1956 and the Collapse of Stalinist Politics of History: Forgetting and Remembering the 1942 Újvidék/Novi Sad Massacre and the 1944/45 Partisan Retaliations in Hungary and Yugoslavia (1950s–1960s)*

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Two acts of mass violence that occurred during World War II have strained relations between Hungarians and Serbs for decades: the murder of several thousand civilians in Novi Sad (Újvidék) and the surrounding villages in January 1942, committed by the Hungarian army and gendarmerie, and Tito’s partisan army’s mass killings and incarceration of tens of thousands civilians, most of them Hungarians, at the end of the war. Remembering these atrocities has always been difficult and strongly politicized, but this was particularly the case when the Communist regimes in Hungary and Yugoslavia based the legitimation of their authority on anti-Fascist narratives and interpretations of the war. The conflict between Stalin and Tito, and the anti-Stalinist revolution of 1956 made it even more difficult to propagate the original Stalinist narrative about the war, which stood in ever starker contrast to everyday realities. When Kádár began to revise the political justification of his regime with a narrative that was both anti-Fascist and (moderately) critical of Stalinism in the 1960s, the remembrance of the 1942 massacre changed. In Yugoslavia, the weakening of the central government in the 1960s contributed to a local re-appropriation of the memory of 1942, while the 1944 killings remained a strict taboo until 1989.

Keywords: Stalinism, memory, World War II, anti-Fascist narrative, war criminals, partisans, Tito, Kádár, 1956

Recently, representatives of the Hungarian and the Serbian states expressed their regret for atrocities committed against each other’s nation during World War II.¹ The most notorious of these acts of mass violence was the infamous mass murder in the course of anti-partisan raids in the region of Bačka (Bácska) in January 1942, when the Hungarian army and gendarmerie killed about 3,300

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civilians, mostly Serbs and Jews, between 900 and 1,300 of whom were killed in Novi Sad (Újvidék). Less than two years later, Yugoslav partisans drove out Hungarian and German troops. Over the course of the fall and winter of 1944/45, the partisans killed thousands of civilians (exact numbers are still not available), not exclusively of Hungarian and German background, but also real and alleged “collaborating” Serbs, Croats, and others. Some of the atrocities were “justified” as measures of retaliation for the massacres committed by the Hungarian authorities in 1942.\(^2\)

While the Novi Sad massacre was discussed internationally and nationally roughly since the moment it was committed and then more intensively after World War II and again in the 1960s (and, most recently, in 2011, during the trial of Sándor Képiró, a gendarmerie officer involved in the massacre), the atrocities committed by the Yugoslav army in 1944/45 were an absolute taboo in Yugoslavia and Hungary until the end of Communism.\(^3\) The reasons for this discrepancy will become clearer in the course of this study.

In the Communist period, these acts of mass violence represented challenging events for the historical representation of World War II for both regimes. Their legitimacy rested on anti-Fascist narratives of the war and the heroic struggle of Communist resistance and national liberation, particularly in Tito’s Yugoslavia. In these narratives, anti-Semitic or interethnic motivations of mass violence played minor roles.\(^4\) The conflict between Stalin and Tito added further complexity to the official attempts to deal with the difficult chapters in the history of World War II. After the outbreak of the 1956 revolution and the temporary collapse of the Stalinist system, it finally became impossible to return to this master narrative of World War II. Once Kádár had taken complete control after the brutal suppression of the opposition in the late 1950s, a new, more flexible interpretation of World War II had to be provided.

In the following, I will first describe how the Hungarian and Yugoslav government tried to monitor the memories of the 1942 atrocities and the 1944/45 retaliations immediately after World War II. At the time, most of the commanding officers responsible for the 1942 massacre were put on trial and

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\(^2\) In Vojvodina alone, according to a commission of the Autonomous Province led by Professor Dragoljub Živković, around 110,000 people were killed between 1941 and 1948. Of these, about 56,000 were murdered by the occupying powers during the war, but around 54,000 were killed after the liberation. Cf. Branka Dragovic-Savic, “Seeking the truth in Vojvodina,” EUObserver, March 19, 2010. See also: Živković, ed., \textit{Imenik stradalih osoba ap Vojvodine}.

\(^3\) Mák, “Szigorúan tiltották.”

executed at a time when war criminals were being punished all over Europe. In this context, the atrocities that partisans had committed against Hungarians, Germans, and others at the end of the war in Yugoslavia in 1944/45 were given a completely different meaning and status than the massacre of 1942. In contrast to the Novi Sad massacre, which was broadly covered by the press during the trials and a constituted topic of publications in both countries, even the survivors and family members of the victims of the atrocities were not allowed to speak about them.

The next part of this article analyzes how the Stalinist regime in Hungary and Titoism in Yugoslavia dealt with the memories of the war atrocities between 1949 and 1953, in a period of open conflict between Stalin and Tito. It also briefly describes the erection of a monument dedicated to the victims of the 1942 massacre in Novi Sad in the context of the Yugoslav rift with Stalin at a time when the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary had become mostly the “private” affair of a small minority.

I then look into the changes related to representations of the 1942 massacre in the years immediately following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, in an attempt to analyze how the dramatic events and the experiences of revolution and military intervention influenced the commemorations of World War II. Finally, I will briefly look into the changes in policies in both countries, which were results of de-Stalinization and international events, such as the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem or the crisis of the Yugoslavian federal system in the 1960s.

My intention is to shed light on the complex entanglement of world war memories in Hungary and Yugoslavia by focusing on two acts of mass violence, one in 1942 and one in 1944/45. The 1942 Novi Sad massacre was, to some extent, related to the Holocaust in Hungary and similar atrocities all over German-dominated Eastern Europe, especially the nearby Independent Croatian State, the German-occupied Yugoslavia, the Ukraine, the Baltic States, and other parts of the Soviet Union attacked by Germany and its allies. The retaliations of Tito’s partisans which occurred in 1944/45 against Hungarians, Germans, and others, on the other hand, were bloody reactions to war crimes committed by Hungarian and German troops after the collapse and occupation of Yugoslavia. In part, they were also motivated by the wish to create an ethnic South Slavic majority and thus a continuation of the inner-Yugoslav civil war. The fact that Hungary had lost the war while Yugoslavia was among the victorious allies also had a strong impact on the memory/forgetting of both events. As such, they have been treated completely separately from the 1942 massacre. But as I will
argue here, these crimes were related to each other, and they are still related in the memories of Hungarians and Serbs today.

