

Conceptions of the Catastrophe. Discourses on the Past before the Rise of Holocaust-Memory

Máté Zombory, Hungarian Academy of Sciences

Abstract

To contribute to a critical sociological understanding of the political struggles centering around the canonized memory of the Holocaust, this article proposes an extended comparative study of early postwar discursive constructions of the recent past. Focusing empirically on pre-Cold War Hungary, it analyzes three major institutional discourses, each conceptualizing the recent past as catastrophe: the jurisdiction on political crimes, official religious statements, and public interpretations of intellectuals. The article argues that before the rise of Holocaust-memory, there existed a discursive regime dealing with the historical period of the Second World War. Though this regime around the concept of catastrophe did not apply the Jewish identification, it allowed to confront former acts of Nazi persecution.

Keywords

critical historical sociology, catastrophe, early postwar period, Hungary

For a critical sociological understanding of the present, this article proposes an extended comparative study of early postwar discursive constructions of the past.¹ Focusing empirically on pre-Cold War Hungary, it argues that well before the historical construction of Holocaust memory in the 1960s and 1970s, a discursive regime of dealing with the historical period of the Second World War existed, having the concept of catastrophe at its center. Although the specific fate of the Jews did not play a central role in it, the catastrophe-conception allowed to deal with acts of Nazi persecution. What is more, it had its characteristic norms and representational repertoire, radically different from today's moral universals of Holocaust-memory.² In order to critically understand the way the present-day normative discourse of Holocaust-memory determines not only social relations to the past but also political action in general, this article calls for an historical sociological study of the discursive regime around the concept of catastrophe. In other words, I am not interested here in how societies remembered or forgot the Holocaust *per se*, but in the historical development of normative relations to the past. The problem of Holocaust-memory is crucial for a critical sociology of the present because it has become socially and culturally central on a transnational scale.

The memory of the Holocaust has become detached from its historical and geographical context. It now serves as a point of reference for representing historical events temporarily and spatially far away from the Second World War. Moreover, by the normative order it prescribes, transnational Holocaust-memory frames social and political action: it determines the social conditions of group formation and strategies of political action. Key features of this normative order are the "duty to remember", the individualization of history (the central role of witness testimony in historical representation), historical experience as trauma, the political actor as victim, and the historical event as a crime.³ Public debates about official representations of

history show very well how the normative regime of transnational Holocaust-memory defines political action. They usually unfold around the questions of uniqueness of the Holocaust and of historical truth: one side claims that the other falsifies history while the other accuses the first of appropriating the suffering. This can be demonstrated on the example of the monument to the victims of German occupation in Budapest, erected in 2014 as part of the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust in Hungary. The monument applies the repertoire of cultural representation of the Holocaust when commemorating the suffering of the victims as a duty to remember, however, it constructs the Hungarian nation as the victim of Nazi Germany. In line with the claim that Nazism brought suffering not only to “the Jews” but also to “the Hungarians”, the occupation of the country is conceived as a historical trauma. The Hungarian perpetrators of the Holocaust remain unrepresented, while its victims have to face the fact that they are supposed to assume national community with their former persecutors. Two opposing sides emerge in the debate, Jews and Hungarians, and their desired reconciliation is supposed to be based on their common past suffering as victims of the Third Reich. This case clearly shows the limits of the currently dominant strategy of reconciliation, defined by the trauma-paradigm.⁴ Social groups are competing to have “their memories” recognized and thus to legitimize group boundaries and acquire material and symbolic reparation for past damages. Instead of standing in the paradigm of “memory competition”,⁵ this paper contributes to the sociological critique of the conditions of competition. One way of doing this involves historical, or more precisely genealogical research, which enables us to look at the present-day regime of memory through the reconstruction of already forgotten discourses on the past.⁶

The historical sociological approach applied here draws on two lines of argumentation in the scholarship. One deals with the way societal relations to the past are exposed to change in time, that is, with the history of historical experience. A great number of works have demonstrated that the 1970s indicated a thorough transformation in the regime of historicity,⁷ a turn from history to memory, from the future to the past. Our sense of time, characterized by the moral obligation of commemoration, conceived as preservation, seems to be radically different from those living after the war (and those who actually lived through the war). In the following I will thus take into account how those living in the 1940s experienced history – an experience, which influenced their thoughts and actions in relation to the past. The other line of argumentation is provided by recent Holocaust studies on the early post-war period. Scholars working on the Aftermath have criticized the previously widely shared understanding that Jewish survivors began to remember the Holocaust only in the 1960s.⁸ I will follow this line of argumentation with three considerable and interrelated differences.

First and foremost, the following study applies a prospective perspective⁹ when analyzing discourses on the past in the early postwar period. Research made on the normative basis of the present-day memory of the Holocaust is often retrospective when looking for – mostly in vain – the same cultural relevance of the destruction of European Jews in the past; also, it is often teleological when assuming that what actually happened was not only a probable outcome but a necessary development in history. By its detachment from the context of the war, the cultural significance of Holocaust-memory has become central since the 1960s: before turning into a symbol of unprecedented and unconceivable human suffering, the memory of Jewish suffering was attached to the diverse war experiences.¹⁰ Canonized Holocaust historiography, characterized by its strong retrospective stance, often fails even to recognize that the destruction

of the Jews was remembered and retold – though in different ways – already in the 1940s. As Cesarani put it, “‘The Holocaust’ as we know it, is not to be found in these post war accomplishments, but by the 1950s the first layer of historiography and literature had been laid.”¹¹ Accordingly, Holocaust historiography excludes a multiplicity of sources dealing with the history of the destruction of the Jews differently than today. This is the case, most of all, with various accounts of survivors, journalists, or medical personnel immediately after the war: “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.”¹² Studies often disregard the accounts of those of Jewish origin who did not speak as Jews, or sometimes even considered this a suppression or effacement of Jewishness.¹³ From the perspective of Holocaust-memory, for example, the distinction is not visible between Jews (who identify themselves as such) and those qualified as Jews (forcibly identified as such by Nazi authorities), which played a crucial role in postwar discourses. Acknowledging the historicity of the Holocaust memory-construction means that the diverse sources about the destruction of European Jewry are integrated into the scope of analysis when mapping the discursive field of the early postwar period. The fact that those who witnessed the war did not conceptualize what had happened as we do today does not mean that they remained silent. They simply spoke differently.

Second, the analysis of discursive constructions of the past is inspired by conceptual history,¹⁴ as it intends to reconstruct the structural relations between “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation” of different social agents in a given historical situation. Besides recognizing that utterances of Jews from non-Jewish positions took an important part in discourses on the destruction of European Jewry, this article extends the scope of research also in terms of the subject of discourse. In other words, the scope of the research is not restricted to the conceptions of the suffering of the Jews. Drawing the entire discursive field in which utterances addressed the past, that is, not limiting it to the concept of Holocaust, is a precondition of understanding what norms influenced in what way the social relations to the past in a historical period prior to the construction of normative Holocaust-memory.

Third, the exploration of this normative discursive field enables us not only to understand how and why the memory of the Holocaust has emerged as the ultimate symbol of evil and inexplicable suffering but also to uncover other conceptions of the past that have been forgotten or marginalized. The critical potential of the following study, inspired by Foucauldian genealogy,¹⁵ lies precisely in the fact that by reproducing passed futures it enables a critical reading of the present. It provides subject positions, strategies of representation and normative principles through which the present-day regime of memory can be questioned. By focusing on the immediate aftermath of the Second World War in Hungary, this article demonstrates how the analysis of the conditions of social struggles over the past contributes to the repertoire of sociological critique of the prevailing memory politics. The question is not what actually happened in Hungary in the so-called coalition years (1945-48),¹⁶ whether Hungarians confronted the past or not, but the conditions of possibility of actions in relation to the recent past, the conditions according to which, if one intends to do so, postwar dealing with the past can be measured and judged.

