

COUNTERREVOLUTIONARY ICONS

The representation of the 1956 “counterrevolution” in the Hungarian communist press

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This article unites theories of framing, collective memory and a sociological concept of icons in order to examine how icons can represent a frame of a historic event over time in journalism. Focusing on the central Hungarian communist daily Népszabadság's 30 years of coverage of the 1956 Hungarian revolution against the Soviet Union, the article argues that the newspaper—in alliance with the party—constructed iconic persons, iconic objects, and iconic places of what the regime called a “counterrevolution.” These icons as symbolic condensations served as powerful journalistic tools that represented the framing of the event as counterrevolutionary and furthered the regime's desire to erase the vernacular memory of the revolution. From November 1956 until February 1957 the coverage was inchoate. Thereafter until November 1960 Népszabadság engaged in active icon construction. Népszabadság focused on a few hours of October 30, when protesters murdered several defenders of the Budapest party headquarters. Journalists constructed iconic personalities of this event: the martyrs, their mourning families, the few survivors and also the heroes, who saved lives. Republic Square, where the murders occurred, became the iconic place of the counterrevolution and the victims' bodies were presented as iconic objects. Thereafter until September 1981 Népszabadság restricted the memory of the event to the already established icons providing only rote coverage of official commemorations. Finally, until November 1986 Népszabadság stressed factual achievements of the government's victory over the counter-revolution, while the power of icons was fading.

KEYWORDS collective memory; forgetting; frame; Hungary; icon; narrative; propaganda; revolution

Introduction

Revolutions are eruptions of sentiment that often condense years of quiet conflicts into a very few intense days, weeks, or months. While some revolutions fulfill desires or at least give hope that they will be fulfilled, other revolutions are merely short days of dreams followed by a new consolidation of power. The 1956 Hungarian revolution fueled anti-communist hopes both locally and internationally, but these hopes were short-lived. After the revolution was crushed, 200,000 Hungarians fled the country out of almost 10 million; many became international agents of the respectful memory of the revolution. While the revolution enjoyed appreciative interpretation in the West, a different understanding of the event was built within Hungarian borders. This article addresses how the local communist press represented the—as the regime called it—“counterrevolution.”

The revolution, often recalled as the first tear in the Iron Curtain, lasted from October 23, 1956 until November 4, 1956. It was a nationwide protest against the Soviet-imposed policies of the People's Republic of Hungary. The event started as a student demonstration intended to express solidarity with the Polish democratic reform process. Within a few hours the demonstration turned into violent protests against the State Security Police and later against the Soviet troops. With the party's hope that he could pacify the situation, the reformist Imre Nagy became premier. On October 28 the Nagy government reevaluated the protests, describing them as a broad national democratic movement. A swift process of democratization took place leading up to the declaration of the reestablishment of Hungary's multi-party system on October 30. On November 1, realizing the threat of Soviet intervention, Nagy declared Hungarian neutrality, made clear his intention to withdraw from the Warsaw Pact, and appealed to the United Nations. On the same day the Minister of State of the Nagy government, János Kádár, secretly went to the Soviet Embassy and then flew to Moscow, where he learned about the inevitable Soviet intervention and agreed to lead the new regime that would enjoy the support of the Soviet Union and the satellite countries (Békés, Byrne, and Rainer 2002; Rainer 2009; Szakolczai 2001).

After the "thirteen days that shook the Kremlin" (Meray 1959), on November 4 the Soviet army invaded Hungary. On the same day Kádár announced the formation of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government, and declared the need to put "an end to the excesses of the counter-revolutionary elements" (Hitchcock 2004, 211; Békés, Byrne, and Rainer 2002). He also promised immunity to those who "joined the movement for honest, patriotic reasons" (Békés, Byrne, and Rainer 2002, 216). The United Nations report on the event stated that "[w]hat took place in Hungary in October and November 1956 was a spontaneous national uprising, due to long-standing grievances which had caused resentment among the people." The report also emphasized that the participants of the spontaneous uprising were "students, workers, soldiers, and intellectuals, many of whom were Communists or former Communists" (United Nations 1957, 244).

The Kádár regime remained in power for three more decades and sought to control the collective memory of the event. The end of the revolution marked the beginning of the Kádár era: denying that a respectable revolution took place was essential for the regime's legitimacy (Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór 1999, 217). In order to be published, pieces of writing about the event had to echo the official perspective (Ungváry 2000a, 12). Party control of journalists took various forms including prior restraint, post-publication censorship and self-censorship. Journalists who were selected, approved, and therefore trusted by the regime, still had to apply journalistic tools to express the expected message. They had to find a textual and visual language that served the political elite, but still remained within journalistic style.

Systematic examination of three decades of coverage (November 11, 1956 to November 11, 1986) in the central Hungarian communist daily *Népszabadság* has led me to argue that journalists, in alliance with the party, constructed iconic people, iconic objects, and iconic places that stood for the framing of the event as counterrevolutionary. These icons, represented by both images and texts, became symbolic condensations and symbolic shields that constrained debate over the revolution.

