

Születés és anyaság a régi Magyarországon: 16. század – 20. század [Birth and motherhood in old Hungary: From the sixteenth to the twentieth century]. Written and edited by Lilla Krász. Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Kutatási Hálózat Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2023. 445 pp.

At the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, drawing inspiration from his contemporaries, Thomas Malthus introduced the notion of impending population catastrophe, a notion that would not only seem to become a reality over the course of the next century but would also be seen as an ominous threat by the leading powers of his time. Indeed, it was seen as such a threat that a country's potential and power were generally understood as depending first and foremost on the growth of the population within its borders, and deliberate policies were introduced to further population growth. In the eighteenth century, Habsburg leaders began to feel that they were gradually losing their place as a world power. Instead of attempting to expand their territories, they turned their focus inwards, to questions of domestic policy. They began to see the peoples of their empire more and more as quantifiable subjects. How many did they number? What was their status? How much did they pay in taxes? How many of them were women, children, or Jews? How could their numbers be increased? The volume under review, which was written and edited by Lilla Krász and prepared with the active cooperative work of ethnographer Zita Deáky, examines this exciting transformation, focusing broadly on the period between the mid-sixteenth century and the mid-twentieth century and more narrowly on the time span between the last half of the eighteenth century and the first third of the twentieth. The book weaves an intricate web by exploring the relevance to this transformation of questions of memory and forgetting, money, and knowledge. It offers penetrating analysis of a rich array of sources in a vibrant, highly readable tone.

The book reminds us, perhaps first and foremost, that while the past may sometimes seem distant, it is nonetheless only a few generations removed from today. This “visible” past, which is still largely within the perimeters of family memory, primarily conjures the memory of a community in which, in accordance with inherited social roles (and also tradition and custom), the rituals, practices, and beliefs surrounding childbirth, which was understood as the guarantee of survival, were cultivated and preserved. In seven chapters divided into 23 sub-chapters, the book offers vivid descriptions of the agonies and joys of mothers

of the past centuries, both those whose names have survived and those who remain anonymous, and also of the fates of women who were unable to conceive and babies who were born prematurely, late, or stillborn. It also touches on the roles of men and the fears and accusations surrounding healthy births and births that ended in tragedy. Importantly, the book also pays tribute to Ignác Semmelweis (1818–1865), who unquestionably merits international fame, and Vilmos Tauffer (1851–1934), who was a doctor and surgeon of international renown, as well as to the many doctors and surgeons who actively fought for the development of health care in Hungary and Central Europe, especially in obstetrics and gynecology, and to the many trained or untrained midwives who did their work outstandingly well or, in many cases, devastatingly badly.

But this book undertakes to do far more than that. It also presents customs, practices, beliefs, and ideas which have since been forgotten or which our society today might well find strange. It goes beyond a simple presentation of these beliefs from the perspective of Max Weber's notion of disenchantment and shows how the price of the leaps forward that have been made in the world of health care has been almost incalculable. How could one possibly calculate, after all, the precise costs and benefits in situations in which, because of high mortality rates, people decided simply not to have children at all? The world of people who lived alongside and indeed even felt a close attachment to the holy images on Gothic panels, in wooden churches, or in the stone churches built out of communal resolve is arguably gone, much as the humble fear of cosmic forces that was embodied in the idea of humoral pathology is also gone. The book conjures this world with its vivid descriptions and in-depth analyses of familiar, even famous and also less familiar or entirely unfamiliar images. The numerous illustrations (almost 170) include, alongside those mentioned above, an impressive array of family photographs, photographs of works of art, engravings from books on specialized subjects, and documents that are valuable as primary sources. The reader also finds 27 tables which offer clear illustrations of the many ideas and also serve as source information. It might have been useful to have included a map with table 25 (which gives information concerning institutions where midwives were trained in the Kingdom of Hungary and Transylvania in 1770–1918), and some of the tables should perhaps have included (or been replaced by) diagrams (table 16, for instance, which presents data gathered by István Hatvani on infant mortality in Debrecen, or table 27, which provides information concerning surgeons and midwives who obtained their degrees in Hungary), but tables are unquestionably the most appropriate solution for a comparison of the textbook

texts or documents which fall under other designations. Various excerpts from the book, such as the interpolated explanations, textbook excerpts, and case studies, can be integrated into university and, under special circumstances, secondary school education to further a nuanced understanding of the relevant demographic, social, and even economic chapters. They also help further a grasp of the darker side of the subject, which includes rampant infanticide, ill will that led to the death of a child, or the death of a child as a consequence of unprofessionalism, ignorance, carelessness, or indifference (vivid historical examples of this include the cruelty of midwives who rushed births, infants being prematurely pulled from their mothers' wombs, etc.). Another practice which has only rarely been submitted to serious scholarly study was the use of wetnurses to provide breast milk for infants. This practice led to literally innumerable deaths, as the alleged causes of these deaths provided in the record books were conditions such as "congenital infirmity," "convulsions," "inflation of the intestines," etc.

