

# “SURVIVOR HEROES” AND RISING HEROES

## DISCREPANCIES IN THE CONTEMPORARY HERO CULT

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*Author illustrates the phenomenon where some socialist heroes (“survivors”) have not disappeared together with their fellows, but have remained popular with the examples of the cult of János Kádár and Imre Nagy in Hungary.*

*Keywords: Hero cult, historical remembrance, memory, Imre Nagy, János Kádár*

*Avtor ilustrira pojav, v katerem posamični socialistični („preživelci”) niso izginili skupaj s svojimi tovariši, temveč so ostali priljubljeni, na primeru kulta dveh madžarskih junakov, Jánosa Kádárja in Imreta Nagya.*

*Ključne besede: Hero kult, zgodovinski spomin spominom, Imre Nagy, János Kádár*

Analysing the hero cult of postcommunist Central Eastern Europe we find striking ambivalences. Although the cult of the heroes of earlier history, the Middle Ages, the age of Romanticism appears stable, the historical heroes of the recent past have often been unable to become real national heroes reflecting the judgement of society as a whole.<sup>1</sup> The principal cause of the phenomenon is that the region’s canon of national heroes took shape together with the frequent changes of political system. The fluctuations imposed on collective memory from above transformed the pantheon of heroes too. Some heroes were forced into the background or condemned to oblivion, others have been retained, but in all cases new heroes have been raised to positions beside them. The communist-socialist regimes provided the most glaring examples of the mass creation of heroes with their local, national and supra-national artificially created heroes. With the downfall of the regime most of these disappeared almost without a trace, proving as we have long known in research on hero cults, what is expressed in Boorstin’s thesis, namely that “we can fabricate fame, we can at will (though usually at considerable expense) make a man or woman well-known; but we cannot make him great. We can make a celebrity, but we can never make a hero. In a now-almost-forgotten sense, all heroes are self-made.” (Boorstin 1982: 48)

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<sup>1</sup> The Central Eastern European hero and star cult is analysed in a recent volume: Povedák 2014.

A strange situation arises when we find that some socialist heroes have not disappeared together with their fellows, but have remained popular and anachronistically radiate the spirit of a bygone age in a new era that is basically opposed to and rejects the symbolical content behind the icon of the "survivor hero". Good examples of this are the figures of Josip Broz Tito and János Kádár. My aim in this study is to show the causes that explain the continued existence of the cult of the "survivor heroes", the manifestations of this anachronistic cult and the extent to which this prevents the emergence of new heroes. Why and how are new heroes born and what discrepancies accompany the rise of their cult?<sup>2</sup> I shall illustrate my theses with the examples of the cult of János Kádár and Imre Nagy in Hungary.

### THE "SURVIVOR HERO": JÁNOS KÁDÁR

It is a commonplace that there always have been, are and will be heroes. Basically two different explanations can be provided for the origin of heroes. One is that they can arise from a kind of psychological need, being seen as a characteristic of the functioning of the human mind, the other is that their rise can be helped by a major disturbance or change in the social, economic or cultural canon, in particular revolutions and wars. The most important stage in the political careers of Imre Nagy and János Kádár was the 1956 revolution and freedom struggle, but while it brought the end of the career of one, it marked the beginning of the other's 32-year-long reign of ambivalent value. The judgement of Kádár in public opinion underwent substantial change over these three decades. Immediately after the revolutionary events the majority of the population regarded him as the continuer of the communist dictatorship, but later many people forgot his crime, the brutal crushing of the revolution. As Voigt put it,

the 'Kádárist' consolidation in the 1970s has been compared innumerable times to the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867; while the party secretary who ran to the Russians in 1956 but towards the end of his life was revered by a considerable part of the population as a 'father' has even been compared to the aged ruler, Francis Joseph. Today in particular nostalgia casts a golden light on the rougher aspects of the old aristocracies. (Voigt 2001: 149)

This change in his judgement can be attributed to the artificially maintained relative welfare and predictability within the socialist bloc and to the consciously applied policy of oblivion regarding the events of 1956.

