

1848 in 1998: The Politics of Commemoration in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia

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INTRODUCTION

The year 1998 marked the 150th anniversary of the cascading wave of revolution that swept across Europe in the spring of 1848. Like all great upheavals (indeed like all great events, personalities, or works of art), the revolutions of 1848 do not contain their own meaning. Powerful cultural objects—whether events, persons, or cultural creations—are always ambiguous: indeed that ambiguity, according to Griswold (1987a) is a key part of what constitutes their power. Such objects always offer rich and varied, though not unlimited, interpretive possibilities. It is now widely agreed that the meanings of such cultural objects are not fixed, given, or uniquely ascertainable, but instead are created and recreated in different times, places, and settings through a series of “interactions” or “negotiations” between the objects and their socially situated, culturally equipped, and often politically engaged interpreters (Hall 1980; Griswold 1987a, 1987b; Liebes and Katz 1996).

In the last fifteen years, commemorations—and social memory generally—have emerged as a fruitful site for studying this interactive production of meaning. That the past is constructed and reconstructed to suit the needs and purposes of each succeeding generation; that even personal memory is a thoroughly social and cultural construct; that collective or social memory is not only constructed but chronically contested; that the “search for a usable past” (Comnager 1967) involves not only highly selective memory and a good deal of for-

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getting (Renan 1996[1882]) but even outright “invention” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983); that the politics of the present therefore not only shapes the representation, but often entails the misrepresentation, of the past—these have emerged as consensual, and richly explored, themes in the social study of memory and commemoration.

Yet while the burgeoning field of social memory studies has opened up a rich variety of perspectives on commemorative practices,¹ the literature does have certain weaknesses. In the first place, there has been very little sustained comparative work (exceptions include Buruma 1994 and Spillman 1997). As Olick (1998) notes, the literature on memory, and particularly on “the memory-nation connection,” has consisted largely of “epochal generalizations . . . that move in the rarefied atmosphere of general theory and macrohistory; or parochial case studies that may appreciate the uniqueness of particular moments in particular places but often miss what is general or comparable in the cases” (380–81).

Second, the constructivist tenor of the literature, and the emphasis on the shaping of the past to meet present needs, while undeniably fruitful, risk sliding into a voluntaristic overemphasis on the malleability and manipulability of the past in the hands of contemporary cultural and political entrepreneurs. Although the more sophisticated studies have highlighted this danger, and are careful to avoid it (e.g. Schudson 1989, 1992; Schwartz 1996; Olick and Robbins 1998; Olick 1999; Spillman 1998), much constructivist work gives inadequate recognition to the constraints that set limits on memory entrepreneurship in the present. As Schudson (1989:107) has put it, “the past is in some respects, and under some circumstances, highly resistant to efforts to make it over.”

Third, and relatedly, the literature on commemoration may risk overstating the salience and centrality of historical memory—or at least certain modalities of historical memory—to ordinary people. By focusing for the most part on construction rather than reception, on key protagonists in memory struggles rather than popular responses, the literature may overestimate the resonance and importance of historical memory to those not actively involved in producing and reproducing it. References to contemporary “mnemonic convulsions,” to an alleged public “obsession” with memory, or to a putative “crisis” of memory (e.g. Huyssen 1995, pp. 1–7; Lipsitz 1990:6, 12) do seem overdrawn. That public contests over the past have multiplied and intensified in recent decades is clear. But many such contests are not particularly significant for the wider public. The Enola Gay affair,² for example, stirred up a storm of commentary and occasioned a book entitled *The History Wars* (Linenthal and Engelhardt

¹ For useful overviews, see Zelizer 1995; Kammen 1995; Olick and Robbins 1998.

² The Enola Gay was the aircraft that dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. It was to have been the centerpiece of an exhibit planned by the Smithsonian Institution’s Air and Space Museum for the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II—an exhibit that was intended, among other things, to examine critically the decision to drop the bomb. After an intense lobbying and media campaign organized by military and veterans groups, the museum was eventually forced to abandon its plans for the exhibit.

1996; see also Zolberg 1998). But the wider public scarcely took notice. Just as the “culture wars,” in the American context, are largely an elite construct, involving the polarization of “institutionalized and articulated moral visions” (Hunter 1994, p. vii [quoted in DiMaggio et al. 1996:740]) rather than a deep attitudinal schism among the public at large (DiMaggio et al. 1996), we may suspect that the same holds for many “memory wars.”

In this essay, we seek to build on the insights of the social memory literature—and more broadly on constructivist work on culture and politics—while avoiding these characteristic weaknesses. We take as our object the commemorative talk, practices, and celebrations occasioned by the 150th anniversary of the revolutions of 1848 in Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania. Our perspective is doubly comparative, involving comparisons across national traditions and, within the Hungarian tradition, between majority and minority contexts. We compare the sharply differing salience and significance of 1848 in contemporary Hungarian, Slovak, and Romanian public discourse; we also compare the very different mood and meaning of commemorative practices and discourses in Hungary on the one hand and among ethnic Hungarian minority communities in Slovakia and Romania on the other.³

We are sensitive to the ways in which political actors in various contexts have sought to mobilize memories of 1848. This effort to appropriate the legacy of 1848, and to enlist it in the service of present political aims, itself has a long history. In the case of Hungary (the country, of our triplet, in which 1848 is by far the most central to national self understanding), this goes back to the late nineteenth century (Gerő 1995; Niedermüller 1998). Yet while the “search for a usable past” is chronic, as the constructivist literature on memory has richly demonstrated, “usable pasts” are not all that easily found or invented, and not all pasts are equally “usable” for present purposes. The commemorations of 1848 in Central and Eastern Europe amply illustrate the ways in which the politics of the present shapes the representation of the past. Yet at the same time, the lack of resonance of official Romanian commemorative efforts, and the virtually complete Slovak public indifference to the 1848 sesquicentennial, underscore the point—articulated in sophisticated work in the constructivist tradition but deserving of greater emphasis—that the past is refractory to presentist reconstruction.

While chronicling the public contests and memory projects concerning the legacy of 1848—and seeking to explain the different forms these have taken at different times, in different national traditions, and in majority and minority

³ The sesquicentennial commemorations of 1848 elsewhere in Europe are beyond the scope of the article. For a comparative discussion of the changing meanings of 1848 in European collective memory, considering the 50th, 100th, and 150th anniversaries, and focusing on France and Germany, see Gildea 2000. For an exceptionally thorough review article on the historiography of 1848, including some interesting comparative observations about the much greater resonance of sesquicentennial commemorations in Germany than in Austria or Switzerland, see Hachtmann (1999, 2000), especially Hachtmann 2000:390–96.

settings—we have not limited our analysis to the discourse of memory entrepreneurs. We also collected participant observation data on public commemorations, attending to the manner and mood of the celebrations, not only to the rhetoric in which they were framed. In this way—and without claiming to have systematically studied the “reception” side—we have tried to consider not only memory projects and “memory talk” but also their resonance, or lack of resonance, with the wider public, and thereby to avoid conflating elite memory projects, some of which vanished without a trace, with popular collective memory.⁴

BACKGROUND

The 1848 revolutions were staggeringly complex, and we cannot pretend to review their course here even in highly simplified form.⁵ However, certain minimal historical background information must be sketched. To begin with, it must be emphasized that the countries we are concerned with—Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia—did not exist in 1848 in anything like their present form. Their present territories were then divided between two great multinational empires. Most of the region—all of present-day Hungary and Slovakia, together with the Transylvanian region of Romania—belonged to the Habsburg empire, and

⁴ Our analysis rests on discussions of 1848 in daily newspapers, cultural and political weeklies, and specialized and scholarly periodicals and books in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, including Hungarian language publications in the latter two countries; on speeches given during public commemorations; and on observation of commemorative ceremonies and rituals. The following periodicals were followed throughout 1998. In Hungary: *Magyar Hírlap*, *Magyar Nemzet*, *Mai Nap*, *Napi Magyarország*, *Népszabadság* (dailies); *Heti Világgazdaság*, *Magyar Fórum*, *Beszélő*, *História*, *Kortárs*, *Kritika*, *Rubikon*, *Tiszatáj*, *Vigila* (weeklies and monthlies). In Romania: *România Libera*, *Adevărul*, *Național*, *Dimineața*, *Jurnalul Național*, *Evenimentul zilei*, *Azi* (statewide dailies); *Știri*, *Adevărul de Cluj*, *Ziua de Nord-Vest*, *Transilvania Jurnal* (Cluj and Transylvanian dailies); *România Mare*, *Magazinul Istoric*, “22” and *Dilema* (weeklies); *Româniai Magyar Szó*, *Hargita Népe*, *Szabadság*, *Szabad Újság*, *Bihari Napló* (Hungarian language dailies, the first a statewide paper, the others regional and local papers); *Erdélyi Napló*, *Brassói Lapok*, *Korunk*, *Látó* (Hungarian language weeklies and monthlies). In Slovakia: *Slovenská Republika*, *Sme*, *Národná Obroda*, *Pravda*, *Práca*, *OS*, *Domino Efekt*, *Slovenské pohľady*, *Historická revue* (Slovak papers), and *Új Szó*, *Szabad Újság*, *IFI*, *Csallóköz*, *Katedra*, and *Kalligram* (Hungarian papers). Television and radio broadcasts were monitored on the days of major commemorative celebrations, and the immediately preceding and following days. The collection of press materials was complemented by the direct observation of the major public holidays and commemorative practices. In the latter, the authors were assisted by students from the Department of Communications of the University of Pécs, whom we would like to thank for their help.

⁵ For the Habsburg domains as a whole, a pithy and characteristically acidic account can be found in Taylor (1976) [1948]:57–82. For Hungary, Deák (1979) (or for an abbreviated account Deák 1990) is by far the best account—lucid, balanced, and eloquent. On the Slovak experience, Rapant (1948–1949), though far from nonpartisan, is one of the few detailed accounts available in English. (Rapant was an influential Slovak historian, best known as the author of a monumental five-volume documentary history of the Slovak experience of 1848–1849). See also the discussion of 1848 in Kirschbaum (1995). On the Romanian experience in Transylvania and the Romanian revolution in Wallachia, the works of Hitchins (1969, 1996) are authoritative and nonpartisan. On the cultural, symbolic, and more specifically festive dimensions of the Wallachian revolution, see also Antohi (1999:79–93). On the complexities of the 1848 events on the local level in Transylvania, see Verdery 1983:184ff.

within that Empire, to the Kingdom of Hungary. Slovakia had no distinct administrative existence; the present-day territory of Slovakia was an integral part of Hungary. Transylvania, by contrast, did have a separate historical tradition as an autonomous principality and a separate administrative status within the Empire; it had long been governed from Vienna, separately from the other lands of the “Crown of St. Stephen,” as the Hungarian lands were known. The territorial and administrative status of Transylvania was to become one of the most contentious, and bloodily contested, points of the 1848 revolutions.⁶ The remainder of what is today Romania—mainly the autonomous principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia—belonged nominally to the Ottoman Empire, though in fact the principalities comprised a Russian protectorate. Thus the events of 1848 with which we are concerned occurred primarily in what was then the Kingdom of Hungary and secondarily in the principality of Wallachia (revolutionary agitation was minimal and quickly suppressed in Moldavia).

It is important to underscore that the Kingdom of Hungary bore little resemblance, in territory or population, to today’s Hungary (Macartney 1937:1ff.). It was more than three times as large, including Slovakia, Transylvania, and Croatia (the latter two enjoying, however, separate administrative status) as well as other territories now belonging to Romania, Serbia, Austria, Ukraine, even Italy. More significantly, unlike contemporary Hungary, historic Hungary was a multiethnic state. As ethnic differences came to be interpreted as national differences during the nineteenth century, Hungary became a multinational state, in which Hungarians, although the largest national group, comprised only a minority of the population.

Throughout Europe, but especially in the region that concerns us, constitutional, social, and national issues were entwined in complex ways in the revolutions of 1848. In the first place, there were constitutional, political, and legal questions concerning the granting of constitutions; the demand for responsible, representative, and in some cases republican government; the broadening of the suffrage; the securing of basic political and civil liberties; the abolition (in Eastern Europe) of the remnants of hereditary subjection and manorial obligations; and the establishment (where they did not already exist) of basic principles and forms of legal equality. Second, there were social and economic questions. The most important of these—involving the liquidation of feudal and manorial obligations—were simultaneously legal and, in the broad sense, constitutional questions. Other key social and economic issues concerned what could be done to relieve urban unemployment, protect craft labor from the encroachment of machines, and alleviate rural misery by securing access to land and affordable credit; the structure of taxation (and in particular the extent to which the nobility, previously exempt from taxation in much of the region, should be subject-

⁶ Croatia, too, belonged formally to the Crown of St. Stephen, but had a strong tradition of administrative autonomy. Its status, too, was fiercely contested in 1848. See Deák (1979):79ff., 119f., 129ff., 157ff.

ed to it now); and the nature and amount of compensation, if any, to be paid in return for the abolition of feudal dues.

Constitutional and socioeconomic issues were overlaid and intertwined (except in France) with a third set of issues, having to do with the “national” question. At stake, as Hobsbawm (1996 [1975]:12) has written, “was not merely the political and social content of states, but their very form or even existence.” In Central and Eastern Europe, in the mid-nineteenth century, political units were either much smaller (in much of present-day Germany and Italy) or much larger (in the territories of the vast multi-national Habsburg, Romanov, and Ottoman empires) than the imagined “nations” with which, according to the increasingly widely accepted “principle of nationality,” they were supposed to be congruent. This situation occasioned, amidst the turmoil of the Revolution, a great welter of nationalist claims and counterclaims.

