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Haunting Female Holocaust Narratives from the 1960s in Hungary[1]

Testimonies, memoirs and fictional accounts of the Holocaust written by female survivors, whether artistic or not, were little or not at all studied in Holocaust studies until the 1980s, as feminist scholars have pointed out. Feminist scholarship on women's Holocaust studies became significant when feminist scholars began to examine gendered memoirs, testimonies and fictions. Additionally, historical, empirical explorations on gender and the Holocaust tend to reveal the changing role of women in ghettos, in concentration camps, in the survival strategies, or in resistance, and to illuminate the perpetration of sexual and reproductive violence against women under the Nazi rule by a complex, intersectional analytical way.[2] Comparing these approaches to Hungarian developments, the gender focused research started around the turn of the millennium in Hungary. Despite expanding of the exploration on gender and genocide for the last decades, which endeavour has particularly been concerned with forgotten or unpublished journals, interviews of survivors, only a few studies of Hungarian memorial sites are addressing issues of gender in response to the importance of the remembrance of collective trauma for contemporary and formerly understandings of the past and for the formation of collective identity and memory. From the new perspectives on "Women and the Holocaust" in the context of East-Central Europe Andrea Pető, Louise O. Vasvári, Katalin Pécsi, Ilana Rosen (among others) open new avenues of inquiry, when they engaged to the analysis of interviews and archival materials for Holocaust memory.[3]

My fieldwork in Hungarian women's memory is pertained to memorial narratives of persecution, mainly those memorializing practices that concern female testimonies published before 1989. This paper relies on a tiny part of a greater research focused on the female public representations of trauma and mass violence during the 1960s in Hungary, in which women's stories of genocide were recounted through memoirs, non-fictional accounts, and novels. All of women's holocaust testimonies I will present in this paper appeared as public representations during the 1960's: Gáborné (Katalin) Vidor's memoir: *The Grave is Running High* (1960), Boris Palotai's novels*: The Man* (1962), *The Birds Silenced* (1964), Erzsi Szenes's diary: *The Soul Resists* (1966), however the Hungarian collective memory seem to have forgotten them completely.[4]

This project though was only intended to study forgotten Hungarian female testimonies on the Jewish genocide identifying a kind of *counter memory*, but it inevitably links with other novel research in reliance on Hungarian Holocaust representations and memorialization practices under the Communist era.[5] The view about general setting of "deep silence" on Jewish genocide in Hungary before 1970s and 1980s ordinarily rests on the argument of academic historiography. According to Gábor Gyáni, or Regina Fritz, the official memory of the Holocaust was not achieved until the 1980's. They state that "renewed public interest in the Holocaust reappeared as late as the 1970s and especially the 1980s after the deep amnesia imposed on it, a pause beginning at the late 1940's."[6] Gábor Gyáni refers a "real tide of the partly fictional, partly documentary biographic memory literature in Hungary" in the 1970s, he also adds that

> *"Starting in the 1970s quite a large number of texts on Holocaust memory started to appear in book form, making available the authentic experiences of the Jewish victims of the Nazis and their Hungarian collaborators to a reading audience".*[7]

It is acknowledged that the scholarships of the historical policy in terms of the Holocaust started to work mainly after the collapse of the Communist rule, but along with the new perspectives and researches together are forcing us to rethink and to pose question on how the development of collective memory can be reinterpreted concerning multifarious dimensions of remembrance and forgetting during different period before 1989 raising issues of political context, aesthetics, cultural and media attention on Jewish genocide. In so doing, I shall confront the principal claims on the "deep silence" before 1970s by arguing on a public discourse of the Jewish genocide has been constituted around the issue of "coming the terms with the past" during the 1960s, in which women have already participated adding their voice.

Instead of interpreting the opportunity of the remembrance, or staging questions on the progressions of political discourse that shaped the public discourse of the Holocaust, which have also been greatly influenced by foreign policy events (the Eichmann-trial of 1961, and Arab-Israeli Six-day war of 1967), I would like to concentrate on female narratives, which have become a part of the public memory of mass trauma in their contemporary age, although most of them fell into oblivion a few decades later. My questions in this paper mostly arose from feminist perspective focusing on representational, memorial practices of female experiences and behaviours under extreme conditions: how they spoke of the unspeakable, in which way they recounted her traumatic experiences in their public representations in the 60's.

GENDER AND HOLOCAUST MEMORY

The international discourse on gender issue within the Holocaust studies loaded theoretical debates staging the question: have the testimonies been claimed to be universal examples of suffering, or can they be examined from the gender perspective? Feminist Holocaust studies have sparked important issues on gender differences of the experiences and the testimonies of the ghettos, of deportation, of the concentration camps. The research on women and the Holocaust following first conference on this issue in 1983 thanks to Joan Ringelheim and Esther Katz in USA; subsequently scholars began to gather to different kind of sources, historical documents, interviews, and personal memories. Several scholarships set out to corroborate

1 This paper is an extended version of the English-language presentation of the international conference held at HDKE (Holocaust Memory: Recent Challenges in Research and Representation Conference, November 10-11, 2020.). A part of my research on Hungarian women's narratives was published in Hungarian - Hivatalos amnézia és az emlékezés kényszere. A holokauszt női elbeszélései az 1960-as években [=Official Amnesia and the Compulsion of Remembrance: Hungarian Female Holocaust Narratives during the 1960s] – in *Múltunk,* (64.) 2. 2019. 77–110.

