

History, Past, and the Post-Socialist Nation

Peter Niedermüller

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Time, history and the past are key issues today in many contemporary Eastern European societies. Political parties and movements use history in order to present their vision of future of the societies. Public debates try to explain what happened in the past, how one should understand what happened to the nation in the decades of socialism. At the same time this process of reproduction of history and past will be associated with political visions of the future of postsocialist societies. To say it otherwise: there is a social and political discourse, and a symbolic process of rethinking history all over in Eastern Europe. The paper describes and analyses some central topics and strategies, various facets and vignettes of this discourse, and tries to show how history became a matter of public interest, a conflict of the political culture, and an object of hard efforts of different institutions and organizations.

*Prof. Dr. Peter Niedermüller, Institute of European Ethnology, Humboldt University, Schiffbauerdamm 19, D-10117 Berlin, Germany.
E-mail: PeterNiedermueller@compuserve.com*

The eighties – a time, when nationalism seemed to have disappeared at least in Europe – meant a very innovative period for the studies of nationalism, when some classic work on this field has been published (Anderson 1983, Gellner 1983, Hroch 1985, Hobsbawm 1990). After the collapse of socialism this qualitative upswing within the research changed into a quantitative upturn. Since 1989, since “the year of history” (Peter Handke) it has been constantly stated with a feeling of great emotional disappointment: “that waves of nationalism has formed in a totally unexpected way within the general political change, that were striving for democracy and modernization” (Schramm 1992: 325).

This sudden and abrupt revival or reawakening of national feelings in Eastern Europe produced enormous theoretical interest within the studies of nationalism.¹ However, certain dissatisfaction with these theories or at least with some models of interpretation cannot be hidden away. I think, that dominant explanatory models for the present Eastern European nationalism are often shaky or oversimplified. To give some examples: There are doubts as to whether, what is now called Eastern European

nationalism, simply (and exclusively) describes a “natural” consequence of an ideological void or a kind of reaction to socialism (Beyme 1994, Franzke 1993). One finds a “typical” explanation “which speaks of a re-nationalization or even re-ethnicization” and puts these phenomena down to an oppressed ethnic identity (Hondrich 1994). Other analysis’ emphasize “the return of pre-modern forms of identity”.² Some interpretations, again, depict Eastern European nationalism as a symbolic escape “from the unmanageable ‘New’ to the apparently safe ‘Old’” (Reemtsma 1996: 356). And, it is doubtful, whether the current situation in the Balkan can be explained alone through the outbreak of historically-based ethnic hostilities (Dahrendorf 1996: 195).

These examples clearly indicate a certain theoretical and methodological stagnation within today’s studies of Eastern European nationalism, and could be rightly considered as an oversimplification of a much more complex historical and political situation. Almost ten years after the collapse of socialism we can and should state that the social and political development in the Eastern European countries is much more difficult than we envisaged it in the polit-

ical euphoria of the early nineties. It means, we need other approaches and theories, we have to look for more plausible and striking models and interpretations in order to explain a phenomenon which we call 'Eastern European nationalism' or 'post-socialist nationalism'.

As a first step in this direction one has to examine how the ubiquitous, almost mechanical image of the Eastern European nationalism emerged after the breakdown of socialism, and, what contents were transmitted within this image. Obviously, historical processes and political violence played a decisive role in this perception of Eastern Europe: the Balkan war, the military conflicts in the former Soviet Union, the separation of Czechoslovakia, the political conflict in Moldavia, the all over present anti-Semitism and racism against Gypsies, or, the constant tension and collisions over the minority-rights from the Baltic States to Transylvania, or, the different separatist political and cultural movements in the Eastern European region, and so on. Jacques Rupnik offered a historical explanation, which enjoyed great popularity in the media and politics, and served as a ground for many other interpretations. His famous statement – “The return of history is also the return of the nationalistic demons which one thought long buried” (Rupnik 1990: 135) – pointed to the traditional roots of Eastern European, nationalism and regarded the post-socialist condition as being its return. The return of history became a pervasive metaphor but today the explanatory power of this metaphor seems to be doubtful. First of all, because there are no “nationalistic demons” all over in Eastern Europe, nationalism, and nationalistic politics play different roles in different regions of Eastern Europe. The new political and social order in Eastern Europe cannot generally be defined as nationalist. Nationalist, political movements are central to politics in only some countries. In many post-socialist states they are more likely to appear at the periphery of the political landscape. But at the same time we have to recognize that since the political changes the nation is a basic political and social model of orientation everywhere in this region of Europe. “The Nation and the national state [became] once again the anchor

of hope for a lot of people” (Langewiesche 1995: 100).

Eastern European societies have discovered or rediscovered the nation as a political idea, and as a social ideal. This discovery and/or rediscovery of nation happens in the form of vivid and sufficient social and cultural discourses. Within these discourses different social and political groups try to describe and to define what is the nation, they try to set up models of national culture and national identity, they discuss issues of cultural feelings of belonging, they deal in the context of current political developments with the question the ‘national self’, with the process of cultural and political ‘othering’. But behind all different topics and issues, these discourses concentrate first of all on the problems and dilemmas of national history and of historical past, and at the same time they produce a pervasive symbolic connection between history, the past and the current politics. In other words: after the collapse of socialism a ‘discourse of the national’ has been emerging all over Eastern Europe, which is based on the reflexive conjunction between this discourse and the “new” politics. It means, that the ‘discourse of the national’ serves not only for discussing historical events and processes of the past, but it sets political categories and creates cultural symbols for political use as well.

