

Embodiment by the dead and the state: postcommunist reburials in Hungary

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On June 16, 1989, Imre Nagy, prime minister during the anti-Stalinist uprising of 1956, was reburied along with four members of his government and some three hundred freedom fighters – the latter symbolized by an empty coffin. The six coffins were exposed on Budapest's Square of Heroes before being taken to the largest cemetery of the city. I attended this moving ceremony, which, without any act of violence, delegitimized the Communist regime of Janos Kádár, the man responsible for all these deaths. But this reburial which led to the Kadar's regime downfall was only the most important in a series of similar ceremonies. Since 1988, Hungary has become a country of Antigones. In all of Eastern Europe, it is undoubtedly the country that has had the highest number of "political reburials", to use the Hungarian phrase for this practice.

After the noteworthy work produced by Katherine Verdery (1999), Susan Gal (1991), Istvan Rév (1995), Karl Benziger (2000) and many other authors on the subject, why should we examine these rituals yet again today? Because, to the best of my knowledge, no anthropologist to date has studied successive reburials over a sufficiently long period of time in a given East European country with the objective of drawing conclusions about the role such ceremonies have played in post-Communist nation-building or rebuilding. I would like to initiate such an endeavor by using data about twenty-five individual or collective reburials in Hungary I have studied since 1989. This data comes from both direct observation in the field and documentary sources.

First of all, let us summarize a few working hypotheses. Reburials are signs of a deep social process what we can describe as a gradual thaw in the traumatized memory of Eastern European societies. Indeed, political reburials have two opposite properties setting them apart from any other form of commemoration. One is to arouse conflict and the other is to tem-

per it. On the one hand, a reburial has a very high potential for stirring up traumatic experiences from the past and political conflicts that are latent in the present. By exhuming and exhibiting the corpses of persons who were killed or exiled and then forgotten, a reburial unearths material evidence of traumatic events and social dramas still in the memory of the living. Once reactivated, these events and social dramas create divisions among those who have lived through them or claim to be legatees of their protagonists. On the other hand, a reburial tempers political passions by subjecting them to a normative sense of reverence for the deceased whose exhumed corpses are present during the ceremony. No political reburial has ever ended in a bloodbath. Since reverence for the dead is a social norm much more effective than political censorship, these ceremonies facilitate the passage from the traumatic past toward the tumultuous present with its political confrontations. They thus help recover the nation's traumatized memory and create a sense of temporal continuity. Reburials have a third property, related to the veneration of relics. Since corpses are exhumed and either brought back to the country or moved to another place inside the country, these ceremonies can also be interpreted as a means for reconstructing the nation's spatial unity.

Before coming to these processes, let us emphasize some common traits of Hungarian reburials:

- First, they are national rites. Why? A quick glance at the tables presented below will show that all Hungarian political trends and all religious persuasions have conducted reburials or provided political impresarios for reburials. This ceremony is performed both for famous dead persons and for ordinary people, by the faithful as well as by the agnostic. It is this independence from both politics and religion that allows us to rightly describe reburials as a national rite.
- Second, this national rite has nevertheless a religious dimension as far as it supposedly modifies the post-mortem destiny of the dead. Indeed, Hungarians reserve public reburial for two categories of their nation's dead : the hidden martyr and the exiled patriot. I call hidden martyrs those who were executed, who died in battle or in prison, and whose remains had been secretly interred in Hungarian soil without a funeral ceremony. The exiled patriots are the politicians, intellectuals or artists banned or forced to emigrate, or soldiers who had been properly buried though not in Hungary. In other words, Hungary reserves reburials for the dead who do not have what is called an "ultimate resting place" in its soil. These dead are said to be "wandering", to be "uninterred," "troubled" or "exiled" or to "lack a homeland." They

cannot rest in peace as long as, to borrow a time-honored formula, their “Motherland does not welcome them into her womb.”

- Third, the ceremonies performed for these martyrs and exiles are not always public. Hungarians often perform private reburials. Reburials become political rituals when these are officially or semi-officially attended by elected officials and representatives of the government and of political parties. Thus, the government in power faces a dilemma. If it treats the reburial as a private ceremony, it will be accused of wanting to bar the deceased from the nation’s history; but if it legitimizes the ceremony by attending it, it risks losing its own legitimacy, as illustrated with the fall of the Kádár regime. In effect, a reburial amounts to a political rehabilitation of the dead. This dilemma has existed since the inception of the reburial practice.