National problems and conflicts, intimately intertwined with political and social conflicts, were especially acute in Hungary (Deák 1979; Miskolczy 1994). Here it was not a matter of nationalist intellectuals’ schemes for political reorganization, as was the case in Germany (where such schemes were debated in the so-called Professorenparlament at Frankfurt) and in the Habsburg empire outside Hungary (Kann 1950, II, 3–39). It was a matter, rather, of the conflicting national claims generated by what was *de facto* if not *de jure* a newly independent revolutionary state. This state asserted its sovereignty not only externally, *vis-à-vis* Vienna, but internally, *vis-à-vis* the heterogeneous territories and complex ethnic mosaic of historic Hungary, which it sought to transform into a modern, unitary, centralized Hungarian nation-state; in so doing, it provoked nationalist counter-claims in the name of Romanian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovak, and Transylvanian Saxon nations.

On both fronts, external and internal, revolutionary Hungary soon found itself embroiled in war, against the imperial army on the one hand, and against Serbian and Romanian rebels in the Banat and Transylvania on the other. The complexities of the armed struggle cannot be addressed here. These were sometimes incongruous, as when two armies, flying the same flag, asserting loyalty to the same ruler, and both led by Habsburg officers, confronted one another in battle,⁷ and sometimes tragic, as in the case of the numerous atrocities com-

⁷ Deák provides a splendid example:

“In the summer of 1848 a Habsburg army colonel named Blomberg—a German national at the head of a regiment of Polish lancers—was in charge of the defense of a district in southern Hungary inhabited mainly by Germans. Confronted by an attack of Serbian rebels, Blomberg turned to his commander for instructions. The commander, a Habsburg general of Croatian nationality, instructed the colonel to fight the Serbs, and so did the local Hungarian government commissioner, who happened to be a Serb. But the leader of the Serbian rebels, a Habsburg army colonel of Austro-German nationality, begged Blomberg to think of his duty to the emperor and not of his duty to the king (the two were the same person), whereupon Blomberg, easily persuaded, ordered his Poles out of the region, leaving his German co-nationals to the tender mercies of the Serbs” (Deák 1979: xvii–xviii; see also 1990:220).

mitted against civilian populations. Suffice it to note that after initially agreeing to all Hungarian demands during the astonishing spring collapse, the dynasty eventually recovered its nerve and backed its generals' plans to "restore order" and subjugate Hungary. In this it found ready allies—of convenience, if not of principle—among Croatian, Serbian, Romanian, and Slovak nationalists and the disaffected, fearful peasant populations that the latter were able to mobilize. As a result, in some regions, including Transylvania, relatively well-ordered conventional war shaded over into a more intimate, turbulent, popular struggle that united social grievances and fears, political demands, and amorphous but powerful ethnic sentiment. In Transylvania, this war within the war took on an ethnonational coloration, pitting—at least in collective memory and nationalist historiography, though the reality was more complex—Romanians against Hungarians and leading to atrocities on both sides, memories of which continue to be evoked by political leaders today. No similar ethnic or ethnicized warfare, it should be emphasized, set Slovaks against Hungarians in 1848–1849; the attempts of Slovak nationalist leaders to instigate a general armed uprising against the Hungarians were not successful.

The Romanian revolutionary regime in Wallachia lasted three months before being crushed by Ottoman troops, at Russian urging, in September 1848. The revolutionary Hungarian regime, mobilizing considerable popular support and displaying surprising military strength, held out for another year. Defeat came in the end from the hand of Russian, not Austrian troops, but not before Hungary, embittered by the war with Austria and by the neocentralist constitution that had been imposed by the dynasty in March 1849, had taken the symbolically pregnant step of declaring full independence in April 1849.

In short, the events of 1848–1849 were experienced very differently—and generated very different sets of possible and actual memories—for Hungarians, Slovaks, and Romanians.⁸ For Hungarians, the Revolution and subsequent military "struggle for independence" (*szabadságharc*) have been central to national self-understanding and to national myths for a century and a half. Despite the eventual defeat of the Revolution, 15 March 1848—the date of the popular uprising in Budapest that has come to symbolize the Revolution as a whole, as 14 July has come to symbolize the French Revolution—has become an important national holiday, indeed, for minority Hungarians in Transylvania, Hungary's 'most national' (*legnemzetibb*) holiday. A number of figures from the Revolution and war are commemorated not only in public, official memory but in vernacular forms such as folk songs and tales as well: the fiery political leader

⁸ We do not mean, of course, to imply that all Hungarians (or all Romanians or Slovaks) had similar experiences and memories of 1848–1849. We do argue, however, that differences in the salience, style, and substance of sesquicentennial commemorations do not merely reflect different contemporary constructions of an originally shared and undifferentiated past. The "raw materials" out of which memories of 1848–1849 were constructed—the events themselves and the way they were experienced and interpreted at the time—were already sharply, though not homogeneously, differentiated by nationality.

Kossuth; the great poet Petőfi, who gave poetic voice to patriotic fervor and died a martyr's death on the battlefield in 1849; the generals Klapka and Bem, celebrated for their daring military exploits; and the thirteen generals revengefully executed by the Austrians in Arad in October 1849 after the Hungarian surrender.

For Romanians and Slovaks today, 1848 has neither the symbolic resonance nor the (occasional) mobilizatory power it has had for Hungarians. The events of 1848–1849 have not been central to national self-understanding or core national myths, vernacular or official. This is especially true in the Slovak case. 1848 does figure significantly (though not centrally) in Slovak nationalist historiography; it marks the transition from purely cultural to the beginnings of political nationalism. But there has been little in the way of corresponding popular memory, and neither nationalists nor their liberal opponents sought to organize popular commemorative celebrations in 1998. Romania is an intermediate case. The Revolution in Transylvania, and the guerrilla struggle against the Hungarians, were considerably more significant for popular memory and historiography than the Slovak experience of 1848–1849. Guerrilla leader Avram Iancu became a folk hero in Transylvania, commemorated in song and story. Still, for Romanians, neither this struggle nor the Revolution in Wallachia ever acquired the mythic significance or vernacular resonance that 1848–1849 has had in Hungarian collective memory.

MOOD AND FRAMING

Commemorative practices and discourses on this occasion were structured around two linked oppositions. These define alternative cultural models for representing and commemorating great events. The first opposition concerns the *manner and mood* in which the past is represented, the second the *narrative framing* of the commemoration.

Concerning manner and mood, commemorations are undertaken, in the first model, in an elevated tone, evoking pathos through mythopoetic narrative forms and heroic language and imagery. They proceed in a quasi-religious mood of high seriousness. They are moments of collective effervescence, in Durkheimian terms,⁹ partaking of the sacred or (in Weberian terms) of the charismatic, that is, the specifically extraordinary.¹⁰ In the second model, commemorations are understood and experienced not as holy days but as holidays, involving not sacred communion but spectacle and entertainment. The mood is not quasi-religious but carnivalesque. The language and imagery are less exalted, making room for humor, and—in a different direction—for detached, reflective, self-critical attitude toward the past. The shift from the first to the second mode of commemoration involves the *desacralization* of history and historical mem-

⁹ See Durkheim 1965 [1912]:345f., 389f., 427, 432, 475.

¹⁰ On the sacred or charismatic aspects of commemoration, see also Shils 1975:198; Schwartz 1982.

ory or, in Weberian terms, the *routinization*—*Veralltäglicung*—of historical charisma.¹¹

Analytically distinct from this opposition in manner and mood, though in the case in point paralleling it to a considerable extent in practice, is an opposition in narrative framing—in the manner in which themes are selected and organized on commemorative occasions. In the first model, commemorations are framed in spatially, temporally, and socially or culturally *particularizing* terms. The commemorative lens is focused narrowly on local events themselves or on their meaning for a particular socially or culturally defined group of commemorators (for example, members of a particular ethnic or national group, veterans of a particular war, or victims of a particular accident). In the second model, commemoration is framed in *generalizing* or *universalizing* terms, through narrative frames that situate local events in the context of wider and longer-term processes that are claimed to have significance not only, or even especially, for local commemorators themselves, but for others as well.

In the case at hand—to make this second, rather abstract opposition more concrete—the particularizing narrative frame focused on the specifically and distinctively *national* meanings of the 1848 revolutions. Emphasis was placed on the particular events, conflicts, and battles (in the literal as well as the figurative sense) through which national aims—national awakening, national mobilization, national independence—were furthered, or national setbacks occurred. The generalizing narrative frame, by contrast, situated the 1848 events in the context of processes of pan-European or even (putatively) universal significance. The particular events—especially the violent struggles—of 1848–1849 were passed over in silence or at least de-emphasized. Focus was shifted from particular ethnic or national claims or grievances to more general and universal processes in which 1848 could be seen as a symbolic milestone: liberalization, democratization, modernization, Westernization, the development of civil society, even supranational integration.

These oppositions, then, define the analytical space within which we will situate our concrete analyses. The manner and mood of commemorative practices and discourses can be characterized along a continuum ranging from the sacred and mythopoetic to the carnivalesque, reflexive, and self-critical, while the narrative framing of commemorations can be placed along a continuum ranging from the particularizing to the universalizing. The oppositions, we should emphasize, are ideal types in the Weberian sense. We have constructed them by deliberately accentuating empirically observable patterns so as to form a conceptually consistent whole. The cases we examine do not correspond precisely to these pure types, but they can usefully be characterized in terms of their vary-

¹¹ Weber's notion of *Veralltäglicung*, usually translated as routinization, literally means "towards everydayness"; it denotes the integration of the extraordinary into the ordinary routines of life. On desacralization and the emergence of critical history, see Nora 1996:3–7; Olick and Robbins 1998:108; Gillis 1994:19.

ing degrees of approximation to them. The conceptual space can thus be characterized as follows:

	<i>Particularizing Narrative Frame</i>	<i>Generalizing Narrative Frame</i>
<i>Sacralized Mood</i>	Sesquicentennial commemoration of 1848 among Hungarian minorities Romanian sesquicentennial commemoration of 1848 in Transylvania	Some elements of commemoration of French and American revolutions
<i>Desacralized Mood</i>	St. Patrick's Day celebrations	Sesquicentennial commemoration of 1848 in Hungary Romanian plans for sesquicentennial commemoration of Wallachian revolution of 1848

To anticipate our findings, although Hungarians in Hungary and those in Romania and Slovakia were celebrating the same holiday, the same heroes, the same symbolically resonant dates, we observed a major difference in the mood and framing of the commemoration in majority and minority contexts. The celebrations in Hungary were, on the whole, markedly less sacralized, and framed in more universalistic terms, than those among minority Hungarian communities in neighboring states. In the Romanian case, we observed a tension between two commemorative strategies, one more dispassionate and universalistic, focused on the Wallachian revolution, the other—which came to predominate—more pathos-laden and particularizing, focused on the national conflict in Transylvania. In the Slovak case, both particularizing and universalizing narrative representations of 1848 can be found in historiography and public discourse, but the sesquicentennial went largely uncommemorated.¹²

We take up these three national contexts of commemoration in succession. We give most sustained attention to the Hungarian case, for two reasons. First,

¹² We suggested above that the two axes are conceptually independent. A sacralized mood can be combined with a particularizing or a generalizing narrative frame, and the same holds for a desacralized mood. As indicated in the text, though, two of the four combinations are of particular interest here: sacralized mood and particularizing frame; and desacralized mood and universalizing frame. This is why we indicate that the two oppositions, although independent in principle, overlap in practice in this case. In other contexts, however, other combinations may be found. St. Patrick's Day celebrations, for example, generally involve a desacralized mood and a particularizing narrative frame, while some (though not all) elements of the commemoration of the French and American revolutions combine a sacralizing mood with a universalizing narrative frame.

1848 is central to Hungarian national mythology, and firmly lodged in vernacular as well as elite memory, both in Hungary, and, to an even greater extent, among transborder Hungarians in neighboring states. It is less central to Romanian—and still less to Slovak—national mythology and vernacular memory. Second, a key aim in the Hungarian case is to explore and explain the differences in mood and framing between commemorations in Hungary and those among transborder minority Hungarians—an issue that does not arise in the Romanian or Slovak cases. In discussing the latter cases, our aims are somewhat different. In the Romanian case, we focus on the shift from a generalizing commemorative strategy, situating the Wallachian revolution in its broader European context, to a particularizing strategy, focusing on the national conflict in Transylvania. In the Slovak case, we seek to account for the *absence* of any significant sesquicentennial commemoration.

Olick and Robbins (1998:128) note the powerful “presentist” current that informs social scientific work on memory, highlighting how the past is enlisted to serve the needs and interests of the present. They distinguish between “instrumental” and “cultural” aspects of presentism, the former emphasizing deliberate and often manipulative “memory entrepreneurship,” the latter the inevitable selectivity of memory, since memory is always retrieved and invoked in the context of contemporary frameworks of meaning and interest. Our cases provide rich evidence of both sorts of processes—of deliberate attempts to mobilize the past for present purposes, and of the less deliberative processes and mechanisms that govern the selectivity of memory. At the same time, our cases afford evidence of the *limits* of “instrumental presentism.” By this we mean both the limits of an analytical perspective that emphasizes the deliberate manipulation of the past through the invention of “factitious” traditions (Hobsbawm 1983:2) and the limits of such instrumental efforts themselves. The possibilities of memory entrepreneurship, we shall argue, are conditioned and constrained by the nature and structure of “available pasts” (Schudson 1989:107ff; cf. Schudson 1992:205ff.)—pasts made “available” for present-day use not only by the events themselves, to be sure, but also by their subsequent incorporation into commemorative traditions. As Olick (1999:383) remarks, the past “includes not only the history being commemorated but also the accumulated succession of commemorations.”

