



# **POLITICS WITH BRICK AND MORTAR\***

**NATION-BUILDING THROUGH  
ARCHITECTURE IN  
POST-SOCIALIST BUDAPEST,  
VIEWED THROUGH A  
POSTCOLONIAL LENS**

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*\*Beck (1998), Cover Image Sources: Zoltán Deák/Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Library Budapest Collection, in Építész Forum (2014) and BACU, in Socialist Modern (2018)*

## ABSTRACT

This thesis lies at the intersection of architecture and politics, and analyses how the right-wing Fidesz government in post-socialist Budapest mobilise/d architecture for the purpose of nation-building. In this study, I analyse three projects in Budapest – the National Theatre from the late 1990s, and the National Hauszmann Plan and Liget Budapest Project – both ongoing. The analysis draws from postcolonial theory, the premise being that while new leaders took over from former oppressors, a skewed power dynamic remained, and this reflected in newly built national architecture. My frames of reference are twofold: the decision-making process of the projects, and design of their built outcomes. In the postcolonial case, the first refers to leaders taking unilateral decisions related to the choice of architect, site, and style, i.e. modernism. The second dimension refers to the architecture's attempt to be both forward-looking/international, as well as deeply rooted in tradition, consequently bypassing the traumatic colonial years. I 'test' the extent to which these two premises hold true for post-socialist Budapest. My findings are, that as in the postcolonial context of the mid-twentieth century, the chosen cases evince top-down decision-making in national architecture, asserted by the right-wing in this case. As for architectural style, all the projects hark back to the same prosperous time in national history, mixing antiquity with an international forward outlook in different ways. Overall, the National Theatre displays oppositional sentiment to a larger degree than the current projects whose thrust includes tourism and spectacularity. This research attempts to contribute to bridging the divide between two 'post-' bodies of literature, that despite overlaps, have not really engaged with each other.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

In the early 1990s when Soviet dominion came to an end there were eerie similarities to be made with the end of colonial rule from decades before. Dominion and stifling of autonomy were the leitmotifs of both the socialist, and colonial regimes, and once liberated from domination, these newly independent nations were faced with the task of (re)establishing themselves in the world. This entailed forging an independent, collective identity, and projecting it, internationally, as well as to its people, so as to boost internal self-confidence.

In both post-socialist, and postcolonial nations, the urban environment became the canvas on which this new national identity was sought to be showcased, with not only the destruction of signs and symbols belonging to the previous order, but also new construction. And in both contexts, this was initiated by new leaders who had taken over the reins of governance from the old ones.

It is against this background that I situate my research, for, as I shall elucidate, in both cases, architecture became a political issue. In postcolonial nation-building tactics employed, new hierarchies of power were created and manifested in the built environment. A handful of elites – new leaders and architects – (unwittingly) colluded to re-entrench an unequal society, leading to discrimination between local communities and physical segregation. This is seen in the unilateral decision-making and architectural design. The question lies in whether the same assessment can be made of post-socialist rulers, and more specifically in Budapest. It is through this postcolonial lens that I attempt to hypothesise the nation-building practices in architecture, in three cases in post-socialist Budapest.

- **Research Questions**

The National Theatre project was the construction of a much-longed-for theatre, the National Hauszmann Plan renovates the Buda Castle and the Liget Budapest Project creates a museum district in the city park. With reference to these three projects:

1. In what ways is nation-building evinced through reproduced power hierarchies with respect to decisions on the choice of architect, site, and style?
2. In what ways is nation-building evinced through architectural style and design with respect to projecting Hungarian national identity, and the bid to be European/international?

- **Rationale**

This research attempts to contribute to what scholars have identified as a yawning gap in postcolonial/post-socialist academic engagement. Kuzio (2012) and Tlostanova (2012) point to similarities (as also the differences notwithstanding) between the two natures of oppression and others make a plea for comparative research. It is in the conditions that the two regimes left in their wake, however, that there is fertile ground for comparison, rather

than in the orders themselves. Diener and Hagen (2013) point this out when they write that despite “clear parallels, the literature on post-socialist urbanism draws surprisingly few connections with the considerable research on postcolonial urbanism” (p. 508). Şandru echoes the same sentiment when she writes of the post-socialist context mirroring, in many ways, the post-independence aftermath of much of the Third World, marked by excessively nationalist, dictatorial politics (p. 2).

In academia, their main meeting point is in terms of the approach to their scholarship, i.e. the two ‘posts-’ as being seen as aberrations or anomalies, and of the western hegemony in academia. Postcolonial and post-socialist scholars both, are critical of western urbanity being cast as the gold standard to aspire to, to ‘catch up’ with. Tuvikene (2016) even says that post-socialism forms neither the core nor the periphery, so neither is it the place from where most research perspectives emerge, i.e. the west, nor the primary source of critique, risking a “double exclusion” (p. 133). This sentiment is well summed up by Tlosatanova (2012) who pushes for comparison in an atmosphere of plurality, instead of using the western yardstick as a “model for the whole of humanity” (p. 131).

This research is further validated on account of postcolonial scholars’ disregard, and moreover, rank bias *against*, post-socialist studies (Şandru, 2012). She argues for postcolonial scholarship to broaden its borders, at a time when it is in danger of becoming ossified and institutionalised (ibid., p. 18). Her opinion is that it could therefore use a new lease of life by engaging with one of the great traumas of the twentieth century (ibid., p. 18).

I premise my research on these calls for the building of academic bridges. As for the architectural focus, this too has been under-researched from a production point of view. Most analysis has focused on the architectural product rather than its producers (Molnár 2013, p.12). This research analyses both, though ultimately the product is only as political as its producers.

- **The Cases**

The three projects are the outcomes of the right-wing Fidesz government and were/are highly controversial and debated. Much has been said about their designs and the way they have been handled from a political point of view. This research analyses only those aspects of the projects that intersect with postcolonial theory as defined. Additionally, the architectural analysis component does not weigh the merits and demerits of design but restricts itself to evaluation from a nation-building point of view. A further caveat is that the study is about nation-building as the Fidesz government wields it, through the chosen cases, and does not purport that these claims hold true of other post-socialist parties.

- **Structure of the Thesis**

My thesis is laid out as follows: Chapter 2 contains a literature review that highlights the ideas of postcolonial theory that I draw from and post-socialist theories that are relevant to these. I do so in terms of decisions related to architecture, and the architectural form itself. Here I also state the reasons for the choice of Budapest and situate my research in terms of its relevance to the urban. Following this, Chapter 3 on context gives a background of the political and architectural events that have shaped post-socialism in Budapest so that my cases are better understood. Chapter 4 contains my methodology and an explanation of the methods used for data collection. Following this, Chapter 5 contains my empirical findings and analysis and in three individual sections, I elaborate on the National Theatre, the National Hauszmann Plan and the Liget Budapest Project, respectively. In the fourth section of this chapter, I compare them to each other and also with ex-colonies using the same postcolonial barometer. The final chapter, Chapter 5, concludes this thesis; it summarises the main findings of my study and its limitations, and offers avenues for further research.



## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

My thesis lies at the intersection of national identity, politics and architecture, with specific reference to postcolonial and post-socialist contexts, in their moments of independence. The strands of literature related to these fields is wide and varied, intersecting in different combinations, like nationalism and architecture, postcolonial architecture, post-socialist architecture, sociology and architecture, etc. My main theoretical insights come under a few broad categories and sub-categories, elaborated as follows:

### **I. Postcolonial Hierarchies of Power**

#### **• Postcolonial Power**

Geertz (1993, p. 240, in Batt, 2002) writes of the question of identity being the main preoccupation of nation-building 'the Day After the Revolution' which involves having to articulate who this collective subject is, and based on whose will state functioning is legitimised (p. 1-2). This thinking, which highlights the organisation after the oppressor has been overthrown, speaks to Vale's (1992) ideas of the nationalism of aspiration, that sees the overthrowing of a foreign ruler being replaced, on independence by the nationalism of consolidation. It is in the workings of this consolidation that lies the scope for new skews in power to be birthed. The contention is that, while the rulers change, they often leave behind a legacy of rules about "power, hierarchy, and spatial segregation" (ibid.). In the articulation of these, lies the hierarchy.

A reflection of this hierarchy in the case of postcolonial nations, lies, for example, in the decision behind the choice of capital cities, and parliament buildings, for their siting and appearance was chosen by the new leaders, not by the populace (ibid.). The power to decide national identity rested in the hands of not a political system but a single regime so a particular ruler and a building came to be equated with one another (Vale, 1992, p. 51), often compromising the interests of the community at large. In wielding such decision-making power, these rulers – often "hybrid predecessors" of the colonial regime (ibid.) – held sway and did so with the architect who led the project, often also chosen by them personally and without a competition as is current-day practice. For example, Scriver and Srivastava (2015) write of Le Corbusier's hesitation to take up the Chandigarh commission, noting that he eventually relented given the "special relationship he soon developed with Nehru [independent India's first prime minister] as the de facto client for the new state capital" (p. 173).

In the immediate aftermath of independence, given that the new rulers had likely participated in the freedom struggle and were homegrown, their authority was rarely questioned and there were few other parties involved in the process. Decisions were taken by these new rulers as seen, for example in the Indian case of local architects resenting having to mould their designs to a nation-building agenda (Scriver and Srivastava, 2005). In 1959, 12 years after independence, one opponent grumbled that architecture must not be confined by

the false construct of a “national style” and that a policy for this purpose must be rejected on principle (Mody, 1959, in Scriver and Srivastava, 2005, p. 167). The only other bodies that were “moderating constraints upon the excesses of political will” (Scriver and Srivastava, 2005, p. 138) were the Public Works Departments and ‘All-India’ infrastructure Departments, the former themselves relics of the colonial era – institutions contained of draughtsmen and assistant engineers to the British (ibid., p. 129). The main takeaway is that political will was excessive and that there was not much possibility for meaningful contestation of rulers’ decisions.

- **Subnational, Personal and Supranational Identities**

Vale (1992) theorises the hardwiring of power and politics in postcolonial government building; of these new hierarchies, he cites the three sources of identity, masquerading as ‘national’, being in fact subnational, personal, and supranational. The first refers to the penchants of the rulers, the second, to the architect’s design statement, and the third, to the government’s interest in “pursuing international identity through modern architecture and planning” (Vale, 1992, p. 48). Further, given that new states, are seldom culturally homogenous, the national identity conveyed in the creation of the parliament building, is usually a regurgitation of the identity of the powerful group. (ibid., p. 49).

On personal identity, while major architects, are today called starchitects, the phenomenon of brand value attached to certain personalities was consequential decades ago too. As Vale (1992, p. 52) points out, the opportunity to fashion such an edifice gave the architect a free reign to infuse the architecture with their own ongoing design concerns, which may or may not have matched the political ground realities and public issues of symbolism. Most significantly, architects chosen for such projects in the postcolonial post-independence moments of the developing world were almost always educated in the west or received a “Western-influenced architectural education closer to home” (ibid.). Louis Kahn in Bangladesh, Oscar Niemeyer in Brazil and Geoffrey Bawa in Sri Lanka are but a handful of many examples. All this points to the sensibilities of the architect having played a major role in the projection of national identity, however far-removed they may have been from its context.

The endurance of the colonial legacy is also seen in the case of postcolonial Nigeria, the irony clear in that the Nigerian Institute of Architects that churned out the leading architects of the country, was established in London, not Lagos (Immerwahr, 2007, p. 168). According to King (2003), while class divisions replaced racial ones, colonial space lived on because the regulations and bylaws of the colonisers did, so “colonial values” became ingrained in planners and others (p. 180).

Supranational identity stresses the aspect of aspiring to modernity, wherein as Edward Shils phrases it (in Vale, 1992), “‘Modern’ means being Western without depending on the West”

(p. 51). Not only did this manifest in choice of architect as described above, but also in the choice of architecture, in most cases modernism.

## **II. Architectural Style and Built Form in Postcolonial Nation-building**

### **• Spatial Articulation of Hierarchy**

In terms of the spatial expression, the three previously mentioned identities were neatly encapsulated in built form under ostensibly national architecture. In his extensive analysis, Vale (1992) uses examples from across the postcolonial world, pointing out how, through the design of capital complexes, the leaders of these new nations reinforced asymmetrical power relations in the name of national identity. His view is that it is in the design of national buildings, that those in power show their stripes most truly. While architecture as a sign of power has been discussed elsewhere, Vale's (1992) choice of postcolonial parliamentary buildings is for reasons of their self-conscious approach to nation-building, for he feels that in these specifically, are power and identity manifested most obviously for the ruler power as well as the architect (p. 4). These two parties formed the primary actors of the enterprise.

This is clearly seen in the example of the design of the capital complex in Chandigarh, which despite being a provincial capital, became the poster-child of independent India. It was the pet project of the Jawaharlal Nehru, who took a personal interest in appointing (foreign/Western) architect Le Corbusier. It was funded by the national government, Nehru going so far as to call it the "temple of the New India" (Nehru, in Vale, 1992, p. 106).

In terms of layout, Ravi Kalia has critiqued the plan as being a spatial mapping of power, for the placement of the 'thinking' function, i.e. the capitol group as being at the head of the plan, he contends is a reaffirmation of the Indian caste structure (Kalia, in Vale, 1992, p. 107). Further, the spatial allocation of residential areas bears a resemblance to colonial planning, by means of the hierarchical layout from rich to poor groups corresponding with distance from the capitol (Sarin, in Vale, 1992, p. 107). The largest houses provided in low-density areas belonged mostly to government officials, whereas lower income groups were housed further away from the workplace (ibid.). Additionally, the "axial vista leading to a privileged high place" (Vale, 1992, p. 110) is reminiscent of the ceremonial colonial axis of British-designed New Delhi, which speaks volumes about old manifestations of political power creeping into new designs.

The same is echoed by authors who while not talking of specifically government buildings, but city-level spatial distribution, contend that social inequality was plotted onto the physical terrain. As Chakravorty (2000, in King 2003) claims, post-independence Calcutta retained much of its colonial spatial boundaries, with native upper class people establishing themselves in previously colonial physical space (p. 171).

Architecture is one symptom of a broader trend in regurgitated power imbalance, one that is clear also in McClintock's writing, where she says, that the very term 'postcolonialism' implies binaries of the 'before' and 'after' independence, and coloniser and colonised. This disregards

entirely the multiplicity existing within this colonised population, which in effect means that “[c]olonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance” (McClintock, 1992, p. 86).

- **Use of Modernism and Westernisation in Architecture**

The choice of architectural modernism in Chandigarh and elsewhere was an attempt to shed the past and embrace a new – and hopefully – brighter future, and was therefore a highly symbolic move. This ‘future’, most snugly fits in with Vale’s (1992) conception of supranational identity, i.e. postcolonial states’ desire to be like the west, paradoxically deriving national pride from a demonstration of the “ability to equal the West on its own terms” (p. 53). Here is where national architecture seeks to be a symbol of economic progress, in its choice of materials and design style. According to him, architectural modernism manifested in these countries is much less out of sync with the local specificities than site-specific design attempts made during colonial rule (p. 53). This points to a case of ex-colonies reaching so far for validation from an international audience and a projection of nation to the world, that the end result was “[c]oncrete-box parliaments” “far more ubiquitous than anything out of Hitchcock and Johnson” (p. 53).

