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Pető, Andrea

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Contacting Histories

Impacts of Reading Holocaust Testimonies in Hungary

Andrea Pető

Introduction

Luisa Passerini described in her work the difference between history and memory caused by the Cold War division in Europe. She claims that on the western side of the Iron Curtain, memory was spontaneous and non-reflexive and history was scientific and critical, while at the same time in the countries of the former Soviet Bloc, institutionalized history writing did not offer a space for critical thinking, and therefore memory became the designated space for critical thinking. This paper, a side project of the qualitative analysis of the post-WWII people's tribunals in Budapest, focuses on how public and private histories about history of political justice in Hungary clash on the individual level in an oral history project. The purpose of the research was to examine what female university students knew about a crucial period of Hungarian history: the post-war political justice process. In a series of interviews, I examined how their opinions were affected by a month of intensive study of related primary sources and court testimonies in the archive, and how they understood these documents and legal cases. This paper aims to analyze how historical narrative concerning their own family stories has changed as a result of their close reading of individual stories from the people's tribunals. My research supports Passerini's argument that the continued divide between history and memory after Cold War has not ended. I claim that public and private memories are formed against each other and not in dialogue even if there were a space for a kind of dialogue, with reading primary sources about a traumatic topic in the archive.

In a previous analysis of conservative and extreme right wing female politicians based on narrative interviews, I demonstrated how family was a crucial institution for transferring

conservative values during the period of communism.¹ The findings of this present research also underline the importance of family providing an interpretative frame which resisted both public history and more importantly, personal first hand experiences. “Family” is one of the most controversial and complex concepts in gender studies. Gender research investigates how different power relations are constructed, acted out and performed in emotional communities. Family is also considered a “double wall” filtering out undesirable events and building an exterior wall, while maintaining internal cohesion.²

This article argues that the most decisive and influential unit in political socialization in politically divided communities is the family. It is the closest emotional bond influencing how individuals process new, first hand information about the controversial activity of the people’s tribunals (1945-1950). It also serves as a “double glass” as its members see what they want to see. As Chamberlain and Leydesdorff pointed out:

Memories of the family (and family memories) play an important part in our perception of ourselves and others, and necessarily are implicated in the negotiations any one individual will make between cultural spheres and in the process of accommodating a new personal stability.³

This article explores how in the case of these negotiations family memories play a crucial mediating role between private memories, and public and official histories.⁴ The article supports the major finding of Paul Thompson, that stories created and circulated in families about the past are signposts of remembrance and identity.⁵ The paper asks the following questions: What consequences should be drawn when canonized public historical knowledge representing a moral point of view contradicts conclusions made on the basis of researching primary sources about traumatic experiences in the archive? Does it change the frame of understanding or does it leave the frame intact? How are these contradictions solved by the female university students who took part in this pioneering research project in the field of political justice in Hungary?

¹ Pető, *Napasszonyok és Holdkissasszonyok*. and Pető, „Die Marien in der Sonne“, 138-174.

² Kellenbach, “Vanishing Acts”, 305-329.

³ Chamberlain, Leydesdorff, “Transnational Families”, 231.

⁴ Pető, Waaldijk, “Histories and Memories”, 74-91.

⁵ Thomson, “Family Myth, Models”, 36.

The research project

The aim of the research project was to explore the activity of people's tribunals in Hungary.⁶ The history of the post-war lustration process is one of the most controversial public narratives in Hungary related to the memory of collaboration Hungary with Nazi Germany.⁷ The first judgement of a people's tribunal in Hungary was brought against two soldiers on 4 February 1945; the soldiers were found guilty of causing the death of 124 men in the labour service.⁸ (The country was fully liberated in early April.) The decree regulating the people's tribunals (81/ 1945. sz. M. E.) was published in the *Magyar Közlöny* [Hungarian Gazette] the next day. In the subsequent period too, legal regulation of "people's justice" continued along this rather contradictory path. The adoption of a law regulating the people's tribunals was necessary in part because, in the major cases of precedence value, this was the only means of bringing to justice the people that had given the orders under the former regime. It was only within this legal framework that one could reject the argument that an individual had been "acting under orders". Without such a framework, it would have been difficult to convict the political and military elite of the Horthy regime – which was responsible for Hungary's actions in the war.⁹ As preparations for a peace treaty were commenced, the adoption of the law was also necessary in order to remove the legal absurdity whereby this important issue was regulated by mere decrees (which was the case until the proclamation of Act VII of 1945 in September 1945). The social and political climate – and consequently the legislative environment as well – were quite different in 1945 than in 1946 or 1947. The Act on People's Tribunals of 1945 was a rushed, incoherent piece of legislation. In the subsequent period, the people's tribunals were subject to repeated regulation, with further restrictions being introduced. The process began with the adoption of Act VII of 1946 on the Criminal Law Protection of the Democratic Order of the State and the Republic, which incorporated a rather broad definition of "anti-democratic