Another problem related to this topic is the fact that little study has been devoted to the memory of the atrocities. As of now, there are no studies on the memory of 1942 in Novi Sad, and there are very few on the memory of World War II and the Holocaust in Yugoslavia. While the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary has been studied more often, almost all studies complain that there is a lack of secondary literature on the topic.

Trials and Executions. The Immediate Post-War Years 1945–49

At the end of 1946, the commanding officers of the 1942 raid, together with representatives of the local Hungarian elites, were executed in Novi Sad and nearby locations. After these executions, diplomats from both countries worked on improving relations between the two states. However, the Hungarian government’s hope that the demonstrative punishment of war criminals and the gesture of cooperation with Yugoslav authorities could result in more benign treatment of Hungary at the Paris peace negotiations turned out to be too optimistic. The Paris Peace Treaty of 1947 basically reestablished the borders of Trianon.

The war crimes trials related to the 1942 raids, which were held at the People’s Courts in Budapest and in Yugoslavia, made extensive use of the materials that had been collected by the Military Court at the Chief of Staff in the months after the massacre in 1942. At the time, these legal proceedings

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5 For war and Holocaust remembering in Yugoslavia, see: Kerenji, Jewish Citizens; Karge, Steinerne Erinnerung – versteinerte Erinnerung; Szerbhorváth, “A jugoszláviai holokauszt emlékezete.”
7 On October 26, 1946, the Hungarian-language newspaper Magyar Szó reported on “A bácskai razzíák felelőseinek bűnpere”. See also: Jenő Györkei, “Nemzeti szeretetlenség” [National cold-heartedness], Magyar Nemzet Online, January 12, 2002.
8 Today, this material is lost. In April 1942, military court prosecutor Colonel Dr. József Babós, under orders by Chief-of-Staff Szombatbelyi, began his meticulous investigation, which resulted in a report seven hundred pages long and concluding that a mass murder had taken place. During the German occupation, Babós went into hiding, and the Arrow Cross arrested some of his family members. In 1947, he gave testimony during the People’s court war crimes trial against General Jány, but on September 29, 1947, the court noted that “he was a fugitive.” The Communists had begun to investigate his activities against Communists under Horthy. Cf. Varga, “Forradalmi törvényesség.” In connection with the trials, see: Zinner and Róna, Szálasiek bilincsben, 1:48–73. For an overview and analysis of the people’s courts, cf. Karsai, “The People’s Courts.”
and the indictment against General Feketehalmy-Czeydner and 14 other officers had been a provocation for Hitler, who granted political asylum to the four main defendants shortly before the occupation of Hungary in March 1944. The people’s court trials were thus a continuation of these proceedings, in contrast to other post-war war crime trials.

The propaganda that accompanied the war crime trials demonized the suspects as “Fascist thugs,” “psychopathic,” “sadistic” “criminals,” and it highlighted a few facts and witness accounts. The massacre of 1942 was used in a number of war crime trials because a great deal was known about it on the basis of the thorough investigations that had occurred under Horthy in the spring of 1942. During the trials, the judges and the political representatives also used the characterization of the “psychopathic” war criminal in order to proclaim that the real victim of the war was the “Hungarian people.” In the trial against General Feketehalmy-Czeydner, the commander of the operation in Novi Sad in 1942, the political people’s prosecutor, György Marosán, a Social-democratic politician, interpreted the Novi Sad massacre as a “defeat of the Hungarian nation,” which had lost “more than a war; … its honor and reputation.” According to Marosán, the “true accused” were not Feketehalmy-Czeydner or Grassy, but the whole system and the elite of the Horthy regime, the “noble gang,” which had suppressed and betrayed the innocent Hungarian people.

In the context of the post-war trials, Tito had asked for the extradition of the officers responsible for the Novi Sad massacre. His request was granted by the Hungarian government. However, he also requested that Horthy himself be handed over. In this case, Stalin vetoed his demand. A public trial of Horthy in Yugoslavia would have strengthened Tito’s reputation as the leader of the most

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9 Braham, The Destruction, doc 64, 117–18.
11 Zinner, Róna, Századok világszínben, 1:283. György Marosán (1908–92) was a baker, who rose during the 1930s to the higher ranks of the trade unions of bakers. After 1945, he was a member of the Politbureau (1948–56), and he also served as the President of the Yugoslavian–Hungarian Friendship Society and had various other high positions during the Communist period. Cf. Új Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon (Budapest: Magyar Könyvklub, 2002), 4:527–28.
12 Stalin considered that Horthy had at least attempted to switch sides before the end of the war, that he had begun armistice negotiations in Moscow, and that he was, after all, “an old man.” Cf. Haraszti-Taylor, “Why Was Admiral Horthy not Considered a War Criminal?”; Sakmyser, “Miklos Horthy and the Allies, 1945–1946.”
successful European partisan movement of World War II. Stalin was becoming increasingly suspicious of Tito’s political ambitions.

The 1945/46 war crimes trials therefore had different functions in Hungary and in Yugoslavia. The Hungarian government wanted to demonstrate that the country had become a democracy and that it wanted to break away from its Fascist past. In Yugoslavia, World War II had a different character. It had been not simply a heroic fight led by Tito’s partisans against the occupying powers under German leadership, but also a bloody civil and ethnic war between Croatian, Serbian, and other nationalists. Therefore, the war crimes trials were supposed to show the triumph of a unified, multi-ethnic partisan movement against foreign occupiers who had victimized the Yugoslav people and against inner enemies and traitors. The new Yugoslav regime, so the promise went, would overcome all ethnic tensions and conflicts. In this context, any talk of the atrocities committed by the partisans against Hungarian and other civilians in the aftermath of the collapse of the occupation had to be silenced.