2 Ofer – Weitzman (eds.) *1998;* Weitzman – Ofer *2015.*

3 See among others Pető – Hecht – Krasuska (eds.) 2015; Pető 2020; Vasvári 2014; Vasvári 2016; Pécsi 2007; Pécsi 2013.

4 The broader version of my paper was published in Hungarian in 2019. See Jablonczay 2019.

5 See *Zombory* – Lénárt – Szász 2013; Ebenshade 2019.; Kékesi - Zombory 2022.

6 Gyáni 2016: 215; Fritz 2012.

7 Gyáni 2016: 224–225.

women's particular experience with a finding and recovery gesture. By stressing the gender differences in experiences and their memories, as Myrna Goldenberg, Joan Ringelheim, Esther Katz, Dalia Ofer, Lenore J. Weitzman, Zoë Waxman, Marlene Heinemann, and others remind us that the gender differences also shape the experiences of those inflicted by physical and psychological pain. These feminist scholars pointed out that women also wrote down their testimonies, but these testimonies were not interesting to be researched by historical or cultural memory scholarships until the 1980s, men's narratives dominated the Holocaust discourse, which have not shaped the experience of women, and we must mention that female experiences did not easily enter public discourse. These studies on the field of Holocaust and feminist studies addressed the particular experience of women under "double jeopardy" subjugating them to sexual and emotional violence as women as well as mothers, and the researches also stressed the significance of bonds of womanhood (*maternal consciousness and sisterly solidarity*) providing singular strategies for surviving.[8] The decisive role of feminine identity (*biological roles*) in relation to the rate of their survival (*nurturing, supportive bonds*) displays that their bodies could be fatal, since pregnant women were sent directly to the gas chambers, thus gender differences shape the experience of the genocide. At the same time, they submit when "woman" functions as a metaphor for marginalization, interpreting the female gender as a sign of suffering, absence, and vulnerability is also problematic.[9]

Dalia Ofer, Lenore Weitzman (1998), Carol Rittner (1993), Joan Ringhelheim (1998) among others, claim that the study of women in the Holocaust is necessary to retrieve the absence of women's voice and testimonies in Holocaust history and memory. In contrast to this point of view, Ruth Bondy (1998) or Lawrence Langer (1998) disagree over whether women and men should be considered as two diverse groups. After the millennium, the common-sense notions, such as representation or "different voices" were challenged from many directions. The scholars with new feminist perspectives on the Holocaust underlined those early scholarships with their "recovery mission" emphasized the lost voices, different experiences of women by suggesting the field's shortfall to endow to women's voices, the sex difference as given was treated instead of examining its position as social construction affording sex stereotypes. Most recently, for historical and empirical research, Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman have provided a new theoretical framework defining structural sources for gender differences in the Holocaust and proposing the more powerful model concerning sequential development of women's coping strategies during the Holocaust. This model departs from traditional gender concepts, they portray how women's various behaviour during the atrocities, continuing or disrupting of pre-war roles, their diverse responses to them in accordance with their different ages, backgrounds or social class can be analysed.[10]

The scholars working in the field of memory studies – particularly around national memory, counter memory, memorialization, testimony, post memory – have also started to engage with feminist analyses of gender, sexuality, race, nation and class for decades. Within the field of study of women's history and memory, the form of counter memory has proven useful as a conceptual tool, addressing gender differences in the act of remembering, and disclosing the political structures due to the forgetting strategies of official nationalized memory.[11] The female research on Holocaust memory also posed in terms of gender differences in narratives of female testimonies staging: how does the role of female witness diverge from that of male victim, how does gender shape the acts of remembering in narrated memory?[12] Sara R. Horowitz addressed the issue on different reflexions, recollections, interpretations of Nazi atrocities subjected women to violence, arguing that "women's testimonies reveal distinctly different patterns of experience and reflection from those of men", "women may remember differently from men – or they may remember different things". She has also added that

> *"Treating women as a more or less unified group with similar behavioural characteristics ignores important differences in cultural background, social class, age, economic standing, level of education, religious observance, political orientation- differences that, like gender, contribute to the way victims responded to their circumstances."*[13]

Horowitz argued that discussing women in Shoah literature, three areas (women are figured by men; women's own memoirs, gender perspectives in research) reveal the differences between male and female narratives on women's representations. According to her, women are portrayed as marginal, helpless, fragile, morally deficient, and eroticised in their victimization by men's narratives.

