

ROUGH DRAFT

More than Victims? Popular Responses to national Socialist and Stalinist Dictatorships - the Case of Hungary

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“Where there is tyranny/It’s tyranny that rules” Gyula Illyés

“Never will you make/the individual prevail against his age. / An age is a current that sweeps and swamps: / a man may swim with it but never master it.” (Imre Madách, *The Tragedy of Man*)

We imagine totalitarian dictatorships as highly repressive systems where ordinary people are helpless victims. The story of two sisters suggests that reality may be more complicated. At the time of the German invasion of Hungary in March 1944 two sisters quarreled about their paternal heritage in a provincial town. One of them, Mrs. M was able to arrange for German troops to loot her sibling’s house and take what she thought rightfully belonged to her. She even bragged to her sister, Mrs. L that the things she could not take from the father’s heritage thus she now got with German help. In retaliation Mrs. L denounced her sister’s half Jewish daughter to the Gestapo. According to the denunciation the Ms were hiding Jews – which was true – and were operating a secret radio station in their house. The Gestapo took Mrs. M and her daughter into custody, but later released at the intervention of a German officer, who was Mrs. M’s acquaintance. Mrs. L did not give up and unleashed her friend, an officer of the Hungarian army, on her sister. The officer and his men took Mrs. M and her family, daughter and Jewish husband, allegedly to shoot them. While they were being escorted, the group ran into a German convoy, a member of which, a Hungarian of Schwabian origin convinced the officer and his men to release the family. The next round in the family feud occurred under communist rule. Mrs L. denounced her sister to the political police in an effort to get her sent to internment camp. From then on, both parties sought to use the People’s Court, which was tasked with dealing with war crimes to exact revenge on the other. Finally, at Mrs. M’s behest Mrs. L. and her officer friend were tried for war crimes in 1950. Unusually for a Stalinist court, the judge took the matter seriously and on the basis of witness

testimony acquitted the defendants. In the verdict the judge admonished the parties stating that they were all adept at “exploiting the levers of power.”¹

In Nazi Germany two sisters turned in siblings out of anger, a father-in-law denounced his son-in-law for listening to foreign broadcasts in reality because of domestic conflict, a cousin who sought revenge on another.²

According to the totalitarian model denunciation was a form of total control. It was the product of the climate of vigilance and mutual suspicion engendered by totalitarian regimes and a response to their insistence on ideological orthodoxy, conformity and exclusion of alien elements of the community. Denunciation functioned as surveillance, which was used to discipline the citizens. The citizens’ model focuses on what people could achieve through denunciation. In fact by soliciting and acting on them the state put its punitive powers at their subjects’ disposal.³ In Hitler’s Germany the Gestapo could not have been as efficient as it was without “self-policing” of the citizens. Thus, totalitarian systems seem to have been less terroristic, less exclusive, less oppressive and citizens had more power and agency than we previously assumed, in fact a sizeable segment of society seem to have taken part in making the system work. That is, people were more than victims. In the Soviet Union abuse of power denunciations were the weapons of the weak, kolkhoz chairmen were the most popular targets: “these kulak scum take grain for themselves while honest toilers go hungry.” The greater the degree of control authoritarianism attempted to exercise over the population the greater the degree of participation from the population was required. Police states are not simply imposed from above by ruthless dictators. By contrast Sheila Fitzpatrick has found that freely offered denunciations may not have been typical starting point for Soviet secret police investigations; in the Great Purge many denunciations were written by communists out of fear or to be at the safe side rather than real sense of duty, outrage or malice.⁴

¹ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [Hungarian national Archives, hereafter cited as MNL OL], XX-5-B, 50. doboz, 6881/1950

² Robert Gellately, *Denunciations in 20th Century Germany: Aspects of Self-Policing in the Third Reich and the German Democratic Republic*, in Sheila Fitzpatrick – Robert Gellately, Chicago, London, 1997. 185-221.

³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Signals from Below: Soviet Letters of Denunciation in the 1930s* in Fitzpatrick – Gellately, *Accusatory Practices: Denunciation in Modern European History*, opcit. 85-120.

⁴ Gellately, *Denunciations in the 20th Century*, opcit; Fitzpatrick, *Signals from Below*, opcit. For a good summary of questions pertaining to Stalinist dictatorships see Kevin McDermott, Matthew Stibbe, *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Problems, Perspectives, Interpretations* in McDermott, Stibbe, *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe: Elite Purges and Mass Repression*. Manchester 2010. 1-18.

Some studies of repressive systems have suggested, albeit based on partial data, that more people “assisted” benefited from and participated in the running of the totalitarian regimes of the 20th century than previously believed. The main question is whether this made those political systems less coercive, less totalitarian and more consensual hence more “democratic” than previously assumed? Was there *less* fear and repression, and *more* consensual, popular support in sustaining Hitler’s Germany and the Stalinist political systems than the totalitarian model suggests? What sustained dictatorial regimes that governed in the name of the people but relied on mass terror to extract compliance and maintain stability?

In order to answer this question we must consider not only the scope repression but also how this may have altered the *behavior* of individuals as opposed to a non-coercive political system that is to say the two way *dynamic* between repression and participation. Both Hitler’s and Stalin’s [including the regional variants] regimes emphasized public interest above private, allegiance to the party state over loyalty to kin and family. In fact a private sphere was not supposed to exist as a separate entity from the political. The notion that grassroots actors may have sustained them raises an interrelated question, namely whether the choices available to individuals was less limited, whether there was more freedom in these political systems than we previously assumed? Was individual participation in running terroristic dictatorships – and nobody questions that these systems were terroristic ones for some even if not all - a result of a general “human condition” or did tyrannical regimes alter the way individuals behave? Is it always possible to separate victims from participants, wrongdoers and bystanders? Or did most people forced to appear in some or all roles? Did individuals living under harsh conditions shape the regime they lived in? Or did the conditions mold, against their will, the participants? Examining the notion of participatory dictatorship sheds light on the nature of centralized oppressive regimes, the role of coercion and terror, traditions and human nature in shaping the attitudes behavior strategies life experience of ordinary individuals.

It may be assumed that people need to adapt to the political and historical environment in which they find themselves. Therefore those who grow up and live under harsh dictatorial rule have markedly different life experiences than those who live in democracies. They develop skills that allow them to survive even thrive dictatorship which may not work in democracies. It is reasonable to expect that people who were raised in Hitler’s state or a Stalinist one developed

different traits than those who grew up in non-coercive political systems such as Roosevelt's America.

Classifications of political systems we tend to concentrate on institutional structures, legal frameworks, methods with which the rulers wield power. It is harder to measure and classify the depth and breadth of political control and intervention in personal spheres. It may not be immediately visible that communist systems were more oppressive than traditional dictatorial regimes. Many western intellectuals who visited the communist state in the 1930s failed to appreciate the scope of repression there. Stalinist formations called themselves democracies. In fact, like Germany under Hitler, the branches of government were theoretically separated, they had functioning parliaments, local governments. Of course that appearances are misleading: these were parliaments with no power, self-governments with no authority, courts that were under the informal sway of the ruling party and ideology.

In order to better understand the predicament of the individual and the individual's contribution to the operation of totalitarian dictatorships one must first understand the scope – breadth and depth – of control, coercion and persecution in totalitarian states. Although the meaning of control and persecution are clear, the term coercion may pose a difficulty. Historians have found that there was less coercion and more cooperation than previously believed. Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union were found to be less coercive and to have rested in more cooperation than previously thought. However, as we shall see, semblances may be misleading and much although by no means all, of citizens' or perhaps it is better to say, subjects' cooperation with these regimes may have been coerced. There were indirect forms of coercion which may not always be palpable and are not easily discernible in the paper trail of the past therefore it must be found in *traces* of history. On the other hand the interpretation of resistance is also problematic as motives are hidden, rather than revealed by the sources. Historical interpretation is subjective: documents are opaque, evidence is not full, the past is available through the present and historians are biased. Thus a "true" reconstruction of the past "as it was" may not be possible and therefore our understanding of past regimes will be contested.

It is with this proviso that this paper will explore "participatory dictatorship", namely that compliance was from a large segment of society was consensual, by looking at important

components of existence under tyrannical rule: terror, repression, resistance, cooperation and collaboration.

Collaboration, resistance

Mrs. Csizmazia lived in a small village in western Hungary. In 1952 she denounced fellow villagers to the State Security Authority for murdering Soviet officers. Her report led to an investigation as a result of which seven people were executed. Her story contained a kernel of truth. One of the defendants stepped in when a Soviet soldier attempted to rape one of the women where they were sheltered. In the ensuing scuffle the Soviet's handgun went off and killed him. The security services solicited such denunciations by offering substantial reward: shoes, clothing and food as well as official decoration. Mrs. Csizmazia was highly pleased with her reward and made it known that she would continue reporting to the authorities.⁵ We could say that this was a typical case of social participation in repression: the "investigation" was sparked by an ordinary citizen. The communist system produced extreme shortage of every day commodities that was unnatural in peacetime. In this respect the woman's confession was extracted by the exigencies of her times, the drastic shortage of consumer goods produced by Stalinist economies. She of course like millions of others had the also coerced option to endure hardship imposed by the system of government, which held out rewards for those who employed the base instinct of bringing trouble on others for personal gain. It is a historical "fact" that she denounced the interpretation of this "fact" is complex.

Centralized as these states were, National Socialist and Stalinist political systems may not have been simply ran from top to bottom, in a rulers against victims paradigm. Rather, a significant number of ordinary citizens worked with, used and even exploited the political system, while of course this would not rule out that these tyrannies had an inordinately large number of victims. One author argued that the dictatorship in the Soviet Union enjoyed a large measure of popular support as for instance a large cheering crowd showed up for one of the major bourgeois sabotage trials, several trials occurred in a festive atmosphere.⁶ On the other hand a Hungarian escapee testified that the population in Hungary "sympathizes with things the regime despises."⁷ That

⁵ Müller Rolf, *Politikai rendőrség a Rákosi korszakban*. Budapest, 2012. 193-195.

⁶ Richard Overy, *Dictators. Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Russia*. London, 2004.

⁷ Karl Brown, *Regulating Bodies: Everyday Day Crime and Popular Resistance in Communist Hungary, 1948-1956*. Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation. The University of Texas at Austin, 2007. 77.

totalitarian systems enjoyed wide popular support rest mainly on evidence gleaned from letters of denunciation. Soviet officials, who were in a good position to judge how popular “socialism” was had a different opinion. In 1953, after the East German uprising a Soviet official wrote: “what was surprising for the Moscow leadership was not the mere fact of discontent... but the overwhelming, widespread and explosive nature of it.”⁸ The pressure of politics on individuals living in dictatorships was strong: they faced choices that individuals are not forced to face in democracies. Dictatorships nurtured, invited and exploited the basest human instincts to sustain their oppressive rule: malice, hatred, greed, mendacity, suspicion, disloyalty, prejudice, revenge the antitheses of qualities that make open systems succeed. As one émigré from communist Hungary explained in 1957: “One could succeed in proportionate degree with one’s ability to make oneself useful to the system. And the latter used mainly the low capabilities of human beings. It taught everybody to lie, to spy and to slander.”⁹ As George F. Kennan has once averred, Communism – and one might add Nazism - exploited “the evil rather than the good in the human race.”¹⁰

People often found themselves in situations where acting in accordance with their moral conviction forced a choice between keeping the law and breaking it. Keeping the law is a virtue in democracies that serves as the glue of society. Under national socialist or communist rule keeping the law may not always be a virtue. Non law abiding citizens may become more virtuous than those that keep laws requiring denunciation and persecution. The nuclear physicist Edward Teller, who was born into a well-to-do upper middle Jewish family in Budapest, asked his revered grandfather about the validity of laws because he had some doubts. “Grandfather: Laws must be obeyed without exception. ... Obeying the law must be possible for all people... The law cannot forbid the desire for revenge. It can only limit it by justice.’ ‘Edward Teller: in a democracy the obligation to obey the law was absolute. To disregard democratically established law at one’s

⁸ Mark Kramer, The Post Stalin Succession Struggle and the Upheavals in Eastern Europe part 2, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, volume 1 number 2 1999, 4.

⁹ Cited in Brown, *Regulating Bodies*, opcit. 5.

