

Postcommunist Histories in Budapest: The Cult of Great Men in Spring 2002

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The past must be acknowledged...

Attila József (quoted in Terror Háza Museum leaflet, p.1)

There is only politics where there are frontiers.

Ernesto Laclau (1990:160)

Politics of the national history still dominate post-communist politics in Hungary in 2002. This paper will bring evidence that history politics takes place in Hungary through the celebration of heroes and remembrance of anti-heroes. History writing is an inherently political activity that forms borders for identification. The study focuses on the continued politics of the street names and statues in Budapest, two exhibitions (the recently opened Terror House and the Millennium Exhibition 2002), and two films shown in the election time Hungary in April 2002. Revealing the sets of heroes and villains as pictured in spring 2002, it shows the limits of official remembering and forgetting. Vitality for any context, it shows the contingency of our understanding of history even where it appears as an established and institutionalised truth.

History as a political discourse

The official aspect makes the national history and memory potentially contested. (Azaryahu 1999) The above quote Attila József, quoted in a leaflet of the Terror House Museum, presupposes that it is possible to recognise and accept as facts, acknowledge, certain events of the past. In contrast with debate or contestation, acknowledgement entails besides action a claim of truth. Quite like taking a photograph. Pictures, as well as stories such as histories, are interesting for historical and political analysis. While picturing something, they also bring evidence of what has been omitted, what escaped the photographers lense. Histories, when acknowledged as the story of what happened, construct frontiers. As Laclau argues, making and preserving frontiers is politics. Writing history is an inherently political activity, an attempt to establish a political discourse.

Political discourses aim at sedimenting themselves and thus seeks representation. In doing so they need nodal points, points of reference. In Lacanian psychoanalysis these are termed *point de capiton*, 'the point in the signifying chain at which "the signifier stops the otherwise endless movement of the signification" and produces the necessary illusion of a fixed meaning.' (Evans

1996: 148. See also Howarth et. al, 2001: 8.) This paper argues that in postcommunist Hungary, these nodal points are historical personalities through which the political discourses seek representation and aim to fix meaning. Political forces aim at monopolising certain personalities, both give them meaning and use the conceptions of them to legitimate their own ideologies.

One of the features of postcommunism has been the continuous rewriting the past.¹ Mainly the question had been which epochs and which personalities have been celebrated. Official history-writing can be studied through the street names and statues of cities, or the politics of official commemoration. (e.g. Azaryahu 1991, 1999, Ferguson 1994) For example, in the early 1990s, when the postcommunists changed the street names in Budapest of all the layers of street naming the late 19th century names were returned. (e.g. Nyssönen 1999) Later on, especially from the 1998 onwards statues from the interwar period have been restored in the squares of Budapest. In what follows, rather than looking at the return of certain historical epochs, I will focus on the personality politics: the cult of great men in Budapest.

The cult of great men has been important in Hungarian politics from the period of 19th century nation building to the Interwar period and communist times, and has not disappeared during the first ten years of postcommunism. Rather, the discourse on the nation's greatness is visible in the recent emphasis the achievements of Hungarians, often those of international calibre. This paper focuses on spring 2002, coinciding with the era of Fidesz-MPP (Fidesz – Hungarian Civic Party) led rightwing government. First it observes statues and memorials, then the street names of Budapest, and finally new exhibitions and films shown in Budapest in spring 2002. These highlight personal achievements of Hungarians, contrasted with national shame.

Statues and memorials in Budapest

The trends in the street names and statues in postcommunism have followed the political climate. The public commemoration is still based on the memory of the 'great men'. Formally the year 1998 was not distinct from the previous ones, but it started bringing the heroes of the new power holders, the main party in government conservative Fidesz-MPP, into the capital city. Of the 22 memorials or pieces of public art erected in Budapest in 1998 17 were commemorative of historical figures, two were collective memorials to a group of people (victims of the 1956 uprising, of the 1848/49 fighters, and victims of the WWII bombings in Budapest) and one commemorated a historical moment (125th anniversary of the unification of Buda, Pest and Óbuda). The year also witnessed the first attempt to represent previously unseen religious figures in postcommunist Budapest: a

¹ As Nyssönen has observed, the past dominated the first years of postcommunism in Hungarian politics from the street names to the parliament debates. (Nyssönen 1999)

hospital in the centre of Budapest now hosts sizeable reliefs commemorating Saints Kozma and Damjan, medical doctors and martyrs of the 1st decade of Christianity in Hungary. Full size statues and the abstract memorials are rare.² An example of the latter is Memento for the victims of the era of 1945-56 erected in 1999. It mirrored the political climate breaking the way for the *Terror Háza* museum that was opened in Spring 2002, similarly as the memorial of the unification of Budapest for the film Bridgeman, *Hídember* (see below).