The debates on the crisis of representation also claimed about the difference of testimonies articulated by men and women, whether "real" differences between men and women should be validated or women's victimhood should be understood to produce gender as an identity? Recognizing the role of cultural interposition in the memorial practices and in the public imaginary, and the meaning of the constructed role of gender, we can acknowledge that memories carry the stories of sexual abuse, violence, abortion, the murder of children, heroic and painful stories of female supporting, these experiences could not have been integrated into their own Holocaust memoirs by female survivors. In these narratives often, as Lawrence L. Langer stressed, the texts and the sub-contexts collide with each other, the reader must uncover – through the effort of confrontation with the witness – the covered stories of the sufferer from below the text as sub-contexts,[14] furthermore, the memory of the body is central, in which the female body is portrayed as fragmented, dismembered, or absent (intersected that of body with categories of class and race).

The new horizon interrogates the notion of representation as "standing for an absent object, event, or experience", which could not be a vehicle for self-expression, or construction of "fact" as a basis of truth assertions about the past or present. Furthermore, the question is posed on the paradox of the testimony. According to Lisa Disch,

> *„the most compelling connection between the fields of Holocaust and feminist studies: the fraught connection of authority to experience that is played out in the event of testimony. Testimony cuts to the heart of debates about representation insofar as first-hand accounts are taken not simply to represent the past but also to remember it, to construct it through available narrative frames. This is the paradox of testimony: that speaking neither discloses the self nor reports the past but lays bare (...) the uncertainty of authorship, experience, and identity".*[15]

8 Disch – Morris 2003.
9 Remmler 1994: 170.
10 Weitzman – Ofer *2015*.
11 Lourie – Stanton – Vicinus 1987.
12 Hirsch – Smith 2002.

13 Horowitz 1998: 370.
14 Langer 1998.
15 See Disch – Morris 2003: 13.

HAUNTING FEMALE NARRATIVES IN THE 1960S

There is a shift within the field of (female) memory and Holocaust studies from recognizing "different voices" to demonstrate how the past is turn out by testimony, memory or art, including the increasing interest towards the dynamics of remembrance evolving the circulation of the meanings in a broader environment.[16] Nevertheless, the forgotten and erased female memories and authors should be recovered by analysing the ways of cultural remembering and forgetting. What a culture recalls and what it forgets are involved in the dynamics of gender and power, in that case, the process of recalling/forgetting and the foreign policy have become inextricably intertwined. As we know from the scholarship of memory studies, the narrated forms of traumatic experiences, the representability of traumatic events are always transmitted into compelled conversion. The witness did not only tell his/her own memory, the individual stories and memories are shaped by social narratives, indeed, the remembrance is always forged in conjuncture with the public and private.[17] The acts of remembrance are linked with the mediation of cultural practices that forms of memory can receive frame, meaning, and encoding of genres,[18] which themselves evolve with changes in media technologies over time.[19]

I sought to examine the female representations of traumatic events, which were both respond to and produce cultural memory, but these forgotten female texts can be interpreted as alternative or counter-narratives of the past within a public discourse on a Holocaust during the 1960s. The explored testimonies established narrated traumatic memories that can be described in a genre of "life writing"[20] in which the biographical and autobiographical, the fictional and non-fictional, the individual and collective acts of remembering, the haunting presence of the past in the present, the representational difficulties of the narrative regarding the painful traumatic stories are embedded in a politically and socially regulated representational and discursive formations of larger structures of violence, oppression or terror.

Gáborné Vidor's testimony, *The Grave is Running High* (*Háborog a sír*) was published in Hungary once in 1960, in Germany under the name of Katalin Vidor (*Unterm Zeichen des Sterns*) in 1963 (translated by Bruno Heileg), and was reprinted in 2014 under the title *Alltag in Der Hölle*.[21] The little information we have about her life is from the official biographical lexicon, from her book and from journal reviews. According to these sources, Katalin Vidor was born as Catherine Sommer in Zalaegerszeg on September 22nd, 1903, died in West Berlin on June 7th, 1976. Her book appeared under her official Hungarian name, Gáborné Vidor (as an official name of a wife after marriage). She was deported to the extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1944 from her hometown, Zalaegerszeg.[22] After four months in Birkenau, she was selected for labour, and was transferred to Sackisch, then to Merzdorf, both subcamps of the Groß Rosen concentration camp. She survived, but her son, Tibor, her family and her husband's family were killed. Her husband, Gábor Vidor (1895–1958) was forced into Labor Service in a cement factory then he was obliged to move to Italy as a medic in an ambulance. After 1945 he lived as a dentist in Feldafing (Upper Bavaria). Katalin Vidor, after her liberation from the concentration camp, apparently lived again in Zalaegerszeg and Budapest, later moved into Berlin. She worked as a translator (on especially psychological theme), she wrote articles in journals (*Zala Newspaper, New Life, Life and Literature*), finally she begun to publish on her experiences in the camp only fourteen years later after her release (1960). Unfortunately, Katalin Vidor's personality and her testimony were forgotten in Hungary. Nevertheless, the question arises, whether the oblivion has at all periods prevailed, whether the testimony has been always neglected?

