

# PRO&CONTRA

Central European Studies in Humanities

Volume 5

Issue 1

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Líceum Publisher

Eger, 2021

# **PRO&CONTRA**

Central European Studies in Humanities

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ISSN 2630-8916 (online)

Managing publisher: Rector of Eszterházy Károly University

Published by Líceum Publisher, EKV, Eger

Head of publisher: Andor Nagy

Managing editor: Ágnes Domonkosi

Layout editor: Bence Csombó

Year of publication: 2021

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**SHRIMOYEE CHATTOPADHYAY**

**Home and Homelessness in Jhumpa Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's"**

Pro&Contra 5

No. 1 (2021) 5–24.



## Abstract

The continuous process of movement in the diasporic context results in a feeling of homelessness for immigrants. In this paper, I will focus on the impact of displacement and the significance of the Western urban locations in the lives of South Asian diasporic women and the ways geographical locations affect the identity of the female protagonist, as represented in Jhumpa Lahiri's short story, "Mrs. Sen's". The struggle between home country and the host nation is a common theme of every diasporic literary work, which results in alienation, loss of belonging, rootlessness and trauma, in the lives of the female immigrants. My paper will further probe into the ways culinary art, for instance, cooking and serving food, and vehicles, such as buses and cars, have a significant impact on the reconstruction of female identity and the ways female characters gain agency within the narrative structure.

**Keywords:** Agency, Identity, South Asian diaspora, Western urban location, Women

## 1. Introduction

Displacement, especially if it is forced, has an affective impact on migrants. The experience influences how "homely" one might feel the trauma of displacement.<sup>1</sup> In this article, I focus on the conflict between "home" and "homelessness," which is a common feature in diasporic literatures, and the impact of this tension on the identity of the female protagonist in Jhumpa Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's". As Avtar Brah argues, 'home' is a "mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination," which is a place of "no return".<sup>2</sup> The continuous transformation of migrants' identities challenges their sense of belonging to any tangible place; as John McLeod claims, "[t]hey can be deemed not to belong there and disqualified from thinking of the new land as their 'home'".<sup>3</sup> The impact of displacement is not only physical, for instance, lack of certain kind of food in the host nation may affect the health of the immigrants, but it is also psychological. The emotional and psychological turmoil that immigrants undergo results in them becoming rooted in their past and can lead to alienation, melancholia and nostalgia. As migrants long for their homeland, they "love, hate, fear, panic, resent, envy, mourn, cheer,

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<sup>1</sup> Sara Ahmed, "Home and Away: Narratives of Migration and Estrangement." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 3 (1999): 341 and Isabel Macedo and Rosa Cabecinhas, "Diasporic Identity(ies) and the Meaning of Home in Autobiographical Documentary Films." *Lusophone Journal of Cultural Studies* 2, no. 1 (2014): 60.

<sup>2</sup> Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 188–89.

<sup>3</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 212.

complain, etc. within a different emotional register than the host country”.<sup>4</sup> The yearning of these diasporic people incites them to recreate a “home” away from home.

This struggle is depicted in Jhumpa Lahiri’s “Mrs. Sen’s,” the sixth short story in her collection, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999). The narrative explores the life of a young Indian woman, Mrs. Sen, who, similarly to Ashima in *The Namesake*, moves to the US to accompany her husband, Mr. Sen, who teaches mathematics at a university. In this article, I intend to investigate how the concept of “home” is constructed in the diasporic narrative. For the main character, Mrs. Sen, “home” refers to Calcutta and not to the apartment in New England. Her relentless effort to preserve her culture, mostly through clothes and food, is akin to Brah’s notion of “homing desire,”<sup>5</sup> defined as a wish to recreate “home” in the diasporic space. But simultaneously it critiques discourses of “fixed origins”.<sup>6</sup> This desire also acknowledges the pain that is involved in the journey and the process of settling down: the struggle between the routes and the roots that immigrants confront in their day to day lives. In this article, I will focus on the role displacement plays in the construction of a “home” between cultures in the short story, the significance of the geographical scale where the main character lives and its impact on the Bildung of the female protagonist. I aim to analyse these themes through focusing on the narrative strategy of “Mrs. Sen’s” and foregrounding the role of the two female characters, Mrs. Sen and the mother of the eleven-year old American boy, Eliot, whom Mrs. Sen babysits every afternoon.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, I will also explore the ways culinary art (preparation of food, serving and other skills related to cooking), which is associated with the native culture of the main character, and vehicles, such as cars and buses, reflect Mrs. Sen’s sense of displacement and participate in the transformation of her identity.

## 2. Narrative Strategy and Its Significance

Even though “Mrs. Sen’s” is recounted by a third person narrator, the American boy, Eliot, serves as the lens through which the protagonist’s habits and emotions are focalised.

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<sup>4</sup> Adriana Margareta Dancus, “Diasporic Feeling and Displaced Nostalgia: A Case Study: ‘Import-eksport’ and ‘Blodsband’” [sic] *Scandinavian Studies* 83, no. 2 (2011): 250.

<sup>5</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 189. In the anthropological sense, culture is defined as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” Lib Tylor, “The ‘Unhomely’ Stage.” *Studies in Theatre and Performance* 26, no. 3 (2006): 1. To define “space,” I rely on Lippard’s definition: space is where culture is lived. Lucy Lippard, *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society* (The New Press: New York, 1997): 10.

<sup>6</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 189.

<sup>7</sup> The character of Mrs. Sen is inspired by Jhumpa Lahiri’s mother who used to babysit when she was in London.



Relying on Martina Caspari's assertion that the American child's position in the narrative creates a possibility of a "new space, new hybrid and fluid sense of community,"<sup>8</sup> I argue that Eliot acts as the spokesperson for the Indian protagonist, Mrs. Sen, in this short story. His significant role is evident from the narrative structure which is framed by Eliot: the short story begins and ends with a reference to him. By placing Eliot's vision in the centre of the analysis, my paper will show that the discourses of fixed origin<sup>9</sup> can be critiqued in Lahiri's short story.

Mrs. Sen's lamenting for her family members, as witnessed by Eliot, is akin to Brah's claim that "home" is "a place of no return"<sup>10</sup>: "My sister has had a baby girl. By the time I see her, depending if Mr. Sen gets a tenure, she will be three years old. Her own aunt will be a stranger"<sup>11</sup>. Thus, Eliot's witnessing of Mrs. Sen's nostalgic recollections makes it apparent that though India appears to be a "mystic place of desire"<sup>12</sup> for her, this vision is different from what the country signifies for Eliot, the focalizer of the short story. For him, India is just a country in the East. In other words, the very narrative technique of the story problematizes discourses of fixed origin.

### 3. Comparative Analysis of the Two Female Characters

From the very beginning of his babysitting days, Eliot is aware of Mrs. Sen's obsession with her home and her traditional habits. While chopping vegetables, Mrs. Sen usually refuses to let Eliot walk around, except for one occasion: "she broke her own rule; in need of additional supplies and reluctant to rise from the catastrophic mess that barricaded her, she asked Eliot to fetch something from the kitchen".<sup>13</sup> I claim that her willingness to allow Eliot to invade the kitchen space, an area that symbolises an ongoing composition of her home culture traces,<sup>14</sup> marks the beginning of her integration into the host nation. The episode makes it obvious that although Mrs. Sen is comfortable sharing her innermost feelings in

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<sup>8</sup> Martina Caspari, "Changing the Dominant Discourse and Culture, One Eater at a Time: Subversive Discourse and Productive Intervention in 'Mrs. Sen's' in Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies*" *Pacific Coast Philology* 49, no. 2 (2014): 249 and Contrary to earlier readings of Lahiri's "Mrs. Sen's," which focused extensively on the figure of the protagonist, Martina Caspari places Eliot more in the centre of the narrative to explore how the child experiences his "home culture with new critical eyes." Caspari, "Changing the Dominant Discourse," 249.

<sup>9</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 189.

<sup>10</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 188.

<sup>11</sup> Jhumpa Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's" *Interpreter of Maladies* (London: Flamingo, 2000), 122.

<sup>12</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 188.

<sup>13</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 115.

<sup>14</sup> Jon Anderson. *Understanding Cultural Geography: Places and Traces*. (London: Routledge, 2015), 15.

the presence of Eliot, she ensures that his mother does not witness her daily activities: “By the time Eliot’s mother arrived at twenty past six, Mrs. Sen always made sure all evidence of her chopping was disposed of. The blade was scrubbed, rinsed, dried, folded, and stowed away in a cupboard with the aid of a stepladder”.<sup>15</sup> Mrs. Sen’s urgent act to dispose of the evidence of her chopping reveals her inferiority complex and shame in front of the American woman. To Eliot, Mrs. Sen represents the “other,” and it is ironic that even though Mrs. Sen serves her ethnic food to his mother, she “removes everything” related to her culinary art that “marks her otherness,”<sup>16</sup> as if she was a powerless, marginalised figure compared to the dominant American woman.

I further wish to argue that Mrs. Sen and Eliot’s mother act as foils for one another. Mrs. Sen is a young Indian woman who has moved from Calcutta to the US after her marriage, following her husband. Though the narrator does not provide adequate details about Eliot’s mother so as to familiarise the readers with her practices and actions, her constant presence in the narrative is foregrounded mostly through Eliot. The striking contrast that instantly comes to the forefront is that Eliot’s mother is a financially independent, American woman. Even though she is a single mother who has to work outside her home to support her family, she seems to be emotionally detached from her son. On the other hand, Mrs. Sen is loving, affectionate and welcoming. In short, Mrs. Sen is everything that an eleven-year-old can desire for in a parent and which he seems to lack from his own mother. Hence, Eliot does not mind being at Mrs. Sen’s place during the afternoon. He becomes involved in Mrs. Sen’s life emotionally and she is often portrayed through his eyes in the narrative.

#### 4. Creation-Recreation of “Home”

As Brah points out, “home” is the “lived experience”<sup>17</sup> of a particular locality. For the diasporic women, the concept of “home” marks the varying experiences of the “pains and pleasures,” the “terrors and contentments,” or “the highs and humdrum of everyday lived culture”<sup>18</sup> that remind them of the moments that they have spent with the people in their homeland. The lived experience results in a desire to recreate a home-like experience, which Brah calls “homing desire,”<sup>19</sup> within the diasporic space of the host nation. Mrs. Sen’s

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<sup>15</sup> Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s,” 117.

<sup>16</sup> Anita Mannur, *Culinary Fictions: Food in the South Asian Diasporic Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2010), 159.

<sup>17</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 188.

<sup>18</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 189.

<sup>19</sup> Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora*, 189.

trauma is caused by her displacement and constant struggle to establish a stable sense of home in the host culture. Throughout the narrative, she tries to recreate traces of her native country, her home in Calcutta, within the university apartment in the US. Unfortunately, however, she is never successful in reconciling the differences that lie between these two homes. At the beginning of the narrative, the notion of "home" for her is fixed: "Everything is there"<sup>20</sup> in Calcutta, she asserts. The narrator's detailed description of Mrs. Sen's US apartment proves her detachment from her new home:

The lobby was tiled in unattractive squares of tan, with a row of mailboxes marked with masking tape or white labels. Inside, intersecting shadows left by vacuum cleaner were frozen on the surface of a plush pear-colored carpet. Mismatched remnants of other carpets were positioned in front of the sofa and chairs, like individual welcome mats anticipating where a person's feet would contact the floor. White drum-shaped lampshades flanking the sofa were still wrapped in the manufacturer's plastic.<sup>21</sup>

It is rather obvious why Mrs. Sen has never really felt at home in her new apartment. I would claim that the chaotic situation in her apartment is akin to Homi Bhabha's notion of "unhomeliness,"<sup>22</sup> which highlights the protagonist's lack of desire to integrate into the host culture. Adapting Freud's theory of the *unheimlich*,<sup>23</sup> Bhabha defines the feeling of unhomeliness as "the sense of dislocation that arises when the boundaries between the outside world and the domestic domain blur."<sup>24</sup> Mrs. Sen's displacement from Calcutta to the US has resulted in a similar unhomely situation: she is expected to negotiate, erase and blur the boundaries between the inside and the outside, that is, her home and public place, and between her past and present. I argue that Eliot's presence in Mrs. Sen's household blurs the boundary between her domestic and public space, which results in a chaotic situation within the private space of the apartment. The American boy perceives her constant uneasiness and disorientation in her new environment to be due to her forced displacement. By positioning Eliot as a focalizer, the narrative mediates the cultural differences<sup>25</sup> such as

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<sup>20</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 113.

<sup>21</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 112.

<sup>22</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 141.

<sup>23</sup> Freud in his essay "The Uncanny" ("Das Unheimlich", in German), uses the term *unheimlich* and its opposite *heimlich*. Freud defines the term uncanny as something which is frightening yet familiar. For Freud, the uncanny situates the strangeness within the ordinary. Annette Russell, "Journeys through the Unheimlich and the Unhomely," *Roehampton Journal for Academic and Creative Writing* 1, (2017): 3.

<sup>24</sup> Russell, "Journeys," 3.

<sup>25</sup> As Hofstede explains, although certain aspects of culture are physically visible, their meaning is invisible: "their cultural meaning...lies precisely and only in the way these practices are interpreted by the insiders."

Indianness and Americanness, and it also highlights different attitudes towards food and driving, which are deployed by the two female characters.

“Mrs. Sen’s” portrays the isolation of a female immigrant in her apartment. At the beginning of the narrative, she is unable to part with her native customs and traditions as she refuses to acknowledge that India is no longer her geographical home. Her dissatisfaction with her new environment is also evident when she discloses to Eliot that “[h]ere, in this place where Mr. Sen has brought me, I cannot sometimes sleep in so much silence”.<sup>26</sup> The silence that Mrs. Sen complains about is the result of the absence of her family members and the memories associated with her nearest and dearest. It is not only through her home decor that Mrs. Sen attempts to preserve her home culture but her connection with her homeland is also apparent through her obsession with Indian clothes. Even when in the US, she prefers saris to Western attire and the lack of opportunity to wear them frustrates her:

She flung open the drawers of the bureau and the door of the closet, filled with saris of every imaginable texture and shade, brocaded with gold and silver threads. Some were transparent, tissue thin, others as thick as drapes, with tassels knotted along the edges. In the closet they were on hangers; in the drawers they were folded flat, or wound tightly like thick scrolls. She sifted through the drawers, letting saris spill over the edges. “When have I ever worn this one? And this? And this?” She tossed the saris one by one from the drawers, then pried several from their hangers. They landed like a pile of tangled sheets on the bed.<sup>27</sup>

The pile of unworn saris in the cupboard symbolises Mrs. Sen’s resistance to American culture. She is reluctant to relinquish her past and is caught between two contrasting worlds. But it is also important to note that Mrs. Sen has no friends in the US neither does she like to leave her apartment, without her husband. Thus, she lacks an opportunity to display her designer traditional wear.

Even though Mrs. Sen is unable to fit in due to her preoccupation with the past, for Eliot, it is his mother who “look[s] odd” when she visits Mrs. Sen in her “cuffed, beige shorts and rope-soled shoes”.<sup>28</sup> Her shaved knees and thighs are “too exposed”<sup>29</sup> amidst the covered objects in Mrs. Sen’s apartment. This is confusing as what Eliot’s mother is

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Geert Hofstede, *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind* (London: Harper Collins Business, 1991), 8.

<sup>26</sup> Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s,” 115.

<sup>27</sup> Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s,” 125.

<sup>28</sup> Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s,” 112.