¹⁰ Cited by John Lewis Gaddis, George F. Kennan and the Strategy of Containment in Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy During the Cold War*. New York, 2005. 146-200.

convenience would lead to anarchy.’ Judith Shoolery, Teller’s editorial assistant relates that Teller “never answered my question as to what should be done under a fascist system.”¹¹

Ignác Lázár was a railroad employee who broke the law regarding illegal border crossing and thereby criminalized himself by helping a man cross the Romanian-Hungarian border. He risked spending several years behind bars. At court he justified his crime by stating that he “took pity on the man, also a railway worker and that’s why he helped him.”¹² People who accepted the moral condemnation and the punishment to adhere to more general values and helped *others* were perhaps not exceptional although it would be hard to estimate their number. A distinction thus needs to be made regarding resistance, the rejection of a political system or a part thereof. Some historians would regard any action that was against totalitarian law an act of defiance of and resistance against the regime. Operating in the black economy could thus be seen as resistance because it was illegal yet it did not necessarily signify rejection of the system only the will to survive in it by working around it. Helping another person is the necessarily definition of resistance it constitutes and act beyond self-preservation and thereby must necessarily mean the rejection of a part or the whole of the system. A narrow definition of resistance - “anything could be resistance as everything was forbidden” - as the historian Nikolaus Wachsmann explains - “blurs the lines between very different acts.”¹³

Studies of the genocide perpetrated by the Nazis in the Second World War have moved away from the Auschwitz centered, ‘bureaucratized’, modern, factory-like model in which men were only cog wheels in killing planned by a few fanatical Nazis and carried out by faceless bureaucrats whose individually non-murderous tasks culminated in mass murder. Even faceless administrators of the Holocaust were aware of the outcome of their labors and described the victims in dehumanizing terms.¹⁴ Studies of the Holocaust and mass killings in World War II began to focus on the mass murders on the eastern front the method of which was highly personalized, often carried in with primitive weapons in backward areas characterized by long standing ethnic and national strife. Although as Omar Bartov has pointed out, many of the German

¹¹ István Hargittai, *Judging Edward Teller: A Closer Look at One of the Most Influential Scientists of the 20th Century*, Amherst, 2010. 42-43.

¹² MNL OL, XX-5-B 23. doboz, 3/23/1950.

¹³ Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL – A History of Nazi Concentration Camps*, New York, 2015. 499.

¹⁴ Wendy Lower, *Hitler’s Furies – German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields*. Boston, New York, 2013. 109. An administrator would say: “this or that must go get rid of that piece of shit.”

killers, who wore the uniform of the SS, the Einsatzgruppen or the Wehrmacht received Nazi indoctrination in their training quite a few units were comprised of, in Christopher Browning's terminology, ordinary men.¹⁵ István Deák has shown that the German military code would have allowed these men to deny orders for the murder of civilians but nobody ever did so.¹⁶ In addition, the local population willingly engaged in the mass killing of civilians, often without German instigation. Many times the killers and the victims were members of the same small community. The victims were mostly Jews, but Poles and Ukrainians also did a thorough job of murdering civilians of the other community. The killings occurred not far from the living quarters of the victims and were carried out in a highly personalized form. Germans would use automatic weapons to shoot their victims into ditches from close range. Locals, who sometimes acted at the instigation of the Germans, sometimes of their own accord and sometimes even against the will of the Germans, would slaughter their victims with axes, scythes, pitchforks even bare hands. These killings were not done surreptitiously. On August 4 1941 for instance SS and army units in Zhitomir transformed the public hanging of Jews into a public spectacle that was followed by the hanging of 400 Jewish men. A similar spectacle was organized in an ancient Lithuanian city. In front of a petrol station "the death dealer of Kovno," a bulky man wielding an axe literally hacked Jews to death to the cheers of a festive, cheering crowd comprised of men women and children who thereby became accomplices to crime. Many lives would not have been lost without the willing and active participation of people who themselves were oppressed and persecuted by the German occupiers. In fact it even happened in 1944 that retreating German troops saved Jews from being butchered by Ukrainians on a bloody rampage. Nobody forced the female companions of Nazi bigwigs to practice their shooting skills on civilians or to execute starving children by shooting them in the head.

Some saved lives at great personal risk. Some rescuers were altruistic while others extracted bribes. Offering and taking bribes is immoral – and illegal – in a democracy. In the upside down world of national socialist and communist rule it became an acceptable mode of behavior.

¹⁵ Christopher Browning: *Ordinary Men – Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland*. New York, 1992; Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941-1945: German Troops and Barbarization of Warfare*. New York, Oxford, 2001; Omer Bartov, *Communal Genocide: Personal Accounts of Destruction in Buczac Eastern Galicia in 1941-1944* in Omer Bartov, Eric D. Weitz, *Shatterzone of Empires: Coexistence and Violence in the German Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Empires*. Bloomington, 2013. Radu Ioanid, *The Holocaust in Romania*. Chicago, 2000.

¹⁶ Istvan Deak, *Essays on Hitler's Europe*. Lincoln, 2001.

Taking a bribe and allowing someone to cross the border illegally, into freedom in 1951 was more humane than refusing to take the bribe. Bribes saved lives during the Holocaust: Romanian border guards accepted money and valuables for safe passage from Northern Transylvania into Romania in 1944. On the other hand an official of the Swiss interior ministry was fired for not abiding Swiss law and making out fake passports for Jews to flee into Switzerland. An arrow cross official, who was going to arrest a Jewish family hiding out in Budapest took a large amount of cash for letting them off the hook and even provided the family's son with fake Christian papers. Helping for money is not nearly as good as helping altruistically but it saved lives. Many people in Hungary and elsewhere took the money and still refused to help, or, even killed or turned the person in to the authorities. Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat saved thousands of lives. In order to do so he dealt, negotiated with and bribed Hungarian and German officials, some of them responsible for mass murder. For many the complex imperatives of harsh historical conditions, self-preservation, opportunity for personal enrichment, the need to break the law to be a good person, proved impossible to reconcile.

We may never know why some in the same village, national and ethnic community picked up an axe while another opened a cellar an attic or other hideout in their homes to save the person their neighbor was trying to kill. It is easier to discern the motive of the killer than the rescuer. Men and women murdered for a multitude of reasons and the combination of them: for material and financial gain, racial and anti-Semitic conviction, general brutalization and revenge. Rescuers rarely left a trace of their motives. This could also be material gain, and religious conviction, emotional attachment and I would safely use a non-technical term, *good*. Even in the darkest times *one* option was left open: not to join the haters, the choice between good and evil. Although most inmates in concentration camps lost their humanity in their brutal struggle for survival a very few wanted and was able to show compassion and the even more downtrodden. Conversely, Nazi forced labor camps could not have worked without the coerced, but nonetheless real cooperation of the *kapos*, camp leaders chosen from the ranks of the prisoners. It is also clear that some these men and women actually took pleasure in and profited from their part in sadistically maintaining order in the camp, some of them fulfilled their gruesome and dangerous task by limiting violence as much as possible.

Do men create the historical conditions or do the historical conditions shape the man? Historians differ the following case makes it clear that there is no easy answer to the dilemma. It is often hard to discern the difference between collaborators and resisters, victims and perpetrators. The roles are sometimes mixed or roles change. As a witness in his 1949 trial explained, “I am in a very difficult situation, I have to defend an arrow cross... this young man saved me... he helped everyone... When I tried to thank him he refused and said I did my duty.” A high-ranking functionary of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, László Szalai helped disseminate national socialist ideas and to construct a powerful, popular national socialist movement. When his party eventually came to power in October 1944, he used his high office to save and rescue Jews. Szalai sent a police unit to the Budapest ghetto to protect the inmates from the atrocities of his party comrades and Germans. He played an instrumental in saving the ghetto, which housed roughly one hundred thousand people, from its planned destruction by the arrow cross militia. As one of his witnesses put it: “All the Jews left alive in Budapest owe their lives to him.” His motivation was clear: the movement he believed in moved away from the ideal of social equality towards racially motivated persecution, which he thought was wrong. He refused any compensation for what he did. One person testified after the war that Szalai had thrown people out of their homes and taken their belongings; many more said that they owed their lives to him. Was the testimony true? There can be some doubts in view of the many contrary testimonies. Or did he pretend to go along with the killers in relatively minor crimes so that he retained the opportunity to save lives? Alternatively he might have thought that it was all right to take valuables from Jews, an attitude that would not be surprising in view of his ideological outlook. Maybe he believed that a large good deed offset a small malfeasance. We may never know the truth. Be that as it may, Szalai found his way out of his moral conundrum, and may have shaped rather than let himself be shaped, by historical conditions.¹⁷

The separation of identities is even harder in Oszkár Brunner’s case, who was sentenced in 1971 as a former arrow cross party serviceman who participated in the robbing, torture and murder of civilians during the Soviet siege of Budapest in 1944-1945. Arrow cross armed detachments were responsible for the murder of several thousand people, most of them Jews. They carried out their monstrous deeds while the Red Army was only a few miles away. One witness recalled seeing

¹⁷ Szalai Pál, Állambiztonsági Történelmi Levéltár, Budapest [hereafter cited as ÁBTL] 3.1.9 V-102557/1.

in a house that had been used by the arrow cross thugs. The vacated house was “littered with corpses, some of them skinned.” On the dinner table “human flesh and limbs were served on the plates.” In a hospital morgue she saw more arrow cross victims, “terribly mutilated corpses, their hands tied behind their backs, shot in the head.”¹⁸ Although looting their victims was a definite motivation, and the savage rape and torture inflicted on their victims can be attributed to group pressure and base instincts, a number of those who took part in the atrocities were motivated by racial anti-Semitism, the desire to get rid of Jews while they still can. This was the *ideological* goal to which they sacrificed even their personal safety if needed, as the longer they stayed in the capital the less likely it became to escape Soviet capture. Several of the killers, similarly to their likeminded German, Austrian and other murderers on the eastern front later claimed that their killings were preemptive: if we don’t get them now they will get us later.

All this was happening in a besieged city where the Red Army, the German SS and Wehrmacht and their Hungarian allies were fighting door-to-door, under the pounding of artillery fire and allied heavy bombings. The streets were littered with unburied dead, civilians cowering in dark and freezing cellars lived on meat hacked off frozen horses. The city was also divided between hunters and hunted: armed Nazi thugs were seeking out Jews, left-wingers and deserters some of them hiding out in hospitals convents or private homes and other hiding places. Extreme violence the constant sight of death in a city that became a battlefield, mass starvation and breakdown of public services and utilities served as the backdrop in which the servicemen operated.

The murders were not decreed by the upper echelons of the arrow cross party, most leaders of which fled the city before the Soviet encirclement was completed in December. Previously low level functionaries and others who joined their ranks took events into their own hands and perpetrated a series of crimes unprecedented in Hungary’s history. This is the background in which Brunner’s actions unfolded. Despite the reams of documentation: police records and court documents, testimonies of eye witnesses, his “true” story may never unfold.

The following is perhaps the most likely reconstruction of the events although by no means the only possible scenario. Brunner owned a small but financially successful plant that produced

¹⁸ ÁBTL V-121 588/b.

mechanical parts. He was known as a decent person with leftist political convictions and was married to a Jewish woman with whom they had a daughter. In 1944 the arrow cross raided his factory as a result of a denunciation that he was employing and hiding Jews, mainly women. He was most likely denounced by a female employee who was a member of the arrow cross. It is possible that the woman was motivated by a mixture of anti-Semitism and jealousy as the handsome Brunner had an extramarital affair with a Jewish coworker. It is likely that he established sexual liaison with several other employees. In fact womanizing may have been at least one motive for his willingness to employ persecuted people. It must also be said that he was risking his life by doing so. There is no doubt that whatever the motive may have been, a number of people found refuge in his factory where they were allowed to spend the nights.

Late in 1944 uniformed Nazis took Brunner and his protégés to the 12th district *nyilasház* [arrow cross house], which operated as a house of horrors. There they were interrogated and severely beaten. Most witnesses supported Brunner's postwar testimony that he was beaten beyond recognition and was forced to perform perverted sexual acts with his lover, who was also found and taken in. Thereafter he was made an offer to join the Nazi detachment. Thus far he was a rescuer and victim of terror. A significant number of Jewish survivors testified at his first, 1945 trial that they owed their lives to him. In addition, he may have also participated in a scheme of distributing fake, Christian papers to persecuted individuals. From then on, however, he became a perpetrator. Brunner claimed that he did not make a free choice as he the arrow cross had threatened with his daughter's life. After that, however, he recruited his brother, Tivadar. Although Brunner claimed that he did not take part in executions a multitude of witnesses came forward in his second trial, in 1971 claiming that he not only brutally beat and tortured his victims but he also took part in a number of executions by the river Danube. Brunner claimed that he was blackmailed: they threatened to kill his daughter unless he joined. Witnesses confirmed that Brunner eagerly participated in the beatings countering his claim that he was coerced. Neither he nor his sadistic brother had been party members or had any known record of pro-Nazi or anti-Semitic sentiments. He had no prior convictions and would mold into society until he was apprehended.¹⁹ Extraordinary conditions crushed Brunner and activated a demonic strain in his character that

¹⁹ ÁBTL, Budai gyilkosok, O-141/761.

might well have remained dormant in normal times. From a man of virtue he became a barbarous individual, lost in the conflicting imperatives, impulses of his time.

