BANDITS, HEROES, THE HONEST AND THE MISLED: EXPLORING THE POLITICS OF REPRESENTATION IN THE HUNGARIAN UPRISING OF 1956

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Introduction reflecting on this conference dedicated, as it was, to stock-taking the recent developments and possible future trends in Cultural Studies – a politically committed, activist mode of theorizing broad cultural and social issues – I sensed that the current Eastern-European metamorphoses had relatively scarce manifest impact on the intellectual agenda or even on the intellectual atmosphere of the event. To put it in another way, I sensed a curious tension in the conference constituted by the 'said' and the 'not-said'. Stuart Hall talked about the imperative of cultural theory to come to terms with what he described as 'a series of new times' and 'new conjunctures'; about the need to revise paradigms of the past which these 'new times' have 'thrown open to inspection'. Even if my reading is not congruent with his intended meaning (which I hope is not the case), I regarded his statement as a reference to the Eastern-European 'Other', which, though not for the first time but perhaps more radically than ever before, has been urging Western Marxists and other leftists to re-theorize their positions. Apart from a few other isolated remarks concerning particular aspects of Eastern-European societies, little else was said on this subject. Since the theoretical framework of Cultural Studies was developed in Western Europe and North America, it is natural that its primary focus has been advanced capitalist society. Additionally, because of the presence and impact of anthropology on this multi-disciplinary inquiry into cultures and – not unrelated to this –, the political pull of the so called Third World, Cultural Studies have had a lot to say on the dominated or colonized 'Other' as well, on the cultural interaction between capitalist and traditional societies. It is all the more interesting how those societies which up to quite recently had been the site of what was called 'existing socialism' are left virtually unexplored by Cultural Studies. I have wondered whether this apparent lack of interest might be due to western leftists' ambivalence towards these societies perceived as sites of a compromised, abused and now eventually defeated utopia? Could there have been a fear that a critical stance towards these political systems (while they were still socialist) would threaten the

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distinctive political edge of Cultural Studies and western leftism in general, vis-a-vis the 'mainstream' dominant discourse on socialism in their own society? Whatever inhibitions constituted the so called Second World as a virtually blank space, it is obvious that fundamental contributions to cultural studies related to this part of the world should primarily come from researchers located in Eastern and Central-Europe. The Hungarian revolution of 1956 is an event of special significance not only for Hungarians, who have recently elevated it to the rank of a national holiday, but also for the western socialist and communist movements. Referring once again to Stuart Hall's talk at the conference, 1956 Budapest marked the beginning of the disintegration of Marxist theory and, as well-known, the beginning of a crisis within the international Labor movement. In contemporary Hungarian historical consciousness the predominant meaning of the revolt is somewhat differently inflected. Rather than signifying crisis and breach, it enjoys moral approval as an act of resistance and defiance against an oppressive tyrannical order. The present paper is an attempt to capture the initial discursive construction of the uprising in the public political domain.

From 1956 to 1989

> We must be ready to receive every moment of discourse in its sudden irruption; in that punctuality in which it appears, and in that temporal dispersion that enables it to be repeated, known, forgotten, transformed, utterly erased, and hidden, far from all view, in the dust of books. (M. Foucault)

The timeliness of a close investigation of the Hungarian national uprising of 1956 is evidenced by its recent official reevaluation. It does not seem unnatural that a new regime, which came to power as a result of free elections early this year, (in April 1990), would rewrite national history and its special events. The reassessment of 1956, however, had been initiated by Imre Pozsgay, an eminent reformist within the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (at the time a state-party) a year before. To the astonishment of many of his comrades, Mr. Pozsgay proposed to qualify the 1956 events as a 'national uprising', thus dismissing the officially still effective label of 'counterrevolution' expressing the political views, sentiments and interests of an ever shrinking minority of communists, who had been rapidly losing political control even inside of the Communist Party. A set of significant events inevitably followed from the renaming of what in colloquial speech had been merely referred to as 'fifty-six'. The oppositional parties demanded that

October 23rd, the initial day of the uprising be commemorated as a red-letter day (paid holiday) and replace the imposed-upon celebration of another October Revolution, the one which had brought about the first socialist society in Russia in 1917. The leading figure of the 1956 events, Prime Minister Imre Nagy came to be rehabilitated. Imre Nagy was himself a Communist leader whose political orientation would classify him a reformist in our days. However, in the early 1950s, during the Rákosi era[1] he was pushed aside with the less benign label "revisionist" and was even excluded temporarily from the Communist Party. As the revolution commenced, however, there was a massive pressure to appoint him Head of the Government. He enjoyed the support not only of the revolutionary crowds but apparently that of the Hungarian and even the Soviet Communist Parties (Kopácsi, 1986). Nevertheless, two years after defeat of the revolt, Imre Nagy was executed as a result of a death sentence brought at a secret trial. Together with hundreds of predominantly rank-and-file participants, he came to be buried in an unsigned mass prison graveyard. In her study of the political culture of the French revolution, Lynn Hunt (1984:34–38) has discussed its successive stages in terms of theatrical genres. She has argued that comedy was followed by romance, which eventually grew into tragedy. Analogously, I would suggest that the Hungarian uprising conformed to the script of a tragedy. More particularly, the circumstances and the mode of Imre Nagy and his comrades' execution revived a theme known from ancient Greek tragedies. Sophocles' Antigone may come to one's mind, a piece in which the tyrant Creon forbids the protagonist to bury her father, a victim of Creon's lust for power.[2] No wonder that during the thirty-two years of the Kádár regime (1956–1988), the name of Prime Minister Imre Nagy was hardly ever mentioned, and his undignified death was known to, and remembered by, only a small politically active minority. However, as a doctrinaire Communist control over the definition of 1956 had been removed, a bewildering multiplicity of previously muted or suppressed voices came to be heard, literally, through the mass media as well as via the printed word. In the spring of 1989 the streets of Budapest were flooded by books – exhibited on temporary news stands –, great many of them dedicated to this subject. The releases included other 'classics' – previously on index – and more recent writings; local and foreign publications; memoirs and archival materials, facsimile re-issues of contemporary newspapers and so forth.[3] Imre Nagy and the politicians closest to him thus joined the lines of publicly recognized national heroes, a process culminating in a grandiose funeral ceremony where each of the several hundred victims of the post-revolutionary terror were individually commemorated. The extent to which definitions of the revolt affected the very basis of the political system is

