

**A Comparative Perspective on the Memorialization of the Holocaust in  
Germany and Hungary**

*The role of the actors in constructing memory, 1990-2014*

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by  
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## **Abstract**

This thesis addresses the salient phenomenon of Holocaust memorialization in Germany and Hungary from 1989/1990 to the present-day. The fundamental reason for the rapidly developing Holocaust memorials and monuments across Europe in the 90s can be largely explained by the political shift across Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, in the midst of newly established democracies, reunited Germany along with Hungary wished to come to terms with their troublesome past. This thesis focuses on the disparities between the methods these two countries have pursued to remember their Holocaust victims. In order to elucidate on the complex mechanism behind the diverse process of memorialization in Germany and Hungary, the evolvement of their history politics first and foremost ought to be discussed. The public representation of the past as in memorials, monuments, and museums cannot be solely approached from an empirical point of view. Therefore, for the sake of providing a more comprehensive understanding, this thesis will shed light the way in which various actors of memorialization have been influenced by the changes in history politics within the two countries. By introducing state intervention and civic initiative as actors of memorialization, I intend to illustrate to what extent they shape memorial landscapes as well as the nation's collective memory. Throughout the thesis I argue that Germany's approach to commemorate the Holocaust is more developed than Hungary's. Still, from a critical point of view I maintain that there are opportunities for further commemoration developments in both countries. Consequently, I will demonstrate gender as a relatively under-studied category in the field of Holocaust memorialization. Finally, with the aim of the comparative approach this thesis seeks to scrutinize the actors and the factors that led to the establishment of the two countries' dominant narratives on Holocaust commemoration as well as to emphasize the infinite process for a more authentic national remembrance.

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## Introduction

The subject of memorialization particularly with regard to the Holocaust has captivated the attention of numerous scholars, historians, art historians, sociologists, and artists in the last thirty-four years. The continuously growing interest of academia in Holocaust commemoration can be explained by the combination of various factors. First, by quickly glancing over the vast numbers of memorials and monuments erected across the world dedicated explicitly to the victims and martyrs of the Holocaust one can conclude that every nation has a different concept in of how Holocaust should be remembered. Second, precisely because of this diversity in Holocaust memorialization, memorials and monuments offer the chance to scholars to deploy numerous critical approaches.

In the majority of cases, comparative research on Holocaust memorials largely focused on either the aesthetic sides or the aggravation of the memorials served purely catalogical purposes. However, in recent years, the focus of academia has shifted to observe the memorials in the light of the given nation's history politics. Eminent scholars from James E. Young, Stefan Berger, Bill Niven to Tim Cole, Gabor Gyáni, John-Paul Himka along with others have recognized the impact that 'politicization of history' has over memorial landscapes. By gradually mapping out the analogies in the history politics of different countries, their extensive influence on the process of memorialization becomes apparent.

Therefore this thesis aims to follow the footsteps of respective academics for a more comprehensive understanding of the fundamental significance of German and Hungarian history politics in memorializing the Holocaust. The motive is to assess the disparities and parallels in Germany and in Hungary, two nations which are comparable due to their shared historical resemblances. As both countries experienced the trauma of two totalitarian regimes (fascism and communism), I became concerned over the way Germany, a nation of

‘former perpetrators’ mourns its victims and Hungary, a nation that currently portrays itself as a victimized country, commemorates its victims. For broader comparative purposes it would be also interesting to thoroughly observe the opposing narratives for memorializing each countries’ Communist past, however this thesis concentrates particularly on Holocaust remembrance.

In the course of carrying out the comparison between Germany and Hungary I intend to apply a ‘synchronic’ perspective, in a sense that the memorialization process within the two countries will be examined under a specific time period, from 1990 to present. Though, Holocaust memorialization was certainly present to some extent in postwar Europe, after the collapse of Communism, the dominant narrative for remembrance in united Germany as opposed to Hungary predominantly transformed. Among the changes brought by the political shift of 1989 the most striking is concerning the subject of this thesis, the way these two countries attempted to face their own past under newly established democratic values.

According to historian, Alexei Miller, the despotic style of Communist countries included a hegemony over every sphere of politics which made it possible to manipulate national narratives of history and memory. By censoring publications, historical researches, and articles many historians and research institutions were exposed to governmental control.<sup>1</sup> However, with the collapse of the authoritarian system not only intellectuals were allowed to express their opposite views more freely but the lessened state supremacy opened up possibilities for pluralistic approaches on national remembrance. Consequently, the following chapters will elucidate on the new methods of memorialization constructed by democratic societies.

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<sup>1</sup>Miller. Alexei. Introduction in “The Convolutions of Historical Politics” edited by Miller Alexei and Lipman Maria. Budapest-New York: Central European University Press, 2012 pp.2-3.



In addition to pursue the analysis through the comparison of memorials in Germany and in Hungary, special attention will be paid to the role of different actors in the process of memorialization. When discussing actors one should always take notice of who is really responsible for the establishment of specific museums and memorials. For that reason, to constantly raise questions such as for whom these memorials have been erected and for what purposes adds additional significance to the research. The act of remembrance in public places is typically carried out by either the state or by civic initiatives as an act of resistance against governmental power over memory. Consequently, the focal point of the thesis will be chiefly on state and civic actors and their function in shaping collective memory and dominant narratives within the two countries.

Throughout the comparison it is also important to take notice of how the progress of history politics within the two countries affected the method of remembrance carried out by different actors. The approaches of Germany and Hungary to constructing the dominant narrative for Holocaust commemoration post 1990 undeniably formalized the roles that state or civic actors eventually followed through in the process of memorialization. By acknowledging that the legacy of the Nazi past is an everlasting responsibility, Germany endeavored to establish a governmental strategy for memorials and memorial sites that not only advocates transparency in German politics but encourages the mutual relationship with civic actor groups as well.

In comparison the situation in Holocaust remembrance is more complex in Hungary. There is an evident disconnect between the way current government desires to demonstrate the country's responsibility during the World War II and the way civic initiatives hopes to. Despite that the tragic outcome of the Holocaust plays a significant part in Hungary's politics of memory, the governmental approach on its remembrance give rise to serious concerns for the future. By imposing dominance over the national narrative the Hungarian

state has gradually lessened the possibility for civic initiatives to interject. In so doing, the government not only generated the disapproval of various Jewish associations and nonprofit organizations, it also outlined an unsettling outlook for the Hungarian memorial landscape as well as for Holocaust education.

If we take a fleeting glimpse of the accomplishments in the field of memory studies we recognize that apprehensions regarding the institutionalization of memory are certainly not a new phenomenon. In 1989, French historian, Pierre Nora in his work, *Between Memory and History* introduced the concept of *lieux de mémoire*.<sup>2</sup> Nora argues that the desire to preserve *milieux de mémoire* – real environments of memory – that symbolizes the exchange of memories between individuals has shifted to *lieux de mémoire* – sites of memories – that focuses more on how to remember reality. *Lieux de mémoire*, according to Nora represents a socially constructed approach that maintains memory throughout museums, monuments, and archives. Given Nora's point of view this conscious act of the society for reconstructing the past in *lieux de mémoire* may pose danger for the disappearance of 'true memory'.<sup>3</sup>

Akin to Nora's hypothesis, Aleida Assmann, another leading figure in memory studies, goes even further by stating that with the construction of national memorials the process of remembrance becomes a governmental duty. In this respect, the official way of commemoration will isolate not only the individuals' memory but their wish for a more personal remembering. On a further note, she asserts that 'while individual recollections spontaneously fade and die with their former owners, new forms of memory are reconstructed within a transgenerational framework, and on an institutional level, within a

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<sup>2</sup> Nora, Pierre. "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire" in *Representations*, No. 26, University of California Press. 1989. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2928520>

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.* pp. 7-10.

deliberate policy of remembering or forgetting.’<sup>4</sup> In other words, without preserving individuals’ memory there is a fear that the memory conveyed through either second or third generation survivors or through state narratives will lead to misinterpretation.

Getting back to the diverse situation on Holocaust remembrance between Germany and Hungary, in the first chapter for the sake of providing a more comprehensive perception I will demonstrate the evolution of their history politics. Since the political circumstances before 1989-1990 have largely affected the two countries’ current representation and way of commemoration of the Holocaust, the postwar years up to 1990 will be concisely discussed. Indeed the political shift of 1989 positively shaped the method of remembrance in both countries yet it is equally important to recognize the obstacles that surfaced as acts of counter memorialization in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Because the comparative approach of the thesis is twofold after clarifying the dominant narratives formed by the two countries’ history politics the following chapters will examine the role of different actors in Holocaust memorialization. While the first chapter relies chiefly on secondary source of literature, the chapters on state intervention and civic initiatives will be influenced by primary sources such as state policies, official governmental plan on memorials, and interviews and articles. By juxtaposing well-known as well as recent memorials in Germany and in Hungary my aim is not only to critically reflect on them but to highlight their responsibility in shaping collective memory on the Holocaust.

While Germany’s way of coming to terms with its past has been praised by several historians one should not overlook the long process for reconciliation. Amidst the political turmoil in postwar Europe, divided Germany’s approach towards its dark legacies became a

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<sup>4</sup> Assmann. Aleida. *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. p. 6.

target of criticism. In the post-unification period, however, Germany has strived to restore a sense of national normality by holding a firm position against its Nazi past. Yet, even today the question resurfaces as to whether the memorialization and remembrance of the Holocaust will continue once it is no longer a pressing issue for Germany.

On the contrary, Hungary is still experiencing a kind of collective amnesia towards its national responsibilities for the tragic outcome of the World War II. Despite the obvious obliteration of Holocaust memory in memorials and museums there is an increasing effort from civic initiatives for a more honest and more self-critical way of remembrance. Through comparing the method of memorialization of the Holocaust between the two countries this thesis will argue that Germany appears to do a more comprehensive task than Hungary. However, within the last chapter I will illustrate a relatively new critical aspect on memorialization of the Holocaust that has been largely overlooked by both of the countries.

By introducing gender perspective in the subject of Holocaust remembrance my aim is to draw the attention to its primary importance. In this last section I will reveal that the absence of gender knowledge can actually gradually lead to an ahistorical representation in memorials. In so doing, I will examine the globally known icon of shoes in the Holocaust and the way memorialists attached either explicitly or implicitly gender presence to an object that is described entirely gender-neutral by survivors. The fundamental premise of that statement is based on survivors' video testimony and archival documents, in which I found that 'shoe' is very much a central topic of their discussion. However, when analyzing Holocaust shoe memorials in Germany or in Hungary the underrepresentation of the importance of 'shoes' stressed by the survivors is clearly missing. The conclusion of the last chapter aims to fit in the overall argument of the thesis that is Holocaust remembrance as well as the effort to come to terms with the past ought to be an everlasting process for both

Germany and for Hungary. The case study on gender perspective in particular serves as a great example that there are still opportunities for enhancement.

## **Chapter I. The Evolution of History Politics in Germany and in Hungary**

In the attempt to reflect on the impacts of various actors on the process of memorialization and to review the latest memorials in Germany and in Hungary, the contextualization of the historical period holds a fundamental importance. The fall of the Soviet Union in 1990 undoubtedly triggered significant changes in the realm of German and Hungarian memory politics. After the end of the Cold War, amidst the newly established democracies governmental involvement vis-à-vis increasing civic engagements steered both nation's way toward the acknowledgment and reconciliation of their past. Despite their shared historical similarities, particularly to the repression under two totalitarian regimes, one can agree that Germany as opposed to Hungary took a different turn in the construction of dominant narrative. For the sake of providing a better understanding of the two countries' current positions on history politics and more importantly on the Holocaust memorialization their convoluted approach first and foremost ought to be examined.

When discussing memorialization it is important to bear in mind that Germany as well as Hungary struggled in not only commemorating the victims of the Holocaust and their fascist past but to pay tribute to the Communist era as well. Nonetheless, in this thesis I intend to focus solely on juxtaposing the remembrance of the Holocaust within the two countries even though I believe their method of memorializing the Communist period is equally important and deserves to be observed separately. As previously noted, the reinvention of national consciousness that gradually resulted in a so called memorialization phenomenon in Europe is marked by the years of 1989-1990. In order to have a greater insight on the subject, however, it is vital to briefly address the postwar years as well. Certainly, Holocaust memorialization existed prior to the 90ies but to some extent under a different narrative.

### 1.1 The Annals of Holocaust memorialization, pre-1990

Prior to Germany's reunification the surrendered country had to face severe geopolitical changes as a result of the Potsdam Conference held between 17 July and 2 August in 1945. Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (later replaced by Clement Attlee), and newly elected American President Harry S. Truman assembled to negotiate on postwar German borders along with economic changes, and reparations. The division of Germany by the Allied powers led to the formation of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949. As expected both states sought to take a firm stand against their Nazi past however the process they carried it out varied extensively.

Under the governing party of the GDR, SED (Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschland), the country not only positioned itself a communist but as an anti-fascist state as well. The East German government's narrative toward its fascist past was strongly characterized by heroes, resistance fighters, and the sense of victimhood. Given Berger's point of view the glorification of certain aspects of the former German Imperial past in particular to the resistance against absolutism and feudalism, the early labor movement resulted in an abandonment of national responsibilities concerning the Holocaust and National Socialism<sup>5</sup>. The marginalization of Jewish suffering from the East German historical consciousness along with the generalization of Nazi past was adopted as a dominant narrative thus GDR could exculpate itself from any ambiguous entanglement with the Third Reich.

In accordance with this sense of victimization in the GDR the term victims as a matter of fact was expanded from solely referring to the millions of Jews who perished under

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<sup>5</sup> Berger, Stefan: *"German History Politics and the National Socialist Past"* in *The Convolutions of Historical Politics* by Miller, Alexei, and Lipman, Maria. Budapest-New York: Central European University Press. 2012. p.27.

National Socialism to ‘ordinary’ people who suffered under the war period, e.g. people who lost their places of residence, had to fulfill military duties, or who strongly opposed against the Nazi regime. Consequently memorial sites and monuments in the GDR reflected predominantly on either the martyrs of Hitler fascism or the heroic Soviet liberators and communist resistant fighters, as illustrated in the Neue Wache or the Treptow Memorial in Berlin. Both state-sponsored memorials suggest the abnegation of national responsibility as well as the lessening of the significance of Jewish question from public discourse.



*Figure 1: Neue Wache or ‘New Guard’ memorial. Memorial was reopened in 1960, originally situated in the eastern part of Berlin, memorial intended to commemorate the victims of fascism and militarism. Photograph by Agnes Kende*



*Figure 2: The Soviet War Memorial in Treptow Park was designed to remember the 5000 fallen Soviet Soldiers who courageously fought in the Battle of Berlin in 1945, Photograph by Agnes Kende*

On the contrary, under the pressure of Western Allies, the West German Government (FRG) took on a more self-critical, self-reflecting approach in terms of remembering its fascist past. With the supervision from western countries the process of ‘denazification’ along with the reimbursement to the state of Israel played the largest role in West Germany’s history politics. Furthermore, in order to grasp the legacies of its dark past or to gain a more expository understanding on the National Socialist ideology under totalitarian regime, the FRG government established the Institute of Contemporary History in Munich in 1947. Aside from the foundation of the Institute the subject of the researches focused



chiefly on the political influence of National Socialism thus underplaying the weight of the Holocaust.<sup>6</sup>

By all means the years of 1960ies and 1970ies with the Frankfurt Auschwitz (1963-1965) and Eichmann (1961) trials shifted the Holocaust and the faith of European Jews from the periphery to the center of history politics of West Germany. The perpetrator trials not only opened up the possibilities for research on the subject on the Holocaust, but also helped survivors to break the silence and to come to terms with their own experiences after a long period of time. Moreover, the Historians' Controversy (*Historikerstreit*) in the late 80ies further strengthened the importance of the Holocaust in German collective memory. The article of Ernst Nolte that triggered the controversy was published in the newspaper of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* stating 'that the National Socialist's anti-Bolshevism was a legitimate response to a totalitarian threat'.<sup>7</sup> Nolte's argument faced heavy criticism primarily by philosopher Jürgen Habermas who in contrast with Nolte hoped to draw the attention to the uniqueness of the Holocaust in world history and to its more centralized place in German history politics.