From the viewpoint of my research based on reconsidering the (female) representations of Holocaust under the communist era, it is a remarkable fact that her testimony still had reviews during the 1960s in literary journals, and that the printed copies were soon snapped up demonstrates she had an impact on that era. In 1961, one of her reviewers elaborating on his assessment as this testimony is a memento of the female lager and the horror of Auschwitz, stressing the survival witness how could remain a human being under the destruction and dehumanization.[23] In her narrative the female survivor, the witness, wanted to emphasize the experience of exclusion, stigma, violence and destruction, publishing her statements built on her own experience and memory in own right as a part of the public discourse. We cannot claim that this female memoir of Auschwitz has been completely laid unremarked in its time, entirely neglected, or tabooed. On the contrary, this book was awarded with the so-called "plane prize" of 1961 by the institutional side of the remembrance by the Publishing Directorate General of the Ministry of Culture. After that, the book was translated into German (GDR).[24] The translator, Bruno Heilig also translated two other memoirs during these years (Oszkár Betlen: *Élet a halál födjén. Auschwitzi visszaemlékezések*, 1959 [*Leben auf dem Acker des Todes*, 1962], György Sós: *Végtisztesség,* 1962 [*Die letzte Ehre*, 1965)].[25] It can be assumed that the German translation of Katalin Vidor's memoir would not have taken place without this state award. Unfortunately, with the changes in the political circumstances, particularly it became negligible from the 1970s, when the criticism had acknowledged that Katalin Vidor's memoir is a shocking document after all suggesting that the written form of this memory was inappropriate in the literary sense.[26] Thus, this testimony, like many others, went into oblivion for almost 50 years in the Hungarian cultural memory and Holocaust remembrance.

Inasmuch as Katalin Vidor published her memoir under the communist era, in the early of 1960's, it is presumed that the manner and the perspective of the records were influenced by the political and social environment surrounding her. The survivor, who recollected and interpreted her experiences, met Soviet liberators, and the context may have been charged politically, but a communist hue or reference to soviet resistance would not appear in the rest of the narrative. The writer of the memoir was starting to recall the moment of the Soviet liberation by remembering the traumatic events in the process of writing. She tries to tell a retrospective narrative of the past, the story of the traumatic events can be told. As it is well-known, in the narrated memory, the remembering includes a reinterpretation of the past in the present, which process is not a passive, the narrator actively gives meaning to the past.[27] Several records of personal experiences recalled from a second level of the narrative, a present and the past has been taken together, providing insight into the way in which remembered, narrated records, in accordance with the memorial writings of the 1960s, differed from that of previous ways of speaking. Since the remembering process is embedded in the narrative, the survivor contacted the past by remembering past events 14 years later. A sentence stated by survivor in her narrated memory, "*the grave is running high*"[28] , gives title of the recollection

16 Disch – Morris 2003: 13; Rigney 2008.
17 Hirsch – Smith 2002.
18 Rigney 2008.
19 See Nünning 2008; Erll 2008.
20 See Vasvári 2016.
21 Vidor 1960; Vidor 2014.
22 A small Jewish community lived in Zalaegerszeg from centuries; there were 1076 inhabitants in April 1944. The ghetto was established in May 16, 1944 to which the Jews of the city, Zalaegerszeg, Lenti and Nova (375 families, 1,221 people) were forced to move. The inhabitants of the rural ghettos were concentrated in transit and assembly camps of Zalaegerszeg, squeezing in around 3,450 people. The Jews were deported from the III. and IV. Gendarmerie districts between July 4th and 6th with four railroad trains. 2,900 people onboard the train left Zalegerszeg on July 5th and arrived in Auschwitz on July 7th. In April 1945 around 100 people returned to the city. By 1962 the number of the Jewish community had decreased to 30 in Zalaegerszeg. Balázs (ed.) 2008; Vidor 2014: 196–198.
23 Nyerges 1961.
24 Molnár 1962.
25 Kárpáti 1993: 106.
26 Földes 1977.
27 Smith – Watson 2010: 16.
28 Vidor 1960: 166.

and is a deeper indicator or a symbol to designate the phenomenon of the haunting past in the present. For the author telling the truth is imperative, for the sake of millions, whose monstrous death claims remembrance to educate and warn. Moving between past and present in narrating the displacement and dehumanization confronts us with the unspeakable brutality, cruelty, murders, and fear, the everyday life in hell, recounting how they would make great effort to survive during the ordeal (often from an intellectual observer position). Additionally, she focuses on the experience of mutual support and solidarity, the strategies of survival. She is describing their hopeless, paralysed situation living in the shadow of death, every concept is annihilated, the coordinate system of reality is lost:

> *"death comes in milliseconds" (...) in one of the camps, the "untaugliches" no longer sit on the ground, and the chimneys shed more smoke ... Tomorrow perhaps we will do - the paralyzed fantasy strains, then stumbles into a realistic thought: at night we will have more space in the block, and at the moment this is the 'point', the tomorrow is not yet interesting."* [29]

The first-person narrator tries to select the events, and as in every autobiographical narrative, the act of remembering is connected to rhetorical acts.[30] However, here this selection is rather supposed to be linked with the unspeakability of traumatic events. When the survivor-narrator recounts her story, the present tense is much more frequent in the way of narration than the past tense, the events are recorded simultaneously by a narrator as a "penetrating eye", but she also has an interpretative perspective through which she appears in the foreground. The narrator of the recollection is forced to omit the circumstances of the deportation, the painful memory of arrival and separation from her family. Recounting her story being in the camp, but only two days after her arrival since those two days are entirely forgotten, she cannot remember, because of the fear she felt about asking herself: where her family was, and what happened to them?[31]

The first part of the memoir is about the ordeal of Auschwitz, when in November they were being transferred to a textile factory in Mezdorf and is dedicated to a testimony on children and mothers of Auschwitz. Like many other female testimonies, the survival-narrator cannot tell the stories of violence against children, or the drama of death directly, the dying is counterpointed by stories of heroism, self-sacrifice, and solidarity. The text recounts on women's bounding, how important it was for women to create the sense of sibling belonging, how they were able to help each other, similarly to Holocaust sources and scholars who have stressed as well, "the fact that survival, first and foremost, was random, virtually all memoirs by women implicitly or explicitly credit survival to some manner of women's friendships and collaboration."[32] It can also be pointed out that, on the one hand, socialisation gave women a learned role in relationships and interdependence, and on the other hand, they were more inclined to write so-called collective biographies rather than autobiographies, in which stories of friendships and solidarity were more prominent than in men's narratives. [33]

It will also be striking how she presents herself as an actor when she would reach a numbed, *Muselmann* state, that can be described as "*distortion in/of Auschwitz*", "*when the soul is stricken down death*",[34] receiving outside help from someone as she tries to help others. Recounting a story of human affection, beyond all suffering and torture, recounting some stories in which women help each other in order to avoid being perished and succumbed, how can they save their lives and children's lives, or obtain the necessary food. She emphasized that the role of nurturing could have helped to survive: their responsibility as mothers, or women forced them to overcome their own depression and to conceive strategies for their survival. She attempts to express the extreme joyful feeling when two children find their mother in a wonderful way, and the crisis of language comes to light from a new perspective, the real joy cannot be represented:

> "*My science stops here again. Shall I say joy, laughter, crying? ... Words, words, and words. They embrace, they almost absorb each other. The questions and answers are immersed in the flood of questions and answers, the language is just a crutch, a support for the heart, because nothing but nothing is interesting, just to hug again, to intertwine, and to live together - or die!*"[35]

In recounting the uncomprehending gladness of liberation, she also refers to a Czech little boy born in Mezdorf:

> *"a mother pushes a little boy, Tomika born in Mezdorf, in a car home on the country road. Women surround the car and go. No, the wheels of the car are not spinning in the dust of the road: the Czech women put their hearts in front of the car, by means of rolling into Prague."*[36]

A careful reading of *The Grave is Running High* may reveal that narrative memory tries to veil the unspeakable trauma: what happened to her family, with whom she was deported together to Auschwitz, what happened to millions? The stories of saving children are highlighted in her narrated memory, but the death of her own son has remained unspeakable. According to Lawrence Langer, particularly, in a female testimonial narrative "the subtext of her life and her testimony is not a quest for release but an admission of irreplaceable loss."[37] But as Sara R. Horowitz states,

> "examining the ways the atrocity of the Shoah affected women or men, in specific terms – in their roles as mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, daughters, sons, lovers, friends, workers, homemakers – reveals to us something of the trauma they continue to bear."[38]

According to the German edition, this is not just a book about Nazi terror, about death, suffering of victims, but it is a report about life, about the humanity that still exists during the extreme ordeal. The focus is on women's recruitment in their autonomous human existence, even though they have been mentally and physically damaged. Even in Auschwitz, many of them apparently saw themselves not only as objects of the Nazis, but still at the same time, they could remain subjects of their own lives.[39]

Boris Palotai (1904, Nagyvárad – 1983, Budapest) was born into a Hungarian Jewish family in Oradea (Nagyvárad), lived in Kosice between 1919 and 1940, and in 1940 moved to Budapest. During the war she and her family survived the persecution by hiding with forged papers in Budapest.[40] In terms of her career, it can be noted that she already belonged to the Hungarian literary circle in Kosice, her lyrical verse and her novels were started to be published in interwar period, but she became known and renowned in Hungarian publicity particularly after the war during the Communist era without so much as receiving a real recognition of her in the high literary field. The literary evaluation of her writings has remained incomplete, namely her works – out of which many films were made - were inserted into a popular category, but they were neglected. Most likely, this aesthetic aspect was one of many reasons due to which the Hungarian literary history could not draw attention to those novels that are steadily connected with the memory of the Holocaust.

