

FRAMING WARTIME SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN HUNGARY

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the contemporary Hungarian framing of wartime sexual violence (that was committed in World War II). It analyzes a novel *Denied* by Judit Kováts published in 2012 and its reception in the Hungarian media through discourse analysis. In order to find out the dominant ways in which wartime sexual violence is understood and framed, it uses feminist theories of wartime sexual violence and gendered nationalism that the author combines with the current state of memory politics of WWII in Hungary.

This thesis argues that wartime rape is generally framed in a nationalist and gendered way, in which wartime sexual violence is exclusively commemorated as a brutal crime committed by the Soviet soldiers. In this discourse women are only conceptualized as the symbols or reproducers of the nation, which gendered and nationalist framing is used to claim national victimhood. The consequence of this limited framing is the false memory politics of WWII and the suppression of Hungary's involvement with Nazi Germany. This research also points to the lack of feminist voices in the public discourse in Hungary about wartime rape, and the overall absence of critical thinking about gender based violence or violence against women.

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Introduction

Although wars have been accompanied by different kinds of sexual violence against women throughout the history, intensified public attention to this topic was played in the 1990s in response to the war in the former Yugoslavia. Before and after this, feminist scholars have drawn attention to the gendered nature of war (first Brownmiller 1975) that naturalizes violence against women, and argued that wartime rape is not a sexually motivated act, but is a sexual manifestation of violence and control (Brownmiller 1994, Goldstein 2001, Merry 2009, Seifert 1994). Wartime rape is often marginalized and silenced in historiography, public discourses and collective memory, but it is equally articulated and used for political purposes. The most common form of expropriating women's experiences of rape is for nationalist goals, in order to claim a nation's or ethnic group's victimization and violation through symbolic gendering of the nation (Massad 1995, Mookherjee 2008, Helms forthcoming). In these discourses women are conceptualized as symbols of the nation (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989), whose reproductive capacity is in the focus of nationalist interest, as they are constructed as the reproducers of the nation, who are responsible for the nation's honor and purity (Das 1995).

As a Hungarian feminist and gender studies student who is interested in gender issues and in the ways these topics are treated in Hungary, I have chosen to analyze how wartime sexual violence that happened during World War II has been framed in contemporary Hungary. I have chosen the case of WWII, because this historical period is still an issue that is part of public discourse and debate in contemporary Hungary. This public interest is also due to the fact that after WWII, Hungary became a socialist country and the history of this period was constructed by Soviet interests that silenced the atrocities that Red Army soldiers committed against civilians. In the Soviet version of WWII, Europe was liberated from fascism with Nazi Germany's defeat, and the Red Army and the Soviet Union were portrayed as heroic liberators in this struggle. This

became the official history of WWII in Hungary and in other socialist countries. After the fall of state socialism in 1989, revealing atrocities by the Red Army soldiers fitted into the general trend in East-European post-socialist countries to discuss atrocities of the “communist” regime and articulate suppressed voices (Mark 2010). In Hungary, the most famous account of wartime sexual violence in the post-socialist period was Alaine Polcz’s memoir (1991), in which she narrated this topic from a female perspective and also testified to her own experiences of being raped. Historical works also undertook this topic: Andrea Pető (1998, 1999, 2000, 2003) analyzed the public framing of the Red Army rapes in 1945 and contrasted her findings with the same cases in Vienna. Krisztián Ungváry examined wartime rape in the context of the military history of Budapest’s siege (1998) where he looked at archival files, interviews and personal accounts about Soviet atrocities against Hungarian civilians, including rapes and looting. A non-Hungarian historian, James Mark, also investigated the topic of wartime rape (2005, 2010), but he focused on how these rapes were commemorated by middle-class people during oral history interviews he made between 1998 and 2000. Mark found that the personal framing of this issue is informed by the interviewee’s political commitment and saturated with “political conflicts over the Hungarian past” (Mark 2005:136).

My research is following thematically Pető’s research, as she is the only scholar who examined wartime rape in Hungary from a gendered perspective, and I am also interested in the public framing of wartime sexual violence. At the same time I also use Mark’s argument, as I am interested in how the dominant framing of this issue overlaps with current political discourses of memory politics of WWII and nationalism. In this sense, my research contributes to the existing literature on Hungary in terms of gender, violence and history, as in the past ten years this theme has not been taken up by scholars. Theoretically it builds on feminist theories of wartime sexual violence, gendered nationalism and memory politics.

The overall guiding question of this thesis is how wartime sexual violence has been framed in contemporary Hungary. I argue that this topic has been framed in a nationalist and gendered

way, although the gendered aspect of war and wartime rape has been neglected, or to be more precise it has been taken for granted. This means that the wartime rape of women as a by-product of war's "nature" has not been problematized, but normalized. In addition, wartime rape in Hungary is exclusively commemorated and framed as an abuse committed by the Soviets soldiers, and this trauma has been nationalized. For this research, I chose to analyze a recently published Hungarian novel entitled *Denied* (Kováts 2012), and the novel's reception in the Hungarian media through discourse analysis. This novel is a female account of WWII in Hungary that describes the widespread rapes and other atrocities that Soviet troops committed against civilians. In addition I chose it because it brought the topic of wartime rape into the public discourse in Hungary, and considering that it was published recently, scholarly attention has not been paid to it. Although the author of the novel claims that she based this story on oral history interviews with WWII survivors, it is a fictional story that is constructed as a memoir, but interestingly in the Hungarian media this novel is referred to as the "truth" that happened in Hungary during WWII and received as authentic.

Besides wartime sexual violence as a central theme of this novel, I chose it for my research, because the very positive feedback that was assigned to it in book reviews was suspicious for me, as issues of gender based violence generally do not cause public attention and interest. Therefore in my analysis I both examined the framing of wartime sexual violence in the novel and the dominant ways in which the book reviews framed this topic. The overall finding of my research is that wartime sexual violence is exclusively talked about as a crime that was committed by Soviets, and its nationalist framing is used to prove the victimization of the Hungarian population, beside the other forms of crimes that the Hungarians had to face due to the Soviet soldiers' occupation and later during the Soviet style socialism. I argue that my analysis of the dominant framing in the book reviews challenge Mark's (2005, 2010) argument in the sense that there were no significant differences in how the reviews talked about the book and wartime rape on different political sides. This finding lead me to the conclusion that the memory politics as presented in the novel,

namely portraying the occupation of the country by Red Army soldiers as the biggest disaster in WWII, is a widely accepted and shared notion, as it was not criticized in any of the book reviews.

In terms of structure, the thesis has four chapters. In chapter 1, in order to contextualize my analysis of the contemporary framing of wartime sexual violence, first, I give a brief historical background of Hungary during World War II and its involvement with Nazi Germany. Then I look at discourses on women during and after socialism in order to show the reasons for the general hostility about women's issues and the absence of feminist political agendas in the post-socialist period. At the end of the chapter I look at how the memory politics of WWII in the post-1989 era is interlinked with present day nationalism and claiming the martyrdom of the nation, and how gender and wartime sexual violence fit into this memory work.

Chapter 2 provides the theoretical background for this thesis. I look at feminist and gender theories about wartime sexual violence, and complement them with previous research on wartime sexual violence in Hungary. Then I examine the similarities of wartime rape in Hungary and Germany in WWII and how this issue was treated and commemorated publicly. In the end of the chapter, as the novel *Denied* is perceived as authentic in the Hungarian media mostly due to its reliance on oral history interviews, I look at critiques of oral history as a method, to point out the problems with this understanding.

Chapter 3 and 4 are analytical chapters. In chapter 3 I contrast *Denied* with Alaine Polcz's memoir as both are first person accounts of WWII and wartime rape, although Polcz's is a memoir, while Kováts' is fiction. I am examining the two books' different framing of wartime rape and look at the similarities and differences between them. When analyzing *Denied*, I also argue that the novel fails in its author's stated aim, namely to 'come to terms with the past.' In chapter 4 I provide my findings of the discourse analysis of the book reviews of *Denied*. I look at the general framing of the book, then how wartime sexual violence is talked about, followed by a discussion of the silences and in the end I examine how *Denied's* memory politics fits into the

mainstream memory politics of WWII. As a conclusion, I argue that these book reviews are generally uncritical of the novel and its framing of both WWII and of wartime sexual violence.

I chose discourse analysis as a main method for my topic, because I was interested in the general reception of the book *Denied* in the Hungarian media, and what kind of social meanings and knowledge are produced about it, and in the broader sense about WWII, wartime rape, gender, violence and nationalism. For this analysis, I have looked at all the book reviews about *Denied*, and conducted my analysis following Tonkiss' (1998) guidelines. For finding the book reviews, I used the novel's Facebook page as a base (https://www.facebook.com/megtagadva?ref=br_tf) as most of the reviews are linked here, and also searched the internet for the ones that were not included here. The data that I analyzed covered book reviews from August 2012 to April 4 2013. I also examined interviews made with its author, Judit Kováts, discussed in chapter 4. Following Tonkiss (1998), besides the recurring themes, I also paid attentions to the silenced topics and omissions of these reviews. What I was interested in was not only how particular book reviews talked about this book or contradictions within selected texts, but rather to get a general sense of how selected themes are perceived and conceptualized according to *Denied*. My guiding questions for the analysis were: how is wartime sexual violence framed and understood in the novel and the book reviews? What are the main themes along which the book was talked about? What are the main issues that were raised according to *Denied* in the Hungarian media? Did the reviews find this book valuable? Are there silenced issues or topics that were visibly omitted?

Overall my research is a continuation of previous research about wartime sexual violence in Hungary with a focus on how is this topic framed in 2013. As the novel *Denied* cannot be seen in itself as representative for the understanding of this topic, this is the reason why I chose to analyze the book reviews about it, in order to show the general perception of issues of wartime rape, memory politics and nationalism in contemporary Hungary.

I. The case of Hungary

In this chapter, first I briefly describe Hungary's historical background in the Second World War and point to its involvement with Nazi Germany. Then, I will investigate the changing gender relations in the socialist and post-socialist period, in order to delineate what factors played role in the post-socialist context for the general neglect of women's issues and the lack of feminist movements and feminist political agendas in Hungary. At the end of the chapter I will look at the memory politics of WWII in the post-socialist period and how wartime sexual violence fits into this memory work through nationalist discourses.

I.1. Hungary in World War II.

Hungary's involvement in WWII had much to do with the outcome of World War I, which marked the end of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. Although Hungary became an independent nation-state after long rule of the Habsburgs, due to the Treaty of Trianon in 1920, one-thirds of the Hungarian speaking population was left out of the new nation-state borders and two-thirds of its previous territory was detached. This decision has been perceived as a loss of both territories and ethnic Hungarians, in addition meant an economic damage, according to the loss of its main sources of raw materials and infrastructures (Benkes et al. 1998, Száray - Kaposi 2006). The Treaty of Trianon has been a trauma since 1920 for the Hungarian nation, and the notion of "Greater Hungary" and its "historical borders" that were withdrawn after WWI are still issues that form a base for national victimhood and irredentist ideology for nationalist and right-wing political parties and ideas.¹

¹ The contemporary government, Fidesz also shows attempts to keep up the continuity of the idea of the "Greater Hungary" as it granted citizenship rights to those ethnic Hungarians who has Hungarian predecessor and speaks Hungarian, which conditions fits and favors those who were detached from the "motherland" due to the Treaty

After Trianon, territorial revisionism was the main guideline for Hungarian politics, a pursuit that was supported by the whole population. In terms of foreign policy the goal was to break out from the political isolation that was a result of WWI and make new political alliances. In Hungary's orientation towards the political right, the short lived communist dictatorship in 1919, called 'Tanácsköztársaság' played a role and set the base for strong anti-Bolshevik feelings and atmosphere. Hungary's shift to the right was also marked by the agreement with Italy in 1927 (Treaty on Friendship, Conciliation and Arbitration), and with Austria in 1931. With Germany, Hungary made trade pact in 1931. After the German occupation of Austria in 1938 (Anschluss), Germany became the neighbor of Hungary, and also Hungarian politics became more oriented towards Germany. As Germany supported Hungary's irredentist politics, the relationship between the two countries became tighter according to the first (1938) and second (1940) Vienna Awards, in which Germany offered important territories to Hungary, which had been taken away by the Treaty of Trianon (Benkes et al. 1998, Száray - Kaposi 2006).

Hungary became part of the Axis Powers in 1941 with the Tripartite Act, and joined the war on their side in 1941 after the bombing of the city of Kassa that was committed by unidentifiable aircrafts but were considered to be Soviet (Romsics 2012: 138). Even before 1941, Hungary's right wing and pro-Nazi politics is traceable due to the three introduced Jewish laws, that restricted the Jewish presence in cultural, political, economical and educational spheres, and from 1941 forbid the marriage between Jews and Hungarians. In addition the first discriminatory law, the Numerus Clausus Act was introduced already in 1920 that restricted the admission of Jews to 6% in the higher education, therefore long before the German pressure was made for anti-Jewish laws (Braham 1998, see also Ságvári 2002, Pók 1998).

Although the prime ministers frequently changed after the end of WWI, the power of the regent, Miklós Horthy, who was appointed in 1920, remained unchanged until August 1944. Due to an unsuccessful peace treaty with the Anglo-American forces that Hitler learnt about, German

of Trianon (present-day from Romania, Slovakia, Vojvodina, Ukraine), and also provides them the right to vote in the upcoming political election.

forces occupied Hungary in 1944 March. Although this historical event is conceptualized as an occupation, it differs very much from the country's later occupation by the Red Army, as Hungary was an ally of Germany, therefore in this case military resistance did not take place as they did not perceive German troops as enemy. While in the case of the Soviet forces, they were treated as enemy and a hundred days long siege was fought for the occupation (or in the Soviet's perception liberation) of Budapest. Regarding the German occupation, Horthy's power as a regent remained unchanged until October 1944. After Romania's change-over to the Allies, Horthy tried to establish a peace treaty and end the war, an attempt that became unsuccessful due to German forces that arrested and captured Horthy's relatives. Horthy was removed from his position on October 15 due to this unsuccessful peace negotiation with the Soviet Union, and Ferenc Szálasi, the pro-Nazi leader of the extreme right Arrow Cross Party was appointed, who received all the political power and became the "leader of the nation" (Benkes et al. 1998, Száray - Kaposi 2006).

It was under Horthy's rule as a regent that the deportation of the Hungarian Jews began (beside the discriminatory Jewish laws that he could have opposed as a regent) and overall about half a million Hungarian Jews were deported mostly to Auschwitz-Birkenau in under three months, which was the fastest process of deportation in the Holocaust history. However, Horthy stopped the deportation of Jews of Budapest after the mentioned three months on July 7, it is argued by Braham (1998), that in 1944 it was already known to the Allied powers and also to Horthy what deportation to Auschwitz meant (Braham 1998: 27). However, there is no public consensus (or recognition) about the question whether the collaboration with the Germans to eliminate Hungarian Jews was voluntary or forced, although according to Veessenmayer's (the representative of Germany, who helped Adolf Eichmann to accomplish the 'Final Solution') testimony at the Nurnberg Tribunal, without the Hungarian state and its representatives' help they could have never managed to deport as many Hungarian Jews as they did (Benkes et al. 1998: 219).

Hungary was occupied by the Red Army in 1945, and Nazi Germany was also defeated. According to the Peace Treaty of Paris, Hungary's territorial borders became the same as it was defined in the Treaty of Trianon. Within a few years, Hungary became a part of the Soviet Block, and Soviet style socialism was established in the country, with Soviet-supported government. Hungary became a People's Republic in 1949, which year also marks the end of the multi-party system and democracy (Romsics 2012). From 1949 socialist/communist dictatorship had been ruling the country and Soviet military troops were present in until 1989.² Under socialism, the official history of WWII was established by the Soviets, in which the Red Army soldiers were portrayed as liberators and any negative portrayal of their role and attitude during Hungary's occupation was suppressed. Hungarian state socialism ended regarding the revolutions in 1989 and the overall collapse of communism.