<sup>29</sup> Lahiri, “Mrs. Sen’s,” 113.

wearing is typical American attire, yet in Mrs. Sen's apartment, which resembles a miniature version of her Calcutta home, the American clothes look out of place. In contrast to Mrs. Sen's apartment, which is nice and warm, the tiny beach house where Eliot and his mother live is rather cold, and they have to carry a portable heater from one room to another. I read the differences between these houses as a reflection of Eliot's relationship with the two female characters within the confines of the houses. Although he is a mere audience at Mrs. Sen's place, he always feels the warmth in her behaviour and never senses any communication gap with her which is in contrast to the relationship that he has with his mother. But at the same time, Eliot finds it strange that Mrs. Sen, who is otherwise very affectionate and loving, does not display emotions for her husband. She always refers to him by his surname, "Mr. Sen,"<sup>30</sup> as if "they are only distantly acquainted" and "disobeying some unspoken rule between them".<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the narrative suggests that "home" is not only a geographical location, but it is human feelings and emotions that make a place "homely". This is evident from the relationship and bonding that Mrs. Sen and Eliot share despite their cultural differences.

## 5. Memory and Nostalgia: Remembering "Home"

Similarly to most diasporic narratives where nostalgia produces frustration and disappointment in diasporic subjects, Lahiri's short story exposes the protagonist to be suffering from "double displacement"<sup>32</sup> through Eliot's vision. This anguish is not only because of a physical displacement but also a "metaphorical one that adds to her sense of exile".<sup>33</sup> Eliot realises that one of the things that makes Mrs. Sen happy is the arrival of letters from her family. It is her "custom to check the mailbox"<sup>34</sup> daily. Apart from letters which connects Mrs. Sen to her native land, the memory of "home" is also evoked by a cassette recording of her relatives that was her farewell present when she travelled to the US with her husband:

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<sup>30</sup> One explanation that can be provided here is that it is a custom in many Bengali households that a wife is not supposed to address her husband by his first name and mostly uses a nickname or refers to him as her child's father.

<sup>31</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 112 and 118.

<sup>32</sup> Gayatri Gopinath, "Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion" in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, ed. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden: Blackwell, 2003), 261–79.

<sup>33</sup> Gopinath, "Nostalgia," 261–79.

<sup>34</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 121.

she played a cassette of people talking in her language...As the succession of voices laughed and said their bit, Mrs. Sen identified each speaker...The final voice on the tape belonged to Mrs. Sen's mother. It was quieter and sounded more serious than the others. There was a pause between each sentence, and during this pause Mrs. Sen translated for Eliot: "The price of goat rose two rupees. The mangoes at the market are not very sweet. College Street is flooded." She turned off the tape. "These are the things that happened the day I left India." The next day she played the same cassette all over again.<sup>35</sup>

The above recording may seem trivial but for Mrs. Sen it is priceless. Her repetitive desire to listen to the recorded cassette ascertains that she "positions her own existence in the past, as if it were frozen in time, stuck in the movements and contexts in which these events were produced".<sup>36</sup> Although she scarcely communicates with anyone in the US, it is not only her Indianness which is at stake that causes alienation, but she also faces difficulty in integrating into the host culture.

Even though Eliot becomes a part of Mrs. Sen's nostalgic journey by being a witness to her emotions, his mother, an American living in her home country, is unable to grasp the emotional agony that Mrs. Sen goes through. In contrast to his emotional bonding with Mrs. Sen, when Eliot recalls his memories with his mother, he can only think of the times when he is deprived of his mother's affection: "It was one of the rare days his mother had a day off, but they didn't go anywhere [...] Eliot had suggested that they go through the car wash a few miles down the road [...] but his mother said she was too tired".<sup>37</sup> Therefore, while Mrs. Sen suffers from the trauma of being physically away from home, that is, her country of origin, Eliot is psychologically homeless as he lacks a close and emotionally stable relationship with his mother.

## 6. Culinary Art and Kitchen as a Transformative Space

Culinary art, such as cooking food, serving and other skills related to the preparation of meals, is usually regarded as a practice that confines women within the world of domesticity and, at the same time, reflects a nostalgic longing for home. The protagonist's obsession with her home culture is clear from the very beginning of the narrative. Mrs. Sen's ever-

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<sup>35</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 128.

<sup>36</sup> Sofia Cavalcanti, "Unreal Homes: Belonging and Becoming in Indian Women Narratives" *Humanities* 7, no. 133 (2018): 6.

<sup>37</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 116.

present nostalgia for India is not only evident through her recreation of an Indian home within her US apartment, her preference for Indian attire or her reminiscence of the time she spent with her family members, but also through the portrayal of her elaborate culinary performances. As James Gilroy observes, "taste and smell, 'our most delicate and seemingly fragile senses,' act as the most 'persevering and zealous keepers of our past experiences'".<sup>38</sup> The narrative represents food as a cultural signifier<sup>39</sup> since it evokes Mrs. Sen's home culture, as well as a source of physical nourishment and sustenance. Mrs. Sen takes refuge in culinary art to dissipate nostalgia and homesickness, an attempt to negotiate her homely emotions.<sup>40</sup> It is my contention that Mrs. Sen's culinary art signifies her accomplishment as a successful female immigrant in the host nation, because her preparation of Indian snacks for Eliot's mother highlights her desire to cross her cultural boundaries, but, at the same time, she also preserves the culture of her homeland. Her kitchen space and the living room, the locations where she cooks, eats and serves food, become ambivalent spaces, akin to Bhabha's hybrid third space.<sup>41</sup> This hybridity is primarily due to the presence of the American boy, Eliot. The kitchen and the living room not only become the meeting ground for cultural exchange, but they also affect Mrs. Sen's identity as within these spaces she becomes empowered through her culinary performances. Thus, the culinary practices transform the kitchen from a limited, domestic area into an empowering location. In other words, the food imageries in Lahiri's narrative not only bring back memories of "home" as the protagonist uses the medium of food to remain culturally tied to her motherland, but they also epitomize her agency.

Besides the arrival of letters from India, the other thing that makes Mrs. Sen content is "fish from the sea side".<sup>42</sup> Fish plays a significant role in her everyday life as it is a "tool for nostalgia"<sup>43</sup> and has the power to change her emotional stability. What makes her unhappy is the unavailability of the right kind of fish in the US:

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 98–109.

<sup>39</sup> Caspari, "Changing," 246.

<sup>40</sup> To emphasize the relation between food and memory in diaspora narratives, Paula Torreiro Pazo indicates that "the evocative and emotional power of food, as a cultural artefact, continues to be the backbone of many Asian-American narratives of migration and displacement, in which the characters, frequently described as deeply nostalgic and homesick, 'eat in order to remember'." Paula Torreiro Pazo, "Diasporic Tastescapes: Intersections of Food and Identity in Asian American Literature." Thesis. University of Coruna (2014): 110.

<sup>41</sup> Bhabha, *Location*, 252.

<sup>42</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 123.

<sup>43</sup> Madhuparna Mitra, "Lahiri's 'Mrs. Sen's.'" *The Explicator* 64, no. 3 (2006): 185.

'I can never find a single fish I like, never a single.' Mrs. Sen said she had grown up eating fish twice a day. She added that in Calcutta people ate fish first thing in the morning, last thing before bed, as a snack after school if they were lucky. They ate the tail, the eggs, even the head. It was available in any market, at any hour, from dawn until midnight.<sup>44</sup>

Her dissatisfaction with the types of fish available in the US is not only a food-lover's struggle, it is rather a cultural issue which shows an immigrant woman's desire to keep her native culture alive in the diaspora.

The space of the kitchen in any household is usually associated with domesticity but for Lahiri's protagonist, the living room, where she sits on the floor and performs her culinary art of chopping and cutting vegetables, symbolises a site of agency. Migrant women, "unable to gain access to other spaces, turn [their] patriarchal and solitary confinement to the kitchen into [their] personal shrine of Indianness".<sup>45</sup> Being a victim of alienation and homelessness, Mrs. Sen feels most confident and empowered in her living room. Within this inner space, the element that symbolizes her self-affirmation is the cutting blade that she brought with her from India. This cutting blade in Bengali is known as "*bonti*".<sup>46</sup> The narrator reveals why she uses this particular blade, instead of any regular knife, as for Mrs. Sen, the *bonti* is not just a piece of cutlery but it represents her ties with her motherland and recalls memories of her Indian community:

'Whenever there is a wedding in the family', she told Eliot one day, 'or a large celebration of any kind, my mother sends out word in the evening for all the neighbourhood women to bring blades just like this one, and then sit in an enormous circle on the roof of our building, laughing and gossiping and slicing fifty kilos of vegetables through the night.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 123–24. In *Migrant's Table*, Krishnendu Ray associates fish with diasporic Bengali people, claiming that it is not only a literary image but also a cultural and social issue: fish, along with rice, is the most enduring and potent symbol of "Bengaliness." Krishnendu Ray, *The Migrants Table: Meals and Memories in Bengali-American Households*, (2004), 155.

<sup>45</sup> Pazo, "Diasporic Tastescaapes," 115.

<sup>46</sup> Banerji, "The Bengali Bonti," 23–26. *Bonti*, is a Bengali term for a curved blade used to chop, peel or dice vegetable, fish or fruit. It is a common cooking tool found in both rural and urban parts of Calcutta. Bengali women perform the task of chopping or peeling by sitting on the floor or standing. Chitrita Banerji mentions that this tool is "associated with Bengali women, and the image of a woman seated at her *bonti*, surrounded by baskets of vegetables, is a cultural icon." Chitrita Banerji, "The Bengali Bonti" *Gastronomica: The Journal of Critical Food Studies* (2013): 23–26.

<sup>47</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 115.



In the unfamiliar surroundings in the US, the *bonti* signifies a sense of belonging, reassuring Mrs. Sen of her connection with India. By literally and metaphorically holding onto this tool, she acquires an identity of her own,<sup>48</sup> re-establishing her lost self which is connected to India.

Mrs. Sen's domesticity is also foregrounded by her very name. The fact that she is only referred to as someone's wife proves her dependence. Similar to typical Indian women, who are either known as someone's daughter, wife or mother, the narrative does not provide the protagonist with a first name. Therefore, in order to subvert the patriarchal confinement, she takes refuge in her culinary art:

Each afternoon Mrs. Sen lifted the blade and locked it into a place, so that it met the base at an angle. Facing the sharp edge without ever touching it, she took whole vegetables between her hands and hacked them apart: cauliflower, cabbage, butternut squash. She split things in half, then quarters, speedily producing florets, cubes, slices, and shreds. She could peel a potato in seconds...While she worked she kept an eye on the television and an eye on Eliot, but never seemed to keep an eye on the blade.<sup>49</sup>

Cooking is, therefore, an empowering act for Mrs. Sen. Eliot is amazed by her efficiency and skills. He observes minute details of her culinary act as she prepares elaborate meals either for her husband or a variety of snacks for Eliot and his mother. The American child is especially fascinated by the special blade that the protagonist uses, which reminds him of "the prow of a Viking ship".<sup>50</sup> Even though for the American child this is simply a strange and unique tool, as Angelo Monaco claims, the *bonti* acts as a "metonymic vehicle of ambivalence"<sup>51</sup> in the narrative, through which Mrs. Sen longs to transport herself from America to her homeland.

In contrast to the extensive efforts that Mrs. Sen puts into preparing her meals, Eliot's mother opts for readymade food. The narrator reveals that after reaching home from her office, the first thing that Eliot's mother does is to pour a glass of wine and eat bread and cheese, and later order pizza. The reference to the wine and cheese, and the manner she consumes them in a rush evokes the world she lives in: a hassle-free life where less energy is required to prepare food. After the day's work at her office, however, it is understandable

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<sup>48</sup> Pazo, "Diasporic Tastescapes," 115.

<sup>49</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 114.

<sup>50</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 114.

<sup>51</sup> Angelo Monaco, "Neurosis as Resilience in Jhumpa Lahiri's Diasporic Short Fictions" *Transcript Verlag* (2018): 167.

why Eliot's mother has no energy to prepare meals. The narrator also reveals that the only occasion when she took the effort to prepare something was the time when "she'd invited a man from her office to dinner – a man who'd spent the night in his mother's bedroom, but whom Eliot never saw again".<sup>52</sup> Eliot also recognises that the type of food that these two female characters prefer varies widely, as his mother discloses her dislike for Mrs. Sen's concoctions. Thus, from Eliot's point of view, food represents human bonding: the labour that Mrs. Sen puts in preparing a meal can be read as a loving gesture of an Indian mother, which clearly shows the difference between her and Eliot's emotionally unavailable mother.

## 7. Vehicular Cosmopolitanism: A Transformative Perspective

Vehicles, such as cars and buses, play a significant role in Lahiri's short story. For Mrs. Sen, who is oscillating between two contrasting worlds, her home and the host country, the car and the act of driving, have a significant meaning. Due to her displacement, Lahiri's protagonist is no longer only an Indian but she has become a "citizen of the world".<sup>53</sup> To explore the significance of commodified life of object, such as the car, which vitally establishes radical transnational modes of belonging,<sup>54</sup> Hengameh Saroukhani coined the term "vehicular cosmopolitanism" in her analysis of Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists* (2005).<sup>55</sup> In Lahiri's narrative, as I intend to show, the car, on the one hand, represents an enormous challenge for the female protagonist, as she has always disliked it: "I hate it. I hate driving. I won't go on,"<sup>56</sup> while on the other hand, the inner space of the car becomes a transformative space in the short story, a "micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion".<sup>57</sup> For critics such as Paul Gilroy and Homi Bhabha, motility, as a cultural condition, is a state that aims to combat the state of pathology of borders, belligerent nationalisms and the rationale of racism.<sup>58</sup> As it is evident in the inner space of the car, where Eliot is a constant companion to Mrs. Sen, the constant cultural exchange with the American boy transforms the female protagonist's identity. The car signifies a promise in Lahiri's short story: "Mr. Sen says that

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<sup>52</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 123.

<sup>53</sup> Hengameh Saroukhani, "Vehicular Cosmopolitanism: The Car in Bernardine Evaristo's *Soul Tourists*" *Études anglaises* 70, (2017): 12.

<sup>54</sup> Saroukhani, "Vehicular Cosmopolitanism," 13.

<sup>55</sup> Saroukhani, "Vehicular Cosmopolitanism," 12. In Evaristo's *Soul Tourists*, the car represents a *poesis* [emphasis in the original], that unsettles the humanistic assumptions of vernacular cosmopolitanism. Saroukhani, "Vehicular Cosmopolitanism," 11.

<sup>56</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 131.

<sup>57</sup> Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Saroukhani, "Vehicular Cosmopolitanism," 14.

once I receive my license, everything will improve. What do you think, Eliot? Will things improve?' 'You could go places,' Eliot suggested. 'You could go anywhere.' 'Could I drive all the way to Calcutta? How long would that take, Eliot?'"<sup>59</sup> Eliot realises that Mrs. Sen has never been able to consider the land of America as her own country. As perceived through the child's eyes, Mrs. Sen's fear of driving exposes her lack of desire to integrate into the new culture, as she is often ashamed of American habits, for instance, she criticises Eliot's mother for being away from her son for most of the day.