The gradual transformation of the practice of providing health care into a specialized profession also led to the expansion of an emerging market. This meant both the invention and dissemination of new tools and the addition of new customers to the market network, as well as an increasingly strong demand for health care and a marketplace attitude which has shaped the profession and practice of health care for the past two centuries. The book offers a detailed presentation of the most important implements used during various moments of this history, including, for instance, the belts and cinctures that were used in the early modern period to facilitate the birth process. The so-called belt of Saint Margaret, the use of which only the upper classes could afford, and the belt-cord used by peasant women and worn by their husbands offer extreme examples of the tools used to facilitate childbirth (which, after all, put women less than an arm's reach from death, as it were). The evolution of these tools is made easy to understand by the book, however, if we consider the example of the changes which took place in the contents of the midwife's bag. The four columns of Table 10 summarize the stages of development over a century, in the course of which the birth stool, for example, fell out of use, while by 1882, soap, which certainly had not been in use in 1823, was also found alongside the metal tools. The periodical *Bába-Kalauz* (The Midwives' Guide) kept midwives informed of the newer implements available for use in obstetrics equipment, which was part of overall developments in the pharmaceutical industry (as exemplified by the improvement in the quality of the pharmacy containers presented on pages

24–25 of the book). While the book provides nothing in the way of specific calculations, it offers a thorough and circumspect look at the training and educational opportunities midwives had (and the related costs), which became increasingly important from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, as midwives found themselves more and more compelled to acquire documents which certified their abilities. This strikes me as just as essential to any understanding of the process of professionalization as the repeated emphasis on the fact that a midwife, who was put under more and more expectations by the state and the professional world, was first and foremost an employee of the community in which she worked and, given the intimate nature of her work, was also often a very influential member of this community with an array of responsibilities and was sometimes even one of its informal leaders.

Finally, the book presents the process of medicalization through a series of emphatic contrasts over 350 pages (concluding with a bibliography, a list of illustrations, an index of personal names, and acknowledgements). These contrasts include, for instance, the stark difference between the narrow medical and surgical community on the one hand, which consisted entirely of men, and midwives on the other, who were all women and who were found all over the country. One could also mention the issue of birth control, which, although as ancient as humankind itself, cannot be said to have been part of conscious family planning before modernization, apart from the practice widespread in some parts of Hungary of having only one child (specifically the so-called Ormánság and Sárköz regions). Similarly, one finds the opposition between the largely academic theoretical knowledge concerning childbirth and predominantly empirical, practical knowledge. One could also mention the contrast between the fear of doctors and surgeons on the one hand and the trust and confidence in midwives (often due to their vulnerability), as well as the narrow social world of doctor and surgeon in contrast with the broad social circles of midwives, and so on. The book (which is a hefty tome and therefore is perhaps not ideal as something one would browse in bed) is a particularly engaging read in part because it raises a fascinating general question: how did the customs, rituals, and practices surrounding birth, which was fundamentally a family affair, move from this intimate, narrow sphere to the more public, regulated world of the hospital? Or rather, how did birth move *for the most part* to the hospital, since it is worth noting that, since the publication of the first version of the book, laws in Hungary have changed and home births are now permitted, if under strict restrictions. This alone would not have justified the republication of the book

after almost two decades, but the constantly expanding national and international specialized literature on the subject does. The book has grown, and changes have been made to the illustrations and design to ensure that the work as a whole better meets expectations today. The publication of the new volume in the “Family – Histories” series was funded by the research project *Hungarian Family History before Modernity: Childhood and Mosaic Families in the Sixteenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, led by Gabriella Erdélyi, and published by the Research Centre for the Humanities Institute of History. The book continues to capture the interests of readers, as is most eloquently proven, perhaps, by a comment posted in May 2023 (four months before the launch of the new edition) to *Moly.hu*: “I would like to note, this book is well-nigh impossible to get. I myself, after having pre-ordered it two years ago on Bookline (where it is still unavailable), finally bought it on Vatera. So... make no mistake about it: anyone who gets a copy will not give it away easily.” I am sure this reader will not be disappointed to get a copy of the new edition.

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The Shadow of the Empress: Fairy-Tale Opera and the End of the Habsburg Monarchy. By Larry Wolff. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023. 435 pp.

“Sometimes I get up in the middle of the night and leave the clocks all, all stand. But you do not have to be afraid of her either. She too is the creature of the Father who created us all.” These words about time are sung by the *Marchallin* in *Der Rosenkavalier*, the 1911 opera by Richard Strauss and the Viennese poet Hugo von Hofmannsthal. They seemingly represent the lamentations of a middle-aged woman over the passing of time, but they can be also understood as the dilemmas of the Habsburg regime, which had to recognize and adapt to the necessities posed by political and social modernity. This interpretation is supported by the fact that the character in the opera is called Marie Thérèse, the name of the most popular Habsburg ruler. The next major collaborative work by Strauss and Hofmannsthal, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, was written and composed during World War I. It is less often discussed than *Rosenkavalier*, although it is full of similar subtleties. It is a welcome development, then, that *Die Frau ohne Schatten* is in the center of Larry Wolff’s remarkable work, which provides a total intellectual history of this fairytale opera.