Let us look more closely at the roots of this phenomenon. Reburials were frequent in 19th century Europe. The political model was probably the transfer of Napoleon’s remains to the Invalides in Paris in 1840. Hungary “reinvented” the national reburial in 1870 following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise – an attempt to dispel the deep trauma left by the failure of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. The first hidden martyr to be publicly reinterred was Count Batthyány, the head of the first revolutionary government executed by the Austrians. His remains had been secretly immured for 21 years in a cloister. The archetype of the exiled patriot brought back for reburial in the homeland was Prince Rákóczi II. This leader of the unsuccessful 18th century War of Independence against the Hapsburgs had been declared an enemy of the homeland and banished for life. He died in Turkey and was buried there. In 1906, his remains were repatriated in a lavish ceremony. Thus, reburial ceremonies originated during a period of relative autonomy for Hungary under the dual monarchy. They already bore their distinctive characteristics as a political ceremony decided by officials with the intention to dispel historical traumas and mobilize the people who had been affected by them. No ceremony prior to the 19th century has the four characteristics just described.

Why recall these older ceremonies? Because major reburials since 1989 have followed the “ritual scenario” worked out during the 19th century. Let us look briefly at the ritual process generating these ceremonies.

First of all, the deceased are made “present” prior to the ceremony. This starts with the lengthy and morbid quest for the hidden martyrs’ bodily remains or with drawn-out negotiations with authorities who hold back from rehabilitating well-known exiles. This reactivates the memory of the traumatic experiences with which the deceased are associated.

A second phase is the announcement of the scheduled ceremony. The reburial is always announced as an “act of family devotion” even though it is negotiated by a committee made up of kin to the deceased and of their political impresarios. Announcing the reburial as an act of family devotion is essential. In contemporary Hungary, no one questions the right of anyone to be buried in his homeland. No reburial has been refused as a refusal would signal a return to dictatorship. Presenting the reburial as an act of family devotion draws attention to the ceremony’s irreproachable legitimacy. It also taps a wellspring of emotions for the ceremony: sharing the family’s apolitical grief regardless of the political conflicts rekindled by the event itself. The tearful wife or daughter of the deceased alongside the politicians is a key image – like Antigone – in these rites.

During the third phase, the remains are exhumed and, if necessary, identified. The disinterment of the martyrs of 1956 provided a distressful example of what can happen during this phase. It was thus discovered that the corpses had been mistreated, the bodies dragged through chains on their feet and buried in a heap with animals from the zoo. Broadcast on television, this aroused a unanimous outcry; but the shared sense of reverence forbade any outward sign of vengeance.

Announcing an exhumation has a major effect: it triggers an intense process bringing to mind the actions, ideas and accomplishments of the deceased. In politically explosive reburials, as for the executed or exiled officials of Horthy’s pro-German Regency, political forces rekindle past conflicts. Debate takes place not only in the newspapers and on television, but in homes and on the streets. Ordinary people as well as professional guardians of memory take part in this debate. History is thus rewritten, and the nation recovers a part of its repressed memory. I would like to insist that this debate falls under a limitation, namely the restraint imposed by a sense of reverence for the deceased as the nation awaits the reburial. The effects of this social restraint imposed by what Hungarians call *kegyelet* can be observed in many ways. Any political talk, even critical, about the deceased starts out by expressing sympathy with the family and affirming the right for burial in Hungarian soil. Pamphleteering is out of the question. Anyone who makes sound critical judgments is blamed for lacking reverence for the deceased, who have a right to an “ultimate resting place” in Hungarian soil.

Finally, there is the ceremony itself. It takes place around an impressive catafalque erected on a square or in the cemetery. The closed coffins are on the platform, visible to all, including television cameras. Around them are assembled the grieving families and political impresarios. The plat-

form is arrayed with burning torches and national symbols, and surrounded by a crowd. All this dramatizes this exhibition, and magnifies the family's mourning into a nation's grief. In this baroque setting, speeches are made drawing lessons from the lives of the deceased for current politics. The political impresarios must skillfully act so as to take part in the family's mourning without appearing to be profiting from the ceremony. They make speeches not in their party's name but for "the whole nation sharing the suffering felt by those being close to the deceased". These speeches carry even more weight given the presence of the remains and of the mourning families. The procession then moves slowly towards the cemetery or the grave, where the deceased are reburied. Later on, a set of wooden memorials of a special kind will be erected on this "place of national reverence".

This brief outline fails to describe the atmosphere during reburials, family-like in some cases, extremely intense in others. It also fails to suggest the fear of police provocations during certain reburials, particularly the aforementioned reburial of the martyrs of the 1956 Uprising. In particular, it makes no mention of the deathly stillness that prevailed at that reburial as the names of all the martyrs were being read out in alphabetical order, some followed by the shout "Present!" Nor does it describe how Budapest then came to a standstill as the wailing of factory sirens was heard, or dwell on the crowd standing in attendance throughout the ceremony and the tears shed during the singing of the national anthem.

