

Máté Zombory: *Hungarian Golgotha*. Strategies for dealing with the past at a Hungarian publishing house in 1945*

In 1945, the second issue of *Valóság*, the newly established monthly journal of democratic Hungary, stressed the public and political importance of books and publishing houses in the post-war reconstruction efforts.¹ The editorial board even published a list of the books that had appeared in 1945 up to 20 October, when that issue of the journal was published. The author of the article “Our new book production” divided the titles into three categories.² Books he categorized as “ideological” were the most prominent due to the urgent task of countering the harmful impact of the *ancien régime* in people’s minds. He attributed less importance to a category of books that he called “war-deportation-internment literature”, since these mass-produced books were a drain on the rare resources of paper required by more important publications, as well as diverting public attention away from dealing with the problems of the future and inviting people to immerse themselves in the pleasure of escaping from horrors of the past. The third category, the so called belles-lettres, turned out to be of lesser public importance since it lacked political-ideological pertinence in the post-war context; in peaceful and consolidated times it would have probably attained a higher ranking in the genre hierarchy. The subject of this study is the publishing policy of a small company that, publishing 13 out of the 36 titles of the “war-deportation-internment literature”, was the most influential in the second category .

Not only did the publishers and their publications constitute a political issue in the context of restoration, but so did their readership. The journal *Hungarian Review of Books* published a specialist survey of the Budapest reading public in 1945.³ Collecting data mostly via “direct contact”, the author came to the conclusion that people who picked up a book were led by two main needs, one public and one private. The overwhelming popularity of “topical, political literature” as opposed to other (quality) genres was a result of the fact that readers had become eager to know the “reasons for our decay and what the solution might be”. This category included small booklets, reportages, memoirs, political programs, and reviews, publications that “address[ed] the elimination of the politics of the recent past and the unfolding of the Hungarian future”.⁴ According to the study, the other factor orienting the reading public was the attainment of a state of psychological satisfaction, in other words, to “escape from the troubles of struggling for a living, from the bleakness of life” into the fictional world of

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¹ On 12–14 July the Book Days were held (the event had taken place regularly since 1929) where 31 publishing houses presented 56 books to the Hungarian reading public. All in all 644 books were published and 3.2 million copies were sold in 1945. These figures doubled the following year. Varga, Sándor: *A magyar könyvkiadás és könyvkereskedelem, 1945–1957*. Budapest, Gondolat, 1985.

² Czibor, János: “Az új magyar könyvtermelés mérlege.” In: *Valóság* 1–2 (1945), p. 67–70.

³ Sziklay, László: “Budapest olvasóközönsége 1945-ben.” In: *Magyar Könyvszemle* 1–4 (1946), p. 70–89.

⁴ Sziklay 1946, p. 75.

desires. This need was met by a group containing religious and trash literature, which represented low quality literature with no importance for public life in the post-war era.

As a matter of fact, the role attributed to book publishing in post-war restoration comprised two main tasks. The first might be termed mental restoration, that is, the ideological work of uncluttering people's minds and freeing them from the impact of the previous regime. Orienting people to public affairs was also part of mental restoration. The second undertaking was to document and spread factual knowledge: because the draconian control of the public sphere and propaganda had hindered the free circulation of information before 1945, an urgent endeavor in the post-war period was to tell the true story of recent history, as well as to inform the public about the current political and social situation. Certainly, both main tasks contributed to legitimating the new regime. It might seem surprising that contemporary reports attributed a harmful role to the otherwise flourishing personal life-story genres although, at the same time, emphasized public interest in literature in general. Probably the classical position of literary criticism is responsible for this disregard of the importance of popular genres considering them as low quality. Indeed, while currently great cultural value is ascribed to testimonies and oral history accounts of publicly unknown individuals and such works are published merely because their narrators lived through historical events, in the post-war period such values were non-existent. This is not to say, however, that the memory of the recent past did not play an important role in reconstructing the political life of the country. As the study of the *Hungarian Book Review* points out, "the mental attitude of looking back" characterized both the readers of high literature and those "who expect only entertainment, narcosis" from the writings.⁵ Indeed, one of the bestsellers in 1945 was the personal journal of the well known writer Sándor Márai. Other acknowledged writers, such as Lajos Kassák, Tibor Déry, Lajos Nagy, József Darvas, Ernő Szép, became the center of attention through writings based on their personal experiences during the war. Apparently, in these cases the public was concerned with the ways in which the well-known public figure had lived through the catastrophic times. Popular imagination about literary writing has it that authors take material from their own lives, hence there is nothing unusual in the fact that they published their war experiences. However, what attracted the public to the personal writings of either unknown or non-literary authors? What social and political role can be attributed to the popular genres of experience-based "retrospective literature"?

In what follows I will analyze the social role of life-history writings published in the immediate aftermath of the war in Hungary. This study relies on two main recent currents in Holocaust studies in the early post-war period. One focuses on attempts to document, narrate and research the catastrophe, immediately after liberation in Europe. Recent studies have persuasively challenged the "myth of

⁵ Sziklay 1946, p. 83.

silence” according to which survivors of the Holocaust, unable to bear their traumatic experiences, repressed their memories and focused their energy on rebuilding new lives after the war ended, remaining incapable of telling their stories of persecution for decades.⁶ Indeed, survivors told, wrote down, showed, and performed their experiences in diverse forms, but “until recently, histories of ‘Holocaust literature’ and historiographical surveys have ignored most of these, either because they did not appear in English or because they did not address the fatal peculiarity of the Jewish situation.”⁷ The other tendency identifies a historical change in the practices of remembering and representing the catastrophe; fundamentally, it raises the question of how the memory of the Holocaust influences our global culture of memory.⁸ Accordingly, this article has a dual objective: on the one hand, to reconstruct early post-war discourses on the catastrophe, and on the other to confront them with elements of the currently dominant memory culture that defines European policies on the past. I will analyze the publishing strategy of Károly Müller and his Áron Gábor Book Publishing Company, a small publishing house whose entire post-war activity was concerned with the recent past. Particular attention will be paid to the joint edition of eight books titled *Hungarian Golgotha. A Series of Novels*, published in 1945.