From several possible principles of mapping the field of postwar Hungarian public discourses (such as political affiliation, literary genre, personal recollection, and theoretic approach), I

chose to analyze institutional statements. The reason behind this is that arguably institutionalized discourses had the greatest impact on the population. Although it is really difficult, if impossible, to measure the impact of discourses, one possible way is by taking into account the social institution as the producer of a particular discourse. In the following, I map the discursive field according to three types of institutions. The most powerful discourse-producer in the period was the state. On the state level, I analyze people's jurisdiction (retribution trials), which dealt explicitly with the political significance of the recent past. The first decree on people's jurisdiction came out as early as January 1945, and after a major modification in April, it was adopted as a law in September 1945.¹⁷ The second type of discourse-producer was the Church. The majority of the population belonged to Christian Churches.¹⁸ To give an insight into the discourse(s) by which the Christian Churches in Hungary addressed the recent past, I will rely on two official statements, one made by the Catholic Church, and one by the protestant churches. In order to take into account Jewish religious standpoints, I will analyze the journal of the Orthodox Israelites and that of the Neolog Fraction.¹⁹ Finally, the third type of discourse-producer was the public intellectual. Here I will discuss leading public intellectuals interpreting the recent past by a close reading of publicist articles in the national press that came out almost immediately the battle front left Hungary. The genre of opinion article enabled the immediate response to topical questions, however, at the same time this rapid form of discourse did not make possible the elaboration of profound explanations (the authors, mostly scholars and professionals, usually edited their series of articles into a monograph a couple of years later). Public intellectuals are selected according to the way they experienced the war. In each typical conception of the catastrophe I will touch upon the role of Jewish identification.

It should be noted that the reconstruction of the religious and intellectuals' discourses of the catastrophe are far from exhaustive. Instead of mapping the entire discursive field of the post-catastrophic period, which would far exceed the scope of this contribution, it is rather the cross-comparison of institutionally prescribed positions and strategies of past representation, which lies in the center of this article. To allow further comparison, additional mapping of religious and intellectual discourses is necessary. I argue that to critically understand the present day discursive order, it is necessary to reconstruct the conceptual map of the catastrophe in the Aftermath. Since the analysis of language use is essential in this method, and the aim is a grounded comparison, I do not aspire here for an illusory sociological representativeness. Rather, I will deal intensively with selected discursive units.

Bringing To Justice Those Who Caused the Historical Catastrophe

Besides justification committees²⁰ and relocation/internment, people's jurisdiction was among the most important ways of historical justice in the immediate aftermath of the war.²¹ In accordance with paragraph 14 of the armistice agreement signed in Moscow on January 20, 1945,²² these newly established institutions of political justice primarily dealt with political crimes,²³ delivering their verdicts on the basis of one's role in the previous regime. The preamble of the decree on people's courts²⁴ declares that all those "who caused or participated in the historical catastrophe which happened to the Hungarian people" should be punished as soon as possible. The jurisdiction and the actual practice of people's courts can be interpreted as a specific state-level institutional answer of the Hungarian legislation and judicatory practice

to the most acute problems of the postwar era, resulting from the “historical catastrophe”: how to eliminate the remnants of the criminal and unjust past in order to establish the new democratic order. Beyond retribution, the main role attributed to these institutions included political emancipation, which meant making “the people” the subject of historical justice through the organization and composition of the people’s courts’ councils, and the regulation of the proceeding; production of historical truth by way of presenting original documents and providing testimonies of defendants and witnesses; and contribution to the moral rebirth of the community through inscribing the difference between wrong and right in relation to past events. In order to reconstruct how this state-level legal discourse conceptualized the “historical catastrophe”, I will confine myself to the analysis of the classification of political crimes and of the juridical practice.

Political Crimes of the Past

Before I analyze ways in which Hungarian legislators conceptualized the catastrophe by classifying political crimes of the past, the impact of the emerging international penal law on the situation in Hungary needs to be clarified. Postwar European justice was established on two separate yet connected levels. While the international legislation in the Nuremberg trials dealt with crimes not exclusively linked to national territories, national people’s tribunals treated local cases. While Nuremberg required new forms of international legislation, people’s courts entailed new forms of national justice. Although they applied different criminal categorizations, the two levels were also connected: countries had to extradite individuals to the international court if needed, and the international legal proceedings certainly influenced the way national courts delivered their verdicts.²⁵ Today, historiography tends to interpret the Hungarian legislation on people’s courts on the basis of the categorization developed for the Nuremberg trial of the principal war criminals: crime against peace, war crime, crime against humanity.²⁶ However, Hungarian legislation introduced two new types of political crimes, neither of them completely fitting to either of the categories of the London Agreement of August 8, 1945 that formed the basis for the subsequent Nuremberg trials. As a matter of fact, the Hungarian legislation had been introduced already before the publication of the London Agreement. The Hungarian National Front of Independence declared already on December 3, 1944 that “The traitors of the nation and the war criminals must be arrested and delivered to future people’s courts, initiated on this purpose”.²⁷ In a grass-root manner, certain national committees (local political authorities) had authorized political retribution even before the national decree on the people’s courts was formulated on January 25, 1945.²⁸ The decree came into effect on February 5, 1945, and the procedures commenced accordingly.²⁹ Contemporaries were aware of the preparation and the proceedings of the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal and they dealt with the question of whether the Hungarian legislation on political crimes was in accordance with the international one.³⁰ Usually they answered with a definitive yes. In Hungary, causing the catastrophe, or participating in it, was perceived as a crime of political nature. As the legal expert Imre Szabó emphasized: “these are *political trials*, and in some extent of a new type, that, either one perceives it or not, have their specific nature”, namely that “the object of the criminal case is a political act and the political nature of the act has to set the framework and procedure of the whole criminal case”.³¹ In order to “provide the possibility to retaliate against all those acts that directly or indirectly put Hungary into this terrible

catastrophe”³², the Hungarian decree on people’s courts defined two new types of political crime: war crime (it included both what the international legislation called crime against peace and war crime),³³ and crime against the people (*népellenes bűn*).³⁴ This classification echoes the formulation of the program of the Hungarian National Front of Independence, which mentions “traitors of the nation” and “war criminals” as perpetrators of political crimes. Legislators categorized past political crimes by substantial law, that is, by defining the object of the crime: while war crime referred to making offensive war and breaking conventions of waging a war, war propaganda and collaboration with German military and security forces, crime against the people included mainly persecution of social categories (the decree speaks of “certain layers of the people”, “layers of society”, and “racial and denominational hatred”), fostering fascist and antidemocratic ideas in public, and collaboration with anti-popular state forces and organizations. After its first modification in April 1945, the text of the ministerial decree on people’ jurisdiction was published and distributed together with the expositional interpretation of the Minister of Justice. István Ries defined crimes against the people as acts that were not connected to the war, did not serve Hungary’s involvement (or intensified its participation) in the war, or the prevention of the armistice agreement, but were realized “against some groups of the Hungarian people, namely the Jews or the democratic elements”.³⁵ Then existing interpretations found a causal relation between the two types of political crimes. Explaining the new penal categorization, Ries argued that the catastrophe did not commence with the war, it was “rooted in the counterrevolution following the 1919 revolution” that is, in the so-called Horthy-regime under which “Hungarian soil was mined, and the seeds of hatred were scattered”.³⁶ Imre Szabó’s judicial interpretation of the Hungarian legislation on political crimes corresponds with this explanation. He argues that the legislators considered the Hungarian participation in war as the logical consequence of a uniform anti-popular policy going back before the war years, even to 1919. In consequence, war crimes were connected directly to the Second World War, while crimes against the people were related to the politics that led Hungary into the war.³⁷ In parallel to the causal relation between the two types of political crime, in general, the possible punishment of crimes against the people was less severe than in the case of war crimes.

