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The Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year 2014

Some Remarks

Abstract

From the perspective of the past two (almost three) years, it seems that the significant anniversary of 2014 went down in the annals of history as a remarkable fiasco of Hungarian memory politics. *Controversial Monument, Divided Hungarians, Angered Jewish Community* – these newspaper headlines are still fresh in our minds. Over the course of the year, the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year turned to become somewhat infamous, and scandal followed upon scandal not only in domestic media but also in foreign newspapers. However, everything had started off well in the beginning. This essay will first briefly introduce the broader context of this fiasco, discussing the main differences between Eastern and Western European memory politics before and after 1989. It will then distinguish some milestones of the Hungarian ambiguity and delay in coping with the European tendencies in Holocaust remembrance. After that, it will turn to its central subject, analysing the main events of the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year 2014. Toward the end, the essay will map the different initiatives between the coordinates of memory politics and show some unintended consequences of the unsuccessful governmental intentions.

After long decades of more or less parallel processes in European memory politics – namely the common usage of the antifascist narrative of the extermination of Jews during the Second World War in Western and Eastern Europe alike – this memory reached a crossroad in the 1970s and 1980s.¹ In Germany and later in many countries of Western Europe, it has become *the Holocaust*, the universal metaphor of the suffering of Jews, and has evolved into the hegemonic discourse of European history of the twentieth century, while in the Soviet bloc the forms of memory of the 1970s and 1980s underwent only minor changes with regard to the antifascist narrative of the 1950s. During the years of political transition in 1989/1990, many scholars estimated that this relatively new a-synchronicity between Eastern and Western memory politics would be overcome relatively quickly.² After 1990, a number of new domestic institutions, museums, and NGOs started to import Western know-how such as museum pedagogy, educational materials, commemoration techniques and so forth into the former Ostblock with the clear intention of implementing the predominantly German and American memory framework in these

1 See e.g. Richard Ned Lebow/Wulf Kansteiner/Claudio Fogu (ed.), *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, Durham 2006; Dan Stone, *The Holocaust, Fascism and Memory. Essays in the History of Ideas*, London/New York 2013.

2 Henry Rousso, *Das Dilemma eines europäischen Gedächtnisses*, in: *Zeithistorische Forschungen/Studies in Contemporary History*, Online-Ausgabe 1 (2004), <http://www.zeithistorische-forschungen.de/16126041-Rousso-3-2004> (17 January 2017).

countries as well.³ However, even these ‘Westernisers’ of memory culture did not take into consideration the fact that the harmonisation and the ‘(Western-)Europeanisation’ of different narratives and memory practices of the Holocaust would require another two or three decades in both parts of Europe – considering that the construction of a common memory is the overall aim.⁴

The Prior Conditions of Hungarian Memory Politics after 1989

Why are there still significant differences in memory politics between Eastern and Western Europe? Retrospectively, some of the reasons can be listed while focusing on the Hungarian case but also taking into consideration the broader Eastern European tendencies.

Immediately after the transition, mainstream Western memory studies ignored or at least marginalised the experience of Stalinist terror and post-Stalinist dictatorships in the Communist countries, while, during the political transition, it was precisely the conflicts around these experiences that played a crucial role in the (re-)formation of national identity and memory politics in the former Communist countries.⁵

As a matter of fact, in Eastern Europe the Holocaust as a formative part of a national history has not become as important in memory politics as in the West. In many countries of the former *Ostblock*, the Holocaust has yet to become an inherent part of the national historiography. In this sense, researchers on the other side of the Iron Curtain often divided the history of the twentieth century into two different, often contradictory or reciprocally excluding narrations: the Holocaust and the Gulag – with the former falling outside of the scope of historical studies.⁶

However, rivalry can often help to shape scientific knowledge, institutional positions and so forth, and to make them more transparent. As a matter of fact, in Germany the re-forming of the public memory of *Flucht und Vertreibung* in the 1990s did not contravene the fundamental principles of memory politics of the Holocaust but opened a new discursive field not only of German identity but also of Polish-German and Czech-German memory landscapes.⁷

In Hungary, the memory landscape is in parts even more complicated than in other East and Central European countries due to the presence of a third topic in the

3 See e.g. Daniel Levy/Natan Sznaider, *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter. Der Holocaust*, Berlin 2001; James Edward Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven 1993; Katja Köhr, *Die vielen Gesichter des Holocaust. Museale Repräsentationen zwischen Individualisierung, Universalisierung und Nationalisierung*, Göttingen 2015. For the latest developments in the field, see Olga Gershenson/Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *New Jewish Museums in Post-communist Europe*, in: *East European Jewish Affairs* 45 (2015) 2-3, 153-157.