For Wolff, who has published several landmark monographs on Central European history in recent decades, this work was evidently a “passion project,” not only because it was his “pandemic book” but also because of the homage the work pays to the author’s grandparents, who were born in the Habsburg Empire. In a similar manner as in some of his other works, *Die Frau ohne Schatten* is only the “small place” where Wolff studies his “bigger questions:” twentieth-century Vienna and the ways in which the perception of cultural modernity changed as a result of the war. In parallel, we follow the life story of the empress, who had to leave the political scene in the very same year as the fairytale empress walked onto the stage for the first time: Zita, wife of Austrian Emperor and Hungarian King Karl.

The book consists of three parts. The first discusses the two main stories from the turn of the century up to World War I. The second presents the period of the war, and the third examines the afterlife of the opera and Zita’s long widowhood. The structure of the book has an exciting dramatical character, as the different stories run parallel and even the plot of the opera is explored gradually. In all three parts, Wolff provides his readers with meticulous analyses of the opera’s different social, cultural, and political contexts, as well as

a profound reading of the opera's complex symbolism and musical language. The refinement of the contextualization is, in my view, the greatest merit of the book, which is comparable to Moritz Csáky's masterpiece on Viennese operetta.

Wolff follows the creative process of Strauss and Hofmannsthal through their letters, which suggest that Hofmannsthal was the more erratic of the two, while Strauss comes off as more serene. In the letters written in the first days of the war and the crises leading up to it, one finds few if any allusions to the contemporary events. However, the plot of the opera takes discernibly darker turns. During the war, Strauss' perception of his creative path changed. He declared that *Die Frau ohne Schatten* would be the last romantic opera he would write, as in the face of European Armageddon, one had to break from the Wagnerian tradition which had dominated his musical language until then. This shows already in the opera itself, as during the dramatic climax, when the fairytale emperor turns into stone, the empress loses her ability to sing and expresses the terror she feels in spoken words. Additionally, Wolff situates the opera in its musical context: Mozart's *The Magic Flute* was clearly a constant reference point for the creators, as was Engelbert Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, but several other standard works of Austrian and German music are also mentioned. Here, perhaps, it might have been worth putting slightly more emphasis on the connection to Wagner's *Parsifal*, as compassion is a key element in the empress' journey to becoming human, just as it was crucial for the *reine Tor*.

Wolff also shows how contemporary experiences of the Habsburg Empire made their way into the plot of the opera. The treason of the Nurse, for instance, is reminiscent of the infamous case of the officer Alfred Redl, who was a spy for the Russian Army, and the chaotic human world of the opera into which the empress and the nurse descend in the first act can be interpreted as analogous to Vienna's chaotic *fin-de-siècle* mass politics as well as the prevailing circumstances in Galicia, where Hofmannsthal was stationed as a soldier. Wolff also contemplates what might come to mind for the first audiences immediately after the war while listening to parts of the opera such as the chorus of unborn children or the gorgeous third act duet of the separated wife and husband. His splendid analyses of the music are illustrated by extracts from the score, which are of tremendous use to the reader (provided he or she can read sheet music).

The section titled "Postwar" presents in detail the different casts and conductors performing the opera over the course of the century. Readers who are passionate admirers of twentieth-century conductors and opera singers (as this reviewer is) will greatly appreciate this part. The postwar life of the real-life

empress is also presented in detail. During the interwar period, Zita still held on to the prospect of Habsburg restoration, which became definitively impossible with the *Anschluss*. However, the one-time empress eventually found another passion with the prospect of the sainthood of her late husband. The process of Zita's own sainthood is where her life story collides with that of the author, as Wolff was asked to participate in the process of her beatification as a scholar of Zita's life in North America. There is also a symbolic collision of *Die Frau ohne Schatten* and Zita's death. The Viennese Boys Choir sang at the funeral of the late empress in Vienna. The choir also sang in Sir Georg Solti's luminous recording of the work, which was made during the same period.

The Shadow of the Empress is an entrancing read. Wolff's intimate knowledge and genuine love of culture are impressive and captivating, and he shows a passionate devotion to his subject that is rivaled only by such outstanding scholars and cultural historians as Carl E. Schorske or Moritz Csáky. This "pandemic book" is also itself an example of how true scholarship can prevail in times of crisis.

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Re/imaginings of Disability in State Socialism: Visions, Promises, Frustrations. Edited by Kateřina Kolářová and Martina Winkler. Frankfurt/New York: Campus Verlag, 2021. 319 pp.

