

“MY GENERATION IS QUITE A SULLEN ONE...”: TRAUMA AND REMEMBERING IN LIFE STORIES AFTER 1956

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ABSTRACT Following 1989, the public discussion and examination of the history of secret police agents happened in an inadequate, unsatisfactory manner: Hungarian society was unable to come to terms with its former informers. This proved to be a loss not only for the victims, “the targets”, but also for the “observers”. The catharsis of asking and receiving forgiveness did not occur, although it could have lead to deliver provided relief also for those who were involved. The purpose of this essay is to describe the life story of E. V., who suffered a nervous breakdown when her fiancé was executed in 1957 during the post-revolutionary persecutions. Meanwhile the political police recruited her as an agent. Based on the available sources, it is possible to claim that after the Hungarian political transformation in 1989, E. V. reshaped her memory and her personal identity because she was unable to face her past. She claimed in her life history interview: “I am no relative or friend to anyone”.

KEYWORDS Hungarian revolution, 1956, suppression of revolution, informer, political police, trauma, personal and collective memory, state socialism, Hungary

INTRODUCTION

The memories of the participants of the 1956 revolution (demonstrators, leaflet distributors, armed rebels, the Red Cross crew rescuing wounded persons, etc.) in Hungary share a common feature. Participants usually recall the outbreak of the revolution and its subsequent events as an euphoric experience. These memories reflect the exceptional enthusiasm of men and

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women in the streets who were willing to sacrifice their lives.²

In the period following the suppression of the revolution, euphoria was replaced by feelings of fear, despair and disappointment. Nonetheless the stories told of 1956 include a sharp distinction between good and evil, just and unjust, beautiful and ugly, appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. These recollections consider demonstrations or street fights positive, whereas the power that oppressed the freedom fight appears, in contrast, as something in a negative light.³ The majority of individual recollections about 1956 reflect the events in accordance with the narrative canon of collective memory.

There are a few recollections, however, which construct narratives that differ from these general canonical forms; thus, deserving special attention by the scholars. These reflections may represent fellow fighters and associates, or at least some of them, as traitors, murderers or looters. They might even label and the revolution as a “counterrevolution”, which is the appropriate terminology of the post-1956 Kádár-regime. Listening to such stories, the storyteller’s self draws intense attention since it points to experiences differing from the canons of collective memory, which due to their atypical attributes are in themselves important to study.

The purpose of this essay is to describe the life story of E. V., who suffered a nervous breakdown, when her fiancé was executed in 1957 during the post-revolutionary persecutions. The political police abused her state of mind, and recruited her as an agent. Based on the available sources, it is possible to claim that E. V. suppressed her memories about 1956, which hindered her ability to pursue adequate memory-work. As a consequence, she was unable to ask forgiveness from her victims and – being herself also a victim –she was unable to forgive herself.

In addition to providing a rich account of E.V.’s life, more questions can be raised: (1) How was E. V. talking about the revolution in her 1957 confessions and her 1992 life interview? Did her relationship to the events of 1956 change in between the two dates?; (2) Who she identified herself with when telling her story in 1992? With the freedom fighters or the police network which represented the political power in 1957? ;(3) E.V. continued to produce reports for almost 20 years. Is it possible to detect from the sources any changes in her attitude towards the subjects of surveillance or the comprehension of her own personal identity? It is tempting to consider “involuntary informers”; persons who were reluctant to provide information or authentic accounts on the target

2 On these memories see Bögre 2006: 20-64.

3 On the dramatic atmosphere prevailed after the fall of the freedom fight see Bögre 2006.

persons since they identified themselves less with their roles than “committed informers”. (Gyarmati 2007: 18) Does it conform to the evidence? (4) Finally, it is very important to analyze what were her plans for the future?

TRAUMA AND MEMORY

Memory secures continuity between past and present. According to Ricoeur, “There is no being with memory, which is not oriented to the future at the same time.” (Ricoeur 1999: 61) Paul Ricoeur has argued that the meaning of past occurrences is not fixed or permanently defined. In his contention, past sins can jail anyone within the confines of self-accusation, but asking for forgiveness can secure deliverance, which changes the meaning of the individual’s past, as well. (Ricoeur 1999: 61) However, the road to deliverance can be long and the goal may be impossible to reach without the Freudian “memory-work”. Those persons who committed or suffered from traumas (damages, wounds) in the past usually want to forget their experiences or deeds— they are not willing to face them; therefore, they react through suppression. “This is what I have done – Memory says. This is not possible – Pride says and remains stubborn. Finally memory yields.” (Pfitzner 2008: 87)⁴ Suppression, however, leads to repercussions for self-identity, which are to be prevented by projecting those onto others. The other, thus, becomes the traitor, the murderer, the looter whom is possible to be reported on, an act which turns the informer into the protagonist of Good. Positive images of the self are possible to protect by positing oneself as the opposition of Evil.

The mind can protect itself against traumatic memories (Erős 2007: 24) by the means of splitting.⁵ The form of splitting which erases emotions is coined as “derealisation”. (Pfitzner 2008: 87) Unbearable reality is thereby turned into somewhat more bearable reality by cutting off emotional contents. This psychological action, however, can result in the dissolution of the self: the individual becomes unable to narrate events occurred to him or her. (Erős 2007: 24)

E. V. first told her personal story in 1992. She was requested to recollect the revolution and her revolutionary activities after the changes in 1989. Since E. V. was a victim and a traitor at the same time, a condition she could

4 Rudolf Pfitzner quotes Nietzsche.

5 Splitting is a mental process that erases the unbearable emotional consequences of traumatic experiences. Individuals erase these from their memories as if the unwanted event or person did not belong to their past.

not reveal in the interview, she was talking about her past knowing that she had to conceal parts of it. It proved to be difficult since due to the decades-long suppression of memories the process of “derealisation”, the exclusion of emotional contents, had already affected her psyche. Therefore, she was retelling the majority of events as if those had been the experiences of an outsider. In turn, she projected on others her sense of guilt because of her deeds in the past, which she had been forced to commit and, as a result, she described some of her former fellow fighters as the guilty ones. E. V., who for decades was subjected to distorted mental processes, was unable to reveal her past during the interview. Telling her life story failed as a post-trauma mental therapy since many of the details of the actual occurrences remained untold. Recollection did not result in catharsis and in fact, in E. V.’s case, it was unable to replace or to trigger the missing memories.

