

# PRO&CONTRA

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# **PRO&CONTRA**

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**BÁLINT HONOS**

**Reformism, Radicalism, and Progressivism:  
The Case of Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century Colorado Politics**

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## Abstract

This paper examines the political dynamics of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century Colorado, focusing on the interplay between reformism, radicalism, and progressivism. The objective of this paper is to integrate classical syntheses that sought to capture the broader conceptual history with the abundant local and regional historical writing. This is done in order to address the limitations of focusing on labels such as reformism, radicalism, and progressivism, as well as the fragmentation of historical research. The careers of Senator Henry M. Teller and Representative John F. Shafroth are central to understanding the juncture of the broader conceptual history and the social history of regions and to ultimately understand the complexities of the era. This study identifies three critical themes in Colorado's political evolution: the struggle over silver coinage, the loosening ties to political parties, and a constructive attitude towards political institutions. By analyzing these developments, the paper argues that Colorado's experience provides valuable insights into the broader currents of American political thought during this transformative period. The roles of Teller and Shafroth underscore the complex relationship between regional interests and national policy, revealing how local actors helped shape the political culture of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century American Politics through political institutions.

**Keywords:** Populist, Free Silver, American politics, Colorado, political culture

## Introduction

The development of mass movements is a primary focus of historical research on late 19<sup>th</sup>-century American politics, with especially the Populist often taking center stage.<sup>1</sup> Industrialization, the institutionalization of the Western expansion and the development of a need for broader representation caused a wider set of change in how Americans conceived their political, economic system and their society. This paper tries to highlight the practices of conceptual labeling and the consequences that followed from this practice in historical writing. It offers an alternative perspective by examining the direct correspondence between historical actors and their conceptualization of politics in a manner that focusing on social and discursive (local/regional) contexts. The paper is not an attempt at a general review of

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<sup>1</sup> This paper refers to the broad movement that appeared at the end of the century and its politically organized form (People's Party) as Populist(s) with a capital "P" opposed to populism with lowercase "p," which may refer to current debates in political science in connection with the theory of populism

the historiography of Populism, neither an attempt to mark out new research directions on Populism *per se*. This essay argues merely that in order to understand its impact, it is important to examine the effects of the heterogeneous web of reformist culture formed by different organized and informal movements, in line with contemporary research on the era.<sup>2</sup>

The opening section asks questions about reliance on terms such as “radical,” “reformist,” and “progressive” within normative-dialectic frameworks of much of “classic” 20<sup>th</sup>-century historiography. These concepts often served as macro-labels of movements and positioned them relative to later political developments like Progressivism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century and New Deal Democrats later. Alternatively, it defined them in relation to ideologies like modern liberalism and socialism. Later historical writing heterogenized these broad narratives, highlighting both continuities and discontinuities with the aforementioned movements or ideologies and focused more on the regional strains of the movements, thus circumventing the problem that an archetypal Populist had proven impossible to construct. This paper continues on this track by introducing two Colorado Silverite politicians, Henry M. Teller and John F. Shafroth, and tries to connect the individual to their activities as a member of a political group and also to the broader culture of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century public life via studying the changes in the *political*.

The term *political* as used in this context does not align with Carl Schmitt’s definition, but refers to the conceptualization of political action, influenced by Pierre Rosanvallon’s theoretical work. As Rosanvallon argued:

“[i]n speaking of “the political” as a noun, I thus mean as much a modality of existence of life in common as a form of collective action that is implicitly distinct from the functioning of politics. To refer to “the political” rather than to “politics” is to speak of power and law, state and nation, equality and justice, identity and difference, citizenship and civility—in sum, of everything that constitutes political life beyond the immediate field of partisan competition for political power, everyday governmental action, and the ordinary function of institutions.”<sup>3</sup>

In this sense, the paper attempts to showcase that by interpreting also the broader political culture through the relationship between individual actors and their outlooks and self-reflection rather than merely positioning them in relation to their predecessors and successors, a more nuanced picture of late 19<sup>th</sup>-century becomes attainable.

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<sup>2</sup> For an overview on the party system and political culture see: Rachel A Shelden and Erik B Alexander, “Dismantling the Party System: Party Fluidity and the Mechanisms of Nineteenth-Century U.S. Politics,” *Journal of American History* 110, no. 3 (2023): 419–48.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, *Democracy Past and Future* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 36.



## Conceptual Framing and the Historiography of Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century American Public Life

The People's Party and its travails and transformations, as well as subsequent third party activities, remain at the center of much of the historical writing on the era.<sup>4</sup> The People's Party was the political party established in the 1890s by the former Farmer Alliances. It rose to prominence as a kind of political rebellion within the agrarian sector, prompted by the farmers' deteriorating credit situation, the decline in crop prices, and the advent of industrial capitalism. The movement spread to the West and Midwest and established itself as a political party advocating for economic reforms (silver coinage, gradual income tax, anti-trust legislation) and also political ones (initiatives and referenda, term limits, direct election of U.S. senators). The dynamics of historical debates was determined by the exchange between critical readings on the Populist, most notably by Richard Hofstadter who reacted to the early work of John D. Hicks who evaluated the Populist as a positive reformist movement, with the work of Lawrence Goodwyn the latter approach prevailed and scholars like Michael Kazin and Charles Postel expanded on it.<sup>5</sup> Their works highlight the mainstream dynamic of the historical debate, which was revolving around the normative evaluation of the movement. Were the Populist agrarian reformers as Hicks or Goodwyn argues or were they backward thinkers like Hofstadter alleges? This entire historical disagreement, however, is based on shaky ground as Southern, Western and Midwestern Populism had different traits. Therefore, recent studies have tended to focus more on a state-by-state analysis of the movement providing context, but blurring the overall national narrative.<sup>6</sup> The question of labeling, how radical or reformist the Populists were, and the continuities and discontinuities in relation to later movements, like Progressives and New

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<sup>4</sup>As this paper selectively handles major works for more encompassing historical works see: Worth Robert Miller, "A Centennial Historiography of American Populism," *Kansas History* 16, no. 1 (1993): 54–69; William F. Holmes, "Populism: In Search of Context," *Agricultural History* 64, no. 4 (1990): 26–58; Ryo Yokoyama, "'Populism' and 'Populism': Aporia of the Historiography of American Populism," *Review of American Studies* 39 (2017): 101–22.

<sup>5</sup>For the individual authors mentioned here see (in order of mention): Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1955); K. D. Bicha, "The Conservative Populists: A Hypothesis," *Agricultural History* 47, no. 1 (1973): 9–24; Victor C. Ferkiss, "Populist Influences on American Fascism," *The Western Political Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (1957): 350–73; Sheldon Hackney, *Populism: The Critical Issues* (Boston: Little Brown, 1971); John Donald Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers' Alliance and the People's Party* (U of Minnesota Press, 1931); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); Michael Kazin, *The Populist Persuasion: An American History*, Rev. ed (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Charles Postel, *The Populist Vision* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). {\i}Populism: The Critical Issues} (Boston: Little Brown, 1971

<sup>6</sup>Holmes, "Populism: In Search of Context," 26–27.

Dealers, was instrumental during the initial debates. For Hicks and especially Goodwyn, the focus fell on how Populist continued the radical republican tradition of American politics. Hofstadter, due to his negative evaluation, delimited the continuity with New Deal progressives. The already existing ample historical work on local and regional organization patterns provided munition to highlight positive and negative traits for either side of the argument as race relations, movement organization, main policy aims, the relations to major parties and political practice in general all differed regionally.

While in 1896 the People's Party practically fused with the Democratic Party, the party practically disappeared at the beginning of the 1900s, the questions of its legacy caused further complications.<sup>7</sup> Continuities with subsequent reformist movements and populist projects could be interpreted as belonging to the tow of the original Populist. Leftist historiography evaluated how the movement possibly showcased socialistic and radical trends and even came to represent itself at times as an alternative to capitalism.<sup>8</sup> Later Norman Pollack revised his work and adjusted his analysis to suggest a reformist capitalist—rather than flat out anti-capital—bent to the movement.<sup>9</sup>

Analytically speaking, these works can be categorized based on the conceptual labels they prefer. Radicalism represents a quick change in the political *status quo*, while reformism takes a more gradual approach. Progressivism is often associated with modern American ideals like New Deal liberalism. For Hicks or Goodwyn, and with a more radical emphasis for Lasch or Pollack, the focus fell on establishing continuity with progressivism (and even explaining how vistas supposedly opened, leading to socialist conviction). In this context, radicalism is portrayed as a direct contradiction to the established norms, while reformism acts as a barrier to Populism's ability to bring about a change in American politics. This notion is best exemplified by Goodwyn's theory of a "shadow movement," which steered agrarian Southern Populist towards free silver advocacy in the Western and Midwestern regions, resulting in the dilution of their more extreme policy suggestions through their alliance with national Democrats. This notion neglects to separate regional specificities and how they interacted with each other, exemplified by how Silverites, Populist and reformists within Democrats and Republicans cooperated during the election of 1896. Lasch and Pollack stretch the positive reading, by tying Populism to socialism, in order to establish a

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<sup>7</sup>R. Hal Williams, *Realigning America: McKinley, Bryan, and the Remarkable Election of 1896* (Lawrence, Kan.: University Press of Kansas, 2010); Daniel Klinghard, *The Nationalization of American Political Parties, 1880–1896* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>8</sup>Christopher Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1969); Norman Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America: Midwestern Populist Thought*, 2nd printing, A Harvard Paperback (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976).

<sup>9</sup>Norman Pollack, *The Just Polity: Populism, Law, and Human Welfare* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

foundation for an American socialism. Lasch defined radicalism as socialism, but he believed that the Populist movement did not fall under the category of being ideologically socialist.<sup>10</sup> For Pollack, the opposing attitude of existing socialist leaders and failing to unite urban and agrarian workers posed an important problem, as earlier mentioned this led to conceptualize the Populist as radicalism.<sup>11</sup> Here the scholars must have to consider that certain policies needed to be adjusted to accommodate the rural farmer population with urban workers. The best example is the issue of agricultural prices, where irreconcilable positions arose. Accommodating the farmers' demand to raise the price of agricultural products through economic measures would mean a higher cost of living for workers. This reconciliation needed a more pragmatic approach, this is exemplified by the fact that the silver issue was gradually abandoned and the issue of controlling interest rates was solved through the reinstatement of the federal central banking system. Hofstadter's interpretation alludes to progressivism and especially the difference between Populist and New Deal progressives, also reflecting to a different dialectic where his own historical context of McCarthy's radicalism became the inheritor of Populist's "agrarian myth."<sup>12</sup> Hofstadter, by highlighting negative continuities, therefore asserts a discontinuity in possible broader positive effects of the movement ignoring how certain elements of the movement adapted their policy stances and implemented pragmatic measures which in fact affected later movements.

This paper seeks to highlight a few neglected, but insightful cases that have received little attention in discussions about this era. Mostly situated in Western states, the Silverites were active members of the established political parties, with a strong presence in the Republican Party. They advocated for silver coinage, meaning a bimetallic payment system where both gold and silver coins are in circulation. The economic idea was that increasing the money supply would decrease interest rates and improve the credit circumstances of western farmers. Naturally, the subject of silver became a central theme in many mainstream works, yet they were seamlessly incorporated into the wider scope of the Populist movement. They were portrayed mostly as a group that diverted the agrarian movements' attention from their more radical issues (see the "shadow movement" concept) or nativists and anti-Semitic (see in Hofstadter's work). When it came to the key figures, silver was mostly associated with William J. Bryan in the aforementioned work and the election of 1896.

What this paper particularly proposes, in line with studying the *political*, is to examine the contemporary problematization of social life and related reflections; as well as the redefinition of the contour of politics that followed from that. By focusing on these notions,

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<sup>10</sup> Lasch, *The Agony of the American Left*, 7.

<sup>11</sup> Pollack, *The Populist Response to Industrial America*, 85–102.

<sup>12</sup> Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to FDR*, 23–59.

the case of the Silverites provides further clarification regarding how their decisions were determined by historical specifics like rising industrialism, the integration of the American West, and the debates on the role of central government. More importantly, rather than focusing on evaluating their action, this paper explores the relationship between their conception and action when they faced dissonance between the two and they had to readjust and realign. Bradley J. Young captured this well when he studied the Western Republican revolt. According to his argument, three distinct traits can be identified: westernism, Republicanism, and the silver issue.<sup>13</sup> Apart from those three, the most crucial factor is their ambivalent relationship with other parties and their alliance founded on shared values. This can be described as an issue that is limited to a specific region and state, to some extent. However, the Biographical Directory of the United States Congress suggests that representatives who supported the Silverite movement in the early 1900s were inclined to change political parties and regarded the parties as no longer relevant. It appears that before policy issues for either Populist, Silverites and other movements, the most important task was a radical rethinking of representation in the broader sense. The main argument of this paper is that through the reconceptualization of representation, it was mostly the Silverites who served as a conduit for the progressive proposals like the expansion of suffrage and the increase in the role of the federal government in relation to their citizens. Most importantly, they re-conceptualized the role of a representative in relation to the represented and how a politician can affect structural changes. This can be described as a shift in political culture, centered around increased representation of the public and radical transformations in the system through political institutions, policy and political conduct (including the potential abandonment of the two-party structures), inflicted by politicians with a peculiar mix of political acumen and idealism. The central emphasis fell on cultivating values to advance reforms rather than on specific policies which would assume importance only after the change of this broader understanding of the political. The presence of this culture of change (sometimes radical, sometimes reformist) in these third parties and, more importantly, in the major parties until the mid-20<sup>th</sup>-century was what drove change across the political institutions, and nowhere are these commitments more apparent than in the case of the Silverites.

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<sup>13</sup> Bradley J. Young, "Silver, Discontent, and Conspiracy: The Ideology of the Western Republican Revolt of 1890-1901," *Pacific Historical Review* 64, no. 2 (1995): 243–65. On Western reformism: Paul Kleppner, "Voters and Parties in the Western States, 1876-1900," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (1983): 49–68; Nathalie Massip, "Populism in the American West: An Enduring and Evolving Trend," *Ide.As. Idées d'Amérique*, no. 14 (2019). For an overview of regional studies: Yokoyama, "'Populism' and 'Populism': Aporia of the Historiography of American Populism," 109–11.

All this suggests that the pervasive culture of reform in the economic, social, and political realms demanded a reevaluation of politics at a more comprehensive level. For this undertaking, the priority should lie in the examination and interpretation of the framing and promotion of the issues, rather than the assessment of policies. The late 19<sup>th</sup>-century American political milieu stands out as an exceptional historical context, marked by profound societal and political shifts owing to the industrial revolution and the changing stature of the United States. The Silverites exemplify the reformist culture that tried to define the changes while also trying to implement change and, to that end, disregarded traditions of party affiliation, representative politics, and offered the practice and conception of a different *political*. Labels of radicalism, reformism, and relativism in subsequent movements become inadequate in this sense, as there are radical elements primarily focused on changing the political system and redefining the perception of political parties, while the Silverites' efforts to implement policy changes through political institutions can also be seen as reformist.

### **Western Tradition in National Politics: Henry M. Teller and John F. Shafroth**

In the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, Colorado was an archetypical Western state. Admitted into the union in 1876, it was a full-fledged member of the United States of America. Henry M. Teller was politically active and ultimately elected to the 44<sup>th</sup> Congress as a senator. John F. Shafroth, 24 years younger than Teller, was a businessman and a city attorney in Denver until he considered national office in the 1890s. Both men were initially Republicans, which was typical in the West during the post-Civil War era. Nevertheless, with the emergence of new challenges in the context of industrialism, the circumstances altered due to factors such as railway companies, Eastern credit, and the conditions of silver mining. Consequently, both men were compelled to adjust accordingly. The sectional nature of the silver issue and the thematization of it as a Western issue is often mentioned. Bradley J. Young, when examining the ideology of the Silverite movement, highlights westernism, Republicanism and silver coinage as an essential component of the movement.<sup>14</sup> This section will further explore Teller's and Shafroth's perspectives on American politics and how these themes influenced their thinking.

Henry Moore Teller and John Shafroth had formal affiliations with both the Democratic and Republican Parties, along with their individual Silverite Republican factions.<sup>15</sup> Teller

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<sup>14</sup>Young, "Silver, Discontent, and Conspiracy," 245.

<sup>15</sup>The collections of the History Society of Colorado and the Denver Public Library contain the primary sources related to the contested election. Additional documents are gathered at the University of Colorado in Boulder. The three books later referenced by Ellis Elmer, Smith D. Duane, and Leonard J. Stephen are

ran as a Republican until 1896, then briefly as a Silver Republican, and from 1901 until his resignation as a Democrat. Shafroth was first elected as a Republican in 1894 and re-elected twice as a Silver Republican in 1896 and 1898. He later won as a fusion candidate of the Silver Republican and Democratic Parties in 1900 and then as a Populist with Democratic support in 1901. In 1904 resigned because of election frauds in 1902, then when he reentered Congress (he briefly served as the Governor of Colorado from 1909 to 1913) as a senator in 1912 he run on a Democratic ticket. At first glance, this complex web of changes in affiliations and coalition building for elections seems complicated, but untangling the events, decisions, justifications, and reactions from constituents and colleagues permits us to peek into the dilemmas of the reformist culture at the turn of the century. Studies of individual politicians highlighted how those people faced current political issues and dilemmas and what kinds of political innovations and techniques they applied.<sup>16</sup> The focus on uncovering these shifts in thinking in politics, as mentioned in the previous section, is captured by the way representation was conceptualized.

The central issue for Silverites, especially Teller and Shafroth, was to conduct politics in a way to achieve their goal: silver coinage. What differentiates them from Populist is their tendency to be pragmatic about how to achieve these goals, while maintaining a moral ground for their political practice. First, they rejected party affiliation and implied their commitment to representing the interests of the common people. This was in contrast to the Populist, for whom maintaining an independent third party identity was crucial. For the Populist the matter of fusion, until 1896, was predominantly a regional concern, as observed in states such as North Carolina and South Dakota.<sup>17</sup> Second, silver as an issue was present in the West, especially in the rocky mountain regions, because of regional business interest, mostly silver mining. Nevertheless, Silverites framed the issue of silver coinage in international terms and as an issue serving the people. Third, when Silverites got to political power in congress they ultimately labored through the institutions to implement changes opposed to congressional

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major works that summarize the collections and serve as biographical works on Teller and Shafroth.

