

# **SYMBOLS IN TRANSITIONS: PUBLIC PLACES, REPARATORY JUSTICE, AND THE STATUE PARK**

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I present a new victim-oriented reading of the policies aimed at restructuring public places based on the transitional justice and on the geography of memory literatures and on a normative reconstruction of past events. My main theoretical argument is that the removal of authoritarian symbols from public view can be considered in itself as an institution of reparatory justice, and that transitional societies have moral obligations to implement such policies, preferably with explicit reference to victims. In addition to this theoretical reasoning, I also explore its theoretical and practical limitations and I conduct a case study using essentially qualitative methods. I have decided to focus on the Statue Park of Budapest and my primary goal is to determine whether the theoretically and morally desirable victim-oriented considerations played a role in the decisions of the policy-makers. The result of this analysis is that the empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that victim-oriented approaches played a significant role in the decision-making process, but only in an implicit and marginal way.

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## INTRODUCTION

In transitional societies, the removal of a symbol associated with the overthrown authoritarian regime from public view can be an act of important symbolic relevance. In general, the restructuring of public spaces is also a practical and obvious way of dealing with the past. The removal of statues, monuments, and symbols associated with the old regime, the erection of new memorials and the changing of street names are visible and can be implemented relatively easily, and thus can be among the first policies which send the message that a fundamental and irreversible change is afoot in the society. Indeed, the usual interpretation of the legally structured methods of dealing with such symbols is that policy-makers want to disassociate the new democratic order from the practices and the crimes of the previous regime. But I believe that an important element is missing from these interpretations, namely reference to those who have suffered under the repressive system. Therefore, based on the transitional justice and on the geography of memory literatures and on a normative reconstruction of past events, I present a new victim-oriented reading of the policies aimed at restructuring public places. My main argument is that the removal of authoritarian symbols from public view can be considered in itself as an institution of reparatory justice, and that transitional societies have moral obligations to implement such policies, preferably with explicit reference to victims. Importantly, this alternative justification is not intended to replace or nullify existing valid considerations. It rather offers additional grounds for the relevant policies, and I believe that it is of crucial complementary value for them.

Although the restructuring of public places may at first sight appear to be an issue restricted to transitional periods, it is in fact part of the “past that does not want to pass.” From time to time it reappears on the political agenda in most new democracies, sometimes

for crude political gains and sometimes for nobler purposes, which means that its relevance is not limited to the few years of the transition, narrowly understood. The topic also raises a myriad of exciting puzzles. What are the morally legitimate reasons for removing these symbols? What motivations are really present in actual policy-making? Which is the best strategy to deal with these symbols? Best strategy in terms of social support, reconciliation, or moral integrity? Why some symbols are removed while others are not? And many more interesting questions can be posed. Nevertheless, the fate of incriminated symbols has attracted relatively little social scientific attention, maybe because it is situated in the “grey area” between many disciplines which is so difficult to grasp. Thus the topic of the symbols in transitions is of great relevance and full of important questions which very few have attempted to answer. In this study, I focus on one aspect of the problem, namely on the removal of certain symbols interpreted as a form of reparatory justice, while creating connections to already well-developed fields of social scientific research.

The structure of my thesis and the works of previous research on which the different parts rely is the following. In the first chapter, I discuss some crucial concepts (such as the reasonable fear of the victims, the different types of authoritarian regimes, responsibility) and I briefly outline a few analytical tools developed in the geography of memory literature which are essential to the understanding of my argument. But most importantly, based on the classification of Elster (2004), I present a new categorisation of victims which aspires to incorporate the three main dimensions of victimhood (intensity, extension, and type of suffering).

Then I move on to the theoretical foundations of my paper and to my main argument in Chapter Two. The reparatory justice literature lies at the core of my research paper, which I first present in the wider context of transitional justice and later enumerate the functions and forms of reparatory justice, while emphasising the relevant scholarly debate about the



“closing the books” (Elster 2006) and the “moral duty to respond” (Dimitrijevic 2011) approaches. After a short introduction to the geography of memory literature, I build my argument where these two theoretical pillars overlap; I extend and improve the idea put forward recently by Swart (2008) about considering street name changes as a possible form of symbolic reparation to victims.

In Chapter Three, I explore the theoretical and practical limitations of my argument and explain their relevance supported by real world examples. This chapter is the turning point in my paper where the theoretical discussion gradually gives its way to an empirical analysis. The reason behind this structure is that I feel that issues with such high moral relevance need to be approached first from a normative point of view, and only with this normative core does it make sense to turn to empirics.

Therefore, after the main theoretical argument and its limitations have been explained in details, the last chapter is in fact a case study. For reasons of relevance and feasibility, I have chosen to examine the political decision-making process behind the establishment of the Statue Park of Budapest,<sup>1</sup> and to a lesser extent its artistic conception, its public reception and its development over the decades. My main goal is to determine whether the theoretically and morally desirable victim-oriented considerations played a role in the decision of the policy-makers. The methods applied are essentially qualitative, and in order to increase the validity of my findings, I use triangulation between the available sources of information (primary sources, secondary sources, personal interviews). The semi-structured interviews are a valuable source of information, but given that the events of interest happened long ago, the data they provide are treated with exceptional caution.

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<sup>1</sup> The Statue Park is a purpose-built establishment open to visitors consisting of 42 statues and memorials removed from the public places of Budapest.

Lastly, I conclude my thesis with briefly summarising my main argument together with its limitations and its conceptual, analytical and theoretical foundations, and with a short description of the case study and its main findings. The result of this analysis is that the empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that victim-oriented approaches played a significant role in the decision-making process, but only in an implicit and marginal way. Finally, I outline possible directions for further research in the wider topic and within the narrower boundaries of this research paper.

## CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTS AND ANALYTICAL TOOLS

### *1.1 Concepts*

Before embarking on the detailed argument of my paper, I clarify the most important concepts and present some useful analytical tools in this chapter. First of all, by the term ‘public places’ I essentially mean streets, squares, and the façades of government buildings, but in the wider sense they include the interior of publicly accessible establishments. In my view, the symbols of an authoritarian regime displayed in public places may be statues, memorials, and street names with explicit political content referring to the official ideas and ideals. For example, even a small ornamental five-pointed red star in a state-owned cultural centre can be considered as such.

Furthermore, I find it important to differentiate between different types of authoritarian regimes which helps understand my comments about the classification of victims that I propose in the next section. For the purposes of that argument, a simple one-dimensional categorisation of authoritarian systems, based on the degree of repressiveness, is sufficient. On one end of the spectrum lie hard dictatorships, which do not shy away from using overt force and repression to crush dissent; while on the other end, consolidated or normalised authoritarian regimes rely on indirect and less visible methods to silent opposition and only to the degree which is necessary for preserving the dominance of the official ideology. In-between are mild dictatorships or semi-consolidated authoritarian regimes, with differing degrees of overt repression against and silent suppression of the resistance.

A minor clarification is owed to the notion “reasonable fear of the victims.” Developed by Linda Radzik, it originally means that those whose social group has been the target and the victim of serious violations of human rights may have good reason to fear the people in whose name the crimes have been committed. Radzik (2001) argued that “even non-perpetrating members of the wrongdoing group will be objects of reasonable fear, even they have duties to respond” (467). In my reading, this term can be understood as a concept and it means, within the context of this paper, that if the symbols of the authoritarian regime remain in their original place victims may have reason to be afraid that the hostile practices and ideas of the past regime also persist.

Additionally, I feel the need to discuss some words whose meanings are unclear or intermingled in their everyday usage, but important clarifications nonetheless must be made for technical purposes. For instance, there are many ways to interpret the words ‘responsible’ and ‘responsibility.’ Especially in the theoretical part about the duties of transitional governments towards victims, I rely heavily on the distinction between the three different understandings of responsibility as explained by Velasquez (1991). First, the term may denote the quality of character by meaning that someone is reliable or trustworthy. Second, responsibility in the forward-looking sense is used to mean duty or obligation, something that an agent is required to do. And last, the backward-looking meaning of the term is “used to indicate that an action or its consequences are attributable to a certain agent” (112).

Furthermore, there are other common words which need to be carefully defined and analytically delineated from each other so that one may make sense of the nature of these duties. Firstly, by regret I mean “sadness that you feel about something, especially because you wish it had not happened,”<sup>2</sup> which does not involve self-blame. Shame is a feeling somewhat more subtle and powerful, and signifies higher emotional engagement with those

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<sup>2</sup> Definition from the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English.

suffering from the undesired events; the person does not blame himself or thinks of himself as being causally linked to their misfortune, but neither he is completely detached and independent from their lives. Finally, for the purposes of this paper, apology is the expression of sadness for what one has done and for the actions one holds himself causally responsible. Note that there is significant overlap in the daily usage of these words, and real life feelings are perhaps always more complex and volatile, so the distinction presented above should be treated as purely analytical. Additionally, many understandings and detailed treatises of regret, shame, and apology exist in the relevant philosophical and moral literature;<sup>3</sup> but I believe that, given the purposes of this paper, a more nuanced categorisation is not required, and engaging in this literature would render my argument unnecessarily complex.

## ***1.2 Victims***

Arguably the most important conceptual clarification I need to make at the beginning of my analysis is the identification of the group called ‘victims of the authoritarian regime.’ In this respect, I rely heavily on the classification outlined by Elster (2004), who distinguished between victims according to the type of their suffering. Since victims become members of the “victimised group” by suffering some grave injustices, making differences between them based on the different ways they suffered seems to be intuitive, which is of course highly dependent on the types of injustices committed. The first type of suffering described by Elster is material suffering, which is generally the destruction or the confiscation of property. Secondly, personal suffering is “harm to life, body, or liberty” (168). Lastly, the category of intangible suffering “consists of the lack or loss of opportunities” (168). This subtle and elusive category basically covers the cases when “under an autocratic regime, certain opportunities may be denied to all citizens, denied to specific

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<sup>3</sup> See for example Smith (2008), Barkan and Karn (2006), and Linda Radzik (2009).

groups, or restricted to a privileged elite” (180), and is centred on the idea that these less visible injustices in themselves can lead to harm and thus to victimhood.

I build upon the insights of this useful classification while attempting to construct categories more suitable for the purposes of this analysis. As mentioned above, in this paper I embark on the normative reconstruction of past events; more specifically, I would like to identify some moral aspects of the past which could have (or should have) motivated the political decision-makers of transitional societies to deal with the symbols of the past regime on display in public spaces in some way. Therefore, in the classification of victims, I should rely on a conceptual framework in which the relevant decisions of policy-makers can be the most appropriately understood. More simply, given that policies of reparatory justice also take into account other dimensions of victimhood besides the type of suffering, a good framework for the analysis of the relevant decision-making would include these other possible considerations as well.

Along with the type of suffering, I specify two other dimensions of victimhood based on my own understanding of the concept. For the purposes of this thesis, the number of people (or rather the proportion of the population) affected by a certain injustice will be henceforth referred to as the extension of the suffering, while the intensity of the suffering will denote how much suffering the given injustice caused to the affected victims.<sup>4</sup> The way I see it, reparatory justice is (and should be) as least as much concerned with the intensity and the extension as with the type of suffering. For this reason, I propose an alternative categorisation of victims which mainly distinguishes between victims based on the intensity and the extension of suffering, but also takes into account the different types of suffering to a certain extent. Admittedly, by combining these three analytically distinct features of suffering

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<sup>4</sup> Note that this distinction between the different dimensions of suffering makes only analytical sense, as in reality the levels and dimensions of victimhood are highly interconnected and are hard to define or measure.

into a single classification, the proposed conceptual framework is inevitably less precise and more ambiguous than the those categorisations which rely on only one of them. However, I believe that the advantages of this eclectic view with its wider scope outweigh the losses imposed by some potential problems with clarity, at least in the context of this paper.