What I have delineated above about Hungary's history is a very brief discussion of its wartime background that aimed to point out its intensifying political orientation towards Nazi-Germany. The periods of different prime ministers in details were not analyzed considering that I wanted to provide a general historical overview, and highlight points to which later I can refer back as parts or rather omissions of Hungary's memory politics of this era.³ Now I turn to the era, that followed WWII and look at how discourses on women and gender relations changed during and after state socialism.

I.2. Gender in Hungary – before and after socialism

State socialism is very often referred to as a regime that emancipated women. This was in fact the ideology of communism, but many feminist scholars (Fodor 2002, Gal and Kligman 2000, Haney 1994, Zimmermann 2010) argue that in the real existing socialism the proposed gender equality

² The last Soviet troop left the country in 1991.

³ For a more detailed discussion of this topic see: Deák 2000.

did not come into realization. In fact, socialist regimes did change gender relations to some extent, due to their paternalistic nature they reduced men's power position in the family, by making the process of divorce easier and legalizing abortion.⁴ Socialist paternalism imagined the whole nation as a family, the head and father figure of which was the Party itself (Verdery 1996). Another important change was that women's involvement in the workforce became mandatory, although, what remained unchanged was the assumption of women's basic role as mothers, caretakers and unpaid housekeepers. In this sense, socialism maintained traditional family roles, although the socialist state introduced social policies and institutions that aimed to help women in their double burden, for example child care, maternity leave, public cafeterias, and kindergartens.

In the case of Hungary, which was an agricultural country after WWII, the 'catching up development', namely the fast industrialization of agriculture in order to catch up with the 'West' required more workers, therefore the incentive of women's entrance to the workforce was not only a policy to equalize them with men, but also an economic need and decision (Zimmerman 2010). Women's entrance to the workforce and their inclusion in the education system were the main factors that contributed to their proposed emancipation, although their gendered position in the domestic sphere remained unchanged (Fodor 2002, Zimmermann, *ibid.*). Beside the new requirement of paid work, the unpaid housework remained the responsibility of the woman, causing the notion of double burden. Zimmermann argues (*ibid.*) that different opportunities of paid work and state support was available in a different extent for different groups of women, according to location, qualification, and ethnicity. Therefore neither the gender equality existed in reality, nor the social equality, in contrast with socialism's official ideology.

How were gender relations formed by the fall of state socialism, and the political and economical change that followed it? Gal and Kligman (2000) claim that this transformation in East European countries was experienced differently by women and men. They examined how

⁴ Ceausescu's Romania was an exception from this pattern, for this see Kligman 1995.

the ideological concept of public and private and its gendered coding changed during and after socialism, and concluded that these concepts mainly gained their gendered connotations due to the gendering of the labor force and workplace. While during socialism, women were first drawn to the public sphere to the workforce, later were drawn back to the private sphere to fulfill the duty of motherhood, where they also had to contribute to the second economy. After state socialism, the economic change also caused shifts in the gendering of work sectors and division of labor force, when men predominantly occupied high paying jobs in private sectors, and women low paying jobs in the public sphere, that they often had to supplement with part-time jobs. Beside economic changes that caused shifts in the gendering of the workplace, the shift in politics from dictatorship to democracy also had gendered effects.

Like Gal and Kligman (2000), Haney (1994) also argues that post-socialist politics became a visible masculine domain. Like the old regime, these new democracies also established male dominated discourses about female duties, which were highly informed by anti-socialist ideology. The question of human reproduction and abortion became one of these issues of public interest in post-socialist CEE countries (Gal 1994). Susan Gal (1994) argues that instead of treating reproduction as an issue of women's rights, it was framed as a political and legislative issue. Gal analyzed Hungarian political debates around abortion, and showed how the question of reproduction became an issue of nationalist concern of the death of the nation in conservative/Christian discourses. Abortion was also portrayed by the right wing political parties as a remnant of liberal legislation of the socialist regime, which they opposed on the base of anti-socialism. In this sense on the political right, the framing of women's issue was informed by anti-communism and gendered nationalism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989).

Haney (1994) detects the same patterns in Hungarian political discourses regarding women's role as reproducers of the nation, in addition identifies the emphasis on the "sanctity of the family" and the political aim to give back the opportunity to women to remain at home – something that socialism was now seen as having taken away from them (ibid:114). However

Haney, through the examination of women's gendered relationship to the state during and after socialism claims that the two relationships do not differ as much, as one would assume. Pronatalist state politics, that has been a characteristic for the post-socialist period, is also detectable during socialism from the 1960s, although at that period it was coupled with emphasis on women's fundamental role as workers. Antifeminism or the hostile attitude towards feminism and feminists is another similarity between the two eras. Through her research during socialism, Haney detected that the words 'feminist' and 'communist' were even used as synonyms by her interviewees, that again shows the imagined relationship between the two ideologies, which common belief about the two's nestedness was brought over to the period of post-socialism.

The fact that women's emancipation has been conceived as a socialist achievement in the post-socialist period, partly justifies the general hostility against gender and women's issues. Goven (1993) argues that the roots of this hostility can also be traced in antipolitics publications in the early 80s that even appeared before the fall of state socialism. Women in this discourse were portrayed as responsible for social disorder, for being "powerful agents" of or alliances with the state, and for not fulfilling their feminine duties as mothers (ibid: 225). According to antipolitics' accounts, the family and the home (the "private sphere") was the sphere of independence from the state, the locus of resistance, that women betrayed by using the opportunity of getting divorced, that they could obtain with the same right as men due to the socialist family law (Goven, ibid, 234). Goven claims that the main trigger for the hostility against women from the 1980s onwards was the changed gender relation within the family, when not only men had the right and power over the family, but women also got the opportunity to decide to quit it. Goven concludes that the reason why Hungary lacks feminist movements in the post-socialist era is also due to the male-dominated perception of women who "become socially dangerous when they are permitted to leave the private sphere" (ibid: 236). Haney (1994) has the same conclusion about the hostility against working women that was coupled with the intensified

concern about the declining national birthrates that could be solved by women's return to their original, domestic sphere.

More than twenty years has passed since the fall of state socialism, and not much has changed in terms of gender issues. A study from 2010 that investigated women's political participation in Hungary concluded that since 1989, their participation has decreased compared to the socialist period, and the question of gender equality has not been a special agenda of any political parties (polhist.hu). Feminism as a political movement, and gender or women's issues as a political agenda are also absent in Hungarian politics, and female MP's general neglect to the issues of gender sensitivity, for example to propose attention to legislations' different effects on men and women are also absent. In addition, women's participation in the parliament is also very low compared to other European Union countries, in fact the lowest (polhist.hu).

As mentioned, gender issues lack political support and agendas, and although in past few years, the party LMP showed clear attempts to draw attention to issues of gender based violence, mostly domestic violence, the male dominated parliament and the ruling Party Fidesz generally show no interest in these questions. Their negative attitude toward gender issues can be exemplified by a case in September 2012, when the Hungarian Parliament had to discuss the question of domestic violence due to a civil initiative. More than one hundred signatures were gathered to make the Parliament to take up this topic on their agenda, because the Hungarian Criminal Code did not include domestic violence as an independent criminal offense. The governments' negative attitude toward this topic can be exemplified by their scheduling of the discussion for late night (because this issue was not found important enough to discuss during the day) and also by their prevention of the television coverage of the event.

Furthermore, the way in which male MP-s, mostly from the ruling party framed the question of domestic violence also revealed that they treat this question as a non-issue. One Fidesz MP, István Varga argued that if women would fulfill their primary duties as mothers and would give birth to enough children, then domestic violence would not occur (belol.hu,

magyarinfo.hu). Varga also draw attention to the threat of the ‘death of the nation’ if women do not follow his (and generally the ruling party’s) guidelines. In his monologue, Varga conceptualized women as biological reproducers of the nation through the logic of gendered nationalism (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989).

Although Fidesz showed no interest in the question of domestic violence in September, some weeks ago it turned out that one their MP-s, József Balogh beat his current partner and his previous wife. His party, Fidesz as a respond to this fact dismissed him from the party, however Balogh remained in the Parliament as an independent MP, and two weeks after the incident Balogh is still not prosecuted by the police. Even if domestic violence is a crime that some of their representative’s commit, domestic violence is not discussed by the government. The detailed analysis of these mentioned cases is out of the scope of this thesis, but I wanted to point to the general treatment of issues of gender based violence in the contemporary Hungary. There is a link between how domestic violence and (as it will be discussed in the following) wartime sexual violence is treated, as in both cases women are only conceptualized through their reproductive and sexual capacity in relation to the nation-state, and both are forms of violence are based on gender and power hierarchies (Das 1995). In these nationalist discourses women are only constructed as biological reproducers of the nation, in which their voices are suppressed and marginalized.

I.3. Hungary and memory politics of WWII

James Mark (2010) argues that after 1989, East-European post-socialist countries had common characteristics in dealing with their pasts. These common patterns included turning back to the pre-war era as a search for tradition and to “re-establish continuity of the nation”, events of reburials, removal of communist statues and memorials, and reveling the atrocities of the “communist” regime (xiv).

In Hungary, the most famous institutionalized form of dealing with the past is the House of Terror that was established in 2002 by the contemporary ruling-party Fidesz, which in contrast with its original ideology as democrats in 1989, later became a nationalist and anti-communist party. This memorial is located at Andrassy Street 60, previously the headquarters of both the pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party and after the Soviet occupation, the State Security Office (ÁVO)-and Authority (ÁVH). Although the House of Terror aimed to represent the crimes and atrocities of both fascist and communist regimes, it has been highly criticized for only demonizing the latter one (Mark 2010, Otto 2009, see also Frazon and K. Horváth 2002). Instead of portraying the atrocities of both regimes, the House of Terror concentrates on national victimhood and on demonizing every aspect of the state-socialism. Viktor Orbán, the leader the party Fidesz claimed at the opening ceremony of the House of Terror, the date of which incorporated symbolical anti-communist meanings (the eve of Imre Nagy's execution and Memorial Day for the Victims of Communism [Mark 63-64]: "The only honest part of facing up to our past is this House" (quoted by Mark 64).

The problem with House of Terror, as Lene Otto (2009) argues is that this memorial is established to form collective memory and authentic representation of the past, which representation is in fact very much one-sided and therefore partly false. In Hungary, the House of Terror is a "museum" that not only tourists visit, but also graduating high schools students as part of their history class, in order to become familiar with their country's past, however what they can get here is a false sense of the five decades before 1989. The problem is that the House of Terror fails to admit the country's contribution to its "double occupation" and Hungary's pro-German politics (Otto *ibid.*, Mark 2010). Instead, it portrays Hungary as a passive victim, as the textual narration of the room "Double Occupation" claims it:

From the mid-thirties onward, Hungary found herself in the buffer zone between the increasingly more aggressive Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, which by the end

of the decade once again became a power to reckon with. Allied with one another, and subsequently locked in a life-and-death battle, the two totalitarian dictatorships strove for a new order that had no place for an independent Hungary. After the outbreak of World War II, Hungary made desperate attempts in order to maintain her – albeit limited– elbow-room and to avert the worst scenario: German occupation. It was a great achievement that this eventuated only in the fifth year of the war, on March 19, 1944.⁵

This excerpt reveals and shows a dominant thread running through the mainstream memory politics, and its erasure of Hungary's conscious collaboration with Germany due to its revisionist plans, and that it was occupied due to the leaks of its political plan to get out of the war, when the defeat of Germany was foreseeable. In addition, it is also characteristic of this memory politics to shift the blame for killing Hungarian Jews to the German occupational forces and to the German appointed Szécsen-regime, and to minimize Hungary's responsibility as "acting on orders" (Ságvári 2002). However, the elimination of Hungarian Jewry gets little attention in House of Terror, mostly in written narrations made for and distributed in the different rooms, while other episodes during socialism, for example persecution of the church or forced labor in Gulag are emphasized as tragic episodes of the nation.

Where did gender figure at the House of Terror? As Lóránd (2012) argues, gender is absent from this discourse, the only occasion where it gets relevance is the room of 'double occupation'. Here, visitors can listen through a telephone to excerpts that are documents from the 1940s with diverse content, they contain both political speeches and music. As Lóránd claims, among them an excerpt from Alaine Polcz's memoir can also be heard that the author read out. The importance of this memoir (to which I will come back later in chapter 4), is the author's personal narration and account of wartime rape by the Red Army during the country's occupation, including her own. However, as Lóránd points out, parts were cut out of this monologue, and in the form it is exhibited in the House of Terror, it does not work as an autobiographical text, but

⁵ Official material from the House of Terror, distributed in the „Double Occupation” room.

gains a new interpretation and functions as a national narrative of victimhood and implies “metaphors of the rape of the motherland” (Lóránd, *ibid.*). However, the problem with Lóránd’s article is that she goes into too much detail about the House of Terror, the perception of Polcz’s memoir in 1990s and the memoir itself, but she does not present sufficient evidence about her argument. She quotes many parts of Polcz’s book, but only at one occasion does she point to the excerpt which was cut. The part that was cut out explains, that the Hungarian soldiers probably also raped women on the eastern front. In the end Lóránd argues that what the House of Terror is aimed to represent is the widespread rape of Hungarian women by the Soviets, therefore the gendered nature of wartime sexual violence and its targeting of women gets lost in a nationalistic discourse that aimed to emphasize collective national victimhood.

According to Mark (2010), after the fall of socialism the articulation of suppressed voices during socialism and silenced topics of victimization and suffering were revived in the public sphere. Breaking taboos and silences was a part of the common trends of establishing a new national identity that incorporates the notion of national victimhood. Experiences of victims/survivors gained public attention, and were portrayed as a form of social healing (Mark 194-197). According to Mark, wartime rape was one issue of this trend, but as Lóránd argues regarding the House of Terror excerpt the emphasis is not on personal or subjective experiences of rape, but on the collective suffering of the nation. Similarly, Andrea Pető (2003), who wrote several articles on wartime rape in Hungary by the Red Army (1998, 1999, 2000, 2003, 2012), also claims that after 1989 the dominant memory politics of the war was about the double occupation of the country and the Soviet troops’ looting and rape, the focus on which served as a basis for claiming national victimhood and to draw the attention away from Hungary’s Nazi past (Pető, 2003: 133).

The emphasis on wartime rape and atrocities of looting of Red Army soldiers was also informed by the era in which these atrocities gained publicity, namely forty years after the establishment of the communist rule, after which, the Soviet wartime atrocities became

interpreted as a sign for the later horrors of the Soviets, state socialism. As Fidesz became the ruling Party in 2010 together with the Christian party KDNP, the emphasis on creating a new regime that is strictly separate from the socialist regime and the previous left-wing government (MSZP, whom they portrayed as the direct successors of the communists), again became an important factor of their government's agenda. Their anti-socialist attempts are traceable in many of their political programs and legislation, for example by the establishment of a new national constitution (or as they call it "Fundamental Law") in order to break with the previous one that was introduced during socialism in 1949, because they designated the latter as "communist", even it has been substantially modified since 1989. The new constitution that was introduced in 2012 January makes visible the nationalist politics and political guidelines that Fidesz embodies: conservatism, heteronorativity (as they recognize marriage only between male and female), Christianity (as the importance of Christianity in the nations' history is highlighted in its preface), and anti-communism (as it declares that the roots of the Hungarian freedom is in the 1956 revolution) (kormany.hu). In terms of memory politics, they argue through the new constitution's text that the country lost its self determination in 1944 March, at the time of the Nazi occupation (which maintains the notion of the Hungarian nation's victimhood through WWII, and shifts the responsibility of persecutions against Jews to the Germans) and gained it back in May 1990.

My aim with this chapter was to give a background about Hungary's memory politics, its current atmosphere of anti-communism and the general pattern towards claiming national victimhood about Hungary's role in WWII. As I implied through this chapter, and as I will argue in the following chapters, wartime sexual violence is not framed as a gendered issue or as a form of violence against women, but as a crime committed by the Soviet army, which provides a base for claiming national victimhood.

II. Theoretical frameworks

In this chapter I provide the theoretical background for my research about the contemporary framing of wartime sexual violence in Hungary. Therefore I will first look at feminist critics and theories about wartime sexual violence. Then I focus on scholarly works that examined previous framings of wartime sexual violence in Hungary. As the occurrence of wartime sexual violence during WWII and its public framing in Hungary and Germany has many similarities, I will also compare these two cases. At the end, as my analysis is going to be about a novel that is based on oral history interviews, which method has been generally perceived in the Hungarian media as authentic, I will look at the specificity of this method and whether it can be evaluated as authentic.