Consequently, my thesis is: It is not enough to search for, or to acknowledge only the classical forms of political nationalism in order to understand and interpret the present social and political situation in postsocialist Eastern European countries. The ‘discourse of the national’ should rather come into the focus of ethnological research. We should try to describe the language, the topics, the strategies and the logic of this discourse; we should analyze its main categories and its symbolic mechanism in order to understand the political and social order of postsocialist societies. If we do not talk about ‘Eastern European nationalism’ in general, if we focus rather on the ‘discourse of the national’, then we have to find other approaches, other explanatory models, which could shed light on the cultural logic of the ‘national’ or nationalism and trace its social and symbolic

functions within the new political context of postsocialism. And this is what I try to do in this paper.³

'The Discourse of the National' – Some Theoretical Remarks

A 'discourse' is a socio-cultural phenomenon, which is differently defined and interpreted within social and human sciences.⁴ There are different discourses in every society. They overlap and complement each other, they merge and fuse, or, they contradict each other. Each discourse is demarcated by its own topic and internal rules as well as by the relation to other discourses. The discourses are produced as well as performed through politics, media, science and the academic world. They can model, influence and determine the way of thinking in a society. They consist of verbal forms, of texts, categories and conceptions as well as of cultural knowledge, of symbolic actions or rituals. That means that every discourse is a system of thinking and argumentation. 'Argumentation', in this case, does not only refer to the verbal level but also to the level of practice of the discourse.

However, this kind of understanding of the 'discourse' which is prevalent within cultural studies points not only to the organization of knowledge or to the meaning of these conceptions. It also considers the way those organizations are produced – the *discursive practice*. Each discourse produces extensive socio-cultural vocabularies – a series "of coherent definitions, ideas and metaphors, which enable the individuals to organize and classify the diversity of their social perceptions according to general categories. They are empowered to act consistently" (Tenbruck 1990: 22). The different components of a discourse are interwoven and produce a "discursive formation" or a symbolic space in the society. The for every society imperative unity and capability of political action (Reinhart Koselleck) is created through different discourses and their vocabularies as well as within the symbolic space. The social consensus of political action does not emerge from itself, it is a product of political and symbolic negotiation between social groups and individuals within each discourse. Hence, the discourse does not

simply "mirror the interests of a single class. One and the same discourse can be used by groups with different and even contradictory class interests" (Hall 1994a: 153; Rösen 1994: 3). Within the same discourse "different and even contradictory" fields of knowledge are produced. Certainly, not every field of knowledge contains the 'truth' or is socially feasible. Thus powerful political and symbolic fights over the truth of knowledge take place within every discourse. Since truth is constructed and at the same time controlled by the social reality, the truth which is created in a discourse and realized in social practice means power (Foucault 1980: 201). Accordingly, the particular groups and social subjects try to make their verbal and symbolic knowledge 'become true' in order to exercise (political) power.

The 'discourse of the national' indicates that we are not simply confronted with a political, ideological or cultural nationalism in contemporary Eastern Europe. We should rather deal with the question of how different meanings, concepts and categories, "which influence and organize our behavior as well as our view about ourselves" (Hall 1994b: 201), are created in the social and political space of post-socialism. In other words: In the 'discourse of the national', a certain way of thinking, a cultural system, a symbolic space and a certain political and social reality is constructed (Spencer 1990), where people can politically and socially interact. The discourse analysis traces the relations between ideological and cultural conceptions of the social world, symbolic constructions, cultural processes and the political interpretation of social order. These contexts play a constituting role especially in the case of post-socialist societies in Eastern Europe.

The discourses of a certain society can only work through particular cultural forms. To put it differently: Cultural forms are those means which help to depict the topics, conceptions and strategies of the discourse. All discourse consists of the same potential cultural forms. The latter are nonetheless applied in different configurations within the different discourses. The basic cultural forms of discourse are shaped firstly by verbal and written as well as political and scientific/academic texts – i.e. political

speeches, discussions, debates, books, articles, essays etc. They constitute the *linguistic* level of the discourse. Secondly, the forms consist of social and cultural rituals – i.e. political and cultural events, national holidays and historical remembrance days as well as symbolic performances of memory, etc. They describe the *ritual* level of the discourse. Thirdly, the basic cultural forms of the discourse are molded by the visual depiction and representation by the media – i.e. films, exhibitions, etc. They render the *visual* level of the discourse.⁵

According to these forms we can distinguish three mechanisms of the discourse: the textualizing, ritualizing and the visualizing mechanism. Certainly, in practice it is impossible to clearly separate the different forms and mechanism from each other. They are entangled in each other and depict the specific topics of the discourses.⁶ Since different discursive forms are applied in different configuration, semantic and pragmatic relations between the forms, themes and strategies of a discourse are developed and strengthened. On the one hand discursive forms work as a ‘cultural filter’. Certain topics and motives of a discourse are pushed into the fore, whilst others retreat into the background. In this way the semantic accent of a discourse takes shape and alters. On the other hand the ‘strength of representation’ of each discursive form varies according to the particular themes and their abstractness. For example, there are topics and motives, which should be represented in a ritualized form within ‘the discourse of the national’ while others find more suitable presentation for example in the visual form. Hence discourses need extensive and diverse configurations of each discursive form, which have to be in harmony with the different topics of the discourse in order to reach as many groups as possible within one society.