COMMEMORATIONS IN HUNGARY AND AMONG TRANSBORDER HUNGARIAN MINORITIES

The Desacralization of the Past

1848 has long been a cornerstone of Hungarian political culture and a cardinal point of reference for Hungarian national self-understanding, both official and vernacular. Even regimes that sought to neutralize the revolutionary imagery of 1848 (notably the authoritarian conservative regime of Miklos Horthy between

the two world wars and, ironically, the communist regime) could not avoid commemorating 1848 in some form (Gerő 1995). And 1848 has been central to vernacular memory as well; references to its great events and to its heroes, martyrs, traitors, and villains permeate Hungarian folklore and national mythology.

The sesquicentennial celebrations in Hungary and among transborder Hungarians focused on 15 March. But this date had not always been privileged in official commemorations.¹³ Indeed the potential explosiveness of 15 March, commemorating as it did a symbolically resonant popular uprising, meant that governments have often looked askance on this date. When the Hungarian government established a holiday commemorating 1848 as the 50th anniversary of the revolution approached, it rejected 15 March in favor of the “safer” date of 11 April when, in 1848, the Hungarian legislation codifying the basic constitutional and legal principles of the new order was given official royal sanction (Gerő 1995: 242). Except during the brief revolutionary interlude of 1918–1919, 15 March was not publicly celebrated until 1928. In the interwar period, the conservative-nationalist Horthy regime cultivated the nationalist and military rather than the revolutionary traditions of 1848. For the 80th anniversary of the revolution, in 1928, the regime did replace 11 April with 15 March as the official national holiday. But in this and succeeding years, it staged 15 March commemorations so as to emphasize militarist themes and irredentist commitments (Gerő 1995:243–45).

Revolutionary and democratic themes came to the fore again in official post-war commemorations of 15 March, but not for long (Gerő 1998). The commemoration of a popular democratic uprising soon became dangerous for the increasingly dictatorial regime. Already in 1951, a government decree proclaimed 15 March a regular work day. After the crushing of the 1956 uprising, in which the ideals and symbols of 1848 had figured prominently, the authorities discouraged any kind of spontaneous celebration of 15 March. Official celebrations were observed each year, but without real popular participation, in large part because 15 March was not a work holiday. It was, however, a school holiday, so children were mobilized into participating in the newly established “revolutionary youth days.” These bundled together 15 March, 21 March (on which the Hungarian Soviet Republic had been proclaimed in 1919), and 4 April (on which the Second World War had ended, for Hungary, in 1945) into a single invented tradition (Hofer 1992:35; Gerő 1995:247).

Beginning intermittently in the early 1970s, and then more continuously from the early 1980s on, the lackluster official commemorations of 15 March were shadowed by spontaneous, unofficial counter-commemorations, some of them forcibly broken up by the police. These afforded opportunities for initial-

¹³ The historical sketch in the following paragraphs draws on Gerő (1995), Hofer (1992), and Gyarmati (1998).

ly tentative and ambiguous, later more forceful oppositional gestures. By the late 1980s, as the numbers of participants grew from hundreds, to thousands, to tens of thousands, these had become occasions on which the “state and the nascent civil society struggled over the ‘ownership’ of the holiday and of national symbols” (Hofer 1992:35). This struggle culminated on 15 March 1989, when a massive opposition-organized commemorative procession completely upstaged the official celebration, powerfully linking memories of 1848 with those of 1956, and invoking both—as struggles for freedom crushed by reactionary regimes—to support the intensifying demand for democratization. Along with a few other symbolically powerful moments—notably the re-burial of martyred 1956 Prime Minister Imre Nagy three months later—this dramatic moment of collective effervescence represented a turning point in Hungary’s peaceful transition to democracy.¹⁴

Nine years later, the sesquicentennial in Budapest¹⁵ had nothing like this solemn and dramatic quality; it did not mobilize masses or inspire enthusiasm. It had little palpable political weight or significance, and no feeling of ritual gravity. Instead of a solemn, Durkheimian collective ritual, the official commemoration was organized as a mediatised spectacle.¹⁶ Planned by well-known film director Miklós Jancsó in quasi-cinematographic fashion, it was designed to be enjoyed equally well *sur place*—as an open-air stage—and at home in front of the television screen. The main commemorative event was staged in front of the National Museum, where, on 15 March 1848, the young poet Petőfi had declaimed his newly composed “National Song,” a stirring call for national liberation, later celebrated as epitomizing the spirit of resistance to oppression. The museum building was draped in national colors, and the slogan inscribed on banners on the pediment—Liberty, Equality, Fraternity—firmly placed the Hungarian revolution in the wider European tradition. Following speeches, including one by Hungarian President Árpád Göncz, was a choreographed performance designed to evoke the events and the mood of the revolutionary days.

In addition to the official ceremony, the municipality organized a parade of

¹⁴ Drawing on the anthropological theory of ritual, Hofer (1992) provides a rich and stimulating analysis of the 15 March commemoration of 1989. On the role of this commemoration in the Hungarian transition, see also Stark and Bruszt (1998):30–31, and Kis (1999).

¹⁵ Since the sesquicentennial commemoration was centrally planned and staged chiefly in Budapest, we do not concern ourselves here with commemorative celebrations in the provinces. However, it is important to note that in addition to the central commemorative celebrations, organized “from above,” there is also in provincial and small-town Hungary a robust tradition of locally organized commemorations of 1848, not only in the sesquicentennial year or on otherwise marked occasions, but in “ordinary” years as well. The specific forms of these local celebrations fall outside the scope of our study; but the existence of continuous local as well as central commemorative traditions distinguishes Hungary from Romania and Slovakia in a manner that will be important for our comparative analysis.

¹⁶ In this respect, the commemoration followed the model of the French bicentennial celebration of 1789 (Kaplan 1995), albeit on a much smaller scale.

huszars in traditional regalia; a re-creation of a nineteenth-century street market; and an evening re-enactment of the events of the revolutionary days in period costume, in which monumentality was leavened with scenes from the everyday life of the period. The mood of these events was relaxed and cheerful rather than ceremonious and elevated. Despite the inclement weather, the events succeeded in attracting many people, especially families with small children. Children wore paper hats modeled on the traditional headgear of *huszars* and carried small flags and balloons in the national colors. Many people wore the tricolor “cocarde”—for some a symbol of the nation, for others of freedom and revolution, for still others simply the thing to wear on 15 March. Younger people, most of them indifferent to the commemorative occasion and drawn by the prospect of entertainment, filled Kossuth Square in front of the Parliament, where a popular music concert was organized for the afternoon. As an organizer of the nineteenth-century street market put it, emphasis had been placed on the “everyday and more humorous side” of the events so as to allow people to celebrate the revolution in their own way, “without false pathos,”¹⁷ and without all participating in a single mass ritual. The result was that the national holiday moved away from the model of a solemn, sacred, collective ritual, and was instead assimilated to entertainment and to “ordinary” private sphere holiday practices of families and youth.

The desacralization and displacement of pathos in commemorative celebrations were accompanied by a critical and reflexive posture in commemorative speeches and in journalistic and essayistic accounts of the anniversary. Press accounts focused less on what happened in 1848 and more, in a reflexive manner, on changing perceptions of and ways of talking about the 1848 events in the subsequent century and a half. Celebratory or denunciatory accounts yielded to an acknowledgement of ambiguity; “in history unambiguous situations and unambiguous answers emerging from them are extraordinarily rare,” as it was put in the columns of a popular history review.¹⁸ In general, press commentary broke with the model of larger-than-life national heroes and demonized national traitors, and with the debates that had raged since 1849 about the relative merits of the radical Kossuth and the moderate Széchenyi, or about whether general Görgey was to be considered a traitor for surrendering to the Russians in August 1849. In 1998, it became almost a fashion to speak dispassionately of these figures, most notably of long-demonized Görgey. Commentators emphasized that Görgey “does not fit into the black-white scheme of evaluation.”¹⁹ This critical and ambivalent stance, in the face of the ambiguities of 1848–1849, extended to prominent public figures as well. Even President Göncz, in his official commemorative speech, called attention to changes

¹⁷ Field notes.

¹⁸ András Gergely, “Széchenyi és Kossuth vitája. A programok és a programadók,” *Rubicon* 1998/2:4–7.

¹⁹ *Magyar Hírlap*, 14 Mar. 1998.

over time in official understandings and appraisals of the revolution, and defended Görgey, saying he had been unjustly scapegoated for the Hungarian defeat. This self-reflective stance, however, did not lead to critical reflections on the arrogant and insensitive policies of the leaders of the Hungarian revolution *vis-à-vis* Romanian, Serb, Slovak, and other national minorities.

1848 in 1998: Between European Integration and Nationalist Disintegration

It has long been a central theme in the study of memory that historical memory, like memory in general and indeed all cognitive processes, works in a selective manner. Social memory is doubly selective, both positively and negatively. From the inexhaustible multiplicity of the past, particular events, persons, and themes are singled out as worthy of commemoration, while others are condemned to oblivion—not simply by default, or passively, by virtue of escaping notice, but actively, by virtue of being deliberately ignored, downplayed, or repressed. The Hungarian sesquicentennial was an exercise in such active forgetting as much as it was in selective remembering. As Ernest Renan put it in a celebrated lecture, “forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for nationality. Indeed, historical inquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations” (Renan 1996[1882]:45).

The dual selectivity governing the official commemorative celebrations in Hungary—and the way 1848 was discussed by state and government elites and the mainstream media—reflected more than anything else the delicate international political conjuncture of the late 1990s. Poised between zones of supranational integration to its north and west and of nationalist disintegration to its south and east, Hungary was at the time of the anniversary a candidate for membership of both NATO and the European Union. Integration into these institutions had been the top foreign policy priority of both post-communist governments. It was also the top priority of the Young Democrats (Fidesz—Magyar Polgári Párt), the chief and, as it turned out, victorious opponents of the governing socialist-liberal coalition in the electoral campaign that was underway in the spring of 1998. Hungarian elites, even those with diametrically opposed views on many other issues, were thus united in seeking to demonstrate that the country could satisfy the political as well as the economic conditions of European integration.

In this context, the sesquicentennial represented both an opportunity and a danger. As an instance of European integration *avant la lettre*, a pan-European uprising against feudalism and autocracy, a symbol of progress, modernity, democracy, and civil society, 1848—and Hungary’s prominent role in the revolutions—seemed perfectly suited for celebration in 1998. Commemorations could emphasize the long-standing Hungarian commitment to civil liberties, constitutionalism, the rule of law, and representative government, all dramatically highlighted in the spring of 1848.

At the same time, the anniversary represented a danger. Here we come back to the complex intertwining of political, socioeconomic, and national strands in the 1848 revolutions, and to the consequent ambivalence bound up with their commemoration. After all, 1848 was by no means an unambiguously progressive chapter in European history. It could scarcely be overlooked, least of all in the 1990s, that it was also a key chapter in the history of European nationalism, the moment when nationalist claims first crystallized throughout Central and Eastern Europe, and when the irreconcilability, and explosiveness, of such claims first became sharply apparent. In this respect, 1848 seemed particularly *ill-suited* for commemoration in 1998. For it could be seen to symbolize the “other Europe,” the Europe associated with nationalism and ethnic violence—precisely the Europe that postwar supranational integration was designed to bury forever. This “other Europe” had returned with a vengeance in the 1990s, immediately on Hungary’s southern border, indeed partly in areas that had belonged, albeit loosely, to the historic Kingdom of Hungary. It was therefore particularly urgent for integration-oriented elites to avoid having Hungary’s “good European” claims and credentials compromised by association with the noxious “Balkan” mixture of nationalism, ethnic homogenization and war, especially since European institutions—not only the European Union but the Council of Europe, NATO, and the OSCE—placed particular emphasis on transcending ethnic conflicts and ensuring the rights of minorities.

This, then, was the dilemma facing Hungarian elites in the spring of 1998: how to selectively emphasize the “good European” dimensions of 1848 while downplaying the ethnic and national grievances, conflicts, and violence that were then unleashed, and in so doing to demonstrate the country’s civic, modern, and “Western” credentials.

This was done, or at least attempted, in three ways. First, a strongly generalizing narrative frame was adopted. Commemorative attention was not directed toward the revolutionary events themselves, or to the military triumphs and defeats of 1848–1849. The very term “revolution” was avoided, or qualified in expressions such as “peaceful revolutionary transformation.”²⁰ Instead, attentions were focused on the longer-term historical process of which 1848 was said to mark a symbolic beginning. The term most often used to designate this process—*polgárosodás*—means the development of civil or civic society on the one hand and of bourgeois or middle-class society on the

²⁰ The head of the Hungarian millennial commemoration committee, which supervised the commemorations, wrote of a “peaceful revolutionary transformation” that gave birth to “Hungarian civil [*polgári*] society and the modern nation state” (Gábor Erdődy, *Magyar Nemzet*, 14 Mar. 1998). And as Bálint Magyar, then Minister of Culture, put it in his commemorative speech: “In Hungary, since 15 March 1848, there has been no place for any other kind of revolution—only that kind that, through the instrument of laws, creates a new and better order for citizens . . . it was not weapons that dictated the April Laws, not despotism that established responsible and representative government, press freedom, and the liberation of the serfs, but the demand for and logic of lawfulness” (*Magyar Hírlap*, 16 Mar. 1998).

other.²¹ In his commemorative speech on 15 March, President Göncz emphasized that 1848 initiated, or at least gave decisive impetus to, a long process of *polgárosodás*, a process interrupted by the defeat of the revolution in 1849 and the subsequent period of neo-absolutist rule, but revived after the Compromise of 1867.²² The historical parallel was clear: after another, longer interruption in the twentieth century—a partial interruption during the conservative, Christian, nationalist Horthy regime of the interwar period, and then a more complete one under the communist regime—*polgárosodás* had once again resumed in Hungary, tentatively at first, under Kádár, then in full force after 1989. The contemporary meaning of 1848 was that the process of *polgárosodás*, initiated in 1848, was alive and well in 1998, providing a secure basis for Hungary's integration into European structures.²³

Second, the Hungarian process of *polgárosodás* was itself framed in generalizing rather than nationally particularizing terms. Unlike the process of nation-state building—another long-term process in the region that received decisive impetus in 1848—*polgárosodás* could be represented as a universal, and universalizable, development, as a positive-sum rather than a zero-sum process. Moreover, it could be represented as quintessentially European. In the words of Ferenc Glatz, President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, “The revolution not only brought us closer to Europe, but was itself a European phenomenon . . . the demands collected in the revolutionary [Twelve] Points—naturally with the exception of the point that urged the union with Transylvania—are similar to the demands of other European revolutions.”²⁴ Glatz cast the whole course of Hungarian history as a process of catching up (*felzárkózás*) with the happier and richer half of the continent. In this strikingly but interestingly anachronistic perspective, European integration was already the goal of St. Stephen, Hungary's first Christian monarch, a thousand years ago.²⁵ It was furthered by nineteenth-century industrialization and urbanization, and in a symbolic sense the revolution of 1848–49 was one of its most important moments.