The *Népszabadság* coverage of the "counterrevolution"¹ had four periods: from November 1956 until February 1957 the coverage was inchoate. It was dominated by reports on the arrests and trials of counterrevolutionaries and by attempts to communicate

the inclusion of the rest of the Hungarian society in the new political community. Thereafter until November 1960 *Népszabadság* constructed icons of the counterrevolution and tried to deconstruct the event's positive Western image. *Népszabadság* focused on a few hours of October 30, when protesters murdered several defenders of the Budapest party headquarters. Journalists constructed iconic personalities of this event: the martyrs, their mourning families, the few survivors and also the heroes, who saved lives. Republic Square, where the murders occurred, became the iconic place of the counterrevolution and the bodies of the martyrs were presented as powerful iconic objects. Between November 1960 and September 1981 *Népszabadság* provided only rote coverage of yearly official commemorations of the victims of the counterrevolution. Finally, until November 1986 *Népszabadság* stressed factual achievements of the government's victory over the counterrevolution, while the power of icons was fading.

During all four periods *Népszabadság* emphasized that the counterrevolution was violent, internationally pre-planned, and shaped by fascists and criminals. With this characterization the local press aimed to revise the Western journalistic representation that framed the event as a pure, local, and spontaneous revolution shaped by heroic youth. *Népszabadság* showed the icons of the West as false icons, while constructing new icons, which summarized the "real" meaning of the event.

The 1956 Hungarian revolution was one of the seminal moments of the postwar era and its memory has endured in both East and West. In 1956 *Time* magazine chose as its Man of the Year the symbolic figure of the "Hungarian Freedom Fighter" instead of naming a specific revolutionary leader. This would not be repeated until 2011, when *Time* magazine selected "The Protester" to become Person of the Year. While in 2011 *Time* chose "The Protester" to represent various uprisings all around the world, in 1956 the "Hungarian Freedom Fighter" stood for one revolution that directly shaped the Cold War.

Both East and West established icons of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, but entirely different ones. As the first scholarly research on the representation of the 1956 revolution in the leading Hungarian communist daily, this article fills a substantial gap in press history. But in addition to its significance in understanding a particular moment of press history, this article also has larger theoretical implications. I offer a meeting point for theories of collective memory, framing and a sociological concept of icons in order to demonstrate how iconic persons, objects and places can embody social meanings and therefore powerfully represent frames over time in journalism. Icons do not speak for themselves; they are attached to narratives. This feature of icons becomes particularly salient if we examine contrasting icons in connection with a single historic event.

Theoretical Framework and Literature

Icons are symbolic condensations that "root generic, social meanings in a specific and 'material' form" (Alexander 2008, 782).² In the past decade the emerging interdisciplinary field of materiality studies has examined how material forms embody values and shape social relations (Tilley et al. 2006; Woodward 2007). The "material" form of icons—for instance, faces of people, shapes of objects, and designs of places—are powerful carriers of ideology and memory. A handsome young protester can convey a sympathetic and strong revolutionary message. A tank, especially if it confronts a "weak"

individual, powerfully represents oppression. A square that hosts crowds and has memorable architectural features easily becomes the most essential representation of a revolutionary event.

But even these revolutionary icons need narratives to support them. Journalists can interpret the icons differently with the help of contradicting contextual details. The press might reveal the criminal past of a sympathetic revolutionary, or show how a tank supported a good cause. Journalists can also highlight the violent acts that took place on the seemingly welcoming public square. While icons are often understood as aesthetically powerful visuals that we immediately sense rather than interpret, icons are never independent from their narratives. And while we often tend to associate the word “iconic” with images, icons can also be persons, objects, places and performances represented and constructed by images *and* texts (Bennett and Lawrence 1995; Lee, Li, and Lee 2011).³

The narrative of the icon can be part of a larger frame of interpretation. How the frame interprets the event shapes the types of icons editors select for the event’s journalistic representations, and, also the icons’ narratives. Framing literature pays special attention to the media representation of social movements (Chan and Lee 1984; Gitlin 1980; McLeod and Detenber 1999; McLeod and Hertog 1999). The central concern for these scholars has been that the mainstream media tend to focus on exceptionally violent and spectacular moments of social movements, while neglecting the complex reasons for the protests (Harlow and Johnson 2011). This work has focused on the frames journalists developed for protests while the social movements were active but it has not conceptualized how the media can communicate a long-term frame for a short-term revolutionary event.

Just as communication theories of framing paid little attention to collective memory, collective memory research has also neglected both the theory and the practice of journalism (Edy 1999; Zelizer 2008). Some theories of collective memory mention news media as a carrier of memory (Huysen 2000; Olick 1999; Thompson 1996), but these do not comprehensively describe how the press constructs and maintains a historical narrative. Moreover, these theories often consider journalism as a physical archive of memory. Reflecting Carey’s distinction between the transmission and the ritual view of communication (1992, 15), even a very recent collection on memory speaks about “the role of various technological media in the transmission of memory” (Olick, Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Levy 2011, 311), not about an interpretative and performative community of journalists actively shaping collective remembrance. A significant portion of memory research is dedicated to the politics of memory (Bodnar 1992; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983; Olick and Robbins 1998), but this literature rarely refers to journalism.

Only a few pieces of media research have focused directly on journalism and collective memory. For instance, writing about Watergate in American memory, Schudson (1992, 1997) emphasized that celebrity protagonists of Watergate became living monuments of the scandal. Their careers and deaths sustained the event in media. Oren Meyers (2002) examined how Israel’s history was presented via visuals and texts in commemorative supplements of Israeli newspapers. Hariman and Lucaites (2007) demonstrated how iconic photographs of the past work as symbolic reference points in the coverage of contemporary events. And Zelizer (1992) showed at the 30th anniversary of the Kennedy assassination that journalists made the assassination story as much about themselves as about Kennedy, by acting as authoritative spokespersons of the event. Moreover, Zelizer’s scholarship (1998) also addressed the long-term risks of iconic visual

representations in journalism. Speaking about the frequent recycling of Holocaust imagery and vocabulary in journalism to interpret new atrocities, she highlighted the ways familiar visual representations may help us position the new event while also detracting from our understanding of it.