“Fascists” on Both Sides of the Border: Stalinism and Politics of History and Memory in Hungary and Yugoslavia at the Height of the Stalin–Tito Conflict

While establishing one-party dictatorships in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Hungarian and the Yugoslavian Communist leaderships established historical narratives of World War II which were supposed to stabilize and legitimize the new regimes and, at the same time, direct the focus of society towards the socialist future. The preamble of Hungary’s constitution of 1949 (its first written constitution) was based on an absolute dichotomy between the “reactionary past” and the “progressive socialist future,” and it declared that the future was only safeguarded by submission to the hegemony of the Soviet Union:

The armed forces of the great Soviet Union freed our country from the yoke of German fascism, crushed the infamous power of the landowners and wealthy capitalists, and forged the path of democratic progress for our working people. In hard battles with the masters of the old order and their defenders, the Hungarian working class came to power and rebuilt our war-torn country in alliance with the working peasants, and all with the selfless support of the Soviet Union.13

Instead of stability, the Stalinist years in Hungary were marked by a latent civil war, for the radical attempt to transform society along Soviet lines could only be implemented through the destruction of political, social, and cultural institutions, ideas and mentalities that had characterized the country before 1945. The Stalinist constitution of 1949 can thus be seen as a kind of utopian social blueprint that had to be forced through owing to social resistance. The Constitution of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia of 1946, radically amended in 1953 and replaced by a new constitution in 1963, was similarly based on Stalin’s constitution of 1936. Unlike the Hungarian constitution, it did not contain any reference to the war or the Soviet Union, in part because Tito and the partisans had won the war mostly independently and had enjoyed strong support from a large part of the population, in contrast to the Hungarian Communist Party. However, the 1946 Constitution declared that it was the “expression of the unanimous will of all the peoples of the Federative People’s Republic of Yugoslavia,” reflecting the principle of “brotherhood and unity” (bratstvo-jedinstvo) that Tito had proclaimed in order to solve or just cover up ethnic tensions and conflicts.

In both cases, the memory of the war (the ritualized and rhetorical forms of this memory) was strongly oriented towards the future of the socialist state. The 1942 raid in Novi Sad and some of the surrounding villages and the 1944/45 retaliations in particular represented complicated, delicate topics. On the one hand, both regimes could refer to the 1942 massacre as an example of “Horthy Fascist” brutality, and both could relate the perpetrators to the broader context of Nazi (and capitalist) imperialism. Some of the Hungarians who had, in 1942, protested against the massacre together with the heroic Communist partisans were now celebrated as examples of the good, progressive forces of history. Thus, the most prominent anti-Fascist Hungarian hero in both countries became Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky of the Independent Smallholders Party, who had publicly protested against the 1942 massacre and had demanded

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16 For Yugoslavia, see: Karge, “Mediated Remembrance,” 51.
17 However, Zombory, the Police Chief of Novi Sad, and Fehrenbach, the High Sheriff (főispán) who had also protested, were executed in 1946 as representatives of the occupying administration. The fact that they had organized the deportation of the Jews from Novi Sad did not play a role in this.
that the commanders be punished.\textsuperscript{18} A few weeks after his protest, the Novi Sad massacre became widely known internationally.\textsuperscript{19} Bajcsy-Zsilinszky was arrested immediately after the German occupation of Hungary and later hanged by the Arrow Cross government.\textsuperscript{20}

All of the Communist Parties in Europe (including Western Europe) propagated historical narratives of World War II, representing it as a struggle between the good popular forces of anti-Fascism against evil Fascism defined “as the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, and most imperialist elements of finance capital.”\textsuperscript{21} This ideological perspective on history made it difficult to discuss openly the role played by nationalism and racism during World War II. This partly explains why, beginning in 1949, the Holocaust slowly began to disappear from public discourse.\textsuperscript{22} Antisemitism was just a minor, if detestable, ideology of this brand of Fascism, but it was not really seen or cast as central. The Hungarian people, like the Communists, were victims of “Horthy-Fascism.”\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore, as Judit Pihurik has observed, for Hungary—in contrast with Yugoslavia—the fact that the country had participated in the war against the Soviet Union as “Hitler’s last ally” was the “original sin” of the Horthy era, and the Communists used this fact of history to fashion enemies.\textsuperscript{24}

In this context, the White Terror of 1919–20 during the rise to power of the Horthy-regime was merged with the Holocaust and the atrocities of World War II in order to create a continuous “Fascist” period. In a book published in 1951, two leading communist historians emphasized this continuity:

Thus, in 1919 and 1920, it was not merely the seeds of fascism which appeared in Hungary, but rather fascism itself. In the Hungarian fascism of the twenties and forties, not only the fundamental idea but even the participants were the same. In 1919 in Orgovány and in 1942 at the massacre in Újvidék the same Horthy stood at the helm; . . . . The same people, the

\textsuperscript{18} For a short biography of Bajcsy-Zsilinszky, see: Vígh, “Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky.” His memorandum to Horthy is published in: Tilkovszky, “Útott a cselekvés utolsó órája.”
\textsuperscript{20} The cult around his martyrdom began as soon as his dead body was brought in a procession to Budapest. Cf. Fisli, “A ’nemzet halottja’, 1945” See also: Lévai, Hősök hőse...! Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Endre, a demokrácia vértanúja.
\textsuperscript{21} Dimitrov’s 1935 phrase is quoted in: Blinkhorn, Fascism and the Right, 142.
\textsuperscript{22} Cf. Fritz, Nach Krieg for Yugoslavia: Kerenji, Jewish Citizens, Karge, Steinerne Erinnerung.
\textsuperscript{23} Quoted in Apor, Fabricating Authenticity, 111–12.
\textsuperscript{24} Pihurik, “A háborús múlt.”
same crimes: from 1920 to 1944, our history has a direct road to the reign of terror of the Arrow Cross hordes.\(^\text{25}\)

At the same time, the people’s courts, which had been officially established in order to put war criminals on trial, were closed. On April 1, 1950, the People’s Court in Szeged, the last functioning people’s court, ceased its activities, after 15 courts had already been terminated in 1948. Although the regime continued to initiate trials against less prominent war criminals, some of which were related to the Novi Sad massacre, these trials did not get much media attention, and in many cases took place in secret. These mostly secret legal proceedings were part of the routine of the Stalinist suppression, which during the period between 1949 and 1953 affected tens of thousands of Hungarians in various ways.