Of postcolonial Nigeria, Immerwahr (2007) writes, “Once tropical modernism had been seized upon as the national idiom, there was surprisingly little interest on the part of Nigeria’s architects in developing it or adapting it to incorporate indigenous traditions or culture” (p. 168). Where there was inclusion of local practices, it was merely a token gesture (ibid., p. 168). This is also true of postcolonial India, wherein, the decision to choose modernist architecture was official and decisive, and taken at a debate called the ‘Seminar on Architecture’ organised to discuss the direction for post-1947 architecture (Brown, 2009, p. 293). It was at this gathering – attended by architects, government officials, politicians, and Nehru himself – that “they firmly chose modernist free expression over a state-driven revivalist style” (ibid., p. 293).

In more general terms, scholars like Jones (2011) too, see choice of architectural style as being loaded with meaning. He writes of “architecturing a future” (ibid., p. 67), and though not specifically speaking about ex-colonies, he writes of modernist architecture offering Europe a break from the immediate past of the Second World War, unencumbered as it was, by tradition (ibid., 67). Modernist architecture claimed rationality, universalism, less class differentiation and more egalitarian social organisation (ibid., p. 70), which made it an obvious choice for fledgling democracies of the postcolonial world.

- **On Borrowing from the Past and Hybrid Formations**

If the future connoted the west and an international audience, the past connoted a rooting in local, indigenous tradition. National architecture – an uneasy stalemate of the two – became a manifestation of modern nations’ claim to spring from deep in history, nations being “human communities ‘so natural’ as to require no justification other than self-assertion” (Hobsbawm, in Vale, 1992, p. 54). Additionally, architecture and urban design looked to some

favoured period of the past, so the built environment was used as an “iconographical bridge between preferred epochs, joining the misty palisades of some golden age to the hazy shores of some futures promises by neatly spanning all troubled colonial waters” (Vale, 1992, p. 50-51).

In trying to bridge these waters, there was often a descent into a kind of kitsch, or as Vale (1992) puts it, “cartoon form” (p. 54). For a new nation to straddle international modernism and local cultural elements is to find a balance between the universal and the particular. Of this Vale (1992) writes, “One form of design denies the possibility of an architectural contribution to national identity; the other reduces architecture to a three-dimensional, government-sanctioned billboard advertising selected aspects of indigenous culture” (p. 54).

The spatial manifestations of hybridity and mimicry which characterise postcolonial discourse (Bhabha, 1994, in King, 2002) are also pointed out by King (2002). While not in the sense of kitsch as is Vale’s mention of it, in talking of Nigeria’s postcolonial Tropical Modernism, King (2002) says that these “new ‘tropical urbanisms’ mark out newly developed regional or national identities while simultaneously permitting the urban elite to stay within the transnational space of modernism” (p. 385). Immerwahr (2007) too writes of it as a “bold hybrid idiom” (p. 166), chosen as the official government style for offices and major downtown buildings, and Nehru even went so far as to call it a “mongrel style” (Nehru, in Vaz, 1954, in Kalia, 2006, p. 144)

In India, this debate panned out as one between the village and the city, the former seen as traditional and the latter as the future. Batting for these sides were Gandhi and Nehru respectively, with the former famously having said that India lives in her villages. The implication was that that was the authentic version of the nation. Eventually it was Nehru’s ideas of modernism that dominated.

Despite the presence of hybridity, postcolonial nations chose modernist architecture as the dominant style with or without infusions of local or traditional practices, rather than whole-hearted engagement with traditional elements. Therefore, where local elements *were* used, architectural forms landed somewhere on the spectrum between kitsch and hybrid.

### **III. Post-socialist Nation-building**

- **Exclusion and Nationalism**

These concerns find relevance and resonance in the post-socialist context because of the very nature of similarities between them. Coming out of a four-decade traumatic oppressive regime, countries of central and eastern Europe tried to recreate their image in the world. The ‘national question’ has been the most significant post-communist preoccupation and contention between parties (Evans and Whitefield, 1995, 1177-1204; Kitschelt *et al*, 1999, in Fowler, 2004, p. 57). Many of post-socialist nations faced similar political struggles in that communist oppression gave way to firebrand nationalism, and increased social inequality (Leach, 1999). Leach (1999) writes that the “physical Wall has been demolished only to be

replaced by emergent, social walls [...]. The logic of exclusion remains. The exclusion of the Wall threatens to be replaced by the 'exclusion' of nationalism," (p. 158). This talks directly to the continuing – but new form of – hierarchy in postcolonial nations, and is echoed by Andrusz (1996) who writes that "sections of the intelligentsia, for a variety of quite subjective reasons including anger at the lack of esteem and privilege accorded to them by earlier 'workers' states, prefer to focus on the ardent notion of national identity rather than on the practical concerns of citizenship" (p. 54-55).

In a different conception, Czepczynski (2008) too refers to these inequalities, speaking of the new tyranny in terms of the tyranny of the market, not politicians. Capital as the new coloniser is not my own approach to reading into neo-colonial practices in post-socialist Budapest, but neoliberal conditions that welcomed the country when the Curtain was drawn, no doubt influence its approach to nation-building. As with other decisions, decisions on architecture and urban planning became the prerogative of a number of urban-level bodies, with internal tussles, and the national government persisting in its attempts to gain control over the urban environment.

- **European Identification and Dredging up the Past**

The general trend of central and eastern European nations' assertion of "the essentially 'European' character of the national identity" (Batt, 2002, p. 4) is widely acknowledged. Molnár (2013) writes that architecture stepped up to the task of mediating between the return to Europe and globalisation (p. 7). And Diener and Hagen (2013, p. 504) too point out that "post-socialist urbanism is simultaneously intertwined with efforts to reconcile new urban and national identities with broader "European" or "Eurasian" narratives."

Of the latter tendencies, one example as tackled by Verschuren (2017) is Skopje's projection of Macedonian identity through architecture in *Skopje 2014*. Pegging it as being of the copycat variety, she writes of all the styles employed as being "lent, borrowed or cannibalised" (p. 33) from western European cities. The craving for western Europe and invocation of ancient times is to the omission of socialist, non-Christian and non-ethnic Macedonian histories (Mijalkovic & Urbanek, 2011; Kubiena, 2014, in Verschuren, p. 38), which may sound like postcolonial nations' attempts to bypass the entire colonial period.

Just as one leg of the postcolonial bridge is in antiquity, so too in post-socialist examples. Apart from a westernisation, the thrust as seen from *Skopje 2014*, is a reversion to a certain version of the romantic past, and this is also seen in the case of Warsaw, where Crowley (2014) writes of the "ghostly outlines and shadows of history" (p. 210), saying that new building schemes, trace themselves according to street markings that ceased to exist over sixty years prior (Crowley, 2014, p. 210).

Going even further back in time, Warsaw's seventeenth century Saski Palace – destroyed in the war – is set to be rebuilt by the city, in its neoclassical avatar (Wayback Machine, 2018). While the interior design may deviate from the original plans, and the building will house

offices, the pervasive sense of nostalgia haunts the post-socialist reconstruction, seeing as in the tender, "the architectural form must refer to the prewar arrangement and traditional materials must be used during the construction process" (ibid.). The longing for the past plumbs the depths of history, and this tendency is possibly more so in Warsaw than other post-socialist cities, for it was severely bombed in the Second World War. So what is absent in reality stays vivid in the imagination (Crowley, 2014, p. 210).

#### **IV. Post-socialist Hungary and Why Budapest**

Politically, central European countries – have been resistant to western European academic tendencies to lump them with "everything east of Elbe" (Czepczynski, 2008, p.3), signifying as this does, a territorial association with Soviet countries. For these countries their identity is neither west nor east, but central and therefore the fashioning of the term Central Europe that comes from Mitteleuropa initiated by popular Czech writer Milan Kundera in the mid-1980s (ibid.). The in-betweenness is also pointed out by Stanishev Sr and Stanishev Jr (2016) who write, "On a political level, these countries were part of the communist bloc, while on cultural levels, they at least semiconsciously considered themselves part of a larger European cultural space and tradition" (p. 54). Relatedly, these countries have a history of insecurity given their constantly changing positions as part of an empire, then as fragile republics and then their absorption into a bloc once again. As Batt (2002) puts it, of central European counties, "national identities have had to be painfully constructed and fought for, and territorial borders have been chronically insecure and frequently changing" (p. 2). This has contributed to Hungary's sense of mistrust, seeing itself as it does, of having been stripped of agency and tossed around with the other countries in the region.

Unlike states of the former USSR – that were more like extensions of the 'core' – Hungary was a satellite nation that fell under Soviet rule. Moreover, it was at the western edge of the Iron Curtain, and enjoyed many privileges not accorded to other communist bloc nations. For example, after the uprising against communist forces in 1956, there was a relaxation in dominion over the state. Further, the country had a reasonably well-defined national culture even before 1945 (Diener and Hagen, 2013).

Furthermore, the installation of communism did not eradicate borders within the bloc into one 'socialist brotherhood', instead helping to harden the sense of nationhood within these imposed boundaries (Batt, 2002, p. 7). As Von Beyme (1996) puts it, Hungary was secure in its sense of nation, unlike 'latecomers' to the nation-building process, who need treaties for their justification. It has an unambiguous sense of nationhood, not entangled with allegiances to the core. In this sense it most closely resembles colonies that were distinctively at a distance ('periphery') from the imperial core under colonial rule.

Additionally, despite its overall ethnically homogenous population, insecurity arises in that the country's 'national camp' behaves as if in 'new state' settings (Fowler, 2004, p. 58). This is more often associated with heterogeneity (ibid., p. 58). So, the aspirational ideal is a 'more

national state' (ibid., p. 58) and nation-building is relevant, as nationalists saw the population as having become unmoored from its national past (ibid., p. 60). This also speaks to Molnár's (2013) views which are that Hungary had an "insecurity about its modernity and its "Europeanness"" (p. 23). So each post-1989 government in Hungary has had its own version of the nation and "return to nationhood" (Palonen, 2013, p. 538),

Hungary's security of its of nationhood complicated by its insecurity of being adequately 'European', its marginality to both east and west, and need to assert itself, all make its capital, Budapest an interesting case to study.

## **V. The Articulation of the Urban in 'Post-' Nation-building**

There are several ways in which postcolonial nation-builders employed cities for the purpose of showcasing their new and national identities. In some cases, new cities that would house government administrative functions were created where there were none. Vale (1992) writes of the politically-motivated relocation of Pakistan's new capital – Islamabad was chosen for its distance from the fraught India-Pakistan border. In other cases, cities were important for being kept at a distance from government functions, as in the case of Sri Lanka's capitol complex – an island on the outskirts of its capital, Colombo. Isolating national functions thus, can be seen as an engagement with the urban by virtue of keeping it at bay, and in this case, signifying neutrality in a civil war, then tearing the country apart.

Cities were also mobilised in their positions as oppositional to the rural, as seen in the creation of Chandigarh, that became the flagbearer of modernity and Nehru's "temple of the New India" (Nehru, in Vale, 1992, p. 106). Here could India be "free from the existing encumbrances of old towns and old traditions" (ibid.), a clear reference to the equation of tradition with the village life. The future was industrialisation, and this meant the urban.

The importance of cities to postcolonial nation-builders is uncomplicated – they were crucibles for potential growth, forward-looking, and held national political consequences., they were receptacles of national aspiration and representative of the global quality of the nation, rather than being entities in themselves.

In the case of post-socialist Hungary however, Budapest existed as a city in its own right, well before communist rule and before Hungary took the shape of the nation-state it is today. Its position did change multiple times, from being twin capital of the Austro-Hungarian empire to capital of a shrinking territory. It continues to be important in post-socialist times when cities have acquired new prominence, as nation states have been rescaled (Brenner, 2004).

With Hungary's right-wing populist turn with the first Fidesz government in 1998 however, its engagement with the capital started to bear slight resemblances to the engagement-by-rejection, as seen in Sri Lanka, albeit in different ways and for different reasons. This government drew support from the countryside, tried to deepen the populist-urbanist divide, and focused through its architectural ventures on ignoring the city (Palonen, 2013). Budapest,



being liberal-ruled at the time, the Fidesz government was not well-disposed towards it but used the cityscape to concretise its discourse, trying to “domesticate it” and add on elements of the party’s political stripes (ibid., p. 540). Its major building projects of the time circumvented the city while still using it. One such examples is the Millennium Park whose creators carved out a countryside idyll, replete with imagery of nature and landscapes within the urban fabric (ibid., p. 543).

As for the cases under study, with the National Theatre the Fidesz government chose a site outside the inner city and on the Pest side of the city on the banks of the Danube, yet accommodated within the panorama over Budapest (ibid., 545). There was an attempt to engage with the city but on its own terms. In the contemporary projects the engagement with the city is more obvious. The cases attempt to resuscitate history, and there is also a tourism angle to both the Liget and National Hauszmann projects; for both these aims, the city is vital. As nation-building is attempted in different ways so too is the city used to different degrees for this purpose.

### 3. ARCHITECTURAL POLITICISATION IN HUNGARY'S HISTORY

The National Theatre, National Hauszmann Plan and Liget Project come up against a history of political polarisation, a marked feature that has seeped into the fabric of Hungarian architectural discourse. This is spoken of in terms of the clash between right and left-wing ideologies and the related populist-urbanist schism in architecture. Its roots go as far back as the interwar years when the rift between the "functionalists" and the "regionalists" corresponded with the urbanist-populist division (Ferkai 1998a; Saad 1986, in Molnár, 2013, p. 127). After the war, it was a clash between Soviet-imposed social realism and modernism, in the 70s there was a pushback against modernism exemplified by the Tulip Debate, and later the organic movement, as communism entered its twilight years. The resistance to modernism is a product of the socialist era, originating from the mid-70s (Molnar, 2013, p. 105), for before that ironically, modernism *was* the resistance (to Stalinist social realism). Regardless, polarisation is deeply ingrained in architecture, as in politics, and remains a spectre that continues to haunt Hungary.

In this chapter I trace Hungarian architectural history from a politicisation point of view, from post-World War 2, till the 2000s, highlighting the thread of oppositionality running through time and its current weakening. With this my post-socialist case studies can be understood from the perspective of historical clash and path dependency, and to some extent, merely routine successors to a series of cases reflecting factionalism in architecture.

#### **I. Social Realism, Modernism and the Tulip Debate**

Post-war architectural subjugation first took root in 1951 with the imposition of social realism for the communist regime saw modernism as a western and cosmopolitan import and therefore denounced it (Simon and Laczó, 2015, p. 24). Social realism was short-lived, lasting only until 1956 (Simon and Laczó, 2015, p. 24; Aman 1992; Moravanszky 1987; Prakfalvi 1999, in Molnár, 2013, p. 115), but its imposition was impactful for it left a lasting impression on the profession (*ibid.*, p. 115). It became the pole against which modernism resisted, the latter being associated with international, western European trends (Szegő and Gerle 1982; interviews, in Molnár, 2013, p. 115). So once freed from its shackles, Hungarian architects embraced modernism with a greater vengeance (*ibid.*, p. 115), highlighting early tendencies to architectural antagonism. As Bonta (1984) writes of the exuberance, "At the initial euphoria, every modern form was a success. Hungarian architects hurried to get hold of forms regarded as backward in the time of socialist realism" (p. 20).

So when, in the mid-1970s a group of young architects – the Pécs Group – applied tulip forms to the facades of socialist housing blocks (Figure 1) in the city of Pécs, the advocates of modernism were enraged. In what is called the Tulip Debate, they railed against the idea of folk art on modernist forms, seeing it as "antimodern" (Molnár, 2013). The majority of the profession wanted to keep modernism pure as it was the link to western Europe and a "signal that Hungarian architects belonged to a cherished European cultural tradition" (*ibid.*, p. 120).