The elections in 2002 was emphasised in statue politics. A five meter tall life-size statue of Béla Kovács on a speakers podium was erected on a politically highly respected place, next to the parliament. Kovács was once a leader of the Independent Small Holders Party (the predecessor of the FKGP, a party in Government in 1998-2002). He was taken to the Soviet Union in 1947 'because he stood on the way of the left wing blocs politicians, mainly the communists' explained the Minister of Cultural Heritage Zoltán Rockenbauer in the opening ceremony.³

On the left, plans were also made by various associations for erecting a statue of István Bibó, political and historical writer and, to quote the left-wing *Népszabadság*, 'a great man of Hungarian democratic thinking'. (NSZ & MH 2/3/2002) The appropriate time would be year 2004, the 25th anniversary of Bibó's death, and place somewhere near the parliament. Characteristically to the Hungarian cult of great men, also a possibility of renaming a street after Bibó was mentioned. (NSZ 2/3/2002).

A bunch of new statues of famous Hungarian actors and actresses in nationally well known theatrical roles were erected in front of the new National Theatre in Budapest. These also highlight the preference for life-size statues of important figures in the Hungarian history as opposed to abstract public art.⁴

The existing statues caused some debate as well. Budapest's last Soviet Liberation Monument on the Freedom Square was decided to be removed – temporarily – due to the construction of underground parking hall. The representatives of the Hungarian Life and Justice Party (MIÉP) were for the complete removal of the obelisk, whereas the socialists reminded that there were Soviet Liberation Memorials in Western cities too. The Russian Federation wanted guarantees the Foreign Ministry besides the Ministry of Defence, for that the memorial would be returned to its place. This in turn angered the MIÉP.

² Majority of the visual reminders are memorial tablets in the houses where the great men worked or lived (e.g. Ferenc Kölcsey who authored the lyrics of national anthem) and busts of great men in public places. Postcommunist examples of commercial public art are rare but, for example, in 1998 the Daewoo bank sponsored a statue in Budapest.

³ NSZ 27/2/2002 'Felavatták a Kossuth téren Kovács Bela szobrat'

⁴ See e.g. Budapest Sun 11/4/2002, Tamás S Kiss: 'Laying down the law'; MH 14/3/2002, pp.1-2.

(NSZ 16/3/2002) In a letter to the editor of the right-wing *Magyar Nemzet* it was stressed that Hungary was in a war against the Soviet Union, and that the memorial would be more appropriately placed in the cemetery of Soviet soldiers.⁵

A restoration project, was also mentioned in the press: that of the Kossuth statue in Rákospalota, Budapest. This bears evidence that the older heroes of the Hungarian history were neither forgotten in 2002. (NSZ 20/3/2002) Another example of the concern of the national canon was expressed in 1998, when a plaque of Attila József was erected in the XI district.⁶

Street names and great men (April 2002)

The Budapest street names have not changed much during the later period of postcommunism, as the main changes focused in 1990-94. There have been new names in the newly built areas and proposals for returning old names to the centre. The politics of street names continues.⁷

A new development in the street name planning bears evidence of the enforcement of the cult of the great men in Budapest. The city-planning and city-image preservation committee proposed that in the next few months every street name commemorative to a person should be accompanied by a plaque stating briefly the most important events and achievements in the persons life. According to the official figures, of the 1950 different streets in Budapest 1096 uses a personal name. The greatest men made it to most of the districts of Budapest. The most frequently commemorated person is Lajos Kossuth who is featured in 17 street names.⁸

A major renaming event also took place a week before during the first round of the election. The city-code of Budapest forbids street naming after the elections have been called (Ráday 1998), but public buildings can still be renamed. On 28

⁵ Zoltán Bencze, letters to the editor, MN 15/4/2002

⁶ Noteworthy for the importance of memorials in Hungary was also that both the Budapest section in the left-wing national daily *Népszabadság* (e.g. 2/3, 7/3, 11/4/2002) and in the right-wing national daily *Magyar Nemzet* (e.g. MN 27/3 & 17/4/2002) hosted series of articles about the memorials in the city in spring 2002. The latter focused on the memorial plaques, whereas the former one on the international memorials in Budapest and another under the title 'Ércnél Maradandóbb' (longer-lasting in metal). In addition to the series, also few other stories about the Budapest statues were published in the papers. (e.g. NSZ 19/4/2002)