Just as frequently recycled iconic photographs can hide the nuances of events, iconic people, objects and places can also become simplified summaries or even caricatures of what was once a rich and complex historic moment. This article therefore examines how icons can represent a frame of a historic event over time in journalism serving both remembrance and forgetting.

Newspaper Culture and Media Control Mechanisms of the Kádár Era

Writing about the media culture of the Kádár regime is like imagining a picture based on a few puzzle pieces. No comprehensive history of *Népszabadság* exists, and reliable literature on the media control mechanisms of the Kádár era is sporadic (Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór 1999; Cseh et al. 2004; Hegedus 2001; Murányi 1994; Takács 2005, 2008, 2012). The primary research was conducted in the Open Society Archives in Budapest, which hosts the collections of the Hungarian Unit of Radio Free Europe's Radio Liberty Research Institute (Unit). A special collection of the Unit was dedicated to the Hungarian communist press representation of the 1956 revolution including continuously updated press clippings from multiple newspapers. The research population for this article was defined as all press clippings between November 11, 1956 and November 11, 1986 from the central communist party daily *Népszabadság* in the 1956 collection of the Unit. Using textual analysis I systematically examined all 417 articles.

In the few days of the 1956 revolution Hungary suddenly experienced freedom of expression. During the revolutionary period newspapers and parties proliferated and the old ones reshaped their identities (Murányi 1994). On October 31 the Hungarian Workers' Party, which was the leading communist party, was dissolved and the Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party (HSWP) took its place. *Népszabadság* (*People's Freedom*), a daily founded on November 2, 1956 as the central organ of HSWP, remained in this role after the revolution until the 1989 political changes.⁴ Until 1968 the country had three national dailies: *Népszabadság*, the trade union newspaper *Népszava* (*People's Voice*) and the newspaper of the Patriotic People's Front entitled *Magyar Nemzet* (*Hungarian Nation*). This newspaper structure was significantly extended in the late 1960s. But *Népszabadság* had the largest circulation throughout all three decades with most members of the political and economic elite being its subscribers (Takács 2008).

Some 170 samizdat works were circulated in the 1970s, but samizdat publications became widespread only in the 1980s (Béla Nové, "Talking About Censorship and the Lost World of Samizdat", *Eurozine*, October 27, 2010). However, oral news, including political jokes and political gossip, spread quickly. As an astute observer of everyday life in communist Hungary remarked, "[c]ommunism is a regime of compression: long lines, constant waiting, a limited number of extremely crowded places, everybody constantly at the same place" (Rév 2005, 4). These unofficial pieces of news competed with the official published news.

Media law was not codified until 1986. News publication worked according to party directives and a confusing web of media control mechanisms. János Kádár's influential

cultural deputy, György Aczél, developed the policies for regulating the cultural scene, called the policies of the “three t’s”: *tiltás* (ban), *tűrés* (toleration), *támogatás* (support) (Révész 1997). The sphere of bans was gradually shrinking, while the sphere of toleration became increasingly dominant, providing some space for creative journalistic work (Murányi 1994).

The central tool of media control was the individual responsibility of the carefully selected editors-in-chiefs and editors, who regularly met with the Department for Agitation and Propaganda and the Information Bureau (Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór 1999; Takács 2008). The regime also relied on the party loyalty, dedication, and self-censorship of individual journalists (Takács 2005). The regime considered journalists to be advocates of the public good and in return for this unique position and the right to speak publicly, they had to limit their speech (Haraszi 1987). A complex system of rewards also made sure that loyal journalists felt appreciated (Bajomi-Lázár 2005, 28).

The January 21, 1958 press directive of HSWP’s Central Committee shaped the media landscape for the following three decades. It envisioned a press that while fully dedicated to the party, educated the public in a combative and entertaining style, with the help of a variety of journalistic tools. The directive prescribed that journalists “have to use indirect tools of agitation in addition to the direct ones” (Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór 1999, 290). Beyond these general requests, the exact representational style was not specified, not even in connection with the counterrevolution. The directive demanded that journalists “fight against the counterrevolutionary ideology” (Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór 1999, 289), but without describing the weapons journalists should and should not employ.

The frame of the counterrevolution was developed by December 5, 1956, when the Provisional Central Committee of HSWP passed a resolution on the precedents and reasons of the counterrevolution. The resolution gave four reasons:

- the mistakes of the pre-1956 leadership that “initiated a sectarian and dogmatic policy in party state and economic affairs, and introduced peremptory, authoritarian and bureaucratic methods of leadership”;
- a dissenting wing within the party opposition that took the criticism of the mistakes “outside the party and into the streets, where reactionary elements were able to join to it”;
- the “Horthyite-fascist and Hungarian capitalist-landowner counterrevolution” that intended “to restore the capitalist and landowner regime”;
- international imperialists whose “radio stations (Voice of America and Radio Free Europe) have not stopped instigating against the Hungarian People’s Republic and its institutions” (Békés, Byrne, and Rainer 2002, 460–3).

Journalists needed to find innovative direct and indirect forms of agitation that powerfully represented this framing of the event and were suitable for newspapers.