Third, while the national conflicts, ethnic violence, and military campaigns of 1848–1849 could not be ignored altogether, they were de-emphasized, and

²¹ *Polgárosodás* is a processual, developmental term derived from the word *polgár*, which, like its German counterpart *Bürger*, unites two concepts rendered separately in French and English: *citoyen* and *bourgeois*, the citizen and the *bourgeois*.

²² As a result of the *Ausgleich* or Compromise of 1867, Hungary became, in most respects, a quasi-independent state within the Habsburg empire.

²³ See *Magyar Hírlap*, 16 Mar. 1998. On the tension between national and European perspectives in commemorations of 1848 elsewhere in Europe, see Körner 2000.

²⁴ Interview with Ferenc Glatz, *Népszabadság*, 14 Mar. 1998. The “Twelve Points” were the demands formulated by Budapest revolutionaries on 15 March 1848.

²⁵ This perspective on Stephen as “a modernizer who ‘chose Europe’” was much in evidence a decade earlier, in 1988, when the 950th anniversary of Stephen's death was celebrated (Hann 1990:17). On the semiotics and pragmatics of invocations of “Europe” in Hungarian history, in the context of a persisting awareness of Hungary's relative “backwardness” and of its problematic and contested relation to “Europe,” see Gal 1991.

the national myths that had grown up around them were deconstructed. The legendary national confrontations of 1848, it was argued, were an exaggerated and anachronistic construction of later times. National consciousness was not so firmly established or hegemonic as would appear from retrospective accounts in a heroic or mythical mode, and economic and status group cleavages divided the “nation.” 1848–1849 therefore involved not mass national conflict but rather a conflict of elites representing competing national programs, and seeking, with variable success, to mobilize their putative constituencies.²⁶

The ethnic and national conflicts of 1848–1849 were also ‘de-individualized.’ Instead of focusing on particular conflicts, still less on particular (especially violent) episodes from these conflicts, the conflicts and antagonisms were referred to in terms that were generalizing, de-individualizing, abstract, and dispassionate, drained of their galvanizing particularity, cathectic power, and symbolic resonance. Public commemorative discussions did not celebrate the feats of Hungarian generals or the *honvéd* troops who fought against the Romanian guerrilla leader Avram Iancu or the Croatian General Jelačić. Pushing this generalizing framing to its limits, President Göncz characterized 1848 as a “multiethnic struggle for freedom” (*soknemzetiségű szabadságharc*) and therefore as a holiday not only for Hungary but for the entire Carpathian basin.²⁷ *Szabadságharc* is the standard Hungarian term for the Hungarian struggle for freedom or, less euphemistically, the war of independence in 1848. Applying the adjective “multiethnic” to this noun de-individualizes the conflict, and suggests, comfortingly but misleadingly, a multiethnic common front of the people against dynastic neo-absolutism. It was in fact a confused and by no means fraternal struggle that often pitted members of one putative nation against those of another. Through this linguistic sleight of hand, the very events that, from another perspective, are adduced as evidence of enduring antagonisms were transmuted into a symbol of a fraternal multiculturalism *avant la lettre*.

The final move was to suggest that these generic conflicts and struggles, stripped of passion and particularity, could be resolved precisely through the completion of the process of European integration. As President Göncz again put it, this time in his speech at the official state celebration, the idea of Europe transcends local conflicts:

It is the lesson of two crushed struggles for freedom [i.e. 1848 and 1956] and two lost world wars, that the equal peoples of the fractured area of historic Hungary can once again be frank with one another in a Europe in which borders exist only on the map, in which—as has been the case for centuries—they have enriched each other’s culture. They can be themselves, but good friends, as members of the great territory that embraces them, the common Europe. Hungary is striving for this today. For this would solve, peacefully, the contradictions of the revolutionary period that have survived to this day.²⁸

²⁶ See, for an elaboration of this argument, the special thematic issue of the review *Historia* 1998/3.

²⁷ *Népszabadság*, 14 March 1998, reporting the President’s speech at the opening of a thematic exhibit on 1848 at the Military History Museum.

²⁸ This passage, printed on a widely distributed brochure containing the program of the official

In this way, refractory ethnic conflict in the region was converted from an argument *against* EU enlargement to an argument *for* enlargement, which, it was suggested, would definitively put such conflict to rest.

Of course, not all Hungarian commemorative speech and commentary sought to de-individualize or desacralize the ethnic and national conflicts of 1848–1849. Nor did all situate 1848 in a generalizing, optimistic narrative of *polgárosodás*, rather than in a particularizing, pessimistic story of the often-crushed, still-unfinished struggle for national unity and independence. Our characterization applies to the mainstream political, journalistic, and cultural elite in Hungary. As we will show in the following sections, the prevailing commemorative mood and narrative framing were quite different among minority Hungarians in Slovakia and especially Romania. Even in Hungary proper, there were some conspicuous exceptions to the prevailing dispassionate mood and universalizing, “Westernizing” framing. István Csurka, head of the extreme right Hungarian Truth and Life Party (MIEP), emphasized the national aspects of the revolution at the commemorative celebration-cum-political demonstration his party organized on Heroes Square. He also called attention to the historical and contemporary enemies of the nation: foreigners, the financial oligarchy, liberalism, social democracy, Europe, NATO, and so on. Some black-clad participants in this MIEP-sponsored event wore badges with maps of greater Hungary.²⁹ Yet while the number of participants was substantial—perhaps 2000—this provocatively particularizing stance was exceptional. The leading mainstream right oppositional figure, Young Democrat leader Viktor Orbán, adopted an intermediate stance.³⁰ Implicitly challenging the up-beat official framing in his commemorative speech, he interpreted twentieth-century history as a series of tragedies for the Hungarian nation, as a result of which the goals of 1848 remained unrealized.

The Transborder Dimension: The View from Hungary

Thus far we have neglected an important, distinctive, and delicate aspect of the sesquicentennial for Hungarians: its transborder dimension. There are two aspects to this, both arising from the discrepancy between the borders of historic and contemporary Hungary. First, there are large Hungarian minority communities in Slovakia and Romania,³¹ who see themselves as part of a border-

commemorative celebration, served as a motto for the entire commemoration. Ferenc Glatz, interviewed in *Népszabadság* of 14 March 1998, also drew the lesson of the “necessity for regional unity in Central and Eastern Europe.”

²⁹ “Greater Hungary” means Hungary before its post-World War I territorial dismemberment, including Transylvania, Slovakia, the Serbian province of Voivodina, and some other, smaller territories.

³⁰ Later, during his four years as Prime Minister, Orbán would adopt a more strongly nationalist stance on a variety of issues, including a later phase of the commemoration that we address below.

³¹ We neglect here the smaller Hungarian minority communities in the former Yugoslavia and southwestern Ukraine.

spanning Hungarian ethnocultural nation, and for whom the commemoration of 1848 therefore posed delicate problems of national identity and political loyalty, problems we take up in the next section. Second, some of the most important commemorative sites—what Pierre Nora (1996) calls *lieux de mémoire*—are today in Slovakia and Romania. Thus not only the commemorators, but also the commemorated are today spread across three states. This posed a problem not only for Hungarians in Slovakia and Romania but also for commemorators in Hungary. How could they take account of this transborder dimension without jeopardizing the universalizing, “Westernizing” narrative frame described in the previous section? The conspicuous lack of congruence between ethnocultural and political boundaries served as a reminder of precisely what the “Westernizing” commemorative strategy sought to “forget”: the explosive link between national claims and zero-sum territorial struggles in the region, spectacularly inaugurated in 1848, especially in Transylvania, and still being played out in Kosovo 150 years later.

After nearly forty years of invisibility, transborder Hungarian minorities came to occupy a significant place in public discussion in Hungary in the 1990s. The status of Hungarian minorities in neighboring states had been a taboo subject under communist rule, but began to re-emerge in the 1980s as concern mounted about the increasingly repressive Romanian regime, and as many Hungarians from incipient civil society oppositional circles traveled to Transylvania to demonstrate solidarity with Transylvanian Hungarians. Since 1989, the political class has been united across party lines in accepting, indeed asserting, the responsibility of the Hungarian state for monitoring the condition, protecting the rights, and promoting the welfare of Hungarian minorities in neighboring states,³² although there have been sharp and ideologically polarized differences about how this should be done. Ties to transborder Hungarians were institutionalized in a state Office of Transborder Hungarians, in cross-border subsidies in a variety of domains, and in Duna TV, a well-funded state television channel established to provide Hungarian-language broadcasting for and about Hungarians in neighboring states. As a result, the transborder dimension of the sesquicentennial was too salient to ignore. As one indicator of the inescapability of the transborder dimension, Duna TV provided extensive coverage of transborder Hungarian commemorative celebrations. Hungarian newspapers also highlighted the transborder dimension, placing side-by-side accounts of commemorations in Hungary and among transborder Hungarian communities.³³

³² Along with integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions and maintaining good relations with neighboring states, this has been one of the three foreign policy priorities highlighted by all post-communist governments in Hungary.

³³ *Magyar Nemzet*, 16 March 1998, reported on transborder commemorations under the headline “Hungarians commemorate the 150th anniversary of the revolution and war of independence in several thousand settlements in the Carpathian basin.” Even the liberal daily *Magyar Hírlap*,

Here, too, the key to negotiating potentially hazardous commemorative waters lay in selectivity regarding what was emphasized, and what was ignored or minimized. In the prevailing Westernizing commemorative frame, the transborder dimension was interpreted as a matter of geographic commonality rather than ethnic particularity. The best illustration of this was President Göncz's characterization of 1848, quoted above, as a "multiethnic struggle for freedom" belonging not only to Hungarians but to all peoples of the Carpathian basin. Insofar as ethnic Hungarian elements were highlighted in the commemorations, these tended to be purely cultural or folkloristic elements such as folk costumes or folk music. While transborder Hungarians connected the 1848 struggle for liberation to Hungarians' current struggles for autonomy and minority rights in Slovakia and Romania, this was not a central theme of official commemorative discourse in Hungary. Instead, the transborder dimension was represented in Hungary in more de-politicized and estheticized fashion as part of the overall commemorative choreography. During his 15 March speech, for example, President Göncz was flanked by four young girls wearing traditional costumes of the Szék (a Hungarian village in Romania well-known for preserving traditional Hungarian folk dress); photographs of this were carried on the front pages of the next day's papers.

In 1998, as in every year since 1990, Hungarian state and government officials participated in transborder commemorative festivities. In this respect, too, a tacit selection guided their choices of *which* transborder commemorations to participate in, and *how* to participate. Hungarian officials selected transborder sites that were politically or culturally important but at the same time acceptable from the standpoint of contemporary foreign policy concerns. One of the most important transborder commemorative sites was Bratislava (German: Pressburg; Hungarian: Pozsony), today capital of Slovakia, in 1848 seat of the Hungarian Diet in the early phase of the Revolution. It was here that the constitutional and legal framework of the new order was worked out in late March and early April 1848. Bratislava was not only an important site, but a "safely" commemorable one in 1998. What could be commemorated there was precisely what the Westernizing narrative frame emphasized: the constitutional enactment of personal freedom, legal equality, and representative government, as yet unshadowed by the dark clouds of ethnic conflict and war. Perhaps for this reason, a higher-ranking Hungarian government official participated in the commemoration there than in other transborder commemorations. At all transborder sites, Hungarian officials were careful to keep their rhetoric measured, their tone matter-of-fact, and their feelings muted.