In the categorisation that I propose, the first group of victims consists of those people who are exposed to the most extreme suffering conceivable: those who are unrightfully imprisoned for an extended period of time, who are forced to live in inhumane conditions, who are subject to torture or to indirect bodily harm, or who are even killed during the authoritarian regime. Members of this group suffer from severe personal harm, which may or may not be coupled with material loss.<sup>5</sup> The second group is made up of those people who do not experience significant overt threat to their person or direct attacks on their existing property, but are nonetheless continuously discriminated against and are silently treated in unjust ways.<sup>6</sup> People in this category are allowed to carry on with their daily lives, but are treated unfavourably, are discriminated against and/or have to live under permanent uncertainty regarding their future. Again, the harm done to a victim in this group may be personal, material, or both, but essentially it is less severe and much more indirect than for members of the first group. The incessant but invisible intrusion on their lives means reduced prospects for life, which may also qualify as intangible suffering. Lastly, to the third group belong the victims whose loss is essentially intangible, being related to the opportunities which are denied to them or which they forego (knowingly or not) simply because they live under an authoritarian regime. These people are often perfectly satisfied with their lives; they

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<sup>5</sup> In some cases, the material loss may be so grave that the resulting destitution of a victim results in mental or bodily harm, thus indirectly causing personal suffering as well.

<sup>6</sup> A typical example for this group of victims may be the well-educated silent opposition of consolidated Eastern European communist regimes.

do not need to fear arbitrary discrimination, harassment, or persecution, and may not even be aware of the rights and of the possible life prospects denied to them.

Naturally, there are some regularities which may be noted within this conceptual framework, especially when one takes into account the different types of authoritarian systems. The first category, by the nature of the extreme forms of harms described, is at the highest possible level of the intensity of suffering. For this reason, people in this category may have the strongest claim to the acknowledgement of their victimhood and thus to the special rights owed to them in this respect. Moreover, in hard dictatorships, the proportion of victims falling in this category may be incredibly large, especially in the phase when a new political elite consolidates its power. In milder repressive systems, the number of victims in this class falls substantially, while in consolidated authoritarian regimes it is generally the narrowest category in terms of the extension of suffering.

The second category of victims is probably the most difficult to grasp and its delineation from the other two can hardly be based on exact measures comparing the intensity and the type of suffering between victims.<sup>7</sup> Typically, this class incorporates the members of a victimised group which is treated in the official rhetoric as despised and of questionable loyalty, and may even be singled out as a threat to the prevailing system and as an enemy of the society. They are not forced to leave their homes and their valuables in masses and are not physically harmed in significant numbers, but they are forced to live in uncertainty, they are treated unjustly, are discriminated against and are denied certain rights and opportunities which are bestowed to others.

The most acute conceptual problems arise with regard to the third category of victims. In a repressive regime, everyone is denied some rights and opportunities, which

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<sup>7</sup> I doubt that such precise measures can be constructed at all, given the complexities and moral ambiguities in the myriad of different cases, lives and fates in dictatorial, authoritarian and transitional societies.



means that in terms of intangible suffering (i.e. material gains which could have been achieved, or personal freedoms which could have been enjoyed, had it not been for the authoritarian regime) everyone can be considered a victim in a certain way. But that would indeed be a dangerous overstretching of the concept of victimhood. If everyone is a victim, does it make sense to talk about victimhood in the first place? “Watering down” the concept of victims in this way would lift the term to such a high level of abstraction that it would lose any relevance and meaning. Furthermore, this broad and weak sense of victimhood raises the question of whether the consciousness of the victims of their own victimhood is a prerequisite for the acknowledgement of their suffering and for the acceptance of special rights owed to them.<sup>8</sup> The independence between victimhood understood as a result of unjust treatment and the self-perception of victimhood is indeed a puzzle. A person against whom significant wrongs have been committed, but who does not see himself as a victim is just as easily conceivable as a person who (because of psychological problems or for any other reason) regards himself as a victim without any real harm done to him. In my view, the basis of the identification of victimhood should be the injustices committed, regardless of whether someone believes himself to be a victim or not.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding the ambiguities and shortcomings of the elusive concept of intangible suffering (already analysed more extensively by Elster), I believe that it is of relevance in some cases and that it is a useful tool especially in the context of normalised authoritarian regimes, to which the case study of this paper refers.

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<sup>8</sup> Naturally, this problem may exist in the other two categories as well, but I believe that it is in this third group that the great number of victims who are prone to such denial can raise significant doubts about the consciousness of the victims.

<sup>9</sup> Note that this reasoning does not imply that someone considered to be a victim based on the injustices committed against him cannot demand that he should not be *treated* as a victim. The way I see it, the right to refuse the special care and respect owed to a victim of grave injustices is one of those special rights which are due to victims on the basis of the injustices committed against them.

I find that the above classification can serve as a good analytical framework of my analysis, and that it is sufficiently robust to exceptions, even after taking into account its flaws and its limitations. The problems mentioned before were limited to the issue of the consciousness of victims and that of measuring the suffering of victims accurately, but another difficulty in this classification is the comparison of the intensity of suffering across different types of injustices. More simply, how can one compare different levels of personal and material suffering, for instance? And where does a person stand if, on the one hand, he suffers from certain injustices during the authoritarian regime (e.g. he is denied the freedom of speech, as a form of intangible suffering), but on the other hand he also profits from some other injustices prevalent in the social system (e.g. he receives favourable treatment in university admission procedures because of the social class of his father)? These questions are of course not unique to the categorisation of victims outlined above, but are dilemmas generally encountered in all attempts to find an appropriate definition for the term.

### ***1.3 Analytical Tools***

This section enumerates some analytical tools developed in the field of geography of memory which may be of use later in this analysis. First of all, different approaches exist to studying commemorative landscapes, of which Dwyer and Alderman (2008b) mention the three most prevalent. First of all, the ‘text’ metaphor identifies landscapes as symbolic systems which are “written and rewritten, read and erased by ‘authors’ and ‘readers’ within their own specific socio-spatial contexts” (169). Interpretations about the past and consequently about the meanings associated with different memorials change over time through social discourse. Commemoration is thus an active process through which the relevance of the memorial is sustained and gradually altered at the same time. Secondly, the approach which understands landscapes as ‘arenas’ focuses on the political competition

directed at influencing interpretations about the memorial and thus about a part of collective memory. “The contest over whose conception of the past will predominate lies at the core of the politics of memory” (171). Lastly, the metaphor of ‘performance’ is concerned with how “the memorial landscape is constituted, shaped, and made important through the bodily performance and display of collective memories” (173-174). The weakness of the geography of memory approaches, to my mind, is that they leave too much room for interpretation and ambiguity. If the meaning of places of symbolic relevance can be written and rewritten so easily through public discourse, what real importance do these places have? It seems to me that thinking about public places as having no lasting effect and no message in themselves whatsoever is too relativistic and flawed.

Szűcs (1994) explains the special status of the statues and the memorials erected in public places and identifies the different points of view which typically emerge when societies need to deal with them after transitions. Such statues with apparent political content are halfway between small symbols bearing the marks of the authoritarian regimes (e.g. small busts of Lenin), which can be considered as replicated copies and can be easily (and justifiably) removed from public view, and buildings of particular relevance to the ideology of the former political regime whose removal would be unreasonably costly. Statues in public places are unique, they are essentially works of art (regardless of whether they are good or bad, whether they have explicit political message or not), their removal can only be accomplished with significant costs, and their meaning is highly dependent on the landscape they are set in. Szűcs notes that with regard to the different points of view about the fate of such statues, on one end of the spectrum are the radicals, whose only concern is the removal of the statue from its original place and possibly its elimination, while on the other are the rationalists, who are convinced that time neutralises the political impact of these statues, which are anyway part of national history, regardless of whether for good or ill. In-between is

the museum-supporting view, which is ready for compromise in order to preserve the statues in their physical integrity, no matter whether at their original place or somewhere else. Proponents of economic pragmatism favour the melting of the statues and the reuse of their material for “real” works of art. Lastly, the ironic approach holds that the statues should remain at their original place, but their political message and relevance should be eliminated by making them seem out of place, grotesque, and even amusing, for which the supporters of this view have countless ideas.

Finally, it may be worth identifying the different fates which may possibly befall symbols and memorials during and after transitions. Forest and Johnson (2002), in analysing the changing landscape of Moscow, differentiate between four possible outcomes. On the one hand, some places may be glorified and considered as part of the historical prologue to the new national identity and thus as an essential part of collective memory. On the other hand, some may be disavowed, demolished or relocated and treated as pariahs for being in a way associated with some unpleasant part of the past. However, the real problem is posed by the memorials whose meaning and relevance is contested, because whatever happens or does not happen to them, they will be subject to public outrage. Last of all, in some rare occasions the past may be treated as past, which signals that the society has come to terms with both the positive and the negative sides of the meaning associated with the commemorative object and has become confident with the memory it represents.

## CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL GROUNDS OF THE VICTIM-ORIENTED

### INTERPRETATION

#### *2.1 The Reparatory Justice Literature*

In this part of my thesis I first present the theoretical foundations on which I build my main argument by situating my study in the transitional justice and, to a lesser extent, in the geography of memory literature, and by highlighting my contribution to these fields. Then I outline my argument in details for considering the restructuring of public places as an institution of reparatory justice.

The transitional justice literature lies at the core of the theoretical foundations of this paper. According to one prominent author in the discipline, “transitional justice can be defined as the conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterized by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes” (Teitel 2003, 69). In a more informative and broader definition of the term, the field of transitional justice is generally understood to refer to “formal and informal procedures implemented by a group or institution of accepted legitimacy around the time of a transition out of an oppressive or violent social order, for rendering justice to perpetrators and their collaborators, as well as to their victims” (Kaminski, Nalepa, and O’Neill 2006, 295). In general, policies of transitional justice can be categorised as either perpetrator-oriented and victim-oriented. Retributive justice is aimed to punish perpetrators and to hold them responsible for the crimes they have committed, and its most widely used institutions are criminal justice and lustration. Reparatory justice, on the other hand, focuses on victims in the first place. “Reparations is a general term that encompasses a variety of types of redress, including restitution, compensation, rehabilitation, satisfaction, and guarantees of nonrepetition” (Hayner 2001,

171).<sup>10</sup> Finally, investigating the truth serves both great branches of transitional justice mentioned above; shedding light on the wrongs that have been committed in the past is (or desirably should be) an important common denominator of both retributive and reparatory policies.<sup>11</sup>

The functions that reparatory justice fulfils are just as diverse as its forms. Importantly, bringing the injustices committed to the fore is in itself an acknowledgement of the suffering of the victims; telling the truth is the first and crucial step in bringing about reparatory justice. Secondly, expressing grief and compassion for those wronged can be considered as symbolic reparations to the victims, while the other forms have also specific functions (e.g. material reparations attempt to compensate for the suffering and/or for the loss of income on the side of the victims). Danieli claims that the goals of reparatory justice policies should be the “reestablishment of the victims’ equality of value, power, esteem, (...) relieving the victim’s stigmatization and separation from society, (...) repairing the nations’ ability to provide and maintain equal value under law and the provisions of justice” (Danieli 1995, 581). Moreover, reparatory justice has both back-looking features, “as it implies a rectification of past wrong” (Teitel 2000, 119), and forward-looking goals, as settling accounts with the past this way also aims to lay the foundations of a decent society.

Naturally, the many forms and the whole idea of transitional justice raise countless problems and questions. Criminal justice, lustration, and the question of amnesty are focal points of the social scientific and public debate about transitional justice. Questions about retroactivity, about the moral separateness of persons, about the application of the rule of law to those who did not respect such principles, about reconciliation and justice are some of the

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<sup>10</sup> Italics, present in the original, have been removed by the author.

<sup>11</sup> Note that all too often, unfortunately, the politics of silence and denial have proved to be stronger than claims for truth and acknowledgement. For good treatises of this problem, see Cohen (2001), Dimitrijevic (2006; 2010), and Schwan (1998).

most controversial. Although the most apparent dilemmas appear in the retributive aspect of transitional justice, the reparatory branch is also subject to criticism and problems. For instance, Cowen (2006) discusses the flaws in the logic of restitution, as well as the practical limitations and the moral issues involved, while upholding the overall legitimacy of, an albeit modest measure of, restitution. However, the most important debate is about the apparent tensions between the background-looking and the forward-looking objectives. “How can we start building a new and more just social order if we always have to look back and tear open the wounds of the past?” ask proponents of the “closing the books” approach. “On the contrary, how the foundations of a just society can be laid if past injustices remain unaddressed, and the wounds of the past are left to fester?” reply the supporters of the “moral duty to respond” view.<sup>12</sup> This debate is not limited to the victim-oriented branch of transitional justice; but discussing it further would need volumes a hundred times as large as this study given the extension of the debate, and it falls out of the scope of this paper anyway. But there is one particular aspect of the controversy which is important for my purposes, namely the idea that exceptionally grave crimes create special rights for victims and special duties for the rest of the society. Therefore, I consider only these arguments and discuss their relevance in the specific cases this paper refers to, without addressing the broader context of the debate.