Compared to race, gender, sexuality, and class, disability remains a rather undiscovered area of research in social sciences and humanities. However, a growing number of historians have convincingly argued that disability provides a novel angle for a more nuanced understanding of social and political systems of the past. *Re/imaginings of Disability in State Socialism. Visions, Promises, Frustrations* seeks to contribute to this knowledge building by putting the focus on the former Eastern Bloc, suggesting that the complexities posed by understandings of dis/abilities of bodies and minds accentuate the many challenges faced by the Soviet socialist project, particularly these complexities overlapped with various categories of “otherness.”

The purpose of the multiauthor volume, which consists of an in-depth introduction and nine chapters, is precisely to argue for the close analysis of these very challenges and to complicate the picture of state socialist attitudes towards disability. Therefore, one of the key points of the book is to show how state socialist regimes attempted to strike a balance between theory (socialist utopia) and practice (social engineering).

The egalitarian principles of socialist ideology and the exclusionary nature of state-defined normalcy concepts present an apparent paradox, which is addressed in several chapters of the volume. For instance, the notion of defectology, defined as an influential epistemological framework which spread across East Central Europe from the USSR, was initially meant to be a state-controlled emancipatory process. In practice, however, it led to the creation of hierarchies of “defects” based on the limits of these supposed defects to “correctability.” Explained at length in the chapter *Work as a Form of Emancipation: The Emergence of Czechoslovak Defectology*, by Marek Fapšo and Jan Randák, defectology became a powerful domestic discipline in Stalinist Czechoslovakia under the scientific supervision of Miloš Sovák. Later, it acquired new meanings in accordance with socialist economic interests and state-defined standards of productivity. The chapter *Engineering Socialist Integration in the Age of Normalisation: Roma and People with Disabilities as Objects of Care in Socialist Czechoslovakia*, coauthored by Kateřina Kolářová and Filip Herza, examines how disability, race, and ethnicity were viewed in the framework of this discipline, also concluding that the overly normative nature of defectology led to the failed integration of those with

purportedly unchangeable defects, who were persistently labeled as “useless” members of socialist societies.

Work indeed played a quintessential role in the collective effort to build socialism. Since disabled bodies and minds were perceived less productive than abled ones, individual bodily or mental difference was, again, a major source of tension under socialist regimes. In the chapter *Disability Assessment under State Socialism*, Theodor Mladenov discusses socialist disability assessment, a classification mechanism based on medically determined work capacity. Mladenov draws attention to the ways in which disability assessment was used by the Bulgarian Communist Party as part of a broader state socialist biopolitical project which aimed to construct a constantly improving socialist ideal and, within that, the new Bulgarian Soviet personality type. Underpinned by allegedly scientific foundations, this “medical-productivist” (p.92, 112) model of disability assessment therefore served as the ultimate control over disabled citizens, regulating their access both to work and support and expertly advising (or rather imposing) ways of personal improvement aligned closely with notions of socialist morality.

The distinctive soviet disabled identity is also a salient point in the chapter by Claire Shaw, titled “*Just Like It Is at Home!*” *Soviet Deafness and Socialist Internationalism during the Cold War*. In this study, Shaw analyzes transnational socialist relationships through the first International Symposium of Societies and Unions of the Deaf Socialist Countries, which was held in Moscow in 1968. This event was dedicated to the creation of the ideal socialist deaf person, who in principle would have a sense of shared identity and belonging with other deaf people (and other ideal socialist types of actors) across the Eastern Bloc. This chapter also illustrates how deafness seemed to be a “correctible” and a widely acceptable condition under state socialism. This ties into the argument presented by Fapšo and Randák, who point out how strongly Sovák believed in the emancipation of deaf and mute children through defectology (p.70).

Childhood, which was also a concept coopted and manipulated by socialist ideology, is another recurring theme in the volume. Both Martina Winkler, author of the chapter *Disability and Childhood in Socialist Czechoslovakia*, and Natalia Pamula, whose chapter is titled *Out of Place, Out of Time: Intellectual Disability in Late Socialist Polish Young Adult Literature*, use children’s stories and media as well as young adult literature to explore how childhood and disability were (symbolically) connected for pedagogical purposes. Winkler argues that the study of overlapping discourses on childhood and disability sheds light on