Let us summarize now how this ritual operates. It sets off and condenses a limited number of processes:

1. *Producing bodily evidence of past traumatic events: the quest to find and unearth the remains for reburial – or the repatriation of the remains – brings up traumatic events from the past.*
2. *Piaculary updating: some dimension of these events is played out in the present because of the confrontation between the "political heirs" of the deceased and other political forces. This confrontation, regulated by a normative restraint out of reverence for the deceased, recovers repressed bits and pieces of the society's memory of the trauma.*
3. *Creating the illusion of a genuine burial by exposing the coffins and mourning families.*
4. *Transferring the substantial legitimacy of this burial requested by the dead person's relatives to the political maneuverings of the reburial's hidden impresarios: the latter try to appropriate this legitimacy through public speeches about "sharing the family's grief", which is "the entire nation's grief" and so on...*

5. *Equating reburial with a political rehabilitation: clear-cut conflictual debates which would necessarily precede the political and judicial rehabilitation of the reburied dead are replaced with a funerary rite regulated by the common norm of reverence for the deceased.*
6. *Converting the social norms attached to grief and reverence for the dead – especially the norm of sympathy and the prohibition on criticizing the deceased – into political leverage.*

Such are the processes underlying the “graveside politics” that all governments and political parties in post-communist Hungary have been playing, as they resuscitate the dead for their own strategic purposes. There are many examples of this practice. Parties have secretly kept reburials on hold in order to have them performed at a propitious date, close to elections. In 1992, a far right group robbed graves without the approval of the families of the deceased and laid the remains to rest in a new “national pantheon” intended to honour “all the victims of communism”. In 1994, the new socialist government “normalized” and officialized this pantheon for the sake of a “national reconciliation of the dead with the living”. A few years later, a Committee of National Reverence, formed by the Orbán’s conservative government, drew up a list of more than a thousand persons to be reburied.

Thus the dead are still haunting Hungarian politics. For conservatives, the martyrs of the 1956 Uprising symbolize the original sin of the Socialist Party, many of whose members come from the former Communist Party. Confrontations regularly take place in lot 301, where these martyrs are “ultimately” laid to rest. In 2002, the socialist prime minister paid tribute to them in secret; and his party paid its respects in the privacy of a house dedicated to Imre Nagy. In October 2003, the Socialist Party, which headed the government, went further. Under the pretext of showing respect for those close to the deceased, the government opted against sending an important representation to the cemetery. The prime minister Medgyessy apparently panicked : he sent a wreath to the cemetery at night and then flew to Paris to pay tribute at the memorial for the 1956 Uprising erected by refugees in the Père Lachaise Cemetery. The liberals, in a coalition government with the socialists, were craftier. They sent their leader to the cemetery, where he escorted the widow of a major Communist martyr. This symbolic calculation paid off. No one dared to heckle this political couple, since Antigone was going to her husband’s graveside and her “mourning family” benefited from immunity.

As this sample of the casuistry of Hungarian reburials shows, “graveside

politics” does not belong to the past. In 1988 Susan Gal (1991) was already surprised by the intensity of indirect political confrontations between the government and the opposition with regard to Béla Bartók’s reburial shortly before communism collapsed. This ritual process persists even though it has so little to do with any democratic rationality. Let us mention only the latest event which happened during the night following the celebrations of May 1 2007: one part of Kadar Janos’ bones and his wife’s remains were stolen by unknown persons in the cemetery of Kerepes. For lack of surviving relatives, the small orthodox communist party (MSZMP) has immediately proclaimed its exclusive right to rebury them.

Nevertheless, a point should be underlined. None of the major reburials since 1989 has led to a major change of government policy in line with the opinions of the deceased or of their political impresarios. The conservative government that came out of the 1990 elections did not shift towards the “socialism with a human face” that had been advocated by Imre Nagy, reburied a year earlier. Nor did the socialist-liberal government formed following the 1994 elections restore to any degree the spirit of the very conservative Regency of Horthy, who had been reburied in a half official ceremony a few months earlier. In other words, politics at the edge of the grave is hardly profitable for those who practice it.

Why, then, has Eastern Europe dug up so many of its dead? Why is the cemetery still such a lively political forum in Hungary? To answer this question, let us now examine the chronological list of hungarian reburials organized from 1989 to 2002 (Tables 1-2).

Looking at the two tables, we notice that the dead are not chosen by lot for reburial. Instead, they are, we might say, bundled in groups. Since 1989, there have been three groupings of reburials, indicated by various tints of shading in the fourth column in Table 1.

- Between 1989 and 1990, victims of the repression following the 1956 Uprising were reburied. During this period, no one who died before the communist takeover was reburied. The most recent martyrs were the first to be dug up for reburial.
- Between 1990 and 1991, former victims of the communist regime were reburied, particularly Cardinal Mindszenty, the emblem of opposition during the Nazi period and throughout the whole Soviet period. At the same time, political reburials were shifting from left to right.
- The decade from 1991 to 2001 marked a greater step back into history and into the memory of the living. Persons whose activities or deaths were associated with the Horthy Regency (1919-1944) were reburied.