II.1. Feminist theories of wartime sexual violence

Wars have been accompanied by different kinds of sexual violence against women throughout history; wartime rape, sexual enslavement, abduction, forced prostitution have been regarded as natural “by-products” of wars (Brownmiller 1975: 32). Although the forms of sexual violence varies in wars and conflicts, the common ground for these incidents is *war's gendered nature* that make possible and even legitimizes wartime rape (Brownmiller 1975, Cockburn 2004, Enloe 1994, Goldstein 2001, MacKinnon 1994, Merry 2009, Turpin 1998, Stiglmayer 1994). In contrast, the gendered nature of war is very often not questioned, but is taken for granted according to biological and historical explanations, as ‘boys will be boys’ or ‘men fight, women stay at home’, that build on essentialist assumptions of the sexes, and portray violence as a natural and inherent part of masculinity, and peace and passivity as feminine characteristic. As Cynthia Cockburn argues “sex roles and responsibilities are accepted, even idealized, as contrasted and

complementary. The power relations of gender, however, are absent from this discourse”(Cockburn 2004: 27). The problem with the taken for granted notion of war’s gendered nature is the normalization of the power structures and hierarchies that it creates and reinforces: male domination over women. In addition Cockburn (2004) argues that violence is a continuum, and finds the sharp distinction between peace and wartime useless, because gendered violence is present not only during the period of a conflict, but in pre-and post-war phases, only in different forms. Cockburn’s idea of the ‘continuum of violence’ is important because it points to the structural nature of gender based violence on the one hand, and because it highlights that wartime violence against women is not an isolated phenomenon, but a continuation and exaggeration of ‘everyday’ life violence.

Feminist scholars have argued that wartime rape is not about sexuality, but is a sexualized form of violence, control, and a “way hierarchies of power are formed and maintained” (Merry 2009: 157, see also Brownmiller 1994, Goldstein 2001, Merry 2009, Seifert 1994). It is mostly contextual how these rapes are conceptualized by perpetrators and in the public during and after the conflict or war, still there are common characteristics. Ruth Seifert (1994) distinguishes three explanations for wartime rape, first, when women of the losing half are conceptualized as booty by the winners, a practice that is conceptualized and naturalized as a form of the “rules of the game” (Seifert: 58). Due to this explanation, the enemy’s women become legalized trophies of the conquerors. The second, when raping the enemy’s women serves as a communication between the opposing male groups, in order to show that the male enemy cannot protect the women of their community. In this case, raping the enemy’s women also serves as a source to humiliate and challenge the masculinity of the enemy’s community. Third, when the performance of rape is conceived as an expression of masculinity.

In addition to Seifert’s explanations, Cythnia Enloe (2000) highlights that rape is very commonly militarized in wars and conflicts, and also determines three conditions under which rape is militarized: for recreational reasons, when sexual intercourse is conceptualized as a right

that soldiers deserve for fighting, and this need is satisfied with military brothels and forced prostitution. The second form is when it occurs in the name of national security, as in the case of Chile and the Philippines, and serves as a form of torture. The third form is the case of “systematic mass rape”, when rape functions as an instrument of war (‘rape as a weapon of war’), like in the case of Bosnia and Rwanda, where rapes were used consciously in order to perform political goals (ibid: 111). I find Seifert’s and Enloe’s argument important, because they point to the mechanisms and explanations through which wartime rape have been naturalized, legitimized and gained the status as a by-product of wars. These explanations and reasons for the occurrence of wartime rape have to be complemented with the very commonly used and acknowledged biological explanation, when rape is constructed as a legitimate biological need of the soldiers, hence the ‘boys will be boys’ explanation. However, different functions and motivations of wartime sexual violence are not always clear or separable.

It also to be emphasized that wartime rape is not always naturalized as casualties of wars and as an expression of ‘boys will be boys’ understanding of masculinity, but also serves political goals in many cases (Mookherjee 2008). The framing of wartime rape is very often saturated with politics and power at the time of occurrence, just as in the process of its public remembrance and forgetting (Mokherjee 2006). The most common expropriation of the discourse of wartime rape is for nationalist goals, in order to claim a nation’s or ethnic group’s victimization and violation through symbolic gendering of the nation (see eg. Massad 1995, Mookherjee 2008, Helms forthcoming). As Anthias and Yuval-Davis argue (1989), women have been predominantly constructed as symbols of the nation, in which discourses they are represented as reproducers of the nation, therefore their reproductive capacity and sexuality gained importance in nationalist narratives. Because of the gendered focus and duty of the women, who is nurturing and reproducing the nation, their honor and purity is a central question for the nation (and its patriarchal logic), which can be violated in wars and armed conflicts. In fact this violation of the nation’s honor is very much targeted in wars by the opposing nation (or community) in which

women's body became a tool through which male groups communicate (Das 1995). Sexual violence is realized as a way to disrupt the nation's ethnic purity (Massad 1995), continuity, and raping the enemy's women also serves as a source to humiliate and challenge the masculinity of the enemy's community as they failed to fulfill their masculine duty to protect their women (Seifert 1994). Nationalist discourses, which are also predominantly male discourses, instead of admitting their (symbolic) defeat and the failure to protect their women, they either emphasize the brutality of the enemy community (national or ethnical) and portray wartime rape as an act that is only characteristic of the enemy, the 'other'; or express this violation through gendering the national territory and conceptualize it as the 'rape of the motherland' (Massad 1995). In these nationalist or state discourses, the voices of rape victims remain silent, or even become silenced, and proper discourses on these violations are expropriated in the name of national honor and purity (Das 1995, Mokherjee 2008). In fact, instead of focusing on individual women's violation and suffering, what very often gets articulated is the violation of the whole nation, and wartime rape is used to demand national victimhood and the moral status of innocence (Helms forthcoming). Silence around wartime rape is a common phenomenon that feminist researchers face. As Theidon framed it "to talk about rape is to talk about silences" (2007: 459), but this claim does not only refer to the lack of public discourse of them and historical marginalization of these events (Seifert 1994), but also survivor's reluctance to talk about it. It is commonly noted by feminist researchers that women do not like to talk about their experience of being raped and if they do they do not testify it in first person, but instead narrate events as witnesses of others' raped (eg. Herman 1992, Theidon 2007).

Wartime rape as a problem and an issue gained international visibility and attention in the 1990s, in response to the war in the Former Yugoslavia. As I have mentioned, hitherto this practice had been acknowledged as a natural casualty of wars (Seifert 1994), although feminist scholars have tried to draw attention to its gendered nature, first Susan Brownmiller, who wrote a

foundational book on rape in 1975.⁶ Due to the widespread and ethnically motivated nature of sexual violence that occurred during the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina, this war gained international attention not only in the media and among feminist scholars, but also in international law, largely due to feminist activists. Regarding the Bosnian war, wartime rape has become a grave breach in international law and is recognized as crime against humanity (Copelon 1994). Although the recognition of wartime rape as grave breach and crime against humanity is a huge success if we consider that hitherto this practice was acknowledged in the Geneva Conventions as crime against honor and dignity, Copelon argues that this change in the international law was not due to an understanding of the gendered nature of war, but due to the framings of these rapes as genocidal rape and a form of ethnic cleansing. In addition, she argues that mass rapes have occurred in many other countries and conflicts besides Bosnia, which did not draw any international attention and remained unreported. Carol Harrington (2011) points out that it was not a coincidence that wartime rape as a human rights issue became part of the UN security and peacekeeping agenda in the 1990s, and was not only due to the successful activism of feminist advocates, but was interlinked with the fall of the Soviet Union. She claims that violence against women and gender mainstreaming became a politically supported issue due to the political context at the end of the cold war, and served as a political opportunity for the USA to appear as the defender of democracy, and framed wartime sexual violence as a security problem and as a characteristic of “new wars” and undemocratic countries. In this discourse violence against women in wartime and in armed conflicts became an international security issue rather than a gender problem, which highlights that on the one hand its gendered nature is still neglected (for example UN peacekeepers also commit sexual violence against refugees), while on

⁶ Although Brownmiller is one of the most frequently quoted feminist scholar theorizing rape, it has to be acknowledged that she conceptualizes rape as a form of violence against women, therefore as a crime in which the group of perpetrators (men) and victims (women) are clear, and designates patriarchy as the source of the problem. In contrast, the feminist scholars that I quoted and mentioned above claim that (wartime) sexual violence is a form of gender based violence, in which there are no clear and identifiable groups of victims and perpetrators, as the source of the violence are gender inequality and unequal power relations.

the other hand this issue is used as politics also on an international level, not only in the conflict zones.

II.2 Previous research about wartime sexual violence in Hungary

Against the background of the Soviet occupation and later state socialism that was forcibly established after the WWII in Hungary, public discourses on wartime rape were silenced. After 1989, as it was mentioned in the previous chapter, voices and experiences that had been suppressed during socialism were articulated (Mark 2010). The most famous articulation of wartime sexual violence has been Alaine Polcz's memoir that was published only two years after the end of state socialism. Scholarly works, dominantly from historians, were published some years later, starting from 1998.

Andrea Pető, whose name was already mentioned in chapter one, is a historian and a gender scholar, and the only one who analyzed this topic through gendered lens. She published research on wartime sexual violence by the Red Army, first, an analysis in which she tried to methodically reconstruct the widespreadness of sexual violence during Budapest's siege in 1945 (Pető 1998, 1999). Then she contrasted the way in which wartime rape was publicly framed in 1945 in Budapest and Vienna (Pető 2003: 130). As these rape cases were silenced both on the individual and collective level, what her research shows is the difficulty of examining silence. Pető looked at sanitary and health official records in order to reconstruct and prove the widespreadness of these sexual atrocities, because regarding the Soviet occupation of the country and the sexual violence that Soviet soldiers committed, legal and free abortion was first institutionalized (Pető 2003: 135). Beside the newly introduced measurement of abortion, the medical treatment of venereal diseases of gonorrhoea and syphilis also became state-supported in Budapest due to the high number of women having venereal infection. Pető argues that rape

cases were only perceived, acknowledged and dealt with as a “public health” problem (Pető 2003: 137). Although Pető’s aim was to prove the occurrence of mass rape, she highlights that the actual or the approximate number of women who were raped and abused cannot be designated, because only those women were recorded in these administrative systems who used the services of either abortion or sexual health care (Pető, 1998: 213). She argues that after the war, these rapes were not only silenced by the new Soviet allied political regime, but the masculine nature of wars and militarism also contributed to the “conspiracy of silence” (1998: 204). Pető claims, as the above delineated feminist theories of wartime sexual violence pointed out, that rape serves as an instrument to humiliate the male enemy through violating their “property”, and the “retelling” of these cases only strengthens the victory of the winners, therefore the women have to remain silent in order to remain “loyal” to their men (Pető 2003: 141). Another important argument of Pető’s works is that she argues that the political commitment of the rape victims informed the way they recalled and narrated the experience of rape, and her leftist respondents narrated rape in third person (1998: 217), however feminist researchers argue that this is common strategy of narrating personal experience of being raped (Theidon 2007).

Pető’s remark about the importance of political views in recalling and narrating sexual violence is shared and argued by James Mark (2005, 2010), who based his argument on oral history interviews with Hungarian men and women with middle-class background. Mark states that the way rape narratives are constructed is linked to the addressing of these cases’ political importance, and are “shaped by political conflicts over the Hungarian past” (2005: 135). However, as Lóránd pointed out, Mark’s methodology lacks important feminist theories of wartime sexual violence, and clear distinctions between opinion of interviewees who were raped and who were not (2012 footnote 7).

Besides these deficiencies, Mark’s argument about how the political commitment of the interviewees informs their portrayal of the Red Army atrocities is important for my research, as he emphasized that in many cases the interviewee’s framing of wartime rape goes hand in hand

with the national memory politics. He identified three forms of framing, the first by conservative-nationalist responders, who minimized the importance of the German occupation in their lives, but emphasized the Soviet occupation as the greatest disaster of the war. This group of people highlighted the brutality of Red Army soldiers that targeted every woman and emphasized the widespreadness of these rapes. Racialized language was also characteristic of this perception. The other framing was characteristic for respondents with leftist political commitment who in many cases were also Jewish: here the denial or the marginalization of rape cases was typical (Mark 2005: 145). They often admitted a rupture between what they thought of these cases in 1945 (mostly considered them Nazi propaganda) and after 1989 (realized these stories were actually true). Naturally Jewish respondents saw the Red Army as liberators, and their narratives often described that women willingly offered their bodies to these soldiers and also defined these women as “honorable” (151). In contrast, the female respondents of this group did not contribute to the male-dominated narrative of consensual sex, instead framed rape as something that soldiers do, and did not acknowledge it as traumatic or as a form of victimization (Mark *ibid.*: 152). In the third pattern that Mark designated, people performed “more balanced” narrations, which were not based on black-and-white portrayals of the Soviet soldiers. As a conclusion Mark highlights that only those framings of rapes get publicity which “support contemporary political agendas” (Mark *ibid.*: 158), which in Hungary’s case are the conservative-nationalist framing, while other opinions are neglected. Furthermore Mark complicates the understanding of addressing wartime sexual violence as a form of “truth-telling”, because the narratives about it were saturated with nationalism (139).

In the same year as Pető’s research was published on the gendered consequences of Budapest’s siege, another Hungarian historian, Krisztián Ungváry published a book on this military event entitled *The Siege of Budapest* (1998), in which he dedicates a subchapter to the Soviet atrocities against Hungarian civilians. In this investigation he relies on diaries, interviews, memoirs and archival documents. Ungváry dedicated a sub-subchapter to the issue of rape and

looting, where he mostly quotes personal accounts of these events with diverse portrayal of the Soviets. Overall he portrays wartime sexual violence as a by-product of war and does not contribute much to this discourse due to his descriptive nature of writing. Considering that he investigates the events of rape and looting in the same subchapter, even if they did not always occur together, his understanding of these issues echoes Enloe's concept of "lootpillagelandrape" (Enloe 1994), through which Enloe captures the way in which rape gets naturalized as an inherent part of the fighting vehemence. In contrast with Pető, Ungváry determined that about 10% of Budapest's female population was raped, about 50,000 women, while Pető counted it between 50,000 and 200,000 (Pető 1998) Ungváry also mentions cases when men were raped, which he narrates as "however unbelievable it sounds", which reveals his heteronormative understanding of rape, that only sees women as rapeable according to their biological sex and instead of its symbolic meaning, he describes male-male rape as a form of psychological violation (ibid: 294). Although he mentions that sexual motivation was not the only driving force in the rapes performed by Red Army soldiers, he claims that mass raping of the enemy's woman was more specific to the Soviet army than to any other European one (Ungváry: 294). Still, I have to emphasize that Ungváry's work is the only scholarly work I encountered that compares the Soviet troops with German soldiers and for one small paragraph considers the possible similarity between their behavior, namely that the Germans also violated the non-Jewish population, although he does not mention sexual violation, only looting and murder (282).

II.3. The German case

Although wartime sexual violence in Hungary has been framed with ethnicized overtone, it differs from cases like Bosnia or Rwanda, where ethnicity really played a significant role. Hungary was invaded and occupied by a foreign country's army, which can be conceptualized as

a fight between nations; while in the latter cases the conflicts took place in the territory of one country.⁷ The motivation of rapes were also different, because in Hungary, Red Army soldiers acted as a conquering army that rapes the women in the defeated territories. Regarding the rapes in Bosnia, wartime rape was dominantly conceptualized as “genocidal” and as a tool for ethnic cleansing, which were used to gain territories, and in Rwanda also served the goal to eliminate the ethnic group of Tutsis.