Contents and topics of a discourse can be described on different levels of abstraction. For instance, it could rightly be stated that the focal point within today’s Eastern European ‘discourse of the national’ are common abstract terms and categories like national identity or the process of coming to term with the past.⁷ But at the same time there are concrete and special topics of each (national) discourse, like

for example Katyn, the conflicts between Poland and the Ukraine or the program in Kielce in 1948 in the Polish discourse, or, in the case of Slovakia, the role of the Slovak state in the interwar period, the national upheaval against the fascist regime or the so called “language-law” would be central to the discourse. The characteristics of the Hungarian discourse could be the minority rights, the revolution of 1956 or “the Hungarian way” of socialism. But if we concentrate on the categorical net alone, or on the different topics of a national discourse, we cannot describe the cultural logic and the semantic structure of the discourse. Therefore, I think, we should analyze first of all the strategies of the discourse in order to gain an understanding of its logic and structure. These strategies are cultural and symbolic mechanisms which take up different themes and contents and bring the latter (consistently) together, contextualize and problematize them in certain forms.⁸

The Strategies of the Discourse

The focal point of the ‘discourse of the national’ is history seen as an “interpreted time”, as a “cultural representation of the past” (Zerubavel 1994: 105). However, history is not simply depicted in post-socialism, it is represented in a reflexive way. The reflexive representation of history has several historical and political beginnings as well as reasons, which evolved within the context of the political and social transformation as a symbolic reaction to socialism. On the one hand there is the common experience of Eastern European societies that their own history and past during socialism was falsified and rewritten or even destroyed. On the other hand there is the public and politically motivated opinion that the symbolic aim of socialism was the destruction of the national history, and – at the same time – the construction of an ideologically homogenized history. On the basis of these experiences came a ‘theoretical’ foundation of the discourse into being. It is a common view all over in Eastern Europe that the socialist ideology misrepresented the ‘historical truth’, annihilated the ‘objective historical truth’, and symbolically destroyed the ‘his-

torical reality'. 'Historical truth' and 'historical reality' are represented here as entities, which create the philosophical (and political) antithesis of socialism. Socialism has been represented as an ideology, or as an ideological system, while post-socialism is characterized as a political and social order based on historical truth and reality. But 'truth' and 'historical reality' are represented not only as philosophical or epistemological categories; 'truth' and 'historical reality' designate the moral basis of a 'new society'.⁹

Within this particular historical, philosophical and political context the central issue of the discourse is the 'objective' representation of the national history. It is one of the most important political, moral and symbolic demands of post-socialist societies. Thus the discursive practice of the new Eastern European societies points to the reconstruction of the historical reality and objectivity, to the repair of the 'damaged' history, to regain the 'stolen' history and focuses on its reproduction or new interpretation. We can distinguish three main strategies of the post-socialist 'discourse of the national', which are closely linked to each other and used to interpret history 'objectively'. I would define the strategies as: *restoration*, *reconstruction* and *mythologization* of history.

Restoration

The metaphor of '*restoration*' is based on the experience and deep-seated conviction of many Eastern European social groups that socialism caused great symbolic damages to history. On the one hand certain facts, events and processes were erased and excluded from history, and became historical taboos in socialist times. Hence, they were left to fall into social oblivion. On the other hand the 'national history' was suppressed generally and replaced by 'socialist' history. Accordingly, revision, correction and restoration of ideologically and politically motivated misrepresentations of history became a central political and moral issue of this discourse.

Restoration means in this context the recovery and representation of missing historical experiences, it aims at the 'completion' of histo-

ry. It means for the practice of discourse that historical processes and events are put into a new light, and that the semantic emphasis gets altered. Events, which were until then situated at the 'periphery of history' or which were taboos or kept secret, suddenly are interpreted as central issues of a 'new' and 'real' history, and vice versa. For example, the cruelties of the Red Army during and after the Second World War, the political horror of socialism, the work camps and the Gulags, the political trials, the expulsions and executions, the torture, the 'traditional' ethnic and national conflicts, or, Trianon, the peace treaty after the First World War and its political and historical consequences for Central-Europe and the Balkan, etc. At the same time series of historical situations and occurrences which previously described the core of history, have been marginalized or even stigmatized after the collapse of socialism. For example, feasts and heroes of the communist movement, the political role of communist parties before and during the Second World War, and so on.