**Table 1:
Political reburials in Hungary from 16 June 1989 to 13 December 2002**

The deceased	Major activities Circumstances and place of death	Date and place of reburial	Context evoked by the reburial	Political impresarios
270 persons Including: IMRE NAGY, Pál Maléter, Géza Losonczy, Miklós Gimes, József Szilágyi	Freedom fighters and officials involved in the Nagy government formed during the 1956 Uprising. Executed by the Kádár government (1950s and 1960s).	16 June 1989 in lot 301 in Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery (Budapest)	The anti-Stalinist uprising of October 1956	The predominantly Socialist/Liberal Committee of Historical Justice (T.I.B.) and reformist Communists
Anna Kéthly	President of the Social Democratic Party and minister of Foreign Affairs in the Nagy government. Died in exile in Belgium (1976).	1990 in lot 301 in Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery (Budapest)	1945-1948, 1956	Social Democrats
Lázár Mészáros	Minister of Defense in the 1948 government. Died in exile in England (1858).	15 March 1990 in Baja (his birthplace)	The anti-Hapsburg Hungarian Revolution (1848)	Hungarian Democratic Forum (M.D.F.)
Árpád Tihanyi	Martyr of the 1956 Uprising. Executed.	30 October 1990 in Mosonmagyaróvár	The 1956 Uprising	Left-of-center Liberals and Socialists
Gábor Földes	Theater director, martyr of the 1956 Uprising. Executed.	17 May 1991 in lot 301 in Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery (Budapest)		
After the March 1990 elections, a conservative coalition government headed by the M.D.F. was formed with József Antall as Prime Minister.				
Oszkár Jászi	Political scientist, minister of National Minorities (1918-1919). Died in exile in the USA (1957). Opponent of the Rákosi government. Executed (1949).	17 July 1991 in Farkasrét Cemetery (Budapest)	Béla Kún's revolution (1919) and Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	Left-of-center Liberals (SZ.D.SZ.)
Imre Becsei		7 December 1991, repatriated from Lot 298 to a cemetery in Ugod	Rákosi government (1948-1956)	Left-of-center Liberals and Socialists
MINDSZENTY JÓZSEF	Primate of the Catholic Church in Hungary. Died in exile in Austria (1975).	4 May 1991, Esztergom Cathedral	Rákosi and Kádár governments (1948-1956, 1956-1989)	Conservative right-wing, Catholic Church, M.D.F.
Lot 298 transformed into "national pantheon": 2,000 persons listed	Anti-Communist or Horthy officers, politicians and opponents as well as war criminals. Executed between 1946 and 1952.	September-October 1991, Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery (Budapest)	Horthy Regency (1919-1944), WW II and the period right afterwards	The nationalistic Committee of Justice for Martyrs (M.I.B.), right-wing
György Somogyvári	Writer, radio speaker, MP. Died in prison (1953).	13 February 1992 in lot 301 in Rákoskeresztúr Cemetery (Budapest)	Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	Right wing of the M.D.F.
Miklós Kállay	Prime minister under Horthy (from 9 March 1942 to 19 March 1944). Died in exile in New York (1967).	17 April 1992 in Kállobemjén (his birthplace)	Horthy Regency (1919-1944), WW II	Right-of-center MDF
9 soldiers from the Carpathian area in Ukraine	Killed by the Arrow Cross Party (1944). Ambiguity: Hungarian or Ukrainian?	1 November 1992 in Cinkota	Szálasi's Nazi regime (1944)	