The atrocities that were committed in Hungary against women in WWII mostly resemble the case of Germany in the same time period, which is not only more examined in academia, but also more commemorated and recognized in the public sphere in Germany. In terms of the Soviet sexual violence that was committed during WWII, the widespread rape of German women is what is mostly commemorated in feminist scholarly works, even if the Soviet troops raped through all the way to Berlin that affected many other countries as well (Brownmiller 1975, Goldstein 2001, Seifert 1994, Turpin 1998). Following the above delineated masculine logic of war, it is not surprising that Berlin, the capital of Hitler’s empire was mostly affected by “lootpillagelandrape” (Enloe 1994). In this sense, Red Army soldiers performed their victory also through the bodies of German women, to make their triumph complete over Nazi Germany. Beside Berlin, rapes occurred in Hungary and Austria in the highest number, but as the cities were capitals of Axis Power countries and (the main) collaborators of Hitler’s Germany the high number of atrocities here are also not surprising (Mark 2010).

Another similarity between Vienna and Hungary is that they were not only occupied by the Soviet Red Army, but previously also by the German forces, and although both foreign forces committed atrocities against civilians in Vienna and Hungary, wartime rape is only commemorated as an abuse that was committed by the Soviet soldiers. The reason for these mass rapes by the Soviets is mostly explained as a revenge for the atrocities that Hungarian and German armies committed in the Soviet front against Soviet civilians (Brownmiller 1975,

⁷ In the case of the Bosnian war, it took place in the former Yugoslavia, between ethnic groups who lived in the same country, although in this internal conflict Serbia and Croatia were also involved.

Naimark 1997). However, the problem with this explanation is that Soviet soldiers did not only rape German or Hungarian women, but also Poles in Silesia (Naimark 1997:75), Jewish women through liberation of concentration/death camps and ghettos (Hedgepeth and Saidel 2010), Serbian women in Yugoslavia (Naimark 1997:70) and during and after the siege of Budapest they “raped women regardless of nationality” when the Red Army attacked the Swedish legation (Naimark 1997:70). These examples problematize the simplified explanation of revenge as the main motivating factor for rapes by the Soviet army, therefore I would rather suggest that these rapes followed the “rules of the game” (Seifert 1994: 58), as Red Army soldiers only raped women in conquered territories.

What further links the Hungarian and the German case together most significantly from my topic’s angle is the commemoration of wartime rape, and how it was dealt with in the public. In both cases, wartime sexual violence has been framed as only committed by the Soviet army, therefore it is conceptualized as an abuse between two nations, and not by soldiers against civilian women, or by male individuals against women. This framing implies that the soldiers of their nations’ army did not rape civilians abroad, which is in fact not true in case of the German and Hungarian Army, who both committed sexual violence on the Eastern front (Krausz 2013). Furthermore the depiction of wartime rape as a racial and cultural characteristic of the Red Army started long before their arrival through the German propaganda that was also used in Hungary by the Arrow Cross Party in order to raise the fighting moral against the ‘red beast’ (Grossmann 1995, Heineman 1996, Naimark 1997, Mark 2005, 2010). Therefore the negative attitude towards Red Army soldiers and fear of them was established before their encounter with the civil population, in addition they were received as enemy both by the civil population and by the local military. Therefore narratives of these rapes were politicized even before they happened, not only afterwards (Pető 2003).

After Nazi Germany’s defeat, the control over Berlin was divided between the Allied powers, and its territory was later physically divided by the Berlin wall from 1961. The public

dealing with mass rape was different in these territories, as East Germany (GDR) was occupied by Soviet troops, and West Germany (FRG) was under American, British and for a shorter time French control. As I will argue in chapter 5, the contemporary Hungarian framing is very similar to the West German postwar framing of rape incidents, when according to Heineman (1996) the victimhood of German civilian women were publicly incorporated into the German national identity and their experiences were used to express the victimhood of the German nation. In the West German case the expropriation of women's experiences of rape were generalized and "degendered" in order to make them applicable for the whole nation (Heineman 1997: 365, 376). Hence rape as gendered act or as a violence that targets women was neglected, and instead it was framed in political and national terms (Heineman: 370).

In contrast with West Germany, in the Soviet occupied Zone, incidents of rape continued even after the military defeat of Nazi Germany, and continued to be silenced in the postwar years. Instead of acknowledging the ongoing sexual abuses by the Red Army against civilian women, the press in East Germany stated that these atrocities of rape and pillage had been committed by German bandits who wore Red Army uniforms (Naimark 1997:104). In contrast with Vienna and Budapest, in the Eastern zone of Germany, abortion did not immediately become legalized, only the treatment of venereal infections was supported by the state (Naimark 1997)⁸. Naimark only found one case in which violations against the civilian population was publicly discussed, but instead of dealing with rapes, only acts of looting bicycles and watches were articulated (ibid: 134-136). Naimark claims that at this discussion rape cases were silenced and were recommended to be forgotten, because these accounts were considered to give rise to unwanted hostile behavior against the Soviets.

In Germany, feminists started to deal with wartime rape from the 1990s, the most widely cited work is a documentary film from this era, Helke Sander's *BeFreier und Befreite* (Liberators take Liberties) that aimed to break the enforced silenced about wartime rapes. This film and its

⁸ However, later abortion was legalized in East Germany in contrast to West Germany.

feminist critics reveal how hard it is to neutrally rearticulate wartime rape, even if women's testimonies are placed in the focus. In her critique about the film, Atina Grossman (1995) pointed out that Sander's portrayal of German women as innocent victims is problematic, because it lacks the proper political context of the war and Nazi Germany's role in provoking the outbreak of the war. Grossmann argues that German women cannot be portrayed as only innocent victims, because they also benefitted from and contributed to Hitler's regime (ibid: 49). Hence they cannot be labeled only as an ahistorical "universal victim" of the masculine logic and performance of war (ibid: 47-49). In addition, she claims that in Germany (although she does not specify which part) women did not perceive the experience of being raped as a loss of their honor, because it was experienced on a wide scale and hence did not produce the feeling of shame or guilt. Furthermore, Grossman argues that these events were often commemorated by German women through personal diaries and novels that are traceable in postwar literature (ibid: 50). How and why did these stories become silenced then? As Pető (1998) pointed out with her concept of "conspiracy of silence" the masculine logic behind these silences, Grossman also argues that silencing began when the fighting German men returned to their homes in West Germany. In short, the Hungarian case both resembles the public framings in East and West Germany. The similarity with East Germany is the public suppression of these rapes from 1945 onwards as in both countries Soviet style socialism was established, while the postwar West German degendered framing resembles the contemporary framing of rapes in Hungary, which I will discuss in the analytical chapters.

II.4. Critiques of oral history

As the novel *Denied* was based on oral history interviews, which method was mainly understood as authentic in the book reviews, in the following I discuss the scholarly critique of oral history, and problematize whether it can be seen as an objective source about historical events.

Oral history as a research method is used to gain information of not only about the past itself, but also the way respondents give meaning to past events and what they recall from it (Abrahams 2010). Portelli (1991) argued that what makes oral history different from other historical methods is that it requires two living persons, the historian and the narrator, and the data itself is produced through the interaction of these two people. He determined and analysed six factors that make oral history specific: orality, narrative, subjectivity, credibility, objectivity, authorship (Abrahams, *ibid*:19, Portelli 1991). Through oral history interviews, the historian becomes a part of the construction of the past, and gets more involved in forming the data, than in other practices of analyzing materials that have already been produced (Portelli *ibid*). Portelli emphasized that an oral history narrative “tells us less about *events* than about their *meaning*” (1991: 50; emphasis in the original). He argues that this does not mean that these narratives do not have factual value, although they are saturated with subjectivity, imagination, desire, and distorted by personal and communal memory (Portelli: 49-51). He highlights that the interviewees believe that they are performing the ‘truth’ of the past, although memory of the past is always changing. He argues that oral history sources are inherently not objective (*ibid*: 53) as they are based on the subjective memory and its recalling, a process guided by the historian through his questions and interests. Hence it is a collaborative project, which raises the question of authorship because of its shared nature.

Portelli emphasized that the historian’s leading position has a great influence on the produced testimony, and feminist criticism has put even more emphasis on this power position (Sangster 1998, Sprague and Zimmermann 1989). It has also been highlighted that this power position is not only present during the recording of a life narrative, but also during the interpretative process of analyzing the data, which can easily result in creating arguments that the respondent never claimed or alluded to (Borland 1991). Feminist historians have interest in oral history because it is used or can be used to give voice to groups whose experiences have been marginalized by traditional historiographies (Sangster 1998). Sangster argues that even women’s

experiences cannot be taken for granted as objective, because background factors of class, race, culture, position, religion, political view also inform their construction of memory as well as a feminist researcher's choice of data collection (1998: 92). Similarly to many other scholars she also highlights the constructed nature of memory, which is never pure, but mediated through language.

Testimonies, oral or written (personal diary, memoir) are not representations of the past, but the reconstruction of the past from the present, which is informed by its purpose and the historical context of the remembering (Smith and Watson 2010). Memory also has politics, because it has to be considered who is authorized to speak, what and how can be remembered and articulated, whose memory becomes collective memory, what is forgotten, what kind of identity position is produced through the remembering, what kind of knowledge is produced... and so on (Smith and Watson *ibid*). Therefore life narratives should not be treated as objective representations of the past.

Personal accounts of traumatic events and human rights violations have started to gain historical importance since the Holocaust (Assmann 2006). This usage of personal life narratives first and foremost raises the questions of authenticity, in terms of both the experience and the survivor (Smith and Watson *ibid*). First person narratives of witnessing traumatic experiences are expected to be true, as they stand and speak on behalf of others who cannot speak (Smith and Watson 2012: 591) Therefore the validity of these kind of witness narratives and the author's identity are commonly perceived with suspicion, as some witness narratives has turned out to be untrue, false witnesses (Smith and Watson 2012). The most commemorated case of fake memories is Wilkomirski's *Fragments: Memories of a Wartime Childhood*, a Holocaust memoir that turned out to be false, as the author had never experienced the Holocaust as a child as he claimed. Suleiman (2010) argues that the main problem with Wilkomirski's book after its disclosure as hoax, is that he claims it to be a memoir instead of a novel. Suleiman argues that labeling its genre as memoir would only be valid if he would have truly lived those experiences,

although he could call it a novel and imply with this genre that it contains fiction. Although first person memoirs also include fictional elements due to the changing nature of memory that I have discussed previously, their lived nature is what authorizes their validity as a form of truth telling. Suleiman insists that the question of labeling written first person accounts is what determines the requirements that it has to meet. However, what we will see in the next chapters is somehow a reverse of the Wilkomirsky case, as Kováts's novel *Denied* is a novel, therefore fictional, but the fact that it was based on oral history testimonies creates the illusion of authenticity for it, and it has been mainly perceived in the Hungarian media as a true representation of what happened in Hungary in WWII.

III. Female accounts of WWII and wartime sexual violence

In this chapter, I am going to focus on first person accounts of WWII by female narrators, and introduce Hungarian two books: first Alaine Polcz's memoir (1991) which was published only two years after the fall of state socialism, and is a predecessor of the novel *Denied* (2012) that is in the focus of this thesis. Through this chapter, I am going to argue that Polcz's memoir serves as an important counterpoint to *Denied*, in terms of the portrayal of the Red Army soldiers and the understanding of violence against women. In addition I find *Denied* a bad copy of the former regarding the story itself and the tone of narration.

III.1. *One Woman in the War*

Alaine Polcz's memoir is not only important regarding its topic, namely that it narrates and portrays wartime sexual assaults and mass rapes in WWII in Hungary, considering that these atrocities have been acknowledged by male authors as well (Boldizsár 1982, Konrád 1989, Márai 1972, see also Ungváry 1998) who mostly wrote about this in exile or emigration. It is important because she was the first (and up until now the last) person, who narrated this topic from a female perspective and also testified to her own experience of being raped in war in a first person account. In this sense, her memoir resembles the diary of a German woman, who also wrote about her own experiences, including of being raped several times in *A Woman in Berlin, Eight Weeks in the Conquered City* (2005), but the difference is that the author of the latter wanted to remain anonymous about her identity. As both books are autobiographical texts, in light of the previous chapter it is presumable that the question of authenticity was raised about *A Woman in Berlin* because its author was anonymous (Redmann 2008). As I referred to in the previous chapter, in order to become historical sources personal testimonies have to be verified as authentic, and as the German diary lacked authorship it was debated in terms of authenticity

(Redmann 2008). This diary was first published in 1954 in English in the US, then in 1959 in German, and only in 2003 at the time of the republication of the diary in Germany was the identity of the author revealed by a journalist, and its authenticity verified (Redmann *ibid*). What further connects the two autobiographical texts is that they do not give a simplistic picture of the war in which these incidents occurred, do not only portray Red Army soldiers as brutal beasts and do not represent themselves (and in a broader sense women) as only passive victims without (sexual) agency.

The genre of *One Woman in the War* is a memoir, and was written by Alaine Polcz, who was previously known as a clinical psychiatrist and as the wife of a famous writer, Miklós Mészöly. Polcz wrote her memoir in the 1970s-80s, and according to her, the main trigger to publish it in the 1990s was an essay that gave a negative image of the Red Army troops, the stereotype of which she wanted to counterbalance with her own experiences, but she did not reflect on the political situation as a reason why she did not publish it before the fall of socialism (Tezla 2002: 11). Beside the experience of WWII, the memoir also depicts Polcz's marriage with her first husband, which relationship frames the beginning (marriage) and the end (divorce) of the novel. The hardness of war and marriage are portrayed as parallel throughout the book, as in the preface it is claimed "War is not easy. Neither is marriage" (Polcz: front matter). Her marriage is described as abusive, with a husband who was alcoholic, suppressed his young wife, cheated on her, and was generally not interested in her; despite that she did not leave him, but loved him. In contrast with the traumatic nature of her marriage, as Vasvári points it out, Polcz tends to re-evaluate her previous naivety in an ironic tone (for example when she did not understand what it means that 'Soviets go through women'), but her marriage is a clear exception from this pattern, which is portrayed as a "saintly calvarie" (Vasvári 2011: 78).

The story of *One Woman in the War* as it is included in its subtitle (*Hungary 1944-1945*) takes place in the last years of World War II in Cluj (Transylvania) and Hungary⁹. The memoir describes the last year of the war in a chronological logic through a young girls' lens and depicts the burdens she faced due to the war: hiding, starvation, lice, sexual violence, venereal infection, illness, loneliness, hopelessness. Although she also only talks about rapes (including her own) that were committed by Red Army soldiers, she portrays the situation of war in a very complex way, where everything is unpredictable, not only the behavior of the Red Army soldiers: "We were defenseless; we could be wiped out at any moment by partisans, the Germans, the gendarmes, or even the Hungarian soldiers" (Polcz 2002: 70). In addition, in general she does not uphold the mainstream civilized/barbarian dichotomy between the German and Soviet soldiers, but portrays their behavior as similar, adding that Russians were more unpredictable. However, at one point she maintains the East-West dichotomy between Hungary and the Soviet Union and claims that "Hungarian soldiers could not have behaved any more honorably in the Russian villages. Only, they were not this barbaric. Here the East had invaded the West" (Polcz *ibid*: 85-86). This orientalist portrayal of the Russians as backward and barbaric is also traceable in *A Woman in Berlin* and in both cases these depictions could have been informed by the anti-Bolshevik propaganda (Redmann), although Larry Wolff argues that this construction of Russia/Russians as backward or barbarian has a longer history before the German propaganda or even the Enlightenment (Wolff 1994).

Polcz does not generalize the Germans and the Soviets as good or bad in relation to the Hungarians, but gives examples of both sides as being good and bad to her and also to other civilians. At one point she even explains how easy it is to break a women's spine during rape even without intention (*ibid*:77). Furthermore, it is often highlighted as evidence for the brutality of the Red Army that they raped every women from young age to elderly, but Polcz claims that "oh

⁹ Northern Transylvania was a part of Hungary at that time according to the Second Vienna Award. For a brief history of Transylvania see Tezla. 2002: 4 -7.

well dear Lord, in the dark every cow is dark, implying that this was not an intentional choice of the soldiers, therefore not evidence of their brutality but their nonchalance (2002: 97).