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<sup>12</sup> For some of the most convincing arguments on both sides of the debate, see Elster (2006) and Dimitrijevic (2011).

## 2.2 The Geography of Memory Literature

The importance of symbols in politics and in social discourse has been studied extensively,<sup>13</sup> but the application of the concepts and analytical tools developed in this field to the borders of politics and geography (i.e. the importance of symbolic public spaces in politics) has become prevalent only over the last two decades, with particular emphasis on former authoritarian states. Early works devoted to this topic typically concerned the role of such symbols and places in shaping identities, especially in promoting nationalist sentiments (Johnson 1994; Nora 1996). By considering places of symbolic relevance and the shaping of identities, these initial steps inevitably turned more and more historical. By its nature, nationalism seeks to find –real or imagined –common historical roots and to establish myths around them; thus symbolic places which affect identities, especially nationalist ones, tend to reflect on the past. Consequently, social scientific interest in the symbolic power of commemorative places increased in the mid-1990s. In his seminal book, Nora (1996) coined the term *lieux de mémoire* (places of memory) which became widely applied in following works. In the same year, Azaryahu (1996) broke with the practice of focusing only on memorials and introduced the new approach of analysing commemorative street names.

Since these first attempts, geography of memory has evolved to a social scientific field in its own right. Comprehensive treatises have been published about the topic (e.g. Dwyer and Alderman 2008a), while research has become more systematic with more and more standardised and refined analytical tools (see Foote and Azaryahu 2007; Dwyer and Alderman 2008b). Numerous empirical studies have appeared about the change of commemorative places and of public memory in transitional societies, again with special emphasis on the shaping of national identities. This social scientific interest was doubtlessly

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<sup>13</sup> See Edelman (1964; 1988) for a comprehensive analysis.



inspired by a puzzling and unforeseen phenomenon, namely by the interest of foreign tourists in the symbolic sites of the former communist rule, from which the booming market of ‘heritage tourism’ has evolved (see Light 2000). Forest and Johnson (2002) and Gill (2005) analysed Moscow; Light (2004) focused on Bucharest; while Hungary, and most importantly Budapest, was analysed thoroughly from different perspectives by Foote, Tóth, and Árvay (2000), Kovácsi (2001), Light (2002) and Palonen (2008).

While relying heavily on the findings of these solid empirical works, mostly on those about Budapest, the primary aim of my research is to extend, improve and provide theoretical grounds for an interpretation put forward by Teitel (2000), and more recently by Swart (2008), which considers the changes of street names as a part of victim-oriented justice. Taking into account the cases of Germany and South Africa, Swart remarked that street name changes may constitute a legal form of reparation to victims if the new street names commemorate the crimes committed against them and thus acknowledge their suffering.

### ***2.3 Restructuring Public Places as an Institution of Reparatory Justice***

In this part of my paper, I extend Swart’s argument and apply her reasoning to a wider universe of cases. First of all, an important extension is that, in my understanding, the reparatory value of restructuring public places of memory is not limited to changing street names. I believe that any form of such restructuring which bears explicit or implicit relevance to victims<sup>14</sup> can be considered as an institution of reparatory justice. Secondly, I am convinced that the new street names and the other symbols which replace previous ones do not necessarily have to commemorate victims to constitute a form of reparation to them.

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<sup>14</sup> That is, street name changes, removals of statues, of memorials and of other symbols from public view, and naturally the establishment of new places of memory commemorating victims.

Simply removing a symbol which represents the repressive regime, its ideology, and thus its crimes, is in itself a form of reparation, even if the new symbol taking its place is not commemorative in nature. The act of removing a symbol representing repression, the act of condemning the ideas it stood for, the act of expressing regret or apology for the crimes committed in its name can all be a form of reparation to victims.<sup>15</sup> Thirdly, I build my argument on the moral aspect of the transitional justice literature; I believe that the victim-oriented approaches in the symbolic transition can be explained more appropriately on these moral grounds than in the legal framework and in the legal line of argument followed by Swart. Lastly, I extend the notion of the moral independence of the institutions of transitional justice (based on Linda Radzik) to the phenomena in question. This means that, as far as I am concerned, the removal of authoritarian symbols with political content should be treated as morally and analytically separate from other related forms of reparatory justice, namely the replacement of old symbols with new ones commemorating victims and the establishment of completely new places of memory in the honour of victims. The different institutions of transitional justice should not be treated as interchangeable, or as if they were in a trade-off relationship. Satisfying one aspect of the special duties imposed upon a society after grave and systematically organised crimes does not imply that other aspects do not need to be treated with the same care, that they can be minimised, or may not be addressed at all. These institutions are morally independent from each other, and a transitional society must fulfil its moral duties with respect to all of them with the same attention. The removal of symbols is a form of reparatory justice in itself, as I argued above, and this means that the enactment of

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<sup>15</sup> The difficult issue is that of determining whether these concerns were really present, explicitly or implicitly, at the time of the decision about the removal of the symbols in question. And even if the answer to this question is in the affirmative, in certain cases the extent of explicitness may not satisfy the needs of the victims, as some victims may demand more straightforward and more easily interpretable symbolic reparations than hidden messages. But this problem should be considered in the empirical part only, as this theoretical chapter discusses the possible normative aspects of the decisions.

other measures of reparatory justice (e.g. new memorials commemorating victims) cannot fulfil the duties of a society in this respect.<sup>16</sup>

The main theoretical argument and the core novelty of this thesis is that policies aimed at removing authoritarian symbols from public places after transitions can be considered as institutions of reparatory justice. Appeals for such policies by victims are legitimate claims which constitute one of the special rights on the side of the victims, and thus societies are morally compelled to respond to such needs. In the great debate mentioned above, I accept that the “closing the books” approach is found wanting in moral integrity based on the argument that grave injustices and mass crimes need to be addressed properly, regardless of the amount of time passed and of the current public opinion. Even consequentialist counterarguments, claiming that the result of such policies would be detrimental to the new fragile democratic order, lack sufficient moral authority, let alone empirical basis.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, by accepting that the dark crimes of the past must be brought to the light (truth) and must be addressed properly (retributive or reparatory justice), one necessarily realises that the response should take the form of special rights for the victimised group, and of special duties for the rest of the society.<sup>18</sup> The way I see it, these rights and duties vary according to the type, intensity and extension of suffering.

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<sup>16</sup> More simply, in the context of this paper it means that, from a moral point of view, it does not matter if victims-oriented considerations are present in other forms of restructuring public places, such as in the establishment of new places of memory commemorating victims. No amount of new memorials can compensate for not removing authoritarian symbols. The duties mentioned above can only be fulfilled with respect to the removal of symbols if a society really removes those symbols from public view and makes considerations for those who suffered explicit to the extent expected by the victims.

<sup>17</sup> Note that good empirical studies exist arguing that strict policies of transitional justice can increase the risk of failure in democratic transitions (e.g. De Biro, González-Enríquez, and Aguilar 2001; Elster 2004), but their validity is questionable at best (see Méndez 1997).

<sup>18</sup> I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Dimitrijevic, for this eloquent and analytically sound reasoning, presented in the lectures of his Transitional Justice course.

I believe that symbolic reparations are especially important and that they can encompass the key elements of reparatory justice. They can symbolise the realisation and acknowledgement by a society that something terrible has happened, the regret or apology that everyone feels about these grave crimes, and the resolution that it will not happen again. The first step is the realisation or the acknowledgement of the past crimes, which is the equivalent of telling the truth. The next stage is the expression of regret or of apology (depending on the different agents), the backward-looking aspect, during which the society moves from the realisation of the crimes to feeling sad (but not necessarily ashamed or causally responsible) about them. Finally, the society resolves that such monstrous acts will never happen again, which is a crucial forward-looking promise.

In my view, policies aimed at restructuring public places, if carefully planned and implemented, can send messages to victims about all three of these steps. Firstly, removing an authoritarian symbol with explicit political content from public view can signal that the society believes that the symbol is not fit to stand tall in public places because the past regime sullied it with its criminal actions. This is the phase of realisation. Secondly, as a backward-looking symbolic gesture, by removing the symbol the society can express regret or apology about these crimes; the new statue, street name or memorial, the inauguration speeches, the wording of the official justification for the removal are some of the opportunities when compassion for victims can be emphasised and can be made explicit. Lastly, the restructuring of public places can also be the message of present and future disassociation from the previous regime. In the case of public places, this forward-looking part is undoubtedly strongly connected to the realisation that the symbols of the previous regime stood for false ideals, but the resolution goes further by declaring that these wrongs will never be committed again.

Removing authoritarian symbols from public view is often seen as part of the process of condemning and breaking with the ideas and with the practices of the past (first and third stages of dealing with the past), but very rarely regret, apology, or considerations for victims are explicitly stated.<sup>19</sup> While I do not question the legitimacy of existing arguments, I propose an alternative justification for such policies which is not intended to replace the usual justifications, but rather to complement them to make them more coherent and convincing. The proposed theoretical novelty is more focused on victims, and thus fills the gap of the second phase, while giving additional meaning to the other two phases as well. I am convinced that the essentially backward-looking regret or apology is the crucial link between the realisation of past wrongs and the forward-looking resolution of “never again,” without which the process of facing the past is only partial and half-hearted.

So far, I have addressed the part of my argument which refers to why the society needs to consider (or reconsider) the policies in question with more attention to those who have suffered during the authoritarian regime. Now, I explore why victims may feel the need for extending the process of settling accounts with the past to authoritarian symbols in public places, and why it might mean a form of symbolic reparation to them. Firstly, as already mentioned above, removing a symbol from public view sends the message that the society believes that the ideas of the past regime were wrong and many acts committed in their names were grave crimes. This realisation can be consequently interpreted by victims as reassurance on behalf of the society that “they were right.” However, this implicit message may not be explicit enough or sufficiently clearly explained to meet the need of the victims. Therefore, the expression of regret or apology is important as an explicit acknowledgement of the suffering of the victims, which is again a form of reparation. Lastly, the presence of the

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<sup>19</sup> Naturally, such victim-oriented considerations may play an important role in forms of restructuring public places other than the act of removing symbols (such as in the establishment of new commemorative places). But as I argued above, these forms of reparatory justice should be treated as morally independent.

symbols of the past can bring back disturbing memories and may be a constant psychological burden for victims. In some cases, if past suffering and fear are constantly evoked, victims may also feel insecure in the present; if the symbols of the past regime remain in their place, they might feel that they have reason to fear that the practices and the self-justification of the new regime would not be significantly different. Therefore, the removal of these symbols from public view may help dismiss these fears and may reassure victims about the resolution on behalf of the society that such crimes will not happen again.

Note that the argument I put forward provides legitimacy to the removal of certain symbols from public display only, and restrictions on the private use of such symbols (e.g. on wearing a red star pin) is another issue altogether. The stakes and the methods of evaluation are different because in the case of private use one needs to take into account the seemingly irreconcilable objectives of preventing psychological harm and offence to sensitive people and of preserving the freedom of expression. Victims may be offended by the sight of someone wearing the symbols of the authoritarian regime, which may also evoke fear and disturbing memories. However, it can be argued that banning the private use of such symbols constitutes an unjustified limitation of the freedom of expression.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> For some interesting discussion about the wider topic, see Feinberg (1995), who promotes limitations to the free expression of opinion, a critique by Barrow (2005) arguing for a duty of not taking offence, and a response by Hayden (2006) defending the duty to respect others' sensitivity. There is also ample empirical evidence to show the lack of consensus about the issue. In an important legal decision, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in 2008 in the Case of Vajnai v. Hungary that the ban on the private use of the five-pointed red star in Hungary limits the freedom of expression. The main argument of the Court for deciding in favour of Mr Vajnai was that the red star does not necessarily refer to the Soviet communist repressive system, but it is a legitimate symbol of political parties in many other member states and of the international labour movement. Therefore, by failing to make a difference in its meaning, the ban is too broad in a democratic society. However, the Court failed to provide any suggestions on how to distinguish between the different meanings of the symbol. Moreover, the Court has never condemned the strict ban on Nazi symbols, such as the swastika, in countries like Germany and Austria, even though it too has many other meanings (for example to Hindu minorities). The same concerns of double standards and of freedom of expression were present in the debate in the European Parliament over an EU-wide ban on totalitarian symbols in 2005.