Also, some of the officers involved in the 1942 raids had escaped. Sándor Képíró, one of the patrol commanders during the 1942 raid, began a new life in Argentina.\(^\text{26}\) Gusztáv Korompay, who had admitted during the military trial of 1943/44 that he was involved in mass shootings of civilians for which he was not punished, escaped and probably went into hiding in West Germany.\(^\text{27}\)

Less fortunate were those gendarmes who had been caught by the Red Army at the end of the war, or handed over to the Soviet Union by the US Army. They spent mostly between five and ten years in various Soviet labor camps, and, when they returned to Hungary after Stalin’s death, the Hungarian State Security Authority imprisoned them again in camps or put them in jail.\(^\text{28}\) While the regimes suppressed all kinds of real and imagined opposition, many war criminals were integrated into the Stalinist system. The murder of half a million Hungarian Jews and the suffering of other groups during the war were mostly silenced. The 1950s were marked in all countries—in Eastern and Western Europe, the United States, and elsewhere—by a new phase of forgetting the


\(^{27}\) A Lutheran pastor who married a woman named Ilona Korompay in Budapest in 1943, asked his brother-in-law, Gusztáv Korompay, in Germany in 1945 to take care of his two small children, which he did until 1957. This could be just a coincidental similarity in names, but the same pastor was also taking care of the burial of Colonel General Gusztáv Jány, the commander of the 2nd Hungarian Army, who was executed in 1947 (exonerated by the Hungarian Supreme Court in 1993). Cf. “Balikó,” *Evangélikus élet; Gárdos, Nemzetvásárt*, 197.

\(^{28}\) The former First Lieutenant Gerencséry was sentenced by the Military Court in Budapest in August 1951, after he had also returned from a Soviet POW camp. Cf. HL, BTK 2925/1951. Two other former gendarmes were put on trial in August 1953 and received sentences of 15 years in prison for war crimes. Files of the trial in the Budapest Capital Archive were kept secret: BFL, XXV.4. – 0343 – 1953.
war and the Holocaust. Everywhere the rebuilding of society, the creating of families, and economic and social questions gained precedence. In this new phase, gendarmes and soldiers who were not put under observation by the State Security or arrested, as well as Jewish survivors and the large part of Hungarian society were seeking to integrate into society. In other words, they were seeking a new beginning.

Communist propaganda now targeted new types of enemies, which were also indiscriminately defamed as “Fascists.” After the wave of revenge and retaliation in the immediate post-war years, accompanied by the practice of the Communist party of integrating into its institutions of power a large number of “little” Arrow Cross Party members, some of whom became active in the secret police, new repression campaigns began in the late 1940s in a context of a hysterical war paranoia.

The split between Stalin and Tito, who had been close allies at least until 1947 and who shared ideological convictions, was provoked by Tito’s expansionist policies towards Albania and by his reluctance to accept Stalin’s idea of a close, centralized structure of the Communist camp in Eastern Europe, dominated by Moscow. A few months later, the US government decided to support Tito against Stalin. For Stalin’s followers in Eastern Europe, this was treason, and it could only mean that Tito had always been an enemy, a secret supporter of imperialism and even of fascism, who had hitherto only hidden his “true face.”

Instead of war criminals, it was now communist leaders who sat in the docks of courts. Even those who had worked tirelessly for the Stalinist cause, such as the former minister of the interior, László Rajk, who was responsible for the killing, torture, and imprisonment of thousands of enemies of the regime, was now an “enemy.” In order to “prove” the connection between Rajk, “Titoism” and “Horthy Fascism,” the State Security unit which organized the show trial arrested, among many others, a former gendarmerie officer who had been working against the Germans at the end of the war, accusing him of organizing the alleged coup d’état against the communist regime. The judge at the trial was the same person who had previously led the proceedings against officers and administrators charged with organizing the deportations of Jews, a fact that

29 Judt, “The Past Is Another Country.”
30 Examples in: Gyarmati, “Ellenségek és bűnbakok.”
32 Lees, Keeping Tito Afloat.
33 Cf. Hodos, Show Trials, 60.
shows how radically the priorities of the Hungarian law enforcement authorities had changed in only two years’ time. Party leader and strongman Mátyás Rákosi clarified in Szabad Nép on June 8, 1949: “Today’s Yugoslavia is a typical police state in which the Trotskyite clique keeps its grip on power through Gestapo methods and with the help of their Gestapo agents. ... At every turn we will unmask the Tito gang as traitors and agents of imperialism.” Just as Stalin was a symbol of the Eastern Bloc’s unity in the minds of the respective national party elites, Tito now embodied the enemy. He was cast as a man who consorted with “imperialists” and “fascist powers.”

The conflict between Stalin and Tito and Rákosi’s strong engagement in it created a difficult situation for the remaining Hungarian minority in Novi Sad and the Vojvodina, as well as for the South Slavic minority in Hungary. On November 29, 1949, a new Hungarian radio program was inaugurated, Újvidéki Rádio, broadcasting from Novi Sad. The new radio program got immediately involved in this ugly propaganda war, fighting against the “lies” of the Hungarian State Radio Kossuth, which had begun to attack Tito vigorously in the context of the show trial against László Rajk in the summer of 1949. Radio Kossuth had already introduced or extended programs in Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian. While the Yugoslavian leadership was concerned about “Cominformists” among the Hungarian minority, which numbered roughly half a million people, the Hungarian authorities on the other side of the border were afraid of Yugoslavian agents, especially among the small South Slavic minorities. Because of these concerns, a group of Yugoslav Hungarian communists were arrested and put on trial in Novi Sad as spies in April 1949. Tensions between armed units rose at the border, and there were numerous incidents involving Hungarian and Yugoslav border guards.