The Catastrophe and the “Jewish Question”

The legislation on people’s courts conceptualized the recent catastrophe in the national framework: it happened to the Hungarian people and it was the Hungarians who were the subject of the catastrophe. This legal discourse seemingly did not recognize the significance of the Holocaust, since it did not apply the category of Jewish. Today historians tend to interpret this retrospectively and in a teleological manner as “underplaying the tragedy of the Final Solution”,³⁸ or as the “suppression”³⁹ of the Holocaust.⁴⁰ At the same time, the lacking references to the Holocaust in the legal discourse on political crimes can be striking since the so-called Jewish question was an important public matter in the early post-war years. Two questions arise from this. The first is whether people’s jurisdiction was applicable to the crimes related to the persecution of the Jews, while the second refers to the problem of Jewish participation in the formation of the postwar historical justice system.

The answer to the first is a definitive yes: acts of antisemitic persecution could be qualified as both categories of political crimes. They could fall into the category of war crimes, according

to point 5 of §11 referring to the violation of conventions and international agreements on waging war, the treatment of POWs, and the atrocities committed against the civilian population, including “people’s illegal execution and torture”. For instance, György Horváth, commander of the police in Kassa (Košice), was convicted of war crimes because he committed atrocities during the ghettoization and deportation of the Jews, similarly to József Miklósi, second-in-command in a labor service company, accused of atrocities committed during the “death march”.⁴¹ Béla Buócz, commander of the police in Szeged after October 15, 1944, was indicted of war crimes because he had occupied a high position in the Arrow Cross administration.⁴² Another case shows that not only high ranked political representatives could be brought to justice because they had persecuted the Jews. An individual was convicted of committing crimes against the people, because he in June 1944 denounced a hiding married couple to the police. According to the interpretation of the National Council of People’s Courts (the court of second instance whose councils were composed of professional legal delegates of the coalition parties), the defendant was to be indicted also of war crimes because “uncovering the identity of the plaintiffs before the police caused their arrest, internment and later deportation, so it gave a hand to the fascist police and military authorities in committing violent acts against their persons”.⁴³ What is more, even Jews could be indicted of the anti-Jewish persecution. Dezső Schwartz, assistant to a barber in a concentration camp near Auschwitz, had “maltreated and beaten his deported fellows without any reason”, because he wanted to demonstrate his gratitude for being granted his prominent position in the camp. He was accused of war crimes “since he was culprit in illegal torture of people abroad”.⁴⁴

Persecution of people of Jewish origin could have been indicted also as a crime against the people. This category involved various acts of persecution of the Jews so instead of listing different cases, I turn to how the Minister of Justice interpreted the applicable paragraphs in a booklet explaining the decree on people’s courts.⁴⁵ Although the text of the decree does not use the category of a “Jew” or “Jewish”, and the persecution of non-Jewish “layers of society” (according to religion, class, or political affiliation) could also be indicted of crime against the people, most of the examples given by the minister are related to the persecution of the Jews. According to Ries, the first point of §15 of the decree refers to individuals in high position, ministers, and MPs, among others, “who initiated the measures against the Jews or consciously took part in their adoption”. Besides the anti-Jewish laws from 1938, Ries included the measure of *numerus clausus* in 1920.⁴⁶ The second point refers to the “official organs giving effect to the deportation of the Jews”. The minister interpreted the third point of the paragraph as referring to the acts of judiciary officials, who had been, for example, “making difference between Jew and non-Jew, persons of left-wing and right-wing”. The subject of acts included in point 4 can be virtually anybody. Ries gave an example of someone giving anti-Jewish or anti-socialist speeches on the radio. Point 5 includes denunciators among members of the Arrow Cross Party, irrespective of whether the denunciations led to imprisonment. The final point of §15 refers to those abusing their power against individuals, for example aggressing women. According to Ries, also §17 of the law refers to those who allowed the above mentioned acts to happen, who joined *Volksbund* or any extreme right wing organization on their own or who spread propaganda.

In general, the Hungarian people’s jurisdiction treated racial persecution as an assault on the Hungarian people. In the case of the commander of labor service in Kisvárda, the National

Council of People's Courts explicitly declared that the persecution of the Jews had not been an injury to those suffering under the command of the defendant or to the Jewish society, but to the whole Hungarian people.⁴⁷

The second matter concerning the Jewish question is the participation of Jews in the legal retribution, the supposed "Jewish revenge", that some scholars consider the biggest problem of the system of people's jurisdiction.⁴⁸ István Bibó, the sharp-sighted socio-political analyst of the coalition years, established that the participation of "Jews and those affected by the anti-Jewish laws" in the process of historical justice provided an empirical base for the theory of Jewish revenge.⁴⁹ He argued that, in order to prevent this damaging belief, only non-Jews could faithfully and healingly judge "in the case of the Jews and their persecutors". Bibó's standpoint is problematic because of the moral message of doing justice to the persecutors of the Jews without the participation of the persecuted themselves (Bibó does not seem to regard as problematic the participation in legal retribution of those who had been persecuted on non-racial grounds). Yet Bibó himself perceived the problematic nature of his previous statement, when he remarked that the selection of people's judges according to their non-Jewish origin would not be really different from the previous racial persecution: "making such difference between Hungarian and Hungarian is itself already fascism".⁵⁰

Ákos Major, first chairman of the Budapest People's Court, later president of the National Council of People's Courts, asserts in his memoirs that he discussed the possible problem of antisemitism fostered by the Jewish presence in people's jurisdiction with the under-secretary responsible for the people's courts, and also with communist Minister of the Interior, László Rajk and the leader of the communists, Mátyás Rákosi himself. According to Major, they agreed that the problem could be solved by intervening into the process through which the political parties delegated the people's judges. Rajk asked for data on the presence of Jews in Hungarian political justice, that Major provided (it is not clear how he obtained such data), but the issue eventually died away.⁵¹

As a matter of fact, political forces had not many options to solve the problem. The alternatives were to do nothing, thus contributing to the persistence of the Jewish revenge theory, or to intervene and adjust the system of political justice according to racial distinction. Both alternatives would have led to the decrease of legitimacy. Finally they chose the first option. Hungarian jurisdiction on political crimes did not apply the distinction between Jew and non-Jew. This was the case with the legal classification of crimes, as well as in the regulation of the proceeding, or in the filling of positions (people's judges, chairmen of the council, people's prosecutors, and others). Both the legal construction of the plaintiff and that of the political subject of historical justice lacked such a differentiation. In this way, the system did not repeat the homogenizing and forceful identification introduced by Nazism. It left it to those participating in the proceeding to decide whether they are biased or not by their personal experiences.⁵²

A systematic and complete investigation of the practice of people's courts would necessarily involve also an assessment of the nature and prevalence of past deeds that led to individuals actually facing justice. The offered insights into the legal discourse on political crimes reveal that the system of political justice was rooted in the local socio-historical background in Hungary and had specific features in relation to the international developments. The first of the two new categories of crime that the new legal discourse introduced, war crime, was in part in

accordance with international regulations (crime against peace and war crime) while the second one, crime against the people, emerged from a specific Hungarian historical background. The legal discourse on past crimes imposed the national framework, making “the Hungarians” the subject of historical justice. The “historical catastrophe” was thus interpreted as a national tragedy that happened to the Hungarian people. Although the legal discourse, because of an anti-fascist standpoint, did not apply any differentiation between a Jew and a non-Jew, so there was no distinct category of an “anti-Jewish crime”, yet crimes related to the persecution of the Jews could be tried as crimes against part of the Hungarian society. In a sense, the Hungarian categorization was even subtler than the one based on the conception of Holocaust-memory, the latter permitting only three positions: persecutor, (Jewish) victim, and bystander. Not only actual anti-Jewish deeds became punishable in post-1945 Hungary, but also the promotion of anti-Jewish ideas. At the same time, the legal discourse on political crimes made also other previous types of persecution, such as political and social persecution, punishable by law.