It also stood for resistance to Soviet rule (ibid., p. 120). Active in this dispute was Máté Major, an architect, and member of the communist party (Moravánszky, 2016, p. 35). In his opinion, architecture movements in 20th-century Hungary that referenced folk forms had ulterior political motives, and could be linked to authoritarianism and conservative views. (Major, 1975, in Kiss, 2016, p. 109). His statement shows the crystallisation of architectural association around political ideology.

The Tulip Debate was first time architectural modernism was called into question (Molnár, 2013, p. 105). Its proponents saw architecture as a receptacle of the nation as well as European traditions, and as central Europe being distinct from the Soviet Union (ibid., p. 105). Its critics levelled against the Pécs Group, the accusation of populism, casting the conflict in binaries so that modernism was not toppled (ibid., p. 127). They suggested, among other things, that the modern and the national were mutually exclusive (ibid., p. 121). As supporters and dissenters came crawling out of the woodwork, the debate reenabled the formation of camps and the clash was cast in urbanist-populist terms (Molnár, 2013; Kiss, 2016).

The administration crushed the resistance (Simon, 2006, p.25, in Kiss, 2016, p. 110) but the episode did not end there, for the clash could not stem the expanding “populist circle of Hungarian architects” whose forms drew from nature and native traditions (Simon, 2006, p.25-26, in Kiss, 2016, p. 110), from becoming more openly “traditionalist and antimodernist” (Makovecz, 1985, p. 225, 1993, p.10, in Kiss, 2016, p. 110). And when communism began to wane, and time came for resistance again, dissenters protested through the organic movement. This variety of postmodernism looked very much like the strive for a “return of ornamentation, vernacular traditions, historicism, and cultural identity” (Molnár, 2013, p. 106) concerns that already had quickenings in the failed tulip attempt.



*Figure 1: Tulip Houses in Pécs, Source: MTI, in Molnár, 2005, p. 113*

## **II. Postmodernism, the Organic Movement and Regime Change**

Postmodernism offered a welcome alternative, and attacked modernism through the use of “ornamentation, playfulness, stylistic eclecticism, and, especially in Europe, historicism in architecture (Habermas 1987; Jencks 1998 [1977]; Klotz 1988; Larson 1993)” (Molnár 2013, p. 106). Further, it was a strong force in central and eastern European countries (Moravánszky, 2016, p. 28). As Lange (2016) writes of the intersection between architecture and politics at the time, the style was used as “a means for re-framing identities. As forgotten or neglected

historical relationships were being reconsidered, for example, built heritage and preservation became inevitably politicized. Questioning the modern project on the level of aesthetics thus went hand in hand with rethinking its wider political premises (and future promises)" (p. 14). Much more so than in the west, postmodernism in these countries was serious business, for it concerned itself with the regional and national (Lange, 2016, p. 14).

One such attempt was the organic movement, driven by nationalist, conservative feeling and pushback against the regime (Heathcote, 2006, p. 36). Even so, Makovecz – its most famous pioneer – never intended to develop a Hungarian national architecture by using vernacular elements (Ferkai, 1998b, p. 291). He used universal folkloric motifs that transcended the Hungarian border (Moravanszky 1985, in Molnár, 2013, p. 130): vernacular elements like "gates, doorposts, and verandahs," motifs like "birds, flowers, spirals, yin-yang, hearts, totems" and anthropomorphic elements like the "face, eyes, mouth, rib cage, and skull" (Ferkai, 1998b, p. 291). Makovecz is worth mentioning because the organic movement was the only significant architectural resistance to what Heathcote (2006) calls the 'rational'. It did not offer a vision for the future, but continued to oppose, even post-1989; it shifted its battle from one object of opposition to another, i.e. from the severity of communist forms to the ubiquity of globalised capitalistic ones (Heathcote, 2006, p. 38).

The implication is that the movement was largely pure opposition, that rather than fighting *for* something was fighting *against* something else. Broadly seen, this is the quality of postmodernism itself, whose aim was to position itself *against*, rather than suggest the direction forward, a problem lying even with the name as Simon and Laczó (2015, p. 18) point out. In Hungary, when the regime changed, and there was no more need for resistance, postmodernism persisted in its vague all-embracing form, accommodating under its umbrella several types of architectural expression. So 1990s architecture does not show a specific direction despite regime change, and the defining feature of architecture as antagonism remains to a degree.

Several scholars, Moravánszky (2016) and Ferkai (1998b) included, point out that the fall of the Iron Curtain was not a hugely decisive moment for Hungary. Architecturally there had been contact with the west well before the change in regime, as documented by Zarecor (2014) and Moravánszky, (2016). The latter refers to the joint Budapest-Vienna Expo for 1995, called "Bridges into the Future" decided on in 1987 Moravánszky, (2016, p. 41) and even reads into its cancellation in 1991, asserting that "piercing the Wall led to much more interaction than its full removal has" (Moravánszky, 2016, p. 42). He says that "once it came down and full visibility was established, there was less interaction across the sides (ibid., p. 42). This is worth noting for it again points to Hungarian architecture organising itself around opposition. The wall had given rebels a purpose, so once the adversary was removed, its void had to filled with a new one.

### III. Early Post-socialism and the Seville Pavilion

One project that makes a case for the continuation of architectural polarisation in the post-socialist years and sets the stage for better understanding the controversies of the National Theatre, is the 1992 Seville Pavilion. It was the first to end up in the crossfire (Kiss, 2016, p. 112) of “this post-socialist Kulturkampf” (ibid.).

Hungary’s pavilion for the 1992 world exhibition was to be designed by István Janáky (Kiss, 2016, 113) however his design of a butterfly aviary signifying eastern European metamorphosis from caterpillar to butterfly, was roundly criticised for being too conceptual and not properly representing Hungarian national identity (Vargha, 1991, p. 43, in Kiss, 2016, p. 113). The commission was finally withdrawn and went to Makovecz who accepted (see Figure 2) once the communists had relinquished power (Kiss, 2016, p. 113-115). Janáky was not an architect associated with the left but was seen to represent cosmopolitan, urbanist interests (Kiss, 2016, p. 114), which makes it understandable as to why Makovecz’s populist leanings sat better with the right (ibid.).

The Seville case highlights the populist-urbanist conflict, an alternative view of the architectural politicisation. Kiss (2016) writes that the fissure was “so prominent that one could easily find oneself pigeon-holed into either, while lacking real ideological conviction” (p. 115). This divide closely mirrors the left-right divide, for as Palonen (2009, in Palonen, 2013, p. 546) points out in speaking of the National Theatre, the left was seen as promoting “pro-western attitudes” and foreign firms and capital. So socialist and urban got lumped together by virtue of both being enemies of the right.



*Figure 2: Seville Pavilion, Source: Makovecz Website and Avtavr Tumblr*

Also in 1992, Makovecz and a group of others founded the Hungary Academy of Arts (MMA) with the aim of protecting, representing and spreading Hungarian talent in the arts, architecture included (MMA website, n.d.). In 2011, the second Fidesz government passed a law converting it from a social into a public body (ibid.). That now MMA funds “nationally

minded" – often organic – architecture with government finances (Quirk, 2015) is worth mentioning as it points to the critiqued co-optation of the organic aesthetic by the party.

#### **IV. The 2000s**

The backdrop of clash is much more prominent for the National Theatre case which was during Fidesz's first term. In recent years there has been a loosening of rigid architectural opposition as will be shown in the contemporary Liget case. Architecture has less of a target and is more splintered and diverse. Comparing the current scene with 20<sup>th</sup> century architecture, Lamers (2015) writes that the classification into movements in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a more difficult task (p. 14). Economic circumstances have rendered architects more flexible and adaptable to various constraints, such as client requirements and site (Lamers, 2015, p. 14). He says that on accord of the disappearance of communist era restrictions, the last two decades can be seen to be characterised by architectural experimentation and diversity (ibid., p. 14). The dispersion in architectural direction of 21st century Hungary encompasses 'Post-Organicism', Hungarian Regionalism, Hungarian Minimalism, and a contemporary form of modernism (ibid.). Further with the influx of capital, building priorities have changed, and as Zarecor (2014) writes, the focus is on types like commercial skyscrapers, offices, luxury and suburban homes, and other high-end developments. "Such buildings fulfill (sic) residents' yearnings to have what they missed during communism, not only the physical presence of new, colorful, and well-made buildings, but also architecture practiced (sic) as a creative act by a known author" (p. 266).

This points to the sense of lack felt regarding the paucity of foreign architect-designed buildings Lamers (2015) laments, "No designs have been realised by any contemporary international 'star' architects: no "Gehry" or "Nouvel" as in Prague, also no "Renzo Piano" or "Norman Foster" as in Berlin" (p. 17). The author further writes, "Hopefully, in the near future some other first-class international architects will get to realize their designs in Hungary. This could positively influence the Hungarian building market" (Lamers, 2015, p. 19)

The change in architectural priorities is also the result of a generation of architects trained post-1989 (Heathcote, 2006; Lamers, 2015), their international outlook inspired by contemporary buildings, publications and visits to from other parts of Europe (Lamers, 2015, p. 16). With all these developments and the stress on the global, the 'national' question or quest for local architecture is increasingly backgrounded.

#### **V. Conclusion**

In this section I have taken a historical view to the decades of politicisation of architecture in Hungary. Authors have variously referred to this schism in talking of the Tulip Debate, the urban-populist divide, the Kulturkampf and the organic-versus-rational. All of these point to the same issue: that polarisation runs deep and essentially, twentieth century architecture was split down the middle – its decades neatly sorted into one or other category. This is largely the backdrop against which the National Theatre is set up, but notwithstanding, in

recent years, with a loosening up of strict positions, the context of the National Hauszmann Plan and Liget Project is slightly different. Regardless, history is impossible to shake off and continues to form the bedrock on which Budapest builds itself.

## 4. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

### I. The Method Adopted

My thesis adopts Robinson's comparative approach of 'thinking through elsewhere' (2016). She stresses the importance of focusing on "flows, networks, connections, influences, circulations" and advocates for analysing how processes travel between distinctive places (Robinson, 2016, p. 12). As explained, there is value in teasing apart post-socialist Budapest – and more generally, post-socialist cities – through the established body of literature that postcolonial theory offers. This approach in comparative urbanism positions cities 'in a world of cities' (Robinson, 2011), instead of seeing them as isolated objects. She further advocates, that the essence of such research lies in making international comparisons (ibid.), rather than obviously similar ones; the latter end up being restrictive and geography-bound (Robinson, 2016).

Robinson's (2011; 2016) approach finds specific resonance in Tuvikene's (2016) conception of a 'deterritorialised' approach to studying post-socialist urbanism. Deterritorialisation sees the socialist aftermath as a concept that can be applied to various aspects of the city, regardless of spatial or temporal constraints. It moves beyond "particular territorialized urban experiences" (ibid., p. 140), so as to achieve a more "global imagination of cities by relying on frameworks less susceptible to area-based hegemonic conceptualizations." (ibid., p. 140).

Given that I apply Robinson's approach, the comparative element lies in the travelling of theory between contexts. Postcolonial theory becomes the peg on which I fasten post-socialist empirical findings, whereby I analyse the extent to which the three cases are in alignment with said theory. And in my final analysis too, where I compare nation-building across the three cases, I do this while staying within the postcolonial framework as constructed in the Literature Review.

### II. Research Methods

My units of analysis are: one, the decision-making procedure, and two, the architectural outcome in terms on design.

Decision-making: Here I study the selection/appointment of professionals, analysis of the architectural competitions held – their degree of openness, and of honouring the jury's decisions, and of the overall architectural procedure, through:

- Interviews – Academics, Heads of Projects, Opposing Groups, Architects involved
- Media Analysis

Architecture: Here I study the built outcome of the cases – their design, siting, and the architectural styles adopted, through:

- Interviews with Architects concerned
- Media Analysis



- Visual Analysis
- Analysis of Hungarian Architectural History

- **Interviews**

I contacted around 35 potential respondents and could eventually conduct 11 semi-structured interviews. I have used data from eight. Of these, five were in-person interviews conducted during a two-week research stay in Budapest, one was on the phone and two were by email. All were recorded and transcribed. All but one in-person interview was in English. This was with Nagy in Hungarian and I used an interpreter. The email interview with Turi Attila was also in Hungarian. Where I have quoted from this interview, I had translation help from a native speaker. All my in-person interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 2.5 hours, the longest one being the interpreter-assisted interview with Nagy. Nagy and Balogh have been anonymised. The details of my interviews are as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Date and Place</b>
Balogh	Architect and urbanist	27 March 2018, Lumen Café, Budapest, in-person
István Schneller	Chief Architect of Budapest (1994-2006), former member of Hauszmann Committee	28 March, 2018, Szent István University, in-person
Dezső Ekler	Architect, former member of the Hungarian Academy of Arts (MMA), participant in National Theatre competition, 2000	28 March, 2018, Ekler Építész Kft., in-person
Nagy	Involved in the National Theatre design process	30 April, 2018, National Theatre, in-person
Rostás Zoltán	Strategy Director, Városliget Zrt. (Liget Project)	3 April, 2018, Városliget Zrt., in-person
Edwin Heathcote	Architecture critic at the Financial Times, jury member on the Liget Project, author of works on Hungarian architecture	7 July, 2018, phone
Emilia Palonen	Political scientist and scholar active in the areas of populism, politics of memory and nationalism, urban cultural policy, etc, Hungary	15 August, 2018, email
Turi Attila	Architect involved in the organic movement, Head of Art Department, MMA	12 August 2018, email

I have analysed my interviews using the thematic method as described by Morse (2012), who writes of identification of a theme running through the interview. She writes, "Sometimes the theme is foregrounded, sometimes it is backgrounded, and sometimes it is present only by inference and revealed through indicators, signs, metaphors, or other means of interpretation" (p. 197). In my case, this theme is nation-building through architecture in relation to my case studies.

- **Media Analysis**

Much ink has been spilt on the controversies surround these projects and most of the media and architecture platforms are in Hungarian. Wherever possible I have used English sources, but where I have used Hungarian ones, I had help from a native speaker.

- **Analysis of Hungarian Architectural History**

All my case studies have historical path-dependencies, but my contemporary ones – the Liget and National Hauszmann projects – reference the post-Resolution era in a much more specific and direct way. Architectural history as analysed, has been interwoven with the findings from other methods in the empirical presentation of these two cases.

- **Visual Analysis**

I have used visual analysis to back up claims made by respondents in interviews or from the information I obtained in through media and discourse analysis. Based on simple observations of architecture from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century during my visit, I have drawn correlations between built form then and now – in my cases. The National Theatre, already having been completed, I could make on-site observations, and in the case of the Liget and National Hauszmann projects, my observations are based on architectural projections and 3Ds.

- **Limitations**

One limitation was of course the language barrier that possibly hampered my response rate to interview requests, and also to conducting wholly meaningful interviews with those whom I interviewed in Hungarian. The reading material was also restricted, for example, there is an entire book on the National Theatre design written by the architect which was inaccessible to me.

Additionally I was not able to talk to any politicians and this could have been due to the timing of my research stay. For example, the city mayor of the early 1990s Gábor Demszky was willing to talk to me but was busy on account of the upcoming national elections in April.

A further limitation is due to the historical nature of the research. A few people I would have benefited from speaking to are either no more like György Schwajda and Imre Makovecz, or,

as in the case of architects Ferenc Bán and György Vadász, retired as I was told, and reside outside Budapest. I was also told that they might not speak English, and eventually for their inputs, I had to rely on secondary sources.

The consequence of these constraints is that most of my respondents were architects or academics.

- **Note on Terminology**

In the interest of avoiding confusion, henceforth, “communists” refer to pre-1989 rulers and “socialists” refer to the post-1989 democratically elected Hungarian socialist party. Where “socialist” appears in respondent statements, I have retained it, but it is clear from the statements which government is being referred to.