indicated by the choice of the day of October 23 for the declaration of the Republic of Hungary. Substituting for the denomination People's Republic, a shorthand term for proletarian dictatorship, the new name signifies the restoration of pluralist democracy abandoned in 1948. The eventual acknowledgement of the 1956 events as a national democratic revolution was of great symbolic significance not only in shattering the old socio-political system but in establishing and cementing the one arising in its wake. As the rivalry between the major new parties grew into nasty confrontations, particularly during the election campaigns, it became imperative to emphasize images and events evoking a sense of unity and bond between as diverse political forces as represented by conservative Christian Democrats and Radical Liberals, Reform Communists and Peasant Smallholders. The memory of the revolt proved sufficiently powerful in the Hungarian collective consciousness to serve such a purpose. As a headline of a local daily paper has recently announced, '1956 is the grounding of our future'. The use of concepts 'revolution' versus 'counter-revolution' defining the nature of the revolt does not only signify opposing political interests, ideologies, sentiments, but also stand for competing narrative accounts of what actually took place between October 23rd and November 4th of that year. The conspiracy theory, which János Kádár resorted to in an attempt to legitimize his Soviet backed power, persisted in official political publications even as recently as 1986. Thus, for example, János Berecz's book (1986) issued on occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the event, attributed the uprising predominantly to the organized conspiracy of the inner and outer enemies comprising western imperialist and local fascist elements. Contrarily, most 'unofficial' accounts have emphasized the spontaneous character of the revolt. During the Kádár era the validity of the 'conspiracy-theory' could not overtly be challenged. Yet on the level of choice of words denoting 'fifty-six', an implicit debate and negotiation had been going on for a long time.[4] As a result, voices on both sides, adversaries and supporters of the revolt, tended to avoid names explicitly qualifying it. In the official domain the more neutral phrase 'tragical event of '56' was gradually replacing the term 'counterrevolution' connoting violent retaliations and the betrayal of the cause of independence. In other sites of public discourse, the term 'uprising' had gained legitimacy. Imre Pozsgay's proposal of 'popular uprising', denoting a cautious acknowledgement of a rightful cause, aimed at creating an alliance between those more or less reform minded communists who had feared or refused to name 'fifty-six' a revolution or a freedom fight, and those diverse, increasingly visible political groups who have been struggling for the sanctification of this event.

Discourses of oppression and liberation and the French revolutionary tradition

The debate over the name and the meaning of the October events did not start after the revolt had been put down. From the very first sign of civil unrest, the contest of diverse political forces over the definition of the participants' political goals and actions was apparent. This contest was not merely running parallel to, or reflecting the events. The interpretations and reinterpretations of what was taking place seem to be integral and directly relevant to the revolutionary process as a whole. In attaching special significance to revolutionary rhetoric, to speaking and naming, I am drawing on Lynn Hunt's aforementioned discussion of the political culture of the French revolution. Hunt has been interested 'in the logic of political action as it was expressed symbolically', in the ways people 'put the Revolution and themselves as revolutionaries into images and gestures' (*ibid.* p. 14). Symbolic practices, including rhetoric speech, have been seen by her not as epiphenomenal to non-linguistically constituted realities. Hunt has viewed them as practices shaping the actors' consciousness and their resulting intentions, interests and activities. This methodology shares its basic assumptions with constitutive theories of human activity in treating language as an active political force (for an overview of constitutive theory, see Mehan et al. 1990). However, the specific relevance of Hunt's study for my present investigation lies in her application of post-structuralist theories to revolutionary discourse. Hunt has contended that the very concepts of modern politics and ideology were forged by the French revolutionaries in the sense that they 'managed to invest these concepts with extraordinary emotional and symbolic significance' (*ibid.* pp. 2–3). Extending this line of thought I would like to argue that public discourse in modern non-democratic and non-pluralistic political contexts – exemplified by any unitary language, revolutionary and totalitarian alike – follows distinctive rules. First of all, the relative significance of discursive practices vis-a-vis non-linguistic/non-symbolic ones is greatly enhanced. In other words, representation assumes an unproportionate amount of autonomy in relation to social praxis. As Hunt has observed, 'the crumbling of the French state let loose a deluge of words,' to make talk the 'order of the day' (*ibid.* pp. 19–20). However, as Francois Furet has emphasized, 'speech substitutes itself for the power' and 'the semiotic circuit is the absolute master of politics'. This is explained by the disruption of what he has considered 'the normal relationship between society and politics'. Therefore, according to the logic of this argument, 'politics becomes a struggle for the right to speak on behalf of the Nation. Language becomes an expression of power, and power is expressed by the right to speak for people' (quoted by Hunt, *ibid.* p. 23).

The French revolution has, in my view, established a double-faced tradition. In its struggle against royal tyranny and its fervor to establish civil rights and bourgeois freedoms, the revolution showed its liberatory and democratic face. On the other hand, as the process of radicalization moved – to borrow Hunt's metaphors – from comedy and romance towards tragedy, a distinctly different face, an increasingly oppressive one made itself visible. With its paranoid obsession to detect conspiracy; with the elevation of denunciation of civil duty, as well as with its repeated re-writings of history, the Terror laid the grounds for twentieth century totalitarian political systems. Typically, in admitting to their indebtedness to the French example, revolutionary movements tacitly identify it with its liberationist face. Hungarians acted so in 1848 for the first time, struggling for bourgeois democracy and national sovereignty. In 1956, because some of the most crucial of those 19th century demands had not been met (civil rights) or became topical once again (national sovereignty), the French revolution became once again an empowering model to follow. The inclusion of the Marseilles among the revolutionary musical repertory indicated how the liberationist ethos of that tradition helped shape a new collective consciousness.

In my close analysis of the Hungarian Radio's broadcast programs I am attempting to trace and identify elements of two modes of discourse viewed as constituting as well as articulating the two facets of the revolutionary tradition: a liberationist/democratic one and an oppressive/terroristic one. Ironically, in Hungary of the mid-1950s, the liberationist efforts – as part of the broader process of de-Stalinization throughout Eastern Europe – were being directed at transforming a system that had perceived itself as revolutionary. Hence, the controversy over designating the revolt as revolutionary versus counterrevolutionary. The spokesmen of the Stalinist regime were bound to speak the language of terror, even under the radically changed circumstances of the uprising. Instead of the passive or compliant acceptance, typical for the times of uncontested domination, their rhetoric was now received as provocative and prompted violent forms of resistance as well as opposing accounts of reality. The revolutionary voices spoke diverse dialects of what I will call 'liberationist' language. Although feeding on national historical traditions of liberation movements, the unity of this discourse was extremely precarious for having been based upon very different understandings of democracy, freedom and 'Hungarianness'. The relative strength of this popular alliance was ensured and enhanced by the anti-Soviet theme, dramatically foregrounded throughout the course of the events, due to the initial intervention of the Red Army, their unceasing presence, and the threat of a total invasion. It is important to note, however, that individual voices representing particular social groups, political

forces or institutions cannot be neatly classified along the variable of 'liberationist' versus 'terroristic'. Firstly, as I have tried to point out, both modes of discourse were of totalizing character in the sense of claiming to represent the whole nation. This involved the predominance of a dichotomous value system, a black-and-white world-view underlying meaning construction. Certain inflections of the national theme, in particular, which had started as part of liberationist discourse, assumed elements of terroristic rhetoric. Speakers of the Stalinist status quo, on the other hand, attempted to coopt the 'liberators'' nationalistic rhetoric. It follows that liberationist and terroristic modes of expression were not fixed with particular ideologies. The diverse articulations and elaborations of central concepts and themes such as national independence and unity or the democratic renewal of socialism involved a constant flux of value-emphases and incessantly changing accents and refractions of meanings. Additionally, acts of genuine conversion were also the order of the day. This can be captured in the extremely dynamic formations and re-formations of what may be called discursive alliances. Following Foucault's idea of the unities of discourse (1969), I view these alliances as carriers of relations that are not arbitrarily imposed, yet tend to remain invisible for conventional political analyses operating with pre-given categories. What themes and issues defined the formation and rearticulation of discursive alliances? How were particular political goals translated into revolutionary rhetoric? How did the revolution create its own myth and what kind of myths did it feed on? Before attempting to answer these questions, I need to discuss the special role of the Hungarian Radio as a preeminent site of public political struggle during the revolt.

