
ABSTRACTS

Katalin Baráth: Partial Assimilation. Narrative Models of Identity in Historians' Résumés (December 1951)

The study examines the corpus of forty-two résumés written by historians in the same month and for the same purpose: they all applied for scholarship in December 1951. This body of sources is the product of the recruitment campaign following the 1949 communist takeover and the subsequent decimation of existing work collectives. The interplay of these losses and the disproportionately overplanned and notoriously underachieved production quotas brought about by sovietisation created an increased demand for workforce. Although the source may be approached from various angles, the study is limited to a text-based analysis whereby the corpus is interpreted as a response to a communication situation in the past. This perspective is especially useful considering the fact that all the résumés involved were 'successful': nearly all the authors were awarded scholarships and some went on to graduate with a doctoral degree. The résumés can be categorised into four identity types. Based on the characteristics of these identity types and the evaluation of the résumés by the official decision-makers, the study concludes that the community of historians was more heterogeneous at the time than would be expected in view of the period in general. Regarding expectations and performance, it seems that adopting the official ideology was not a mandatory criterion for employment, although it certainly did not mean that academics were free to choose their research subject in any position.

Gyöngyi Farkas: From Open Letter to Anonymous Letter. A 'True-Blue Democrat' and Collectivisation

During the collectivisation drive between 1959 and 1961, the Political Investigation Unit of the Csongrád County Police Headquarters conducted secret mail surveillance to intercept letters inciting against the campaigns. Among the letters seized, there were a couple of anonymous letters written in the same hand. The subsequent investigation identified 78 year old Szatymaz farmer, Imre Szüts, as the author of the letters. Szüts had been farming on 38 acres (appr. 15.4 hectares) of land until the 1950s when he was denounced as a 'kulak'. By 1960 he was left with 2.8 acres (barely over a hectare) of vineyard and orchard. His letters differ from other anonymous letters written in the era which nor-

mally addressed the local administrators of collectivisation and their main aim was persuasion. Although these used argumentative means to some extent, they primarily deployed uncouth expletives and threats to dissuade the local forces of collectivisation. Imre Szüts's letters, however, were not written to acquaintances and their aim went beyond a simple stab at pulling strings in the local campaign. Addressees included the protagonists and authors of propaganda articles published in the county daily *Délmagyarország* and the national *Szabad Föld*. These people were not known to him personally and in his letters Szüts addressed them to expound his opinion about collectivisation, the mendacious propaganda, and possible ways to help peasantry survive the impending 'period of crisis'. The study attempts to reconstruct the personality of the writer and his motivation to overstep the safety limits of expressing his opinion about collectivisation and make his voice heard by the establishment, that is, individuals who either consciously supported or indirectly facilitated collectivisation.

Sándor Horváth: A King in Disguise: Reporting as a Means of Asserting Self-Interests at the Dawn of the Kádár Era

How did the socialist regime and the individual mutually shape one another in everyday life? The study's protagonist, Agent G, produced state security reports in a Nógrád County miners' community throughout the entire Kádár era. Acting like a "king in disguise" he used his reports to administer justice in the everyday conflicts of his community, while as an official of the local football team playing Second Tier in the National Championship he also had the opportunity to travel widely and frequently around the mining district. Earlier in his life, he had been tried as a war criminal and then participated in the rebel village's Workers' Council in 1956. Despite the fact that he was a mediocre student leaving school at 14 to work either as physical labourer or junior office worker at the railway and in the coal industry, national politics recurrently intersected Agent G's life and career. The study reconstructs Agent G's strategy to use his reporting activity to advance his personal ambition, his way to adapt to the expectations of the agent network, and the changes in his perceptions about the world around him as reflected in his reports. Through Agent G's reports written at the end of the 1950s, Horváth traces the identity transformation of an individual who had previously not been considered a supporter of the regimes he lived in. How did Hungarian society change after 1956 and what made people politically 'passive', at least seemingly, by the beginning of the 1960s? Agent G's reports, mostly based on exchanges overheard in the mine, provide a glimpse into the process that fundamentally changed the language of and attitudes towards politics in the underbelly of Hungarian society. Compared to the transformation of his fellow villagers, the agent's collaboration with local authorities was hardly anomalous.

Besides the agent's reports, the in-depth study also builds on relevant state security documents and People's Court archives, as well as interviews with Agent G's former colleagues, relatives and widow.

Edit Lantos: "Our Constitution Grants Religious Freedom for All Honest Workers". The Basis and Background of Proposals and Justification of Ecclesiastical Construction Projects between 1957 and 1960

The study examines church building after 1945 in correspondences found in the archive of the State Authority for Religious Affairs, specifically those exchanges that concern constructions and applications for building permission. In order to be successful, the applicants made references and used the language of contemporary political propaganda. Besides appealing to the constitution and freedom of religion, they also often contain references to current events reported in the press at the time. Lantos first places the applications in the context of the legislation and press cited in their text, then goes on to analyse the applicants' attitudes behind the construction of their argument. The question of how they chose their modes of persuasion is raised by the fact that the correspondence between the authority and the applicants, usually residents of smaller settlements, had its own unique rhetorics, which mirrored contemporary propagandistic utterances almost without exception. Using the journalistic platitudes of contemporary press as argumentation, especially for modern readers, offers an insight into the vulnerability of ordinary people, but also into their ability to adapt to the prevailing *modus vivendi*. Moreover, the analysis also shows that there have been times and places where propaganda was actually successful and parishioners believed that their building permissions will be granted on the basis of their arguments cited in the applications.

