Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism

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were either realized abroad, in the context of competing national histories, or were intended for an international audience.

These projects can be understood as embodiments of antifascism, an overarching historical narrative that connected the past to contemporary politics. Accordingly, the primary goal of these projects was to represent the country and to position its current communist leadership, as well as their perceived political ancestry, within an antifascist narrative that helped to legitimate them internationally. Despite being located at preeminent sites of the Holocaust like Auschwitz and Mauthausen, these projects focused on the antifascist struggle rather than (Jewish) victimhood, simultaneously promoting abroad—under the pretext of memorialization—the Hungarian communist leadership and their preferred historical narrative.

Nonetheless, this paper argues that antifascist memory politics had an unintended effect on the evolution of the memory of the Holocaust in Hungary. With the integration of the genocide into a wider historical narrative, both real and virtual spaces were created where the memory of the Holocaust could emerge. For instance, the victims’ perspective was represented amongst the unsuccessful candidates for the memorial in Mauthausen, as well as by some of the works created for the exhibition in Auschwitz. As for the antifascist exhibition in the National Gallery in Budapest, it is possible to identify a curatorial decision there to include Holocaust-related works of art despite their commemorative tone and private ownership. Moreover, these state-funded projects also opened up a discursive space, where eventually even criticism of official memory politics could emerge.

The Hungarian Memorial in Mauthausen (1955/1958–64)

The invitation to erect a memorial in Mauthausen “to the memory of the victims of fascism”—as Hungarian authorities put it—arrived from the International Mauthausen Committee (Comité international de Mauthausen) by the way of the Hungarian embassy in Vienna. In early 1955, the International Re-

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2 Proposition for the Secretariat [To erect a Hungarian memorial in Mauthausen], Hungarian Workers' Party, Department of International Relations, January 24, 1955, attached to the acceptance, Proposition to erect a memorial to the memory of the victims of fascism in Mauthausen, subitem 12, within item 10 (Various issues), Proceedings of the meeting of the Secretariat [of the Hungarian Workers' Party], January 31, 1955, Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára, hereafter MNL OL), M–KS 276, 76. f. 54. cs. 352. ő. e. Since the documents cited in this study do not have a formal title, I will refer to them with an English description.
lations Department of the Communist Party (the Hungarian Workers’ Party) prepared a proposition for the Secretariat on how to respond to this invitation. According to their information, the Soviet Union, Poland, and Italy had already announced their intentions to erect national monuments at Mauthausen to the memory of their own victims who had been murdered there. The proposition reveals the inherent, discriminative nature of the prevailing antifascist narrative; depending on the reason for being persecuted, Party officials attributed different “values” to the victims: “According to the information acquired, the number of the victims from Hungary nears 15 thousand. Amongst them approx. 100 were deported due to political reasons. The others landed in Mauthausen due to racial and religious reasons. Nevertheless, our participation in erecting a monument in connection with the anniversary of the liberation bears political importance.” The proposal, which the Secretariat approved, suggested a 2 meter tall memorial column, costing 45–50,000 forints in total, but for reasons unknown, the monument was never built.

It was only a year after the 1956 revolution that the plan to build a memorial surfaced again. The Mauthausen Memorial Committee of the Committee of the Persecutees of Nazism, itself a branch of the Hungarian Partisan Association, visited the leaders of the Jewish community at the end of 1957, asking to financially support the planned memorial and also for help with the public fundraising. By the end of March 1958, 70,000 forints were collected, and the Committee of the Persecutees of Nazism commissioned Aladár Farkas, a politically engaged communist sculptor to create plans for the memorial. By the end

3 These projects date—from the submission of the plans to the inauguration—to 1955–57, 1954–56 and 1952–55, respectively. See Hildegard Schmid, Kunst, die einem Kollektiv entspricht...: Der internationale Denkmälhain in der KZ-Gedenkstätte Mauthausen (Vienna: Bundesministerium für Inneres, 2007).

4 Proposition for the Secretariat [To erect a Hungarian memorial in Mauthausen], Hungarian Workers’ Party, Department of International Relations, January 24, 1955, attached to the acceptance, Proposition to erect a memorial to the memory of the victims of fascism in Mauthausen, subitem 12, within item 10 (Various issues), Proceedings of the meeting of the Secretariat [of the Hungarian Workers’ Party], January 31, 1955, MNL OL, M-KS 276-76. f. 54. cs. 352. ő. e.

5 Proposition for the Secretariat [To erect a Hungarian memorial in Mauthausen], Hungarian Workers’ Party, Department of International Relations, January 24, 1955, attached to the acceptance, Proposition to erect a memorial to the memory of the victims of fascism in Mauthausen, subitem 12, within item 10 (Various issues), Proceedings of the meeting of the Secretariat [of the Hungarian Workers’ Party], January 31, 1955, MNL OL, M-KS 276-76. f. 54. cs. 352. ő. e.