Beside wartime sexual violence, Polcz also talks about domestic violence as a form of violence that women face, and although she does not use the vocabulary of second wave feminism regarding this issue (domestic violence/marital violence, gender based violence, violence against women), she implicitly reveals the patriarchal structure that connects the two forms of violence. In addition she also mentions an occasion after the war, when she was in the hospital for serious illness and a priest sexually harassed her. Therefore she does not only portray sexual violence in connection with war and soldiers, but with men. Furthermore, Polcz explicitly claims that rape is not a sexually motivated act, but a form of violence, as she states that she did not feel that she was raped, but violated bodily.¹⁰ This kind of understanding of rape as not an expression of sexuality, but instead violence, control and dominance points in the direction of the gender based understanding of rape (and other forms of violence), although this critique of patriarchal power is not made explicit in the memoir, but “structurally inscribed” in the narration (Lukic 2010: 220). In addition, venereal disease, which was a common by-product of wartime rape by the Red Army, is not a disease that only soldiers transmitted to her, but even before the war she got it from her own husband. This serves as another form of evidence for the connection between everyday and wartime sexual patterns, and reduces the extremity of sexual infections as a disease that was only specific to the Soviet soldiers, even if this venereal disease (gonorrhoea) was the reason why Polcz could not bear children later on in her life.

Another important part of the novel, which is very often quoted (as in Lóránd 2012, Lukic 2010, Vasvári 2011), is when Polcz finally arrives to Budapest to reunite with her family, and at the dinner table she is asked whether she had been faced with widespread rapes, she admits that she was also raped as everyone else was. After dinner, her mother said:

¹⁰ Violated bodily is my translation, in the English version it is translated as “attacked me physically” (p.89), but I think it does not give back what Polcz meant in the original: “Nem azt éreztem, hogy megerősakoltak, hanem azt, hogy testileg bántalmaztak”. (Polcz, 2005:109).

My dear girl, don't tell such nasty stories, people might believe them!' I looked at her. 'Mother, it is the truth'. She began crying and put her arms around me. Then I said, 'Mother, I said they took everyone away, they raped every woman! You said they took away women here, too'. 'Yes, but only those who were whores. You are not one', my mother said. Then she threw herself on me and begged, 'My dear, tell me it is not true!' 'All right' I said, 'it is not true. They took me away just to nurse the sick'. (120-121)

This excerpt grabs the “social hypocrisy” that surrounded raped women in the postwar period and contributed to their victimization and stigmatization in the society (Lukic, *ibid*: 219). This excerpt completes Pető's concept of the “conspiracy of silence” as it points out how the enforced masculine nature of silence was interiorized also by the female population (1998, 2003).

I find Polcz's memoir important according to its complex understanding and depiction of sexual violence and for disrupting the simplistic depiction of the Red Army. Polcz does not question whether Soviet soldiers raped women, because they did; what she does in this memoir is implicitly question whether they should be only talked about and remembered as rapists. In addition it should be noted, that as I have mentioned earlier, personal memories are subject to change, forgetting and erosion, and Polcz does reflect on this process and admits on occasion that she cannot recall all the details or that there is a possibility that she remembers something wrong (Lukic 2010). I find this gesture important, because for me this confession of possible deficiencies suggests that she is aware that her memoir is not only personal, but public, considering that it depicts an event (wartime rape) that is representative for many other Hungarian women.

III.2. *Denied*

Denied was published in 2012 and was written by Judit Kováts, who has a background in archives and history. *Denied* is her first book, although previously she had published some short literary

stories. According to her stated motivation to write this novel, she claimed that next to the bed of her dying mother, she realized that she does not know much about the era of her mother's childhood, and as her mother was too sick to be interrogated at that time, she started to make interviews with her aunt, and found other interviewees with the help of snowball method (könyves blog). She made oral history interviews with 23 or 25 elderly persons (she did not specify their sex), who lived through WWII, and asked them about the “the war, the front, the soviet occupation, than the kulak persecution and collectivization” (a vörös postakocsi). Although the topic of the novel is WWII, her questions of interest reveal that what she talked about with her interviewees was not only the war itself, but also harms that not soldiers, but the later established new regimes committed, and this mixing of crimes by the Red Army soldiers and by the socialist regime is a very common characteristic of the mainstream Hungarian memory politics, in which the former and the latter are connected by the continuity of the diverse horrors committed by the ‘Soviets’. Kováts claims that she used “a lot of” (*sok*) information from these interviews as a source for her novel, and that the novel that she created portrays WWII through the ruined life of the protagonist Anna as “it can never be known from archives and history books”(a vörös postakocsi).

In interviews that were made with Kováts, she argued that “official history that we study and teach” (...) “which can never be objective” is not “suitable” to come to terms with the past(könyves blog). Kováts claims that in contrast with the ‘official history’, oral history interviews can “reconstruct the objective events” of the past (a vörös postakocsi). With this statement she is alluding to the gaps that history books generally contain as they rely on hard facts and describe events of the public sphere like politics and economics, and do not reveal much from the private lives of different groups in the same time period. In addition she could probably also be referring to historians’ debates around the changing relationship between history and memory, as the two used to be seen as quiet separate, but in the 20th century and mostly in light of war, these two have become much more connected, and as pointed out in the oral history

section, memory has also gained the status of historical source in some cases (Assmann 2006, Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi and Levy 2011). According to the above quote, Kováts obviously claims that oral history is more authentic as a historical source than history books, although she does not point out anywhere that this could be true mostly for cases of human rights violations, and for marginalized groups (like women) whose lives were not incorporated into historical knowledge. Furthermore, in one of the interviews Kováts asserted that history as a discipline cannot be objective, because official history is a result of selections that is “never devoid from some kind of power interest (political, economical, military)” (könyves blog). In another interview she claimed in connection with the previous explanation, that oral history as a method can supplement the discipline of history, and its subjective nature can be eliminated by emphasizing the recurring themes from the interviews made with “an adequate number of people from different social background” (a vörös postakocsi). From these statements it is presumable that Kováts does not refer to or acknowledge in any interview the criticism of oral history as a historical source, nor does she take into account what I described in the previous chapter about the nature of this method and what it is used for by historians. In addition as she claims that ‘official history’ is political, she implies that personal histories are not and are devoid from different kind of interests, which in terms of oral history was also questioned by scholars (Sangster 1998, Portelli 1991).

From the oral history interviews that Kováts conducted she created a fictional protagonist, an 18 year old girl named Anna Somlyói, but her fictional story is presented as a memoir, as the narrator is the protagonist in her elderly years, who recalls the events of her past. The story takes place in a Hungarian village, near the Tisza river, starting in 1942. Although Hungary is already in the middle of WWII, the war, as the narrator claims, was not affecting their lives until the Jews were forced to wear the yellow star, were gathered and deported, and personally for her and her family, until the front reached their village and the “Russians” occupied it (In the novel the narrator always calls the Soviets “Russians). Anna, the narrator,

states that “two months after we got back Geduly (her high school) from the (Hungarian) army, the student years ended and I became an old woman” (Kováts 2012: 33). Her idyllic life was ruined by the occupations, which was previously filled with friendship, tests in school and romantic love. The German occupation disrupted their life first because the school year ended abruptly and the Jews were forced to wear the yellow star. For them the German presence did not mean personal harm, only nuisances, as they had to create a bunker in which to shelter from American and Soviet bombings and because her father was taken to the front to fight. The real trauma began with the “Russian” occupation, as the narrator retrospectively claims that “Everything came to an end, and the person who lived through all the things that followed was not me. That was another Anna Somlyói” (90). What followed for her was constant hiding from soldiers, starvation, diseases, rapes, lice, forced labor, and all these things happened to her many times. Both women and men civilians were murdered, robbed, and taken away for forced labor. After the war, Anna’s micro-community made her marry a man who was twenty years older than her, in order to gain back her purity that she had lost due to the rapes that the “Russians” committed. Her marriage turned out to be a disaster, they never had a harmonic relationship, and their personal life was also ruined, as her husband was in jail and on forced labor for acting against the state, and later committed suicide.

The framing of wartime sexual violence in the novel can also be characterized by silence and denial, similarly to its public perception in that era and later on during socialism, and this denial is one of the things that the title of the book refers to. After Anna was raped, she denied that she had been raped and never explicitly referred back afterward what happened to her, only referring to it as ‘that’. The experience of rape caused a rupture in her life and in her identity, and the denial of her identity as being raped is illustrated with the split between the narrator and the narrated I, and with her recurring statement “not me, not me, not me”. When she was first raped, she was taken away from a bunker, where her mother and her younger siblings were also present, but her mother did not say a word at that event or afterwards. Anna could not even talk about

this with her own mother, who generally did not show emotions towards her. After her father's return from the front, Anna describes that "'about that'" I did not say anything to him, because he was a man too" (216). There is no further elaboration about this claim (it is the last sentence of a paragraph), but it could allude to that she did not talk about the rapes to her father because it is inappropriate to talk about a girl's sexuality in front of man, or it could imply that as her father is also a male therefore he cannot understand her suffering because he belongs to the biological group (men) of the perpetrators. Anna incorporates the traditional patriarchal discourse about rape and its consequence as the loss of purity, and recalls how the rape victims pondered their responsibility for being raped. She also described that after the first time she was raped, she was disgusted by herself and "after the first one it was all the same how many times it happened" (154). The recurring theme about sexual violence is that everyone knew who was raped, which was perceived as a silencing effect: "why talk about it – I was telling myself – if the whole family, the village, the world know it" (196). This explanation of hers (for why no one talked about rape) is complemented with the blame on her micro-community, that forced her to marry a much older man, in addition on the new regime that silenced these incidents because they represented the Red Army as heroic liberators, and "the heroes do not murder, loot and rape" (248). Then why not talk about it after the fall of socialism? – the reader could ask. The narrator claims that then "there was no one to tell to. Everything happened so long ago, that nobody cared, and just a few of us stayed (alive)"(248).

Anna only described her first experience of being raped and as a conclusion of the rape experiences stated that "even if it was one of them, or many of them, they were all in a hurry to have it done as soon as possible, to be relieved, and leave me there. As if a thousand years old unsatisfied necessity drew them, that is essential for the next day's fight, for the war's tomorrow"(154). This quite vague statement refers to two things in my interpretation: first, to the historical relationship between war and sexual violence, and second between rape and men's sexual needs. This explanation fits to the patriarchal logic of rape that I have referred to in the

literature review chapter, in which rape is legitimized as a natural by-product of wars and men's needs.

Although Kováts' aim was to create a personal story of WWII that would realistically give back this event and would motivate the readers 'to come into terms with the past', in the following I will claim that this is not what is happening in the novel. First of all, the concept of 'coming to terms with the past' was created by Theodor Adorno, and referred to the postwar German society's reluctance to face up to their Nazi past or collaboration with Hitler's regime (Mushaben 2004). Hence if Kováts would have wanted to write a novel according to this concept, she should not have created a story that is about crimes of the Soviets, but instead about the Hungarian (and German) crimes against the Jewish population, and the problem of its commemoration. Kováts refers to two incidents from the past years, when Hungary's reluctance to 'come to terms with its past' was emphasized (a *vörös postakocsi*). The one to first raise this criticism was Imre Kertész, famous writer and Holocaust survivor in an interview made by the newspaper *Die Welt* on the occasion of his 80th birthday in 2009.¹¹ Kertész said that: "I am a metropolitan person, I have always been. A metropolitan person does not belong to Budapest. The city has completely Balkanized. A metropolitan person belongs to Berlin. About Hungary he remarked that mainly extreme right wing anti-Semitic opinions get articulated, and that "Hungary's role in WWII, Hungary and fascism, Hungary and socialism: all this is not elaborated"(*nol.hu*). In the Hungarian media this interview caused indignation, because Kertész claimed to be a Berliner, although he lived in Berlin only in the past ten years, and was born and lived in Hungary and wrote in Hungarian in his whole life. The other event that also caused huge indignation was in 2011 by another prominent literary figure, Ákos Kertész (not a relative of Imre Kertész), writer and dramaturgist. Ákos Kertész in his article in the newspaper *Amerikai Népszava* stated that "Hungarians are generically subservient" (Kertész 2011). In addition, he argued that the Hungarians are responsible for the Holocaust, because they are the only ones (in

¹¹ Kertész received the Nobel Prize in literature in 2003.

contrast with Germans) who did not admit and regret crimes against Jewish people and did not seek absolution. Kertész later apologized for calling the Hungarians “genetically subservient” and admitted that it is problematic that he made an argument based on biology. As his condemnatory remarks about the Hungarians caused huge indignation in the right wing, his Kossuth Prize was withdrawn and he emigrated to Canada.

Kováts’s stated purpose was to write a story that is not black and white, and to portray civilians both victims of the Soviet violence and also perpetrators, as they were also looting the deported Jews’ property just as the state and representatives of the state did (a *vörös postakocsi*). In this sense, Kováts aimed to break with the idea of the innocent Hungarian civilians, and therefore depicted how civilians fought with each other for Jews’ properties, for the food that the escaping German troops left behind, and also that they did not resist the Jewish deportation. This storyline of the novel could be interpreted as the part which is aimed to motivate the reader to ‘come into terms with the past’, but as the narration of the Jews’ deportation is portrayed in the beginning of the novel but later is forgotten until the end of the book, I think it is too weak to cause memory work in the reader. The looting of Jewish property would be a much more interesting topic, as the theme of Hungarian society’s collaboration is a suppressed or at least debated issue (Ságvári 2002, Vago 2010), but in the novel it is not framed as a form of collaboration, because the emphasis is on how people envied each other’s booty when others managed to acquire better things. However the novel is written as a memoir and the story is told as a recollection; there is no reconstruction of the past in a historical sense. For example, the Holocaust is not mentioned in the case of Jewish survivors, only that they immigrated to Israel (after the 1956 revolution). This omission would be less of a problem, if the novel would not be presented as a historical piece that reflects of the past.

Furthermore, when Kováts was asked in an interview, whether her interviewees easily talked about the deportation of the Jews, she answered that

I put the words into my protagonists' mouth, that for them it did not make a difference whether their neighbor was Jewish, Greek Catholic, Calvinist..... The kind of anti-Semitism which is still traceable in the media and the public sphere – *in my opinion* – did not exist in those small communities. (my emphasis; könyves blog)

This excerpt shows the vagueness of how much this book is based on oral history testimonies and how much it is a representation of what Kováts thinks of the past, although I am aware that according to the genre of the book (novel) it is a fiction and its authenticity cannot be called for accountability. Instead, what is problematic is that Kováts claims that this is an authentic book, which – as it will be argued in the next chapter – is taken for granted truth in the book reviews, and this is what creates the problem. The books' authenticity is even claimed in its blurb: “Although Anna Somlyó is a fictional person, everything she tells are true events that happened (Kováts 2011)”.

The other part of the novel that can refer to the process of facing up to the past depicts some men from the village cooperating with the “Russians” and giving up their community in order to save their own family members. Two forms of this betrayal is portrayed, first when a man reveals the young girls' hiding place because he is too afraid that otherwise the “Russian” soldiers would take away and rape his wife. The other case is when a man selects other villagers for forced labor in order to save his own son from this. In between these two versions, which points out the benefits of the German occupation (looting Jewish property) and the collaboration with Soviets are the events when people stole dead soldiers' clothes.

Kováts stated in an interview that we (Hungarians) are not facing our past, “neither the Holocaust, nor the 1956 revolution, or the fall of socialism” (a vörös postakocsi). She claims that we (Hungarians) have to become familiar with our past, which has been changed, “silenced and denied” many times, alluding to the socialism that truly had its own version of WWII, which was enforced on the population as the official version of history. Kováts argues that Hungary's past has to be known in order to have the possibility to face up to it, because now there are too many

things that are not acknowledged, and I would say that she does understand her novel as a form of filling this historical gap. Although and interestingly, she claims that we have to ‘come to terms with the past’, but we do not have the right to judge what our predecessors did. She illustrates this claim with an example of the book (already mentioned):

In the novel, during the occupation, when the Russians collect people for forced labor, Gyurka Koncz’s son gets caught. Gyurka goes to the headquarters to rescue him, but he has to provide ten other people in exchange. And he decides who that 10 person will be, as he is going from house to house with the Russians. He literally sold those ten people and all of them died, nobody came back. So, do we condemn him because those ten person’s death is his responsibility, or do we absolve him because he saved his son? (a vörös postakocsi)

This excerpt depicts Kováts’ relationship to the Hungarian crimes as neutral, or even permissive, meaning that she did not want to judge these incidents and created her character according to the same guideline. Although the sins committed by the Hungarians are portrayed in a rational way, as above, implying that there is some kind of an acceptable way (saving his son) for these sins. In contrast, the Soviet soldiers’ behavior is not “excused” in the same manner, she does not rationalize it as Polcz did, who speculated that Hungarian soldiers probably also raped on the eastern front. Even though the protagonist remarks that those who volunteered to collaborate with Germans and Russians were sometimes even more brutal with the population, this statement is not backed up by as many examples as the violations that the protagonist bore from the Soviets. Furthermore at the end of the novel, the protagonist states as a sum of her previous years that “with communism such terror (*rémuralom*) began, that had never been even during the Horthy regime” (248).