Self-policing or “total control”?

People governed by terroristic regimes have themselves inflicted terror on their peers. German citizens sent countless letters to national socialist authorities to get some action from the state or express love for Nazism and Hitler; denunciations were often sent to the Gestapo, the Nazi police state was not merely imposed on society from above. Denunciations helped the Gestapo, which in fact “could hardly have operated with such success had it been denied the participation of the German population as occasional voluntary denouncers.” The state’s formidable punitive powers were put to the disposal of its individual citizens. Private enemies could be ratted on and the state could take care of your problem.²⁰ In Würzburg out of 175 casefiles involving efforts to enforce the social and sexual isolation of Jews, 57 percent began with denunciations from the population at large. The extent of denunciations suggests considerable social involvement in the terror system at the grassroots level, including denunciations against “ordinary” Germans in non-racial crimes. “It seems,” Robert Gellately has written, that self-interest fueled the self-policing system.” Denouncers offered tips in order to get rid of enemies, rivals, competitors, occurred in neighborhoods, homes even families. In Germany people began to count and even solicit the intervention of the system and calculate how the authorities could be enticed or manipulated into acting on their behalf. Some people denounced each other so often that only direct threats to send both parties to concentration camp put a stop to it.²¹ In Russia and later the Soviet Union denunciation served as a means of social control over the behavior of local authorities.²²

Denunciation as a social practice in the harsh European systems of the 20th century has to be put into the proper perspective. National Socialism persecuted certain groups of the population and those actively resisted it. The Stalinist state waged war on most of the population, although the focus groups of attack could change from time to time. Timothy Snyder has shown that the Great Terror in the Soviet Union was directed in roughly equal proportion against diverse “enemies

²⁰ Fitzpatrick – Gellately, *Accusatory Practices and Denunciation in Modern European History*, opcit.

²¹ Gellately, *Denunciations in the 20th Century*, opcit.

²² Vladimir Kozlov, Denunciation and its Function in Soviet Governance in Fitzpatrick-Gellately, *Accusatory Practices and Denunciation in Modern European History*, opcit. 121-152.

of the state” and different national minorities.²³ In both societies the enemy was invested with diabolical qualities. A “them or us” mentality, either we destroy the enemy or they would destroy us characterized Nazi thinking regarding the Jews as well as Stalinist dogma regarding class enemies. A Soviet advisor in Czechoslovakia, Likachev explained, “Either we twist their neck or they twist ours.”²⁴

In case Hitler had his way Germany would have gotten rid of all its enemies after deporting or killing them all. This was not the case in Stalinist systems, where the intensification of terror was enshrined as a law. In 1953, a Hungarian judge explained his verdict in the following words: “The criminal case just tried is another proof that we are constructing socialism in the midst of the hatred and resistance of the last remnants of the *shattered* exploiting classes.” They had to contend with serious repercussions though: “we are able to unmask and crush those who lift a finger on our homeland.” In fact as Stalinist dogma of the constant intensification of class struggle “predicted” that the more enemies destroyed the more intense their opposition became, which in turn required the intensification of oppression. As the same judge put it: “the enemy is viewing our progress on the road towards socialism with increasing rage and chooses more and more ways to attack.”²⁵ Party chief ideologist József Révai explained that the enemy was numerous and variously defined. It included “Zionists and Hungarian bourgeois nationalists” and the remnants of capitalists, kulaks and cosmopolitans.” In addition, the lingering bourgeois ideas also nourished hostile elements.” To make things worse, on a higher level of development, class struggle would “inevitably” become more intense. “Political consolidations and the increase of class struggle were not contradictory conditions, as the enemy weakens its resistance grows simultaneously.” As another functionary, the historian Andics put it, “on the higher stage of development class struggle intensifies and this was *inescapable*.²⁶ Even in 1953 a party secretary estimated that there were still 500 thousand

²³ Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin*. New York, 2010. Chapters 2 and 3.

²⁴ Cited in Petr Blazek – Pavel Zacek, Czechoslovakia in Krzysztof Persak and Lukas Kaminski eds., *A Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus*. Warsaw, 2005. 87-162.

²⁵ Zudar és társai, MNL OL, XIX-10-K 4 doboz.

²⁶ Révai feljegyzése Rákosinak, MNL OL, 265. F. 65. Cs. 16 őe; elméleti feladataink és a pártoktatás, Révai és Andics hozzászólása, MNL OL, 265. F. 53 cs. 10. őe.

hostile elements left in the country.²⁷ In Poland there were six million names on the list of suspicious and hostile elements.

There was one secret policeman for every ten thousand inhabitants in Hitler's Germany and one for 500 in the Soviet Union. Including unofficial ones, there were 100 and 500 thousand members of the Stasi in the GDR. After the coup in Czechoslovakia, in reaction to the mass resistance to the new regime, the authorities registered 200 thousand people, between 1951 and 1958 the security service, StB kept 125 thousand people under active surveillance. In 1955, Czechoslovak state security, which lorded over a population of 12,5 million, employed the services of almost 38 thousand informants of various categories. In 1990 260 thousand citizens of the country were rehabilitated who had been victims of political crimes. There were 32,638 political prisoners in 1950 and 240 people were executed in justice murders between 1948 and 1960.²⁸

In Romania the General Directorate of People's Security was tasked with "the defense of democratic conquests and to ensure the security of the Romanian People's Republic against the plotting of external and internal enemies." Opposition to the communist regime was a criminal offense according to a law passed in 1949. The death penalty was introduced also in 1949 for treason and economic sabotage and a decree was promulgated to punish acts "considered danger to the society" even in these were "not specifically provided for in the law as crimes." In 1948 Securitate employed the services of 42,187 informers and in 1951 417,916 Romanians were kept under watch. In addition two years prior to Stalin's death, security troops were employed, 64 thousand of them including officers, to maintain public order in major industrial centers and to quell any resistance to government measures. Resistance to collectivization alone led to the arrest of 80 thousand peasants. According to some accounts between 1949 and 1960, 134,150 political trials took place involving at least 549,400 accused.²⁹ [

An even higher number, over 45 thousand informants reported to the Hungarian State Security Authority in 1953 in a variety of arrangements: informers and their handlers or as "social contacts" with no formal ties to the authorities. This did not include people "provisionally" recruited by the police for individual affairs under investigation. The country's population was 9,5

²⁷ Zapis besedi s Bíró in Galina P. Murashko ed., *Vostochnaia Evropa v Dokumentakh Rossiskikh Arkhivov*, vol 2. Novosibirsk, 1997. 866-871.

²⁸ Blazek - Zacek, *Czechoslovakia*, opcit.

²⁹ Denis Deletant, Romania in *Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus*, opcit. 291, 305, 317.

million, which was a higher per capita ratio than either the USSR or Hitler's Germany. The armada of informers kept 1,149,659 people under observation that is roughly one out of every eight Hungarians. During the domestic thaw following Stalin's death in 1953, 666,728 files were "erased" because they were collected "unlawfully." On the other hand the political police's "observation potential" increased by 44 per cent in 1954. State censors opened almost 30,000 letters annually and in 1955 close to 43,000 reports were filed on recorded conversations.³⁰ The figures suggest that people had every reason to think that they were observed all the time which justified their reluctance to speak in public. The number of state security personnel employed to monitor and control the population does not tell the full story, the placement of them was equally significant in creating an atmosphere of full control. The fear of being denounced may have been more widespread than many historians realize. It was not the real numbers of political policemen that counted but the not unfounded perception that they were everywhere, permeating the fabric of society. Hannah Arendt has written that both National Socialist and Stalinist systems developed "a system of ubiquitous spying where everybody maybe a police agent" "where each individual *feels* himself under constant surveillance." In fact the placement of informants was at least as important as numbers to make citizens feel that they were being watched. Internal documents on the formation of the Hungarian political police reveal that not only did they try to put informers everywhere, "there should be a reliable informant even in the smallest hamlet" but that they should also be well-placed. People who saw many others by virtue of their occupation such as housekeepers, hairdressers, former gendarmes who knew everyone in the village, people who staffed hotels and restaurants.³¹ There is every reason to assume that people could at least legitimately *feel* that their activities were under constant control. No political system is omnipresent through agents alone but the perception of it may be enough to extract the expected

³⁰ Erzsébet Kajári, Bevezető a Belügyminisztérium Kollégiuma 1953-1956 közötti iratainak tanulmányozásához, in Gyarmati György, Varga Katalin eds., *A Belügyminisztérium Kollégiumának ülései 1953-1956*, volume 1. Budapest, 2001. 24-27.

³¹ Müller Rolf, *A politika rendőrség a Rákosi korszakban*. Budapest, 2012. 156-158.

behavior, *enforced obedience*. This, as John Connelly has shown, could result in anticipatory compliance, which gave “Nazism its tenacity and radicalism.”³²

In order to understand the role of the state security service in a Stalinist political system it is necessary to clarify what its intended role was. According to the resolution passed by the Political Committee of the Hungarian Workers Party [the highest decision-making organ of the communist state] in 1950, “The State Security Authority is one of the most important organ of the *protection* of the dictatorship of the proletariat.” Similar clarifications about the role of state security were made in the other communist states as well. As the anonymous authors of a top secret publication on the history of state security prepared for the use of the Ministry of Interior later put it, “The State Security Authority was put in charge of the *total control* of every organ of the society with clandestine methods.”³³

Surveillance of the population reached unimaginable levels in Hungary. Foreign diplomatic missions were watched and security agents were able to records the names of people who entered them. The librarian of the British Library in Budapest reported to the political police. Although its resources may not have been endless, it was nevertheless formidable enabling it to pursue even the most petty of cases if the perceived interest of the state was involved. State security planted two “undercover” agents in a department store in the mining town of Tatabánya to catch shoppers who were regularly buying up too much textile. The local political police launched a whole operation to catch the malefactors. The agents were “organized” into the “network” on a provisional basis. In fact one of them was a saleswoman, the other the head of the textile department. Two further provisional agents, both salespersons, were recruited in another store in the town. They were also family members of the suspected shoppers.³⁴

A group of five were smuggling people across the border, they were caught as a result of “information gathered through confidential channels” that is from an informant. One person was

³² The Uses of Volksgemeinschaft: Letters to the NSDAP Kreisleitung, Eisenach, 1939-1940, in Fitzpatrick-Gellately, *Accusatorz Practices and Denunciation in Modern European History*. 153-184.

³³ Az állam biztonsága ellen kifejtett tevékenység és az ellene folytatott harc 1948-1958, ÁBTL, A-1364-1.

³⁴ MNL OL, XIX-b-1-j, 33. doboz.

taken into custody who then gave up the whole group in return for his release.³⁵ Mátyás Óze was recruited in 1951 and entrusted to “monitor” certain individuals. Óze may not have joined the services of his own free will. He was likely blackmailed as he had already been sentenced for embezzlement, hiding weapons and passport crimes. Moreover he was a social alien: his father was a miller, he himself a merchant. Even so, he turned out to be a keen agent, he reported “more than actually happened.” At one point Óze decided to leave the country illegally and to take his fiancée with him. He told a friend, István Máté, who also had a criminal record, about his plans, who decided to join him as he felt he had “no future in the country.” Inexplicably, Óze denounced his partner, who was arrested and sentenced to four years and six months. The person who turned him in did not get away with it either. It turned out that Óze had disclosed to Máté that he was an informant of the state security. He was sentenced to three years and the full confiscation of his property after having spent almost three years under “preliminary arrest.”³⁶

If it is true that communist parties made denunciation an obligation as we all as a virtue, snitching was as much an extracted as a voluntary phenomenon. For some people denunciation was also a psychological need. One Soviet “author” addressed 300 “slandorous” letters to the NKVD. Investigation did not confirm the allegations contained in the letters: the political system of total control and full information was particularly suited for psychopathic personalities. Information gathered from snitches was the lifeline of paranoid regimes. State security services routinely recruited prison and camp inmates in return for release.