## 5. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

### CASE I: THE NATIONAL THEATRE

The National Theatre was unveiled in 2002. Its history is one of a series of constructions, demolitions and competitions spanning over a century and leaders of different political stripes. The current theatre was finally built by the Orbán-led Fidesz government. The route that the project took before finally being realised clearly shows the deep wedge in Hungarian politics and how architectural space became the battleground for warring factions. In this section I show through historical symbolism, procedure and politics related to architectural decisions, and architecture, the ways in which the project is one of nation-building in post-socialist Budapest.

#### I. Historical Symbolism

The history of the theatre and the question concerning its construction, goes back to first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when national feeling was on the rise (Sisa, 1998a, p. 145). The idea of having a National Theatre was also part of the nation-building wave that gripped Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Bodnar and Veres, 2013, p. 94). For Hungary, this was deeply connected with the struggle for national independence itself, the right to use the native language and have a place where Hungarian dramas could be performed (Nánay, 2014, 116). To this end a humble theatre building (see Figure 3) was built in the years, 1835-1837 (Sisa, 1998a, p. 160).



Figure 3: National Theatre, 1835, Source: *Építész Forum*, 2000



Figure 4: National Theatre, 1874, Source: *Egikör Website*, in *Anubis127 Blog*, 2017

The period of growing national sentiment gave way to the post-Resolution period, one of full-blown nation-building. At this time the former theatre was remodelled (1873-1876) but in 1913 had to be demolished for safety reasons. Following this, the People's Theatre (1874-75), later known as the National Theatre was built (see Figure 4), and this is the building that came to become a matter of pride for Hungarians during the communist years and after. This too was demolished – by the communists in 1965 on the pretext that the space was needed

to build a metro line. The reason for demolition was a falsehood according Balogh who called it “much more a political act” (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). The demolition was a blow to the Hungarian people (Palonen, 2013, p. 545) and the theatre came to be seen as eternally ephemeral, and a building that never was (Bodnar and Veres, 2013, p. 94). Balogh, and architect and urbanist, referred to there being “a kind of an accumulated frustration around that” (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). It came to be an approved sign of national identity across party lines, as seen in that competitions were held in 1989, 1997 and 2000, each at a time when a different party was in power.

Constructing a national theatre gave the Fidesz government the opportunity to both hark back to a favourable time in history and assert continuity from that time, as well as villainise the previous government – socialist – along the way. Nation-building in this project was an agenda that was not simply about assertion of identity but about tearing down the previous government. Further being a cultural project, it sat very well with the government agenda which was to promote culture as the “primarily the task of the government” (Government of Hungary, 1998, p. 47-48 in Fowler, 2004, p. 61).



*Figure 5: National Theatre, 2002, Source: Marc Ryckaert in Wikimedia Commons*

## **II. Decision-making Procedure**

- **Choice of Site**

When the first Orbán government came to power in October 1998, they scrapped the previous government’s plans, changed the site, and established a new committee to oversee the project. Heading this was György Schwajda – a veteran theatre person – who has variously been called “special advisor to the government” (Palonen, 2013, p. 546), Minister of Defence (Szobota, 1999) and more disparaging, “self-proclaimed national theatre chief architect” (Vargha, 2000). Schwajda would not report to Ministry of Culture but directly to Orbán (Bodnar and Veres, 2013, p. 95).

The previous government had planned for the theatre in the city centre, at Erzsébet Square, and even commenced building works, using the design of Ferenc Bán. When Fidesz took power, they moved the site from Erzsébet Square to a plot of land further south, along the Danube, a part of the upcoming agglomeration called the Millennium City. This parcel of land held significance because it was the designated area for the world exhibition slated to be have been held in 1995, and cancelled by the previous government on account of

budgetary problems (Palonen, 2013, p. 538). With the exhibition, the intention – of both left and right – had been to transform the city the way the 1896 World Expo had done (Palonen, 2013, p. 538). Palonen (2013) writes that the future development of city infrastructure “also had a nation-building function, which the Hungarian right wanted to recall with the 1990s Expo plans: claiming to represent direct continuity from this national golden era” (p. 538). The Expo had been planned to be held in the Millennium City and Nagy, who was part of the National Theatre design process said that the land was already designated for cultural use as per its arrangement plan (Nagy 2018 personal communication, 30 March). So, the government nation-building agenda could well be achieved through the National Theatre project. Further, through the location, this could be done while also dealing a blow to the previous government on multiple counts: one, by changing its chosen site, two, by changing it to state-owned land (Ilona, Népszabadság, May 9, 2001, in Palonen, 2013, p. 546), three, by perversely going back to a site where the left had cancelled earlier exhibition plans, and four, because the site was far removed from the city. Points three and four highlight Fidesz’s unwillingness to engage with the city, a reflection of the urban-populist division that authors have claimed are remnants from the time of the Tulip Debate.

As Déry (2001) writes, “This is the first nationally important public building in Budapest to be removed from the historically located inner city of the capital. This fact reflects the opposition between the “civilian and national” government and the “liberal and cosmopolitan””. This and the fact that the theatre would be housed on nationally-held land shows how keenly the government wanted to steer clear of any association with the city and its government. Regardless of political intent, the official reason for the change in site was financial (Nagy 2018, personal communication, 30 March).

- **Choice of Architect**

Not only was the selection of site political, but also that of the architect. Though the Ministry was obligated to float a tender for building (Szobota, 1999), it did not; no competition was held and instead, the project was handed to Mária Siklós. Siklós had much experience in working on theatre architecture (Nagy 2018, personal communication, 30 March), but according to Vargha (2000) had never designed one, having always been involved in reconstructions. Schwajda and Siklós knew each other based on prior association, when Siklós refurbished the theatre in Szolnok (Vargha, 2000; Respondent, 4, 2018) – under Schwajda’s presidency (Nagy 2018, personal communication, 30 March). They were also in talks about collaborating on the Thália Theatre reconstruction when he was director there (ibid.). It is also said that there was another connection, this being Siklós’ design of Schwajda’s own house (Vargha, 2000; Szobota, 1999; D Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March) which raises suspicions on her choice.

Based on this choosing, the chairman of the Chamber of Hungarian Architects (MEK) resigned, for he could not convince Schwajda “that the selection of an architect for such an important building is mandatory to be by public tendering” (Vargha, 2000). Opposition also

emerged from the Association of Hungarian Architects (MÉSZ), an independent cultural organisation, that protested that the original construction was stopped (Papirusz.hu, 2003). This prompted the Hungarian Chamber of Architects to hold another competition, heavily qualified however, because two of the conditions were: the competition would be by invitation – and there were only seven invitees (Papirusz.hu, 2000) – and that proposals should use Siklós' design (Origo.hu, n.d.).

Referring to his attempts to push Schwajda to have a competition for the project, Schneller, then Chief Architect of the city, said, “[W]e tried to explain him that it is not good that there is no competition. And so it was, he promised that he makes a competition. And after that conversation, he made a very quick competition, but invitation competition” (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). The competition was won by György Vadász, on the basis of it being the closest to resemble Siklós’ (Bodnar and Veres, 2013, p. 96), but eventually the commission went back to Siklós, the reason being that he did not want to use and modify her design, nor give his name to it (ibid.).

What is clear is that the government did everything in their capacity, including flouting due process, to have Siklós design the theatre but the reasons for choosing her were not governed by her particular oeuvre or architectural aesthetic. The absence of such a link was stressed by all the respondents I posed this question to. Balogh, “So changing the architect had been on a kind of a political basis. So of course, if you do a National Theatre and your project gets scrapped as a political decision-maker, you want to have your own people. So again it was a personal project to choose the designer [...]” (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). Schneller said, “[T]here was not a political decision that it has to be built in a traditional Hungarian style, but I think that was the most important was to make it very quickly, and it has to be finished up till the next elections [...]” (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). And practising architect, Ekler too dismissed aesthetic considerations. He said more generally, that the only connection between politicians and the MMA architects commissioned to design such buildings was money, power and influence (Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March). In terms of formal, aesthetic elements, the only connection was building size, and further, short deadlines accompanied by the pride of completing projects on a tight timeline (ibid.). That was all (ibid.).

As for the speedy deadlines that Schneller and Ekler mentioned, Nagy said of the project, “[I]t was governmentally decided that a new theatre should be built by 2002, the 15<sup>th</sup> of March” before the site was decided (Nagy 2018, personal communication, 30 March) even. The date is sacred for being Hungary’s annual national holiday when it celebrates the anniversary of its failed 1848 revolution against Habsburg rule. The National Theatre was completed in 19 months (ibid.) and had its opening ceremony on the 15<sup>th</sup> of March (Bodnar and Veres, 2013, p. 96). Elections would be held less than a month later. The date, the quick work and the looming election, all fed into the project procedure.

- **Choice of Style**

The government did not have a style of choice, but it did have certain principles that it specified, through which it intended that nation-building be embodied in the theatre building. Nagy stated, "[T]he programme of the theatre, which was specified and determined by [Schwajda] [...]. It wasn't a long list of requirements. First of all the theatre should be functional, but it should also utilise valuable traditions of theatre building which has a history of 2500 years. But it should also use the technical innovations of the 21st century. And it should also protect and make a reference to the Hungarian architectural traditions next to the Millennium City Centre" (Nagy 2018, personal communication, 30 March). The statement throws light on two aspects of the design brief: one, that guidelines were specified by the ruling power, and two, the guidelines themselves, i.e. that the design be a mix of old and new. Qualifying the first point, Nagy was clear that while the inclusion of historicist elements was a requirement from the client, it was not felt to be an imposition because this kind of approach was "close to" the architect's way of thinking (ibid.). Nor was there a style specification: "[T]he client's needs did not include any actual specific thoughts on style, and stylish elements. And yet they were very significant and [an inspiration] in the whole process before the building was finished" (ibid.). So, the ruling party stated guiding principles but did not determine the specifics of style.

Even if the architect and government were wholly in sync as Nagy impressed, Siklós did not command architectural awe and the two parties were not collaborating on equal ground. As Balogh put it, "[S]he was an unknown architect, and stayed like that afterwards too" (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). According to Ekler, she had never actively been an architect, rather more worked on interiors (D Ekler, personal communication, 28 March). There was a power imbalance tilted in favour of the government, not a conscious choice for ideological reasons or because of a specific architectural quality possessed of the architect. It has even been said that when Siklós was asked why she chose this style, her response was that she was following the commissioner's wishes (Népszabadság, 2001, in Palonen, 2013, p. 547).

- **Anti-socialist Backlash**

The choice of architect and site was disconnected from any inherent quality they possessed and moreover an exertion of power directed at the previous government – the socialists. As Balogh said of the grounds for cancellation, "It wasn't on aesthetic base that they cancelled the project, it was purely on political statement, that, "Whatever the socialist government decided upon, we are cancelling that."" (2018, personal communication, 27 March). The rejection of Bán's design was just an excuse (ibid.). Schneller confirmed, "I think it was only the intention to stop because it was begun by the former government, and we have to do anything else." (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). These statements on



the decision-making show that nation-building for the government was *against* something rather than *for* a certain principle.

Their decision-making was defined by oppositionality rather than specifying an architectural aesthetic. The attempt was to *undo* rather than *do* so the government simply upturned previously-made decisions. To this end, the resistance was mounted, not directly against the communist regime but against the previous government by equating it to the communists. As Fowler (2004) writes, the first Fidesz term can only be understood in reactionary terms for the socialist government connoted to some extent “non-national, communist-era traditions” (p. 61).

- **Factionalism**

Splintering of groups once the communist yoke was shed is also seen in that the district mayor, belonging to the liberal party, halted the construction, claiming problems with the permit (Bodnar and Veres, 2013, p. 96). Subsequently, a permit was passed at the municipal level and construction began (ibid.). Later the Budapest Chamber of Architects initiated legal action against Siklós for signing the contract prior to the competition results, but after that the head of state even awarded her with “the order of distinction” (ibid.).

The constant wrangling and controversy shows how splintered the political situation was and how the notion of nation was one directed at other political parties within the nation rather than at the former oppressor or at the world. The enemy was made an internal threat. This is a product of the neoliberal era, where a rescaling of statehood (Brenner, 2004) has taken place, and there are leaders at the national, city and district level, and also various other bodies. So despite ham-handed measures and weak institutions, the case saw civil society protests, political opposition and bad press trying to push through the cracks in the governmental power-flexing.

### **III. Architecture**

As in decision-making, so too in architecture did oppositional political behaviour surface. Architectural design became a battleground, not because its actual built form represented either the right or left but because it was used as such. When asked about parties having architectural styles of preference, Palonen, an academic who researches this area, stated in an email interview, “They may want to talk about their mutual difference in these terms. There is nothing intrinsic in this relationship but this is rhetorically constituted for strategic purposes” (E Palonen, 2018, personal communication, 15 August). Attila, an architect, too, when asked whether there are political party-based architectural preferences roundly rejected the notion, saying, “No. This is so weak and low-pitched.” (T Attila 2018, personal communication, 15 August).

Still architecture was politicised, and pointing to the political colour of it, rather than any architectural quality, Palonen said, “The whole point is in the confrontation itself not the

contents of it" (E Palonen, 2018, personal communication, 15 August). This confrontation played out as styles were appropriated on either end of the political spectrum. As Palonen wrote, "[T]he Orbán government articulated a preference for the historicist-regionalist organic architecture [...]. In contrast to that the socialist government preferred more clear-lined modernist themes in style" (ibid.).

- **Bán's Design**

Before the Orbán government took power from the socialists in 1998, the commission belonged to Ferenc Bán. His design was a "modernist building" (Palonen, 2013, p. 546), which is what prompted the World Federation of Hungarians – Hungary's largest NGO – to protest, arguing that it contained glass walls and did not meet the standard of being 'Hungarian,' for glass reflected the communist period (Palonen, 2013, p. 546). They also argued that this building was simultaneously being capitalist, symbolic as it was of the capital influx, foreign firms and the liberal market, all of which the left had come to stand for (Palonen 2009 in Palonen, 2013, p. 546). The wedge was being cast in urbanist-populist terms (Palonen, 2013).

As seen in Figure 6, Bán's design lacks organic forms or lifted historicist elements, his preference being for abstraction of historical and natural elements (Szabó, 2015) over wholesale lifting. Szabó (2015) refers to the freestanding columns as "clear classical architectural quotation" (p. 156). Bán (1997, p. 24, in Szabó, 2015) himself states of the design, "Deconstruction disciplined by a colonnade. Rigidity and playfulness. ... Differentiation and simplicity. Instead of the nostalgic reminiscence of the former siting, a real greenery with terrain motions of hills and valleys, flowing through under the building." The combination or "collage" (Szabó, 2015) of massy volumes and deconstructed, fragmented elements arranged asymmetrically on the site, might have proved too conceptual for the Fidesz government.