György Majtényi: Colonising Poverty. The Life of the Poor and the Discourses of Power in the Kádár Era

Pál Schiffer's 1971 film, *Letters to the Windfall*, tells the story of a lottery winner waiter from Gyöngyös, and the reactions of the people. These letters are all the more interesting as they coincided with the first Hungarian research on poverty led by István Kemény. The letters addressed to the lottery winner present a sharp image of the circumstances of the groups which were described in sociological terms by the researchers participating in the study. These evocative documents also reveal how the state, describing itself as socialist, created strong dependen-

cies in all walks of Hungarian society, but provided the least care for everyday people. Majtényi claims that state socialism can be viewed as a postcolonial system, especially in the sense that it treated exclusion and subjection as invariables, mainly associated with the operation of state authorities. Majtényi uses this interpretation in his analysis of the circumstances of the poor in the period, as well as the role of the authorities' discourses used to conceal or distort their experience of poverty in the public forums of the time.

Szandra Németh: Is Balaton for Everyone? A Study of Individual Motivation behind Holiday Home Construction in the Socialist Era

In 1979 there were about 350-380,000 summer plots, properties within and outside municipal areas in Hungary, which were mainly used for holidaying or active recreational purposes. Between the 1960s and 1980s these properties served as recreational spaces for nearly a third of the entire population of the country. They were primarily located near the waterfront of Balaton, the Danube Bend and Lake Velence, and any place with an attractive environment suitable for holiday-making. What motivated people to invest in properties and construction projects? Why was it exactly around this time that the characteristically narrow strip holiday plots appeared with their simple wooden or brick houses or sometimes just a lorry cabin to sleep in? Németh explores the available opportunities to spend holidays in a closed country where travel was difficult and only a few people could venture abroad – rarely and in strictly organised formats. How and why did the demand to build holiday homes emerge? Analysing interviews, the study examines the motivations of people who chose to buy and build their holiday homes in this era, with special attention to the genre specificities of oral history.

Petra Polyák: “Class Aliens” at University

The social and education policy of the party state treated the higher education aspirations of various social groups differently. While students of worker or peasant origin were supported at university admissions, ‘class aliens’ were excluded from higher education altogether, leaving them only the loophole of ‘individual assessment’ to appeal to. In order to segregate those who benefitted and those who were barred, in 1949 the education administration developed a system of data collection and management to maximise the information known about each student. Students were allocated into categories by origin, following a painstaking collection of minute details about their parents’ income and

financial situation. However, due to the professional/political differences of the assessors and the lack of clear methodology, the interpretation of the collected data was arbitrary on every level. From 1949/50 onwards, the higher education institutions exposed a large number of 'interloping class aliens' who were charged with withholding pieces of information which would cause their exclusion from higher education. Besides sanctioning any attempt to hide from the omnipresent control of the establishment, disciplinary actions taken for 'withholding information' focused on the students' life stories and the (still very much arbitrary) interpretation thereof. The author examines disciplinary cases between 1950–1956 to find out whether 'withholding information' was indeed a conscious strategy of 'class aliens' to gain admission to higher education. The students' arguments suggest that many of them were aware that providing 'real' information about themselves would result in their exclusion and they did indeed keep certain details from the admissions officers. Others, however, tried to legitimise the self-description of their social standing in order to deny the charges of deliberate misrepresentation and 'withholding'. Upon more detailed examination, Polyák concludes that most of the disciplinary cases concerned the continuation of studies rather than admissions. For some students 'withholding information' was not a strategy to gain admission since their right to continue their studies in higher education was questioned only after their enrolment.

Mihály Szécsényi: Popular Fiction and Dictatorship. Episodes from the Life of Writer Claire Kenneth

Klára Kende, better known as Claire Kenneth (1908–2000), is perhaps the most renowned Hungarian writer of popular fiction in Hungary and the world. Her father was a tradesman, her mother a governess. Her family background familiarised her with the social life and values of the middle class and aristocracy, which in turn enabled her to become part of 'society'. Both in her marriages and in her life, she strived to live her dreams and ambitions. She re-interpreted reality not only in her writing, but also carefully curated her private life in order to show the public only what she wanted them to see. She was preparing to become a writer from an early age and the success of her 1946 *Night in Cairo* vindicated her strategy. Following the communist takeover, the new regime began the ultimate control of literary activities. Popular fiction such as Kenneth's was immediately forbidden. The last blow to Kenneth's world was when she, her son from her first marriage, and her third husband, military officer Pál Bárdossy, were forcibly relocated to Tizsasüly in May 1951. She refused to give up. It seems that what was at stake for her was not simply her own existence, but the world that she created in her literary works through the popular fiction genre. The study reconstructs various phases of Kenneth's extraordinarily resilient life-story, using

resilience as an interpretive frame. Besides state security documents, contemporary communist criticism, and reminiscences by her contemporaries, the most important source used is Kenneth's correspondence during and after the years of her forced relocation. The letters provide an insight into Claire Kenneth's story, her connections, behaviour, excellent sense of humour and irony which enabled her to survive the relocation and the dictatorial regime. In 1956 Kenneth defected to the United States, where she was able to continue her career as a writer.