Erring From the Right Path: Religious Conceptions of the Catastrophe

“We have lived through one of the greatest catastrophes of our homeland” – thus begins the pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops on “the sins of new paganism, real democracy and freedom” that was read publicly in the Churches of Hungary in early July 1945.⁵³ Besides material ruins, it points to the even more depressing “moral ruins manifested in the souls”. According to the document, the “respect of authority, the most important pillar of national life, broke down” together with the faith in traditions. This happened despite the fact that “we received many blows because the forces, intervening in the management of our fate, contravened the past, and broke with the ancient faith; they attempted to attain their limitless goals on the basis of new pagan principles”. Among the evil deeds of new paganism, the pastoral letter mentions that “innocent people were interned, despoiled of wealth, deported, murdered, as if there were no Ten Commandments, as if the command of love was not announced, binding us even in relation to our enemies, and without which one ceases to be Christian.” It reminded the listeners that those who took part in the realization of the inhuman decisions, or supported them, “forgot the teaching of our faith”. Referring to the “robbing of those who left” the document lays down that “the war doesn’t justify sin and doesn’t suspend the binding of the Ten Commandments”. The same goes for denunciations of neighbors. After these unambiguous references to the persecution of the Jews, probably alluding to the hostile activities of the Red Army in Hungary, the Bishops declared that those violated against their own will are without sins before God.

One part of the pastoral letter deals explicitly with the POWs and Jews, referring to the latter as “escapees” and “deported”. The bishops expected Christian solidarity and agreement from the believers in order to avoid, in the name of retribution, the self-destruction of the nation. The document ends with statements on how the Catholic Church shall contribute to the “real democracy”, with honoring its martyrs, and with declaring its miraculous survival: “the news about the intention of the Russian troops to destroy the Church did not prove to be true”.

The Hungarian Committee of Universal Consistory, composed of all non-Catholic Christian Churches, announced its Festive Declaration “in the midst of development of the greatest historical drama, when the country was liberated from the occupation, in the ruins of a collapsed

world, but among the reassuring signs of a new epoch”.⁵⁴ Accordingly, the declaration calls everybody to repentance:

Let’s examine our acts and thoughts, let’s account for how we sinned against God and human, and let’s in dust and ashes sigh over our mistakes that we committed or because of what we failed to do either as nation or as individual. After having recognized our sins, let’s contradict publicly all such satanic teachings that deprave the dignity of God-image, and take away the freedom of man.

In the following, the declaration stands by the importance of international peace and the necessity of social transformation in Hungary, though regretting the fact that replacing the old order with the new entailed painful tensions. Finally, after announcing the necessity to reconstruct the Church and to re-establish faith in the Christian truths, it encourages to repair and to maintain the integrity of Christ’s body.

It is hard, certainly, to speak of a uniform Jewish religious position toward the destruction. In my analysis I rely on two sources, according to the two important religious movements of Jews in Hungary. The authors of the *Bulletin of Orthodox Community*, journal of the Autonomous Orthodox Israelite Community, apply several denominations for the catastrophe (without using this term). In 1947, the first article of the first issue, *Before the Autumn feasts*⁵⁵, for example, speaks of the “aftershocks of the sufferings of the terrible years”, “latter grave years”, bloodshed (*vérzivatar*), and “dreadful loss of our blood”. The author, Dezső Korein (1870–1949), a functionary of the orthodox Central Committee, states that

our life is set out on Biblical grounds. It is our concern not only to declare the truths and the directions of our holy laws but to live according to them and to set an example both to our descendants and the whole humankind [...] We don’t deny the past which is the fundament of our present and the assurance of our future. We are driven, in our frame of mind, by the direction and the moral rules of our holy traditions.

Consequently all those who “stayed alive due to the peculiar goodwill of God Almighty”, have the “holy obligation” to keep the traditions, religious faith and strictly follow the holy laws. The article calls for praying to God: “we erred, we became faithless, forgive our sins”. This provides remedy in the future, that is, the supply of the next generations of Hungarian Orthodoxy. In the issue of April 1948 one can read that

we think with sorrow to those brothers of ours, destroyed by the murderous terror, who remained behind in the gas chambers, in the labor service, and in the death camps of the deportations: to our half million brothers in Hungary and to the six million Jewish martyrs.⁵⁶

Although the journal did not deal explicitly with the recent catastrophe, but rather with its consequences, one can indirectly conclude that the “blows of fate” were the consequence of abandoning the right course.

The inauguration speech of Rabbi Béla Eisenberg (1908–83) held in Győr at the monument dedicated to the city’s martyrs of deportation and labor service, directly addressed the question of the recent catastrophe.⁵⁷ Eisenberg, who was the rabbi of Győr from 1947, and one year later was appointed the rabbi of the Vienna Jewish Community, represented the Neolog movement.

His oration, published in the journal of the National Rabbi Association, begins with the citation from the Bible (Jeremiah 4:31): “Woe is me now! For my soul fainteth before the murderers”. He thus draw a comparison: the sorrow of the prophet over the “devastation of his homeland and his crying for the misfortune of his people” fades out in relation to the mourning of the remnants of Jewry in the present. Eisenberg expresses the inexpressible nature of the “tragedy”: “words can only follow as faint shadows the horrible reality of the fact”. As for the reason for the tragedy, the orator said:

The sinner built the temple of the evil whose altar is: the death camp, whose sacrificial flame is: the permanently eddying smoke of the gas chamber and the crematoria, whose music is: innocent children’s scream of death, and whose sacrificial priests are: the raging herd of crooked henchmen.

Although these temples of sin have been destroyed by the Allies, continues Eisenberg, under the ruins there are still bleeding human hearts. After giving some examples, he switches to the present and the future:

when standing before the memory of 5,000 brothers of Győr, our purpose mustn’t exclusively be to bring back the bloody shades, the fearful horrors of the past; since the representation of reality might cause that, as before the evil period of the Flood, the sentence of the Bible is announced again, the most tragic sentence ever written on this earth: ‘And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land’ (Genesis 6: 6, 7).

That is to say, it is the memory of the martyrs that obliges us to look into the future, ‘the future of Israel and the whole humankind. By looking to the future,

we may see that from this inexpressible historical villainy a significant, even the most significant historical factor will become, and that after this darkest period of human history the peaceful star of justice lightens. [...] Only this thought can give us the strength to get free from brooding shades of the past.