G. V. was sent internment camp for sabotage in 1952 when he was recruited and employed as a cell informant. This may have been a welcome opportunity to get out of a hopeless situation as internees did not know when, if ever, their sentence would expire. At first sight this is purely a coerced situation where the victim has little to lose and everything to win. However, V was never left alone. In 1956 his files were destroyed but he was contacted again a year later and in the early 70s he was forced to collect information on his daughter and son-in-law. It is another matter, that as far as one can tell from lifeless written evidence, he may have done so with enthusiasm.³⁷

³⁵ MNL OL, XX-5-b, 22 doboz, 2975/1950.

³⁶ MNL OL, XIX-10-K, 4. doboz.

³⁷ ÁBTL III-1-B, “Florence”.

Personal ambition also served as a motivating factor in non-meritocratic societies. Malicious denunciation was a path to well paid, prestigious positions which could not be attained by talent and achievement alone. P. was a prominent historian and editor who made it his business to write detailed and lengthy reports to the authorities of his colleagues' counter-revolutionary activities. His services were so valuable that state security recruited him as a regular agent. It was not long before P presented the bill for his originally unsolicited services. In return for his much appreciated reports he asked the "authorities" for a coveted directors' post in the country's cultural institute in a capitalist state. Denunciation was not an occupation restricted to the depraved. It was extracted by states that defined security in a very broad sense to maximize control by extending the scope of terror to thwart anti-state activity before it could happen.

Even crimes that *were about to* happen were supposed to be reported and failure to do so was a criminal offense even if the defendant did not know about the intent. This was *self-policing* but not *voluntarily* so. Judge Andó sentenced four people who had "illegal business contact" – [purchasing nylon stockings] but of whose alleged spying they knew nothing about. According to judge Andó, "actually none of them were told that Fazekas was an imperialist spy, his spying was unknown to any of them. But purely the things they did know about him [the alleged spy] in the present international situation with the *obligatory* political vigilance binding all Hungarian citizens, they could have been *expected* to conclude that Fazekas was spying. Today, when the sharpening of the class struggle and the ever increasing aggresso [sic] activities of the imperialists were proven by various forms of subversive activities camouflaged cunningly, [the law] which regulates reporting obligations of imperialist activities can be interpreted according to the demands of increased vigilance only."³⁸

The Scope of Repression

A proper perspective of tyrannical regimes requires that we understand the scope of repression. Stalinist states manufactured their enemies. In view of the fact that most people may have opposed them this may have been counterproductive. Seeking out invisible enemies was an important feature of communist statecraft. It justified a constant state of terror as the means to extract compliance as well as the institutional pillar of the system, the security apparatus.

³⁸ Szabó István és társai, ÁBTL, 10-51048-952, V-93057, 1951.

Provocation, the Czechoslovak state security opined, was the only correct way to uncover and convict our enemies.³⁹ “Enemies of the state” “wormed their way” into even the most unlikely places such as Soviet Hungarian companies, which, according to a report to the communist party’s political committee, had become the ‘reservoirs of hostile elements.’ These “shady” figures, former “Horthyite officers” and their *offspring* as well as former landowners, occupied high positions around the Soviet comrades and were creating an anti-Soviet atmosphere. It was alleged that interpreters of ‘bourgeois origin’ deliberately mistranslated in order to stir conflict.⁴⁰ In February 1950 the Political Committee of the Hungarian communist party declared war “in the spirit of communist vigilance against hostile elements and agents that had wormed their way or were planted into the ranks of the State Security Authority.”⁴¹

George Schopflin has observed that Stalinism was an ideology of perfection; hence, there could be, by definition, no problems that could not be solved. If a solution should fail, failure could be attributed to antagonists. Consequently there was no place for error, there were no accidents, honest mistakes⁴². In Romania a law passed in 1950 imposed the death penalty for crimes including “*negligence* by workers “leading to public disaster” as well as theft, destruction of military equipment, plotting against the state and economic sabotage.”⁴³ In the final phase of Bolshevization Western interests and presence was being rooted out. Leaders of the Hungarian-American Oil Company were tried for “deliberately misplacing experimental oil rigs where there was no hope of finding oil.” In 1951, after the Soviet leader announced that a war with the imperialists would break out in 1953. In the atmosphere of heightened preparation for war two officers, who had served in the pre-war army were executed in a medical doctor’s plot of food poisoning. According to their show trial, it was a conscious act of sabotage and a conspiracy to overthrow democracy when the international situation was becoming acute.⁴⁴ Militarization also reached the countryside. Although the collection of crops was a national security interest, the

³⁹ Cited in Blazek – Zacek, *Czechoslovakia*, opcit.

⁴⁰ MNL OL, M-KS, 276. F. 53. Cs. 146. őe.

⁴¹ Az állam biztonsága ellen kifejtett ellenséges tevékenység és az ellene folytatott harc, opcit.

⁴² George Schopflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe*, Oxford, UK, Cambridge, Mass., 1993.

⁴³ Deletant, *Romania*, opcit. 291.

⁴⁴ Zsitnyányi Ildikó, A hazáért mindhalálíg - a magyar tisztikar ellen irányuló perek, in Okváth Imre ed, *Katonai perek, 1945-1958*. Budapest, 2001.

machinery at disposal was subpar but individuals had to take the blame for failure. A party secretary of a machine station was charged for “negligent repair.” He was not taken into custody because there was a shortage of technical experts. A piece of iron got caught up in a trasher working in a *kulak* household and ruined it, the kulak was arrested for conscious sabotage.⁴⁵

The fact that ‘offspring’ were counted as natural enemies showed that class based persecution interpreted *class position* as an *inherited* trait just as *race* was in national socialist ideology. In other words, the status of class enemy was externally constructed and not contingent on the disposition of the individual. Sheila Fitzpatrick has noted, that social aliens were objects of stigmatization like *Gemeinschaftsfremde* in Germany. In 1938 a group of peasants who denounced a kolkhoz chairman recalled that his father had exploited peasants.

Therefore, in Stalinist practice, one could be *born* a ‘class enemy’ if that person had a parent that was identified amongst the enemies of the people. A certain Lajosné F. Kiss was charged with spreading false rumors. The report of her activity stressed that she had 9 yokes [which would qualify her as a working peasant] and was of „kulak origin.”⁴⁶ Hence descendants bore their stigma even if they had, in course of their lifetime become members of the working class. Theirs was not the stigma of the color of their skin or the shape of their skulls the curvature of their nose but their family history which stayed ineradicably with them. Thus peasants, who by virtue of the size of their plot would otherwise qualify as ‘working peasants,’ and hence would not be subject to persecution, still qualified as kulaks, a social class to be ‘liquidated’ if their parents were, or had been kulaks: “even if there is any change regarding the wealth status of a kulak, even if he loses all his wealth he does not *cease* to be a kulak. This is a decisive issue regarding the *class struggle* because if we are not careful he will worm his way into the ranks of the workers with great ease.”⁴⁷

The social circles under repression was further widened with the adoption of Stalinis’s concept of *presumption* of guilt, another measure that extended persecution to imaginary acts. Individuals, by virtue of their social origin were considered to be enemies of the state automatically and did not even need to commit a crime to be deemed dangerous to society and therefore to be

⁴⁵ Jelentés Sebestyénnek, MNL OL, XIX-B-14 3. doboz.

⁴⁶ MNL OL, XIX-B-14, 3. doboz, sz. n./52.

⁴⁷ Házi elvtars Beér elvtarsnak XIX-B-1-q, 20. doboz, 0634/1951, 229/1951.

eligible for repression. A certain Istvan Szabó was charged because his adopted son was charged with treason. The judge admitted that he knew nothing of his son's alleged spying activities. Nevertheless, he considered Szabó 'dangerous to society since his close relative became a servant of the treasonous Titoist gangs and as a result Szabó himself can be used for subversive activities against our people's democracy.'⁴⁸

This case highlights yet another way the circle of repression was widened: family members were arrested for crimes committed by their kin. As Stalin explained in a toast in 1937: "And we shall destroy every such enemy, even if he is an old Bolshevik. We will destroy his entire clan, his family. We will destroy without mercy anybody who, with deeds or thoughts... infringes on the unity of the socialist state. For the destruction of all enemies... their own, their clan."⁴⁹

Between 1948 and 1953 state security opened over 500 files for conspiracies to overthrow the People's Republic. The large number for a country for a population as small as the Hungarian is not surprising given the broad interpretation of the crime. According to a ruling of the Supreme Court the act was considered committed even if the preparations were not adequate to achieve the desired result but were only directed at it.⁵⁰

The scope of repression was immeasurably broadened as every-day life was criminalized. Activities normal in democratic societies such as shopping, listening to the radio, reading books and the like were deemed to be criminal offenses. In addition, relatively small violations of the law were endowed with *political significance*: for instance stealing was considered a subversive act designed to undermine people's democracy. Political authority was protected even from verbal abuse: in 1947 an individual was placed under "police supervision" i. e. sent to an internment camp for "utterances against democracy" – telling *jokes* about communist party leader Rákosi.⁵¹ In 1952 a peasant woman was indicted for spreading the "alarmist rumor" that the state was decreasing compulsory delivery quotes by half.⁵² The Soviet state criminalized standing in line for foodstuffs during the – unadmitted – famine of 1933. People were sent to prison for hoarding in the 1950s.

⁴⁸ Szabó István és társai, opcit.

⁴⁹ Cited in Mark Edele, *Stalinist Society*. Oxford, 2011. 78]

⁵⁰ MNL OL, XIX-10-K, 4. doboz, Zudar és társai, opcit.

⁵¹ ÁBTL III/C V-78019.

⁵² MNL OL, XIX-B-14, 3. doboz, sz. n./1952.

Buying too much bread or lard could result in spells in jail lasting up to eight years. State security attributed the shortage of textile and cotton products in the town of Tatabánya to black marketeering. Yet such acts as hoarding food may not have been designed to subvert the communist state but as a desperate act to circumvent an inherent flaw of the dictatorial economic system, shortage. Consumer goods were in short supply because of inherent flaws of the central command economy but the systemic failure was criminalized and the shortage was made out to be a result of a conspiracy of criminals.

In Tatabánya it was discovered that the textile needs of the miners who “were making good money” could not be satisfied because the sales personnel in a department store and a People’s store conspired to buy it up and sell it on the black market. It was suspected that exploiting their insiders knowledge of the next shipment of the product they had their family members line up and buy textile “in excess of their personal needs albeit in small quantities.” They sold it at a profit to an “individual merchant” - who was otherwise a member of the Hungarian Workers Party - in Budapest who was supposed to resell it in legal stores. The petty scale of the whole affair is shown by the fact that house search at the merchant’s home came up with 22 meters of textile. State security staged an operation to round up the perpetrators. Four detectives were stationed in the People’s Store in “conspirative attire” in addition to two occasional informants recruited for the purpose. Similarly, six detectives, two other policemen and two occasional network agents were stationed in the department store. In other words 16 agents were mobilized [beside the head of the investigation] to uncover a manufactured crime involving a few dozen yards of linen. The report prepared by the political police did not fail to mention the Budapest merchant’s original family name, Weisz, which was a clear indication of his Jewish background.⁵³

Ferenc Jancsik of Balassagyarmat was found guilty in the criminal offense of “withholding commodities.” Jancsik, a confectioner, had allegedly been a member of the Arrow Cross Party, after which he entered the Hungarian Workers Party. In the course of a membership revision Jancsik was labeled a “class alien and exploiter” and was ousted from the party. His membership in the former national socialist party would not have mattered if he had not been a class alien. State security prepared a “study of environment”, a character study that depicted Jancsik in Shylockian terms, in the crass language of class struggle. He attempted to “accumulate wealth” after the

⁵³ MNL OL, XIX-B-j, 33. doboz.

“liberation,” provided housing for the assistants of his shop in the cellar, where one of them “contracted pulmonary disease.” Jancsik was allegedly “so tight fisted that he had no friends” so that he would not have to spend any money on them. “The workers did not like him” as “he behaved like a landlord, his daughter owned a German shepherd.” Such social tension of course may have been real. In the Soviet Union, for instance a couple was denounced in 1933 for “living like kulaks, making money out of renting their houses to vacationers and possessing gold.” The charges were made complete – and farcical had they not been so dangerous – with the statement that Jancsik “hated the people’s democracy, agitated against the Soviet Union and insulted Democracy.”