⁶ Barna, Pető. *Political Justice in Budapest*

⁷ Karsai, "The People's Court and Revolutionary Law", 233-252. and Pető, "Problems of Transitional Justice in Hungary", 335-349.

⁸ Pető, Problems of Transitional Justice

⁹ Decree no. 81/1945. M. E. of the Transitional National Government states the following concerning people's justice: "...those who caused or took part in the historical disaster affecting the Hungarian people, should be punished as soon as possible..." Section 13 of the Decree defines the term "war criminal" while the term "crime against the people" relates expressly to public office holders (members of parliament, senior civil servants).

statements”. The legal situation was altered, and the people’s tribunals became players in the broader political chess game. Further restrictions were introduced in the Act on People’s Tribunals of 1947; thereafter, the people’s tribunals were subject to additional procedural rules. The final judgement to be issued by the Budapest People’s Tribunal came in the Rajk trial of 1949.¹⁰ After the Hungarian revolution of October 1956, Law-Decree No. 34 of 1957 on the People’s Tribunal Councils re-established the tribunals – but with quite different political aims in mind: punishment for the 1956 revolution.

The outcome of a case headed by a people’s tribunal depended on timing and the identity of the accused.¹¹ When the first cases were heard, the west of the country was still a conflict zone. Meticulous legal work was almost impossible. When the survivors of the death camps began to return to Hungary in mid-1945, a whole series of accusations and complaints were made; the people’s tribunals were not ready to examine all the cases. Perpetrators, who managed to evade the first wave of prosecutions, could count on more lenient punishments in the subsequent period. In the confused aftermath of the war, a person could evade justice simply by moving from one side of Budapest to the other. At the same time, the legal framework, which was strictly regulated by the Act on People’s Tribunals and the provisions of the Criminal Code, provided perpetrators (those brought into the justice system mechanism in the manner analysed below) with opportunities to evade punishment, either by employing means in line with the spirit of the law (by proving their innocence with the assistance of lawyers) or by non-legal means (by threatening or bribing witnesses).

As far as collective memory is concerned, victims of Nazism were critical to this legal process as according to them, it produced mild sentences for the perpetrators. Moreover, people’s tribunals became instrumental in the communist takeover in Hungary as the Ministry of Justice was controlled by communists and therefore represented a Stalinist *Justizmord*. One of the foundational points of today’s revival of extreme right politics is questioning the legitimacy of the people’s tribunals which at the same time fails to question the role of Hungary in WWII, an alarming political tendency that made this micro research very timely.¹²

The prehistory of this research was that a gap was spotted in the literature in researching the people’s tribunals. The general statements by historians about the activity of the people’s

¹⁰ For more details, see: Pető, Andrea: *Geschlecht, Politik und Stalinismus in Ungarn. Eine Biographie von Júlia Rajk*. Studien zur Geschichte Ungarns, 12. Gabriele Schäfer Verlag, Herne, 2007.

¹¹ A good example is: Pető, Blood libel

¹² In fact nearly all interviewees pointed out the similarities of present day Hungary and the period of Second World War as far as political violence, rising Anti-Semitism and intolerance are concerned.

tribunal were based on analysis of individual cases without having an overview of process as a whole (1945-1949). Therefore, a quantitative research project was set up to fill in this gap.

The post-war lustration has a memory, but no history. Everybody has an opinion but so far there is no comprehensive and representative study of files produced by this lustration process. The documents produced by the tribunals (denunciation letters, police investigation files, testimonies, minutes of the people's tribunals, indictments, and verdicts) comprise the files of individual cases. The files differ greatly in length: some are 5-10 pages long, but in complex cases or where the defendants were "important" politicians or criminals, the files could be 200-800 pages in length.