Criminalization of Counterrevolutionaries and Narratives of Social Inclusion (November 1956 to February 1957)

During these months the Kádár government had to gain control over the country. The armed protests ceased by mid-November, but political resistance was widespread. The government therefore decided to toughen its position and introduced martial law in December. Until 1960 35,000 people faced legal action for insurrectionist activities.

Two hundred and twenty-four revolutionaries were executed before 1959 and an additional five before 1961. Altogether 10,000 individuals and their families were affected by the reprisals. Imre Nagy was secretly tried and then executed on June 16, 1958, which became public news only on June 17 (Békés, Byrne, and Rainer 2002, 366–75; Rainer 2009).

Articles in *Népszabadság* reflect the fearful atmosphere of this period. Some reports about arrests of counterrevolutionaries were already published in November. After the introduction of martial law, reporting about trials, sentences, and executions became common. Articles sometimes coupled messages of repression and relative hope. In December *Népszabadság* coupled in one article two rejected clemency appeals resulting in executions with three granted pardons resulting in life imprisonment (“The Decision of the Presidential Committee of the People’s Republic About Appeals for Pardon”, *Népszabadság*, December 21, 1956, 1).

Central to governmental efforts toward order was the question of how to distinguish between good socialist revolutionaries, who were considered to have participated in the protests only to reform the system, and the infiltrated counterrevolutionary fascists and criminals, who turned a peaceful demonstration into a violent counterrevolution. A *Népszabadság* editorial entitled “Who is a Counterrevolutionary?” tried to provide a definition:

We regard as counterrevolutionary those who consciously fought for the restoration of the capitalist system and participated in the fights for this purpose. But we do not regard as counterrevolutionary those who participated in the events not with the intent to restore the capitalist system, but to fight against the mistakes of the past and for the independent socialist Hungary. (January 18, 1957, 3)

The editorial avoids calling the event “counterrevolution” and provides a way for some participants of the protests to join the new system.

Until February 1957, the only visual representation of the revolution was a New Year special photo section of *Népszabadság*. Under the title “Hard Year”, the four-page section showed a photograph of people gathering on a Budapest avenue during the revolution and a photograph of Budapest in ruins after the revolution along with images of various foreign natural disasters and political events. The titles of the Hungary-related photographs avoided the word “revolution,” calling the event “days of excitement.” Confusingly, the back cover of this special section was dedicated to the memory of Sándor Petőfi, a heroic revolutionary poet who was born on New Year’s Eve in 1823 and died during the 1848–1849 Hungarian revolution against the Hapsburgs. The back cover had a photograph of children playing in front of his sculpture, and reproductions of five paintings displaying Petőfi and the demonstrations of 1848. The 1956 protesters frequently evoked the 1848 revolution. Slogans, demands, and symbols of 1848 were central for the new revolution. With this back cover the party daily referred to the strong revolutionary traditions of the country during times of severe repression. A settled portrait of October 1956 as a counterrevolution was not yet fully formed.

Along with these inchoate journalistic practices, *Népszabadság* attacks on the event also began. The most frequent strategy was to focus on defendants with criminal past. *Népszabadság* also started to brand the counterrevolution as a preplanned international project. During one week in 1957 two articles were dedicated to this topic. “Washington’s Hand in Hungary: An American Journalist Exposes the Foreign Organizers of the Counterrevolution”, written by the radical socialist American journalist Albert E. Kahn,

called the event a counterrevolution and asked Americans devoted to peace and freedom to rethink their position on the event (January 20, 1957, 9). Six days later another article spoke about the country of origin of the weapons, arguing that the counterrevolutionaries fought with foreign weapons smuggled into the country ("They Shot from German, Belgian, and American Weapons: What Does the Expert Say About the Smuggled Weapons?", *Népszabadság*, January 26, 1957, 4).

While courts quickly sentenced "counterrevolutionaries" to death, the *Népszabadság* coverage was confusing. Not even the name of the event, the "counterrevolution," was fully established. A relatively slow process of standardizing the narrative began only during the second period of the coverage.

Construction of the Icons of the Counterrevolution and Deconstruction of the Icons of the Revolution (February 1957 to November 1960)

While reports about court sentences continued at the beginning of this period, *Népszabadság* also started to articulate the framing of the event as counterrevolutionary. The exceptionally violent siege of the Budapest party headquarters on Republic Square was placed in the iconic center to represent all 13 days of the protests. All other events of the revolution that generally did not involve mob violence were gradually moved out from the sphere of iconicity (Eörsi 2006; Mink 2006).

Népszabadság placed a high priority on constructing iconic figures. On February 17, 1957 the youth weekly *Magyar Ifjúság* published an article about the survivors of the siege on the Republic Square headquarters, entitled "Those Who Returned from the Grave Accuse." Two days later *Népszabadság* republished the same article (February 19, 1957, 9). József Sólyom, a reporter for *Magyar Ifjúság*, saw in *Paris Match* a disturbing photograph of defenders of the headquarters being shot by protesters. In a Budapest hospital, Sólyom found a survivor, József Farkas K., who spoke about his life and survival.