Eisenberg makes difference between the war, “this gigantic catastrophe, into the filthy mire of blood of which the whole world sank”, and the “great tragedy of Jewry”. The latter must be the example for the future according to which Eretz Yisrael is the only solution to “this thousands-year old question” (it means, the so-called Jewish question) both to the Jews and to “the consciousness of the entire humanity”. Recompensing the Jewish tragedy, the “biggest historical injustice”, Eisenberg continued, was a precondition of the future worldwide establishment of democracy and equality before the law. The monument, accordingly, “must eternally propagate what the consequence is when the evil and hatred, the violence and injustice takes dominance over man”.

On the basis of these religious responses, it is not inappropriate to speak of a particular religious discourse on the catastrophe that has more common features than differences. Localizing what happened in the long history of “blows” on the respective religious community is what characterized it. Since the recent catastrophe was not seen as unprecedented in nature, the

reasons attributed to it are also similar to the interpretations of the precedent cases (in Eisenberg's speech, inexpressibility refers to the greatness of sorrow and not to the impossibility of representation; what bans to exclusively represent the reality of the tragedy is that it might provoke, by making the past evil present, the wrath of God). The abandonment of faith, turning away from traditions and breaking the God's commandments – are the commonly revealed causes. The "blows" are understood as God's punishment. Believers must thus return to the right path as only this would lead to the recovery of both individuals and the community. Universalism is another common feature of the post-catastrophic religious discourse. Since Christianity has always proclaimed its values as universal, crimes committed against these values have also been conceptualized as universal, as inhuman. Christian authorities claim that breaking the law of God, according to which all human beings are equal, concerns the entire humankind and thus it is not specifically a Jewish matter. This sort of religious universalism greatly differs from the universalism of the Jewish religious stance, according to which what happened specifically to the Jews concerns the whole of humanity.

It is important to note that in all cases the catastrophe is clearly differentiated from the war (though the destruction by the war constitutes one of its important elements): it was theft, murder and fornication as breaking certain of the Ten Commandments; racial differentiation and idolatry as 'satanic teachings'; and Jewish tragedy as opposed to catastrophe (identified with the war). We can even identify a sort of Christian discourse of anti-fascism: the Catholic authority confronts the unacceptable refusal of the fundamental Christian principle that all humans are equal before God; the Protestant one called fascist ideology a destructive "satanic teaching" that imposed the classification of the blood principle. Although none of the Christian sources apply Jewish identification in conceptualising the catastrophe, they unmistakably refer to the sins committed in relation to the persecution of Jews.

By this we already started the discussion on the differences. The Christian institutions spoke of the Hungarian catastrophe (this is why the pastoral letter deals also with the question of secular-governmental authority). The catastrophe was conceptualized as a moral crisis of the nation, an anomic social state in the Durkheimian sense, which is caused by turning away from Christian values. The Catholic Church explained the moral crisis, named as a new paganism and understood as human behavior without the guidance of tradition and authority, by the turning away of Hungarians from the Ten Commandments and the laws of God in general. The Protestant Consistory found the causes of the catastrophe, also conceived as amorality, in the work of "satanic evil". The Jewish sources, by contrast, spoke of the martyrdom of the Hungarian Jews on one hand, and of all the Jews, regardless of nationality, on the other. Eisenberg came to the conclusion that the lessons of the tragedy were that there was no difference between the Jews of the different countries, and that they deserve their own country as belonging to one distinct nation. Jewish religious discourses apply a double conception of the catastrophe when singling out the Jewish tragedy as a distinct part of the national catastrophe.

The post-catastrophic restoration was conceived according to how the religious community was constructed. For Christian sources, postwar material, mental and spiritual restoration was primarily a national task, while the Jewish ones were occupied by the fate of the local community, and by the universal questions posed by the Jewish tragedy. The Hungarian national frame was important when it comes to the state of the Jewish religious institutions of

the country. Their positions in relation to the idea that human action caused the catastrophe were also quite different, though religious authorities avoided any black-and-white description. Although to a different degree, both Christian documents deal with the question of the responsibility of the Church in the development of the catastrophe. As a conclusion, they argue for the necessary (institutional) reform of the Church. Protestant churches even call for a mass repentance, by which individuals can examine their previous acts and thoughts in order to recognize sin that must be rejected. The Jewish sources, conversely, avoid self-positioning exclusively as victim; they raise the question of their own role in the tragedy. Yet it is not surprising that especially the Christian sources deal more thoroughly with the questions of guilt and consciousness of perpetrators.

Moral Degradation, Mental Illness and Lack of Solidarity: Responses of Public Intellectuals

“The catastrophe has not yet even passed, we still live in it” observes Gyula Szekfű (1883–1955), in his article entitled “Bitter lesson” in the first issue of the civic journal *Világ*, on May 14, 1945.⁵⁸ Being an influential historian and publicist during the interwar years, and academic professor, who opposed the Nazi orientation primarily from a Conservative-Catholic stance, Szekfű starts his argument by pointing to a ranger who got lost in the wilderness. After having found his way out, “he will carry in his memories for a long time the enormities that he got to know there”, meaning that his experience with the wilderness will determine his future life. This exemplifies that “things cannot pass without consequence and individuals cannot avoid drawing the lessons.” Szekfű continues by saying that ‘neither the great human community, the nation’ can avoid drawing the lessons of its previous deeds since ‘its every deed conditions its future path with cold consequentiality’. For Szekfű, the ultimate question is whether people can acknowledge that what makes it difficult in life is the logical outcome of their previous actions for which they carry responsibility. What actions was he talking about? “The stone has been thrown and we already know who was hit and how, but we tend to forget that the stone was in *our own hands*”. Szekfű argues that nobody can reproach the others with issues of the yesterday since nobody is without sins, and no one can judge the nation: “the collective crimes are all ours, not only those who committed them”, “all of us are responsible in a way, since we are all members of this lost nation, and none of us had enough strength to show the way out in time, to lead out the people from the jungle that the country was made to be”.

Although using a rather metaphoric language, Szekfű refers to certain specific historical events as national sins that ought to be confessed.⁵⁹ One is the Arrow Cross takeover of October 15, 1944 when the army could not enforce the Regent Horthy’s command on armistice. Szekfű also makes reference to the deportation of the Jews by flaying the “easy apology about the outcast of hundreds of thousands from the body of the nation, and their merciless destruction”.

Not only arguing for the necessity to face and acknowledge the moral degradation of the past, Szekfű also calls for the identification of the causes behind the catastrophe in order to prevent history from returning: “Soul-searching must be done to discover the sins and to take a dislike on them to avoid repeatedly committing them ever again.” What this means is that every “cell of the nation”, regardless of the scale of responsibility, must look inside and carefully define his or her previous sinful deeds as causes of the later consequences. According to Szekfű, this practice would result in detaching the self from those views by which the errors were made,

since the individual can recognize the mistakes and realize their terrible consequences. Drawing the bitter lesson serves as the rightful definition not only of the moral behavior but also of a moral and right political orientation toward the future.

Zoltán Horváth (1900–1968), journalist and historian, and leading figure of the Social Democratic Party, survived the war in hiding and under false identity, being persecuted both as a leftist and a Jew. In his article, “Reckoning with the past”,⁶⁰ Horváth argues that the recent war was different from all previous ones in the sense that it broke out due to an unprecedented ideology. The Hungarian state (only partly representing the people) “served a trend [that is, the Axis Powers led by the Nazis] that a nation with healthy instincts should have denied even if, by accident, it wouldn’t have been defeated but temporarily succeeded in achieving victory”. What is more, Horváth continues, the regime in interwar Hungary was a “vile and greedy class domination” that should be condemned for its moral smallness on its own, independently from the later involvement in the war.