certain transformations within the Czechoslovak political propaganda, which was initially centered around the concept of overcoming and correction in the 1950s and then shifted towards “the construction of a strongly normative social consensus with inclusive features” (p.287) through the Czechoslovak new wave movies in the 1960s. On the other hand, *The Formation of “Disability”: Expert Discourses on Children’s Sexuality, “Behavioural Defectivity”* by Frank Henschel, and *“Bad Families” in Socialist Czechoslovakia (1950s–1970s)*, and *Discourses of Prevention, Risk and Responsibility in the Women’s Magazine Vlasta (1950s–1980s)* by Maria-Lena Faßig † demonstrate that state narratives routinely placed the blame on families, claiming that the responsibility for “defective” children lay with destructive parental influence, neglect, or certain stigmatized health-related issues, such as substance abuse or addiction. With this in mind, Faßig presented the gendered aspects of this mechanism by analyzing Czechoslovak propagandistic content directed to mothers, who faced intense pressure to raise useful children for the state. In contrast, the chapter *“We as parents must be helped.” State–Parent Interactions on Care Facilities for Children with “Mental Disabilities” in the GDR* by Pia Schmäuser unveils the complicated “state-citizen interactions” (p.250) between parents and the authorities in the GDR. Schmäuser calls attention to the inherent tension between the “individual” and the “collective” by showing parent-state negotiations concerning whose responsibility it was to raise disabled children.

While the volume presents a multitude of theoretical frameworks, discourse analysis is the key methodology used by most of the authors. Although named and defined only by Faßig (p.150), the cultural model of disability also seems to be a collectively accepted approach among the contributors, considering that all chapters intend to reflect on shifts in understandings of and approaches to disability under different regimes, in different cultural contexts, and at different points of historical time. However, the sources used by the authors vary. For instance, Mladenov studies official documents of the Soviet and Bulgarian authorities (p.94). Henschel (p.120), Kolářová and Herza (p.168), and Fapšo and Randák (p.64) analyze expert narratives and state socialist discourses of science regarding defectology. As mentioned above, Winkler (p.260) and Pamula (p.295) use Czechoslovak and Polish children’s and young adult literature and films. Faßig (p.149) relied on a propagandistic Czechoslovak women’s magazine, Shaw (p.30) and Schmäuser (p.239) both investigate archival materials of state narratives, combined with personal accounts, such as letters and petitions.

To locate the volume in the context of broader methodological debates, it is worth mentioning the categorization of sources in disability history set up

by Elizabeth Bredberg, which is cited as an important reference point in the journal article “State of the Field: Disability History” by Daniel Blackie and Alexia Moncrieff, published in *History* in 2022. For Bredberg, there are three main types of sources: institutional (official documents, such as state, medical, and various other expert records); vernacular (lay representations of disability in the media, literature, or art); and experimental (egodocuments and interviews). This categorization is highly important, as it calls attention to the relevance of experimental sources in historical disability research and underscores that institutional and vernacular sources mainly originate from nondisabled actors. Without explicitly discussing this categorization, this book seems to challenge it. Given that most of the vernacular sources used by the authors, such as films, literature, and newspapers were under state control (a women’s magazine, children’s literature, and movies were in fact analyzed to highlight their propagandistic and/or pedagogical values in communicating socialist values), the question arises whether there is a need to reevaluate existing methodological concepts of disability history that have been formulated primarily from Western perspectives in order to discover how expert and lay narratives of disability under socialist regimes actually differed, as well as how alternative ideas were regulated or even banned from public discussion.

As for the closer analysis of the types of sources used in the volume, two issues seem to deserve further discussion. First, the number of sources documenting lived experiences of disability under state socialism (such as interviews, letters, personal accounts, diaries, or memoirs) is strikingly limited, especially in contrast with the thorough study of sources offering examples of expert and state rhetoric presented in the volume. As pointed out earlier, political and medical records alone prove inadequate if we seek to understand how the grand narratives trickled down into everyday life, as is indeed problematized by some of the authors of the book (e.g., Mladenov, p.94), if, however, left unresolved. Second, the lack of references to the material and design culture of state socialism (which would be most relevant for chapters focusing on work or socialist modernization) leaves many questions unanswered. As historians Katherine Ott and Bess Williamson argue in *The Oxford Handbook of Disability History* (edited by Rembis, M., Kudlick, C., and Nielsen, K. E.), disability history, viewed through the lens of non-textual sources, urges us to understand the imposed normativity of objects and spaces that remain woefully exclusionary to many. While the reviewed book touches (rightfully) on the connection between the visions of disability emancipation and socialist technological utopia (e.g.,

Kolářová & Herza, pp.182–83), it does not observe material culture, architecture, or design, and this leaves room for further material investigations that could complement the text-based and visual sources presented.

To conclude, the editors and contributors of *Re/imaginations of Disability in State Socialism. Visions, Promises, Frustrations* intend to address gaps in Eastern European disability history. The book puts forward the proposition that state socialist attitudes towards dis/abilities of bodies and minds had many facets, so the authors call for a new focus that points towards the varied ways in which the political regimes in postwar East Central Europe envisioned, constructed, and dealt with notions of “disability” and “normality.” Although Czechoslovakian *visions, promises, and frustrations* are undeniably overrepresented in the volume (with the remaining chapters studying the USSR, Poland, Bulgaria, and the GDR), the authors succeeded in equipping readers with a more comprehensive view on this difficult topic, adding vitally important scholarship to both disability history and area studies. Thus, *Re/imaginations of Disability in State Socialism. Visions, Promises, Frustrations* will be well-suited for researchers from different academic levels and backgrounds who are looking to carry out comparative case studies in disability history. The volume will also certainly influence further methodological considerations in the field.