It is a commonly held opinion that János Kádár did not allow a cult of personality to be built up around him.<sup>3</sup> His portrait did not appear on the walls of public institutions, school textbooks did not contain tidied up stories of his life, no streets or squares were named after

<sup>2</sup> The writing of this article was supported by the OTKA NK 81502 research programme and the MTA-SZTE Research Group on Religious Culture.

<sup>3</sup> Among others it is an indication of his political decency that he was not "general" secretary but "first secretary".

him. This is, in fact, true but it does not mean that there was no cult. It must be taken into account that a cult of personality can be created not only by being imposed from above, there can be a demand from below in parts of society for a point of orientation or a charismatic leader, on which the artificial cult can be built and, as in this case, it can become immanent. Good examples of this, among others, are the cult of Stalin, Castro or Che Guevara and also in the case of Kádár, where an official cult of personality cannot be discovered but one nevertheless existed at the individual level.<sup>4</sup> As the change of political system gradually recedes into the past, a growing nostalgia can be built up on this attitude. This is fuelled by the fact that the excessive expectations of that time brought ambivalent results. We can say that among the broad sectors who are experiencing the negative consequences of the transition to a market economy, there is a not merely left-wing political subculture of now ageing persons faithfully preserving the memory of Kádár. For them the Kádár era was not a dictatorship but the “best solution in the given circumstances” that brought not luxurious but predictable and secure living conditions. For them, Kádár was a wise leader whose life history contains many hero motifs, as it did earlier during the years of socialism. The survival of these motifs is greatly assisted by the appearance of György Moldova’s books on Kádár that have sold hundreds of thousands of copies.<sup>5</sup> The typical “Moldova subject” that often pays scant attention to the historical facts can be summed up as follows: János Kádár, originally János Csermanek, was born in 1912 in Fiume as the “illegitimate child” of a servant girl and a soldier. “His foster father never accepted him.” His mother raised him “alone”, together with his younger brother born a few years later, in great “poverty”, but with deep love. Already “as a child he worked,” but he was not prepared to do just any kind of work. “His morality” was already evident when he left his job of accompanying a blind beggar woman after a single day because he did not think it right to lead her from table to table in coffee-houses to beg. He was one of the poorest students. Although “he was outstanding in his studies, he was often mocked” for his shabby clothing. In the interwar years he became a member of the underground communist movement out of conviction, “to help the poor and the workers.” He was imprisoned then after the war he held high posts, but during the Rákosi dictatorship (1947-1953) in a show trial his comrades “tortured and imprisoned him.” After the 1956 revolution “he created the country’s prosperity with self-sacrifice” and hard work. “This country has never had such a good thirty years, which is understandable as this was the first time we had a leader from among the people.”<sup>6</sup>

The long-suffering poor child who is not loved by his step-father, the purposefulness, the help given to the poor, leading the country to prosperity after being liberated from prison are all international motifs characteristic of the heroes of tales that have survived through the

<sup>4</sup> This kind of personality cult from below can be found outside the frames of the totalitarian system also in democratic countries (for example the cults of Churchill or John Fitzgerald Kennedy).

<sup>5</sup> György Moldova (1934- ) became one of the most popular writers of the Kádár era. He remained loyal to Kádár to the end, and even today denies the dictator’s crimes. In his opinion all the executions after the 1956 revolution were justified (Moldova 2006). He openly declares his admiration of Kádár. His historical-type books on Kádár have been criticised by historians, but despite that have become bestsellers.