The measured stance and muted tone of the official discourse, however, were not universally shared. For the conservative press in Hungary, the transborder

generally less concerned with Hungarians in neighboring states, reported, although less extensively, on the transborder commemorations.

dimension of the sesquicentennial elicited a strongly emotional tone and a stance that emphasized the tragic course of the nation's history and highlighted its historical and contemporary losses and grievances. Referring to a memorial tablet placed in the wall of the fortress at Aiud (Nagyenyed), near the site of an important battle of the Revolutionary period, the mainstream conservative newspaper *Magyar Nemzet* reminded its readers that "beneath [the tablet] are buried those 800 Hungarians, whom Axente Sever, one of the leaders of the enemy Romanian irregular troops, had massacred on 8 January 1849." The paper also lamented the ruined or truncated condition of Hungarian memorials in the neighboring states, decrying the disappearance of the memorial tablet commemorating Pál Vasvári and the 200 Hungarians that "died with him a heroic death."³⁴ In a similar manner, some well-known performers from Hungary, appearing at transborder commemorative ceremonies (the singers József Dinnyés in Cluj and Lajos Illés in Oradea) articulated the suffering of transborder Hungarians, and their "heroism" in the face of national oppression, in highly emotional terms.³⁵

A similarly pathos-laden and particularizing stance was adopted later in the sesquicentennial period by the conservative and nationally oriented Fidesz-MPP government, headed by Viktor Orbán, that replaced the socialist-liberal government in July 1998. As noted above, Orbán had already emphasized Hungary's succession of national tragedies in his 15 March sesquicentennial speech, when he was still in opposition. A year and a half later, as Prime Minister, he presided over the sesquicentennial commemoration of another key event from 1848–1849: the execution by the Austrian authorities, in the town of Arad, on 6 October 1849, after the final defeat of the Hungarian forces, of thirteen leading Hungarian generals, known to Hungarians as the "Arad martyrs" or simply as the "Arad 13." The commemoration was intertwined with a conflict about a late nineteenth-century statue commemorating the generals, which had been removed in 1925 by the Romanian government, kept in a warehouse for three decades, and moved to the Arad fortress in the 1950s. Now, on the occasion of the sesquicentennial, it was to be placed, along with other monuments, in a new Memorial Park dedicated to Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation. But this plan became embroiled in a sharp dispute, with opinion polarizing along national lines; Romanian nationalists objected that the generals were "the murderers of many Romanians." As a result, the statue was erected instead in the courtyard of a Franciscan monastery, and Orbán spoke at the 5 October ceremony of the statue's "liberation."³⁶ At this event, and at the commemoration of the executions the following day, higher-ranking Hungarian officials were present, and in larger numbers, than at any of the 15 March transborder commemorations. This clearly marked a greater, and more particularizing, emphasis on the trans-

³⁴ *Magyar Nemzet*, 14 Mar. 1998. ³⁵ Field notes.

³⁶ Esti Híradó [Evening News]. *Magyar Televízió* 1, 5 Oct. 1999.

border dimension of the sesquicentennial than that of the Socialist-Liberal government. While the previous government had sought to avoid conflict in framing the commemoration, the Orbán government adopted a more combative stance. To this nationally minded government—and to nationally minded Romanian critics of the event—the 6 October sesquicentennial could be seen to be commemorating a double tragedy: not only the executions of 1849, but also the loss of massive Hungarian territory in 1920. This duality added to the pathos, particularizing frame, and conflictual nature of the commemorative celebration.³⁷

The Transborder Dimension: The View from Slovakia and Romania

“The real Hungarian celebration,” observed one participant in the 15 March commemoration in Budapest, “is across the border.” According to this view, widely shared on both sides of the border, certain national values, symbols, idioms, and practices find their most authentic and resonant expression in Hungarian minority communities. And indeed, on this occasion, specifically *national* values, symbols, idioms, and practices were articulated by minority Hungarians in Slovakia and especially Romania with greater pathos, power, and political weight than in Hungary.³⁸

In Romania, commemorations were undertaken in an elevated, grave, and sacred mood, with little of the carnivalesque, “profane” holiday spirit observed in Hungary, and equally little of the detached, critical, reflexive attitude towards the past that characterized the commemorative discourse of state and government officials and the liberal press there.³⁹ The narrative frame was particularizing rather than generalizing, and emphasized the specifically national character of the events. Thus minority leaders spoke not so much of revolution or of a process of modernization or *polgárosodás*, but rather in the first place of a struggle for freedom (*szabadságharc*). And this was not the “multiethnic struggle for freedom” to which President Göncz of Hungary had referred, but rather the *Hungarian* struggle for freedom or—as the term *szabadságharc* is better translated in certain contexts—fight for independence. In this way, the commemorations linked past and present as parts of the same unfinished story. Past and present were of course linked in Hungary as well. But there the prevailing unfinished story was one of modernization, Westernization, and *polgárosodás*, teleologically framed to culminate in the integration of Hungary into the Euro-

³⁷ *Népszabadság*, 7 Oct. 1999.

³⁸ Commemorations were organized by the major Hungarian umbrella-organizations-cum-political-parties in Romania and Slovakia. In Transylvania, the main “Hungarian” churches (Catholic and Calvinist) played an important role as well (during much of the Ceaușescu era, when Hungarians could not openly celebrate 15 March, these churches had provided the key institutional space for national commemorations). In areas where Hungarians comprised local majorities—in the Szekler region of Transylvania and parts of southern Slovakia—local authorities were also involved, and sought to give the commemorations a local as well as a national character.

³⁹ Elements of the carnivalesque were found only in the overwhelmingly Hungarian Szekler region of Transylvania.

pean Union. In Romania, by contrast, it was in the first instance a story of the unfinished, pathos-laden struggle against national oppression. In Hungary, commentators emphasized that the “revolution is over,” and that what required commemoration was not so much the revolution as such as the long-term political, social, and economic processes in which the 1848 revolutions marked a key moment, not only in Hungary but throughout Europe. In Transylvania, by contrast, Hungarian commentators emphasized that the Hungarian struggle for freedom or fight for independence was *not* over, but continued in the form of the Hungarian minority’s ongoing struggle for rights and recognition.

Thus at Miercurea-Ciuc (Csíkszereda)—where the ‘central’ celebration for Transylvanian Hungarians was organized—the president of the DAHR linked the 1848 revolutionary idea of freedom to the struggle of contemporary Hungarians in Romania for their rights, and more specifically, as another speaker emphasized, to the contemporary Hungarian demand for communal [*közösségi*] and territorial autonomy. The main Transylvanian Hungarian weekly summarized in twelve points—evoking the famous twelve points formulated by the Budapest revolutionaries on 15 March 1848—the “demands of the Hungarian national community of Romania.” These included an autonomous Hungarian language education system, the reestablishment of an autonomous Hungarian language university, the use of bilingual signs and inscriptions, the use of minority language in public administration, and the right to use and display Hungarian national symbols.⁴⁰ The ironic reversal involved in casting the events of 1848 as precedents for contemporary Hungarian struggles for minority rights—when, in 1848, it had in fact been Romanians and Slovaks who were struggling for minority rights, indeed specifically for communal and territorial autonomy, against the incipient Hungarian “nationalizing state”—seems to have been lost on the Hungarian leaders.

Where nationalist conflict dominated local politics in 1998, debates about 1848 were intense and embittered. Commemorative practices and historical discussions in such settings were burdened by tensions and passions that deeply divided elites, even when they did not much exercise the wider public. This was most noticeable in Transylvania, particularly in its largest city and cultural capital, Cluj. There, political conflicts since the fall of Ceaușescu have focused on struggles over historical symbols (Feischmidt 2001), and tensions concerning 15 March were heightened by an attempt by the town’s notorious Romanian nationalist mayor to forbid the Hungarian commemorative celebrations.⁴¹ Hungarians defied the ban on celebrating this “most important holiday of united Hungariandom (*összmagyarság*),”⁴² and the mayor’s stance simply reinforced

⁴⁰ *Erdelyi Napló*, 18 Mar. 1998.

⁴¹ Although state-level politics, in the spring of 1998, were more nationalist in Slovakia under Vladimír Mečiar than in Romania, local politics were more nationalist in Cluj than in any Slovak city.

⁴² Statement by the Cluj county DAHR, *Szabadság*, 10 Mar. 2001.

the prevailing particularizing, embattled narrative frame. The mayor's office then organized a noisy counter-demonstration, joined by perhaps 200 people, including the mayor himself, dressed in national colors, to coincide with and protest against the Hungarian commemorative procession. It was also in Cluj that still-unresolved questions about the armed conflicts of 1848–1849 were discussed in highly politicized fashion: the mayor and his associates charged the Hungarian revolution with 40,000 Romanian victims, while the local DAHR leaders branded Romanian national hero Avram Iancu the “initiator of massacres.”⁴³

Elsewhere in Transylvania, Hungarian commemorative speeches did not dwell on the violent conflicts of 150 years earlier. Indeed, they sought to avoid discussing the events themselves, preferring the rhetorical high ground of abstract references to the “struggle for freedom.” But no such scruples prevailed in the Hungarian-language media in Romania. Several Hungarian daily and weekly papers published accounts of events of 1848–1849 in Transylvania, including violent clashes, that had previously been passed over in silence.⁴⁴ These accounts portrayed Magyar heroes in a struggle against armed Romanian rebels, and held the latter responsible for the bloodshed.⁴⁵ In general, the reports suggested, it was still not possible to transcend the enmities of that period: “the tragic mistakes and cruel events of the time inflicted such deep and painful wounds in the souls and consciousness of the peoples of the region that . . . time has not yet been able to heal them.”⁴⁶

In Slovakia, too, connections between 1848 and present political aims were drawn.⁴⁷ László Dobos, Vice-Chair of the World Federation of Hungarians, and himself from Slovakia, remarked in Pered (site of an 1849 battle) on 15 March, that the “struggle for liberation [of 1848–1849] finds its continuation in today's struggle of Slovakia's Hungarians for administrative autonomy, for the free use of our language, for integration of all Hungarians in Hungary and abroad, for the united Hungarian nation, and for social justice.”⁴⁸ In the context of approach-

⁴³ *Szabadság*, 18 Mar. 1998.

⁴⁴ *Brassói Lapok*, 13–19 Mar. 1998; *Hargita Népe*, 14 Mar. 1998; *Szabadság*, 14 Mar. 1998.

⁴⁵ Among key Romanian figures of 1848–1849, only Nicolae Bălcescu, a leader of the Wallachian revolution of 1848 who sought reconciliation in the spring of 1849 between Hungarians and Romanians, was consistently portrayed in a favorable light in the Hungarian press.

⁴⁶ *Szabadság*, 14 Mar. 1998.

⁴⁷ The linking of past and present drew additional power by embracing other events as well. Just as in Budapest the commemoration of 1848 in 1989 gained powerful resonance from its highly topical and timely references to the crushed uprising of 1956, subsuming both 1848 and 1956 under the rubric of struggle for liberation (*szabadságharc*), and linking both to the struggle for liberation then going on against the remnants of communist rule, so in Slovakia in 1998 commemorations of 1848 drew at the same time on memories of 1948, when large numbers of Hungarians were expelled from Slovakia (as part of an official “exchange of populations” in which smaller numbers of ethnic Slovaks from Hungary were resettled in Slovakia). In Hetény (Slovak Chotín), for example, expellees from 1948, now living in Hungary, were invited to participate in the 15 March commemorations, at which the heads of the ethnic Hungarian parties gave speeches (field notes).

⁴⁸ *Uj Szó*, 16 Mar. 1998.

ing parliamentary elections, in which the three Hungarian parties had agreed to cooperate and run on a common platform, minority leaders placed great rhetorical emphasis on “Hungarian unity.” Through this stress on unity they sought historical legitimacy for contemporary electoral strategies, and they sought to represent it concretely by traveling on 15 March to the larger or more symbolically important southern Slovakian localities, giving speeches at every stop.⁴⁹ To a greater extent than in Transylvania, however, these invocations of 1848 to legitimize present political aims and claims were complemented by more detached and critical historical reflections like those we observed in Hungary.⁵⁰

Rites of Affiliation and Separation

The transborder 15 March commemorations can be analyzed not only in terms of their mood and narrative framing, but also as a form of symbolic action, as rituals of affiliation and separation. The commemorations effected a symbolic reconfiguration of social relations, symbolically erasing one border and drawing another in its place. They linked minority Hungarians across the boundaries of state and citizenship to their co-ethnics in Hungary and, at the same time, marked them off from their Romanian and Slovak neighbors and fellow citizens.

This symbolic drama of affiliation and separation occurred through the medium of what Pierre Nora has called *lieux de mémoire*,⁵¹ the symbols “in which collective heritage . . . is crystallized” (1996, p. xv). These include historically significant events, illustrious dates, and symbolically charged objects such as statues, commemorative plaques, flags, and anthems. Although such objects are always polysemic and subject to reinterpretation as circumstances change, they symbolize and embody a sense of collective continuity.⁵²

But whose sense of continuity? And what collectivity? In Romania and Slovakia, the *lieux de mémoire* are strikingly ethnicized; collective memory—

⁴⁹ *Uj Szó*, 16 Mar. 1998.

⁵⁰ In the Hungarian language youth monthly, for example, and in a periodical directed at Hungarian teachers, there were articles on 1848 that emphasized the modernization of the country and the ‘catching up’ to Europe (*Ifi*, Mar. 1998) and that critically analyzed the nationalist endeavors of Hungary in 1848 (*Katedra*, Mar. 1998). And a local leader of the Hungarian Civic Party—the most liberal of the three Hungarian parties in Slovakia—reflected critically on the ethnic exclusivity of national traditions: “In the present political atmosphere, this is only our own [Hungarian] holiday, but the time will come when we—Slovaks and Hungarians—will celebrate together. For the time being, Slovak historians do not consider it [1848] their own holiday . . . Unfortunately, in central Europe, holidays have been expropriated. . . . The significance of [18]48 is that it marked the beginning of *polgárosodás*, and that [18]67 arrived, the Compromise, with which we gained much more than with the Revolution, which was bloody, and resulted in casualties” (interview, 15 Mar. 1998).

⁵¹ *Lieux de mémoire* can be translated as “places of remembrance” or simply “memory sites,” although the term refers not only to physical places or material objects but to any objects around which collective memory and collective representations crystallize.

⁵² Nora argues that given the eradication of organic *milieux de mémoire*, as repositories of a self-conscious, undifferentiated, living collective memory, and their replacement by specialized, differentiated *lieux de mémoire*, this sense of continuity is only a relative and residual one (Nora 1996:1–2).

least in connection with 1848—has been prevailingly, indeed almost exclusively defined in ethnonational terms. Statues commemorating 1848, for example, were torn down or moved in Transylvania and southern Slovakia after each change of regime: after 1918 those of Kossuth, Bem, Petőfi, and Klapka; after 1938–1940 (when Hungary temporarily regained control of southern Slovakia and northern Transylvania) those of Lúdvít Štúr, Avram Iancu, and Alexander Papiu Ilarian.⁵³ There are few “civic” memory sites connected with 1848 that embody memories common to all Romanian or Slovak citizens, independently of ethnicity. Instead, the memory sites we consider in this section are understood—not only by ethnic Hungarians but by Romanians and Slovaks as well—to “belong” to Hungarians, and they have no meaning, or negative meaning, in the Romanian and Slovak public spheres; while the memory sites we consider in the next section are understood to belong to Romanians, and to have no meaning or negative meaning for Hungarians.