The Hungarians’ blameworthy behavior is rather emphasized in connection with silencing and stigmatizing rape victims: “the most insincere were our people. Those who got away and thought inside that soldiers behave like this in every war, so we were also somewhat responsible, for not being able to better hide from them and resist them.” (Kováts: 248). This attitude can be

understood as Kováts' critique of how raped women were treated by their community, however the regimes' suppression of these incidents are equally highlighted by the protagonist.

In contrast with Kováts' aim, I will argue in the following, that this novel is rather more symbolic than representative, in which wartime sexual violence and its consequences appear to be a symbol of national suffering. The place where the story takes place is not named in the novel, but according to Kováts it could take place in any village or city in Hungary, which implies that she finds this novel representative for the whole country and symbolic for the nation. This idea can be underlined with her claim about oral history interviews that can create an authentic history of the past. Reading through the interviews made with her, I had the impression that Kováts truly wished to create an authentic story without any extremist nationalistic feelings (for example she disapproved of the behavior of the right-wing militarist movement "Magyar gárda" (könyves blog)), but the kind of memory politics of the past that she represented (nationalist, conservative) did not really challenge the mainstream historical memory of WWII. I would argue that since she incorporated a negative portrayal of the Hungarian civilians in the novel, this can be evaluated as a step towards a more realistic memory of the past. However as these acts were never framed as an act of collaboration, but only implied that civilians benefitted from the Jewry's deportation, and because the important background of the politics that led to the outbreak of the war and the discriminative atmosphere towards Jews is left out of the book, it cannot be valued as an act of 'coming to terms with the past' in the sense that this concept was used in Germany.

Instead, her novel has a clear symbolic reading of the nation, since the narrator is a fictional person and Kováts created a fictional story and a gendered body of the nation that was raped and ruined forever. Since the symbolic figure for the Hungarian civilians is a young innocent girl, whose life was ruined by the "Russians", therefore the symbol of the nation is a raped woman who could not bear children because of these rapes and her life was irreversibly disrupted and destroyed. The Soviet occupation is portrayed as the biggest disaster in the protagonist's life, as she was forced into a marriage that she never wanted to be in, furthermore she never enjoyed sex

with her husband, and became interfile because of the gonorrhoea that she got from the “Russian” soldiers. Anna’s inability to conceive or to enjoy sexuality can be read as a gendered narrative for the nation, which expresses the disruption of the nation because of the Soviet occupation and in a broader sense also from state-socialism. In this patriarchal logic, women are only imagined in relation to the nation through their sexuality and reproductive capacity, and if they lose this capacity, they become and perceive themselves as useless as they cannot fulfill their biological duties in the traditional gendered way (Das 1995, Helms forthcoming).

What I find very problematic about this book is the omission of the broader historical context of WWII, the political decisions that drew Hungary into the war allied with Nazi Germany and the portrayal of the German soldiers as civilized men. The depiction of Soviets follows the stereotypical description of Red Army soldiers as always drunk, unpredictable and violent looters, who rape every woman whom they could. In contrast, the author felt it important to highlight that when Hungarian soldiers were accommodated to their house “they did not touch us with one single finger, never said anything bad” (Kováts: 84). With this contrasted portrayal of German-Hungarian and later “Russian” soldiers, she maintained a dichotomy of good versus bad representatives of the nation. The novel frames sexual violence as a national/racial characteristic or practice, as there is no mentioning that others (Germans or Hungarians) also raped or the possibility that they could have behaved similarly in enemy territories.

In addition to the above omissions, choosing a young girl for a narrator serves a good subterfuge to neglect the political context of war, the understanding what alliance with Germany meant, and the possibility to not mention the Jewish laws that were introduced from 1938. This focus of a young girl, who is portrayed in a very traditional gendered sense (who spends her time dedicated to emotions and love, gossips about teachers, while all the boys were familiar with military events, airplanes and bombs), also gives the opportunity to not mention for example violent crimes that the Hungarian soldiers committed against civil population abroad. In addition

at the beginning of the novel, it is described that the protagonist Anna and her friends were all in love with the regent Miklós Horthy's son, István, whose photo they carried with themselves. This is problematic, because Miklós Horthy as described in chapter 1 was the regent of the country and was a right-wing Germany ally, therefore reading things like this in the novel made me wonder why Kováts chose to incorporate this platonic love, and how authentic and representative was this event in the oral history interviews.

The conclusion can be drawn that the novel *Denied* did not succeed to 'come to terms with the past' in the original sense of the concept, and instead of articulating the diversity and complexity of how wartime rape can be dealt with by the victim, she created a gendered story of national suffering. Although Kováts' aim was to reveal the atrocities that the Red Army troops committed, I would say that she did not contribute much to the existing texts on this topic, furthermore the experience of wartime rape was by Polcz Alaine in a much better way – both as literature and in terms of framing rape.¹² As I have implied in the beginning of the chapter, I find *Denied* a bad copy of Polcz's memoir, as its story traceably follows the patterns of the previous, although it is a fictional story. The protagonist in both texts is a young eighteen-nineteen years old girl who had a bad marriage, a family that did not really care about her and silenced the protagonist's experience of rape, both got a venereal infection of gonorrhea that made them infertile, and the description and language of the rape scene is also very similar. The important difference lies in how the two protagonists concluded what happened to them. As I have mentioned, Anna perceives her life as ruined because of what happened to her in the past (rape that led to a bad marriage), and her last sentence is "I cannot break free" (from the past) (255). In contrast Polcz could end her unsuccessful marriage and got over what happened to her during the war, therefore performed agency. She challenged the mentioned patriarchal logic of rape, as she could move on her trauma of being raped and also on that she could not fulfill the gendered duty of reproduction.

¹² I am aware that Polcz's novel is a memoir, but it has been mainly referred to in Hungary as literature.

IV. Discourse analysis of *Denied's* perception

I have chosen discourse analysis as a method for my topic, because I was interested in the general reception of the novel in the Hungarian media. I have analyzed all the book reviews about *Denied* through the methods outlined in my introduction. What I was interested in was not only how particular book reviews talked about this book and to look at contradictions within selected texts, but rather to get a general sense of how selected themes are perceived and conceptualized according to the novel. My guiding questions for the analysis were: what are the key themes along which the book was framed? What are the main issues that were raised? Did the reviews find this book valuable, and if they did, why? How is sexual violence framed in the book reviews? Did they refer to wartime sexual violence as a broader pattern of war, or only in connection with the book? Are there silences? Which topics generated confronting ideas? Is the novel framed differently by left-and right media?

Overall I found that these reviews probably reveal more about the problematic level of Hungarian journalism than about anything else. I have analyzed 29 articles from different media sources: from literary portals, online cultural portals, newspapers (online and offline), journals, news portals and two personal blogs.¹³ My first observation was that these reviews commonly did not present any original perception or framing of the novel (or of wartime sexual violence), but basically were built on the book's blurb, which they plagiarized (included several parts of it without any reference or quotation mark). The most common sentence that I read in these texts was from the mentioned blurb, which stated that "Although Anna Somlyó is a fictional person,

¹³ Considering the limited amount of time that I had, I searched for Hungarian book reviews only on internet, by using the author's name and the novel's title as search words. Therefore there is a chance, that some newspapers did publish reviews in their printed version that were not published on their internet page. However, some of the offline reviews were scanned and uploaded on *Denied's* facebook page. In addition, I also searched for the novel on popular newspaper's homepage, however without result in many cases that I will point to in chapter 4. I also searched for book reviews in English, but I only found one that is a translated version of a Hungarian review by its author. Overall I was looking for Hungarian reviews because I was interested in how this novel is perceived in Hungary and among Hungarians.

everything that she tells are true events that happened” (Kováts 2011). My second observation was that although these critics receive *Denied* as a historical novel, they do not situate the wartime experiences in a broader context of war, do not position Hungary’s situation in the context of WWII, or mention that most of the war experiences (death, sexual violence, looting, pillage, starvation, poverty, destruction, humiliation) are general experiences of any war. Although *Denied* is a novel, the average reviews found this book authentic in a historical sense and valuable for its topic, namely for the narration of WWII from an everyday person’s viewpoint and for revealing what they referred to as silenced topics. My third observation was that the political commitment of the media outlet where the reviews were published did not play a significant role in how *Denied* was framed, as these reviews resembled each other very much. My fourth observation was that in contrast with the reception of Polcz’s memoir, which was also reviewed by famous Hungarian intellectuals (e.g., Sándor Radnóti and Otto Orbán) besides journalists, no such prominent literary person wrote a critique about *Denied*. In addition, there was no feminist review or debate of the novel and also progressive discussions of wartime sexual violence were absent.

For the transparency of my analysis, I have divided this chapter among the topics that I was mostly interested in (and to which my above mentioned questions refer): first, the general framing of this book (including its evaluation and the controversies), second, the framing of wartime sexual violence, third, about silences and omissions that I have found, fourth the connection between political commitment and framing of *Denied*, and in the end about the current state of memory politics in Hungary.

IV.1. General framing of *Denied* - or the state of Hungarian journalism

As I have mentioned, my first general observation was the schematic nature of these reviews and their overall reliance on the book’s blurb and claims of the author without any critical reflections.

This schematism could point to three things about the authors of these reviews: first, that they agree with the author's claims about what is in the novel, second, that they had no personal opinion of the novel and therefore relied on those claims, and third that they had to write a review of this book but did not (critically) read it and therefore relied on its blurb and other reviews (as plagiarism of each other can also be found among them). Beside all of these possibilities, the schematic nature of these critiques also reveal the general state of Hungarian journalism and prove that plagiarism is not an ethical issue in the Hungarian media, and portraying other's idea(s) without any reference is a practice that is widely and unproblematically used.

Overwhelmingly the authors of the book reviews claim that this book is valuable. Most of them found it valuable not only as a literary novel, but also as an authentic historical source or representation of WWII. Although most of the reviews were published on literary or cultural portals or newspapers, the general emphasis on this book was not as a literary product, but as a historical representation. About its literary value the same things were highlighted: its neutral and objective voice, its documentarist nature, and the narration which only “portrays the events but does not judge.”¹⁴ This purported objectivity not only referred to the voice of the narration and the narration itself, but also to the portrayal of WWII. All of the critiques mentioned that Kováts conducted oral history interviews with WWII survivors, and they generally perceived this methodological approach as something that is representative and authentic in itself. Some authors even claimed that Kováts established a new literary genre, because she used oral history interviews and based her novel on it.¹⁵ (As in all of the critiques, claims like this were vague and were only stated but not explained.) In most of the reviews, oral history was not only perceived as a method that represents something objective, but also as something that reveals the ‘truth’ and ‘true events’. Typical framing of this tendency are as follows: “These are real events that took place in Hungary, which were told by old people to the author” or “although the characters are

¹⁴ This statement was made by many authors, for example see: Feliciter.net; Sándor 2012; Sándor 2013.

¹⁵ Sándor 2012 and könyvkolonia.hu.

fictional, the events are real”, and “behind every line (of the novel) stand real people and real events.¹⁶

Although Kováts claimed that these interviews were an important source of the book, and there were differences about how much impact the journalist attributed for them, oral history as a method is not explained in any of the critiques, nor is it problematized how much of these sources she actually used from those interviews in her novel. In addition no one explained what oral history is generally used for by historians, or mentioned the critiques of this method or questioned its objectivity or authenticity. Oral history is taken for granted as an authentic method in all of these reviews, and as I investigated in the previous chapter, Kováts herself argued about this on behalf of her novel. There was only one critique that highlighted that it is strange to “call this book reality” when it is in fact a fiction that is some kind of a mixture of those interviews and because it only portrays one life story that is constructed.¹⁷ There were some reviews that acknowledged that it cannot be a “factual novel”¹⁸ as the narrator is fictional, but still because of the oral history interviews, “the stories she wrote are undoubtedly authentic”.¹⁹ Interestingly, it was only explicitly claimed in one review that even the stories that these survivors told Kováts are uncertain in a sense because they are a reconstruction of their memory, which is changeable²⁰. Overall critical voices were almost absent from the reviews.

Beside the usage of oral history, Kováts’ background as an archivist-historian and her claim that she looked up archival war files created an additional kind of authenticity. Hence the research and the interviews that she conducted were perceived as authentic because of her position as a historian. Therefore it is the historian profession that assigned guarantee for her novel’s objectivity and authenticity in the reviewers’ perception. This was despite the fact that

¹⁶ Olvaslak.hu, Sándor 2012, Orosz 2012.

¹⁷ Divány.hu. This was also the critique which had the most negative tone about and portrayal of the novel, however it was published on a blog that is dedicated to fashion, consumption, food, culture, lifestyle, and children.

¹⁸ Deményi, 2013.

¹⁹ Batai 2012 and olvaslak.hu.

²⁰ Markovics 2013.

previously her main research focus was the Hungarian ‘Reform Era’ (nineteenth century) and she worked mainly as an archivist, and then as a publisher in her own company, Feliciter publisher.

Almost without exception the reviews argued what I previously cited: “Although Anna Somlyó is a fictional person, everything that she tells: are true events that happened” (Kováts 2011). I am not implying that what Kováts wrote was overall untrue, although in the reviews it is very vague what the journalists perceive as truth – the story itself, or the military events (as there are only few of them that explicitly remark that the military/historical events are which they perceive as authentic or true²¹). I am only highlighting that these different sides of the novel (experiences of the narrator, personal oral history interviews of the survivors on which the novel is based, military events, behavior of the soldiers) are treated as one, and the fact the journalists do not uncouple these threads gives the impression that they believe that everything that is in the novel is a realistic and truthful representation of WWII. I will elaborate on the problem with this framing in the later subchapter about silences, but in short, the general omission of the broader political background of WWII, Hungary’s alliances with Nazi Germany are not problematized or even mentioned at all, not even as a thread that could have made the novel more realistic. In these reviews, the narrator’s voice as objective (which means that she does not judge but only represents the things as they happened) is very often intermixed with the historical objectivity of the book, which clearly echoes the other quote from the book’s blurb which was widely cited (again, without reference) and acknowledged: “The author keeps her distance: she only portrays the events, so to speak shows the reality, but the edifications have to be deduced by us. However *facts* are stubborn things: the events follow each other without commentary, and actions speak instead of principles.” (Kováts 2011, my emphasis). In connection with this framing, the genre of the book (a novel) is mostly perceived in the reviews as a docunovel or as fictional memoir, war novel, in addition as a women’s novel at two occasions. There was one journalist who even drew

²¹ For example, Károlyi 2012 and Kiss 2012.

an analogy with the genre of documentary.²² All these framings show that the novel's historical authenticity is taken for granted by the journalist.

I have pointed out in the previous chapter, that Kováts values personal stories more in contrast with the “official” history, and in lot of the book reviews Kováts’ dichotomy between ‘official history’ and ‘personal history’ recurs. Many journalists also claimed (following Kováts’ argument) that there is a very strict dichotomy between the two, and some authors stated that this novel (re)presents a history that could never be known from history books.²³

The themes that were made taboo, and are “revealed” in this novel are denoted as the collective expropriation of the deported Jews’ properties by their neighbors and village community, the community’s inaction when the Jews were previously deported, their fight for the food that the soldiers left behind, those parents’ behavior who collaborated with the Russians to save their own children, their thievery of dead soldiers’ clothing, all of which was summed up in one of the reviews as “*our* guilt” (emphasis in the original).²⁴ The possessive determiner “our” refers to Hungarians, who survived WWII, therefore “us” means non-Jewish, and as the Holocaust also targeted Roma people, non-Roma people. This means, that the book reveals that there were also bad things that Hungarians committed, therefore “we are” not generally innocent. Framing of these issues as our “own guilt” comes up in another review that also emphasizes that in order to process traumas issues of the folk’s involvement in looting after the Jews’ deportation.²⁵ However at the same time this guilt is paired with another taboo that the novel is facing, namely the widespread rape of Hungarian women by the “Russians” (which I will explore in depth in the next subchapter), and also their lootings, inhuman and violent behavior, and that they took away many people (regardless of gender and age) to forced labor for years in many

²² Ayhan 2013.