<sup>6</sup> My italics. [I.P.] [http://index.hu/belfold/2012/12/03/kadar\\_tartja\\_el\\_a\\_csaladomat/](http://index.hu/belfold/2012/12/03/kadar_tartja_el_a_csaladomat/)

centuries (Campbell 1993). This effect of son of the people was reinforced by his plain speech pointing to his working-class origin. As my interlocutors stressed, Kádár "truly wanted a better future for the people, just the hangers-on around him handled things badly", and even "the Hungarian people have never had it so good at any time in their entire unfortunate history and never will in the future either as they did under Kádár".<sup>7</sup> "...you could see salami and bread thrown out with the rubbish, people had so much to eat."<sup>8</sup>

The phenomenon is complex. It cannot be regarded merely as the continued existence of an attitude ingrained during the period of socialism, it is not simply nostalgic longing, rather it is maintained and reproduced by sadness at the present circumstances and the "lack of a hero" caused by the lack of a contemporary charismatic leader on the Left. Writing about the re-emerging Kádár cult, György went so far as to declare "the time of János Kádár, the superstar has arrived". According to György there is a major condition for Kádár to become a "pop culture icon": a change of medium. Currently Kádár is still a textual hero. For him to become a pop culture icon, he has to enter the world of images, he has to appear on T-shirts (György 2006)

I cannot fully agree with his opinion as he makes this claim on the basis of the state of affairs at the moment and investigations directed only at Kádár without placing the findings in a wider horizon in two respects. Firstly, the creation of global heroes operates in an entirely different way from the creation of national heroes. The marketability of Che Guevara is the consequence of a number of factors, the most important of which are a superficial knowledge of his views and life and the lack of direct contact with him. The great majority of those who buy his icon have no personal memory of him or any collective memory in their society, they have no real knowledge of the cultural context in which Guevara existed. "Che" is much more a fashion icon than a real identification model. This cannot be achieved with Kádár because of the ambivalent judgement of his person found in Hungarian society and the negative experiences of many people. Kádár's person, his ideals and negative deeds form an integral part of Hungarian public thinking, and for this reason they are not suitable for becoming an icon. It is possible that nostalgia will cast a more flattering light on his political career and activity, but this kind of subjective historical re-evaluation does not in itself create a cult on a society-wide scale. It is only in a political subculture that János Kádár has become a historical hero, but this is not how he appears in the eyes of the majority society.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, György did not take into account that in the national culture the making of a hero always arises from the society as a whole. This supposes the existence in the society of a consensus that accepts the given person as a hero, together with the character traits of heroes. (These include acts of social justice, placing the interests of the community before their own, making sacrifices for the community, etc. – See Povedak 2014). Although Kádár's symbolic figure survived the

<sup>7</sup> 63-year-old woman, 67-year-old man, 13.11.2010.

<sup>8</sup> [http://index.hu/belfold/2012/12/03/kadar\\_tartja\\_el\\_a\\_csaladomat/](http://index.hu/belfold/2012/12/03/kadar_tartja_el_a_csaladomat/)

<sup>9</sup> It must be mentioned here that there is also a considerable Kádár counter-cult in the society. According to this view his political career makes him an "antihero" who betrayed the revolution and his country. A sign of this counter-cult was seen in May 2007 when his grave was robbed and his skull disappeared.

change of political direction in 1989, he did not fall unequivocally together with his system, he has not been forgotten like the countless artificially created heroes of socialism. It is true that considerable nostalgia for his era can be observed in a number of groups in Hungarian society, but within these Kádár is a hero only in a narrower subculture, only this small group regards him as a “proletarian saint”, as Moldova has called him.