Farkas came from a working-class family. He was a military conscript who was ordered to the headquarters on October 23. Farkas explained to the reporter that seeing the overwhelming power of the protesters, Imre Mező, one of the secretaries of the Budapest Party Committee, left the building holding a white flag with the intent to negotiate a peaceful surrender. But instead of carrying out negotiations, he was murdered. Protesters forcibly removed the defenders of the party headquarters from the building and then shot them at close range. Farkas felt the force of the bullet and collapsed. Unknown rescuers carried him to an ambulance while protesters tried to finish him off. The reporter also visited another survivor, Lajos Somogyi Berta, who was staying with his parents in a town in the countryside. During the siege, he had been shot nine times and robbed of his money. In the chaos, someone saved him from lynching and took him to a hospital. Only 23 years old, missing one leg due to damage from his gunshot wounds, his poor family had to take care of him. The article included photographs of the two handsome and visibly traumatized survivors, as well as the original photographs of the shooting.

József Farkas K. and Lajos Somogyi Berta, victims of the counterrevolution's violence, became powerful iconic figures of the counterrevolution because their words and faces provided a real-life example of the excesses in the protest movement. The moments when

protesters shot them were also recorded in influential photographs of Western photojournalism. These “about to die” photographs (Zelizer 2010) displayed the mortal fear of young and sympathetic men and the meaningless violence of the counterrevolution. *Life* photographer John Sadovy shot several rolls of the siege: his photographs and personal narrative of the siege were published in *Life* magazine and in many foreign news publications (see Figure 1). Ironically, newspapers in Hungary used the same Western photographs to represent the counterrevolution and the police identified counterrevolutionaries based on these images (Hollós and Lajtai 1974, 168).

Martyrs of the Republic Square siege were also frequently discussed. Imre Mező was at the center of journalistic interest. His failed attempt to negotiate symbolized the amorality of the counterrevolutionary “mob.” In an almost mythical triad, he left the building with two colonels of the Hungarian army, János Asztalos and József Papp. After being shot, Asztalos was hanged upside down, while the protesters tried to cut out Papp’s heart before hanging him as well. The perpetrators thought they were killing key members of the secret police, but in fact their victims were members of the Hungarian army. The violent siege also had an iconic female victim, the 39-year-old veteran antifascist Éva Kállai, who jumped from a second-floor window of the headquarters to avoid being lynched. Showing these innocent victims of the event was a way to trigger moral outrage in the readers (Ettema and Glasser 1998).

While survivors and victims were central iconic figures of the counterrevolution, they were not alone. To stabilize an image of the revolt as a counterrevolution, a



FIGURE 1a

Two photographs from John Sadovy’s photo-series on the Republic Square siege. In the first photograph Lajos Somogyi Berta is on left and József Farkas K. is on the right. Originally published by *Life* magazine (“Hungarian Patriots Strike Ferocious Blows at Tyranny”, November 12, 1956, 34), reproduced by *Népszabadság* as illustration for the article “Those Who Returned from the Grave Accuse” (February 19, 1957, 9). Copyright by Getty Images. Printed with permission



FIGURE 1b

convincing frame required everyday heroes, who saved lives during the dangerous counterrevolutionary days. These heroic rescuers showed that everyone, regardless of political position and social class, can do something against counterrevolutionary forces. The families of the victims, with a focus on hard-working parents, young wives, and children, constituted another group of iconic figures. An early article reported on governmental commemorative prizes given to the families. Surprisingly, in this largely non-visual period of the coverage, it even included a large image of the peasant parents of the victim Ferenc Gubics. The grief-stricken father held the prize, while the mother was crying (“The Dedicated Fight of the True Sons of Our Country Was Not in Vain”, *Népszabadság*, August 19–20, 1957, 2).

Népszabadság created a strong contrast between the abused iconic bodies of the victims and the impure bodies of the counterrevolutionaries. Journalists emphasized that the lynching of the defenders of the headquarters did not stop with their deaths: the bodies

of the victims were hanged, kicked, and mutilated. In contrast to the sacred bodies of the victims, the bodies of the counterrevolutionaries were presented as profane. An article ironically entitled "The Sons of the US" argued that the photographer from *Life* magazine made a mistake by not asking the photographed protesters to take off their shirts. He would have seen that their bodies were covered by tattoos, which they received while serving prison sentences. According to the article one of the counterrevolutionaries even had tattoos of the American and the British flags along with pornographic representation of women ("The Sons of the US: Sketchy Portrait of Three Tattooed Murderers", *Népszabadság*, May 14, 1958, 8). Female revolutionaries were discredited with a different strategy: counterrevolutionary women were often described as prostitutes. Their past in the world of prostitution was both "revealed" in reports about their trials and in articles about foreign photographs representing them (for instance: "Court Sentence About the Republic Square Prostitute Counterrevolutionary", *Népszabadság*, June 29, 1957, 8).

By the first anniversary, the counterrevolution had its iconic figures, iconic objects, and iconic places. The disabled iconic survivor, Lajos Somogyi Berta, wrote the commemorative piece of *Népszabadság*. He called the counterrevolutionaries "bloody and sadist murderers," while praising the victims, their families, the survivors, and the heroes for their courage. He argued that while the West looked at the murderers as heroes, the West should instead praise the heroism of those who saved lives on Republic Square ("It Was Today a Year Ago: True to Your Oath You Died as Heroes", October 30, 1957, 9).

In addition to iconic people and iconic objects, the party headquarters on Republic Square provided the iconic place of the counterrevolution. By the first anniversary the building was restored, with a plaque commemorating the victims of the shooting and lynching. On the day of the anniversary an article in *Népszabadság* made it explicit that "not only the headquarters was restored, but also the Communist movement in Budapest" ("We Shall Remember!", October 30, 1957, 3). The building embodied the party's message: while communism was attacked, it is now in better shape than ever. Other damaged buildings in Budapest that could have served as unofficial mementos of the revolution were also quickly renovated or replaced by new buildings (Ungváry 2000b; Dent 2006). In these buildings, plaques did not commemorate the events. The space of the revolution became only a memory, while the space of the counterrevolution was consciously shaped for remembrance.

