic power and its ever growing demands, and has little or nothing to compare with Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, or even Mussolini's Italy, which due to their peripheral and Mediterranean geostrategic situation, and the real control over inner society driven dynamism, had succeeded in maintaining a wider range of autonomy in their positioning and acts. Even comparing with the half or partial success of Finland, and the moment marked by the success of switching sides by Romania in August 1944 (as a similar plan had gone all wrong in Italy a year before, ending up to be the scenery of a prolonged war between the major actors of WWII in Europe, as also with a civil war alike situation between the North still controlled by forces allied to Germany, and the Centre and South which backed the effort to switch sides), Hungary lost even its remained partial sovereignty gradually from March to October 1944, which led to the total failure of leaving the orbit of the hegemonic great power. Hesitation and over emphasizing the importance of a peculiar sense of honour had obscured the higher duty of the political regime: its "loyal" behaviour also in the moment of leaving the former ally's side had directly led to failure of the Miklós Horthy-led attempt to build a faith accompli on October 15th, 1944, and the instituting of radical right-wing political actors to power, which was to be known in the history as the tragic episode symbolized by Ferenc Szálasi led government.

The third main part of the monograph is not only new in interpretation, but also in gathering and corroborating different historical sources to reconstruct the last decade of the former Regent of Hungary, spent in a forced exile apart from its country. The reconstruction of each episode of the 1944 to 1949 odyssey of Miklós Horthy and his family, as to

⁵³ Horel, Catherine, *Amiralul Horthy...*, pp. 255-256, 320.

the motivation and specificity of his exile in Portugal is also offering an important element to the evaluating of the former Regent of Hungary's activity in shaping history as it happened. The specific place he had chosen for himself in the political emigration's society is contrasting with the closing scenery animated by the reception of news about the 1956 revolution in Hungary, his febrile and outdated efforts to reemphasize his relation with the Hungarian society, then followed by a lethargic end, as Miklós Horthy had just realized there is not any role to be played by him, lacking any interest for the reality of this world surrounding him.

The volume has a very valuable chapter dedicated to the afterlife of Miklós Horthy and his family in the entire period of time following his death, a historical symbol more often frequented by the actual politics of memory in the late Communist, then transitioning and finally the post-Communist era. After synthesizing her conclusions in a few pages, Catherine Horel offers also a structured list of sources and bibliographies used for writing this monograph, completed by photographs published to illustrate the main discourse of the present volume. An index of names completes the critical apparatus of the book.

As reflecting on the question of how one can integrate the volume published by Catherine Horel in the new historiography dominated by the phenomena presented in the first part of this presentation, we are sure that it will serve for a certain positive drive toward a new approach to elude the politically motivated partisan discourse-shaped scenery, as returning attention to a narrative based on critical use of sources and integrating all results of the already published bibliography, much common to the professional historian and his vocation.

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