Publishing and political resistance

In order to understand Müller’s publishing policy in 1945, it is important to see the direct link between his publishing and political activity⁹ in Hungary before and during the war. As a former resident of Prague, Müller became a key figure in the rescue movement for Czechs, persecuted mostly because of their political affiliations following the Nazi occupation. One year after his arrival in Hungary in 1938, he launched his first Hungarian publishing company with the help of a front man. The firm published mostly books in popular genres by English and American authors, providing employment in the form of translation to blacklisted writers, and it also published works by blacklisted Hungarian writers. He continuously gave work, temporary or permanent, to people persecuted due to their political convictions or Jewish origin. Such activities brought consequences: the authorities forced the company into bankruptcy in 1942. Müller was confined for nine months in an internment camp in Kistarcsa, and was fined for violating the anti-Jewish laws.

⁶ Diner, Hasia: *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962*. New York: New York University Press, 2009; Cesarini, David and Sundquist, Eric J. (eds): *After the Holocaust. Challenging the Myth of Silence*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012; Jockusch, Laura: *Collect and Record! Jewish Holocaust Documentation in Early Postwar Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

⁷ Cesarini, David: “Challenging the ‘myth of silence’: postwar responses to the destruction of European Jewry.” In: Cesarini, David and Sundquist, Eric J. (eds): *After the Holocaust. Challenging the Myth of Silence*. London and New York: Routledge, 2012, p. 21.

⁸ See e.g. Alexander, Jeffrey C.: “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama.” In: *European Journal of Social Theory* 5(1) (2002), p. 5–85.; Levy, Daniel and Sznajder, Nathan: *Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006.

⁹ Source of this summary: Budapest City Archives XVII.797.

Because he was not allowed to obtain a trading license, Müller only managed to found the Áron Gábor Book Publishing Company in 1943, again with the help of the “Strohmann method” (as soon as possible, he obtained the trading license and changed the name of the firm to his own in March 1945). The new company employed practically the same personnel as the former one. Initially, the war and the political regime prevented the company from publishing extensively. Only one book appeared in 1943, *Kint a pusztán* [Outside in the puszta] by Mihály Cserzy (1865–1925), which depicted everyday peasant life in a sociographic style. In 1944, there appeared a translation of a work by K. R. G. Browne, “the most appropriate book to help us forget for a few hours all the troubles of the day,” as one of the advertising flyers of the publishing house put it.¹⁰ The same year Müller prepared a literary series entitled “Titans of Foreign Literature” that would have comprised works by six classic French and Russian novelists: Balzac, Dumas, Maupassant, Dostoyevsky, Gogol, and Goncharov, of which eventually two went public. The names of the series were not without political connotation in a country that fought the war as an ally of the Nazi Germany. More importantly, by means of this publishing activity, Müller managed to offer work to those who otherwise would have been left without income. Indeed, at the time the six translators of the publishing house were of Jewish origin.

In his curriculum vitae, one can read that Müller provided (advance) payment to more than an estimated 25 authors “who for a long time were not permitted to work because of their political affiliation or race and who were exposed to the gravest financial problems”.¹¹ The collective declaration of more than a dozen journalists and writers to the committee of political verification¹² in favor of Müller in June 1945 confirms the statement of the publisher-entrepreneur: when “everybody was occupied with clearing up the ruins”, there appeared a “book publisher who didn’t negotiate or give vague promises but immediately gave money, a possibility to live, and work. Many Hungarian writers lived for months off what they received from Károly Müller”.¹³ This declaration, signed by most of the authors of *Hungarian Golgotha*, proves that resistance politics and publishing policy were closely related in Károly Müller’s activity. Many of the books that appeared immediately after the liberation had already been written and paid for in 1944. For Müller, however, resistance, did not exclusively mean the support of blacklisted intellectuals. He worked as one of the “direct aids” of Raoul Wallenberg,¹⁴ and also personally rescued a number of people from forced labor as well as from arrest by Nazi authorities.

¹⁰ Budapest City Archives XVII.797.

¹¹ Budapest City Archives XVII.797.

¹² See Papp, Gyula: “Az igazoló eljárások és a háborús bűnök megtorlása 1945 után Magyarországon.” *AETAS* 24. évf. 2009. 2. szám, 162-179.

¹³ Budapest City Archives XVII.797.

¹⁴ Botos, János: “Raoul Wallenberg magyarországi kapcsolatrendszere.” In: [eds Botos, János and Kovács, Tamás]: *Üldöztetés, embermentés, újrakezdés: tudományos emlékülések 2007. április 12. és május 8.* Holocaust Dokumentációs Központ és Emlékgyűjtemény Közalapítvány, Budapest, 2007, p. 8–46.