4 Małgorzata Pakier/Joanna Wawrzyniak (ed.), *Memory and Change in Europe. Eastern Perspectives*, New York/Oxford 2015; Zuzanna Bogumił/Joanna Wawrzyniak/Tim Buchen/Christian Ganzer/Maria Senina, *The Enemy on Display. The Second World War in Eastern European Museums*, New York/Oxford 2015.

5 Maria Todorova/Augusta Dimou/Stefan Troebst (ed.), *Remembering Communism. Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in Southeast Europe*, Budapest 2014.

6 See Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe Since 1945*, New York 2005; Marek Kucia, *The Europeanization of Holocaust Memory and Eastern Europe*, in: *East European Politics & Societies* 30 (2016) 1, 97-119; John-Paul Himka/Joanna Beata Michlic (ed.), *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, Lincoln 2013.

7 E.g. Jürgen Danyel/Philipp Ther (ed.), *Flucht und Vertreibung in europäischer Perspektive*, in: *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 51 (2003) 1. In Hungary, incidentally, the discourse on the Beneš decrees failed to lead to a Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation. See for example Ágnes Tóth, *Migrationen in Ungarn 1945–1948. Vertreibung der Ungarndeutschen, Binnenwanderungen und slowakisch-ungarischer Bevölkerungsaustausch*, Munich 2001; László Szarka (ed.), *A szlovákiai magyarok kényszertelepítésének emlékezete 1945–1948 [The Memory of the Forced Migration of the Hungarians of Slovakia 1945–1948]*, Komárom 2003.

arena of national remembrance. Beside the terror of the Nazis and the Communists, Trianon (the peace treaty of 1920) plays a very important, if not the most important, role in Hungarian memory politics.⁸ Despite the persistent anti-Communist propaganda of the governments of the right-wing Alliance of Young Democrats (Fidesz), it seems as if the deliberate reconstruction of the interwar 'Trianon Trauma' almost immediately after 1989/1990 finally obtained such a hegemonic position in Hungarian memory politics with which the Holocaust – despite its death toll of more than 600,000 Hungarian citizens – could not compete.⁹ Many Hungarian scholars agree that remembering the Holocaust and Trianon – due to their similarities in self-victimisation, symbolisation, and generalisation of particular historical events, the mythologisation of history, and so forth – are mutually exclusive forms of remembrance. However, from a historical point of view, Trianon and the Holocaust are tightly connected components of the failed politics of nation-building of the twentieth century, since Hungary took part in the Second World War to regain the territories that it has lost in the First World War. Thus, in this context, the chauvinistic and extremely nationalistic interpretation of Hungarian history gained such an overwhelming hegemony in the national discourse that it blocked any development of a reflective, critical memory politics and thus the integration of the interwar 'Trianon Trauma' into a modern, introspective public history.

Ambiguity and Delays in Remembrance of the Holocaust

The Hungarian memory landscape demonstrates a certain ambiguity and delay compared to other European countries. Concentrating on the memory of the Holocaust, I would like to mention only a few milestones of this ambiguity and delay:

- 1990: The Hungarian state started to consider paying compensation and restitution to the victims of the Nazi persecution very late. Instead of a commitment, however, it was a half-hearted measure. The Jewish restitution law was in fact the last act in the line of restitution laws of the new democratic parliament and it did not cover forced labour, whereas the victims of Stalinism (for example foreign forced labourers in the Soviet Union) were entitled to compensation. Precisely at this point and in this matter, it became evident how much the new Hungarian democracy was not ready or prepared to accept the responsibility of the contemporary Hungarian state for the fate of its citizens during the Second World War – and thus made obvious the thoroughly problematic memory politics of the Hungarian Third Republic of 1989/1990 from its very inception.¹⁰
- 2000/2001: Hungary became a signatory to the Stockholm Declaration and a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA). However, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was not present at the meeting in January 2000 when the participating governments discussed the importance of