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE LIMITATIONS OF THE VICTIM-ORIENTED INTERPRETATION**

The argument I put forward in the previous chapter is broad and general, and there are several theoretical problems and puzzling observations which may limit its validity in certain cases. Relying on the numerous in-depth empirical studies already mentioned and focusing on the landscape of the city of Budapest, in this part of my paper I discuss some real world examples for which the practical application of the theory outlined above would not provide a fully satisfactory answer. First of all, the required degree of explicitness of victim-oriented considerations is a crucial issue. As mentioned above, victims may not be satisfied with indirect and implicit messages signalled simply by the very act of removal. If, however, more explicit references were made “obligatory” in the form of moral duties, the theory would become so rigid that it would strive to determine the fate of almost all policies aimed at restructuring public places. Applied in this way, the new approach would not allow for any legislative discretion and artistic freedom in the matter. Therefore, the way I intend my theory to be read is the following. Explicit references are welcome and are morally desirable, as they can be understood as reparations to victims, but they do not necessarily form a part of the duties of society towards victims. The duty to remove incriminated symbols from public places remains, but making references to victims explicit is only a desirable act. Therefore, a decision-maker does not have to say explicitly with regard to each removal that it is necessary in order to accommodate the claims of the victims, and he does not have to erect new memorials commemorating victims in the stead of each removed symbol either. Although the establishment of new places of memory in the honour of the victims is certainly welcome, and I would say that it is even a moral duty for transitional societies, it is morally independent of the duty of removing symbols associated with the previous regime. In simpler

words, there is no duty to erect the new memorials in the place of the removed symbols; they can be erected elsewhere, and as long as incriminated symbols are removed and new memorials are built somewhere, a society fulfils its duties. But naturally, replacing an authoritarian symbol with a memorial for victims performs a triple role, as it satisfies both duties and sends an explicit message to victims.

Secondly, an important shortcoming of the new theory is that it fails to capture the patchy and selective nature of the removal of symbols from places of memory experienced in practice. In other words, it does not explain in details which symbols should be chosen to be removed from public display, and which ones should not. An overall pattern observed in empirical studies about changing street names and memorials is that symbolic places more closely associated with the previous regime are more likely to be restructured. This suggests that different places have different degrees of association with the oppressive system and thus different chances of being accepted untouched in the new democratic regime. The street names and memorials of public figures not directly connected to the political establishment, of lesser importance or of extraordinary non-political achievements usually remain intact. However, interestingly, the degree of accepted or “forgiven” association with authoritarian regimes seems to be subject to volatile changes over time. For instance, although never publicly scrutinised before, two decades after the transition the Hungarian government suggested changing the name of the largest network of libraries in Budapest because the person after whom it was named, Ervin Szabó, had voiced his revolutionary ideas publicly and had played an active part in the Hungarian Socialist movement prior to the First World War. The new victim-oriented theory does not specify the “tolerable” degree of association of a symbol with a certain authoritarian regime, which –based on empirical observations –seems to be highly dependent on the prevailing public discourse and on political needs.



Thirdly, another observation of empirical studies is that the removal of objects of symbolic relevance has been most frequent in the centre and gradually less prevalent toward the periphery of post-communist cities. With respect to street names in Moscow, Gill (2005) gave two possible explanations to this puzzle; one is related to the problem of replacement and the other to the political affiliation of the residents. The former depicts the dilemma of finding suitable street names to replace the old ones, which represents a challenge to the theory described above. The new approach only gives justification for the removal of certain symbols from public view, but gives no suggestions concerning with what to replace them. Many of the analyses of the actual city landscapes view politicians as reluctant to arbitrarily choose the new street names, as that would resemble the politically motivated changes of the previous regimes. Consequently, they would rather revert street names to their former, pre-authoritarian version, which is considered neutral. Gill argues that as no such alternatives exist in the newly-built, peripheral parts of the cities, street name changes have been sparse in those areas. However, I am convinced that these replacements are similarly politically loaded decisions, as the changing street names back to an earlier “version” typically serves the purpose of constructing a new national identity around the glorious parts of the pre-authoritarian past, and of signalling complete disassociation from the previous regime.

Whatever the motivation behind the changes, nevertheless, the problem of finding alternatives to the removed symbols often emerges. The most prominent example in Budapest is Szabadság tér, a large square hosting a Soviet memorial with a five-pointed red star in the heart of the city. Palonen (2008) found that many initiatives to replace it with the interwar memorial of Trianon have been defeated since 1990 on the grounds that it would have revisionist and irredentist repercussions. I might add that any third solution would surely spark similar political outrage, as it would mean neglecting both of the sensitive memorials presently available.

The other explanation suggested by Gill is that name changes are more prevalent in the historic centres of the cities because these areas are frequented by relatively wealthy people (who mostly prefer a break with the past), while the periphery is populated by the poor (who are generally more supportive of the communist regime). The question arises whether it is morally acceptable to relax the original theory and to bend to the will of the local residents (after all, they are the ones who live there and see the symbols every day), or, more generally, whether it is practically possible to make politically neutral decisions about issues so closely connected to identity. The potential exploitation of the removal of symbols in the name of the victims for political gains is a real issue, and it may cast doubt on the practical usability of the theory presented above, unless a convincing argument can be presented on how to avoid such abuses of the victim-oriented approach for political purposes.

Another issue casting doubt over the appropriateness of the theory for practical application is that of the shortage of funds for the removal of the symbols of the past. Palonen (2008) remarked that in the cases when no sufficient funds were available for such projects, or when complete removal was economically unreasonable, often the meaning of existing places of memory was systematically changed. Such “metamorphosis” occurred when the Liberation Memorial was slightly transformed to become the Freedom Statue and one of the most important symbols of the city of Budapest. Its meaning was changed from glorifying the “liberation” of Budapest from German forces to commemorating independent statehood. There are, nevertheless, some failed attempts of transforming the meanings of places of memory: Light (2000) commented on the attempted but unsuccessful metamorphosis of Casa Poporului in Bucharest, seen as the giant complex of the megalomaniac Ceaușescu, to Palatul Parlamentului, a miracle of Romanian architecture. The relevant question is, nevertheless, whether these initiatives to change the meaning of existing sites, even if successful, are sufficient to fulfil the duties of transitional societies argued for in the theory.

Additionally, we must also consider the possibility when, according to the theory, the removal of certain symbols is necessary, but the act would violate some higher moral principles. A good example is that of war memorials commemorating fallen soldiers in cemeteries. According to Foote, Tóth and Árvay (2000), these places of memory have been left intact in Hungary, regardless of their sometimes aggressive and propagandistic nature. The Bronze Soldier of Tallin which commemorates fallen Soviet troops is an especially sensitive issue in Estonia because of its marginalised but substantial Russian minority, but the relevance of the statue is well illustrated by the widespread outrage sparked by its relocation in 2007. In such cases, the goal of doing some reparatory justice to present victims may be secondary to that of honouring dead victims of war, regardless of their situation.

Finally, probably the most difficult question to answer in the light of the new theoretical approach is how the past can be remembered as past; in what ways memorials reminding passers-by of disturbing periods of suffering may be placed in the city landscape? The simple answer is that past crimes may be and, according to some accounts, should be remembered as the dark side of history so that everyone will know what has happened and what the society should avoid in the future. Provided that additional safeguards are in place which ensure that victims may not interpret these memorials as a threat, as mockery, or as the glorification of the past, they are perfectly compatible with the theory of this paper. The Statue Park of Budapest may be a good example of such a highly controlled place of commemoration. It is intended to be an open-air “museum,” which implies some sort of emotional detachment from the object of commemoration, while many other symbolic safeguards are also in place so that the regime and its crimes with which the statues are associated are remembered as a part of history, a part with which Hungarians are mostly confident with and which they are not afraid to commemorate or to show to the world.

## CHAPTER FOUR: A CASE STUDY – THE STATUE PARK

### *4.1 Purpose of the Analysis*

In the previous chapters, I have presented the theoretical grounds for considering the restructuring of public spaces after transitions from authoritarian regimes as a form of reparatory justice to victims, and I have explored the theoretical and practical limitations of this victim-oriented interpretation. Thus far I have relied on a normative reconstruction of past events, presenting what moral considerations could have been (or should have been) present in political decision-making about the policies in question. Now, it would be interesting to ascertain whether these morally desirable motivations were indeed present in actual cases of policies aimed at restructuring public places.

It would be impossible to analyse all or even the most important cases of policies aimed at the removal of former authoritarian symbols from public view, and even a meaningful sample would be difficult to agree on. Furthermore, considering so many issues would necessary lead to thin conclusions and shallow research. For these reasons, I have decided to narrow the scope of my analysis and to concentrate only on the Statue Park in this chapter. Located on the outskirts of Budapest, this solution to the demands of dealing with the statues and the memorials of the communist era is in many ways unique and served as a reference point for other post-communist Eastern European democracies which faced the same, or at least similar, dilemmas. Therefore, as my aim is to acquire deep and thorough understanding of a limited number of issues, the study of the Statue Park (and to a lesser degree, the statues and memorials it consists of) seems to be the most reasonable and feasible choice.

The aim of this analysis is to determine whether the theoretically and morally desirable victim-oriented considerations were present in the decision-making process. Therefore, this case study is not a general descriptive analysis with the aim to explore all the underlying motivations behind the Statue Park, but rather a more purpose-driven enterprise specifically looking for concerns for victims in the decision-making process. As my theoretical argument concentrates only on the removal of the symbols of the authoritarian regime from public view, the case study is mostly concerned with what the official considerations were for relocating these statues and memorials. But as the afterlife of these symbols (their fates after the transition) may also be of relevance to victims, I find it important to include the artistic conception of the Park, its development over time and its public perception in the analysis which searches for victim-oriented readings of the way the symbols have been dealt with. Additionally, the act of removing certain symbols is very closely related to other issues such as what happens to the symbol afterwards and how the society interprets the removal and the afterlife of the symbols. In my opinion, making distinction between these interwoven processes makes only analytical sense. Therefore, in this case study it is worth examining the history of the Statue Park and its changing public perception over time together with the initial decision about the removal of the statues and memorials.

A further complication is that the Statue Park is only one part of the Memento Park. The other part, the Witness Square, is organically connected to it but has little relevance in itself for policies aimed at the removal of certain symbols from public view. Strangely, the "Boots"<sup>21</sup> in the square does make explicit reference to the destruction of a prominent statue during the Revolution of 1956, but this extreme form of removal does not qualify at all as a legally structured policy aimed at restructuring public places, which is the primary focus of

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<sup>21</sup> The "Boots" is the exact replica of what remained of Stalin's enormous statue after the angry crowd saw to its violent destruction on 23 October 1956, an event which became one of the symbols of the revolution.

this paper. Therefore, for the purposes of this analysis I see it prudent to speak of the park in its entirety (Memento Park), while making the important distinction between its two constituent parts wherever it is necessary.

## ***4.2 Description of the Memento Park***

The necessity of dealing with the problem posed by the statues erected by the previous regime with an explicit political message soon became obvious to the newly elected officials of Hungary after the bloodless overthrow of the communist regime. Violent attempts organised by radical groups to remove such memorials from public places became more and more widespread. As many works of art were damaged or perished as a result of these illegal activities, directly through the intentional destruction of the statues or indirectly due to the unprofessional and dangerous methods applied at their removal, some publicly acceptable and legally structured action clearly needed to be taken. A subtle dilemma presented itself, however. Removing (no matter how good or bad) works of art from public view for political reasons and rearranging public places along some ideologically motivated programme would have seemed to be no improvement over the former authoritarian practice. After the communist takeover, all references to previous political arrangements were eradicated from public places in an effort to remove all traces of the past, and thus all memories of the possibility of doing things differently. By destroying the statues of the communist era, the new democratic system would have committed the same mistakes and would have taken the same rigid and purely ideologically driven measures in this matter as the communist system it had succeeded. Therefore, taking violent revenge on these statues was considered to be to a certain extent a threat to the calm, cool-headed, and dignified image of the negotiated transition, and to the legitimacy of the new fragile democracy as a whole.

