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TEXTS, STRUCTURES AND EXPERIENCES:

THE SOCIETY OF STATE SOCIALIST HUNGARY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE[2]

ABSTRACT

In the state socialist system sociology could establish its reason for existence and construct its identity by merely emphasizing the objectivity of its scientific investigations (since to the „real" processes even the power had to pay attention). In this role-interpretation – that can be called 'socialist modernity' – the missionary zeal of science, its faith in development, scientific objectivity and in the cognizability of social reality concealed the inevitable, indirect effort of the ideology of power. The discipline has built up it myths in accordance with that concealment. The conclusions of historical studies on state socialism – seemingly well grounded and referenced – are often not only based on the phenomena examined but are also coloured by the period's accepted conceptual framework. Our present knowledge about the society of the era is, to a large extent, based on these concepts, too. It is this lack of conceptual self-reflection with regard to historiography that explains why several historians believe they are discussing social reality, but are in actual fact only interpreting categories formulated in the wake of various party decrees. Unless we are able to uncover the effects of the identity policy that worked to create the virtual reality of state socialist society, unless we recognize the nature and operation of the various discourses of power and science, we cannot reach a reliable understanding of the period's phenomena.

Key words

social history, historiography, conceptual history, stratification, structuration, mobility, modernization, acculturation, everyday life, revisionist historiography, Alltagsgeschichte, Eigensinn, autonomy

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ON SOCIAL TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Synchronicity between social processes and the scientific discourses on them should not be necessarily sought after. It takes time for science to be able to conceptually depict a phenomenon through its own repertoire of methods. However, constructed categories can survive the period by virtue of their role in scientific investigation. As Durkheim stated: "these notions are closer to us and more within our mental grasp than the realities to which they correspond, we naturally tend to substitute them for the realities, concentrating our speculations upon them. Instead of observing, describing and comparing things, we are content to reflect upon our ideas, analysing and combining them. Instead of a science which deals with realities, we carry out no more than an ideological analysis." (Durkheim 1982: 60.)

According to the well-known critique, not only theories and methodologies of traditional social history, but also its positivism was endeavoured and taken over from social science; which itself was shaped by natural scientific thought. Social stratification, thus, was described in terms of distinct conceptual models; where metaphors, as they are to describe (social) structure, are frequently borrowed from geography or architecture. These metaphors imply that the dominating structure of society is that of a hierarchy. Consequently, several historians frequently refer to "lower," "upper" social "strata" and "classes," and speak of the relations between "base" and "superstructure," where individuals are differentiated by their proper social groups. These social groups are many times depicted in a static, stationary state, which is similar to the terminology used with geological strata; as though contemporaries had actually been in a spatially definable position, and could be described via the metaphors of "up" and "down" (Burke 1994: 58).

It has been repeatedly pointed out that, in contrast with the hierarchical view, the value of social positions is highly relative.[3] It has also been underlined that by describing social stratification and social change via the above-mentioned concepts (class, stratum or social mobility), historians tend to automatically approve of the existence of such a hierarchy without presenting case-oriented empirical proof thereof. The general claim is that traditional social-history writing can be taken as a product of modernity and thus mirrors a view embedded in modernism; meaning the reign of "great emancipatory narratives," and the application of such theoretical/conceptual constructions that are alien to contemporaneous "realities" of ordinary people (Joyce 1995).

The portrayal of a given historical phenomenon is highly dependent on those processes in action that, many times also ideologically, affect historians of the time. The need to answer the question as to what relation can be found between the conceptual language of social history and phenomena experienced in the world of contemporaries has made historians reconsider their own terminology (concepts and interpretations). The artificial nature of these historical categories have recurrently been pointed out: namely, that the portrayal and interpretation of these concepts alter in correspondence to the subject of research or the resarcher's interest. (Fox–Genovese–Genovese 1988; Wilson 1993: 18–19; Novick 1990: 440; Wehler 1988: 143).

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[3] This kind of reflective writing also has a tradition in the Hungarian social sciences. For example, in the beginning of the 20th century, Lajos Leopold claimed that the notion of 'prestige' originally meant 'legerdemain', and in order to get a better understanding of the behaviour of the (upper) social groups he denied automatic adoption of their self-representation (Leopold 1910). Similarly, István Hajnal (1943) and Ferenc Erdei (1980), among others, also articulated such a reflective attitude towards the adapted social terms and concepts in their works, in the first half of the 20th century.