Although some liberal, Westernizing rhetoric in Hungary sought to frame the sesquicentennial in inclusive, “civic” terms, this was not even attempted in Slovakia or Romania.⁵⁴ Representations and commemorations of the past remained, on this occasion, strongly ethnicized. Romanians questioned in the streets of Oradea on 15 March knew only that “the Hungarians are celebrating.” It was also in Oradea that a Hungarian man, questioned about the possibility of a common celebration, replied that “we don’t bother one another, but we don’t mix much either.”⁵⁵

In Slovakia and Romania, the 15 March celebrations functioned as a ritual occasion for the manifestation of ethnic solidarity. Commemorations were organized around particular Hungarian sites of memory, especially statues, memorial plaques, and tombs. Everywhere the central commemorative event involved laying a wreath at such a site. Where multiple memory sites existed, as for example in Cluj and Oradea, the commemoration took the form of a procession from one to the other. By thus taking symbolic possession of key sites of remembrance, minority Hungarians marked space and time as “their own.”⁵⁶

⁵³ On the vicissitudes of nationally marked statues in East Central Europe, see King 2001; Feischmidt 2001. For a related work on the “political lives of dead bodies,” attending mainly to nationally marked rituals of reburial, see Verdery 1999.

⁵⁴ The one exception—the 1999 attempt, discussed above, to establish a memorial park dedicated to Romanian-Hungarian reconciliation—foundered on Romanian nationalist opposition to including a late nineteenth-century statue commemorating Hungarian generals executed in 1849.

⁵⁵ Field notes. In everyday life, to be sure, there is a great deal of mixing. Our point about the ethnicization of the transborder sesquicentennial commemorations should not be taken to imply that “the Hungarians” and “the Romanians” (or “the Slovaks”) confront one another as bounded and unitary groups in the ordinary course of social life. For a critique of such “groupist” analyses, see Brubaker (2002).

⁵⁶ Although such open and organized public appropriation of memory sites in Romania and Slovakia was impossible before 1990, local Hungarians knew of the sites and, through informal commemorative practices and what Zerubavel (1996) calls mnemonic socialization, kept them alive in collective memory. The best example of these unofficial commemoration practices concerns the site of Nyergestertő in the Szekler region, where 200 Szeklers died in 1849 in a last-ditch struggle

They designated the territory to which the Hungarian nation—understood as a cultural and historical entity transcending present-day state frontiers—symbolically laid claim. “In celebrating the struggle for liberation and the revolution,” said Dobos in the speech quoted above, “we are re-appropriating the sites of our history [and thereby] reclaiming our history.”

In Romania, 15 March was a particularly powerful symbol of such transborder ethnic solidarity. For here the so-called “Twelfth Point”—the last of the twelve demands formulated by Budapest revolutionaries on 15 March 1848, calling for the union of Transylvania with Hungary—was powerfully, although tacitly, resonant. In 1998, this was of course an embarrassment to the Westernizing narrative frame that prevailed in Hungary. To Romanian nationalists, it was an outrage (and a sufficient reason for regarding Transylvanian Hungarians’ commemorations of 15 March as illegitimate, a sign of latent if not manifest irredentism). To Transylvanian Hungarians, however, the Twelfth Point—and by extension 15 March—evoked historic Hungary during its golden age, the half-century after 1867, when the revolutionary Twelfth Point had become reality. By publicly enacting and displaying the unity of *magyarság* (Hungariandom), and taking symbolic possession of memory sites considered sacred to national history, the 15 March commemorations did not simply discursively lament the tragedy of Trianon that ended this golden age and ordained the dismemberment of the country, but symbolically canceled that tragedy and restored the links with fellow Hungarians that Trianon had severed. At the commemoration in the overwhelmingly Hungarian town of Miercurea Ciuc (Csikszereda), a participant remarked that “1848 is the Szeklers’ last connection to Greater Hungary.”⁵⁷ The Catholic priest celebrating the ecumenical memorial religious service in Cluj characterized 15 March as the “most national [*legnemzetibb*] holiday of Hungariandom.”⁵⁸ This understanding of the special position of 15 March is widely resonant among transborder, and especially Transylvanian, Hungarians, for the commemorations on this date embody and enact the unity of Hungariandom—a unity otherwise, of course, notable only for its absence. The Twelfth Point had no bearing on Slovakia, the present-day territory of which was, in 1848, an integral part of Hungary, and would remain

against the overwhelmingly superior Russian forces that had been called in by Vienna to crush the Hungarians. On the site of the mass grave are thousands of small crosses, most of them fashioned out of branches from trees in the surrounding forest. Before 1989, it was customary for visiting Hungarians from the region to set up another small cross or—on All Souls’ Day, 1 November—to light candles at the grave. After 1990, when open commemoration became possible, the commemoration at Nyergesterő became more organized and shifted to 15 March, involving Hungarian politicians and public officials, yet still in an unofficial, purely Hungarian setting, allowing the commemoration to proceed entirely in Hungarian and among Hungarians, without the obligatory gestures towards the wider Romanian public sphere—Romanian flags, speeches in Romanian as well as Hungarian—that characterized official commemorations.

⁵⁷ Szeklers are an originally distinct people, long assimilated to Hungarians, living as a compactly settled majority in the mountainous eastern part of Transylvania.

⁵⁸ Quoted in *Szabadság*, 24 Mar. 1998.

so until it was awarded by the Treaty of Trianon to the new state of Czechoslovakia. (In part for this reason, the legitimacy of Hungarian commemorations of 15 March was not contested in Slovakia as it was in Romania.) But in Slovakia, too, 15 March commemorations symbolized the historical unity of the Hungarian nation, regardless of political frontiers. And as in Romania, commemorations in Slovakia too signified a claim that Hungarian minorities “belonged,” in an indefinite yet powerful sense, to Hungary. The presence of state and government representatives from Hungary at 15 March celebrations in Slovakia and Romania in the 1990s was particularly important in this connection, for it ratified this claim to “belonging.” This represented a crucial symbolic break with the state socialist period, when the symbolic “membership” claims of transborder Hungarians were not publicly acknowledged by Hungarian officials.

ROMANIA: WHOSE 1848? WHICH REVOLUTION?

As in Hungary, so too in Romania 1848 has taken on different meanings in different political contexts. And in Romania as well, two broadly different interpretations of 1848 can be identified in 1998: one particularizing and pathos-laden, the other more universalizing and dispassionate. The former, focusing on the conflict in Transylvania, sees 1848 as a key moment in a narrative of national oppression and liberation; the latter, focusing on the revolutionary upheavals in Wallachia, sees 1848 as a key moment when Romania ‘joined Europe’ by participating in European-wide democratic revolutions.

Here a brief historical digression is necessary. For the differing commemorative possibilities afforded by the revolutions in Transylvania and Wallachia in 1998 did not simply reflect recent “invented traditions,” but emerged as differentiated commemorative traditions over a much longer time span. They are grounded, moreover, in the sharply differing course of events in 1848–1849 in the two settings; and these, in turn, reflected very different political and ethno-demographic situations.

Transylvania belonged to the lands of the Crown of St. Stephen that had comprised the historic Kingdom of Hungary, but it had long been administratively separate from Hungary proper. Although Romanians were in the majority, political life was monopolized by the Magyar, Saxon, and Szekler “nations”—not nations in the modern sense but legally and politically privileged estates or orders. Landowners were Hungarian, and towns were dominated by Hungarians and Germans. The Romanian majority was overwhelmingly comprised of peasants, but a nationally conscious secular intellectual elite had recently emerged alongside the traditional clerical elite and had begun to articulate nationalist goals.

The status of Transylvania was fiercely contested in 1848. Hungarian revolutionaries demanded that Transylvania become an integral part of Hungary. Attracted by the liberal ideals of the Hungarian revolution, many Transylvanian

Romanian intellectuals, led by philologist and editor Timotei Cipariu and journalist George Barițiu, were initially willing to accept the union with Hungary. They hoped that the new liberal and democratic regime would benefit Transylvanian Romanians and further their economic, social, and national development. But disenchantment with intransigent Hungarian nationalism—particularly with the Hungarian refusal to recognize Romanian nationhood—soon generated opposition to the Union. This was led by philosopher Simion Bărnuțiu, who argued that Union would gravely threaten Romanian nationhood. On this view, which came to prevail among Romanian intellectuals as tensions with Hungarians intensified, the Romanians in Transylvania and other parts of the Habsburg empire (principally the Banat and Bukovina) should be united into a single province as part of a far-reaching ethnofederal reorganization of the Empire (Hitchins 1969:181ff.; 1996:219, 249ff.).

The political and ethnodemographic situation in Wallachia was quite different. Wallachia (with its sister province Moldavia) belonged formally to the Ottoman Empire but was in fact a Russian protectorate. Here the landowning boyar elite, Orthodox clergy, peasants, and even the incipient urban middle classes were predominantly Romanian. The Romanians, led by liberal intellectuals, made “their own” revolution in June 1848, which lasted three months before being crushed by Ottoman troops at Russian behest.

In Transylvania, where Romanian peasants were subordinated to Hungarian landowners, social and ethnonational issues were intimately intertwined.⁵⁹ In Wallachia, where both landlords and peasants were predominantly Romanian, social conflicts were not coded or framed in ethnic or national terms. In Wallachia too, to be sure, national themes were centrally important in 1848. But they focused on external independence rather than internal ethnic conflict. And independence here meant independence *vis-à-vis* the Ottoman Empire and Russia, not *vis-à-vis* Hungary. Hungary and Hungarians were seen not as internal ethnic enemies but as potential external political allies in the struggle against the great reactionary powers—hence the tragic quality, from the Wallachian revolutionary perspective, of the conflict between Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania (Hitchins 1996:265).

A strongly nationalist interpretive line and commemorative tradition has characterized the historiography of the 1848 revolution in Transylvania from its inception. The note sounded by Alexandru Papiu-Ilarian, a leading participant in the events, in his contemporary history—“only nationality can save the Romanians”—set the tone for subsequent accounts. The popular assemblies in Blaj on 30 April and from 13–15 May have been interpreted in teleological perspective as moments at which the Romanian nation awoke to consciousness of itself and embarked on its historical mission of achieving national unity and independence. Like nationalist historiography elsewhere, this attributes greater

⁵⁹ On the complexity of this intertwining on the local level, see Verdery 1983.

national self-consciousness and unity to Romanians than they in fact possessed in 1848.⁶⁰ The events of 1848–1849 did not so much express a pre-existing national consciousness as stimulate the subsequent development of one, with military confrontations and atrocities in particular providing abundant grist for nationalist mills and a resonant popular basis for a sense of shared nationhood.

Historiography and popular memory have been strongly ethnicized, with a powerful anti-Hungarian current. Popular memory and literature have commemorated not the intellectual and political leaders among the Romanians but the romantic rebel Avram Iancu, leader of the Romanian guerrilla troops who successfully held out against the Hungarians in the mountains southwest of Cluj. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the story of the “king of the mountains” (*craiu munților*), fighting the Hungarians, and fighting also (in more literary versions) for social justice and national unity, has been preserved in songs, legends, and folk tales. As the chief symbol of Transylvanian Romanian nationalism, Iancu took his place in the pantheon of the united Romanian nation-state after the First World War.

The communist regime initially ignored Avram Iancu and the Transylvanian national struggle in favor of the Wallachian revolution, which was better suited for the internationalist revolutionary pedigree it sought to construct. From the mid-1970s on, however, the newly nationalist political line reintroduced Iancu into the pantheon of national heroes. Monumental statues of him were erected in many cities, especially in Transylvania.

With the fall of the communist regime, the Avram Iancu cult did not fade away, but gained new momentum, especially in Transylvania. Never before had the figure of Avram Iancu been as important for Romanian politics as during the 1990s, when he was central to symbolic struggles between Romanians and Hungarians (Boia 1997:278). An Avram Iancu Association was founded in Cluj, and he became the main symbol of the Transylvanian Romanian nationalist parties. On their initiative, an enormous statue, with Avram Iancu set high on a column, sword in hand, was erected in a central square in Cluj. In 1998, these parties and affiliated organizations made Avram Iancu central to the sesquicentennial commemorations. But the official state celebrations did not give special weight to Avram Iancu. His mythos is largely restricted to Transylvania, and many in the Bucharest-centered political class are indifferent to him. Moreover, the government, which had been cultivating good relations with Hungary, and in which the Hungarian party was a coalition partner, no doubt wished to avoid identifying the official commemorations with the anti-Hungarian sentiment that had come to be associated with Avram Iancu.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Transylvania Romanians were represented not only in the unofficial Romanian troops that fought the Hungarians but also in the Hungarian army itself; similarly, some Hungarian peasants participated in the great Romanian national assembly at Blaj.

⁶¹ Ironically, Iancu was in fact a more complex figure than the fanatical ultra-nationalist and military hero/villain he is made out to be by Romanian and Hungarian nationalists alike. Not only

A very different way of construing the link between past and present was afforded by the June democratic revolution in Wallachia. Its leaders included young boyars who had been educated in Western Europe, mainly in France. Their ideal was an independent liberal state on the Western model, and they rejected everything that Wallachia stood for at the time: economic and social backwardness, Ottoman and Russian dependency, and cultural “orientalism.” The symbolic high points of the revolution were the proclamation read to a popular assembly in Islaz on 21 June, the triumph of the revolution in Bucharest on 23 June, and the festive celebration at the “Fields of Liberty” on the outskirts of Bucharest a few days later, where the crowd acclaimed the Islaz program. The program embodied the classic liberal demands that came to the fore in 1848 throughout Europe: civil equality, enlarged franchise, equitable taxation, freedom of press and assembly, abolition of titles of nobility, and an end to the hated labor services (*clacă*) owed by peasants to their landlords. It also embodied a demand for national autonomy under Ottoman suzerainty (Hitchins 1996:240 ff.).