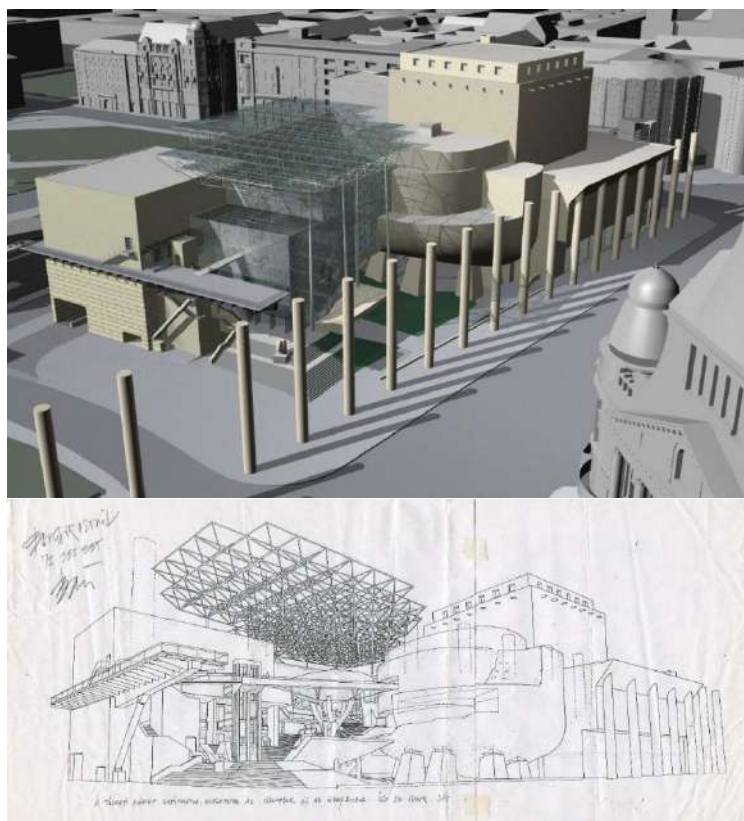


Figure 6: Bán's Design, Source: Bán, 1998, in Szabó, 2015

- **Vadász's Design**

Of the competition that Schwajda was forced to hold Ekler, who was invited to participate, stated that the brief stipulated conditions on parts of Siklós' design that must be retained. He said that in the competition brief given to the participants, there was a red line drawn around the theatre, the main hall and the stage, indicating that these elements could not be touched (D Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March). They were allowed to redesign only the surface and facades but not alter the height and Siklós' original idea (ibid.).

The winning design by György Vadász was also not upheld. Vadász too, was not particularly known for organic or historicist designs, something that would not have sat well with Fidesz's nation-building. In fact, Vadász's office is associated with being the pioneer of the resurgence of modernism in the 1990s (Sütő, 2002, p. 83, in Simon and Laczó's, 2015, p. 20). Ekler referred to Vadász's proposal as being entirely in the CIAM<sup>1</sup> aspect, of the 30s and 40s (D Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March). He described the design as having a lot of white, a large cantilevered roof and glass elements (ibid.).

As for what this represented, his later statement accurately summarised the politicisation of style: he said that Vadász's design looked significantly more modern than the one in the centre and consequently like a product of the left (ibid.). He added that there was a furore in a magazine at the time wherein one critic questioned the government's motives for working in this style, because modernism could be associated with the left (ibid.). Defending his design, Vadász (2000, in Palonen, 2013, p. 546) asserted that he had combined tradition and simplicity in what was a Hungarian design. But as Palonen (2013) writes, "[T]he discourse on architecture that the government professed equated any "organic" style with national, whereby any glass-walled box must be foreign, metropolitan" (p. 546). Eventually both Bán and Vadász were side-lined.

- **Siklós' Design**

Eclectic architecture, prevalent in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, was characterised by a reversion to historicist elements and given that it was the predecessor of modernism which toppled it, it can be seen as the natural choice of the right. Siklós' design is eclectic (Nagy 2018, personal communication, 30 March) for it lifts from the past. She had used this historicist inspiration from the last 100 to 150 years in all her theatre architecture, and had also understood the details while working on the eclectically-designed 19<sup>th</sup> century National Opera House reconstruction (ibid.).



*Figure 7: Statues on the Façade, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 35*

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<sup>1</sup> CIAM (Congrès internationaux d'architecture moderne) was the seminal conference in Athens when a band of architects officially decided to spread the principles of modernist architecture.



*Figure 8: Neo-renaissance Arches on the Façade, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 49*



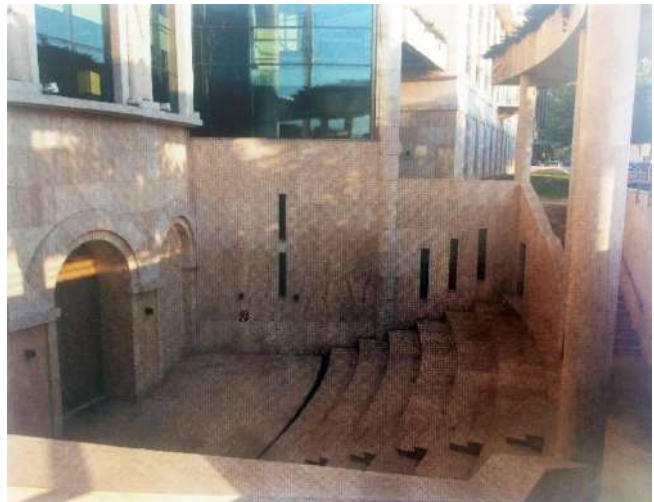
*Figure 9: Neo-renaissance Arches on the Façade, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 40*

The abundance of statues on the façade (see Figure 7) and semi-circular arches (see Figures 8 and 9) are Renaissance-inspired. Of the former Nagy said that the absence of sculptures in the last 50 years was unlike architecture of the previous century and with their placement in the National Theatre, "history appears and also the traditions appear" (ibid.).

Roman amphitheatre-inspired spaces are incorporated in the design both internally and as an add-on element outside. The former (see Figure 10) is by means of the colosseum-like central stage area that was not to be touched as per the competition brief, and the latter (see Figure 11) is a small playing space (ibid.).



*Figure 10: Internal Amphitheatre, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 112*



*Figure 11: External Amphitheatre, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 42*

Other period elements that have been designed into the National Theatre are the sweeping, floral metal fabrication of the roof projection and door handles among other places. These are seen in Figures 12 and 15 in the National Theatre and in Figures 13, 14 and 16 in turn-of-the-century architecture. Their inspiration can be inferred through the similarity in forms. Siklós wanted to invoke history and such elements became part of her toolkit.





Figure 12: Roof Projection, National Theatre, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 35



Figure 13: Front Porch Roof, Liszt Ferenc Academy of Music, Budapest, Source: Dore, 2018



Figure 14: Front Porch Roof, Budapest Operetta Theatre, Budapest, Source: Dore, 2018



Figure 15: Door Handles, National Theatre, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 33



Figure 16: Door Handles, Budapest Operetta Theatre, Budapest, Source: Dore, 2018

A prominent element of the design is the recreated façade of the old theatre. Demolished by the communists in 1965, it finds itself in a watery grave at the entrance to the new one (Figure 17). Referring to this, Nagy stated that its demolition gave it a sacred meaning and its incorporation was Schwajda's idea, for he had "experienced the demolition of the theatre so deeply that he wanted to display this experience in some way" (Nagy 2018,



*Figure 17: Memorial to the Former National Theatre, Source: Siklós, 2007, p. 133*

personal communication, 30 March). This element shows a direct confrontation with the communist past and points again to the oppositional nature of the government's post-socialist nation-building in architecture. Designing this into the theatre also shows the difference with Bán's approach of refraining from invoking the nostalgia of the previous site (Bán, 1997, p. 24, in Szabó, 2015).

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The driver of Fidesz's post-socialist nation-building as seen in the National Theatre was oppositionality. In both decision-making and architectural form, the target was the previous socialist government for they were equated to the communists. When Fidesz took power they perversely changed the site and architect which led to much controversy. Further, they politicised design by choosing architecture with organic and eclectic elements over rectilinear forms for the latter connoted modernism and therefore, the previous government.



## CASE II: THE NATIONAL HAUSZMANN PLAN

The National Hauszmann Plan is the multi-phase refurbishment of the Buda Castle District launched in 2014 by the third Orbán government. It is touted as being the largest project in the coming years (Taraszovics, 2015) and is massive in scope for its attempted overhaul of the Castle District. It is slated to continue till 2024 (Diplomata Magazin, n.d.). However, project in-charge and prime minister's state secretary for cultural heritage and prominent cultural projects, László L. Simon stated that the entirety could even take up to 20 years to be finished (Hungarian Spectrum, 2014; Lyman, 2016). A national budget of 7.9 billion HUF (EUR 25.8mn) was rolled out for 2015 (Gulyás, 2015) and 3.4 billion HUF (EUR 10.6mn) for 2016 (Sain, 2016). Established at the institution of the National Hauszmann Plan was a Hauszmann Committee, consisting of 34 experts and decision-makers from various fields (Kelecsényi, 2015), the team including architects, historians, and others, their task being to assist and discuss the possibilities for the work (Hungary Today, 2014).

The Buda Castle with its current exterior is a product of constructions from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, encapsulating architectural styles from early baroque to full-blown baroque (Kelényi, 1998b, p. 118). It was badly damaged during the Second World War and all the service buildings outside the palace, built during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, were demolished (Magyar, 2018). This includes the Royal Stables, Riding School and Guard Building. The Riding School and the Guard Building, that were demolished during the communist years, will be rebuilt as per their original designs as part of the initial works of the National Hauszmann Plan (see Figures 18-21). Contemporary materials will be used while maintaining a 19<sup>th</sup> century appearance. Current works also include the renovation of the Csikós Court and rebuilding of the Stöckl staircase (Sain, 2016) as shown in Figure 22.



Figure 9: Riding School, pre-war, Source: *Építész Forum*, 2015

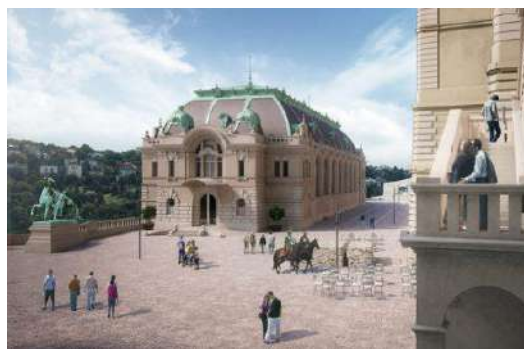


Figure 8: Riding School, National Hauszmann Plan Visualisation, Source: *Buda Castle Budapest*



Figure 20: Guard Building, pre-war, Source: *Skyscraper City*, 2015



Figure 21: Guard Building, National Hauszmann Plan Visualisation, Source: *KÖZTI*, in *We Love Budapest*, 2016



*Figure 22: Csikós Court and Stöckl staircase, National Hauszmann Plan Visualisation, Source: KÖZTI, in Bud News, 2016*

One of the main wings of the palace currently houses the National Gallery, important to mention because it will move to the Liget museum complex. The palace is also home to the Budapest History Museum and National Széchényi Library. According to the Prime Minister's Office, the palace will continue to be used as a cultural quarter, with the addition of some ministerial functions (Gulyás, 2015).

In this section I analyse the project from the perspective of what it means for nation-building. Given that it is a restoration work, architectural design is relevant inasmuch as what it connotes symbolically. There are two dimensions. One is the architectural restorations through which those in power attempt to fix in public memory the importance of a certain era. The second dimension is about decision-making and politics, and the self-importance of prime minister Orbán as seen in the National Hauszmann Plan procedure.

## **I. Architectural Restoration**

### **• History and Symbolism**

The Buda Castle has been a source of pride for all its history, and concurrent with geopolitical shifts in Hungary's positionality, a canvas for architectural experimentation – "an architectural diary of Hungarian history" as Harrach (1990) most incisively called the Castle Hill. The palace is significant first for its construction and position in a time of 14<sup>th</sup> century medieval prosperity, then its demolition by the Turks during the 1541-1686 siege, followed by its occupation by the Austrian army. The army converted the remains into a fortification and installed an underwhelming design (Kelényi, 1998b, p. 120). The palace continued to remain much longed for and Hungarian aristocracy petitioned Maria Theresa to have a grand version built. She did, though as a token of appeasement, never considering moving in, so it was never used as a royal palace (ibid.). Later with the monumental 1867 Resolution that made Hungary equal partner in the monarchy, its meaning grew even greater and a whole wing was added by Alajos Hauszmann, the namesake of the current plan. The addition effectively doubled the size of the palace (Sisa, 1998b, p. 206), so that when completed in



1905, it was the largest and grandest royal palace in the world (ibid.), its grandeur speaking unequivocally of Budapest's aspirations of equalling Vienna (ibid.).

The palace is furthermore significant for its position in the Second World War and after. In 1944 it was besieged for nearly two months as it was caught in the crossfire between German and Soviet troops (Harrach, 1990). It was later renovated by the communist government. The interior was simplified and modernised (Sisa, 1998, p. 206), work that has been condemned as being of poor quality by the current government, prompting it too, to tinker with the architecture.

- **Harking back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

The palace has always been a node of insecurity, and this plan is one more attempt in a centuries-old slew of attempts by the powerful, to regain control of it. The current attempt is to revive fin de siècle glory, so all the renovation and restoration works are geared towards this goal. As one author points out, "It seems that the most important consideration in the project is to remake the royal palace as it was before 1945. Whatever changes were made since then will be obliterated. *With 1945 time stopped* (emphasis added)" (Hungarian Spectrum, 2014).

Not only does time seem to have stopped in 1945 but it seems to have started in 1867, with the Resolution. This was a time of economic boom – the Gründerzeit – in view of which, the extant castle acquired renewed importance and was enlarged. For the government this doubling in size was the castle's highest point, so the Habsburg years are papered over. This is noteworthy as it reflects an unwillingness to engage with an unpleasant history – a period it considered itself as being colonised by the Habsburgs. In speaking of the need for the project, Laszlo L. Simon (in Lyman, 2016) said, "The castle was always in a special position," and. "It was the actual place of the rulers until the Habsburg years. So this is an attempt to bring the castle into this era of national renewal." His words indicate that for the current nation-building frenzy, some periods in history are of higher priority than others. It is clear that the pre-1867 Habsburg years are not one of them and therefore must be dispensed with.

Yet, resentment towards the Habsburgs went hand-in-hand with needing to 'match up' so after the Resolution, the castle enlargement was a grandiose gesture of overcompensation. Ekler stated that the ambitions of the Hungarian political leaders at the time was always to be at the same level as the Austrians, not subordinate (D Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March) and they needed something to show for their newly acquired position – a physical landmark in the cityscape. The dogged building of it was a show the world that this was the Kaiser's home, when in fact, the Kaiser was Austrian (ibid.). He called it tricky political thinking and the result of the aspirations of the powerless to imperial status (ibid.).

Similar insecurity takes architectural interventions of the current government to this same time period. Hungary was nation-building then and is nation-building now. As Balogh stated

of the current tendency towards nostalgia, "Now of course the current regime is much more explicit about this whole nation-building exercise through architecture, so there's a very strong historicist revival totally detached from contemporary discourse in architecture" (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). And Schneller spoke of it as "national pride or historical pride [...] from the government side" (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). Attila on the other hand was in favour of the reconstructions, stating that "if a nation's identity involves an architectural work, it must be rebuilt" (T Attila 2018, personal communication, 15 August). As is clear, it is still from the Resolution and after that the government derives Hungary's sense of validation and identity. So the attempt is to restore the castle to its pre-war condition.

- **Pushback Against Communism**

The National Hauszmann Plan is moreover legitimated as the castle stands not only as a symbol of good times but importantly as a symbol of a communism-free time. Prime minister Orbán called the Hauszmann Committee "the war council" and his decision to undertake the project "the reconquest of the castle for the Hungarian people" (Hungarian Spectrum, 2014). The buildings were used as mental institutions, prisons and for other functions during the communist period (T Attila personal communication, 15 August), so presumably the war is being waged against the phantom of communism. Further, the communist dictum to obliterate the past (ibid.) is seen to be met with an overexuberant revival of it. Attila stated that if an old building can be rescued, decision makers would favour saving it through reinterpretation and rework than demolition and rebuilding (ibid.). In the National Hauszmann Plan this seems to translate in some places at least to wholesale rebuilding.