Radio, action and discourse

During the 1950s in Hungary, the radio was the only electronic mass medium and, as a state monopoly, it functioned primarily as a political institution. Therefore, the struggle for the control of the Radio was of great symbolic and strategic importance. How crucial the mass media had become for totalitarian systems was first remarked upon by Horkheimer and Adorno (1972:159) arguing that the wireless was as instrumental to the National Socialists' cause in Nazi Germany as the printing press to the Reformation. A tragic dimension was added to the liberationist struggle to abolish the Stalinist monopoly of this medium by the fact that the incident around the Radio building on October 23rd served as a spark in turning the peaceful and

disciplined demonstration, led by the students, into an armed confrontation. The students, having listed a set of demands of the Government, marched to the premises in the hope that these would be broadcast. Instead, they found themselves intimidated by the arms of the Secret Police (Kopácsi, *op.cit.*). Their demands addressed, among others, such civil rights issues as the freedom of speech (Fabó, 1957: 12). It took another week for the rioters to liberate the Radio, which signalled not only the elimination of the Communist Party's censorship, but also the expulsion of Stalinist voices from the Radio personnel. Attempts were made to establish the guidelines for a new democratic broadcast policy (Nagy, 1984). Radio Kossuth marked its renewal by inserting the distinctive 'free' into its name. From the start, however, the Radio assumed a direct and active political role, unusual in times of peace and order. Due to the permanent flux on the top echelons of the Communist Party and the Government, the Radio served as a loudspeaker for the leaders to address the 'people out there'. These speeches and the various public notices – threats, promises, warnings – had a special urgency with their intent to directly interfere with the armed fights. In a sense, the Radio belonged to the community of the nation – not because it was to be used by anyone or everyone, but because it addressed people as members of a collective rather than casual listeners. From time to time, in order to address the fighters directly and immediately, listeners were requested to place their sets out in the windows. This act spatially reinforced a specific communicational arrangement whereby the atomized individual households or families, typical contexts for radio use, were dissolved into one undivided space. In this sense, the radio with its modified purpose may have helped shape a new kind of collectivity with a special force. The frequently recurring metaphors for the nation as 'family' or a 'wounded body'; or the description of the armed clashes as 'fratricide' thus may have grown closer to people's lived experiences than in pre-modern eras, when communications technology was not essential to political life. With all its preeminent role, the Radio did not represent the public discourse of the revolt in its entirety. The most extremist voices speaking the brutal language of revenge and lynching, anti-Semitism and chauvinism, did not make it to the studio. Certainly, accounts of those bound to perceive the events as counterrevolution, exaggerated the presence of right wing extremism. Nonetheless, the repeated appeals by respectable personalities to the public to preserve their sobriety and restrain from the lynch-law indicates the existence of a revolutionary underworld (Fabó, *op.cit.*).

Discursive alliances at the beginning of the revolutionary process

> This afternoon an enormous youth demonstration took place in our capital. Perhaps you, Hungarians living abroad will be surprised to hear this piece of news. We, the witnesses of this wonderful ferment, having manifested itself in passionate assemblies and newspaper articles over the past few weeks, have been expecting it to happen. (Fabó: 15)

The enthusiastic and sympathetic report portrayed the youth's symbolic evocation of the War of Independence of 1848 by reference to their songs, national banners, cockades and emblems. It further recounted their demands, which addressed a range of political and economic issues. All this was located in the context of the past few years' democratic movement aiming to 'purify' the 'sacred ideals of socialism' from the 'sins' attributed to the Hungarian Communist Party leaders. The emergence of this voice was significant in that it conveyed the political and moral concerns and passion of the university students and the intellectuals, initiators of the revolution. In identifying himself with the demonstrators, the radio reporter assumed the historically informed rhetoric of the revolution in emphasizing its central symbols and metaphors in statements like 'Budapest celebrating a new March 15th in the October spring'.[5] The report was aired on Radio Freedom, a state-run station airing programs for Hungarians abroad. Half an hour later, the First Secretary of the Communist Party (named Hungarian Workers' Party and abbreviated HWP) Ernő Gerő delivered a speech denouncing the youth's movement as 'poisoned by chauvinism' and 'reactionary'. In a similar vein, he condemned their manifesto's call for pluralism and civil rights for allegedly pointing to bourgeois rather than socialist democracy (Fabó: 16–18). These two voices set the tone for the confrontation and negotiation taking place between two discursive alliances during the initial stage of the uprising: one comprising predominantly socialist reformist 'liberators' empowered by a particular reading of national history; the other representing the Stalinist ruling elite. This tone radically altered as the Stalinists and subsequently the communists in general were losing ground. Already months prior to the outbreak of the revolt a relative tolerance for different, though not openly contesting voices characterized the Radio's broadcast policy (Scarlett, 1980: 31). It is worth noting that the youth demonstration itself was officially approved by the Minister of Interior. Nevertheless, until they were removed, the Radio Party leadership had exercised overall control in setting the agenda and providing the definitive interpretations for the actual situation. The representation of active political forces was distorted and censorship was in effect. The chronicling of the events blatantly contradicted many observers' and participants' experiences. Alternative accounts, which I will discuss later in this paper, surfaced only after

successive changes had taken place in the composition of the Party administration and the Government. The distinction which I have suggested between the liberationist and the terroristic mode of language is based upon their contrasting statements in attempting to make sense of what was actually happening, as well as on the different style and nature of their rhetoric. I will attempt to capture these differences in three closely interrelated areas of debate: a) the definitions of the actions and the identity of the actors as to their socio-political status, interests and intentions; b) the general moral/cultural frame underlying the fight between opposing political forces for the meaning of such quasi-religious notions as 'honesty', 'sin', 'sacredness', 'pollution' and 'purification', and c) the 'national issue' where differing constructs of patriotism and forms of national historical consciousness were set against one another. Who were the revolutionary actors and in what activities were they involved? The struggle on this issue between the 'liberationists' and the Stalinist rulers had started before the demonstration had turned into a bloody conflict. What the radio report described as 'wonderful ferment' (Fabó: 15) was referred to by the Party Secretary Gerő as 'evil nationalist poisoning' (Fabó: 18). The two texts suggested incompatible concepts of national history and identity. As I have argued, the reporter drew on the ethos of 1848 so as to promote a sense of unity through reviving and reliving history.[6] In contrast to this, Gerő implicitly identified Hungarian history with that of the local communist movement, even though it had represented a rather inconsequential political force until the end of WW2:

> We, communists are Hungarian patriots. We were patriots in the prisons of Horthy-fascism[7] during the hard decades of illegality... (Fabó: 17)

Both voices foregrounded the youth as centers of the present movement. Whereas the reporter projected an image of them modeled after the legendary revolutionary youth of 1848, celebrated by successive generations, Gerő claimed that these young people were merely acting under the influence of certain inimical forces. The sinister abstractness of the phrase 'enemies of our people' (Fabó: 17) curiously contrasted with the radio report's empirical everyday concreteness in depicting the actual adherents of social and political change. Speakers of totalitarian and terroristic discourse typically employ abstract sociological categories or labels to refer to social subjects ('working class', 'peasantry', 'intelligentsia', 'imperialists', enemy of the people'). As opposed to this, the reporter substituted a spontaneous classification for the established one and that was based upon demographic, occupational and situational roles – all to the overall effect of articulating, and at the same time,

promoting an emerging collective identity. Naming the actors as 'young workers, pedestrians, soldiers, old people, high school students, conductors' suggested a diversity in a developing unity of action (Fabó: 16). The following morning the Hungarian Cabinet announced to radio listeners that 'fascist reactionary elements' had launched an armed attack against what was referred to as 'our public buildings' and 'our armed forces' (Fabó: 21). The voice of the Ministry of Interior spoke about 'looting counterrevolutionary groups' *(ibid.)*. Many more notices reported on the outbreak of the revolt in a similarly terroristic manner. Significantly, the act of taking up arms against the establishment earned the insurgents not only the nastiest political label available in the existing vocabulary ('fascists'), but also the stigma of ordinary criminals attached to it. 'Counterrevolutionary bandits', 'hordes' etc. were accused of murdering 'ordinary citizens, soldiers and secret policemen' (Fabó: 22). Through this minor manipulation of facts – arranging the classes of victims in a particular order –, the official voice suggested nothing less than the fighters were mindless killers. Additionally, the defeat of the 'counter-revolution' was declared to be the sacred goal of the nation and 'every honest Hungarian worker' was summoned to condemn the 'bloody ravage' *(ibid.)*. This mode of criminalizing political adversaries and commanding unconditional loyalty on a moral basis remained a decisive feature of terroristic discourse, despite its subsequent re-adjustments. October 24th witnessed important personnel changes in the State and Party apparatus. Imre Nagy became appointed to the post of Prime Minister and called back to the membership of the Central Committee with a few other previously silenced and persecuted Party leaders. Nagy proclaimed the institution of summary justice for the fighters, but the deadline of granting amnesty to those unwilling to lay their arms had to be repeatedly extended. A communicational rearrangement occurred when radio listeners were requested to place their sets out in the windows so that fighters could be called on directly to end the shootings. This was a remarkable turn in that revolutionaries, up to then stigmatized as criminals and enemies, came to be acknowledged and addressed as members of the body social. From that moment onwards, the Radio was exploited by the power elite as a major tool of negotiation with the insurgents. Rather than calming down, the fighting became ever more intense. The intervention of the Soviet Red Army troops, unexpected and incomprehensible even for some members of the ruling elite, prompted many to take sides with the revolutionaries, including entire units of the Budapest Police and the Army (Kopácsi, *op.cit.*). Official public notices displayed signs of pressure to recognize elements other than 'counterrevolutionary' such as 'drifting and misled young people'. This ideological concession was compelled by the Party and Government's

immediate need to exert influence on the armed masses and have them surrender by means of persuasion. Imre Nagy's speech later during the day added a respectable voice of support to the uprising. Firstly, his informal and inclusive mode of address made no distinction between the fighters and the general public: 'People of Budapest' were meant to include the insurgents as part of the city's community. Secondly, while rhetorically constructing this unity, he claimed to be part of it rather than distancing himself as a leader. Thirdly, for the first time, the complexities of the situation were addressed by way of distinguishing between three groups of revolutionaries: the young 'peaceful demonstrators', the 'good-willed workers' and some unspecified 'hostile elements'. Although qualifying the workers as 'good-willed' was not exempt from a tint of condescension, Nagy no longer used the omniscient terroristic language of the Party elite. Lastly, the Prime Minister refused to condemn the revolt by labelling it; he simply referred to it as the 'fight'. This speech made a shift towards redefining the Stalinist rulers' agenda. Despite his call for reconciliation and peace, Nagy's idea of restoring order was proposed as a means rather than an end in itself. He saw it as a precondition of carrying out what he called 'our sacred national program', one of consistent democratization in every domain of the political and economic life – a program he had proposed as early as 1953. By transferring sacrality from the Party's objective of merely restoring order, the Prime Minister made a political as well as a moral commitment for social change. A believer in peaceful reforms, Nagy regarded the armed confrontation as a moral threat:

> ... we must not allow that blood pollute our sacred national program. (Fabó: 23)

The Communist Party's hard-liners applied various discursive strategies to enhance their communicative efficacy and regain control. Firstly, they appropriated certain elements from Nagy's speech, for example in making clear distinction between the students' demonstration and the activities of hostile forces who were persistently designated as 'robbers', 'murderers' and 'counterrevolutionary bandits' (Fabó: 24–29). Secondly, they coopted a nationalist style of rhetoric removed from the cause of sovereignty. The Hungarian Popular Front, a mouthpiece of the Party, for example, crowded its text with the adjective 'Hungarian' ('shed Hungarian blood', 'Hungarian future') to appeal to as broad masses as possible. It subverted itself, however, due to the contradiction inherent in the right wing fascistic connotations of its phrasings and the left wing extremism carried by two elements of the text: the brutal, derogatory language decrying the 'provocateurs' and the de-historicized concept of national identity. As exemplified by Gerő's speech, this mode of

de-historicized discourse carried with it the assumption that the existence of the country was entirely a communist accomplishment.[8] As a result of confusing the Hungarian people's interests and history with those of the Party, the insurgents emerged in this construct as a threat, not to the regime but to the survival of the nation as a whole (Fabó: 34). Thirdly, the Party targeted specific segments of the population via pseudo-autonomous organizations controlled by itself. The address of the National Council of Hungarian Women represented perhaps the most militant and aggressive version of terroristic speech (Fabó: 24). Apart from indiscriminately labelling the fighters as 'murderous provocateurs', 'slanderers' and 'liars', the short notice was packed with threats and commands. Like the appeal of the Popular Front, this rhetoric was also bound to fail. The very idea of calling on women to hold back their relatives from street battles was to appeal to women's assumed domesticity and instinctive rejection of violence. The militant tone undermined the effectiveness of such a strategy, which was, by the way, out of line with the communist ideology of women's emancipation. The National Peace Council issued a similar notice appealing to women's traditional roles and attitudes, but now in a sentimental redressing: 'Wives, mothers, Hungarian women!... Wives, mothers! You must know what the blessings of peace are. Help so that bloodshed be ended...' (Fabó: 25)

