

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

1. *The Theoretical and Methodological Framework*

The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy at the end of 1918 is a much debated chapter of European history. Since the 1920s historians have been trying to enumerate and explain the major causes contributing to the process that sealed the fate of the empire. Between the two wars, Oszkár Jászi argued persuasively for the thesis of an “organic process” according to which the dissolution “...grew out of the inevitable logic of a long series of social causes.”¹ A number of other historians believe that the “organic development” model, relying on internal causes, does not sufficiently explain the events that can be understood only in the light of the foreign policy concepts of the victorious powers and of the interest groups behind them. This point of view is represented today by François Fejtő.² There are also historians who believe that it is hopeless to seek an answer to the question whether the most important causes of dissolution were internal or external. According to the French historian Michel Bernard, it is impossible to separate the causes historically and to argue persuasively for one or the other. His monograph about the fall of the Dual Monarchy summarizes his opinion tersely by stating, “everybody was against the Monarchy.”³

The first explanations for the dissolution of the empire, however, are not found in historical works but in the memoirs of the former Austro-Hungarian political elite, written between 1919 and 1945. The memoirs are not scientific texts and studying them is not only of interest because they are reliable sources for the history of past events. Their significance lies in the fact that the authors usually represented some

readily recognizable political and/or ideological view which they wished to buttress with their recollections. To this extent these works share the societal function that, according to Michel Foucault, characterized History “long before the constitution of the human sciences.” Accordingly, “it has performed a certain number of major functions in Western culture: memory, myth, transmission of the Word and of Example, vehicle of traditions, critical awareness of the present...”⁴ In this work we seek an answer to the question how the members of the Austrian and Hungarian elite thought about the dissolution of the empire and of the country and whether these opinions could be grouped according to certain perspectives.

The work is based on the catalog of the National Széchenyi Library and on the bibliography assembled from the references in the monographs dealing with the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. This bibliography contained memoirs the authors of which were demonstrably members of the political elite of the Monarchy or of the Successor States. I considered only the Austro-German and Hungarian authors and omitted the politicians of the other nationalities, wishing to limit myself to the comparison of the reactions of the losers. I made an exception for some authors of Slavic extraction who clearly identified themselves with the empire and with the Habsburg dynasty. Memoirs written about World War II or those that were written in the completely different political atmosphere after 1945 were not included, as these were revealed to be following radically different emplotment strategies, making sensible comparisons impossible. I also omitted the authors born after 1900 who thus could not be considered genuine eyewitnesses of the dissolution.

I defined “political elite” from a practical perspective and on the basis of “sufficient conditions.” I included in the elite those who met one of the following criteria: ministers, secretaries of state, other high-ranking government officials, members of the upper or lower houses of Parliament during the Dualism or between the two wars, leaders and/or founders of political parties, holders of high administrative positions in administration (e.g. comes or deputy comes [ispán] of a county, Landesmann, mayor of an autonomous municipality), military or police officers who reached the rank of general, senior editors and owners of newspapers, members of the high clergy, noted writers and others who

belonged to nonpolitical elite groups but who had good connections with the highest ranks of the political elite (university professors, artists, owners of landed estates, industrialists and bankers). In addition to these criteria I included all those who occupied a position of trust around Francis Joseph, Francis Ferdinand or Charles IV.

Narrowing the base of the study made it conform to the natural subtypes of the memoir literature. It could be assumed that the members of the political elite in their memoirs would discuss the process of the dissolution of the Monarchy on its merits.⁵ Rural teachers, reporters or police officers in their memoirs largely limited themselves to their immediate environment and thus were not suitable for inclusion in an analysis of the dissolution of the Dual Monarchy.⁶

On this basis one hundred memoirs were included in the study, a representative sample of the approximately two hundred works on the list. They naturally fell into three categories. The first two groups were the “Old Austrian” and Austro-German memoirs. The authors of the first group were mostly German-speaking who after 1918 looked back on the Monarchy as the anchor of their primary identity. There were thirty-two memoirs in this group. The second group consisted of twenty-two memoirs. These authors, in contrast to the first group, committed themselves to the new Austria after 1918 and had serious reservations vis-à-vis the imperial inheritance. The third group was composed of forty-six authors who considered themselves to be Hungarians above all and who concentrated in their memoirs on Hungary rather than on the empire. In affiliating authors with the respective social groups, the testimony of the texts was accorded primacy over biographical data. Thus it happened that a politician usually considered to be Hungarian, like Prince Lajos Windischgraetz was placed into the Old Austrian group because in his memoirs he focused on the problems of the dissolution of the empire and gave few signs of his Hungarian identity. For similar considerations Friedrich Funder, publisher and confidential advisor to Francis Ferdinand, a significant figure in the press history of the Monarchy, was placed with the new Austrians, since in his memoirs he treated the dissolution of the Monarchy not as a personal loss of identity but only as a break in Austrian history.