The castle is further entwined with communist history for being subjugated to supposedly poor renovations made to the damaged parts in the 50s and 60s. In an official statement, questioning the internal and external appearance of the palace, László L. Simon said that the reconstruction and demolitions contributed to destroying the historical value of the palace just as much as the war itself did (Balázs, 2015).

This sentiment is echoed by many professionals, for as Schneller stated, "There are a lot of architects or historians on that side, who thought that the reconstruction under the Kádár regime [communists] was not good, and therefore we have to show to the world that we have a real castle in original style. And therefore step by step, we have to reconstruct the buildings in the original situation. And this was liked by the minister president or the circle of ministers, persons in contact with him, and they tried to realise this [...]" (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28th March). He elaborated on the mindset of the government saying, "[T]he simplified reconstruction, the democratic government explained that it was made by the communist regime, because they hated the so-called royal Hungary and so on. But it was not so. It was, that time in the 60s and 70s, it was all over Europe that little simplification or modern principles were used..." (ibid.).

Of these restorations, the respondents I asked were positive; Schneller said that although it was a simplified and a slightly modern restoration it was "quite good" (ibid.). Heathcote, an architecture critic with much knowledge of Hungarian architecture, too said the same: "[T]hey did, actually, I think a very interesting job of recreating a lot of buildings and putting some quite subtle modern interventions in the 50s and 60s" and "They did it very well, the socialist government of the 50s and 60s did actually a very good job" (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July). Heathcote also commended the contemporary government for their approach to historic architecture (ibid.) and said that there hasn't been too much rebuilding of lost structures "which is surely a good thing" (ibid.).

In this project however, where there is rebuilding, it stands diametrically opposite the communist approach to restoration. Harrach (1990) who worked on the restorations of the 50s writes that architects were "'not to copy what had existed, not to try to remake what had been destroyed, and still less to create "new old" things'" (Team of Architect, 1976, in Harrach, 1990). Further, not only does the government see the restorations themselves as poor but they also stand as a living, daily reminder of the nation's communist past that it so badly wants to shake off. Of these years, Heathcote explicated, "In the post-war years the communist government was keen to keep the memory of the war alive, because communism was the resistance, the resistance to the Nazis, so they felt they had good on their side, and the traces of the Second World War were left as a reminder of why the socialists had taken power" (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July). What this means is that the current government sees the castle as a site of neglect by the communist government, in a self-serving gesture of their post-war conquest. In this respect, the castle has become the battleground with the architectural legacy of the now non-existent enemy. For by tinkering with its architecture, the current government seeks to undo a painful history, as if the war never happened, as if communism never happened. This, Simon and Laczó (2015) write is a frequent tool in historiography – the obliteration of the recent past in favour of a distant one (p. 25). Speaking of architects, they write, "The total exclusion of all achievements of socialism was the key that led Hungarian architects to the realization of a direct revival and the casting aside of everything in between" (Simon and Laczó, 2015, p. 25).

In his statement, László L. Simon spoke of the pre-1989 renovation as architectural sin or injustice needing correction and of the presence of open wounds pending closing (Kahlweit, 2016). And Heathcote explained, "I think with the demise of the socialist government – now there's a right-wing government – they're less keen to look at the legacy of the war" (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July). To leave parts of the building in their state of demolition, and to not rebuild demolished structures, would be to have to live with the constant reminder (and acknowledgement) of trauma from the war and communism, something that doesn't fit with the nation-building agenda. After all, this agenda is one of antagonism to the oppressor, i.e. a villainisation of the communists. So while it *would* – as Heathcote said of one of the buildings – be "a powerful gesture to leave it there as a

bombed-out ruin" (E Heathcote 9 2018, personal communication, 7 July), this however, is not quite the gesture that the right-wing seeks to preserve in public space and public memory.

- **The Army Headquarters Proposal**

One project from 2004 in connection with the castle shows how it was a site of contestation well after the regime change when there was a competition to refurbish the former Army Headquarters (Figure 23) that had been ruined in the war (Kiss, 2016, p. 112). A part of the original ground floor was still standing but the competition parameters disallowed reconstructing the new addition as per the original design (Plant website, n.d.). It was won by the architecture studio Plant in 2005, who used a contemporary architectural language (Kiss, 2016,

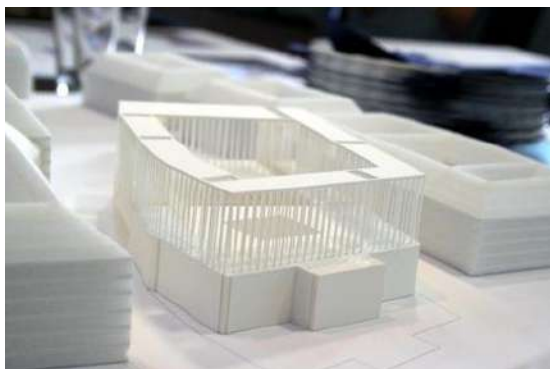


*Figure 23: Army Headquarters, pre-war, Source: Zoltán Deák/Fővárosi Szabó Ervin Library Budapest Collection in Epitesz Forum, 2014*

p. 112) to articulate the form of the designed addition. They did not want to show an "eternal imprint of the longing" and call this the "pain of inevitable renunciation" (ibid.). As the architects explain, "The new segment does not want to pursue the logic of the old one, yet they cooperate. Both of them are components and separate units simultaneously" (ibid.). Their proposal is shown in Figure 24. It was however, never built.



*Figure 24: Plant Architects' Proposal for Army Headquarters Refurbishment, Source: Plant Website, 2005*



*Figure 25: Second Proposal, Source: Epitesz Forum, 2017*



*Figure 26: Third Proposal (co-authored), Source: Epitesz Forum, 2017*

The project is not well documented in the media, and less so in providing sufficient grounds to make with certainty, correlations between architecture and politics. Fidesz was not in power at the national level in 2005 but the castle was still a site of conflict and heritage debate. As regulations changed and new proposals were invited (Pesti and Hokker, 2017), the winning architects made subsequent designs (Figures 25 and 26), all with a contemporary vocabulary. Finally, in 2009 a ban was imposed by the municipality on alteration of the area (ibid.), so the refurbishment as it currently stands does not have a parasitic roof but nor has it been rebuilt to its former neo-baroque splendour. It has undergone minimally invasive restoration (Epitesz Forum, 2014). What the project highlights is the sanctity of the castle and reluctance to breach its 19<sup>th</sup> century historicity. Kiss (2016) infers from the events that transpired, that the ideological schism developed into a political one which is why the original plans were cancelled (p. 112).

- **Tourism Dimension**

Though less prominent in the discourse, building and restoring is also connected to boosting tourism which is another approach that the current government takes to nation-building. Diplomata Magazin (n.d.) writes that currently only 34% of the Hungarian National Gallery, the Budapest History Museum and the National Széchenyi Library, can be visited, but the National Hauszmann Plan will, at the least, double this rate. This will purportedly be achieved by the retainment of the cultural functions of the castle. As per the official view, the National Gallery will be converted into a palace museum like Versailles (Schneller, 2016). It is also said that once the Riding Hall is reconstructed, equestrian events, balls and fairs will take place in the vein of the Vienna Hofburg riding hall at the Hofburg (Taraszovics, 2015).

Additionally, László L. Simon called for the use of contemporary architecture if it is functionally and aesthetically appropriate (Balázs, 2015), putting the focus on tourism and public convenience. The rebuilding of the Stöckl staircase will open up another pedestrian route (Kelecsényi, 2015) and there was also a plan for a hidden escalator to be incorporated in it (Sain, 2016). The Riding Hall too, stands above an already-built underground car park. These show that the government uses contemporary architecture and technology for the *appearance* of authenticity; it is not of concern that rebuilt stables for horses accommodate subterranean car parks while horses draw carriages above. Both these functions keep the tourist in mind.

## **II. Decision-making and Politics**

- **Interwar-inspired National Feeling**

The interwar period is another time of nationalist resonance. This was when Hungary was a republic, and one-third its size, after the collapse of the monarchy at the end of the First World War. Miklós Horthy who led the country made efforts to win Hungary back its lost territories and is viewed as a national hero by the right-wing. The government's views are reflected in Heathcote's statement: "[T]hey're a bit more even-handed in their praise of the

fascist government. They're not necessarily very opposed to the Horthy regime of the 1930s and 40s" (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 9 July). Balogh too when asked whether the Dual Monarchy era was the source of inspiration and the attempt was to recreate that time, said that while that was true, it was more about the interwar period when there was no longer a monarchy (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). They further said, "[F]or today's politics, in terms of the whole public administration of the state, I think it really goes back to the monarchy – very hierarchical, very bureaucratic, very submissive. In terms of nationalist discourse, it goes back to a later era of the interwar period when Hungary was a single country and not part of an empire." This was also the first time that the castle had permanent residents (Hungarian Spectrum, 2014) for Horthy ruled from there (Kahlweit, 2016). This could be another possible source of inspiration for the Orbán government.

- **Prime Ministerial Motives**

Balogh referred to nation-building through architecture and historicist revival as being accompanied by a top-down, aggressive agenda (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). One of the concerns that critics have is that Orbán's plans to "kick out the National Gallery" and "install himself in new offices nearby" (Lyman, 2016), which is what makes them condemn the entire idea as grandiose and stoked by Orbán's megalomania (Hungarian Spectrum, 2014). In fact, he "has been plotting for at least fifteen years to move himself and his huge staff to the Castle District," Sandor Palace in 2002 to be specific (Hungarian Spectrum, 2016). He started renovating it during his 1998-2002 term but lost the election, so his plans did not fructify (ibid.). The choice of location is significant however because Sandor Palace had been the residence and office of the prime minister between 1881 and the end of the war (Hungarian Spectrum, 2014) which again could point to Orbán's image of himself as successor to that era.

Speaking of the prime minister's sense of self-importance, Ekler said that Hungary is now a false republic and the prime minister wants to move to the castle to be a king (D Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March). He also said of Orbán, that there is a desire to consider the country as a great empire, but the truth is that it is three times smaller than it was (ibid.). For Heathcote however it wasn't all black and white; he said of the move of the prime minister's office to the Castle District that "there's a kind of a megalomania at the heart of it, I think, you know Orbán imagining himself as the emperor moving back into the castle and the palace. But, you could equally argue well, that is the historic home of government. So I could see the argument, that well, why not, would it not be better to have a purpose-built gallery, that's suited to contemporary conditions, and then have the government back in a quarter which is easy to defend and you know, easy to...it's kind of very symbolic there up on the hill. So I can see both sides of the argument" (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July).

- **The Hauszmann Committee**

The aggression of the plan is evidenced in the controversy surrounding the nature of decision-making as seen from the trouble it has run into with Hauszmann Committee members. Formerly a part of this committee, István Schneller and two fellow-members, in an open letter to the Minister of the Prime Minister's Office, quit, citing the "anti-democratic way of government decrees and decisions" (Schneller *et. al.*, 2016). When asked about this, he said that regarding the purpose of the committee, they were "told that it will be a very good job, because we shall make a long-term development strategy, and we shall debate about it, and we try to decide the right direction, where to go" (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). But as the meetings proceeded, he realised that it was "not a real job, but it was only a representation. The architects showed the plans and we had one hour to discuss it, and it was no real decision. After two or three sessions, I told to the leader of this committee that it is not good [...] because I don't want to take part in a committee which doesn't have any, any right, not right but any possibility to debate about it" (ibid.). The committee being so big and meeting time limited, it was impossible to have meaningful debate, and he urged the authorities to "begin very step by step, but they do not want it, they wanted only to have a representing committee" (ibid.). He further said that decisions were made on the "highest level, the minister president, very narrow, very narrow friends, or people who are responsible" and there was limited scope for rebuttal (ibid.).

### III. **Conclusion**

The National Hauszmann Plan shows a contemporary approach to nation-building which seeks to invigorate the turn-of-the-century neo-baroque aesthetic using modern materials and incorporating modern conveniences. The thrust is simultaneously a return to the golden age of the city and a decrual of communist era reconstructions of the 50s and 60s. This dual motive shows Fidesz's nation-building agenda to be a backward-looking, communist-bashing exercise. The attempt to attract tourists through modern conveniences talks to the international image that the city hopes to achieve and in this way boost tourism.

Additionally, the megalomania of the prime minister also forms a large part of the power-hunger narrative, for he plans to relocate to quarters near the palace. In terms of due process while there was a committee to advise on the work, it was simply a dummy as seen from the resignations of three members who cited the absence of democratic measures. These point to top-down and unilateral decision-making.

### CASE III: THE LIGET BUDAPEST PROJECT

Down the hill from the castle, on the other side of the Danube, is where the Liget Budapest Project is underway. Coming up is a museum district in the city's largest open green space, the városliget or city park. Said to be one of Europe's largest museum developments (Frearson, 2014), the park will house museums and other cultural infrastructure. The project was launched in 2014 by the second Orbán government and is being headed by László Baán, the Director General of the Museum of Fine Arts.

The Liget project evinces a nation-building agenda for a few reasons. In this section I evaluate this through the symbolism of the site, architectural reconstructions and new forms, and decision-making procedure. The project stands as a combination of historical and contemporary meaning, through which identity is expressed.

#### I. The Significance of the Park and the Millennium Exhibition

The city park holds much meaning as every government has wanted a piece of it (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March) and tried to situate it within its own agenda. It was designed in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century – the age of reform (Sisa, 1998a) and a time of national awakening. Balogh cited its design as being “an identity-building exercise because the park itself was the first public park in Europe that was built as a public park [...] instead of a royal park handed over to the public. So it was very much in line with this kind of enlightened agenda to build a modern city and a modern nation around that” (Balogh, personal communication, 27 March). For its meaning at a particularly successful time in history – and moreover a nation-building time in history – the government constantly tries to hark back to that time. As with the castle, the park and its position at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are highly symbolic from a national perspective.



Figure 27: Millennium Exhibition Postcard, 1896, Source: National Széchényi Library, 2016

The park was actively roped into 19<sup>th</sup> century nation-building during the Millennium Exhibition of 1896. This was an endeavour celebrating the 1000<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the state, embodying one of the major post-Resolution aims of the administration – to showcase the country as not only politically independent but also culturally so (Székely, 2015, p. 34). The exhibition was about presenting Budapest to the world during the city's economic boom, and “a lot of pavilions were built which were kind of showcasing a modern constructed national identity. So it was explicitly about that project” (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). As is clear, the park was a tool for the ‘construction’ of national



identity then. Further, with the event, Budapest tried to join the ranks of other international cities like London and Paris from previous years (ibid.).

## **II. Architectural Reconstructions**

### **• Reconstructed Old Structures**

Many of the original structures were razed after the exhibition, suffered damages in the war, or were demolished by the communists. The Transport Museum, Városliget Theatre and pavilions from the 1860s, among others, are part of the Liget plans and are in various stages of being rebuilt from scratch using modern materials. Apart from the pavilions that were demolished to make way for the Millennium Exhibition itself, the other structures suffered damage or demolition during and after the war and reviving them is a way of trying to recreate fin de siècle prosperity.

The Transport Museum will regain its original Romantic-Eclectic form (Liget Budapest, n.d.), but now with its dome offering a view point over the park “thanks to the special architectural solutions” (ibid.). Ferenc Pfaff who designed the original structure, did so for many Hungarian railway stations during the late 19th century (Sisa, 1998b, p. 202). Hungarian railway lines grew from 2841 kilometres to 22,870 kilometres between 1867 and 1918 (ibid.), and this museum was one of the first of technology and transport on the continent (Hungary Today, 2015). So it is no doubt a matter of pride for the nation and cause for wanting to preserve the iconic building as a symbol of the affluence of the time.