⁷ The study of the street names of Budapest have been recently catalogued. In my doctoral thesis I will use the catalogue of street names published by the City of Budapest that reaches until the elections of 2002. For more in-depth information I will consult the street name encyclopaedia published in 1998. Ráday et al. (1998)

⁸ NSZ 6/4/2002 'Mesélő utcanevek'

March the news broke out that the *Népstadion*, People's Stadium, would be renamed after Ferenc Puskas, perhaps the most famous Hungarian football player of all times. (MH 28/3/2002) Puskas, whose 75th birthday present this gesture was, scored two goals for the *Aranycsapat* (Golden Team) who beat England 3:6 in 1953. Puskas left the country after the 1956 uprising and won the Spanish league five times and the cup twice in Real Madrid. He belongs to a rare category of ex-patriot Hungarians commemorated in Budapest. The committee deciding was the Friends of Sportmen including the president of the republic Ferenc Madl (Hungarian Democratic Forum, MDF), the PM Viktor Orbán and the Minister of Youth and Sports Tamás Deutch (Fidesz).⁹ It was a very popular move and gained publicity, but also removed some of the socialist vocabulary (*nép* = people) from the city-text. However, the renaming of the stadium had not yet by late April 2002 taken effect in the public transport station names.¹⁰

Museums

The commemoration of heroes is often accompanied by the creation of anti-heroes. Political ideologies, and discourses such as attempts to write a national history, aim at creating a discursive whole. In the task they need to establish frontiers, define 'us' and to make a difference between the 'us' and the 'them'.¹¹ In the writing of national histories the constitutive other, behind the frontier, can be stressed as between other nations and the own nation, or the great men and the not-so-great men of the past.¹² Whereas the anti-heroes of the street name change are those who are being replaced, and thus removed from the official canon, a change in the statues does not require simultaneous naming of the hero and the anti-hero. Interestingly from the perspective of memory politics in postcommunism, the statues branded as of the previous regime have largely been removed from the city in the early 1990s, and were substituted later, as in practice a substituting statue was more difficult to create than a name. In Budapest many of the statues were relocated in the Statue Park Museum outside the city.

The Statue Park is not the only museum in Budapest that presents a set of (anti)heroes. In spring 2002, two new exhibitions were opened: the *Millenáris*

⁹ MH 28/3/2002, 2/4/2002, MN & NSZ & *Nemzeti Sport* 3/4/2002

¹⁰ See e.g. NSZ 19/4/2002 'Elköltözik a Népstadion buszvégállomás'.

¹¹ These are partly constitutive of identities. See e.g. Howarth, Norval & Stavrakakis 2000: 10, 219-236.

¹² Often these are branded as the traitors of the nation or representatives of foreign powers. These two conceptions were used by the civic (right-wing) block before the Hungarian elections in 2002, against the opposition block, the Socialist party and the Liberal Democrats. (e.g. Tóth&Török 2002)

Park and the House of Terror, *Terror Háza*. The first was an projected the country's image, and the latter of a dark period in the country's past.

The House of Terror Museum was simultaneously a memorial, commemorating the victims of the political terror or torture, but it also represented the 'victimizers': the Hungarian national socialist Arrow Cross Party who had held its head quarters in the building on Andrásy út 60 in 1944, and the communist secret police, the ÁVÓ/ÁVH, whose activities in the house were covered for the period 1945-56. 'This museum commemorates the victims of terror and is also a memorial, reminding of the dreadful acts of terrorist dictatorships', was the official statement. (*Terror Háza* leaflet, p.1) At the entrance of the museum there are two memorials of equal size, one to the victims of Arrow Cross terror and another to those of Communist terror.

The critique of the museum focused on the fact that the view of history has been used in political purposes. The main focus is on Communism, only two of the thirty-odd rooms focus on the Hungarian Nazis, branded as 'bloodthirsty' (*Ibid.*:5), and any elaboration of the background to the rise of Nazi regime reduced to a statement that Germany occupied Hungary in 1944.¹³ The socialists, who expressed their sympathy to the victims and their families, would have wanted to change the name of Terror Háza: 'If we are trusted by the voters [in the April elections], the new name of the terrible building under 60 Andrassy Street will be the House of Remembrance and Reconciliation, Laszlo Kovacs has said.' (BBC monitoring 24/2/2002) The rhetoric of the museum also caught the attention of international observers:

As visitors to Budapest's newest museum wait to buy tickets, a video clip of a sobbing man plays over and over again. The man, Mihaly Mozes, is remembering the victims of Hungary's post-war Communist regime.