One of the major differences that exists between the two female characters is their attitudes towards driving. It is through Eliot's experiences that this difference is revealed: "It seemed so simple when he sat beside his mother, gliding in the evenings back to the beach house. Then the road was just a road, the other cars merely part of the scenery. But when he sat with Mrs. Sen, under an autumn sun that glowed without warmth through the trees, he saw that same stream of cars made her knuckles pale, her wrists tremble, and her English falter".<sup>60</sup> Though driving is quite common in the US, this is a new experience for Mrs. Sen, as in India her family had drivers. As she boasts, "[a]t home, you know, we have a driver".<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Sen's fear of driving at the beginning of the narrative is gradually reduced because of her craving for fish, which is related to her home culture. Thus, her cultural association enables the protagonist to transform her personality.

The craving for fresh fish from the market, which instigates Mrs. Sen to drive, is associated with her native culture. The transitory space of the car also becomes a medium which connects the domestic space to the more open spaces. In other words, with the help of her car, Mrs. Sen makes the journey from her home to the fish market. Although it has to be acknowledged that the car journey has not been a successful one for her: she meets with an accident and eventually gives up driving. The accident highlights her struggle between her living in the past, as she used to have a driver back in India, and her efforts to adapt to the new present. The unavailability of her husband and her fear of driving compel Mrs. Sen to take the town bus to go to the seaside to buy fish. However, after encountering minor racial discrimination on the bus, she takes the risk of driving alone, without Mr. Sen's assistance. Hence, vehicles become mediums through which, on the one hand, she attempts to fulfil her homing desire, but which, on the other hand, participate in the transformation of her identity.

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<sup>59</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 119.

<sup>60</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 120–21.

<sup>61</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 113.

## 8. Transformation of Identities

Throughout the course of Lahiri's narrative, both protagonist and the child redefine their notion of home. Eliot has been a constant companion to Mrs. Sen: he has been a witness to her obsession with her home culture, cooking, and also her difficulties with driving. Having spent a lot of time at Mrs. Sen's apartment, the child is exposed to a new culture which is rather different from his own. However, he does not share this new experience with his mother. Even though Eliot is able to recognize Mrs. Sen's innermost feelings, he prefers to hide this knowledge:

When, eventually, his mother asked him in the car if he'd noticed a change in Mrs. Sen's behaviour, he said he hadn't. He didn't tell her that Mrs. Sen paced the apartment, staring at the plastic-covered lampshades as if noticing them for the first time. He didn't tell her she switched on the television but never watched it, or that she made herself tea but let it grow cold on the coffee table.<sup>62</sup>

Although the American boy is not familiar with Mrs. Sen's cultural background, he can grasp her emotional turmoil. However, his choice of not revealing his experiences to his mother hints that he knows intuitively that his mother will not be able to understand the vulnerable position of the Indian woman, so far away from her homeland. Gradually, Eliot begins to identify himself with Mrs. Sen. He becomes aware of his own needs and feelings: "[T]he first day, just as he was taking off his coat, the phone rang. It was his mother calling from her office. 'You're a big boy now, Eliot,' she told him. 'You okay?' Eliot looked out the kitchen window, at gray waves receding from the shore, and said he was fine".<sup>63</sup> It is not only Mrs. Sen who suffers from loneliness and depression, then, but Eliot is also in need of physical and emotional companionship.

## 9. Impact of Places on Human Emotion

Unfortunately, the cultural exchange between Mrs. Sen and Eliot does not last long. The relationship of the protagonist and the American boy has not only been limited to the domestic space but they have also become close companions through their car journeys.

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<sup>62</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 128.

<sup>63</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 135.

On the one hand, the car becomes a site of cultural exchange between Mrs. Sen and Eliot, and on the other hand, it participates in the *Bildung* of the protagonist. During one of their trips to the fish market, which is their only solo trip without Mr. Sen, Mrs. Sen causes a car accident in which both of them are injured. After the accident, Eliot's mother refuses to send her son to Mrs. Sen's place and decides that he will stay alone at home during her office hours. Although Eliot's mother calls him as soon as he gets home from school, she fails to understand that he still needs affection, love and tenderness, and, more importantly, her company.

Transformation of emotional experiences is also reflected by the colours associated with the physical places: when Eliot is at Mrs. Sen's apartment, he is exposed to a vibrant atmosphere, evident from the bright colours reminiscent of India, the food she makes, the smell of her food, such as the combination of all the spices and the colour of her vermillion.<sup>64</sup> "Mrs. Sen's slippers, each a different color," "pimpled yellow fat off chicken parts," "crushed vermillion," "bright pink yogurt".<sup>65</sup> Contrary to these vibrant colours, which suggest a lively surrounding, at the end of the story, Eliot is portrayed looking out at the "gray waves receding from the shore"<sup>66</sup> in the beach house, which reveals a gloomy state of affairs as the child suffers from homelessness, melancholy and isolation. It is ironic that his mother, in the beginning of the narrative, had been looking for someone to take care of him and in the end, it is Eliot who longs for human contact and, perhaps, learns to take care of himself. It is also important to note that even though Mrs. Sen babysits Eliot, gradually it turns out that it is Eliot who looks after her. Each afternoon, Eliot has been a constant companion to her. Mrs. Sen, who yearns to have company as most of the time she is alone at home because her husband is busy at the university, shares her innermost feelings and emotions with Eliot, making him a part of her alienation, rootlessness and melancholia. Through the medium of her letters, recorded cassettes or stories about her homeland, Mrs. Sen metaphorically takes Eliot with her on her oscillating journey between both worlds, her homeland and the host nation.

Therefore, though at first sight, Lahiri's short story, "Mrs. Sen's," appears to be a simple tale of a female immigrant's journey from her home country to the US, with the help of the American boy, Eliot's focalisation, the multi-layered symbolisms of the text come to the surface. The narrative intricately deals with issues such as displacement, desire for homeland

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<sup>64</sup> Vermillion: In Bengali it is known as *sindoor*, which is worn by married women along the parting of their hair. It is usually red or orange-red coloured cosmetic powder from the Indian subcontinent. In Hindu communities *sindoor* symbolises matrimony and loyalty of a wife towards her husband. Vermillion represents the female energy and is worn by women to ensure the longevity of the husband.

<sup>65</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 114–18.

<sup>66</sup> Lahiri, "Mrs. Sen's," 135.

and the sense of belonging as related to particular geographical locations. Even though the protagonist of the narrative is an Indian woman, an American child's vision reveals a cultural hybridity that challenges Mrs. Sen's sense of home and fixed cultural origins. My article has explored the differences that exist between the two female characters, Mrs. Sen and Eliot's mother, as perceived by the narrative's focalizer, Eliot. While the American woman is less connected to her home and her child, Mrs. Sen satiates her homing desire by remembering her family members through recorded cassettes. Receiving letters from her relatives is also a manifestation of her ties with her home country, the memory that she cherishes being so far away from her home and family members. Her obsession with cooking, and her craving for fresh fish enable her to remain grounded in her ethnic culture. Yet again, it is her desire for fish, a common Bengali food, that compels Mrs. Sen to overcome her fear of driving, thereby becoming more open to the culture of the host country. However, the text remains ambiguous as to whether Mrs. Sen can be considered a successful immigrant or not. Through her preservation of native culture she seems to reject assimilation but at other times, such as when dealing with her gastro-accomplishments, she tries to adapt to the new present.

The narrative also reveals that it is not only Mrs. Sen who desires to recreate a home of her own: Eliot, and perhaps his mother as well, suffer from a sense of homelessness and crave to establish meaningful human relationships. This suggests that home is not a fixed place of origin in this story but is rather an unsteady emotional attachment. It is the presence of certain human beings within the geographical locations that make the real meaning of "home". Thus, through the conflict between "home" and "homelessness" the narrative explores the development of the South Asian diasporic female protagonist.

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**DÁVID SOMOGYI**

**“The blacklist was a time of evil...”**

The Blacklisting in the McCarthy Era and the Hollywood Ten

Pro&Contra 5

No. 1 (2021) 25–47.



## Abstract

After World War II, the Second Red Scare planted the seeds of uncertainty and hatred throughout the U.S. Before the fall of McCarthyism, ten screenwriters from Hollywood faced prosecutions due to their past allegiances. They were all members of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA). President Harry S. Truman (1884–1972) and his associates were committed to exposing anyone with even the slightest connection to the CPUSA although the President was himself a liberal. This research sheds light on the Hollywood Ten’s unfortunate fate (henceforth: Ten) while discussing its contemporary politics. The Ten refused to confess and talk during their prosecutions, which led to their careers’ destruction despite their blacklisting being lifted during the sixties by individuals in the industry including Dalton Trumbo (1905–1976) and Kirk Douglas (1916–2020). In the present study, relevant historical evidence, materials, and sources were consulted. It is argued here that the Hollywood Ten story retains an enormous influence on the current U.S. political climate and proposes that the recent #MeToo movement would have failed without the sacrifice of the Hollywood Ten.

**Keywords:** blacklist, Hollywood Ten, McCarthyism, #MeToo, The Second Red Scare

## Introduction

The period after the Second World War was a time of uncertainty and chaos. Even though the United States had seen relative peace on the home front and did not suffer the ravages witnessed elsewhere, it still suffered significant losses. Its political and ideological values were shaken, which led to a growing fear and dread in the nation.<sup>1</sup> This fear was encapsulated by the Second Red Scare, a phenomenon exploited by various people like Joseph McCarthy (1908–1957) during the Cold War. The fear of active Soviet spies within the U.S. gave him enormous power to dissect and strip people’s civic rights and liberties. One group in particular was the Hollywood Ten, comprising ten Hollywood directors, writers, and producers deemed communist by the government. They are listed in the second part of the paper.<sup>2</sup>

According to the research, loyalty hearings were held at those trying times to cement people’s allegiances to the USA. The Hollywood Ten chose not to testify during the

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<sup>1</sup> “Take A Closer Look: America Goes to War.” *The National WWII Museum*. <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/students-teachers/student-resources/research-starters/america-goes-war-take-closer-look>

<sup>2</sup> “Hollywood Ten.” *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hollywood-Ten>.

hearings, which lead to the end of their careers. Most of them spent six to twelve months in confinement after the prosecutions. They also spent some time in prison, away from their loved ones and families.<sup>3</sup>

Why did the Ten fight the government? Dalton Trumbo (1905–1976) was the most famous of them, even managing to continue his moviemaking career to some extent after the Hollywood Blacklist. He is known for screenplays including *Roman Holiday* (1953), *Spartacus* (1960), directed by Stanley Kubrick (July 26, 1928 – March 07, 1999), and *Exodus* (1960), directed by Otto Preminger (1905–1986), *The Fixer* (1968), *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971 also director), and *Papillon* (1973). Trumbo was among the Hollywood Ten and refused to testify before the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) in 1947 during the Committee's investigation of Communist influences in Hollywood. During this time, some of his screenplays were named after other filmmakers and he wrote others under various pseudonyms. However, in many cases, his films were shown without mentioning the screenwriter. He also visited Hungary in connection with Bernard Malamud's novel, *The Fixer* (1968, directed by John Frankenheimer), shot in Budapest's *Mafilm* studio, and stayed for four months in Hungary.<sup>4</sup> He and his fellow prosecuted men were part of the Communist Party of the United States when it was acceptable to be a part of such groups. As he argued in his loyalty hearing: "I do not belong to any organization whose conduct is intentionally destructive of them inimical to the government of the United States..."<sup>5</sup> When the Second Red Scare enveloped America, they suffered and fought against McCarthyism and their ensuing blacklisting. McCarthyism was a blanket term for unfounded accusations against people regarding loyalty to the country mainly related to communism.<sup>6</sup> Trumbo also followed international affairs, and in private, he criticized some aspects of Soviet behavior; however, he never wrote anti-Soviet articles. In personal correspondence, he was asked whether he ever planned to write a book about the crimes of the Stalin regime, Trumbo replied: "It is entirely conceivable that I would ... do so," adding that he had protested the imprisonment of writers opposed to the Soviet invasion of Hungary (1956), the resumption of nuclear testing (1961), and the prosecution and sentencing of dissident Soviet writers (Daniel and Sinyavsky, 1966).<sup>7</sup>

The prevailing atmosphere in the USA created a hostile environment for those looking to settle there and continued to do so until the fall of McCarthyism. For decades, people

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<sup>3</sup>"Hollywood Ten."

<sup>4</sup>Larry Ceplair and Christopher Trumbo, *Dalton Trumbo: Blacklisted Hollywood Radical* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2010), 464.

<sup>5</sup>"Dalton Trumbo, HUAC Hearings." *Wisconsin Center for Film & Theater Research*. <https://wcftr.commarts.wisc.edu/exhibits/dalton-trumbo-papers/huac-hearings>

<sup>6</sup>"The Hollywood Ten."

<sup>7</sup>Ceplair and Trumbo, *Dalton Trumbo*, 474.

lived in fear of a nuclear war while enlightened individuals like the Hollywood Ten suffered their unfortunate fate. Along with the American people, institutions also lost their civil rights and had to protect themselves from the prosecutions’ prying eyes. As Geoffrey R. Stone, a contemporary professor of the law, argued, “Even passing over the unfairness to those discharged or denied employment, the program’s impact was devastating.”<sup>8</sup>

Loyalty hearings destroyed trust in the government. McCarthyism was a short-sighted idea that only benefited those willing to sacrifice others (Durr 304). How then did Joseph McCarthy rise to power? How did the Hollywood Ten deal with the blacklisting? What can we learn as a society from their fall? The three parts of this paper will scrutinize these questions. Since the Hollywood Ten story is still one of U.S. History’s blind spots and in the shadow of the current #MeToo movement in Hollywood, I feel it is essential to raise awareness of this era and its history. To achieve the goals mentioned above, the transcripts of Dalton Trumbo’s loyalty hearings are utilized. These written materials can be associated with the Ten, like Trumbo’s 1939 anti-war novel *Johnny Got His Gun*. The 1950 John Berry documentary on the group is used as a primary source.

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## The Second Red Scare

It is true that currently, in the twenty-first century, we are blessed with a relatively non-hostile environment. However, tensions are rising all over the globe due to international politics and the coronavirus. The era analyzed in this paper are not dissimilar to the current climate. The Second Red Scare and the McCarthy era resulted from the Second World War.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the sources, after the Second World War, international relations were destabilized and fragile. The government of the United States were on high alert defending their state secrets from foreign spies and terrorists. We need to understand the background of public fear in those times in the U.S. before going any further. In the November of 1959, the United States Armed Forces introduced the DEFCON (Defense Readiness Condition) alert state to monitor foreign nuclear activity. This system has five readiness levels, ranging from a non-increased, usual readiness level to maximum readiness with implications of a nuclear war. The defense system was on level two for most of the Cold War. The state

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<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey R. Stone, “Free Speech in the Age of McCarthy: A Cautionary Tale,” *California Law Review* 93, no. 5 (2005): 1393.