The mistrust and animosity between the two communist regimes had a strong influence on how they dealt with problems deriving from the past, and

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34 Judge Péter Jankó (1907–55) committed suicide in 1955, when the rehabilitation of Rajk began. The background of the rehabilitation was, among other considerations, that Hungary could improve its relations with Yugoslavia, two years after Stalin’s death. Between 1950 and 1953, he had been the leading member of the Supreme Court in Budapest. “Jankó Péter.” Magyar Életrajzi Lexikon.
35 Révész, “Az ellenségkép-modellék.”
36 Banac, With Stalin against Tito, 216–17; Ludanyi, “Titoist Integration.”
37 Borba, April 4, 1949.
38 It is difficult to gauge how serious these incidents were, but they are documented in the pages of Magyar Szó during the early 1950s, the Hungarian-language newspaper of the Yugoslav Communist Party, published in Novi Sad.
the past itself became a subject of dispute. In 1950, Moša Pijade (1890–1957),39 one of Tito’s closest collaborators and a leading figure in postwar Yugoslavia, tried to convince the Hungarian minority that the Yugoslav Communist Party had been benevolent from the outset:

I still remember our difficult situation at the end of the war and the beginning of our immediate final liberation. There were people then who thought that we should treat the Hungarian national minority harshly. However, my fellow Yugoslavians, we had from the first moment on the strong conviction that we have to fight against any symptom of nationalism. …. Therefore, my fellow Yugoslavians, when those who are under the command of Moscow outside our borders try to defame us by claiming that we suppress the national minorities and that we don’t give them rights, schools, nothing, it is the usual defamations of chauvinists who want to inflame chauvinism among the national minorities.40

However, those who had not forgotten the atrocities committed by the partisans may well have understood this statement to have meant something resembling the following: let us forget what happened at the end of the war and focus instead on the principles of our minority policies, because the Stalinists in Hungary only want to undermine the new beginning, which brought better minority rights for you. Consequently, the massacre of 1942 was also not mentioned in the publications of the Hungarian minority. The mass violence of the war could not be incorporated into the new narrative of Brotherhood and Unity.

The task of fostering and shaping the memory of the war lay in the hands of partisan and veterans’ organizations.41 Although they produced politically controlled narratives of the “people’s war of liberation” or of the “socialist revolution” which represented the main foundation for the legitimation of the regime, Heike Karge distinguishes these narratives from the “diverse social practices of communicating and performing the past of the war in society”

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39 Moša Pijade (1890–1957) was a painter and leading member of the Communist movement in Yugoslavia since 1919. In 1941, he joined Tito’s liberation movement, and as of 1942 he was a leader of the Anti-Fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ). After the war he was president of the federal parliament. See: Serbs Who Marked the 20th Century. Biographical Lexicon (Belgrade: n.p., 2006), 407.
40 Magyar Szó, March 24, 1950.
41 Karge, Steinerner Erinnerung, passim.
on the local level. The *Federation of Fighters of the war of the People’s Liberation in Yugoslavia* (SUBNORJ), the official representative body of the partisans, was closely linked to the communist party. The organization concentrated on the erection of monuments and offered different forms of remembering: as mourning of deaths, mostly in local settings, but also as (tourism) business, artistic engagement, social commitment, or, rather dominantly, as pedagogical mission. The social practices of arranging memory excluded many surviving victims of the war from public support who could not be classified as “fighting partisans,” especially members of the Jewish population. Since the late 1950s, however, the category “participant in the people’s war of liberation” was extended to victims who were not “stained” by collaboration, still excluding the Hungarian victims, but including the shrinking Jewish community.

The politics of remembering also mirrored the ideological clash with Stalin. In 1952, a new board was founded, responsible for the “identification and restoration of historical sites of the people’s war of liberation.” This led to the erection of the Tito monument at Titovo Užice. This could be understood, at least to some extent, as a reaction to the huge statue of Stalin built in Budapest on the occasion of Stalin’s 70th birthday in 1949. At the moment when the Communist leadership declared that the Soviet leader was “the greatest Hungarian” the Stalin cult reached its peak. As a consequence, the toppling of the huge statue became the most important act of symbolic liberation from the tyrant during the days of triumph of the Hungarian revolution in late October, 1956. The Yugoslav Communist party journal *Borba* mocked the elevation of Stalin into the pantheon of Hungarian history, and this was noticed by the temporary Hungarian chargé d’affaires in Belgrade, József Kovács. Reporting to the Foreign Ministry in Budapest, Kovács complained about “infamous attacks” in the Hungarian-language press against the Soviet Union and the people’s democracies, and he claimed to have seen the growing influence of US imperialism in the socialist country. Kovács went so far as to accuse the Titoist “Fascists” of continuing to commit atrocities against the Hungarian minority, referring to the murderous

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42 Ibid., 11.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 110.
45 The Hungarian State Security launched investigations against people who had asked why a Hungarian was not celebrated instead of Stalin. MNL OL 276/89/162, doc. 274. For an excellent analysis of the statue dedicated to Stalin in Budapest see: Sinkó, “Rituals.”
acts at the end of the war. In a report dated April 17, 1952, Kovács compared the situation at the time with the situation at the end of the war:

The Yugoslav Communist Party under Titoist control never fought to realize the Leninist idea of the nationalities policy, neither during the war nor after the war. Immediately after liberation, when the Soviet liberating troops continued to chase the Fascists, the invading Yugoslav partisans carried out huge ‘cleansing’ operations among the minority population in the entire Vojvodina. They were not at all driven by the class standpoint when, for example, they dragged off hundreds or thousands of Hungarians from their houses, drove them out of their businesses, locked them up in internment camps where many died, and even shot many before they had even arrived at the internment camps. [...] We can see all of this again today. [...] The Hungarian minority schools suffer from a terrible lack of school books.47

The hysterical clash between the two communist propaganda machines reached a new climax in the summer of 1952, when Borba claimed in an article that the Hungarian authorities would carry out “genocide” against members of the South Slavic minorities in the border areas with Austria and Yugoslavia, hinting at atrocities committed during the occupation.48 The journal opined that:

Rákosi’s agents have, with regard to their anti-national crimes, already exceeded long ago the Horthy feudalists and the Szálasi Fascist gendarmes. The national Yugoslav minority in Hungary has become a defenseless target of Stalinist-type genocide. An example is the gradual and systematic resettlement and extermination of seven thousand Slovenes who live in the areas near the Austrian–Yugoslav–Hungarian border.

The quotations above demonstrate that terms like “Fascism” and “genocide” had become almost completely meaningless in the Stalinist language in both countries in the propaganda referring to the crimes committed during the war.

At the same time, in 1952, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the massacre, its public commemoration in Novi Sad entered a new stage with the erection of a monument in the Jewish cemetery, not far away from the center of the town. The cenotaph in Novi Sad was one of five new monuments built to

commemorate the Jewish victims of World War II, initiated and organized by the Federation of Jewish Communities and supported by the federal government in Belgrade. All five monuments were situated inside Jewish cemeteries, not in public locations. The ceremonies in Novi Sad lasted for two full weeks, and they were attended by Yugoslav state and Party officials and Israeli and U. S. Jewish delegates. They were also fully covered by the Yugoslav mass media. A year later, Andreja Deak (1889–1980), a Yugoslav military doctor of Hungarian–Jewish background and a Communist since 1919 who had barely survived the 1942 massacre, published a short story about the raid.