"All those people who were hanged, why did they do that to them?" he asks. "Youngsters of 16, 18, who just had different views . . . they hanged them. That's what socialism was about."

The presentation is typical of the emotive material in the museum. Called the House of Terror, it aims to recount the history of state terror in Hungary, both under the Communists and under the Nazi-style regime that preceded them. The terraced building was used before 1945 by Hungary's extreme-right Arrow Cross movement, and subsequently until 1956 by the Stalinist-era secret police. However, many believe the museum suggests as much about Hungary's present as its past. (FT 3/4/2002)

¹³ For example, there was no mention to revisionism in the public discourse in general in the 1930s.

The attempts to write official histories of the nation are by nature political. What heated up the debate,¹⁴ was the coming elections in Spring 2002, when the government parties would face opposition headed by the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP).¹⁵ The terror museum is not much different from the former concentration camp Holocaust museums, such as Auschwitz and Buchenwald. They are memorial spaces that concretise historical heritage. (See Azaryahu 1999: especially 343) As commissioned memory, it highlights certain period of time in the light chosen in the political context.

Importantly for the purposes of this paper, the Terror Háza museum presents the anti-heroes. The tortures are explained to be the same people during Communist and Nazi times, which vitally forms front between the workers of the Arrow Cross and ÁVÓ/ÁVH on one side and the victims and the visitor on the other. Also the informants mentioned in the exhibition texts are included in the category of political police co-operators: one was either with then or against them. Few personalities are mentioned by name. Gábor Péter, once the head of the Hungarian political police, still has been dedicated a room in the house. Finally, at the exit from basement where the reconstructed prison cells, the memorial to the victims, 'the Hall of Tears', and screens showing the departure of Soviets troops and Orbán's speech at the opening ceremony, there is the 'Gallery of Victimisers', workers of the political police. Here a border between the friends and villains of democracy is reproduced. The museum offered a picture of a certain discourse on the past, but did not open up space for contestation of the past with possibilities of taking different perspectives. In so doing, it manifestly acknowledged a certain conception of the past and drew the frontier between the good and evil – without offering a chance for reconciliation.

The Millenáris Park was opened in 2001, as the platform to raise the image of Hungary. The current exhibition, the 2002 Millennium Exhibition, focuses on Hungarian culture and great men.¹⁶ The museum was confirming the linguistic

¹⁴ Terror Háza was widely reported and commented in the Hungarian print media (e.g. NSZ 20/2, 2/3, 16/4/2002, MN 30/3/2002, MH 2/3, 5/4/2002, Budapest Sun 7-13/3/2002). The opposition papers (NSZ/MH) generally saw it too political.

¹⁵ The director of the Museum is Mária Schmidt, the advisor to the Primer Minister Viktor Orbán (Fidesz). She 'insists, however, that conservatives are simply redressing the historical balance. "Because history in Hungary was told by the Communists, it was a falsification," she says. Hungarian governments before October 1944 were not terror regimes, Ms Schmidt says. Ms Schmidt believes the museum has boosted Fidesz's campaign against an opposition she claims is still mired in the Communist past. "There were over 130,000 people coming for the opening of the house. They were showing that those people in Hungary who do not want to live under Communism or other dictatorships are . . . very strong.'" FT 3/4/2002

¹⁶ In his account on Ignác Semmelweis, a medical hero Imre Mora has pointed out what many have not dared to say aloud about the cult Hungarian of great men: 'We

orientation of many histories and definitions on the Hungarian nation.¹⁷ Interestingly, museum tour starts from the Hungarian writers, poets, translators, and linguistics. These are the people who – together with politicians, kings and religious leaders – are present in the canon of heroes pictured in the street names and statues of the Hungarian towns. Moving further, domains of the theatre, architecture, ‘the art of mathematics’, and music were displayed. The practical arts and sciences occupy another hall exposing the technical and scientific skills of Hungarians. Visual arts and film follow natural sciences and technology.

Sports, which led recently listed of sources national pride (Csepeli 1998) was almost underrepresented: the focus was on two things: the Golden Team (*Aranycsapat*), the earlier mentioned national football, and the Summer Olympic winners. This highlights the importance of Budapest’s application for 2012 Summer Olympics the governing parties set on the agenda for Hungary before the elections, as well as the renaming of the *Népstadion*.