After the collapse of socialism a new form of history emerged in post-socialist countries, which plays a central role in the process of symbolic restoration of history. Numerous autobiographies, diaries, life story narratives and historical memories were published in the past few years everywhere in Eastern Europe. In these literary and documentary texts (and also films) people as representatives of suppressed social groups remember the past, and illustrate the historical "reality" of socialism through their individual fate and their own life history. But these verbal and visual texts are not simply memories but "testimonies". Testimony is a specific kind of memory. Its constitutive characteristic is to approach another person, to impress the listener, to talk to the whole community (Felman-Laub 1992: 204). It is commonly known that the "socialist" history was an ideologically homogenized one, and only the officially construed and politically manipulated history was permitted for the public in socialist times. There was one "great narrative" of history and alternative interpretations of it were excluded from the public discourse of socialism. After the political changes social groups which

had no place within this “great narrative of socialist history”, were raising their voices to tell their own historical experiences, and these voices gained particular significance within the process of symbolic restoration of “objective” history. In these memories and testimonies, the ways and principles of the socialist everyday life are described from different social and political perspectives (peasants and workers, prisoners and persecuted intellectuals, etc.), and the daily harassment and experiences of suppression has been told in form of different narratives. In short, the symbolic restoration of history points at representation of lost, ideologically stigmatized and political marginalized experiences and everyday realities of different social groups.

This “history from below” originally aimed at the presentation of repressed plurality and plurivocality of historical and cultural perceptions in socialism. In this way the homogeneous construction of the official “socialist” history had to be amended and restored. Today, we can establish the fact, that the discovery of this new dimension of history has been followed by additional theoretical and symbolic consequences, which could easily be utilized for political purposes. First of all I have to refer to the fact, that the symbolic restoration contributed not only to “completion of the history” but that it also produced a new way of historical perception. The endeavor to modify the socialist idea of homogeneous history, to individualize and pluralize history led to a perception and representation of history where the microperspectives and the particular focus of different social groups became in hegemonic role. This is a new (political and cultural) idea of history, which makes impossible to tell or to represent *one* “great narrative” of history. Since the collapse of socialism, history gradually vanishes behind individual fates and particular life worlds in Eastern Europe. “Great” contexts or historical macroperspectives become invisible and the particular group-memories will be separated from their original historical context.

To put this process in theoretical terms: History is being decentralized (Conrad-Kessel 1994), the past is symbolically “privatized” and “disintegrated” (Ankerschmit 1996). Nonethe-

less this ‘postmodern’ decentralization and privatization of the past fulfill a specific function within post-socialism. They are directed against the official “socialist” understanding of history. They attempt to construct an “other” history through individual and specific experiences and memories of different social groups. The integrative power of this “other” history – which is supposed to connect the different life narratives consistently and thus construct history – is produced by exclusion, repression and suffering, fear, pain and emotion as collective consequences of the marginalized and stigmatized social and political situation. The discursive representation of suppressed life worlds created a symbolic space where the history of socialism is represented as a history of suffering, as a permanent and continuous burden, pain and misery of the *whole* society.

Here emerges a new interpretation of history or the post-socialist historical understanding, which shows the suppression, the opposition and the struggle of the *whole* society against socialism. But this interpretation has nothing to do with historical and political “reality” of socialism, it is rather an imagined history and past. But it allows of representation of history as something substantial, that has to be defended against socialism. This “philosophy of history” gradually caused a very important symbolic demarcation in post-socialist countries. The idea that socialism did not only suppress single groups but put the whole society under political duress, has slowly gained ground. Hence, the society, which had turned against the political system of socialism, provides the scene for the *true* history or historical reality. In that way two versions of history has been produced. On the one hand there is the “true” history, which was kept in particular life worlds, in a kind of “social privacy”, in the hidden life worlds of the nation. On the other hand there is the “falsified” history, which was created by the political system of socialism for the social and political public. In this symbolic opposition the “true” history is necessarily the national history, the history of the nation and the falsified history is the socialist history. The history of political suppression in that way turned into the history of the nation and became the moral ground of the post-social-

ist social order. And the process of symbolic restoration turned particular group memories into national history (Assmann 1988: 11) and in that way suppressed all the other historical perception and representation.

Reconstruction

The discursive strategy of “reconstruction” is grounded on the imagination, that “history” was not only damaged but was totally ruined and destroyed during socialism. It means that socialism had created interpretative frameworks, ideas and narratives of different historical events which are fictitious, wrong and simply a lie. Accordingly, reconstruction means the removal and abolition of false historical interpretations and thereby the restoration of the historical truth – the explanation and understanding of the “real” history. The symbolic reconstruction of history focuses on different historical periods, processes and events, topics, dates and protagonists of the past which were in socialism marginalized and which could play a substantial and meaningful symbolic role in the creation of a new post-socialist society.