29 Vidor 1960: 7. [The English translation of the Hungarian original (and all other Hungarian originals) was made by Tímea Jablonczay.]
30 Smith – Watson 2010: 16.
31 Vidor 1960: 12.
32 Goldenberg 1996: 86.
33 Bos 2003: 36.
34 Vidor 1960: 35.
35 Vidor 1960: 35.
36 Vidor 1960: 287.
37 Langer 1998: 361.
38 Horowitz 1998: 366.
39 Vidor 2014: 196–198.
40 Palotai 1975: 126.

Boris Palotai's two fictional novels, *The Man (A férfi)* (1962), and *The Birds Silenced* (*A madarak elhallgattak*) (1964) are engaged in the direct antecedent and aftermath of the Holocaust depicting the process of traumatic memory elaborated in narrative structure of novels from female perspective, but here the effect of the trauma is not emerged from the experience of the survivor. The struggle of remembering is at the heart of the two novels, the events are focused on two perspectives shifting the emphasis. These novels particularly recount the compulsion to remember and confront the hidden past, they make prosecutions and call for empathy for the victims, moreover, these novels can attract and hold the attention by means of their own narrativizing processes, literary skills based on narrative coherence and fidelity. *The Birds Silenced* narrates two stories: during the 1960's the male protagonist (a writer) recalls to 1944. In the narration of the two stories of the novel, two times are layered on top of each other: from the present time of the early 1960s past events were being emerged: a love story of a hiding Jewish girl in the summer of 1944, which story was repressed in the consciousness of the male protagonist. The protagonist was a celebrated writer during and after the Nazi era, nevertheless, who is not described as a collaborator of the Nazis, but who does not recognize the circumstances and consequences of inhumanity and terror, who does simply look away, and with that he will be an accomplice of the murderous system. We would say today that this man characteristically inhabited what Michael Rothberg refers to as the implicated subject, who is neither perpetrator nor victim, but beneficiary and accomplice of a system of power that makes some people victims and others perpetrators. To quote literally Rothberg,

> *"Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles. Less "actively" involved than perpetrators, implicated subjects do not fit the mould of the "passive" bystander, either. Although indirect or belated, their actions and inactions help produce and reproduce the positions of victims and perpetrators. In other words, implicated subjects help propagate the legacies of historical violence and prop up the structures of inequality that mar the present; apparently direct forms of violence turn out to rely on indirection. Modes of implication—entanglement in historical and present-day injustices—are complex, multifaceted, and sometimes contradictory, but are nonetheless essential to confront in the pursuit of justice."*[41]

In fact, it is a position occupied by a large part of society, by the community itself, a position that is widely reflected in the works of memory published in the 1960s. Compared to the unconsciously acting protagonist, the other characters represented in the novel wear masks and play a role: in the age of disaster, in the destructive world of totalitarianism, they are forced to wear masks under the pressure of the destructive machinery, it is underlined that the roles of privacy cannot function as they cannot trust each other. The characters appearing next to the protagonist represent different statuses and habits, who will be an accomplice to the system, or who will be resistant. In the narratives the layers of the present and the past (and narrative levels) overlap, the past becomes apparent, namely, the retrospective mode of the narration with act of remembering to begin to work, from a level of reflection along with the excavation into the past, the traces of trauma are starting to haunt. The male protagonist wants to deny his responsibility for the traumatic events, but the traces emerge after 17 years, it gradually turns out that he was unaware responsible for someone's (her lover) deportation, and her death. The memory of the male fictional protagonist oscillates between amnesia, forgotten details and overly clear memory images. The

41 Rothberg 2019: 1-2.

fictional representation of the individual act of recalling and forgetting with the past symbolically refers to the forgetting strategy of Hungarian collective memory passing the responsibility of the community by reason of the mass murder. The book was published many times and was translated into several other languages. Even a movie was also made from the novel by Zoltan Fábri (*Nappali sötétség, Daytime darkness*) and it did not only become popular in a narrow intellectual circle.

The plot of another novel, titled, *The Man*, was drawn about the effect of certain experiences upon those who survived them. The female protagonist had just returned home from the concentration camp and tried to remake her life after the liberation, getting help from her female friend, who had no exact experiences about the atrocities. The female protagonist of this novel struggles to recover a collapsed connection with life, she survived an unspeakable ordeal, but she cannot overcome her suffering, her memory; because of the loss of her family, she lost hope to remake her life. The present – in which she was forced to live –always collapsed to the past, repetitive images appeared around her children who were thrown up onto a van, disappearing right before her eyes, shipped in gas chambers. This past is incomprehensible, her life is split into absent past and present, but this past cannot be inserted into her present, the past is haunting. As Lawrence Langer argues, *"women who outlived the atrocity also inhabit two worlds, the world of then and the world of now."*[42]