2. *Psychological and Narrative Aspects of the Analysis*

In working with the database defined above I gave consideration to the interpretation, or interpretations, applied by modern historiography to the process of dissolution. Against this background, it was possible to determine the elements that were omitted and those which were especially emphasized in the various memoir groups. It also appeared that in order for certain political and social elite groups to support and enshrine their own ideology and their way of looking at history they used certain methods of reinterpreting the past with a recollective-narrative technique very much addressed to their present.

The theoretical basis for the analysis of patterns of remembrance was provided by Maurice Halbwachs's theory of collective memory (*mémoire collective*), which was further refined for historical research by Jan Assmann.⁷ According to Halbwachs's pioneering theory, individual processes of remembering are dependent on social systems of memory, which provide both the blueprints for the structuring of remembering and the meaning of what is remembered. The starting point for the research, therefore, was the assumption that "Awareness and recollection...can develop in the individual only by participating in societal interactions."⁸

Studying the source material, according to Halbwachs's theory, requires identifying which events were preserved by historical memory and also how and to what purpose they were combined.⁹ This task yields the following seminal questions for research: 1) How were events and myths preserved and endowed with particular local evaluations? 2) Why are the particular events included in certain types of memoirs and why do they appear in a particular sequence?¹⁰ These investigations also permit insight into the functionality of memory, in other terms allow the question of how narrative structure and semantic composition contributed to constructing and consolidating group identities.

In this process our second core assumption was that, "Collective memory is concrete not only in space and time but also as regards self identity. This means that it is linked exclusively to the perspective of a real existing group."¹¹ The assumption permits the derived hypothesis that the occasional similarity of assessments among the various groups was of secondary importance because in every case the qualitative dif-

ferences between the narrative configurations were decisive. This means that even the identical details may carry different meanings because the different textual environments override what ordinarily would supposed to constitute the “literal” meaning.

The area of collective memory relative to experiences in the immediate past was defined by Jan Vansina as communicative memory. Communicative memory differs from the so called cultural memory in that the latter transmits information to the members of the group indirectly, via multiple “switches” of remembering, implying significant hermeneutic differences in horizon. The elements of this knowledge of a time long past are endowed with a symbolic-ritualistic meaning. Between the two kinds of memory there is a “floating gap” that moves with the passage of time.¹² This book is a study of generational memory, based on the memoirs of two successive generations, seeking to identify the cardinal points in collective memory, relative to the recent past, of the elite groups under study and the narratives constructed by them. In Vansina’s theory, such an investigation would concern itself with communicative memory. In the following pages, however, it is contended that his otherwise highly productive distinction can be further refined at particular moments in time, such as major historical breaks and radical changes in the identity of groups, when layers of the distant past and the immediate past may coalesce and on such occasions the levels of communicative and cultural memories may also meld together. This process unfolds, because the contents of generational memory begin immediately to become ritualized and canonized. If this is so, the breakup of Austria-Hungary can be expected to have been such an instance, providing a confirmatory test for this otherwise common-sense hypothesis.

On the basis of similar considerations Halbwachs’s concept of history is also open to question. In his system the two years under consideration, 1918–1920, are prehistoric from the perspective of the following two decades because the French thinker considered history as a purely artificial temporality [*durée artificielle*], a sense of which is acquired in the process of socialization that is diametrically opposed to the personal understanding of “real duration,” derived from personal experience (*durée*).¹³

From a purely technical point of view, the memoirs under study can be assigned to the “prehistoric” category. A careful investigation of

the recollections, however, reveals that F. C. Bartlett was correct when he criticized Halbwachs's rigid separation of the two notions.¹⁴ The personal past can very well be assumed to be "prehistoric" as it is preserved in the memory of individuals, albeit it is never free of the influence of the structuring norms of social groups. In the course of decades, however, it increasingly becomes written, and thus cultural, memory, which receives an artificial temporality as a narrative composed in accordance with group norms. Simultaneously, it ceases to be pure memory, and acquires the characteristic of history.¹⁵ These histories-in-the-making of course reflect the peculiar sets of values characteristic of the individual groups, and thus mirror the social struggle for the domination of public memory. The authors of the memoirs, in the process of composing them, were making their contributions to such competing discourses, producing texts which were never identical, yet consonant and mutually reinforcing on the key events preserved in cultural memory.