### PITFALLS OF THE HERO CULT: IMRE NAGY

In 2007 Elemér Hankiss conducted a survey in which he asked which Hungarian politician would be the best suited to solve the problems facing the country at that time. The “winner” was István Széchenyi, followed by Lajos Kossuth and Kádár. Imre Nagy ranked in only “sixth place”, behind Ferenc Deák and József Antall.<sup>10</sup> If the survey can be considered representative, less than ten per cent of the Hungarian population regarded Imre Nagy as being able to solve the country’s problems. Despite this, in contrast to Kádár, Imre Nagy is a historical hero, whose esteem, views, behaviour and ideals are regarded as positive by the majority of the society. At the same time, for most Hungarians – at least on the basis of the survey – he is not a person who became famous for the solution of conflicts: the events of 1956 with which his name is closely associated were brutally crushed by the Soviet aggression. But public opinion does not regard this as the fault of Imre Nagy, and his person, as my paper also shows, is associated with the concepts of “freedom”, and “heroism”. This view is based on what was said by the speakers at his reburial on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1989.<sup>11</sup> It was then that a new evaluation of 1956 began, reshaping the memory of it, a process that still continues today.

At the same time the judgement of his person is far from unproblematic in Hungary following the change of system. One of the causes of this is that events of 1956 were not talked about during the Kádár era, giving rise to “suppression by the whole nation” concerning him (in the words of Ferenc Mérei). In this respect the communist era can be regarded as a “cold” culture, as it “froze” the memory. It created a false historical consciousness and there was no possibility to change it or fill in the missing parts. The place of a “natural myth” narrating 1956 was taken by an “artificial myth” that its constructors used to manipulate society. The person of Imre Nagy was in practice absent from the cultural memory of several generations as the depoliticisation of society could only be achieved by “leaching” the nation’s historical memory as fully as possible, encouraging “collective amnesia”. (Gyáni 2000: 46) As a result,

<sup>10</sup> István Széchenyi (1791-1860) the “greatest Hungarian”, the leading politician of the Reform Age, Lajos Kossuth (1802-1894) a symbolic figure of the Reform Age and the freedom struggle, Ferenc Deák (1803-1876) “the wise man of the homeland”, one of the leading figures in Hungarian political life, József Antall (1932-1993) first prime minister after the change of system. The results of the survey: <http://www.vilag-gazdasag.hu/index.php?apps=cikk&cikk=201748> Last accessed on: 1<sup>st</sup> April 2010.

<sup>11</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> June 1989, the day of the reburial of Imre Nagy and his executed fellow revolutionaries is often defined as the symbolic date of the change of system in Hungary. For an analysis of this see Zemléni 2002.

those who grew up after the change of system know the history of 1956 and the figure of Imre Nagy only from the official history textbooks and school commemorations.

It is a problem that the reinterpretation of the past regarding 1956 occurred rapidly and radically. (György 2000) The memory of the series of events of that time became a living part of the political and cultural heritage almost overnight. The actors changed place with lightning speed, some figures disappeared, others were raised high. In the opinion of György – although Imre Nagy clearly became a symbol of the 1956 events – after the change of system in 1989 no hero of 1956 emerged to whom memory could be attached.<sup>12</sup> The reason for this according to the author is that a collective amnesia unprecedented in Hungarian history and a forced policy of forgetting<sup>13</sup> prevailed in the Kádár era.

In the brutal retortions and the decades of consolidation that followed the revolution was almost entirely marginalised and diverted into the channels of private history, personal 'oral history'. The collective amnesia imposed in the place of collective memory was the same institution as the other instruments serving to maintain cultural memory. (György 2000: 20)

The author's opinion is in line with the theses of Jan Assmann who deals at length in his well known works (Assmann 2004) with the essence, creation and survival of cultural memory, and with forgetting. Assmann argues that memory survives in communication and if this is broken, or if the frames of reference of the reality transmitted in the communication undergo change or even fade away, the consequence is forgetting. People remember only what they transmit in communication and what they are capable of placing within the frames of reference of collective memory. (Assmann 2004: 37) Nevertheless György notes that imposed silence is not yet in itself forgetting, and that collective amnesia is not identical with the experience of forgetting of each single member of society, but in his opinion without social openness the world of experience full of the fears of individual life cannot be shaped into a tradition. In this connection he mentions that the well tried method of canonising heroes by placing their names in the memory awareness of public spaces has been almost entirely absent. Hardly any squares and streets have been given 1956 names since 1989, while the names from before 1948 have been generally revitalized. In this sense 1956 could even be regarded as an invented tradition, but 1956 is not an invented tradition. It must be taken into account that within the frames of folklore the events of 1956 persisted, remained alive,<sup>14</sup> indeed remembe-