The items, which were available only in short supply, included paprika – the staple of Hungarian meals - soap, pepper, coffee and linen. In addition, he purchased raw materials for his cakes, which was not easy as crystal sugar and cocoa powder were often unavailable. Hence he purchased partly from private persons, in excess of the immediate needs of the business. According to the indictment, he “only bought them in order to deprive the workers and hoard them for himself.” Thus his act qualified as sabotage and Jancsik received two years in prison and a fine of 6000 forints, roughly a six month income. Two others were also sentenced to shorter prison terms in the same affair.⁵⁴

Not only was travelling from one city to another without permission a criminal offense in the Soviet Union, but the Soviet borders were essentially closed. This Stalinist practice made an oversized prison out of the Soviet occupied lands. Thus “escape” was literally the only way to leave a people’s democracy, which was a criminal act. In Czechoslovakia the Ministry of Interior ensnared members of the “former ruling classes” by using provocateurs who offered to acquire the documentation which would allow them to leave the country legally. The border guards erected a fake border crossing station where these documents were examined only to be pronounced fake. The victims, who for a moment felt themselves an arms-length from freedom, were arrested.

István Rupp was tried in 1952 for illegal border crossing. His sister lived in Vienna and apparently was a member of the Viennese Opera. She asked Rupp to join her and live in the Austrian capital. According to court documents an “unknown person” appeared in Rupp’s home

⁵⁴ MNL OL, XIX-B-j, 33. doboz.

and offered to get him a passport. Although Rupp rejected the offer the person came back once again and asked for Rupp's photo. Eventually after some vacillation, Rupp and another person living with him apparently gave in. Prior to the delivery of the passport they were arrested and accused for having made preparations to leave the country. There is little doubt that the state security was reading Rupp's mail and the person offering the passport was a provocateur. It was clear to the judge that Rupp and his companion never left their home for the journey for which they made preparations. However, according to the verdict, "illegal border crossing begins when somebody leaves their home with the intention of leaving the country." The widespread practice of punishing "preparatory activities" for border crossing was not prescribed by the penal code although specified activities were. Nevertheless Rupp received a sentence of four years – for allegedly intending to go to Vienna.⁵⁵ Courts were inundated with cases relating to border crossing. In the year 1955, 1102 people were convicted for attempting or planning to cross the border,⁵⁶ three out of four only planning their escape. Many of them got off the hook by agreeing to work for the state security services. Crossing the border illegally could be highly dangerous as Hungary was separated from Austria by a minefield and barbed wire. The unilaterally created no man's land on the western border was heavily patrolled by the border guards, which served as a branch of the State Security Service. West bound trains could only be boarded with a valid exit visa, which hardly anyone had and the trains too, were patrolled by the state security service. Finally, border zones that outsiders were allowed to visit only with special permit. Many were caught and some detonated themselves during the crossing. Hence it required lengthy planning and a lot of courage to cross the border illegally. Smugglers would be paid to take people to the other side, but it is likely that many of those were already agents of the state security. Levente Wein was caught trying to cross the border with his family and turned by the security service. He offered his smuggling services only to turn his unwitting clients over to the police. Illegal border crossing became a source of vulnerable informants the number of which were increased by people who made the trip at the instigation of provocateurs. On the other hand the historian Karl Brown found that in some places the barbed wire and minefields were not intact; the border guards either could not care less or were bribed to turn a blind eye to illegal border crossing. Some refugees claimed that it was as

⁵⁵ MNL OL, XIX-10-k, 4. doboz, 003094.

⁵⁶ Brown, *regulating Bodies*, opcit. 88.

easy to cross the border as crossing the road. Some people even made it across the border with small children. Experiences could be very different.

Almost immediately after its introduction the Stalinist economies of Eastern Europe began to fail leading to severe shortage of commodities. This was in part to the inherent flaws of the central command system and in part to the militarization of the economies, which were preparing for a world war. Collectivization was meant to break the backbone of independent farmers and the eventual destruction of the “kulaks”, “wealthy peasants” as a social class. Compulsory delivery was introduced which reduced the peasants’ will to produce. The idea was to use resources extracted from the countryside for heavy industrialization, which served the needs of military preparation as well as “economic modernization” prescribed by Stalinist dogma. All this led to severe food shortages, which was made worse by the need to export agricultural produce for vital imports for the industry. This required extraordinary repressive measures to extract everything possible for the peasantry. Stalinist economic policy led to food shortage, which intensified repressive measures in the countryside, making the original problem even worse. Nevertheless, food shortage was a welcome opportunity to justify the liquidation of a “hostile” social class, an aim announced by Stalin as well as Stalinist leaders in Eastern Europe.

Peasants were prohibited to slaughter their livestock without permission. Killing pigs was a long standing social custom in Hungary and doing so can be interpreted as the survival of social customs despite terror and even as politically motivated resistance. It was also an attempt to circumvent the system in order to survive. Courts were flooded with cases of “black slaughter.” Criminal proceedings launched under this pretext give an insight into the number of people repressed under Rákosi’s rule. In January 1952 alone criminal proceedings were initiated against 2634 people. Even this was not enough as further measures were ordered to prosecute even more cases of illegal slaughter. “Social” considerations were to play no role in reporting these crimes. In spite of a tsunami of decrees aiming to reduce it, the number of animals slaughtered illegally was on the rise. This suggested that “control was very lax.” Therefore the Ministry of Interior, aiming to increase the number of denunciations, instructed local councils to “mobilize wide masses” to control black slaughter. State control on local authorities was tightened: the local council was mandated to ceaselessly control activities designed to curb illegal slaughter. Statistics regarding repressive measures against black slaughter reveals that all social strata of the peasantry

were repressed, in fact more “poor” peasants were prosecuted than “middle” peasants or kulaks.⁵⁷ Again, experiences varied. In places security policemen were privy to or even participants of black slaughter. Even so the very large number of people arrested for the crime attests at least as much to the terroristic nature of the system and its potential to apprehend and clamp down on “subversive acts” as to the potential survival of customs and social cohesion in a totalitarian state.

The large number of enemies the state dealt with is highlighted by the immense number of people arrested and sentenced for treason and conspiracy. These represented virtually all social layers revealing the Stalinist terror was more inclusive than Nazi. Hundreds of such cases were tried in Hungary alone and in each case, most of which were tried in secret by military tribunals paraded a large number of defendants.⁵⁸ Most of these cases were manufactured in the war hysteria generated by the government in the wake of Stalin’s instruction to prepare for a final war with the capitalists. A 21 year old lieutenant of the air force, Tibor Dodonka was sentenced to death for supplying his uncle, an alleged spy, information about a military air field. Even his interrogator, who may have used physical force to extract a confession, reported that Dodonka was telling the truth when he denied the charge. A political police report revealed that Dodonka was forced to sign a pre-scripted testimony. An even wider segments of the populace were kept under terror by the legal practice of sentencing for the ‘preparation’ for illegal activity.

The top down - bottom up dynamic of dictatorial rule

Victims of persecution were sometimes themselves persecutors or participated in the construction of oppressive police states. Béla Szász was known in the western world as the quintessential victim of Stalinist persecution. His reputation was founded on his memoirs first published in English, which described his ordeals at the hands of the brutal political police. Szász was arrested as part of Soviet-occupied Eastern Europe’s largest show trial to date, in 1949. He

⁵⁷ MNL OL, XIX-B-1-q, 20, doboz, 0673/1051.

⁵⁸ The following few cases will give an example: Végh – Pahy-Shreter group, 15 people arrested and sentenced; Kollmann László and his residence, 1950, Kolmann was sentenced to death, 9 others to prison; László Németh and his group, 1950, 2 death sentences, two long prison terms; “networks” of Antal Bálint and Gyula Jakabfy, 3 executions, one life sentences 26 “participants” condemned to 1 to 15 years; in 1951 86 members of the “White Guard” conspiracy were arrested and sentenced, two of them to death; three people were executed and 14 others were sent to prison, in one case for life, in a “kulak conspiracy” in the small town of Izsák in 1951; in the László Fazekas affair a secret military tribunal sentenced 5 people to death and 16 others to prison in 1952;

recounts the story of his brutal interrogation and ceaseless torture and how he refused to cave in and confess against the main defendant of the trial. His was a story of martyrdom and heroism and became one of the classic memoirs of communist terror. Only recently was evidence uncovered that Szász had worked for the political police himself and helped ensnare an active opponent of the communists, who would finish his life disgraced, in the gallows. Szász was a young idealist, a captive of his ideology of perfection, who brought down an enemy of his cause.

The historian Denis Deletant emphasized that ‘reliance on terror was an instrument of political power.’ It was wielded in two stages: first, to eliminate political opponents to consolidate political power and second, to ‘ensure compliance’ once revolutionary change had been effected.⁵⁹

The omnipotence of the state in molding society, the breaking down of existing relationships has been challenged. Violence was not simply by a centrally organized reign of terror but could be unleashed even by villagers, one against the other, profiting from the general chaos to settle scores. Katherine Verdery concluded in her study on collectivization in Romania that the policies of creating a kulak class which were “intended to promote class struggle gave way to expressions of community solidarity,” and argued that kulak status was a result of negotiation and not imposition.⁶⁰ In the village of Tizsakécske the “arbitrary actions” of the local authorities led the “working peasants to side with the kulaks” and “welded the population into *unity* irrespectively of class.”⁶¹ Sheila Fitzpatrick has suggested that atomization may not have succeeded in the Soviet Union, where family bonds were strengthened rather than weakened, as attested by letters written to the authorities on behalf of spouses who were arrested during the purges. This is contradicted by the success of the Soviet state’s campaign against the family as a bourgeois institution that resulted in a dramatic hike in divorces and orphaned children many of whom lived in the streets of large cities and involved in criminal activity. Polish women deported to the Soviet Union were appalled by the decline of moral standards and the decline of family values and bonds.⁶²

⁵⁹ Dennis Deletant, Political Purges and Mass repression in Romania, 1948-1955 in McDermott – Stibbe, *Stalinist Terror in Eastern Europe*. 141.

⁶⁰ Constantin Iordachi – Dorin Dobrinu, Introduction in *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power – The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949-1962*. Budapest, New York, 2009. 1-24; Katherine Verdery, *Exploiters Old and New: Making and Unmaking Rich Peasants in Aurel Vlaicu*. Ibid. 307-328.

⁶¹ Valamennyi tanács elnökének, MNL OL, XIX-B-1-q, 29. Doboz, 0714/951.1/5.

⁶² Katherine R. Jolluck, *Exile and Identity: Polish Women in the Soviet Union in World War II*. Pittsburgh, 2002.

Communism was an ideology of the collective where the aspirations of the individual were subordinated to the good of the collective. While this ideal may have been close to the collectivist traditions of rural Russia it was did was foreign to the traditions of individualism in Central Europe. Propaganda emphasized the collective, politics instilled mistrust and paranoia in the social fabric, leaving people with the sense of and isolation. It was logical for the state to strive for social atomization. In conditions where the majority of the society, even the beneficiaries of the “rule of the proletariat” opposed the political system –as witnessed by the Hungarian revolution in 1956 - isolated individuals were easier targets for the instruments of power than groups of people in a political system that regarded members of society as targets to be suppressed even to be annihilated. Real and imagined opponents of the political system were hunted down like enemy forces on the battle field. Social solidarity was a ritual which had no bearing on reality. Groups of friends that gathered in pubs to vent their frustration with the political system were shattered by provocateurs and snitches planted in them. Their conversations may have been hostile to the rulers but they were blown out of proportion into plots and conspiracies. People understood what it meant when the black sedan pulled up but they had no recourse. The lack of legal protection against the state and the fear of the consequences of arrest led many to desperate acts. Minister of Interior Sándor Zöld got wind that he would be arrested but did not wait for the arrival of the leather coated men. He killed his wife, children and mother-in-law and committed suicide. Killing them was a desperate act of family solidarity; his suicide was an act of resistance that deprived the state security from the opportunity of extracting the names of other „enemies.”

A widow committed suicide by her husband’s grave when her newly-wed daughter and her son-in-law were picked up by the political police. She offered her sacrifice in the misguided hope the couple to be released. Her martyrdom was in vain as the couple was sentenced for putting up an alleged ‘enemy of the people’ in their home. Her act was no doubt caused by fear of the consequences of her loved ones’ arrest. Fear was instilled consciously as a means to extract compliance. While conspirators were tried in secret many political crimes and their punishment were well publicized no doubt as a deterrent. In 1951, in order to halt the alarming number of illegal slaughters, the Minister of Interior, Árpád Házi decreed that violators should be tried immediately and that the verdicts be published by the press.⁶³

⁶³ MNL OL, XIX-B-1-q, 20. doboz, 0673/1951.

Robert Gellately argued that unlike German self-policing, it is impossible to regard Stalinist society – under surveillance by a large NKVD and a rapidly growing net of informers as self-policing in a similar sense, despite the prevalence of popular denunciations. In the GDR policing was less closely linked with repression and punishment, writing to the authorities with grievances, complaints and requests was accepted as every-day practice while regular police informers were held in low regard. There may have been so many denunciations that the dichotomy between victims and perpetrators did not stand up. The propensity to denounce depended on political and cultural traditions. And this leads to the next issue, the one of what was reported and why. This may have had to do with the top-bottom, bottom down dynamic generated by the totalitarian state.