Consequently streets and public squares, for example, were renamed everywhere in former socialist countries after the political change. Hence, historical events and protagonists got erased from the historical “mental map” of a city. Former ritual and ritualized places or *lieux de memoire* of urban space are reconstructed (Azaryahm 1991). The effect of those changes is a new symbolic texture of street names and places of remembrance. They describe *the* different, and reconstructed historical horizon for everyday life. The demand to abolish the false historical interpretation and to reconstruct the historical truth reveals a further leitmotiv: The ‘pollution’ of history, which occurred under socialism, has to be removed. ‘Purity’ is a cultural conception, it is based on a strong understanding of social order. One has to know, that things have their right place and what is allowed to be done and what not, etc. (Douglas 1966). In regard to this understanding, for example, the socialist monuments were removed from the public squares in Budapest and exhibit in an “open air museum”, which some years ago

opened in the outskirts of the city. In this way the city’s appearance and history were “purified”. A polluted fragment of the past and history is locked up in a symbolic ghetto. It was not simply destroyed but put into its “right” place. Hence, re-construction of history means re-creation of the “original” order, of the historical truth, the returning to former or original conditions.

If one “knows”, what was the “original” order and what is the “historical truth” then one has only to select those traces and remnants of past which suit the desired aim. Thus reconstruction also describes a process of politically and ideologically motivated selection. Accordingly, it is not “*the*” history or the “historical truth” which is re-constructed, rather, elements and components of the imagined past are selected and re-presented. The “pre-socialist” political and social order, and especially the interwar period give a good example of this selective perception of historical past. The interwar period has been idealistically, romantically and nostalgically revalued. It appears to be the “golden age” of Central Europe. For some countries in this region the interwar period is a time, when their own national state was founded or re-founded. After the collapse of socialism the interwar period has been reconstructed as the last historical period of national independence and political democracy, as a time, when the nation was not repressed and dominated by socialism.

Within this interpretative framework former politicians and “protagonists” are called into the collective memory and their political ideology and philosophy of social and cultural order has been reinterpreted. For example: Miklós Horthy, who was the Hungarian administrator and a long standing as well as faithful ally of Hitler. By 1938 he had already signed the laws against the Jews. He had sent divisions of the Hungarian army off to the Russian front side to fight with the Nazi Wehrmacht. However, today he is not depicted as a fascist politician but as a tragic hero of history, who was torn between two power blocs (Germany and Soviet Union) and dictatorships (Socialism and Fascism) and who wanted to save national independence. The Rumanian dictator, Antonescu

is also not remembered as a follower of Fascism and Nazi-Germany but as a politician who had reconquered ancient, historical Rumanian territories. Tiso, the leader of the fascist Slovakia, is celebrated as the founder of the Slovak state. The fascist and dictatorial character of the interwar period is, of course, not reconstructed, it is glossed over and transfigured.

The history of the Holocaust in Eastern Europe is an other example of that, what reconstruction really means. There is almost no comment within the post-socialist 'discourse of the national' on the legal and political discrimination against the Jews and the ubiquitous anti-Semitism of those times. The Holocaust and therefore the political and social responsibility of these societies is hardly ever mentioned. Instead, it is "re-constructed" that the Jews were solely persecuted by Germans and that only the Nazis are responsible for the Holocaust. It is further "re-constructed" that, for example, the Jews from the Bukovina survived because they were sent to Rumanian and not German concentration camps. Also, it was "re-constructed" that the people in Hungary did not know anything about the deportations and especially about the concentration camps. The Holocaust is not denied in post-socialist Eastern Europe but is not particularly remembered. One could succinctly say that the Holocaust does not belong to the historical memory of the Eastern European nations. The explanation for this silence is that the cultural forms of memory do not provide the means to critically examine the horror of the Holocaust. The perpetrators cannot remember and the victims cannot forget – the memory has been "frozen". The thesis of the petrified and frozen memory is an important symbolic means of the re-construction of history. With its help an attempt is made to exclude the Holocaust from the national history. The Holocaust is depicted as a tragic event of history, where the "alien" Jews were persecuted and murdered by the "alien" Germans. Consequently, the Holocaust is no longer part of the national history. Therefore the nation cannot (and if only in a limited way) remember the Holocaust.

Another object of reconstruction are the historical dates – dates of national celebration as

well as national commemoration and holidays. They provide the temporal horizon of history or the symbolic space of the historical time. To put it differently: Within the 'discourse of the national' a web of historical dates is reconstructed and at the same time reinterpreted. This web or these historical dates are especially important since they describe those aspects of social life where people are encountering the temporal horizon of history through symbolic and ritualized behavior (Rüsen 1994: 6). For example the 23rd of August – the day when Rumania went over to the allies in 1944 – has recently been intensely disputed in Rumania. The 23rd of August was declared on the one hand as a national holiday, on the other hand it was perceived as the starting point of the national tragedy of socialism. The 4th of April, the official date of Hungary's liberation almost disappeared from the post-socialist historical horizon. Thereby the fact vanished, that the liberation meant the end of the war, which had signified for many of the social groups the end of persecution and suppression and, first of all, the end of the Holocaust. Other dates became central in history, for example: the 23rd of October, the day when the revolution broke out in 1956, or, the 20th of August, the day of national commemoration, which date was reconstructed as the ritualized memory of the foundation of the Hungarian state (Nieder-müller 1997).