The records of the people's tribunals had an uncertain fate.¹³ They were originally collected by a special section of the State Protection Authority (*Államvédelmi Hatóság*), Hungary's secret police. When this section was placed under the auspices of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the documents were sent to the ministry's archives. In 1975, some of the records of the Budapest People's Tribunal and People's Prosecutor (approximately 30 per cent, according to surveys carried out at the time) were transferred from the Metropolitan People's Tribunal of Budapest to the Budapest Municipal Archives (BFL). From 1975 until 1989, the Ministry of Interior gradually transferred the files of the people's tribunals to the Budapest Archives. Thus, at some point in time after the abolition of the people's tribunals, a significant part of the archival material was transferred to the state security services. In recent years the activity of the people's tribunals in Budapest was reconstructed by the archivists. And these were the court files the ten researchers started to research.

Preparation for archival research

The participants of the research project "Memory of WWII and transitional justice" financed by Rothschild Foundation (Europe) were ten female BA students of sociology at Eötvös Loránd University (ELTE), Budapest. The students were selected based on their expertise in quantitative methods. Associate Professor Ildikó Barna recommended the best students in her quantitative methods class for the task. The students were in the same age cohort, between 21 and 24 years of age. No claim of representativity should be made because the point of this

¹³ Pető, Schrijvers, "The Theatre of Historical Sources", 39-63.

research was to see how a nearly homogenous group of young, middle class, female university students try to make sense of the court records and how they reconcile public and family histories with the newly gained knowledge from their archival research.

None of the participants had any previous experience working with original documents in an archive. In preparation for working in the archive, a training session was conducted where participants learned about the secondary literature on the history of people's tribunals and legislation regulating the activity of people's tribunals. Together with the researchers, we examined and coded one sample file produced by the tribunal, discussing how to read and code it. First the participants read the file, then coded it following a questionnaire which transformed legal information into quantifiable facts. After that, we went through the coding together and checked whether each person understood the file the same way, in order to guarantee the comparability of results.

The sample and supplementary sample were drawn by stratified random sampling: 500 files were randomly chosen from a total of 70,000 available files in the Budapest Municipal Archive, with each researcher receiving 50 for coding. Due to the sampling method the participants received more or less the same type of files – although they differed in length (5-200 pages) and in terms of emotional gravity. The coding process included the deep understanding of the court case based on the available files which was not always easy, because the documents were sometimes missing or the legal case was just too complex.

As far as the research process for this article is concerned, the researchers were asked to fill in a questionnaire parallel with the archival research and to make a sound-file about their reading of each case. They also wrote a summary report about their work in the archive. I interviewed them individually before and after they undertook the labor-intensive work in the archive, examining such complex and sensitive material. The chosen method was a narrative interview with topical questions. The aim of was to send in a group of emotionally and professionally well-prepared researchers to do the very complex and innovative archival work. I was also interested in their feedback and I planned to offer a space for self-reflection after reading through long and emotionally-demanding files about the Holocaust in Hungary.

In the first interview I conducted with them individually I asked about what they knew about people's tribunals before the research and what their greatest fear was from this work assignment. This interview situation also served as an icebreaker as these young university students had never participated in research projects before. For some of them, this work was

their first paid employment, and therefore they were full of uncertainties about their own abilities as researchers and whether they could meet the high standards and expectations of this research project. For those who already had work experience, the interviewing process was a novelty as they were now handled as partners not as machines mechanically delivering results. The fact that leader of the project was interested in their work-related feelings also caused some concern.

The second interview was more of a discussion between two colleagues. The month of archival work made these young researchers experts, and they spoke about their assignment and their accomplishments with confidence. My opening question was about the most surprising finding during their work. This was followed by a discussion of the paradoxes of the activity of the people's tribunals such as for inconsistent-applied legal practices and light sentences for serious crimes.¹⁴

In this paper I analyze the impact of these files consisting stories of horrific events narrated by young women, who formed a homogenous group based on all the variables (age, gender, education, location) apart from family background. I investigated their feelings and understandings using oral history as a method of inquiry. Oral history proved to be a timely method to investigate how subjectivity is constructed and experiences are narrated.

Preparation for the research: public histories that matter

The participants in this research had all studied history as a preparation for their high school diplomas. When they first heard about this research project, many of them looked up the official, public history of the people's tribunals in their old history textbooks. They found altogether two lines about this legal process. This is no accident: the history of the 20th century is a topic only in the final year before high school graduation; and the post 1945 period is usually studied in class just one or two months before the final graduation exam, leaving limited time for discussion.