What somebody reports makes a big difference. Even in a dictatorship one can conceive a denunciation of corruption, which can be conceived as *cooperation* in rooting out social anomaly. One may also give up a person in hiding not because the person in question is avoiding the authorities for committing an act that cannot be universally accepted as a crime but because that person is persecuted as a result of the worldview of a political system. It is different to report to the authorities a real crime such as corruption than to report, accepting the tenets of an ideology of hatred, a person persecuted by the state. Denunciations can also be distinguished from the perspective of the expected outcome. One can denounce another in the expectation that the person will receive a fair judgement and a punishment commensurate with his act. One may also denounce others in the full knowledge that the punishment would lead to harsh reprisal that is not at all deserved and not commensurate with the alleged crime.

In 1944, a housekeeper repeatedly sought out the local arrow cross party service that Jews were hiding out in a house opposite to hers. By then it was open knowledge that such people were likely to be murdered, which indeed turned out to be the fate of the people denounced. A caveat must be made, however. In 1945 for instance the political police received a large number of denunciations regarding arrow cross war criminals from victims and witnesses of terror. Denouncing war criminals particularly by former victims falls into a different category than the housekeeper's act even though the consequences could be expected to be similarly harsh.

One may assume that poorly educated people may not be aware of the consequences of their actions. Malicious snitching was not limited to the poorly educated. In 1949, after the

communist seizure of power three historians, S H and V raided the offices of their workplace the Institute of History in Budapest searching for illegal literature. They broke open offices and searched drawers in the middle of the night. The scholars they denounced lost their positions and their careers were cut in half. One of the accused, B, was planning to mail books to Switzerland. V told him he considered “the dissemination of the works of defected historians an “*anti-state*” action.⁶⁴ This was a highly dangerous accusation that could result in very serious reprisal. It is impossible to ignore the ideological dimension of this case. K was came from a bourgeois background who had close ties to the prewar elite, a fact that was cleverly presented to the state security. In 1941 the prime minister sent him to the US to explain Hungary’s commitment to the Anglo-Saxon powers. In 1949 K’s Anglo-American orientation – “K. *bragged* about hiding an English parachutist during the war” - was used against K, as evidence of his anti-Soviet stance. V reported that K’s attitude was “hostile to the people’s democracy.” This was exemplified with the claim that in his scholarly work K allegedly “overemphasized the results of Western scholarship while remaining silent on the achievements of Soviet science.”

The whole affair in the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was part of the communist takeover of cultural and scientific institutions and the state security services had an official agent there, who was assisted by young communist zealots, who were also striving to take over the positions of power from their “bourgeois” peers. But it was H, one of the unofficial informants who launched a full scale security invasion of the institution. He informed the state security authority that “planned sabotage was going on in the Institute.” It was then that the political police instructed H and his associates to break into the offices for “evidence” of hostile activity. K was also accused of having played a role in the suicide of a colleague by revealing that the colleague was being “watched” by the state security.

The incident is revealing of the mechanism of totalitarian life: the presence of agents, the abundance of voluntary social helpers, the role ideological – in this case Communist - conviction, careerism and the interplay of top to bottom and bottom to top action, absolutism and voluntary participation at one and the same time. Denunciations may not have to be baseless to be reprehensible: denouncing kulaks for hoarding food may have factual basis but in view of the “crime” committed may be considered malicious. It is such *collaboration* which sustains terror

⁶⁴ ÁBTL, Kosáry, 10-30392/950.

and hence is the bottom-up component of a totalitarian regime. H became an official informant of the state security services in 1952, the height of Stalinist terror. Later, he became a top intellectual who was a critique of the regime and the state security services kept him under surveillance. If anyone he should have been able to know the boundaries of loyalty to the state.

Well connected people could and did profit from the persecution of others by abusing their power in a political system where the victims had almost no legal recourse. Lower level functionaries defied the central authorities but not in a positive sense. Housing shortage was well-known part of life in Soviet-type societies. In the town of Szolnok the local council wished to provide the workers university with housing. According to the well-tried method used by the political police and the army to provide their cadres with homes, the municipal council compiled a list of “undesirable elements” to be evicted from their homes who could be moved to shared apartments. It turned out that the council moved out way more people than they got permission for and a “large number” of people who were not involved with the university, five county council members, eight party functionaries, one policeman, one army private one Stakhanovite and 12 others were given apartments in such a manner. This also meant that in several cases more than two families were moved into the same dwelling. Since the operation was considered secret good political connections were needed even to know about it let alone take advantage of it. Several council and party activists were involved in the scam. The victims were forced out of their homes with threats of deportation to the countryside.⁶⁵ The person who denounced the affair did so with good intentions on behalf of victims who had no power to defend themselves.

Does the individual swim with the tide or control it? P. N. was the scion of a highly educated bourgeois family who joined the communist movement and spent the war in exile in Switzerland. He entered diplomatic service and sent to Cairo. There he was tasked with monitoring the head of the diplomatic mission, who happened to be the Hungarian president’s son-in-law and a prominent member of the party that won the election in 1945 and the major road-bloc to communist victory. N opened his superior’s mail and concluded that Cs was involved in treasonous activities as a sworn enemy of the communist movement. N denounced him to the communist dominated security service. Cs, a young man of 29, recently married with a small child, was recalled to Hungary, arrested, tried and executed for high treason after the communist seizure of

⁶⁵MNL OL, XIX-B-1-q 29. doboz, 13-303/1952.

power. N later became a prominent intellectual and practitioner of literary criticism – when he was not penning reports in his capacity as a paid agent of state security. Decades later N claimed that he did not expect such a serious sentence but he refused to express regret. His motivations, as revealed by his unpublished memoir and a lengthy interview, reveal multifarious motives. He disliked Cs who owed his career to his marriage. N deplored that Cs never invited him out not even for coffee and deplored his superior’s alleged marital infidelity. Although his grievances reveal bourgeois attitudes they made it acceptable for N to deliver Cs into the arms of the state security. “The bright picture [he] envisioned [of communism] never faded” despite his later disappointments in the record of the political system, which he had hoped in 1945 “would bring about paradise on earth.” N considered Cs a traitor to not to the state but the communist movement for which he had to perish. Cs was expandable. N considered the deadly result of his actions a product of the times: “life was cheap then it was so easy for somebody to die.” Ideology, then and not personal gain was the chief motivating factor for a young middle class intellectual’s betrayal of human decency. There is little doubt that the outcome of Cs’s denunciation would have more serious consequences than his “demotion” as treason was publicly known to be punishable by death. “Determined, opportunistic and a scoundrel.” This was Cs’s opinion of N.⁶⁶ N hoped that he would shape his times and by denouncing Cs he would help communism to victory. Of course he later realized that communism was helped to power by the Soviets and his “contribution” to victory was negligible. His mindset was shaped by the ubiquitous presence of death, and communist doctrine, so fashionable in some social circles of early 20th century Hungary. The doctrine he acquired by choice narrowed his vision and mobilized him as a young zealot, to bring down the old social order and its values. He had agency, but in the narrow constraints of his times. N like so many others had some, albeit limited choices, and had he not wanted to make history, he could have made a better one. Of course, his future career might have suffered but he would not standing before history as a scoundrel. Revealingly N reflected on his experience with history: “shitty times, shitty people.”

Treatments of dictatorships that concentrate on various actions that impede or facilitate the functioning of the system or gage how deeply the state was able penetrate social structures miss an important point. Choices were directly or *indirectly* coerced by the policies of the power center.

⁶⁶ The passage is based on Katona Ferenc, *Tevőleges részese voltam – Nagy Péter akadémikus két emlékezete 1948-ra.*

Citizens reported to the Stasi for personal enrichment, merely for a chance to travel to the West or were threatened, coerced or even blackmailed into cooperation. They also were acting in a political system that did not grant the opportunity to travel freely or to get ahead in life without serving the system. A mechanic conspired to fool state inspectors to think that he had repaired a broken tractor: the bad one was hidden while another tractor station lent a good one for the inspection. He was working around a system where spare parts were usually unavailable, which politicized poor work as conscious subversion and where there was little or no incentive to work in the state economy. His options were constrained by the conditions of state socialism.

A prominent intellectual and historian of the 18th century, K was awaiting trial for his role in the revolution of 1956. He offered to work as an informant for the security services of a political system that he despised in the hope that he would be acquitted. His motivation was to regain his liberty and life as a scholar. Whether individuals volunteered was coerced or was blackmailed to “participate” in dictatorial rule by snitching on the other there were systemic constraints on their actions. Once committed to work for the services it was hard to break free. The Mephistophelean deal was rescindable by the holders of power only, the individual.

This is not to say that character was not a play: one could, after all, opt not to pursue a stellar career if the price was collaboration. Direct blackmail was not always the motivation to work as a snitch. Out of four [!] agents working on unmasking a historian only one was working under duress: that person was “*afraid* because of his Trotskyist connections” – one of the most dangerous accusations that could be made in 1950. According to his state security assessment “he was not honest to the Party or the Security Authority.” Informant 55/1 was characterized as “exceedingly cunning, hard-working, ambitious who hopes that by working for us he can get his party membership card back.” Informant iv/r/11 was said to have “worked for us out of careerism and was afraid that this would portray him in an unfavorable light in the eyes of the Party.” Fear and ambition led them to perform their unsavory activity.

Harsh political conditions brought out the best and the worst. The monks of the Salesian St. Alajos Institute in Budapest suffered physical abuse to hide Jewish children in their convent. Somebody betrayed the children, who, except for one, who managed to escape, were murdered. Pathological behavior blossomed in the conditions of war and dictatorial rule. Zoltán Harangi worked for the Swedish Red Cross in World War II, which was involved in the large scale rescue

of Jews. Harangi clandestinely collaborated with the district arrow cross party service and denounced a hospital which served as a Jewish hideout. The doctor in charge of the hospital took bribes from the people hiding there. Harangi also revealed to the Arrow Cross that there were labor servicemen hiding at the Swedish Red Cross in the full knowledge that he was exposing the victims to mortal danger. In both cases he may have been motivated by the easy access to the victims' money and valuables - the looted valuables were found at his home after his arrest in 1945. He had a fall out with the party service members of which beat him to pulp. Nevertheless he continued his shady activities: he sold Swedish protective papers and had his clients taken away by the Gestapo. He blackmailed robbed, and had a woman deported in 1944; her husband recognized him but dared not report Hanga to the authorities as by then he was in the service of the Soviet military intelligence. Hanga was tried after the war on several occasions and despite his insanity plea he was sentenced to forced labor. He got out of prison in the chaotic days of 1956 revolution and joined one of the resistance groups some members of which suspected that he was a snitch. He was saved by one of his comrades. While pretending to be on the rebels' side he contacted the security services and gave them the names of the members of his group. He also falsely claimed that secret policemen were liquidated in a hospital. When the revolution was over Harangi became an official informant of the state security and urged the arrest of his former comrades – again in the full knowledge that they faced death. Just as in 1944, his actions led the death or incarceration of his victims including the one that saved in 1956. This record only endeared him to the state security. He continued to serve the security services into the 1970s, when he was penning reports on arrow cross men and former cell mates. This was a story of mutual dependence: the police used his services in full knowledge of his shady past, which in turn made him out the perfect informer, one that worked out of passion and was also easy to blackmail. For Harangi denouncing was a passion. In his 1949 verdict it was noted that Harangi „showed no sign that he was sorry for what he had done.”⁶⁷

There were so many denunciations – required and solicited by the state - that they were starting to cause problems. In a case against a group of people who were manufacturing false denunciations, the judge warned that “our authorities, state security agencies... receive baseless slanderous denunciations with the necessary caution... anonymous denunciations that serve as the

⁶⁷ Eörsi László, *Az örök vamzer. Beszélő*, volume 17 number 1 2012.

basis for such undermining of [people's] reputation must end.”⁶⁸ The ultimate paradox of the system of surveillance and snitching was a conspiracy which involved the writing of fake denunciations in which the denouncers were condemned and their victims were released on the grounds that the incriminating letters were intended to mislead the authorities and subvert the people's democracy. It was an illustration of the atmosphere of paranoia imposed by the repressive state.

