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Relationship between memory and identity on the example of 15th March celebrations in Banská Bystrica (end of the 1880's – 1914)

Alica Kurhajcova

Matej Bel University, Slovakia
40 Tajovskeho Str., Banská Bystrica, 974 01
PhD Student
E-mail: alica.kurhajcova@umb.sk

ABSTRACT. The study focuses on the 15th March celebrations in public place of town Banská Bystrica from the end of 1880's to 1914. Through ritual-symbolical presentation of celebrations shows on mutual relationship among memory and identity. Because of memorial day celebrated a fight of Hungarian (Magyar) revolutionaries for freedom, it is interesting to follow functions of memory at mostly Slovak background.

Keywords: public place; memory; national identity; 15th March celebrations; rituals; symbols; Banská Bystrica.

INTRODUCTION. Following the title of the papers, I ask two questions in the introduction: What is the mutual relation between memory and identity? Can the identity be formed during the commemorations? If yes, then how?

In the introduction, it is necessary to stress that period of dualism in Austria-Hungarian monarchy meant the climax of nationalism of dominant national communities – Germans and Hungarians. It also represented „fire test“ for those more resistant with historical right (Croatians) and also for the politically passive, who sought support in coalition with nations of similar destiny (Slovaks, Serbians, Romanians). One of the expressions that reflected distribution of political powers, helped to legitimize power, strengthened ideas and values of the nation were celebrations of commemorative day, or official holiday. Relevant group did not claim only the place in the calendar of holidays. It also occupied open and enclosed public spaces in towns and through rituals and symbols it implanted memory of its own nation in there. The result of this process was strengthening of identity: whether its own group's identity or identity defined to another group.

I will illustrate this process as well as the process of the national identity formation by means of the contents and staging of the 15th March celebration in the town Banská Bystrica in the period of the Austro-Hungarian dualism (till 1914). First I will try to explain the memory significance for the elite of the Hungarian nation, their ideology and attitude towards the 1848 traditions. Then I will inform about circumstances in Banská Bystrica during dualism. And only after that we will be able to present individual conditions under which the celebration participants identified themselves with the content of the national (i. e. Hungarian) memory.

In this papers I distinguish dual identity: identity “we” and identity “they”. In the first case the celebration participants explicitly or latently identified themselves with the memory content. Similarity and inner unity of the group was concerned in that case. Those who ignored the manifested ideas formed the second group. So the identity manifested itself as a difference and particularity in the relationship to the other group [1].

Ideology of the political representation of Hungary and the 1848 cult

Even liberal-conservative political class in Hungary was aware of the historical – national memory in formation of the nation identity and return to the common traditions after 1867. The reasons were mainly to:

- integrate and preserve the nation affiliation feeling (identity “we”)
- form the enemy picture or to gain over “those the others” (identity “they”)

- legitimate their historical right and political course in the state,
- realize the Hungarian state idea.

That is why the alternative (nationality) historical narratives (i. e. pictures of non-Hungarian nations about their own past and origin) were pressed out from the official discourses. So it is valid that “the national memory (according to T. Pichler selective or purposeful) is the past, selectively instrumentalized for the present” [2]. That means that the state power looked in the past for its answers to fulfill its political goals. The updated past support the internal political and nationality conditions in the state.

Nationalism as an ideology and political program recorded a change in the value orientation, especially in the period of dualism. The personality of the ruler was degraded to the state symbol and the nation and its identification with the state became the dominant value [3]. The definition of the Hungarian nation, as the only political nation, was introduced into validity by the nationality act in 1868 [4]. The act at the same time excluded the state creative role of the non-Hungarian nations and ignored their existence. In practice, their meaningful language, spiritual and cultural assimilation started. Two groups crystallized within the framework of the political elites of the Hungarian nation who postulated formation of the homogenous Hungarian national state. Within two different traditions:

- governmental Liberal Party on the tradition of compromise (support of the Hungarian state concept under condition of the dualistic system preservation),
- oppositional Party of Independence on the tradition of the year 1848 (its materialization in the form of a personal union with the Austrian part of the monarchy).