The revolutionary regime lasted only three months, but the liberal ideals of 1848 survived in the discourse of the Romanian intellectual and political elite. Leading political figures of the United Principalities (the union of Moldavia and Wallachia that came into being in 1861) were “Forty-eighters” (*pașoptiști*), as were major figures of the liberal party throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. During the interwar period, the liberal ideals of 1848 were overshadowed by the dominant nationalist political mythology. Under communism, the 1848 revolution in Wallachia was initially given pride of place among national traditions. During the early cosmopolitan and class-struggle-oriented period of communism, Nicolae Bălcescu was celebrated as the leader of the radical faction of revolutionaries, an advocate of universal suffrage, equality for Gypsies and Jews, reconciliation with leaders of the Hungarian revolution, and radical agrarian reform. In the 1950s, Bălcescu figured as the protagonist of a number of novels and dramas; his portrait graced the hundred lei banknote; and schools were named after him in all Romanian cities and towns. Yet by the 1980s, and especially after 1989, Bălcescu was almost completely forgotten, overshadowed, in Transylvania, by Avram Iancu.

In the 1970s, the revolution, along with many other significant events from Romanian history, was integrated into and subordinated to the mythology of na-

had he initially favored Union with Hungary (Hitchins 1969:189) but, in the closing days of the war in 1849, he responded favorably to the conciliatory gesture that the Hungarians, facing imminent defeat, had finally made to Romanian national claims. Writing to Kossuth, Iancu expressed his “keen regret that present circumstances do not permit us to negotiate on re-establishment of peace with our Hungarian brothers. Our position is far too critical. Hungarian forces are far removed and Russian armies are advancing; moreover, it would require much time and effort to reawaken in our people a friendly feeling toward you. However, . . . to prove the genuineness of our sentiments for the Hungarian nation we have decided to remain neutral toward Hungarian troops. We shall not attack them unless they attack us” (quoted in Hitchins 1969:273).

tional unity. The revolutions in Transylvania, Wallachia, and Moldavia, it was argued, were parts of a single movement seeking unification into one nation-state. Yet as critical Romanian historians have argued, this obscures the different aims and understandings of Romanian revolutionaries in the different settings. In Transylvania, national concerns—the struggle for national recognition and autonomy—were indeed paramount, though it is anachronistic to see the Transylvanian national movement as a struggle for the establishment of an independent nation-state (Boia 1997). In Wallachia, by contrast, projects of social, economic, and political modernization were more significant than national questions. These, in turn, were not only less salient than but qualitatively different from national concerns in Transylvania, focusing on external independence *vis-à-vis* Russian and Ottoman influences rather than, as in Transylvania, on internal ethnonational conflict with Hungarians.

The approaching sesquicentennial prompted a reconsideration of 1848 and its contemporary significance. In January 1998, the leading liberal journal of opinion, the Bucharest weekly called *22* published an article by historian Adrian Niculescu emphasizing the important role of the 1848 revolution and the preceding democratic movement in the political and ideological formation of the Romanian nation. Today, Niculescu argued, it was time to return to 1848, “our sole successful model of Westernization and European integration.”⁶² He went on to propose the creation of a new national holiday, “Tricolor Day,” on 24 February, commemorating the date in 1848 on which the Romanian national flag was displayed for the first time, at the Paris Hôtel de Ville, the headquarters of the revolution in France. This plan would have placed the 1848 commemoration firmly in a universal, European, Westernizing context, and would have emphasized democracy and civil society rather than national liberation. Niculescu’s programmatic article proposed further that new memorials, statues, and plaques be dedicated throughout the year, so as to strengthen, concretize, and naturalize this new historical tradition. Finally, the article specified the dates and events from 1848 that ought to be commemorated, highlighting the key events of the Wallachian revolution of June, and emphasizing that this was the only modern liberal democratic revolution in Romanian history. Conspicuously downplayed in this proposal, on the other hand, were the events of the Transylvanian revolution, which, with their strong nationalist overtones, fit much less well into this universalizing commemorative strategy.

Taking its cue from this article, the government duly proclaimed 24 February “Tricolor Day” a few weeks later, and called on Romanians to celebrate the

⁶² Adrian Niculescu, “Revoluția Română de la 1848–150 de ani,” *22*, 1–7 Jan. 1998. Other Romanian intellectuals emphasizing the importance of the Wallachian revolution as a useful contemporary model included literary theorist Adrian Marino, historian Sorin Antohi, and liberal political thinker Stelian Tănase. For Marino and Antohi, the Wallachian revolution is an important model because it “translated” universal ideals into an appropriate and resonant local idiom, transforming Europe “into a local reality” (Marino and Antohi 2001:158).

events of 1848. These pronouncements, however, were met with general indifference, and with the exception of a few radio and television broadcasts, the “holiday” passed uncelebrated and unnoticed. After the failure of this feeble attempt to commemorate the democratic revolution of Wallachia, and a discussion in the press in March about whether the Transylvanian or Wallachian revolution was more worthy of commemoration,⁶³ the government abruptly shifted course and designated 15 May in the Transylvanian town of Blaj as the site of the major official sesquicentennial commemoration.

It is possible that a more energetic government effort to commemorate the Wallachian revolution could have been more successful. However, it is also possible that even a more energetic effort would have failed, given the lack of any strong commemorative tradition emphasizing the Wallachian revolution except for the self-discrediting tradition sponsored by the communist regime. New commemorative traditions, to be sure, can indeed emerge (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and energetic governmental sponsorship has often been central to their emergence. But state sponsorship and cultural entrepreneurship are not sufficient; resonance, and time, are required as well.⁶⁴ The weakness of democratic traditions in twentieth-century Romania, and their “contamination” by communist efforts to appropriate them, constrained Romanian possibilities for commemorating the Wallachian democratic revolution in 1998 and limited in advance the resonance of any such commemorative efforts.

The shift from Wallachia to Transylvania represented a shift from a universalizing to a more particularizing commemorative strategy, and from an emphasis on a liberal democratic revolution on the Western model to one on the Romanian national movement. Blaj is one of the most important Romanian national *lieux de mémoire* in Transylvania; it was the site, in 1848, of the popular assembly that demanded the recognition of Romanians as a nation in 1848. According to nationalist tradition, it was also where the slogan demanding unification with Moldavia and Wallachia was first formulated: “We want to unite with the motherland” (*Vrem să ne unim cu țara!*). The commemoration was given some prominence by the participation of the highest state and church (Orthodox and Greek Catholic) leaders. President Constantinescu emphasized in his speech both the national and the civic-democratic aspects of 1848. The speech was followed by a folk music show which was designed, without any special celebratory staging, to display the cultural unity and the traditions of the Transylvanian Romanians. A light rain fell throughout the day, the crowd was modest in size, and the mood was restrained.

⁶³ 22, 1–7 Jan. 1998, and 24 Feb.–2 Mar. 1998.

⁶⁴ Hobsbawm himself concedes the importance of resonance: “conscious invention succeeded mainly in proportion to its success in broadcasting on a wavelength to which the public was ready to tune in. Official new public holidays, ceremonies, heroes or symbols . . . might still fail to mobilize the [citizenry] if they lacked genuine popular resonance” (1983:263–64). The importance of resonance—and the corresponding limits to manipulation, invention, construction, and so on—has been stressed by Smith (1986, 1991:356–59, 1998:129–31).

Much more significant in the Transylvanian Romanian media than the Blaj event were reports and commentary on the 15 March celebrations of Transylvanian Hungarians. Judging simply from the number and length of articles, the media were more concerned to react to Hungarian commemorations than to help construct a distinctively Romanian commemorative tradition. Already in the week or two preceding 15 March, some Transylvanian Romanian newspapers began to warn of the dangers of the commemoration, going so far as to invoke the specter of Kosovo.⁶⁵ The Hungarian celebrations were criticized, and had been criticized throughout the 1990s, as commemorations of the national holiday of another country. Reports highlighted the use of Hungarian flags in the commemorative celebrations, seeing these as evidence of revisionist intentions and lack of loyalty to the Romanian state.⁶⁶ DAHR leaders were criticized for inciting interethnic conflicts by voicing radical political demands in commemorative speeches.⁶⁷ The Revolution in Transylvania, it was emphasized, had cost tens of thousands of Romanian lives;⁶⁸ 15 March therefore evoked in Transylvanian Romanians not the memory of triumphant civic ideals but that of national oppression and ethnic violence.⁶⁹ In one representative statement: “. . . the implementation of the Twelfth Point—the union of Transylvania with Hungary—unleashed a wave of anti-Romanian terror. It was accompanied by the destruction of whole villages and the martyrdom of tens of thousands of Romanians.”⁷⁰ Accounts such as these appeared mainly in the local newspapers of Transylvanian cities.⁷¹ Similar accounts were given by nationalist politicians. For Transylvanian Romanians, the memory of 1848 cannot be detached from the union with Hungary, and this sustains the collective fear of once again losing Transylvania.

SLOVAKIA: THE UNCELEBRATED SESQUICENTENNIAL

As in Hungary and Romania, 1848 has been interpreted in two broadly differing ways in Slovakia: as an episode in a nationalist narrative leading from national oppression through national awakening to national independence; and as an episode in a general European story of progress, modernization, and de-

⁶⁵ *Adevărul de Cluj*, 5, 9, and 10 Mar. 1998; and, for the reference to Kosovo, 12 Mar. 1998.

⁶⁶ *Știrea*, 16 and 18 Mar. 1998.

⁶⁷ *Știrea*, 16 Mar. 1998; *Adevărul de Cluj*, 16 Mar. 1998; *Jurnalul Național*, 16 Mar. 1998; *Adevărul*, 16 Mar. 1998.

⁶⁸ The actual numbers given varied between 40,000 and 200,000.

⁶⁹ Declaration of the Party for Romanian National Unity in *Știrea*, 13 Mar. 1998.

⁷⁰ *Cuvântul liber*, 13–15 Mar. 1998.

⁷¹ The statewide Romanian press was less centrally concerned with the Hungarians' 15 March commemorations. The more nationalist papers criticized the use of Hungarian national symbols but discussed historical conflicts with much less intensity, and without the sense, characteristic of Transylvanian discussions, that the burdens of past conflicts continue to weigh heavily on the present. The pro-government *Curierul Național* emphasized the peaceful quality of the commemorations and reported on President Constantinescu's letter to his Hungarian counterpart, emphasizing the possibility of transcending the conflicts of the past (*Curierul Național*, 16 Mar. 1998).

mocratization. In 1998, however, 1848 was conspicuous mainly for its absence: outside Hungarian minority circles, the sesquicentennial was largely invisible.

What accounts for this comparative invisibility, and for the feebleness and lack of resonance of attempts to harness the past for present political purposes in 1998? On a purely constructivist understanding, one that emphasizes memory entrepreneurship and the manipulation of the past for present purposes, this is a puzzle. Since it became independent in 1993, Slovakia had been ruled (with one brief interruption) by the nationalist party of Vladimir Meciar, for whom nationalism had proved a successful electoral strategy. In part because of Meciar's nationalist stance, however, Slovakia had slipped off the "fast track" towards European integration. In this political conjuncture, the sesquicentennial would seem to have afforded both nationalists and their liberal opponents opportunities to harness the past for their (very different) political purposes—especially in the context of an electoral campaign leading up to parliamentary elections scheduled for September 1998. If suitable traditions were not readily available, one might have expected efforts to invent them. Yet neither nationalists nor their liberal opponents made much of 1848 in 1998.

Slovakia, then, is a "negative" case; the sesquicentennial went largely unmarked. This, we suggest, reflects constraints deriving from the nature of the "available pasts" (Schudson 1989:107ff.). For historical reasons, reflecting both the course of events in 1848 and patterns of historiographic tradition and social memory in the intervening century and a half, the commemorative opportunities afforded by the sesquicentennial in Slovakia were in fact quite meager, both for the liberals and for their nationalist opponents.

Comparison with Romania is instructive in this respect. The 1848 revolution in Wallachia provided richer historical "raw materials" for a "Europe"-oriented commemoration emphasizing modernization, Westernization, and democratization than were available in Slovakia, though in Romania too the "usability" of this past was limited by the lack of a viable twentieth-century commemorative tradition. Unlike their Romanian (and Hungarian) counterparts, it was difficult for Slovak liberals to claim an 1848 revolution of "their own." In 1848, Romanians lived in Hungary proper, in Transylvania, and in the Romanian principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia, and they experienced 1848 in very different ways in these different settings. By contrast, Slovaks lived only in Hungary, with no separate administrative territory or institutional framework of "their own" in which they could have established a revolutionary regime like the one established in Wallachia. Even with a somewhat more favorable "available past," Romanian liberals' efforts to commemorate the Wallachian democratic revolution in 1998 were feeble and ultimately unsuccessful. With much more meager historical raw materials and no significant commemorative tradition to work with, Slovak liberals' commemorative opportunities in 1998 were still more narrowly restricted.

Important revolutionary events—including the drafting by the Hungarian

Diet and ratification by the King of the “April Laws,” amounting to a constitutional blueprint for a modern liberal state—did unfold in what is today the capital of Slovakia in late March and early April of 1848. But these events have been coded as part of Hungarian national tradition, and not seen as “commemorable” in Slovakia, even by liberals. Slovaks were not involved in the work of the Diet, which, like other pre-modern, estate-style representative assemblies, was dominated by aristocrats, almost all of whom were Hungarian. Thus while these legislative events were part of a revolution *in* (what would later become) Slovakia, they did not count as part of a revolution *of* or *for* Slovaks.