> *"The maternity continues to haunt: one biological feature of their gender, the capacity to bear children, has had a singular impact on their efforts to confront their ordeal. The woman could not escape the taint of her memory, "her absent past is permanently present inside".*[43]

In Boris Palotai's novel the memory of the body and the portrayal of the body are playing a central role in the process of act of remembering: the body as it was scared, it was under total humiliation, but it can operate a site which tries to stand against the loss of identity, precisely because of her deep bodily memory a resumption of her life proves impossible. Not only the representation of the process of the unbearable memory is crucial, the remembering processes and images intersect with the meaning of the collective memory regarding the past, and the present provides recognition for the female protagonist and for the reader about Hungarian complicity. It is symbolically emphasised that the resumption *in Hungary* is impossible, the investigation of survivor-witness about the past, when she discovers the hidden past of a Hungarian man, all society is uncovered, pointing out the accomplice of Hungarians.

The fiction supposedly can be interpreted as a pseudo-factual novel,[44] which intends to provide a fictional realm by means of additional claim to extratextual verification. In doing so, the novel reifies its memorial status: even though it is not the author's own testimony, but it is held to be a remembrance of her friend, another survivor-female writer, Tereza Rudnóy (1909–1947) which contains a fictionalized set of biographical elements referring to Rudnóy's tragical story before and after the liberation. Her children were executed in Auschwitz after arriving at the camp, her husband is assumed to have died in labour service; she and her sister were only members of their family to survive the ordeal. Rudnóy tried to begin to rebuild her life, however she died in an accident in 1947.[45] As a survivor she aimed to speak of the unspeakable with her fictionalized testimony (a kind of documentary novel), titled *Liberated Women Survivors* [*Szabaduló asszonyok*] – published in 1947 [2011], a month before her death – she wanted to tell the truths struggling against amnesia after the horror and liberation. This testimony had not merely personal therapeutic function for own writer

42 Langer 1998: 353.
43 Langer 1998: 361.
44 Foley 1986.
45 When she wanted to ferry over the Danube, from Léva (Slovakia, from her sister) to Esztergom, the ferry storm-bound, all passengers drowned.

– she formulated it immediately after the release in Boris Palotai's home supporting her –, but it has a collective value as well. Unfortunately, her life, her previous works, and her extraordinary testimony totally went into oblivion after her death.[46]

Erzsi Szenes (Elisheva Senesh) (1902–1981) was a Czechoslovakian–Hungarian–Jewish woman writer, a Holocaust survivor, later Israeli writer and journalist. She wrote down her autobiographical accounts in her half-literary ghetto-diary entitled *The Soul Resists* [*A lélek ellenáll*], (1939–1941) published in 1966, and in her memorial texts published in Israel *I have a homeland* (*Van hazám*) in 1956. Accordance with her records, she participated in the Jewish resistance (she was not a partisan or fighter, but she attempted to have a talk with diplomats/politicians on behalf of saving Slovakian Jewish community) during the Nazi era, moreover she was one of the witnesses in the Eichmann–trial. She was known for her poetry in Hungarian and Czechoslovakian literary circles in the interwar period. Must be noted here, that after the war her reputation has only remained in the Czechoslovakian–Hungarian literary history. In Hungary she was only able to reappear in the publicity for a short time, in 1960's, before and after she was totally forgotten. The memory of her and the history of her oblivion are also peculiar.

On the day, 19th of March 1944, the German command reached Budapest, the occupation was enforced meeting no resistance from the Hungarian Army. She was arrested on the 21st of March 1944. During her imprisonment she was repeatedly interrogated, tortured and relocated to a camp in Kistarcsa, Hungary, then deported to Auschwitz. Her parents were deported from Mihalovce to Auschwitz and murdered in the autumn of 1944. During this time, her brother was killed by the SS nearby Banska Bistrica. From Auschwitz she had to endure in Fallerslaben, then she was transmitted to Salzwedel into a military factory, where she was until she and her fellow prisoners were liberated by the American forces. After spending three years in Bratislava, her experiences related to the Holocaust were published in a Slovak-language journal (she was a columnist of *Knihy a Osudy*). Already shattered by the realization of her disrupted life, she decided to leave for Bratislava at the beginning of the first immigration wave of Holocaust survivors from Europe to reach Israel in 1949. Until her death (1981) she lived in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, worked as a writer, published her memoirs, short novels, articles in an Israeli–Hungarian journal, Új *Kelet* (*New East*) organized around a Hungarian literary circle.