A fourth discursive strategy on the part of the Radio Party leadership consisted in publishing a host of telegrams reportedly received from work collectives and student committees. These texts displayed a striking uniformity in content and style. The recurring motifs included the condemnation of the 'counterrevolutionary provocation'; greetings for the newly elected Central Committee of the HWP and the Prime Minister; the approval of his program of renewal; lastly, the assurance of the State and Party leaders of the collective's loyalty and trust for them. It would be difficult to detect the authors of these telegrams. Interesting to note, nonetheless, that they were aired in quick response to the Party's official call to 'every honest worker' to 'condemn the bloody ravage of the counterrevolutionary gangs'. This leaves scarcely any doubt as to the pre-existence of a script, after which these standardized texts were modeled, presumably by low-level Party committees, on behalf of particular communities, which were apparently excluded from the process. The desired consensus was thus translated by the Party into fiction, into a simulacrum of political representation. Broadcasting these telegrams epitomized how far the world of public discourse had been detached from the world of experiential realities, and yet invading it. The terroristic politics of representation tended to reduce people into passive characters, if not puppets, of a very real script, written by distant authors according to inscrutable rules. This voluntaristic political practice – one which deliberately confuses a desired

state of affairs with the actual one – is seldom effective in molding people's perceptions and judgements of reality, but it is definitely self-defeating when discourse is not monopolized by one speaker. The credibility of the telegrams was seriously undermined by more balanced accounts. One of these, the Journalists' National Association argued for a massive working-class participation in the revolt. Rather than finding excuse for them for having been 'misled', the journalists claimed that their struggle was 'just and perfectly justified' (Fabó: 31). With this reading of the uprising, however, the Association's aim was to make a more powerful case against the perceived minority of 'hostile provocateurs' disrupting the revolutionary process. For, at this point, the Stalinist and the 'liberationist' speakers did not merely compete for the discursive control of the situation, but also shared some common goals resulting from apprehension and fear as to where all the fighting would lead to; how far the right wing forces would push the angered masses. To put an end to the combats was seen by both groups as the most important immediate goal. The appointment of Imre Nagy and the formation of a new Government must have felt a disturbing concession for the Stalinist elite and an encouraging prospect for future change in the eyes of the intellectuals and the students. Contrarily, the masses of workers, especially in the countryside, were less trustful and tended to see Nagy as 'just another Communist' who could only deserve credit by ridding his Government of its predominantly compromised personnel and shake off Soviet domination. Therefore, the discursive construction of Imre Nagy by 'terrorist' and 'liberationist' speakers alike as a wise ruler capable to restore order expressed a shared interest of speakers having access to the Radio. The difference between the two political forces lay in their differing motivation of supporting him. The Stalinist elite adhered to him for strategic reasons, while the democratic reformers promoted the image of a trustworthy leader out of genuine conviction. Transferring the leading role of administration to Nagy, however, involved shifting the center of power from the Party to the Government. In fact, this was compelled by the Party's acute crisis of legitimation. The unpopular First Secretary Gerő resigned (and escaped to the Soviet Union) to be replaced by János Kádár, who attempted a cautious departure from the Stalinistic agenda.

Purity, unity and the rhetoric of the national democratic revolution

On October 25th an abrupt change occurred in the general tone of the Radio. At this point, the Radio seemed to get into the very center of the revolutionary process. The communique issued on Kádár's appointment to the post of First Secretary was repeatedly broadcast and followed by a call

addressing 'Hungarians' to celebrate and put out national flags. They were summoned to return to their homes and workplaces from street demonstrations. Reports were subsequently aired on people's ecstatic mood as they were hooraying, kissing and embracing in the streets. The national Anthem and the Marseilles were played. Broadcasters created the impression of the revolt having arrived at a turning point, if not at victory. Without relying on other sources, it is difficult to unravel whether these reports were edited and orchestrated rather than reflecting people's mood. In any case, the program served to introduce and accentuate Kádár's and Nagy's upcoming speeches. Keen to adjust himself to the 'liberationist' or 'national democratic' mode of rhetoric, by now the dominant one, the First Secretary of the Party seemed desperate to formulate a differentiated and balanced account of the past few days' events. To abandon the overall derogatory tone of his predecessor, at the same time expressing his serious reservations about the politics of the movement as a whole, seemed like dancing on a tight-rope:

> The demonstration – honest as to most of its goals, – in which part of our youth was involved in; a demonstration starting out peacefully degenerated, in a matter of hours, into an armed revolt against the state power of the People's Democracy – according to the intentions of counterrevolutionary elements, enemies of our people. (Fabó: 56)

For Kádár, the People's Democracy, that is, the monopolistic Party rule 'remains and must remain sacred' *(ibid.)*. To support this claim, he gave a twist to the notion of 'liberation' as understood by forces supporting Imre Nagy. It was the socialist dictatorship which Kádár saw as the guarantee of freedom from the 'old yoke', a popular communist metaphor for the semi-feudal capitalist system characterizing Hungary during the pre-WW2 era. Contrarily, the Prime Minister shifted the accent from the counterrevolutionary elements to the workers and justified their participation by contextualizing it:

> A small number of counterrevolutionary instigators launched an armed attack against the order of our People's Democracy. They enjoyed the partial support of the workers of Budapest, who had been desperate over the prevailing conditions in our country. This desperation was aggravated by the severe political and economic mistakes committed in the past, the redemption of which should be an imperative both regarding the country's situation and the general wish of the people. (Fabó: 56)

Such a portrayal of the process did not only invalidate the Communist Party's 'theory of deception', which had denied coherence and meaning to the mass' activities, but established an obvious causality between the destructive political practices of the regime and the revolution. The crucial moment of the