<sup>12</sup> According to the author this can also be seen in the fact that the 1956 heroes have no place of memory that could be properly called a national pantheon. The No 298-301 cemetery plots, for example are located "*in the city's biggest and least elegant*" cemetery. György 2000. 31.

<sup>13</sup> We could add to Assmann's finding that power is one of the strong stimuli to memory, that so is forgetting, as in this case the existence of the power was threatened by memory of the events. They therefore tried to achieve that people would not remember it, or at least that they would not remember it in the way it really happened. For this they had to "construct" a new 1956.

<sup>14</sup> Naturally not in all families. The memory of the 1956 revolution had a different degree of importance for example, in the life of a person with a low level of schooling living in a small country settlement where the revolutionary events did not lead to street fighting.

ring them became a form of resistance. Proof of this can be seen in the fact that at the time of the change of regime in 1989<sup>15</sup> the symbols of 1956 came to the surface again. György is not right in claiming that individual memory became increasingly ionised and finally sank into collective oblivion. (György 2000: 22) I find the diagnosis of “collective suppression” much more apt: as a result of the suppression the grievances of the past are stored up in the social consciousness because they cannot be expressed or resolved at the time, but when the right situation arises everything that was artificially suppressed rises again to the surface. In this way the person and cult of Imre Nagy became activated again and as his name again “filled with content and values” – that then generated change in the structure of cultural memory and in the functioning of the culture – we can see that his memory can be classified in the category of “hot” memory. Firstly, there were emigrant groups outside the country for whom 1956 brought a paradigm shift in their lives, tearing them out of their accustomed life space, bringing a forced change that they did not have to and could not forget. They kept alive the memory of the events of 1956, regarding it as the basis of their identity and the source of their collective consciousness. This group lived beyond the Iron Curtain, but their memory seeped into the country in samizdat publications and in Radio Free Europe broadcasts, strengthening the revolutionary memory that was, in fact, fragmenting. Secondly, it is possible that those who lived through and passed on the events are themselves becoming a part of memory around 40 years later, but just as the rising generations do not forget their predecessors, they do not forget the major events that influenced their lives – even if they were suppressed in public (but not among family members!). Thirdly, although “no one lives in the past”, that is, this memory does not draw on the collective memory of a living group, (Assmann 2004: 45) it still remains alive in the national historical consciousness. The reburial on 16<sup>th</sup> June 1989 brought this historical consciousness to life, thereby achieving what Zempléni called regressive reconstruction of national memory.

However, it must be mentioned that no social consensus has yet been reached regarding the person of Imre Nagy. Some people emphasise that he was a communist and cannot fully identify with him for that reason, while others regard him as a true democrat and therefore follow his views. The reason for this could be that in connection with Imre Nagy as national hero people need a “simple, schematic” picture, one that allows them to declare that he was a freedom fighter, the embodiment of positive political virtues, and in this picture there is no room for any contrast, nuances or ambivalence. But if a writer of articles on history or a politician talks about such things it acts as a kind of brake to the spread and deepening of the reviving cult of Imre Nagy, impeding the unfolding of historical memory. The fact that the political parties hold their celebrations separately, evaluate the tradition of 1956 and Imre Nagy differently and are developing different “canons” also contributes to this. Individuals who

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed even before 1989 – it is sufficient to think of the ban on the commemoration of 16<sup>th</sup> June in the last decade of the Kádár regime! This is also confirmed by the banners reading “We do not forget!” that were always present at opposition gatherings at that time, referring to the rejection of contrafactual remembrance and hence also to rejection of the regime that created it.