536 Soviet soldiers	Fallen in combat during the Battle of Budapest (1945). Disinterred from under Communist monuments in Budapest, the monuments having been moved to the "Cemetery of Statues" (Nagyfőtény). Ambiguity: liberators or invaders?	1 November 1992 in lot 251, Rákosszentmihály Cemetery (Budapest)	Szálasi's Nazi regime (1944) and the liberation of Budapest (1945)	M.D.F. government
Unknown soldiers (Battle of the Don)	Fallen in combat in the USSR (1943). Ambiguity: victims or heroes?	1 November 1992 in Rákosszentmihály Cemetery (Budapest)	Horthy-Kállay period (1942-1944) and the Nazi alliance	Military reburial. Right wing.
160 soldiers	Died defending Budapest against the Russian Army (1945).	1 November 1992 in Rákosszentmihály Cemetery (Budapest)	Horthy (1919-1944) and Szálasi (Arrow Cross Party, 1944)	Right-of-center M.D.F.
Miklós Horthy, his wife and son	Admiral in the Austro-Hungarian navy, regent of Hungary (1919-1944). Died in exile in Portugal (1957).	4 September 1993 in Kenderes (his birthplace)	From Béla Kún's Communist government to WW II (1919-1944)	Committee of Hungarian Sailors, legitimists and the M.D.F.'s right wing
Attila József	Poet. Suicide (Hungary, 1937). Fallen in combat.	17 May 1994 in Kerepes Cemetery (Budapest). Third reburial. 1994 in Györgytaláló	Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	Former Communists (including the president of the Writers' Union)
Unknown WW II soldiers	Fallen in combat.	17 June 1994 in Kerepes Cemetery (Budapest)	Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	Military reburial
Count István Bethlen	Prime Minister (1921-1931). Died in prison in the USSR (1946).	18 June 1994 in Sárospatak	Horthy Regency (1919-1944) and the Battle of the Don (1943)	Conservatives, aristocrats and the M.D.F.
László Deseő	General and military attaché in Moscow (1935-1940). Died in prison in the USSR (1946). Actor. Died in New York (1941).	30 November 1997	Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	Legitimists and the M.D.F.
Gyula Kabos	Home Secretary (1931-1938, 1938-1944). Deported, died in exile in Vienna (1948).	8 October 1998 in Pécs (a private ceremony)	Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	Artistic circles
Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer	Ambassador, minister in the Horthy government (1936-1938, 1944). Died in exile in Heidelberg (1980).	22 October 1998 in Budapest	Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	After the March 1998 elections, a right-wing government was formed by the FIDESZ, F.G.K.P. and M.D.F. with Viktor Orbán as Prime Minister.
Dömök Szentiványi	Historian, minister in the Horthy government (1932-1938, 1939-1942). Condemned for war crimes in 1946, died in prison in Hungary (1951).	13 October 2001 in Tas (his birthplace)	Horthy Regency (1919-1944) and the alliance with Hitler	Conservatives (M.D.F.-FIDESZ)
Bálint Hóman	Head of Christian Democratic People's Party (Néppárt). Died in exile in New York (1974).	13 December 2001 in Kerepes Cemetery (Budapest)	Intermediate period (1945-1947)	Conservatives (M.D.F.-FIDESZ representatives present at the reburial)
István Barankovics	After the March 2002 elections, a Socialist-Liberal (M.SZ.P.-SZ.D.SZ.) government was formed with Péter Medgyessy as Prime Minister. NB: Lot 298 in Rákosszentmihály Cemetery (Budapest) is considered to be the place for right-wing political burials; and lot 301, for left-wing ones.			Conservatives (M.D.F.-FIDESZ representatives present at the reburial)

Table 2: Political reburials in Hungary in the 19th century and after 1956				
The deceased	Major activities Circumstances and place of death	Date and place of reburial	Context evoked by the reburial	Political impresarios
Count Lajos Batthyány	Head of the first government formed during the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. Executed in Budapest by the Austrians (6 October 1849), the corpse immured in a cloister for 21 years.	<i>Dual monarchy (Austria-Hungary, 1867-1919)</i> 9 June 1870 in Kerepes Cemetery (Budapest). First reburial of a hidden martyr and first reburial following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867).	The antifeudal, anti-Austrian Hungarian Revolution (1848).	Királyi Pál (MP), moderates among the opponents of Austria, and loyalist officers in the Revolution
Lajos Kossuth	Governor of Hungary and radical leader of the 1848 Hungarian Revolution. Died in exile in Turin (20 March 1894).	1 April 1894 in Kerepes Cemetery (Budapest). The first semiofficial reburial. The national ceremony was "tolerated" by the Emperor, its costs covered by the city of Budapest.	The antifeudal, anti-Austrian Hungarian Revolution (1848).	Radicals
Prince Ferenc Rákóczi II and 6 exiled companions	Leader in the fighting during the anti-Austrian War of Independence (1703-1711). Died in exile in Turkey (1735).	27-30 October 1906 in Budapest-Kassa (now in Slovakia). The first "group" reburial. Delayed for 171 years. Rákóczi's reburial (preceded by his political rehabilitation) was tolerated by Emperor Francis Joseph I and the Austro-Hungarian government.	War of Independence (1703-1711)	Kálmán Thaly (MP and writer) and supporters of independence.
2500 persons (Kőszeg)	Forced into work brigades. Died or executed during WW II, victims of the Szálasi regime and Nazis.	1946-1947, prior to the Communist takeover 1946 in Budapest	WW II and Szálasi regime (Arrow Cross Party)	Communist Party government
Imre Sallai, Sándor Fürst, Endre Ságvári and Ferenc Rózsa	Anti-Fascist militants in the labor movement. Executed or killed in prison (1940-1944).	1947 in Budapest	WW II and Szálasi regime (Arrow Cross Party)	Communist Party
After the anti-Stalinist uprising in October 1956 against the Communist government headed by Mátyás Rákosi (1949-1956) was quelled by the Warsaw Pact, the Communists formed a government with János Kádár as First Secretary of the C.P. (1956-1988).				
László Rajk	Home Secretary under Rákosi. Executed in 1949 and buried in a forest.	6 October 1956 in the Mausoleum of Communist Martyrs (Budapest)	Rákosi's stalinian dictatorship (1949-1956)	Communist Party's Central Committee
Mihály Károlyi	Twice-exiled president (1918-1919). Died in exile in France (19 March 1955).	18 March 1962 in Kerepes Cemetery (Budapest)	Béla Kún's Communist Republic	Communist Party's Central Committee
Mátyás Rákosi (secret reburial)	First Secretary of the P.C. (1949-1956), exiled in 1956, died in 1971 in Gorki (S.U.)	16 February 1971 in Farkasrét Cemetery (Budapest) - secret reburial of ashes	Rákosi's stalinian dictatorship (1949-1956)	Communist Party's Central Committee
Béla Bartók	Composer, emigrated in 1940. Died in exile in the USA (1945).	July 1988 in Farkasrét Cemetery (Budapest)	Horthy Regency (1919-1944)	Moderates in the Communist Party