In order to acquire “the inner security, the mental balance and the human or national conscience without which it is not possible to build and maintain a new and free country”, it is central for Horváth to completely reject the former regime. In his view, similarly to that of Szekfű’s, the past heavily affected the present and the future, albeit in a different manner: “The past inhumanities, the cowardice, the legacy of the perfidies committed against our own people have left so deep and incurable mental wounds with which it is impossible to produce a healthy national life.” Horváth argues against collective compunction because it prevents necessary (national) self-respect. Probably because of what he endured in the past, Horváth refused to be included in the community of perpetrators and thus disagreed with any collective “*mea culpa* attitude”.

As a way to an “inner clarification”, Horváth also proposed massive individual introspection: “Here we have to appeal to the methods of psychoanalysis and consider as our principal goal to make conscious those breaks in us caused by the sufferings, human mortifications, humiliations and repressions of the past.” By this, Horváth acknowledged the effect of the past on the present, even on those “who were not part of the past”, the oppressed people. He called for the exposition of those breaks in order to “acquire a powerful and decisive weapon into our hands against the danger that similar dark forces could once again commit similar crimes against us in our name.” Besides mental healing and avoiding the repetition of history, a further purpose of this practice is to convince the world that in Hungary “a dwarfish minority despotized over great masses of the nation, whose one and only guilt – although one shouldn’t marginalize it – is that it tolerated the regime for too long, it allowed the terror to gain power over themselves almost until the psychosis of suicide.”

Ernö Munkácsi’s (1896–1950) editorial, entitled “For a new life”, appeared on November 18, 1945 on the cover page of the first issue of the newly launched weekly journal *Új Élet – A Magyar Zsidóság Lapja* (New Life – Paper of the Hungarian Jewry). The author was previously a secretary and later a prosecutor of the Israelite Community of Pest. Following the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944, Munkácsi was appointed General Secretary of the Jewish Council in Budapest. Munkácsi starts his article as follows: “We propagate ‘New life’ over the grave of the majority of Hungarian Jewry – over the smoky ruins of its destructed life.” By drawing the lesson from previous “tragedies” in the “many thousands years long history of Jewry”, he directs the attention of readers to the ‘signs of the will of life’ triumphantly finding

their way from the ruins. Paraphrasing the slogan of the French Revolution, however, the author attributes an essential role to the memory of the past: “We forgot nothing and learnt a lot”. First of all, one must never forget that “the Jewry was the social layer that many times, almost uniquely, suffered the most during the past sable period” of the past 26 years in Hungary. Munkácsi states that those “who were eager to rob our moral and material goods, are our enemies and the enemies of the Hungarian people”. Second, he reminds the readers that after the introduction of the anti-Jewish laws, “we explored our truth and the peril threatening the nation with the confidence of the 1,000 year-long coexistence, and with the conscious faith in eternal historical lessons.” Finally, the memory of those “many thousand Hungarian Jews”, “our martyrs” must never be forgotten.

Among the lessons that “we learnt” Munkácsi mentioned that “our decay” was caused not only by “external enemies [...] but also [by] our inner diseases: factionism, self-interest, the short-sightedness of worrying exclusively for oneself”. Hungarian Jewry did not learn from the lessons of the past, and did not hear the warnings that “the people must perish who don’t understand the two leading ideas of the time: the necessity of equalising wealth and the importance of organisation. Together with mass conversion to Christianity during the persecutions, this prevented the Hungarian Jews from joining forces and reacting in solidarity. It should be noted that Munkácsi, as his article series entitled “How did it happen?” in the same journal testifies to, was deeply convinced that the Jewish council made a huge mistake when being in contact only with the German authorities and turning to the Hungarians only when it was too late.⁶¹

“Yet our sufferings did not end with this” – continues Munkácsi, pointing to the challenges stemming from the social environment in the immediate postwar period: “The hyenas of reaction, who enviously regret this small layer [of society], are watching for the remains of Israel that escaped the dangers.” The normative relation to the past, underlying the text of Munkácsi, is identified by Jewishness itself: “The meaning of Jewishness: keeping everything valuable and eternal from the past yet finding all new that reanimates the old, that brings it close to the heart, to the mind, to life”.

The most important lesson of the past was the need for a thorough democratization of Hungarian Jewish life: Munkácsi argues that by introducing universal and secret suffrage, the Community must be reorganized to be the center of Hungarian Jews, where the will of the community and not that of a clique of interest is definitive. Furthermore, Hungarian Jewry should get relief and compensation from the majority society; Munkácsi necessitates not only the legal reparation for the previous anti-Jewish legislation but, “through the laws and decrees to be adopted, the creation of an atmosphere and the undertaking of guarantees so that the tragedy of the past might never occur again, so that Hungarian Jews indeed possess equal rights in this country.” Munkácsi finished his line of thought by declaring that “it is not death but life that Judaism is the religion of, so we truly serve the memory of our martyrs if we start a new life.”

Reading these three opinion articles in parallel, it is hard to decide what is more striking: the similarities or the differences. To begin with the former, all authors share the conviction that the catastrophe must be explained by the past. All of them put emphasis on historical continuities rather than on the idea of rupture. The relation between past and present was univocally conceived as a chain of cause-consequence. This idea of history lies behind the

intellectual claim to interpret the catastrophe: one should be occupied by the past in order to define the causes that determine the present. This constitutes the condition of postwar (social, material, and mental) reconstruction. Analyzing the causes of the catastrophe is also the source of moral orientation: it is the only way to determine what to do in the present and future. What is more, “drawing the lessons” from the past, as the prevailing form of dealing with the past, serves to avoid the repetition of the past catastrophe, never identified with the war.

Another common characteristic of the analyzed intellectual interpretations is their national framework. The catastrophe, which happened to the Hungarian nation, is narrated as an intra-national oppression. Szekfű speaks of the persecution of Jews as the “outcast of hundreds of thousands from the body of the nation”, and of the persecutors as “the stone [that] was in our own hands”. In his view, the nation is a quasi-organism bound together by a collective sin. Horváth speaks similarly, though from the position of a former victim, when describing the national rift in terms of the opposition of the ruling class against the dominated people. By formulating that “crimes [were committed] against us in our name”, he refers to the *topos*, the “ruling [of] the people against the people”. Munkácsi spoke in a similar way also about the Hungarian Jews, differentiated as one layer of society. For Munkácsi, the fact that a clique driven by self-interest ruled the Jews of Hungary was the inner cause of the tragedy. The Jewish suffering, though particular, remained one of numerous cases of suffering of the nation. Szekfű took the discursive position of the “Hungarian persecutor”, Horváth spoke as “persecuted Hungarian” without applying the Jewish identification, and Munkácsi’s position was that of the “persecuted Hungarian Jew”.

This brings us to the question of differences. Most importantly, this discursive subfield is characterized by the multiplicity of narratives on what happened and why. Szekfű applied a civilizational narrative when identifying the decay as moral degradation, and a sort of barbarism of the wilderness. He used the metaphor of a jungle to signify the lack of solidarity between parts of the nation. Szekfű also relied on Christian morality when putting emphasis on (collective) sins. In his conception, the realm of dealing with the past was part of personal consciousness. Its practice included soul-searching, understood as the analytical dissociation of cause and consequence of one’s deeds to avoid repetition of history and as a way of ideological purification.