The purpose of the research was to evaluate what kind of expectations these researchers had before starting the archival research and what was the impact of their work experience, given

¹⁴ More on these controversies see Pető, "Problems of Transitional Justice"

that they formed a homogenous group as only their family background was different. The interviews and the research reports revealed the negotiation process between individual close readings of the files, master narratives and family patterns, or to put it differently, between private memories, on the one hand, and public and official histories, on the other.

Families that matter: private memories

During the first round of interviews the family stories of interviewees about the people's tribunals came up as three generations were involved in constructing memories about the Holocaust.

The grandparents of interviewees included in the project, came from rural and urban families, including families from Budapest and from the provincial cities.¹⁵ Their social background was working class or middle class (mostly intellectuals). As far as ethnicity is concerned there were interviewees of ethnic German, Greek and Jewish origin. Some researchers came from ethnic Hungarian families who emigrated from Romania and Ukraine. As far as the political background is concerned: some interviewees had grandfathers who were deported to Siberia as ethnic Germans, while others had grandparents who were deported to Auschwitz. Some were proud of their Jewish ancestry, while others learned to conceal the Jewish identity of one or more grandparents.

The parents of the interviewees tended to be all middle class. As the Hungarian higher educational system is very selective and the participants came from a top university, it was no surprise that their parents were middle class or upper middle class and there was no variety among them.

The researchers were all living with their parents, which is a common demographic feature of university students in Hungary: due to economic reasons the university students usually opt to study in the city where their parents live.

During the first interviewing session of the project, before the archival research has started I inquired about the reaction of their parents to their participation in this research project. I also asked them about their expectations regarding the archival work. In their response they said

¹⁵ It is a very small sample so there is no use of giving exact numerical data about the interviewees.

that they generally expected to acquire knowledge, information and “truth” about an otherwise unknown period of history. For some this research was also an ego project: “Perhaps it will give me some self confidence if I manage to deal with this” (7) or “It will help me to understand the history of Hungary a little bit more”.(10)

Families acknowledged without any resistance the fact that their daughters were to spend a month in an archive. Some parents were envious of their children, because they would “get access to files which nobody else had seen”.(4) An interviewee’s father, coming from a Jewish family, hoped “his children would learn more about this (the Holocaust A. P.)” (6) and he supported any occasion which would lead to his daughter knowing more about the Holocaust.

The fascination with the archive as a place of possible “truth” worked very well in this case too. In the post-research interviews, participants voiced their shock at seeing the original signature of Miklós Horthy, the leader of interwar Hungary, or that of Ferenc Szálasi, the head of the Hungarian Quisling government in 1944. As expected, the archive brought them close to “real” history. The fascination with archive as a place of “true” history was very much present in the narratives of the interviewees. This over-mystification of documents as “real” history fits very much in the post-1989 historical discourse in Hungary devaluating historical narrative as not “true” while celebrating the document itself as “truth”.

I detected in the first interview session a cleavage in private family histories. For most parents the people’s tribunal was a communist-dominated institution, which unjustly ordered the forced movement of people.(3) Parents of Jewish ancestry who experienced the Holocaust, however, knew it as the post-war institution that, in the end, failed to provide justice.

In interpreting the data, the gap between Gentile families and families of Jewish origin widened when participants talked about their own education related to the canonized version of public history. As high school students, all participants visited the House of Terror as a part of their institutional education. This controversial museum featuresuring the two periods of Hungarian history: Nazism and communism. One of them described the visit as follows:

“It was a mandatory visit; at high school you have to go there and then go here, do this and then do that.” (4)

The description of experiencing the visit of the House of Terror already serves as a cultural marker. Jewish members of the group underlined the museum's one-sided presentation of Hungarian history. According to the House of Terror, the Arrow Cross Party (the Hungarian Nazi Party) was exclusively responsible for the deportations; it ignores the role the Horthy administration played in effecting the quickest and most fatal deportation of the Holocaust.¹⁶ Participants of Jewish origin also noted their visits to Auschwitz, Yad Vashem or the Berlin Holocaust Museum. The non-Jewish participants pointed out the horror of communism and the legal uncertainties affecting their families during communism. Although the social background of the participants was similar, participants reacted differently when they confronted the history in the archive with their own family background and private memories.