²³ Markovics 2012, Tóth 2012 and olvaslak.hu. Although these do not highlight that is probably true for the socialist period, when Red Army soldiers were indeed portrayed only as heroic liberators.

²⁴ Antal 2012. It is interesting, that this author published this article in English (Antal 2013) which does not include the quoted sentence. In the Hungarian version: “Nevertheless, Denied has a rightful place in a literature which aims to answer the question of who we are, actually. In a literature, that shows with merciless power *our* guilt, even if we forget about it” (emphasis in the original).

²⁵ Szerbhórváth 2013.

occasions. ‘Coming to terms with the past’ in the journalists’ understanding not only means that the Hungarians as an imagined community have to face its own guilt, but those things also have to be acknowledged that the “Russians” did with them in this memory work. Two things are in the scales symbolically: victimhood (innocence) and being perpetrators (guiltiness), and as Kováts and the narrator of the novel “does not judge only portrays the events” (Kováts 2012) neither do the journalists.

The reviews differ at the point when it comes to the topic of coming to terms with the past, and what are the things that should be remembered and faced. Some of them as I have mentioned, claimed that “our guilt” is that the folk also participated in the looting, while others put much more emphasis on the violence committed by the “Russians”, but they do not only highlight sexual violence, but equally violence, killing, looting and forced labor that was represented in the novel. What these book reviews revealed is that there is a clear assumption about the nations’ innocence and superiority (and victimhood) in contrast with the Soviets’, as the Hungarians’ sins are not judged by the journalists. They only reproduce or re-evoked Kováts’ claim that “our” task is not to judge our predecessor’s acts, but to acknowledge and face them, and this is clearly what is going on in this reviews: they acknowledge that the Hungarians also did morally questionable and bad things (and some of them added that what else can one do in war), but the violence committed by the “Russians” are not only acknowledged, but highlighted and treated in a very different manner, which is what my next subchapter is going to investigate (könyves blog).

IV.1.1. Framing wartime sexual violence – degendering violence

My main driving question for writing this thesis was to find out how is wartime sexual violence framed in contemporary Hungary. As the novel *Denied* was publicized prior to its release with an excerpt when the narrator describes how she was raped, therefore its topic or at least part of its

topic was obvious. I was curious why it gained such positive feedback in the media (although I am not claiming that this question can be fully answered) in contrast with the fact other forms of violence against women, like domestic violence or rape is an issue that has been rejected by political agendas and public interest. What I was interested in, was how these book reviews framed wartime sexual violence according to the novel, how much emphasis this topic gained in the reviews and whether has it been realized as a form of gender based violence, or as an isolated and brutal act of the Soviets, or as the violation of the motherland/national territory, or a general by-product of war.

What I generally found in these reviews was the kind of narrowness that I have tried to portray above, on the one hand by failing to contextualize wartime rape in the broader context of WWII, or in the general masculine logic of war, and instead portray it as an isolated phenomenon. On the other hand I found the uncritical usage of what the narrator in the novel and Kováts claimed in interviews about the effect of rape was common, namely that it irreversibly disrupts life. This framing of wartime sexual violence clearly follows the perpetrators' aim, and this kind of uncritical reproduction takes away even the illusion of that rape victims can have agency or can get over their traumas. This framing is in contrast with what Polcz (1991) described as her own experience, admitting that she also had to commodify her own body in order to get something to eat, and who could later get over to what happened to her. Similarly, the protagonist of *A Woman in Berlin*, after acknowledging that she is going to be raped anyhow, decided to chose one man with whom she was going to have “consensual” sex, instead of being raped by any and all soldiers passing by. I am not questioning that (wartime) rape can and does disrupt life, only that this portrayal construct rape victim as passive and without agency, and I am not sure how representative this is of Hungarian cases.²⁶

²⁶ Although there is no discussion in the novel of victims who got pregnant due to the rapes, as Pető argued (1998), a significant number of women received abortion after the siege of Budapest, which for example is a form of agency.

The other statement of Kováts' about rapes that the journalists follow is that during state socialism these victims were silenced by the regime and after the fall of socialism, no one was interested in their stories: "silence settled on a long, dark age, that did not want to listen to them, and by the time they could have told anyone, there was no one to tell it to and no reason for it".²⁷ The latter claim is false, as it is proved by the popularity of the novel on the one hand, on the other hand considering the authors whom I already mentioned who previously undertook this topic. In the reviews experiences of wartime rape were commonly described as "unspeakable", from which there is no escape. In these reviews, the position of Kováts was not only described as authentic, but also was overemphasized, as one of the journalists claimed that a lot of rape survivors did not have the chance talk about their traumas, because they "either died, or a researcher as committed to oral history like Kováts did not find them," implying that those survivors who were interviewed by Kováts are in a better psychological condition because they could talk about their experiences to an empathetic person, who also revealed their traumas for the public. This claim also implies that rape victims are passive, and that the ones interviewed by Kováts were unable to speak themselves and had to rely on Kováts to give them a voice.

When I state that there was no broader context of wartime rape, I mean that not a single author mentioned the widespread rape of women in Berlin, or in other countries where the Red Army also committed assaults like they did in Hungary. Generally they also did not mention any other case of wartime rape, like the war in the former Yugoslavia (except for two cases that I will discuss below), which gained international attention regarding the mass rapes, although two of the articles were published in a daily newspaper (*Magyar Szó*) in Vojvodina, which was part of the former Yugoslavia.²⁸ This general erasure of other cases of wartime rape also means that rapes committed in Hungary are implied to be unique. In addition since there is no reference to any

²⁷ Sándor 2013. The same argument can be traced in R.Kiss.

²⁸ Sándor 2013 and Markovics 2013. In addition, one of the journalists, Szerbhorváth György was born in Vojvodina and also reported of the war as a journalist in the former Yugoslavia, but he only makes a parallel with literature representation of wartime rape, to *A Woman in Berlin* and to Polcz's memoir. (However, it has to be added that he is the only one who is familiar with *A Woman in Berlin*)

other war or armed conflict where rape was used as a ‘weapon of war’, it shows that the reviewers are either not familiar with this pattern (which I think is mostly the case), or they did not mention it, because portraying wartime rape as unique intensifies the extreme brutality of the Soviets. In any case, this portrayal implies some kind of national victimhood, as these mass rapes are portrayed as crimes that were committed by a nation (“The Russians”) against another, Hungarians. Wartime rape in this sense is not acknowledged as a crime committed in war, following war’s logic, but rather perceived as a backward and brutal characteristic of an ethnic group, the “Russians”. Using wartime rape for gaining national victimhood and the moral status of innocence is a common characteristic for dealing with these incidents on a national level, and silencing the gendered nature and subjective suffering of women on the other (Helms forthcoming).

One book review that was published on the online homepage of the journal *A Vörös Postakocsi* (the red post coach) by the editor-in-chief, was supplemented by “official” comments by three of his co-workers. (This technically means that their shorter reviews are published as comments under the editors’ article). One of the commentators, also one of the former editors of the journal, argued the following:

The rapes committed by the Soviet occupying soldiers were an essential part of the Soviet army. It can be known from the wars in the former Yugoslavia and Africa, that raping women (and even men) is a characteristic of certain nation’s fighting habit. It was an expression of intimidation and symbolic victory (Onder 2012).

This author explicitly ethnicizes sexual violence in war, and implies it as a non-civilized practice that only certain nations do. With this framing, he denies that rape is a common characteristic or by-product of war. I do not want to personally attack the male author of the above quote, but I have to mention, that the author of this misleading statement is Szilárd Borbély, who is a poet, writer and literary historian who was awarded with the prestigious literary József Attila award, and

the fact that a highly educated man thinks about gender based violence as a cultural attribute is unfortunately representative of the common Hungarian mentality about gender issues.

I found only one review that focuses on the thread of wartime sexual violence in the novel, the author of which appears to be familiar with some literature about this topic, as he remarks that this practice is legally acknowledged as crimes against humanity, and also claims that feminist theory blames patriarchy for its occurrence (but he does not refer to any author). Furthermore, he mentions that Andrea Pető also wrote about this topic using a “historical approach”.²⁹ Unfortunately, similarly to the framing of wartime sexual violence by other journalits, this author talks about the protagonist as a “dishonored girl” (*meggyalázott*), similarly to other reviews, from which one even called her “wasted” (*megpocsékolt*).³⁰ Although I stated that this author, Csuka, focuses on the rape thread of the novel, he does not frame it as gender based violence, neither does he approach this topic from the perspective of feminist theory, as he mostly talks about how rape was perceived by the protagonist and overall argues that *Denied* is important because it makes an attempt to “incorporate wartime sexual violence into collective memory”.³¹ This review points to the direction that I have found no review that gave a gendered analysis of the book or of wartime rape, instead they only reproduced a stereotypical understanding of dishonored women (Das 1995, Helms forthcoming) that we know for too long.

The things that were highlighted in the reviews in connection with the rape of Hungarian women were that this violence was made taboo because the “Russians” stayed in Hungary, which became a socialist country, where any public discourse that would negatively portray the liberating heroes of the Red Army was banned and silenced. Hence they followed the novel’s statements and only re-articulated it. Interestingly many reviews included a reference to wartime rape, but did not talk about this form of violence openly, only implied it.³² This means that they did not used words like rape or sexual violence, only stated that the book reveals the burden that

²⁹ Csuka 2013.

³⁰ Gerincre vágva blog

³¹ Csuka, *ibid.*

³² For example: Györffy 2013 Or Neuberger 2012.

women had to face during the “Russian” occupation and that they had to cover their face with dust and had to hide from the soldiers, with no explanation of what it was that they feared. Here, it has to be highlighted that if wartime rape of Hungarian women, or this phenomenon in general would be so unknown as some authors (and implicitly Kováts) claim it, than without reading Kováts’ book, some of these reviews could not be interpreted. In contrast with the reviews that do not openly talk about rape, there were some that included this case in their title, like the one that stated that “Judit Kováts wrote on behalf of the women who were raped by the Russians”³³ or “Wow, the Russkis raped women!”.³⁴

There was a difference between the authors on the subject of breaking the silence about wartime rape. Namely, some claimed that this is a new topic which is why they found this novel valuable and important, while others argued that these incidents are (widely) known or that other texts have already revealed them. The fact that only one third of the reviews mentioned Alaine Polcz’s memoir (and only one mentioned *A Woman in Berlin*) and/or drew a parallel between the two books is telling about the journalists’ general knowledge about this topic and the literary products of the past twenty years, and also their failure to even do a web search about this topic.

Among those who drew a parallel between *Denied* and *One Woman in the War*, there is also a contradiction about which one they found more valuable as literature, but the ‘votes’ for both sides are balanced. There are others, who instead of mentioning or besides mentioning Polcz’s memoir, claimed these incidents were and are known in the society, and this knowledge was passed to the next generation by grandparents or other relatives³⁵. But this knowledge was not only restricted to the widespread occurrence of wartime rape, but also to other forms of burdens that the civilians had to face: forced labor, bombings, looting and random violence. These incidents were valued on the same level, no hierarchies were established between them, which means that in many cases wartime rape was interpreted as one of the many forms of violence that

³³ R.Kiss 2012.

³⁴ Divány.hu

³⁵ R.Kiss *ibid.*, Sándor 2012, Gyórfy 2013, Divány.hu, olvaslak.hu.

occurred during the war, but more precisely because of the “Russian” occupation. In addition, this equation of the different forms of violence (whether they were gendered or not) points in the direction of a degendered understanding of victimhood. This argument is confirmed by another kind of argument that can be traced down in these reviews, which claims that the fictional character of the narrator could be substituted by anyone who lived at the time of WWII.³⁶ This means that sexual violence is not realized as violence against women (I haven’t read of cases when men were also sexually violated by the Red Army), but rather as a kind of violence that is similar to forced labor or killings. Therefore this novel and the female perpetrator is interpreted as a symbol of the Hungarian nation, to which many journalists explicitly or implicitly referred.³⁷ That is why I am arguing that national victimhood in this sense is not gendered, but degendered by these reviews, similarly to the postwar west-German expropriation of rapes in order to claim national victimhood (Heineman 1997).

On two occasions, journalists problematized that the novel was popularized with excerpts from the ‘rape scene’, because they found it problematic that the “only twist of the story was spoiled”³⁸. Hence they did not find this problematic on behalf of the victims and because wartime rape is not an issue that should be used for propaganda purposes, but understood wartime rape only a part of the novel’s story.

As mentioned earlier, wartime rape was mainly framed as an unspeakable thing, for which there are no words, the things from which there is no escape and “it is questionable whether is it possible to talk about what happened to her (the protagonist)”³⁹. Beside portraying rape as something unspeakable, as mentioned the framing of these women as dishonored, wasted people was also common. This depiction not only referred to what happened to the novel’s protagonist, but generalized to all the (Hungarian) rape victims/survivors, creating the narrative of the victimized women, who is passive, whose life is ruptured, who in many cases become infertile

³⁶ Ayhan *ibid*, Bártai *ibid*.

³⁷ Károlyi *ibid*, Sándor 2012, Ayhan *ibid*., Bártai *ibid*, Onder *ibid*, Neuberger *ibid*, R.Kiss *ibid*.

³⁸ [Divány.hu](http://Divany.hu), olvaslak.hu

³⁹ Györffy *ibid*.

and therefore her life was totally ruined, because she could never get over their trauma. This framing fits into the patriarchal logic of wartime rape itself, when it not only functions to humiliate men and the community through women's bodies, but also to disrupt, symbolically and physically the continuity of the community, but on a larger scale the nation, as discussed in chapter 2.

Framing rape as unspeakable also fits the patriarchal logic of representing women as passive victims. Their experiences are converted into one story, one narrative, not only by the book but by these reviews as well, and in contrast with one journalist's claim that Kováts's book is very important because it "gave face and name to those rape victims who were silent about the violence they suffered during the war in their whole adult life"⁴⁰, these women are re-silenced and put in a stereotypical box of national casualties. I am not convinced that the overall emotional framing of these events as "horrible" and its public acknowledgement means any progress, as the emphasis in these reviews is not on the fact that they experienced what they experienced because they were women. In addition, as Scott (1991) argues, instead of taking experiences for granted, the very logic should be revealed why certain groups gain certain experiences, in this case why women face rape in war.

Both in the novel and in these reviews, violence is portrayed as an experience which civilians only felt on their skin when the "Russians" arrived, which means that first, they totally separate the experiences of Jews and the "Hungarians", and second, that they deny the very possibility that German or Hungarian soldiers were violent against civilians: "with (and by) the Russians forced labor and violence also arrived".⁴¹ Furthermore, the dramatization of wartime violence that disrupts women's lives and the solidarity that these authors discursively offer, is in sharp contrast with the perception of other forms of gender based violence in Hungary, for example domestic violence or rape, to which no parallel has been drawn by any of these authors. Although by and large revealing the taboo of wartime rape is portrayed as not only a personal

⁴⁰ "Gerincre vágva blog.

⁴¹ R.Kiss *ibid.*

interest on behalf of those who were raped and silenced, but also in the interest of the nation, if we stick to the very logic of the novel, for the fictional and at the same time symbolic figure of Anna, telling her own experience did not help her or result in any kind of relief or salvation, as she finds her whole life wasted.