Hence, reconstruction points here to the discursive setting of another temporal horizon which reconstructs and interprets the historical processes and events by itself and thus depicts the "historical truth". And it means, that the reconstruction of history turns into something mythical (Burke 1991:295). Certain politicians and ideologies as well as social institution of an earlier historical time get isolated from their political activity, ideological meaning and function, or, they are taken out of their former political and social context and 'fitted into' another political and social context. The reconstruction describes the political as well as social de-contextualization and the simultaneous re-contextualization of historical actors, events and time-periods. This symbolic and discursive process enables a shift of emphasis

in history and in the past, in order to “re-construct” a new and mythic image of history. Within the political, academic and discursive practice of post-socialist countries the demand for an objective reconstruction of history means to eradicate or – more precisely – to “excavate” history. There it describes the process of “evacuation and hollowing. Old bones are taken apart and are put together in relation to each other. Furthermore, they are exhumed and the place of excavation is becoming purified. Excavation means to dig very deep in order to uncover and dispose of the refuse of the past” (Giddens 1993: 459). Anthony Giddens’s metaphor of excavation is very striking for this discursive strategy. There the post-socialist history has to be dug out and purified, and the refuse of socialism must also be disposed of.

Mythologization

The third discursive strategy signifies the attempt to integrate the “restored” and “re-constructed” historical processes and events into a broader political and ideological context and thereby to create myths of origin of the new political system. Myths of origin are – in a certain sense – useful for all political and social systems. Myths of origin are constructed and fictitious memories of the historical beginning and political, social and cultural origin. These myths fulfill two basic functions: they explain and they legitimize. “The rooting in the origin is a strategy to secure identity. Who knows, where he is coming from, knows, who he is” (Angehrn 1996: 307). The Eastern European societies produce their myths of origin in three ways.

On the one hand there is the “historical” myth of origin. They represent the historical origin of a nation or of a people. These narratives contain symbolic images of an “ancient folk and home country”, an “ancestral culture” and an “own history”. They can be symbolized and ritualized in different ways. In form of national commemorations like, for example, in Hungary where the 1100th anniversary of the Hungarian conquest was celebrated. Or in form of historical or archaeological exhibitions, like in Bulgaria or in form of thick historical monographs about the historical origin of the Ruma-

nian people. Certainly, the myths of origin employ academic objectivity as well as historical truth. However, their substantial function does not point to the historical reconstruction of a social and cultural “primordial state”. They aim at the creation of an imaginary, temporarily and historically wide-ranging continuity, where national identity can be demonstrated. “The range of the time period between origin and the present resembles the depth and intensity of the own national self-esteem” (Rüsen 1994: 13). This discursive strategy leads the discursively arranged self-esteem up to the historical consciousness and combines it with the concept of national identity. The role which the national identity plays within this concept depends on the historical consciousness and its focus on past actions and thinking. In this way national identity is understood as the political and symbolic expression of a historical continuity which is socially and culturally demarcated.

On the other hand “social” myths of origin are created: “Social existence demands collective design” (Soeffner 1989: 168). This collective design of post-socialist societies will be produced through social myths. Social myths of origin create a social and national identity through “affirmative adjustment and imitating repetition”. They render the socio-cultural origins as “obligations for the future” as well as “an unbroken, effective, shaping power” (Rüsen 1994: 17). The political and socio-cultural origins of post-socialist way of life and social order in Eastern Europe are accordingly presented and symbolized. The rediscovery and symbolic re-construction of the bourgeois culture and bourgeois life styles is an essential part of these myths. But through this re-construction of culture and lifestyle political predecessors and ideological ancestors are demonstratively put into the fore. In this way political programmes and future social orders can be explained and legitimized. Social myths of origin, of course, do not mirror former class identities and the historical reality of some social classes. Exactly the Central European bourgeoisie serves as a good example for the imaginary character of the social myths of origin. It was a social class which was characterized by deep political, social as well as cultural cleavages (Bácskai 1986–

1988, Roth 1995). But in the process of creation of social myths the social, cultural, and political conditions of this class will be idealized and homogenized. There, the issue is not the bourgeois identity nor the bourgeois reality of the interwar period, rather, the focal point is how the bourgeoisie can be utilized as a political and social emblem. The question is, how the bourgeois culture and the imagined bourgeoisie could represent political aims and social philosophies of post-socialism. Thereby, these myths depict a bourgeois culture, identity and society, which had never existed in historical reality. However, these historical and social imaginations are exactly the mechanisms the social myths of origin are based on.

Within the 'discourse of the national' the "cultural myths of origin" also play a specific role. Apart from the historical and social horizon they provide a metaphoric cultural scene. Folk culture and national culture are keywords of the cultural myth of origin. These categories represent the "real", genuine culture – "the culture of the folk" – and its continuity, authenticity, archaism and beauty (Kaschuba 1986). The concept folk culture "bears a vision of totality as well as the wish to set up definite restricted and manageable systems, contexts and spaces. The term '*Denkgebäude*' is very useful in this case. It is a building made out of thoughts, where someone can live and the mind is fed by visions of the past" (Köstlin 1990: 13). Behind this metaphor a complex symbolic process is hidden. Within this process the folk culture gets removed from its social context, and at the same time it will be represented as an aesthetic phenomenon. In this – in a social way – neutral form it resembles the national culture. Thus national culture is a question of "cultural heritage" (Hofer 1991).