The separation between both the political parties was sensible also in their different approach to the year 1848 as the national myth, tradition and cult [5]. The beginning of its perceiving as the cult is put to the year 1849, when the civic societies on 15th March commemorated the first anniversary of the Hungarian revolution, its conquests and the beginning of the fight for freedom. The defeat of the revolution, restoration of the absolute-centralistic system and repression of any nationalistic appearances or manifestations against the emperor led to the opposite effect – to strengthening of this historic date in the conscience of the Hungarian society. Even more that 15th March was the bearer of the positive psychological experience – triumph (victory without bloodshed). In fact, Austro-Hungarian Compromise officially without any serious obstacles allowed to proclaim the ideas of memorial day – idea of liberty, equality and brotherhood – and to manifestate them in the form of enclosed society celebrations at the beginning (since the beginning of 1870’s). During the period of dualism the Party of Independence showed its initiative. Influenced by the living “legend” in exile, Lajos Kossuth, it took possession of the memorial day with the intention to gain its followers and mobilize its sympathizers. The anniversary was not acceptable for Francis Joseph I, the Hungarian king. The Hungarian government accepted it although did not undertake to organize its celebrations. Its liberal character though made it possible for the society to form its own framework of the celebration with all the rituals and symbols, which could update the given historical picture [6].

The new situation did not favour only different „non-Hungarian“ interpretations of revolutionary events (including Slovak). In Slovak culture just after the revolution and continuously since 1860’s completely different image from Hungarian image of the years 1848–1849 profiled in press, art and political discussions at limited and modest conditions. It presented the struggle of Slovaks for freedom and sui juris with elements of heroism, martyrdom and critics of Hungarian attitude towards Vienna and other nationalities. However, first anniversaries in the years 1868–1869 and 1874–1875 indicated the emergence of new political situation in Hungary. Political power distributed the interpretation in Slovak society about patriotic feelings of Slovaks in common struggle with Hungarians for revolution and Hungarian motherland. On the other side, memory of Slovaks about 1848 was shifted into private sphere of patriotic intelligence. In the period of dualism, it became the witness of „smudging“ its own national memory [7].

From the end of the 1880s a new trend began. Public spaces of bigger and smaller towns changed into the scenes of the identity symbolic representation and justifying of the legitimate power in the state. So the ceremony of the revolution anniversary installed itself into streets. The stress on pompous ceremonies, patriotic and pathetic speeches was put in the municipal

environment and regions with the high concentration of non-Hungarian nationalities with the aim to assimilate them and to form their awareness of identity.

Image of Banská Bystrica in the period of dualism

The county of Zvolen belonged among the almost homogenous Slovak counties [8]. This picture was modified by increasing number of the inhabitants who stated to be of the Hungarian nationality in the towns of the district. Banská Bystrica, the seat of the county and the former free royal town, in accordance with the communal act (*article XVII./1871*) ranked among the towns with the constituted magistrate. In the second half of the 19th century, the spreading industrialization, building works, development of railway transport, modification of road and street network and electrification led to its modernization.

Similarly as other Slovak towns, also Banská Bystrica was a subject of hungarization (from the middle of the 1870s). It was reflected in hungarification of schools and churches, foundation of Hungarian societies, publishing of pro-governmental Slovak (*Svornosť, Krajan*) and Hungarian press, hungarification of street names and absence of the own national (Slovak) intelligence group. The prolonged hand of the Hungarian government was represented by its burgher-urban elite and head representatives of the district.

The results of the official census, concrete data about nationality composition for the years 1880 and 1890 showed rather its Slovak (or Slovak-German) character. In the period of the strengthened hungarization (1900–1910) the tables registered big growth of the Hungarian inhabitants in favour of the Hungarian state idea (Table Nr. 1) [9].

Year	People	Slovaks	Magyars	Germans	Others
1880	7159	4342	1165	1396	256
1890	7485	4229	1799	1389	66
1900	9264	4852	3132	1179	95
1910	10 776	4388	5261	879	154

Table 1: National structure of Banská Bystrica (1880–1910).

15th March celebration in Banská Bystrica

Generally, the celebration of the historic anniversary retrieved the past (memory) of the group. The remembering group received the experience and knowledge about the historical past by means of its ritual acts and symbols. In this way the conscience of the national affiliation in a part of the inhabitants was (de-) formed. In order to make it possible to speak about identification with the Hungarian nation memory and formation of the identities “we” or “they” also at the 15th March celebration, we observed if the following conditions were fulfilled:

- regularity of the historic anniversary,
- presence of the celebrating (active and passive participants) in the time and space,
- ritual repetition and use of the common system of symbols,
- formulation of the memory in the common language,
- formation of the value system and operating on emotions.