Some liberal Slovak intellectuals, to be sure, have sought in recent years to challenge nationalist readings of 1848, to pry the revolution, and the history of the region more generally, from the grip of nationalist historiography and nationally bound commemorative traditions (Elias 1990; Chmel 1992; Kováč 1996). They have pointed out that many Slovaks sympathized with the general revolutionary spirit of the time and participated in the revolutionary ferment. More concretely, many sympathized with the ideals and liberal legislation of the “Hungarian” revolution, in its early phases at least, and more Slovaks probably fought for the revolution, in the Hungarian army, than against it in the volunteer legions organized by the uncompromisingly nationalist Slovak National Council. By emphasizing this broad Slovak support and participation, liberals challenged Hungarian claims to exclusive “ownership” of the revolution. At the same time, they challenged the Slovak nationalist tradition, with its “debilitating myth of a thousand years of oppression,” that rendered invisible Slovak support for the revolution, thus depriving Slovaks “of the history of which we, too, were the makers” (Kováč 1996:530). But these arguments remained confined to a small circle of liberal intellectuals, with no wider public resonance. For commemorative purposes, moreover, these various forms of participation in and support for the revolution could not plausibly be assembled into something that could be celebrated as a specifically Slovak revolution.

Nationalists seeking to turn 1848 to political advantage in 1998 faced difficulties of their own. For although 1848 has been seen primarily through a nationalist (rather than a liberal or democratic) prism in Slovak historiography, it has not occupied a central place in the nationalist imagination. The Slovak national movement in 1848 was an affair primarily of a relatively small group of intellectuals. Its chief text was the fourteen-point program adopted at Liptovský Mikuláš on 10 May, under the heading “Demands of the Slovak Nation.”⁷² The Hungarian government responded repressively to this petition, seeking to arrest

⁷² Demands included radical agrarian reform with universal peasant land ownership; the reorganization of the Hungarian part of the Habsburg empire along ethnofederal lines, with a Parliament, elected by universal suffrage, for each national group; a Slovak national militia; the official use of the Slovak language in Slovak territories; and an autonomous Slovak school system, including a university. The text of the petition is printed in Hungarian in Steier (1937, I:75–78); and in Slovak in Steier (1937, II:48–52).

the organizers, who fled to Prague and later to Vienna. There they formed the Slovak National Council, and recruited volunteers to fight against the Hungarians. The invasion of this force in September 1848, however, was easily turned back, and attempts to instigate a general anti-Hungarian uprising among Slovak peasants were conspicuously unsuccessful. Subsequent military activities by Slovak volunteers were not undertaken independently but were coordinated with and subordinated to the now determinedly counter-revolutionary Imperial forces, with whom Slovak national leaders had reluctantly decided to ally themselves, thereby elevating their national goals (which they mistakenly believed would be supported by the court) over the revolutionary goals of political liberty and social reform.

For Slovaks, 1848 involved no galvanizing events, no great mass meetings or mobilizations, no heroic military exploits, no tragic martyrdoms, no bitter fighting between Slovaks and Hungarians, no larger-than-life figures that fired popular memory as much as Avram Iancu or Lajos Kossuth⁷³—none of the stuff of which myths are easily made. In Hungary and Transylvania, a deeply rooted, resonant national mythology has grown up around 1848; there has been nothing comparable in Slovakia. Repressed by the Hungarian authorities, distrusted and ultimately dismissed by the Austrians, and lacking a mobilized mass following, the Slovak national movement of 1848 left no strong traces in Slovak collective memory. 1848 has never counted among the most important symbols of Slovak national mythology, and has never been commemorated by a national holiday. National mythology has centered on the question of statehood, and 1848–1849 contained no breakthroughs, indeed no progress, in this respect. Independent statehood was simply not plausible for the Slovaks at the time; no Slovak leader demanded independent statehood or a complete break with Hungary or with the Habsburg empire in 1848. Slovak national leaders did demand the federal reorganization of the empire along ethnic lines, which would have involved the creation of an autonomous Slovak province, but these hopes were, in the end, disappointed by their Austrian allies.

Given this limited range of “available pasts,” is not surprising that a mere handful of articles addressed 1848 in the sesquicentennial year, nor that only two feeble commemorative gestures were made in 1998. Significantly, neither involved any popular dimension or public participation. On 10 May, political leaders assembled in Liptovský Mikuláš to commemorate the Hungarian adoption of a petition articulating both democratic and Slovak national demands on 10 May 1848. The oppositional Slovak Democratic Coalition chose this occasion to sign its founding documents. And on 25 August, at the initiative of the nationalist ruling parties, the Parliament officially commemorated the Slovak

⁷³ Ludovít Štúr, one of the key Slovak leaders of 1848, is indeed a central figure in the Slovak national pantheon, but not because of his role in 1848: Štúr is celebrated, rather, for successfully codifying the Slovak literary language and thereby laying the foundation for the Slovak national movement.

National Council. The Council has been the focal point of discussions of 1848 in nationalist historiography, celebrated for its romantic, if quixotic, campaign to incite a general uprising against the Hungarians. But unlike the Romanian folk hero Avram Iancu, celebrated in popular as well as official memory for his daring guerrilla exploits against the Hungarians in 1848–1849, the Slovak National Council and its abortive attempt to provoke a general Slovak uprising in 1848 have little popular resonance. The commemoration, to be sure, was reported in the nationalist press, but it involved no public celebration or popular participation of any kind.⁷⁴

The Slovak media, unlike the Romanian media in Transylvania, largely ignored the Hungarian commemorations of 15 March.⁷⁵ For Romanian nationalists, the Twelfth Point of the Budapest 15 March uprising in 1848 (demanding the Union of Transylvania and Hungary) is itself sufficient to render illegitimate, indeed disloyal, the commemoration of 15 March by Transylvanian Hungarians. For Slovak nationalists, 15 March is a more neutral occasion, overshadowed by the 14 March anniversary of the establishment of the Slovak state in 1939.⁷⁶ For Transylvanian Romanians, more generally, 1848 is bound up with the image of the Hungarian “enemy,” not only in national ideology but also in folklore; for Slovaks, 1848 has no such meaning. In 1998 elite-level national conflict was actually more intense in Slovakia than in Romania, for Slovak nationalists were in power in Bratislava, while Romanian nationalists were in opposition in Bucharest. Yet like their liberal counterparts, Slovak nationalists were neither capable of exploiting, nor even inclined to exploit, 1848 for present political purposes. The sesquicentennial, for Slovaks, remained uncelebrated; the Hungarian minority had the commemorative field to itself.

CONCLUSION

Like all great events, the revolutions of 1848 can be construed in multiple, sometimes mutually exclusive ways, and offer multiple, competing lessons for the present. On the occasion of the sesquicentennial, two competing narrative framings can be identified in each country. In one framing, 1848 stands for a civic, democratic, modernizing Eastern Europe, casting off the vestiges of feudalism, autocracy, and Empire, and joining the West on a progressive develop-

⁷⁴ The petition adopted at Liptovský Mikuláš included radical socio-economic and political demands along with national demands, and is therefore look on favorably by liberals as well as nationalists. The Slovak National Congress, on the other hand, having cast its lot with the counter-revolutionary forces of the imperial court and taken up arms against the Hungarians, had clearly put national goals ahead of political and socioeconomic ones. Support for the Congress in 1998 clearly marked one as a nationalist.

⁷⁵ The pro-government *Slovenská Republika* reported critically on the Hungarian 15 March commemoration in its issue of 17 March 1998; but in comparison to the Romanian press in Transylvania, the Slovak press devoted almost no attention to it.

⁷⁶ *Slovenská Republika*, 16 Mar. 1998.

mental trajectory leading to the modern market economy and liberal democratic polity. The national experience of 1848 is seen as part of wider and more general processes: European, Western, even universal. In the alternative, particularizing, framing, 1848 stands for national liberation, for an Eastern Europe “awakening” to the call of nationality, revolting against national oppression, seeking national recognition and autonomy, and embarking on a nationalizing developmental trajectory leading to the creation and consolidation of independent nation-states in place of multinational empires. The national experience is celebrated for its distinctiveness, not subsumed under a universal perspective. These two framings are sometimes intertwined, as when ‘Europeanness’ or ‘Westernness’ or ‘modernity’ are claimed—for example by Hungarian minorities—as distinctive national properties.

These alternative framings of 1848 echo a more general cultural pattern characteristic of the European periphery. The opposition between a generalizing, universalizing discourse of Europe, modernity, progress, and ‘the West’ on the one hand and a particularizing discourse of national distinctiveness, tradition, indigeneity, and authenticity, sometimes identified with ‘the East,’ on the other, is a familiar one that goes back to the nineteenth century. In Hungary, claims to Western, European modernity confront counterclaims to ‘Eastern’ authenticity (Gal 1991; Hofer 1991). In Romania, parallel myths of origin and national self-definitions contend, one (Roman and Latin) ‘Western’ and generalizing, the other (Dacian) indigenist and particularizing (Verdery 1991). In Russia, the opposition between Westernizers on the one hand and Slavophiles and Eurasianists on the other has structured debate about Russian identity and about Russia’s place in Europe and the world for a century and a half (Walicki 1989 [1975]; Riasanovsky 1952). And in Greece, the ‘Westernizing’ idealization of classical Greek culture is countered by an appreciation of ‘Eastern’ (Balkan and Turkish) influences on everyday practices (Herzfeld 1987).

Yet despite these formally parallel oppositions in ways of representing the past and understanding the present, there were striking differences in resonance and meaningfulness of 1848 in 1998, and in the manner and mood in which the events of 1848 were commemorated.

The sesquicentennial in Hungary and among transborder Hungarian minority communities could draw on a rich and living commemorative tradition. 15 March has long been an important national holiday for Hungarians on both sides of the border, even when forbidden by the regime (that it was forbidden was a powerful tribute to its symbolic and mobilizational power). In Hungary itself, the generalizing frame prevailed despite attempts to challenge it by conservative and nationalist opposition parties. The commemorations were used by incumbent elites to represent Hungary as a reliable European country, facing West and looking forward, as it were, with a firm and stable commitment to the progressive, modern, Western values and institutions it had dramatically embraced in the spring of 1848. For the purpose of demonstrating Hungary’s suit-

ability for membership in the European club, high pathos and mass mobilization, heroes and martyrs, were neither necessary nor desirable. The tone of the celebrations, carefully choreographed for television audiences, was light, accessible, and easy-going, rather than sacred or solemn.

Quite different were the mood and narrative framing among minority Hungarians in Southern Slovakia and especially in Transylvania. Here the commemoration was more salient, and more 'sacred' in tone, than in Hungary. In ethnically mixed areas, solemn commemorative rituals dramatized and concretized the separateness of ethnic Hungarians and their cultural and emotional identification with the transborder Hungarian 'nation.' The commemorative choreography suggested dignity and grandeur: there was no hint of the ethos of entertainment that prevailed in Hungary.

In Transylvania, Romanian and Hungarian elites battled over representations of the past and its implications for the present, their struggles nourished by competing national mythologies and demonologies. Slovak public opinion, in contrast, took no notice of minority Hungarians' commemorations. 1848 was in effect "surrendered" to the Hungarians; its meaning was not publicly contested, and apart from a few feeble gestures, the Slovak political class did not seek to appropriate 1848 for its own presentist purposes. Because ethnic Hungarians' commemorations were not contested, and because the 'national question,' though burdened in the present, was not as heavily burdened by 1848 itself in Slovak areas as in Transylvania, the commemorations had less political weight and drama in Slovakia.

In the Romanian public sphere (outside of Transylvania), and especially in Slovakia, the outstanding feature of 1848 in 1998 was its invisibility. 1848 was not put to effective political use. In the Slovak case, the simplest explanation, borrowed from Gertrude Stein, may be the best: there was just not enough 'there' there, not enough "material" suited for myth-making today, and no previous commemorative traditions to build on. Romania disposed of richer historical "raw material," but this material was not readily "available" in 1998, for it had not been incorporated into a vibrant commemorative tradition like that of Hungary. Indeed the heavy-handed attempts of the state socialist regime to use the Wallachian Revolution to legitimate its rule only succeeded in discrediting appeals to the Romanian revolutionary tradition. The only 1848 figure firmly ingrained in Romanian popular memory was Avram Iancu. But he fit only the particularizing, mythologizing, narrative frame, not the generalizing, anti-heroic frame that might have underscored Romania's European connections and fragile but nonetheless significant democratic traditions. And even in the mythologizing, particularizing frame, the commemorations had little popular resonance.

While the Hungarian cases illustrate the mobilization of the past, in two strikingly different ways, for present political purposes, the Slovak and Romanian cases reveal the way in which the nature and structure of "available pasts" con-

strain commemorative opportunities in the present. What makes a past “available,” to be sure, is governed not only by the “events themselves” or the way in which they were experienced and interpreted at the time but also, and crucially, by the ways in which the events were—or were not—incorporated into commemorative traditions (Schudson 1989:108; Olick 1999). In 1998, in considerable part because of a vibrant, living commemorative tradition, 1848 was “available” for present-oriented projects in Hungary, and especially among Hungarian minority communities, in ways that it was not to Romanians outside Transylvania or to Slovaks. The literature on commemorations and the invention of tradition has neglected negative or failed cases of memory entrepreneurship,⁷⁷ focusing instead on conspicuous commemorations and successfully invented traditions. Considering the absence of Slovak and the weakness of Romanian attempts to deploy a “usable” 1848 in 1998 alongside the more robust Hungarian sesquicentennial commemorations serves as a useful reminder that memory entrepreneurship in the present is both enabled and constrained by the past.

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⁷⁷ An interesting exception is Confino’s (1997) study of the failure of Sedan Day to take root as a national holiday in Imperial Germany.

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