The indictment of the defendants can be read as an anatomy of the Stalinist political system although obviously it was not meant to be: “[T]hey ruin their victims spiritually and psychologically, they intimidate their environment in order to make them *insecure, distrustful, so that they never feel safe*.” The ringleader was a medical student who graduated from a Catholic high school. His actions seem to have been motivated by revenge, his targets were individuals who had previously courted his wife. His allegations, sent to the security police, sounded “realistic enough” couched in the language of class struggle. A doctor was “spreading false rumors regarding comrade Stalin's death. Please put an end to this.” A “group of medical students were spreading the flu epidemic. Their instigator and mentor if the Hungarian Zionist Union. The members of this are Jewish bourgeois and people they bribed, who had received substantial amounts of money.”

The alleged “conspiracy” was made up of medical students at least one of the participants may not have known that he had been “recruited” as a member. No document originating from the state security makes it possible to discern any kind of truth. It is likely that they did manufacture denunciations, mostly against doctors and medical students as well as individuals who belonged to the persecuted social classes, in order to “ruin them.” A retired major who had served in the pre-war army was denounced for “spying and conspiracy”, another former officer with anti-state conspiracy sabotage, and the dissemination of “fascist” flyers. Thousands were arrested under similar charges and many were executed. What leads one to think that this part of the indictment was true is that state security would seldom let a retired “Horthyite” officer off the hook therefore the accusations must have been deemed completely groundless. Once in their clutches the authorities would need to widen the circle of defendants and make their case out to be conspiracy. It stretches imagination to believe that one medical student would “instruct” another to spread the bacilli or viruses of contagious illnesses such as flu, dysentery or typhoid. It is equally hard to

⁶⁸ Zudar és társai, XIX-10-K, 4. doboz.

believe that they would plot to detonate railways or set fire to the Lenin Institute. This the writing of malicious letters cost those dragged in the case dearly. As their deed was, according to the verdict “motivated by the boundless hatred of the dictatorship of the proletariat” harsh sentences for meted out. Endre Zudar was sentenced to 14 years and the full confiscation of his wealth for “organizing and leading a conspiracy to overthrow the People’s Republic.” Five others were condemned to terms between 5 and ten years in addition to the confiscation of their wealth thus making sure that their families would become destitute.

Totalitarian systems have been seen as a form of “plebiscitary democracy”, a political system that employs mass mobilization to elicit acclaim and consent without enabling genuine political participation. Hundreds of thousands of party members condemned “enemies” exposed by the state in local party discussion groups.⁶⁹ The role of unofficial denunciations in state control may have been limited. Hungarian and other East European sources indicate that tips regarding serious anti-state activity, treason and conspiracy, which posed the biggest problem for communist states and which carried the most intimidating sentences may not have come from ordinary citizens or even informal collaborators of the state security services. These crimes may have been “revealed” and/or manufactured by professional agents and provocateurs. In 1954 Ottmár Faddi, a Franciscan monk was sentenced for “organizing a counter-revolutionary plot” that was allegedly designed to “seize power, restore capitalism and the establishment of a Catholic government with American assistance.” This was no small conspiracy as, according to report prepared by the State Security Authority, there were eighty members of the plot and another “hundred people were privy to it.” Twenty-seven people were taken into custody, of whom five were “treasonous agents of the security police.” The documentation makes it clear that the “conspiracy” was betrayed by two members who were agents of the political police, even their real names can be identified. Faddi and 12 others were given sentences from life to six years in prison by a military tribunal. The fact that none were sentenced to death reflects the relative thaw of the post-Stalin years. Faddi’s group and others with whom they allegedly were “in contact” were prominent politicians of the prewar era. That they were discussing regime change and perhaps even the establishment of political parties in the hope that the Americans would liberate the country is not entirely plausible. We know that the U.S. was involved in the establishment of resistance groups behind the iron curtain.

⁶⁹ Tim Kirk, *Nazi Germany*. London, 2007.

It is also clear the “organization” was infiltrated by agents of the state security who may have provoked the “conspiracy” – careless talk by old men.⁷⁰

The, “participatory” model, which stresses forms of collaboration does not explain the instability of the Stalinist political systems in Eastern Europe, most of which faced existential crisis. The very existence of the German Democratic Republic was threatened when in the first three months of 1953 122 thousand people fled into Western Germany. Country-wide protests occurred in the GDR and Czechoslovakia that was put down by the forces of the state security services.

One of the main sources of popular anger were the policies pursued in the countryside. The party state aimed at breaking down existing social relations, kinship relations through which village life was organized were to be replaced by class struggle; from private owners and independent producers, peasants were to be transformed into lumpen proletariat in collective farms.⁷¹ Kulaks were singled out as the socialist regimes’ chief targets. In Hungary communist party leader Rákosi borrowed Stalin’s interpretation of the kulaks to conclude that they were the “most implacable enemies of the construction of socialism” and planned their “liquidation.” This definition almost killed the system it was meant strengthen.⁷²

Collectivization and the compulsory delivery of products constituted some of the most repressive acts of Stalinist social and economic engineering. Literature usually defines terror in terms of torture incarceration, execution of “enemies.” Repression against the peasantry included these methods but as in Ukraine it included economic repression including deprivation of livelihood, serious food shortage and even the threat of famine. As in the Soviet Union in 1932, the harvest had been good in the preceding year. Delivery norms were established at the same level in 1952 even though due to freeze and draught.

Compulsory delivery was part of an economic policy that used resources extracted from agricultural production for industrialization and military buildup. In 1952 food shortage became critical, generating great discontent and the “hoarding” of food, a criminal offense. In the village

⁷⁰ ÁBTL, Faddi Ottmár és társai, V-10-51514/54.

⁷¹ Iordache – Dobrinu, *Introduction*, opcit; Verdery, *Exploiters Old and New*, opcit.

⁷² Megbeszélés, Rákosi, Gerő, Kiszeljov, 1951. in Baráth Magdolna ed., *Szovjet nagyköveti iratok Magyarországról*. Budapest, 2002. 53.

of Szabadszállás the political police was called because the trashers asked for the wheat that they earned. In Tolna 200 women and children “gathered” to stop the confiscation of wheat. A blacksmith of an agricultural cooperative “agitated” against requisitioning, he was “handed over” to the state prosecutor. In at least some places the villagers were forced to hand over even their seed grain. In Lánycsák the villagers were left with no seed grain, in two other localities “working peasants” threatened at a meeting that they would not fulfill their quotas if they were left with no seed grain. Seed grain is the last resort, the great famine in Ukraine was unleashed when peasants were forced to relinquish it. A report for the Interior Ministry stressed that in the county of Békés “in most cases requisitioning included the head quota and the seed grain” as well. Nonetheless, those who spoke about it “were taken away for spreading alarm rumor.”

Policies regarding the delivery were anarchic. In Békés county people were first told that the delivery quota would be above the head quota, which was later altered that they needed to fulfill the norm before the head quota. By then the peasants had already delivered their norm to the state and were thus forced to relinquish their produce a second time.

It seems that resistance against it, despite the terroristic methods applied and the limited means available to oppose it, was widespread. In an Orwellian fashion, a member of parliament lectured 600-800 villagers of Esztár that the standard of living was on the rise. Local potentates were hackled and the crowd wanted to capture the party secretary among shouts that the collective farm should be disbanded. When a police force was sent in and used tear grenades to dispell the crowd chanted that the „people’s” regime was no different from the old: „in the old regime only the gendarmes treated people like this now it is also the police.” In the village of Mindszent the political police reported that 400-500 people attended a meeting where they emphasized that they would not comply with compulsory delivery. The protest was instigated by poor peasants some of whom were members of the party. Similarly, in another village four people, including a man who had just received land, “agitated” against the same policy and the “crowd” pledged not to comply. Inhabitants of Fábíánsebestyén believed that even the head quota of the wheat would be taken away. Mostly women attended a meeting at which two kolkhoz members, one laborer and a woman interrupted a lecture on Korean War to protest “the exploitation of the peasantry.” A woman threatened to hang her child because she could not provide food. At that point two others interjected that “those should be hung who took the wheat even if the person was a communist.”

All of these cases were handed over to the State Defense Authority for investigation. A party functionary in Lovasberény who was sent to lecture about the “Tito gang” was interrupted with shouts that he should rather talk about bread. The secretary of the local council may have agreed with the protestors as he refused to intervene. In Sándorfalva a council member told an agitated crowd that the peasants were “deceived” because they were told that the head quota would be secured. According to the report 300 people were gathered and the party secretary was “stopped” by a coalition of classes that included a former “Horthyite” policeman a former gendarme and several farmers with small plots. Five of them were taken into custody by the political police. Another village sent a deputation to party leader Rákosi but managed to speak only to his secretary. In Nemesnádudvar a landowner attacked the president of a local council with a pitchfork and was taken into custody.

Elsewhere, in Zala County, somebody fired at the party secretary in Szabolcs a “kulak” stabbed the party functionary. It took 24 policemen to disperse a crowd of 800, which demanded that the collectors leave their village. They were allegedly incited by the Catholic priest. Even the dry, bureaucratic report suggests that the requisitioning was universally condemned as the local party secretary, “remained passive.”⁷³ In Baranya County a local council secretary, who ranked alongside the party secretary as a local potentate, went further. He declared that “the working peasant will have no bread. The decree on requisitioning was not made by the workers and he would not execute it.” Thus class war rhetoric was turned upside down and used against the state. It was reported that requisitioning ground to a halt and the secretary, György Kiss was taken into custody. Solidarity among the classes was not predicted by Marxist ideology. Yet in spite of the strident rhetoric which blasted former exploiters and kulaks as leeches and bloodsuckers of the workers, it was not hard to find. In Vajta a “28 yoke kulak” started a demonstration that was joined by the 8 yoke wife of a party member. The secretary of the local soviet called the requisitioners “a gang of crooks.” The 70 person march was disbanded by 14 policemen. It was reported that in Békés county the council was “indecisive” some members, even leaders “did not agree that everyone should be required to fulfill the delivery norm.” In the village of Bikal the president of

⁷³ MNL OL, XIX-B-14, 3. doboz, sz. n. 1952.

the local council was caught in the act of illegal slaughter. In another locality the council secretary declared that black slaughter was an “unnecessary harassment of the people.”⁷⁴

Not all functionaries were in solidarity with people: one council secretary threatened that he would have state security take away everyone who failed to fulfill the norm. In spite of the fact that police state and party functionaries often turned condoned and even took part in illegal killing of livestock it remained a dangerous enterprise. In 1951 and 1952 thousands of peasants a month were arrested and sent to jail leaving their families to fend for themselves. No doubt old habits played a role but to incur such a risk must have been motivated dire need. In order to curb the meat shortage the “presidents of the executive committee of the municipal councils were ordered to “supervise actions designed to combat black slaughter, the measures taken in reprisal and the execution of the sentences.”⁷⁵ The war on the peasantry, which extended to “working peasants” as well, penalized “hoarding” of food. Ferenc Reisz received two years in jail and a fine for buying seven kilos of bread and 65 croissants; Károly Bod was sent to jail for three years for hoarding 139 kilos of flour and 20 kilos of sugar; József Fábian got three and a half years for buying just ten kilos of flour. Another man paid with his freedom for hiding lard in his garden.⁷⁶

Katherine Verdery alluded to the fact that there was an element of dialogue on the state-peasant relationship where the former attempted to negotiate its position in the power relations albeit from an unequal position. In Fábiansebestyén protestors talked about “the exploitation” of the peasants thus turning the weapon of class struggle on its head and employing it against the communist state thereby reversing their own position from “agitators” against the rule of the people to victims of oppression. In some localities instead of education local authorities used threats with the police and the State Security Authority to extract compliance. At the same time the police was sometimes indecisive and did nothing to forestall protests and were unable to remove the main instigators of protests. In Bucsa on the other hand agents of the State Security, with the help of the local communist party committee, were able to apprehend the organizer and thereby forestall a demonstration. The sixteen people that were put into custody reveal a “popular front” albeit this time one that was directed against the state: one cooperative president, one district controller, 4 agricultural laborers, one working peasant and 9 kulaks. As a result of an

⁷⁴ Feljegyzés a megyei tanács vb titkárának, 1 March 1951. MNL OL, XIX-B-1-q 0634.

⁷⁵ MNL OL? XIX-B-1-q, 0673/1951.

⁷⁶ Feljegyzés a Belügyminisztérium számára, MNL OL? XIX-a1-2-ee, f tük, 198. doboz, 39. dosszié.

“extraordinary” procedure eleven families were expelled from the village. In general, many party and council members refused to comply with their delivery obligations moreover, they failed to take part in “agitation” or organize “party days” – hardly to chagrin of their constituents.