Textual analysis in the book is modeled primarily after Paul Ricoeur's and Hayden White's theories. According to Ricoeur the past of the historic subject is composed of narrative-like experiences and it is for this reason that history may be termed a narrative. According to White, however, the narrator selects certain elements from the chaotic, disorganized and in its entirety unreportable past, that correspond to his earlier ideas and that he then combines into a history having the desired nature and effect.¹⁶ This distinction is of critical importance for a theory of history but for us it was even more important that both theories consider the act of writing a historical text as an experiment in fixing a chronologically (re)structured and therefore fictionalized process.

Based on the above, the social dynamics of collective memory can be shown as a simple triangular model. In creating the narrative, the person doing the remembering participates in the group process during which the community constructs its narrative of the past. The identity governing the process of remembering derives from group membership, yet the process of recalling/reinventing the past nevertheless affects the group as whole, as well.¹⁷ Canonization of memory thus also means an action-reaction relationship. The collective memory above all circumscribes the area of individual memory by defining some events and individuals as significant and irreplaceable. The text so con-

structed and placed before the reading public also contributes to the solidification of the “*mémoire collective*” and to its case-by-case refinement. This process really corresponds to White’s “*emplotment*” on a social plane and thus the social and textual dynamics at long last become parallel to each other. Citing Roland Barthes’s celebrated concept, the “*effet du réel*”¹⁸ appears simultaneously at the level of the text and of the group process. In the first one it appears on the basis of historicity and in the second one on the basis of the firmness of the contents of recollection and the peripherization of alternative memories.

As shown by this sketch of our method the collective memory that can be attributed to groups can be grasped through language. Creating the spatial areas of memory is most strongly related to the power relationships of competing ideologies because this space can always be expropriated by the representatives of the powers in being. For this reason the study of the geographic space of collective memory can be principally used for the reconstruction of the efforts made by the political systems and the caste expropriating the power in order to create societal cohesion and have the masses identify with the dominant ideology.¹⁹ The situation is different as far as language (speech) is concerned. It assures the possibility of self-manifestation for the representatives of interest groups and ideologies excluded from power, thus elevating the language into the sphere of polemics, confronting the geographic space that can be viewed as the sphere of those in power.

From the perspective of socio-psychology, “The precondition of memory is identification with the perspective of one or more groups and the acceptance of one or more styles of thinking.”²⁰ Similarly, in the perspective of socio-linguistics, the same can be grasped through the analysis of group-specific language usage. Because we are analyzing texts in our study, it is inevitable that while investigating collective memory the memory of groups is interpreted by the elucidation of their discourse.²¹ Among others, Paul Ricoeur and Clifford Geertz emphasized the importance of approaching society through its discourses.²² According to the former, at a certain depth “Analysis of ideological manifestations is transferred to the semiotic dimension of culture,” i.e. some important aspects of ideology can be approached by the social sciences only through a system of symbols and, primarily, through discourse.

The above statement of Ricoeur assumes that between the use of language and ideology there is a linkage that can be uncovered and illuminated. This is also held by Roland Barthes who in *Writing Degree Zero* stated that every political and/or ideological writing, that can be taken as an action, can always be made to correspond to certain power blocs and to normative societal groupings. According to him, "It is beyond any doubt that every power group and régime appearing with normative demands possesses its own writing, the history of which still awaits to be written."²³

This history would examine the writings which, according to Barthes, have a dual nature, "By virtue of the dual nature they simultaneously contain the being and appearance of power, (meaning), what they are and what they would like to appear like. For this reason the study of political writings would be the best social phenomenology."²⁴ Thus, in agreement with Ricoeur, Barthes believes that the study of social manifestations is made possible by its language in its written form that both immortalizes and uncovers its users. The starting point for this is offered by that strand of socio-linguistics that claims that, "Worldview is largely determined by language....The worlds in which different societies live are different worlds."²⁵ As such they can themselves be studied as systems. Culture is the expression of a worldview, the knowledge of which is required for function within the culture.²⁶ Memory is one of the cultural functions of a community that can be studied productively as one of the areas of cultural grammar taken as a system of rules.