Structurally, Horváth’s discourse was very similar except for the fact that he applied a medical-therapeutic narrative inspired mostly by psychoanalysis. In this case the hardships of the past caused intellectual and mental wound to the people; accordingly, the catastrophe is seen as a mental illness: the rule of instincts (inhumanities and dark forces). Instead of searching for the soul, historically rooted in Christianity, Horváth proposed to apply the methods of psychoanalysis as a way of dealing with the past. Accordingly, healing from the mental illness means putting an end to the repetition of the past (as repetition compulsion). At the same time, Horváth also spoke a different language since he applied a Marxist vocabulary. In this latter narrative the catastrophe (primarily the war) was an outcome of the anti-democratic system of class domination, which could be healed only by societal transformation.

Munkácsi was interested in the inner causes of what he called the tragedy: the disorganization of the Jewish Community that resulted in the lack of solidarity when most needed. He applied a moral-political narrative when putting emphasis on the non-democratic rule; he also relied on a quasi-medical narrative when identifying the tragedy as an inner (moral) illness. The

“tragedy” was the destruction of one layer of Hungarian society that in itself was the subject of the catastrophe: it testified to the radical amorality and fracture of the political community of Hungarians. In Munkácsi’s account, the catastrophe was not limited to the war; the antisemitic regulations of the Horthy-regime constituted a gradually growing menace in his narrative. In allusions one can identify here a “functional explanation” for the persecution of the Jews (“robbing our moral and material goods”). Accordingly, the inner proposal for recovery was the democratization and social equality in the Jewish community, while the outer, addressing the whole Hungarian society, was the restitution and compensation, together with political equality with non-Jewish Hungarians; the recovery of the Hungarian Jewry was conceived as a Hungarian national interest.

Conclusion

My article opened with a hypothesis that a discursive regime existed in the immediate aftermath of the war, which dealt with the historical period of the Second World War. Concerning historical temporality, conceptual repertoire, subject positions and normative prescriptions, it had its specific features, radically different from those prevailing today. Irrespective of institutional discourses, the recent past was conceptualized as a catastrophe. The concept of a catastrophe, together with that of a tragedy, referred to a break in history, and was inscribed in historical development. There is a continuity of historical breaks. This is particularly clear when comparing the conception of catastrophe with that of a historical/collective trauma. Unlike the latter, the former not only calls for the identification of the causes but also for a definition of human action and responsibility. This is due to the way history was conceived by those who lived through it. Postwar conceptions of the catastrophe are thus characterized by the urge to disclose the causes in order to direct a social action toward the future. Not only were contemporaries aware of the specific nature of the disaster related – but not restricted – to the war, but they shared the belief that understanding its causes would prevent its reoccurrence in the future. In contrast to the present-day “age of commemoration”, to use Pierre Nora’s term, the postwar era was the age of learning from history, in which drawing the lessons of the past was a way to avoid the reoccurrence of the catastrophe. In the postwar discursive regime, consequently, questions of explicability or representability were not raised. Contrary to the conception of Holocaust-memory, explanation was a moral obligation, and the limits of representation, if questioned at all, had to do with the relation between the sacred and the profane.

The catastrophe occurred in the chain of events and happened to the Hungarians (or Hungarian Jews). This national interpretation is more or less true for each institutional discourse analyzed in this article. However, religious discourses construct the catastrophe as universal, which has national significance only because it happened (also) to the Hungarians. Turning away from the Ten Commandments or God as such, which was the basic reason for the catastrophe, lacks historic or geographic specificity.

What is striking is how diverse were the conceptions of the recent past compared to the regime of Holocaust-memory. The jurisdiction on people’s courts dealt with politics as a realm of power, and defined political community according to one’s role in the development of the catastrophe. Legal discourse criminalized politics in large sense of the word. Religious discourses dealt with morality as the foundation of the community. What caused the catastrophe

was turning away from the commands of God and from the teachings of the past. Religious conceptions of the catastrophe, however, mutually exclude each other since only particular religious prescriptions and traditions could lead to recovery. Comparing to these two rather unified discourses, public intellectuals' interpretations rely on a multiplicity of narratives, each conceptualizing the catastrophe according to binary oppositions, such as civilization-barbarism, healthy-ill, (good)-evil, (heaven)-hell, democratic-antidemocratic, progressive-reactionary, and so on.

The method of cross-comparison allows us not only to identify features of discourses chosen according to a mapping principle, but also to take into account their interactions. While there was not much of an interaction between the legal (state) discourse and the religious ones, intellectuals drew heavily on both. They used the new legal vocabulary and shared the legal construction of the catastrophe when they assumed that the former regime had been against the people, the catastrophe had been the meaningless sacrifice of the people, and Jews had been persecuted as one part of society. Legal criminal terms, such as the new political crimes, often used, symbolized the sins of the entire nation; in the usage of the concept of sin, religious and political-legal discourses combined. The fact that this sort of discursive interaction always entails the change of meaning is clearly visible in how the practice of soul-searching transforms in public intellectuals' use. While in the religious context this practice aims at naming and denying sin, in the public one it serves reasoning by the analytical differentiation between (good and bad) deeds as causes in historical developments.

The analysis of institutional discourses proved that subject positions are not necessarily constructed according to the classification of the Nazi persecution. The homogenizing racial identification of "the Jews" did not play any role in the catastrophe-conceptions (the recognition that in Nazi ideology all Jews were equal came up in the Jewish religious interpretation as a lesson of the past). There was no unified Jewish position. Subject positions taken by individuals, labeled by the Nazis as Jews, radically differed according to particular institutional discourses: religious Jewish utterances had more in common with Christian utterances than with Jewish secular ones. They also differed according to the discursive distinction between the "Jew" and those "qualified as Jew", that is, if someone assumed the Jewish position or not. It was the discursive position that determined the utterance and not Jewish origin as such.

¹ This project was supported by the Janos Bolyai Research Scholarship of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

² Alexander, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals".

³ For a short discussion of this, see Rousso "Vers une mondialisation de la mémoire."

⁴ Fassin and Rechtman, *The Empire of Trauma*.

⁵ Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*.

⁶ See also Zombory, "Hungarian Golgotha".

⁷ Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity*.

⁸ See among others Cesarani and Sundquist, *After the Holocaust: Jockusch, Collect and Record!*; Peschel, *Performing Captivity, Performing Escape*; on the changing role of witness testimony; Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*.

⁹ Lotman, *Universe of the Mind*, 221-245.

¹⁰ Alexander, "On the Social Construction of Moral Universals".

¹¹ Cesarani, "Challenging the Myth of Silence", 32.

¹² Cesarani, "Challenging the Myth of Silence", 21.

¹³ Cesarani, "Challenging the Myth of Silence", 21-23.

¹⁴ Koselleck, *Futures Past*.

¹⁵ See e.g. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

¹⁶ See Palasik, *Chess Game for Democracy*.

¹⁷ An examination of the state-conception of the catastrophe would also be possible by analyzing public education. However, the re-establishment was slow, state published schoolbooks were available from 1946, and taking an empirical account of the teachers' role would be very difficult.

¹⁸ In 1949, 67,8% of the believers were Catholic, 21,9 % Calvinist, 5,2 % Evangelical, 2,7% Orthodox Catholic, and 1,5% Israelite. Kollega Tarsoly, *Magyarország a XX. században*, 387.

¹⁹ On Jewish religious movements in Hungary, see Frojimovics, "The threefold path", 102-111.

²⁰ These were the institutions of political lustration of the administration and the public sphere in 1945. See Zinner, "Háborús bűnösök pereit" ..