speech, however, was Nagy's promise to start negotiations with the Soviet Union on the withdrawal of their troops from Hungarian territories. Embracing the theme of independence, eventually leading him to declare Hungary's neutrality at the United Nations, earned Imre Nagy a genuine mass following. This manifested itself in his ability to terminate the combats by the last days of October. With the Stalinist voices suppressed, the Radio reflected as well as helped shape a democratically organized national unity across the multiplicity of voices now demanding to be heard. A host of new organizations erupted nationwide on grass-roots level such as workers' councils, various national and youth guards, committees etc. Political parties, churches, professional associations, silenced and banned since the communist takeover in 1948, re-emerged to welcome and influence the revolutionary proceedings according to their widely differing political visions. Organs up to then controlled by the Stalinists like the Radio itself or the Communist Party's daily, the 'Szabad Nép' (Free People) etc. aligned themselves behind the country's new leaders. Purges began in order to replace compromised figures holding key positions. The revolution started to weave its own myth. The unity and power of it originated from a variety of sources. It was increasingly drawing on the national historical mythology but also on the day-to-day expressions of international solidarity. On the negative side, it also gained strength from an acute sense of being threatened and from the painful awareness of lost lives sacrificed in the fighting. Although endangered by its own excesses (purges, lynch-law, anti-Semitism), the uprising was acquiring a certain tragic dignity. Many of those initially protesting against the Stalinist/terroristic misrepresentation of the revolt were now concerned to retain and discursively elaborate this sense of dignity, or, with their own words, the 'purity of the revolution'. Naming and re-naming remained central throughout the twelve days of the uprising. At this stage redefinitions were vital to the moral dignity and political self-perception of the revolutionary participants. It was a kind of meta-discourse discrediting the claims made by the spokesmen of the defeated regime in earlier broadcastings. Re-inscribing the 'story' by challenging the crude or condescending cliches imputed by them had a number of motives. First, it may have been an instinctive gesture of self-defence. People had been conditioned during the Rákosi-era to fear imposed upon political labels ('kulák', 'imperialist agent' etc.) because of their arbitrariness and fatal consequences. Attributing counterrevolutionary intentions to anyone implied a death sentence – which were actually produced on mass scale during the post-revolutionary terror. Additionally, people must have felt a genuine desire to restore the disturbed relations between what constituted their sense of truth based upon the experiential reality and the official representations of reality. Label-like categories, as I argued earlier in this paper, were connected with particular, in many

cases fabricated, narratives. The editorial of 'Szabad Nép' (October 28th) read out on the Radio provided the first passionate and eloquent defence of the insurgents and their cause:

> We disagree with those globally evaluating the events of the past few days as a conterrevolutionary and fascistic coup attempt. (...) The uprising started with the rallies of the college youth. Yet it would be a grave mistake to view them as expressions of merely a youth movement. The young people of Budapest articulated the sentiments and noble passions to be found in the hearts of the people as a whole. At last, we must recognize that in our country a great national democratic movement has evolved embracing and uniting the whole nation (...) Especially later in the afternoon, some dissonant voices joined the demonstration whose demands no longer related to socialist democracy. It must be noted that at this stage, a number of students undertook to convince the blinded and the extremist elements that the struggle was being carried for socialist democracy and not against the social order. (Fabó: 89)

By voicing the participants' viewpoints and motives, marginalized up to then, the author suggested a narrative of the proceedings of the first day dissimilar from the 'terroristic' accounts. With respect to the explosive moment of the revolution, the journalist emphasized the role of the First Secretary Gerő's speech, which, in displaying unresponsiveness towards the revolutionary demands, caused considerable disappointment among the public. A new aspect of the 'story' was thus uncovered, namely, the Party leaders' accountability in letting the demonstration grow into armed clashes:

> By then the street atmosphere had been extremely tense. At various points of the city shootings began. Let me add that even during the second and third days protesters marched in front of public buildings with slogans such as 'Independence! Freedom! We are no fascists!' *(ibid.)*

The indiscriminate imposition of the 'fascist' label in 'terroristic' speech – even though in some cases derived from a genuine dread – had served to create a sense of hideous threat. In contrast, simultaneous charges of petty burglary had set an equally dishonoring tone of mockery and despise for the insurgents. In order to purify the revolutionary actors from such accusations, the journalist recalled the sight of untouched goods behind broken shop-windows: a favored and lasting image signifying '56 as a 'moral revolution'. Certain words and metaphors, increasingly solemn and religion-based, such as 'purity', 'blood', 'brotherhood', 'sanctity', 'sin', 'sacrifice', 'conversion', 'resurrection' etc. flooded the public rhetoric. In the discursive construction of the youth, as leaders of the democratic movement and fighters or even martyrs of the uprising, the road leading from 'purity' and 'honesty' to 'sanctity' was short. The

ideology of democratic renewal found a 'natural' symbol in them. As I have pointed out, onto this 'natural' symbolism was grafted an historical one, that relating to 1848 and its celebrated youth. As the writer Gyula Háy stated, this was the revolution of the young and those 'young in spirit' (Fabó: 57). In its repeated calls to end the fighting, the Government, too, appealed to the preciousness of young lives. Reformers emphasized the need of saving lives for the future to carry out the program of democratization. The nationalist argument was built upon the idea that Hungary as a small nation could not afford to waste her young in what was experienced as a 'fratricide'. Rhetoric notwithstanding, the confrontations lasted and many died. The tragic sense of lost lives became essential in the evolving myth of the revolution. And as the metaphor of 'family' for nation grew prevalent (even implicitly in the form of addressing the public as 'my Hungarian brothers'), biblical images of blood sacrifice – Christ and first-born sons – came to be evoked as well. The exalted atmosphere in which the young were glorified as heroes and saints of the uprising is tellingly illustrated by a piece of writing authored and read out by the ex-Stalinist poet Zoltán Zelk; in his tortured cry he addressed them to be granted absolution from his sins and a communion with them (Fabó: 131). The grief over the young people's death also prompted the rise of anti-communist terroristic voices calling for revenge. Such speeches, some of them occasioned by the Memorial Day funerals (commemorated in Hungary on November 1st), oddly mirrored – that is, echoed with reversed meanings – the Stalinist discourse with its name-calling and brutal language.[9] The revolution created new alliances and dissolved old ones. A great number of communists abandoned the old faith as the Party had cut off its own head – ever more intensely denounced as the 'evil' and 'sinful' Rákosi/Gerő clique. The new leaders' legitimacy of rule depended on what was seen as their 'honesty' and 'true Hungarianness'. The construction of Imre Nagy and, to a lesser degree, of János Kádár as trustworthy leaders is of interest not only for the role of rhetoric in soliciting popular support but also for the odd convergence of ethical and ethnic purity in public speech. Nagy had started to build his credibility as the focus of the democratic movement already back in 1953. Temporarily, he was excluded from the Party as a 'right wing revisionist'. Kádár had been jailed for some time during the early 1950s. The autobiographic moment of being victimized by the Rákosi regime had a key function in generating trust and loyalty for both leaders. In general, persecution provided the moral capital for many more newly appointed directors and secretaries in diverse political and cultural institutions. Obviously, the recurrent phrases of 'true Hungarian' or 'true patriot' communicated two things about the persons thus described: on one level it denoted moral integrity and a commitment to serve national interests against the Soviet Union; on another, it coded