6 The Hungarian names of the organizations are: “Nácizmus Üldözötteinek Bizottsága” and “Magyar Partizán Szövetség.” It is safe to assume that the Mauthausen Memorial Committee, “Mauthauseni Emlékbizottság” or “Mauthauseni Emlékűbizottság,” belonged to the Committee of the Persecutees of Nazism, since they operated at the same address (Beloiannisz Street 16), see Új Élet, December 1957, 4.

7 Proceedings of the Hungarian Partisan Association’s Board Meeting, March 27, 1958, 5, MNL OL, M–KS
of November, funds raised from the public reached 100,000 forints, and the model by Farkas was approved. Unfortunately, this sculptural plan has been lost and no photograph has been found. However, it is certain that the plan included a 6.5 meter tall sculpture, two candelabras, and a memorial plaque, all cast in bronze. The total cost was estimated to be half a million forints. Spending a considerable amount of public funds on the memory of the predominantly Jewish victims did not, however, meet with everyone’s approval at the Hungarian Partisan Association. During the discussion one of the officials, Jenő Fazekas went as far as proposing an alternative financial solution: “There are 50–60,000 deportees, it should be examined whether the former deportees could build the memorial at their own expense. They could do as much for those who have perished.” This proposal inherently suggested that the genocide of the Hungarian Jews was by no means a Hungarian matter, but merely a Jewish one. Therefore, only survivors, and not Hungarians in general, should be charged with the moral and financial obligation of remembrance.

As the project developed, the Partisan Association realized that a competition between various proposals was a legal requirement for memorials to be erected abroad. For this reason, in July 1959 they contacted the Fine Arts Fund, which was responsible for public commissions, and tasked them to execute the project to honor “the memory of the more than 30,000 Hungarian martyrs who perished in Mauthausen and its subcamps.” (In the documents the project was specified as “the memory of the more than 30,000 Hungarian martyrs who perished in Mauthausen and its subcamps.”)
usually defined accordingly, as the “Hungarian martyr memorial in Mauthausen” or simply the “Hungarian memorial in Mauthausen.”) The Partisan Association argued that the task was long overdue as numerous national memorials were already in place. According to their program, “The Hungarian memorial should express the liberation, the fight for peace and against fascism, the solidarity.”\textsuperscript{10} This plan, conceived in July 1959, was scheduled to be inaugurated in May 1960, yet due to the number of organizations involved, their disputes, the increasing costs, and the need for permissions (by Austria as well as Yugoslavia and Italy, the nations with neighboring monuments), the memorial was only completed in 1964.\textsuperscript{11}

At the end of September 1959, the Fine Arts Fund announced an invitation-only competition, involving six sculptors: Jenő Kerényi (1908–1975), István Kiss (1927–1997), Agamemnon Makrisz (1913–1993), István Martsa (1912–1978), József Somogyi (1916–1993) and Ferenc Laborcz (1908–1971).\textsuperscript{12} During the consultation held in mid-October, the nature of the expected outcome had been defined further: “In terms of meaning, the works should express suffering, solidarity and liberation. (It shall not be offensive.)”\textsuperscript{13}

Six plans were submitted in total by five sculptors, as Jenő Kerényi did not take part in the contest, while Ferenc Laborcz created two plans. His works, a boy killing a snake and a female figure with raised hands appear to mirror the themes of “fight” and “liberation” set forth in the program (figures 8.1 and 8.2). Yet, according to the opinion of the jury, “regarding its form and theme, both his figures are dominated by lyricism and both plans are intellectually undemanding.”\textsuperscript{14}

Half of the submitted works concentrated more or less on the suffering of the victims. István Kiss portrayed six extremely emaciated figures, one dead and five standing with raised hands, signifying loss, survival, and liberation (figure 8.3).

\textsuperscript{10} Letter from the Partisan Association to the Fine Arts Fund, July 20, 1959, SzM KEMKI ADK, 25000/2014/M/VII/1.

\textsuperscript{11} “Vasárnap avatják a mauthauseni magyar mártíremlékművet” [The Hungarian martyr memorial will be inaugurated on Sunday], Népszabadság, May 9, 1964, 10.

\textsuperscript{12} All of them were established, middle-aged sculptors (43–51 years old), except for Kiss, the youngest applicant (32). The sculptors were chosen by the Committee for the Division of Work (“Munkaelosztó Bizottság, MEB”), operating at the Fine Arts Fund, on September 30, 1959. Invitations to participate were sent to the sculptors on October 6, 1959.

\textsuperscript{13} The sculptors were due to submit a 1:10 scale model and a smaller 1:50 scale plan to match the model documenting the surroundings of the future memorial in Mauthausen. Proceedings of the consultation about the martyrs’ memorial in Mauthausen held at the Hungarian Partisan Association, October 13, 1959, 2, SzM KEMKI ADK, 25000/2014/M/VII/1. It is unclear whether the “offensive nature” ("támadó jelleg") was meant to reference Austria, the host country, or, more likely, the Germans.

\textsuperscript{14} Proceedings of the Sculpture Jury, April 29, 1960, Sz/237, 2, SzM KEMKI ADK, 25000/2014/M/VII/1.
Figure 8.1. Ferenc Laborcz, *Design for the Hungarian Martyr Memorial in Mauthausen*, *(Boy killing a snake)*, 1:10 model, 1960. Source: Museum of Fine Arts—Central European Research Institute for Art History, Archive and Documentation Center (SzM KEMKI ADK).