Until the reunification of two Germanies, divided memory was the representative feature in the matter of commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. The portrayal of this so called 'double past' was evident via memorials, monuments, historical debates, and popular culture. The year 1990 not only put an end to the consideration of the Holocaust as a taboo subject in Germany, it also triggered a new wave of memorialization under a more collective, united narrative. The dominating framework for memorialization in reunited Germany became the West German model. On one hand, the incorporation of the crimes that were committed by the Third Reich into their national consciousness assured

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<sup>6</sup> Berger. Stefan: "German History Politics and the National Socialist Past". pp. 23-25

<sup>7</sup> Berger. Stefan: "German History Politics and the National Socialist Past" p. 31.

Germany's position as a member of the NATO<sup>8</sup> and the European Economic Community<sup>9</sup>. On the other hand, the disciplinary guidance from the Allies on how to acknowledge and memorialize their National Socialist past, heavily burdened German population with the sense of collective guilt that eventually erupted in a series of counter-memorialization.

Akin to the political circumstances in postwar East Germany, the Soviet occupation of Hungary generated the establishment of the Hungarian Communist Party (*Magyar Kommunista Párt*)<sup>10</sup> under the leadership of Mátyás Rákosi. Despite the formation of people's court in 1945 by the Communist Party that dealt with putting former war criminals on trial the dominant narrative on remembrance focused largely on the heroic liberators and the victory of communism over fascist dictatorship. According to historian Tim Cole with the very few memorials that have been erected to remember the dark times and its victims in Hungary 'the Jewishness of the Holocaust was quite literally pushed to the periphery.'<sup>11</sup>



Figure 3: Deportation Memorial Wall in Újpest, 1947, Photograph by Agnes Kende



Figure 4: Brick Factory Memorial in Obuda, 1945, Photograph by Agnes Kende

<sup>8</sup> NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) founded in 1949 as a military alliance

<sup>9</sup> EEC (European Economic Community) founded in 1958 it later became the European Union in 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Note that MKP (Magyar Kommunista Párt) was not the first communist party in Hungary, the first Communist Party was originally formed in 1918 after the World War I under Béla Kun in the course of Hungarian Soviet Republic ( Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság)

<sup>11</sup> Cole. Tim. "Turning the places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory. Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95" in Hornstein. Shelley and Jacobowitz. Florence's "Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust". Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. p. 277.

It can be concluded that those few aforementioned attempts to memorialize the Holocaust in Hungary (Deportation Memorial Wall in Újpest and the Brick Factory Memorial Stone in Óbuda) along with even fewer publications and research allowed to be published on Hungary's collaboration with Nazi Germany and on the fates' of Hungarian Jews did not have substantial impact on the nation's victimized image. However, the seemingly fading governmental control during the 80ies allowed intellectuals and research institute to further explore Hungary's history with special reference to World War II period. Furthermore government approved the construction of specifically "Jewish" memorial in the heart of the city. The official unveiling of the *Memorial of the Hungarian Jewish Martyrs* took place on 8 July 1980 at the courtyard of Dohány Street Synagogue.



Figure 5: The Memorial of the Hungarian Jewish Martyrs at the courtyard of Dohány Street Synagogue, 1980, Photograph by Agnes Kende

Similarly to Germany, the political shift of 1989 brought significant changes as well in Hungary's way of facing its own past. However, as I stated previously the process of coming to terms with their troublesome history differed between the two countries. The reason for this is firstly that the expectation for investigating that nation's dark legacies was not as pressing as in the case of Germany. Secondly it proved to be more reasonable to

follow the neighboring post-communist countries narrative of victimization. Thirdly during the struggle to establish a new democratic national identity after 1989, Hungary feared that adopting a self-critical approach at this point would solely endanger its newly gained patriotism. Additionally Eastern European countries were prone to describe their sufferings under the two dictatorships as a European phenomenon so they could exculpate themselves in taking national responsibilities.

### **1.2. Confronting Counter-Memorialization post 1990**

Reunification in Germany did not go without difficulties; the nation once again experienced the emergence of anti-Semitic crimes and racial violence between 1990 and 1995 that have seriously jeopardized the newly united German identity. Even though, the majority of European countries along with the United States supported Germany's reunification, the development of neo-Nazis incidents within anew politically and economically strong country raised obvious concerns for a new wave of German nationalism.<sup>12</sup> With greater reason Germany was expected to hold a firm position in regards to the way failures of the past are integrated in Germany's collective memory or to the place that Holocaust occupies in Germany's historical consciousness.

The appearance of neo Nazi and xenophobic demeanors must be explained by the combination of various factors. Economically, as Randy C. Lewis, the author of *'The Neo Nazis and German unification'*, claims that the limited access in the job market and in the higher education provided a fertile soil for scapegoating and violence. Sociologically, the frustration induced by Germany's reparations program to reimburse Jewish victims of the Nazi atrocities and by the rapid growth of immigrants who pose danger for a homogenous

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<sup>12</sup> Kurthen. Hermann and Bergmann. Werner and Erb. Rainer. How the Burden of the Past Affects the Present in Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany after Unification. USA: Oxford University Press, 1997. p.39.

population. Additionally the sudden success of the right wing political party *Die Republikaner* (Republican Party, REP) during the first national election in 1989.

Consequently all of these factors contributed to the serious increase of numerous violent crimes and discrepancies. As stated in the book on '*Antisemitism and Xenophobia in United Germany*': 'In 1990 the 38 counted anti-Semitic acts were composed of 9 involving arson or explosive acts, 4 involving bodily injury, and 25 involving property damage, such as graffiti. Of 39 cemetery desecrations, half were of proven right-wing origin.'<sup>13</sup> Although extreme right wing, ultranationalist political parties such as REP, NPD (*Nationaldemokratische Partei*) or DV (*Deutsche Volksunion*) never gained significant political influence in the German Government, their hate propaganda and anti-Semitic views have turned the international media and current academics' interest on the country.

In 1987 neo Nazis gathered together in a cemetery of Wunsiedel a small town in Germany to commemorate Rudolf Hess's death, who was one of the most controversial figures of Nazi Germany. In the beginning of the 90ies the number of participants in the Rudolf Hess memorial march has rapidly increased. Hess played an important role in the Nazi Party (NSDAP) but he mostly became known for his independent mission to Great Britain in 1941. The purpose of his visit was to negotiate peace between Germany and Great Britain. However, he was shortly captured upon his arrival by British secret service and he was imprisoned till his death in 1987.<sup>14</sup> The fact that neo Nazi movements portrayed Hess as a positive figure, an 'ambassador of peace' and legitimized his actions can be understood as a denial of national responsibilities along with whitewashing of German history.

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<sup>13</sup> Kurthen, Bergmann and Erb. *Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany after Unification*. p.24.

<sup>14</sup> Dörfler. Thomas and Klärner. Andreas. *Rudolf Hess as a 'Martyr for Germany': The Reinterpretation of Historical Figures in Nationalist Discourse in Nationalist Myth and Modern Media* edited by Brinks. Jan Hermann and Rock. Stella and Timms. Edward. London- New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2006. pp.139-146.

In 26 September, 1992, an arson attack on the Jewish barrack in the former concentration camp Sachsenhausen, near Berlin engendered strong public reaction. Followed by a visit of the Israeli Prime Minister, Yitzchak Rabin the concentration camp memorial has been significantly vandalized by extreme right. The evidence of the arson attack on Sachsenhausen was eventually integrated within the exhibition of the concentration camp memorial in order to raise awareness for potential dangers imposed by growing anti-Semitism. The German government officially condemned the incident as an attack on the representation of the past however it did not cease the consecutive wave of anti-Semitic violence in the forthcoming years.<sup>15</sup>

Akin to the previously mentioned dramatic events of the early 90ies, one of the oldest synagogues of Germany in the state of Schleswig-Holstein was firebombed by two Molotov Cocktails in 25 March 1994. The building was heavily destroyed, however people living in apartments above the synagogue managed to escape. The Jewish community was shocked by the attack committed by right-wing radicals and demanded the banishment of any sort of anti-Semitic incidents<sup>16</sup>. Despite that, violent racist attacks such as swastika graffiti have already been precedent assaults against the synagogue in Lübeck and against Jews went to extremes.

In terms of history politics in the post-unification period there were evident controversies in connection with what lessons had been learned from Germany's Nazi past and from the Holocaust. Given the incidents of far right-wing it can be stated that even though the Holocaust was never denied by them, extremists have wished to rehabilitate the National Socialist past. In so doing they were hoping to establish a more powerful and more homogeneous national identity within the reunited Germany. It was soon realized by the

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<sup>15</sup> Neumann. Klaus. Antifascism and Anti-Semitism in Shifting Memories: The Nazi Past in the New Germany. USA: University of Michigan, 2000. pp. 132-136

<sup>16</sup> Kurthen, Bergmann and Erb. Antisemitism and Xenophobia in Germany after Unification p. 38.

government that serious measures ought to be done in order to permanently end neo Nazi vandalism, riots, and desecration of Jewish properties, religious symbols. Moreover, in the midst of the political shift of 1989-90 across Europe, during which Holocaust became the central event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germany as a nation of ‘former perpetrators’ was expected to lead the way in Holocaust memorialization.

Hungarian government’s contradictory interpretation of its past did not seem to cease with the political changes of 1989. On the contrary, with the end of the Cold War, a sort of competitive mentality surfaced regarding the remembrance and representation of Hungary’s double past. It can be stated that there has not been a governmental consensus on neither what Communist legacy signifies in the present nor on the Holocaust and national responsibility during World War II. By chiefly generalizing the last twenty five-years, the only agreement reached in the political discourse concerning the period under the two totalitarian regimes was the politics of victimization and self-exculpation. This dominant narrative for memorialization is interwoven with the glorification of some aspect of the past by current and former right wing, conservative governments and the radical nationalist party, Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary).<sup>17</sup>

Hungarian well-established historian Gabor Gyáni remarks that one of the first public manifestations of Hungary’s role during Second World War after 1990 was carried out by József Antall, the first democratically elected prime minister of Hungary.<sup>18</sup> Albeit, Antall has acknowledged the series of laws restricting the rights of Hungarian Jewry he also emphasized that until 19 March 1944 the Jewish population of 725,005<sup>19</sup> could live in security. With the intent of further averting official apology the parliament passed the

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<sup>17</sup> Jobbik radical nationalist Party, founded in 2003, leader of the political party, Gábor Vona

<sup>18</sup> József Antall, Prime Minister of Hungary between 1990-1993, leader of the conservative Hungarian Democratic Forum (Magyar Demokrata Forum, MDF)

<sup>19</sup> Braham L. Randolph. “Hungary and the Holocaust: The Nationalist Drive to Whitewash the Past”. New York: Institute for Holocaust Studies, city U of New York, 2001. p. 3

restitution law, Act XXV of 1991. The law granted retribution for those Hungarian citizens whose private property was unjustly deprived by the authoritarian government. As Attila Pók Hungarian historian explains:

In the first restitution laws of 1991 (Law XXV/1991 and Law XXXII/1991), compensation was restricted to property "lost" after 8 June 1949 -- in other words, the approved legislation left most Jews and/or their descendants whose properties had been confiscated before the communist regime without compensation.<sup>20</sup>

Despite the fact that the law was eventually extended to citizens entitled to partial compensation for their confiscated property from 1939, it revealed the general discourse of the role of Jews in national consciousness.

To further explain, during the second half of the 90ies a rehabilitation boom broke out from the initiative of the leading conservative party, the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF). The original purpose was to provide justice to the formerly dismissed military officers that implied the reassessment of people's court verdicts after 1945. The rehabilitation committee of the Ministry of Defense was formed at the beginning of the 90ies and throughout the following years in 5,400 cases out of almost 7000 requests it rehabilitated the previously removed ranks. Two outrageous rehabilitation processes that attracted the most public attention are connected to Hungarian actress Sári Fedák and high-ranking officer and one of Horthy's most trusted followers, Ferenc Farkas Kisbarnaki.<sup>21</sup>

Fedák became infamous for her performance in the play "Öfelsége a mama" during which she stepped on the stage with a 'Hitlergruß'. In 1944 she escaped to Vienna where she continued her war propaganda while working at the Donausender radio station. She was rehabilitated in 1994 with the explanation that she solely followed the orders of others.

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<sup>20</sup> Pók, Attila. "Why was there no Historikerstreit in Hungary after 1989-1990". Randolph L. Braham and Brewster S. Chamberlin (eds): *The Holocaust in Hungary: Sixty Years Later*. The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies. Graduate Center of the City University of New York. Social Science Monographs, Boulder, Co. Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2006. pp. 241-256.

<sup>21</sup> Kende, Péter. "Védtelen igazság; Röpirat bírókról, ítéletekről". Budapest: Hibiszkusz Könyvkiadó Kft. 2007.



Whereas, in case of Kisbarnaki, who received his general rank by Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the Hungarian fascist Arrow Cross Party in 1944 was rehabilitated in 1998. The rehabilitation of Kisbarnaki's military title can be reckoned scandalous because according to Hungarian law promotions given by Szálasi are not acknowledged. In conclusion, the rehabilitation processes of former perpetrators, and war criminals just further strengthened the abnegation of national responsibilities of Hungary during World War II.

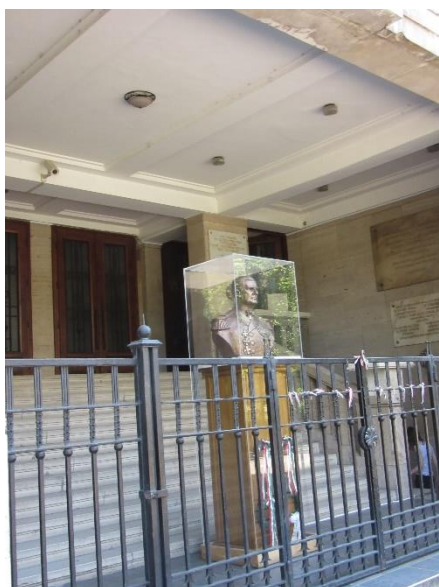
The glorification of the Horthy era and the revival of the Horthy Cult in Hungary are closely connected to the appearance of right-wing extremist and to the current Fidesz government. Without a doubt, it can be asserted that the role of Horthy during the World War II has been primarily overshadowed by the crimes committed by the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party. Moreover, Horthy's active collaboration with Nazi Germany since 1940 has hardly been discussed in public discourse. The 1920 *Numerus Clausus* Act was ratified to limit Jewish admission to higher education and was followed by laws regulating Jewish influence in the economic and cultural sphere are all measures implemented by Horthy's and his anti-Semite government. Furthermore, as László Karsai, historian notes in an interview: "Kamenyec-Podolszkij and the massacre in Novisad had also proven that we cannot only pass laws about Jews but deport them in the tens of thousands".<sup>22</sup>

In opposition to the widely advocated notion that Jews lived relatively protected under the wings of Horthy government, the first atrocities in the course of Hungarian Holocaust, the mass killings of Kamenyec-Podolszkij occurred in 1941, years before the German occupation. During which more than 18,000 Jews were deported from Hungary to the borders of Ukraine and to the hands of SS *Obergruppenführer*, Friedrich Jackeln. Similarly, in 1942 in the city of Novi Sad the Hungarian Gendarmerie murdered more than 3000

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Hungarian historian Karsai, László. "At most the appearance of sovereignty was lost." *Magyar Narancs*, 20 March 2014.