<sup>9</sup> “Take A Closer Look: America Goes to War.”

increased its security measures and had multiple defense protocols monitoring intelligence and critical establishments. This defense classification was a form of reassurance for the American people during the Cold War.<sup>10</sup>

Espionage was not unheard of even in the USA; the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), formed in September 1947, acts as an intelligence-gathering institution. It was the American equivalent of the KGB (Committee for State Security). However, the CIA primarily operated on foreign soil while the KGB dealt with the internal problems of the Soviet Union. They initiated multiple operations in the Cold War, gathering anything they could on Soviet troopers, movements, and their influence on other nations, such as Cuba and Guatemala. The information the CIA came acquired was highly classified; not even different branches of the U.S. government had access to it due to security reasons. Covert Operations carried out by the CIA relied heavily on public covers, political immunities, and fictional organizations for them to be as efficient as possible while gathering intelligence. These facts are essential for this paper because the fruits of espionage assisted McCarthyism create the illusion that the Soviet Union was relentlessly trying to infiltrate American soil.<sup>11</sup>

The Communist Party of the United States (CPUSA) welcomed people into their ranks when established in 1919. The people of the USA did not necessarily support the Soviets; they instead saw communism as an alternate idea for freedom and prosperity. After the Great Depression, some desired more than a return to capitalism and the rat race. The CPUSA was against fascism and initiated multiple programs for those looking for jobs and housing after the Great Depression. Since the USA and the Soviet Union were allies during the Second World War, the Communist Party had no conflict with the government and authorities.<sup>12</sup> Things began to change after the war when the two superpowers came to loggerheads. The CPUSA was vilified, and most of its members cut ties when the Second Red Scare erupted during the Cold War.<sup>13</sup>

According to the sources, the United States had good reason for closely monitoring foreign activity, as they had multiple breaches in security during the war by Soviet spies. It is understandable why they chose to enforce such strict measures, although their fight for global surveillance over their country led to the loss of many people's civic rights. As mentioned before, the KGB was a spying network established in 1954 and was in operation until 1991, when the Soviet Union disbanded due to internal conflicts. Jacob Golos (1889–1943), a

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<sup>10</sup> Joe Wallace, "DEFCON Levels," *Military Benefits*. <https://militarybenefits.info/defcon-levels/>

<sup>11</sup> "The CIA".

<sup>12</sup> Stone, "Free Speech," 1390.

<sup>13</sup> Victor G. Devinatz, "Communist Party of the United States of America," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Communist-Party-of-the-United-States-of-America>

Bolshevik operative, oversaw a spy ring within the USA. It is worth mentioning that he was also a founding member of the Communist Party of the United States of America.<sup>14</sup> Upon discovering these activities after the War, President Harry S. Truman issued Executive Order 9835, the Loyalty Order. It required all federal workers to be analyzed to determine if they were loyal to the state or not. It is worth mentioning that all spies were CPUSA members, but not vice versa. People had to adapt to these changes in their work environment quickly.

<sup>15</sup> A comment from a contemporary lawyer Clifford J. Durr stated:

I am convinced that the Order’s evils far outweigh any possible good that can come from it. Such potentialities of injustice, oppression, and cruelty within its administration will inevitably result in alienation rather than promoting government employees’ loyalty.<sup>16</sup>

This quotation is important because the Loyalty Order cemented McCarthyism in public. Based on the research, civil rights and personal freedom were ignored alongside the First Amendment, a founding stone of the United States Constitution. The First Amendment will be discussed in greater detail when I write about Joseph McCarthy.<sup>17</sup> As written in the Executive Order on the Truman Library’s official website:

1. There shall be a loyalty investigation of every person entering the civilian employment of any department or agency of the Federal Government’s executive branch.
  - a. Investigations of persons entering the competitive service shall be conducted by the Civil Service Commission, except in such cases as are covered by a special agreement between the Commission and any given department or agency.
  - b. Investigations of persons other than those entering the competitive service shall be conducted by the employing department or agency. Departments and agencies without investigative organizations shall utilize the investigative facilities of the Civil Service Commission (“Executive Order No. 9835”).

The order also led the government to oversee smaller institutions and facilities, like public schools. Teachers had to go through many regulation checks and revaluations in their material to ensure there was no threat to the State. The Board of Education also had to

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<sup>14</sup> “Jacob Golos.” *Atomic Heritage Foundation*. <https://www.atomicheritage.org/profile/jacob-golos>

<sup>15</sup> “Truman’s Loyalty Program.” *Harry S. Truman Library and Museum*. <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/education/presidential-inquiries/trumans-loyalty-program>

<sup>16</sup> Clifford J. Durr, “The Loyalty Order’s Challenge to the Constitution,” *The University of Chicago Law Review* 16, no. 2 (1949): 298.

<sup>17</sup> “Truman’s Loyalty Program.”

go through numerous investigations and fact checking. Book burnings were held regularly, and books published within the Soviet Union were banned from the public. Such events are examples of the era's unjustifiable surveillance.<sup>18</sup>

### The Game of McCarthy

The infamous U.S. Senator Joseph Raymond McCarthy from Wisconsin became the face of loyalty hearings.<sup>19</sup> He spent three years in the U.S. Senate while he intimidated his opponents and used fear against them. In essence, the Second Red Scare was a tool employed to eradicate opposing ideals and unwanted personnel out of political and public life. It is worth mentioning that McCarthy was a good friend of the Kennedy dynasty and John Fitzgerald Kennedy (1917–1963), one of the most renowned liberal presidents of the United States to this date despite McCarthy being a hard-boiled conservative himself. Even businesses and local bodies used these tactics to destroy the hope of unionization and of fair working conditions and wages for workers. One such case was the dismissal of over two hundred and fifty municipal workers in New York due to communist allegations against the freedom of speech and fundamental civil rights. Both sides on the political spectrum enabled McCarthy and his witch hunts. The Republican Party allowed McCarthy and his political representatives to continue their witch hunts. He even pressed charges against celebrities and intellectuals who disapproved of his methods. This finding will be important later in my paper when I detail a particular group of people McCarthy prosecuted.<sup>20</sup>

His rise to power began at a Women's Republican Club meeting in West Virginia at which he declared that he had a list of two hundred and five names of communist party members. The Senate did not find anything which could compromise these people.<sup>21</sup> More and more politicians started to distance themselves from McCarthy, seeing that he only used his power to spread fear, even though they allowed him to continue his anti-communist campaign in 1953 during his second term.<sup>22</sup>

Multiple governmental bodies attempted to work against foreign spies and spying networks. The House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was formed in 1938.

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<sup>18</sup>Stuart J. Foster, "Red Alert!: The National Education Association Confronts the 'Red Scare' in American Public Schools, 1947–1954," *Education and Culture* 14, no. 2 (1997): 1–16.

<sup>19</sup>Patrick J. McNamara, "McCarthy, and McCarthyism," *American Catholic Studies* 116, no. 2 (2005): 85.

<sup>20</sup>Stone, "Free Speech," 1392.

<sup>21</sup>McNamara, "McCarthy," 85.

<sup>22</sup>Don E. Carleton, "'McCarthyism Was More Than McCarthy': Documenting the Red Scare at the State and Local Level," *The Midwestern Archivist* 12, no. 1 (1987): 13.



It was the first Committee to oversee and prosecute people in the USA. The Committee published lists featuring individuals with questionable pasts and possible communist ties. Joseph McCarthy later used this system, using his lists to differentiate who was and was not sympathetic to Communist ideology. The HUAC played a vital role for McCarthy, as it legally instituted and allowed the stripping of one's basic rights. Fortunately, the House of Un-American Committee was abolished in 1975 when it ran under the name House Committee on Internal Security. Although this institution was the precursor of McCarthy's United States Senate Committee on Government Operations, it was not directly linked with the latter. However, he appointed the anti-communist ex-director of the HUAC, J. B. Matthews (1894–1966), as staff director soon after receiving the chair at the Subcommittee of Investigations. McCarthy's Committee was established back in 1816, dealing with the operation of post offices and railroads. In 1952 it adopted the name of Committee on Government Operations to oversee the federal government.<sup>23</sup>

Joseph McCarthy's fall began in April 1954 when he started prosecuting members of the armed services. These so-called Army-McCarthy hearings in 1954 were the fallout of both parties being unable to work with each other. These hearings were publicly broadcast on live television, which was a fatal mistake for McCarthy, as his arrogance and uncharismatic endeavor made him unlikeable to the public.<sup>24</sup> His fall began with the summoning of Army Secretary Robert Ten Broeck Stevens (1899–1983) to testify against alleged communists among the ranks of the U.S. Military. McCarthy also wished for special treatment for his friend and staffer, G. David Schine, when serving in the Army. He insisted that he must not be deployed on foreign soil to ensure his safety. The Army retaliated with documents detailing McCarthy's subpar behavior relating to the armed services.

## Ruined Ideals

The final curtain for McCarthy was a series of hearings between the Army and himself, broadcast on live television from April to June in 1954. He also tried attacking a young Army lawyer with claims of Communist affiliation because the current attorney from Boston had such connections in the past when it was acceptable to be part of the Communist Party of the United States of America before the Cold War. It prompted the Army's chief counsel, Joseph N. Welch (1890–1960), to retaliate by saying:

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<sup>23</sup> “HUAC.”

<sup>24</sup> McNamara, “McCarthy,” 85–86.

Let us not assassinate this lad further, Senator; you've done enough. Have you no sense of decency, sir, at long last? Have you left no sense of decency? ("McCarthy-Welch Exchange")

With this, Joseph McCarthy lost all credibility. People could see first-hand how obscure and illegitimate McCarthy's accusations were. His main plan was to eliminate his opponents, not protect American citizens and their civic rights. He went against the very principle the United States Constitution stood for:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, abridging the freedom of speech, or the press or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and petition the government for a redress of grievances. ("Amendment 1")

The Senate also condemned him for his actions. They convicted him for his inappropriate behavior. He kept his post until he died in 1957. The Catholic Church abandoned anti-communist propaganda, and all of McCarthy's allegations were dropped. Over two thousand people lost their jobs and careers during his reign. McCarthyism only benefited those willing to profit from terror, ruining opposing ideals.<sup>25</sup> The next part of the paper will discuss the Hollywood Ten, a group of aspiring screenwriters, and examine how the U.S. government, along with Joseph McCarthy, exploited them so as to reassure themselves that their communist-hunting activities were justified.<sup>26</sup>

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## Who were the Hollywood Ten?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a group of aspiring producers, writers, and directors suffered greatly because of prosecutions in the McCarthy era. They were called the Hollywood Ten or the Unfriendly Ten by their detractors. The name was coined because they consisted of ten individuals working in the Hollywood movie industry. The film industry at that time had its fair share of gossip, so the media picked up the story of the Ten as soon as they could.<sup>27</sup> Joseph McCarthy's attacks on these individuals made them

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<sup>25</sup> McNamara, "McCarthy," 87.

<sup>26</sup> "Hollywood Ten."

<sup>27</sup> Bernard F. Dick, *Radical Innocence: A Critical Study of the Hollywood Ten* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 2.

the martyrs of the Second Red Scare. They could not do anything to save themselves from the government’s clinging claws. The group was formed in the October of 1947 after they refused to speak in front of the House of Un-American Activities Committee. They were only ten of the forty-one called to give evidence to the loyalty hearings. This chapter will detail their profiles and provide an account of the prosecutions.<sup>28</sup>

Samuel Badisch Ornitz (1890–1957), John Howard Lawson (1894–1977), and Herbert J. Biberman (1900–1971) were the eldest members of the Hollywood Ten; they were all screenwriters and authors. Biberman spent the least amount of time in jail, only six months in Texas, where most of the Ten were incarcerated after the prosecution. Lawson and Ornitz had to endure twelve months of confinement far from their families. They also had no further involvement in Hollywood. However, apart from Ornitz, the other two members did additional work in the movie industry, not associating with mainstream moviemaking ever again. John Howard Lawson was a co-founder of the Screen Writers Guild, which was founded in 1933. According to his record, his blacklisting was more severe than the others because of his former relation to the guild.<sup>29</sup>

According to various sources, the other Hollywood Ten members were the author, Alvah Bessie (1904–1985). He lived the most colorful life of the group. He served as a soldier in the Spanish Civil War, wrote for Warner Brothers, and worked at a nightclub for years as a sound manager after the blacklisting. Then there was the playwright with Polish roots, Lester Cole (1904–1985). He was a teacher of screenwriting when he moved to San Francisco after staying a few years in England in the sixties. He knew his target audience very well, so he worked primarily on mass-produced films.<sup>30</sup> The famous producer Robert Adrian Scott (1911–1972) started his journalism career and even returned to Hollywood after the sixties, working for Universal Pictures. Albert Maltz (1908–1985) began working as a playwright in New York before coming to Los Angeles and suffering a familiar fate. His career post-blacklisting was also not as successful as before, although he managed to get credit as a producer for the movie, *Two Mules for Sister Sara* in 1970.<sup>31</sup>

In my opinion, an unusual case, Edward Dmytryk (1908–1999), born to Ukrainian parents, had a most difficult childhood. His father did not have a stable job, and Dmytryk had to leave his home and start supporting himself from the age of fourteen. He was the only member of the Hollywood Ten who went back to the House of Un-American Activities

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<sup>28</sup> David L. Dunbar, “The Hollywood Ten: The Men Who Refused to Name Names,” *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 16, 2015, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/lists/hollywood-ten-men-who-refused-839762>

<sup>29</sup> Dunbar, “The Hollywood Ten.”

<sup>30</sup> Dick, “Radical Innocence,” 30.

<sup>31</sup> Dunbar, “The Hollywood Ten.”

Committee and testify in front of the house. He named twenty-six other ex-members of the communist party and abandoned the values the Ten appeared to uphold. He is still included in the group because initially, he was part of the movement when it formed. He went back to directing Hollywood movies after he ‘cleared’ his name.

Ring Lardner Jr. (1915–2000) was the youngest of the group. He was a student at the Anglo-American Institute of the University of Moscow, a fact which did not help his case when he was prosecuted. The screenwriter managed to escape the blacklist in 1965 when he was given credit for *The Cincinnati Kid* (1965). He was the only member of the Hollywood Ten who managed to live through the twentieth century.<sup>32</sup>

According to my findings, the most famous person out of the Ten was the screenwriter Dalton Trumbo. After his father died, he moved to Los Angeles. He started his career in writing as a side job alongside working at a bakery to help his mother and sisters and fund his studies at the University of Southern California. He wrote short stories and was a gifted student.<sup>33</sup> He began his screenwriting career when he was promoted to the story department of Warner Brothers. Apart from being an excellent screenwriter, he also managed to become a well-respected author. His book written in 1939, *Johnny Got His Gun*, even won a National Book Award. I mention this book because it has a strong anti-war message, which further tainted Trumbo’s image for the government. It came out just two days before the Second World War broke out. A movie version of it was released in 1971, and the director was Trumbo. It was not long until the prosecutions came, and he was in prison for a year in 1950. Alongside his fellow nine artists, McCarthyism consumed his career until he was given a chance of redemption in 1960 when the renowned actor Kirk Douglas (1916–2020) helped him by giving him full name credit in the movie, *Spartacus* (1960) as a screenwriter. Otto Preminger (1905–1986) also did the same with *Exodus* (1960).<sup>34</sup>

### Tearing the Blacklist

His resurgence with *Spartacus* was not as easy and straightforward as it appeared. Research on Dalton Trumbo’s return to the Hollywood fold reveals exciting inconsistencies. Kirk Douglas brought Trumbo into the fold; director Eddie Lewis (1919–2019) allowed him to work on the big picture again. At first, he showed the outline for *Spartacus* to Trumbo,

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<sup>32</sup> Dunbar, “The Hollywood Ten.”

<sup>33</sup> Dick, “Radical Innocence,” 184–185.