The ceremonies and the press coverage in Novi Sad marked a difference compared to the dwindling presence of any ritualized expressions of the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary at the time. Representatives of the Hungarian state tended to eschew those events. While in 1948 a representative of the president of the state, even if not a prominent one, was still present during the inauguration of the memorial to the martyrs in the Jewish part of the new central cemetery in Budapest, in 1954/55 not one state official showed up for the commemorations of the 10th anniversary of the German occupation and the deportations of the Hungarian Jewry. Such ceremonies had become “private” events.

In Yugoslavia, the official support for the commemorations and the invitation of representatives from Israel and the United States were related to Tito’s attempt to establish a place for the country within a broader international context that included capitalist countries. At the same time, this act of commemoration of 1942 was only possible because the Jewish victims’ story had been included in the foundational myth of Titoist Yugoslavia, according to which all ethnic groups had turned into “martyrs of the war of liberation,” with no specific indication of the circumstances under which this had taken place or

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50 Andreja Deak (1889–1980) was born in Szigetvár, Hungary. In 1919, he became a member of the Hungarian Communist party. A year later he moved to Yugoslavia, where he worked as a doctor. He was interned by the Hungarian army but survived the war and became a high ranking officer in the military medical administration, until he was promoted to the position of General. His short stories were published in German as: Razzia in Novi Sad und andere Geschehnisse während des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Ungarn und Jugoslawien (Zürich: Werner Classen, 1967). The short stories first appeared in 1953 in Serbian under the title “Pod žutom trakom” (Under the Yellow Star).
51 Fritz, Nach Krieg und Judenmord, 235–36.
52 The neglect of the topic can also be demonstrated by the isolation of one of the few Holocaust scholars in Hungary at the time, Jenő Lévai. See: Laczó, “The Foundational Dilemmas of Jenő Lévai.”
53 Lampe, “Yugoslavia’s Foreign Policy in Balkan Perspective.”
the people who had committed the killings. This was necessary in order to gloss over the fact that many of the victims of the war had been killed because of ethnic or political conflicts between the various Yugoslav factions. The fact that, in the meantime, the Jewish population of Novi Sad had shrunk stood in stark contrast to the public inauguration and the presence of international guests and the media during the erection of the monument. After hundreds had emigrated to Israel, there were only 372 Jews left in 1950, compared to more than 4,000 living in the town before 1941.54

After Revolution: A “Fascist Plot” or Rákosi’s Failure?

After the crushing of the 1956 revolution, the most immediate problem for the new Communist leadership under János Kádár was to gain acceptance as the legitimate government inside and outside the country. The fact that its power was based on invading Soviet troops weighed heavily on it. One way to reacquire credibility, at least from the perspective of the Hungarian Communist government, lay in the denunciation of the uprising as a “Fascist” plot, supported by imperialist powers in the West. This was, at least among some circles inside the country but also for some orthodox Communists outside its borders (who feared a return of the “most reactionary forces”), a plausible explanation and justification of the unrestricted use of force against any opposition. In this context, the labelling of the “enemy” as “Fascist” was supposed to justify the exclusion and, in many cases, the execution or incarceration of people identified as real or potential enemies, since these “elements” were regarded as a threat to human society that had to be destroyed. This changed only slowly, with the amnesties in the early 1960s, which were, in part, related to a compromise with the United States that was reached with the hope of bringing an end to the country’s diplomatic isolation.55

Before that, the Kádár regime staged a number of trials against members of the former gendarmerie and army officers based on the Stalinist construct of a continuity of “Fascist” crimes between 1919 and 1956.56 As of 1958, some 22,000 persons had been arrested, 229 of whom were condemned to death. About 200,000 people had left the country for the West. It was only in 1963,

55 Kastner, Ungarn 1956 vor der UNO.
56 Numerous examples in: The Counter-revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy. See also: Pihurik, “A háborús múlt.”
when a general amnesty was proclaimed, that the situation in the country finally settled down. By then, 367 persons had been executed.\textsuperscript{57} Especially in the trials against former gendarmes, the judges made an attempt to put an ugly “Fascist” face on the narrative of the “counterrevolution.” About 140 former officers were indicted and sentenced during this period.\textsuperscript{58} Among them, the former army officer János Nagy was put on a list of “Fascist Terrorists, Arrow-Cross Men, War Criminals, Robbers and Murderers Let Loose on the Country” in 1956.\textsuperscript{59} Nagy was identified as “a leading figure of the massacre which took place at Újvidék in 1942,” without any mention of the fact that a People’s Court had already sentenced him in 1948 for this act.\textsuperscript{60} When he was released in 1956, he had already served almost eight years in prison. Nothing was said about the specific crimes he had allegedly committed in 1956 except the fact that he had come out of prison. The connection between the “Fascists,” “War criminals,” and those who had been active during the revolution of 1956 was in most cases only suggested, not proven. However, in most cases it was very difficult to link the persons and deeds committed during the Horthy period or in World War II to activities related to the revolution of 1956.\textsuperscript{61} Until 1961, 33 former gendarmes were executed, 26 of whom had been convicted first and foremost for “crimes” allegedly committed in 1956.\textsuperscript{62} The Ministry of the Interior supported the judicial campaign by collecting a 17-volume-strong “documentation” that was supposed to prove that numerous “Fascist” groups had been active between 1945 and 1956.\textsuperscript{63} In this context, references to the 1942 Novi Sad massacre could be integrated into the narrative because the judges could make use of the substantial investigation files produced by the military court in the Horthy period.