Serbian civilians among those were 700 Jews. None of these examples for Hungary's atrocious crimes during the Horthy era are carefully depicted in history politics or museums, and memorials.



*Figure 6: Bust of Admiral Miklos Horthy, 2013,*

*Photograph by Agnes Kende*

On the contrary, in the recent years Horthy's figure became the part of Hungarian nationalist pride. Jobbik, the Movement for Better Hungary extreme right-wing political party is not only celebrating the anniversary of Horthy's entry to Budapest on 16 November 1919 but they also erected statues and renamed streets after him for commemorative purposes. The official unveiling of the bronze Horthy bust occurred in 2013, the statute is located on the property of Hungarian Reform

Church in the 5<sup>th</sup> district of Budapest. The bust was initiated by the church's minister Lóránt Hegedűs whose wife maybe not so surprisingly is a member of the Jobbik party.

Moreover, within a year at Gyömrő, small town close to Budapest, the Szabadság tér (Liberty Square) was renamed after Miklós Horthy. Eventually due to continuous civilians protest the mayor of Gyömrő acknowledged the mistake and corrected it by renaming the town square again. Indeed the glorification of the Horthy era was not a new phenomenon invented by the extreme right wing party however, it gradually gained more dominance in Hungarian national consciousness with the appearance of the Jobbik. The members of the party explain their admiration for Horthy's figure by emphasizing his wish to recover former territories lost by the Treaty of Trianon and his overall nationalistic views.

In conclusion both Germany and Hungary faced controversies in regards to coming to terms with their past after and prior to the political shift of 1989. In the case of Germany the internal and external pressure on maintaining a self-critical approach led to a more transparent, a more institutionalized way of memorialization. The denunciation of Holocaust denial (Auschwitz lie) as a punishable offense in 1994 by the Federal Constitutional Court and the establishment of the first official commemoration of the Memorial Day for the victims of National Socialism (anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz) are both considered important steps for Germany's *Erinnerungspolitik* (Politics of memory).

Conversely, the commemoration of the Holocaust in Hungary and the Hungarian state responsibility still occupies a central place in the public discourse. Despite the continuous attempts for remembering its victims the Hungarian government is still propagating a simplified narrative of national history. Therefore the following chapters of the thesis first and foremost aim to shed light in what way these above aggregated governmental measures and diverse narrative for history politics reflect on the two countries' memorials and monuments within the new wave of memorialization after 1990. Additionally, in an attempt to provide a more objective perspective on the landscape of memorialization in Germany and in Hungary civic engagement in contrast to state-sponsored memorials will be discussed in more depth.

## Chapter II. *Framing the memory, State intervention*

*“How does one mourn for six million people who died? How many candles does one light? How many prayers does one recite? Do we know how to remember the victims, their solitude, their helplessness? They left us without a trace, and we are their trace”*

Ellie Wiesel<sup>23</sup>

The years of 1989-1990 with the collapse of the Soviet Union not only triggered fundamental political changes across East-Central Europe but also generated a memorialization phenomenon among the majority of post-communist countries. The term phenomenon aims to indicate the burgeoning nature of memorialization post-1990 during which the frameworks for memorials and monuments were constructed under democratic conditions. Along with many nations desire to join the European Union, came the recognition that commemorating the Holocaust rather than averting it might be more beneficial for their own interest. Without a doubt, constructing state-sponsored memorials seemed to be the most preferred way to work through the troublesome years of totalitarian periods.

Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate the state as an actor in Holocaust memorialization both in Germany and Hungary. Although, Germany developed a united, more self-critical strategy in remembering the Holocaust while Hungary is keen on portraying itself as a victim of Nazi Germany both nations' state-sponsored memorials can be observed critically. Through guided remembrance, framed memory, and constructed reactions from their visitors' I argue that state memorials often fail to address the individual

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<sup>23</sup> Wiesel. Ellie. Expert from his speech at the Days of Remembrance Ceremony, Washington, D.C. 2001 from United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007199>

as well as the complexity of the memory. Understanding the limitation of the research I will chiefly concentrate on the most recent and most debated Holocaust memorials in Germany and Hungary.

Before we proceed any further, clarification of the term ‘memorial’ is essential. It may be self-evident that memorials ought to traject memory, but more importantly, the questions arise of whose memory is represented and for whom the memorial should stand. Moreover, would a national Holocaust memorial be constructed solely for remembering its victims, or from a more critical aspect would it serve as an apologetic gesture by uplifting the burden from each nation’s consciousness? Is it meant to be a place for mourning or a place for teaching valuable lessons from history to future generations?

As Paul Williams, professor in museum studies, points out in his book, *Memorial Museums*,<sup>24</sup> the primary aim of memorials is reconciliation that can refer ‘equally to the governmental, public task of social cohesion and nation rebuilding, and to the private need to mourn the dead, these processes are seldom seamless or harmonious.’<sup>25</sup> By extension, it can be stated that the functions of memorials are often tainted with various political intentions because of the emphasis that memorials should be located on either a sacred place or an educational site.

## **2.1 The Role of the German State on memorials and memorial sites**

Due to the international pressure on Germany to hold a firm position against its fascist past, the central and regional governments introduced the Federal Strategy for Memorial Sites

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<sup>24</sup> Williams, Paul. *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities*. Oxford-New York: Berg, 2007.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* p.113.

(*Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes*)<sup>26</sup> in 1999 that not only formalized what constitutes as a national memorial site but also set the criteria for governmental funding as well. In the following years the law was complimented by the Coalition agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD<sup>27</sup> that aimed to give further attention to the cultural sphere in particular to educational policies and cultural institutions, with a focus on epochs of dictatorships, namely that of the NSDAP<sup>28</sup> and SED.<sup>29</sup>

As stated in the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes*, the German government soon recognized that the vast majority of the memorials dedicated to the victims of the Nazi past have been initiated chiefly by civic engagements. Consequently the memorial landscape of Germany became decentralized and heterogeneous. Taking historian Bill Niven's argument into consideration, the German law for memorial sites is mostly considered to be a bureaucratic, budget oriented document that identified those accountable for specific national memorials.<sup>30</sup>

On the one hand, the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* not only established the framework principles for memorialization but its overall significance in particular to its close relation with civic engagements ought to be examined as sui generis in Europe. On the other hand, it can be argued that by collectivizing victims in Holocaust memorials, the government inadequately attempts to fulfill its aim for individual reconciliation.

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<sup>26</sup> Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes, 1999 in Presse- und die Informationsamt der Bundesregierung. last updated:2015..[http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Archiv16/Artikel/2005/11/\\_Anlagen/gedenkstaettenkonzeption.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=2](http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Archiv16/Artikel/2005/11/_Anlagen/gedenkstaettenkonzeption.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=2) p.4.

<sup>27</sup> The Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD in 11 November 2005 in Presse- und die Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, last updated 2015 [http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2004\\_2007/2006/01/\\_Anlagen/coalition-agreement951220.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile&v=1](http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/EN/Artikel/2004_2007/2006/01/_Anlagen/coalition-agreement951220.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1)

Additional information: CDU (Christian Democratic Union) liberal-conservative political party, currently in power under Chancellor Angela Merkel, CSU (Christian Social Union in Bavaria) Christian democratic, conservative political party, SPD (Social Democratic Party)

<sup>28</sup> NSDAP (National Socialist German Worker's Party), Nazi political party between 1920-1945

<sup>29</sup> SED (Socialist Unity Party of Germany) ruling party of the former German Democratic Republic between 1946-1989

<sup>30</sup> Niven. Bill and Paver. Chloe. Introduction in Memorialization in Germany since 1945. p.1.

Firstly, the law established that the institutional funding for memorials and places of remembrance must be a fundamental duty of the state in order to preserve German historical consciousness and its culture of remembrance. Moreover, it emphasized the various functions a memorial can hold in particular to educational facilities. On further note the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* recognized the primary importance of the generation that lived through and witnessed the horrors of the Nazi regime.<sup>31</sup> By acknowledging their contribution in the construction of National Socialist memorial sites the government hoped to keep their ‘autobiographical memory’<sup>32</sup> alive.

In 1999 the Bundestag came to an agreement as part of the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption* that the state would pay special attention to support memorials and places of memory that are connected to the dictatorships of NSDAP and SED. Initially the law only included the funding of the Buchenwald, Ravensbrück, and the House of the Wansee Conference memorial sites, the Topography of Terror Documentation Center, the German Resistance Memorial Center, the Berlin-Hohenschönhausen Memorial, the ‘Stasi’ prison, the German Historical Museum, the Berlin Wall Memorial, and the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe.

Memorials as such are declared to be authentic historical locations that expected to provide coherent clarification of the totalitarian nature of the two regimes. Besides, in order to obtain governmental funding the memorials and memorial sites ought to meet the following criteria implemented by the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption*:

- the location of the memorial or memorial sites must have an outstanding historical importance (e.g. a location of persecution)

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<sup>31</sup> Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes p. 2-3.

<sup>32</sup> Reference to Halbwachs. Maurice. On Collective Memory. London: University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1992. As Halbwachs explains that “*autobiographical memory*” is a shared and personal experience between individuals. However he argues that if memory of this kind is not in constant fluctuation or if it is not shared by people, it can easily vanish.

- the memorial and memorial sites ought to have a pedagogical, academic, museological concept
- the requirement of national and international cooperation with other memorials
- the cooperation with schools and other educational institutions<sup>33</sup>

Even more importantly the federal government would support close collaboration among the representatives of the victims, other respective associations, along with civic initiations for the sake of maintaining transparency in the institutionalized way of memorialization. In 2008 the law was supplemented by the involvement of other memorials and memorial sites in Germany, and it also made a special reference to the additional constitutional changes derived from the grand coalition between CDU/CSU, and SPD.

The federal elections in September 2005 induced the formation of Germany's three major political party's coalition between the CDU, CSU, and the SPD. The Coalition Agreement signed on 11 November, 2005 not only aggregated coalitional discussions but it also proposed reforms on culture, education, and social developments<sup>34</sup>. By comparison to the Federal Strategy for Memorial Sites, the Coalition Agreement advocated Germany's special responsibility in the cultural sphere. As enounced in the agreement: 'The funding instruments indispensable for preserving Germany's vibrant and diverse cultural scene should be strengthened...[T]he Federal Government's policy on funding memorials launched in 1999 will be continued with the aim of ensuring that sufficient attention is given to the two dictatorships on German soil.'<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes pp. 3-4.

<sup>34</sup> Moore. Carolyn and Jacoby. Wade. Introduction in German Federalism in Transition: Reforms in a Consensual State. New York: Routledge, 2010. pp-4-6.

<sup>35</sup> The Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD in 11 November 2005 . pp. 2-3.



In the light of the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes* and the Coalition Agreement it can be concluded that both substantially contributed to the government's involvement in the building of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe. On a further note, the construction of the Berlin memorial also compliments the *Gedenkstättenkonzeption's* principle on joint effort with civic initiation, since it would have never been built without the active participation of civilians or the 'Perspective for Berlin' group or without public donations.<sup>36</sup>



Figure 7: Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin, 2005, Photograph by Agnes Kende

Yet the fact that the planned Holocaust memorial in Berlin breaks with the criteria that the law for the strategy of memorial sites requires is considered remarkable. Particularly that of the location of the memorial neither bears an outstanding historical location nor is designed on an authentic site. Nonetheless the emblematic significance of the location cannot be overlooked. Peter Eisenman's design for the memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is situated in the heart of the city, surrounded by numerous prominent buildings such as the Reichstag in the governmental zone, the Brandenburg Gate, and Potsdamer Platz.

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<sup>36</sup> Niven. Bill and Paver. Chloe. Introduction in Memorialization in Germany since 1945. p.2.

In 1995 the winning design of Peter Eisenman and Richard Serra was chosen for Germany's national Holocaust Memorial. Both Americans, architect Eisenman and sculptor Serra envisioned a monument consists of nearly 2,700 individual grey steles that vary in size. According to their initial plan the different size of the pillars represent the individuality while the large number of the steles creates a sense of labyrinth symbolizes the collectivity<sup>37</sup>. The memorial in Eisenmann's view does not seek to provide a narrative for the memory it rather invites the visitors to continuously question the atrocious deeds that gradually led to the Holocaust.

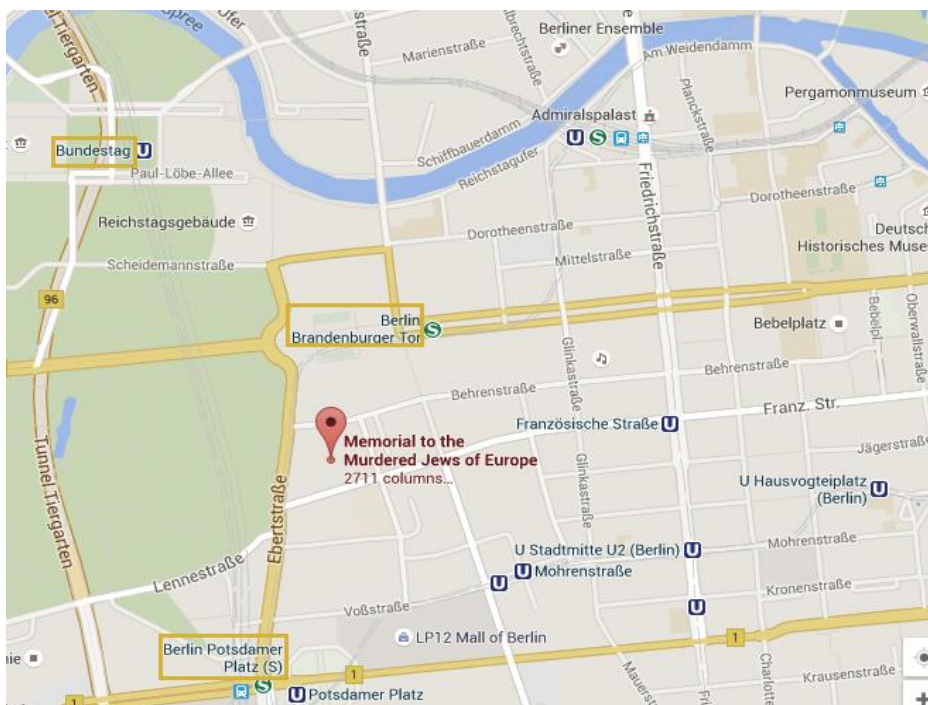


Figure 8: The location of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe surrounded by prominent sites in Berlin.