<sup>34</sup> Larry Ceplair, “Kirk Douglas, ‘Spartacus,’ and The Blacklist,” *Cinéaste* 38, no. 1 (2012): 11–13.

who replaced its original writer, Howard Fast (1914–2003), without the author knowing. Trumbo started writing under the name Sam Jackson at the beginning phase of the project. At some point, Trumbo’s dialogue was partly rewritten by Peter Ustinov (1921–2004), which caused him to quit the production. Kirk Douglas reported that he acted as a mediator and made a deal with Trumbo. He managed to invite him back by crediting his real name as a screenwriter when they released the movie.<sup>35</sup>

According to Eddie Lewis, Trumbo pushed for the screen credit, not Douglas in the first place. According to my research, it was ultimately Lewis who raised the idea of having Trumbo’s name on the poster for *Spartacus*. He spoke with the heads of Universal-International to accept Trumbo as part of the crew. Fortunately for him, the head of the studio, Ed Muhl (1907–2001), allowed the blacklisted screenwriter to receive the screen credit for his work on the poster. Although out of precaution, he waited for the announcement just a day before the movie opened in theatres. I think it was ultimately not just Kirk Douglas who fought for Dalton Trumbo’s name to be recognized again. It was a series of collaborations between the people responsible for the movie, although Kirk Douglas likes to take sole credit as written in his memoirs, *The Ragman’s Son* (1988) and *I am Spartacus: Making a Film, Breaking the Blacklist* (2012).

Though Douglas continues to be hailed in Hollywood as the “man who broke the blacklist,” his future reputation will not, in my estimation, be helped with this book. He is unreliable as a historian of the blacklist.<sup>36</sup>

He indeed played an important part, as he allowed Trumbo to start writing for the movie. He did make a difference, although it is an over-exaggeration to state that he alone broke the Hollywood Blacklist.<sup>37</sup>

## A Fight Lost Against Time

The Hollywood Ten began its fight in the October of 1947 when they stood before the House of Un-American Activities Committee. They had all joined the Communist Party of the United States of America previously in their lives, a fact which led to their summons and the main charge against them. The HUAC inquired about this exact fact during the trials:

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<sup>35</sup> Ceplair, “Kirk Douglas,” 11–13.

<sup>36</sup> Ceplair, “Kirk Douglas,” 13.

<sup>37</sup> Ceplair, “Kirk Douglas,” 11–13.

“Are you now or have you ever been a member of the Communist Party?” The Ten bravely tried to fight back against the HUAC on the terms of the First Amendment. They believed that their freedom of speech, political identities, and the CPUSA being a non-violent group could protect them from prosecution but unfortunately, they were wrong. They were the public face of the prosecutions and public vilification. All of them were fined a thousand dollars each in addition to prison time. Alvah Bessie, during the trial, argued that “I will never aid or abet such a committee in its patent attempt to foster the sort of intimidation and terror that is the inevitable precursor of a fascist regime.”<sup>38</sup>

The Hollywood Ten became the center of the discourse about the legitimacy of the HUAC activities in Washington. They protested and spoke publicly against the court’s declaration, but it was too late for them. According to the sources, after the HUAC marked them as communist sympathizers, none of the big Hollywood studios wanted to work with them again. I firmly believe that they were targeted because, as screenwriters, they were the brains behind the movies. They made all the critical decisions in the filming process, unlike the actors, for example. Even people associated with the blacklisted individuals were in danger of unemployment and shunning.<sup>39</sup> From November 1947 through 1948, all of the Ten were sentenced to six months in federal prison.

There were two categories regarding these prosecutions: the blacklist and the gray list. People on the gray list were as vilified as the people on the blacklist. The only difference was that they could still find minor work in their fields. Just like the Ten, individuals were given an opportunity to officially denounce their communist views in front of the court, which many did so as to continue their work in their respective fields.<sup>40</sup>

I understand that the prosecutions against artists in the Hollywood movie industry were a complex procedure, an attempt to ensure a mutual relationship between institutions and media companies. The HUAC had to provide the evidence, while it was the respectable movie studio’s job to expel and no longer employ the prosecuted individual. Individuals targeted by the media only had the illusion of free speech. As stated by Dalton Trumbo in an excerpt from the HUAC hearings: “The committee in its hearings has clearly and consistently attacked the constitutional guarantees of a free press...”<sup>41</sup>

The studios relied on lists and updates from the hearings taking place in Washington, so they always had the latest information available so as to be able to determine whether they

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<sup>38</sup> Dunbar, “The Hollywood Ten.”

<sup>39</sup> Dunbar, “The Hollywood Ten.”

<sup>40</sup> Elizabeth Pontikes et al., “Stained Red: A Study of Stigma by Association to Blacklisted Artists during the ‘Red Scare’ in Hollywood, 1945 to 1960,” *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 3 (2010): 461.

<sup>41</sup> “Dalton Trumbo, HUAC Hearings.”

currently employed individuals on the list or not. The media was also heavily influenced by the government, and they were afraid that if they challenged the current power in favor of the Ten, they would be deemed communists. John Berry (1917–1999) was one of the few writer-directors who dared to make a short documentary on the Hollywood Ten in a film of the same name in 1950. As a result, he was also blacklisted after the movie was released.<sup>42</sup> Berry’s short movie is an essential historical source in mapping and understanding the Hollywood Ten case from their perspective. Elizabeth Pontikes highlights the atmosphere of the era in her article, arguing that:

The public supported blacklisting: for example, supermarket owners threatened to boycott films that featured communists. Laurence Johnson, a supermarket owner in Syracuse, New York, threatened to place signs in his stores warning customers not to buy products of any company that sponsored a program starring one of “Stalin’s little creatures”.<sup>43</sup>

The fight against blacklisting only became a justifiable cause after the sixties, when McCarthy and the Second Red Scare faded from public consciousness. Although their careers were ruined, their fight became the standing stone of the repressed of those times, and they had an enormous influence on generations to come.<sup>44</sup>

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### **The American Legion: Foes or Allies?**

Unfortunately, the Ten’s cruel fate was not a wake-up call to those prosecuting innocent individuals and groups around the U.S. More victims followed for years to come until McCarthy’s eventual fall. As mentioned in the first chapter, various groups wholeheartedly supported the blacklisting and McCarthy. One such organization was the American Legion, which boycotted the Hollywood Ten’s works and remained convinced of McCarthy’s prosecutions. This non-profit group was founded on March 15, 1919, by war veterans from the First World War. The founding members included the son of the president of the same name, Lt. Col. Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (1887–1944), an officer of the National Guard, George A. White (1880–1941), and an ex-congressman, Ralph D. Cole (1873–1932).

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<sup>42</sup> Pontikes et al., “Stained Red,” 461.

<sup>43</sup> Pontikes et al., “Stained Red,” 461.

<sup>44</sup> Pontikes et al., “Stained Red,” 462.

They played a decisive role in forming the American society of the era. The romanticizing of militarism in the USA soared with this group's foundation.<sup>45</sup>

According to the research, this non-profit group's aim was, at least not initially, witch-hunting and boycotting individuals due to the fear of communism but aiding sick and war veterans. They advocated scholarship and real estate for returning soldiers all around the United States of America. The famous GI Bill of Rights in 1944 was heavily promoted by them, enabling cheap housing and funds for the education for millions of soldiers returning from the war. Like many other militaristic groups in the U.S., they also endorsed numerous sports teams and Boy Scout Organizations helping American youth assimilate into society. This group rapidly grew in numbers and profited from contributions. They currently have nearly two million members across the U.S. taking part in organized events and lobbying for army personnel and war veterans, with National Commander James W. Oxford, elected in 2019.<sup>46</sup>

This group seemingly had noble ideals until the Second Red Scare, when Joseph McCarthy gained the spotlight due to his anti-communist propaganda. The American Legion chose to endorse McCarthy primarily because of his patriotic ideals, which were, in the author's opinion, esteemed by war veterans returning home after fighting for their country. They began to make demands in political life, aiming to end the Korean War at all costs and rooting out various personnel, like Secretary of the State Dean Acheson (1893–1971) from their posts. The Legion started boycotting media from individuals with associations with the Communist Party of the United States.<sup>47</sup>

One particular film relevant to this research is Edward Dmytryk's *Give Us This Day* (1949),<sup>48</sup> which the American Legion shunned. The Legion warned theatres that it would boycott them unless they removed the movie from their establishments.<sup>49</sup> As we now know, Dmytryk cleared his name by editing his statement about his CPUSA background a few years after his blacklisting; others were not so lucky. The American Legion promoted all manner of regulations in an attempt to undermine personal freedom and civil rights. They aided the identification of suspected communists and lobbied for all previous CPUSA members to be prosecuted under the charge of treason. They also provided lists and media campaigns. The Hollywood Ten was just one group of people whom the Legion targeted. Their aims of purifying the government from the communist threat died with

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<sup>45</sup> Marquis James, *A History of the American Legion* (New York: William Green, 1923), 15–16.

<sup>46</sup> "About the National Commander."

<sup>47</sup> "Red Scare Dominates American Politics."

<sup>48</sup> *Give Us This Day* (1949).

<sup>49</sup> Sue Harper and Vincent Porter, *British Cinema of the 1950s: The Decline of Deference* (Oxford University Press, 2003), 15.



the fall of Joseph McCarthy. Their Americanism continued to play an essential part in the organization’s system, although fortunately, their witch hunts and boycotts stopped after a period of time.<sup>50</sup>

### The Past Versus the Present

In my opinion, the American Legion’s dark history is reflected in our current political climate and culture in the USA. Would organizations like the Legion boycott media like they used to if there were to be another Red Scare or a similar phenomenon nowadays? After the 1960s, the Unfriendly Ten became the Hollywood Ten and ceased to be demonized and shunned by the movie industry.<sup>51</sup> The political climate is an ever-changing field, as written by Arthur Eckstein, a professor of history at the University of Maryland:

On October 27, 1997, on the fiftieth anniversary of the original HUAC hearings, there was a gala celebration of the Ten, with a massive audience of the Hollywood creative elite, and with significant stars appearing as members of the Ten in a re-enactment of parts of the HUAC.<sup>52</sup>

Their careers were irreversibly damaged, although, as mentioned before, they still managed to work in the industry in various capacities. It is contended here that a few potentially wonderful careers and works coming from members of the Hollywood Ten were lost due to their blacklisting. Who knows how different the current Hollywood climate would be had it not been for the Second Red Scare?

The most recent inquisition in Hollywood, the *#MeToo* movement, does, at least on a surface level, invoke memories of the Hollywood Ten and their persecution. However, *#MeToo*, fortunately, has had a positive effect on the industry, unlike the events of the Second Red Scare. It is a fact that these types of movement always carry a heavy burden. If the wrong people get prosecuted or labelled as something they are not, in our case, ten aspiring screenwriters, it is hard to come back from such accusations. One sensational magazine headline can ruin one’s career if one gets on the wrong side of the media. I believe that we have positively progressed as a society since the fifties. Therefore, oppressed

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<sup>50</sup> M. J. Heale, *American Anticommunism: Combating the Enemy Within 1830–1970* (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 173, 187; Don E. Carleton, *Red Scare: Right-Wing Hysteria, Fifties Fanaticism and their Legacy in Texas* (University of Texas Press, 2014), 357.

<sup>51</sup> Arthur Eckstein, “The Hollywood Ten in History and Memory,” *Film History* 16, no. 4 (2004): 424.

<sup>52</sup> Eckstein, “The Hollywood Ten,” 425.

individuals working in the movie industry could rise and stand against Harvey Weinstein. They were more fortunate than the Hollywood Ten in the sense that they had a much more comprehensive platform to voice their opinions from. If the Ten had the power of the Internet, which was ironically an invention of the Cold War back in the fifties, they would have had a better chance at breaking the stereotypes and unfair accusations of those espousing Joseph McCarthy's ideals.<sup>53</sup>

### Our Future, Our Fight

Good public relations have become one of the most critical aspects of the movie and media industry of late. The Ten's public stunt against the government was such a controversial event that a similar movement would get conflicting reactions from two opposing sides. With today's technology of photo editing and deepfakes, which is used to edit one's dialogue and expressions in a video, we would have difficulty decrypting what is fake and not. Ultimately, it is a gamble to take a stand against oppressing forces in any industry. We can celebrate that the *#MeToo* movement managed to expose individuals in Hollywood, exploiting their power to engage in sexual violence, rape, and blackmail.<sup>54</sup>

As Eckstein argues:

because of the cultural shift in Hollywood to domination by a *bien-pensant* Left that started around 1960 and accelerated in the 1970s, the Unfriendly Ten are now lionized as American 'rebels' and martyred 'non-conformists'.<sup>55</sup>

The case of the Hollywood Ten has become a symbol of retaliation against oppressing forces and ideals. McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare might have ended their careers, but they could not extinguish the flame of their spirits. We do not know when the next big scandal in the Hollywood movie industry breaks out. We only know that we have people we can take an example from. The internet gives us another weapon for fight injustice. Governments and regimes can no longer hide their questionable means of stripping people of their civic rights. We can find and judge every major event occurring in our world with the push of a button or the touch of a screen. We have to distinguish blatant propaganda from actual policies

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<sup>53</sup> Moira Donegan, "Harvey Weinstein went from untouchable to incarcerated. Thank #MeToo," *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/feb/24/harvey-weinstein-untouchable-guilty-thank-me-too>

<sup>54</sup> Donegan, "Harvey Weinstein."

<sup>55</sup> Eckstein, "The Hollywood Ten," 425.

because nothing is black and white in our world. The internet can also be used for clearing someone’s name, not just for giving labels. In the past, there was less information available to create judgments about accused individuals. Now we can surf the internet and research to create our narratives. The *#MeToo* movement and the Hollywood Ten case demonstrates that we should not take oppression lightly. If questionable behavior is accepted, the bubble of sorrow and pain will burst and expose the individuals responsible for the wrongdoings.

The Hollywood Ten were victims of their trying times like some people are victims nowadays. The government, the laypeople, and the media have to learn to make careful deductions while investigating someone and their background. The Cold War primarily featured proxy wars, yet still had its victims just like any other war in history. Political correctness originates from the contemporary politics of a specific age, and therefore the Ten were ‘canceled’, as it might be termed today. It was not politically correct to have communist backgrounds, no matter how much they pursued those ideals. Politics changes over time, and I hope that the American and every society worldwide can progress past discriminating against individuals based on their abandoned ideals in their pasts. Sacrificing its people’s rights and ignoring the amendments that the country was built upon was a grave mistake, in my opinion. While trying to defend our own, we should not make humanity as divided as in the fifties. The human species is prone to revolution and always retaliates when cornered with false narratives and ideals.

## Conclusion

In the end, the Second Red Scare and the Hollywood Ten case were a history lesson learned the hard way. Some people lost the government’s respect and their peers, such as Dalton Trumbo or Alvah Bessie. In contrast, some people and groups like Joseph McCarthy and the American Legion profited from the population’s fear. The Ten showed us that no matter how desperate our situation is, we can always make sure that history remembers our cause. If they were to accept their fates silently while doing nothing in retaliation, we would not celebrate them as free speech heroes in our current era. In my opinion, fighting against all the odds for justice is the most heroic act one can undertake. The Cold War made the government of the United States of America commit acts of terror. It does not reflect well in retrospect but demonstrates that we have to look back at history and see what went wrong to progress as a society in the twenty-first century.

This paper has demonstrated that it is essential the issues of the past be discussed even if they are controversial. Free speech and activism are as important as ever, as evidenced

by the current world climate. Society may indeed have other fights in the future for justice, like the #MeToo movement. Humans have the right to expand and cherish their freedom and dreams, although it often leads to conflict with people essentially wishing the same for themselves. I end my research with Trumbo's words delivering a final judgment on the era: "The blacklist was a time of evil (...) there were only victims" (Dalton Trumbo).

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**MÁRK TURÓCZI**

**The Romance of Revolution? The Discourse of Revolutionism  
among Hungarian Youth 1957–1970**

Pro&Contra 5

No. 1 (2021) 49–65.