Most importantly, the exhibition displayed the cult of the great men in Millennial Hungary. From the perspective of street naming, it reveals that there are many more great personalities in Hungary than what the highly canonised street names bring to fore. By the same token, it confirms Csepeli’s claim that the Hungarian nationalism has until recently relied on the literature and literary figures (1989). Even if the language was the first building block, also memory of the high quality visual creations are important for the Hungarians sense of community. Even if the exhibition was only in Hungarian, this perhaps would bridge Hungarians to the rest of Europe and the world: even if they would not understand the exact meaning of the works of Kosztolányi, Petőfi or others, many of us remember trying to solve the problem of the Rubik cube or at least we have used the ballot-point pen, discovered by the Hungarian László József Bíró.¹⁸ It seems, however, that the Millennium exhibition focused on rasing the self-confidence and self-knowledge of Hungarians.

Hungarians are often accused of magnifying our virtues and claiming an ethnic link to every major discovery. In this case [of Semmelweis], our PR has failed.’ (Mora 2001: 206)

¹⁷ In general, language has been considered to be the main quality of Hungarianness in the 19th and 20th century, similarly as in the rest of the Eastern Europe, but became the key emphasis in the Hungarian nation state thinking after 1867 and the double monarchy time. According to the liberal ideals, for example Lajos Kossuth emphasised that there would be one language and one nation in the kingdom of Hungary. This conception meant that everyone who would learn to speak Hungarian would be accepted as a citizen, and later brought with it strict language laws on the teaching of other vernacular than Hungarian, even in predominantly non Hungarian speaking areas. (e.g. Barany 1962, Hoensch 1996)

¹⁸ For more information see Mora 2001: 215-6

The *Millenáris Park* was important as it worked as the platform for the governing parties before the elections. It is a modern, fairly simplistic complex of old factory buildings united by a set of water ponds, to exhibit the progressive ideas of the party, especially its ability to carry out visible national projects. The millennium of Hungarian statehood – since the Crowning of St. Stephen in 1000 – was celebrated through an exhibition about the greatness of the nation (or its great men) in the ethos of the millennium of the arrival of Hungarians in the area and the World Exhibition in 1896. Similarly, it also imported lasting elements in the Budapest architecture: much of the city of Budapest were built in national romantic style in the turn of the last century – recently the trends in the cityscape are expressed by the new public space provided by shopping centres.¹⁹

In the millennium exhibition the history of the country is written in a thematic, instead of chronological order. It is tried to bring alive through the great men (on very few occasions women), who finally perform a static role and are usually mentioned only once.²⁰ Importantly, like the street names and statues, the exhibition appears as another attempt to form a canon or a heroic order: the great men of Hungary. It expresses as the nodal points of the discourse the achievements in the fields of arts and especially natural sciences and technology. What is lacking, compared to current trends in museums, is the interactivity. The exhibition does not invite questions about whether others could be included in the set of heroes. Like the street names and statues, it works as a statement, and provides a reference for the set of great men of a certain time and a certain discourse.

Films

Showing how Hungarian national memory had turned from language to images the millennium exhibition of 2002 represented Hungarian professionals in cinema who had made their fame usually in Hollywood or France to a much greater extent than in the street names or statues, for example. Indeed, many Hungarian films have engaged with a political message.²¹ A recent film

¹⁹ For an interesting study in urban sociology in Budapest, shopping centres and the globalised city-image, see Bodnár 2001, especially Ch.6.

²⁰ The National Museum is hosting an exhibition the ‘Men Who Made the Century’ also in 2002. It is an exhibition of famous Hungarian scientists, usually ex-patriots. Also here, there is little information about the men (!) and their inventions, but the picture of the scientist and the few lines are at least complimented with some personal items of pictures of such, which make the persons more alive.

²¹ A classical example of this is ‘The Witness’, *A tanú*, anti-communist (or at least anti-Stalinist) film by Péter Bacsó (1969) released in Hungary only after success in international festivals. It popularised the image of the Hungarian orange (*a magyar narancs*). It was produced in the native Hungary and everyone, including the communist

attempted to monopolise a historical figure and use it as a nodal point to project a political ideology.