8 Eric B. Weaver, *National Narcissism. The Intersection of the Nationalist Cult and Gender in Hungary*, Oxford 2006.

9 See the episode of the Hungarian *Historikerstreit* discussed later in this paper.

10 M. A. [Mink András] A magyar zsidóság kárpótlása [The Restitution of the Hungarian Jews], in: *Beszélő* 24 (2002) 7; <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/a-magyar-zsidosag-karpotlasi> (17 January 2017); Randolph L. Braham, Hungary. The Assault on the Historical Memory of the Holocaust, in Randolph L. Braham/András Kovács (ed.), *The Holocaust in Hungary. Seventy Years Later*, Budapest 2016. See also Zsófi Lefkóvics, Tények – Amit a holokauszt-kárpótlással kapcsolatban tudni illik [Facts – What Needs to Be Known About Restitution and the Holocaust], in: *TEV (Tet és Védelem/Action and Protection)*, 22 November 2016, <http://tev.hu/tenyek-amit-a-holokauszt-karpotlással-kapcsolatban-tudni-illik/> (17 January 2017).

Holocaust education and formulated the declaration. Hungary was represented only by the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office István Stumpf who "misled the audience of the Forum", when "he did not mention any of the anti-Jewish laws enacted between 1938 and 1945".¹¹ As a result of the Stockholm Declaration in 2000, Hungary has since 2001 officially commemorated the Holocaust on 16 April countrywide – the date marks the beginning of the ghettoisation of Jews in 1944. In the same year, but a bit earlier, 25 February was declared to be the Memorial Day for the Victims of the Communist Dictatorships – this date marks the day in 1947 when Secretary-General of the Independent Smallholders' Party Béla Kovács was arrested and deported to the Soviet Union.

- 2002: The House of Terror, a museum on contemporary history, opened its doors for visitors in the centre of Budapest. As is well known from the essays, articles, and contributions of prominent historians worldwide and in Hungary, the Holocaust plays a marginal role in the exhibition while the Communist terror holds a dominant position.¹² Although the House of Terror has been criticised since the moment it was envisaged, its director Mária Schmidt also became a candidate for head of the new Holocaust Museum – the House of Fates – in 2015.
- 2004: The Holocaust Memorial Centre was opened two years later, on a peripheral lot of the country's capital. Unfortunately, it only opened with a temporary exhibition since the permanent one had not been completed on time. Awkward rumours started to circulate about corruption and embezzlement during the implementation of the project, and finally a Government Commissioner had to guarantee that the opening ceremony would take place. Behind the scenes, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (Mazsihisz) also played a suspicious role in the Advisory Board of the museum. Script, scenario, and concept of the permanent exhibition were also criticised by many Hungarian scholars, the consecutive managements could not operate the museum successfully, and last but not least, the number of visitors have been relatively modest, without any significant increase in the past years. All in all, this cannot be regarded as a success story.¹³
- 2010: Since this year, Hungary has held the *Trianon Remembrance Day* on 4 June – after the days of the victims of Communism and Nazism, this third memorial day commemorating a crucial event of the twentieth century. In contemporary Hungary, this is one of the most important memorial days.¹⁴

11 Randolph L. Braham, Magyarország és a holokauszt [Hungary and the Holocaust], in: *Beszélő* 24 (2002) 4, <http://beszelo.c3.hu/cikkek/magyarorszag-es-a-holokauszt> (17 January 2017) [All translations from Hungarian are the author's].

12 Tony Judt, From the House of the Dead. On Modern European Memory, in: *New York Review of Books*, 6 October 2005, <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2005/10/06/from-the-house-of-the-dead-on-modern-european-memo/> (17 January 2017). Brigitte Mihok, Das „Haus des Terrors“ in Budapest. Spiegelbild der nationalen Geschichtsdeutung? in: *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 19 (2010), 363-378; Stefan Troebst, „Was für ein Teppich?“ Postkommunistische Erinnerungskulturen in Ost(mittel)europa. Bestandsaufnahme und Kategorisierungsversuch, in: Volkhard Knigge/Ulrich Mähler (Hg.), *Kommunismus im Museum. Cologne/Weimar/Vienna 2005* (= Schriftenreihe der Stiftung Ettersberg, Volume 6), 31-54; Mark Pittaway, The 'House of Terror' and Hungary's Politics of Memory, in: *Austrian Studies Newsletter* 15 (2003) 1, 16-17.

13 See more about the Center in Julia Creet, The House of Terror and the Holocaust Memorial Center: Resentment and Melancholia in Post-89 Hungary, in: *European Studies* 30 (2013), 29-62.