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László Borhi: *Survival Under Dictatorships. Life and Death in Nazi and Communist Regimes*. Budapest–Vienna–New York: Central European University Press, 2024. 374 pp.

This is an outstanding book by an outstanding historian. What does a historian need to become an outstanding scholar who produces outstanding works? The factors shaping this process include a combination of a curious personality capable of putting individual and family experiences into a broader context and a well-defined research question that is challenging both for the author and his/her professional circle and also of interest to the wider public. Furthermore, in order to compose a major contribution to the field, a historian must have access to essential sources, skills in source criticism, and institutions that are supportive both in terms of funding research and helping with the process of publication.

Since the beginning of his career during the late 1980s (he graduated from Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest in 1986), Hungarian historian László Borhi has been trying to understand and help his readers understand the historical factors that shaped Hungary's fate after World War II. These factors included the impacts of fascism, national socialism, communism and Stalinism, the making of the Soviet Bloc, and policies of Western Europe and the US towards the dictatorships in Eastern and Central Europe. These issues were not just academic problems for him. They were, rather, personal questions, as he had grown up in this world. He sought to arrive at a more subtle grasp of Hungary's place in the conflicts between the competing superpowers. Personal as these questions might have been, it is a task of the scholar to turn them into research projects, and Borhi did and is doing this with impressive efficiency. His work was strongly supported by the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, which around the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries initiated a large-scale research project titled *Hungary in the Soviet Bloc and the Regime Change 1945–1990*. This project included the publication of chronologies, source publications, and monographs, and Borhi excelled in each of these genres. He began with a chronology (*Az Egyesült Államok és a szovjet zóna. 1945–1990*, Budapest, 1994), continued with a thick volume of sources on US-Hungarian relations between 1945 and 1990 (*Magyar-amerikai kapcsolatok 1945–1990. Források*, Budapest, 2009) and then wrote three monographs (*Hungary in the Cold War 1945–1956. Between the United States and the Soviet Union*, Budapest and New York, 2004; *Nagybatalmi érdekek hátlójában. Az Egyesült Államok és Magyarország kapcsolata a második világháborútól a rendszerváltásig*, Budapest, 2015; and *Dealing with*

Dictators: The United States, Hungary and East Central Europe, 1942–1989, Indiana University Press, 2017). Based on a very extensive source exploration of a vast array of sources, he compared the policies of the dictatorial Soviet Union and those of the democratic United States towards Hungary during and after World War II. In this series of books, Borhi makes a persuasive argument in support of the idea that Hungary's history was determined by the conflicting interests of the rulers of the Cold War world.

After decades of research dedicated to the history of international relations, Borhi shifted his interest towards a different aspect of the history of dictatorships. From the top, he moved to the bottom, which is to say that he began looking for sources that shed light on the survival strategies used by various layers of Hungarian society from 1944 to 1953. His motivations were again personal and professional. His family mourned a grandfather and an uncle who never returned from Buchenwald. But his mother and grandmother survived in part because they followed the advice of an Arrow Cross man. The history of dictatorships includes many such complex events. Survival frequently depended on a decision taken within seconds. How do people behave in such extremely tense situations? How do systems shape the individual and how do individuals shape the system? Borhi also poses the question in a less scholarly way: do “shitty” people make “shitty” times or do “shitty” times make “shitty” people? These are general questions that can be asked in connection with numerous other historical situations as well. This book presents a series of powerful case studies trying to answer these difficult questions. It analyses a time span of less than eight years. Under consolidated circumstances, a period of eight years means continuity. A child can turn into a young adult by graduating from high school, for instance. Another eight years can bear witness to the start of a great career and the start of a family. Between 1944 and 1953, circumstances were changing at an incredibly fast pace in Hungary and the book focuses on three subperiods: the deportation and murder of Hungarian Jews in Nazi work and death camps (April 1944 to the liberation of these camps in early 1945), the terrorist reign of the Arrow Cross people (the Hungarian Nazis) in Budapest from mid-October 1944 to early February 1945, and the Hungarian experience of Stalinism from about mid-1948 to the spring of 1953. The book does not give a comprehensive history of Hungary over the course of these eight years. Still, it might have been interesting to look at the survival strategies used by various layers of Hungarian society during the roughly three years of a limited pluralism between about mid-1945 to

about mid-1948 as well. That, however, would have definitely called for different methods and different sources.