Conflicting truths and silence

The previous self-positioning of the researchers as far as public history is concerned was challenged when they returned home from the archive. They had decide how to interpret what they had learned there, how to insert this newly obtained information into their already existing framework of historical understanding. This was a clash of different "truths" where silence turned to be the dominant coping practice.¹⁷ One of the researchers, whose parents belonged to the elite of the pre-war Horthy regime, did not tell her grandparents about the project she was working on: "Why bother them with these old things; let's be happy that it is over and no longer exists." (2) Denial and omission is a characteristic feature of the Horthy regime's elite: her grandfather had been an army officer who, after the communist takeover in 1947, had worked as a miner. But silence was also present in Jewish families: "We were a cowardly Jewish family: our attitude was 'not to stick out as Jews'." (6) Reservation and silence were motivated by a fear that it could all happen again. The past has not been concluded: "They [the grandparents] tried to be avoid the subject as much as possible, leaving it in a box and not trying to open it." (5)

This general practice of silencing characterizes emotions of researchers regarding their own past. There was however a considerable difference between those who did not want and those

¹⁶ Otto, "Post-Communist Museums", 324-360.

¹⁷ Pető, "Who is afraid of the "ugly women"?", 147-151.

who could not speak about their experiences of war and post-war political justice.¹⁸ In the words of one participant: “Here the Jews really could not speak about what happened to them, or they could not speak about it how I think they may have wanted to.”(6) History of traumatized countries is characterized by discontinuities as far as intergenerational communication is concerned. Communication between generations failed because of an inability to speak about the past.¹⁹ As one of the researchers mentioned: “My father would try to answer my questions, but he does not know anything, because his parents did not tell him what happened.” (6)

In the interviews, the difficulties of facing the past has emerged. The interviewees were also self-reflective about their own role of maintaining the “conspiracy of silence”: “I did not ask any questions... I found it horrible... and this was definitely an escape from my side.” (7) This collective amnesia and reluctance on all levels of society to engage in a minimal *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* -- in particular in Hungary -- is a general feature for both the prewar elite and Jews who kept their Jewish background a secret.²⁰

Understanding the findings: how private memories meet public histories

After the first interview, the female university students started their work in the archives. They had to conceptualize their own findings on two levels: first, they needed to recognize that some of the people’s tribunal trials were show trials aiming to secure the rule of the communist party and these files had nothing to do with war crimes. Second, they had to put the consequences in the framework of postwar political justice, either conforming with, or contradicting their previous frames of understanding.

The first level of conceptualization was not really a challenging task for participants. They quickly understood from the archival material which people’s tribunal cases belonged to which

¹⁸ Pető, “Non-remembering the Holocaust”

¹⁹ Esbenshade, “Remembering to Forget”, 72-96.

²⁰ Erős, Kovács, Lévai, “How Did I Find out that I was a Jew?”, 55-66.

general category. The first category comprised cases “against the democracy”. After 1946 those who criticized the new regime or communists were likely to be prosecuted by the people’s tribunals. These latter cases are difficult to read and to decode nowadays because of their usage of heavy communist ideological vocabulary which was totally new for this group of young researchers. Indeed, the interviewees labeled them as “ridiculous”: a drunken person who made a comment about communists in a pub received the same court sentence as someone who had committed a serious war crime. In 1948 and 1949, such trivial cases defending communism actually made up the majority of the people’s court cases. The second category comprised court cases persecuting crimes committed against the Jews, or denunciation cases in which citizens used the people’s tribunals to solve personal problems (wives denouncing their husbands so they would be free for their lovers etc.).

However, there was a big difference among the participants as far as the second level of understanding is concerned. As one of them wrote in her written report: “It was very interesting to get to know life stories of people, but sometimes it was sad, and it made me angry when the verdicts violated the basic sense of justice.”(2) But this “basic sense of justice” was conceptualized differently by the two groups of participants: those whose families were victims of the Horthy regime and those whose families had belonged to the former elite of interwar Hungary. Those researchers whose families had not been detrimentally affected by anti-Jewish legislation in the interviews mostly underlined the ad hoc character of juridical process. In doing so, they ignored the fact that there were war crimes committed that needed to be punished after the war as part of a legal process.