Kádár and his supporters, however, did not just want to go back to the Stalinist regime. Rather, they attempted to create a new socialist dictatorship, which was distancing itself from both “Fascism” and Stalinism. Kádár himself

\textsuperscript{57} Kovács, “Csendőrsors Magyarországon 1945 után.”
\textsuperscript{58} Békés, “A Kovács-dosszié.”
\textsuperscript{59} The Counter-revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy, 62–63. This list was first used in the form of a leaflet published in late 1956. A photo of the leaflet can be found at: http://www.mek.oszk.hu/04000/04056/html/roplap/pdf/roplap1956_1109.pdf.
\textsuperscript{60} The Counter-revolutionary Conspiracy of Imre Nagy, 63.
\textsuperscript{61} Cf. Rév, Retroactive Justice, 222–30.
\textsuperscript{63} “Beszéltő évek – 1959”
had been a victim of Stalinism, it was claimed, because he had been arrested and sentenced in a show trial. The Kádár regime also applied this double-strategy to the question of war criminals by blaming Rákosi for having failed to punish them. In 1959, the Supreme Military Prosecutor announced in a “top secret” report that a series of proceedings would be initiated against former gendarmerie detectives, emphasizing that the “punishment policy and results of the years after the Liberation had been incorrect because numerous gendarmes and detectives who had committed serious war crimes had remained undetected and unpunished.” The Military Prosecutor also complained that some of the sentences issued by the People’s Courts had been revised and often mitigated.

Ervin Hollós, who had worked in the unit in the Ministry of the Interior responsible for the fight against the “inner reaction,” wrote that under Rákosi many “counterrevolutionaries, terrorists, and members of the suppressive Horthy organs with blood on their hands lived in Hungary and had managed to avoid being held responsible. … It was Rákosi’s immeasurable crime that he not only threw many excellent fighters of the labor movement into prison but also allowed a large segment of the bloody gendarmerie detectives to live free and undisturbed.”

By combining the anti-Stalinist with the anti-Fascist narratives, Kádár managed to create the idea that the judicial campaign against real and alleged “Fascists” and “war criminals” which accompanied the suppression of the revolution was in reality a major effort to deal finally with the problem of Hungary’s Fascist past and its representatives, who had haunted the innocent Hungarian people from 1919 to 1956. Another target of Communist propaganda after 1956—and not only in Hungary—was West Germany, which was attacked by East Germany and other Eastern Bloc countries as a place where former Nazis had made careers and were even dominating the institutions of the Federal Republic. In the 1960s, this new double-strategy of the Kádár regime would allow it to modify the politics of remembering the events of 1942.

The 1956 revolution also put Tito in a difficult position. After Stalin’s death in 1953, both the Soviets and the Yugoslav leaders were keen to come to a rapprochement. In this situation, Hungary played a key role, because Rákosi had

64 Gough, 55.
65 “Beszélő évek – 1959.”
66 Quoted in: Ibid.
67 Bohus, “Reaction to the Eichmann trial,” 745–47.
68 For the following, see: Ripp, “Hungary’s Party;” Granville, “The Soviet-Yugoslav Detente.”
been at the forefront of the anti-Titoist campaign. Rákosi’s return to the head of the Hungarian Communist party in 1955 was therefore seen as a major obstacle for Yugoslav–Soviet reconciliation. Tito also demanded the full rehabilitation of László Rajk (since he had been accused of being the head of a “Titoist” conspiracy), improvements in the conditions of the South Slavic minorities in Hungary, and reparations. Since his first term as Prime Minister, Imre Nagy had had the support of Belgrade because the Yugoslav Communists hoped that a reform of the Stalinist system would lead to a socialist dictatorship not unlike the one Tito was trying to establish.

On the other hand, the Yugoslav leadership was also wary of a weakening of communism and a return of Hungarian nationalism and revisionism. Nikita Khrushchev even tried to spread rumors about the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina. Additionally, Tito must have feared a spread of revolutionary ideas in October 1956. Tito had sympathies for Nagy, but the Yugoslav leadership was shocked by the collapse of communism and feared a restoration of the Horthy regime if the revolution were to get completely out of control. This was the main reason why Tito regarded military intervention as “essential,” as he stated in a meeting with Khrushchev and Georgy Malenkov on the island of Brioni on November 2, 1956, just two days before the Soviet invasion. Later, Tito and Kádár would clash because of the execution of Nagy in 1958, a step that put the Yugoslav leader in a bad light because he had tried to protect Nagy. Both sides, and also the Soviets, had no interest in an intensification of the conflict. This explains why the mutual accusations of being “Fascist” from the Stalinist period did not surface again. Instead, the language in which both camps criticized each other was becoming remarkably moderate. In the United Nations, where the Hungarian government was chastised for the persecution of the opposition, the Yugoslavs defended Budapest.

During the dramatic days in the fall of 1956, the Hungarian-language press in Yugoslavia reported from Hungary with a certain distance, highlighting the chaos and disruption of everyday life and emphasizing that the refugees from the conflict were treated well in Yugoslavia. During these moments of upheaval

70 Ibid., 203.
71 Ibid., 221.
72 Kastner, Ungarn 1956 vor der UNO.
73 See, for example: Magyar Szó in January 1957 had a few reports about the damage fighting between Hungarian resistance fighters and Soviet troops had done in Budapest. Another series of articles was dedicated to the refugees crossing the border into Yugoslavia.
and uncertainty, the fraught memory of World War II was mostly absent from public discourse in Yugoslavia.

After Eichmann: New Trends in the Commemoration of the Massacre of 1942 in Hungary and Yugoslavia during the 1960s

There were at least two international events which contributed to a change in the way communists and Hungarian society discussed the 1942 incidents after 1961. The first was the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, which revived the debate about the Holocaust, which had been essentially abandoned at the end of the 1940s. As Kata Bohus notes, this debate was revived against and in spite of Kádár’s intentions.\(^74\) Another event, which was not directly related to the topic of World War II and Holocaust remembrance, was the breakup of Hungarian international isolation at the end of 1962, when the United Nations decided to take 1956 off of the agenda.\(^75\)

Even before the Eichmann-trial, in 1959, the Hungarian Communist Party had adopted a new concept that rejected Hungarian “bourgeois nationalism” and nationalist tendencies which had, according to some historians, influenced some of the Stalinist narratives of history based on the idea of a 400 year-long “national liberation struggle.”\(^76\) Hungarian historians now could, for the first time since 1949, smell Western air and read Western books.\(^77\) In this context, a few authors began to reevaluate World War II and the murder of the Hungarian Jews in 1944. Looking back, György Száraz wrote that he began to be involved in the process that “could be called historical self-examination or, preferably, taking possession of the whole of our history. It began in earnest in the early 1960s—in close connection with the broadening of the mass basis of the regime.”\(^78\) In 1963, János Buzásy, a young archivist who had just finished his studies at ELTE University in Budapest, wrote the first academic monograph on the 1942


\(^{75}\) Kastner, *Ungarn 1956 vor der UNO*.