²¹ Zinner, "Háborús bűnösök pereit". Although several studies discuss the famous cases of the principle war criminals in Hungary, until today there is no exhaustive and systematic analysis on the functioning of the 24 people's courts between 1945 and 1950. Studies on the subject usually provide data according to type of judgement, and there are no nationally representative data available on judgements according to types of cases. Barna and Pető (*Political Justice in Budapest after WWII*) collected data by probability sampling (n=500), so their results are supposedly representative but only for the 22,000 cases of the People's Court of Budapest. Differentiating between five types of trials, the authors reveal that 81% of the cases were concerned with acts committed during the Second World War, and "ideological cases" became dominant (with 18 %) only in 1948. From this they draw the conclusion that people's jurisdiction cannot be treated merely as the instrument of the class struggle in the hands of the Communist party. In any case, the spring of 1948 marks the end of the first phase of the operation of people's courts in Hungary when 15 out of the original 24 people's courts ceased to function (Zinner, "Háborús bűnösök pereit"). There is neither systematic nor profound international comparison of legal retribution on the national level (Deák, *Europe on Trial*). According to István Deák, the Hungarian system was in accordance with other national cases of post-war historical justice (Deák, "War-Crime Trials in Post-World War II Hungary").

²² It proclaimed that "Hungary will cooperate in arresting the persons charged with having committed war crimes. It will either extradite them to the governments concerned or will pass judgment on them." Quoted by Karsai, "The People's Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary", 236.

²³ The first modification of the ministerial decree in April 1945 included an additional point, according to which "encumbering the post-war peace or cooperation of the peoples" and "bringing about international conflict" was qualified as a war crime. The law on "defense of the republic and of democracy" in 1946 also enabled the prosecution of contemporary acts against the young democracy. It has to be noted, however, that this law imposed the establishment of a separate five-membered council besides each original council.

²⁴ PM Decree of the People's Jurisdiction 81/1945 (25 January 1945)

²⁵ See Szabó, *A nürnbergi per és a nemzetközi büntetőjog*.

²⁶ Karsai for example identifies the category of crime against the people with that of genocide and crime against humanity ('Crime and Punishment'). See also Karsai, "The People's Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary".

²⁷ Quoted in Lukács, *A magyar népbírósági jog és a népbíróságok*, 75.

²⁸ Lukács, *A magyar népbírósági jog és a népbíróságok*.

²⁹ Except the famous trial of the Budapest Court of People's Justice according to which two death sentences were carried out on February 4, 1945. Certainly, this procedure was not based on the national legislation of people's courts (PM decree 81/1945) that introduced the new categories of political crimes. See Papp, "Néptörvényszék, Népbíróság és népbírósági jog Magyarországon", 20-33.

³⁰ See Szabó, *A nürnbergi per és a nemzetközi büntetőjog*, Szabó, "A népbírászkodás időszzerű kérdései", Szalai, *Ítélt a magyar nép!*

³¹ Szabó, "A népbírászkodás időszzerű kérdései", 57, emphasis in original.

³² Ries, "A népbíróság védelmében".

³³ Any act of a person in a post of responsibility fostering Hungary's participation in the war, or preventing the armistice agreement, or promoting war, was qualified as a war crime. Participation in the Arrow Cross takeover on October 15, 1944 and in the state administration afterwards was also considered as a war crime since the Arrow Cross regime extended the country's war participation and deepened on the alliance with the Axis Powers, especially with Nazi Germany. Helping armed forces in violent acts against people or property, and joining the German army of security services (for example, SS and Gestapo), or collaboration with the German army were also considered as war crimes before the people's courts. The category of war crimes also consisted of the acts against the conventions and international agreements of waging war, the treatment of POWs, and the atrocities committed against the civilian population. All those who "took part in people's illegal execution and torture" were brought to justice because of war crimes.

³⁴ Crime against the people pertained primarily to the following acts: initiating "laws [that are] going seriously against the interests of the [Hungarian] people", cruel treatment by the authorities after September 1, 1939 in "executing laws and decrees against certain layers of the [Hungarian] people", public distribution of "fascist and

antidemocratic trends”, arousing and supporting “racial and denominational hatred”, collaboration with organizations serving the “persecution of certain layers of [Hungarian] society”, voluntary function or membership in the *Volksbund* and in antidemocratic parties or organizations, public promotion and support of anti-popular and antidemocratic measures.

³⁵A népbíráskodásról szóló rendelet magyarázata, 33.

³⁶Ries, “A népbíróság védelmében”.

³⁷Szabó, “A népbíráskodás időszerű kérdései”. See also Lukács, *A magyar népbírósági jog és a népbíróságok*, 97.

³⁸Deák, *Europe on Trial*, 193.

³⁹Varga, “Forradalmi törvényesség”.

⁴⁰Similarly, Varga states that ‘the extermination of the Jews was simply classed into »war crimes«’ (“Forradalmi törvényesség”).

⁴¹Lukács, *A magyar népbírósági jog és a népbíróságok*, 255-7.

⁴²Because of mistreatment of Jews, he was also indicted for crime against the people. See “Vádirat Buócz Béla nyilas rendőrfőkapitány ellen” *Népbírósági Közlöny*, November 24, 1945.

⁴³“Intelligens nőnél a bűncselekmény megdöbbentő és szigorú megtorlás után kiált” *Népbírósági Közlöny*, November 8, 1945.

⁴⁴“Az auschwitzi zsidó segéd borbély” *Népbírósági Közlöny*, November 24, 1945.

⁴⁵A népbíráskodásról szóló rendelet magyarázata, 33–6.

⁴⁶See Karády and Nagy, *The numerus clausus in Hungary*.

⁴⁷“A zsidóüldözés nem a zsidó népréteg, hanem az egész Magyar nép sérelme” *Népbírósági Közlöny*, January 5, 1946.

⁴⁸Karsai, “The People’s Courts and Revolutionary Justice in Hungary”; Varga, “Forradalmi törvényesség”.

⁴⁹Bib, “A zsidókérdés Magyarországon”.

⁵⁰Bibó, “A zsidókérdés Magyarországon”, 772.

⁵¹Major, *Népbíráskodás, forradalmi törvényesség*, 186-188.

⁵²This question was explicitly raised in relation to the counsels for the defense, as József Ambrus, lawyer in Budapest, formulated it in an article: “it is not inevitably necessary that a lawyer persecuted due to religious reasons during the previous regime strives to defend a company commander, who committed mass murder”. Ambrus, “A Népbíróság előtti védelem problémája”.

⁵³“A katolikus püspökök pásztorlevele az újpogányság bűneiről, az igazi demokráciáról és szabadságról”, *Magyar Nemzet* July 6, 1945.

⁵⁴The Journal *Élet és Jövő* (Life and Future), weekly paper of the Reformed, partially published it on its cover page on June 16, 1945 under the title “Azt várjuk, hogy kis és nagy nemzetek szabadon éljék a maguk életét”.

⁵⁵Korein, “Őszi ünnepek előtt”.

⁵⁶Kahán Frankl, “Peszach 5708”.

⁵⁷“Roskadozik a lelkem. Avatóbszéd a győri deportált és munkaszolgálatos mártírok emlélművének felavatásán” *Az Országos Rabbi Egyesület Értesítője*, December 1947, 45–8.

⁵⁸Szekfű, “Keserű tanulság”.

⁵⁹Szekfű is more explicit in his book entitled *Forradalom után* (After Revolution).

⁶⁰Horváth, “Leszámolás a múlttal”, *Új Magyarország*, July 10, 1945.

⁶¹Munkácsi elaborated his writings on the topic in a monograph in 1947 under the title *Hogyan történt? Adatok és okmányok a Magyar zsidóság tragédiájához* (How did it happen? Details and documents for the history of the Hungarian Jewry’s tragedy).

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