It is a specific set of symbols and symbolic actions, national affiliation is defined and represented by on this basis. The national culture provides the cultural frame of a society, where the specific society tries to define itself as a nation. This cultural horizon of the discourse or the myth of a genuine, common and uniform culture makes it possible to represent the nation as a common political and cultural formation. It is a formation with its own territory and

its own "political organization of power". It was set up through the collective possession of a common cultural field and common cultural tradition, as well as through common cultural property. Plus, it contains all social classes and social identities. This idea, which is characteristic for post-socialist Eastern Europe today, is based on the assumption that the common culture and the cultural traditions as well as norms and values create the integrative field of social interaction. Hence, the cultural – and in this sense the symbolic – structures are the categorical precondition for the social structures and for social and even political behavior (Giesen & Schmid 1990). This idea brings about the culturalization (Kaschuba 1995) of history and the past. On the one hand culturalization means that historical events and social processes are solely depicted through culture, cultural change and within a "hidden" cultural terminology. On the other hand history and the past are exclusively depicted as the only sphere of national culture, national identity and the "national values and norms". In this way history and the past represent the metaphorical place or the symbolic home of the national.

Conclusion: Cultural Conception and Symbolic Mechanisms of the Discourse

If I would try to sum up what happens in the 'discourse of the national', I should say, it will be narrative abbreviations created through public discussion of different topics. Abbreviation, as it is used here, means: "narratives, which are stored in language and not told as such but which are called into consciousness and communicatively used as already told narratives" (Rüsen 1994: 10). This definition means, that narrative abbreviations do not exist through themselves but that they shall be created and defined within and by the 'discourse of the national'. They have to acquire a common semantic meaning, and a collectively accepted interpretation. Nevertheless, the "whole" history cannot be saved through the abbreviations. They merely refer to "fateful events of the past" (Assmann 1988: 12). In the post-socialist 'discourse of the national' place names (Trianon, Katyn, and so on), dates (1956, 1968 etc.)

as well as a person's name (Horthy, Piłsudski, Antonescu, etc.) and different terms and categories can work as narrative abbreviation, which can be furnished with a particular meaning. Narrative abbreviations work in this discourse as semantic concentrations, they save interpretations and interpreted meanings. At the same time the interpretations which are hidden within the abbreviations, present themselves as the only objective and true explanation. Thus the narrative abbreviations claim that they alone represent the historical truth.

To put it differently: Within the discourse of the national an attempt is made to establish a definite canon of narrative abbreviations, which should serve as "fixed points" of the perception and depiction of history. Accordingly, one can interpret the narrative abbreviations as the symbolic skeleton of the historical memory. However, the problem of post-socialist societies is precisely the fact that there is no commonly accepted interpretation of history which is necessary for the creation of narrative abbreviations. Nor does a political consensus exist which is needed for the collective acceptance of narrative abbreviations. Consequently, within the discourse symbolic and political attempts are made to produce and assert those abbreviations. The frequent and forceful conflicts in contemporary Eastern European societies about historical events, participants and dates have to be analyzed within this context. The different protagonists of the political and social life try to assert their own abbreviations. Thereby they arouse strong political, social and cultural emotions, and they can also politically mobilize pro- and contra-groups. Thus we have already reached the point where the perception, the interpretation and the representation of history, and historical past are transformed into current politics, where the line between past history and current politics has been disappeared.

I have already pointed out that the narrative abbreviations are based on a 'well-directed' selection, and they record an often politically and ideologically motivated interpretation of history. The abbreviations which emerge within the same interpretative framework, are closely linked with each other, and they provide a coherent and integrated picture of history. The

totality of the available pictures, metaphors and abbreviations are represented and cultivated as the "national memory" (Wachtel 1986: 217). The national memory can be understood as a "fictitious and imaginary mixture" of the historical and cultural memory. It works like a mirror where a society is becoming visible "for itself and for others". "The certain past that the society let become visible ... as well as the way the society puts this past into the fore within the value perspective of its identification appropriation says something about its nature and its aim" (Assmann 1988: 16). In this way the national memory works as a symbolic and collective self representation. The national memory wants to represent the nation, which is understood as the collective self. It describes the moral and cultural ground of a society "which is kept, or at least defined as a common property over generations" (Assmann 1991: 11). It means, that within the process of creation of the national memory, culture and history are shaped as a 'monument'. They became a "sign, that points to itself", "stages itself, ... [and] puts itself on show for the past, present and future". It wants "to be seen, kept [and] remembered" (Assmann 1991: 13). This symbolically fabricated ground – culture and history as a monument – is conceived and depicted as tradition in and for everyday life, and is projected into the past (Eisenstadt 1991: 28). This history which is stylized as the national memory consists of figures, "islands", "textures" and "spaces" of memory (Assmann 1988: 12). They represent the historical substance of the nation which can be referred to and relied on in certain historical and political situations. This chain of these symbolic conceptions – culture, history, memory as well as the past, tradition, the "national" and the symbolic ground – was politically instrumentalized immediately after the political change in Eastern Europe. Therefore the 'discourse of the national' was allocated to the center of the political field. Thus the discourse of the national holds a hegemonic position in post-socialist societies. That means the different political opinions, academic argumentations as well as ideological ideas and social strategies can only be realized within this discourse.