ethnicity, and in the given context Hungarianness was invested with a special value in itself. To illuminate the complexities of this context, involving the relationship between ethnicity and political ideologies in 20th century Hungarian history, would lead me too far from my topic. Yet it is fair to say – even without discussing this issue to any depth – that a disproportionate number of Jews had served in the highest positions of the Communist Party. Therefore they were distrusted by certain groups of ethnic Hungarians as the importers of Soviet communism since the most prominent leaders had been exiled in the Soviet Union during the 1930s, and, indeed, they established socialism in Hungary after the Stalinist model and backed by their military presence. This historical fact proved to be sufficient for the survival, and even the re-invigoration of anti-Semitism, an inherited component of ardent nationalism since the early 20th century. The perception of Jews as aliens and agents of an alien power had barely been affected by other facts; a number of them turned the opponents and/or victims of the Rákosi regime, including followers of Imre Nagy (Judt, 1990). As I have argued, the Radio provided no access to overt anti-Semitic (neither to any chauvinist) propaganda during the uprising. It remained contained by the double entendre of nationalist rhetoric. Besides, or maybe due to, his 'true Hungarianness' – understood in this case as identifying completely with a particular historical and cultural tradition –, Imre Nagy was able to command a distinctive style of speech. First, as I argued earlier in this paper, he had the talent to address his public without the typical restraint and remoteness characteristic of other communist leaders. Second, he spoke the language of a historically grounded romantic nationalism, although without any recognizable anti-Semitic overtones. It was in his speeches that the interrelatedness of the three key issues: the self-definition of the revolutionary acts and actors; the ethos of the uprising (the 'moral' theme), and the historically located concept of national unity (the 'national' theme) can be identified in the most explicit form. In his oratory delivered on October 28th, these themes had cohered into something close to 'master script' of the revolution. The Prime Minister started off by setting up a three-layered temporal framework; the events of the 'past week' were placed in the perspective of the 'past decade'; further, all of this he embedded in the context of 'our one-thousand-year old history' viewed as abounding in tragic blows. Thus a sense of continuity with the past was established; a past portrayed as a site and sequence of negative historical experience. The uprising, suggested to be unprecedented in its severity, appeared as both a disruption and a tragical climax in Hungary's history. The evocation of the idea of the one-thousand-year old Hungary carried a great emotional weight for it had been deeply engrained in people's minds by the pre-communist hegemonic ideologies. It conveyed a 'structure of feelings' vital to a tragic-heroic sense of national identity. Although the phrase had been overused and abused in

conservative rhetoric, in the given context, it was bound to resonate with the actual sentiments of diverse constituencies:

> During the last week murderous events followed one another with tragic speed. It is the fatal consequences of the past decade's horrendous faults and sins that have surfaced in these misadventures which we are now witnessing and in which we are participating. In the course of our one-thousand-year old history our Fate has not spared our people from trials and tribulations. Yet a shock comparable to this one has ever befallen to our country... (Fabó:93)

Followed by this introduction, his denunciation of the views that had qualified the uprising as a counterrevolution sounded particularly sharp and emphatic. While acknowledging the presence of some criminal and reactionary forces – note his distinction –, Nagy asserted that in the fighting a 'national democratic movement' had developed 'with elementary force': one encompassing and uniting our whole people'. He distinctly established the Party rulers' moral and political responsibility not only in the growth of a democratic oppositional movement, but in the actual outbreak of the revolt. In appreciating the national unity produced by the revolutionary acts Nagy reinforced the historically based sense of collectivity to which he initially appealed. In this manner, he managed to discursively create the foundations of legitimacy for his new 'independent and socialist Government', proclaimed to serve as a genuine expression of the people's will'. *(ibid.)* Along with his radical political moves and gestures – the declaration of Hungary's neutrality, the institution of the multi-party system, the dissolution of the Secret Police (ÁVH), the encouragement of the workers' councils' activities etc. –, Imre Nagy's communicational skills may have had a profound effect on the growing cult surrounding him. Already during his life-time, he came to be elevated on the pedestal of a prophet:

> He was the man who, harassed and stained, has always persisted with the Hungarian people's demands; even when the country's situation became truly severe (...), he assumed responsibility to lead the nation out of the catastrophe. (Fabó:118)

As is well-known, Imre Nagy eventually lost control over the course of events. On November 4th the Soviet authorities arrested him together with his Cabinet. Simultaneously, Kádár announced the establishment of the Hungarian Workers' and Peasants' Government. Historians may only speculate on the extent to which the utopia of an independent socialist democracy could have been upheld in case the revolution had survived. Yet despite its precarious political unity and its recognizable shift of accent from a socialistic democratic

towards a more conservative nationalist discourse, the revolution succeeded in creating an identity of its own. I have attempted to show how this identity was linguistically shaped by the acts of re-defining the very nature of the events and by producing and celebrating its heroes: its charismatic leader Imre Nagy and its martyrs, the youth.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate the discursive construction of the Hungarian revolt of '56 through the interaction and confrontation of diverse political forces as displayed by broadcast Radio, during the twelve days of the uprising. I was primarily interested in the process in which two distinct types of rhetoric – termed as 'terroristic' and 'liberationist' – attempted to take and keep control over the definition of the situation, that is, of the revolt itself. The struggle was initially constrained by the institutional arrangements characterizing totalitarian political systems. Although this system had had some cracks in it when the revolt broke out, public speech was barely open to contestation, not unlike the unitary belief-system which it articulated and attempted to shape. The discursive space of public life, the official domain, had been considerably detached from the non-public or non-official sphere, as well as from social praxis. Most of the official accounts of the proceedings of the revolution (including reports on people's responses to them) were voluntaristic and arbitrary, that is, constructed according to the dictates of pre-existing scripts or immediate tactical needs. Representation was typically perceived by the public as misrepresentation. Furthermore, this domain grew beyond its own 'normal' boundaries, not solely to mould but to overshadow or substitute for the world of everyday experience. In my analysis I have sought to point to the inflexibility and crudeness of the terroristic language. Those employing this language were not prepared to defend their validity claims when questioned by the opposition's own accounts of the revolt. They were no more prepared to integrate perspectives other than their own. That is how various speech elements taken over from the opposition rendered themselves so easily identifiable as coopted: neither did they accord with the basic ideological assumptions nor with the style of rhetoric typical of the Stalinists' scripts. The revolt of '56 may be regarded as a complex intertwined system of discourse and action. Paradoxically, the struggle to dominate representation was far too essential to have stayed within the confines of verbal contestation. From this point of view, it is of symbolical relevance that the list of revolutionary demands contained the demand of liberating speech. In other words, a principal