The majority of Müller's publications came out from the beginning of 1945, and focused directly on the recent past of Hungary. Even some of the literary publications had political relevance to the past of the country. A novel that Müller wanted to publish as early as 1944, written by Renée Erdős (*Gránátvirág*), a previously blacklisted and persecuted writer, could not appear until after the liberation. A novel by József Kerekesházy (*Egyszer béke volt...*) had already appeared before the war in a censor-friendly version and was put on the blacklist in 1943. In 1945, "it was the idea of my publisher to write again about the old, peaceful times", "to take the reader back to [that] world of dreams, after a sea of suffering."¹⁵ One book by Jenő Antal Molnár (*Két világ*) was a fictional narrative of the "real epoch" between 1939 and 1944 when "the basis thought to be the most solid, the moral world order, shifted and dissolved".¹⁶ The fictional personal journal of a young Christian woman tells the story of the gradual process of discrimination, stigmatization and exclusion because of her supposed Jewish origin, a process which then leads to a suicide attempt. There was another novel by a Hungarian author,¹⁷ and in addition the publishing house published two translations, Defoe's complete *Robinson Crusoe* and *Germany: A Winter's Tale*, the satirical verse-epic by Heinrich Heine from 1844. The latter, the "prophetic judgment of the poet genius on his homeland",¹⁸ was certainly not lacking the political dimension in its interpretative context. An interesting undertaking of the publishing house was the "Phonetic Hungarian–Russian Dictionary and Talker", which was intended to serve practical purposes, and was hence addressed to those who did not intend to learn the "quite difficult Russian grammar" and the Cyrillic alphabet but would have been keen to get on with Russian people in everyday situations such as discussions, in shops or in the office. It seems that only the company's musical publications remained completely apolitical.¹⁹

The majority of the titles in 1945 were issued as part of the "New Times – New Books" series, which addressed problems directly connected to the recent past. Totalling nearly 30 publications, they can be divided into four categories. The largest, and thus probably the most important in the publishing policy, contains autobiographical-journalistic accounts of the catastrophe. The main topics are the siege of Budapest, the Pest ghetto, forced labor, death camps, political resistance, war crimes, etc. The quasi-scholarly books on the former regime constitute another typical trend in Müller's company, with a clear commitment to reaching the broader public. A good example is the sequel publication of booklets, "The ten month-long tragedy", which provided a short and easily understandable historical account of the period between 19 March 1944, the German occupation of Hungary, and 20 January

¹⁵ Kerekesházy, József: *Egyszer béke volt...* p. 7.

¹⁶ Molnár, Jenő Antal: *Két világ*, blurb.

¹⁷ Kovai, Lőrinc: *Ítélet előtt*.

¹⁸ The publisher's advertisement.

¹⁹ The publishing house launched a journal which carried sheet music, and published a book by the Italian conductor Sergio Failoni, who was well-known in Hungary as a former musical director of the Hungarian State Opera in Budapest.

1945, the armistice agreement between Hungary's provisional government and the representatives of the Allied Powers. Altogether four issues of the sequel publication came out. The third type of publication dealt with questions of historical justice, also in a popular style, addressing the wider public: books on the people's courts, public accusations of perpetrators, as well as reports on newly accessible historical documents. Finally, the fourth group of book was the miscellaneous. It contains titles that are difficult to put into one of the previous categories, such as a collection of anti-fascist anecdotes and jokes "Let's laugh at Hitler and his companions" by László Palásti and Adorján Stella.

After 1945, the publishing house gradually began to decline.²⁰ The great moment for Müller's second publishing house happened to be the year of change. As an important agent in the emerging national public sphere, particularly among the small publishing houses, he represented a unique publishing policy. Connecting capitalist enterprise with national issues of restoration, especially with questions related to the recent past, he combined social scientific inquiry with popular-sensational genres, and as shall be shown later, personal memoir genres with journalism. This policy is inseparable from the social network he was part of during the war, and from the resistance activity he pursued. A thorough analysis of his network would merit a separate article. However, what is important to point out here is that his relationships cannot be described in party political terms. He himself was a member of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, and in his circle one can find members of the Smallholders' Party or the Hungarian Communist Party. One cannot classify his network in "racial" terms either: there were people with Jewish origins, and also those with non-Jewish origins. The common denominator of this group of people seems to be the fact that all of them were "people of letters": journalists. Accordingly, in what follows closer attention shall be given to a peculiar publication of Károly Müller's company, in which seven authors were involved.

National Tragedy

"The eight books even individually are of great value to experience-literature, which is necessarily based upon the world's greatest events; taken collectively they provide a true cross-section of the story of the dark, recent past. No photograph or film could record the truth for the viewer as colorfully, animatedly and realistically as the 'Hungarian Golgotha' as it reveals to its readers what really happened in the days when power was in the hands of the enemies of true Hungarians."

In this excerpt from the publisher's foreword a number of features are explicitly stated in relation to the joint publication of *Hungarian Golgotha*. First, the eight works represent "experience-literature", which means that they are factual genres, with reference to the most recent great event of History.

²⁰ In 1946, a collection of interviews with the principal defendants of war crimes appeared.

Second, as the phrase “true cross-section” suggests, the joint publication was supposed to describe the totality of the “dark recent past”. In the publisher’s advertisements, all eight books are referred to as items in the “New Times – New Books!” series. The publisher selected the books on the basis of their role in conceptualizing the recent catastrophe: each book of the “series of novels” stands for an aspect of the Hungarian Golgotha. Third, the publisher’s intention was to give a colorful, animated and realistic picture of the catastrophe. Thus the target audience was the national public, in other words, the ordinary people of the country. And finally, the “dark recent past” is characterized by the fact that the catastrophe happened to the Hungarians. Considering it as a discursive construction of the catastrophe, I will first analyze the thematic construction of *Hungarian Golgotha* to determine the meanings attributed to what had happened. This will be followed by a study of the series of novels in relation to the currently dominant culture of memory that is characterized by the central role of the canonized, institutionalized and universalized Holocaust memory.