During E. V.’s life she was never forgiven— the majority of those having had a similar fate also refuted the action—,consequently no relief could be delivered. Victims of the committed sins remained anonymous and so, the guilty suffered as well. She did not merely lose her past, but also, according to Ricoeur, she lost expectations and hopes in the future as the consequence of her forgetting her origins and losing her orientation.

It is only the analytic-researcher who is able to recreate a coherent life story out of those lacunae in E.V.’s narratives, which emerge as consequences of the dissolution of experiences and the blurred horizon of expectations. Yet, whereas the researcher may produce a coherent story, one which is perhaps also close to reality, it may still be far from the truth.

METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

I use five different groups of source material for this article. E. V.’s confessions (1), reports on her by former prison-informers (2), and the minutes of her interrogations are available for researchers.(3)⁶ Reports she wrote as a secret agent following her release between 1959 and 1977 (4) and a life history interview recorded in 1992 are also accessible (5).

(1) Her confessions during her interrogations are typical first narratives of an arrested person written in order to justify his or her actions. The target audience of these narratives were the police officers. These narrative genres elucidate the way the prisoner interprets his or her situation as well as his or her defensive strategies.

⁶ On the uses of these types of sources see Farkas 2006.

(2) The reports of the prison informer are the written form of oral discussions occurring in the prison cell generated by hierarchical relationships. The agent in the cell initiated a guided discussion with the captive person according to the previous instructions of the police officer. These reports are, therefore, secondary constructions shaped significantly by the identity and personal diligence of the prison informer.

(3) The minutes of the interrogation differed from the confessions, similarly to the reports of the prison informer, since a third person recorded the oral discussion who typed only a condensed version of the original. The text of the minutes of the interrogation is the construction shaped equally by the language of arrested persons and the authorities. These minutes reflect a controversial situation between two opposing parties, which the inquirer, who possesses the power to physically exterminate his or her opponent, dominates.

E. V.'s prison reports are somewhat different from all the other types of records, but these also demand decoding. The conditions which generated these reports are crucial.⁷ "Normal" agent reports differed from those of the prison informer. In this case, reports were generated in the prison, in a total institution according to Goffman, where the informer sought to improve his or her status by denouncing others. In contrast, the author of reports written in the "free" world, the agent is physically not dominated by his or her recruiters. His or her opportunities are different, even if these are largely varied according to the personal qualities of the agent. Reports born in this way are also secondary constructions, narratives which mix police guidance with the intention to provoke and denounce. The "client", the secret police officer defined the content and purpose of dialogues, while the agent explored these themes for the police. Agents of the "free" world had a certain level of liberty. The meaning of liberty does not include the unmasking of his or her identity as a police informer, but a variability of forms of behaviour according to the personality, style and status of the informer. The informer is not always aware of his or her opportunities in the "free" world, he or she can be the captive of the situation; yet in theory, some level of freedom prevails. The secret police was prepared to tackle intentional unmasking by the regular monitoring of agents and by directing more agents to the same target person. Multiple surveillance was also a widespread practice, which made it easy to control the agents. However, if the agent obtained sufficient routine, he or she could develop a personal strategy, which expanded his or her opportunities. In this perspective, the typology of agents (like faithful ones or involuntary agents) is certainly too simplistic.⁸

7 See in more details Gyarmati 2007 and Gyöngyi Farkas's essays published in 2006.

8 Gyarmati 2007

The archival sources mentioned previously preserved textual constructions, which concealed the real intentions of various participants in the secret police system even from each other. It is the task of the researcher to decode these meanings, to detect the—presumably—real intentions in order to get access to a world, which up until today poses numerous unanswered moral questions.

(5) Finally, I used E. V.'s life interview born in a new, democratic condition as an important source. In 1992, when the interview was recorded, the public image of the participants of the 1956 revolution radically changed. In the new political context, the majority of 1956ers were already officially declared heroes in public discussions. Therefore, the background of conducting interviewed-recollections with 1956ers was shaped by the often non-manifest demand to create a "heroic myth".⁹ The new collective conception in contrast with the image of 1956 of the Kádár-regime made it also possible to tell individual stories fearing the authorities no more. In the new political context, however, the frames of interpretation in public communications preferred the stories of heroes. For many, this provided the opportunity to re-think their own roles in 1956. E. V., on the contrary, was not able to confess about herself in 1992 unless she omitted 20 years of her life; she described her role and the other actors in 1956 parallel to the silence about her post-1956 experiences as a secret agent. Therefore, her life story and her confessions in the interview remained full of ambiguities. One can recognize significant breaks, omissions, contradictions and inconsistency of various parts in the text. The life story, also because of its date following 1989, covers a fragmented self.

The method of decoding sources meant the comparison of texts born in various time periods. Comparing various textual details concerning the same themes, persons and places one could detect the changes in E. V.'s behavior. It is possible to explore in these sources the modalities of her expression, the decrease and subsequent increase of her level of independence and the peculiar interpretation of her role as a secret agent. By following the events occurred to her, like following the consecutive steps in a chess game, it becomes possible to describe many of 1956ers as subjects of the power of the party turning both "observers" and the "objects of observation" into playthings of that power.

⁹ A more comprehensive discussion is Litván 2000. The characteristics of public opinion is analysed by Radnóti 2006.

E. V.’S BIOGRAPHY¹⁰

E. V. was born into a Budapest working-class family in 1920. She lost her mother when she turned to 13. She started to work in weapon factories doing unskilled labour when she became 16 years old. She married for the first time in the age of 20 having a daughter from this marriage. Her first husband died in the eastern front in the USSR; her daughter died in the age of two. She moved to the country-side where her grandparents lived during the war, then after the end of the war she returned to the capital where she married once again. From this marriage she bore two children. She worked in the Dinamó Machine Factory as an accountant until 1956, where she was also a trade union representative. During the revolution in 1956, E. V. had already raised her children alone as she had divorced also from her second husband. She got to join the insurgents of the “Corvin-köz” (so called corvinistas) on 24 October 1956 as a nurse and kitchen hand. She acquainted and fell in love with László Iván Kovács, one of the leaders of the insurgents. Following the fall of the freedom fight, Iván Kovács was arrested and jailed. E. V. followed him by her own will with the firm intention to save the man even at the price of her own.

According to sources, E. V. was recruited as a police informer on “patriotic principles” before Iván Kovács’s execution (30 December 1957), between their first and second instance trials.¹¹ The political police employed her until 1977, when she was released upon the initiative of her police contact officer since, according to the police terminology, “her employment started to yield lower level results”.¹²

HOW DID SHE GET INVOLVED WITH THE REVOLUTION? E. V.’S DOUBLE REMEMBRANCE

Listening to E. V.’s memories, one can conclude that she was not aware of the coming of the revolution: she had theatre tickets for 24 October 1956 and was prepared to visit a play together with her sister. At that time, she was working in the Dinamó Electrics Factory as a stock clerk and accountant. One

¹⁰ I have changed the acronym of the person.