This is as far back as the memory of the living was able to reach from direct experience: except one case (Mészáros), no personality at work before the Horthy regime was reburied.

- Since 2002, reburials became rarer. But, as we have just seen, “grave-side politics” continue in other ways.

To sum up, post-communist reburials have gradually reached further back into Hungary’s traumatic history and memory. In a former paper (ZEMPLÉNI A. 1996), I proposed an interpretation of this phenomenon. According to it, the above mentioned groupings of successive reburials correspond to stages in the regressive reconstruction of Hungarians’ memory of the traumatic past that their society has been undergoing during the xxth century. As their focus has moved backwards in time, these rites have lifted a series of piled up collective amnesias and the successive prohibitions which had wrought them. To borrow a phrase from historians studying the Austrian case (BOTZ G. 1992), they have uncovered the “lies of life” (*Lebenslüge*) accumulated in Hungarian society since the Second World War. Three ceremonies with a national scope provide convincing evidence of this : those attached to the names of Nagy, Mindszenty and Horthy, successively reburied at two-year intervals (1989, 1991, 1993).

What were the traumas, prohibitions, amnesia and “lies of life” at stake in these cases ? I will give but a single example of this. The trauma of the quelling of the 1956 Uprising and the subsequent wave of executions, including Nagy, needs no comment. But how did Hungarians overcome it? The social history of the memory of 1956 has not yet been written. For seven years after 1956, the forces of law and order mercilessly censored any mention of the Uprising. Over time, this prohibition could dispense with sanctions since most of the population had internalized it. I recall a conversation with my sister from the late 1960s. Our memories of the Uprising deeply differed, even though we had lived through it together. Like so many Hungarians who did not leave the country, she had little to say and tended to share the official viewpoint. This conversation led me to understand what historians would later confirm: that the prohibition had caused a deep collective amnesia about the Uprising, its ideals, the fate of those who had been killed, and the crimes committed by the Kádár government. The first impact of the reburial of the martyrs of 1956 was to dispel this amnesia and arouse feelings of shame and repentance about having forgotten the dead and the revolutionary utopia.

But where did this collective guilt come from? It apparently stemmed from the “lies of life,” in other words, the compromises that, during the Kádár

period, Hungarians accepted and came to believe and value. In the 1970s, Hungary was said to be the “most joyous stand in the Communist showcase.” After launching his well-known slogan “Whoever is not against us is with us”, Kádár launched reforms that separated private from public life and tolerated businesses and lobbies. Under this much praised “Hungarian model”, people were free to build houses, travel (a little) and, in effect, tend their own gardens, all under condition that they not mention the “regrettable events” of 1956, the monopoly of Communist Party and the Soviet occupation. The overwhelming majority of the population, including the intelligentsia, accepted this compromise. Meanwhile, the executioner of the martyrs of 1956 became quite popular. Little attention has been given to this fact. During this period of “goulash socialism”, Kádár was affectionately called the “Old Man”, and people were afraid lest Moscow oust him. The guilt and shame aroused by viewing the remains of the Old Man’s victims cannot be set down to a loss of memory alone. The coffins placed in view were mirrors that, held up to society, forced it to recall its own compromises.

Traumas, taboos, amnesia, compromises, all these elements can be observed in the historical background of the reburial of Cardinal Mindszenty and, even more, of persons associated with the Horthy Regency (1919-1944). We I cannot go into details here. Suffice it to say that, for these ceremonies, major corpses associated with the right were dug up from the memory of Hungary’s tumultuous pre-Communist past. This broke the dead silence that had covered up the moral and military disasters resulting from collaboration with the Nazis. These reburials thus revived older, deeper, traumatized memories, all the way back to the country’s dismemberment by the 1920 Trianon Treaty.

To conclude, political reburials proceed by regressively reconstructing bits and pieces of the Hungarian society’s memory of its traumatic past. Obviously, no ceremony has benefited from a consensus in the whole society; but each ceremony has activated components that have led to rewriting a piece of the nation’s history. Through these ceremonies, rival political forces successively appear on the podium of national bereavement. There is no more effective means to recover the nation’s repressed memory than to disinter its dead. Reburials do not just evoke pieces of the past. They compel everybody to take position. As previously pointed out, today’s Hungary is a funerary democracy, where there is no case of a reburial being refused. Showing the deceased on the catafalque broadcast over television forces people to take sides for or against their legacy, for or against the political impresarios who are staging the reburial. In this way, the bits and pieces of

history that these ceremonies successively bring back into memory are gradually put together in that kind of changing emotional landscape we call “national consciousness”.