In the joint publication of *Hungarian Golgotha* the separate books follow each other in the alphabetical order of their authors – this suggests that the editor gave equal weight to the topics the authors treated in their works. Some topics reoccur in several books some are dealt with only in one.

Table 1. The composition of *Hungarian Golgotha*

Author	Title	Topic	Genre
János Fóthy (1899–1979) journalist, writer, art critic	Horthy-woods – The Hungarian Devil’s Island	Forced labor	Reportage/novel
István Gyenes (1915–1984) journalist, writer, literary historian	Life Under the Ground	Resistance, war	Novel
Margit Izsáky (1899–1977) journalist, theater actress	Crucified Country	War	Reportage
Jenő Lévai (1892–1983) journalist, writer, editor	László Endre. The first on the list of Hungarian war criminals	War crimes	Biographical account
Jenő Lévai (1892–1983) journalist, writer, editor	The Martial Law-Court Judges of Margit Boulevard. Indictment against	War crimes, resistance	Documentation, historical account

	József Babós, Vilmos Dominich and their court-martial henchmen. Details of various resistance movements		
László Palásti (1903– 1979): journalist, writer	The Novel of the Death March of Bor	Forced labor	Reportage/novel
Mihály Petyke (1906– ?) journalist	I was a captive of the Gestapo... Political reportage-novel	Persecution for political convictions	Reportage/novel
Zoltán József Vajda (no special status)	Army with Shovels	Forced labor, war	Autobiographical account

Forced labor

The theme of forced labor is represented thoroughly in three books of the series. The author of the first work, János Fóthy, adopts the position of an intellectual who shares his opinion with the public in crucial social and political matters, as suggested by the allusion to Émile Zola's *J'accuse*: Alfred Dreyfus was imprisoned on Devil's Island. The author was interned on Csepel Island in Budapest where he was forced to work in the former Manfréd Weiss factories. He explains:

“I was a Hungarian writer and journalist of Jewish origin. This was my only crime. My only crime was that I dared to serve Hungarian culture and European humanity on the pages of *Pesti Hírlap*, *Nyugat*, *Új Idők* and other papers humbly, modestly, poorly and passionately for a quarter of a century.” (p. 7)

“Dedicated to the martyr-memory of my fellow-internees who were deported and never came back”, the reportage novel is based on Fóthy's experiences between April and November 1944. The book ends with the author's return to Budapest, where, in the “City of Satan”, dominated by hatred and fear, he struggles with the feeling of alienation: “I have returned from Devil's Island, but I have not returned to freedom. I made my way back to the world, yes, but this world is not mine anymore.” (p. 89)

László Palásti tells the story of his internment in the forced labor camp in Bor, Serbia, from May 1944 and the death march to Hungary that lasted until October.

“When I was called up on 17 May 1944 in Vác, I thought I would be discharged in three months and I would be able go back to my original job, writing, albeit illegally. Although I lost my editor's desk in

1938, I still believed that Hitler's reign of terror would be over and the country would be liberated, as would be the soul and the fountain-pen." (p. 3)

For Palásti, similarly to many other intellectuals in Hungary, the anti-Jewish laws, the first of which came into force in 1938, meant they were deprived of their professions. It is telling that Palásti starts his story with the forced labor, rather than discussing the event that forced him into illegal work. In his book he depicts everyday life in the camp in a classical reportage style. Although he managed to escape from the death march in Hungary, the story of the forced laborers continues. Relying on survivor informants, Palásti tells the tragic fate of those who remained captured by the Hungarian forces, and later by the German ones. For the author, the issue of public interest is not his personal suffering but the story of Bor, told through the experiences of his fellow internees. In fact, the reportage-novel ends with scenes in which the former captives reunite regularly to share their experiences with each other and to find out what happened to the other comrades. "They remember everything. Many bad things, few good things." (p. 90). Retelling the stories about the forced labor camp has another important function, which is to testify to the deeds of the perpetrators. To that of lieutenant-colonel Ede Murányi, for example: "Wherever he may be, he cannot escape. Six thousand witnesses desire his punishment. Three thousand living and the same number of dead witnesses, killed though innocent, with eyes crying for revenge" (p. 90).

The third book on forced labor is that of Zoltán József Vajda, who began to write it in 1944, but the story starts in the late 1930s with the introduction of the first anti-Jewish law, and ends with the liberation. Being a non-professional writer or journalist, his narrative is not restricted to events he witnessed and his experiences as an internee. He applies a "civilian narrative", in other words, he gives an account of what happened to his family members, as well as commenting on the political situation, and often steps outside the narrator's role. Contrary to the two other books on forced labor, in Vajda's work a detailed pre-history unfolds of the actual physical persecution. In this narrative the main reason for the humiliation, whose form *par excellence* is forced labor, is hatred between people. As the author puts it, forced labor is "humiliation which differentiates one human from another", a dehumanizing label. As this hatred grows, the division of society deepens.

"The hatred stirred up by base emotions is getting gradually stronger and the country is increasingly moving onto a path that at the outset manifests itself in the lawless expropriation of the material goods of Jewry, later in depriving them of their liberty, and finally in robbing them of their life." (p. 30)

Most importantly, in *Hungarian Golgotha* forced labor appears as part of the national tragedy. Vajda, for example, explicitly sets the recent catastrophe into the great national narrative. He argues that Hungary's participation in the war led the country into a bigger tragedy than the battle of Mohács in

1526 when the Ottoman Empire invaded, or than the Mongol invasion in 1241. Similarly, Fóthy considers the establishment of Jewish internment camps one of the most shameful episodes in Hungarian political history. Palásti recounts in his book that the forced laborers wanted to intone the Hungarian national anthem when they stepped back onto Hungarian soil. Thus forced labor, and the persecution of the Hungarian Jews in general, is presented as a radical exclusion from the Hungarian nation, as a forced division of the nation, and the persecution of a part of it. Fóthy even speaks in organic terms: “we were surgically removed from the body of the community like a malign ulcer” (p. 23). Those authors of *Hungarian Golgotha* of Jewish origin often use the distinction between the notions of Jew and “considered to be Jewish” or “racial Jew” that is, the person who becomes identified as Jewish by force through the racial legislation.