As I briefly mentioned in the beginning the project itself became a target of criticism from politicians, historians, and the general public. Historian Jürgen Kocka, for instance argued that the exclusion of other victim groups such as Sinti, Roma, and Homosexuals

<sup>37</sup> Young, E. James. *At Memory's Edge: After-Images of the Holocaust in Contemporary Art and Architecture*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000. p.186.

would negatively influence Germany's process for coming to terms with its dark past. Kocka's concerns presumably derived from the reopening of the Neue Wache national memorial in 1993.<sup>38</sup> Shortly after the reunification Chancellor Helmut Kohl proposed the idea for re-inauguration of the New Guard Memorial in Berlin. By dedicating it to 'the victims of war and the rule of violence' the memorial failed to recognize not only the Jews as the main victim group but the other victim groups as well.

Other skeptical speakers have questioned the fundamental reason behind building the memorial, as they believe Berlin is already a scene for *lieux de memoire*<sup>39</sup> where memory of extermination and terror left its imprint on every corner of the capital. The public's fear of being overwhelmed by the memory of destruction was most accurately addressed by academic, James E. Young, who wrote:

These were persuasive arguments against the monument, and I am still ambivalent about the role a central Holocaust monument will play in Berlin...As instructive as the memorial debate had been, however, it had neither warned nor chastened a new generation of xenophobic neo-Nazis-part of whose identity depends on forgetting the crimes of their forebears. And although the memorial debate has generated plenty of shame in Germans, it is largely the shame they feel for an unseemly argument-not for the mass murder once committed in their name. In good academic fashion, we had become preoccupied with the fascinating issues at the heart of the memorial process and increasingly indifferent to what was supposed to be remembered: the mass murder of Jews and the resulting void it left behind.<sup>40</sup>

Young further asserts that state involvement in building the Holocaust Memorial was necessary in order to publicly acknowledge the atrocities of the Nazi period and the void left in German national consciousness.

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<sup>38</sup> Note that the history of the Neue Wache, guardhouse goes back to the beginning of the 19th century, until 1918 it served as a memorial to the Wars of Liberation then it became a memorial for the victims of World War I, and under the GDR government the memorial was dedicated to the victims of Fascism and militarism. It was not until the reunification of Germany that the memorial was transformed into the 'Central Memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany for the Victims of War and Tyranny.'

<sup>39</sup> Reference to Pierre Nora. *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire. Representations*, No. 26, University of California Press. 1989, pp 7-24. French historian, Nora, coins the term *lieux de memoire*, – sites of memories – the term stands for a socially constructed approach to maintain memory throughout museums, monuments, and archives.

<sup>40</sup> Young, E. James. Germany's Holocaust Memorial and Mine. *The Public Historian*, Vol. 24, No. 4. (Autumn, 2002) p.71.

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=02723433%28200223%2924%3A4%3C65%3AGHMPM%3E2.0.CO%3B2-3>

As I previously asserted collectivization of the victim groups is a pressing issue for the memorial. Not only does it not allow visitors to grieve or to reflect at the memorial site but it also ignores the extent of the genocide. By acknowledging the 6 million people who were annihilated during the Holocaust with solely 2,700 number of unmarked grey pillars the memorial covertly creates a space for de-personification and detachment from the actual event. Additionally it needs to be noted that the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe excludes any remark on other significant victim groups of Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, in recent years separate memorials to the homosexuals and the Sinti and Roma victims have been erected by the government. However, if we take into consideration the large amount of effort that was put into the building of the central Holocaust memorial and the underground museum, the intentional underrepresentation of the other victim groups becomes apparent.



*Figure 9: Memorial to the Homosexuals Persecuted under the National Socialist Regime was opened on 27 May, 2008. Photograph by Agnes Kende*



*Figure 10: Memorial to the Sinti and Roma of Europe Murdered under the National Socialist Regime was opened on 24 October, 2012, Photograph taken from the website Deutsche Welle*

For the sake of argument it should be remarked that weighing the importance of different victim groups ought to be avoided in memorials, otherwise neither a comprehensive understanding of genocides nor a critical mindset can be expected from the new generations. Despite that ‘never again’ became the principal motto in memorialization of the Holocaust in Germany, one must always seek to question to what extent the memory boom of the 90s with governmental dominance over remembering pose danger to gradually allowing people to forget. With an overall credence in state controlled commemoration there is always a fear of what is being remembered and for what purpose it is being remembered.

## **2.2 The Role of the Hungarian State on memorials and monuments**

To begin with, it is important to bear in mind that as opposed to Germany’s *Gedenkstättenkonzeption*, the Hungarian government has not felt the need to formalize state responsibilities on memorials and memorial sites. Despite the fact that there has not yet been an official criteria system ratified on what count as a national memorial or on the varied functions memorials ought to hold, the dominant narrative is clearly present in state supported and sponsored memorials. Taking the existing monuments and memorials on the Holocaust or on fascist totalitarianism into consideration, it becomes clear that the majority are largely based on the political instrumentalization of the nation’s perception on its past. Namely, adapting the politics of victimization and consequently abnegating any national responsibilities for the tragic outcome of the Holocaust.

When discussing the politics of victimization the historical event of the Treaty of Trianon undeniably plays an important role. As carefully explained in Hungary’s dominant narrative the trauma of the Treaty was one of the triggers for Hungary’s desire for collaboration with Nazi Germany. Furthermore, the Treaty, and the dissolution of the



Austro-Hungarian monarchy after World War I, also served as a catalyst for a more discriminatory view of minorities, particularly the Jewish population. With the national conservative Fidesz<sup>41</sup> government in power this sense of irredentism occupies a more central role than ever before in Hungarian national consciousness.



Figure 11: House of Terror Museum in Budapest, 2002,  
Photograph by Agnes Kende

Indissolubly connected to the representation of the memory of Trianon in museums is the opening of the House of Terror in 2002. The House of Terror by all means can be reckoned as one of the first prominent examples for the way in which the Orbán government is commemorating Hungary's past. The museum supposedly remembers the victims of two totalitarian regimes, Fascism and Communism in Hungary with the purpose that the past must be acknowledged. Historian John-Paul Himka cleverly points out in his book, *Bringing the Dark Past to Light*<sup>42</sup> that countries that had to endure the atrocities of two totalitarian regimes, the memorialization process of the past can be reckon more conflicting.

<sup>41</sup> Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Alliance) national conservative political party, first in government between 1998-2002, currently in power under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán from 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Hanebrink. Paul. *The Memory of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Hungary*. in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe*, edited by Himka. John-Paul and Michlic. Joanna Beata. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013.

The museum is indeed a perfect example for the general misinterpretation of joint representation of the two totalitarian regimes. Instead of offering a deeper insight on the development of the two despotic systems and their fatal consequences it simply puts one dictatorship against the other. In so doing, the museum makes the mistake of encouraging visitors to measure the crimes of fascism against the crimes of communism. In his essay, ‘Why not invent the past we display in the museums?’ Anthony D. Buckley formulates his unsettling ideas regarding the latest trends in museums:

In the museum world, relativism justifies the bread and circuses of commerce. There has been a growth of theme parks and display centers, and the ethos of these institutions has spread into more sober mainstream museums. The prime aim of such bodies is commercial: their concern is to raise revenue. And to this end there is a new emphasis on providing not only the comfort and entertainment of the public, but also versions of history that ‘people want to see’<sup>43</sup>

Taking Buckley’s alarming words into account, the House of Terror can be easily described as museum of hi-tech alienation of Hungary’s historical memory. The standardized alienation is expressed by not only displaying unoriginal artifacts but the usage of words as well. As an illustration, opening the exhibition with the Arrow Cross and identifying the Arrow Cross Party as Hungarian Nazis implies that roots of anti-Semitism did not exist in Hungary prior to Szálasi’s take over. Furthermore the unbalanced representations of the two totalitarian regimes have raised numerous questions. The two rooms that sought to represent the Arrow Cross Party are certainly overshadowed by the illustration of Communist’s crime in more than twenty rooms.

Besides, the main narrative is the victims of Hungary yet neither the deportations nor the anti-Jewish legislations under the Horthy government are thoroughly explained. It is evident that the main objective of the museum is not to portray Hungarian Jews as the victims but to illustrate Hungary as a victimized country under dual occupations. The final

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<sup>43</sup> Buckley, Anthony D. “Why Not Invent the Past We Display in Museums? Making Histories in Museums.” edited by Kanagh, Gaynor. London –New York: Leicester University Press, 1996. p.43

outcome of the museum is a non-chronological, ahistorical narrative by which the visitors are guided through Hungary's national memory with political intentions. The director of the museum Mária Schmidt explains the underrepresentation of the Holocaust in Hungary by claiming: 'We didn't want to deal with this period as we have few documents; this will be the task of the future Holocaust museum.'<sup>44</sup>

The statement of Mária Schmidt however can be seen as controversial for numerous reasons. For example, the Holocaust Memorial in Budapest was not yet open at the time when the House of Terror exhibit premiered. However, since the two were planned in relation to each other, the museum exhibit deliberately excluded aspects of the Holocaust. Thus arose speculations among Jewish associations and historians for a conscious political motivation to create a potentially false interpretation of Hungary's national history.



*Figure 12: Holocaust Memorial Central in Budapest, 2004, Photograph by Agnes Kende*



*Figure 13: House of Fates Holocaust Museum, planned opening is in 2015, Photograph by Agnes Kende*

<sup>44</sup> Braham. L. Randolph. "Hungary and the Holocaust. The Nationalist Drive to Whitewash the Past." New York: Institute for Holocaust Studies, Graduate Center of the City University of New York, 2001. p. 13



When the Budapest Holocaust and Documentation Center was opened in 2004 the curators' original intention was to depict Jewish faith between the burdensome years of 1938-1945 in Hungary. On one hand the permanent exhibition of the museum puts a strong emphasis to illustrate the relationship between the state and Jewish citizens around the World War II period. On the other hand, concentrating only on this specific time in Hungarian history does not sufficiently depict the integration of Jews into Hungarian society prior to the Holocaust. Moreover, as often occurs in cases of state supported Holocaust memorials, they tend to embody victims as a homogenous group annihilated by the Nazis. Consequently, the lack of individual representation silences the unique memories.

Furthermore, the pending openings of the latest state initiated Holocaust museum, the House of Fates (the official opening date is yet to be determined) holds little potential as well for a more objective approach. The institute will focus on the experience of children during the Holocaust with the assistance of similar spectacular high-tech tools that have been used in the House of Terror. As stated among the museum conceptions edited by KKETTK (The Foundation for Research on Central-Eastern European History and Society)<sup>45</sup> the Holocaust exhibition will be covered by three major categories. The first display centers on the fate of children during the Holocaust and the second will illustrate their rescuers. By introducing many cases of life saving activities the museum aims to set outstanding examples for humanity during such a dark time. Last will be the personal stories, as in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., visitors will follow the experiences of various survivors and victims in order to present the historical events in a manner more relatable to younger generations.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Közép-És Kelet Európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Közalapítvány

<sup>46</sup> Courtesy of MAZSIHISZ, Schmidt. Maria. A Holokauszt Gyermeáldozatainak Emlékhelye-Európai Oktatási Központ (an "Emlékhely") kiállítási és szakmai programja megalkotása tárgyában kidolgozott Konceptió (Detailed Concept on The Memorial Site for Children Victims of the Holocaust). Detailed Concept on The

Interestingly, based on its principle plan the museum should not affect the uniqueness of the already existing Holocaust Memorial on Páva Street.<sup>47</sup> One can argue that constructing two Holocaust memorial museums in the capital city is in fact unprecedented in Europe. Furthermore, the estimated cost of the House of Fates is around more than six billion forints (almost 20 million Euros) in gross while the Holocaust Museum in the 9<sup>th</sup> district not only struggles with expenses but is unable to modernize its permanent exhibition or to fix its damaged interactive equipment.

By aggregating numerous examples for Holocaust museums and documentation centers across the world, Schmidt aims to legitimize her motives to construct the House of Fates side by side with the Holocaust Memorial Center. However, she overlooks the fact that in those cases one institution is either a memorial site or a museum and none of those share the same title of being a Holocaust museum. Moreover, one might say that Schmidt being the director of both establishments, the House of Terror and the House of Fates would only create a total state hegemony over the Hungarian states' Holocaust narrative that would further alienate the Holocaust Memorial from the public audience.

Finally the authenticity of the location needs to be discussed. Despite that the preferred site is decentralized as in the case of Páva Street, Schmidt insisted on constructing the House of Fates at the obsolete, ruined train station in the 8<sup>th</sup> district of Józsefváros. According to her conception, the reconstructed train station would symbolize the horror of deportations, however historians are still debating the accuracy of Józsefváros train station during that dark period of Hungarian history. Overall, the House of Fates raises serious concerns regarding its desire to be an educational center that can effectively and objectively engage future generations with the lessons of Hungarian national history

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Memorial Site for Children Victims of the Holocaust. Közép-És Kelet Európai Történelem és Társadalom Kutatásáért Közalapítvány. 2013.p.5.

<sup>47</sup> ibid p. 20.

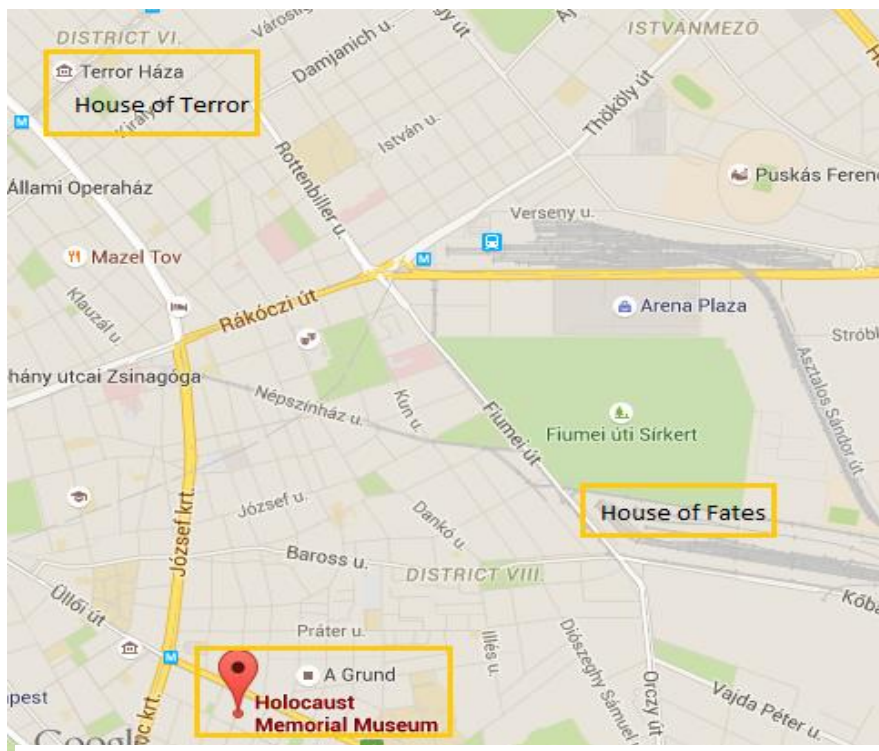


Figure 14: The location of House of Fates in accordance with the Holocaust Memorial Museum and the House of Terror

In conclusion Gyáni Gábor notes that modern memory is born out of a certain way of representation of the past and of the consensus of a given political group that creates the framework of commemoration.<sup>48</sup> In this respect formalizing a given nation's memorial landscape along with constructing a dominant narrative for memorialization may engender various predicaments. In Germany there is a risk that collectivization of the victim groups may deepen the division among communities and can eventually provoke violent reactions. Whereas, in Hungary the issue is not even the collectivization of the victims in the first place but rather the identification of them. Hungary's obscure position against its controversial past not only misleads the younger generations toward an apocryphal national

<sup>48</sup> Gyáni Gábor. "The memory of Trianon as a Political Instrument in Hungary Today." in Miller, Alexei and Lipman, Maria. *The Convolutions of Historical Politics*. Budapest, New York: Central European Press, 2012 p.97

history but it provides a fertile soil for the emergence of “right-wing political propaganda” in Hungary.<sup>49</sup>

When juxtaposing the two countries approaches for state memorialization of the Holocaust it becomes clear that Germany feels that with constructing the central Holocaust memorial in Berlin and later expanding the remembrance to other significant victim groups, it has adequately fulfilled its duty for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Evidently, German governmental steps toward constructing a strong framework for Holocaust remembrance must be acknowledged. Germany’s constant effort to face its painful past eventually helped to establish a true form of national normality and a sense of proud for being German again. In contrast, Hungary’s attempts to commemorate the Holocaust and its history during World War II might not reflect positively on the purpose for reconciliation. Since state-sponsored memorials bear various controversies and often exclude collaboration with other actors in shaping collective memory, it can be concluded that they may not be the most accurate platform for commemorating individuals. Therefore, in the following chapter I will illustrate civic engagement as an actor for a more singular way of remembrance.