The most important novelty of the book is the focus on survival strategies when investigating the functioning of Nazi and Stalinist dictatorships. Borhi defines survival strategies as a neglected, grey area between collaboration and resistance. The concept also helps him take sides concerning the top-down and bottom-up models of Stalinism. He argues that the two models of Stalinism “in the Hungarian case are not mutually exclusive but mutually complementary. Survival as a concept is a bridge between the two narratives” (p.359). Indeed, this is a useful analytical concept that can be applied to victims, perpetrators, and onlookers alike, since, as circumstances changed, as they did at an extremely rapid pace during the period discussed by Borhi, former victims might take revenge and turn into perpetrators and some former perpetrators became their victims. Willingly or unwillingly, former onlookers often found themselves in the position of either victim or perpetrator. The basic frame of the well-structured presentation of the carefully selected numerous case studies is the oppressive role of the state and the relationship between the state and the various groups of survivors. This is a logical and properly substantiated approach from the perspective of the real and potential victims. Still, as the book points out, during the second subperiod, the Arrow Cross terror in Budapest, the collapse of the Hungarian central state power allowed for the most violent and often only loosely coordinated acts of cruelty by of smaller Arrow Cross gangs targeting defenseless Jews. Borhi argues that under these circumstances, survival was a collaborative effort, whereas in the Nazi work and death camps survival was determined more by individual efforts. In this uncontrolled environment, various patterns of behavior could take the most extreme forms, including empathic solidarity and extreme sadism. Perpetrators were driven by greed, ideologies, and ethnic and social prejudices. The case studies show how these factors, either individually or mixed, could generate the most violent agency. During the two other subperiods, when the Hungarian state was able to function properly, highly centralized brutality and cruelty set more limits to individual choices. This is how in about seven weeks starting mid-April 1944, 437,000 Hungarian Jews could be deported to concentration camps. The Stalinist state developed perhaps the most sophisticated mechanism of terror, where truly no one (including top level leaders) could feel safe. This takes us to the other key concept in the book: fear which, together with anxiety, permeates all social layers in dictatorships, and Hungary was no exception. Fear determines not only the mindset of victims

but also drives perpetrators, because they frequently assume that if they do not destroy their real or assumed enemies, they will be defeated by them. Stalinist systems take this view to the most dramatic extreme. As Borhi argues, “[i]f Hitler had had his way, Germany would have rid itself of its ‘enemies’ by deporting or killing them all. In Stalinist systems, where the constant intensification of terror was enshrined as a law, the supply of enemies was unending” (p.276). Borhi integrates the concept of hope into his analysis as well, however, arguing that it was hope that sustained the will to survive the Nazi and Stalinist machineries of oppression. For some people, hope was sustained by the prospect of liberation by foreign armies. For others, it was kept alive by the notion that there was a better world on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

Borhi draws on an array of sources, including interviews with Holocaust survivors conducted in the immediate aftermath of the war, court documents of trials against perpetrators, letters, diaries, and even works of art and literature. He takes sides in the debate concerning the reliability of interviews with survivors. He agrees with Gábor Gyáni, who points out that “the history of the Holocaust can be explained rationally but it cannot be comprehended. This not only allows but requires us to place the human voice and human experience on an equal footing with the insights of the historian if the scholar of the past seeks to narrate an event of the magnitude of the Holocaust.” (p.8). The cases reconstructed on the basis of these sources offer narratives which might well bear comparison with pointillist paintings. In a pointillist painting, the many small dots created a unified image when viewed from the proper perspective, and this is similar to the experience of the reader who consults the interviews with survivors. Another strength of the book is that it persuasively shows, by drawing on numerous examples, how hatreds can transcend political systems and also how deeply rooted individual and group passions can connect to more abstract state involving ideologies of hatred driven by centralized power.

Borhi argues that no comparable book is available in the extremely rich secondary literature on the history of these dictatorships. I think that at least two works very well known and appreciated by Borhi have to be mentioned here as a comparison. The first is Timothy Snyder's *Bloodlands* (Borhi wrote an extensive review on it in the third issue of this journal in 2014), which admittedly puts greater emphasis on the forms of destruction but which, like Borhi's book, also considers the motivations of the perpetrators. Borhi accepts Snyder's point that Stalin's war was not a crusade against tyranny but a life and death struggle for the survival of his regime and targeted both class enemies

and ethnic minorities. Where Borhi substantially disagrees with Snyder is that Stalin's murderous policies were not comprehensible simply in terms of an ideologically determined class struggle. For Snyder the Soviet Union was not guided by ideology. Borhi, however, convincingly argues that in the Soviet Union and in countries of the Soviet Bloc, the societies were permeated with the basic tenets of communist ideology: a strong belief in the historical necessity of overcoming the retrograde imperialist powers by all possible means. Borhi does not accept Snyder's notion of "Ersatz victory," i.e., the idea that, when the plans for a transformative utopia of the dictatorship of the proletariat failed, a policy of mass murder was proclaimed as a kind of "substitute victory." The deaths of millions of victims were not, Borhi argues, simply collateral damage or events of secondary significance. On the contrary, for Hitler and Stalin, these deaths were their primary goal. These problems are essential in the interpretation of the numerous case studies in the book. Borhi strongly disagrees with the view that a blind belief in a radical ideology can absolve perpetrators of their individual responsibility. This is perhaps the most important message of the book: "The events described in the book were not guided by invisible historical sources or cogwheels in a machine. They were determined by people who were capable of unspeakable atrocities or selfless deeds of good. Human decency was a choice even in the hardest of times" (p.360).