In 1958, a competition for a memorial dedicated to the victims of the Republic Square siege was announced. The deadline was March 15, 1958, the 110th anniversary of the 1848 revolution. The completed winning entry, a collaborative work of Viktor Kalló and Lajos Skoda, was unveiled on October 30, 1960, the fourth anniversary of the Republic Square siege. The 16-foot tall bronze and concrete monument, showing a soldier hit by a bullet, embodied the message that "while a fighter can be murdered, the ideology still conquers" ("The Memorial of the Fallen Soldiers of Hungarian Freedom Was Unveiled on Republic Square", *Népszabadság*, November 1, 1960, 1).

Iconic people, iconic objects, and iconic places became embodiments of the frame of the counterrevolution. They represented that the corrupt, violent, and internationally supported counterrevolution failed to win over communism, humanity, and common sense (Figure 2; Table 1).

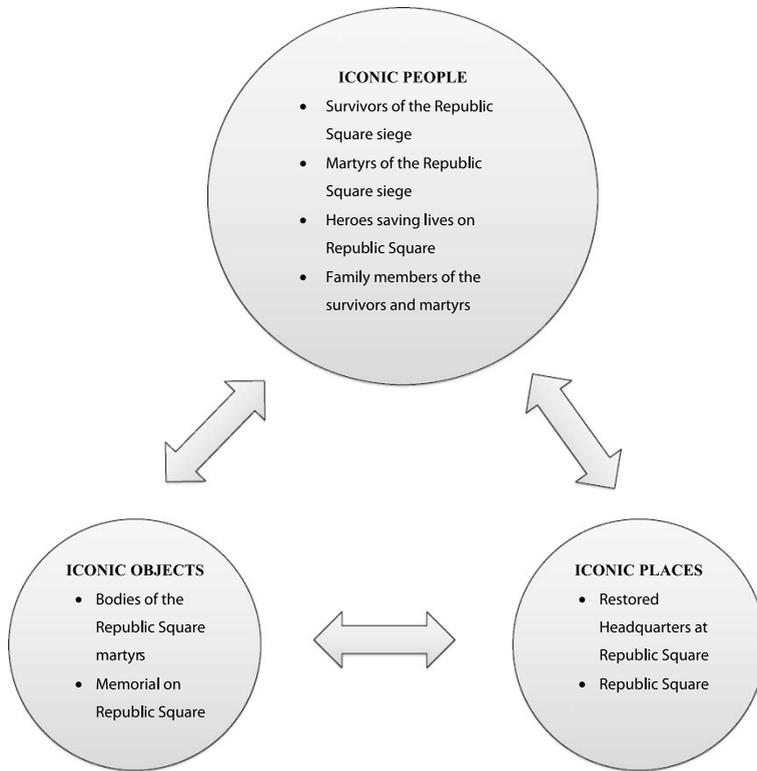


FIGURE 2
Icons of the counterrevolution: iconic people, iconic objects, and iconic places

TABLE 1
The local frame of the counterrevolution and the Western frame of the revolution

	Counterrevolution	Revolution
Participants	Criminals and fascists	Innocent youth
Organization	Preplanned	Spontaneous
Organizers	Initiated and supported by international forces	Local
Method/ tactic	Dominated by mob violence, in particular lynching	Non-violent revolutionary process with occasional armed fighting

Routinizing Memory: Anniversary Journalism as the Ally of Forgetting (November 1960 to September 1981)

In this period, *Népszabadság* started restricting the memory of the event to the established icons of Republic Square. Coverage was almost exclusively about the yearly official commemorations of the victims. While in 1958 the article about the commemorative party events explained the Republic Square atrocities in detail, later articles only occasionally provided context for the official ceremonies.

The *Népszabadság* articles about the commemorative ceremonies were almost identical each year as though based on a template. They were short, formalized, and lacking

in interpretation. The articles were entitled—with slight variations—“Commemorations of the Victims of the Counterrevolution.” They reported on two events: the official ceremony at the commemorative plaque dedicated to the victims, and the official ceremony at the Kerepesi cemetery, where the victims were buried. The articles were dominated by a list of party and state officials who placed flowers at these sites. The articles were frequently accompanied by a photograph of either ceremony. The leading party officials were mostly recognizable on the photograph, but their facial expressions were not readable. One exception is the article of 1966 with a relatively close shot of the General Secretary of HSWP, János Kádár (“Commemorations of the Martyrs of the Counterrevolution”, November 5, 1966, 1).

The only moments when *Népszabadság* moved slightly beyond the yearly repeated formalized reports were the three anniversaries: 1966, 1971, and 1976.

On the 10th anniversary the leading article entitled “One Decade” was relatively forgiving toward the counterrevolutionaries, mentioning that at the time some participants likely did not completely realize what they were participating in. The article focused on the government’s successful work, on the ways in which its gentle and careful policies had gained back people’s trust and transformed the country (*Népszabadság*, November 4, 1966, 3).

In 1971 the regular report about the official ceremony included a small extra section written in italics. The section called the counterrevolution the largest imperialist provocation since World War II. The article also praised the iconic victims of the counterrevolution (“Commemoration of the Victims of the 1956 Counterrevolution”, *Népszabadság*, November 5, 1971, 3).