War crimes

Lévai’s book, commissioned by Müller, lays an indictment against one of the most infamous perpetrators of crimes in Hungary during the war. It reviews the life and political activity of László Endre, State Secretary in the Ministry of the Interior after the German occupation, and Commissioner of Civil Administration under the Arrow Cross rule. The book begins by addressing the People’s Court and providing the list of war crimes that Endre committed. The reason for publication is juridical:

“I have compiled a volume of detailed and authentic evidence for all my statements and I hereby distribute my work to the public in order that László Endre be brought to justice for the above accusations and that he be fittingly punished based on the published conclusive evidence.” (p. 3)

Lévai’s method is journalistic rather than historiographic: collecting and commenting on documents, quoting interview sources, referring to personal observations. His own newspaper articles, which he published from 1925 on about the wrong-doings of Endre, constitute a major source for his book.

László Endre is represented as a traitor who acts against the Hungarian nation. Two of the seven points of Lévai’s indictment against Endre deal with the crimes against the Jews (deportation of “more than 700,000 Hungarian citizen of Israelite religion” and the death marches to Germany in February–March 1945). “He was the executioner of Hungarian Jewry, and also persecuted thousands of Christian Hungarians because of their political stance” (p. 5). In a similar fashion, the publisher intended to clarify the role of Endre in the national catastrophe. In an unattributed remark after the publisher’s and the author’s forewords, the following can be read:

“[Endre] lives in the popular consciousness as the executioner of Hungarian Jewry. In actual fact, as we will see, László Endre is also the executioner of the Hungarian workers and last but not least the

Hungarian peasantry, which he tortured and tormented for decades. He made hundreds of thousands of people from these layers of society homeless and played them into Nazi hands.” (p. 6)

War

Another important topic of the series of novels is war: besides serving as background in the works of Vajda and István Gyenes, it is the principal subject of Margit Izsáky's book. *Crucified Country* is a collection of reportages and feuilleton pieces based on interviews and personal observations of everyday life during the siege of Budapest. The distinct short texts include the description of personal relationships and everyday life in the air-raid shelter, where the strict spatial distinctions that existed between the inhabitants of a house disappear; and interviews that Izsáky conducted in prison with two teenagers who were former members of the Arrow Cross Party and were arrested for murder. Famine, bombardment and waiting – these elemental experiences of a small residential community in Budapest during the siege stand for the suffering of the entire country. In this representation the war impinges upon helpless Hungarian civilians who, passively endure the catastrophic times.

Resistance

The contrary is the case in Gyenes's novel on national resistance, the only fictional narrative among the books of *Hungarian Golgotha*. It represents the Hungarian fight for independence, and tells the story of a group of young resisters during the siege of Budapest who chose not to support the war, but instead to take up the fight “when the anti-cultural forces overran the country” (p. 34). The story, romantic in places, is built on the opposition of surface and under the ground:

“On the surface everything was dancing the bloody dance of death of a past doomed to destruction. Order, reason, perspectives on the future thrived only under the ground. In secret gatherings, among the deadly threats of thousands of dangers the best were organizing themselves, putting their lives at risk every hour and minute, to rescue as many as possible human lives and material possessions, and above all as many as possible ideas, truth and humanity from the hands of the murderous German–Arrow Cross terror.” (p. 36–37)

Similarly to Izsáky's book, the story unfolds around the residents of Budapest house in an air-raid shelter where the protagonist, who is the leader of the young group and “knew that he was neither a hero nor was he tilting at windmills”, wants to take action instead of speaking. The novel ends with a shoot-out between him and the Germans when finally the first Soviet soldier appears. Their shoulders meet and they fall to the snow embraced. The protagonist dies with the word “victory” on his lips.

In 1945, indeed, the new democratic regime needed the founding national myth of political resistance under the German occupation. Lévai's other contribution, *The Martial Law-Court Judges of Margit*

Boulevard, as its entire title shows, was written with different purposes in mind. It is partly devoted to documentation, as it explores three opposition movements and the ensuing trials for treason during the 1940s. By establishing a unitary narrative of the Hungarian “national resistance movements”, and at the same time commemorating their executed leaders as “martyrs of democracy”, Lévai surely aimed to contribute to the ideological foundation of the new regime. The publication also served as an indictment against the perpetrators, two judges of the martial court of the former regime established in Margit Boulevard, Budapest. Commemoration of the martyrdom of the fighters for democracy is an important point here, since the three opposition movements discussed were not connected with each other: the common element is that their leaders became victims of the same regime through the treason trials.

Persecution because of political convictions

“The well-known political journalist’s exciting reportage on the inhuman methods of the Gestapo, based on his personal experiences,” reads the publisher’s teaser for Mihály Petyke’s book. It tells a story of the Hungarian “leftist” intellectuals who were captured by the Gestapo simultaneously with the German occupation of the country. Here the tragedy of the nation is represented by foreign rule. Petyke is perplexed by the fact that during his interrogation the Gestapo cites conversations that he had with politicians long before the occupation. He writes in detail about the Gestapo’s means of breaking the spirit of the captives, and of the sophisticated methods applied during his interrogation, which lasted many hours. The story ends with the release of the journalist a few weeks later: he returns to the city of Budapest, and faces the radical changes in Hungarian politics. As if he had arrived on an alien planet, he writes: “Stigmatized people strolled in the street. They wore a yellow star of David on the left of their breast. And people passed among them as if they had already got used to it and there were nothing unusual in it” (p. 114).