¹¹ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37206. 48. Her first report according to the sources was written on 17 December 1957. ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2.

¹² ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-37206. 48.

of her bosses was Vilmos Garamvölgyi,¹³ who in retrospect was thought to already know something as he had warned the workers with the following, “Folks, troubles will come, it is impossible to continue, the country will stop moving, there is no work and nothing else, the factory cannot work. And then he kept saying now I was to go away for a while, he says, but be careful since I would come back one day. So, we did not take this so seriously.”¹⁴

E. V. recollected the pleasant atmosphere of this discussion in her life interview (1992). Her boss warned her to take a cab if she wanted to visit the theatre. “So, we got to understand only later that they have already known something, that a demonstration will come and things like that, but we knew nothing.”¹⁵

On 24 October trams already stopped circulating in Budapest, the women had to walk. On their way, they met the crowd already massing in the streets. She called the demonstrators a “great crowd” in her self-confession she was required to write after her arrest on 17 March 1957 in the Pest County Police Department. “I just got mixed with them” – she wrote.¹⁶ In the minutes of her interrogation prepared according to her self-confession, when she was asked “How did you get to the counterrevolution?”, she used the term “great many people” to describe the demonstrators. In other places, but still in 1957 she referred to the men and women in the streets using a neutral expression, “*the crowd was running up and down.*”¹⁷

35 years later in her life interview (1992), when recollecting the same events, she used different words to describe the crowd. At this time, she appropriated the official terminology of the Kádár-regime. “*We were told not to go out to the Grand Boulevard (Nagykörút), there is a great demonstration there, as the students and who knows who else, we were told this and that, the mob gathered there then all kinds of shootings...*”¹⁸ (Italics here and hereafter are mine. Zs. B.)

E. V., moving together with the crowd, reached the Corvin Cinema following the Üllői road. The woman described this detail in her interrogations (1957)

13 Vilmos Garamvölgyi (1909-?) police officer. He was employed by the Ministry of Interior from 1945, was sentenced by unjust accusations for 6 years in 1950, released by amnesty in 1953. He was the director of the National Police from December 1956.

14 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 2-3.

15 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 2-3.

16 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 7.

17 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1.

18 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 3.

as a sort of attempt to rescue herself from the dangers of the demonstration. If the minutes are credible, she told the following about this moment:

*“People were breaking the windows of the Corvin Cinema, as those who did not live in those areas, but they could not to go home, tried to find shelter there. I also entered the cinema, where the side-doors have been already opened.”*¹⁹

According to E. V.’s 1957 self-confession, the Corvin Cinema provided shelter for passers-by against the already started shootings. She mentioned neither during her interrogations nor in her self-confession that she had witnessed shots coming out of the windows of the Corvin Cinema and that she had taken care of wounded persons in the cinema on 24 October. Her silence about these events was certainly not accidental.

Contrary to these stories, E. V. evoked the details of her entering the Corvin Cinema in a different manner in her life interview (1992). In this, she emphasized that she had suffered among the crowd, “when we were grabbed and pushed into there (to the cinema) to be under the arcades...cries were there, shootings were there, but certainly I went.”²⁰ In the following, the reader learns from her life story that she already met wounded and armed persons in the cinema. “Do you also belong to here?” – she was asked by a man-at-arms. “I said it depends who could tell it as I had no idea where to belong to.”

*“So, I saw that those who stand by the windows took such small sawed off guns from their coats and suddenly I see they start to shoot, and I say, oh my God, how did I get involved in, I wanted to go to the theatre, and then I am here in the cinema among such a company. Then they did not even let me in peace. Then one of them started to cry for someone to come here, a man is bleeding here in the stairs, he was lying there. So I say, what can I do, folks, I say I can help with giving first aid. Then they said, it’s all right, just stay here, you cannot go anywhere now.”*²¹

According to the minutes of the interrogation (1957) she had to spend the night of 24 October in the 4 “Corvin köz” house as she was unable to go home. “The situation got worse by morning, shootings became more regular, so he (the housekeeper) offered to stay with them until the situation gets better

19 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 2.

20 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 2.

21 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 3.

and I can go home. This I accepted and stayed with them."²² She wrote about this in a similar manner in her self-confession (1957): "*There was such a hellfire out there, so I went into their flat.*"²³

The texts quoted here described the same events from different temporal perspectives (1957 and 1992). One can recognize differences "only" with the terminology. During the interrogation and in her self-confession (1957), E. V. used more neutral terms concerning the events than later in her life interview (1992). For instance, she called the people in the streets a crowd in front of her interrogators, where she explained the reason of her ending up in the Corvin Cinema with her intention to find rescue. According to her self-confession (1957), she stayed in the 4 "Corvin köz" house since there were fights outside in the street. She gave accounts on the events in a logical, but cold distanced manner during her interrogations and in her self-confession (1957).

As a contrast, in her life interview (1992) the term mob appeared already in the first pages to complete and even to replace the word crowd. Subsequently, when recollecting the occurrences, she claimed that she and others had been pushed into to the cinema, which implies violent behaviour. In the cinema, she was actually frightened by the outlook of the company she got to instead of the theatre. The expression "I had no idea where to belong to" was used in 1992. E. V. made no reflection on this 1957, when she could have even benefited from it during her trial.

In 1992, she remembered to stay with the insurgents since they had forced her to bandage the wounded, so she had no choice but to remain. One conclusion can be already drawn: the revolution meant a completely different thing for E. V. in 1992 than it used to do in 1957, at the time of her arrest.

Following the stream of memories, one can learn from E. V.'s narrative why she did not try to go home in spite of the fact that her two small children were waiting for her.

*"In fact, we did not even worry about who was who as everyone was concerned with helping the others. So, nothing else was important, and, say, enthusiasm caught us, that those elderly and youngsters were all determined to fight, to do something, so these all just took me away, it was not possible just to leave so simply, that I just leave and go home, it was not possible. I happened to find myself into this and kept doing."*²⁴

22 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 2.

23 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 7.

24 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 4.

A few sentences later in the interview it seems as if she had started to regret what was said before: she changed her tone apparently without any reason.

