

Foreword by Prof. dr. Bagdy Emőke

It is impossible to read Vilma Alföldi's interview book with the children of the 'enemy', the persecuted young people, whose destinies were determined by the stigma they bore due to their origin, without horror, compassion and sadness. They had to be punished for the assumed transgressions committed by their parents, which were 'merely' handed down to them so that the punitive castigation would culminate in their suffering. They were in the spring of their lives, when the young souls still look to their desired future with confidence and longing, when it is also a life task to plan and dream of what we want to become. In the book, the recollections of these youngsters vividly show how their life plans and future were shattered by an unreasonable and unjust verdict: make them suffer as well. The exclusion and stigmatization based on origin is one of the most shameful chapters in Hungarian history, a historical sin of the period between 1948 and 1963. 'He who is not with us is against us', says the one-time slogan. In the Communist terror of the Rákosi era and in the years of the subsequent Kádár consolidation after the overthrown and betrayed revolution of '56, when we were ordered to deny our own 'freedom struggle' and rename it a counter-revolution, during the hard and then soft dictatorship, and from the decades of social traumatization and silencing, Vilma Alföldi focused on and opened a channel to express its anguish to a generation of whom many had suffered the heavy handedness and oppression, destroying their youth and future.

It is not a coincidence that I was eager undertake the task of writing the foreword to this well-researched, archival material-based work, which nonetheless is smooth flowing and captures the interest of the reader with ease. I myself could be one of the interviewees as I grew up in this era as a stigmatized young person, being a 7-year-old who was just enrolled in school in 1948. I myself experienced a barrier blocking my progress at all points in my educational history until I finally was permitted to enter university in 1963, the year of the amnesty. For me, this event was akin to salvation. As a child, I experienced many forms and the painful consequences of negative discrimination.

My father was a Calvinist pastor who was barred from preaching and was classified into the so-called other ('E') category. My grandfather was a class enemy in the 'X' category and was a B-listed person due to his poems that were deemed chauvinistic; he was degraded to become one of the most undesirable

enemies of the regime in the communist world. To this day, I remember my grandfather's terrified face dreading when the curtained car with the leather-jacketed hoodlums would come for him taking him somewhere, he knew, he could hardly return from. Our large family fled to a small village that served as our safe refuge; from here I cycled seven kilometers to my school every day as I did not want to attend the village's four-grade combined single teacher school.



To high school neither I, nor my brother were admitted. My peasant peers C grades were better qualifications for admittance than my always outstanding report card. However, I drew a sense of pride from my marginalization, I turned my 'otherness' into a positive force and my family's values became the guiding beacons of my life. Providence had resolved all the disadvantages I had to endure, one by one. A peasant girl dropped out of the high school in October and I could even take her dormitory place. All this was possible in silence, with the quiet help of positively inclined good-intentioned people. I graduated with honors in 1959, and I have kept my certificate of excellence signed by Valéria Benke, then Minister of Education, to this day. However, the University of Debrecen sternly rejected to admit me to their Latin-Hungarian teaching program, after all 'how could they entrust the education of the next generation to somebody who had received an idealistic education?' With a broken heart and hopelessly, I was looking for an opportunity to continue my studies, now staying with my relatives in Budapest. I eventually became a certified physiotherapist and worked in a healthcare institution for pulmonary diseases for four years. In 1963, the 7th party congress heralded the dawn of a new era when 'Comrade Kádár' uttered the new slogan: 'He who is not against us is with us!' 1963 became the year of the general amnesty, a form of redemption. I once again applied for university admission in Budapest and was able to get a place in psychology as a full-time student, having my classes in the evening hours. However, the contemptuous attitude of the regular students and the demeaning treatment of the professors towards us were offensive and painful to me. With the dean's special permission, I was able to transfer to the regular program after successfully passing my differential exams and — albeit somewhat late and in a roundabout way — became a 'normal' university student.

Summarizing my long journey in a nutshell, it is no wonder that Vilma Alföldi's book also captivated me, leading my attention to a group of persecuted ones. Still, my successful life journey makes me grateful as I could have fared so much

worse, not unlike the 43 fellow victims who were finally given a voice in Vilma Alföldi's completely fascinating, fact-based interview book.

Why do I consider this book extremely significant? When Vilma Alföldi 'opened Pandora's box' in a radio interview a flood of memories was unleashed and the interest in the topic began to spread. From the stifling spiritual cemetery of silence, the seemingly dead are finally rising and their mourning that could only find relief in a human voice through the sharing of memories and their common pain at last could be heard. Tears also petrify and tears suppressed torment the body. Secrets and silence sicken the organism, it is a psychological command to process losses through weeping, telling, sharing, and remembering. The healing power of peer empathy is what brings true consolation for the common sorrows. Instead of self-blame, release is the path to closure and reconciliation.

As it has been so often and tragically in Hungarian history, from the stifling atmosphere of the decades following the compromise with the Habsburgs after the revolution of 1848, the mandated order to silence any mention of Trianon's mutilating historical crime or the multifaceted crimes of the Communist dictatorship, superbly documented in part by the author here, we have lived our lives in endless tension and torment without proper mourning allotted to us.

You have to eventually raise your voice. If we open the shut door of silence, the soul is liberated. That is the only way it can heal. The beautiful lines of our Kossuth Prize-winning poet László Bertók from Pécs are the most fitting, not only in praise of Vilma Alföldi's book, but also as a message to all of us, readers, narrators and mourners:

'Because we all know life and death

balance on the tip of a moment.

To depart is too little, to stay is too much,

what makes me human is to speak my thoughts!'

May the brave witnesses and sufferers, the pioneering writer, and all her followers be blessed, so that their hearts can finally find reconciliation and relief through their memories.

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