<sup>16</sup> In the case of Silverites many individual studies and biographical works exist, some examples: Joel Sipress, "A Narrowing of Vision: Hardy L. Brian and the Fate of Louisiana Populism," *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 7, no. 1 (2008): 43–67; Irving Bernstein, "Samuel Gompers and Free Silver, 1896," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 29, no. 3 (1942): 394–400; Lewis W. Rathgeber, "Joseph C. Sibley, Democratic Presidential Aspirant in 1896," *Western Pennsylvania Historical Magazine* 37, no. (1954): 107–15 For works treating Silverites as a group see: William L. Hewitt, "The Election of 1896: Two Factions Square Off," *The Colorado Magazine* 54, no. 1 (1977): 44–57; Elmer Ellis, "The Silver Republicans in the Election of 1896," *Journal of American History* 18, no. 4 (1932): 519–34.

<sup>17</sup> Ronnie W. Faulkner, "North Carolina Democrats and Silver Fusion Politics, 1892-1896," *The North Carolina Historical Review* 59, no. 3 (1982): 230–51; D. Jerome Tweton, "Considering Why Populism Succeeded in South Dakota and Failed in North Dakota," *South Dakota History* 22, no. 4 (1993): 330–44.



Populist who at the turn of the century disappeared. These main points demonstrate a slightly different, but dissimilar in a seminal way, notion on behalf of the Silverites. The long careers of Teller and Shafroth represent the pinnacle of a pragmatic radical-reformist sentiment that successfully transmitted its values across different political parties and eras.

As the Congressional carrier of both Teller and Shafroth showcases, party affiliation was secondary to achieving political goals. Historical writing often portrays this behavior as potential opportunism. In certain instances, this may indeed be the case, as later demonstrated. Distinguishing between opportunism and political astuteness, however, proves challenging.<sup>18</sup> Nonetheless, a key aspect of this era is a widespread culture that rejected the ruling parties. The summer before the 1896 election and the subsequent Republican, Populist and Democratic primaries demonstrate this notion to parties well. The letters of Teller preceding the convention reflected the support and the bitter dilemmas the silver faction faced; one letter (dated the last day of the Republican convention) says—“Man is a traitor whose principles aren’t stronger than political affiliations is [...] a traitor [...] people are with you.”<sup>19</sup> Teller becomes the leader of a Western faction in the Republican Party which first attempts to implement Silverite policies in the party’s platform, but as the party will not be receptive, they bolt and form a separate Silverite Republican Party.

In a circulating document, which Teller revised, the sentiment is undoubtable, the Silverite Republicans write:

“When, as delegates to the St. Louis Republican Convention, we withdrew from that organization, we stated that we could not long- or act with the party which proposed to utterly abandon the bimetallic system, because we believed that such a policy if enacted into law would mean untold distress, and we intended thereby to indicate that we would [for the future] throw our influence to the party which [~~“party which”~~ is crossed out and rewritten as “candidate who”] should appear most willing and most capable of assisting in the restoration of silver to its rightful place as a money metal. The Democratic Party in its Chicago Convention has taken a position in its platform so pronouncedly favorable to silver and has nominated candidates of such unquestionable convictions in favor of the bimetallic policy and of such high personal character that we have determined to give them [~~“them”~~ crossed out switched to “those candidates”] our support.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sheldon and Alexander, “Dismantling the Party System.”

<sup>19</sup> P.L. Hatsway to Henry M. Teller, June 18, 1896, MSS622, box 1, folder 16, Henry Moore Teller Collection, History Colorado, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>20</sup> Handout document draft for public distribution, July 18 1896, MSS622, box 4, folder 53, Henry Moore Teller Collection, History Colorado, Denver, Colorado.

The crossing out of any reference to the support of any parties as organizations (here specifically the Democratic Party) stresses the need for Teller to not affiliate with them, but with the issue. Both Shafroth and Teller got broad support, many of the letters that Teller receives attest to a broad support from other Western states and sometimes from more surprising places. 51 Nebraska Republicans approve of his bolting from the party.<sup>21</sup> A man from Chicago sends a telegram immediately during the St. Louis convention disparaging the Republican presidential candidate—“Familys [sic] congratulations people are with you McKinley’s name is mud.”<sup>22</sup> He got letters even from Ohio encouraging him and most Americans to abandon party affiliation in favor of the silver issue, which would improve the situation of the average person.<sup>23</sup> The picture after the lost election of 1896 (for Democrats and Silver Republicans too) was similarly bleak to the Silver Republicans:

“Of five congressmen who had taken an active part in the bolt from the Republican Party, only two—Shafroth and Hartman—were returned to the next Congress; of the five senators, one—Teller—was re-elected, one—Dubois—defeated, and the other three—Cannon, Mantle, and Pettigrew—held over for the rest of their terms, but did not secure re-election.”<sup>24</sup>

In certain cases, such as Dubois’, a Silver Republican lost to a Populist or another coalition-affiliated politician because of disagreements within the organization. Despite the perception of solid support for Bryan in the electoral college, he actually lost California, Oregon, North Dakota, most of the Eastern coast, and the Midwest, including Pennsylvania and Ohio. Colorado was stable for Shafroth and Teller, as the organized Silverites disappeared from the political sphere, the gravitation to the Democratic Party and subsequent Bryan tickets developed in Teller’s and Shafroth’s mind.

Western senators and representatives besides the issue of silver coinage indirectly tied their choice to bolt from the Republican Party to representing their constituents and people around the US. After the loss of 1896 many Silverites reconsidered their political affiliations. For example, William M. Stewart got re-elected as a Silver Republican senator of Nevada, but later rejoined the Republican Party. He recollects:

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<sup>21</sup> “51 Republicans” to Henry M. Teller, June 20 1896, MSS622, box 2, folder 19, Henry Moore Teller Collection, History Colorado, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>22</sup> Ferd Barndollan to Henry M. Teller, June 18, 1896, MSS622, box 1, folder 14, Henry Moore Teller Collection, History Colorado, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>23</sup> Seven Citizens of Canton, Ohio to Henry M. Teller, June 16 1896, MSS622, box 1, folder 14, Henry Moore Teller Collection, History Colorado, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>24</sup> Elmer Ellis, *Henry Moore Teller, Defender of the West* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1941), 286.



“After the silver question was eliminated from politics, having been a Republican from the organization of that party, I returned to my natural allegiance, and entered upon the campaign with the Republican Party in 1900. My Republican associates in the Senate understood that I severed my relations with the Republican Party on the silver question, and that my position on that question was unchanged.”<sup>25</sup>

The case of Stewart showcases that the Silverite movement was not a homogenous political entity. Teller and Shafroth were confronted with the dilemma of the obsolescence of their individual Silverite Republican Party; nevertheless, they decided to uphold their promise and work towards achieving their political goals in accordance with their principles. For example, when Stephen Leonard writes about Shafroth he describes his position:

“He consorted with Populists because of their stand on silver, but Congressman Shafroth, attorney and real estate investor, was no radical. His rhetoric simply reflected that he was a Westerner representing Western businessmen against Eastern businessmen, whom Shafroth and many others in the West saw as exploitative, colonial overlords. For him the question was not whether the West would be developed, but rather who would benefit from that development.”<sup>26</sup>

Although the influence of business interests cannot be denied, it is worth examining the shift that both Teller and Shafroth underwent in the late 1890s towards an anti-colonialist stance, which was in direct opposition to the Spanish-American War and the Boer Wars. In a similar vein to Stewart, they also recognized the impracticality of pursuing bimetallism. However, unlike Stewart, during the Wilson administration, they made a significant shift towards stricter regulations and the establishment of the federal reserve system. Through this change in approach, they were able to successfully achieve their objective of improve interest rates.<sup>27</sup>

Finally, differently from some of their colleagues who would abandon the political system or revert to past party affiliations, they actively took part in Congressional politics. During the 1900s, they became active members of the Democratic Party. Shafroth’s willingness to participate within the system came under test when in 1902 he faced allegations that he got elected due to ballot stuffing and other methods of voter fraud. Although as Shafroth believed

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<sup>25</sup> M. William Stewart, *Reminiscences of Senator William M. Stewart, of Nevada* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1908), 319.

<sup>26</sup> J. Stephen Leonard, *Honest John Shafroth: A Colorado Reformer* (Denver Colorado: Colorado Historical Society, 2003), 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 21–36; Ellis, *Henry Moore Teller, Defender of the West*, 287–334; Duane A. Smith, *Henry M. Teller: Colorado’s Grand Old Man* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2002), 196–212.

he got elected legitimately, as one of his letters to Teller's personal secretary exemplifies—"I am confident that I was elected and that there were no 2,792 illegal votes cast, and I feel quite confident that the House will not turn me out. Still, of course, in politics there is no certainty with relation to contested election cases."<sup>28</sup> However, as later during a congressional committee investigation showcased that a group, probably independently from Shafroth's campaign, did conduct voter fraud, faced with this Shafroth resigned and after an unsuccessful run he took a break and later run for the governorship.<sup>29</sup> On the contrast, Joseph Sibley during the 1896 campaign took a different route. Similarly to Teller and Shafroth he bolted the Republican Party, and later attempted a failed run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination, despite his support for a Teller nomination for president (which Teller didn't accept and after Silver Democrats were successful in their party he supported the Democrats) he abandoned the party to become a Republican.<sup>30</sup> When it comes to their relationship with the American political system, both Teller and Shafroth can be seen as reformists in this sense. Nonetheless, their advocacy for women's suffrage, silver coinage, and regulation, coupled with their refusal to align with any political party in favor of prioritizing the people's best interests, can be described as radical. This showcases the intricate political culture that can be viewed as the precursor to contemporary American politics.

The role of Teller and Shafroth, in particular, serves as a clear illustration that, unlike movements such as the Populist or their own Silverite Republican Party, they possessed the ability to effectively navigate the American system while also bringing about the essential reforms advocated by the Populist. Teller and Shafroth have demonstrated a willingness to adapt their political approach or even leave their party if the situation calls for it, all while upholding their idealistic beliefs. It is crucial to understand that their persistence and advocacy, which are rooted in their values, do not undermine the efforts of social movements. Instead, they indirectly integrate these movements into the fabric of the American political system.

## Conclusion

The political environment in late 19th-century Colorado serves as a symbol of the wider movements of reform, radicalism, and progressivism that permeated the United States

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<sup>28</sup> John F. Shafroth to Thomas F. Dawson, June 30, 1896, MSS622, box 2, folder 20, Henry Moore Teller Collection, History Colorado, Denver, Colorado.

<sup>29</sup> Leonard, *Honest John Shafroth: A Colorado Reformer*, 33–36.

<sup>30</sup> Rathgeber, "Joseph C. Sibley, Democratic Presidential Aspirant in 1896.,"; Joseph C. Sibley to Henry M. Teller, June 25, 1896, MSS622, box 2, folder 20, Henry Moore Teller Collection, History Colorado, Denver, Colorado.

at that time. The era's historical writing often simplifies the historical context by treating different political movements homogeneously under labels such as radical, progressive or reformist; while other work in order to curb this problem reverts to local or regional microanalysis. This paper attempts to reconcile the two notions through analyzing individual politicians' conceptualization of the political. The essential elements of this notion revolve around the influential roles assumed by Senator Henry M. Teller and Representative John F. Shafroth. Their careers embody the shifting political ideologies of the time, as they were willing to forsake party affiliation in favor of relatively radical, though not necessarily sound, political values, all while adhering to the institutional structure of American politics. The political transformation of Colorado during this period can be viewed as a representation of the larger conflict between reformist and radical factions on a national scale. However, the paper argues that it is more accurate to interpret it as the establishment of a political culture that effectively safeguards, transfers, and adapts policies to accomplish political transformation.

The roles of Teller and Shafroth, along with the key issues they supported, illustrate the complexities and contradictions of this transformative era. Their legacies serve as a constant reminder that the ongoing pursuit of reform and progress demands skillfully managing the delicate balance between idealism and pragmatism, while also addressing the intricate challenges of reconciling regional interests with national imperatives, moreover necessitates a radical shift in how politics is conceptualized.

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**OLGA KAJTÁR-PINJUNG**

**American Exceptionalism and Exemptionalism in Presidential Rhetoric:  
George W. Bush and Barack Obama on Guantánamo Bay**

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## Abstract

The notion of American exceptionalism has been used for various purposes, yet it is exceedingly difficult to define as it has had multiple meanings. The belief that the United States is exceptional is as old as the country itself and it is one of the few ideas on which every president of the United States agreed even though their interpretations of it varied. The paper argues that the events of 9/11 contributed to the emergence of the main characteristic of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American exceptionalism: exemptionalism. It means that the United States government created circumstances in which it could exempt itself from applying and complying with international laws in order to accommodate its interests. Although the use of exemptions is not unfamiliar territory for the United States government, it has been amplified after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This paper investigates how former presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama interpreted American exceptionalism and analyzes their Guantánamo Bay-related decisions and speeches with the purpose of identifying instances of exemptions that showcase how the new, unprecedented nature of transnational terrorism enabled the United States to manipulate legal terminologies to justify their actions. The use of exemptions creates double standards that ultimately undermine the moral authority of the United States.

**Keywords:** American exceptionalism, exemptionalism, Guantánamo Bay, presidential rhetoric

## Introduction

The present paper aims to provide a thorough yet concise look at the history of American exceptionalism and list the multitude of purposes and changes the term has undergone through the course of U.S. history. The main argument is that one of the major characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American exceptionalism is exemptionalism<sup>1</sup>, which is heavily present in the Guantánamo Bay-related presidential rhetoric and decisions of George W. Bush and Barack Obama. By analyzing presidential speeches and measures, the purpose of the paper is to examine how exemptionalism appears in them and what role it plays in the way American exceptionalism is understood in our century. The research exclusively focuses on former presidents Bush and Obama because, on the one hand, the former was the sitting

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Ignatieff, "Introduction," in *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, ed. Michael Ignatieff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4. The term "exemptionalism" was coined by Michael Ignatieff.

president of the United States at the time of the 9/11 terrorist attacks therefore his role is indisputable and consequential; President Obama was rather vocal about his desire to close the Guantánamo Bay detention facilities, which, as we know, has not happened to this day. On the other hand, they both served two presidential terms; hence they do not have the possibility to return as the leaders of the most powerful nation in the world. Consequently, they are the most relevant to the purposes of this particular research paper. I have chosen to exclude President Biden because he chose a reticent approach in his Guantánamo Bay-related communication, and President Trump has had a considerably different perspective on American exceptionalism which should be the subject of a separate research project.<sup>2</sup>

Guantánamo Bay and American exceptionalism have been popular areas of research among American Studies scholars, and they have been analyzed from various perspectives. This paper—even though it may not provide readers with stunning revelations—intends to contribute to the existing corpus by incorporating the two phenomena in the examination of speeches and legislative measures. Consequently, the paper adds a different approach and perspective to a very narrow and specific space that is Guantánamo Bay and examines its relation to American exceptionalism in the rhetoric of presidents Bush and Obama.

Following a brief exploration of the historical and geographical significance of Guantánamo Bay to provide a basis for the context in which the research operates, the paper continues with the definition of the terms American exceptionalism and exemptionalism; I will provide a concise historical background of American exceptionalism with the purpose of showcasing the versatility of the notion. Then, the paper explores the meaning and intended usage of exemption and exemptionalism and explains how it is adopted in this particular project. The next part of the paper includes a comparative analysis of former U.S. presidents Bush and Obama's rhetoric regarding Guantánamo Bay and the detainees held there, with specific attention to instances of exemptionalism, as I claim it is one of the most significant features of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American exceptionalism. The analysis of each administration follows the same structure; it begins with an inquiry into how the former presidents interpreted American exceptionalism respectively and then the focus narrows down to instances of exemptions with respect to Guantánamo Bay and the detainees held there. It cannot be accentuated enough that the present paper solely focuses on the Guantánamo-related presidential decisions, and it does not attempt to diminish the otherwise strikingly compelling discrepancies between the Bush and Obama administrations.

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<sup>2</sup> Olga Kajtár-Pinjung, "From Bush to Biden: Presidential Attitudes towards Guantánamo," in *New Horizons in English and American Studies: Papers from the Doctoral Program* ed. Lívía Szélpál and Anna Kérchy (Szeged: IEAS e-books); manuscript under publication

## Guantánamo Bay

The Guantánamo Bay naval base is a set of facilities located on the island of Cuba operated by the United States which has been leasing the territory from Cuba since 1903, following the Spanish-American War.<sup>3</sup> In the twentieth century, it was used as a center for naval operations, a training facility for military personnel, and a detention facility for Cuban and Haitian refugees.<sup>4</sup> Its latest role as a detention center for the prisoners of the War on Terror began in January 2002, when the first detainees were taken to the island.<sup>5</sup> Since then, it has become a symbol of the violation of basic human rights, indefinite detention, the application of so-called enhanced interrogation techniques, and the abuse of prisoners. It was chosen to host the individuals who were allegedly responsible for or associated with the attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, specifically due to its favorable and ambiguous location.<sup>6</sup> Since it is outside the territory of the continental United States, the Bush administration argued that it was outside its control and jurisdiction, therefore they could circumvent the application of U.S. constitutional rights and international human rights obligations. This argument is problematic because, on the one hand, the lease agreement unequivocally declares that the United States has jurisdiction and control over Guantánamo Bay.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the location of the detention facility should not have justified the denial and ignorance of basic human rights laws to which the U.S. had been a party, such as the relevant sections of the Geneva Conventions. Since its opening, it has held around 780 detainees from all over the world, most of whom have never been charged with a crime. Today, there remain 30 detainees at Guantánamo Bay.

## American exceptionalism and exemptionalism

American exceptionalism is very challenging to define as it is a “cumulative set of beliefs” that has been used for various, often strikingly different, purposes throughout history.<sup>8</sup> According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, exceptionalism is “the condition of being

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<sup>3</sup>Jonathan M. Hansen, *Guantánamo: An American History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011) 153.

<sup>4</sup>Amy Kaplan, “Where Is Guantánamo?,” *American Quarterly* 57 no. 3 (September 2005): 839.

<sup>5</sup>Kaplan, “Where is Guantánamo?,” 831.

<sup>6</sup>Hansen, *Guantánamo*, 310.

<sup>7</sup>*Agreement between the United States and Cuba*

<sup>8</sup>Ian Tyrrell, *American Exceptionalism: A New History of an Old Idea* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021), 198.

different from the norm.”<sup>9</sup> Donald E. Pease claims that American exceptionalism is a “fantasy” that allows U.S. citizens to “define, support, and defend the US national identity.”<sup>10</sup> It has often been used to express the superiority of the United States over other nations.

American exceptionalism emerged on the American continent with the arrival of the first settlers from Britain. Although the term was born much later, the understanding and belief in America, the new world, being different from the rest of the world and carrying a special role already existed in early settlement. It has been used for various social, political, and cultural purposes, however, providing a definition for it seems quite challenging. The simplest and yet the most accurate explanation was suggested by Ian Tyrrell, who states that “the United States is exceptional because a large majority of Americans have believed it to be so.”<sup>11</sup> However overly simplified his definition might seem, it contains the core meaning of the expression and it is free from any traces of politics, society, and culture. Nevertheless, it should be noted that merely the fact that Americans believe the United States to be exceptional would not necessarily make it so; the rest of the world would need to share this belief for the United States to be put in the category of being exceptional and hence endow it with the meanings and roles associated with it.