IV.1.2. Silences – and the omission of ‘coming to terms with the past’

I have previously referred to the main topics that are silenced and ignored in the novel *Denied* and in the reviews: the broader political context of WWII and the preludes that lead to it, Hungary’s alliance with Nazi Germany and the fact that the Soviet Union was an enemy and its army a conqueror. Furthermore, the violent crimes that the Hungarian soldiers and the Hungarian army committed against civilians in other countries, for example in Vojvodina (in 1941 massacring Serbs and Jews), and in the Soviet Union (1941-44). The suppression of these topics contribute to a distorted memory politics, that is still built on national victimhood and claiming of innocence, and an inadequate attempt at coming to terms with the past.

As I have delineated above, *Denied* is framed as an authentic, realistic novel in a historical sense that is narrated by a fictional character, but is based on “authentic events”.⁴² Authors who claimed that these events were representative of the whole country not only claim that looting, rape and other forms of violence were present everywhere in the country and on the same level, but also that the occupation by the Soviet army was the most dominant and the worst memory/event of WWII. This also means that the alliance with Nazi Germany and the deportation of Jews are beside the point, and also implies that this retrospective emphasis on the Soviet occupation is blended with the burden of state socialism. According to the novel and the reviews that also only concentrated on the selected themes that novel concentrates on, occupation by the Soviets was portrayed as the emblem of the horrible events of WWII. The

⁴² Magvető.

reason for the occupation of the country by the Red Army is not taken into consideration, just as the fact that Hungary economically served Germany, which also put a burden on the country. None of the journalists questioned the positive portrayal of the Germans, as in the novel Germans only appear as soldiers side by side with Hungarians, and any reference to their racial politics or elimination of Jews, not to mention homosexuals, the disabled, or the Roma is absent. Furthermore, this metanarrative that is claimed to be authentic, is only representative of a particular group of people and experiences of the civil population who lived through WWII, who did not belong to the above mentioned groups targeted by the Nazi politics.

IV.1.3. Political commitment in the book reviews

Mark (2005, 2010) argued that the political commitment of his oral history interviewees very significantly influenced the way in which they talked about wartime rape and the Soviet occupation. In contrast, in the book reviews I did not find this kind of casual connection between the political view of the media outlet in which the reviews were published and the way they framed the novel and in a broader sense the Soviet occupation. However, most of the book reviews were published on online literary and cultural portals, which do not have a traceable political commitment. Interestingly, in the right wing media *Denied* was underrepresented, as many of the right wing newspapers (Heti Válasz, Barikád, Magyar Hírlap) did not publish book reviews about it. Similarly bigger news portals (index.hu, origo.hu) only published reviews about *Denied* on their other related thematic portals (divany.hu, kotvefuzve.postr.hu). A leading weekly, HVG also did not write about this novel.

Some of the reviews were published in left-wing newspapers (Élet és Irodalom, 168 óra, Magyar Narancs) but the downplaying of the behavior of the Red Army soldiers that Mark found (2005, 2010) in his left-leaning interviewees was not at all characteristic for these reviews. For

example they all wrote about the novel as one in which “Russian” soldiers raped the protagonist. In addition many of them also remarked on the authenticity of the novel, for example Csaba Károlyi wrote in *Élet és Irodalom*, that the story could have happened “almost anywhere in Hungary” and that “this fictional book still has the value of a document, irrespectively of that this is not a story of a real people or peoples”.⁴³ On the online version of *Népszabadság*, the reviewer Péter Demény made a parallel between Kováts’s novel and the Holocaust survivor and writer Primo Levis’s work because both of them “talk about the horror with the accuracy of a report”.⁴⁴ In another review that was published in the online version of *168 óra*, it was argued that “everybody knew raped women and children born out of rape. The Russians did not spare even the old women: there were some, who died of the shame”.⁴⁵ However this was the only review that at the end highlighted that the Soviets also liberated many people besides the violations that they committed, while all the others only talked about the Red Army as liberators in a sarcastic way.⁴⁶

I only found one review that was published in a right-wing newspaper, in *Magyar Nemzet*, which was already mentioned by its title “Judit Kováts wrote on behalf the women who were raped by the Russians”.⁴⁷ This review is a shorter one, that explains the plot of the novel, with an emphasis on the rape thread: “even today we do not know exactly how many women’s fate does the fictional character Anna Somlyóí articulate because it is not documented how many women were raped by the Russian soldiers in Hungary and how many could never ever recover after the tragedy”.⁴⁸ This author also notes, that “with (and by) the Russians forced labor and violence also arrived”.

⁴³ Károlyi *ibid.*

⁴⁴ Demény *ibid.*

⁴⁵ The latter is also a refernce to the novel, when an old women killed herself because she was raped. Sándor 2012.

⁴⁶ “The Soviet occupation meant tragedies for many. But those who escaped the ghettos, were alive due to the Soviets. These together are our shared history” Sándor 2012.

⁴⁷ R. Kiss *ibid.*

⁴⁸ R. Kiss *ibid.*

Beside the above review, I found two that were both published in a Vojvodina based Hungarian newspaper, Magyar Szó. Before I checked the media source where they were published, I had the presumption that they were published in right-wing media. It is striking that these articles talk about the novel and “communism” as if they had also experienced it.⁴⁹ One of these reviews claimed that this novel is an “indictment against history, tyranny, past falsifiers, silence forcers, the beneficiaries of power. The indictment of the Man (*ember*) who was disabused of his faith, deprived of his hope, lost his love and denied from his memory”.⁵⁰ The other review from the Vojvodinian newspaper was suspiciously right wing because of its nationalist tone, as it talked about Trianon as a trauma that “will never disappear from the Hungarian public awareness”, and also noted referring to the novel, that Anna and her family did not suspect “that in 1942 it was not easy even for a pure Hungarian family to survive”.⁵¹ This author had a very similar (almost word to word) statement with another author, Nikolett Antal (who was quoted earlier for talking about “our guilt”), and stated that:

“...no one dies of a star, neither will you.” Anna calms her Jewish friend with this when the Jewish Laws were introduced. However not only Eta Goldberger and the rest of the Jews of the village died of the star, but also the Hungarians”⁵²

The first part of the quote is a quote from *Denied*, but it took me a while to realize that in terms of Hungarians the star that they died of must imply the red star, the emblem of bolshevism. Hence in the second half of the quote a parallel is made between the suffering of the Jewish population and the Hungarians, in a broader sense between the Nazi regime and the Soviet.

⁴⁹ Yugoslavia was also a socialist country, but it was different from other CEE socialist countries as Tito broke with Stalin in 1948. As pointed out in chapter 2 Soviets also raped here at the end of WWII

⁵⁰ Sándor 2013.

⁵¹ Markovics *ibid*.

⁵² Markovics *ibid*. The similar statement from Antal’s (2012) article was: “...no one dies in a star, neither will you.” – says Anna to her friend when the Jewish Laws were introduced. However, one way or another, they both died of it”.

IV.1. 4. The current atmosphere of memory politics, nationalism and *Denied*

As I have pointed out, in the book reviews there was a total absence of the broader context of WWII itself and the acknowledgement of similar crimes (sexual violence, humiliation, random killings) that were committed by other soldiers than Soviets. Any incidents that could be similar to what the Red Army did to “us” (Hungarians) is unthinkable to had been done neither to “us” by others than the Red Army, nor by the Hungarian army against others. However, for the latter case a very good example is a book about Hungarian atrocities in the Soviet Union in WWII, that was published recently in 2013 (Krausz). This book is based on archival files of testimonies and documents about Hungarian violations against civilians as brutal as what the Red Army did, or even more. Aside from looting, random killing and sexual violence, it is also argued that Hungarian troops burned houses, villages and innocent people alive at will (Krausz 2013). The ‘Hungarian Spring movement’ which is connected to the right-wing party Jobbik, has accused and reported Krausz for what he argues in this book and for his “public denial of crimes of communist regimes”.⁵³ (Although the book is explicitly about the Hungarian troops in the Soviet Union and does not investigate the Red Army’s crimes in Hungary). Given the book’s genre (it is based on archival sources and translations of these) and taking into account the lack of public visibility of scholarly works in Hungary, mass popularity is not likely, also because of its subject of Hungarian war crimes. Of course, recognizing that the Hungarian army also raped, murdered, pillaged would erase the possibility of sharply contrasting it with the Soviet army, and would erase the possibility to claim national victimhood according to what happened “to us” in World War II.

This hostile and dismissive environment against historical works that aimed to document violations by the Hungarians is not only characteristic of the extreme right Jobbik. The tragedy of the Hungarian Second Army is the mainstream memory of the Hungarian Army in WWII. The vast majority of this army died in 1942 at Voronezh, and their portrayal as victims often serves as

⁵³ Czene, 2013.

discursive evidence for the Germans' cruelty, as it was a German decision to send the Second Army on the direct frontline. However, a documentary entitled *Doni tükör* was made in 2003 by Péter Erdős, who recorded interviews with the local people at Don about the behavior of this Army, who testified and revealed that the Hungarians were really not as heroic and humane as they are commemorated in Hungary. Since that time none of the state financed television channels broadcasted this documentary, which shows the general reluctance to face up the past of Hungarian war crimes (Ungváry 2013).

Denied nicely fits into this one-sided memory politics, and the positive feedback that it gained in the Hungarian media is due to this memory politics, which is not only characteristic of people with right-wing commitments, but I would argue that it has been generally incorporated by the whole population as a mainstream memory of WWII. I can confirm my argument with the book reviews that I have analyzed, as there were no significant differences in how this novel was framed by media on different political sides, that lead me to the conclusion that the kind of memory politics that Kováts portrays can be considered typical of Hungary. In this sense, my findings challenge Mark's (2005, 2010) argument about the important causal connection between political commitment and the narration of wartime sexual violence.

During the writing process of the thesis I learned that a film is going to be made with Hungarian rape survivors of WWII. The director of the film is Fruzsina Skrabski, who is a journalist and previously co-made a film about the unveiling of the "biggest living Hungarian communist", Béla Biszku, entitled *Guilt and Impunity*. Her strong anti-communist feelings were made public in this film, and besides that the film about rape victims is going to be in the cinema in September 2013, I learnt that Judit Kováts is also taking part in it (although it is not known to what extent, my presumption is that she introduces her interviewees to Skrabski). Skrabski's film is being supported and financed at least in part by the national media authority (NMHH). On the web page of NMHH, a short description of the film is published with the working title "Soviet

exploit: dishonor". From this description I quote some parts that can imply the kind of document that is going to be made:

In wars the rape of women counts as a form of warfare, but perhaps the most brutal in this sense were the Soviet troops that occupied Hungary. (...) I intend to make a psychological documentary that retroactively reconstructs how this indignity indisposed the victims and the whole society. My presumption is that the shame is as big for the woman and the society that it is still hard for the victims to talk about it and for the society to process it. (..) This atrocity has additional victims: those children who were conceived due to this violence. We would also give voice to children who were born from violence. (..) We would also search for psychologists who helped raped women in solving their trauma in Bosnia after the war. We would be searching for a solution to how a woman can process this, and what the motivation of the soldier can be. We would also search for Soviet and Serb soldiers and ask them what they think about this (NMHH).

I quoted the text in length because it is loaded with many things that are mixed and raise many questions such as: why are the Soviets portrayed more brutal than other soldiers in other wars/armed conflicts? How do they measure brutality? Why do they presuppose that victims would want to talk about their rape experience and have it videotaped? What is the similarity between the Bosnian war and the Soviet occupation in Hungary? Why is Serb soldiers' motivation important for the Hungarian case? Why don't/won't they interview Hungarian ex-soldiers? Why don't they contrast the rapes committed by Soviets in Hungary with the ones that Hungarians committed in the Soviet Union? Will they discuss the latter at all?

As it was pointed out by Atina Grossmann (1995) in the German context, even if a victim-centered commemoration is made about wartime rape, it has to be contextualized in the political era when it happened. Furthermore, as it was described through the chapter, the discussion of wartime rape in Hungary lacks visible feminist critiques and gender approaches, which result in an unbalanced nationalist expropriation of this trauma. The recognition of gender based violence is absent from the awareness of ordinary intellectuals, as none of these book

reviews analyzed *Denied* from a gendered perspective or referred to the gendered logic of wartime sexual violence. As argued, *Denied* and the book reviews both framed wartime sexual violence in gendered national discourses: while the novel has a clear symbolic reading of gendered national victimhood, the reviews degendered these rapes and perceived it as an element of Hungarian national suffering during WWII.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the contemporary framing of wartime sexual violence in Hungary through the novel *Denied* and its reception in the Hungarian media. The analysis of the discourses about wartime sexual violence not only revealed how this topic is talked about, but also the ways in which World War II is remembered in Hungary and how it is saturated with nationalism, in addition to the way in which violence against women is (not) understood. This analysis also pointed to the lack of feminist voices about the topic of wartime sexual violence and the general absence, at least publicly, of critical thinking about violence against women. I argued that wartime sexual violence is exclusively framed as a crime committed by the Soviet soldiers against Hungarians, without any reflection of Hungary's alliance with Nazi Germany that led to the occupation of the country in the first place. This framing fits the dominant nationalist understanding of Hungary's role in WWII, which only emphasizes and commemorates things "done to 'us'" and silences "things done by 'us' to 'others'" (Judt 2002: 163).⁵⁴ Moreover, using the rape of women for claiming national victimhood is not a phenomenon that is only characteristic for Hungary, but a pattern that has been widely used to imply the nation's innocence (Helms forthcoming).

This thesis both contributes to the international feminist research on wartime sexual violence with the case study of Hungary, and to the scholarly works that examined wartime sexual violence committed in Hungary. After the fall of socialism, intensified public attention was paid to this topic that was suppressed previously by the Soviet-supported regimes during socialism. However, in the last decade the widespread rape of Hungarian women in WWII disappeared from public discussion, but now this topic has been revived. I am not claiming that

⁵⁴ Judt's quote is in a sense taken out of context, as in this article he talks about the postwar European memory politics of WWII that was dominated by the articulation of Germany's guilt and responsibility for the war. The original sentence is: "Two sorts of memories thus emerged: that of things done to 'us' by Germans in the war, and the rather different recollection of things (however similar) done by 'us' to others after the war (taking advantage of the situation the Germans had obligingly if unintentionally made possible)."

the revival of the interest towards wartime sexual violence is only due to *Denied*, considering that a documentary by Fruzsina Skrabski about wartime rape victims is going to be in Hungarian cinemas in September 2013. Instead, I would suggest that the contemporary atmosphere of anti-communism, and to some extent pro-fascist attitudes give an opportunity to expropriate the trauma of women who were raped in WWII for the nationalist program of demanding national victimhood and innocence. That is why the lack of feminist critical voices is problematic, because the public discussion of wartime rape only consists of a limited and patriarchal understanding of the topic, that nationalizes this trauma and portrays women as passive victims. Furthermore, in these discourses, voices of those women who actually had this trauma remain silent, however their personal accounts should be articulated, if they wished for. This is the work with which feminist and gender scholars could engage, in order to highlight that there are other ways in which wartime rape and other forms of gender based violence can be talked about besides the political and the national discourses that only conceptualize women as symbols or reproducers of the nation.

In terms of limitations, I feel that the main limit was the material itself that I analyzed through the thesis. I already pointed out the schematic nature of the book reviews and the overall poor state of journalism that lacked both critical and feminist voices. Although I have tried my best to pull out as many aspects of my data as possible, I am afraid that my findings are not as interesting as it could have been if *Denied* would cause real debates, that not only reaches journalists but also the academia . Overall I feel that that considering *Denied* and its reception, this thesis revealed more about Hungary's state of memory politics and nationalism, and less about wartime rape itself.

This research could be continued by the analysis of Skrabski's forthcoming film and the comparison with *Denied's* portrayal of wartime sexual abuse. Also I am looking forward to see how that film is going to be received in public discourses and whether will it create any public debates. Especially, since as I argued, that political commitment did not play a significant role in

how the novel and rape by the Soviet Army was framed in the book reviews, I am looking forward to finding out whether this reception is going to be the same about Skrabski's film. Furthermore this film is probably going to have a wider audience and more publicity than the novel did according to its genre. Considering the indignation and debate that Skrabski's previous co-produced film created, I can only hope for a more interesting discussion of wartime rape than how *Denied* was received, in which gender scholars and historians would also engage in order to reveal the complex nature of this topic, that I also tried to show in this thesis.

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