Figure 8.2. Ferenc Laborcz, *Design for the Hungarian Martyr Memorial in Mauthausen*, *(Woman with her hands raised towards the sky)*, 1:10 model, 1960. Source: SzM KEMKI ADK.

Figure 8.3. István Kiss, *Design for the Hungarian Martyr Memorial in Mauthausen*, 1:10 model, 1960. Source: SzM KEMKI ADK.

Figure 8.4. József Somogyi, *Design for the Hungarian Martyr Memorial in Mauthausen*, 1960. Source: SzM KEMKI ADK.
Although the composition is quite strong and complex, the jury found this work problematic: “from the symbolism of the figures the intellectual subject-matter is missing and without this, the portrayal of the prisoners of the camp cannot be satisfying for us today.”\footnote{Proceedings of the Sculpture Jury, April 29, 1960.} It appears that even though the work visualized both suffering and liberation, the realistic portrayal of the victims was simply not considered sufficient. The missing element that the jury was most likely referring to was the teleological interpretation of suffering, the highlighting of a positive cause, in short: the visualization of the antifascist struggle.

For similar reasons, József Somogyi’s plan (figure 8.4) was considered equally problematic. His work shows a stiff cadaver, the frozen posture of which resembles the bodies excavated in Pompeii. Two elements complement the figure: the dove of peace on its shoulder and a broken ionic half column—a common topos of demise—in the background. To quote the jury’s words: “The tone of József Somogyi’s work is pessimistic, it symbolizes demise in a complicated manner and it does not express the struggle for the ideals.”\footnote{Proceedings of the Sculpture Jury, April 29, 1960.} Apparently, without a clear emphasis on the antifascist fight, the commemorative tone alone was not considered satisfactory.

István Martsa’s sculpture (figure 8.5), which we will encounter again in connection with the Hungarian exhibition in Auschwitz, received mixed judgement: “the symbolism of the additional elements is not clear. Due to its accentuated verticality, his work is not in harmony with the Yugoslav and Italian memorials. The compositional quality of the work is acknowledged by the Committee.”\footnote{Proceedings of the Sculpture Jury, April 29, 1960.} One must admit that the smaller scale model—probably due to a scaling mistake—seems gigantic when inserted into the model representing the whole site (figure 8.6). Nonetheless, one might wonder which elements were deemed additional and unclear by the jury. The sculpture shows a male figure kneeling on a stake built up from wooden cuboids resembling railway sleepers (railroad ties). His right arm is stretched towards the sky, intersected by his bent left arm in the form of a cross. The symbolism is rather straightforward: the train tracks refer to deportation, the stake and the cross—even though the latter is somewhat peculiar given the Jewish context—to sacrifice and martyrdom. The figure is stepping on the stake almost voluntarily; this, coupled with the motive of the cross, suggests a teleological, almost religious nature of the sacrifice.
The winning design, which met the approval of the jury in every aspect was by a Greek émigré, Agamemnon Makrisz, an influential figure in Hungarian cultural politics (figures 8.7 and 8.8). Besides praising, rightfully, the composition and its placement within the given space, the jury highlighted that “The main virtue [of his work] content-wise is that it is not pessimistic, it expresses the positive traits of the fight against fascism.” As Béla Ujvári, the “leading

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specialized lector” and representative of the Fine Arts Fund wrote in his more detailed analysis: “Agamemnon Makrisz’s plan on the one hand depicts the barbarity of fascism realistically through the form of the figures, on the other hand it emphasizes the will and power to oppose the barbarity of fascism. The composition, although the suffering and hardship is evident from the figures, is not depressing, nor pessimistic, it does not speak of destruction and death, rather about new life.”

Indeed, the memorial shows a dynamic composition: nine strong, geometrically simplified, almost uniform figures are standing back-to-back with their

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arms and fists raised towards the sky. Without prior knowledge, they would rather seem to be workers at a demonstration than prisoners of a concentration camp.\textsuperscript{20} The sculpture thus meets the requirements of the antifascist narrative: it shows active figures instead of passive victims, whose portrayal was considered, as we have seen above, “pessimistic.”

**Victors vs. Victims: A Non-Commissioned Hungarian Plan**

The development of the official project for Mauthausen resulted in press coverage that provided both inspiration and opportunity for survivors to thematize the Holocaust. With its focus on the suffering of the victims, a non-commisioned plan for the Mauthausen memorial was similar to the majority of the un-selected commissioned plans, its form, however, was much more progressive. It stepped further away from strict realism towards a more abstracted type of figuration. Rezső Berczeller (1912–1992) created his small terracotta sculpture titled *Mauthausen* in 1958 (figure 8.9) when the plans to erect a national memorial were already publicly known due to the fundraising campaign.

\textsuperscript{20} A contemporary work pertaining to the same iconography is Drago Tršar (1927–), *Manifestants I.*, 1959, Ljubljana, Moderna galerija (Museum of Modern Art).