thrust of the uprising aimed at restoring a 'normal', interactive relationship between public and private discursive spaces, between representational practices and experience. The 'liberationist' voices, by virtue of their very presence, challenged the legitimacy of the whole system of public political discourse as best exemplified by such symbolic acts as the re-naming of the Radio Station or by announcing on October 28th: 'Today the papers already write the truth.' (Fabó: *op. cit.*) Owing to the fact that the right of speech had not been pregiven, much of the debate over the meaning of the events assumed the form of a meta-discourse: retrospectively, 'liberationists' discredited the claims made by the Stalinist speakers, who had been silenced by then. I would like to contend that this was primarily a counter discourse in that it tended to mirror the terroristic language. In re-inscribing the uprising, the insurgents employed the same moral and quasi-religious vocabulary as the Stalinist ruling elite. In fact, the debate implicated a struggle to relocate the 'sacred center' of the social system from the Party to the Nation – represented by the Government – and to invest notions of 'honesty', 'sin', 'stain', 'brotherhood' or 'patriotism' with new oppositional meaning. The concept of patriotism leads to the uses and meanings of history in the revolutionary practices of signification. Most interesting is the mode in which the cause of self-determination was linked to the celebration of the national past, and on the re-living of a particular chapter of it, the Independence War of 1848. As Martha Lampland (1986) has suggested, the insurgents spoke the 19th century language of their predecessors and revived a whole symbolic system (names, emblems, cockades, forms of manifesto etc.) attached to that revolution. The everyday language spontaneously incorporated full verses from the romantic revolutionary poet Sándor Petőfi's poems as if the past would have been projected unto the present. There may be a number of possible explanations for this phenomenon. It may be viewed as a protest to the Stalinist practices which systematically de-historicized and emaciated the Hungarian national identity.[10] On the other hand, the degree of embracing the tradition of 1848 also speaks to the political culture of the Hungarian society of the time. In the mid-1950s there existed no other language available than that of the past. Just as the political issues raised by 1848 (civil rights, independence) had not been properly settled over the following one hundred years, their re-emergence brought with it the rhetoric in which they had originally been voiced. The importance of this phenomenon is difficult to overestimate in the light of contemporary analogous developments in Eastern-Europe, following the collapse of communist governments (Judt, 1990). Because these countries have had very weak or no Liberal parliamentary traditions whatsoever, at present they also find themselves lacking the appropriate language of modern pluralist politics. As Tony Judt had observed:

> All they could look back to – and herein lies the problem – is exactly what they're now getting: nationalist rhetoric, a strong emphasis on the identity of the nation and religion. (*ibid.* p. 14)

The revolution of '56 also drew on national rhetoric embedded in the oppositional or dominant ideologies of different regimes over the past two centuries. For the 'last' available movement combining demands of democracy and independence, the insurgents needed to reach as far back as 1848. And this also explains why the French revolution, as mediated by the Hungarian 1848, proved such an empowering example to follow with its strong emphasis on a unitary language invested with high moral passion. France at the end of the 18th century was no different from 20th century Eastern-European societies in one sense, namely that she, as Hunt (*op. cit.* p. 43) has contended, also lacked the 'Whig science of politics' on which to base democratic institutions and practices. Without pointing to this parallel in the nature of political structures – with the corresponding similarities in social structure such as the lack of a solid bourgeois class (Moore, 1966) – it would be difficult to account for the French Revolution's impact on a society located in radically different historical times. In a further research on this subject it would be interesting to explore the tension within the liberationist discourse, a tension arising from its commitment to bourgeois democratic values on the one hand, and the emotionally infused nationalist rhetoric burdened with conservative authoritarianism, on the other. That this was sensed by many witnesses of the uprising as a real threat to its original goals, is indicated by the fact that even a non-liberal writer such as László Németh voiced his anxiety, a mere three days before the Soviet tanks had invaded Budapest:

> The day before the revolution had broken out, I moved to the countryside with the resolution that I would only be concerned with working on my unpublished manuscripts. After the days of awful anxiety, I only had one night to struggle with my joy. Since then I have merely been feeling the pressure of responsibility, which must be a concern of every intellectual today. (...) I still had seen no more than what the radio and the events in the countryside had allowed me to see, but then already I clearly perceived the danger, the immediate threat that the nation, in her sacred impulse, responding only to her emotions, would commit something irredeemable. And looking ahead a little, I was worried that, while the figthers' attention was focused on the withdrawal of the Soviet troops, others expecting the return of their old glory would elbow their ways to the new positions, thus turning the revolution into a counterrevolution... (Fabó:249)

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Notes

1. Mátyás Rákosi was the leader of the Communist Party from 1941 to 1956. On returning to Hungary from Soviet exile, he became Secretary General of the HCP. He was State Minister (1945–49), Deputy Prime Minister (1952–53). In 1953 he ceded the premiership to Imre Nagy but remained First Secretary until July 1956 when he emigrated to the USSR. In 1962 he was expelled from the Hungarian Communist Party for his political crimes. (Kádár, 1985, 156)
2. Having finished the draft of this paper, I came across with a publication containing Ferenc Fejtő's speech commemorating the 30th anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy and his fellow-martyrs, and inaugurating their symbolic memorial in Paris, June 16, 1988. Fejtő, the émigré writer and President of the Hungarian League of Human Rights, also referred to the ancient Greek literary parable in his speech entitled: *Our Creons Violated the Laws* (Tóbiás, 1989, 529).
3. To name a few of the most significant publications: Bill Lomax: 1956 – Hungary (trans. from the original English language version: London, 1976); *United Nations Report of the Special Committee on the Problem of Hungary*. General Assembly, Official Records: 11th Session (New York, 1957); *A forradalom hangja* (The Voice of the Revolution). Radio Broadcastings of Hungary between October 23–November 9, 1956. in: Századvég Füzetek 3 (Budapest, 1989); *1956 – A forradalom sajtója* (The Press of the Revolution). Assembled and introduced by E. Nagy (Gyromagny, 1984); *Az igazság a Nagy Imre ügyben* (The Truth in the Nagy Imre Case). Re-issue of first edition; Bruxelles, 1959. in: Századvég Füzetek 2 (Budapest, 1989).
4. The history of designating the '56 events in official and colloquial speech was briefly but perceptively remarked on by György Csepeli in his lecture 'The Twilight of State Socialism in Hungary' given at the University of California, San Diego, Department of Sociology, April 1990.
5. March 15th was the day when the War of the Independence and Freedom commenced in 1848.
6. For a fine analysis pertaining the attribution of meaning to past actions in the 'making' of history, see Lampland (1986).
7. Miklós Horthy was the Regent of Hungary (1920–44). Although he allowed a certain freedom to parliamentary forms, the system was essentially authoritarian (e.g. Horthy banned leftist parties). In 1944 he ceded power to the fascist extreme right Arrow Cross Party.
8. For a discussion of the historical roots of such communist assumptions in Eastern Europe, see Judt (1990).
9. In line with the more right wing attitudes prevailing in the countryside, the radio stations in the provincial towns showed more openness to anti-communist 'terroristic' propaganda than those in Budapest.
10. The Rákosi regime did not entirely dispense with the Hungarian history and culture. It is more appropriate to say that Stalinist politics was ambivalent and abusive towards this heritage. In the arts, for example, indigenous folkloristic forms were used to convey 'socialist' ideological contents, thus ruling out modernist cultural influences. As regards history and the appreciation of the revolution of 1848, the latter was canonized as part of the 'progressive tradition', yet March 15th was wiped out as a national holiday. This ambivalence may be explained with the rulers' apprehension about the obvious potential of March 15th to articulate national resistance.

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