The following paragraphs discuss the history of American exceptionalism in a quite concise and simplified manner because it is not the primary focus of the present paper and it has been studied by academics around the world resulting in a massive corpus on the subject.<sup>12</sup> As mentioned above, in the seventeenth century, without consciously realizing it, English settlers expressed their high hopes for America as the land of opportunity to create a distinct life from that of Europeans, holding hopes and promises for a new beginning. The term manifested in the self-reliance of settlers, the ability of the colonies not only to survive but prosper in this new, undiscovered land of America at their disposal.<sup>13</sup> Besides the growing material prosperity, American exceptionalism became ideologically charged and associated with the desire to fight for independence from Britain in the eighteenth century. The success of the Revolutionary War and the subsequent separation from the mother country further reinforced the exceptionality of the nation which culminated in the creation of the—to this day—most important documents: the Declaration of Independence and

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<sup>9</sup> “Exceptionalism,” In Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/exceptionalism>. Accessed 24 Oct. 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>11</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *American Exceptionalism*, 198.

<sup>12</sup> Some examples: Deborah L. Madsen, *American Exceptionalism* (Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 1998), Godfrey Hodgson, *The Myth of American Exceptionalism* (New York: Yale University Press, 2010), Charles Lockhart, *The Roots of American Exceptionalism: Institutions, Culture, Politics* (Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), among others.

<sup>13</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *American Exceptionalism*, 4.

the Constitution of the United States. With the birth of these founding and unparalleled documents, the extraordinary nature of the country became even more emphatic.<sup>14</sup> According to Seymour Martin Lipset, the Revolutionary War was essential for the birth of American national identity and the notion of American exceptionalism.<sup>15</sup> By the nineteenth century, American Exceptionalism somewhat departed from its ideological denotation and once more became synonymous with the abundance of natural resources, rapid population growth, and territorial (Westward) expansion. In the “American Century”<sup>16</sup> or, in other words, the twentieth century, however, the term regained its ideological meaning as it was coterminous with political freedom and “economic and military strength projected abroad.”<sup>17</sup>

The twenty-first century began with the horrific and tragic events of the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, that shocked the entire world. One of the main reasons for the public outrage and dismay was the fact that the United States had not been attacked on its own soil since the War of 1812, with the exception of Pearl Harbor in Honolulu, Hawaii, outside the territorial United States.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the main targets of the attacks were innocent civilians which increased the severity of the situation and the government’s reaction to the events. I argue that exemptionalism is one if not the most significant characteristics of twenty-first-century American exceptionalism.

Exemptionalism as a term was used by Michael Ignatieff, who said: “America supports multilateral agreements, but only if they permit exemptions for American citizens or US practices.”<sup>19</sup> It means that the United States has supported the establishment of international laws, agreements, and cooperations, but, in some cases, it refused to sign and become a party to the very agreements in the birth of which it had participated. One example of this act of non-ratification of an agreement is the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is the only international court with jurisdiction to prosecute individuals for the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes, and it “was established as a court of last resort to prosecute the most heinous offenses in cases where national courts fail to act.”<sup>20</sup> The United States advocated for the foundation of the ICC and yet it refused to implement it into its own legislation. Another striking example is the Genocide Convention (Convention on the

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<sup>14</sup> Ian Tyrrell, *American Exceptionalism*, 32.

<sup>15</sup> Seymour Martin Lipset, *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996), 39.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Luce, “The American Century,” Reprinted in *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 2 (1999): 159–171. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24913736>.

<sup>17</sup> Tyrrell, *American Exceptionalism*, 177.

<sup>18</sup> Clive Stafford Smith, *Bad Men: Guantanamo Bay and the Secret Prisons* (New York: W&N, 2008), 39.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Ignatieff, “Introduction,” 4.

<sup>20</sup> Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, “International Criminal Court,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, October 23, 2024. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/International-Criminal-Court>, accessed August 30, 2024.

Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide) which was created at the end of the Second World War and it took the United States forty years to ratify.<sup>21</sup> It is important to note, however, that non-ratification does not equal non-compliance, meaning that the fact the U.S. did not sign an agreement does not mean that it did not act according to the rules of said agreement.<sup>22</sup> In these cases, the United States refused to implement international agreements in its own legislation because it argued that such contracts may jeopardize the sovereignty of the U.S. if other nations are allowed to interfere in their domestic proceedings. At the same time, the citizens and leaders of the United States have a perennial and unbreakable faith in their own justice system and refuse to allow an outside party to intervene in their honorable processes. Exemptionalism, in the context of the present paper, means and is used as a state of special circumstances in which the United States purposefully refuses to be a party to or respect international laws in order to create a privileged situation for itself in which it is immune to the application of and compliance with transnational agreements.

### **Comparative analysis of presidential rhetoric and decisions of George W. Bush and Barack Obama on exceptionalism and exemptionalism**

The following section of the paper deals with the comparative analysis of presidential speeches in order to identify how American exceptionalism appears in their rhetoric. First, the focus is on American exceptionalism, and after identifying the former presidents' approach to it, the focus will be narrowed down to exemptionalism and how it relates to Guantánamo Bay in presidential rhetoric and decisions by including specific instances of it. The analysis follows a chronological timeline, starting with President Bush and continuing with President Obama, who, similarly to their predecessors, "have always subscribed to and trumpeted, to various degree, the tenet of their country being exceptional."<sup>23</sup>

President George W. Bush had the immense and incomprehensible responsibility to react to and handle the chaos that was brought about by the events of 9/11. As one of the most powerful nations in the world, the rest of the developed countries looked to the United States and entrusted it with the responsibility to do whatever was necessary to prevent further acts of terrorism. This serious duty was proudly undertaken by the United

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<sup>21</sup> Samantha Power, *"A Problem from Hell": America and the Age of Genocide* (New York: Perennial/Harper Collins, 2002): 161-169.

<sup>22</sup> Michael Ignatieff, "Introduction," 7.

<sup>23</sup> Zoltán Peterecz, "American Exceptionalism in Presidential Rhetoric," *Eger Journal of American Studies* 14 (2014): 89.

States, as the president affirmed: “We did not ask for this mission, but we will fulfill it.”<sup>24</sup> Due to the shock and loss of innocent lives, the Bush administration assumed a so-called reactionary politics, the point of which was that the government made its subsequent decisions based on fear of possible future attacks.<sup>25</sup> This sense of duty and responsibility was evident in the first presidential address after the tragedy:

These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat. But they have failed; *our country is strong*. A great people has been moved to defend *a great nation*. Terrorist attacks can shake the foundations of our biggest buildings, but they *cannot touch the foundation of America*. These acts shattered steel, but they *cannot dent the steel of American resolve*. America was targeted for attack because *we’re the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world*. *And no one will keep that light from shining.*<sup>26</sup> (emphasis added by the author)

As we can see from the highlighted parts, the president predominantly emphasized the strength and resolve of the nation. “Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world.”<sup>27</sup> This strong sense of leadership and responsibility is President Bush’s most emphatic and weighty message, which endured the test of time and lasted well into his second term: “The only way to protect our people, the only way to secure peace, the only way to control our destiny is by our leadership. So the United States of America will continue to lead.”<sup>28</sup> Besides the leading role of the United States, another explicit theme that reappeared in the speeches of Bush is the assumption of the role of the savior for the entire world by stating that they were called to “defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of all mankind,”<sup>29</sup> and claiming that they will “lead the 21<sup>st</sup> century into a shining age of human liberty”<sup>30</sup> by “defending liberty and justice because they are right and true

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<sup>24</sup> George W. Bush, “Presidential Address to the Nation,” October 7, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/10/20011007-8.html>, accessed August 30, 2024.

<sup>25</sup> Lisa Hajjar, “The Afterlives of Torture: The Global Implications of Reactionary US Politics” in *State Crime Journal* 8 no. 2 (2009): 164, DOI: 10.13169/statecrime.8.2.0164.

<sup>26</sup> George W. Bush, “Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation,” September 11, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>27</sup> George W. Bush, “Statement by the President in His Address to the Nation,” September 11, 2001, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2001/09/20010911-16.html>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> George W. Bush, “State of the Union Address by the President,” January 31, 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/stateoftheunion/2006/>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>29</sup> George W. Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union,” January 28, 2003, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2003/01/20030128-19.html>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>30</sup> George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation,” September 11, 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060911-3.html>, accessed August 16, 2024.



and unchanging for all people everywhere.”<sup>31</sup> Based on the examples provided, it may be determined that President Bush considered American exceptionalism to be characterized by the leadership of the United States and its role as the guardian angel of the whole world which conclusively resulted in instances of exemptionalism.

I argue that hand in hand with the leadership position and duties of the United States emerged the most significant characteristic of 21<sup>st</sup>-century American exceptionalism, exemptionalism. In this context, the term is used to represent the instances when and where the United States government intentionally misused legal terminologies in order to exempt itself from, on the one hand, applying international laws with the purpose of using any method at their disposal during interrogations, and, on the other hand, taking responsibility for their actions and the damage they had caused. In the following section of the paper, four cases of exemption are analyzed which illustrate the length to which the United States went after 9/11.

As the first—and most obvious—instance of exemption, one must mention the location of the Guantánamo Bay naval base, where the government chose to hold the suspected terrorists they captured or otherwise acquired in the War on Terror. The Bush administration decided not to hold the prisoners on U.S. soil, instead, they refurbished the detention facilities at Guantánamo Bay to accommodate the suspected terrorists.<sup>32</sup> Besides security concerns, the main argument for the decision was that, at the time, they assumed it to be a “rights-free zone,” or a so-called “legal black hole,” where neither constitutional nor international laws were applicable, which could not have been further from the truth.<sup>33</sup> First of all, the United States government argued that the fact that the detention facility is located outside its continental territory and the detainees were non-citizens meant that the United States Constitution and its amendments could not be applied. Even though the justification seems sound, the Bush Administration chose to ignore the specifics of article three of the perpetual lease agreement they signed with Cuba in 1903, which clearly states that “the United States shall exercise complete jurisdiction and control over and within said areas.”<sup>34</sup> To put it simply, at the time of the arrival of the first terrorist suspects in January 2002, the United States did have jurisdiction at Guantánamo Bay which they intentionally and comfortably ignored.

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<sup>31</sup> George W. Bush, “President Delivers State of the Union Address,” January 29, 2002, <https://georgew-bush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>32</sup> Karen Greenberg, *The Least Worst Place: How Guantanamo Became the World's Most Notorious Prison* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5–6.

<sup>33</sup> Harold Hongju Koh, “America’s Jekyll-and-Hyde Exceptionalism” in *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights*, ed. Michael Ignatieff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 128.

<sup>34</sup> Agreement Between the United States and Cuba for the Lease of Lands for Coaling and Naval stations; February 23, 1903, [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/dip\\_cuba002.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/dip_cuba002.asp), accessed August 16, 2024.



Secondly, The U.S. government denied prisoner-of-war status to Guantánamo detainees, and they provided various reasons for doing so. They argued that the Geneva Conventions did not apply to these individuals because they did not belong to any nation-state since they were members of the transnational terrorist organization called al Qaeda; they did not wear a uniform that could have distinguished them from civilians, therefore they did not follow the laws of war.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the U.S. claimed that at the time of capture, Afghanistan did not have a functioning government so it was not a party to the Geneva Conventions.<sup>36</sup> At the same time, while denying POW status to the detainees, the government and the president kept reassuring the public and saying that the prisoners were treated in a “fashion consistent with the Conventions.”<sup>37</sup> Consequently, one might rightfully pose the question of why deny them the POW status if they were treated in compliance with the regulations. Although the reasons listed above might seem acceptable in the unprecedented circumstances created by the new transnational nature of terrorism, they should not diminish the fact that the United States chose to exempt itself from applying international laws instead of—after having carefully examined the irregularities—executing the necessary changes that would fit this unprecedented situation.

The third example of exemption is the creation of the legal category of “unlawful enemy combatant.”<sup>38</sup> Instead of using the already existing terminologies and calling Guantánamo detainees criminal defendants—which they would have been had they been citizens of the United States entitled to all the rights and protections of the title—or prisoners of war—in accordance with the relevant sections of the Geneva Conventions—the government created a separate name for them in order to be able to circumvent both domestic and international laws that would have required them to treat the detainees humanely and respect their basic human rights. Unlawful enemy combatant as a designation had not existed before, therefore, it lacked any legal description that would have specified the rights to which they would have been entitled. Hence, the category of unlawful enemy combatants did not warrant any legal protection for the detainees. In the words of Donald E. Pease, detainees “were interned on Guantánamo Bay because they lacked the protection of human rights, and

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<sup>35</sup> George W. Bush, “President Discusses Creation of Military Commissions to Try Suspected Terrorists,” September 6, 2006, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060906-3.html>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>36</sup> Ali A. Jalali, “Afghanistan in 2002: The Struggle to Win the Peace,” in *Asian Survey* 43, no. 1 (2003): 184, <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2003.43.1.174>

<sup>37</sup> “Decision Not to Regard Persons Detained in Afghanistan as POWs,” in *The American Journal of International Law*, 96, no. 2 (2002): 480, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2693945>.

<sup>38</sup> “Military Commissions Act of 2006,” October 17, 2006, <https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/laws/pl109-366.pdf>, accessed August 30, 2024.

they lacked human rights because they were displaced onto Guantánamo.”<sup>39</sup> This vicious circle resulted in some individuals spending years of their lives at the Guantánamo Bay detention facility without ever being charged with a crime because they were deprived of the opportunity to advocate for themselves, be represented by an attorney, or have legal protection and rights altogether.

The final instance of exemption manifested in another linguistic fabrication of the term “enhanced interrogation techniques.”<sup>40</sup> The U.S. government created the term and used it for controversial methods that reached beyond the conventional means of interrogation and were used by the military and intelligence agencies during the interrogation of the detainees. The justification of the government for the application of such methods was that they needed to do whatever it took to extract information that might have led to the prevention of further future attacks.<sup>41</sup> The Bush administration was inspired to come up with the term enhanced interrogation techniques because its purpose was to circumvent international and domestic laws that specifically and unequivocally forbid the use of methods that are tantamount to torture during interrogations. By inventing the term, the U.S. was able to apply the questionable techniques without any legal ramifications and they could reiterate their mantra according to which “the United States does not torture,”<sup>42</sup> which lasted until the Abu Ghraib scandal in the spring of 2004, when photos portraying American military personnel abusing Iraqi prisoners were leaked to the public.<sup>43</sup>

The choice of location, manipulation of terminologies, and creation of previously unknown legal categories are clear representations of how the Bush Administration exempted itself from complying with international laws and essentially, being held accountable for human rights violations. These instances of exemption are problematic because they create double standards, ultimately resulting in the United States losing its leadership in moral authority—if it has not already. As Harold Hongju Koh argues,

even while the United States has been holding Taliban detainees in the exceptional legal category of “enemy combatants” without Geneva Convention hearings, it has been

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<sup>39</sup> Donald E. Pease, *The New American Exceptionalism*, 176.

<sup>40</sup> “Report of the Special Task Force on Interrogation and Transfer Policies,” United States Department of Justice, [https://www.justice.gov/oip/foia-library/2009\\_report\\_special\\_task\\_force\\_interrogation\\_and\\_transfer\\_policies/dl](https://www.justice.gov/oip/foia-library/2009_report_special_task_force_interrogation_and_transfer_policies/dl), accessed August 30, 2024.

<sup>41</sup> Clive Stafford Smith, *Bad Men*, 34.

<sup>42</sup> George W. Bush, “Military Commissions,” October 6, 2006.

<sup>43</sup> Andrew Moravcsik, “The Paradox of U.S. Human Rights Policy,” in *American Exceptionalism and Human Rights* ed. Michael Ignatieff (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 195.

ferociously protesting the denial of Geneva Convention rights to American prisoners of war captured during the Iraq War.<sup>44</sup>

The instances of exemption resulted in the occurrence of double standards and hypocrisy that undermined the moral authority and leadership status of the United States which might end up jeopardizing its relationship and cooperation with other powerful nations that recognize its shortcomings.

The reactionary approach of the Bush Administration was replaced by a troubleshooting one when Barack Obama started his first presidential term at the beginning of 2009.<sup>45</sup> The main purpose of the new administration was to distance itself from its predecessor and try to remedy its mistakes and deficiencies.<sup>46</sup> In the initial days of his presidency, President Obama signed two executive orders related to Guantánamo Bay in January 2009: *Executive Order 13491: Ensuring Lawful Interrogations*<sup>47</sup> banned the use of enhanced interrogation techniques, while *Executive Order 13492: Review and Disposition of Individuals Detained at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base and Closure of Detention Facilities*<sup>48</sup> aimed to close the detention facilities within a year of its signing. The latter, to this day, has not come to fruition. The desire of the new president to do better than Bush appeared in his perspective on American exceptionalism.

The role of the savior and the strong sense of leadership that characterized President Bush's rhetoric and perspective on exceptionalism was absent from President Obama's speeches. He focused on and emphasized the importance of American values, the rule of law, and due process.

To overcome extremism, we must also *be vigilant in upholding the values* our troops defend - because there is *no force in the world more powerful than the example of America*. That is why I have ordered the closing of the detention center at Guantánamo Bay, and will seek swift and certain justice for captured terrorists - because living our *values* doesn't make us weaker, it makes us safer and it makes us stronger.<sup>49</sup> (emphasis added by the author)

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<sup>44</sup> Harold Hongju Koh, "America's Jekyll-and-Hyde Exceptionalism," 138.

<sup>45</sup> Kajtár-Pinjung Olga, "From Bush to Biden," 15.

<sup>46</sup> Tung Yin, "Anything But Bush?: The Obama Administration and Guantanamo Bay," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy*, 34 no. 2 (2011): 480. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=1855047#paper-citations-widget](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1855047#paper-citations-widget), accessed August 30, 2024.

<sup>47</sup> "Executive Order 13491—Ensuring Lawful Interrogations, The White House January 22, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/ensuring-lawful-interrogations>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>48</sup> Executive Order 13492—Review and Disposition of Individuals Detained at the Guantánamo Bay Naval Base and Closure of Detention Facilities, The White House, January 22, 2009, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/DCPD-200900005/pdf/DCPD-200900005.pdf>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>49</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks of President Barack Obama – Address to Joint Session of Congress," February

His idea and sense of leadership are rooted in the founding values of the nation rather than its ability to “defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of all mankind.”<sup>50</sup> According to President Obama, the United States is exceptional because “on every issue, the world turns to us, not simply because of the size of our economy or our military might—but because of the ideals we stand for, and the burdens we bear to advance them.”<sup>51</sup> He, similarly to his predecessor, firmly believes in American exceptionalism, however, contrary to Bush, Obama attributes it to the unmatched values and example the United States has to show to other nations.