\(^{76}\) A short mention of the debate can be found in: Pach and Ránki, “A Történettudományi Intézet 25 éve,” 466–67.

\(^{77}\) Berendt, *A történelem*, 160.

\(^{78}\) Száraz, “The Jewish Question in Hungary,” 27.
massacres.79 A year later, Tibor Cseres published *Hideg napok* (“Cold Days”), a novel that would make the 1942 raid known again in Hungary and throughout the world.80 A movie by András Kovács based on Cseres’ novel was released in 1966 with the same title. It was a huge national success, with 600,000 viewers in the first three weeks.81 Outside of Hungary, the film was shown in various cities in Yugoslavia, as well as in Paris, New York, Moscow, and other places, but its biggest success was the Second Prize at the 1st International Film Festival of Karlovy Váry in Czechoslovakia. It also garnered some praise at the Venice Film Festival of 1966. Tibor Cseres and András Kovács, who were engaged in numerous discussions with the public about the film as part of a new effort to study the effects the film had had on “the masses,” regarded the film as a “progressive” message.82 Kovács also claimed that Fascism was not a Hungarian specialty and was not restricted to the past, because Vietnam showed that similar crimes were still happening. Instead, he suggested, the film should be understood as an educational tool which could help overcome the nationalist relics and the “exaggerations” of Stalinism and foster a truly “socialist patriotism.”83 What had mostly changed at this moment was the idea of the “enemy.” In the book and film, the Hungarian soldiers who participated in the Novi Sad raid, even those who evinced Fascist leanings, were characterized as complex human beings, not simple “Fascist thugs,” as they had been dubbed during the Stalinist period.

Others celebrated Cseres’ book as an example of the renewal of Hungarian socialist literature and as an example of Hungarian Vergangenheitsbewältigung.84 Georg Lukács contended that the film approached the reality and truth of

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79 Buzásy, *Az újvidéki “razzia.”* Immediately after the war, the event was mentioned in: Lévai, *Hősök hősé...!,* 12. One of the first historiographical descriptions of the event and the historical context can be found in: Macartney, *October Fifteenth,* 65–79.

80 By 2014, the book had been edited 33 times in Hungarian since the publication of the first edition: Cseres, *Hideg napok.* It has been translated into and published in Serbian (1966), German (East Berlin: Volk und Welt, 1967), Polish (1968), French (1971), and English (Corvina, 2003). These are the results from Worldcat.org, and they are not exhaustive. The writer, Béla Horgas, among others, referred to the Eichmann trial in his review of Cseres’ novel: Horgas, “Hideg napok...” With regard to Kovács’ film, see: Labov, “Cold Days.”

81 The film *Hideg Napok* (1966) also showed the officers and soldiers involved in the massacre as (flawed) human beings, not as primitive Fascist thugs, as films had done during the Stalinist period. Before he made the movie, András Kovács had spent some time in France, studying the Cinéma Verité, which had a significant impact on the Nouvelle Vague. Cf. Haucke, *Nouvelle Vague in Osteuropa,* 479–82. The numbers of viewers are given in: Kovács, “Egy film drámája,” 183.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid., 197, 200.

84 Cf. Horgas, “Hideg napok.”
history, presenting a “new, disillusioned national self-image.”85 In her memoirs, Ágnes Heller remembered that, after the movie, “Hungarians for the first time since the end of the war spoke about the Jews as victims. Before it, there had been only Fascists and Communists.”86

Either way, by the late 1960s the Cold Days of 1942 had become a Hungarian lieu de mémoire. This had also an effect on Yugoslavia. As point out above, at first the 1956 revolution did not result in a change in the conception of Yugoslav politics of memory. Rather, it made functionaries in Belgrade and in the states and provinces more alert about possible nationalism among different ethnic groups.

Beginning in the second half of the 1960s, as a result of the international trends in Holocaust remembrance and the debates initiated by the book and film “Cold Days” the city of Novi Sad began to publicly commemorate the 1942 massacre.87 The first official act of commemoration in the town that was not restricted to the Jewish community (as the one in 1952 had been), but rather encompassed the whole local community, was a ceremony on the Danube promenade near the city center in 1967. These commemorations in Novi Sad could also be understood in the wider political context of the deep constitutional crisis of Yugoslavia in the 1960s, which resulted in the weakening of the central government in Belgrade and a strengthening of the political forces on the periphery. Remembrance of the events that had taken place in and around Novi Sad in 1942 was related to the idea of Serbian victimhood in the war.

Conclusion

When the Stalinist system collapsed in Hungary in the aftermath of the revolution, the narrative of the war as a fight of the Hungarian people against its Fascist oppressors, supported by the glorious Soviet army, also faltered. The invading Soviet tanks and the brutal fighting in the streets of Budapest, followed by massive violence against any form of opposition, forced the restored Communist regime to modify its interpretation of World War II. Kádár’s attempt to portray his regime as both anti-Fascist and anti-Stalinist allowed reinterpretations after the amnesties of the early 1960s and the tentative opening of the country to

85  Quoted in: Fenyő, “Egy igaz magyar film,” 1836–37; see also: “Interjú Lukács Györggyel”.
86  Heller, Affe auf dem Fahrrad, 285.
87  In 1966, Tibor Cseres’ novel was first translated into Serbian by Sava Babić with the title Hladni dani (Cold Days) (Subotica: Minerva 1966).
Western ideas. The Hungarian people remained the main victim of the war, but Hungarian soldiers could now also be represented as complex personalities, not only as Fascist thugs. The character of the Horthy regime and a critique of nationalism and of the failure of Rákosi to deal with war criminals were also more openly discussed. The memory of the 1942 massacre in Novi Sad was one of the newly debated events of World War II, and these debates also had an impact on Yugoslavia. There, in the context of the political and constitutional crisis of Yugoslavism, local memory of the massacre, beginning in 1967 (on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the raid), opened a new chapter in the interpretation of the war, while the atrocities committed by partisans at the end of the war remained a taboo until the fall of the regime.

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