On the 20th anniversary, *Népszabadság* published another expanded analysis of the two decades, as well as the regular report about the official ceremony. The analysis dedicated more attention to the counterrevolution than it had in 1966, and also commemorated the victims. It expressed strong devotion to the Soviet Union. The closing thoughts summarized the achievements of the two decades of consolidation (“Twenty Years Ago”, *Népszabadság*, November 4, 1976, 3).

On these three anniversaries journalists made explicit the deal offered by the Kádár regime: in exchange for giving at least the appearance of accepting the frame and icons of the counterrevolution, Hungarians enjoyed a relatively high living standard and social security (György 2011). By mechanically reproducing the icons of the counterrevolution in the other years, *Népszabadság* avoided discussing any other participants, objects, places and moments of the “commemorated” historic event, especially those sympathetic revolutionary moments that were in the center of the international media coverage of 1956. The minimalistic representational style in this third period of the coverage also raises the question of whether the political leadership intended to remember the counterrevolutionary frame or wished to forget 1956 and *all* its frames. The contrast between the creativity of the second period of the coverage and the minimalism of this third period indicates that over time the regime became less invested in a powerful remembrance of the counterrevolution.

The Fading of Counterrevolutionary Icons and the Rise of Facts in Relation to the Successful Consolidation (September 1981 to November 1986)

By the 25th anniversary of 1956 *Népszabadság* had to react to the intense memory work of Hungarian emigrant groups and the international press (Glant 2007) and, also to

the increasing contemporary interest in the local democratic opposition in the revolution. During the early 1980s the leading local samizdat *Beszélő* spoke about 1956, the first illegal art exhibition on 1956 was announced, and the democratic opposition realized that a reconstruction of what happened in 1956 could shake the regime's legitimacy (György 2000, 115–200).

In 1981 *Népszabadság* initiated a series on the counterrevolution entitled "This Happened" (September 18, 1981 to October 25, 1981). Neither the title, nor the series left much open room for doubt or interpretation, but it broke the long tradition of repetitive counterrevolutionary icons. Out of the 13 articles of the series, only one was devoted to the events of Republic Square. In the introduction the editor of the series underlined that while the regime clearly produced less historical writing on 1956 than did the West, instead of scholarly writings the social achievements of the preceding 25 years embodied what had changed and what the government had come to stand for (P. Rényi, "Historical Lesson: Introduction to a Series of *Népszabadság* Articles", *Népszabadság*, September 13, 1981, 3–4; Rényi 1981). Moreover, in connection with the series, *Népszabadság* published letters from readers. All published letters followed the counterrevolutionary frame, but this was the first time that the newspaper included any substantial personal history of the event ("The Conclusions Matter: National Unity, Strong Power of the Workers", *Népszabadság*, October 29, 1981, 15).

Népszabadság did not forget to publish its yearly article about the official ceremonies in 1981. But the headline of the article omitted the word "counterrevolution." The related photograph was of the monument on Republic Square. Putting the individual soldier in the center evoked memories of the iconic victims, and, also meant a break away from the regular photograph of party officials. ("Commemoration of the Martyrs of 1956", *Népszabadság*, November 5, 1981, 1).

A few articles still referred to icons. In 1982 *Népszabadság* published an article about a *Life* photograph representing a young Hungarian freedom fighter. The same journalist who wrote reports about the trials of counterrevolutionaries in the late 1950s tracked down the photographed teenager. In 1981 this counterrevolutionary, who had worked as a car thief for a while, no longer thought much of the 1956 protests, describing them as a temporary phenomenon in which people participated mostly out of excitement and misperception (L. Szabó, "Tracing a Photograph", *Népszabadság*, February 13, 1982, 12).

In 1985 *Népszabadság* recalled a counterrevolutionary icon. The author of the article was József Sólyom, who had written the series on the Republic Square siege survivors back in 1957. According to Sólyom, one of the iconic survivors of the Republic Square siege, József Farkas K. contacted him and they met again to discuss the nearly three decades that had elapsed. The article included some of the famous *Life* photographs of the Republic Square shooting along with a photograph of Farkas and his family in 1985 (J. Sólyom, "Live and Thrive, My Child!", *Népszabadság*, April 12–13, 1985, 6).

On the 30th anniversary the main series of *Népszabadság* was entitled "Facts Respond," reflecting new journalistic and political attitudes (October 15, 1986 to October 23, 1986). The introduction declared that this time the series would not be descriptive but rather debate-oriented: it would answer questions. The series' aim was to correct "misunderstandings and mischaracterizations" in connection with the history of 1956 and the post-counterrevolutionary decades of consolidation. The first two articles dealt with questions in relation to the counterrevolution, while the other three articles considered the successful consolidation. The introduction emphasized that those

countries that now “accuse” Hungary of “silencing 1956” have not been willing to confront hard periods in their respective pasts. As an example, the introduction mentioned that the United States was actively commemorating 1956, but “[w]here do they officially remember the large protests of American students against the Vietnam war? When will they remember the victims of the persecutions in the McCarthy era, when will they rehabilitate the Rosenberg couple?” (“Facts Respond: Documents About 1956 and the Decades Thereafter, New Series in *Népszabadság*”, *Népszabadság*, October 15, 1986, 3).