14 Miroslav Michela/László Vörös et al., Rozpad Uhorska a Trianonská mierová zmluva. K politikám pamäti na Slovensku a v Maďarsku [The Destruction of Hungary and the Trianon Peace Treaty. On Slovakian and Hungarian Memory Politics], Bratislava 2013; Margit Feischmidt, Populárna emlekezetpolitika és az újnacionalizmus. A Trianon-kultusz társadalmi alapjai [Popular Memory Politics and New Nationalism: The Social Fundamentals of the Trianon Cult], in: Margit Feischmidt (ed.), *Nemzet a mindennapokban* [The Nation in Everyday Life], Budapest 2014, 51-81. On the Trianon debate, see The "Trianon"-Debate in the Hungarian left-liberal weekly *Élet és Irodalom*, <http://www.imre-kerteszkolleg.uni-jena.de/index.php?id=414> (17 January 2017).

Until 2010, the Hungarian political elite did not change the main structure of the constitution of 1949. The old-new, provisional constitution of 1990 – a very democratic but also very secular juridical charter of the new Hungarian Republic – did not use the historical or religious symbolism of interwar Hungary. Finally, in 2011, and with a two-third majority in the Parliament, Orbán's time came to legislate a new Basic Law. The process of constitution-making remained hidden from the public from beginning to end. The new Hungarian Constitution was finally adopted on 18 April 2011. One section of the preamble was fiercely criticised by historians and political scientists¹⁵ as well as by the head of Jewish community.¹⁶ It claims that Hungary lost its independence and sovereignty when it was occupied by Nazi Germany in March 1944. This provision implies the Hungarian state's innocence and denies its responsibility for the deportation of Jews in the summer of 1944.

2012: In the summer of 2012, a kind of *Historikerstreit* broke out in Hungary.¹⁷ The main topics of the controversy were the language of and the attitudes toward the historiography of the Holocaust. The Hungarian *Historikerstreit* is closely related to both the revival and exoneration of the Horthy era (1920–1944) in current Hungarian politics and the ambivalent attitudes toward the Holocaust in public memory. The Horthy era was heavily influenced by racist right-wing radicalism, anti-modernism, anti-liberalism, and antisemitism in Hungary. As a political system, it functioned as an autocratic quasi-democracy that not only coquetted with Nazism but subsequently intensively cooperated with the Third Reich in order to revise the Paris treaties. Turning back with restorative nostalgia to the political symbolism of that era meant the revival and reprisal of the above-mentioned mentality and political slogans. This nostalgia also strengthened self-victimisation of the 'nation' and an ambivalent attitude toward the memory of the Hungarian Holocaust.

All of these steps were undertaken by ruling national-conservative governments. The permanent exhibition of Holocaust Documentation Centre was initiated by the social-liberal government in 2004. On the other hand, the social-liberal governments between 2004 and 2010 clearly failed to formulate a well-defined concept on reckoning with the country's troubled past. The position held by MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) and later on by the Fidesz over 25 years was hardly ever criticised or challenged: For example, the House of Terror won the Prize *Museum of the Year* under the aegis of the left-liberal coalition. Only a few exceptions can be mentioned: Between 2002 and 2006, the Hungarian delegation to IHRA was headed by Bálint Magyar, the Minister of Education, who vehemently supported the education of children and young people on the history of the Holocaust, and it was under his term that the new exhibition in the Hungarian pavilion in the Auschwitz Museum was established within six months in 2004.¹⁸ The aggressive nationalism of the con-

15 Gábor Halmai, Hochproblematisch. Ungarns neues Grundgesetz, in: Eurozine, 25 January 2012, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2012-01-25-halmai-de.html> (17 January 2017).

16 Monika Kovács, Global and Local Holocaust Remembrance, in: Randolph A. Braham/András Kovács (ed.), *The Holocaust in Hungary. Seventy Years Later*, Budapest 2016, 231-250.

17 Éva Kovács, Overcoming History through Trauma. The Hungarian *Historikerstreit*, in: *European Review* 24 (2016) 4, 523-534.