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<sup>49</sup> Gyáni Gábor. “The memory of Trianon as a Political Instrument in Hungary Today p. 112

### Chapter III. *Stumbling over the Dark Past- Das Stolpersteine Projekt*<sup>50</sup>, Civic initiative

*“96 millimeters square, concrete sheathed in brass,  
smooth and shining, mortared among cobblestones.  
Gedenken. To remember. Sprinkle these stumbling stones  
across Frankfurt and Berlin and Hamburg.”*

Rachel Unkefer<sup>51</sup>



Figure 15: *Stolpersteine, Stumbling Blocks memorial*,  
Photograph by Karin Richert

Reflecting upon the previous chapter it becomes apparent that when discussing the subject of memorialization the impact of the state cannot be overstated. In the following pages, however my aim is to elucidate first and foremost the difference between state sponsored and civil agents of memorialization. As Bill Niven, professor of contemporary German history, suggests in his work, *Writing the History of Memory*, memory can become the tool of ‘political instrumentalization’.<sup>52</sup> In postwar East-Central Europe particularly, reconstructing past or presenting ‘collective memory’<sup>53</sup> has become highly problematic. The

<sup>50</sup> See image 3.1. in the list of illustration, <http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/gallery/>

<sup>51</sup> Unkefer. Rachel. *Stolpersteine*. Poem in The Citron Review, Micro-Fiction, Flash-Fiction, Creative Non-Fiction, Poetry, Last edited: Spring 2015. <http://citronreview.com/2014/09/01/stolpersteine-2/>

<sup>52</sup> Berger. Stefan and Niven. Bill: “Writing the History of Memory”. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Halbwachs. Maurice: “On Collective Memory”. London: University of Chicago Press, Ltd., 1992.

public representation of memory has to respond to current political demands and in this way the purpose of memory is distorted.

Akin to Niven's premise, Tim Cole suggests in his essay *Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary* that erecting a memorial is a 'conscious act of choosing to remember certain people and events' and that act symbolizes a form of political power over the nation's memory and past.<sup>54</sup> With this in mind addressing civic initiatives on memorialization has fundamental significance. Albeit, the critical attention of scholars has chiefly been concentrated on state supported memorials, throughout this chapter I argue that memorials from civic initiatives may have stronger influence on shaping collective memory. Moreover by introducing the *Stolpersteine* memorial (Stumbling Blocks) as a case study I intend to demonstrate the project's ability to not only concentrate on the remembrance of individuals, but on the individuals that are doing the remembering.

After a brief introduction on the *Stolpersteine* project itself in Germany and Hungary, the critiques concerning the Stumbling Block memorials will be addressed, but also the imprint these small memorials have made on Germany's and on additional European countries' landscape of memory. In contrast to the predominant state supported memorials in postwar European countries, I assert that the innovative Stumbling Blocks memorials have positively influenced everyday remembrance and have expanded the understanding of collective European memory of the Holocaust.

### **3.1. Civic actions vs. State supremacy on memorialization**

As I argued earlier the transformation of public history and the motives of political actors are closely tied together. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989-1990, however in the

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<sup>54</sup> Cole. Tim. "Turning the places of Holocaust History into Places of Holocaust Memory. Holocaust memorials in Budapest, Hungary, 1945-95" in Hornstein. Shelley and Jacobowitz. Florence's "Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust". Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003. p. 272-273.

midst of newly established democracies the general hegemony of state was stirred by the emergence of other actors. Surely with the gradual further involvement of civic engagement, diverse perspectives have appeared which have significantly challenged the dominant narrative on memorialization. Before I approach Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* project as a case study for non-state sponsored way of memorialization I will discuss the objectives and disciplines of civic initiations in more depth.

By all means civic engagement advocates active participation among the members of a given community. With the consensus of every participants it makes public decisions and interferes if necessary against social malfeasances. On a further measure of importance, civic engagement wishes to devote itself to issues that have been marginalized or neglected by state actors with the result of ameliorating the quality of the society. In other words, civic engagement in memorials concentrates on individuals who desire some sort of a personal conciliation that a centralized, collective memorial is unable to provide.

Since public memorials are designed to trigger certain emotions, they often fail to grasp the complexity of the traumatic event.<sup>55</sup> Given the majority of cases, state sponsored memorials do not allow visitors to actively engage with the victim's memories nor do they offer a place for self-contemplation. Ideally public memorials should promote collaboration with civic engagements in the hope of a more personal, relatable memorial landscape. Similarly, stated at the first international conference on *Memorialization and Democracy*: 'Deliberate local, national, and international strategies are required to ensure that memorials do not undermine other democracy-building efforts but rather complement such initiatives.

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<sup>55</sup>Bickford. Louis Brett. Sebastian, Sevchenko. Liz: *Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action*. Report based on an International Conference, held on June 20-22, 2007 p. 2.

One of the key actors is government, which can play an important role in helping support initiatives through public policy'.<sup>56</sup>

According to, well-known historian, James E. Young: 'official agencies are in position to shape memory explicitly as they see fit, memory that best serves a national interest.'<sup>57</sup> Given Young's argument, if the public representation of memory has to respond to current official demands the purpose of the memory will be distorted. In many cases government funded memorials offer their interpretation of the national narrative, yet it does not necessarily mean that it reflects the most accurately on the particularity and multiplicity of the actual memory.

For this reason a growing desire for the individual way of reparation as well as an individual way of remembering can be seen among the people for whom the traditional state memorials and its national narratives do not symbolize their personal approach of remembering. Whereas state memorials tend to focus on collective memorialization of victim groups, in various cases that often implies either explicitly or implicitly excluding various categories such as age, gender, religion, or race. As a consequence, non-state supported memorials that concentrate on individuals have more capacity not only to symbolize the absence of those who perished and suffered under National Socialism, but to shape the landscape of memorialization.

With a considerable effort to construct a democratic society, German government puts large emphasis to support civic initiatives from the state budget. As stated as a pivotal principle in German politics civic initiatives must be not only theoretically but affectively a

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<sup>56</sup> Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action. Report based on an International Conference, p.3

<sup>57</sup> Young, James E. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 1993. p.3.



part of the governmental responsibilities.<sup>58</sup> In order to represent Jewish interest to German government and to advocate peaceful coexistence between Jewish population and Gentiles, organizations such as the *Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland*<sup>59</sup>, *Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin*<sup>60</sup>, the *Leo-Baeck Institute Berlin*<sup>61</sup> are actively engaged in German politics. The collaboration between civic initiatives and German government does not go always without difficulties. However, their overall presence in Germany's cultural life and their mutual respect with the state serves as a good example for taking national responsibility to preserve the memory of the Holocaust.

In Hungary as well, the Holocaust commemoration relies largely on diverse civic actor groups who, with active participation and empathy for the subject hope to contribute to a more accurate way of memorializing the darkest chapter in Hungarian history. Various educational projects, commemorative events, conferences, and exhibitions on the Holocaust can be attached to respective Jewish associations, such as *Mazsihisz*<sup>62</sup>, *Haver Foundation*<sup>63</sup>, *Kidma Association*<sup>64</sup>, *Hanoar Hatzioni*<sup>65</sup> association, and numerous other federations of regional Jewish communities, as in Szabadka, Szombathely, Veszprém and Nyíregyháza. As I mention previously, when discussing Holocaust representation on a national scale state should firmly support the collaboration with civic initiatives.

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<sup>58</sup> Andersen. Uwe. and Woyke Wichard. *Handwörterbuch des politischen Systems der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*. Germany: Leske + Budrich, Opladen, 2003. pp. 44-45.

<sup>59</sup> Zentralrat der Juden in Deutschland (Central Council of Jews in Germany) was founded in 1950.

<sup>60</sup> Jüdische Gemeinde zu Berlin (Jewish Community of Berlin) reestablished in 1995.

<sup>61</sup> Leo-Baeck Institute New York-Berlin was founded in 1955 by Hannah Ahrendt, Martin Buber, Max Grünwald, and Robert Weltsch

<sup>62</sup> Mazsihisz, Magyarországi Zsidó Hitközségek Szövetsége (Federation of Jewish Communities in Hungary)

<sup>63</sup> The word Haver means 'friend' in Hebrew and in Hungarian as well, the Foundation is a non profit organization

<sup>64</sup> Kidma became an independent organization in 2002, organizes cultural program and exhibitions related to Jewish life

<sup>65</sup> Hanoar Hatzioni is a youth organization originally established in Israel and it is currently located in 17 countries including Hungary.

In 2014 for the upcoming 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Holocaust commemoration the Hungarian government called for civic tenders for governmental funds. Interestingly enough, all the aforementioned Jewish associations and foundations declined the recently received governmental funding by collectively stating that state constructed narrative on the Holocaust, namely the politics of victimization and the abnegation of national responsibility, does not corroborate with their views.<sup>66</sup> In so doing they wished to raise awareness on the government ahistorical representation of the Hungarian Jewish fate with the glorification of the Horthy era, the absence of the Arrow Cross Party in education, and the controversial current political remarks on the subject matter. Despite the discrepancies with the government, Hungarian civic initiatives in 2007 took an important step towards working through the difficult past of World War II by joining the German *Stolpersteine* project.

### 3.2. Das Stolpersteine Projekt of Germany

One of the most recent approaches to commemorating the victims of the Third Reich in Germany is the *Stolpersteine Projekt* or in English, the Stumbling Blocks project. The uniqueness of this project derives from the way it challenges the traditional and rather hegemonic way of Holocaust memorialization. As opposed to the state-sponsored, collective yet impersonal representation of the victims of the totalitarian regime, the stumbling blocks address the individuals. By taking a civic initiative approach, the stumbling blocks seek to remember every victim regardless of their age, gender, or their religion, murdered under National Socialism during the years of 1933-1945.

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<sup>66</sup> Czene. Gabor. 'Visszautasították, de azért elköltik a kormánytól kapott pénzt' Article published in Nepszabadság Newspaper, 08. 11. 2014.



Figure 16: Artist Gunter Demnig is installing the Stolpersteine, Photograph by Karin Richert



Figure 17: Trail of Remembrance designed by Gunter Demnig, 1993 in Cologne, Photograph by Traces of War website

The German artist, Gunter Demnig has been previously involved in various space installations and performances mainly in Cologne, Germany. The original idea for the *Stolpersteine* design occurred to him in 1993 while he installed a memory trail for Roma and Sinti Holocaust victims in front of the town hall of Cologne.<sup>67</sup> In a documentary, Demnig expressed his shock at a passerby's limited knowledge regarding the sheer scale of Nazi-led deportations and murders.<sup>68</sup> He then envisioned an installation project across Europe in the size of a granite cobblestone (96x96x100mm) that can now be purchased by individuals, school groups, or communities for 120 Euros.

The purpose of the small memorial stones is not only to avoid the differentiation among the Jewish, Sinti, Roma, homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the victims of Euthanasia program but to give back the names to the perpetrated individuals. In so doing, Demnig makes a firm stand against the dehumanization process of the Nazi ideology. By

<sup>67</sup> Cook, Matthew and van Riemsdijk. "Agents of memorialization: Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine* and the individual (re-)creation of a Holocaust landscape in Berlin". *Journal of Historical Geography* 43 (2014) pp. 138-147. Also see picture in index. Traces of War.com. Spur der Erinnerung "Mai 1940 - 1000 Roma und Sinti" Unter Fethenhennen / Trail of Remembrance "May 1940 - 1000 Roma and Sinti" Unter Fethenhennen <http://en.tracesofwar.com/article/9950/Trail-of-Remembrance-May-1940---1000-Roma-and-Sinti-Unter-Fethenhennen.htm>

<sup>68</sup> Franke, Dörte. "Stolperstein: Ein Film von Dörte Frank". 2008.

designing the stones slightly above the ground, the artist not only intended to raise awareness among general public by purposely stumbling over the memorial but also to incorporate the tragedy of genocide in their everyday life. According to the article published in the Journal of Historical Geography: ‘Before Demnig can create and install a *Stolperstein*, individuals or groups must receive a permit for the installation from the city.’

<sup>69</sup> The main precondition for the stone being installed includes evidence that the given address is the last known residence from where he or she has been deported or seen missing.

As officially stated on the *Stolpersteine* homepage, the memorial stones ought to start with the title of ‘*Hier wohnte*’ (Here lived) in other cases ‘*Hier lernte*’ (Here studied), ‘*Hier lehrte*’ (Here taught), ‘*Hier arbeitete*’ (Here worked) or ‘*Hier praktizierte*’ (Here practiced as a doctor) can be used as well. The stones should indicate the following essential information: First name, Family name, and Maiden name, Year of birth, Full date of arrest if applicable, Information about internment in a camp, Year and place of deportation, and details concerning their tragic fate. <sup>70</sup> With reference to the aforementioned features of the Stumbling Blocks, the core functions of these memorial stones is to personalize victims they are intended to represent, to emphasize the initiative of private civilians over state-sponsored memorialization, and to provide second and third generation survivors of the Holocaust a sense of closure.

As it has been previously stated each and every *Stolpersteine* ought to represent the individual victims of the National Socialism. However, as Östman, Lars points out in his PhD dissertation on Demnig’s memorial project the overrepresentation of Jewish victims cannot be neglected. In reference to Östman’s analytical research on the subject ‘out of

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<sup>69</sup> Cook, Matthew and van Riemsdijk. “Agents of memorialization: Gunter Demnig’s *Stolpersteine* and the individual (re-)creation of a Holocaust landscape in Berlin”. Journal of Historical Geography 43 (2014) p. 140.