“So, I got into it this way. I got to know those persons who now call themselves ‘leaders’ and ‘commanders and’ who knows whatever. At that time I did not experience so much leadership: men came and went minute by minute or hour by hour, it was not like an organized group or unit”²⁵

E. V. remained in no. 4 “Corvin köz” even after the fall of the freedom fight; she left this location of the fights only on 26 November.²⁶ During the fights, as it was already mentioned, E. V. and László Iván Kovács fell in love with each other. On 12 March 1957 Iván Kovács was arrested. E. V. went to the Police Department in order to obtain information on her lover, where on 15 March she was also arrested.

E. V. IN PRISON

After the fall of the freedom fight E. V. and László Iván Kovács were torn apart for a while and they did not meet up until 5 February 1957. From then onwards, they looked for each other on a daily basis, consequently E. V. was aware of all his actions and political plans. Iván Kovács was unable to accept the fall of the freedom fight, he was making plans to rescue Pál Maléter (the minister of defence of the revolution), to establish a political party “Turul” and began to produce leaflets. He was committed to keep the revolutionary fire.²⁷ Soon, he was arrested and was carried away together with his father to the Pest County Police Department. E. V. first was searching for him, then she followed him into the prison. She was committed either to save the man’s life or to die together with him.

Her interrogation records (1957) describe the events as follows, “When did you learn about Iván Kovács’s arrest and what did you do then?”²⁸ Answering the question she told the police officers that when the man had not shown up in their meeting of 13 March, she had become worried about him. She travelled to the village of Alsógöd to talk to Iván Kovács’s parents, but there she found only the mother since the father had been already taken away, as

²⁵ Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 5.

²⁶ On details of the events during the freedom fight Bögre 2006, Eörsi-Fülep 2007.

²⁷ Bögre 2006, Eörsi-Fülep 2007

²⁸ ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 6.

well. E. V. promised the help of a lawyer to Iván Kovács's mother, which the woman accepted. After talking to one of her lawyer friends, she went to one of her sisters whose husband was a security police officer to learn about the chances of helping Iván Kovács. The police officer became angry and suggested not taking any steps otherwise she would be recognized as one of the *corvinistas* and would be arrested. Then she continued her narrative:

“I left home on the morning of 15 March with preparing a small pack for Laci (Iván Kovács) with gifts received from Belgium.²⁹ I took with me a night-suit as I wanted to meet Laci even against the advice of my brother-in-law, and I really believed that I would be locked in, too.”³⁰

Her self-confessions (1957) imply similar meanings: namely, she meant to follow Iván Kovács in prison by her own will.

“On 15, I went away to her mother, where I learnt that they had been taken away from Vác (nearby Budapest) and she asked me to look for them in the Pest County Police Department as they belong to these county. So I came here. The previous evening I visited my sister whose husband warned me not to go anywhere for information because if I say “Corvin köz”, I would be arrested immediately. Despite, I came here, as I knew so that there was no food here and I brought meal for him with no intention of smuggling anything in it. I had the intention to go forward to the Mosonyi³¹, where I wanted to find a former security police officer who could talk more about those times.”³²

Comparing these paragraphs with their counterparts in her 1992 interview, one can discover important differences in the description.

29 E. V. regularly received packages from her stepparents in Belgium.

30 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 6.

31 Prison in Mosonyi street

32 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 10. This security police officer was caught by the Corvin köz freedom fighters during the revolution and wanted to execute him. According to the sources, Iván Kovács prevented it. Presumably, E. V. wanted to find this man to give evidence for Iván Kovács's benevolence. The man, however, did not appear during the trial, “the secret police was unable to locate him”, so he was unable to give evidence for the defence.

“Unfortunately, when everyone was saying goodbye,³³ then addresses were recorded in a calendar; Iván Kovács also noted mine and some others, so we were caught because my address was found in his wallet. That was the case why I was arrested. But previously his mother was by me and told me that her son had been taken away, this happened on 11 March, and she told to me to try to go to the police, as they were living in the village of Alsógöd, so try to go to the police department in Aradi street to ask about the Laci,³⁴ as she was afraid to go, as she was her mother after all. So I went and there my identity card was taken away, which I haven’t seen anymore. I was arrested immediately, anyone who just came to ask about him, was caught there. They invented that it was a conspiracy against the state.”³⁵

In her life interview (1992), she explained the reasons of her arrest by the address Iván Kovács hold. Then she remembered that Iván Kovács’s mother visited her, not the way around, and she went to the police upon her request. These differences each were not extremely significant, but in all case signify a tendency. In the 1992 text, she made these persons responsible for her arrest, concealing her own decision to follow the man even to the prison. This is a remarkable divergence as the role of “victim” would have suited better her interrogation (1957) than her subsequent life interview (1992). Nevertheless, she did not attempt to represent herself a victim during the interrogation (1957), at that time she emphasized her own will to act.

THE SENTENCE OF THE COURT AND E. V.’S REPORTS FROM THE PRISON

The court tried “the case of László Iván Kovács and his companions” for the first time on 15 August 1957. László Iván Kovács, István Vén, E. V. and Erzsébet Frey were the defendants. Iván Kovács was sentenced to death, E. V. got six years. The trial of the second instance held on 18 and 27 December did

33 „Saying goodbye” reflected the leave of the corvinistas, especially those who left the country.

34 The headquarters of the Pest County Police Department.

35 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 17.

not modify the first sentence. Iván Kovács was executed on 30 December.³⁶

According to the sources, as it was indicated before, E. V. was recruited as an informer already in the prison. She was locked up together with non-political captives and was instructed to obtain information from them.

She submitted her first known report about Mrs. Szalay who was accused of killing her own daughter on 13 December 1957 (five days before her trial of the second instance). In E. V.'s view "the woman intended only to make the Russians and Sárjai [unknown person] suspicious".³⁷ Next day, on 14 December, she wrote about Mrs. Tóka,³⁸ whereas the following days she was ordered to observe Mrs. Szalay again. E. V. noted in her report on 16 December, "*Yesterday, I succeeded in talking to her soul and the woman cried real tears.*"³⁹ She was "working" also on Mrs. Szalay's case on 20 December (two days following the trial of the second instance!). On that day, she "sent a message" to her interrogator in her report, "I am sure more could be done with her, had not certain guards filled her head with silly things."⁴⁰ On 21 December, according to E. V. Mrs. Szalay confessed her crime to her, and she reported on 23 December about that "*the woman has thoroughly changed, she is quiet and trusts in that the authorities will help her in getting a punishment not too serious.*"⁴¹

She noted the non-political criminals also in her life interview (1992), whom she considered unbearable in retrospection 35 years later. She had very hard times by the common criminals (as she called these persons). "How long did it take for you to get out of there?" – asked her interviewer in 1992.