Furthermore, the attempts to restructure public places did not enjoy the support of the general public at all. Interestingly, many politicians at that time justified their decisions in favour of changing certain street names and of removing statues of political nature from public view by making references to the overwhelming will of the public, having supposedly manifested itself in several occasions. For instance, the important report of the Cultural Committee of the General Assembly of Budapest of 14 November 1991, which laid out a comprehensive proposal to solve this problem, began as follows: “After the local elections of 1990, finding a solution to the situation of statues and memorials of political nature in public places in a legally structured way has emerged as a widespread public demand.”<sup>22</sup> However, a large-sample survey with 1200 observations conducted in September 1992 by the credible Medián research group found that more than half of the respondents would have let most of the statues in its original place, while support for the destruction of these statues was well below 10 per cent with respect to every category of statues. Furthermore, 57 per cent of the sample believed that more street names had been changed than it had been necessary, and only 10 per cent agreed that more changes were necessary (see the demonstration of the results of the full analysis in Table 1 in Appendix A). Consequently, with a hindsight, the belief in the large public support which was assumed to back these policies seems to be entirely baseless.

The three factors outlined above –the reluctance of the new political elite to resort to aggressive and politically motivated actions, the relative indifference of the public towards the symbols of the previous regime, and the (mistaken) belief in the public will to deal with these statues –appear to have greatly influenced the policy decision which finally favoured the peaceful solution of the establishment of a park, where these incriminated statues could be displayed for everyone to see. The source of all these factors may be traced back, in my

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<sup>22</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

view, to the highly consolidated status of the communist regime and to the negotiated nature of the transition. While admitting that these reasons are oft-repeated, I believe that their importance is indeed hard to exaggerate.

As the primary aim of the policy-makers was to tackle the problem of these incriminated statues and memorials with the least political overtones possible, the Budapest Gallery was entrusted with the professional supervision of the competition for the artistic conception and for the detailed design of the Park. The Evaluation Committee favoured the plan submitted by Ákos Eleőd, who envisioned a Park with the motto “Not mockery; memento”<sup>23</sup> (Eleőd 1993, 61). He answered to the two most common types of criticism –to the one which viewed the plan of the Park as the glorification of the communist regime, and to the other which objected to the project on the grounds that it would stigmatise and make fun of the past –by providing a modest and sensible design for the Park without any political message. He believed that the indirect and subtle references would preserve the elevated artistic status of the Park, which is key for an apolitical place of commemoration, for an open-air “museum” of statues. His main line of argument is that these statues and memorials representing the ideas of the communist regime were erected to dominate the space, to mark the city for the ruling ideology. However, they do not simply represent the communist regime in Hungary. Their story is valid for any dictatorship, which all try to control the past and bend it to their liking. Democracy, on the other hand, is the only political system with dignity, in the sense that only democracy is capable of facing its past in a mature way. Therefore, when the statues and the memorials of a past regime can be placed in a park with no direct political intent (i.e. not telling people explicitly what they should think about the past), when the symbols of the past regime are not melted or destroyed, something important happens. At that moment, the park is no longer about dictatorship; it is about democracy and its dignity. “It is

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<sup>23</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.



a pleasure to participate in the absence of book burning”<sup>24</sup> (Eleőd 1993, 61), closed Mr Eleőd the short explanation of his design.

According to the original plan, the Memento Park consists of two parts, which are essentially homogenous. The Statue Park (see Illustration 1 in Appendix B),<sup>25</sup> on the one hand, with forty-two statues and memorials arranged in a thematic order, and the Witness Square on the other with the “Boots” and two buildings used for hosting catering, shops, conferences, and exhibitions (see Illustration 2 in Appendix B). The entrance of the Statue Park is immense with classical elements (see Illustration 3 in Appendix B), but there is nothing behind it, “behind the scenes,” which symbolises the vast emptiness beneath the impressive façade of lies. The statues and memorials are organised along three  $\infty$ -shaped walks. The paths turning back on themselves and the mathematical sign for infinity mean that these walks are with no end, that they always have to turn back to the Path. The Path connects the three themes, it is wide and straight, and it marches on bravely from the enormous iron gate; it embraces the Red Heart of the Park from two sides (see Illustration 4 in Appendix B), and goes on until collapsing abruptly into the Wall (see Illustration 5 in Appendix B). This is a reference to the idea that the arrogant and boastful ideology has proved to be a dead end in history. Before plunging into the extremely high and wide Wall, two erstwhile emblematic figures of Budapest (Ostapenko and Steinmetz, the one-time Western and Eastern “gates” of Budapest) bid farewell to the visitor on the great journey ahead (as they used to in their original places), which in fact lasts only a few metres more until its end.

Whereas the Statue Park is intended to be a place of silence, contemplation and commemoration, the Witness Square is a place for voices, sounds, and activity. It is presumably named after a popular film entitled *The Witness* ridiculing the Stalinist era under

<sup>24</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>25</sup> Also called as the “One Sentence about Tyranny” Park, with direct reference to the moving poem of Gyula Illyés with this title, whose ever line is engraved on the enormous gate of the Park.

the rule of János Kádár, but it may also refer to all those having witnessed the crimes of the authoritarian regime. Although it may seem as a conceptually different entity, Mr Eleőd has convinced me that the whole conception would not be whole without it. Its most important element is the “Boots” of Stalin (see Illustration 6 in Appendix B) which lies on the virtual line incorporating the iron gate in middle of the entrance with the poem *One Sentence about Tyranny* engraved on it, the Path, the Red Heart, and finally the head-on collision with the Wall. Both the Statue Park and the Witness Square are meant to capture one crucial moment, namely the realisation of the desire for freedom. It is more emblematic in the Witness Square (associated with the falling great statue), which symbolises that moment in the Revolution of 1956, while it is more subtle in the Statue Park, which is intended capture that elusive moment in the change around 1989-1991.

### ***4.3 Methodology***

By the nature of the research interest, the methods of the analysis are essentially qualitative in this case study. At the core of this empirical part lies the close reading of primary sources, complemented with the holistic interpretation of the content, which are probably the most reliable sources of information in this setting. I have systematically checked the relevant documents (the decisions of competent authorities, committee and other reports, political declarations) looking for hints of concerns for victims. I have attempted to find such references by looking at specific parts of the text, as well as by interpreting the text to identify the wider, general purposes stated in the documents, either explicitly or implicitly. I have chosen to analyse primary sources both at the macro and at the micro level of the texts because I believe that it may well be that even if in the stated purposes of a policy no explicit reference is made to reparatory justice in general, or to victims in particular, such considerations may still be present in the background; it is possible that implicit references to

victim-oriented justice remain hidden behind more general terms because of the often ambiguous wording of official documents (micro-level), as well as behind the more holistic interpretation of the texts. Thus I have paid attention not just to the “letter” but also to the “spirit” of these primary sources. Naturally, as the interpretation of this “spirit” manifesting itself in the relevant documents is mainly based on impressions and thus can be extremely biased, these implicit meanings identified in the texts should be treated with special care. For these reasons, I have not considered the implicit references I have identified relying on the “spirit” of the texts as actual manifestations of concerns for victims and for reparatory justice. Such fragile impressions cannot be the base of my enquiry for victim-oriented approaches in these documents. Therefore, I have merely regarded them as useful starting points of research which need to be clarified, as potential findings for which more evidence needs to be collected to be considered seriously. This procedure of basing these thin impressions on more solid grounds can probably be conducted by confronting these fragile findings with data gathered from secondary sources, from interviews conducted at or around the time of the decisions, or from personal interviews conducted over the course of this research project.

Secondary sources were also important in my analysis. I have taken into account articles published in newspapers and journals covering the decisions connected to the development of the Park. The news reports about the policy decisions and about the decision-making processes are by their nature interpretations of a kind. This means that the analysis of the interconnections within this collection of news reports is more likely to serve information about the prevailing public discourse than about the original intentions of policy-makers. Nevertheless, they are important sources of information, but any hints about concerns for victims identified in these articles should be supported (or refuted) by evidence from more reliable sources, such as the above mentioned primary sources, including interviews.

Furthermore, political declarations made by officials participating in the decision-making processes related to the establishment and to the development of the Statue Park, and interviews conducted with them at the time of such decisions are invaluable sources of information. They probably reflect most reliably what people involved in these decisions thought about the topic, how these differing opinions produced debates, and thus what arguments were present at each side of the public discourse. All in all, I am convinced that they can provide excellent and methodologically sound evidence for or against the existence of concerns for victims in policy decisions. Additionally, I believe that they might be even better suited for this task than traditional primary sources (e.g. reports, initiatives, and decisions found in archives), as many arguments and considerations which are present in the background may nonetheless be omitted from official papers, whose wording is often ambiguous and whose style is usually too concise to include references to detailed arguments or to dissenting opinions.

Lastly, I have found it useful to conduct interviews personally with the most prominent figures involved in the establishment and in the development of the Park. Interviewing has been subject to severe criticism over the last decade, not only with regard to certain methodological aspects, but also concerning the validity of any data gathered using such techniques.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, when interviews are used in social scientific projects, researchers should always give convincing answers to three fundamental questions: why interviews are necessary in the given context, what precautionary measures the researcher should take so as to ensure the good quality of the data, and how answers can be interpreted in a methodologically sound way.

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<sup>26</sup> For a good review of the relevant literature and for a fair assessment of the “radical critique” of interviews, see Hammersley and Gomm (2008).

The rationale behind conducting interviews is the following. They are naturally a new source of information, but that argument alone is not sufficient, as data of bad quality seems to me to be probably worse and certainly more misleading than no information at all. Contrarily, what I see as the primary advantage of conducting these “elite interviews” is that they might help me to interpret the official texts and contemporary interviews, and perhaps even provide information and hints for further research which I would not be able to obtain from other sources. As mentioned before, the wording of official texts, such as committee reports and political decisions, is often ambiguous and sometimes lacks the detailed enumeration of the reasons, arguments and motivations underlying the specific decisions. Furthermore, it is perfectly possible, even probable, that many considerations and arguments which were present at the discussions of policy-makers may not have been included in the texts of the official reports and decisions, and may not have even been mentioned in contemporary interviews, in political declarations, or in the news coverage.

In regard of the schedule and the structure of the interview, I relied heavily on the definitions and guidelines developed by Berg (1989). I decided to conduct semi-structured interviews as I already knew very specifically what I was looking for. This choice allowed for a reasonable degree of standardisation, and thus for comparison between the data gathered from different interview subjects, as the questions were essentially the same; but it also permitted some deviations from the strict structure of questions, which is important for the interviewer as it enables him to reflect on the answers of the respondents, to make them talk more on a crucial topic, and to establish rapport with the interview subjects. The interview questions were structured so that the respondent had considerable time to talk in general terms and freely at the beginning, while specific questions which are more relevant for the research project were asked later (see the interview questions in Appendix C). The first questions are shaped in a way to let the interviewee explain his ideas and memories in details,

while victim-oriented ones are more targeted and straightforward, as they are aimed to obtain specific information from the respondents.

I have intentionally chosen the interview subjects from the members of the former political elite who have taken part in different stages of the development of the park, and in different capacities, which hopefully widens the extent to which information can be gathered about the decision-making process. Appendix D gives a short introduction about my informants, and also discusses their relevance in the development of the Park. I identified these key people based on the history of the Park, looking for those whose support and efforts were essential to the project. My first attempt to establish contact with them was through their personal e-mail addresses which I could easily locate on the Internet; as advised by Lilleker (2003), in the letter I have explained the topic and the nature of my enquiry in broad terms, some details about the underlying research project, but I intentionally did not elaborate on the specific research questions I was likely to ask. It might have been a (methodologically, but I believe that not ethically) questionable move to omit references to the existence or non-existence of the victim-oriented approach I am interested in. Surely, this way interview subjects did not have the opportunity at all to prepare for these specific questions, but I feared that any such knowledge prior to the interview would have given them too much time to think about the “desired” or “socially acceptable” answer to these delicate questions; and such biases would have rendered the data obtained in the interviews even more fragile than it already is.