The other historian whose work merits comparison with Borhi's book is István Deák, in particular his book *Europe on Trial. The Story of Collaboration, Resistance, and Retribution During World War II*. Both in this book (which was, sadly, his last) and in many of his other writings, Deák gives numerous examples of how complex the concepts of collaboration and resistance are. Resistance might bring weaken the enemy, but it might prompt vicious acts of revenge, whereas collaboration might help survival. Deák masterfully explains how the same person or group could play both a hero and enemy role for various socially, ethnically, and religiously differing groups, but this never leads him to bottomless relativism. Some of the cases Borhi presents challenge the wildest images of sadism, but just as Deák does, Borhi always finds counterexamples and shows the complexities. Deák deals more with larger scale events, such as high-level decision-making processes, while Borhi's focus is more on a vast number of micro-stories, but Deák's descending hierarchy of collaboration, cooperation, and accommodation can be applied to these case studies as well. One example presented by Borhi in great detail is that of Oszkár Brenner, tried in the last trial of Arrow Cross criminals in 1971, after having been acquitted by the People's

Tribunal in 1947. Brenner was a successful entrepreneur who hired and hid a number of Jews but also joined an Arrow Cross group and participated in the atrocities committed by this group. In his trial, he argued that he had done this to save his business and the Jews under his protection. After citing numerous witness reports concerning the complexity of Brunner's behavior, Borhi summarizes the story as follows: "Was he a war criminal, a rescue angel or some of both? We may never know for sure" (p.187). Another story concerning the complexity of rescue given detailed treatment in the book is about the convent of the Sisters of Divine Love. Only some of the Jewish children hidden in this building could be saved. For the parents of the children who were saved, the nuns were angels. Those whose children were not saved, in contrast, demanded serious punishment of the sisters after the war. Borhi examines the behavior of one of the nurses as a paradigmatic example of a dilemma that many people in crisis situations had to face: unwillingness to lie due to their Christian faith, but at the same time, this faith motivated them to help. Borhi devotes considerable attention to denunciations and points out that, whereas in democracies respect for the law serves as the glue which holds society together, "[u]nder National Socialist or communist rule, obeying the law may not always have been a virtue. Citizens who break the law may be more virtuous than those who obey laws requiring denunciation and persecution" (p.273). This is a point that is relevant to an understanding of all types of authoritarian systems. We often consider respect for the rule of law a pillar of democracy but, the rule of inhuman laws can challenge basic moral norms. Both Deák and Borhi observe that none of the available sources suggest that guards and other persons who worked in the service of oppressive regimes were punished when they were lenient in their treatment of prisoners or members of persecuted groups. Group psychology, however, confirms that people can turn into unwilling perpetrators when they do not want to lose the sympathy or support of their comrades. The atmosphere of a community spirit might be a more effective tool with which to enforce discipline than the prospect of punishment.

The analysis of levels of cruelty and possible motivations behind acts of cruelty helps Borhi paint a picture of many shades. Orders can be followed loosely or strictly, and victims can sometimes be better put to use if they are treated decently. Belief in a cause that offers the promise of redemption and the fear that if we do not destroy the declared enemy the enemy may destroy us are hatreds that can drive violent aggression.

How could we point out the most important scholarly achievements of this truly outstanding book? Drawing on a vast array of primary sources concerning the history of three Hungarian dictatorial systems, László Borhi approaches the functioning of totalitarian dictatorships from the deep layers of society. The secondary literature will certainly use his numerous case studies for comparative investigations. His investigation of the Arrow Cross terror in Budapest in particular, which rests on Hungarian sources which have hardly been used and which are not accessible to anyone who does not read Hungarian, offers penetrating insights into the very deep levels of the human condition. It describes intersections of individual and institutional evil. As I have already mentioned, an investigation of survival strategies during the period of limited political pluralism between 1945 and 1948 could be an interesting avenue for the continuation of the survival strategies project, and in the longer run, the same applies to the early Kádár period. Borhi presents a plethora of complex situations, but his conclusions are always straightforward. He rejects the notion that dictatorships were also built on a deal between perpetrators and victims. Still, he admits that many average people living under dictatorial systems could fall under the spell of totalitarian ideologies, and even some inmates in the Nazi concentration camps internalized Nazi ideology. The book is an emotionally challenging read, as the reader must confront numerous stories of extreme cruelty, but its ultimate message is optimistic: even in the most critical situations, there were always some people who found the ways and means to avoid complicity.

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