*"After 3-4 months, but I could not stand it any longer. I spent almost quarter of a year together with them, but I say, there were awful sick women there, they fell in love with each other, jealousy was there and fights occurred. But when the guard came they turned into angels, so they withdrew everything, so it is such a horrific world."*⁴²

³⁶ On the events during the prosecution see Bögre 2006, Eörsi-Fülep 2007.

³⁷ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 4.

³⁸ Mrs. Tókais husband, János Tóka was accused of killing János Brenner (1931-1957), assistant minister of the village of Rábakethely (diocese of Szombathely). János Brenner is currently being considered as beatus.

³⁹ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 7.

⁴⁰ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 10.

⁴¹ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 12.

⁴² Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 37.

According to her life interview (1992), she escaped to a private cell from the non-political prisoners.

“And then you were in a private cell all the time?”

Yes, I was there all the while, for six months, I believe, I mean for six months before my release. And the doctor kept me asking if I could still stand it. I said, I could stand it since I requested a lot of books, so the guards carried the books to me by the tens, twenties, I finished half of their library in two years, but for me it was very good.”⁴³

The story of the private cell appeared in an unusual context in E. V.’s recollections (1992), a context which brought relief for her. This was a place where the doctor took care of her, she received dozens of books for reading and altogether it meant a positive experience for her (“it was very good”).

Considering her reports written in the prison, the meaning of the quoted sentence should be modified. It is not only the accuracy, what becomes now doubtful, but also it reveals the intention of the speaker: she had to invent a story about her last months spent in prison. Since she was unable to clarify her actual role, she employed clichés about non-political prisoners and interpreted her months in the private cell by a story authenticated by these narrative conventions. According to the sources, she was demanded to report about 1956ers during the last months preceding her release (1959), which refutes the interpretation of her “escape” to a private cell. According to the records, she was to move in-between various cells in order to be able to gather information about as many political prisoners as it was possible.

“I was got together with Mária Cs. in the same cell, who told me she knew me. I met her in the “Corvin köz” during the counterrevolution...”⁴⁴

The report was typed on 4 July 1959, and ended with the following sentences,

“The informer wrote the report in the prison. However, it is necessary to type the report for the appropriate processing of the files.”⁴⁵

⁴³ Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 37.

⁴⁴ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 58.

⁴⁵ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 58.

She reported similarly,

*“I hereby report that on 10 December Mrs. Sándor H. mentioned in cell no. 13 on 4th floor that Anna K. had told her that István M. had took part in the crimes of István Angyal and in the extermination of human beings during the counterrevolution.”*⁴⁶

Another typed report from the prison dated as 3 July 1959 began with the following sentences,

*“It is my citizen’s duty to report: I knew positively that the following persons participated in the counterrevolution during the days of the revolution...”*⁴⁷

In her reports about 1956ers (1957) she already used the terminology of the police officers, she started to appropriate the official interpretation of the revolution and to use the descriptive language in accordance with it. Yet, it was still not total identification. Arguably, she was uncertain about her proper identity since she also used to stand on the same side as those whom she reported about a year later. Occasionally, she mixed the expressions of revolution and counterrevolution, while sometimes she used them as synonyms. There are places where she described the fights in a very complicated awkward language, calling these as crimes or, absolutely inappropriately, the “exterminating of human beings”. Resisting the temptation of a deep analysis of the relationships of language and human psyche, I emphasize that the radical changes can be explained by the involuntary transformation of E. V.’s roles and identities.

Preceding any such questions, E. V. addressed the issue of betraying others in her life interview (1992),

*“So, obviously we told no one to participate, so that he and he was there, but we always told that we did not remember, even if we were confronted with other arrested persons we said we did not know anything.”*⁴⁸

In the light of texts analysed so far, it seems logical to conclude that the speaker obviously did not tell the truth due to the fact that she used to be an informer. The case may even be closed by stating that E. V. was morally responsible for revealing others. However, I was concerned with what occurred to the identity of the woman who had wanted to save the man she loved even

46 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 60.

47 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 63.

48 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 34.

by sacrificing her own life in 1957, but she had failed as Iván Kovács had been executed and she had been forced to serve as an informer. The question is how did her identity transformed, how could she come to terms with her new role? Is it possible to detect from the sources if she had a chance to control her activity as an informer? Could she develop an independent strategy in this respect? Are these sources adequate for such a task?

Before answering these questions, it cannot be postponed any more to ask why it was possible to recruit E. V. as an informer in the prison. It is impossible to clarify the actual reasons today, since she developed no detailed narrative in her life interview (1992). Yet, there are fragmented hints in her recollections (1992), which may explain the reasons.

“They started to hurt me, you know how it is when you are being hurt and tortured, it is possible to hurt someone without kicking and beating, but it is possible to torture the soul of people...”⁴⁹

She gave the following account on the day of Iván Kovács’s execution,

“To sum it up, it occurred on 25th,⁵⁰ and he was executed on the 31st.⁵¹ I was called to the office of a political officer, I was called there and I was told to sit down and they started to discuss with me all kinds of things, and I forced myself to concentrate on the tiles of the neighbouring building as they kept telling me horrific things. And the man asked me if I knew why I was called in, I said I did not know. He said we called you in to inform you that László Iván Kovács was executed today. So, my legs started to shake, my teeth to shiver, it was such a bad feeling, and I told him that it was no good to inform me about this, what could I do now, I could take it as it is. I could not say anything else.”⁵²

Elsewhere, (also in her 1992 life interview) she spoke about that she was blackmailed with her children.

“What do you want, you have two children, you need to get out of here. What would your children think when they would grow up and learn that their mother was tortured to death in prison. So, from the edge to the other one. It is possibly a tactics of

49 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 36.

50 She refers to the trial, inaccurately, as it was closed on 27th.

51 The accurate dates are 27th and 30th.

52 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 21.

investigation, but is a very disgusting tactics, it is difficult to stand. Very difficult."⁵³

Finally, during the recollections of experiences in the prison she mentioned the benevolent attitude she met there (1992), which is possible to understand in the light of the previous paragraphs.

"I do not know if it was due to my special luck or what, since they knew that I worked in hospitals, as they learn about everything, and there was a fairly sympathetic woman guard.

In which prison?