<sup>70</sup> Stolpersteine. <http://www.stolpersteine.eu/en/technical-aspects/>

Berlin's 5220 *Stolpersteine* 4832 are for Jewish victims (92.5%).<sup>71</sup> If we take into account the fact that out of the twenty million martyrs who died due to the cruelty of the Nazi regime, the numbers of Jewish victims constitute 6 million, one can argue that if Demnig's original idea was to provoke the state-supported, collective way of Holocaust memorialization for what reason the other victim groups are predominantly underrepresented. By all means it is unreasonable to expect every victim to be remembered by the Stumbling Blocks installation, Demnig as well acknowledges that his work of art embodies a rather symbolic feature than a statistically correct representation of the Holocaust.<sup>72</sup>

The second important factor that sheds light on the controversial aspects of the *Stolpersteine* project is the concept of situating the memorial stones on the ground. Various city councils in Munich, Leipzig or Kassel opposed the installation of Stumbling Blocks. This was due to the council's conception of permitting a memorial, designated to Holocaust victims, that could be stepped upon would indisputably offend the Jewish communities. As Imort asserts in his essay many civilians of Leipzig argued that the *Stolpersteine* resembles to the Hollywood Walk of Fame and in addition Charlotte Knobloch, one of the highest representatives of the Jewish community in Germany, believed that commemorating the victims on the dirty ground would provide an improper message for the passerby.<sup>73</sup>

In addition to the debate revolving around the placement of the stones, issues concerning vandalism were addressed by many opponents of the monuments such as

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<sup>71</sup> Östman, L. (2014). "The 'Stolpersteine' and the Commemoration of Life, Death, and Government: A Philosophical Archaeology in light of Giorgio Agamben". Københavns Universitet, Det Humanistiske Fakultet. p. 150.

<sup>72</sup> Imort, Michael. "Stumbling Blocks as Decentralized Memorial" in Niven, Bill and Paver Chloe's: "Memorialization in Germany Since 1945". London-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. p.236.

<sup>73</sup> Imort, Michael. "Stumbling Blocks as Decentralized Memorial" pp. 237-239.

Knobloch.<sup>74</sup> The vice president of the European Jewish Congress, and of the World Jewish Congress, Knobloch was apprehensive that the appearance of *Stolpersteine* would provide a fertile soil for anti-Semitic actions in Germany. Albeit, only 0.5% of the *Stolpersteine* memorials in Europe have been destroyed thus far, with instances of vandalism to the monuments have been reported in cities such as Berlin, Salzburg, and Budapest up to the present day<sup>75</sup>. In an interview with *Deutschlandradio Kultur*<sup>76</sup>, sixty-three years old Petra Fritsche a devoted activist of the *Stolpersteine* project, expressed her discontent about the devastation of Stumbling Blocks in Berlin-Friedenau. As Fritsche notes, supporters of the monument placed an "info-box" (*Informationskasten*) providing context through photographs of survivors and documents related to the actions of the Nazi regime. The monument has since been sprayed over with black gloss paint and the "info-box" itself has been broken twice:

Dieser Informationskasten wurde schon zweimal eingeschlagen, alle Dokumente wurden gestohlen und es wurden Pamphlete hinterlassen: Dass man genug habe von diesem Schuld-Kult und dass man Berlin stolpersteinfrei machen wolle. Das weist auch ganz eindeutig auf Nazis hin, auf Faschisten. Denn es ist die Wortwahl der Nazis...<sup>77</sup>

A similar situation occurred in Dresden where the stones were not only sprayed but a few of them were broken as well. Likewise in Stuttgart in 2007, ten out of 250 *Stolpersteine* have been vandalized by grey graffiti spray. Many citizens and local activists

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<sup>74</sup> see picture in appendix, <http://michabrumlik.de/deutschlandradio-stolpersteine-in-berlin-vandalismus-und-querulantentum/>

<sup>75</sup> *ibid.* p.239.

<sup>76</sup> Rosbach.Jens. "*Stolpersteine in Berlin: Vandalismus und Querulantentum*" in Deutschlandradio Kultur. Posted on 05.02.2015. [http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/stolpersteine-in-berlin-vandalismus-und-querulantentum.1001.de.html?dram:article\\_id=310797](http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/stolpersteine-in-berlin-vandalismus-und-querulantentum.1001.de.html?dram:article_id=310797) Webpage last edited 31.03.2015.

<sup>77</sup> "The information box has been broken for two times already. All documents have been stolen and pamphlets have been left: "It would be enough with the culture of guilt, Berlin should be free of stumbling blocks." This shows that it has been Nazis, it has been Fascists; because this is the word choice of Nazis" Rosbach.Jens. "*Stolpersteine in Berlin: Vandalismus und Querulantentum*" in Deutschlandradio Kultur. Posted on 05.02.2015. [http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/stolpersteine-in-berlin-vandalismus-und-querulantentum.1001.de.html?dram:article\\_id=310797](http://www.deutschlandradiokultur.de/stolpersteine-in-berlin-vandalismus-und-querulantentum.1001.de.html?dram:article_id=310797) Webpage last edited 31.03.2015.

according to the article from *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*<sup>78</sup>, expressed their outrage in public discourses by stating crimes as such are direct and intentional violation on the Holocaust victims. As a symbolic consolation to the Stumbling Blocks advocates in Stuttgart and affront to those who committed the defacement, after the stones have been cleaned and polished, the engraved names on them are more noticeable than ever. One can agree that the graffiti spray over the small memorial stones cannot solely be considered as an insult on the victims and survivors of the Holocaust alone, but an attack on the entire democratic European entity as well.



Figure 18: Example for vandalism by black gloss paint, Photograph by Deutschlandradio

An equally problematic aspect of the *Stolpersteine* monument lies in its ambiguous contextualization. It would be reasonable to conclude that by focusing entirely on the Holocaust and most importantly on the fate of its victims the memorial actually marginalize other relevant factors of the Nazi totalitarian regime. By assuming that there was a blueprint for genocide or that genocide constituted the ideological foundation of the regime is in connection with the intentionalists' argument among historians. As the author of *'Decoding*

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<sup>78</sup> Bock. Jürgen. Vandalismus - Erneute Schändung der Opfer Zehn Stolpersteine mit Farbe besprüht - Lokale Initiativen setzen Belohnung aus in *Stuttgarter Nachrichten*. 07.08.2007.



*the Holocaust*<sup>79</sup>, Roger Draper explains the intentionalists' point of view that the annihilation of Jewish people originates from the Nazi racial ideology and that there was a continuous murderous thought concerning the Jews. Conversely, functionalists believe that economic and territorial interest played the major role in Hitler's long term goals. One could argue that the complete exclusion of the Third Reich's economic interest and their desire for conquering larger and larger territories might lead to a false conclusion on how Nazi Germany initially intended to deal with the Jewish Question. In order to prevent further misconception, the Center for Political Education of Germany (*Landeszentrale für politische Bildung*) created a mobile application which one can easily download for additional background information concerning the victims and the area's historical significance free of charge.<sup>80</sup>

### 3.3 Botlatókövek – Stolpersteine in Hungary



Figure 19: Stolpersteine (Botlatókő) in Budapest, Vth District, Photograph by Agnes Kende

<sup>79</sup> Draper. Roger. Decoding the Holocaust. New Leader;02/08/99, Vol. 82 Issue 2, p14.

<sup>80</sup> Der SWR. 1.11. 2013. <http://www.swr.de/swr2/stolpersteine/stolperstein-app/-/id=12116966/did=12316496/nid=12116966/15rg3w8/index.html>



By following Demnig's initial concept to commemorate individual victims as well as to draw the attention to Germany's struggle to come to terms with its controversial past, Hungarian partner associations hoped to implement the same idea into Hungary's commemorative landscape. The official display of the first Stumbling Blocks in Budapest on April 27, 2007, was born out of the joint effort between the 2B contemporary art gallery and the Bipolar Kulturstiftung des Bundes.<sup>81</sup> The first three Stumbling Blocks were succeeded by another 47 memorial stones both initiated and funded by the Bipolar organization whose main objective is to support cultural cooperation between Germany and Hungary.

According to Agnes Berger, coordinator of the *Stolpersteine* project in Hungary the prime intention was to commemorate those victims who have no living relatives and hence no one can keep their memory alive.<sup>82</sup> As Berger further explains for the process of selecting memorial locations in Hungary, they not only included the Budapest Holocaust Documentation Center but numerous historians and archivists as well. Since the massive deportations of 1944 largely affected the countryside, the organization along with the researchers believed that is where they should focus too. Even though the commemorated individuals ought not to be well known by the society or to have living family members, their last place of inhabitation before deportation or killing should be in a central location of the given city. The reason for that criterion is to effectively raise awareness of the community for the Stumbling Blocks project.

On one hand it is true that a conscious effort has been put in to the publication of Stumbling Blocks memorials, in particular the roundtable discussions with the artists Gunter

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<sup>81</sup> Bipolar a project initiated by the German Federal Cultural Foundation to promote cooperation between Germany and Hungary. The foundation provided 3 million euros for German-Hungarian projects between 2005-2007

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Berger. Agnes by Lederer. Pal published in Népszabadság Online, Jan. 27, 2007. Source from 2B Contemporary Art Gallery's website: <http://www.2b-org.hu/sajto98.html>

Demnig and public ceremonies surrounding the commemorative event. On the other hand these appealing attempts of the associations are still relatively unrecognized by the Hungarian community. Regardless the organizers hope that in the future other civic initiatives will join to coordinate and oversee the commemoration process in Hungary and thus individual requests cannot only be funded but collected more efficiently. When Berger was asked to comment on the anticipated discrepancies regarding the appearances of the small memorial stones, she responded that provocative remembrance like the Stumbling Blocks project can be problematic but there is no actual fear if it leads to constructive debates.<sup>83</sup>

Similarly to Germany, the representation of other victim groups by Demnig's small memorial stones is also frequently shifted to the periphery of remembrance in Hungary. As Berger explains, the documents on Roma, Sinti victims are relatively difficult to find in the archives and even less records are available on the fate of homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses or politically persecuted. Despite the obstacles, Berger hopes to bridge the gap by contacting Roma associations. On 21 June, 2007 the first *Stolpersteine* was placed to commemorate Gyula Algács leader of a gypsy band (*cigányprímás*) who was taken to a forced labor camp from the Roma settlement in Újfehértó from which he never returned.<sup>84</sup> According to the archival data just from that county alone more than 17,000 Jews and other thousands of Roma people were taken to death camps or labor camps.

Within a few years more than ten Hungarian cities have joined the civic initiative of the Stumbling Blocks commemoration. Now, memorial stones can be found in Szeged, Pécs, Balatonfüred, Kisvárd, Mak, Nagykanizsa, Szolnok, Szombathely, Nagykőrös and

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<sup>83</sup> Interview with Berger. Agnes by Lederer. Pal published in Népszabadság Online.

<sup>84</sup> From the Archive of Szombat, Jewish Political and Cultural Journal. 21. 06. 2007. 'Tisztelgés egy cigányprímás előtt'. <http://www.szombat.org/archivum/tisztelges-egy-ciganyprimas-elott-emlekezo-ko-a-holokauszt-ujfehertoi-roma-aldozatanak-1373029132>

Budapest. Even though the project is still in the initial phase, incidents for vandalism against the memorials have already been reported. One of the first incidents was the Magdolna Laub *Stolpersteine* that disappeared overnight from the 12<sup>th</sup> district of Budapest, Hungary. Likewise, two days after the memorial stone has been installed by Demnig in the 5<sup>th</sup> district unknown assailants dug out the *Stolpersteine* from the ground. Civic engagements immediately wished to reinstall the memorials in order to combat vandalism and to preserve the individual memory of former urban and rural inhabitants.

By the end of 2014, there has been 48,000 *Stolpersteine* installed in eighteen other countries across Europe, including Austria, the Czech Republic, Holland, Belgium, Slovenia, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, Italy, Luxemburg, Croatia, France, Norway, Russia, and Switzerland. Reasons for the burgeoning nature of the project in the recent years can be explained by the combination of distinctive factors. Firstly as Assmann notes in her publication on '*Europe: A Community of Memory?*<sup>85</sup>' that effort has already been made to implant Holocaust as a collective memory in the European identity.

In her essay Assmann nonetheless criticizes the idea to create a united framework for commemoration and Holocaust education. Furthermore she concludes that the 'Holocaust has become the paradigm or template through which other genocides and historical traumas are very often perceived and presented'.<sup>86</sup> In other words the Europeanization of the Holocaust exists only in a comparative perspective but not in a sense of collective remembrance. To a certain extent establishing a unified European identity in relation to the Holocaust would imply a collective desire to come to terms with the past. It can be argued that the acceptance of a shared responsibility among most European countries does not go

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<sup>85</sup> Assmann. Aleida. Europe: A Community of Memory? Twentieth Annual Lecture of the GHI, November 16, 2006. <http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/bu040/011.pdf>

<sup>86</sup> Assmann. Aleida. Europe: A Community of Memory? Twentieth Annual Lecture of the GHI, November 16, 2006. <http://www.ghi-dc.org/files/publications/bulletin/bu040/011.pdf> p. 14.

without difficulties even in present days. As Assmann points out, ‘Establishing Europe as a transnational frame for memory would mean building a common European consciousness as victims and perpetrators’.<sup>87</sup> In general the sense of victimization and the forcing of collective guilt on Germany has yet been the most accepted narrative. However if we take into account the impact that *Stolpersteine* movement has on the landscape of European memorialization it can be concluded that the project has contributed a great deal to signify Holocaust as a European phenomenon.

In spite of the countless critiques that Demnig’s memorial project has faced it is important to note that *Stolpersteine* is considered to be one of the largest memorial in Germany. Concerning its small size and disperse nature the Stumbling Blocks firmly stand against the more centralized, impersonal way of commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. Moreover, memorials initiated by non-state actors may provide a more authentic, personal way of understanding on the specific event that is being commemorated and they have the ability to motivate observers, causing the passerby to become a more active participant in the narrative that these types of memorials create.

Even though the Stumbling Blocks do not intend to symbolize gravestones, for many survivors as well as second or third generation relatives it serves as a more preferred place for mourning and remembrance than state-sponsored memorials. Moreover, by placing the *Stolpersteine* on actual *milieux de mémoire*<sup>88</sup> – real environments of memory- as in former places of residence, they offer a more authentic and personalized approach of memorialization. At the end of his essay, Imort raises a quite provocative question on whether the *Stolpersteine* memorials are genuinely meant for Jewish communities and victims, or they rather meant to ensure that Germans never forget their dark legacies of their

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<sup>87</sup> Assmann. Aleida. Europe: A Community of Memory?. p.23.

<sup>88</sup> Nora, Pierre: “Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Memoire*”. *Representations*, No. 26, University of California Press. 1989.

past.<sup>89</sup> I argue, nevertheless, that Gunter Demnig's memorial installations contributed a great deal to Germany's, as well as Hungary's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* that is working through the past.

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<sup>89</sup> Imort. Michael. *Stumbling Blocks as Decentralized Memorial*. p. 240.

#### Chapter IV. *Gendered memories of the Holocaust shoes, Gender perspective*

*“We are the shoes, We are the last witnesses  
We are shoes from grandchildren and grandfathers.  
From Prague, Paris and Amsterdam  
And because we are only made of fabric and leather  
And not of blood and flesh,  
Each one of us avoided the Hellfire”*

Moses Schulstein<sup>90</sup>

This final chapter continues to examine the phenomenon of iconic Holocaust memorialization, in special regard to gender. One can agree that the formerly analyzed actors such as state and civic have both used gender as an analytical and explanatory category in the production of the collective historical memory of the Holocaust. Yet in the majority of cases gender as a category have become the subject of generalization. Scholars commonly either merely acknowledge the existence of gender or understand it as an alternative for women's history. However, I argue that gender category is deeply integrated not only in history but in every sphere of academia as well therefore it needs to be examined on the same scale. By combining Holocaust memorialization with gender perspective I hope to contribute in a multidisciplinary sense to the field of memorial studies. Especially considering the implicit or explicit presence of gender in memorials and memorial sites it becomes even more incomprehensible why gender still holds a secondary importance in Holocaust research.