The first public ceremony of the so called “day of the nation genesis” in Banská Bystrica refers to 1887. Until that time, it was the matter of one or two societies. Ferencz Éder, a court notary, initiated its realization and in 1888 founded a permanent committee for the ceremony organization [10]. Regional newspapers in Banská Bystrica, *Besztercebánya és vidéke* annually submitted a report on its organization (until 1914). In spite of insignificant programme modifications (e. g. unfavorable weather, political conflicts), the same repertoire was regularly repeated in these four stages:

1. morning ceremonial services,
2. autonomous matinee of schools and some societies,
3. evening procession with torches and fairy lanterns connected with a manifestation at the main square,
4. ceremonial banquet (or theatre performance, concert).

The newspapers reported also about regular mobilization of representatives of the magistrate, cultural, church and school institutions and individuals. Their activity was not

connected only with announcement of schedule of the ceremony course on placards in Hungarian national colours, but also with an announcement which supplemented it. Inhabitants were appealed to participate in the event, to lighten their windows during the torch procession and to decorate their houses with flags and decorations. There exists a mention from 1889 about involvement of the female part of audience into preparations: „...the committee hereby appeals with a patriotic plea to willow ladies to kindly produce national (red-white-green) cockcards” [11].

The rituals and symbols as bearers of the 15th March memory, which were a part of the above mentioned stages, unified the celebrating not only in time, but also in space: in churches, gymnasiums and drawing rooms of secondary and primary schools, society rooms, at the main square, in streets, municipal theatre, restaurants of a saving bank and National Hotel. Hungarian national flags on public buildings and houses, decorations in shop windows, shooting from mortars in the morning and bells invoking for sacral ceremony announced celebration atmosphere in the town. On the other, they expressed identifying with ideology of elites of Hungarian nation.

School celebrations were characterized by accustomed rituals and revolutionary symbols: occasional lectures and patriotic recitations (for example Petőfi's *The song of nation* known in public according to its first two words *Come on, Magyar!*), singing (hymnic songs – *God bless Hungarian...*, Vörösmarty's „*Szózat*“, songs glorifying Kossuth and kuruc songs) and wearing Hungarian national tricolour – cockarde. In this way, school youth acquainted with conquests and ideals of the revolution (liberty, equality and brotherhood) and its leaders – Kossuth and the March youth. Teachers encouraged youth into patriotic love and self-sacrifice in passionate speeches. The men of the revolution were supposed to be the ideals. The goal was to educate youth in patriotic spirit, to form their historical consciousness – their feeling of identity with descendants of former Hungarian national heroes. The goal was to form Hungarian identity on the prejudice of Slovak identity (or German). The memory of 15th March was monumentalized by some societies in Banská Bystrica: Evangelic society, Catholic journeywork society, Self-educating society of young businessmen, Madách society and others.

Students of secondary grammar schools and seminaries, choir of choir of Catholic journeywork society, sometimes Madách society were repeatedly confronted with content of memorial day at evening torch procession. Its ritual form was described in regional press [12]: „...students of burgess and trade school with Hungarian national flags in the front fared forth to Saint Stephan Square, where gypsy band was already playing. Firemen gave them torches, burn them and while singing patriotic songs and Rákoczi March, procession moved to Bela IV. Square. Below lighted windows, they called in chorus Long live!” [13].

On the main square, participants of procession, town's elite, including members of organizational comitee, choirs a the rest of audience listened to ceremonial speech as well as occasional poem by Petőfi or by another Hungarian poet. The audience expressed their agreement with the ideas of the day by singing national anthem, *Szózat* or Kossuth note.

Celebration ceremony was ended up by a banquet of town and district elite: members of comitee, mayor, distict administrator, his deputy, clerics, journalists of local newspaper, notaries, attorneys and thier ladies. Numerous toasts were concerned on His Majesty, motherland, the men of revolution, revolutionary army of 1848, honveds living in the town (Koloman Sztrakoniczky in the year 1895) [14], freedom of press and patriotic women. From first two years of organizing ceremonial dinner (1888–1889), there are mentions about presence of individuals from peasant class. In 1888, votive speech of a peasant from Podlavice village made a splash: „Let me, the Hungarian (Magyar) motherland son, be allowed to tell few words in Slovak language...“, and in consequence, he exalted the conquest of revolution – abolishing of subjection [15]. At 50th anniversary of revolution in 1898, former honveds from 1848–1849 participated at the banquet [16]. Toasts and witnesses of revolution made memory trustworthy and authentic and thus made it eternalized, as well as fixed. Hereby, annual greeting telegrams to Torino, Italy (until 1894) made living tie between town inhabitants and Kossuth.