Notwithstanding the fact that President Obama customized his interpretation of exceptionalism to fit the aims of his administration, he failed to prevent the emergence of exemptions in his Guantánamo-related decisions thus unintentionally continuing the legacy of his predecessor despite his best efforts to break away from it. One instance of exemption is changing the designation of “unlawful enemy combatants” to “unprivileged enemy belligerents.”<sup>52</sup> Similarly to its previous variation, it did not exist as a legal category prior to its invention and thus did not contain or indicate any clear rights and protections for the designated individuals. The Bush administration defined unlawful enemy combatants as a person who has,

(1) *engaged in or supported hostilities against the United States or its co-belligerents* who is not a lawful enemy combatant; or (2) been determined to be an unlawful enemy combatant by a Combatant Status Review Tribunal or other tribunal established under the authority of the President or the Secretary of Defense (Secretary).<sup>53</sup> (emphasis added by the author)

An unprivileged enemy belligerent was described by the Obama administration as an individual who,

(A) *has engaged in hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners*; (B) *has purposefully and materially supported hostilities against the United States or its coalition partners*; or (C) was a part of

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24, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-barack-obama-address-joint-session-congress>, accessed August 16, 2024.

<sup>50</sup> George W. Bush, “State of the Union,” 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Barack Obama, “President Barack Obama’s State of the Union Address,” January 28, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/01/28/president-barack-obamas-state-union-address>, accessed August 30, 2024.

<sup>52</sup> “Military Commissions Act of 2009,” October 28, 2009, <https://www.mc.mil/Portals/0/pdfs/MCA%202009%20Chapter%2047A.pdf>, accessed August 30, 2024.

<sup>53</sup> “Military Commissions Act of 2006”

Al Qaeda at the time of the alleged offense under [chapter 47A of Title 10, U.S. Code].<sup>54</sup>  
(emphasis added by the author)

As the definitions demonstrate, the two designations are almost identical, therefore the invention of a new terminology seems futile. It is evident from the definitions—and the lack of substantial differences between them—that the rebranding to “unprivileged enemy belligerents” was primarily motivated by the administration’s previously mentioned wish to do things differently rather than by its desire to accomplish tangible changes in the lives and rights of Guantánamo detainees.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, by emphasizing his “abiding confidence in the rule of law and due process; in checks and balances and accountability,”<sup>56</sup> and that “one of the strengths that makes America exceptional is our willingness to openly confront our past, face our imperfections, make changes and do better,”<sup>57</sup> Obama contributed to creating another instance of double standards. In his interpretation, accountability applies to those non-U.S. citizens who allegedly committed a crime against the U.S., and it does not include those government employees who, in some capacity, participated in the acceptance and application of enhanced interrogation techniques. Furthermore, in a 2014 speech, President Obama acknowledged the fact that the United States used torture during interrogations after 9/11 by saying “We did a whole lot of things that were right, but we tortured some folks. We did some things that were contrary to our values.”<sup>58</sup> According to a study published by Amnesty International, President Obama’s acknowledgment regarding the use of torture did not generate any civil or criminal investigations; nobody who was involved in the abuse of detainees was charged with a crime and held accountable for the abuse they committed.<sup>59</sup> Hence, the administration created a double standard by punishing non-citizens but exempting government employees who abused detainees and used methods of mental and physical torture during interrogations.

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<sup>54</sup> “Military Commissions Act of 2009”

<sup>55</sup> Tung Yin, “Anything But Bush?” 491–492.

<sup>56</sup> Barack Obama, “Remarks by the President on National Security,” May 21, 2009, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-President-national-security-5-21-09>, accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>57</sup> Barack Obama, “Statement by the President Report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” December 9, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/12/09/statement-president-report-senate-select-committee-intelligence>, accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>58</sup> Barack, Obama, “Press Conference by the President,” August 1, 2014, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/01/press-conference-president>, accessed September 5, 2024.

<sup>59</sup> Amnesty International, “USA: ‘We tortured some folks’: The wait for truth, remedy and accountability continues as redaction issue delays release of senate report on CIA detentions,” *Amnesty International*, September 2, 2014, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/AMR51/046/2014/en/>, accessed September 5, 2024.

Despite his best efforts to close Guantánamo, President Obama failed to do so and his administration continued to create exemptions with the intention of expressing the extent to which they broke away from the previous leadership of the United States, and providing legal protections to those government officials who took part in enhanced interrogations. Even though President Obama emphasized the importance of American values, accountability, and checks and balances in his rhetoric, he did not succeed in achieving any results in these areas.

## Conclusion

American exceptionalism has always been a widely used notion by presidents of the United States through the course of its relatively short yet eventful history. It has been applied to express the unique situation of the nation from the early settlers to this day. At times, it was coterminous with material possessions, abundance of natural resources, growing industrialization, and even the superiority of the United States over other nations of the world. Following the tragic events that took place on September 11, 2001, American exceptionalism gained an obnoxious attribute in the form of exemptionalism. The previously unfamiliar threat of transnational terrorism brought about unprecedented challenges concerning the applicability of international and domestic laws. However, instead of attempting to overcome these challenges by making the necessary modifications based on informed decisions, both presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama exempted the United States government from complying with international agreements. These instances of exemption meant the invention of thus far non-existent legal categories and terminologies such as “unlawful enemy combatant,” “unprivileged enemy belligerent,” and “enhanced interrogation techniques” in order to be able to interpret laws in a way that best suited their interests. Exemptions created double standards that ultimately undermined the credibility, accountability, moral authority, and tenacity of the United States.

The present paper exclusively focused on American exceptionalism and exemptionalism in the Guantánamo Bay-related rhetoric and decisions of former presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. However, further areas of research for the existence and role of exceptionalism and exemptionalism could be previous administrations’ approaches to the topic and even 21<sup>st</sup>-century U.S. foreign policy. It will certainly be fascinating to see what the future holds for American exceptionalism and exemptionalism in light of the results of the general elections of 2024.

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**MÓNIKA HORVÁTH**

**The Question of Loyalty:  
Habsburg Subjects in the Service of George I Rákóczi**

Pro&Contra 7

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## Abstract

In my article I would like to offer another perspective on the relationship between the Principality of Transylvania and the eastern-north-eastern part of the Habsburg Monarchy, which was called Upper-Hungary. This region was a unique part of the Monarchy, with respect to its religion and society. Upper-Hungary was part of the Habsburg Monarchy but because of the subjects who lived there had a strong connection to the Principality of Transylvania.

In my article I will focus on the Rákóczi family, especially George I Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1630 to 1648). He was the second member of the Rákóczi family who was elected to be the Prince of Transylvania. But he also had huge properties in Upper-Hungary, which meant he was a subject of the Habsburg rulers while also being the Prince of Transylvania at the same time.

I would like to show how George I Rákóczi influenced the political decisions of the Habsburg Monarchy in this region as a Prince of Transylvania and a local aristocrat. This influence depended on those people who served Rákóczi as a soldier, officer, or governor of his estates. I will focus on those subjects who came from Upper-Hungary and were loyal to the Prince of Transylvania.

**Keywords:** Habsburg Monarchy, Principality of Transylvania, Upper-Hungary, protestant, aristocrats, nobility, George I Rákóczi

## Introduction

Researching the history of the Habsburg Monarchy is always a challenge for historians and this is especially true if we would like to focus on this particular area of the Monarchy. During my research I first noticed a circle around certain prominent members of the famous Rákóczi family. My doctoral thesis deals with the economic history of a Protestant family from Upper-Hungary called the Fáy family. While working on the history of the Fáys, I became aware of the life of Stephen IV Fáy (†around 1640) whose relationship with the Rákóczi family led to his own advancement. It is an interesting question, whether there are others who were similar to Fáy? Perhaps they were also the part of the circle around Rákóczi? And if so, how and why?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Horváth, Mónika “Egy Rákóczi-familiáris, Fáy (IV.) István levelezése 1633–1639 között” [The Correspondence

Through the family connections, the mention of Thomas Debreczeni (1570–1650) and Paul Szemere (†around 1649) can be found in several letters and some other sources, we can conjecture that they also belonged to this circle. But how did they serve the Rákóczi family? What did the three of them have in common? What are the differences?<sup>2</sup>

In this study, I would like to present my research that I have conducted over the past three years. The results are waiting for additions in the future, so this study is a description of the knowledge that I have gathered from archival and current sources.

Our brief historical overview starts with the Battle of Mohács in 1526 which was one of the most significant dates of this area and for these families as well.<sup>3</sup> At Mohács (present day *Mohács* in Hungary), the Hungarian army was decisively defeated by the Ottomans. This defeat was a calamity for Hungary that had many detrimental consequences. During the two decades after Mohács, the country was weakened because of the subsequent civil war between the supporters of Ferdinand (King of Hungary from 1526 to 1564) and those of John Zápolya's (King of Hungary from 1526 to 1540) infant son, resulting in the capture of Buda Castle (present day *Budapest* in Hungary) by the Ottoman sultan Suleiman (Sultan of the Ottoman Empire from 1520 to 1566) the Magnificent in 1541. After the capture of Buda, Hungary was divided into three parts. The central area of the country was occupied by the Ottomans, and this part is called Ottoman Hungary. The second territory was Transylvania, and after the Treaty of Speyer in 1570 it was called the Principality of Transylvania. The western part of Hungary, stretching from the Adriatic to Transylvania, was ruled by the Habsburg family, called the Kingdom of Hungary. This region served as a shield for Vienna against any

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of One of George Rákóczi's Servitors called Stephen IV Fáy, from 1633 to 1639] *Lymbus* (2020), 181–183; Horváth, Mónika "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz. Fáy IV. István levelezése (1633–1639)" [Details to the Duties of a Servitor of George I Rákóczi. The Correspondence of Stephen IV Fáy (1633–1639)] *Aetas*, 36, no 2 (2021), 154–155; Horváth, Mónika "Fáy László gazdasági feljegyzései a 17. század második feléből" [The economic conscriptions of Ladislaus Fáy from the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century] on [https://disszertacio.uni-eszterhazy.hu/156/1/Horv%C3%A1th%20M%C3%B3nika\\_disszert%C3%A1ci%C3%B3.pdf](https://disszertacio.uni-eszterhazy.hu/156/1/Horv%C3%A1th%20M%C3%B3nika_disszert%C3%A1ci%C3%B3.pdf) (November 28 2024)

<sup>2</sup> Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése, 184–185.

<sup>3</sup> About the Battle of Mohács: Perjés, Géza, *Mohács* [Mohács] (Budapest: Magvető Könyvkiadó, 1969); Szakály, *A mohácsi csata* [The Battle of Mohács] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1977); *Mohács. Tanulmányok a mohácsi csata 450. évfordulójára alkalmából* [Studies about Mohács for the 450<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Battle], ed. Rúzsás, Lajos – Szakály, Ferenc (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1986); and recently: B. Szabó, János: *Mohács* [Mohács] (Budapest: Osiris, 2006).

About the history of the Habsburg Monarchy, see, Evans, *The Making of the Habsburg Monarchy, 1550–1700. An Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 235–266; Pálffy, *Hungary between two Empires 1526–1711* (Indiana University Press, 2021), 7–80; Martyn Rady, *The Habsburgs. To rule the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), 75–83.

Ottoman attack.<sup>4</sup> Upper-Hungary was the north-eastern part of the Hungarian Kingdom and therefore it was part of the Habsburg Monarchy. The fact that Upper-Hungary was the furthest part of the Habsburg Monarchy, it was far from Vienna but near to the Principality of Transylvania, made its situation even more difficult.

The Rákóczi family was one of the most famous princely families in Transylvania. Many researchers from Hungary are familiar with George I Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1630 to 1648), George II Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1648 to 1660) and Francis II Rákóczi (Prince of Transylvania from 1704 to 1711) because of the War of Independence that he led. The Rákóczis were one of the aristocrat families who had huge properties not just in Upper-Hungary, but also in Transylvania and Poland. They were one of the richest families in the Kingdom and in the Principality of Transylvania. In addition, they had influential family connections and political contacts and had a pleasant activity in the patronage of cultural life in Transylvania and in Upper-Hungary.<sup>5</sup>

### The influence of George I Rákóczi in the economic level: the Rákóczi's masons

In the early modern period, owning property meant having a reputation for being wealthy and distinguished in social rank. One of the most significant people of the period was George I Rákóczi who tried to acquire as many estates as possible to increase his power in the area. On the one hand, he bought or rented these properties, on the other hand, he was not afraid of illegal acquisition of estates (extortion, threat and so on).<sup>6</sup>

This was the reason why it was an important question about who could manage the several part of the family estates? One of them, Thomas Debreczeni, was one of the most loyal subjects of George Rákóczi until his death.<sup>7</sup> The most significant source about the life of Thomas Debreczeni is his own last will from 1645 which contains the date of his

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<sup>4</sup> *Erdély rövid története* [The Brief History of Transylvania], ed. Köpeczi, Béla (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989), 228; Pálffy, *A tizenhatodik század története* [History of the Sixteenth Century] (Pannonica Kiadó, 2000), 32, 59–64, 90–96, 35–44, 104.

<sup>5</sup> About George I Rákóczi and his son, George II Rákóczi for example: *I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai (1631–1648)* [The Economic Documents of the Properties of George I Rákóczi], ed. Makkai, László (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1954); *Erdély története. 2. kötet. 1606-tól 1830-ig* [The History of Transylvania from 1606 to 1830. Volume 2.], ed. Makkai, László – Szász, Zoltán (Budapest, 1986), and so on.

About Francis II Rákóczi for example: Dobrossy, *A Rákóczi-szabadságharc dokumentumai. Abaúj-Torna, Borsod, Gömör-Kishont és Zemplén megyékből 1703–1704* [The Sources of the War of Independence from Abaúj-Torna, Borsod, Gömör-Kishont and Zemplén Counties in 1703–1704] (Miskolc, 2004) and so on.

<sup>6</sup> *I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai*, 21–25.

<sup>7</sup> *I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai*, 486.

birth and the list of his properties. We know that the family were considered to be part of the nobility in 1609 through the activity of Thomas Debreczeni.<sup>8</sup>

Thomas Debreczeni began his career as a soldier during the uprising of Stephen Bocskai from 1604 to 1606. But after this event his life changed significantly. From 1608 to 1610 he became the economic manager of Szatmár Castle (present day *Satu Mare* in Romania) which means that he managed the mason around the castle and made decisions about the economics of Szatmár. This castle was important for the Habsburg Monarchy because, at this time, it was the eastern center of the Hungarian defense system. As we can see, in the beginning of his career, Thomas Debreczeni worked in the service of the Habsburg ruler called Matthias II (King of Hungary from 1608 to 1619).<sup>9</sup> From 1611 to 1623 Thomas Debreczeni started to work as an economical manager on the estates of George Thurzó (1567–1616, Palatine of Hungary from 1609 to 1616) and later his son, Imre Thurzó (1598–1621) in Tokaj (present day *Tokaj* in Hungary) in the Habsburg Monarchy which was located near to Szatmár Castle.<sup>10</sup>

After that, Debreczeni got a breakthrough in his life and from 1623 to 1629 he became the manager of estates of the then current Prince of Transylvania, Gabriel Bethlen.<sup>11</sup> Based on several sources we can clearly see that he was strict and liked following the rules. Thanks to his work, Debreczeni received many of his estates from the Prince of Transylvania as a reward.<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Bethlen trusted him because he was proven as a good subject. Perhaps this was the reason why Debreczeni was the writer of the last will of Bethlen.<sup>13</sup>

Three years after the death of Gabriel Bethlen in 1632, as an economic manager who already had many previous experience, Thomas Debreczeni started to work in the

<sup>8</sup>The publication of the last will of Thomas Debreczeni: Dienes, “Debreczeni Tamás végrendelete” [The Testament of Thomas Debreczeni] The whole text here:

[https://epa.oszk.hu/03300/03307/00003/egyhzstorteneti\\_szemle\\_2001\\_01\\_143-156.htm](https://epa.oszk.hu/03300/03307/00003/egyhzstorteneti_szemle_2001_01_143-156.htm) (July 11 2023)

Debreczeni–Droppán, Béla, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból: Debreczeni Tamás élete és működése” [An Economic Specialist from the 17<sup>th</sup> Century: The Life and the Activity of Thomas Debreczeni] *Fons*, 11, no 3 (2004), 456.

<sup>9</sup>Debreczeni–Droppán, Béla, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere. 450 éve született királydaróci Debreczeni Tamás” [The Employee of Great Princes. Thomas Debreczeni of Királydaróc was born 450 years ago] *Partium*, 24 (2020), 30.

<sup>10</sup>Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 457–461.

<sup>11</sup>I. Rákóczi György birtokainak gazdasági iratai, 668; Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 460–461.

<sup>12</sup>In 1625, the Prince of Transylvania gave to Thomas Debreczeni as a reward the estate of Radnót (present day *Iernut* in Romania) and the villages of Ombod (present day *Ambud* in Romania) and Amac (present day *Amăți* in Romania) in Sáros County. After that, in 1626, Debreczeni became the owner of Pálfalva (present day *Păulești* in Romania), Remete (present day *Rămeț* in Romania) and Vasvári (present day *Oșvarău* in Romania). Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 460–463.

<sup>13</sup>Debreczeni–Droppán, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere”, 32.



service of the new Prince of Transylvania, George I Rákóczi. He became the economic manager of the properties of Rákóczi in Upper-Hungary and in the Castle of Sárospatak (in German: *Potok am Bodroch*) which was one of the centers of the Rákóczi family.<sup>14</sup> In a short time, Debreczeni acted as a governor for George Rákóczi and was able to make decisions not only in economic but also in political issues.<sup>15</sup>

The question is, how can we describe Debreczeni's relationship to George Rákóczi? First, Thomas Debreczeni played an important role in the selection of new supplies to the several economic positions. There were many young people around Debreczeni that he worked with and besides him they had the opportunity to learn about the managing of estates. After that, a couple of years later, they were selected for manager positions and were sent to manage other estates of Rákóczi by Debreczeni. It is important to emphasize that he participated not only in the selection but also in making proposals to Rákóczi. This was an important decision and influenced the future of the properties and the people.<sup>16</sup>

It was important to find the right person like Debreczeni because those who managed a smaller estate received instructions in letters, directly from the governor. Thomas Debreczeni regularly received replies to his instructions, therefore a communication developed between the governor and managers of different estates. This was also important because Debreczeni regularly reported to Rákóczi about his properties and there were many times that the Prince of Transylvania answered these letters. This may have led to a long correspondence between Rákóczi and Debreczeni and sometimes not only about economic questions.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, it was one of the duties of Debreczeni to check the postal network: all letters which were written by the Prince of Transylvania or sent by others to him. It means that he had the right to open and read the contents of letters which also included the personal correspondence of George Rákóczi.<sup>18</sup>

The activity of Thomas Debreczeni was important for the Prince of Transylvania from economic, financial, and communicational points of view.<sup>19</sup> He was an ambitious man

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<sup>14</sup> Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 472–473.