Therefore, I intend to deploy a gendered approach and connect it to one of the most well-known Holocaust icon, the shoes. Without a doubt, shoes in general are regarded as the most gender related object by society. However, I argue that the overtly gender embodiment

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<sup>90</sup>“ The Journey of THIS Man,” last modified December 18, 2010  
<http://thejourneyofthisman.blogspot.hu/2010/12/moses-schulstein.html>

of the shoes cannot be the primary tool for depicting survivors and victim's experiences during the dark times of the Holocaust. By taking examples of shoe memorials and juxtaposing them with archival documents and testimonies, I will shed light on the complexity of shoe memory.

First, I wish to acknowledge the works of well-established scholars who raised awareness on the importance of gender perspective in particular to its role in the Holocaust. Secondly, with a comparative approach between shoes as a gender object and shoes as a Holocaust icon, I will concentrate on memorials by raising the following questions: to what extent do these memorials, memorial sites contribute to gender stereotypes? What can be said about the lack of gender representation of shoes in survival testimonies?

#### **4.1. Gender as secondary importance in the Holocaust memorialization**

With the attempts to understand gender as a secondary category, American historian and leading figure on gender studies, Joan Scott's essay on 'Gender a useful category of historical analysis'<sup>91</sup> needs to be addressed. According to Scott, gender seems to be a 'primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated'<sup>92</sup>. In other words, if gender suggests determining power relations that would result in the inevitable consequence of subordinating one's sex. The main issue here is that gender is often understood as women studies' that leads to the construction of divisions and imbalances within the category.

However, gender as a category by all means should avoid the marginalization of women's history since it is tightly interwoven with men's experiences and men's history. Consequently gender category should not be considered as the only field or the dominant

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<sup>91</sup> Scott. W. Joan. Gender a Useful Category of Historical Analysis. in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, No. 5. Oxford University Press, 1986. pp. 1053-1075

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.* p.1069.

field to signify power relations. In connection with Holocaust studies from gender perspective one might say that women's experiences ought to be memorialized but we should be careful not to superimpose our own contemporary notions of gender onto historical landscape in such a way that the testimonies and archival documents do not support.

As Janet Jacobs, Professor of sociology explains in her respective book on *Memorializing the Holocaust*,<sup>93</sup> the period of the 1980s is considered to be a catalyst for women's studies on the subject of the Holocaust. In 1983, academics such as Joan Miriam Ringelheim, Esther Katz, and Sybil Milton assembled in New York in order to address issues concerning the role of women in Nazi occupied Europe. Moreover, the aim of the conference was among others to shift the focus from women survivors to women's struggle to survive during the troubling time.<sup>94</sup> Hereafter burgeoning literature and research discussing Jewish women resistance, life in the Ghetto from female perspective, women in concentration camps, and sexual violence against Jewish and Roma women and children have become more universal.

Prior to the outstanding impact that the conference accomplished, the majority of academia deemed female and male experience throughout the Holocaust identical. De facto women autobiographical texts and memoirs were less sufficiently reviewed than those of male survivors which gradually led to the exclusion of women's experiences. Additionally it can be stated that there was a distinct male dominance in the Holocaust studies that consequently lessened the diversity of perspectives on the subject matter. However, if we take the non discriminative nature of the Nazi ideology into consideration, historians'

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<sup>93</sup> Jacobs. Janet. *Memorializing the Holocaust, Gender, Genocide and Collective Memory*. London-New York: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd. 2010

<sup>94</sup> Katz. Esther and Ringelheim. Joan Miriam. *Women Surviving the Holocaust*. New York: Institute for research in History, 1983.



general approach for differentiation on male and female experiences can be critically questioned.

On a further note, as Jacobs notices, out of the extensive research and literature that contributed to women's experience in the Holocaust from the mid-80s until today only few have wished to elaborate on gender relations in memorials and monuments.<sup>95</sup> In particular if we take the evident proliferation of Holocaust memorials and monuments across the world into consideration the marginalization of gender memory in connection with public spaces becomes more problematic. The relatively few studies that have dealt with gender memory in Holocaust memorialization are associated with the works of Ringelheim and Marianna Hirsch.

Shortly after the opening of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum of Washington, D.C. in 1993, Ringelheim raised awareness on the absence of women throughout the exhibition by questioning whether gender is a category such as Jews or Roma rather than a subcategory only.<sup>96</sup> While Ringelheim criticized the conceptual invisibility of women in museums, Hirsch examined the visual perceptibility of women in Nazi photography.<sup>97</sup> By observing images of the Second World War, Marianna Hirsch wished to define to what extent photographs can be reckoned as site of commemorations and what the relevance of gender is in atrocity photographs.

In accordance with Jacobs's argument there is a definite gap between gender and Holocaust memorialization that I intended to bridge to some degree by reviewing the Holocaust shoe memorials from a gender perspective. As I emphasized at the beginning

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<sup>95</sup> Jacobs. Janet. *Memorializing the Holocaust, Gender, Genocide and Collective Memory*. pp. xvii.

<sup>96</sup> Ringelheim. Joan Miriam. *The Split between Gender and the Holocaust*. in D. Ofer and L. Weitzman (eds) *Women and the Holocaust*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998. p. 348.

<sup>97</sup> Hirsch. Marianne. *Nazi Photographs in Post-Holocaust Art: Gender as an Idiom of Memorialization* in Bartov. Omer, Grossmann. Atina and Nolan. Mary (eds) *Crimes of War: Guilt and Denial in the Twentieth Century*. New York: New Press, 2002. pp.105-108.

shoes have had fundamental gender relevance prior to the Holocaust. Therefore, to gain a deeper insight on the evolution of its iconic memorialization, the genealogy of the gendered shoes and its representation as a Holocaust memorabilia ought to be discussed.

#### **4.2. If the shoe fits – Gendered Shoes**

From an utterly stereotypical perspective it can be said that shoes are in many ways an indicator of who we are. They not only represent our gender roles, but also our social status, class, and even profession. We define the person who is wearing the shoes as either male or female, a child or an adult. We make assumptions about a person's social station solely by looking at his or her shoes. In other words shoes define identity, they tell a story of one's personality and overall as an object they personify the lives of who wear them. From fairytales to popular culture shoes always carried a special significance. Their ability to fulfill transformations of some kind or to represent transitions between stages is deeply rooted in our public knowledge<sup>98</sup>. Further exploring the subject we may see that even our language is full of shoe references such as, if the shoe fits, one has big shoes to fill or to try to walk a mile in someone's shoes.

Shoes are deeply gendered everyday items in Western culture. However if we take in to account one of the most striking images of Holocaust memorabilia, the display of the pile of shoes in *Konzentrationslager* (concentration camps), for instance in Auschwitz, Dachau, Majdanek, and Belzec, the question raises itself as to what extent this omnipresence of shoe symbol in our everyday life can explain the growing tendency to symbolize such a tragic occurrence as the Holocaust simply with the pile of shoes. In what way does gender as an indirect actor convey the message of the Holocaust shoes to the next generation? Furthermore, what is the message of the iconic Holocaust shoes?

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<sup>98</sup> e.g. Cinderella and the glass slipper, Dorothy and the magical red shoes from Wizard of Oz, contemporary movies and television series

Janet Jacobs in her book notes that during her visit to the concentration camp at Majdanek, her eyes were immediately drawn to the shoe exhibit. As she further explains, the shoe installation was the place where she grasped truly the reality of the genocide. Searching among the relics, as she continues women's shoes stood out from the pile, their silk high heels and colors represented femininity, as opposed to their hidden context of women's deprivation<sup>99</sup>. Without a doubt the exhibition rooms filled with belongings of victims are not only intended to evoke strong reactions from visitors of the museum and memorial sites, but they also wish to represent the void that was left behind.<sup>100</sup>

Considering the powerful image of the thousands of shoes behind glass windows one can agree that it does indeed represent the number of the people as well as demonstrate that the victims were not only Jews, but male and female, adults, and children. Moreover shoes have a more transcendent, deeper message that is to serve as a memorial for visitors. According to Alison Landsberg, an acknowledged scholar in the field of memory studies, museumgoers act as secondary witnesses who can engage with memories of the Holocaust<sup>101</sup>. This material memorabilia ought to symbolize the inconceivable trauma of the victims more than just creating a physical presence the pile of personal objects becomes a legacy for the following generations.<sup>102</sup> Before I analyze in more depth the way memorials and artworks taken up this stereotypical portrayal of shoes I will demonstrate the complexity of shoe memory from survivor's testimonies along with additional archival materials.

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<sup>99</sup> Jacobs. Janet. *Memorializing the Holocaust, Gender, Genocide and Collective Memory*. pp 15-16.

<sup>100</sup> the estimated over 6 million victims of the Holocaust

<sup>101</sup> Landsberg. Alison. *America, the Holocaust, and The Mass Culture of Memory: The „Object“ of Remembering in Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture*. New York: Columbia university Press, 2004. p.116-117

<sup>102</sup> Landsberg. Alison. *America, the Holocaust, and The Mass Culture of Memory*. p. 118.

### 4.3. Try to walk a mile in other's shoe – De-gendered Shoes

With the aid of Visual History Archive<sup>103</sup> I had the opportunity to study survivors' authentic reminiscences on the importance of shoes. After reviewing more than eighty testimonies I came to an outstanding conclusion that shoes were an undeniably reoccurring subject, however, survivors' reflections on shoes conveyed something different than the intended emotional response to Holocaust memorials involving shoes. Within their testimonies their pivotal argument was that shoes did not exemplify their gender roles, their ranks of society or their personalities mainly because that would not be applicable with the idea of the Nazi system. According to their point of view, shoes bear the significance of survival, trading opportunities and their dreadful experience with wooden clogs.

By indexing 'shoes' on Visual History Archive, four subcategories are differentiated: shoe importance, camps shoes, ghetto shoes, and forced marched shoes. In his testimony, Jack Brauns, born in Latvia in 1924, elaborates further on the importance of shoes. According to Brauns having proper shoes meant a chance to survive. In the Kaufering Lager II, as he explains, they were ordered to exchange clothes, including shoes with the Russian POWs. At the end of the treading process there was a huge possibility to remain with a shoe that is either too big or too small for the feet which could have made it impossible to survive. For this reason Brauns drew a conclusion that regardless of the terrible circumstances in the camps, not having the proper shoes could become the biggest destructive element resulting in the loss of lives.<sup>104</sup> Shoes, for Brauns, did not signify his masculinity, profession, age, or social class. Shoes meant survival.

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<sup>103</sup> VHA is USC Shoah Foundation's (Institute for Visual History and Education) online portal that allows users to view more than 52,000 testimonies from survivors of genocide, including the Armenian genocide, the Nanjing Massacre in China, the Holocaust, and the Rwandan Tutsi genocide

<sup>104</sup> Brauns, Jack. Interview Code: 46504, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation. Accessed online at IWitness on December 15, 2014.

Owning a pair of shoes of good quality also opened the possibility up for bartering within the camps. In connection with trading, Polish Jew Roman Ohrenstein shares his story concerning his leather boots. Upon his arrival to Birkenau concentration camp, Ohrenstein managed to smuggle his soap that contained two coins. Having his clothing taken away immediately he was left with nothing but the soap and the two coins hidden in it. For that amount of money he purchased a pair of boots from another inmate. During the interview Ohrenstein asserts: “[M]y boots were very special because to be dressed like a human meant a great deal, it boosted your ego, and self-assurance, and sometimes it was more important than food, because if you looked like a Mensch you had better chance to survive.”<sup>105</sup> In this example, Ohrenstein explains that for him, shoes affirmed his humanity, and contributed to his ability to survive, but did not differentiate his experience as particularly masculine.



Figure 20: Striped pyjama and wooden clogs, Photograph taken from the website of Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum

<sup>105</sup> Ohrenstein, Roman. Interview Code: 27994 Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation. Accessed online at IWitness on December 15, 2014.

The wooden clogs that had played a major role in the Nazi dehumanization process links together the other three subcategories: camp shoes, ghetto shoes, and forced marched shoes. In reference to Aranka Siegal's<sup>106</sup> experience of forced march, it was impossible to walk in the wooden shoes, they not only kept sticking to the snow but they were constantly falling off. Similarly to Siegal, Barbara Fischman Traub<sup>107</sup> also remembers the struggle of keeping the shoes on even though wearing them was equally demanding. From the survivors' point of view these wooden Dutch types of shoes were cutting in to their flesh, leaving blisters and causing bleeding. Furthermore it was very common that the size would not fit, in comparison to the leather shoes, the material of wood cannot be stretched. Ela Weissberger,<sup>108</sup> who survived the Holocaust in the ghetto of Theresienstadt in the former Czechoslovakia, commented that aside from the hard material of wooden clogs they were easily worn out. Therefore in order to avoid any confrontation by asking for a new pair of shoes, prisoners put pieces of rubber in them to make it last longer.

From the National Archive of Hungary I encountered Heléna Huhák's research on 'Female roles and female burdens during the Holocaust' in which she examined various Jewish female experiences in ghettos and in concentration camps under World War II<sup>109</sup>. Similarly, when searching on VHA among Huhák's collection I was also able to find many references to shoes. As I learned from Bözsi Friendmann's diary shoes or more specifically shoe's soles served as an excellent hiding place for personal relics, such as family pictures or treasured letters. From Friedmann's description it becomes apparent that preserving these small personal belongings helped also to preserve some sort of connection with civilization.

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<sup>106</sup> Siegal, Aranka. Interview Code: 8423, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation. Accessed online at IWitness on December 15, 2014.

<sup>107</sup> Fischman Traub, Barbara. Interview Code: 4361, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation. Accessed online at IWitness on December 15, 2014.

<sup>108</sup> Weissberger, Ela. Interview Code: 3850, Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation. Accessed online at IWitness on December 15, 2014.

<sup>109</sup> Huhák. Heléna. Női szerepek, női terhek a vészidőszakban in National Archive of Hungary. Last updated: 22.09.2014. [http://archivnet.hu/pp\\_hir\\_nyomtat.php?hir\\_id=495](http://archivnet.hu/pp_hir_nyomtat.php?hir_id=495)

The additional peculiarity of Friedmann's diary is that it also served as a lager journal that included texts from other female camp prisoners, for instance Olga Klein and Lili Klein from Beregszász. Poems of Anna Pauk and Bözsi Weiszberger can be read as well on the brown carton pages. The finished excerpts were read on Sundays to a small group of women where they occasionally performed songs and small parodies along with the readings. Lili Klein commented on the role of the journal as it brought them humor to some extent in the horrible times which had even more value than a bowl of hot soup or a warm blanket.

As I mentioned these small documents, writings were filled with self-irony, caricatures, and dark humor. One of the sections had the title, "Fashion", from this I would like to present a short fragment:

Ladies! Attention!