The 1986 anniversary was the last chance for the party to celebrate the victory over the counterrevolution. János Kádár resigned as General Secretary in May 1988 and on January 28, 1989 a member of HSWP’s Politburo, Imre Pozsgay, called the 1956 event a “popular uprising.” With this act the icons of the counterrevolution became icons of a frame that no longer existed. On June 16, 1989 Imre Nagy and other central victims of the revolution were reburied during an official ceremony attended by several hundred thousand people and covered both by international and Hungarian media. The legal rehabilitation of the leaders of the revolution was announced on July 6, 1989: the day János Kádár died.

Conclusion

Journalism was not silent about 1956 during the Kádár regime. But the counter-revolutionary icons journalists used as speech still strongly supported forgetting. Icons served as powerful journalistic tools that represented the framing of the event as counterrevolutionary and furthered the regime’s desire to erase the vernacular memory of the revolution. The visual and textual repetition of the counterrevolutionary icons limited the usually playful and flexible process of constructing collective memory.

However, these icons were not embedded in everyday culture, they were not products of social agreement. After 1989 the carefully constructed framing of the event disappeared from the public sphere as though it had never existed. While in contemporary Hungary nostalgia is widespread for both everyday life under communism and János Kádár as leader, the counterrevolutionary icons have not become objects of nostalgic longing. The 200,000 Hungarians who fled the country kept in contact with family members and friends left behind. From 1964 onward “dissidents” were allowed to occasionally visit their families and most Hungarians also had opportunities (albeit with restrictions) to travel abroad. These personal interactions with the West empowered the frame of the revolution. The revolutionary frame also gained strength from the infiltration of the memory work of emigrant groups and foreign media along with some allusions in Hungarian movies, song lyrics and literary works. Furthermore, many of the 100,000 families who were directly affected by the post-revolutionary reprisals kept the private memory of the revolution alive in their homes. While the official narrative of the counterrevolution had strong press support, it could not completely suppress these alternative accounts. Since 1989, the event has been framed as revolution in official, historical, and journalistic representations.

In 1992 Kalló’s sculpture was removed from Republic Square and placed in the Statue Park dedicated to communist public art. The Statue Park is a tourist attraction outside of Budapest that was characterized in Hungarian academic literature as “state socialism’s Disneyland” (György 2000, 330). While Republic Square has both a sculpture and a plaque dedicated to Jean-Pierre Pedrazzini, a French photojournalist who was accidentally shot

during the 1956 siege, the suffering of local victims is no longer commemorated. The iconic name of the square was erased in 2011, when the right-wing administration re-named it Pope John Paul II Square. This official act of replacing a communist icon with a Christian icon was the only proof that Republic Square still had some iconic power.

Contemporary journalistic representations of the revolution rarely mention the atrocities that took place on Republic Square; only a recent theatrical drama seems to revitalize its memory (Papp and Térey 2006). The new official and journalistic representations of the heroic revolution again somewhat simplify the event, settling on a few icons that synthesize only positive interpretations. Those who honor 1956 as a revolutionary moment, like those who pushed the idea that it was a counterrevolutionary moment, are selective about what factual pieces of 1956 they choose to keep alive in memory. Newly erected memorials serve as iconic places for commemorations, and symbols of the revolution, like the Soviet tank or the Hungarian tri-colored flag with the coat of arms of Rákosi's Soviet-style regime cut out of the center, are frequently evoked as iconic objects in contemporary representations of the event.

Icons of the 1956 revolution also have social lives on Hungarian streets. In 2006, during a protest against the socialist-liberal administration, protesters restarted a tank that they acquired from an exhibition that commemorated the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution. And in a 2011 demonstration against the new right-wing administration protesters cut out the symbol of the leading political party, an orange, from the middle of the Hungarian flag. Even in democratic societies icons can condense the selected meanings of historic events and can serve as reference points. Icons do not resemble events as a statue resembles a person, but summarize particular frames of events with the help of narratives. Journalists covering historic moments will continue to take advantage of this feature of icons.

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NOTES

1. Throughout the article I need to use the term "counterrevolution" to speak from the examined newspaper's perspective.
2. Iconic photographs have a substantial academic literature that I have reviewed in my other publications. However, this article is based on a sociological understanding of icons, and discusses iconic persons, iconic objects, and iconic places represented by both texts and images.
3. The nearest to this understanding is the "news icon" concept of Bennett and Lawrence (1995), who emphasized that word pictures can also spread icons. As example they mentioned former CIA agent and Soviet mole Aldrich Ames, whose story evoked spy-novel imagery, but actual photographs of the ordinary-looking Ames did not add much to his fame. However, the news icon concept of Bennett and Lawrence focused only on

cases when icons can be freed from their original contexts and “enter the streams of subsequent, disparate, and often unconnected events” (1995, 23). An icon’s contribution to the long-term narration of a particular event was not part of their consideration.

4. On November 7, 1956 the journalist association announced a general strike entitled “No Line for Kádár.” Few newspapers continued their work, including *Népszabadság*. On November 24 even *Népszabadság* entered a short strike due to the party’s decision to ban the editor-in-chief’s article about a speech of Tito (Murányi 1994, 213). In a series of administrative decisions, including arrests, firings and salary raises, the government seized control over the press by 1957. By December 1957 the journalist association lost 800 members out of 2200 and was stripped from its independence (Cseh, Kalmár, and Pór 1999, 221). In 1989 *Népszabadság* gained independence from HSWP and currently it is the leading left-liberal newspaper in Hungary.

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