<sup>15</sup> Debreczeni–Droppán, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere”, 34.

<sup>16</sup> Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 480–486.

Thomas Debreczeni regularly made proposal to George Rákóczi about the position called *comes curialis*. The *comes curialis* worked in the several centers of the estates and looked over the work of the other workers like the herdsman, the forester, the horse-herders, the miller and so on. Kállay, István, *A magyarországi nagybirtok kormányzata, 1711–1848* [The Administration of the Manors in Hungary in 1711–1848] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1980), 11.

<sup>17</sup> Debreczeni–Droppán, “Nagy fejedelmek főembere”, 35.

<sup>18</sup> Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 486.

<sup>19</sup> Horváth, “Egy Rákóczi-familáris levelezése”, 181–214; Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz. Fáy IV. István levelezése (1633–1639)”, 152–166.

who was living in the Upper-Hungarian region, first in Szatmár Castle, then in Tokaj and Sárospatak and tried to be part of contemporary society. Besides this, Debreczeni tried to establish connections through marriage or god-parenting to the nobility from Upper-Hungary, for example with the Pathay, Reöthy, and Fáy families.<sup>20</sup>

His letters to his relatives contained not only information about family affairs but also other news which was more important to the area where they lived. The reason why the people, including his family members, wrote to Thomas Debreczeni was because they knew he had a special relationship to the Prince of Transylvania. He was the man who was able to deliver their messages directly to Rákóczi as fast as possible which was, especially in the beginning, important to stabilize his power.<sup>21</sup>

It is interesting that from an economic manager's perspective, Rákóczi was more of a landlord than a prince in terms of his personal estates. He was a landlord who entrusted his estates to his reliable employee. The reason why Debreczeni's position was extraordinary is that he was one of the Upper-Hungarian nobles around Rákóczi with an important duty. It is also interesting that we do not have any other information about who was the supervisor before and after him, so we can see he was a special member of Rákóczi's group.<sup>22</sup>

### The influence of George Rákóczi in the basic level: the county

Before I speak about George Rákóczi's local influence, I have to explain at first briefly the function of the counties (in Latin *comitatus*). From the Middle Ages, these were the smaller administrative units within a country which were led by the *supremus comes* (in German *Obergespan*) who was usually the member of a rich and well-connected family. Each *supremus comes* had the opportunity to lead two or three counties at the same time. It was a fact that since the *supremus comes* was a rich aristocrat, he spent most of his life in the Habsburg Court or all around the country. Because of this, the role of sub-prefect (Latin *vicecomes*, German *Vizegespan*) was more important, practically he was the leader of the county and usually he was in the service of the *supremus comes*, for example they managed the castle or the estates of the comes.<sup>23</sup> It is also a fact that the members of nobility who were living in

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<sup>20</sup> Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 455–457.

<sup>21</sup> In 1636, Stephen Fáy wrote about the rebellion against George Rákóczi directly to Thomas Debreczeni because Fáy knew, Debreczeni has more opportunity to meet the Prince of Transylvania in person. Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz”, 163.

<sup>22</sup> Debreczeni–Droppán, “Egy gazdasági szakember a XVII. századból”, 462.

<sup>23</sup> Ember, Győző, *Az újkori magyar közigazgatás története Mohácstól a török kiűzéséig* [The History of the Hungarian Public Administration in the Early Modern Period from the Battle of Mohács (1526) to the Expulsion of

the same region knew each other well and had many experiences of working together in the leadership of the counties. Sometimes they were in the service of the same aristocrats.<sup>24</sup>

Usually, the county ensured the administration of justice, the gathering of taxes, the promulgation of laws and the military protection of the people who lived in the county.<sup>25</sup> In the centers of the counties, the noble families would hold meetings that were called assemblies of the county. These meetings were especially important for the nobles who lived there because they could reach decisions about the future of their villages and therefore their own life. During this period, for the Hungarian nobility, the assembly was a place where they could meet, talk and share information with each other which meant an opportunity to reach their own goals.<sup>26</sup>

The life of Stephen Fáy shows how an ambitious Hungarian noble man can step higher from the lower level of the social rank through his networks. The Fáy's were one of the Hungarian Protestant families during this period with origins in the Middle Ages. The estates belonging to the Fáy family were scattered across Upper-Hungary in several counties, sometimes threatened by Ottoman attack and abutted on those of the Rákóczi family.<sup>27</sup>

In this article I will focus just on the life of Stephen IV Fáy in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. We know that his father – also called Stephen Fáy (†around 1618) – gave him a lot of support. The young Stephen was commended to the service of one of the famous members of the Rákóczi family. This was a typical way of learning; young nobles would often learn the ways of service in the court of a local aristocrat. After that, until the 1630's we do not have any other information about his life.<sup>28</sup>

His name appears in the service of George Rákóczi for the first time in 1632. In this year he was the member of a diplomatic mission to the Crimea. From Rákóczi's contract book,

the Ottomans (1686)] (Budapest, 1946), 40–42.

<sup>24</sup> Dominkovits, Péter, “Főúri udvar – uradalom – vármegye – katolikus egyház. Adatok és szempontok a 17. századi nyugat-dunántúli megyei nemesség mozgásterének kutatásához” [The Aristocrat Court – Manor – County – Catholic Church. Details and Aspects to the Research of the Hungarian Nobility's Opportunity in the Western Part of the Transdanubian Region] *Turul*, 80, no 2 (2008), 38–39.

<sup>25</sup> Ember, *Az újkori magyar közigazgatás története*, 42–43.

<sup>26</sup> About to sharing information in the assemblies of the county: Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz”, 162.

<sup>27</sup> Horváth, Mónika, “Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban. A Fáyak és rokonaik a 17. században” [Marriage Policy of a Noble Family in Upper-Hungary. The Fáy Family and their Relatives in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century] in *Doktorandusz hallgatók IX. konferenciájának tanulmányai*, ed. Szuromi, Rita (Eger: Liceum Kiadó, 2020), 107, 109.

<sup>28</sup> Varga J., János, *Szervitorok katonai szolgálata a XVI–XVII. századi dunántúli nagybirtokon* [The Military Service of Servitors in the 16–17<sup>th</sup> Centuries on the Transdanubian Properties] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1981), 14; Horváth, “Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz”, 156.

which is similar to a modern contract, we know that he worked as Rákóczi's servitor from 1635 to 1639 because during this time he was regularly paid by Rákóczi on a permanent basis.<sup>29</sup>

Besides that, Stephen Fáy worked as one of the leaders of Abaúj County from 1630 to 1631 and from 1634 to 1639. Fáy's relationship to George Rákóczi on the one hand was based on his connections to the nobility and on the other hand, to the Protestant religion. Stephen Fáy strengthened his position around George Rákóczi and his circle because of his marriage. In 1625, he married Catherine Reöthy, who was the daughter of one of Rákóczi's important soldiers from this region called Urban Reöthy (†1647).<sup>30</sup> Considering the position of his father-in-law, it was an advantageous marriage for Stephen Fáy: he found a patron who could support him in entering into Rákóczi's service. It is important to emphasize that the properties of the Reöthy family abutted on those of the Fáy family. We do not know much about Fáy's feelings or those of his wife, but we do know that marriages in the early modern period were made for the purpose of property; a circumstance which could be advantageous not only for the husbands but also for the wives.<sup>31</sup>

Since Stephen Fáy worked in the service of George Rákóczi and in the county in the 1630's, we can ask what was his role in Rákóczi's gaining of power? From his correspondence,<sup>32</sup> we can see that Fáy played a significant role in the Upper-Hungarian region: he recruited soldiers for Rákóczi's army. Many of his letters shows us the success of these recruitment efforts. He sent information to Rákóczi about the enemy's military preparations and the moving of their troops. He probably fought against the enemies of the Prince of Transylvania.<sup>33</sup>

Stephen Fáy was one of the nobles in the county of Abaúj who regularly participated in the meetings of the county. On 27<sup>th</sup> July 1636, the nobles of Upper-Hungary already knew that Rákóczi's enemies would rebel against him again. Fáy took part in the assembly of the county, asking for the help of the nobles who lived there to support George Rákóczi to fight.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 182.

<sup>30</sup> Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 156–157.

<sup>31</sup> Urban Reöthy worked as the manager of the Sárospatak Castle, from 1634 to 1644 he became the captain of Kővár Castle (present day the part of *Berbeșzoaia* in Romania) and after that, until his death in 1647, Reöthy was the captain of Kassa Castle (present day *Košice* in Slovakia). Stephen Fáy married to his daughter, Catherine on February 4<sup>th</sup> 1624 in Fülek (present day *Filakovo* in Slovakia). Horváth, "Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban", 112.

<sup>32</sup> The original correspondence of Stephen IV Fáy can be found in the National Archives of Hungary in Budapest: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [*Hungarian National Archives National Archives*] P1729 Archivum familiae Fáy [*Family Archive of the Fáy family, Section P*].

The published version of the correspondence: Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 181–214; Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 152–166.

<sup>33</sup> Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 160, 162–163.

<sup>34</sup> Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 197–200.

Fáy worked a lot not only for his county but for his country. In 1632, he had worked as a representative of Rákóczi when he visited the Crimea. We do not have any other information about this mission, but Rákóczi probably wanted to keep in touch with the Khan in Crimea. It was important to be at peace with the Crimean Tartars because the Principality was not strong enough to fight two or more enemies at the same time.<sup>35</sup> It is an interesting fact that other members of the Fáy family were also taking part in diplomatic missions. But they were less successful. For example, one of Stephen Fáy's relatives, Peter Fáy (†1620) had been executed in Constantinople many years before while he tried to complete his mission.<sup>36</sup>

We must speak about Fáy's espionage activity, which means in this case delivering information. Correspondence was the quickest and securest way to deliver information between two people. Fáy always thought it was important to send letters about his region to Rákóczi himself or one of his servitors. But what sort of topics did he send to the Prince of Transylvania? He wrote about military readiness in general, the number of troops, and the military actions of Rákóczi's enemies or the Ottoman forces in his county.<sup>37</sup> Then he conveyed the news about the people who he worked and lived with. He talked about various topics with them and knew which people were only pretending and did not in fact support Rákóczi's policy. Fáy wrote about his experiences to Rákóczi and from this Prince of Transylvania was able to make decisions about their careers.<sup>38</sup>

The difference between Thomas Debreczeni and Stephen Fáy was that Fáy did not have any experience in economic activity, he did not work as an administrator on Rákóczi's properties. I think on the one hand, the prince had his own appointees and on the other hand, perhaps it was impossible to work as an estate manager and as a representative at the same time.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, with some further information, we can conjecture the date of Fáy's death which probably took place in 1640. We can find his name in the contract book of George

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<sup>35</sup> Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 156.

<sup>36</sup> Horváth, "Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban", 110.

<sup>37</sup> Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 160, 162–163.

<sup>38</sup> In 1633 Stephen Fáy wrote a letter to his father-in-law about the activity of Catherine of Brandenburg. Fáy was disappointed to the widow of Gabriel Bethlen and supported her to leave Transylvania as quick as possible. Besides that, Fáy helped Rákóczi to gain the title of Prince of Transylvania, he heard disappointing rumors about Catherine of Brandenburg. According to this information, the widow of Bethlen already started to keep in touch to the Habsburg ruler, Ferdinand II. The people also talked about her conversion to the Catholic religion. Horváth, "Adalékok I. Rákóczi György egy felső-magyarországi szervitorának feladataihoz", 159.

<sup>39</sup> The contract of Stephen IV Fáy: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [*Hungarian National Archives National Archives*] E190 Archivum familiae Rákóczi [*Family Archive of the Rákóczi family, Section E*], 3. tétel, Nr. 12. (40.) fol. 95–96.

I Rákóczi for last time in 1639, and I found a letter where his wife is mentioned as a widow in 1640. We do not know anything certain about his death. We do not have his last will which means he probably died in an unexpected accident or a battle or maybe this source was destroyed in a fire during the Second World War or at the time of the anti-communist uprising in 1956.<sup>40</sup>

Fáy was one of Rákóczi's enthusiastic supporters in several counties of Upper-Hungary. The Prince of Transylvania found a loyal person who was in contact with the noble families whose properties were located next to the Rákóczi's estates. In addition, Fáy was one of the Calvinist nobles who had relatively large estates, money and political influence to cover those nobles with his power who were against the Prince of Transylvania.

### The influence of George I Rákóczi in the higher level: the diet

Before showing Rákóczi's territorial influence, I should first explain briefly the function of the Hungarian diet.<sup>41</sup> The diet was the legislative institution of Hungary whose function – unlike its structure for example the numbers of the chambers or the location of the diet – did not change at all, up until these days. The meetings of the diet were located in Pressburg (present day *Bratislava* in Slovakia) and the participants were summoned by the Habsburg ruler. During this period, the Hungarian diet was bicameral which means it had two parts, the Upper – and the Lower Chamber (*tabula superior et inferior*).<sup>42</sup>

The prelates and aristocrats served as the members of the Upper Chamber, they had the right to vote at the diet in person. In addition, it was a privilege of the aristocrats that if they did not want to participate at the diet in person, they could then send in place of himself a Hungarian nobleman who could afterwards share his knowledge about the diet's proceedings.<sup>43</sup> The members of the Lower Chamber were representatives of the cities, the Catholic church and the counties, who also had the right to vote at the diet. The Lower Chamber included the representatives of the Prince or the Princess of

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<sup>40</sup> Horváth, "Egy Rákóczi-familiáris levelezése", 181, 183.

About the short history of the Archivum familiae Fáy [*Family Archive of the Fáy family*]: Kosáry, Domokos, *Bevezetés Magyarország történetének forrásai és irodalmába, I. kötet* [Introduction to the Sources and Literature of the Hungarian History, Volume One] (Budapest: Tankönyvkiadó, 1970), 666.

<sup>41</sup> About the history and the function of the Hungarian diet: Benda, Kálmán – Péter, Katalin, *Az országgyűlések a kora újkor magyar történelemben* [The Diets in the History of Hungary during the Early Modern Period] (Budapest, 1987) and so on.

<sup>42</sup> Szijártó M., István, *A diéta. A magyar rendek és az országgyűlés, 1708–1792* [The Diet. The Hungarian Nobility and the Diets, 1708–1792] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 43–45, 56, 58, 104.

<sup>43</sup> Szijártó, *A diéta. A magyar rendek és az országgyűlés*, 46–48.



Transylvania. In this article, I would like to focus on the representatives of the counties and partly the Prince of Transylvania.<sup>44</sup>

The diet played a significant role in the whole of Hungarian history. After the Hungarian Kingdom had an elected king from the Habsburg family, the bigger part of the nobility did not participate in the policy directly which means that they could not, or did not want to, gain the significant positions in the Habsburg Court or in the administration. Instead of this, they tried to represent their own and territorial interests at the diet. To achieve their goals, on the one hand, the Habsburg ruler had to convene the diet as often as possible and on the other hand, the Hungarian nobility had to be unified. It is already an interesting fact that the Habsburg Court and the nobility acted as competitors at the diet, and both the ruler and the Hungarians represented their own interests in a persistent way. Most of the time, the Habsburg ruler was able to strengthen his position in the Kingdom of Hungary but he knew it would be impossible without the permission of the Hungarian nobility.<sup>45</sup>

Now I would like to focus on a Hungarian Protestant nobleman, Paul Szemere, who also had smaller properties in the Upper-Hungarian region. He was a well-known nobleman in his county who regularly participated in the assemblies of his county and had good connections to the nobility. According to current research, we know the most significant details of his life like his activity as a representative of the counties and the Prince of Transylvania.<sup>46</sup>

Paul Szemere was the member of a noble family with origins in the Middle Ages but they became famous because of his activity during this period. Their estates were also scattered across Upper-Hungary in Abaúj and Borsod Counties.<sup>47</sup>

Paul Szemere worked as the notary of two Upper-Hungarian counties from 1635 to 1640, during this period he was the sub-prefect of Abaúj County.<sup>48</sup> From the 1620's

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<sup>44</sup> Szijártó, *A diéta. A magyar rendek és az országgyűlés*, 51–52; Guszarova, Tatjana, “Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján a 17. században” [The Representatives of the Counties in the Lower Chamber of the Diet in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century] in *Rendiség és parlamentarizmus Magyarországon. A kezdetektől 1918-ig*, ed. Dobszay, Tamás (Budapest: Országgyűlés Hivatala, 2013), 137.

It is important to emphasize that a representative itself was able to represent the interest of more than one aristocrat and counties and/or the interest of more than one county and the Prince of Transylvania at the same time. Guszarova, “Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján”, 137.

<sup>45</sup> Ember, *Az újkori magyar közigazgatás története*, 230.

<sup>46</sup> Nagy, *Magyarország családai. Czímerekkel és nemzékrendi táblákkal, 10. kötet* [The Families of Hungary. With Coats of Arms and Family Trees, Volume 10] (Budapest, 1863), 595.

<sup>47</sup> Nagy, *Magyarország családai, 10.*, 595, 601–602; Borovszky, Samu, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Abaúj-Torna vármegye és Kassa* [The Counties and Cities of Hungary, Abaúj-Torna County and Košice] (Budapest, 1896), 548.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Szemere had a very diverse activity in Abaúj County. From 1625 to 1628 he worked as one of the judges, from 1630 to 1632 and from 1634 to 1643 he was the notary of the county. Besides that, in 1635 and from 1638 to 1641 he worked in the same position of another county called Sáros. Korponay, János, *Abaújvármegye*

to the end of the 1640's, Szemere regularly participated in the assemblies of the diets as representative. He was the representative of Borsod County in 1625 and after that, in 1630, the representative of Sáros County; from 1634 to 1635, from 1637 to 1638 and from 1646 to 1647, in 1642 and in 1649 he was the representative of Abaúj County at the diet. Apart from this activity, he regularly participated in delegations and committees before the summoning of the diet.<sup>49</sup> We can find his name in the contract book of George I Rákóczi in 1635, this year he was paid by Rákóczi on a permanent basis.<sup>50</sup> In 1646, Szemere worked as the representative of the Prince of Transylvania at the diet. It is an interesting fact that he wrote a diary about his experiences and his activity at the diet but the publishing of this source is still one of the tasks for the future.<sup>51</sup>

The marriage policy of Paul Szemere was similar to other contemporary noblemen. He married Clara Putnoky who was the member of a noble family whose properties were located also in Upper-Hungary. Although the Putnoky family was not one of the richest families during this period through this marriage he was able to increase his political power in the Upper-Hungarian region.<sup>52</sup>

The question is, what does it mean if somebody worked as the representative of a county from Upper-Hungary or the Prince of Transylvania during this period? First of all, we know that the leaders and the representatives of the counties had similar family backgrounds, work experience and they had similar opportunities to represent their own interests. In the assemblies these people were able to meet and support each other. Since the estates of a nobleman were scattered across more counties and he would have good connections to other nobles from the counties, it was possible to become the representative of two or three counties at the same time. Besides that, the counties of Upper-Hungary usually had the same proposals and opinions about the questions at the diet. As I mentioned

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*monographiája, 2. kötet* [The Monography of Abaúj County, Volume 2] (Kassa, 1878) 138, 153, 197, 202, 227, 253, 292, 315, 328, 337, 356, 365, 368, 370, 423, 425, 444.