The interviews themselves were usually conducted at the offices of the respondents and lasted around thirty minutes each. Even though most of the interview subjects have excellent command of English, the language of the interviews was Hungarian. The reason for this was that one can express himself more easily and precisely in his native language, and that attention to some linguistic nuances and subtleties, which one may only be capable of in

his native language, was crucial. One interview subject, Miklós Marschall, would have accepted the invitation to the interview, but as he resides in Berlin, the only practically possible way to obtain his answers was in writing. This naturally narrows the methodological usefulness of the information provided, as some important tools which are otherwise at hand in the framework of an interview (e.g. unscheduled probes to get more information, pragmatic reordering or shifting of the questions, spontaneous answers) are foregone in such a situation. Therefore, the data gathered in these written answers need to be treated with extra caution, in the scientific sense of the word.

The information obtained in all these interviews, however, needs to be treated with special care. The most important obstacle is the time factor. Some decisions were made almost two decades ago, and even with the best intentions, subjects may not remember properly the motivations behind their actions, or may simply remember something that was not really there. Memory is a fragile thing which is constantly reinterpreted in the light of present events and developments. Therefore, most responses given in the interviews should be regarded as mere reminiscences necessarily shaped and influenced, to a certain extent, by the evolution of public discourse and by the developments in the personal life of the subject. Nevertheless, they are good and reliable indicators of what the interview subjects think at the present and of the current state of the discourse about the Park. Consequently, even if there was no evidence for victim-oriented approaches playing a role in the original decisions, policy-makers may view their decisions differently with the passing of time; and this possible change of heart can only be captured by personal interviews conducted at the present.

Another potential mistake with which one needs to count when dealing with such interviews is to lead the respondents in a way towards the “desired answer.” As the research question is very specific, I had to pay special attention not to press the interview subjects too much towards telling something about the “desired” concerns for victims playing a role in the

decisions, even if such victim-oriented approaches had not been really present at all. Therefore, I attempted to address this issue by asking only more general questions at the first half of the interviews about the motivations of the policy-makers to see if they mentioned the concerns I was interested in themselves. Narrow questions about the victims in particular were only asked later, and with as neutral questions as possible, so as to avoid leading the respondents to give an answer which they deemed favourable for the purposes of the interview. Even with these precautions, the responses given by the subjects who only “admitted” the existence of such concerns for victims after these specific questions were asked should not be taken for granted, and more references need to be found in other sources before such information can be justifiably considered as some kind of evidence.

Furthermore, there may be considerable differences in the way respondents understand the phrase “victims of the past regime.” Question 7 was included as a direct attempt to eliminate potential conceptual misunderstandings,<sup>27</sup> and it turned out to be very useful; although many respondents were at first surprised at such a seemingly irrelevant question, their answers at this part are essential to understand the responses given to more specific victim-oriented questions. Nevertheless, the worry remains that even if they gave a certain definition of the victims, their answers might have referred to different groups in this quality depending on the context of what they were talking about. For this reason, in an attempt to minimise conceptual inaccuracies arising from this problem, I resolved myself before the interviews to ask for clarification from the interview subjects whenever I felt that the social group identified as “victims” seemed to alter within or across answers.

Another potential conceptual problem I identified prior to the interviews was the possible blur between the two parts of the Memento Park. It turned out that the interview subjects were indeed not fully aware of the differences between the Statue Park and the

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<sup>27</sup> “Who are, in your opinion, the victims of the previous regime?”



Witness Square, while this separation is nevertheless essential for my research. Therefore, I began each interview with asking the respondents to indicate clearly whenever an answer to a given question applied only to one part or to the other, but not to the Memento Park as a whole. However, as none of the subjects made this conceptual distinction during the course of the interviews, I have to be sceptical about the success of this method.

Finally, as the interview subjects were involved in the establishment and in the development of the Statue Park at very different stages, at different periods, and in different capacities, I also felt the need to ask questions specific to the contribution of each respondent to the decision-making processes. This means a certain deviation from the proposed semi-structured interview setting, which would only allow occasional probes and interjections as somewhat spontaneous reactions on behalf of the researcher, but this relaxation is required to guarantee that the great variation between the interview subjects is not a drawback, but rather an important advantage.

To sum up, personal interviews with the former political elites are important sources of information and a useful basis for the interpretation of other materials. However, due to the many limitations of this method briefly discussed above, one should exercise great care in handling the resulting data. Fortunately, many sources in the literature on qualitative research methodology attempt to give suggestions on how to interpret the answers given in interviews so that one may arrive at scientifically sufficiently solid evidence. The conclusion of the review of the literature fiercely critical of interview techniques by Hammersley and Gomm (2008) suggests that one should “assess them [interview accounts] in ways that take account of likely threats to validity; and that, where necessary, we draw on other sources of information to check them” (97-98). I have tried to keep myself to both parts of this piece of advice. The second part, triangulation, is a widely used research method also proposed by Davies (2001) and Lilleker (2003) as a way of increasing one’s belief in the validity of data

obtained in interviews. “This means cross-referencing of data you have collected from interviews rigorously, firstly with data obtained from published first-hand accounts or other documentary sources, and secondly with published secondary source material” (Lilleker 2003, 211). As other primary and secondary sources are readily available, I have found it to be a feasible and highly useful tool during the course of my research.<sup>28</sup>

#### ***4.4 Analysis of Primary Sources and the History of the Park***

Public discussion about the future of the statues and the memorials which had politically significant meaning referring to the previous regime and were displayed in public places started at the very beginning of the transition. As early as 1989, art historian Levente Szörényi suggested the establishment of a park in Csepel Island<sup>29</sup> where all the numerous statues of Lenin could be gathered. The idea enjoyed support from some of the newly formed organisations, such as the FIDESZ party and the Recski Szövetség<sup>30</sup>, which had nonetheless different views on the purpose, on the place and on the artistic conception of such a park. As mentioned before, public authorities needed to respond in some way to the growing number of unruly illegal removals of statues carried out on private initiative. The first step in this direction was a legislation passed by the Parliament which empowered local authorities to manage the works of art on display in public places under their jurisdiction (Hungarian Parliament 1991, 109. §). The enactment of a comprehensive and legally structured plan was progressing painstakingly slowly due to the delicate nature of the question of removing the

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<sup>28</sup> Note that many of my reasons for not relying on primary sources alone in this public policy analysis are similar to those concerns highlighted by Booth and Glynn (1979); they emphasised the shortcomings of relying solely on British Cabinet records as these are 1) often “incomplete, and possibly misleading,” 2) a good guide on the “administrative processes of policy-making rather than on the causes and effects of policy,” 3) are sometimes “self-justificatory” (315). I believe that cross-referencing data across many types of sources should greatly increase the validity of my conclusions.

<sup>29</sup> The proposed destination of the statues was naturally also symbolic; the Csepel Island was a heavily industrialised part of Budapest and was promoted as a model socialist district.

<sup>30</sup> Literally means the Alliance of Recsk, the organisation of the former political prisoners detained at the labour camp of Recsk.

incriminated statues, and the problem became the most acute in the capital; but following several ultimata issued by civil movements radically objecting to the delays and their often violent demonstrations of force and determination, the Cultural Committee of the General Assembly of Budapest finally proposed a solution on 14 November 1991. After careful consideration and detailed consultation with the districts, the Committee suggested the removal of more than sixty statues and memorials and their placement in a new park established for this purpose. The report already indicated that the 22<sup>nd</sup> district had agreed to provide the, hitherto unused, area of land where “the works of art of documentary value”<sup>31</sup> could be displayed. The Budapest Gallery, under whose professional supervision the proposal intended to place the practical implementation of the project, quickly expressed several misgivings about the details of the plan.<sup>32</sup> Most importantly, “for professional reasons,” it called for “leaving a significant proportion of the works of art in question in its place. Their removal would make it more difficult for the future to understand and interpret the previous regime”.<sup>33</sup>

The General Assembly accepted the proposal of the Cultural Committee quickly, on 5 December 1991, and with relatively little debate.<sup>34</sup> The Budapest Gallery invited six prominent architects to prepare a plan for the artistic conception and design of the park on 5 February 1992, with intentionally very few guidelines and requirements specified. The

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<sup>31</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>32</sup> Document entitled *Complementary Notes on the Proposed Legislation “Suggestion on Resolving the Problem Posed by the Works of Art With Political Content on the Public Places of the Capital”* (translated from the Hungarian original by the author) without date or signature found in the archives of the Budapest Gallery. It is most probable that this document was indeed submitted to the General Assembly, as I stumbled upon it while scanning through thousands of pages of official letters, reports, and contracts. Still, since it lacks a date and a signature, there is a fair chance that it was not part of the official decision-making process; it might have been only a proposed objection to some points of the report of the Cultural Committee, and might not have been submitted to the General Assembly in the end. Upon asking Mr András Szilágyi about this (the one-time co-ordinator of the project at the Budapest Gallery, and also one of my interview subjects), he said that he did not remember, which is not surprising after such a long time.

<sup>33</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>34</sup> Compared to the report, the final decision included two more statues to be removed (Steinmetz, Ostapenko) and another (Marx-Engels) to be relocated unless one of the districts was ready to host it (in the end, none was).

Evaluation Committee finally announced that it favoured the application of Ákos Eleőd out of the three submitted plans on 28 May, while explicitly reasoning that the statues and the memorials that were to be removed from public space were “autonomous works of art, thus when relocating them, independently of their former function and as objectively as possible, the guiding principle of their presentation must be the objective point of view owed to any work which documents the past” (2).<sup>35</sup>

All in all, the official reasoning behind the establishment of the Statue Park at this initial stage of its development was mostly centred around settling accounts with the past in a mature and dignified way, establishing a place for commemoration and for educating future generations, and preserving the artistic value of these works. The conception of the Park and the decision-making process leading to this choice explicitly refrained from direct political messages. No references to the victims of the previous regime were made in either sense of the term at the first, and probably most important, part of the decision-making process.

Work on the Statue Park began promptly after the decision of the Evaluation Committee, but progress was slow due to the shortage of funds. The solution of the Park and the choice of the statues and memorials to be held within was surely a carefully framed compromise, but many still opposed this idea. On 11 August 1992, when the construction of the Park hardly began, the Alliance of Hungarian Political Prisoners demanded in a letter addressed to the Budapest Gallery that “the municipality reject the idea of the statue park – deemed to be expensive and superfluous –suspend and cease the works immediately, and remove the symbols and the statues [from any place which may be frequented by the public] which are intended to be displayed but are so far from the interests and the sentiments of the Hungarian people” (Szűcs 1994, 161).<sup>36</sup> This was the second instance<sup>37</sup> that a civil

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<sup>35</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>36</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

organisation of the victims of the previous regime, understood in the narrow and strong sense, raised its voice and asked for, even commanded, the removal of the incriminated statues from public places and took a much harder line than the mainstream political decision-making. Naturally, one cannot justifiably generalise from these views to the other groupings of victims, let alone to the victims themselves, but these are examples which demonstrate that some organisations of the victims of the previous regime actively attempted to influence the political decision-making process, and in support of the more hard-liner side of the debate. This finding strengthens the view that at least a significant proportion of the victims, understood in the narrow sense, did care about the removal of symbols from public places.<sup>38</sup>

After the initial determined efforts and high expectations, the slow progress on the construction site, the occasional critical voices in the public discourse, the financial difficulties, and the legal problems<sup>39</sup> surrounding the Park cast doubt on the success of the enterprise. As part of a series of other cultural events in Budapest, the half-completed Park opened for only one day on 15 September 1993, but the future of the second phase of the project, the construction of the Witness Square, became more and more uncertain. In the following months Miklós Marschall, the Deputy Mayor for Cultural Affairs, took issue with the apparently half-hearted implementation of the municipal decision and urged the completion of the project according to the original plans. He often made references to the domestic and foreign interest in and approval of the idea, to the “international importance” of the Park, which he called a “unique place of memory in Europe.”<sup>40</sup> His main intention was to

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<sup>37</sup> The other being the Alliance of Recsk mentioned before, which proposed the display of the statues of Lenin in the labour camp of Recsk with a quite direct political message.