In Kaszape the local council agreed to raise money for a new church bell in return for the fulfillment of the quota. This deal between the old world and the new may not have pleased everyone as the state security “took” the Catholic priest.⁷⁷ On the other hand in Baranya County class struggle mentality caught on better, as “working peasants” warned that they would “kill” anyone who goes the “attic.” In 1951 former exploiters in the capital city were deported to the countryside. A woman, who was moved to an upper class district of Budapest declared: “we resettled quite a few people from our village and as far as I can see quite a few could be removed from this area.” In some cases class war resonated with old tensions and animosities.

Structural problems of the economy, the lack of incentive to work and perhaps even conscious efforts to sabotage production caused Stalinist economies produced shoddy, often useless products because once a company only had to make sure that it produced enough of the commodity it was supposed to churn out, what it was likely did not matter. What happened in terms of industrial production can only be described in terms of civilizational decline. The Soviet ambassador in Czechoslovakia reported in 1953 that industry had plunged into a “near total chaos” since 1948. Hungary’s economic dictator complained in 1952: “What is happening in the area of quality is absolutely intolerable and untenable... in earlier years...there were not so many well-founded complaints against the commodities we produce.” In the shoe industry, which according to Gerő was once famous for quality, customers returned one percent as waste in 1950 but 25% by 1951. On one occasion the Soviet Union returned 4900 [!] pairs out of a shipment of 5000 because of quality complaints. All of the 140 tractors produced by the Red Star Factory for Romanian export in 1952 broke down by 1953 and only 6 of them could be repaired because the plant did not make spare parts for them. Machine tools shipped to Argentine lost all their paint by the time they got there and electronic control compartment could not be opened because the screws had rusted along the way. Hungarian sugar was rejected in the Far East because it was “filthy” – because, as

⁷⁷ Jelentés Sebestyén Lászlónak, August 4 1952. MNL OL, XIX-B-14 3. doboz sz n/1952.

it turned out, nobody cleaned the production line, canned food, salami, poultry and so were returned by the foreign buyer because of low quality.⁷⁸

General decline due to a mixture of passive resistance and negligence was visible in the countryside. Crops did not meet expectations, peasants resisted delivery norms if they could and even the delivered grain was being wasted. In the midst of harvest a Soviet tractor broke down because of melting. The service personnel of the collective failed to repair it left their workplace and got inebriated. In another thrashing station a broken down machine was put into service the head of the station declared he didn't care. A man was sentenced to three months of imprisonment "for the negligent repair of machinery such as painting them over to make them look as though they had been mended."

Were these conscious acts of sabotage or constructed by an ideologically motivated state to destroy its enemy? If these acts, as some historians suggest, were acts of resistance the totalitarian state was not that totalitarian after all; if they were constructed by an ideologically motivated state the opposite were true. An historian has written that "by criminalizing a broad range of activities and behaviors the party-state essentially set itself in opposition to a wide segment of society."⁷⁹

Unless we suppose that the communist state wanted to minimize its power by taking on imaginary enemies we must conclude that belief in Marxist-Leninist ideas relating to class struggle determined communist statecraft. What seems irrational to us from the vantage point of clinging power was logical for those who looked at the world through communist dogmas: there *were* enemies and an increasing number at that, after all, who needed to be destroyed.

Power of the weak

Black-marketeering, black slaughter, wheeling and dealing with a few dollars and other goods of great scarcity to make ends meet, escaping across the border cannot be interpreted to be acts of resistance in a society of serious scarcity: they were in hard time strategies of mere survival within the "camp-like" limits of communist politics. *Relative* freedom and *relative* strength –

⁷⁸ Külkereskedelmi vezetők értekezlete Gerő Ernőnél 3 June 1952. MNL OL KS 276 f 66 cs 69 őe. Külkereskedelmi elmaradások, 1952 undated, MNL OL XIX-A-2-ee, A/tük, 6 doboz, 8 dosszié.

⁷⁹ Brown, *Regulating Bodies*, opcit.

power of the weak – exist in prisons and camps. Prisoners exercise and engage in many acts, smuggling drug use etc. that are proscribed. The physically strong and “socially” well connected terrorize other inmates and maximize their well-being. Yet all of this is done under the power umbrella of the prison authorities who lay the basic rules of their existence. Theft in factories and collective farms may not only indicate social autonomy and resistance but also a decline of behavioral norms caused by a non-meritocratic political system. The widespread corruption of former communist countries may be rooted in this decline.

A variety of illegal activities were practiced. These included listening to foreign radio, visiting the British library reading room, collecting leaflets dropped by US aircraft, or cursing the political system. But these acts had potentially serious consequences they would not in a free society. The exploitation of repressive policies for personal ends, such as kicking ‘enemies’ out of their homes to get hold of better apartments may reveal the power of low level functionaries to defy high level instructions and profit from their acts. At the same time such acts also indicate the depth of state interference in social affairs.

The interpretation of anti-state and treasonous activities is equally hard. If we take the records of the state security services seriously, armed conspiracies to overthrow the political system flourished. In some cases it is easy to dismiss the veracity of the charges. Pál Hadváry and his four „associates” were tried for treason in 1948. The state security authorities briefed judge in charge of the case on how to conduct the trial. The colonel of state security who interrogated the defendants „recommended” two executions and three prison sentences to the head of the State Security Authority. The addressee obviously agreed as the two executions were carried out.⁸⁰ Kálmán Horváth was accused of making preparations for a foreign invasion of Hungary, blowing up industrial targets, arresting communist leaders as well as spying on behalf of an émigré organization. He was allegedly taken into custody in a shootout. Some elements of the case, in which two people of the twelve defendants were executed, were not altogether implausible. The case was reviewed in the summer of 1956, together with many other murders of justice and was found even by the communist judges that half the defendants were not guilty of the most serious crimes attributed to them.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Müller Rolf, *Politikai rendőrség a Rákosi korban*, opcit., 2012. 143.

⁸¹ Horváth Kálmán és társai, ÁBTL, V-11 790.

Fiction and reality cannot be separated in the literally hundreds of such cases that the early 1950s produced. Although they may have been in large part constructed by agents and blown out of proportion by state security authorities in their zeal to destroy enemies of the state they do attest to socially and geographically widespread discontent, even if not necessarily active resistance to the communist system. Constructed spies, saboteurs and wreckers were the scapegoats made responsible for the problems of the highly dysfunctional political system. However hundreds of trials were held in secret and therefore could serve no useful political purpose. Czech historians Petr Blažek and Pavel Zacek write that a number of alleged cases in Czechoslovakia were instigated by the security forces themselves. In some cases it is difficult to say to what extent the convicted people were really active opponents of the regime and to what extent they were mere victims of fabricated trials. State security used fake letters from abroad, forged subversive printed matter, used agents provocateurs. State security inspired the origin of a number of resistance groups in Moravia in which hundreds of people were arrested. An agent set up an illegal „labor party” and subversive groups sending 14 people to the gallows.⁸²

State security services used provocateurs to entrap people in alleged conspiracies and planted evidence to prove their case. Why did they create so many enemies? The participants of conspiracy trials were recruited from diverse social layers not exclusively from the former ruling classes therefore did not fit well into the class struggle paradigm. Open show trials demonstrated the prevalence of state terror and the ubiquitous presence of the security apparatus and serves as deterrence. Terror is not always rational it may exist for its own sake which could explain the large number of closed trials. Also, many cases contained a kernel of truth: people did make hostile comments. It is not possible in retrospect to distinguish between the comments of embittered, momentarily *angry men* from intent to overthrow the political system.⁸³ Beating, physical and psychological terror, torture was used to extract confessions, which requires extra caution in dealing with these cases.⁸⁴ Even so, the sources will leave a shadow of doubt. Most likely there were a few conspirators who did make plans to undermine and overthrow the political system but the vast majority of people sentenced for such crimes may have been innocent. The problem again

⁸² Blažek-Žaček, *Czechoslovakia*, opcit.

⁸³ Hiroaki Kuromiya, *The Voices of the Dead – Stalin’s Great Terror in the 1930s* Princeton, New Jersey, 2007. 107.

⁸⁴ Former Minister of Justice István Ries dirtied himself under interrogation by one state security’s more sadistic torturers. This enraged the officer, who subjected the ailing, elderly man to further beating as a result of which Ries died a few days later.

how much agency the “oppressed” had. If we decide to accept the interrogation records, verdicts at more or less face value, we arrive at a very different conclusion regarding the nature of Stalinist regimes, top down or bottom up nature, the role of terror and oppression, than if we discount these sources as more falsified than not. Working around the system rather than meaningful active resistance characterized individual behavior.

Conclusion

Denis Deletant has argued that police coercion and intrusion became a part of everyday life and a feature of existence which generated pervasive fear a state of mind which revolutionized not just society’s structures but also personal behavior.⁸⁵ Participation in a dictatorship may not be a good measure of its totality. The depth of penetration into society and the private sphere is a better yardstick. Individuals lived in constrained spaces and made *constrained choices*. In part because they were unable to see the world through any other lens but communist doctrine. Their decisions and actions were shaped by the world view of an all embracing ideology of perfection that held claim to infallibility and absolute truth. In addition, people lived in a reference system that enforced negative behavior: “One could succeed in proportionate degree with one’s ability to make oneself useful to the system. And the latter used mainly the low capabilities of human beings. It taught everybody to lie, to spy and to slander.” Politics penetrated into the innermost individual sphere and elicited extreme forms of compliance. In times of fear people redefine their identity in response to political challenge. Name changes illustrate this response. A woman whose husband was convicted “for unknown reasons” petitioned to retrieve her maiden name as her husband “failed to fulfill the confidence placed in him by our people’s democracy.” A man changed his German sounding name in 1945 when ethnic Germans were being deported to the name a prominent communist politician. When his former hero was disgraced he no longer wished to bear the name of “the basest foe of our people’s democracy” which was a “great burden” to him. Another person requested the change of his name to a Hungarian sounding one at the instruction of the Budapest party committee.⁸⁶ Identities, as we have already seen, were externally constructed. A Stalinist judge explained the aim of those who use of terror: “[T]hey ruin their victims spiritually and

⁸⁵ Deletant, *Romania*, opcit. 286.

⁸⁶ Kozma István, *Családnév változtatás és történelem. Századok*, volume 131, number 2, 1997.

psychologically, they intimidate their environment in order to make them *insecure, distrustful, so that they never feel safe.*”

The exercise of power based on terror was fraught with an inherent contradiction. In order to obtain the obedience of a generally hostile population communist leaderships attempted “the *total control* of every organ of the society with clandestine methods.” This turned out to be counter-productive: instead of consolidation it led to significant social tension and ended up weakening, if not undermining, that control. Soviet diplomats and other officials began to understand in the spring of 1953 that the heavy handed policies of the East European dictatorships and the general although not universal rejection of the class struggle paradigm led to widespread discontent and instability and that the answer was not to further intensify controls and terror but to relax it. It was in response to this recognition to communist dictatorships began to relax terror and recognize more economic political and social autonomy. This is where the Nazi and the Stalinist experience diverged. National socialist rule as witnessed by the social support of most of the national socialist world view including annihilationist anti-Semitism enjoyed broad social support. Marxism-Leninism was far less successful in garnering mass support. The enemies of Hitler’s state were well-circumscribed, those of Stalinism broader and constantly changing. Stalinism manufactured even more enemies than it otherwise had. This was because of communist ideology which was not the justification for persecution but the *cause* of it.

Social tensions and instability caused by the heavy handed terror and control would not have been in themselves sufficient to bring the systems to its knees. Terror and control, it seems can be ratcheted up to control unrest and aspirations towards more social autonomy without the system’s self-destruction. It took the death of Stalin for communism in Europe to take a different turn, towards the system described Vaclav Havel as the post-totalitarian state. Participation in the partisan movement of the Soviet Union was both coerced and spontaneous. In the mixture of coercion and voluntary participation coercion the engineering of human behavior may have been the more crucial factor. People maybe “both victim and instrument of power.”⁸⁷ The two sisters and possibly many more people like them did manipulate the levers of power, in the framework

⁸⁷ Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless* in John Keene ed., *The Power of the Powerless – Citizens against the State in central-eastern Europe* New York, 1985. 36. Vaclav argues that people are able to surrender their identity to the state and to live in lies. Their involvement becomes the norm and put pressure on their fellow citizens. 38-39. I would still argue that pressure comes chiefly from above.

prescribed tyrannical politics. They were lost in the conflict of universal values and the ones imposed on them by Nazis and Communists. Some on the other hand, were able to swim against the tide and shape the flow of the river – defy the universe, the space created by the totalitarian state.