<sup>49</sup> Borovszky, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Abaúj-Torna*, 548; Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 136.

<sup>50</sup> The contract of Paul Szemere in the contract book of George Rákóczi: Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) [Hungarian National Archives National Archives] E190 Archivum familiae Rákóczi [Family Archive of the Rákóczi family, Section E], 3. tétel, Nr. 12. (40.) fol. 15–16.

<sup>51</sup> Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 136.

István Hajnal (1892–1956) already published several important details of the diary of Szemere: Hajnal, István, *Az 1642. évi meghiúsult országgyűlés időszaka* [The Period of the Failed Diet in 1642] (Budapest, 1930), 75, 78–85.

<sup>52</sup> Borovszky, Samu, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Szabolcs vármegye* [The Counties and Cities of Hungary, Szabolcs County] (Budapest, 1900), 530; Borovszky, Samu, *Magyarország vármegyéi és városai, Gömör-Kisbont vármegye* [The Counties and Cities of Hungary, Gömör-Kishont County] (Budapest, 1903), 654; Horváth, "Házassági stratégiák egy felső-magyarországi köznemesi családban", 116.



earlier, from the middle of the 1620's to the end of the 1640's, Paul Szemere also regularly worked as the representative of two or three administrative units.<sup>53</sup>

It is important to emphasize that since the leaders, the administrators and often the representatives of the counties also were in the service of a Hungarian aristocrat like the Rákóczi family, the aristocrats believed that the leadership of the counties and therefore the decisions of diet could be influenced by them.<sup>54</sup>

Besides that, due to the large number of Protestant nobility in Upper-Hungary, these counties represented a different opinion towards the Catholic Habsburg Court. This was one of the reasons why these representatives had a good connection to the Protestant Prince of Transylvania. Paul Szemere participated at the diet as the representative of the Prince and several Upper-Hungarian counties where the estates of Rákóczi were located. Therefore, through Szemere's activity as a representative, Rákóczi had the opportunity to represent his own interest not only in the counties but also at the diet.<sup>55</sup> His presence at the diet as a Protestant representative meant that there was someone who represented the interests of the Protestant nobility.<sup>56</sup>

Although the history of his life and the importance of his work must be supplemented with the information from his diary or other sources of the assemblies of the counties, it is already obvious that the activity of Paul Szemere was important not only for the Hungarian Protestant nobility but also for the Upper-Hungarian region. Besides that, he worked in the

<sup>53</sup> Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 123, 127.

<sup>54</sup> Dominkovits, "Familiárisi szolgálat – vármegyei hivatalviselés. Egy 17. századi Sopron vármegyei alispán, gálósházi Récsy (Rechey) Bálint" [The Service of a Servitor – The Employment of the County. The Life of Balint Récsy (Rechey) from Gálósháza who was the Sub-Prefect (Vizegespan) in the County of Sopron (Ódenburg) in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century] *Korall*, 9 (2002), 33; Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 128.

From 1615 to 1630, George I Rákóczi was the *supremus comes* of Borsod County which meant a good opportunity for him to build connections, increase his power and look over this region. The researchers who work with the Rákóczi era need time to find and show every members of the circle around George Rákóczi. Until now, we know only a few members of the Rákóczi group from Upper-Hungary. Fallenbüchl, Zoltán, *Magyarország főispánjai 1526–1848* [The List of the Supremus Comes of Hungary from 1526 to 1848] (Budapest: Argumentum, 1994), 72.

The servitors of George I Rákóczi in Transylvania: Jeney-Tóth, Annamária, "Adalékok az udvari familiárisi karrierhez I. Rákóczi György udvarában" in *Műveltség és társadalmi szerepek: arisztokraták Magyarországon és Európában*, ed. Bárány, Attila – Orosz, István – Papp, Klára (Debrecen: Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézete, 2014), 319–333.

<sup>55</sup> Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 130, 137, 139.

The activity of Paul Szemere, for example speech at the diet or following the instructions of the counties can be supplemented with other information from his diary or the protocol books and notifications of the counties. Since the main part of these sources are unpublished yet, it needs more time to work with these documents and based on the amount of the data, it deserves to write a completely different and independent article about the topic.

<sup>56</sup> Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 139.

service of George Rákóczi and was a loyal supporter of the Prince of Transylvania and, as one of his representatives, Szemere also had the opportunity to present his interests and those of Transylvania at the diet.<sup>57</sup>

## Summary

In my article I have tried to show how George Rákóczi maintained or increased his power in the region and how he was able to influence the people in the Kingdom of Hungary.

We have looked at Rákóczi's influence on three levels. The first was at the economic level, dealing with the life of an economic manager who worked on Rákóczi's estates. The second was the local influence through the life of a Hungarian nobleman who worked in his county. The third one was Rákóczi's territorial influence through his activity as a representative at the diet.

It is important to emphasize that in my article I have shown the activity of one person at each level but we have to imagine that on every level there were many more people who worked in the service of Rákóczi. Because of these people, Rákóczi could make a stand for his own interests, and become one of the most powerful princes of Transylvania.

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<sup>57</sup>Guszarova, "Vármegyei követek a magyar országgyűlés alsótábláján", 124, 140.

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FERENC TÓKE

Comparing the Tropes of Silence in David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Winfried Georg Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction*

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## Abstract

This paper compares the tropes of silence found in David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*, Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, and Winfried Georg Sebald's *On The Natural History of Destruction* using the methodology of New Historicism. These three works deal with World War II traumatic experiences: the Holocaust, the internment of Japanese Americans after the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the strategic bombardment of German cities. The first question of the analysis focuses on the possibility of processing trauma experience through silence and questions whether remembrance is a more effective way of healing trauma. The process of coping with trauma reveals where the boundaries of representation lie and offers opportunities to expand them. It raises a second question concerning the role of visual representation in coping with trauma experience. The current study scrutinizes the characters of these three works to answer these questions while considering the historical context. The issue is closely related to Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory and the theme of intergenerational trauma. The analysis's main points also involve language use and its connection to visual representation, the mental and social factors surrounding trauma experience, and the effects of war on characters..

**Keywords:** history, memory, trauma, World War II, Holocaust, David Guterson, Art Spiegelman, W.G. Sebald

## Introduction

Some aspects of war trauma resist the powers of depiction.<sup>1</sup> This paper attempts to reveal the internment camp background and air raid survivors' silence as represented in literature. These questions were answered by analyzing three representative works: Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, *A Survivor's Tale*, David Guterson's *Falling on Cedars*, and Winfried Georg Sebald's *On the Natural History of Destruction*. The listed works address the Holocaust, the internment of Japanese Americans, and air raids on German cities. Though much research has been done on the topic of trauma literature, the novelty of my paper is that it focuses on the comparative analysis of three literary works with different genres and highlights the persistent importance of writing about the taboo of silence.

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<sup>1</sup> Friedländer, Saul. "History, Memory, and the Historian: Dilemmas and Responsibilities." *New German Critique*, no. 80 (2000): 10.

The present study investigates whether it is more effective to process the trauma experience through silence or understanding and remembrance.<sup>2</sup> This issue relates to the concept of postmemory introduced by Marianne Hirsch and the theme of intergenerational trauma which is the shared mental representation of large-scale trauma suffered by the ancestors of a group.<sup>3</sup> Postmemory describes the relationship that second generation survivors bear to the personal and collective trauma of those who came before. They remember only using stories, images, and behaviors they grew up in. However, these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply that they constitute memories in their own right.<sup>4</sup>

The second question concerns the role of visual illustrations. Art Spiegelman uses the mixed genre of graphic novels and cartoon to expand the perspective of representation. W.G. Sebald's (pseudo)historical witness literature utilizes photos of bombings to shed light on the taboos of German collective memory. David Guterson's historical novel uses highly visual language. Since these three works deal with specific historical events, a third question arises: whether these pieces of literature are sources of unconventional history.<sup>5</sup>

However, prior to further analysis, the key terms of this study require clarification. According to Hayden White, the past is comprised of events that once existed but no longer do.<sup>6</sup> He also uses the concept of historical past, which includes the studied and represented traces of the past.<sup>7</sup> It merits attention that historical past is only a highly selective version of the past but is understood as the totality of history. Ankersmit, following White's footsteps, states that the notion of the past as historical experience suggests the existence of an objective reality outside human influence.<sup>8</sup> He also highlights that history is constructed.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, Ankersmit introduces the concept of memory to historiography. He argues that memory is strictly within the individual's domain.<sup>10</sup>

Multidirectional memory is a key term concerning my research. Michael Rothberg created the concept, according to which historical memories interact with each other.<sup>11</sup> He

<sup>2</sup> Kisantal Tamás, *Túlélő történetek: Ábrázolásmód és történetiség a holokauszt művészetében* (Budapest: Kijárat Kiadó, 2009), 35.

<sup>3</sup> David Matz, Eric B. Vogel, Sandra Mattar and Haydee Montenegro. "Interrupting Intergenerational Trauma: Children of Holocaust Survivors and the Third Reich." *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology* vol. 46, no. 2 (2015): 186.

<sup>4</sup> Marianne Hirsch. *The Generation of Postmemory* (Columbia University Press, 1983), 5.

<sup>5</sup> Szélpál Livia. „A történelem jövője, bevezetés egy nem hagyományos történetírás (unconventional history) elméletébe” *Aetas*. vol. 22, no. 1 (2007): 136.

<sup>6</sup> Hayden White. *The Practical Past* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 13.

<sup>7</sup> White, *The Practical Past*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Ankersmit. *Sublime Historical Experience* (Stanford University Press, 2005): 4.

<sup>9</sup> Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 4.

<sup>10</sup> Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Rothberg. *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford

favors the productive view of historical memories by arguing that comparing and contrasting memories benefits understanding and remembrance.<sup>12</sup> Rothberg emphasizes the dual nature of memory. It is collective and individual simultaneously: remembrance is an individual action within the framework established by the collective.<sup>13</sup> The concept of shared memory, which integrates and harmonizes the perspectives of individual memories, relates to this dual nature.<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander's psychoanalytic approach introduces additional levels of complexity to Rothberg's idea by accentuating the fact that the individual has a propensity to repress traumatic experiences from the consciousness, which undermines coping. Therefore, traumatic emotions come from the event itself and the anxiety caused by repression.<sup>15</sup>

The different perspectives of experiencing history led Ankersmit to define historical experience as the way a human being of the present experiences the past. The concept involves a duality of feelings. The desire to recover the past creates a moment of love, but the discovery that it is situated in a space enclosed from the present provides a moment of loss.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, the underlying assumption of the essay is to determine how the analyzed works challenge the established limits of trauma representation. Based on Ewa Domanska's definition, Guterson's historical novel, Sebald's (pseudo)historical witness literature, and Spiegelman's graphic novel may be interpreted as historical sources.<sup>17</sup> They belong to the field of unconventional history and are characterized by experimentation with genres. This leads to the conclusion that the past is not a concept with absolute meaning but a multitude of stories within the boundaries of public history.<sup>18</sup> The linguistic turn in the 1970s fostered the emergence of New History, and from that paradigm change, sprouted the different versions of alternate and unconventional histories. The linguistic turn in historiography was first outlined within the intellectual history framework by Hayden White's *Metahistory*<sup>19</sup> in 1973. The described paradigm change resulted in a new historicist literary critique that aims to understand literary works within the historical context. It was created with a particular focus on intertextuality.<sup>20</sup> The present study follows the principle that understanding texts results from the interaction among readers, social institutions, conventions, ideologies, and practices, so it analyzes the aforementioned pieces of literature in their historical context.

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University Press, 2009), 3.

<sup>12</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 11.

<sup>13</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander. *Trauma: A Social Theory* (New York: Polity Press, 2012), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Ankersmit, *Sublime Historical Experience*, 9.

<sup>17</sup> Ewa Domanska. "Hayden White: Beyond Irony." *History and Theory* 37, no. 2 (1998): 174.

<sup>18</sup> Szélpál, "A történelem jövője," 136.

<sup>19</sup> Szélpál, "A történelem jövője," 137.

<sup>20</sup> Szélpál, "A történelem jövője," 138.

## Intergenerational Memory as a Bridge to Healing

The novel *Snow Falling on Cedars* opens with the scene of Kabuo Miyamoto sitting behind the defendant's table. He is accused of murdering Carl Heine.<sup>21</sup> The two men were born on San Pedro Island. They were childhood friends before World War II. The two characters are on opposite sides, but they are very similar. They served in the US military during the war. Carl in the Pacific War while Kabuo on the European front. Both became fishermen after returning home. Carl and Kabuo show only a few emotions but are loving, caring fathers. Despite these similarities, the war changed their relationship.

Kabuo was sent to camp Manzanar<sup>22</sup> and then served on the Western front in the US military. Upon returning to San Pedro Island, he discovered that Carl's mother sold his family's land. Consequently, Kabuo bears hard feelings for the Heine family. Carl fought against the Japanese Empire's soldiers, which altered his feelings towards Japanese Americans. Their conflict is resolved when Carl agrees to return the Miyamoto family's land. Unfortunately, Carl did not live long enough to tell anyone about it, so Kabuo was accused of murder. Racism is unspoken on the heavenly island, but silence still speaks.

Intergenerational trauma is likewise evident. When Kabuo returns from war, he realizes that Carl's mother bought his family's land. It indicates a dual trauma experience for Kabuo. He realizes that San Pedro's people are ungrateful, and he inherited a family feud. It is thought-provoking to see how Kabuo and Carl's characters could serve as a bridge between the two sides. Their fathers once started like them as a possible bridge between the Japanese and Americans, but the war tore those hopes apart as they died.<sup>23</sup> Their story supports the argument that trauma can only be addressed through remembrance and acceptance.

Another protagonist is Hatsue, Kabuo's wife. Her silence requires separate attention from Carl, Kabuo, and Ishmael because her trauma experience is rooted in internment and not in the battlefield. She is torn between two sets of values. The traditional Japanese expectation is that she may marry a Japanese man. However, as a teenager, she is in love with Ishmael Chambers. During her internment in Camp Manzanar, she ends the relationship and follows her family's expectations. Silence becomes her only refuge, because if she speaks out, she reveals intemperance. Therefore, this silence makes her character more Japanese.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Daniel McKay. "Captive Memories: Articulate vs. Disarticulated Silences in David Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars* and Wendy Catran's *The Swap*." *Comparative Literature Studies* 50, no. 4 (2013): 652

<sup>22</sup> Manzanar is best known as one of ten American concentration camps where more than 120,000 Japanese Americans were incarcerated during World War II from 1942 to 1945. (Laher, Neal "The Internment," 1)

<sup>23</sup> Cheryl Greenberg. "Black and Jewish Responses to Japanese Internment?" *Journal of American Ethnic History* 14, no. 2, (1995): 6.

<sup>24</sup> McKay "Captive Memories," 656.

Hatsue's father is arrested because of his Japanese origins, and later, the entire family is interned. It is the first layer of her traumatic experience. The second layer derives from the fact that she is torn between social values. She betrays her family by being in a secret relationship with an American boy, a *bakujin*.<sup>25</sup>

The final product of her realization is a letter to Ishmael in which she explains her feelings:

I don't love you, Ishmael [...] When we met that last time in the cedar tree and I felt your body move against mine, I knew with certainty that everything was wrong. I knew we could never be right together.<sup>26</sup>

Here she generates Ishmael's trauma. The experience of her internment based on her ancestry is not just a trauma. It also lifts the burden of lies. She is put behind fences, but she finally becomes free. Her marriage to Kabuo is the final capitulation of her inner battle. Thus, the combined trauma of Hatsue and Ishmael ends.

Hatsue is a representation of the Pacific War. However, this battle is concluded in a different manner. In her, the Japanese side achieves victory. Hatsue insists that oceans, like cultures, do not mix. She cannot accept her double identity as a Japanese American. When their relationship ends and Hatsue marries Kabuo, the war from within is projected outside as the man fights on the Western European front. After World War II, Kabuo continued to fight for his family's land. When Kabuo is arrested, the conflict reignites in Hatsue. She wraps herself in the silence of hate towards the Americans. The conflict is resolved only when Ishmael uses his position as an outsider to help the Miyamoto family.<sup>27</sup>

The protagonist of *Maus*, Vladek Spiegelman, also has a trauma experience connected to racism. He differs from Carl and Kabuo. He tells his story in detail, engaging his emotions. He does not distance himself from the memories. The text's focus is the individual's effort to represent history and the struggle to retrieve personal memory.<sup>28</sup>

The Germans didn't want to leave anywhere, a sign of all what they did. You heard about the gas, but I'm telling not rumors, but only what really I saw. For this, I was an eyewitness.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> McKay "Captive Memories," 655.

<sup>26</sup> David Guterson. *Snow Falling on Cedars* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 210.

<sup>27</sup> McKay "Captive Memories," 656.

<sup>28</sup> Janet Thormann. The Representation of The Shoah in *Maus: History and Psychology*. *Res Publica*. 8, no. 2 (2002): 127.

<sup>29</sup> Art Spiegelman. *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1991), 59.

Vladek explains why his accounts of the Holocaust are valid, but he is too close to the events to stay objective. He cannot live and tell his story without emotions.

The role of the bridge emerges again in Vladek's case. However, the scene with an Afro-American hitchhiker shows the opposite. Vladek does not want his son to help him. His son notes that the Holocaust survivor Polish Jew should not be racist. Vladek should be a metaphorical bridge, but he cannot fulfill the role.<sup>30</sup> That is why the task inherited by generations after him. Vladek's son, Arthur, helps the hitchhiker. The experiences of the Holocaust do not change Vladek. However, seeing the way his father acts makes Arthur realize that he must be different. He is obligated to write his father's stories so later generations can build a bridge<sup>31</sup> which adds to the previous argument that trauma and conflict can only be addressed through remembrance and acceptance.