The manuscript of her diary, *The Soul Resist*[47] that remained unpublished until 1966, was written inside the Mihalovce ghetto between 1939 to 1941. Her autobiographical accounts begin from the time of her confinement in the ghetto until the time of her rescue. Besides emphasizing the original version of the text – that was written during the time of terror in a hiding place risking the author's life – we might also consider textual aspects – titles, paratextual elements and the functional structuring of the narrative devices – all of which constitutes the narrative activity of the diarist at some level. In her diary she considers events happening around her, internal observations, and reflections, external and internal events seem to carry the testimonial authority to which she devoted considerable effort. Since the text of the diary comprises more narratives and descriptions, observations, and comments with highly reflective accounts, it tells us about the mechanism of memory and the writing act. Through the writing act, she reflects on the process of life, in which the retrospective view on the past assigns meaning to her life. Among other things, self-discovery and self-presentation are threaded throughout her interrelated experiences; such varied functions belong to autobiographical writing. What is significant in this context is not the function of the diary as a momentary interpretation of life,

46 Teresa Rudnóy recounted her experiences about devastation, hopelessness, tormented memories, in posing questions about law and revenge after the liberation. The docu-novel narrates the story of the last 24-hour, the antecedents and consequences of liberation: it confronts us with crucial issues: whether liberation can bring true freedom, whether the unforgivable can be forgiven? Rudnóy's novel examines female body experiences through extraordinarily strong visual narrative devices, connected to visual effects that are at the focus. The text portrays strong female bodily experiences; within this representation the fragmented female body could be revealed as a sign of suffering, absence and vulnerability.

47 Szenes 1966.

which also operates in her text, but the autobiographical effort linked to testimony. Namely at such a moment of crisis, the author, like Szenes, recognizes the significant role of the crisis and attempts to struggle over meaning and order in her life, she may discern the pattern of repeated experiences through telling the story of which narrative identity is constructed. However, within testimonial discourse in relation to the genre of the Holocaust diary the personal experience and self-introspection is linked with the "fate of a whole people", in which "the narrative "I" represents a community or collective", the personal transformation is linked to a group marked by marginalization, oppression, and struggle.[48]

Szenes's book, *The Soul Resists* was published in Budapest and aimed to claim the interest of the Hungarian public, it is explicitly addressed to the Hungarian audience, therefore her Hungarian cultural identity is stressed pointing out her exclusion and the shaping of her identity as a traumatized Jew. Critics underlined that she belongs to Hungary, for instance, András Mezei highlights that "in the shadow of death-camps" "she is thinking of Hungarians all the time: *my country*,"[49] concurrently reviewers also admit that her accounts consist of fragmented lyrical and prosaic elements, but they continue to say that these accounts are described by the writer as a guildsman. At the same time as the publication of her book, Erzsi Szenes also reappeared personally on the Hungarian literary and cultural scene: at the invitation of the poet Ferenc Juhász she visited Budapest in 1966 and was guest of honour on that year's Day of the Book, as a part of the diplomacy, David Giladi, ambassador of Israel also attended to the event visiting her. She was interviewed by several newspapers and the radio. In interviews at the time Szenes spoke of being a witness in the Eichmann-trial[50] and at the trial of Hunsche and Krumey in Frankfurt in 1964, for she was on the transport that was called back from the border by Horthy, but which, as she put it, on Eichmann's orders, was slid over the border for a second time by the SS. The personal appearance of Szenes in Budapest with the publication of her diary was a particularly quaint moment: she became one of the representatives, indeed a diplomat, of the process of „the coming to term with the past" that articulated in the 1960s and of the short-lived period of Israeli–Hungarian cooperation that was blocked with the collapse of the Soviet-Israeli relationship very soon, in 1967. The authority of the survivor who wrote her testimony and who appeared in the publicity is constructed becoming a witness, as she explicitly attended at the Eichmann-trial. According to Annette Wieviorka this trial opens a new era, through which the memory of the Holocaust is being admitted to the public sphere, from this the survivors turning into witness "became an embodiment of memory" attesting to the past and to the continuing presence of the past"[51].

Concluding, female witnesses entered the public discourse on the Jewish genocide during the 1960's in Hungary. Many memories and fictions, including female testimonies, memoirs or fictions on the traumatic past were published, they were closely aligned with a new discourse begin to constitute around the constraint of the "coming to terms with the past" in this era. Although female narratives also participated in the principal concerns of the remembrance, these memories could be easily relegated to the margins of the literature, and they went into oblivion erasing from the cultural memory. In these memorial texts, the working of the remembering process is conspicuous, so to speak, a more complex reflexive narrative form of memory constituted: the memory techniques convey both the inner experience of trauma and the haunting past in the present. This retrospective mode is articulated from a level of reflection, the narrator or the protagonist recall the past after 15–20 years, and in the remembrance

48 John 1989; Hutton 2005: 62.

49 Mezei 1966.

50 Her testimony at the Eichmann-trial (25 May 1962) is available on line on the homepage of Jewishgen (Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York) https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Michalovce/documents/Testimony-of-Erzsi-Elisheva-Szenes.pdf [last accessed on 22 August 2018.]

51 Wieviorka 2006.

of the traumatic past – about humiliation, stigma, vulnerability – the process of "coming the term with the past" is emphasized. The female survivors of their own memoirs or the protagonists of the fictional renditions recall the unbearable traumatic stories on the horror displaying double texts, along with the memories of the unsayable pain of loss confront us amidst the compulsion of infinite remembrance.

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