I was in the Markó street one and then carried to the Mosonyi street Hospital and there a sympathetic prison doctor, or who was also in captivity, arranged for me not to being carried too far away Kalocsa or anywhere else, but he always requested my help in preparing bandages and in doing the cleaning for a few hours."⁵⁴

E. V. developed about these details such a narrative, which made the entire story incomprehensible without further contextualization. It is difficult to imagine prisons in 1957 as "sympathetic" places. It is even more difficult to understand how she was surrounded by more than one benevolent person like the woman guard or the prison doctor. This particular part of her life interview (1992), even if reflecting real facts, addressed only the E. V. of the involuntary informer.

According to the sources, E. V. could be released from captivity in 1959 as an exchange in starting her cooperation with the political police. This occurred, probably, as a result of the trauma triggered by Iván Kovács's execution and of blackmailing her with the two children waiting for her out in the "free" world.

E. V.'S DOUBLE LIFE

In reality, E. V. was released as an informer, but formally by amnesty. Her double life out in the "free world" started. In one of her lives, she served as an informer, in her other she was the "martyr" widow of the 1956ers.

She had to continue her secret police work without any interruptions. At

⁵³ Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 21.

⁵⁴ Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 35.

first, from 1959 she was connected to István Kmeckzó police lieutenant, who described her role in the following, “we intend to use her to obtain information about the current behavior of Corvin köz counterrevolutionaries, persons fled to the West and their relatives.”⁵⁵ She proved to be fairly talkative already in the first year of reporting: she tried to describe accurately the human behavior of the target persons. Occasionally, she exceeded her duties, these times she began her reports with the conventional form,

“Beyond my duties, I report also the following...”,

which usually satisfied her police contact. Her accounts reveal that the target persons trusted her to the maximum level during this period. She learned fast the requirements of the informer position and, according the instructions of the police contact, also the expectations of her. She directed her discussions with former 1956ers towards the prescribed topics, collected the required information on the target individuals and behaved or expressed her opinion according to the agent model. She accurately identified potential witnesses, as in the following example,

*“I am able to prove the activity of Torma and Károly Nagy by Judit Vas, resident of 5 Tompa street, who was a witness of the events.”*⁵⁶

She was on intimate terms with the 1956ers (the reasons why she was employed as an informer), she could regularly meet them; what is more, she celebrated family events usually together with them. Her police contact was well aware of all these, in fact, he encouraged exactly these types of contacts, “Accepting the invitation, you are to visit Mrs. Szöllösi. Observe who is there. Particularly, her yet unknown contacts...”⁵⁷

As a member of the secret police informer network, she was expected to study photographs shot during the revolution and to identify persons who took part in the fights. E. V., as a matter of fact, could identify many,

*“I saw the woman on photo no. 23 in the Corvin cinema. She participated in armed struggle. As far as I know, her name is E. and lives in Ráckeve.”*⁵⁸

The dates of her reports reveal that she was demanded to meet frequently (on a weekly basis) her police contact at the Police Department during the first

55 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 103.

56 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 70.

57 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 190.

58 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 71.

years. Obviously, she omitted these details from her life interview (1992), but, apparently, her emotions seem to reflect them,

*“I was already so disgusted. Whenever I saw the Police Department it made my flesh creep, but they knew me so much, that I was always carried to all these places and was asked about 1956 and my plans. But, I had simply no plans. What did I do in 1956? I did nothing. Just what all decent persons usually do: I helped the weak, didn't I? Nothing else. It was no such big deal.”*⁵⁹

There was no evidence on any of her attempts to provide incorrect information in the reports (1959). They were rather accurate, which demonstrates “the intention to work well.” She recorded everything in that period as if she had been afraid of that ignorance of any details would make her work to fail.

She visited Iván Kovács's family in her double role, as well. She maintained her contacts with the parents both as a secret agent and as a “friend”, a family member sharing the same destiny with them. She followed literally the instructions of the secret police therefore she met the expectations of the security services also concerning Iván Kovács's family.

*“I wrote to Mrs. Iván Kovács (the mother) concerning the addresses of her two other sons on 23rd. She visited me in person on 26th and told me she had received a letter... Furthermore, Mrs. Iván Kovács told me that a blind teacher lived on the 3rd floor of 23 Fő road, in the 10th district, who was also a fortune teller. Many of those who had participated in the counterrevolution visited her regularly, and there the blind woman driven by nationalist emotions recited inciting, rebellious poems for them...”*⁶⁰

E. V. learned from Iván Kovács's mother the accurate residence in abroad and addresses of the two sons, László Iván Kovács's brothers and passed those forward to the political police.

She reported the following about Iván Kovács's father (1959),

“Uncle Kovács came to me yesterday and, in contrast to his previous reserve, he talked a lot and relatively sincerely. He

⁵⁹ Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 43.

⁶⁰ Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 73. I changed the names and adresses of persons who appear in the report.

told me he liked me not to forget of once being a prisoner, which meant if I had received life sentence and the desire for revenge should live on in me. Since he did not tell too much to his wife about how he had been treated inside. But this will remain his debt so far he lives as his teeth were beaten out, and now there are people to revenge his son, who did not receive mercy despite he saved lives. His two sons will return this when it will be necessary. He mentioned that someone had advised him to go to the French Embassy for asking the release of his sons from the Foreign Legion since they used to be minors when had been recruited. He told me he listened to the French and English broadcast in Hungarian and the young workers sympathized with him at his workplace, considering his son not a criminal, but with appreciation. When leaving, he mentioned once again that he wants me living together with them.”⁶¹

The police officer noted after reading the report, *“To meet the political officer of the father’s factory and inform him about the developments.”⁶²*

In her life interview (1992), she remembered Iván Kovács in her other role, the role of the family member, when she recollected visiting his grave after her release (perhaps this time again following orders).

“I searched his grave, the cemetery used to be very dirty, full of with weeds at that time, it was full with cans and trash and the only thing I could get from his parents that seventh row or what and I had to find it so...And I went to the cemetery, this happened on 23rd, and I could not find the grave, I would lie telling otherwise, the only thing I knew was that also Imre Nagy’s grave was there, I could identify it because I knew it was broken and I saw the big stones around. And then one of those stones I put on one of the graves, if it was Iván Kovács’s or not I cannot tell, but I wrote down a Latin text, the Hungarian translation was that nobody was happy until death. I read it in a book and I liked it so much that nobody was happy until death.”⁶³

In her recollections (1992), she was compassionate with the parents and brothers,

61 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 37.

62 ÁBTL 3.1.9. V-145626/1. 37.

63 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 22.