But we have to remind that not all reburials are *stricto sensu* political. Thence stems the question: How to explain the Hungarians’ widespread tendency to repatriate and rebury their dead so as to provide them with an “ultimate resting place”? A national anthem sung at all reburials indicates another way of interpretation: «It (your Homeland) is your cradle and grave that nurses and recovers you. You have to live and die here!». Your cradle and your grave: this is a Hungarian formulation which expresses the widespread idea that one is deeply rooted in the soil of the nation. This image cannot be dissociated from the patriotic imago of the Hungarian’s body belonging dead or alive to the Motherland. Let us note that, in Hungarian, “Motherland” or “Magyar land” and “Haza,” Homeland, are synonyms, except for situations where the Haza is pictured with the help of anthropomorphic tropes such as “mother,” “breast,” “nurse,” etc. The carnal homeland of the Hungarians, who “welcomes in her bosom” the reburied dead, is both a maternal figure and a space category, a nourishing and sepulchral land. This notion cannot be understood without a brief historical reminder.

Since the 15th century and the fall of the medieval kingdom founded by St. Stephen (975-1038), Hungary has been independent only for a few decades. The rest of the time it was, despite unsuccessful wars of independence, under Austrian, Turkish or Soviet control. Suffice it to mention the catastrophe at Mohacs in 1526, which led to the tripartition of the nation, or the 1920 Trianon Treaty, which deprived the country of two thirds of its territory and left one third of the Magyar population outside its borders.

It is no wonder that under these circumstances, the “cradle-grave” of the Hungarian Haza has seldom been a place of “ultimate rest.” As Rév (1995) wrote, in Hungary the normal public ceremonies were not victory parades but burials and reburials. The patriotic leitmotifs which found the ideology of reburial are by far anterior to the advent of this ritual. Here are the most penetrating ones. The motive of the “corruption” of the occupied, devastated Hungarian Land, or even of the Motherland “infested” by the occupant. The motive of the “enslaved” land, where – as the poet Petöfi says – «our forefathers cannot rest». The motive of the foreign land, where the wandering patriot of the national anthem can no longer find his bearings: «He looked around and he didn’t find his Home in the Homeland». And these motives are only offshoots of the century-old leitmotiv of the inner exile of the Hungarians in their own homeland. The hidden martyr

and the emigrate buried abroad are emblematic figures of this exile of the Magyar on his own “disancestorized” land.

At this point, we reach the sacrificial background of this ritual. Here is what a 15th-century preacher, O. Laskai, wrote about the funeral of Saint Ladislav, king of Hungary: «In his mercy, God chose the Hungarians for the offering of this so precious pearl, the body of St Ladislav, because He didn't want him to fall into dust in a foreign land». A few years later, the same preacher added: «Although the Lord has often liberated his legacy – Hungary – through victories, now His wrath was so great against this land because its people were losing its faith, that there is no valley or mount in the entrails of Serbia, Bulgaria, and Bosnia not filled with bones of Hungarians and profusely sprinkled with their blood». Thus, in the late Middle Ages, the burial of the national saint in the Hungarian soil is a sign of God sanctifying the land. The scattering of the bones and blood of its inhabitants outside the homeland is a punishment for their lack of faith which breaks up the kingdom's territorial unity. The link between the nation's spatial unity and the sacrifice of one's self for the terrestrial patria given by God is already clearly established.

Patriotism in the 19th century only reworked this medieval idea of Hungarian Land as a sacrificial space. Taking up Ernst Kantorowicz's word (1951), the celestial patria of Christendom “descended” then, for good, from the sky down to earth, as all 19th century Hungarian poetry testifies. This poetry clearly associated the fertility and prosperity of the Hungarian Land with the germinal potential of the blood shed by its martyrs. As poets say «grass is greener and taller in Mohacs than anywhere else, and the flowers have a stronger scent, the wheat is thicker», «a sacred blood nurses stalks of wheat heavy with kernels; body and soul find nurture there»; «from the holy dust of your martyrs, a new livelier life had germinated» etc. What is this, if not a sacrificial language?

And why does the quest for the relics of famous dead persons to repatriate to Hungary continue to this day? A glaring example is the century-long quest for Sandor Petöfi's remains. As every schoolchild has learned, this great poet and soldier of the 1848 Revolution – a full fledged patriot – supposedly died on a battlefield in Transylvania. There, the poet has a whole set of memorials: three assumed graves – all of which are looked after –, two skulls and especially an old pear tree under which he wrote his last poem. As an eyewitness told us, this pear tree used to be “watered” every year with ox blood. In short, Petöfi is the subject of a strange patriotic cult there, a cult that started in the 19th century and is still alive.