In contrast, researchers from families that suffered during the Holocaust pointed out the deep injustices in how people’s tribunal operated: “In most cases verdicts were not related to the crime committed. In the case of several files it is obvious that the opinion of all involved suddenly changed drastically. I think in these cases the tribunal was bribed or the defendant had connections or was moved to a place where he was out of reach.”(8) Those researchers of Jewish origin said in the interview that they gained knowledge about the past and were reminded that “history repeats itself” (7) as they did not find any justice in the files and they were experiencing the reemergence of racist extreme right wing rhetoric in Hungary at the time of the research. One researcher of Jewish origin pointed out about the war crime trials: “The punishment (for war crimes A. P.), especially compared with communist ideological trials, was ridiculous.”(6) The comparative analysis by researchers about punishments for crimes committed against Jews and for crimes committed against communism proved that political

justice process did not bring the expected reconciliation. The deep injustice that Holocaust was not followed by retribution was commented upon by the Jewish interviewees: “I was disturbed that Jews were not upset on several occasions; they neither rebelled nor spoke up.” (6) The inconsistency of the verdicts and the fact that witnesses changed their statements from one trial to another – because of threats or bribes – were mostly mentioned by those researchers of Jewish origin. A person who was a drunkard and made nasty comments about communists received the same verdict as someone who killed Jews.(8) Those who came from families of Jewish background interpreted the history they encountered in the archive in a more personalized way: “One sees more clearly what the family had to go through.”(8) The relativism of the past was one of the conclusions, as one of them wrote in her written report: “For me, the most important conclusion of the research was that although these historical facts do exist, nevertheless history at the social and individual level is not that obvious; taking it out of its own context, which comes from the memory of those who lived through it, is illusive. The Truth itself is even more undefined.” (10) Studying files of people’s tribunals also made them question their previous assumptions about legal system and the concept of “justice” as a possible outcome of a legal process. If the participants expected files “to describe the events in a realistic way” (9) they were mistaken: “I was sitting over the file,” said one of the researchers “and I failed to understand why this verdict was the outcome; I could not decide based on the documents I read.”(9)

In scholarly literature and in Hungarian collective memory, the process of political justice after World War II is often mixed with show trials after 1946. This was the case with researchers in this research project as well.(10) When I asked them which trials were the most important ones, researcher of non-Jewish origin mentioned show trials that served the communist take-over, which was occurring at the time.(9) The trials against perpetrators and collaborators were silenced in this way.

In summary, participants of ethnically mixed background were more tolerant and open. One of the researchers stemmed from ethnic German family which hid Jews during the Shoah and she was horrified by what happened to them. Those who belonged to families coming from former elite of the Horthy regime pointed out the lack of transparency and the uncertainty of the legal process without mentioning the persecution of Jews.

Conclusions

Twenty years after the collapse of communism, one might assume that in case of the younger generation the frames of interpretations have change. To paraphrase Ernst Cassirer it would have been “written into the minds of citizens”²¹ differently. Due to conflicting interpretations and recent revival of extreme right the general tendency has been one of apathy and hopelessness: “I think there is a great chance that this [persecution of the Jews A. P.] will happen again. It does not depend on us.”(1) This generation considers itself as apolitical (5), and they do not participate in political debates.(4) Only one out of ten researchers pointed out with some uncertainty that “we are the ones, I think, who could turn this back, but I don’t know whether we want to do so or have the strength for it.”(5)

In one family, pain and suffering of the grandparents, who were refugees from Transylvania in 1944, was “a permanent topic” (2) of discussion. In the Jewish families, the Holocaust is discussed as a story without an end which can happen again any time. As Michael Oakshott has argued, this historical past is quite different from “the practical past” that most of us carry around in our heads in the form of memory, imagination, patterns and practices and vague ideas about what history is.²² This micro research was an attempt to illustrate how the “practical past” when confronted with historical past remains victorious and omits everything that does not fit into previous patterns of understanding. The interviews also showed how difficult it can be to break out from dominant and hegemonic mechanisms of constructing historicized subjectivity. Passerini is not necessarily right in her opening quote celebrating memory as a site for critical historical thinking. This article argued that family stories determine private frameworks of historical understanding, and historical knowledge transferred through education has a very limited impact. These family stories about past traumatic events and understandings are the most difficult to change, if it is possible to change them at all. This experimental archival project definitely failed in this respect.

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²¹ Curran, “Racism’s Past and Law’s Future”, 1.

²² Oakshott, *On History*, 18.

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