## Abstract

After the Hungarian revolution of 1956, the Kádár-regime revised the political and ideological tasks and aims in the field of youth politics. In this study, I am going to examine the discourse of revolutionism and its manifestation in youth political movements. By defining the political-historical and ideological background, I focus on “socialist patriotism” and ‘internationalism’ in the early period of the era. With the case study of the “Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok” (Revolutionary Youth Days) the revival of revolutionism will be examined allowing for the ideological construction of revolutionism to be observed in practice. The domestic and global events of 1968 challenged the ideological construction of revolutionism when the “revolutionary romanticism” faced “revolution of the everyday” and it slowly eroded the construction of the “Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok”.

**Keywords:** revolutionism, communism, youth, ideology, Communist Youth League, political movement

## Introduction

This paper is an attempt to examine the discourse of revolutionism in the Hungarian People’s Republic in the field of youth politics. Primarily it is a piece of theoretical research based on the idea of revolutionism; moreover it covers several aspects of the political history of Kádár-era, especially the youth politics. It examines contemporaneous political events and publications in which the idea of revolutionism took form and was transformed. The ideologist of the era has to face, as well as to answer the question posed by the title: Is there any romance in the revolution under the so-called process of “peaceful construction” in Kádár’s Hungary?

The 1956 revolution played an important role for the youth, not only in the clashes on the streets but also in the organizing of the demonstration on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of October. After the 4<sup>th</sup> of November, when the revolution was defeated by the Soviet troops, János Kádár became the new leader and the reorganizer of the Communist Party: the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. In that period, the youth remained problematic for the regime, in the winter those still defiant, primarily young people, released a slogan (“We will start again in March”, the original Hungarian abbreviation is the MUK) which signaled their intention to restart the revolution on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March. The new government took this slogan seriously with a counter-campaign, and with the paramilitary organization the Workers’ Militia the authorities prevented new demonstrations on 15<sup>th</sup> of March. Moreover, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May,

a huge march attended by thousands reinforced the legitimation of the new government. “The Kádár government was clearly apprehensive of the generational power, which the 1956 uprising had so clearly demonstrated, of which this youthful cohort was capable. For this reason, the regime was bent on creating the ‘scientific foundations of youth policy’”<sup>1</sup>

Learning from the problems of the 1950s and the autumn of 1956, a new youth organization – the Communist Youth League (KISZ) – was established on 21st March 1957 (the anniversary of the Declaration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic) an attempt to reinvigorate the process of socializing those aged from 14 to 30 into the norms of a developed socialist society. Their first aim was to expand membership, which was successful in terms of the numbers: within five years of the league’s founding, its membership had reached 708,000 (more than seven hundred thousand). However, the reception of ideological knowledge by these members was problematic for the leadership throughout the entire period.

### The “youth problem”

The so-called “youth problem” became a significant issue from the late 1960s both worldwide and in the Hungarian context. Both interpretations appeared during the Kádár era in Hungary. Frequently it emerged as a problem in the western “bourgeois” countries, yet the same notion referred to the Hungarian situation in some respects. It was important for youth politics to separate the “western” and “Hungarian” nature of the “youth problem”, as discussed in the official youth weekly journal “*Hungarian Youth*” (*Magyar Ifjúság*) in 1970: “Think about the movements of the youth in leader capitalist, imperialist states. However, it is a mistake if we exchange their youth problems with our socialist youth movement’s contradictions, because youth problems in an antagonist society are based on a totally different basis. There are growing symptoms of crisis, in our country, the dynamic rearrangement of society throws up waves of contradictions.”<sup>2</sup> This article was a part of a debate series called “Youth, KISZ, society”, in which a teacher from Csepel (a working-class borough of Budapest) is quoted above. It was a tool of the party leadership to publish these ordinary people’s opinions, thus making it clearer and bringing official ideological positions to newspaper readers, especially to the youth. It was more important after 1968 when several events agitated the “youth problem”, which will be presented later in this paper.

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<sup>1</sup>László Kürti, *Youth and the State in Hungary: Capitalism, Communism and Class* (Pluto Press, 2002), 113.

<sup>2</sup>*Magyar Ifjúság* 14, no. 6 (1970): 14.

In this study, I interpret the “youth problem” within the aspect of political leadership and I position the idea of revolutionism within the framework of the “youth problem”. Firstly, the ideological framework of the youth and revolution will be interpreted with examples from speeches and articles from political leaders and ideologists. It is important to reveal the contradictions between the communist ideology and the political situation of the Kádár-era. Thereafter, I will examine the post-1956 period, when the idea of revolutionism was largely concealed behind two other ideological terms: internationalism and socialist patriotism. The rehabilitation of revolutionism is mentioned in the next chapter, in which a case study of the “Revolutionary Youth Days” reveals the new aspects of the youth and revolution. Here I will present the concept of that political movement, and the global challenges to the idea of revolutionism in the late 1960s. After that, I will examine the effect of that period on Hungarian youth politics especially how the idea of “romanticism of everyday” was constructed and its effects on “Revolutionary Youth Days”.

### Youth and revolutionism

According to the ideological basis of Marxism-Leninism, revolutionism has only a positive meaning and is a significant element of the ideology. From this perspective, revolutions nourish social development. In addition, the youth has a key role in the concept, they are connected with revolution because they symbolize the future in the present. Yet, the authorities’ negative experiences of teenagers participating in counter-revolution makes the concept ambiguous.

After the formation period of the KISZ, the discourse of revolutionism remained important, a fact revealed in the publications of the newly founded youth newspapers, for example, the *Hungarian Youth (Magyar Ifjúság)* and the *Young Communist (Ifjú Kommunista)* and later the *Youth Magazine (Ifjúsági Magazin)*. The youth press was controlled by the central organizations of the party and the KISZ and was intended to play an important role in ideological education. The necessity of romanticism had appeared connected with the criticism of the 1950’s era before the KISZ was founded: “*In the past few years, the social organizations, institutions were not able to realize, these young people want to live in a youthful way, they have youthful desires, plans, they have the necessity for romanticism.*”<sup>3</sup> It is clear in this article, that in a short period after the revolution it was recognized that the political leadership can not ignore young people’s necessity for romanticism, because it could easily be turned against the one-party state.

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<sup>3</sup>Mária Sárdi, “Néhány szó a kétféle adósságról,” *Ifjú Kommunista* 1, no. 1 (1957): 28.

In early 1957, the political leadership had already recognized the necessity of revolutionary romanticism for the youth, although the concept of revolution was bonded to the events of 1956 and remained threatening for the regime, thus it was important to create new forms of youth politics. The young people's need for "revolutionary romanticism" proved problematic, thus the KISZ had to provide the possibility of experiencing revolutionary romanticism while maintaining control, to ensure the party's objectives were met. Lajos Méhes, the First Secretary of the KISZ reflected on the "revolutionary romanticism" in his speech in 1969: "It is a little bit platitudinous, that our youth see only the fights in the past as a revolution, and just in that see romanticism, and they think, our ancestors and fathers had the opportunity to do revolutionary actions."<sup>4</sup> This speech is important in two aspects: firstly, it is a criticism about the past focused behavior of the youth and secondly, it acknowledges the need for "revolutionary actions."

It was necessary for the Communist Party and its youth organization to police the youth's "revolutionary energies." The party leaders were aware of the youth's specific time experience, one such example was occurring in the 1965 meeting of the Central Committee, where István Szirmai, the head of the Agitprop Workshop of the CC made the following comment highlighting the dangers of Maoism: "The youth have a critical eye with regard to the present. Having no experience of capitalism, they are ready for action. Also, they are saturated with tension and energy. They think that it was much easier for their fathers since the latter were given the chance to make a revolution."<sup>5</sup> Szirmai's speech reinforced the concept of Méhes mentioned above, underscoring the energy and the receptivity of the youth.

In the attenuated political atmosphere of the early 1960s, the idea of revolutionism was concealed behind other ideological terms, such as socialist patriotism and internationalism. Thus it was possible to highlight the "traditions of revolutions" and simultaneously separate revolutionism in time (socialist patriotism) and space (internationalism). In that period the specific movements became more important in youth politics, one being the "Youth for Socialism" ("Ifjúság a szocializmusért"). They were also intended to channel the "romantic revolutionism" of young people into various controlled actions (cultural activities, sports). One of the most influential ideologists of the era - György Aczél – declared the importance of emotions in ideological education in a 1958 speech at the Central Committee meeting,

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<sup>4</sup>Lajos Méhes, *The First secretary of KISZ the Hungarian Young Communist League*, 7th may 1969. (Ifjúsági Lapkiadó Vállalat, 1969): 4.

<sup>5</sup>HU-MOL 288 f. 4/73-74. 84 (see also: Ádám Takács, *The Maoist Incident: Effects of Political and Ideological Consolidation on Youth Mentality in the Kádár Regime in the 1960s* Resoccea Report, 2012 ([https://www.academia.edu/15233364/The\\_Maoist\\_Incident\\_Effects\\_of\\_Political\\_and\\_Ideological\\_Consolidation\\_on\\_Youth\\_Mentality\\_in\\_the\\_K%C3%A1d%C3%A1r\\_Regime\\_in\\_Hungary\\_in\\_the\\_1960s](https://www.academia.edu/15233364/The_Maoist_Incident_Effects_of_Political_and_Ideological_Consolidation_on_Youth_Mentality_in_the_K%C3%A1d%C3%A1r_Regime_in_Hungary_in_the_1960s)))

“He thought, that emotional persuasive effect displayed with film, novel, or pictures, should still not be left out of the toolbox of ideological persuasion.”<sup>6</sup>

### Internationalism

Internationalism was important for the communist party’s ideology, Kádárism attempted to implement it for the political socialization of the youth. “Many party leaders, ideologues, and intellectuals hoped that revolutions in distant lands would provide inspiring images of the future of socialism that domestic exemplars were unable to match and that these might profoundly move the ideological inclinations of a younger cohort toward a deeper cultural identification with socialism as a modern, growing, and now truly global ideology.”<sup>7</sup>

In that case, revolutionism presupposed the support of countries where revolutions or freedom fights had occurred in recent years, like Cuba, Vietnam. From these freedom fights, the Hungarian youth should learn, and support them, but only ideologically, and with charity. The regime claimed in Hungary that their fight for freedom had ended after the communist takeover.

After the revolution of 1956, internationalism was an opportunity to create a connection with teenagers and allowed them to showcase revolutionism without reference to recent events. “In the first period of 1960’s league-sponsored magazines such as *Világ Ifjúsága* (World youth) and *Ifjú Kommunista* (Young Communist) frequently communicated new anti-imperialist struggles to the young. In their accounts, a new generation was turning to socialist construction across the world.”<sup>8</sup>

The connection between internationalism and revolutionism is noticeable in the case of Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara’s visit. When Ernesti “Che” Guevara – one of the major figures of the Cuban Revolution – visited Hungary in December 1960, it was the annual conference of the Communist Youth in Budapest, that publicly showcased him to the Hungarian population. The fact that the visit was organized by the youth league and not the Communist Party indicates that the Hungarian ideologist wanted to introduce Che Guevara to the youth. On the other hand, he was not introduced as an “official revolutionary” but as the head of the National Bank of Cuba, despite this his image retained traces of revolutionary

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<sup>6</sup>Melinda Kalmár, *Ennivaló és bozomány, A kora kádárizmus ideológiája* (Budapest: Magvető, 1998), 157.

<sup>7</sup>James Mark and Péter Apor, “Socialism Goes Global: Decolonization and the Making of a New Culture of Internationalism in Socialist Hungary, 1956–1989” *The Journal of Modern History* 87, no 4. (December 2015): 852–891. 861.

<sup>8</sup>Mark-Apor, “Socialism Goes Global,” 857.

romanticism. A report published in *Hungarian Youth* emphasized that image, reporting the look of Guevara as a “giant, tall young man, dressed in the revolution’s uniform.”<sup>9</sup>

When Che Guevara was captured and killed in the Bolivian rainforest, “he had publicly popularized his disappointment in the Soviet Union and he became a follower of Mao Zedong, thus it was necessary that the Hungarian communist party leaders set itself apart from his methods and his extremist idea of the global revolution.”<sup>10</sup> As a result of this, the Hungarian impression of Che Guevara changed, and his previous role in youth politics disappeared, moreover his image became problematic for the party leaders. “They also wanted to keep the Hungarian youth away from Che Guevara, who had become a symbol of the revolution, because following them would have meant joining the Western student movements of the 1960s however, linking youth and the revolution - a decade after the Revolution of 1956 - was a nightmare for party leadership”<sup>11</sup> In practice, this meant that the news of Che Guevara’s death was only very briefly reported in the press, and the regime did not use it for political propaganda. In the 1970s and 1980s, his character remained visible to youth politics, primarily focused on the visual aspects, besides the controversy of his biography.

Another vivid example of “concealing” revolutionism was the state-sponsored policy of anti-imperialist solidarity. “In early 1965, the largest solidarity movement of the entire communist period was established following the intensification of the US bombing of Vietnam.”<sup>12</sup> The favorable global political atmosphere created the opportunity for the political leadership to utilize teenagers’ political activism and to ensure it reflected with the party’s interest.

The “Vietnam Solidarity Committee” was established by university students György Pór and Sándor Bencze under the umbrella of the KISZ. They organized protests at the U.S. embassy in Budapest and the “Vietnamese Sundays” solidarity action. The “Vietnam Solidarity Committee’s” success was, despite appearances, not spontaneous in character: students from different universities in Budapest discovered that although this initiative was approved and officially led by the Communist Youth League, its organization remained largely a volunteer-based activity. “Being an important vehicle for collective social and political activity for university students, the solidarity campaign for Vietnam also allowed for radical commitment and creativity, something that was usually lacking from official communist youth events and initiatives.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *Magyar Ifjúság* 4. no. 52 (1960): 9.

<sup>10</sup> András Murai and Eszter Zsófia Tóth, *1968 Magyarországon. Miért hagytuk, hogy így legyen?* (Budapest: Scolar, 2018), 108.

<sup>11</sup> Murai and Tóth, *1968 Magyarországon*, 116.

<sup>12</sup> Mark and Apor, “Socialism Goes Global,” 870.

<sup>13</sup> Takács, *The Maoist Incident*, 52.



The thirst for revolutionary romanticism manifested itself as leftist criticism of the regime among certain youth groups, criticism levelled against the economic and social reforms of the late 60s. From 1968 onward, the party leadership, as well as police authorities, moved aggressively against those who challenged official interpretations of anti-imperialism, and semi-autonomous and ideologically heterodox movements were shut down.<sup>14</sup>

The best-known instance was the so-called Maoist trial that took place in the summer of 1968. A group of university students including György Pór and Sándor Bence were accused of organizing a Maoist-inspired conspiracy and an illegal party to overthrow the regime, and despite the absurdity of such charges, the leaders were jailed. Word spread that those convicted were Maoist intellectuals, making it clear that domesticating Chinese or other excessive forms of revolutionary behavior would not be tolerated anymore.

Also, the fact that dissatisfaction with Kádárist reforms in Hungary in the 1960s could be generated in some individuals, and in particular among the youth, sympathy toward the Maoist position exposes the very narrowness of the political imagination of those who, while not accepting the political orientation of the regime, actually cared about the future of a socialist society.<sup>15</sup>

### Revolutionary Youth Days (Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok, FIN)

Another aspect of revolutionism was based on Hungarian history. This concept was socialist patriotism, which was an expressly anti-nationalist idea, tightly connected with internationalism, however, it exploited the national history.<sup>16</sup> The concept of socialist patriotism had been used by Lenin, yet its real content and interpretation, the difference between the nationalist “flag-waving” patriotism and the internationalist fortified socialist patriotism was unclear. Furthermore, it was possible to create a definition for the populace, as “the working class’s patriotism is the socialist patriotism.”<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, the interpretation remained problematic, in so far as it failed to define how it differed from the “old-fashioned” nationalism and connected with internationalism at the same time. In the 1960’s the concept of socialist patriotism—followed by historical debates—was inserted into the Kádárist ideology. This was based on Hungarian freedom

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<sup>14</sup> Mark and Apor, “Socialism Goes Global,” 878.