The ways in which historians portray society in a given era are only detectable through the recognition that social-history writing is at all times temporarily fixed. Reinhart Koselleck articulates this claim as follows: "The live tension between actuality and concept re-emerges, then, at the level of the source language and of the language of analysis. Social history, investigating long-term structures, cannot afford to neglect the theoretical principles of Begriffsgeschichte." (Koselleck 2004: 92.) The purpose of this study, after an introduction on conceptual history, is to give an overview of how our knowledge concerning state socialist society has been constructed, and to seek out ways in which this knowledge may be revisited.

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION – ON THE INVESTIGATION OF SOCIETY

Stalinist model: two classes, one stratum

Social historians researching the history of former state socialist countries must face the phenomenon that language and concepts used in the period are strongly permeated by the ideology of the previous system. It is understood that in the state socialist system, the investigation of social stratification was an essential question that also affected the very legitimacy of the system. Thus, for a long time – in the 1950s – it was exclusively the domain of ideologists and propagandists. (This phenomenon – the impact of state ideology on the representation of the society – can also be analyzed through the example of western capitalist countries. However, I suggest that there is a fundamental difference between the political impact of a democratic and that of a non-democratic state ideology.)

Although, prior to the Second World War, the status of the peasantry, poverty in the county, and the role and composition of the middle classes were subjects of discussion, these problems officially ceased to exist after the formation of the state socialist system. As long as the dominant theory, which spoke only about homogeneous social groups, two classes and one status group (i.e. the working class, the co-operative peasantry and the intelligentsia) remained predominant, statistical investigation of social differentiation was next to impossible. (According to the Stalinist model, in "socialist society" two classes and one stratum could/must be distinguished: the working class standing on the basis of state property, the peasantry organized on the basis of co-operative property and the intelligentsia allied with them.) Contemporaneous representations of social conditions were written in the spirit of the worker-peasant-intellectual trinity, so these are obviously the products of a power discourse. Consequently, in Hungary, sociology could only exist after the 1960s (Szántó 1998, Tamás 1988: 455–480.)

New concepts, survey methods and practices

Starting from the 1960s, a new theory of classification (which divided work-character groups) and a number of investigations on mobility led to remarkable changes in social research. András Hegedüs[4] (1964), was the first to make the "two-class and one stratum" model, based on property relations, a subject of criticism. Hegedüs claimed that such a model is only applicable to capitalist society structures. Zsuzsa Ferge (1966) held a similar claim, affirming her argument through an empirical study based on household statistics from Central Statistical Office. Ferge's conclusion was that it is no longer relations of

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[4] Before András Hegedüs held numerous academic posts and worked in various research institutes as a sociologist, he was chairman of the Council of Ministers from 1955 to 1956. Later, after 1968, he became an opposition figure in the Kádár-system.

property that found social stratification, but much rather the position taken in the social division of labor (Szabari 2002). This positioning served as the base of work-character groups, which she did not associate with occupation groups and did not explicitly render into an order of hierarchy: according to the 1963-stratification data, she distinguished seven active work-character groups and a single passive one (referring to pensioners). The question as to whether the work was physical or intellectual was fundamental in defining certain work-character groups (Ferge 1969: 77–85). Correspondingly, sociologists held "social labour division" to be the most prominent force in social differentiation and social group formation (Ferge 1969: 78.), the stance of which eventually left other possible aspects disregarded. The former Stalinist model had constructed *social structure* on the basis of class relations. The subsequent model of *social stratification* described the society from different angles, but mainly from the perspective of occupational structure.

These groups (categories) were also called strata, most probably because sociologists wanted to set up an alternative structure-descriptive model in place of the Marxist-Leninist one, which was class-structured, and under state ideology was much depleted and also subject to careful criticism (at the same time they also tried to adopt Western theoretical views, especially sociological stratification models). However, Rudolf Andorka rightly argued that the above-mentioned stratum-model still best resembles Max Weber's labour-division based concept of class.[5] The theory of the stratum-model was criticized from a "Marxist" point of view for its alleged challenge to state ideology and the power of the working class. Born as an independent discipline, Hungarian sociology was criticized many times by the party leadership for its "uncritical relationship" to Western sociology.[6] However, these stratum-model investigations proved convertible into the conceptual language of the reigning ideology. Statisticians were thus able to view the categories of worker, peasant and intellectual under a new theoretical light. As sociology found a common language with the ideologists of the Kádár system, it seemed to be in a mediating position between society and the government (and to keep this position, it was compelled to conform to dominating ideologies).