The temporal construction of the catastrophe seems to be ambiguous. The intention of the publisher was certainly to use the year 1944 as the symbol of the national tragedy: it is even indicated on the cover of the series of books. In the books by Fóthy, Palásti and Petyke, the story begins immediately after the German occupation of Hungary on 19 March 1944. Losing national independence is thus the core topic of *Hungarian Golgotha*. This temporal limitation supports the interpretation that Hungary was the victim of the disaster. The war experience, indeed, is largely represented as the suffering of the civilian population of Budapest during the siege (particularly in Gyenes’s and Izsaky’s books). At first sight the 1944-concept of the catastrophe seems to be compact, yet there are many exceptions – three major ones concerning the temporality of the narratives. First, Lévai’s book on the chief Hungarian war criminal is a political biography that begins with Endre’s family background, the emphasis being on the period starting in the mid-1920s. Second, in Vajda’s book the national decline commences with the anti-Jewish legislation at the end of the 1930s. Third, Lévai’s work on the

resistance movements focuses on the war years. Concerning Hungary's role in the war, Gyenes's novel constitutes an exception; in this the character of a deserted soldier demonstrates model behavior for the Hungarian army in dealing with the occupiers. In general, the series shows Hungary's military participation in the war as a senseless sacrifice of the nation. However, the nation is not portrayed as a homogenous community of victims; the representation contains at least two fractures. One differentiates between the passive population and those who resisted: this can be seen in Gyenes's book and Lévai's contribution about the "martyrs of democracy". The other distinguishes the Hungarian perpetrators in the nation. In *Hungarian Golgotha* "the Germans" are never mentioned as the only ones who committed crimes. Hungarians serving German power interests are named as traitors, hirelings, sometimes as "Swabians" (Hungarians with German origin), against whom are posed the "true Hungarians". The national perpetrators are often identified with the Arrow Cross Party and other extreme right movements of the time, mostly as high-ranking officials and decision-makers. As the protagonist of Gyenes's novel puts it: "Sometimes I wonder about this type of person: they speak Hungarian fluently, but remain German to the end" (p. 10). These are the nation's "bands working for foreign interests" who are driven only by hatred, according to Vajda.

Strategies of remembering

The following section aims to confront the memory-political strategies running through *Hungarian Golgotha* with elements of the currently dominant discourse on Holocaust memory, which defines the present-day global culture of remembrance. I will focus on three key features of the dominant culture of memory²¹ and raise the question to what extent and in what sense they were definitive in the early post-war conception of the catastrophe. First, I deal with the present-day regime of historicity²² in particular with the social need to "preserve everything"²³; second, I focus on testimony as the procedure of representing the past and victimization as the mode of memory political action;²⁴ and third, I am interested in the "duty of remembering" as the ethical imperative of dealing with the past.²⁵ Instead of demonstrating the negative consequences²⁶ of this setting, or exercising normative criticism

²¹ Rousso, Henry: "Vers une mondialisation de la mémoire." In: *Vingtème Siècle. Revue d'histoire*, n° 94, avril-juin (2007), p. 3–11.; Rousso, Henry: "History of Memory, Policies of the Past: What for?" In: Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger (eds): *Conflicted Memories. Europeanizing Contemporary Histories*. 2007, p. 23–35.

²² Hartog, François: *Régimes d'historicité. Présentisme et expériences du temps*. Paris, 2002.

²³ Todorov, Tzvetan: *Hope and Memory. Lessons from the Twentieth Century*. Princeton, 2003, p. 113–148; Nora, Pierre: "The Era of Commemoration." In: Pierre Nora and L. Kritzman (eds): *Realms of Memory: The construction of the French Past*. Vol. 3. New York, 1996, p. 609–637.

²⁴ Wieviorka, Annette: *The Era of the Witness*. Ithaca and London, 2006; Giesen, Bernhard: *Triumph and Trauma*. Boulder, London, 2004; Hirsch, Marianne and Spitzer, Leo: "The witness in the archive: Holocaust Studies / Memory Studies." In: *Memory Studies* 2 (2009), p. 151–170.

²⁵ See e.g. Conan, Éric and Rousso, Henry: *Vichy: an Ever-present Past*. New England, 1998; Ricoeur, Paul: *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Chicago, 2009.

²⁶ See e.g. Wahnich, Sophie, Lášticová, Barbara and Findor, Andrej (eds): *Politics of Collective Memory. Cultural Patterns of Commemorative Practices in Post-War Europe*. Berlin, 2008.

on “too much memory”, my aim is to reconstruct forgotten or marginalized practices of representing the recent past.