18 See Regina Fritz, Ungarische Holocaust-Ausstellungen im innen- und außenpolitischen Spannungsfeld. Das Holocaust Gedenkzentrum Budapest und der ungarische Pavillon im Staatlichen Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau, in: Ekaterina Makhotina/Ekaterina Keding/Włodzimierz Borodziej/Etienne François/Martin Schulze Wessel (ed.), *Krieg im Museum. Präsentationen des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Museen und Gedenkstätten des östlichen Europa* (=Veröffentlichungen des Collegium Carolinum, Volume 131), Göttingen 2015, 203-225.

servative parties went hand-in-hand with the political inertia of the left-liberals, who promoted a well-balanced, critical, self-reflective social memory. With all that combined, a long process of the secession from mainstream (West-)European memory politics was completed by the end of 2010s.

Annus Miserabilis? – The Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year 2014

2014 will probably go down in the Hungarian history of memory politics as *annus miserabilis*.¹⁹ Everything was going well in the beginning. On the one hand, the Hungarian Government created a fund of 1.8 billion Forint (approximately six million Euros) to sponsor civil-society remembrance. 1,073 applications were received for a total of ten times that amount. Let a hundred flowers blossom – the Civil Fund supported 400 applications: Jewish communities, civic associations, private persons, companies, local governments, ecclesiastical institutions, budgetary authorities, educational institutes, and others could realise their programmes in Hungary and abroad.

On the other hand, in 2013, the Fidesz government founded a new institute, a new museum, and decided to erect a new monument, all of which caused public outcry.

The new institute – the Veritas Research Institute – was founded with the explicit goal of “re-evaluating” [sic] the historical research of Hungary’s past 150 years. According to the right-wing director of the Institute Sándor Szakály, the massacre in Kamenets-Podolsk in July 1941, where 23,600 Hungarian Jews were killed in the Ukraine, could not be considered as the first deportation of Jews from Hungary but was merely “a police action against aliens”.²⁰

The site of the new museum is an old, abandoned railway station on the edge of Budapest that needs refurbishing. The total costs amounted to approximately 25 million Euros. It is called the House of Fates (Sorsok Háza, the name might be an antithesis to Imre Kertész’s Nobel Prize-winning book *Fateless*). According to the intention of its programme director Mária Schmidt (the director of the House of Terror), this new museum would have been devoted to the children who were murdered in the Holocaust. Minister of the Prime Minister’s Office János Lázár explained it in a slightly embarrassing way: “We chose the ‘children’s Holocaust’ as the theme because we were trying to find a point, which cannot be relativised: no explanation, no answer can be accepted when it comes to the murder of a child.”²¹ The museum was planned to open in April 2014, but after two years, its doors remain shut.

19 Similar conclusions were drawn by Ferenc Laczó, Henriett Kovács and Ursula K. Mindler-Steiner; see Ferenc Laczó, Integrating Victims, Externalizing Guilt? Commemorating the Holocaust in Hungary in 2014, <http://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/hungary/integrating-victims-externalizing-guilt-commemorating-the-holocaust-in-hungary-in-2014/> (17 January 2017); Henriett Kovács/Ursula K. Mindler-Steiner, Hungary and the Distortion of Holocaust History. The Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year 2014, in: *Politics in Central Europe* 11 (2015) 2, 49-72.

20 In Hungarian: “idegenrendészeti eljárás”. In the summer of 1941, the Central National Authority for the Inspection of Foreigners instructed that “aliens” be rounded up and handed over to the Eastern Galician German occupation authorities. This action resulted in the deportation of between 13,000 and 18,000 Jews to Galicia and Ukraine, where they were murdered by SS units at Kamenets-Podolsk in August 1941 along with much of the local Jewish population; see George Eisen/Tamás Stark, The 1941 Galician Deportation and the Kamenets-Podolsk Massacre. A Prologue to the Hungarian Holocaust, in: *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27 (2013) 2, 207-241.

21 Gábor Róna, The Orbán Government and the International Jewish Community, in: *Hungarian Spectrum*, 9 November 2014, <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/tag/gabor-rona/> (17 January 2017).



House of Fates, Budapest, Photo: Építésforum, Budapest.²²

On January 17 2014, the Hungarian government decided to erect a new monument commemorating the German occupation of Hungary. The artist said in his work:

“[T]wo cultures are represented: one, which thinks itself stronger, and which is certainly more aggressive, towers above a more tranquil and softer-lined figure, that of the Archangel Gabriel, who represents Hungary. Gabriel, in cultural and religious tradition, is God’s servant or God’s power personified. [...] On Freedom Square, the Archangel Gabriel sits atop a column, among the clouds. In my composition, he has been laid low. [...] He is depicted as handsome and tranquil. His body is perfect, and there is no fear in his eyes. His face is tranquil, his eyes are closed. The monument explains that his dream will turn into a nightmare. A culture, its wings broken, is being crushed by a greater power: the Third Reich and the symbol that represents it, the Imperial Eagle. The depiction of the eagle is the exact opposite of the Archangel Gabriel’s. The Imperial Eagle is an assemblage of mass produced icons and symbols. It sweeps in flight across the world. Soon it will reach us and engulf Hungary, putting its inhabitants in chains.”²³