Operating on the system of values of celebrating inhabitants manifested in all four phases of the celebration. Nation, liberty, motherland, justice, equality and brotherhood, respect to king – values and idea base, which the memory of nation and corresponding coulisses were built on – rituals and symbols. There was an occasional speech at the banquet of 1893: apart from the language and its unifying power (statement: *“Nation lives in language”*) the value of a woman as a mother was stressed [17]. At another occasion, motherland was preferred to the value of language

(1909): „What is the difference among us? That, one speaks Hungarian, the second German and the third Slovak? Don't let the language make barriers between us. If our heart is Hungarian, if we love our country, if we love each other, if we feel compassion, if we act together, so nothing can endanger our motherland“ [18].

Celebrations often cumulated positive and negative emotions and experience, which were transferred to participants by rituals and symbolic externalization of the memory of the 15th March. In the year 1894, because of Kossuth's health state was getting worse, local newspaper *Besztercebánya és vidéke* wrote about glum atmosphere of celebration [19]. The next year, there was a nostalgia in the town for the passed-away legend. This fact was supported by sermon of Samuel Mikler, evangelic priest, about Kossuth's immortality, passionate callings of torch procession below the windows, decorated with the portraits of Kossuth and ceremonial speech on the square: „Kossuth now appears only in the shape of pain and as a hero of legends. His name is an ideal, which will never vanish. It lives on, because he has not finished his mission yet. People do not believe in his death, because he still claims the independence of the land“ [20].

Emotions, presented by organizers who evoked them among celebrating audience, were brought on the pages of Hungarian progovernmental newspapers. Of course, descriptions of passion, enthusiasm and patriotic ardour. Discontent and indifference appeared among the lines only occasionally. Árpád von Klimó paid attention on data about mass participation and enthusiasm. According to him, the reason of their enthusiasm was rarely political content of celebration, the most often it was only public performance. He suggested that it is always necessary to distinguish between organizers, who took all affair seriously, and participants, whose motives for participation at celebration were not always significant, clear [21].

CONCLUSION. On the example of memorial day – 15th March – in Banská Bystrica in the years 1867–1914, I have pointed to the facts, which I mentioned in introduction. From those, I may come to this conclusion: Celebration and its parts – rituals and symbols – preserved and evoked national memory on this holiday. Groups and individuals, who identified with its content, constructed identity „we“: elite and county officials, including committee, students of elementary and secondary schools, teacher staff, some societies, firemen, veterans, less peasants. As well as those, who decorated their windows with flags and enlight the windows in the evening. All the others, who did not participate, ignored the appeal and ideas of celebrations create the identity „they“. Forming the first identity – so called identity of organizers and participants – was assured by following circumstances: regularity of celebration, presence of participants at certain time and space, repetition of rituals, using common symbols, apart from small exceptions common tongue, inculcating common values and expressing emotions (especially organizers). Concerning political program of Hungarian governmental elite, its Hungarian state idea and assimilation practice, we assume that celebration of historical anniversary in former town centre of Slovaks fulfilled propagandistic, legitimational and manipulation function (especially among the young generation). In this „ceremonial“ way, the Slovak element was pressed out of public spaces in Banská Bystrica and to its prejudice, identity to Hungarian nation was getting stronger.

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Взаимосвязь памяти и идентичности на примере празднования 15 марта в Банской Быстрице (конец 80-ых гг. XIX века – 1914 г.)

Алица Кургайцова

Университет Матея Бэла, Словакия
974 01, г. Банска Бистрица, ул. Тайовского 40
Аспирант
E-mail: alica.kurhajcova@umb.sk

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается австро-венгерское торжество 15 марта в общественном пространстве города Банска Бистрица с конца 1880-х гг. до 1914 г. Через ритуально-символическую постановку праздника в статье отмечается отношение памяти и идентичности. Поскольку памятный день отмечал борьбу венгерских революционеров за свободу, есть необходимость изучения памяти этого события в словацкой среде.

Ключевые слова: общественное пространство; память; национальная идентичность; празднование 15 марта; ритуалы; символы; Банска Бистрица.