The sense of time that can be described as present pasts²⁷ is unknown in the early post-war period. In general, social interest concerns the restoration and the future, rather than the past. But the past is not left behind. The sense of time in which *Hungarian Golgotha* came into being can be called the “actuality of the past”, the sense of its not having disappeared. The authors of the series started writing mostly during the catastrophe, even though their work could be made public only after it. The social need behind the publication was mainly to document and provide information on the recent past. A new age had begun but what had really happened remained obscure. Lévai in particular posits his work as a preliminary effort to make future historical inquiry possible, as for example in the book on the national resistance movements he states that “by providing certain details we would like to be of service to historians later devoting themselves to more fitting research on this topic from a historical perspective” (p. 5). Instead of archiving or commemorating past events “as they were”, the journalists strive to present the past in the national public sphere, that is, to show reality and to transmit historical truth. The need behind this memory politics is to learn from history, to derive a lesson from what happened as an orientation for the future. Perhaps not surprisingly, there is no trace of the need to “come to terms” with the past in the memory-political enterprise of *Hungarian Golgotha*. Instead of “working through” the traumatic historical experience,²⁸ the journalists of the series call for soul-searching as a practice of conscience and self-knowledge. Margit Izsáky’s foreword makes this explicit:

“Let us search our souls. How were things allowed to come to this. [...] Devastation and ruins everywhere. Wretched country. I am a journalist. It is my duty to write down what I saw and lived through. And I do so in this form – I write reports, not novels. Everything in this book is real and experienced. [...] If we are able to accurately show what was in the past, that is guidance for the future.”

In the currently dominant culture of memory, the legitimate non-expert practice of representing the past is the testimony of the victim. It is suffering that makes the personal experiences worthy of the public’s interest. In this respect, the memory of the Holocaust certainly served as a model: each and every testimony of the victims of the genocide contributes to keeping the memory of the Holocaust alive and thus to presenting a memento of the consequences of discrimination, exclusion and persecution of individuals because of their group affiliations. According to the relation to the past here

²⁷ Huyssen, Andreas: *Present Pasts. Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, 2003.

²⁸ On the cultural sociological role of trauma see Alexander, Jeffrey C.: “Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma.” In: Alexander, Jeffrey C., Eyerman, Ron, Giesen, Bernard, Smelser, Neil J., and Sztompka, Piotr (eds): *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. Berkeley, London, 2004, p. 1–31.

called the “actuality of the past”, the principal memorial practice of Müller’s publishing policy is radically different from the life historical testimony of the everyday individual. It is journalistic reporting: a discursive practice of transmitting facts that makes private experiences public through elaborating them in relation to a political matter, either as an example, or as an analogy of an issue that concerns the political community. A clear formulation of this is in Petyke’s book:

“I was a captive of the Gestapo in Budapest. In this work I attempt to describe objectively what I saw and heard and what happened to me and my fellow prisoners, from the perspective of a journalist. This was the most memorable experience of my life!” (p. 4).

Although factual genres such as reportage and biography predominate in the series, it is characterized by a mixture of literary and journalistic genres. A frequent term used for the books is reportage-novel, which refers to a text written on the basis of the experiences of the author-journalist to address public interest, but shaped with techniques borrowed from fiction, such as dialogues or dramatization. Certainly, the publisher’s aim to reach the widest possible non-specialist readership should not be neglected here. The narrative styles adopted are various: first-person memoir with fictional elements, documentary fiction, biographic reportage, document publishing, etc. What all these cases have in common is that the journalistic discursive practices as legitimate modes of representing the truth make it possible to render the private experiences public. Also important is that the books rely on journalistic methods of data collection such as interviews, personal observations, and documentation. This methodological relation to facts is a characteristic feature even of the treatment of personal experiences. With the help of the motto, the reader can recognize the author herself in one of the characters in Izsáky’s book. Instead of using a first person narrative of suffering, Izsáky represents herself as one of the ordinary individuals in the air-raid shelter in the third person singular. Similarly, Lévai treats his personal experiences of persecution by László Endre as other sources of his inquiry (the publisher, however, had no qualms about representing their relationship as a long dramatic duel between the man of power and the man of letters). Lévai was engaged in one of the opposition movements he writes about in his book on national resistance (one that helped forced laborers). Instead of applying the first person narrative and representing himself as a hero of the resistance, he remains in the position of the unbiased reporter of the past who confines himself to publishing the files of his trial. All in all, lived-through experience serves as the source of acute and real information which has to be elaborated by the professional writer, and not as the exclusive object of narration. Moreover, personal suffering is not represented as trauma. There is no individual victimization in the memory politics of *Hungarian Golgotha*. Instead of suffering victims, the authors speak of martyrs and comrades who took part in a fight and fell. The individuals who speak of the past in the series are journalists, not survivors, and even those of Jewish origin do not take up the position of the victim of genocide.

In our present-day global culture of memory the central ethical imperative that guides our relations to the past is often called the “duty to remember”. As a characteristic feature of Holocaust memory, this imperative calls for a commemoration of the past to prevent history repeating itself. With the universalization of the memory of the Holocaust, the memento of the Jewish genocide has become a general emblem of Evil, the final consequence of every form of inhuman actions, irrespective of geographic or historical context. At the early stage of the history of Holocaust memory this duty was inseparable from the social obligation personally felt by survivors towards those fellow victims who were not able to return. Speaking in the name of the others, the silent witnesses, in other words representing the community of victims, was a peculiar characteristic of the memory of the Holocaust. In the books of Fóthy and Palásti, which are about the persecution of the Jews, the “duty to remember” is completely absent: the normative imperative of telling the truth of the past is the professional duty of journalism. For the journalist authors of Jewish origin, who pursuant to the anti-Jewish legislation were deprived of their professional livelihood, Müller’s publishing house provided the possibility to pursue their vocation legally. In this way, the very fact that the formerly excluded intellectuals could participate in the discourse of the public sphere proved that the persecution was over. The possibility of working legally provided a political subjectivity: the journalistic profession as political practice constituted a legitimate mode of participating in the public sphere. Thus the personal becomes political in manner different to the case of personal life stories of Jewish suffering.