Arthur Spiegelman's relation to his father's story is an example of intergenerational trauma. By recording his father's memories in a graphic novel,<sup>32</sup> he re-experiences them. He engages these memories and displays the postmemory phenomenon.<sup>33</sup> The graphic novel conveys the son's pain around the Holocaust, as if his suffering was inherited from the father.<sup>34</sup> The signs of distress that Arthur experienced after publishing his work may have resulted from this phenomenon. Postmemory is related to the notion of cultural trauma introduced by Jeffrey C. Alexander. He states that cultural trauma is created when members of a group feel that they are exposed to horrible events, which leave marks on their collective consciousness and determine their future identity.<sup>35</sup>

The idea of postmemory is related to intergenerationally transferred trauma.<sup>36</sup> Research suggests that the children of Holocaust survivors often experience secondary traumatic stress. This implies the need for the children of survivors to process traumatic experiences that their parents have transmitted to them.<sup>37</sup> The distress that Arthur experiences may be the result of intergenerationally transmitted trauma. He hopes that if he writes Vladek's story, the burden of his father's legacy will be lifted. Instead, he feels guilty because he made money on people's suffering which reveals an internal battle between staying silent

<sup>30</sup> Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Began*, 99.

<sup>31</sup> Greenberg. "Black and Jewish Responses," 6.

<sup>32</sup> A graphic novel is a fictional story that is presented in comic-strip format and published as a book. (Costello, "History and Memory," 23.)

<sup>33</sup> Lisa A. Costello. "History and Memory in a Dialogic of "Performative Memorialization" in Art Spiegelman's "Maus: A Survivor's Tale." *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association* 39, no. 2 (2006): 23.

<sup>34</sup> Thormann, *The Representation of The Shoah in Maus*, 128.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander, Ron Eyerman, Bernhard Giesen, Neil J. Smelser, Piotr Sztompka. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* (University of California Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>36</sup> Matz, Vogel, Mattar, and Montenegro. "Interrupting Intergenerational Trauma," 186.

<sup>37</sup> Matz, Vogel, Mattar, and Montenegro. "Interrupting Intergenerational Trauma," 186.

or writing further. Eventually, Arthur finishes the story because he realizes that silence is not an effective way to cope with the transferred trauma.

What also weighs on Arthur's shoulders is the rivalry with his dead brother Richieu.<sup>38</sup> He was Anja and Vladek's first son. Richieu was sent away to an aunt, so he might remain safe. The aunt eventually poisoned him, preventing the Nazis from capturing him. It is challenging for Spiegelman to write about his brother because Richieu died before Arthur's birth. It created a rivalry between them. Arthur had to compete with his brother, who had only one photograph. The child in the photo was perfect in the parents' eyes. The memory made Arthur's feelings bitter towards Richieu because he could never hope to be as good as the ideal brother. Arthur distances himself from Richieu's memory and concludes the intergenerational trauma. Postmemory is finalized in Arthur through the feeling of inferiority towards his dead brother<sup>39</sup>. The brother experienced the Holocaust with his parents. Arthur felt that he could never be good enough because he got away easily.<sup>40</sup> This feeling causes a secondary survivor's guilt in Arthur. By recording his father's story in graphic novels, he involves himself in the events.

The cause of Sebald's intergenerational trauma is his father, who served in the Wehrmacht. Sebald studies the representational silence surrounding the topic of guilt, rightful punishment, and air war. Intergenerational trauma is not strongly present in *Air War and Literature*. However, traumatic events affecting generations are exemplified through the image of the woman carrying her dead child in a suitcase after the bombing of Hamburg in 1943. Sebald's father's involvement in the war must have affected the writer's consciousness. Perhaps this is why he is willing to adopt the outsider's point of view by moving to England. He distances himself from his father's involvement.

Through writing his book, Sebald takes up the role of the bridge. He attempts to connect the past and the present by pushing the boundaries of representation. He tries to bridge the representational gap which originates from the fact that the German collective memory does not provide an appropriate framework to express trauma experiences. It promotes the suppression of the past which might originate from a feeling of guilt, or the collectively damaged capacity of survivors to witness, process, feel, remember and express what they underwent.<sup>41</sup> This attitude makes it impossible for the individual memory to confront the trauma experience. Sebald hopes to inspire individual memory

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<sup>38</sup> Victoria A. Elmwood. "Happy, Happy, Ever After": The Transformation of Trauma Between the Generations in Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*." *Biography* 27, no. 4 (2004): 701.

<sup>39</sup> Elmwood. "Happy, Happy, Ever After," 703.

<sup>40</sup> Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, 15.

<sup>41</sup> Nil Santianez. "Representations of the Void, or, The Language of Silence in the Fiction on the Strategic Bombing of Germany." *Neophilologus* 102, no. 3 (2018): 404



to alter the perspectives of shared memory, which might positively affect collective memory and build a framework to support discourse.

The role of the bridge is also present in Sebald's work through photographs. They are the means through which Sebald deconstructs the images of destruction created by the German cultural memory.<sup>42</sup> He acknowledges the existence of these images built up from the survivor's accounts. However, the use of photos invalidates these. The photographs show a glimpse of the truth untainted by the human experience. Sebald's goal is to present the past instead of the cultural memory, and in doing so, he broadens the means of representation.

The photographs provide a counterpoint, so together with the text, they paint a more realistic picture. *Air War and Literature* takes the historical facts and how the human mind experienced the catastrophe and then uses these descriptions to build a scaffold that supports appropriate representation. Similarly to *Maus* where the graphic novel format enhances the visual aspects of the events and breaks the silence imposed on the Holocaust by the Nazi regime. They hid the Holocaust by deporting the Jewish people and committing mass murders in remote locations. Their secrecy restricted visual records. At the time of the events, the Holocaust was functionally invisible to the general populace.<sup>43</sup> Spiegelman breaks this silence by visualizing Vladek's experience.

The alternative historical nature of Spiegelman's work lies in the use of animal heads. The differences in physical attributes enhance visibility, deviate from historical reality, and give extra meaning to the text. The hybrid body's role is to call attention to the human body's distortion.<sup>44</sup> The bodies are fully human, and the animal heads divert attention to the torture the body undergoes which makes the pictures and the text interdependent.

When Spiegelman depicts scenes from the present, he draws himself as a human wearing a mouse mask.<sup>45</sup> It is a sign of his guilt because of his success. In these panels, he sits on a heap of dead bodies whose faces are natural mouse faces. This indicates that Arthur Spiegelman feels his identity is fake compared to those who died in the Holocaust. As he is confronted with his responsibility towards the cultural effects of his work, his form gradually shrinks until he feels like a child trying to do an adult's job.<sup>46</sup> The only thing that seems to help is his talks with his psychiatrist.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Karen Remmler. "On the Natural History of Destruction" and Cultural Memory: W.G. Sebald." *German Politics & Society* 23, no. 3 (2005): 49.

<sup>43</sup> Orbán Katalin. "Trauma and Visuality: Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and In the Shadow of No Towers." *Representations* 97, no. 1 (2007): 59.

<sup>44</sup> Orbán, "Trauma and Visuality," 68.

<sup>45</sup> Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, 41.

<sup>46</sup> Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, 42.

<sup>47</sup> Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*, 46.



## Language

In this subchapter, I will analyze the language use of the protagonists. In Spiegelman's *Maus*, Vladek uses English to tell his story. However, his expressions are affected by Polish and Yiddish linguistic elements.<sup>48</sup> His use of English indicates that Vladek preserved his national identity. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that Vladek's English does not perfectly serve the function of communication.<sup>49</sup>

Vladek's English in storytelling has another role. It defamiliarizes the Holocaust. It allows Vladek to talk about the events in a language that remains pure from the taint of the Holocaust. Telling the story in English makes reflection easier. It is a strategy of coping with the events.<sup>50</sup> However, language for Vladek has a greater purpose. Vladek, besides Polish, speaks three other languages: English, German, and French. These languages are crucial to Vladek's survival. He is kept alive because he speaks languages. He gains an advantage in Auschwitz by speaking English. He teaches one of the Kapos English because the guard believes that the Reich will lose the war, so he needs to communicate with the Americans. For this service, Vladek gets new clothes and extra food. Language is not the only asset that helps Vladek; it is a crucial element.<sup>51</sup>

The role of language cannot be denied in Sebald's work when discussing the survivors' accounts of the aerial bombing of German cities. The question is whether language is sufficient to voice the catastrophic events. According to Sebald, the post-war German attempts were unsuccessful.<sup>52</sup> The complexity of the experiences can only be adequately voiced in similarly complex literary works where language and narration cooperate, creating a multilayered text that gives insight into how the human mind registers the horrors.<sup>53</sup>

Language has another aspect in Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars*. Characters with Japanese ancestry often use Japanese words. For example, the word '*bakujin*' refers to American people. The Japanese use '*bakujin*' with a negative undertone. The word describes the opposition between the Japanese and Americans. Hatsue, as a young girl, is in love with Ishmael, an American. Their relationship must remain a secret because her family would

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<sup>48</sup> Martín Urdiales Shaw. "Voicing the Survivor of Those Unspeakable Sites: Translating Vladek Spiegelman" *A Journal of Literary Studies and Linguistics*, 2, no. 2 (2012): 3.

<sup>49</sup> Shaw, "Voicing the Survivor," 3.

<sup>50</sup> Shaw, "Voicing the Survivor," 2.

<sup>51</sup> Emily Miller Budick. "The Case of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*." *Prooftexts* 21, no. 3 (2001): 392.

<sup>52</sup> Prager, Brad. "The Good German as Narrator: On W. G. Sebald and the Risks of Holocaust Writing." *New German Critique*, no. 96 (2005): 76.

<sup>53</sup> Santianez. "Representations of the Void," 416.

not allow her to see a ‘*bakujin* boy’.<sup>54</sup> The most accurate description of the difference expressed by the word is probably given by Fujiko, Hatsue’s mother. She cautions her daughter against the Americans:

The whites, you see, are tempted by their egos and have no means to resist. We Japanese, on the other hand, know our egos are nothing. We bend our egos all of the time, and that is where we differ. That is the fundamental difference, Hatsue. We bend our heads, we bow, and are silent, because we understand that by ourselves, alone, we are nothing at all, dust in a strong wind. Simultaneously, the *bakujin* believes his aloneness is everything, his separateness is the foundation of his existence. He seeks and grasps, seeks and grasps for his separateness, while we seek union with the Greater Life—you must see that these are distinct paths we are traveling, Hatsue, the *bakujin* and we Japanese.<sup>55</sup>

Fujiko is trying to justify that they let themselves be relocated to Manzanar without resistance. The family is described as apathetic during the process. Fujiko does not care where her daughters are in the camp. The only thing that ends her apathy is when she reads Ishmael’s letter. The thought of her daughter ‘seeing’ a ‘*bakujin* boy’ awakens the mother’s rage and makes her feel inconsolable.<sup>56</sup> She scolds her daughter but keeps the affair a secret. She keeps her family’s name clean from the taint that Hatsue’s relationship with the *bakujin* boy would have caused.<sup>57</sup>

The trope of silence as a means of coping with trauma is a cohesive force in the three works.<sup>58</sup> In Spiegelman’s *Maus*, silence is essential retrospectively. Vladek is very active during his trauma. Talkativeness is his way of survival, but it is not part of his coping. He expresses that he does not want to talk about the events: “It would take *many* books, my life, and no one wants anyway to hear such stories.”<sup>59</sup> In his process of coping, forgetting is also a crucial factor. He burns his wife’s diaries because he hopes their destruction will help him forget. As he argues, “I had to make an order with everything... These papers had too many memories. So I burned them.”<sup>60</sup> It leads to the conclusion that by not talking about the past and destroying written evidence, he distances himself and makes it easier to live with the survivor’s guilt.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> McKay “Captive Memories,” 658.

<sup>55</sup> Guterson, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, 98.

<sup>56</sup> Guterson, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, 110.

<sup>57</sup> McKay “Captive Memories,” 656.

<sup>58</sup> McKay “Captive Memories,” 656.

<sup>59</sup> Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, 14.

<sup>60</sup> Spiegelman, *Maus: A Survivor’s Tale*, 108.

<sup>61</sup> Budick, “The Case of Art Spiegelman’s *Maus*,” 385.

On the other hand, the silence in Guterson's *Snow Falling on Cedars* has a different role. In their case, silence is not only practiced after the internment but before and throughout. This silence is associated with Japanese composure.<sup>62</sup> Before the internment, Hatsue is rebellious. She does not want to leave San Pedro, but Fujiko convinces her:

You should learn to say nothing that will cause you regret. You should not say what is not in your heart — or what is only in your heart for a moment. But you know this — silence is better.<sup>63</sup>

She reminds Hatsue of what behavior is expected of her. She immediately recognizes that her mother is right. The trope of silence continues to be the survival attitude for the Japanese community during the encampment. They handle the situation with silent apathy. They distance themselves from the events, similarly to Vladek Spiegelman, but they apply it to reality. The expression “*Shikata gai nai*” mirrors the Japanese mentality of accepting every situation as it is. They recognize that they face constraints in their position, so to protect their consciousness, they resort to apathy. Their strategy for survival is not language, like Vladek's attitude, but silence.

Language in Sebald's work is not a survival strategy. Sebald seeks the appropriate linguistic means to describe the given historical events accurately.<sup>64</sup> The use of such language raises the question of whether Germans can be described both as perpetrators of evil and as victims of horrible atrocities. If so, then this leads to the assumption that the Allied nations should also be subjected to a dual description which would confuse the traditional ideas of World War II.<sup>65</sup> The appropriate language that Sebald searches for should be able to assign the responsibility of committing war crimes to the Germans and the Allies.<sup>66</sup> It should also be able to show both sides as victims of such atrocities. A criticism of such a language could be that depicting Germans as victims would degrade the experience of the Holocaust. Thus, the appropriate language should also include the Holocaust as it is traditionally viewed as a center point of World War II.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> McKay “Captive Memories,” 655.

<sup>63</sup> Guterson, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, 99.

<sup>64</sup> Wilfried Wilms. “Speak no Evil, Write no Evil: In Search of a Usable Language of Destruction.” In *W. G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham, Mark McCulloh, Walter de Gruyter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 186.

<sup>65</sup> Wilms “Speak no Evil, Write no Evil: In Search of a Usable Language of Destruction,” 186.

<sup>66</sup> Wilms “Speak no Evil, Write no Evil: In Search of a Usable Language of Destruction,” 190.

<sup>67</sup> Susanne Veas-Gulani. “W.G. Sebald, the Air War, and Literature.” In *W. G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma*, ed. Scott Denham, Mark McCulloh, Walter de Gruyter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 336.

Rothberg's, however, refuses the idea of competing memories. He favors the productive view of memories where comparing and contrasting memories enhance representation.<sup>68</sup> According to Rothberg's view, memories of the Allied air raids and the Holocaust should not be competing for attention. They should both be appropriately represented. In such a discussion, Germans, as victims of war, would not degrade the representation of the Holocaust. In *Air War and Literature* Sebald highlights the lack of appropriate language as a policy of forgetting, which leads to inadequate representation. However, the language Sebald uses is not his only representation strategy. His text is interdependent with the photographs included in his essay. The pictures strengthen the language's representational power. They express ideas by themselves, sometimes forcing the text into a supporting role.

### The Void

In the sense of remembrance, the bombing of German cities between 1942 and 1945 seems to be a paradoxical issue. For years, it affected thousands of people and was treated only with silence.<sup>69</sup> Sebald expresses that the collective German consciousness fails to address the trauma of the air raids.<sup>70</sup> They try to move forward towards a new beginning without coping with the past. Sebald seeks to resolve the issue by finding the appropriate language to represent the atrocities committed against Germany. He must battle the views that describe the destruction of the bombings as deserved. These views originated in the first articles in Allied newspapers that reported Germany's state and set the tone for further discussions.<sup>71</sup>

Even in reunited Germany, depicting Germans as the victims was impossible. The political taboo did not criticize the Allies' attacks on civilian targets.<sup>72</sup> Sebald does not explicitly express such criminalization of the Allied Forces, but his search for appropriate language suggests this view. By denying the fatalistic approach towards the events, he implies the Allies as perpetrators. Sebald breaks several taboos in his work, but not the one against criticizing the Allies for their conduct during World War II.<sup>73</sup>

Another form of silence is forgetting. They believe that they will eventually forget what happened if they do not talk about it. Germany focused all of its efforts on the

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<sup>68</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 11.

<sup>69</sup> Sebald, "Air War and Literature: Zürich Lectures," 4.

<sup>70</sup> Sebald, "Air War and Literature: Zürich Lectures," 6.

<sup>71</sup> Wilms "Speak no Evil, Write no Evil: In Search of a Usable Language of Destruction," 194.

<sup>72</sup> Wilms "Speak no Evil, Write no Evil: In Search of a Usable Language of Destruction," 190.

<sup>73</sup> Wilms "Speak no Evil, Write no Evil: In Search of a Usable Language of Destruction," 186.

reconstruction, excluding any opportunity to discuss the past.<sup>74</sup> Post-war Germany showed similar behavior to individuals who experienced trauma. The work kept the German collective consciousness busy, so the unpleasant memories remained unconscious which supports the argument that silence is not for coping but for forgetting.

Sebald's observation of Germans distancing themselves from the events is supported by one of Kluge's novellas. He writes about an American survey that interviewed the inhabitants of Halberstadt about the city's bombing.<sup>75</sup> The people conducting the survey found that the survivors are willing to talk about their experiences, but they resort to empty phrases, and they show a lack of emotions. This leads to the conclusion that the traumatic experience damaged the survivors' capacity to remember the aerial bombing.<sup>76</sup> A void was created in the survivors' minds concerning the traumatic events. The formation of the void is an unconscious process of the psyche to protect itself. The nature of the events made it easier for the survivors to harmonize shared memory and formulate the framework of collective memory.

The phenomena of the void cannot be captured in the other two works. The only similar example is when Vladek burns Anja's journals in *Maus*. It is an attempt to create an empty mental block. However, it is a conscious effort and relates not only to the Holocaust but to Anja's suicide as well. Vladek's actions correlate with Alexander's psychoanalytic approach where traumatic emotions are consequences of the event and the repression.<sup>77</sup> Vladek faces the events decades later, which means he is also characterized by belatedness. In Vladek's case, repression is a more significant factor than void creation. If void creation and repression are understood within the multidirectional memory framework, concerning the dual nature of memory, void creation may be repression elevated to a cultural level.<sup>78</sup> The possibility of adding a different point of view to the story through Anja Spiegelman's journals excites the author. However, Vladek burns the journals, creating the duality of feelings described by Ankersmit. Art's desire to retrieve Anja's part of the events creates a moment of love, but the diaries' destruction creates a moment of loss.