The conception of national memory and the semantic chain of nation and culture, tradition, past and history have engendered a particular “philosophy of history” and historical perception. A symbolic opposition was worked out: On the one hand we find the “own”, “repressed”, “true” and “real” national history. It represents the past, the historical continuity as well as freedom and the opposition against socialism. On the other hand we have the “falsified”, “fictitious” and “alien” socialist history. It depicts the political repression, the historical discontinuity and a historical, political as well as a social *cul-de-sac*. A symbolic border was created through these opinions and interpretations. It carefully separated the own repressed history – located in the past – from the alien history which was dominant during socialism. In this way the national history, which had to live in a political and symbolic slavery of an “alien” history, became a symbol of political opposition. The “alien” and the “own” do not only represent metaphorical terms, both can carry a concrete social meaning. The representatives of the own history were (and are) the “national” middle class, the peasantry, the nobility or the aristocracy everywhere in Eastern Europe, while the “alien” history was being delineated by the communists, the Jews and the Russians.

The hegemonic position and power of the discourse of the national – “the construction of a collective will through difference” (Hall 1994c: 85) – is based on politically and ideologically motivated wish to overcome this ambiguity of history. The attempt is made to create “one” history of the nation through this ambiguous history. In order to reach this goal one must find the way out of the dead end of history and return to the point where the dead end began and the history “ended”. This particular point is depicted by the interwar period – “the last free moment of history”. The question within the discourse is not the return of history, rather it is the issue of return to the history. When socialism is looked upon and interpreted as a dead end, then one has to get out of it and block it. Vaclav Havel’s explanation in November 1989 – “The history, which was artificially held back, is moving again” – proved as a mistake. Everywhere in post-socialist countries there are polit-

ical parties and social groups which do not want to continue this history. They want to return to the past and start the history from a certain point. The historical present: the socialism, which was situated between the past and the future, is cut out. The past leads directly into the future. This symbolic process can be defined as a metaphoric political past orientation where the line between the past and the future is blurred and disappears. History works as a meaningful construction that interprets the depoliticized and “culturalized” past. It puts the perspectives of the future down to a constructed and “imagined” past. The idea of the nation is dominant in post-socialist Eastern Europe. However, we are not dealing with a traditional political nationalism, rather, the idea of the nation expresses the question for the way of creating a new social order. It is about the political, cognitive and symbolic invention of the “new” post-socialist society. The discourse of the national seems to be the most important symbolic means within this process.

Notes

1. For today’s quantitative as well as theoretical and methodological range in studies of nationalism see: Wehler 1996, Langewiesche 1995, Calhoun 1993.
2. For critical remarks on that explanation see Calhoun 1993: 212.
3. Certainly, the symbolic processes which are analyzed in this paper also have a political function and work in a political and social space. However, the article does not provide the scope for a closer look at the specific political and social situation of the postsocialist countries.
4. I do not know a special ethnological approach of discourse analysis, see Hartmann 1991. However the term enjoys great popularity in ethnology and cultural anthropology. I think, that the term is very useful in order to describe the symbolic dimension and the cultural logic of late modern societies.
5. See Assmann 1988: 19 where he writes about: “verbal, pictorial (figurative and ritual) moulding” of the memory.
6. That means on the one hand that some topics and motives of the discourse are not only depicted on the verbal level but also on a ritual and/or visual level, and vice versa. For example, historical events are not solely problematized in newspaper articles or in academic texts. They are also discussed in forms like a film, an exhibition or a ritualized

meeting. On the other hand it means that all forms and mechanisms mentioned in this paper are utilized i.e. at national holidays or funerals or burials of leading politicians or statesmen. See Ackermann 1995, Lane 1981.

7. An other aspect of this issue shows John Borneman's paper.
8. In the following I will try to characterize the Eastern European discourse of the national. I have necessarily to generalize, although sometimes the differences are more important than the similarities. Particularly when one talks about Eastern Europe and realizes that the political and social processes in East Central Europe – from the Baltic to Slovenia – lead into a different direction than in other region of Eastern and Southern Eastern Europe, problems will occur. To give empirical proof of general and/or symbolic processes is evenly problematic. It is not only a methodologically difficult question, but also the fact that the field of potential sources is extraordinarily wide ranged. On the one hand this study is based on the analysis of Hungarian and Rumanian newspapers. On the other hand it is grounded in ethnographic observation and fieldwork which have been conducted since the political change in Rumania and Hungary. Most of the Rumanian material was arranged by Margit Feischmidt. For her supply I am greatly thankful.
9. To the cognitive and symbolic inherence among ideology, truth and reality, see Geertz 1973.

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