<sup>15</sup> Takács, *The Maoist Incident*, 5.

<sup>16</sup> About the conceptual history of social patriotism in Hungary: Milán Pap, “„A nép és a szülőföld igaz szeretete” – A szocialista hazafiság fogalma a Kádár-rendszerben,” *Politikatudományi Szemle* 22, no.1 (2013): 66–86.

<sup>17</sup> Vince Lukács, “Szocialista hazafiság és proletár internacionalizmus,” in *Ifjúsági előadásorozat 27. 1969/70*, ed. Vince Lukács (Ifjúsági Lapkiadó Vállalat), 7.

fighters and revolutions in the past, hence the peasant uprisings, the uprisings against the Habsburgs, and the building of socialism were all part of the same framework.

Ten years after 1956, a new youth political movement emerged based on revolutionism. It was called the Revolutionary Youth Days ('Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok', abbreviated: FIN), a new political movement for the youth celebrating socialist patriotism free from internationalist connections<sup>18</sup>. Taking place every spring from 1967 to 1988, it was based on three historical public holidays: the 15th March 1848, celebrating the Hungarian Revolution, the 21st March 1919 which saw the Declaration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the 4th April 1945, when Hungary was liberated after World War II by the Soviet Red Army. The essence of this concept was that these three different historical events were connected with the idea of revolution. Thus, March 15<sup>th</sup> symbolizes the origins, the "lighting of the fire of the revolution", and the 4th April is the fulfillment of all former freedom fights, hence the latter was the most significant of the three holidays. The calendrical order also helped to maintain the increasing importance of the events, thus reducing the importance of the non-communist holiday of March 15<sup>th</sup>. Only the 1848 revolution had real legitimation and historical tradition in the society, thus with the movement, the regime attempted to exploit the social memory of that event.

"These celebrations presented earlier instances of domestic leftist radical activism in 1919 and 1945 as precursors of the student and New Left movements that were emerging in the West—not in order to create solidarity with those movements, but to demonstrate that Hungarians had no need for radical fights in the 1960s since their forefathers had already fought those battles some twenty to fifty years previously."<sup>19</sup>

The FIN was not the first example of an ideological connection being created between 1848, 1919, and 1945; it is rooted in the communist concept of history, in which the social development occurs through civic and socialist revolutions. Hence the ideologists interpreted Hungarian history as a chain of uprisings. The predecessor of the "Three Spring" ("Három tavasz") was that under the regime of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the Communists considered the revolution of 1848 as an antecedent, primarily characterized by Sándor Petőfi's character of the revolutionaries.<sup>20</sup>

The Revolutionary Youth Days was a political movement, which included celebrations, marches, cultural and sports events, and competitions, coordinated by the KISZ organizations such as at schools, workplaces and in the army. It became a tradition to organize an opening and closing ceremony of the KISZ at the capital or one of the more significant cities such

<sup>18</sup> Mark and Apor, "Socialism Goes Global," 878.

<sup>19</sup> Mark and Apor, "Socialism Goes Global," 878.

<sup>20</sup> Boldizsár Vörös, „*A múltat végképp eltörölni?*” (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézete, 2004), 100.

as Pécs or Debrecen. The participation of the youth was of utmost importance to the regime, a popularity survey published for the VIIIth Congress of the KISZ in 1971, at which a vast crowd appeared: “the Revolutionary Youth Days were attended by more than two million people a year.”<sup>21</sup> A booklet published by the KISZ mentioned significantly less, but still a high number, “hundred thousands of young people” in 1974.<sup>22</sup>

The movement of FIN included television quiz shows, scientific and art competitions nationwide. As an example, it was the 1967’s conference called “Három forradalmi korszak és az ifjúság” (“Three revolutionary era and the youth”) and the television broadcasted quiz show called “Hősök nyomában” (“In the Wake of Heroes”).<sup>23</sup> The connection between these events was based on the ideological framework of the “three springs”, thus they could focus more on ideology than the actual historical events. An article in *Magyar Ifjúság* reported the 1970’s FIN students’ conference, where the main topic was the relationship between youth and Marxism, with over “two hundred papers on Marxism.”<sup>24</sup>

Most of the events were held by the “basic organizations” (alapszervezet), thus the schools, factories, and even the People’s Army facilities became locations for the FIN. In practice, the organization of these events was left to the local level – with suggestions from the higher authorities – a feature that saw a lot of differences in the attendance at and efficiency of the programs in different basic organizations. The KISZ influence a majority of the younger generation through sports programs, festive membership meetings, debates, and cultural events although the implementation of the ideology depended on the local organizers the KISZ secretaries and propagandists.

The closing ceremonies of the Revolutionary Youth Days were linked to the celebration of 4th April. It was common for this day to include the oath ceremony when the new KISZ members were inaugurated. Here, the symbolism of fulfillment can be observed, moreover in the case of the closing ceremony of FIN in 1967, when the event was held at the top of the Kékes mountain, the highest peak in Hungary, a fire ceremony closed the FIN commemorating the liberation of Hungary in 1945.<sup>25</sup>

After the celebrations, evaluating the event was important for the KISZ and the party’s leading organizations. In a report of the Agitprop Department, they compared the first series of the FIN to the previous, presumably popular “We accuse the Imperialism” (“Vádoljuk

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<sup>21</sup> Csillik András (ed. et al.), *A KISZ VIII. kongresszusának jegyzőkönyve 1971* (Budapest: Ifjúsági Lapkiadó Vállalat, 1972), 101.

<sup>22</sup> *Nyári KISZ vezető képzés '74* (Ifjúsági Lapkiadó Vállalat, 1974), 12.

<sup>23</sup> PII. 289/4 250, Péter Apor, *Az elképzelt köztársaság, A Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság utóélete 1945-1989* (Budapest: MTA Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, 2014), 194.

<sup>24</sup> *Magyar Ifjúság* 1970/10. (március 13.) 7.

<sup>25</sup> PII. 289/4 250. Javaslata Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok megrendezésére. 1966. aug. 17

az imperializmust”) political movement with a positive result.<sup>26</sup> For the legitimization of the newly emerged movement without any significant social roots, participation was very important. Therefore the reports frequently highlighted the high attendance at these events.

### 1968: the year of revolt

In the second period of the 1960s, revolution was the main cultural phenomenon worldwide.<sup>27</sup> Numerous events in several countries reinvigorated the discourse of revolutionism, such as the “cultural revolution” of Maoist China, the Vietnam war, the student revolt in the USA and Western European cities. In Hungary, there were no revolutions or demonstrations against the regime in 1968, but the discourse of revolution was revitalized worldwide, as well as in Hungary, and in the field of youth politics the ideologically based construction was challenged. The historian Éva Sandeisky writes about this period in her memoir: “It was an exciting, eventful, hopeful time when I was a university student. In those years, when the international and the national circumstances made it possible to be part of the processes for the students, at least we thought so. The predecessor and the successor generations of the Kádár-era did not have that opportunity.”<sup>28</sup> These events ensured at least the feeling of the political participation for the youth, they could easily feel, that they had a major social impact under the state socialist regime also.

The year 1968 had direct consequences for Hungary, which affected both politics and ideology. One was the invasion of Czechoslovakia: On the night of 20<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> August 1968, Eastern Bloc armies from four Warsaw Pact countries – the Soviet Union, Bulgaria, Poland, and Hungary—invaded the ČSSR. This event revealed the limits of the Hungarian reform movement and revived memories of 1956.

The main ideologist of Kádárism noted these phenomena, recognized a deficiency in the party’s ideological education. According to György Aczél: “We have to explain the evolutionary type of our time. There are debates about that question within our borders and the international labor movement.[...] because of the differences of the concrete historical condition and duty the revolutionism means different for each country and political party.”<sup>29</sup> With that method Aczél tried to separate the revolution’s “militant” aspect from

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<sup>26</sup> PHL 289. f. 3/240. ö. e. Tájékoztató a Forradalmi Ifjúsági Napok néhány tapasztalatáról KISZ KB Agit. Prop. Osztálya, 1968. június 3.)

<sup>27</sup> Apor, *Az elképzelt köztársaság*, 194.

<sup>28</sup> Éva Sandeisky, “Az én hatvannyolcam,” in *Kádárizmus: átereszek. Évkönyv XVII*, ed. Gyula Kozák (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2010), 263–274. 274.

<sup>29</sup> György Aczél, *Eszmény erejével* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1971), 244.

the state-socialist countries like Hungary, where genuine uprisings are unnecessary. In that same speech, he declared the growing conquest of “revolutionary romanticism”: “In the consciousness of some youngster, the glory of revolution is tied only to the heroes of barricades and guerrilla wars; mostly they mention Che Guevara”.<sup>30</sup>

### Revolutionary Romanticism vs. Revolution of the everyday

In the first period of the 1970s, an ambiguity defined youth politics. On the one hand, the ideologists considered revolutionary romanticism necessary for increasing the participation of the younger generation in the socialist movement. On the other hand, the idea of revolutionism still remained threatening, it required an embedding in the non-heroic everyday.

The question is, how could the youth be revolutionary under the circumstances of state socialism? To answer that question the idea of ‘revolution of everyday’ was born. According to that theory, everyday work, learning and maintaining the existing system are reinterpreted as revolutionary action. One of the first examples of this idea was published by Péter Rényi in *‘Valóság’* journal in 1970<sup>31</sup>, and in more detail in literary historian and ideologist István Király’s essay in *Kortárs* and his book entitled *‘Hazafiság és forradalmiság’* (Patriotism and revolutionism).<sup>32</sup>

The main principles of ‘revolutionism of everyday’ influenced the context of Revolutionary Youth Days from 1968. In the 1968 May issue of *Ifjúsági Magazin*, Ferenc Baranyi, the managing editor of the magazine, published an article titled “Nem érkezettek ide késve” (“You didn’t come here late”). This article specifically targeted young people, who “think of the revolutionary youth of heroic ages with secret envy” and Baranyi offers them the concept of “revolution of everyday”<sup>33</sup> The connection between the Revolutionary Youth Days and Baranyi’s article is clear – besides the publishing date of April – when we examine the three illustrations accompanying the article. Three documents from the historical events being celebrated were published with the article. Probably, it is not a coincidence, that in this same issue, an illustrated report of the situation in Vietnam was published.<sup>34</sup> Thus Baranyi’s article was an attempt to balance the militant with the more acceptable side of revolutionism for the younger generation.

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<sup>30</sup> Aczél, *Eszménk erejével*, 244.

<sup>31</sup> Péter Rényi, “A forradalom, mely nem falja fel gyermekeit,” *Valóság* 13, no. 9 (1970): 13–22.

<sup>32</sup> István Király, “A mindennapok forradalmisága,” *Kortárs* 17, no. 11. (1973): 1791–1808; István Király: *Hazafiság és forradalmiság* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1974).

<sup>33</sup> Ferenc Baranyi, “Nem érkezettek ide késve,” *Ifjúsági Magazin* 4, no. 4 (1968): 22.

<sup>34</sup> György Pille, “Levélosztás... csak este,” *Ifjúsági Magazin* 4, no. 4. (1968): 23–25.

The idea of the “revolutionism of everyday” became clearer in the *Magyar Ifjúság* 1969 May 14<sup>th</sup> issue, in an article titled “Mai feladataink teljesítésével” (“By fulfilling our recent objectives”). This article was an introduction for the forthcoming Revolutionary Youth Days, and its main purpose was to link the revolutionary past with present objectives, to prove that the idea of an exciting past was relevant to the present: “There is no gap between the fights in the past and the present objectives of the youth. It has always been about that, people own their homeland, their life is based on work and enjoying its benefits.”<sup>35</sup>

It can be fruitful to examine the reasons for the strong connection between revolutionism and the Revolutionary Youth Days. In 1967 when the political movement was established, it was beneficial to connect the three celebrations, thus stressing the continuous line of freedom fights and revolutions. However, after 1968 the new, costly emerged Revolutionary Youth Days existed in that boiling political climate, thus the revolutionism may had dangerous connotations. The ceremonies are intended to be the exit of the everyday, they are opportunities to relive romantic revolutionism, thus they could be the basis of a leftist radical movement. The Communist Party and the Youth League tried to avoid that threat by publishing articles saturated with the idea of the “revolution of everyday” and they forced the celebration to focus primarily on the present. According to this interpretation, the Revolutionary Youth Days is the framework, where revolutionism can be experienced by the youth in a controlled and diminished way.

The integration of the “revolution of everyday” into FIN’s concept is more visible in the press representation than the structure of the events and celebrations. As a result of this phenomenon, there is no evidence of cancelled celebrations, the festive nature of the events remained. In the nationwide youth press, the tension between everydayness and festivity was commonly repeated throughout the 1970s. The 1974 February issue of the ‘Young Communist’ (*Ifjú Kommunista*) a publication entitled “Everyday and holidays” analyzed that ambiguity, the author of the article declared the importance of both states, and highlighted that ‘the ideological education should not be reduced only on holidays.’<sup>36</sup>

The discourse of revolutionism remained powerful but global political events years after the student revolts saw the discourse of revolutionism became less important globally as well as in Hungary. In the field of Hungarian youth politics, the forms devised between 1967–1970 remained almost the same, moreover, they became even triter. During the 1970s, the discourse faded so much, that in an article (titled “Youth, Revolutionism”) published in one of the daily newspaper “*Magyar Nemzet*” it was stated that being revolutionary for

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<sup>35</sup> *Magyar Ifjúság* 13, no. 11 (1969. március 14.): 2–3.

<sup>36</sup> G.F., “Hétköznapok, ünnepek,” *Ifjú Kommunista* 18, no. 2 (1974): 32.

the youth means to support the party's politics only.<sup>37</sup> In that period the lack of political activity was a serious issue for the youth organization, thus revolutionism became a synonym for denying the indifference and the political inactivity as illustrated by Karikó: "Have we understood enough with our young generation, why the mandatory work is needed, the learning, besides leisure time reading the maybe grueling books of Marx and other socio-political, philosophical books-journals, watching television about public life."<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

In conclusion, revolutionism was a point of collision in the aspect of youth politics. The events of 1956 revealed the immense differences between the youth's concept of revolution and that of the prevailing communist ideology. In the early period, even mentioning the "revolution" could have been dangerous for the political leadership, thus the idea of revolutionism had been replaced with terms like internationalism and socialist patriotism. Thereafter the Kádár-regime aimed to utilize the "revolutionary energies" of the youth for the party's interest. Political movements such as the "Revolutionary Youth Days" were established to achieve that interest, although the real ideological socialization impact of the youth was less effective than the political leadership expected.