Similar conclusions were reached by Mikhail Bakhtin and several other Russian literati who studied the potential of novels to depict reality and their poetic possibilities. Bakhtin considered the novel as a prose text capable of representing a polyphonic reality. His starting point, similarly to Edward Sapir, was denying that discourse was neutral. In his essay, "The Word in Poetry and Prose," he defines discourse as, "A living societal-ideological fact...existing in the individual awareness on the borderline of their own and not their own."²⁷ Each user, endeavoring to compose what he wishes to say as coherently as possible, in general does not resist the barely realized or unrealized temptations and thus the semantic possibilities offered by the discourse round out his opinion into a worldview.²⁸ The closed interpretation of

the world, also known as ideology, is tightly linked to this fictional past. According to a daring statement by Hayden White, "Ideology may be nothing more than the treatment of a historical event as if it were still a memory of living men."²⁹

The interaction of languages existing within one society is not fully engaged by the conscious or unconscious choice made by the users of these languages or by the hybrid language that might be created by them. The languages could even be at war with each other because every worldview demands that the, "Discursive-ideological world be unified and centralized."³⁰ Thus, in political matters a competition results. According to Barthes every ideological system appears with its own characteristic use of the language and if a conflict develops between these systems the possibilities for transition are radically narrowed or entirely eliminated.

A person entering a political discourse, such as a memoir writer, may become more anonymous by the homogenizing effect of language and thus in political literature, a collective and thus duplicable and mutually supportive fixed language use becomes possible.³¹ The elements of a language are not autonomous carriers of meaning and their significance does not even primarily become approachable to the researcher or reader by revealing the intentions of the speaker. The meaning is the result of the interrelationship of events and functional segments gradually coming together to form a system.³² Even the memoirs, being individual chronicles, are not exempt of this. The sociology of knowledge recognizes the process whereby personal experiences and explanatory schemes are built up into a system consisting of pervasive elements and calls it inter-subjective sedimentation by which it means a situation where "several individuals share a common biography, experiences of which become incorporated into a common stock of knowledge." The final phase of this process is the objectification of discourse by which we mean the consolidation of the forms and expressions of the linguistic system used by the members of the group.³³ The result of this process will be that with time "language becomes the depository of a large aggregate of collective sedimentations, which can be acquired monothetically, that is, as cohesive wholes and without reconstructing their original process of formation."³⁴

In this volume we endeavored to use the above listed points of

view in a mutually complementary form. A condition of reconstructing the discourses is to accept the above described theses about competing linguistic universes as a working hypothesis. This makes it possible to divide the memoirs on the basis of author, language and plot into groups and identify which feature qualifies as a canonized element and on what points opinions vary within the group.³⁵ Because the grouping of languages and emplotments is always somewhat arbitrary we endeavored to perform the analysis at several levels and we selected the thematizing solutions that interrupted homogeneity as the transitional point between the scenes. In practice this meant that we formed the largest possible groups and then we divided these further on the basis of their narrative characteristics. By choosing to first and foremost identify critical junctures in discourses, Foucault's "dispersion of the points of choice," and by using them as an element in organizing the analysis, we endeavored, perhaps inadequately, to satisfy the two seemingly contradictory criteria of the scientific process, namely systematization and the avoidance of distorting selective mechanisms.³⁶ In every case the author can be assigned to his uniform group but every enlarged classification ignores one or more peculiarities of his style. The groups created for analysis in this fashion are always fictive structures, which are then divided into subgroups based not on predetermined ideological choices but by pointing out where the narratives diverge, i.e. at which points they attach different meaning to items referring to the same element of the past. In this way a study of the cultural-subcultural relations, recommended by Sapir, well before Foucault, becomes possible.³⁷

The analytical process of dealing with these memoirs as fictive texts can be justified in several ways. The memoirs were born when historiography was not yet prepared to discuss the recent past and thus there was no canonized discussion of this period. In this situation, the authors engaged in a clear dialog with the present and, involved in the current controversies, wrote their memoirs. Thus, representation of group interest and group views, referred to as autobiographical assimilation, became increasingly manifest. At the same time, these texts lack the disjunctive mechanisms characteristic of historiography, which oppose the present and the past by showing the peculiarities of the period under study.

These conclusions are particularly valid for the memoirs of this

study because the cataclysmic nature of the World War and its significance in bringing an era to its end practically demanded the writing of memoirs. The change can be readily appreciated as the crisis of the old establishment and according to Ernst Cassirer "In the critical moments of man's political and social life myth regains its old strength." In such a situation mythic thinking, of which collective memory is both a creator and a user, functioning as the "expressions of collective wishes," comes into full bloom. This does not exclude conscious political manipulation as a motive for writing memoirs altogether, yet on a societal plane the need to define the semi-past of the Great War can safely be assumed as having catalyzed a large-scale process of remembering of which memoirs are but a segment.³⁸ At the same time very many simple soldiers and officers wrote, largely unpublished, memoirs.³⁹ It is likely that there was a similar desire among the political elite to tell the story with the difference being that for them there was a further stake in the canonization of the past, as it was on this basis that they were judged by society and their political future depended on it.