have been made uncertain by this wide variety of values are therefore faced with the choice of which canon to accept. The generations who learnt of the story of 1956 and Imre Nagy after the change of system, at school, have generally not yet incorporated it fully into their own internal values, within their world view since they are not able to do so because of such dissonances.<sup>16</sup>

Despite all this – or together with it – the cult of Imre Nagy exists and is taking shape. This is clearly visible in collective memory from the statues erected in public places and the rites of the commemorations held on 16<sup>th</sup> June, 23<sup>rd</sup> October and 4<sup>th</sup> November. It is perhaps these rites that give the best idea of the influence of Imre Nagy, as a historical hero living with us, on our communal everyday lives, our collective Hungarian consciousness.

At the same time it is worth noting that the role of Imre Nagy in the everyday activity of our vehicles of popular culture, in our everyday lives, is “not significant”. There are no folklore creations, prose narratives, works of naive art preserving the figure of Imre Nagy.<sup>17</sup> The findings of the survey conducted by Elemér Hankiss also partly confirm the superficial extent of his integration into everyday life. Perhaps Imre Nagy plays a less prominent role at the individual level because the “everyday heroes” of the events of 1956, the “little people”, “kids of (Buda)Pest” who may have participated in the events and suffered for their activity after the revolution and freedom fight was crushed, still live among us. They are members of various communities, settlements, friendly circles, families. The smaller the size of these communities, the more likely the events and heroism of the revolution are manifested principally through these members of the community and only after that in the figure of Imre Nagy. Perhaps there will only be a change in this area when the memory of these “everyday heroes” and “little people” fades within their reference groups and parallel with this they project all those positive attributes onto the heroes of the larger community, the nation (in our case onto Imre Nagy). In this way remembrance gives way to memory.<sup>18</sup> It must also be stressed that mythologisation of 1956 was of greatest relevance in the political resistance to the Kádár regime, after that mythologisation did not act as a driving force among others because the change of regime itself was not revolutionary, and the everyday experiences of later years found no connection with it either.

This is clearly reflected in my surveys by questionnaire conducted among young generations (18-25 years) and older generations (35+ years).<sup>19</sup> One third of the first age group knew of Imre Nagy only at the level of mention, that is, they had heard his name but were unable to say anything at all about his actions, who he was, or when he lived. More than half of the age

<sup>16</sup> Answers to the question: What emotions does mention of 1956 and Imre Nagy awaken in you? often included the following among my interviewees: “none”, “I don’t know”, “no idea”, “I’m ashamed to say only that I was bored at the school commemorations”, “I don’t know his story, I only know that he fought for freedom and the communists killed him”.

<sup>17</sup> It was still not “advisable” to produce or pass on such things in the Kádár era.

<sup>18</sup> Remembrance refers to reflection upon and the exchange of personal experiences about culture and history, while memory refers to a programme for a group’s bonding into a greater “We”, as in diverse rituals with which nations keep alive their past. (Assmann 2004: 52)

<sup>19</sup> I have analysed the results of the surveys (close to 700 questionnaires) in greater detail in an earlier study. Povedák 2011.



group were able to express only generalities regarding his person referring to his qualities, e.g. “he was a martyr”, “he was persevering”, “hero”, “patriotism”, “he was in a defenceless situation”, “he had good intentions”, “he died because he was betrayed by his companions”, they spoke about his political career, and named the positions he held. Roughly one tenth of the students knew about his life. I did not encounter any negative judgement, but there was a lot of ambivalence regarding his communist past (“a hero who can be misunderstood”, “over-defined”, “he was a communist, but in the final analysis he wanted what was best for the Hungarians”, “he was a national hero, although he remained a communist to the end”). The opinion of the adult age group differs entirely from these. The sacral nature of the values that could be linked to his person and 1956 manifested in this group indicates that in the eyes of many people the events that occurred on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the revolution<sup>20</sup> were a desecration of the “ideals and people of 1956”. Special mention must be made of the age group that has a different interpretation of the person of Imre Nagy and the memory of 1956, identifying with it because of their age, personal or family involvement. In their case it is possible to observe the extent to which it shapes the thinking of his admirers, their self-image, how it organises their identity and group consciousness, enabling the individual “to say ‘we’” (Assmann 2004: 16). The attachment to him can thus be interpreted as a kind of force shaping the identity with which the survivors create an identity awareness for themselves.