In Guterson's work, the void is created to conserve the community dynamics. San Pedro's citizens focus on accusing a Japanese man of a crime he did not commit. Pearl Harbor serves as the initial event since it was the first direct attack on the USA and took away the people's sense of safety. The main enemy is not Germany but Japan because

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<sup>74</sup> Sebald, "Air War and Literature: Zürich Lectures," 6.

<sup>75</sup> Santianez. "Representations of the Void," 403.

<sup>76</sup> Santianez. "Representations of the Void," 404.

<sup>77</sup> Jeffrey C. Alexander. *Trauma: A Social Theory* (New York: Polity Press, 2012), 10.

<sup>78</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 15.

they are the immediate threat. Therefore, Kabuo's Japanese identity is almost proof that he killed the other man. Here, repression is presented as a characteristic feature of the Japanese community. The cultural narrative is to distance them from the past. This argument is supported by the Japanese mentality depicted throughout the book. The dual nature of memory is precise: the community prefers repression, so the individual cannot move toward progressive coping.<sup>79</sup>

### Scars of War

The similarities between Carl and Kabuo can also be recognized in handling their traumatic experience. In one instance Kabuo remembers the act of killing on the battlefield. As he is watching his reflection, he knows he seems cold, but he cannot express why.<sup>80</sup> Guterson writes:

What could he say to people on San Piedro to explain the coldness he projected? The world was unreal, a nuisance that prevented him from focusing on his memory of that boy, on the flies in a cloud over his astonished face, the pool of blood filtering out of his shirt and into the forest floor, smelling rank, the sound of gunfire from the hillside to the east—he'd left there, and then he hadn't left. And still there had been more murders after this, three more, less difficult than the first had been, but murders nonetheless. So how to explain his face to people?<sup>81</sup>

The questions give an emotional frame to the thought process while implying that murder in battle seems more manageable than explaining the feelings left by the act of killing. Kabuo wants to break the silence, but he does not know how. He remembers his father's teachings and tries to express himself with his composure. He wants to suggest that he is innocent by distancing himself from the situation.<sup>82</sup>

Ishmael is another character with combat experience but as a journalist, he stays an outsider. Ishmael fought in the Pacific theatre and lost an arm at Tarawa Island. This is the only detailed battle scene in the book. Losing his arm corresponds to his lost love which is well presented in the movie. As Ishmael is drifting between consciousness and

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<sup>79</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, 15.

<sup>80</sup> McKay "Captive Memories," 654.

<sup>81</sup> Guterson, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, 77.

<sup>82</sup> McKay "Captive Memories," 654.

unconsciousness, he relives the days spent with Hatsue. He remembers her letter that caused the hatred he felt against her and, soon after, against the Japanese.<sup>83</sup> Ishmael feels inferior to Kabuo and Carl. He lost his arm in his first battle, so he could not fight anymore. His physical wound from the war and the wound on his soul caused a traumatic experience that eventually made him lonely and bitter.<sup>84</sup> Loneliness became his coping strategy. When Ishmael decides to help the Miyamotos, he uses his outsider position. He can finally separate the two traumas and realize his relationship with Hatsue was not meant to be successful.

Regarding Ishmael's war experience, it is possible to see the two traumas in a different light. After his injury, Ishmael developed post-traumatic stress disorder which is a psychiatric disorder that occurs when

(t)he person has experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of oneself or others, and his/her response involved intense fear, helplessness, or horror.<sup>85</sup>

The definition applies to Ishmael as he confronted trauma and suffered a severe injury. He shows one of the behavioral patterns associated with PTSD: avoidance which includes diminished interest in activities of the community.<sup>86</sup> Ishmael observes the community from the outside through the journal's spectacles. His behavior comes with a feeling of estrangement.<sup>87</sup> He thinks he is unworthy of being a part of the community. The third and fourth aspects of PTSD are the restricted range of effect, meaning the person is unable to have loving feelings and the sense of foreshortened future when the person does not expect to have a career, marriage, or an average lifespan.<sup>88</sup> After Hatsue, he had the chance to marry. However, Ishmael did not want to feel love because of what happened between him and Hatsue. She also denies understanding in *Snow Falling on Cedars* in her letter to Ishmael. His only hope to cope with the war trauma is Hatsue's love which is taken from him with the letter. The loss of his arm represents the loss of Hatsue.

In Sebald's view, hope lies with the future of Germany which is emphasized by the photos that show the aftermath of a bombing and the image of rebuilding. Sebald also strives to broaden the representational perspective of the written text by including

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<sup>83</sup> McKay "Captive Memories," 654.

<sup>84</sup> McKay "Captive Memories," 658.

<sup>85</sup> Ron Langer. "Combat, Trauma, Memory, and the World War II Veteran" *Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* 23, no. 1 (2011): 55.

<sup>86</sup> Langer, "Combat, Trauma, Memory," 51.

<sup>87</sup> Langer, "Combat, Trauma, Memory," 51.

<sup>88</sup> Langer, "Combat, Trauma, Memory," 51.

pictures. He argues that the German collective does not address the issue of the bombings sufficiently. Instead, they use the rebuilding to remove the collective consciousness from the trauma and deny remembrance. The photographs in Sebald's work depict more than just the destruction. They also present what will be there.<sup>89</sup> They support Sebald's claim that Germany tries to forget the suffering of the air raids through reconstruction. The most transparent example is the postcard depicting Frankfurt am Main. The caption on the postcard says "Frankfurt – Yesterday and Today" [Frankfurt – Gestern + Heute]. It embodies the German mentality of forgetting instead of confronting the past.

Photographs have an essential role in Spiegelman's *Maus*. The most significant photo is displayed at the beginning of *Maus II*. It shows Richieu. That photograph caused traumatic experiences in Arthur's childhood as he was constantly compared to the idea of the perfect son. The author also includes Vladek Spiegelman's photograph as he poses in a concentration camp uniform. The picture – taken after being freed – symbolized how integral the Holocaust experience was in Vladek's life. Vladek's post-Holocaust life mirrors post-war Germany's mindset. Both seem to bury themselves in the present, so they do not have to cope with the past.

## Conclusion

The three literary works show different images of survival and coping strategies for representing trauma. Spiegelman's work describes an active way of survival. It touches upon postmemory and intergenerationally transmitted trauma. Guterson depicts a passive way of survival. *On the Natural History of Destruction*, *Snow Falling on Cedars* and *Maus* paint the silent way of coping. Instead of favoring Rothberg's productive view on multidirectional memory the survivors bury the trauma by creating a mental void on the collective as well as on the individual level.

These works break the silence around taboos. The internment of Japanese Americans affected hundreds of thousands of people in the US. The events were treated with silence until 1988 when President Ronald Reagan officially apologized. This event started a discussion about the events between 1942 and 1945, and the novel *Snow Falling on Cedars* is an essential step in the empowerment process.

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<sup>89</sup> Lilian R. Furst. "Realism, Photography, and Degrees of Uncertainty." In *W. G. Sebald: History – Memory – Trauma*, edited by Scott Denham, Mark McCulloh, Walter de Gruyter (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2006), 221.



Spiegelman's work voices the issue of the Holocaust and second-generation survivors. He tries to understand his father so that he can cope with intergenerational trauma. He uses the graphic novel format to push the limits of representation. He mixes visuality and language, presenting layers of meaning: the animal-headed people, the photos, and the use of his earlier comic. Guterson's visual language accurately depicts the snowstorm, the war, the strawberry fields, and the sea, giving special meanings to his storytelling's natural environment. Sebald provides images of destruction. He voices that the Allies agreed on bombing German civilians and that post-war Germany could not cope with the trauma. He observes that German literature could not counter its instinctive silence around the topic.

These works also try to overcome social and racial gaps through their protagonists. It is successful for Hatsue and Ishmael, Kabuo and Carl, but Vladek fails. The answer to the question of whether silence constitutes an appropriate means of coping with trauma is negative. Silence is the source of intergenerational trauma. These works came to be because of the need for more effective representation. In *Snow Falling on Cedars*, conflict originates from Japanese citizens' internment and the relationship between Hatsue and Ishmael. Proper remembrance and communication lead to resolution. The format of a graphic novel can express details that a written text cannot. The animal-headed characters fulfill roles without words. The goal of photos is to make the comic format more realistic. Sebald's photos visualize the German collective consciousness's desire to forget and attempt to broaden representation. Finally, the analyzed works are pieces of alternative history writing since they show historical events from the perspective of minorities. They can be read as historical sources even though they are pieces of unconventional history. As such their experimentation with genres underlines the authors' struggle to expand the boundaries of collective memory through using unorthodox ways of visual representation in regards of individual memory. The representational questions of trauma literature generate even more questions to this day, as my study points out, following the latest theories of multidirectional and intergenerational memory.

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EMŐKE NAGY-TAKÁCS

Review on Philip Goldfarb Styr, *Shakespeare in the Present: Political Lessons*. Routledge, 2024.

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Philip Goldfarb Styr's *Shakespeare in the Present: Political Lessons* is a unique and inventive critical analysis of the relevance of Shakespearian plays in contemporary American politics. The author is an Assistant Professor of English at St. Ambrose University in Davenport, IA, and his first book with similar topicality, *Shakespeare's Political Imagination: The Historicism of Setting*, was published in 2021. His second book, *Shakespeare in the Present: Political Lessons*, was published in 2023 and with its 100 pages and engaging language is a quick read, which makes it ideal for catering to a diverse readership from both academia and general audience. In his book, Styr argues that Shakespeare's works bear relevance in the present, because "Shakespeare's insights into human character, politics, and the absurdities that these two create when combined are still applicable today, even though the world has shifted" (1). However, the book's novelty does not lie in comparing present-day politics and Shakespeare's plays, but rather in its immediacy and contemporariness since the author focuses on the still unfolding events of (post)-Trump administration America. In contrast to other, contemporary political readings and interdisciplinary analyses of Shakespeare's works, Styr's approach is original, because he emphasizes that the conflicts and characters are directly connectable to contemporary political dilemmas, and, as the title foreshadows, argues that Shakespeare's insights should serve as actionable political lessons to contemporary politicians. To support his argument, he applies real-life examples and case studies, which provide a fresh, presentist view, and distinguish his analysis from other thematically similar, yet more abstract and theoretical works. Lastly, another singularity and virtue of Styr's book is that the comparison between contemporary events and past ones, and contemporary political figures and certain characters in Shakespeare's plays are not a mere analogy, but a complex study of both similarities and differences. In his words, "[w]e cannot search among Shakespeare's characters, hoping to rip off a mask in the style of Scooby-Doo and find our contemporaries hiding underneath" (85). The book consists of six chapters, each reflecting on different concerns and aspects of contemporary American politics, the Biden administration, and the president himself.

The book's first chapter examines partisan polarization and draws parallels between the political landscape of late republican Rome—through the lenses of the plays of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*—and the current state of American politics. Styr reflects on the contrast between the leaders of Roman factions, Brutus and Cassius, identifying the previous with the idealistic, nostalgic view of unity that harkens back to the early days of the Republic, and the latter with a more pragmatic leadership, who recognizes the dangers of factionalism and uses Brutus's tragic flaw against him. The comparison between Trump's political maneuvering to Cassius's deception is more nuanced than a simple character equivalence, and the author does not fall into the temptation of "citational opportunism" (12). The chapter also sheds light on the fractured political landscape of Shakespeare's

*Henry VI* and *Richard III*, where Styrt analyzes how personal grievances and conflicts led to factional warfare and peaked during the War of the Roses, which parallel enhances the characteristic of adaptability as a timeless value in political navigation. This chapter serves as a warning about naivety and idealistic thinking since it can have significant implications on political leadership, as well as reminds the leaders never to underestimate the dangers of polarized politics.

The second chapter, “Pretextual Insurrections and Unpunished Crimes,” focuses on the attempted insurrection at the US Capitol on January 6, 2021, and the Big Lie of the stolen 2020 election, which Styrt interprets as a phenomenon of its own, and “not merely another symptom of deepening partisan divides within America” (23). He compares these contemporary events and three Shakespearean plays: *Richard II*, *Coriolanus*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*. Firstly, he posits that Henry Bolingbroke’s rebellion against the unjust and poor ruler, Richard II, is illegitimate and ill-motivated, which shows that treason can be committed under the guise of lawful and justified actions. The comparison between Henry’s and Donald Trump’s actions may seem debatable, given that Trump was a legitimate president and Henry a usurper, yet the author does not apply a simple character parallelism; in fact, he acknowledges significant distinctions between the two. What he highlights through this comparison is “the corrosive idea that a facially plausible excuse should be allowed to smooth over what everyone knows is an illegitimate action” (25). The most conspicuous similarity is the blending of legally justified and illegitimate actions: in like manner to Henry’s unlawful rebellion leading to the Wars of the Roses in 14<sup>th</sup>-century England, Trump’s insurrection was an attack against legitimacy and authority. Furthermore, Styrt examines the disputed elections and their chaotic aftermath in *Coriolanus*, which warns about the potential consequences of the contemporary political unrest, and power transitions. Lastly, the chapter delves into the question of accountability and punishment through the character of Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing*. By highlighting forgiveness and overlooking Don John’s past misdeeds, the author raises awareness of the importance of holding individuals accountable for their actions, in general, and especially in public offices. In sum, this chapter is yet another cautionary tale about the fragility and volatility of power, and legitimacy and to not leave wrongdoings, even of people in very high positions, without appropriate punishment.

In the third chapter, “The Tyranny of Expectations,” Styrt emphasizes the contrast between Trump’s four-year presidency and Joe Biden’s long political history and his rise from one of the youngest senators to the oldest president. He argues that while it is a change in presidency, it serves as a renewed hope in political continuity, and stability. The voters experienced a sense of familiarity with Joe Biden, and his extensive political career set up high expectations towards him. The author mentions the “Diamond Joe” public



image that is connected to Biden, which made him an everyman, a relatable person to all his voters. The chapter focuses on the question of managing and, in the case of *King Lear*, mismanaging public expectations. Styrst posits that external factors, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the foreign policy crises, alongside the way he communicates his negotiations made it challenging for Biden to manage the high expectations of his voters. As an allegory for the leadership journey, he uses the example of the transition of Hal to Harry from Shakespeare's *Henry V*, which also shows that expectations do not always meet reality and that political leaders must possess awareness and adaptation to public expectations and changing politics. The chapter proves that expectations and political reality require prompt management and these challenges are inherent issues of leadership throughout history.

In the next chapter, the author delves into coalition building and issues with the majority within Congress in modern America. Despite the Democrats' rule of the White House, they have a very "slim majority in the House of Representatives and an even fifty-fifty split in the Senate," this division with the rules of the Congress that requires a supermajority of votes to end debate undermines the political negotiations of Democrats and Biden (52). The author draws parallels between the political negotiations in the Congress and the allegiances of noble houses during the War of the Roses, with its scope on Warwick, the Kingmaker's character in the *Henry VI*. Styrst communicates the message that political alliances, no matter how strong, can quickly dissolve, therefore, leaders must not be overconfident in their power and strategies, but be ready, vigilant, and adaptable for power shifts and changes in the political landscape. Furthermore, he analyzes the Democratic Party dynamics and demonstrates how individual senators, such as Senator Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema can influence the legislative agenda via their support or opposition, and consequently how certain senators can mean both an ally and a source of indebtedness for the President. Again, the characters of Warwick, Clarence, and Buckingham from Shakespeare's world serve as warnings about the perils of mismanaged coalitions and shifting alliances, and carry the message that it is pivotal for any leader to understand the complexities of party dynamics and the stakes of one's loyalty.

The fifth chapter, "Illegitimate Justice," discusses the challenges faced by the Biden administration in connection to the federal judiciary system, due to obstruction of Republican appointees, especially considering the composition of the Supreme Court, where three justices were appointed by Donald Trump. Here, Styrst compares the contemporary legal challenges to the injustices faced by Katharine of Aragon in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII* and Shylock in his *Merchant of Venice*, and the potential biases in the judicial system. With this parallel to Shakespeare's courts, which do not reflect fairness or impartiality, the author invites the reader to reflect on the damaged justness and unbiased nature of today's legal procedures, and contemplates the erosion of traditional checks on the Supreme Court. He

illustrates this issue with the case of Justice Clarence Thomas and raises ethical dilemmas of corruption, conflict of interest, and judicial integrity. The message of this chapter is that the decisions of courts could be the target of abuse and manipulation.

The final chapter, “Lost France and Lost Afghanistan,” revolves around one of Biden’s most controversial decisions, the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan in 2021. In addition, the author contrasts the historical warfare of Shakespearean plays with modern warfare and argues that despite the technological advancements and changes, conflicts of the past and present are both framed in terms of victory and loss, as well as the control of territory. Styrk reflects on the media’s parallel making of Biden’s “loss” in Afghanistan to the loss of the Vietnam War. He also includes a comparison between the discourses on “lost France” in Shakespeare, and “lost Afghanistan” in contemporary America. However, as he emphasizes, France was never truly England’s, therefore France served as a state that was always unattainable, distant, and a target of national territorial ambitions. While the motives are different—the United States never claimed to own Afghanistan in contrast to England’s territorial claim of possession over France—the two cases share similarities in terms of the abandonment of home ruling over the obsession with foreign territorial claims.

In conclusion, Styrk suggests that to connect Shakespeare’s time and the present, we must acknowledge how the plays depict individuals’ reactions and motivations to individual circumstances and events, and understand that even though we read them in the present, they were written in the past and “they depict yet other pasts and other societies” (86). A potential criticism that might occur about the book is that drawing a parallel between the themes of the Elizabethan era and contemporary political frameworks possibly oversimplify their complexity. Nevertheless, Styrk successfully transposes the political wisdom of the proto-modern plays to the current political context, without being simplistic, especially by avoiding the risk of reducing the characters to prototypes. Another possible pitfall is the narrow scope of his analysis, as the book solely focuses on political themes, which may create a didactic and moralistic tone for Shakespeare. Some might argue that the book could have benefited from a more holistic and broader analysis, yet, it is important to note that the author clearly and repeatedly emphasizes that the scope of his work is limited and he only intends to provide “a sketch of an approach to presentism through a certain kind of politics” (85). In addition to this acknowledgment, he proposes other unexploited connections between Shakespeare and contemporary issues for further research, such as the relevance of Shakespeare’s ideas on race and gender, or how some pressing issues of contemporary society, like the pandemic, immigration, or abortion laws can be reflected on through the lens of Shakespeare. To conclude, *Shakespeare in the Present: Political Lessons* fulfills the initial goal of the author: it encourages the reader to recognize these plays’ potential to offer insights into present-day political issues and concerns, and to treat them

as cautionary tales and lessons from the past that still resonate in the present. In light of the current presidential elections, this book can play a vital role in interpreting open questions for readers interested in American political games.