*“And the sad thing is that this unfortunate young man (László Iván Kovács) had two twins, who were twenty at that time, and they fled to the West fearing persecution because of their brother’s role in the revolution. It is still unknown what has happened to them. They signed with the French Foreign Legion. I received letters from them from Algeria even in ’62 and ’63, because then they had to register for five years. [...] So I know nothing, but their miserable mother, in fact, lost three children, the family, and this killed the old man, their father, as he was totally broken by these troubles, especially when his son was executed.”*⁶⁴

Her double identity became manifest in a similar manner when she treated also other “themes” differently in her informer’s reports and in 1992.

For instance, once she identified an engineer called Vajda whom Iván Kovács sought cooperation with after the revolution. The security organs were already searching for this man, but so far in vain.

“The prosecution was unable to locate him as the accused persons did not confess on him.”

as the political officer explained.⁶⁵ E. V. provided the missing information in 1959, despite she had been also withdrawn information during her previous trial. E. V. talked only about the failures of the attempts of the police to force prisoners to unmask others (a question not raised in her life interview (1992)).

*“It happened sometimes that we were taken by a car to the Police Department for confrontation, which is a horrible thing, it was known by some of the trials who were in the Corvin. There you saw on the other and recognized the begging gaze in the eyes of the other, it is impossible to describe those lights: ‘do not reveal me’. And when I looked at them I told the judge I had never seen them. I did not see them there, I do not remember, I did not know them, it was a mistake. So, you had to say something all the time.”*⁶⁶

E. V.’s police contact was always satisfied with the woman’s reports (since 1959).

64 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 19.

65 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112. 78.

66 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 49.

“The report is a valuable asset, our informer identified 8 persons on photographs. The Péterffy street murder is verified, this really happened, the culprit has not been identified, yet.”⁶⁷

Her accounts demonstrate the personality of a “faithful informer”. A further example confirms this conclusion, as well. Preceding her release, she became friends with one of the prisoners who asked her to find his mother and to ask the women, in turn, to help her son. E. V. fulfilled the request and immediately reported about the meeting. She described in detail the discussion with the mother, not concealing the woman’s answers,

“I met Gyula Péry’s mother twice. She told me she had written a letter to István Dobi (President of the communist state presidency) in which she revealed that her son used to be the member of a totally different group, not the one the members of which was sentenced, but in another one the members of which were remained free. She told she would not respect anyone and would reveal all those 15 persons being in high positions who had his son sent into the prison.”⁶⁸

The woman trusted E. V. to the extent that she submitted her photographs from the revolution to protect those in case of any misfortunes occurred to her. E. V., however, forwarded the images to the police. She remembered Gyula Péry’s mother also in her life interview (1992), now from a different perspective,

“E. V. I was released, this happened in 1959, and I brought the package I was asked for and it was a gun. Later, it resulted in that the mother of this person (Mrs. Gyula Péry), who was a maniac, senile denunciator, wrote a denouncement to my workplace to return the gun to her son.

K.: Who was the man?

E. V.: It was Gyula Péry. And his mother lived in here, 15 Rózsa street. The point is that as far as I know this Gyula Péry has died since, but his mother in any case triggered quite a lot of inconveniences for me. Since, if this letter gets to the hand of my boss, since it could have been very compromising.”⁶⁹

67 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 77.

68 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 80.

69 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 24.

Her reports from the 1950s imply a certain element of irrationality in her commitment to exceed her expected duties. There is no evidence for any attempts on her part to misinform or unmask security police agents or thinking about this possibility. As if she avenged herself for her actions on others: on the free 1956ers.

THE INFORMER REBELS: BREAK IN E. V.'S AGENT CAREER

The general satisfaction that features the reception of E. V.'s reports, abruptly came to a halt in 1963 when the political police officer, who had previously highly appreciated her work, articulated criticism. The reason was that the apparently "faithful" informer stepped on an independent road: she wrote letters without orders and considered leaving the country without informing her police contact.

*"We asked the informer if she had made steps what she kept secret from us, but which are nevertheless concerned us. We thought particularly of the letter to István Péli, which she did not report about, and also the letter to comrade Kádár. However, the informer has not commented upon these since. We assume that her serious family troubles encouraged her to write a letter to comrade Kádár..."*⁷⁰

She was talking about these events in 1992 (without any questions), however she remembered as if these had happened in 1965.

"Once I wrote to János Kádár to let me leave this country, because I simply got tired of all the regular teasing in all my workplaces, so I wrote to him that so far I would be lived here, I would be always persecuted. I just did not know what to do, I had to endure so lot, that eventually I wrote to János Kádár. However I immediately recognized my letter when I was called again in the Police Department and I saw my own hand-writing among the files, as I can read well backwards and I read the note about the requesting of urgent interrogation on me.

K.: It happened in the 23th district Police Department, didn't it?

70 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2. 36.

E. V.: No, it happened in the Budapest Municipal Police Department. In Deák place, so in the Municipal Police Department.

K.: When did it happen?

E. V. In 1965, because I was so fed up with all these running around, nevertheless I was so well explained what could I become abroad. So I was told that I could become only a housemaid, so I thought, ok but a housemaid, but free, but I got no chance to emigrate. So, I was persuaded that I was fine here and no one would bother me anymore."⁷¹

E. V.'s police contact noted about these events in 1963:

"Despite her shortcomings she is a very good informer. Her work was productive from the beginning, 1958, now we realize the fourth case. In general, monitoring confirmed her reliability. Similar periods occurred to her before, once she wrote a letter unknown to us to comrade major general⁷² Garamvölgyi."⁷³

E. V. tried to break out from the confines of being an informer in 1963, however, she overestimated her capacities: János Kádár hindered her attempt to leave the country. She was demanded to continue writing reports, and she proved to remain talkative when she provided one. She, nonetheless, could change her attitudes due to two reasons. First, the social context of her activity altered: the number of 1956ers whom she could report on already decreased by that period, therefore she was required to write mostly mood reports. Her other job was to monitor new candidates for the security services: persons she either had known before or who were introduced to her on purpose. Her police contact was confident in her appropriate work because of her good communication skills. Nonetheless, the following sentences, which appeared rarely in the mid-1960s, started to frequent the reviews of her work,

"The informer failed to accomplish the task since she did not meet the target person."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 42.

⁷² E. V. met the major general before 1956, he was her boss in the factory.

⁷³ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2. 37.

⁷⁴ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2. 39.