It can be seen that the cult and respect of Imre Nagy differs according to the age group. The younger age group basically shows no attitude that could be interpreted as an indication of a cult. In general they do not take part in community celebrations. Nowadays 1956 and Imre Nagy do not appear in the public domain, they do not watch films on him, do not read about him, and so his memory cannot be internalised. Those who nurture the traditions of 1956 and the cult of Imre Nagy generally came from the generation that had a personal connection with the events of that time or they have higher qualifications and their reading has given them a basic knowledge of the events. For them Imre Nagy and those who were executed for their part in 1956 represent the Hungarian people suffering under the communist rule. For them Imre Nagy is a basis of legitimation, a symbol of democratic values, perseverance, honesty, faithfulness to principles, and patriotism. It can be said that in the cult of Imre Nagy respect for his person, his steadfastness and courage is inseparable from general respect for the events of 1956 and its heroes. Imre Nagy has become so much a symbol of the events that he has come to embody their characteristics and essence. A kind of symbiosis is arising: 1956 and Imre Nagy have become practically one.

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<sup>20</sup> In 2006 there were street demonstrations and disorder in Budapest, sparked by a leaked speech made by Ferenc Gyurcsány, the prime minister at the time, in which he admitted that they had been lying to people for years.

## CONCLUSION

It can be said that Kádár and Imre Nagy have not fully become the hero-antihero pair of the new political system. One of the reasons for this is the ambivalent judgement found regarding both of them. Imre Nagy with his behaviour during the revolution, who sacrificed himself for his principles, is clearly a model to follow. But at the same time his earlier communist political career is too well known. There is none of the lack of clarity that could give his whole life a heroic character. His participation in the communist takeover after the Second World War is known, although not emphasised. This is the negative obstacle that prevents the mythologisation of his earlier life. Although there was a mass demand for his reburial in 1989 and everyone identifies his symbolic figure with the positive values of 1956, a popular cult has not grown up around him. Of course, there may be a much more prosaic reason for all this: the new generations were born in a time of freedom; they do not know what its absence means.

Perhaps they have no need for heroes fighting for freedom, but they need various types of heroes from various historical eras with various virtues—or rather need only imitators of heroes; that is, celebrities. Although the first case might be the result of a type of invention process that originated as a basic grassroots need, it still has an emphatic effect on national identity.<sup>21</sup> When historical figures (not necessarily those that were considered heroes before) are rediscovered, actualized, and emphasized in contemporary times by certain strata of society, this means that every historical period creates its own ideal heroes that not only provide a point of reference for members, but also express the characteristics, shortcomings, and desires of the given period and society. Although these emerging “revival” heroes were reinvented and their figure was adapted to current needs and circumstances, this does not change the fact that they still remain heroes and represent well-known heroic features. They cannot be interpreted without and outside their community or nation. However, in the second case, when celebrities appear to be role models, only the image of the community remains. Whereas the emergence, actions, and evolving cult tied to historical heroes basically occur under circumstances that push community values into the foreground (i.e., historical heroes engage in their individual deeds in the interest of the community and the people), the entire existence of celebrities is rooted in individualism. Although one cannot meet a hero that has become a hero because he has achieved self-actualization by placing himself at the center of attention, it is possible to list numerous heroes that have pushed themselves and their personal desires, aims, and interests into the background and acted and suffered for others. Heroes, therefore, can never be understood on their own, but only as members of a community, as symbolic embodiments of that community, and they therefore serve as models for community identification.<sup>22</sup>

Heroes as significant parts of national traditions are constantly reinterpreted, emphasized,

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, the rediscovery of Blessed Eusebius by certain neonationalist groups in Hungary today (Povedák 2014a), or the time of Finnish nation building, when Bishop Henrik began to be presented as a symbol of nationalism (Anttonen 2012).