The effects of 1968 reinvigorated the discourse of revolutionism in Hungary, positioning the youth to this new phenomenon was challenging for the ideologists. Initially, it seemed to be achieved by the communist party, ten years after 1956 they established a new annual political action based on revolutionism, and they involved a large number of the younger generation. However, facing the "Maoist" challenge, the idea of revolutionary romanticism was repressed again by the Communist Party and the Youth League. The Hungarian Communist Party and youth organization tried to balance "revolutionary romanticism" with the "revolution of everyday" through the programs of the Revolutionary Youth Days. They wanted to include both of these aspects which were difficult to comprehend for the younger generation. In the early '70s, this discourse gradually faded, and in the late '80s before the end of state socialism in Hungary, revolutionism and particularly the 1956 revolution became keystones of protest against the regime.

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<sup>37</sup> Sándor Karikó, "Ifjúság, forradalmiság. A nyolcvanas évek küszöbén." *Magyar Nemzet* 1980. febr. 21. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Karikó, "Ifjúság, forradalmiság," 3.

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ALEXANDRA ERDŐS

Langston Hughes, the Unnamed Hero Behind the Civil Rights Movement.  
W. Jason Miller. *Langston Hughes (Critical Lives)*.

Pro&Contra 5

No. 1 (2021) 67–72.



Little is it known that Martin Luther King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech from 1963 was inspired by "I Dream a World," a poem written by Langston Hughes in 1941 and published in 1945. King's famous speech echoes Hughes' words and ideas from 20 years before, and almost exactly mirrors the way the two icons spoke, as if they were contemporaries.

The new biography, as part of the *Critical Lives* series, aims to present critical figures of culture, literature, and history, in short, and in "the context of their lives." The innovation of the series is that writers also provide readers with illustrations, such as—in the case of Langston Hughes—photographs about himself in various stages of his life (some taken by his friends Henri Cartier-Bresson and Marion Palfi), photographs about his family members, and about handwritten or typed poems—some even containing his signature and/or changes in the words and lines. The series also aims at offering short analyses of major works by the artists, philosophers, or even politicians in question. Miller's book definitely has some freshness compared to the previous biographies written on Langston Hughes. Because of its shortness, it is adequate reading material for the general public and a good starting point for undergraduate students and their theses.

W. Jason Miller (author of *Langston Hughes and American Lynching Culture* [2011] and *Origins of the Dream: Hughes' Poetry and King's Rhetoric* [2015]) presents Hughes's life in its most significant events. One of the focal points of book is the people that impacted the writer's life, career, and authorship, and also the people Langston Hughes influenced. Such is Alice Walker, for instance, but the most important among all is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Civil Rights Movement leader. The stages and intervals presented in the book are further enhanced by significant poems or essays that are also analyzed true to the series' aims. The book also presents how American poets, such as Walt Whitman and Carl Sandburg influenced Hughes's poetry, especially how he used the free verse to speak on behalf of the poor and middle-class black Americans. Miller also reveals that this influence helped Hughes revolutionize blues and jazz poetry into what it is today.

The book consists of eleven chapters, each chapter focusing on certain periods of Hughes's life and the most important events and people from those years. The most interesting for Hughes scholars would be the first chapter with its newly-found information, and the last three in which the reader glimpses into the relationship between the African American Poet Laureate and the Reverend. The first chapter opens with the poet's early life and famous ancestry, something that people unfamiliar with him might not notice at first. Namely, Langston Hughes's birth year is 1901, not 1902—as believed by the poet and writer, and his biographers. Both Faith Berry and Arnold Rampersad in their respective biographies state 1902 to be Hughes's year of birth. The basis of the new information is found in an article written by Jennifer Schuessler (reporter of culture and intellectual life) for *The New York Times* in 2008. According to the reporter, Eric McHenry (poet and teacher at

Washburn University in Topeka, KS) conducted an online search for an ancestor of his from Topeka and came across unknown documents about Hughes's early life, namely evidence about his year of birth. Interestingly, in the early 1900s in the state of Missouri it was not required to document and record birth dates. Readers can rightly ask the question what significance a different year of birth means in the writer's life, and does anything change in regard to Hughes's work and its content? Unfortunately, Jason Miller does not offer an answer to that question, nor is this newly-found information elaborated further—one of the book's few possible flaws.

Further chapters also present some of Langston Hughes's major poems. Some of these are among his earliest ones, "Fairies" (1921) and "Dream" (1923). In these poems one can find the earliest mentions of Hughes's signature metaphor of the dream, which will culminate in the 1951 collection of poetry, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*. Another important poem discussed is "Mother to Son," published in December 1922, which, according to Miller, became "deeply embedded in the common vernacular of African American culture" (29). The above-mentioned poems paved Hughes's way to become an influential African American poet, writer, essayist, and dramatist. He was concerned with the black experience in America and the African American consciousness. Forty years later his poems and metaphors of the dream inspired Martin Luther King, Jr., and Langston Hughes became the unknown hero and voice behind the Civil Rights Movement.

Regardless of being a Hughes scholar or not, one cannot overlook the fact that Hughes called for a revolutionary civil rights movement years, rather decades, before Martin Luther King Jr. was chosen as the leader of the movement in the 1950s and became its hero in the 1960s. However, this does not change the fact that the two men were inspirations for each other. While Hughes spoke like an artist, King did like a reverend. Even though there was mutual respect between the two men, Martin Luther King Jr. never mentioned Hughes' name in any of his speeches, nor did he indicate who was the "mastermind" behind the ideas that changed the 1960s. One of the possible reasons was Hughes's well-known affiliation with the Left, though the poet never officially entered nor sympathized with any communist party. In the turbulent years around Hughes and his affiliation, topped with the hearing before Joseph McCarthy in 1953 during the Red Scare, Martin Luther King Jr. himself and his Southern Christian Leadership Conference were also accused of being in the communist front. This was the reason why the Reverend distanced himself and his organization, and severed public ties with the African American poet.

Despite being questioned and requested to testify for Communism (if not, at least provide McCarthy with names of communist sympathizers) both men continued to show their respect for the other, and in their own ways, their infinite support. On the one hand, Hughes was so deeply impacted by King's presence and role in the MIA (Montgomery

Improvement Association) and Southern Christian Leadership Conference that the Reverend became an integral part of Hughes's poetry and journalism. According to Miller, King appeared "as the subject or earn[ed] a key mention in no less than forty articles Hughes wrote for the *Chicago Defender*" (146). Hughes also declared on two occasions that King would become a "permanent fixture of black history" (Miller 146). On the other hand, the previously mentioned poem, "Mother to Son", was King's first choice to recite in 1956 to honor his wife and celebrate Mother's Day. That same year, which was also one year after the Montgomery Bus Boycott, during which King was chosen to become the leader of the Civil Rights Movement, Langston Hughes wrote the poem "Brotherly Love." This was not only about the Reverend, but also dedicated to him and published in the poet's newspaper column in *The Nation*. Interestingly, the poem is "narrated" by Simple (who appears by the name Jesse B. Simple, and is Hughes's "most fascinating Negro character" (see Arthur P. Davis) himself instead of a constructed speaker, and it is one of the rare instances in which the prose character fluently transmits the poet's words in a different genre. The same Simple in a 1963 article imagines himself as the president of the United States, and in case he is ever elected his first order will be: "I hereby command the misusers to turn over all dogs, prod rods, and fire hoses to Rev. Martin Luther King" (Miller 149).

The bond between the two African American intellectuals just strengthened as years passed. Jason Miller states: "the connection between these two icons [Hughes and King] demonstrate how Hughes's poetry played as much of a key role in the civil rights movement as it did in shaping the New Negro Movement" (159). Anyone who does a thorough research in both men's works cannot overlook how much Hughes influenced King's sermons and speeches. During their time of acquaintance, Hughes was watched by the HUAC, which led to their silence towards each other, but they never ceased to admire each other. Given these circumstances, it is reasonable why King never invoked Hughes's name publicly nor mentioned it. King was, nevertheless, able to get Hughes's words across to millions of African Americans and for future generations, and, as Miller observes, they "were linked visually as writer and performer" (185). As a conclusion we can state that the new biography indeed "illuminates Hughes's status as an international literary figure<sup>1</sup>," whose contribution to the African American literary canon and to the Civil Rights movement cannot be overlooked. Jason W. Miller makes use of unpublished letters and manuscripts to re-construct the image readers have of Langston Hughes. From "the most beloved African American poet of the twentieth century<sup>2</sup>," Hughes

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<sup>1</sup> From the abstract found on the back cover.

<sup>2</sup> From the abstract found on the back cover.

is repositioned as a genius writer who encouraged and promoted poets and writers, and inspired generations of activists and politicians, not only Martin Luther King, Jr., but also such individuals as Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States.



HASSAN AIT-EL-OUALI

The Power of Narratives

Andrea Smorti. *Telling to Understand: the Impact of Narrative on Autobiographical Memory*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland. 2020.

Pro&Contra 5

No. 1 (2021) 73–77.



Since the 1980s, Memory Studies has been enriched by a wide range of perspectives that contributed to the multidisciplinary of the field. Disciplines such as neurology, psychology, sociology, literary and cultural studies have provided empirical, theoretical, and critical concepts and insights. However, little attention has been paid to the heterogeneity of approaches that the field can accommodate. In the past few years, there have been calls to bring the different approaches into a productive exchange and a cooperative dialogue. *Telling to Understand: the Impact of Narrative on Autobiographical Memory* engages in this debate by bringing together psychological and narratological approaches to the study of autobiographical memory. This latter is a significant aspect of the book given that Memory Studies have tended to focus more on social and collective memory than individual memory. The author Andrea Smorti's main target in this book is autobiographical narratives and the cognitive processes of remembering.

The major problem that the author is faced with is that narratives are indispensable to achieve temporal continuity and coherence, but, at the same time, can be unreliable given their constructedness, which renders them liable to errors and, therefore, create fallacies and illusions. Smorti, however, puts aside this ambivalent nature of narratives and relocates the matter to his field of expertise—psychology—to investigate the implications of narratives in the psychological well-being of individuals. The book adopts narrative theory as an approach to deal with one's life memories and experiences and to make sense of them. In other words, Smorti makes use of narratives in his psychological experimentations to see how the narrative structuring of memories leads to understanding one's self and others, hence his argument that “humans must constantly build stories and tell them to understand both their own and others' events” (13). In the two parts, Smorti elaborates on how this twofold narrative understanding develops and takes place.

The first part of the book, Narrative Understanding of the Self, is dedicated to the first facet of narrative understanding. It starts with the supposition that narrative understanding of oneself comes from two sources: memory (to speak of autobiographical narrative in its historical sense) and play (from which narratives that have playful, literary, or aesthetic dimensions originate). Smorti's arguments are premised on the inadequacy of the archival thesis dominating the study of autobiographical memory; thus, he turns to and focuses on the variable of language, which serves as a medium between memory and narrative. This is a major breakthrough in the book and a pivotal point of the argument. The fact that language transforms memories into narratives makes the excavation of memory a more complex process rather than a simple, intact restoring operation.

What seems to be the “mysterious jump” from memory to narrative is made transparent by tracing its trajectory: a memory or thought has to pass through the medium of voice, be subject to the physical (phonetics) and cultural (semantic) constraints of language, and be

organized following a narrative structure within which the autobiographical genre presents a model of organization. Therefore, telling a memory is not a simple remembering process, but follows a number of transformations imposed by the prerequisites of diachronicity and cultural rules. Autobiographical narrative, then, makes the individual develop self-understanding thanks to the influence of the social conventions of storytelling.

“From play to Narrative” is another aspect of narrative understanding that Smorti introduces in the book. Here, the author connects play to narrative via the cognitive functions of constancy and variability that the child develops while playing. These two primary functions are responsible for the accumulation of knowledge that, with the acquisition of language, play can develop into stories endowed and supplemented with imagination. The dialectics of constancy and variability, which can function in adult life, basically sets forth norms and deviations, which in turn provide the material for the construction of narratives, given that the typical structure of narratives centers on narrative tensions, problems, and deviations which disturb norms and equilibrium. The playful narrative can take different shapes and be used for various purposes—literary, autobiographical, or legal—all concerned with reordering, repairing, or explaining certain anomalies and inconsistencies.

In this part, Smorti demonstrates how the exchange between cognitive processes and narrative can cooperate in order to help the individual understand events that are, for example, traumatic by structuring them in the form of a story. Moreover, the cognitive skills responsible for building constancies and creating variability also help the individual with any anomaly through creative story structuring and telling. The arguments presented in this part are supported with empirical evidence from neuroscience as well as from Smorti’s own psychological experiments with patients.

The second part of the book, which deals with the narrative understanding of the other, builds on the coordination between systems of reasoning and on models of interpretation to achieve that purpose. Smorti begins this part by investigating the history of writing, or rather the transition from orality to literacy. This transition means an evolution from episodic memory, to mimetic memory, and finally to narrative memory. With the written text, however, many details, pertaining to the context and authorial intention, are lost; hence the need to recollect what is lost. This recollection becomes subject to systems of reasoning which can be either logical/paradigmatic or plausible/syntagmatic.

Despite the rigid boundaries between the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic, Smorti argues that the narrative understanding of stories (autobiographical or fictional) is the result of both logics—the narrative logic. For instance, the fact that a story belongs to a genre is a paradigmatic aspect of it because it disposes the reader’s mind in a certain category/direction while narrative time/diachronicity belongs to the syntagmatic, plausible logic. In addition to this, the narrative understanding of a text makes use of the interpretative act to

decipher its possible meaning(s). In this regard, three ways of interpretation are possible: (a) author-oriented/biographical, (b) text-based/the text itself, and (c) reader-response. It is in the coordination of all the three ways that narrative understanding of the other occurs. The basic assumption here is that the interpretation is a second version of the text, a continuum between the text and interpretation, which extends to the addresser and the addressee.

In the last chapter, Smorti concludes by reflecting on the impacts of the Digital Age and of cyberculture on narrative understanding. A major impact is the gradual disappearance of the text and the dominance of the paratext, the implications of which include the “literal” death of the author (compared to Barthes’ metaphorical Death of the Author) and the spread of indirect interpretations and superficial readings. Therefore, in the Digital Age, the text increasingly loses its value and becomes insignificant. Consequently, when the text loses its value, so does the Self as the autobiographical self is a text itself; moreover, with the rise of social media, individuals develop syndromes, such as “the fear of missing out” (FoMO) and/or the “pathology of recognition” whereby the individual occupies, not the center, but the periphery of Internet networks.

This book is another contribution of Andrea Smorti’s committed research on studies of memory, autobiography, and psychology. A major strength of the book lies in its taking into consideration the impacts of language and narrativization, with both their constraints and benefits, in order to illustrate the dynamic circulation and metamorphosis of memories and thoughts within the cognitive system, therefore giving new insights that are shortcomings of the approach that considers memory as an archive. Equally importantly, the inquisition into the world of play brings to the fore useful concepts that can explain the source of some narrative devices and literary styles. On the other hand, because the book sets the objective of clarifying how narrative understanding occurs, its methodology takes a determinate course of action in order to arrive at the conclusion, and is blind, for example, to the endless meanings and interpretations that narratives can assume. For this reason, readers might find the author’s interpretations to be biased.

All in all, the book successfully delivers the idea that storytelling is an effective way to achieve narrative understanding. Smorti brings memory and narratives to a rich dialogue that contributes a great deal to Memory Studies. The structure of the book makes it easy to follow the arguments, and the author combines theory and practice and draws from prominent figures like Vygostky, Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Jonathan Culler, Roman Jakobson, to name but a few. Thanks to this, the book takes the reader to discover the dynamicity of autobiographical memory as the author makes eloquent references to dynamic aspects, namely language, play, and cyberculture. The book can be of general interest to students of Memory Studies and Psychology as the research provided leans towards cognitive and narrative psychology, but it can serve as resourceful reference for students of literature as well.