During the election campaign, Budapest's cityscape was dominated by posters. Many of them advertised 'the Bridgeman', *A Hídember*,²² a new Hungarian costume drama about 'the greatest Hungarian':²³ Count István Széchenyi (1791-1860), progressive politician and the founder of the Academy of Science. The name mirrors Széchenyi's great vision of building of the first bridge over lower part of Danube, the Budapest Lanchid, on which the film focuses while also offering glimpses of the other politicians of the times of the Hungarian revolution of 1848-49. The main lead of the film was played by a famous Hungarian actor Károly Eperjes, who also sat in the Hungarian Parliament for three months in 1994 as a Fidesz MP.²⁴ The film was branded as the most expensive film ever made in Hungary and heavily subsidised by the government.²⁵

Preserving the memory of Count Széchenyi has part of the history politics of the Fidesz government. For the millennium they introduced the Széchenyi plan, under the umbrella of which many projects would gain state funding. The delay in the film's schedule from 21 September to elections time 11 April, ensured that the public was reminded about the great reformer.²⁶ The Fidesz election slogan was one Széchenyi's famous phrase: 'A tett első, a szó második' (Deeds first, words second.)

The *Hídember* film also marked the reopening of the *Uránia* cinema renovated into the National Film Theatre (*Uránia Nemzeti Filmszínház*) designated for showing Hungarian films from all times, although it ran in the big cinemas cross the country. *Hídember* was not however, the only film made about Széchenyi in 2002: an independent low-budget film *A legkisebb film a legnagyobb magyarról* ('The Smallest Film of the Greatest Hungarian')²⁷ was also shown around the elections in the art cinemas.²⁸ If not pronounced critique, it offered contrast to

leadership, had to believe its excellence, even if it had a bitter after taste of a lemon. Symbolical representation of the orange have been seen, whether admittedly or not, in the imagery of post-communist political culture and critique (e.g. liberal political weekly Magyar Narancs, or the symbol of the Fidesz-MPP The history of the Fidesz party has also been published in 2002 under the title *Csak egy naranc volt* (Petőcz 2001)

²² Directed by Bereményi Géza in 2002.

²³ First mentioned by Kossuth, also was a hero of the 1848-49 revolution and a 19th century reformer, who later became Széchenyi's rival. (e.g. Barany 1967)

²⁴ MH 27/3/2002 'A harmadik ciklusra elfogytak a művészek és a sportolók' p. 14

²⁵ 1,7-2 milliard forints (\$6.1 million). (NOL 18/4/2002, Budapest Sun)

²⁶ During the two legs of the elections the Fidesz campaign increasingly emphasised the *Széchenyi terv* as compared to the *Bokros package*, of the 1994-98 MSZP/SZDSZ government. This is apparent from the election leaflets.

²⁷ Directed by Kálmánchelyi, Stefanovics, Végh, out in Hungary 28 March 2002.

²⁸ For the blockbuster cinemas and *art mozi* art cinemas see e.g. Bodnár 2001.

the *Hidember* project. From the point of view of this paper, the film also interestingly expressed surprise about the way in which so many places in Budapest were named after the great man.

Conclusion

History writing is a political and ideological project. The above outlined research demonstrates that Hungarian history, as articulated in 2002, has been one of great men of the nation. It has highlighted progressive achievements – contrasted to shameful behaviour during the Communist and Nazi time. Furthermore, it shows how the historical figures can be used as political idols and villains. Through these figures national history was fixed into a (temporarily) closed discourse with its ‘good’ and shameful dimensions. Some of the history-writing also was contested in public and different personalities were proposed to be represented in Budapest as nodal points of an alternative discourse.

While personalities of history can be used as nodal points of a political discourse, their roles may also be contested. This was apparent in the case of opposition party Free Democrats’ (SZDSZ) claims for the declaration of the year of Lajos Kossuth. The year was finally celebrated by the government, as well. The symbolic uses of historical personalities, their mythologisation and role in discourses of political parties could be the topic of a following paper. A comparison of the texts of political writers like Kossuth and Széchenyi and their use and interpretation in today’s public discourse and the main political parties in different periods of Hungarian history would further elaborate our understanding of how the parties construct draw their discourse and the frontiers.²⁹

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BBC Monitoring Service - UK; 24/2/2002, ‘Hungary's Socialists reject "red", "white" or "spiritual" terror’

Terror Háza Museum leaflet (<http://www.terrorhaza.hu>)

Election leaflets circulated in Budapest in April 2002

²⁹ Kapitány Agnés and Gábor have in their ethnographic-sociological study already established that the urban and civic elites’ heros were Saint Stephen and Széchenyi, whereas Kossuth Lajos was the idol of leaders and liberals. (Kapitány & Kapitány 1999:126)

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