<sup>22</sup> Povedák (2014b: 13).

or de-emphasized with current political changes. As highlighted by Ben-Amos (1984: 115) regarding “selective tradition,” the selection of what constitutes tradition is always made up in the present, and the content of the past is modified and redefined according to modern significance. In this way, the cult of historical heroes can always be interpreted as a need-based construction when the heroes of yesterday might be the anti-heroes of tomorrow, and vice versa.

Perhaps they have no need for heroes fighting for freedom but they need different type of heroes from different historical eras with different virtues or rather they need only the imitators of heroes, that is: celebrities. Although the first case might result a type of invention process originated as a basic grassroots’ need, it still has an emphatic effect for national identity.<sup>23</sup> When historical figures (not necessarily those who were considered to be heroes before) are rediscovered, actualized and emphasized among contemporary times by certain strata of society means that every historical period creates its own ideal heroes who not only provide a point of reference for members, but also express the characteristics, shortcomings and desires of the given period and society. The fact that these emerging “revival” heroes were reinvented and their figure was adapted to the current needs and circumstances does not change the fact that they still remain heroes and represent the well-known heroic features. They cannot be interpreted without and outside their community or nation. However, in the second case when celebrities appear to be role models only the image of the community remains. In connection with that, while the emergence, actions, and evolving cult tied to historical heroes basically occur under circumstances which push community values into the foreground – that is, the historical heroes engage in their individual deeds in the interests of the community and the people – the entire existence of the celebrities is rooted in individualism. While we cannot meet a hero that has become a hero because he has achieved self-actualization by placing himself in the centre of attention, we can list numerous heroes who have pushed themselves and their personal desires, aims, and interests into the background and acted and suffered for others. Heroes, therefore, can never be understood on their own, only as members of a community, as symbolic embodiments of that community, and therefore serve as models for community identification. (Povedák 2014b: 13).

Heroes as significant parts of national traditions are constantly reinterpreted, emphasized or de-emphasized with the current political changes. As it was emphasized by Ben-Amos about “selective tradition” (Ben-Amos 1984:115) the selection of what constitutes tradition is always made up in the present, the content of the past is modified and redefined according to modern significance. This way the cult of historical heroes can always be interpreted as a need-base construction when the heroes of yesterday might be the anti-heroes of tomorrow and vice versa.

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<sup>23</sup> See for instance the rediscovering of Blessed Eusebius by certain neonationalist groups in Hungary today (Povedák 2014a) or at the time of Finnish nation building, when Bishop Henrik began to be presented as one of the symbols of nationalism. (Anttonen 2012).

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“JUNAKI PREŽIVELCI” IN NASTAJAJOČI JUNAKI  
NESKLADJA V SODOBNEM KULTU JUNAKOV

Politična nihanja v srednji in vzhodni Evropi, ki od zgoraj vplivajo na kolektivni spomin, so preoblikovala tudi panteon junakov. Nekateri junaki so bili prisiljeni v ozadje ali obsojeni na pozabo, drugi so ostali in dobili družbo, nove junake. Nenavadno pa je, da nekateri socialistični junaki niso izginili skupaj s svojimi tovariši, temveč so ostali priljubljeni in anahronistično izžarevajo duh preteklih časov v novo dobo, ki je v bistvu nasprotna in zavrača simbolno vsebino za ikono "preživelega junaka". To pojasnujem na primeru kulta dveh madžarskih junakov, Jánosa Kádárja in Imreta Nagya.

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