Critics accused the government of attempting to diminish the Horthy regime’s responsibility for the death of nearly one million Hungarians, including two-thirds of its Jewish population, by placing the blame entirely on Nazi Germany. After a heated debate on the ethics and aesthetics of the monument in the newspapers, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary (Mazsihisz) decided in February 2015 to neither participate in the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year, nor to use public funds allotted to various Jewish organisations for this purpose. In a press statement, the new President of Mazsihisz András Heisler said:

“No progress has been made on the part of the government in connection with the Year of the Hungarian Holocaust remembrance. In practice, there

²² <http://epiteszforum.hu/galeria/sorsok-haza/177951> (17 January 2017).

²³ See the historian Krisztián Ungváry on the German invasion statue controversy in <http://www.politics.hu/20140124/krisztian-ungvary-on-the-german-invasion-statue-controversy/> (17 January 2017).

has been no change to the memorial policies, which have turned in a negative direction over the past years.”²⁴

The Federation asked the Prime Minister to stop the inauguration of both the memorial dedicated to the memory of the German invasion and the House of Fates. It also complained that the project’s leader Mária Schmidt was unresponsive to their concerns. The Federation also declared that Sándor Szakály was unsuitable as director of the Veritas Research Institute. The head of the Jewish World Congress, Ronald S. Lauder, wrote a letter stating that his organisation “completely supports the viewpoint of the Hungarian Jewish community with regard to commemorating the Holocaust”.²⁵ 35 organisations (including 27 Jewish communities) and private persons who won financial support for their commemoration projects via a state tender, rejected the state’s resources and established instead a civil alliance called Memento70, which unfortunately could not find enough donors and sponsors for the realisation of the majority of the programmes until the end of 2014.

All these events took place in February, at the beginning of the Memorial Year: trenches were dug, bellicose noises were heard everywhere. The whole commemoration atmosphere was poisoned by the arrogance of the government. Prime Minister Orbán said the monument was “morally precise and immaculate” and he did not accept the requests of the Mazsihisz, nor did he listen to the critiques of domestic and foreign historians. Regardless of permanent demonstrations against the monument, it was finally unveiled early on a Sunday morning in June.

On the Battlefield of Memory

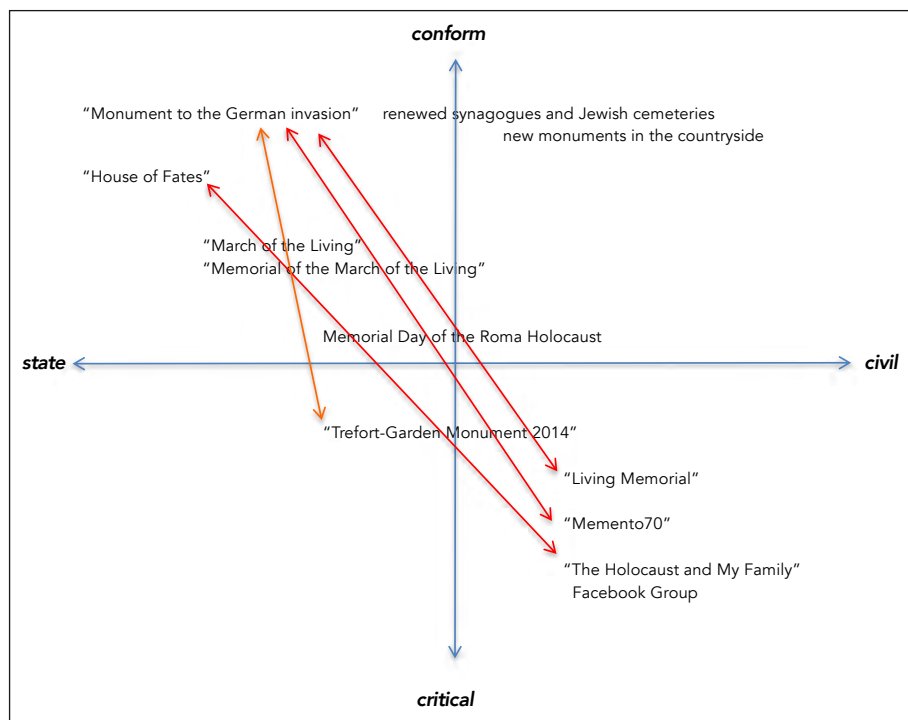
For the final part of this essay, I would like to map the most important commemorations, counter-commemorations, and alternative remembrance events of the Hungarian Holocaust Memorial Year 2014 in the following coordinate system:

- in the dimension of state initiatives (memorials, commemoration programmes, and museums) versus civic actions (March of the Living, Memorial Day of the Roma Holocaust, virtual performances of commemoration, etc.),
- in the dimension of conforming versus critical or independent representations and performances.

As I noted earlier, the monument to the German invasion – *Monument Commemorating the Victims of the German Nazi Occupation in Hungary* – was erected but never officially inaugurated by the government, probably because of the permanent protests against it. Hundreds of local programmes (restorations of old synagogues and Jewish cemeteries, and the opening of dozens of new monuments and exhibitions countryside and abroad) were realised by the support of the Civil Fund during the Memorial Year, but only a few of them showed any creativity in respect to active remembrance formats or regarding a cooperation with the local levels. A schizophrenic situation emerged: On the one hand, representatives of the government addressed the memory of the Hungarian Holocaust in the media in a politically correct way and also joined several civil commemoration events such as the *March of the*

24 Zoltán Kovács, Hungarian Jewish Groups to Boycott Government Holocaust Memorial Programs, in: The Budapest Beacon, 9 February 2014, <http://budapestbeacon.com/public-policy/hungarian-jewish-groups-to-boycott-government-holocaust-memorial-programs/4779> (17 January 2017).

25 Sam Sokol, Jewish Organisations Show Support for Boycott of Hungarian Shoah Commemorations, in: Jerusalem Post, 10 February 2014, <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-News/Jewish-organizations-show-support-for-boycott-of-hungarian-shoah-commemorations-340977> (17 January 2017).



Living or the *Memorial Day of the Roma Holocaust*, but on the other hand, the same government insisted on a biased, a-historical narrative of the Holocaust as well as a representation of a problematic and widely contested national past by laws, monuments, and other non-temporary – meaning lasting – forms of remembrance. Those NGOs and local initiatives which did not reject the support of the Civil Fund realised many events and programmes during 2014: Jewish cemeteries were tidied up and gardened, synagogues were renovated, small memorials were erected, and the history of the local Jewish communities were exhibited in a number of small Hungarian towns.

The civil protest movement of *Memento70* took shape in widespread but not self-evidently successful actions, but the civil alliance could not find enough donors and sponsors for the programmes of its members. However, as a result of the turbulent crisis around the *House of Fates*, the activities of the protest movement ultimately reached one of its remote goals: *Mária Schmidt* – at least for the time being – was removed from her position in the *House of Fates*, and the *Holocaust Documentation Centre* is supposed to move into the new building. Since 2015, the *House of Fates* is ready to open and yet remains closed, uninaugurated, and empty.

There were other small triumphs against state-controlled memory politics: The alternative *Living Memorial* around the official *Monument of the Nazi Invasion of Hungary* telling a different story and expressing a counter-narrative was never removed by the police, indeed hardly any action was taken against it. A group of citizens erected their own alternative monument consisting of photographs, personal mementos, shoes, votive candles, flowers, and rocks. Anyone can add to the memorial and it changes from month to month. This monument is modest, but it is also dynamic and a powerful example of how to challenge (and deconstruct) an officially imposed grand narrative of the country's history.²⁶ The *Living Memorial* turned to

26 Aleida Assmann, *Zwei leere Stühle, die sich gegenüberstehen*, in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 18 December 2014, <http://www.nzz.ch/feuilleton/zwei-leere-stuehle-die-sich-gegenueberstehen-1.18446566> (17 January 2017).



Living Memorial on Freedom Square, Budapest, Photo: Facebook Group *Elven Emlékmű* (Living Memorial).