<sup>38</sup> Naturally, this finding does not mean that the radical and strongly-worded commands issued by these organisations can be seen as the implications of the underlying theory of this paper, in content or shape.

<sup>39</sup> The legal debate about the ownership of the area of land chosen for the Statue Park dragged on until as late as 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author. Accessed on 01 May 2011 at the official website of the Memento Park at <http://www.szoborpark.hu/index.php?Content=Tortenet&Lang=hu>. This chronology was useful in identifying what the most important primary sources were in the case of the Statue Park.

convince the General Assembly to accept and support the Memento Park as one of the many on-going cultural projects for the World Exposition, scheduled for 1996, and perhaps that is why he emphasised the international significance of the Park. His efforts were rewarded as the Memento Park was incorporated into the official programme of the EXPO, and the timely construction of the Witness Square, the part of the project capable of hosting great cultural events, became a primary objective.

But the promise of massive public support was short-lived. In 1994, the new government introduced widespread austerity measures, and the whole project of the EXPO became the victim of these budget cuts. The construction of the Park halted, when even the first phase of the project (Statue Park) was far from completion. The issue of the Statue Park reappeared on the agenda in 1996, when the Cultural Committee of the General Assembly of Budapest voted overwhelmingly in favour of the proposal entitled “*Completion of the Statue Park Meeting European Standards of Quality*.”<sup>41</sup> Enjoying the strong support of Mr Vég, the new president of the Committee, the decision emphasised the value of the Park related to tourism as one of the primary arguments for the development of the site. Nevertheless, due to the resignation of Gábor Vég and to shifting spending priorities, the Park did not gain much from this short-lived resolution. Then the efforts of Szilárd Sasvári, the president of the Cultural Committee of the Parliament, provided new impetus for the construction of the Park; in 1999, he suggested to the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage that the construction of the Memento Park should be completed fully, and “its inauguration on 23 October 2000 [would be] of utmost domestic and international importance as an overture of the series of commemorative events.”<sup>42</sup> Specifically, Mr Sasvári emphasised in many instances how the

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<sup>41</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>42</sup> Accessed on 02 May 2011 at <http://www.szoborpark.hu/index.php?Content=Tortenet&Lang=hu>. Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

Statue Park would be capable of drawing the attention of the international community to Hungary, and of improving its image in the eyes of foreign observers.

After identifying the main arguments developed in the primary sources outlined above, it might have become clear that these attempts to revitalise the project of the Memento Park all invoke the interest and the positive approval of the international community as one of the main reasons for their support. Although these considerations played a part in incorporating the Park into the plans of the proposed World Exposition, they cannot be traced back to the original idea and decision about the fate of certain incriminated statues and memorials. Surely, the fact that the domestic audience was mostly indifferent and occasionally hostile to the whole idea of the Park, while the international reaction was unexpectedly positive and interested, contributed to the shift in the role of the Park, originally not intended by the authorities. The Park began to be viewed as much as a site of tourism and of international interest as that of commemoration, education and culture.

Largely as a result of the efforts of Mr Sasvári, the government renewed its interest in the completion of the Memento Park. Several ministers expressed their strong support for the project, usually mentioning the reasons already identified above. By 2001, all the detailed technical plans of the Park were ready; ministerial promises were made to provide sufficient funds for the construction projects; the problems related to the legal status of the area of land used by the Park were solved. In addressing the latter issue, the General Assembly stated that “the significant domestic and international interest, the [positive] reception by the media and the need to develop its cultural and tourist services justify the proposed extension of the Statue Park”.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Accessed on 31 May 2011 at <http://www.szoborpark.hu/index.php?Content=Tortenet&Lang=hu>. Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

But as the elections of 2002 came to dominate the political agenda, the hope for the completion of the Memento Park diminished. In the same year, Árpád Göncz, the ex-president of Hungary, attempted to save the project from passing into oblivion once again by addressing several letters to prominent political figures and urging them to back the construction of the Witness Square. Similarly to many supporters before him, he mainly referred to the Park as a “unique (...) museum in the world” with a “highly valuable artistic conception,” which “served as an example for the international [community]”.<sup>44</sup> But similarly to many supporters before him, the efforts of Mr Göncz were followed by widespread approval in terms of principle, but by no change in terms of available funds for the construction.

The apparent stalemate was broken when András Bozóki became the Minister of Culture in March 2005. With his help, the most important elements of the Witness Square could be constructed within a year and the Memento Park as a whole drew ever closer to completion.<sup>45</sup> Exhibitions opened in September 2006 in the newly-built “barracks” with the titles “*The victims of communism: Recsk*” and “*A hundred monuments of socialism.*” The inauguration of the “Boots” on the Square at 21:37 on 23 October 2006 marked the fiftieth anniversary of the destruction of Stalin’s statue; and thus the Witness Square, in the words of Eleőd Ákos, “with the “Boots” and the “One Sentence about Tyranny” in its axis” arguably fulfilled its role as the “guardian of the undying myth of the revolution of ‘56” (Szarvas 2001).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Accessed on 03 May 2011 at <http://www.szoborpark.hu/index.php?Content=Tortenet&Lang=hu>. Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>45</sup> Some parts of the original artistic conception could not be accomplished due to the shortage of available funds, but even since then the Park has been developing bit by bit.

<sup>46</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.



An important form of primary sources which have not yet been analysed are interviews conducted with those involved in making the decision and/or in determining the conception of the Park. Eleőd Ákos, the architect of the Memento Park, has given by far the most interviews in this matter. Naturally, he mostly commented on the artistic value of the design, many of which have already been mentioned in the description of the Park, but sometimes he touched upon the interesting points and the problems of the political decision-making process. For instance, his impression was that the original plans of the General Assembly were much more modest than his ambitious project turned out to be.<sup>47</sup> If further evidence could be provided for this issue, this difference between the intentions of the architect and the political decision-makers would be of high relevance for the research question. The nature of such a project is ultimately influenced by the targeted audience and the degree of publicity it tries to attract, and it would reveal much about the original political intentions if we knew how much the final conception of the Park was determined by the designer, on the one hand, and the political process, on the other. Furthermore, Eleőd made explicit reference to victims in one instance known to me in regard of the intended purpose of the Witness Square.<sup>48</sup> This statement is in line with the exhibition about Recsk that he supervised, mentioned above, which refers to the first category of victims. A more indirect reference can be found in another interview (Váradi 1994), which applies to victims more broadly understood as Mr Eleőd talked about “a man with a tragic fate who lived here and brings the drama of his life, ruined under the aegis of these statues, to the Park” (20).<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, in explaining the relevance of the poem “One Sentence about Tyranny” for his

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<sup>47</sup> He stated that “in 1993, the deputy mayor of the capital responsible for cultural affairs [Miklós Marschall] called me and said that I had disappointed them, albeit in a good way, because they had wanted a calm park far away from everything, where someone mowed the lawn now and then, sometimes a few people happened to stumble upon it by chance, and that’s it. But on the contrary, foreign and domestic visitors flooded [the Park]” (Varjasi Farkas 2001:28). Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>48</sup> “The heroes and victims of 1956 gave their blood for democracy; it is our shared responsibility and duty to honour this in a dignified way” (Boros 2006:47). Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>49</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

artistic conception, he mentioned the silence so important for the Statue Park and “pain, grief, powerlessness, shame, shock, anger, and defiance” (Eleőd 1993, 60). In other interviews, however, he did not mention victims at all (Szarvas 1994, Szarvas 2001, Varjasi Farkas 2001, Boros 2003).

To sum up, primary sources reveal no evidence which would support the (morally desirable) view that considerations about victims played an important part in the political decision about the fate of the statues and memorials with political message in public places. There are some identifiable implicit references in the artistic conception of the Statue Park, and there is some limited evidence that such victim-oriented approaches were present in the construction of the Witness Square and in the composition of its exhibitions. Although the Square is in many ways related to the Statue Park and complements it according to the original artistic conception, it would be hard to argue that there is a clear connection between the important message of the Square about the commemoration of the (narrowly defined) victims of the revolution and the display of incriminated statues and memorials removed from public places in the Statue Park. This finding, however, is based on primary sources only, and thus further evidence from other sources needs to be gathered until one can increase his confidence in it.

#### ***4.5 Analysis of Secondary Sources***

Contemporary news coverage is by far the most abundant of secondary sources, and of by far the greatest relevance to the purposes of this analysis. Newspaper articles and other news items may describe differing interests, debates and motivations which are otherwise not present in formal and concise primary sources. But most of these sources addressing the issue of the Memento Park stop short of simply describing the conception of the Park (relying on the plans of Mr Eleőd and on the information brochures distributed by the operator of the

Park) and the new and (usually fruitless) attempts to construct new parts of it.<sup>50</sup> By relying solely on the public announcements and on the text of the political decisions of policy-makers, and without investigative journalism, news coverage seems to be unable to tell me more than primary sources about the motivations behind the development of the Park.

Journal articles, on the other hand, usually contain something more than the simple rephrasing of primary sources, but this “added value” in this case turned out to be the personal opinion of the authors about the idea of the establishment of the Park and of its artistic conception. Pótó (1994) argued early on that the incriminated statues and memorials should have remained in their original place in the open for all to see; strangely, he suggested the planting of high trees around them as a gentle way of hiding them from public view which would have been worthy of a mature democracy. Szűcs (1994) was largely supportive of the idea of the Statue Park and of its architectural design, as well as Géza Boros, who conducted several interviews with Ákos Eleőd and wrote a comprehensive guide to the Statue Park (Boros 2002). Schneller (1994), on the other hand, while admitting the refined artistic composition of the Park and the handling of the topic in a modest and dignified way, claimed that the designer should have been less lenient and distant from the past. He believed that the impression of the Park did not appropriately reflect the feeling of hopelessness and oppression and that it should send a more direct and explicit message to the observer. In my view, this can be understood as a reference to victims, although it is not clear at which level of abstraction of the concept.

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<sup>50</sup> See Wehner (1994), Szarvas (1994), Akovács (1997), Vathy (1997), N. Kósa (2001a), N. Kósa (2001b), P. Szabó (2001), Haraszti (2002), N. Kósa (2002), Murányi (2003), Csider (2006a), Csider (2006b), P. Szabó (2006), Hamvay (2007).

## 4.6 Personal Interviews

I have conducted four personal face-to-face interviews and, as I mentioned above, Miklós Marschall sent me his answers to the interview questions in writing. Initially, I contacted other figures prominent in the establishment of the Park (István Schneller and Szilárd Sasvári), but unfortunately no meetings could be arranged. Although interviews are of limited value to this analysis, as explained in the methodological section, collecting more data in this respect is definitely a possible direction for future research.

The most notable and striking common feature of the interviews is that three of the respondents intuitively outlined a categorisation of victims roughly identical to the one presented above.<sup>51</sup> They all agreed that those killed or imprisoned as a result of their participation in the Revolution of 1956 were without doubt the victims of the communist regime in the first place. Then, those treated unfavourably, unfairly or even discriminated against belong to the second group of victims, who have weaker claims to victimhood than the members of the former category.<sup>52</sup> Lastly, Mr Baán and Mr Marschall believed that it makes sense to talk about the third category, according to which everybody was a victim. Mr Baán explicitly mentioned the level of social and economic development that could have been achieved had it not been for the repressive regime, which seems to me the clearest intuitive description of intangible suffering. Mr Marschall contended that “with a hindsight, everybody was a victim and a beneficiary at the same time.”<sup>53</sup> Professor Bozóki also identified this notion of broadly understood victimhood, but distanced himself from it by saying that “we would not get too far”<sup>54</sup> with this extended definition. Personally, I share the

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<sup>51</sup> A view shared by Mr Baán, Professor Bozóki, and Mr Marschall. Mr Szilágyi did not discuss his opinion about the different categories of victims in similar details.

<sup>52</sup> Mr Marschall did not mention this category.

<sup>53</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>54</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

misgivings of Professor Bozóki about the validity of the third category, but the fact that all three interviewees drew up almost the same classification of victims, without any contact with each other or encouragement from my part, is a surprising and exciting finding. Mr Eleőd identified only one category of victimhood in the context of the Memento Park, which he called “the country as a whole,”<sup>55</sup> which also qualifies in the third group as intangible suffering and as victimhood broadly understood.