This local cult is even more significant, as it is meant to empty graves. In fact, nobody knows where the poet's remains are. And as early as in 1860, another account of his death started going around. He would have been deported by the Russians to Siberia, where, supposedly, he survived. In short, he would not be a martyr hidden in Hungarian soil but an exiled patriot, whose remains should be found, certified, and brought home. This is the meaning of the national archeological serial story of which he has been the subject since then. Here are the very last episodes. In 1956, diggings in Transylvania turned up no remains. In 1988, a Hungarian *nouveau riche* funded the first of a series of archeological expeditions to Siberia. Others followed. The findings, all disappointing, were regularly covered on television. A skeleton was found, perhaps that of a Jewish woman, but certainly not the remains of the national poet that have been the object of a 150-year long search. Yet the search goes on. A few years ago, the Academy of Science authorized the disinterment of Petöfi's parents' remains for genetic testing in the United States so they could be compared with the skeleton from Siberia. To the best of my knowledge, the results are still out. In short, this endless affair has all the characteristics of a reburial project except that it has not succeeded to date, since no certifiable remains have been found.

Nothing seems further away from a sacrificial way of thinking than these postmodern episodes of the Petöfi affair. Nonetheless, they are manifestly the offshoots of an already ancient quest for the remains of the *pro patria mori* of Hungary to be reburied in Hungarian soil. Let's take this a step further. The reburials of the deceased "welcomed" by the Hungarian Motherland can also be understood as if they were as many sacrificial rites. As we have seen, in the sacrificial structure prevalent in the 19th century, the nation occupies the place of the sacrificer, the Homeland – "God's legacy" –, the place of the recipient of the sacrifice, and those who died for their homeland the place of the victim. Hungarian reburials seem to follow this age-old sacrificial pattern based on the idea of bodily sacrifice. From this probably stems the strong tendency of Hungarians to repatriate the remains of their dead in the soil of their Homeland.

This paper has focused on but a few aspects of reburials in Europe. Katherine Verdery (1999) has described the astounding diversity of these rites and of their political, religious, cultural and even economic implications. To mention a few examples, my comments do not apply to rites as varied as: the expulsion of Lenin's and Stalin's embalmed corpses from their mausoleums, the "eviction reburials" in Bulgaria and Romania, the highly political transfer of the remains of Frederick the Great in Germany or of Czar Nicholas II in Russia, the rites for drawing Serbia's borders by using

the bones of Czar Lazar, the reburials of priests intended to reestablish marginalized religious communities, the restitution of the remains of national artists and, not to forget, the reburials of symbolic conquest heroes, like that of Theodor Herzl. As Alex Weingrod (1995) pointed out, the triumphal transfer to Israel of the corpse of the founder of Zionism had a completely different import than Imre Nagy's tense, dramatic reburial in Hungary.

To conclude, I would like to emphasize the anthropological idea running through the previous comments. As I have tried to show, the Hungarian reburials reactivate not just past social dramas but also the age-old emotional means used for nation-building. Among these means, the cult of the dead plays a major role, and contemporary reburials are but recent instances thereof. Now, the model common to all national cults for the dead reaches back beyond the so-called birth of the nation. Their prototype is the *pro patria mori* cult that, like a shadow, has followed all ancient and medieval forms of patria, which have served as the spatial matrix for the nation. The Latin word *patria* refers to a spatial category that, during its very long history, has encompassed all sorts of religious and political formations, ranging from the democracy of the Greek city-states through the machinery of the Roman Empire up to the French Republic or the Third Reich, not to mention the blessed in St Augustine's *celestial patria*, the medieval martyrs' *patria aeterna*, the Crusaders' Holy Land, the 12th-century national monarchies or the democratic nationalism of 16th-century England.

All these forms of "patria" have a single constant: the *pro patria mori* cult. The amazing durability of this cult is that of an essential characteristic inherited by the nation from earlier forms of the patria: the cult that the nation dedicates to itself through the celebration of those who supposedly made the ultimate sacrifice for it. When reading Thucydides, we notice that this form of national self-worship dates back to the 4th century B.C. in Ancient Greece. Athenian funerals for warriors killed in battle already bore several traits typical of national cults for the deceased: the performance of the ceremony in the name of the people (the *demos*), the substitution of collective repatriation of the corpses in the city's soil for individual graves on the battlefield, the empty coffin dedicated to the vanished warrior, and, above all, the invention of the funeral oration, which extols the sacrifice of the deceased in order to exalt the civic values of the city (LORAUX N. 1981).

In short, the national cult for the dead consists of transforming the latter in a ritualistic instrument of the nation's self-worship. To recall the Hungarian formula, the tomb is, indeed, the cradle of this self-worship, which makes the nation so different from any other form of society studied by anthropologists.

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