*Figure 28: Transport Museum, Liget Project Visualisation, Source: Liget Budapest Website, in We Love Budapest, 2015*



*Figure 29: Viewing Gallery inside Dome, Source: Liget Budapest Website*

The Városliget Theatre, a Secessionist building from 1909 had been designed by two acclaimed architects József and László Vágó and was demolished on account of the erection of a Stalin statue in the adjacent square (Liget Budapest, n.d.). Its reconstruction too will contain modern facilities (Liget Budapest, n.d., R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April). As the strategy manager of the company handling the project, Zoltán stated, “The building will be like this from front side, but from the rear side, that will completely new type of aspect, because of a new kind of theatre equipment” (R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April). Secessionism was important for nation-building in the post-Resolution era so the preservation of the exterior is no doubt meaningful. “The whole Art

Nouveau or Secessionist movement in Budapest is very much about building a Hungarian type of architecture,” said Balogh (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). It came to define the Hungarian national identity when the nation was building itself and therefore prompts a return to that era.

Another important reconstruction is of the three oriental pavilions originally designed by Frigyes Feszl. They have been reconstructed as per their original designs (Figure 30), but for design liberties taken with respect to the replacement of the decorated canopy with a wooden structure (We Love Budapest, 2017), and also the unfaithful reproduction of the proportions of the cupola (Figure 31). The architect Feszl was one of the greatest architects of the post-1848 era (Sisa, 1998b, p. 173) and would be important for the Liget’s nation-building agenda, for these years were the aftermath of Hungary’s crushed revolution against Habsburg rule. His architecture represents Hungary’s “nationalistic spiritual undercurrent” (ibid.) and as an architectural figure of his time in quest of a Hungarian style (ibid.), his works gain renewed meaning in the current era of nation-building. Consequently, the Liget plans have brought the pavilions back to life, for as the website states, they “preserve the traditions of the Liget” and “evoke the nostalgic atmosphere of Városliget” (Liget Budapest, n.d.). Here too, “the interiors meet the most modern requirements” (ibid.), a theme running through all the reconstructions.



Figure 30: Frigyes Feszl’s Original Designs, Source: Budapest City Archives, in *We Love Budapest*, 2017

All of these restorations and reconstructions draw from the same place of nation-building which sees the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a time worth preserving and recreating architecturally. Many of these works were made by famous architects of the time and the entire project seems to be driven by nostalgia and recreating the Millennium Exhibition and modelling these structures on former ones is a manifestation of it. Further the stress on incorporating modern features even *within* each



Figure 31: One of the Rebuilt Pavilions, Source: Norbert Hartyányi, in *We Love Budapest*, 2017

newly built historical design is constant, as gleaned from the website and speaking to Zoltán. Each of the designs have changes made to them, entailing 21<sup>st</sup> century innovations behind a façade of antiquity. Some of them even being built in locations in the park, different from their original settings, so the 'construction' of nation furthermore rings true.

The current government's objective of imprinting itself on the park, and referencing the earlier period of frenetic building are aptly summed by project head, László Baán (2018 in Liget Budapest Facebook Page): "[A]s the millennium mood and enthusiasm created the fine art museum, the momentum of the current era of reconstruction will create considerable creations in the field of art. This is not only an art issue, but also a national issue." The government sees itself as custodian of what is national and the project is rallied to project the vision.

### **III. New Architecture and Futuristic Agenda**

- **Clustering of Old and New**

Not only does the Liget use current materials and technology in individual buildings, but also clusters contemporaneity and antiquity in one focused area so as to showcase a concentrated vision of nation. This too is much like the Millennium Exhibition goals. Székely (2015) writes of 1896, that the exhibition was meant to be a receptacle of Hungary's historicity as well as modernity; The Main Historical Group of building showcased both, the latest in economic and cultural achievements, and architectural recreations of the past focusing on history and culture (p. 39).

In the current plans, old and new cohabit in the reconstructions and at the bigger scale, in the entire complex. For if externally antiquity is now asserted by way of the reconstructions, then the contemporary aspect is displayed through brand new buildings. The new museums are the National Gallery, the House of Hungarian Museum and the Ethnography Museum. They have been designed by various high-profile firms, are in different stages of execution, and are promoted as the latest in cutting edge architecture and technology.

- **New Museums**

The National Gallery designed by Japanese firm SANAA, coming down from the Castle Hill, lands squarely on the site of a former communist event hall, which itself was built on the site of the National Hall of Industry built for the 1885 National Exhibition. Of the relocation, Zoltán stated that it is being



*Figure 32: New National Gallery, Source: Liget Budapest Website*

done because the castle location was not a good place for a museum on account of it being ancient and not suited to current needs (R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April). Ergo a building that would accommodate the latest in museum requirements.

Like the National Gallery, the Ethnography Museum too will be relocated from elsewhere and here too the project website boasts, "truly modern," "all-round world-class standard," and a catering to the needs of both the collection and visitors (Liget Budapest, n.d.).



*Figure 33: Ethnography Museum, Source: Napur Architects Website*

For its design, there was stiff competition, as Bjarke Ingels, Rem

Koolhaas and Zaha Hadid contended for the commission (Frearson, 2016). The competition was eventually won by the Hungarian firm, Napur Architects who describes its design as a "21st-century Baroque frame" (ibid.), again showing how antiquity is drawn into the architectural discourse. One website even said that the museum incorporates "a pinch of Hungary [...], with traditional folk motifs decorating the sides of the building" (Póli, 2016). The jury's opinion was that the building would fit the environment and become an icon of the city (Frearson, 2016) and the Liget Budapest website (n.d.) expresses similar hope for the building to "become iconic internationally."

The third new museum is the House of Hungarian Music designed by Japanese firm Suo Fujimoto, which will be built on the site of the offices built during communist times that have been demolished to make way for it. The discourse of tradition and modernity continues with the museum being a meeting point of traditional and contemporary music (Liget Budapest, n.d.). The museum programme is modelled on examples like the Haus der Musik in Vienna and the Cité de la Musique in Paris (ibid.) which keenly shows the company the Budapest aspires to keep.

- **Starchitecture and Competitive City Aspirations**

With the museum collection in one location, the Liget seeks to do the 21<sup>st</sup> century version of what the Millennium Exhibition did over one thousand years ago – become a competitive city. With the Liget there is an attempt to equal Berlin and Vienna (Lyman, 2016; Tamas, 2014) in having a museum district that could become a tourist magnet. This thrust is an official statement: "The objective [is that the museums] be iconic for Budapest and Hungary through a 21st-century approach and by housing collections and receiving visitors at a global standard. [...] It is of primary importance that the new museums provide a lasting aesthetic

experience at the highest standards of contemporary architecture [...]” (Museum of Fine Arts, 2014).

The project aims to draw “hundreds of thousands of new tourists” (Lyman, 2016). According to official estimates, the number of overnight stays by foreign tourists in Budapest would rise by 20 percent after the project is completed in 2019 (Lyman, 2016). Citing “unrealized potential,” László Baán wants to increase the city’s current 3 million foreign visitors per year, a figure considerably less than Prague’s 4.5 million, and Vienna, Barcelona and Milan’s 6 million (Lyman, 2016). Putting it unequivocally, he said, “The goal is to become the No. 1 city-break destination for families in Europe” (Baán in Lyman, 2016).

Already entering the big league, in 2017 the Liget Project was nominated for the Best Futura Mega Project award at the MIPIM (Le marché international des professionnels de l’immobilier) conference the world’s largest real estate exhibition (Hungary Today, 2017). Said Benedek Gyorgyevics, director of Városliget Zrt., the company responsible for the project, with a touch of pride, that these awards are “the equivalent of the Oscars for the real estate industry” (Gyorgyevics, in Hungary Today, 2017).

- **Identity through Branding**

While right-wing nationalism may be absent, the project still bears marks of being an identity-building venture in its quest to put Budapest on the map. Schneller said it was not a project about nationalism, rather about marketing (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). When asked about whether this project could be seen in nation-building terms, Heathcote clearly stated, “Yes, yes, I think probably there is a sense that the nation’s cultural infrastructure was a bit dispersed, and that if it was more concentrated in one area, you would have a burst, you would have a kind of instant tourism burst of identity” (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July).

As for the architecture, when questioned about the preservation of tradition, Zoltán confirmed, “Yes, for the ancient buildings it was very important. But the new buildings it is not a Hungarian...” (R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April). And of these new buildings, Heathcote reckoned that “the identity was intended to come from contemporary architecture” (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July). He continued, “Budapest actually doesn’t have that much contemporary architecture, or doesn’t have that much statement architecture, all the tourist attractions there, are 19th century buildings. And I think there was a sense that if they were going to make it a kind of competitor on the international cultural tourist circuit, then they needed to boost their infrastructure” (ibid.) It is for the requirement of high quality design that the competition was international (R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April): “All because of the quality, because our chief Mr Baán said that we build for the future and the international” (ibid.).



The thrust, while it is for an international identity is less fixated on the national concept. Of this Molnár (2013) springs off Leslie Sklair's (2005, 2006, 2011) assertions, writing that today's iconic architecture reflects a class that is untethered by the bounds of the nation-state (p. 11).

- **Capital as a Reaction to Communism**

The new designs of the Liget project are proud testimony to the capital that has come into the city post communism. Zarecor (2014) writes that since the early 1990s buildings have focused on types that could not be accommodated within the communist mandate, like luxury facilities, commercial buildings, skyscrapers and the like (p. 266). After decades of being behind the Curtain, there is a craving for architecture that has personality and that is built by a known architects (Zarecor, 2014, p. 266). In this way the Liget's post-socialist exuberance for starchitecture can be owed to the years of denial. Anti-communist feeling is displayed not by the demolition of communist-era structures in the park – building on communist rubble was mentioned as mere statement of fact – but by an embrace of new forms. As Zarecor (2014) writes of the contemporary architecture scene, "A continuing interest in international architects can certainly be seen as a reaction against decades of anonymous design culture, but it is also reflects a desire to have some global status and proof of economic viability in the post-communist era" (p. 267). So Frampton's (1985, in Andrusz, 1999) critical regionalist version of postmodernism – one that uses regional architecture as a resistance to the homogenisation of global capital – is being "rejected by the architects, politicians and clients of post-communist societies (p. 67). The future is seen to lie with capitalism, its social relations, architectural designs and forms [...]" (Andrusz, 1999, p. 67). Architectural form itself does not take on the communist past, nor is there a style of choice for design, only a desire to make a statement which is a hallmark of exposure to capital.

Overall, the architectural design – in terms of new and reconstructed buildings – evinces nation-building mainly through the reconstruction works and recalling the Millennium Exhibition. The presence of starchitecture shows a craving to fit into a global context and the designs themselves do not address the communist period. These forms are more about identity-building through branding than deep national feeling.

#### **IV. Decision-making Procedure**

- **Decision-maker**

In terms of who is spear-heading it, the project itself is said to be the vision of a single person, or "the private show of László Baán" as Máté and Kling (2015) suggested in an interview with him. Zoltán referred to him as the "the motor of the whole project," adding, "He has invented, he direct, he lead this vision, all this project, he has the vision actually" (R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April). Said Balogh, "This was his personal project and then he sold it to the Prime Minister" (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). Even so there is no indication that the competitions have been unfair, or the results

manipulated to suit a certain agenda. As Heathcote who was on the jury, said, "The competition was, I have to honestly say, it was run impeccably along every international norm that I know about. Each project was presented alongside all the technical appraisals, and there was a lot of information about how the buildings worked, about the history of the area, the topographic information, the engineering, so they were all appraised actually very even-handedly" (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July).

- **Opposition and its Suppression**

There are however, several groups opposing the plan, the main reason cited being the reduction of green space (R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April). Apart from environmentalists, others in opposition are architects, urban planners and the citizenry in general. Governmental demonstration of power is seen in that both the Liget Project and National Hauszmann Plan are a "prominent investment" under Hungarian law which means that opposing groups cannot initiate legal proceedings against them (Lyman, 2016). Balogh corroborated this when they spoke of "Projects of National Priority," which means that "the government can designate a project with this logo, so they can say that a certain project is a national priority project. And then that project is completely exempted from most regulations and procedures and whatnot. There is a separate government commissioner who is overseeing all of these projects [...]" (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). Further, by law, the state can refrain from lengthy consideration or approval processes as well as monument protection regulations (Kahlweit, 2016). Of a vote on the Liget Project, Schneller said that "it was pushed back by the court, because they told that it is impossible to have a vote because the government made a law on Liget. And they told that in the affairs where there is law, the vote is impossible" (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). This element evidences attempts to stifle resistance and shows that the government is doing what it can to ensure that the projects proceed.

- **Choice of Style**

On choice of style or design elements, the Hungarian government did not dictate architectural design as seen from the presence of a jury for the competitions. When asked about governmental aesthetic preferences, Zoltán said, "The government likes old buildings and the new buildings also. The government has not [opinions about] taste. The government only finance our efforts. [...] The government don't decide about the aspects, it's always the architects and the landscape architects who give the aspects. But reconstruction buildings existed at the same place, it's normal, and the government like very much reconstruct buildings. [...]. They have no demands. [...]" (R Zoltán 2018, personal communication, 3 April). The government's liking for the old and new is seen in the existence of the project and the brief regarding reconstruction and new constructions through international competitions, but not in the final designs chosen. So in terms of specifying a direction, the only one is international.

## **V. Conclusion**

In this section I have tried to show the nation-building function of the Liget Project. Architecturally this is seen in the reversion to the past, particularly in its attempt to recreate the Millennium Exhibition of 1896 when many cultural functions stood in the park. Simultaneously the designs are modern and spectacular which is evidence of identity-building through a branding and tourism-boosting approach, rather than one of national feeling. The presence of these types also reflects the flourishing of capital-intensive architecture now that the Curtain has been drawn.

These structures though similar in their starchitectural quality do not comprise a particular style that the government is pushing. The government has preferences for certain aesthetics (old and new) but design decisions were taken by a jury. The top-down element is instead apparent in certain legal restrictions that stifle opposition, of which there is considerable.



## COMPARISON OF THE CASES AND THE POSTCOLONIAL LENS

The difference in time period and nature of oppression between the two 'post-'s makes for an uneasy fit but there are definite overlaps in principle and when the cases are viewed with a degree of flexibility. The three cases, while they differ from each other in the way they nation-build, align and deviate with postcolonial nation-building in largely the same ways. In this chapter I trace the similarities and difference between the cases, and also their postcolonial 'fit' under the umbrellas of procedure and politics, and architecture.

### **I. Procedure and Politics**

#### **• Due Process and Rescaling**

The critique of postcolonial rulers is that they were the homegrown variety of colonial rulers (Vale, 1992); it was they who decided on architect, site and style in a demonstration of 'personal' identity (ibid.) rather than a political system doing so (ibid.). In this sense they have been criticised for being the sole decision-makers. In the post-socialist cases, while there is a system in place it is a weak or malfunctioning one, authoritarianism is shown through a bypassing of the system rather than the belief – misguided or not – that choices made are in the interest of the nation. The disregard of due process is seen in the way the entire National Theatre project was handled – the competitions, violations and nepotism – and to some extent in the contemporary projects as seen in the resignations of members of the Hauszmann Committee and emplacement of laws to stifle opposition in both ongoing projects.