Furthermore, the views of the respondents on whether considerations for victims played a part in the decision-making process seems to be strongly connected to the classification of victims they gave. Mr Baán and Mr Marschall shared the view that victim-oriented approaches, or rather the feeling of the need to pay homage to the memory of the victims did have a role in policy-making about the Statue Park, but it was by no means a decisive or primary factor. Mr Baán even stated that such considerations can be implicitly understood within the broader aim of disassociation from the past. As members of the Cultural Committee of the General Assembly of Budapest, Mr Baán and Mr Marschall were involved in the same part of the decision-making process (the important proposal of December 1991), thus the similarity of their responses should come as no surprise. On the other hand, Mr Szilágyi, who was active in the implementation of the first phase of the project and did not classify victims in details, explained that he had not felt that the public had perceived the removal of statues and memorials as a crucial form of “tending to the wounds.”<sup>56</sup> Lastly, Professor Bozóki, who had a prominent role in the second phase of the completion more recently, clearly stated that such considerations were not present in the decision. The voice of the Mr Eleőd, definitely the most important figure in the history of the Park, is crucial in this question as well. He talked about victims only when I asked him

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<sup>55</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

<sup>56</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

directly, but then he said that considerations for those who had suffered had been present in the artistic conception of the Park, but only in an implicit way, and he did not identify these approaches as crucial or one of the primary ones that he had had in mind.

It is important to note that I do not want to confront the opinions expressed by the interview subjects with my argument outlined in this paper, or to judge their actions based on the goals of reparatory justice I identify here to be morally desirable. On the contrary, I believe that the Statue Park is one of the most relevant and interesting “museums” of Budapest; its artistic design and the decisions about its establishment and development are one of the most impressive (and rare) examples of consensus and of relative political neutrality in the past decades. My most important objectives are to explore the motivations behind the decision-making process, to listen to and to learn from the arguments of those involved, and ultimately to discuss interesting points of differing opinions. Therefore, even if I found that considerations for those who had suffered were not really important in the mind of policy-makers in this certain case, I would feel all the more reason to present and promote my victim-oriented reading of the issue.

#### ***4.7. Result of the Analysis***

Although the results of the interviews need to be treated with exceptional care for reasons explained above in details, a very interesting and puzzling pattern emerges. Those who had been involved in the early years of the establishment of the Park (Mr Baán, Mr Eleőd, and Mr Marschall), when no trace of victim-oriented interpretations can be found in other sources of information, declared that considerations for those who had suffered had been present in the decision-making process, albeit to a limited extent and implicitly. Even Mr Szilágyi, who was less positive about the Park and the victim-oriented interpretation, did not rule out the possibility of its relevance in the decision. And interestingly, it was Professor

Bozóki who categorically denied that considerations for victims had been important in the project, even though it was with his support that the only meagre but detectable references to victims could be made. The Witness Square was built (with explicit reference to the Revolution of 1956 and more implicit to its victims),<sup>57</sup> and an exhibition about the labour camp of Recsk was held in one of the barracks surrounding it. His opinion did not change when I reminded him of these events later on in the interview. Also, as his involvement in the project is the most recent, I believe that his reminiscences may be the most valid of all four. But one also must bear in mind that these events which could be associated with victims took place in the Witness Square, and thus their implication on the interpretation of the Statue Park is dubious at best.<sup>58</sup>

The controversial evidence from the different sources of information leave me in a difficult situation to draw a fair and balanced conclusion to this analysis. Although the results of the interviews does not refute the existence or non-existence of victim-oriented approaches in the decisions which I have assumed from other sources of information, they are of sufficient authority to render previous findings questionable. I thus conclude that evidence from different sources of information suggests that victim-oriented approaches were present in the removal of the statues and memorials, and in the establishment of the Statue Park, especially shortly after the transition. However, considerations for those who had suffered were definitely not explicit, and they did not seem to exist as an autonomous motivation in favour of the removal of the incriminated statues and memorials; at best, they were only implicitly understood as part of other greater arguments (such as the need for disassociation from the past).

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<sup>57</sup> Recall what Mr Eleőd said: “the heroes and victims of 1956 gave their blood for democracy; it is our shared responsibility and duty to honour this in a dignified way” (Boros 2006:47).

<sup>58</sup> Note that Mr Eleőd has by and large convinced me that the distinction between the organically connected parts of the Memento Park makes no sense, even for analytical purposes.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, my main goal was to present a new victim-oriented reading of the policies aimed at restructuring public places during and after transitions. Based on the relevant works of the transitional justice and the geography of memory literatures, I argued that the removal of symbols associated with the authoritarian regime from public view can be in itself understood as a form of reparatory justice. I have come to this conclusion after the normative reconstruction of past events, during which I have explored what legitimate motivations could have been (or should have been) present at the time of the decision-making process. Importantly, the purpose of this study was not the pursuit of a descriptive analysis to determine the underlying motivations of the relevant policies. The aim of this enterprise was rather to give an alternative justification to complement existing considerations supporting the transitional restructuring of public places.

After outlining my main argument, I provided some theoretical and practical obstacles, in the form of abstract situations and corresponding real world examples, which may limit the validity of the theory in certain aspects. Finally, I conducted a case study in order to ascertain whether victim-oriented approaches were present in the decision-making process about the establishment of the Statue Park. I found that there seems to be evidence for these approaches being significant in policy-making, especially in the early stages, but only implicitly and marginally.

The reason why I have chosen this topic for my thesis is that I feel that many of the attempts to address the past were disproportionately concerned with retributive justice, while considerations for victims played a very limited role (especially in Eastern European transitions). But keeping in mind the moral independence of the institutions of transitional



justice for which I argue above, I think that this bias is completely unjustified and morally indefensible. Therefore, even if concerns for victims did not play any role in actual decision-making processes in transitional societies, it is still important to view, or rather re-view, the way people interpret such policies, even decades after the transition. I am convinced that it is never too late or futile to express regret, shame, or apology (whatever the appropriate feeling may be) for the grave crimes committed.

In conclusion, I highlight the possible directions of further research into the topic. The wider issue of the fate of symbols associated with the authoritarian regime in transitions retains numerous important and difficult puzzles, some of which are mentioned in the Introduction. But I believe that there are also promising opportunities for future research within the narrower approach discussed in this paper. Firstly, the theoretical argument could be expanded and further elaborated on so that it would overcome some of the theoretical and practical limitations identified earlier. Moreover, no amount of available information taken into account can ever be considered enough as new pieces of evidence can emerge anytime, which means that the case study could be subject to improvement in the future. For instance, interviews could be conducted with more people who have played a part in the decision-making process, and I believe that getting information from people who were critical or even opposed the plan may also be useful.<sup>59</sup> Lastly, the empirical part could be greatly expanded in scope by considering how decision-makers of other policies, cities, or even countries have coped with the incriminated symbols and what justifications they relied on.

One of my main goals when writing this thesis was to present a convincing normative argument for a victim-oriented reading of policies aimed at restructuring public places (within the theoretical and practical constraints specified), and to explain that it is

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<sup>59</sup> Out of my interview subjects, only Mr Szilágyi expressed mild criticism about the project. Obtaining information about what the motivations were of those who did not support the establishment of the Park may also be informative and relevant.

never too late to interpret these actions in the light of reparatory justice. Furthermore, I hope that this paper will open up some possibilities of relevant and exciting research, and that a lively scholarly debate will ensure ever better questions and ever better answers with regard to the fate of symbols in transitions.

## APPENDIX A: PUBLIC OPINION ABOUT THE RESTRUCTURING OF PUBLIC PLACES, SEPTEMBER 1992

Table 1. The percentage of respondents favouring different strategies with respect to different statues (translated from the Hungarian original by the author)

	Destruction	Transfer to closed storage	Transfer to a purpose-built park	No removal
Statues of Lenin	9	12	46	33
Memorials of Soviet Heroes	7	9	42	42
Statues of Marx and Engels	6	12	40	42
Memorials of the Hungarian Soviet Republic	4	9	38	49
Statues of the Communist Victims before the Second World War	4	10	37	49
Statues of the Communist Victims of the Communists	4	8	37	51
Memorials of the Communist Victims of 1956	4	8	34	54
Statues of Non-Communist Left-Wing Politicians	2	7	33	58
Statues of Antifascist Partisans	3	6	31	60
Statue of Ostapenko	5	7	29	60

Source: *Népszabadság*, 16 October 1992.

## APPENDIX B: THE MEMENTO PARK

Illustration 1. The Statue Park from a Bird's-Eye View



Source: Google Images

Illustration 2. The Project of the Witness Square



Source: Google Images

Illustration 3. The Entrance



Source: Google Images

Illustration 4. The Red Heart...



Source: Google Images

Illustration 5. ... And the Dead End



Source: Google Images

Illustration 6. The “Boots”



Source: Google Images

## APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS<sup>60</sup>

### *Clarification*

The questions I am about to ask you concern the Memento Park as a whole. But as we know, the Memento Park consists of two essentially different parts: the Statue Park on the one hand, and the Witness Square on the other. Therefore, I would like to ask you to indicate whenever your answers refer to only one of these parts, but not to the Memento Park in its entirety.

### *Throw-away questions to introduce the topic*

1. You played an important role in the establishment of the Memento Park. What did the Park mean to you back then?
2. What do you think of the Park today?

[for those involved in the establishment of the Park]

3. It has often been claimed that the original intentions of the municipality of Budapest were more modest, in the sense that the policy-makers envisaged something like a “cemetery for statues” where these monuments could remain unharmed, but hidden from public view. What do you think of this statement? How do you feel about the course that the development of the Park has eventually taken?

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<sup>60</sup> Translated from the Hungarian original by the author.

### *Essential questions*

4. Why did you support the removal of statues and memorials from public view in the first place?
5. Why did you think that it was a good idea to put the statues away in the Park?
6. According to you, what were the official considerations for this project?
7. Who are, in your opinion, the victims of the previous regime?
8. To your knowledge, did concerns about the victims of the previous regime ever play any part in the official decision?
9. Were concerns about victims important in your personal motivations to support the removal of the statues from public view?
10. Did concerns about the victims play any role in your personal decision to support the establishment of the Park?
11. Why was the “Witness Square” named like that? What does this name mean to you?

### *Closing Question*

12. What, in your opinion, will be the purpose of the Park in the future?



## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

### **Baán, László**

#### *Present function*

Director, Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary

#### *Role in the Establishment of the Memento Park*

As President of the Cultural Committee of the General Assembly of Budapest, he had a prominent role in the early stages of the political decision-making process and in the early development of the Park.

#### *Interview Date*

21 April 2011, from 14:00 to 14:45 CET

#### *Interview Location*

Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest, Hungary

### **Bozóki, András**

#### *Present function*

Professor, Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

#### *Role in the Establishment of the Memento Park*

As Cultural Minister of Hungary, he supported the development of the Park which was crucial for the partial completion of the second phase.

#### *Interview Date*

27 April 2011, from 10:45 to 11:30 CET

#### *Interview Location*

Central European University, Budapest, Hungary

## **Eleőd, Ákos**

### *Present function*

Architect

### *Role in the Establishment of the Memento Park*

He has been the decisive force behind the development of the Park over the last two decades. The artistic conception and the architectural design of the Memento Park were purely his work, and he was also responsible for exhibitions, memorial events, etc.

### *Interview Date*

27 May 2011, from 19:45 to 22:00 CET

### *Interview Location*

Millenáris Park, Budapest, Hungary

## **Marschall, Miklós**

### *Present function*

European and Central Asian Regional Director, Transparency International, Berlin, Germany

### *Role in the Establishment of the Memento Park*

As Deputy Mayor for Cultural Affairs, his support was essential for the project, especially in the early stages of the decision-making and of its development.

### *Interview Date*

Mr Marschall sent me his answers to my interview questions by e-mail on 23 May 2011.

## **Szilágyi, András**

### *Present function*

Head of Department, Budapest Gallery, Budapest, Hungary

### *Role in the Establishment of the Memento Park*

He was a member of the Evaluation Committee which determined the winning plan for the Park, and he co-ordinated the implementation of the early stages of the policy (i.e. the actual removal of the statues and memorials from public view and their transportation to the Statue Park).

### *Interview Date*

27 April 2011, from 13:30 to 14:15 CET

### *Interview Location*

Budapest Gallery, Budapest, Hungary

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