The first snow of the season has arrived. We absolutely cannot walk in our worn out clothes anymore. Before I address the questions from my beloved readers let me say a few words about the upcoming winter trends...in regards of shoes, there are not many changes. In case of the vamp of the shoe the bulky, flat style is still this year's fashion trend. Even though there are obvious signs for pointy front simple male shoes appearing, I am calling for your calm and reason for one or two weeks more. Because then you will be wearing your last seasoned heels again<sup>110</sup>.

With the comment on the "last seasoned heels" they naturally wished to express their hope for a possible liberation and returning home. As I have shown from both archival materials and VHA testimonies, footwear functioned differently in a variety of Holocaust remembrances. In some cases shoes were connected to femininity, but heels represented a sense of nostalgia for the normality of life and could not stand for the discomfort or the terrible circumstances of ghettos and concentration camps. Moreover, these Holocaust

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<sup>110</sup> Hölgyek! Figyelem! Leesett az első hó. Nem járhatunk az eddigi kopott holmokban. Mielőtt kedves olvasóim kérdésre válaszolnék, néhány szót szólok téli újdonságainkról. Cipőinkben nem nagy a változás, divatos még mindig az otromba, tompa orrú cipők. Néhány, hegyes orrú egyszerű férficipő is feltűntek, de nem ajánlom, asszonyaim várjanak még 1-2 hetet s bátran hordhatják az 1 évvel ezelőtt levetett körömcipőiket. [http://archivnet.hu/pp\\_hir\\_nyomtat.php?hir\\_id=495](http://archivnet.hu/pp_hir_nyomtat.php?hir_id=495)

survivors remembered shoes as a necessity for daily survival, to acquire food and above all human dignity. In the following section I will demonstrate that memorials employing the image of Holocaust shoes rather utilize a contemporary interpretation of shoes as strictly gendered. In so doing, memorialists inserted a contemporary, highly gendered layer of meaning to their memorial of shoes worn during the Holocaust. Memorialists obscured the significance that Holocaust survivors themselves attributed to shoes, namely that shoes in their memory were entirely gender neutral.

#### 4.4 Fills someone's shoes – Gendered 'Shoe memorials'

The strong influence of the shoe exhibit in former concentration camps is predominantly visible in second and third generation survivors' art works. Across the world, artists felt inspired to pay tribute to the victims of the Holocaust through the iconic image of shoes. From Israeli sculptor, Sigalit Landau's shoe installation at the Israeli Pavilion of Venice Biennale in 1997 to Joshua Neustein's boots exhibit, in which 17.000 pairs of boots were piled up on the floor of the artists' house in Jerusalem in 1969, artists aimed to emphasize the strong link between the image of shoes and the experience of the Holocaust.<sup>111</sup> Yet as I stated previously contemporary works of arts fail to accurately reflect on the complex meaning of the Holocaust shoe image.



Figure 21: Sigalit Landau: *Oh my friends, there are no friends*, 2011, twelve bronze pairs of shoes, 300 cm in diameter, Photograph taken from the Israel Museum, Jerusalem Magazine



Figure 22: Joshua Neustein, Gerry Marx, and Georgette Battle: *Boots*, Gallery House, Jerusalem, 1969, Photograph taken from the artist, Joshua Neustein's website

<sup>111</sup> Tel Aviv Museum of Arts. Past Exhibitions. <http://www.tamuseum.org.il/>



Józef Szajna, Polish painter, and graphic artist and well-known stage designer was a prisoner of German concentration camps Auschwitz and Buchenwald. His installation is largely influenced by his terrible experiences during the Holocaust, and is currently exhibited at Buchenwald Memorial Museum.<sup>112</sup> The former building of the concentration camp has served as an exhibition space since 1990. Throughout the following years the building was refurbished and officially reopened again in 2013. The Buchenwald Art Exhibition is presenting numerous art works by former inmates who wished to reflect on their severe conditions during their atrocious time in the camps.



Figure 23: József Szajna's installation, *Reminiscences* at Buchenwald Memorial, Germany, Photograph taken from the website of Buchenwald Memorial

<sup>112</sup> Niven. Bill. *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich*. London: Routledge, 2002. p.37.

One of the exhibition rooms, entitled ‘Reminiscences’ is assigned to solely Szajna’s art, who enlarged photographs of Buchenwald victims and fixed these photos on cardboard cutout silhouettes in a form of a person. On the ground in front of the picture installation he threw a small pile of shoes worn by Buchenwald prisoners. Szajna in his art piece insisted that the pile would include a female high heel and a pair of white flat shoes as well. On the website of Buchenwald Memorial the installation is promoted as one of ‘the most prominent artistic investigation of what has been called the “rupture of civilization” under National Socialism.’<sup>113</sup>

Another shoe project influenced by Jewish suffering is displayed on the stone embankment next to the Danube in Budapest, Hungary.<sup>114</sup> The work of Gyula Pauer and Can Togay includes sixty pairs of shoes made of iron. According to their vision the memorial ought to represent Jewish victims being shot into the icy river during the winter of 1945 by Hungarian Nazi Arrow Cross soldiers. Shortly after the Soviet troops entered Hungary and the fatal outcome of the war became unavoidable, Szalasi’s Arrow Cross Party took over the power in October. The Arrow Cross putsch for the Budapest Jews, who had been relatively unaffected so far by the massive deportations, marked the onset of heavy violence across the capital. Thousands of people were taken from the Jewish ghetto to the riverside and were persecuted in the middle of the night by Arrow Cross soldiers.

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<sup>113</sup> Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, Buchenwald Memorial, Art Exhibition. <http://www.buchenwald.de/en/76/>

<sup>114</sup> See Image 4.5. in the List of Illustration, <http://www.pauergyula.hu/emlekmuvek/cipok/galeria/emlekmu.html>



Figure 24: *Shoes on the Danube Memorial* by Gyula Pauer and Can Togay, in Budapest 2005, Photograph by Agnes Kende

The *Shoes on the Danube* memorial commemorates the traumatic experience and the chaotic conditions of Budapest Jews in the ghettos while Józef Szajna's installation in Germany remembers the Buchenwald victims. Both artists chose the image of shoe to pay tribute to the victims and to give them back their personality and lost identity. In case of Szajna's art it is interesting to observe that he either overtly or covertly excluded the representation of wooden clogs even though for most of the camp prisoners those were the instant connection with shoes. One can argue that his intention with using obviously gendered shoes for the installation serves a therapeutic purpose. Due to the fact that he himself suffered along with the people whose shoes he displayed, he intentionally aimed to preserve their image as human beings, men and women, and not as dehumanized, gender-neutral prisoners and victims of the Nazi regime.

Yet, regarding the Budapest shoe memorial the artists did not personally experience the Holocaust themselves. Therefore their applied perspective is one generation removed.

After thorough research on shoe wearers of that period, so they could give an accurate portrayal of the victims, the artists failed to listen to the real memories of people. Pauer and Togay chose the shoe image that is an instant signifier for not only women but people in general to tell the stories of thousands individuals. The memorial is indeed a significant place for mourning and remembering the murderous acts of Hungarian Arrow Cross soldiers but it is equally important to question whether the shoes as such a gendered image are not obscuring the real message, the real memories of each and every individual. The artists have built on a contemporary understanding of shoes as a signifier of masculinity or femininity, when survivor testimonies do not corroborate a gendered reading of shoes in the Holocaust.

Considering the extensive public deployment of shoe image not only in connection with the Holocaust but in our daily life it can be stated that gender has an enormous impact, therefore it should be discussed from a scholarly perspective. The shoe memorials may undoubtedly and ostensibly reflect on the enormous loss of people, yet their memory of the Holocaust cannot be depicted by gendered shoes alone. Hence there is a sincere danger that the representation becomes ahistorical. The trauma of the Holocaust according to survivors' testimonies and the Nazi ideology does not corroborate the memorialists' choice of a very gendered shoes. Therefore the significance of the Visual History Archive testimonies and additional archival sources could not be stressed enough. Taking Moses Schulstein's words in to consideration that I quoted at the beginning of the paper, "We are the shoes, we are the last witnesses"<sup>115</sup> it is our responsibility to adopt a critical approach in connection with representing or commemorating the Holocaust. These sources tell of a different meaning of shoes, one that is gender-neutral, and just as a tool for human survival. Survivors don't attach any gendered significance to shoes, but memorialists in the decades after the

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<sup>115</sup> The Journey of THIS Man," last modified December 18, 2010  
<http://thejourneyofthisman.blogspot.hu/2010/12/moses-schulstein.html>

Holocaust have inserted a "female" presence into our cultural memory of the Holocaust by commemorating heavily stylized and gendered footwear.

## Conclusion

This thesis attempted to analyze the methods of Holocaust memorialization between Germany and Hungary from 1990 to present. The main aim of employing a comparative approach on the subject was to search for explanations of similar historical phenomenon that nonetheless had differing outcomes. To carry out the research for this thesis, I deployed three case studies on state intervention, civic initiation, and the gendered aspect in the two countries with the intention of accurately reflecting on their diverse characteristics. The complexity behind the comparison lies not only in juxtaposing recent memorials in Germany and Hungary, but rather in elucidating the ways history politics after the political shift of 1989 has determined the role of the actors in shaping memorial landscapes. Additionally, I addressed gender as a chiefly neglected although necessary category for future development in the field of Holocaust memorialization both in Germany and in Hungary.

The political circumstances prior to 1990 undoubtedly had a great impact on the two countries present-day approaches towards Holocaust commemoration however it was not until the end of Cold War that Germany's path in politics of memory started to deviate extensively from Hungary's. The fall of the Soviet Union, along with the generation shift from those who were unable to or verboten to give utterance for their experiences during the troublesome years, to those who did not have a close personal connection to the past and wanted to come to terms with it, all contributed to the rapidly increasing memorials for the victims of the Holocaust. With a determined wish to construct a positive image after the two dictatorships, Germany took an immediate governmental responsibility on central and local level as well. Although, with a landscape largely centered on Holocaust memory one might question to what extent it overshadows the remembrance of its Communist legacy.

In general, the term ‘double memory’ is used to describe divided Germany’s contrasting interpretation of the crimes of National Socialism. However, I argue that it could be applied just as accurately but of course under a different connotation to the present situations in the two countries. There is apparent struggle in every post-communist country in regards to how the two totalitarian regimes should be remembered. The effort for the joint representation of the communist and fascist crimes, especially in the case of Hungary, results with one regime is downplaying the other’s significance. With propagating an apologetic narrative for Hungary’s role during the World War II, the memorials dedicated to victims lose their credibility as historical representations.

The chapter on state intervention reveals the linear corroboration between the evolvement of Hungarian history politics and the constructed framework of the current Fidesz government. By preserving the politics of victimization as a dominant narrative the recently erected memorials and museums continue to support the argument that after the German occupation in 19 March 1944 the nation lost its authority over the fate of Hungarian Jews. In regards to the total inculpation of Nazi Germany and the abnegation of any national responsibility along with the advancing popularity of the radical nationalist political party, the Jobbik are of particular national and international concerns.

As an example on 19 May 2015 the Wiener Library<sup>116</sup> organized a panel discussion together with IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance)<sup>117</sup> in London. The aim of the event was to address the concerns regarding the current Chairmanship of the Hungarian government and its method of commemorating the Holocaust. Furthermore, the

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<sup>116</sup> The Wiener Library for the Study of the Holocaust and Genocide was founded in 1933 in London. Today the Wiener Library is considered to be one of the largest archives globally on the Holocaust and Nazi era.

<sup>117</sup> IHRA was founded in 1998 by former Swedish Prime Minister, Göran Persson with the intention to establish an international organization dedicated to worldwide Holocaust remembrance and education. IHRA welcomes the membership from every countries, currently has 31 members. IHRA has an annually rotating Chairmanship, and from 2015 the position is held by the Hungarian government. Hungary has been a member of IHRA since 2002.

discussion, led by Paul Schapiro, the Director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, questioned to what extent Hungary will be capable to fulfill the requirements of IHRA leadership if the government is still in denial of its own accountability for the destiny of Hungarian Jews and gypsies during the World War II.<sup>118</sup>

At the same time, as an act of resistance against the political memorialization of the Holocaust in Hungary, civic organizations recently has begun to take initiation toward a more honest and a more authentic way of commemorating the victims. In this thesis, I have demonstrated the *Stolpersteine* project that was initially a German concept but since 2007 these small memorial stones that are intended to individualize the people who were killed during the Holocaust have sprung up across Hungary as well. The Stumbling Blocks memorials not only allow the viewers to actively engage with the actual memory of the victims, but as it now proliferates throughout Europe, it contributes to a collective acknowledgment for the atrocious crimes committed under Nazism.

Interestingly enough, the latest oppositions against the installation of *Stolpersteine* memorials occurred this year in Villingen, a southern town in Germany. The people who protested against the placement of the 19 memorial stones argued that the town council has already fulfilled its duty to commemorate the deportation of German Jews. Moreover, they added that 70 years after the war ended, Germany should be allowed to finally move forward from their burdensome past.<sup>119</sup> The incident in Villingen might be considered solely as a small warning sign in comparison to the accomplishment by the German government in its institutionalization of memorialization. Undoubtedly, the implementation of the

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<sup>118</sup> Berend. Nóra. A kormány és a holokauszt. (The Hungarian government and the Holocaust). An article published in Hungarian newspaper, Népszabadság. 28.05.2015.

<sup>119</sup> Järkel. Stefanie. Stadtgestolper im Schwarzwald. (Town at Black Forest has stumbled over) An article published in German newspaper, Kontext. 04.02.2015. Source: <http://www.kontextwochenzeitung.de/gesellschaft/201/stadtgestolper-im-schwarzwald-2712.html>



*Gedenkstättenkonzeption des Bundes* in 1999 and its commitment for an active collaboration with civic initiatives serves as a model to be followed. However, one should always note that coming to terms with the past or in German the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* implies an everlasting process for taking responsibility in each and every country.

For this reason, I wished to focus the attention of the last chapter on the gender perspective that has been a chiefly overlooked and under-studied approach in both countries. With the Holocaust shoe memorials as case study I aimed to illustrate that without taking gender into consideration the representation of Holocaust memory can easily become ahistorical. By taking a ‘shoe’ installation at Buchenwald Memorial in Germany and the *Shoes on the Danube Memorial* in Hungary, I observed the way in which the memory of survivors is expressed through these memorials. Supporting my study with video testimonies and archival documents, I came to the conclusion that the Holocaust shoe memorials fail to accurately incorporate the history that the survivors carried on themselves.

When discussing Holocaust memorialization from a critical point of view the incorporation of additional factors for future research such as gender have vital importance. The examination of a given nation’s method of commemoration should not cease with the appliance of one or another perspective. This thesis demonstrated how Germany is much further advanced in the process of memorialization than Hungary. Part of the reason for this discrepancy is that Germany had to face both external pressures to set an example for Holocaust commemoration globally and internal pressure to reestablish a sense of a national normality after the war. In Hungary, however, there are still many obstacles to overcome. Most importantly, state and civic commemoration initiatives often function at cross purposes and bringing them into cooperation ought to be the first step toward a more pluralistic approach. Not only is the process of working through the past an infinite process

but so too is the responsibility to review and reflect on these memorials, politics of memory is as well. This relatively brief overview on the Holocaust memorialization in Germany and in Hungary did not allow me to solve complex issues. Nevertheless, I hope I managed to emphasize the necessity of a pluralistic approach for a more authentic remembrance and also to draw the attention to unexploited areas in the field of public representation of the Holocaust.

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