The national government is seen to try and consolidate power even at local levels. In fact despite the presence of the subnational levels, the city has very little say in big construction works (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March), these happening within the Projects of National Priority framework (ibid.). Schneller, who was Chief Architect of the city during the National Theatre construction stated that at the city level they had tried to stop the construction but could not (I Schneller 2018, personal communication, 28 March). The district had its own mayor and though Schneller personally appealed to him to refuse permission sought by the national government, the district had the right to decide on building permissions (ibid.). The mayor was not a Fidesz member but wanted the theatre in his district and accordingly approved (ibid.).

There was no such scope for independent working in the postcolonial context, where there was a single prime ministerial decision. The large number of political entities that exist in the communist aftermath amplifies the volume of opposition too. All the three cases were/are hugely debated across circles. This difference reflects differing time periods where a rescaling of governance and diminishing of the national scale (Brenner, 2004) has complicated the nation-building process in post-socialist Budapest.

- **Oppositional Decision-making**

Hungary's is a perpetual self-image of being colonised – a uniquely central European condition, as explained by Balogh, using Anderson's (1983) ideas (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). The country's constant political reorganisation and reshuffling and sense of being a victim was well-summarised when they said, "So we had the Habsburgs, then we had the monarchy or the Russians, then we had the entente which was this political corporation after the First World War – the western powers basically – which took chunks of the country away, then it was the Soviets, now it's the European Union, in today's political discourse. So it has become the basic foundation for talking about who you are, even in terms of architecture, it's always against something, it's against an imagined colonial power which might or might not be there" (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March).

Oppositionality as the basis for decisions is unlike postcolonial power wielding, where leaders are said to have mimicked their predecessors, and therefore become like them (Vale, 1992), rather than turn against them. Also, the socialist party continued to exist in Hungarian political space which complicates Fidesz's outlook to the communist legacy.

Hungarian nation-building as Fidesz practised it in the National Theatre, was directed at an internal enemy rather than the postcolonial attempt to project a collective identity to the world. Siklós' choice was based on opposition, for unlike the starchitects of postcolonial times, she was not an equivalent figure in the post-socialist era. The union of Orbán and Siklós does not compare to that of Nehru and Corbusier, Kubitschek and Oscar Niemeyer or other postcolonial pairings, all cases where both leader and architect were strong, independent figures, collaborating on an equal footing. This absence of level ground was further highlighted in a statement made by Ekler. He said that architects interested in major works are also keen on knowing what Orbán wants to see, and that there is much talk among them on whether there is information on his preferences (D Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March).

- **Choice of Style**

Postcolonial leaders trying to build their nations had a clear vision and tried to mould built space on the foundation of certain principles. Modernism was a determined direction, chosen to fulfil this objective. The change in regime and post-socialist period however, only stand as the most recent attempts for the country to gather itself; it was not a single sudden monumental liberation (Ferkai, 1998b, p. 293). Therefore the events of 1989 are not necessarily linked to any new style. The absence of this was pointed to by some of my respondents (Nagy 2018, personal communication, 30 March; T Attila 2018, personal communication, 12 August; E Palonen, personal communication, 15 August). Further, the accompanying burst in building activity primarily involved capital-intensive architecture, rather than that of national significance. The country did not need parliaments and capital

complexes like ex-colonies so there was also no need to choose an architectural direction and imbue national buildings with certain features, as in the case of modernist project.

It was also a time when 'styles' were outdated. Postmodernism that had supplanted modernism, did not have a strict dictum apart from existing in opposition to modernism's purely functionalist spaces, and Hungary emerged as a new nation in a time of such architectural splintering. The variety of architectural tendencies in the 90s included "New Modernism," regionalism, Danish school-influenced architecture, postmodernism<sup>2</sup>, deconstructivism, regional modern and "organic" (T Attila, personal communication, 12 August). So as with postmodernism, so too with Hungary's ambivalent nation-building architectural practices – at times oppositional, at others, plumbing the depths of history, and at still others, starchitectural.

- **The Politicisation of Architecture**

Of the architectural preferences of the government, it would seem that organic forms would be the natural choice of style. Ekler said that the right-wing institutionalised it, took the idea and made it their own because they realised that it made political sense (D Ekler 2018, personal communication, 28 March). They bought the heritage of Makovecz and established a management to run it (ibid.) and Orbán even commissioned an organically-designed football stadium in his home village (Goldblatt and Nolan, 2018).

Similarly, the government has been critiqued for taking over culture via the MMA, in a move that has also been referred to as "cultural dictatorship" (Ágh, 2016, p. 281). Balogh called the body "a clearly political organisation" (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). They further said, "Their aim is much more than to promote Hungarian culture, their aim is to completely redefine what Hungarian culture is. And this means pushing out everything that doesn't fit into the nationalist agenda." For this, the organisation has state support, money, institutions and power (ibid.): "They sit on juries of competitions. They sit in directorships of organisations. They advise policy for the government" (ibid.).

When asked about its activities, MMA member Attila stated, "The MMA participates in project councils, as well as in person, as by individual academics, and institutionally in some advisory bodies (central planning councils, evaluation of architectural tenders, etc.) as a delegate among delegates" (ibid.). He said its aim was not the promotion of any particular tradition but that MMA architects "wish to enrich the culture of this nation in the context of European values and culture, and to help Hungarian architects forming communities in their cultural work." Understandably these accounts are divergent, but it points to government involvement in cultural life. Style and architectural content are eventually immaterial.

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<sup>2</sup> The respondent classifies post-modernism as a strain in itself, as opposed the definition used everywhere else in this document which defines it more fluidly as architecture that defined itself in opposition to modernism. Regardless, relevant in this sentence is the variety of types not their particularities.

More generally, Heathcote theorised the relationship between kitsch and the authoritarian ideal through the cases of Orbán, Erdogan and Putin (E Heathcote 2018, personal communication, 7 July). He stated, "There's always a kind of dictator classical, and I think it has its roots in a lack of confidence and a will to try to create something impressive and lasting – eternal. And when you try to create something impressive and sort of national and all the rest of it, you often end up with kitsch" (ibid). This aptly summarises the architecture of all of these projects, as well as the dictatorial tendencies showing up in design as an overreaching and overcompensation. The crucial difference here between postcolonial and post-socialist contexts is that architectural content mattered in the former case. In Budapest it is about the ruling prime minister's 'edifice complex' (Lyman, 2016).

## **II. Architecture**

### **• Nostalgic and Futuristic Design**

Le Corbusier (1923 in Magyar Építőipar 1988/3, p. 97 in Molnár, 2013) said, ""There is only one professional field where progress is not the law, where intellectual inertia reigns, where people look to the past for answers: architecture" (p.105).

While the Hungarian right searches for some of its answers in the past, ex-colonies followed the father of modernism into what they considered the future. The long period of colonisation made it harder for ex-colonies to ascertain 'when' the nation began, for it usually began post-colonisation. The postcolonial state is entangled with its colonial legacy – it is not wholly independent, and the colonial experience is embedded in its formation (Radcliffe, 2005, in Shaw, 2009, p. 858). This made harder the cherry-picking from history. Consequently, the future was the only place to go and modernism, the means to get there. Although ex-colonies did make attempts to incorporate local and traditional elements these were simply architectural lip service, and architectural form remained modernist with some 'tradition' slapped on for good measure, as has been said of Nigerian Tropical Modernism (Immerwahr, 2007).

Hungary finds it much easier to neatly overlook a few troublesome decades and dig into its fin de siècle glory days. According to Székely (2015) just as Anderson (1983) asserted that "national print languages" helped consolidate the first European nation states, so too, vernacular forms moulded into a "national visual language" contributed to Hungary's crystallisation into a modern, political community (p. 45). 19<sup>th</sup> century development of architecture and nation is therefore the natural go-to point for current nation-builders. The nostalgia shows its sense of security in its nationhood – it has a past that it can reference for its identity, having already completed one round of nation-building.

Further, the cases show both a backward orientation as well as a forward one. In terms of the nostalgic pull, for all the projects, it is the same 19th architectural well that the government draws from, for motifs and elements, though their translation into formal aspects may vary. The National Theatre uses individual elements reminiscent of eclecticism while the National

Hauszmann Plan and Liget projects rebuild old structures, wholesale. Of these historicist reconstructions, Balogh said it's "the closest you can get to [...] national" (Balogh 2018, personal communication, 27 March). Further, all the cases showcase history using modern tools and the latest technology, even modifying interior configurations of the replicas. The immersion in history in the post-socialist examples is much greater than simply a symbolic nod to the past.

As for Fidesz's forward-looking approach, like ex-colonies, it too takes from global architectural trends, but given the difference in time, embracing an international approach now means embracing spectacular, capital-infused creations. This is seen in the National Hauszmann Plan and Liget Project. These creations also seek to have a tourist appeal and boost the economy. As argued earlier, this is more identity-building than nation-building and does not resonate with postcolonial times, where immediate needs required constructing government institutions, and times were moreover, 'pre-neoliberal'. Here starchitecture attempts to make Budapest a competitive city, something outside the ambit of postcolonial nation-building.

- **Communist Antagonism in Design**

Postcolonial nation-building did not have an architectural enemy that could be scapegoated in its nation-building attempts and moreover the coloniser was one to be emulated rather than opposed. In the Budapest cases, their nostalgia-laden architectural endeavours carefully side-step the communist years, so none bear the visual marks of anything that can be associated with communism. The National Hauszmann Plan and Liget Project do so more indirectly – rebuilding what was bombed or not addressing supposedly communist forms, and the National Theatre goes so far as to construct a memorial to the demolished façade of the former theatre.

Looking at the National Theatre and the Liget, there is a change in the approach to new constructions. The latter defines the nation, not in wilful opposition to communism, but by allying with capitalism as a model that the nation was denied while behind the Curtain. So while modernist forms were denounced in the National Theatre and the spectre of communism was still haunting architecture, now, architectural design is not used against the communist enemy. Even though the Liget plans demolish some communist structures and build in their place, the act of tearing down is less of vindication than the need to upgrade the park into a 'world-class' centre. This could be on accord of the time that has passed, so while the nation still harks back to its golden past, it no longer feels the need to pointedly address the post-war decades on the way. This is indicative of a greater sense of security, vis-à-vis the socialist party, for Fidesz has after all completed three terms in office. This possibly enables it to use Budapest to compete architecturally, with more global opponents than concentrate on parochial internal political concerns.

So too, the oppositionality to the perceived 'urban' sensibility of the left and the attempt to deepen the urban-populist divide as has been written about in the National Theatre case (Palonen 2013) does not find mention in the Liget. The tourism and 'world-class' appeal is more prominent than right-wing attempts to dissociate from the city. Further given the need to engage with history, heritage and restoration, the interventions must perforce be located in historical areas.

- **Western, European and International Bent**

Both 'post-'s sought or seek international approval. The orientation for ex-colonies was western and similarly for Hungary, it is European. In the postcolonial context being forward-looking and trying to be western connoted one and the same thing – architectural modernism. The European benchmark to aspire to for Fidesz is linked with Hungary's former glory. In the Budapest cases studies, being European implies going *back* to Europe. Molnár (2013) uses Anderson's (1983) "imagined community" conception to explain Hungary's sense of nation, saying that under communist rule, it was "imagined" and that the idea of Europe remained prominent despite the Iron Curtain (p. 18). Post-Curtain, architecturally this plays out in a reversion to history and to a 'European' time. So while both 'post-'s have an international pull, for the former it translates into the future while for the latter, it is the past.

To summarise, for Hungary Fidesz uses period design to be European, and starchitecture to be international and forward-looking. The years that it leaves out are exactly those when ex-colonies were maximally nation-building. Both 'post-' contexts embrace what was/is in vogue in their moment of liberation. This says less about conscious decisions than about timing and the adaptability of architecture. It points to the idea that nation-building through architecture is not fundamentally about architectural form but about what it represents. Depending on global movements, nations conveniently mould trends of the period to suit the meaning they wish to convey. Associations stick, and architecture remains a vehicle for politics.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this research I have analysed three cases in post-socialist Budapest for the way they evince nation-building in architecture, theorised through literature on the postcolonial context.

Post-colonial nation-building displayed a reproduction of oppression through top-down decision-making in architecture and the design outcome itself. In my research question I asked the extent to which this holds for the National Theatre of the late 1990s, and the ongoing National Hauszmann Plan and Liget Project, all of them initiated by different terms of the right-wing Fidesz government. I further asked how nation-building through architecture in these projects compares to that of ex-colonies in their post-independence moments.

In my results I found that Hungarian history in terms of its nation-building from the 19<sup>th</sup> century forms the backbone of its identity. Further, the century-old wedge between political camps plays out in architecture even today. All my case studies hark back to this era in different ways through their architecture, and there is a specific avoidance of the communist years, these seared into memory.

The National Theatre nation-builds through oppositional decision-making and politicisation of architectural design as left or right-wing. The thrust was a negation of all plans of the previous government – architect and site, and the built outcome was eclectic, in opposition to previous supposedly communism-reminiscent designs.

The National Hauszmann Plan, among several renovation works, restores and rebuilds bombed out structures of the Buda Castle, the castle having acquired the bulk of its splendor during its fin de siècle neo-baroque expansion. The government aims at putting the palace back into this pre-war condition and uses modern means and technologies to do so. Further the government condemns the communist restorations and also aims at installing some ministries in the palace, a move that has been called dictatorial. There have also been allegations of anti-democratic functioning in the process.

The Liget Project tries to recreate the Millennium Exhibition of 1896, clustering modernity and antiquity in the city park and creating a museum district. Nation-building is less evinced in decision-making and communist-bashing is scarce. The architecture however, recreates history, again, by rebuilding former structures with current materials and reconfiguring the interiors. There are also several starchitectural wonders, through which the government aims at competing with other cities to be a popular tourist destination.

There are overlaps with postcolonial literature in terms of some of the decision-making being unilateral and architecture as a physical rulers' intentions. There is however no one style of

choice, as was modernism for ex-colonies and in parts nation-building is oppositional. Further, though the historical and forward thrust is similar to ex-colonies, its manifestation is different. Mainly differences related to the absence of a sound fit are due to the differing natures of oppression and the different time frames of liberation.

- **Limitations and Scope for Further Research**

Apart from limitations to conducting fieldwork, there are several academic limitations as well. Firstly, the post-socialist/postcolonial comparative can only be stretched so far without yielding, for the differences in regimes and time periods inadvertently get in the way. Secondly, I have picked broad trends in postcolonial nation-building that evince oppressive tendencies; this runs the risk of lumping one-fourth of the world into simple categories. Further these categories are based on academics rather than the discourse of politicians from the time, while my current study is based on actual – and naturally better-documented – data. This also means that *prima facie* my post-socialist Budapest cases abide by these categories – as was my hypothesis – but on deeper analysis show cracks. Thirdly, I have analysed the nation-building attempts of a single party, Fidesz, which happens to be just one of the post-1989 governments. So my study cannot make broad assumptions about all post-socialist nation-building in Budapest. A richer analysis would involve looking at the approaches of other political parties as well. Fourthly, much of my opinion of postcolonial India is from intuitive knowledge so I risk unwittingly making certain assumptions based on Nehru or the particular Indian condition.

Having done this research, despite the overlaps I have found in the 'post-'s I find it further fruitful to compare, the variations in architectural imprint of socialist principles in postcolonial and communist bloc contexts during the same time. In some ways the object of post-socialist political opposition was the role model for fledgling postcolonial democracies because of the correlation between socialism and progress. This highlights the gap between the 'post-'s. and also the takeaway that ultimately, architecture is malleable. Liberation or oppression – it is to some extent immaterial – and therefore I advocate for research that focuses on architecture of a time rather than an ostensibly similar event.



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