Or,

“She has not provided any report on the meeting of 9 January 1964 as she learned no relevant data.”⁷⁵

In 1965, she regularly “confessed” about her failure to accomplish her tasks. Since she remained fairly talkative in her successful reports and used routinely the official language, presumably, she still wanted to meet the expectations, but was unable to. As she formulated,

“my generation is quite a sullen one”,

which can be translated to her own situation: she was a sullen woman who wrote increasingly failed reports. She noted more and more frequently that the target persons were unwilling to meet her.

During her “failures”, her general experience was that these shortcomings had no repercussions: she was not sentenced or imprisoned and she did not even lose her job. The target persons avoided her company, which she was committed to report, but this had no repercussions for her. What is more, her opportunities extended: her police contact, apparently, accepted if occasionally she failed to deliver. She regularly noted that the target persons, her “friends” became ill or did not have time, therefore avoided meeting her. These occasions temporally liberated her from the duty of writing reports. It is improbable that it happened consciously. It was a consequence of her modified position, yet, apparently, E. V. failed to draw the adequate conclusions. Contrary to her positive experiences, she did not dare to openly reject the demands; she waited until she would be released from the position. She remembered in detail her failures:

“My duty was to meet István Vén.⁷⁶ I called Vén many times on the phone and we agreed to meet by me. Vén did not come.”⁷⁷

A few days following this report, E. V. did not show up at the meeting with her police contact.

“She asked permit not to meet for two weeks.”⁷⁸

A few weeks later, she was once again sent to István Vén when she recorded the following,

⁷⁵ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2. 50.

⁷⁶ Co-defendant in László Iván Kovács’s trial.

⁷⁷ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2. 135.

⁷⁸ ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2. 142.

“My duty was to visit István Vén and I was unable to initiate anything worth mentioning.”⁷⁹

During the 1970s, she wrote shorter and shorter reports: her target persons were mostly fellow-workers whom she was required to write mood reports about. In 1977, when she turned 57, the security services broke relations with her. She was considered useless: her employment did not yield the expected results.

In her life interview (1992), she was talking about her life in terms more serious than just “being sullen”.

“The original [sentence] was for six and a half years. In fact, I would have received more than this if I had not had two small children. Many disliked it, but so it seems fate wanted my release earlier; if it was for good or bad, I do not know. It may be good for something but not for us. Individually, it brought nothing to us. Honestly, Ady (modernist poet of the early 20th century) told it so, that ‘I was no relative, no friend to anyone’. So, I share it somehow.”⁸⁰

When evaluating Iván Kovács’s destiny, she seemed to talk also about herself,

“Or he wanted to get rid of it all at once, he rather decided to die than to bother or live together with those guys for 35 or 40 or how many years. He rather decided to die.”⁸¹

At another point she remarked about refusing the compensation she was to receive following her rehabilitation,

“Since I do not want one more of such compensation, or what is recently fashion, that people ask for compensation. What should I ask for; tell me, from what? From this ravaged small country? This is such a broken country as I am in my soul. What can I do? Nothing. One should ask for peace and tranquillity.”⁸²

Following 1989, the public discussion and examination of the history of informers happened in an inadequate, unsatisfactory manner: Hungarian society was unable to come to terms with its former informers. This proved to be a loss not only for the victims, “the targets”, but also for the “observers”.

79 ÁBTL 3.1.2. M-29112/2. 148.

80 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 25.

81 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 19.

82 Interview with Mrs. László Móri 1992: 26.

The catharsis of asking and receiving forgiveness did not occur, although it could lead to deliver forgiving also for the self. Lacking the adequate public discussion, there was no other opportunity for former informers but the continuation of suppressing and silencing their previous constrains and sins, which, as we know, is the best effective means of self-destruction.

The following conclusions answer the questions raised in the beginning of this essay.

1. How did E. V. address the revolution in the 1957 sources and subsequently, in her 1992 life interview? It is clear from the terminology E. V. used in the prison, but still preceding her recruitment to the security organs, that she posited herself by the side of the revolutionaries and considered herself fighting for the just cause. Parallel to starting her activity as an informer, the official interpretation of the revolution (the terms of counterrevolution, mob, killers etc.) also appeared in her accounts. By the end of the 1970s, the language of the authorities dominated her reports. However, in 1992, in her life interview she apparently wanted to distance herself from the image of the counterrevolution constructed by the Kádár-regime, but she was unable to do. She was aware of the expectations to express herself a revolutionary in this interview, but eventually she failed to satisfy these demands. The terminology of her life interview reflects a personal identity that cannot come to terms with its own past. She applied contradictory frames of reference to the description of the events occurred to her that implies she was uncertain about her precise position within the events of 1956.
2. With whom did she associate herself with in 1992? She avoided the clear interpretation of the revolution during her interview, instead she tried to represent herself a victim. The sources, however, testify that E. V. was not only a victim, but also a persecutor. Since she suppressed one of the important sides of her identity, perhaps, it hindered her ability to assess adequately also the other side. Her stories about herself remained unlikely accounts since she possessed no frame of reference to be identified with. Her remark, "I belong to nowhere" is possible to apply to the entire course of her life.
3. Do the sources demonstrate a transformation in her attitude towards her role as an informer? Following the reports, one can divide her informer activity into three periods:

In her first period following her release from prison she behaved as a “faithful agent” as if she had always supported the authorities. This phase was succeeded by her “revolt”, when she tried to leave the country in 1963. She was not allowed to, which meant that she had to continue her activity as an informer.

I regard her second informer period starting with 1963; from that date onwards she was an involuntary agent who occasionally tried to avoid her duties. Excusing herself because of illness or other commitments, she did not show up in the meetings with her police contact. In this period, her reports contained no information possibly harmful for the target persons. Her reports concerned rather the general mood, which provided little basis for reaching adequate conclusions about the target persons.

In her third period, E. V. started to write empty, useless reports. In this period, the target persons frequently cancelled the appointments with her or if she succeeded meeting them, she “could not go anywhere with them”, as she expressed in her reports. At the end of this process, the security services released her, so she became finally “free”.

4. What were her plans for the future? E. V. failed to accomplish her memory-work, consequently she had no idea how to behave and how to interpret the revolution following 1989. She claimed about her present (by a loose reference to Ady) that “I am no relative or friend to anyone”. In turn, she considered Iván Kovács having had a better fate as the man avoided to suffer for 35 or 40 years extra. E. V.’s past remained an unmasterable one, she considered her present meaningless and expected nothing from her future.

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INTERVIEW

Interview in the Oral History Archives of the 1956 Institute

Interview with Zsuzsa Horváth alias Mrs. László Móri. Conducted by Mónika Zsuzsanna Nagy. 1992. no. 465.

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