Hungarian Golgotha does not represent a homogenous discourse on the catastrophe; rather, it is a manifestation of an open and unstable discursive field of the national public sphere in which different conceptualizations and memorial practices compete with each other. Within the series, the work of Vajda differs from all the others in many respects. First of all, the autodidact author is not a man of letters. It is thus no accident that the publisher felt the need to provide an explanation for the publication of the first text by a publicly unknown person. In his forward Müller recounts that the manuscript triggered an intense debate among the publisher’s readers, who agreed that it was definitely based on lived-through experiences but “it lacks ‘authorial heat’, in other words the author of the work is not a professional writer.” Consequently, the text “is not a poetic work of a high literary standard” but a “cross-section of reality, an authentic testimony on a glaring stain on the twentieth century, Hungarian forced labor, in the great lawsuit before the tribunal of democracy” (p. 2). To be sure, however, the publisher advertises the book by comparing Vajda’s talent to that of Erich Maria Remarque and Rodion Markovits. What is important is that finally the *Army with Shovels* was included in the publisher’s project despite the differences from the other books of the series, and from Müller’s publishing policy in general. Vajda’s autobiographic account is very similar to the currently dominant practices of memory culture. The book begins with the following:

“Memento!... Let us remember!... Let our remembrance be nourished not by revenge but by the desire that the past shall never ever return. I started writing in hard, cataclysmic times. The story is about an average man in today’s dire times.” (p.3).

The drive behind writing “about an average man” is what we call the “duty to remember”, and the product is very close to the narrative form of today’s life history accounts and personal testimonies. What makes Vajda’s text peculiar in relation to Holocaust testimonies is the fact that the author speaks as a member of the community of “we, (humane) Hungarians”.

Concerning the publishing policy of Károly Müller at large, the central question remains of how the brutal and often unimaginable events of the past could be named, narrated, and interpreted – without the discourse on the Holocaust and genocide. Again, there is no single answer to this: *Hungarian Golgotha* cannot be treated as an example of a homogenous discourse on the catastrophe. Accordingly, many metaphors were supposed to communicate what had happened during the war: catastrophe, tragedy, decay, dark age, etc. In this regard, there are three features that characterize Müller’s enterprise. The first is the push to integrate the catastrophe into the grand narrative of the nation. In this way Jewish suffering, taking an important role in the representation of the catastrophe, is manifested as an aspect of the national tragedy, either as a consequence of treason, or of the growing inhumanity and hatred in society. Both versions are well-known *topoi* of the (Hungarian) national imagination: the former represents the fight between the nations, the latter the case when members of the nation follow their selfish interests above those of the entire community. The second characterizing feature is a reliance on the contemporary judicial discourse on retribution.²⁹ What is remarkable from the present-day reader’s perspective is that, applying the national framework, legislation differentiated between war crimes and “crimes against the people” [népellenes bűnök]. The former referred in practice to any act of waging war and preventing the armistice after 1939 – that is, war *per se* became indictable, primarily in the case of those who had previously been in decision-making positions. The latter included actions on the basis of the “laws and decrees against certain layers of the people”, membership in fascist parties, and distributing anti-democratic ideas. The authors of *Hungarian Golgotha* relied on this legal discourse, although neither systematically nor profoundly. Cases before the People’s Courts were regularly burning issues in the public sphere in 1945, which probably increased the awareness of this legal terminology. Finally, the third characteristic feature of Müller’s publishing policy is the application of a Christian vocabulary to name the horrors neither the national nor the legal discourse could address appropriately. Most importantly, to narrate and thus to remember the human suffering, words like Golgotha, Calvary,

²⁹ See Karsai, László: “The People’s Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary, 1945–46.” In: Deák, István, Gross, Jan T., and Judt, Tony (eds): *The Politics of Retribution in Europe: World War II and Its Aftermath, 1939–1948*. Princeton University Press, 2000, p. 233-151.

crucifixion, martyrdom, sacrifice, etc. are used. This way, the suffering of the community could be remembered as a distant analogy to the suffering of Christ. This sort of suffering has meanings, because being victimized refers to an ideal or goal for which the sacrifice is made. Moreover, Christian vocabulary enabled people to face the responsibility for previous wrong-doings. In this sense, by searching one's heart, one has to confront the sins one has committed to be able to learn from the lesson of the past. Taking responsibility is thus a point of individual conscience. It is essential to note that what we have here is not a religious discourse, as none of the authors were believers (with the exception of Fóthy, who makes no use of the vocabulary under discussion). Müller's publishing policy was secular, as was his social environment.

Conclusion

The Hungarian publishing house of Károly Müller, focusing its activity on the recent past, represents a peculiar case among the early post-war discourses of cultural memory. Müller's publishing policy was closely related to his resistance activity as supporter and rescuer of intellectuals during the war years. By giving them the opportunity to work as authors and translators in 1943–45, the publisher was able to market a good number of publications immediately after the liberation. The political relevance of publishing was multiple: to tell the truth about the past, to convey historical justice, to document the crimes, to indict the perpetrators, and to commemorate the martyrs. The joint publication of eight books, *Hungarian Golgotha*, involved seven authors, with one exception all journalists. As a conceptualization of the catastrophe, it reconstructs the recent past as a national tragedy in which the topic of forced labor is a definitive component. Besides Jewish suffering, constitutive layers of the tragedy are war experience, resistance, war crimes, and persecution due to political affiliations. The strategies of remembering around *Hungarian Golgotha* differ in other additional respects from the present-day dominant culture of remembrance, which has at its center the memory of the Holocaust. In this article, these differences have been analyzed from three perspectives: the sense of time, the practices of representing the past, and the ethical dimension of remembering.