A couple of professors at the ELTE University coming partly from the same demonstration circle also decided to erect a counter-monument behind the gates of the University. The Trefort-Garden Monument 2014 – called *Names in the Mortar Joint* – combined the enthusiasm of the students and the financial support of the state. Some classes of students did research on the interwar history of the university, and the monument’s designers were chosen by an open call. They declared:

“A given community’s responsibility for their past cannot be passed on to monuments. [...] There is a need for a concessive monument. The sign designed by us is huge (nearly 250 metres long), and at the same time almost impossibly small (barely one centimetre high). It expresses the unique and dramatic loss associated with this specific period in the university’s history, but it is not placed into the sight of citizens of today’s university day after day. We would like to raise the interest for recollection not with a direct, visible element, but with a sign, or rather, sign-system, which can remain invisible for the uninterested eye. Instead of allocating one specific place, we intended to create a linear process: the total sign runs through the whole garden, each element of which, however, does have a specific, objective, descriptive content.”²⁷

The only fly in the ointment was that the organisers, who loudly criticised the memory politics of the Orbán government, reached a secret agreement with it and accepted the grant of the Civil Fund. Thus, during the opening ceremony, the disreputable Minister of Human Resources Zoltán Balog made a speech, which was more than painful for the audience.

Last but not least, public indignation mobilised not only domestic and international journalists and historians, political activists, and the new garniture of the Hungarian Jewish institutions, but also broke the barriers of silence (again) among the second generation of Holocaust survivors. Huge memory waves swept through social media: The open Facebook group *The Holocaust and My Family* collects per-

²⁷ <http://emlekhelyi.btk.elte.hu/trefort-garden-monument-2014/> (17 January 2017).



Monument “Names in the Mortar Joints” in Trefort-Garden, Budapest, Photo: Eszter Laik.²⁸

sonal accounts, private memories, pictures, documents, and (re)connects people to their family histories.²⁹ Many of its members declare that they are writing their story for the first time in their life. By now, the group has 6,000 members; every day a new post comes up, which is then followed by long, emotional discussions. Both Jews and non-Jews take part in the discussions. However, except for a few cases, neither the descendants of the Roma genocide nor the children and grandchildren of perpetrators and bystanders publish their stories in separate posts, although the intention of the group owner targeted a thematically larger audience. The mission statement starts with the following words: “All, all Hungarians: Hungarian Jews, Swabians (German-Hungarians), Slovaks, Serbs, Romanians, Roma, Croats, and all other Hungarians with different origins, including those who arrived with Father Árpád in the Carpathian basin, must have a story on their family from the time of greatest danger.”³⁰ Nevertheless, the testimonies of the Jewish survivors were obviously so touching to the audience that non-Jewish participants of the discussion could not publish their stories. Some of the stories were performed in a theatre in Budapest in the summer of 2014 and a year later a book was published based on the edited Facebook posts.³¹

28 Vgl.: <http://www.irodalmijelen.hu/2014-nov-17-1611/teglak-koze-vesett-nevek> (19 April 2017).

29 See Regina Fritz, Persönliche Holocaust-Erinnerungen auf Facebook. (Private) Gegenerzählungen in Ungarn im Kontext des Holocaust-Gedenkjahres 2014, in: *Zeitgeschichte* 43 (2016) 4, 233-249; „Holocaust und meine Familie“. Facebook als Forum für private (Gegen-)Erinnerungen im Kontext des ungarischen Holocaust-Gedenkjahres 2014. Vortrag am Österreichischen Zeitgeschichtetag 2016, 9-11 June 2016, Graz, https://www.academia.edu/27577156/Private_Holocaust-Erinnerungen_auf_Facebook_Gegenerz%C3%A4hlungen_in_Ungarn_im_Kontext_des_Holocaust-Gedenkjahres_2014 (17 January 2017).

30 <https://www.facebook.com/groups/holokauszt.csaladom/> (17 January 2017).

31 Katalin Fenyves/Marianne Szalay, *A holokauszt és a családom* [The Holocaust and My Family], Budapest 2015.

Closing Remarks

Official Hungarian memory politics effect a secession from mainstream European trends, especially in the failure of representing the responsibility of the state and its citizens during the Second World War. It is as though we were living in Austria in the early 1980s but are playing the role of the 'last' and not the 'first victims' of Nazism. Nonetheless, this discourse does not represent one single view of Hungarian history, but a range of diverging approaches, among which – even though unintended – new civil forms of remembrance were born in 2014. After decades of silence, the second generation of survivors could speak and tell the stories of their parents and grandparents publicly, while behind the scenes, further negotiations are being conducted on the future of the House of Fate that have not ended until the completion of this essay.

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