In 1974, the party leadership proclaimed a regulation over the definition of "working-class" and defined a statistical grouping system to be used when scrutinizing social stratification. It has been once again declared that "the working-class is the leading force in our society; it is the ultimate power and its power is realized through a union with the peasantry." The definition of the working class, therefore, was fairly vague: all physical employees from both state- and co-operative industries were categorized under it. Workers in agriculture, commerce, health care, culture and even white collar workers in production fell into the working-class category. It did not take much, consequently, to prove the "leading power" of the working class and thus underline the legitimacy of the "workers' party": "from the full amount of the employed, there are two million six hundred thousand workers, 250,000 overseers and technicians and half a million worker-pensioners; therefore, the total number of workers in Hungary is three and a half million."[7] House-hold statistics were, therefore, also carried out in accordance with the state party's ideology and its conceptual trinity (worker, peasant, intellectual).[8] In practice, the usage of such vague categories meant that actual statistical data was ideologically veiled and, that numerous methodological ambiguities occurred; for example, in the

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[5] It is worth noting that Max Weber's *Economy and Society* was published in Hungary in the same period as researches on stratification were in progress. In the early years of Hungarian sociology, Weber became in a sense the model sociologist. The reason perhaps being his credentials as a critic of bureaucracy – and consequently of state socialism – and as a source for a non-Marxist theory of capitalism. See Andorka 1995: 35–36.

[6] MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 41/1967/85. ő. e.

[7] MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 7/1974/447. ő.e.

[8] MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 7/447. ő.e.; MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 4/1974/125–126. ő.e.; MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 7/1974/452. ő.e.; Andorka 1995a: 36–37.

1970s, those employees who were in co-operatives but did not complete agricultural work were also represented in agricultural physical labour-character groups (Róbert 2000: 226.).

In 1977, the party's Central Committee carried out a report on the state of sociology. The report established that the "researcher's allegiance to Marxist ideology is still not satisfactory in many cases." It was further emphasized that "the application of research techniques and methodologies used in civic sociology to the circumstances of socialist society requires critical adaption and an accurate knowledge of Marxist ideology."[9] Nevertheless, surveillance on the part of the state seemed to recede, as in 1985 the modification of formerly used social categories was initiated. Conclusively, the category of "non-physical workers" was divided into two distinct categories: "intellectuals" and "employed intellectual workers".[10]

Status groups, life styles

Because of the economic changes that occurred at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s, the status-model no longer seemed suitable for depicting the social structure of society. Sociologists thus attempted to construct a more sensitive category-system. The old classification of people into a rigid employment structure was made more dynamic by including an investigation into the different ways in which people from the same employment category actually lived. Besides the employment-structure, researchers attempted to depict different life situations and people's life styles – primarily in the theoretical vein of Weber and Pierre Bourdieu (Kolosi 1984, 1987). These approaches can be considered as *structuration* models, since they attempt to explain the relationship between human agency and the social structure. These investigations had already explained the use of all adopted terms and related them to the circumstances of the era. They re-explored the complexity of social structure, and also aimed at understanding the way in which it had been implemented in state socialist society.

Lifestyle research had a particular relevance in Hungarian sociology, as these studies depicted special ways and forms of social differences, while other sociological analyses characterized "socialist" society by a relatively low level of inequality. In the beginning, Hungarian sociologists studied lifestyle by "time budget" surveys (Szalai 1972). Later, it was argued that everyday life consists of the struggle over society's resources; and researchers also distinguished between material and cultural lifestyle fields, applying Bourdieu's (1984) two-dimensional approach. The status-group model, already used in the 1981–82 data analysis – carried out by Tamás Kolosi and Ágnes Bokor – reflected the new sociological approach. It was Kolosi who offered a definition for status groups, a model that proposed a new stance to describe social structures.[11] Instead of an occupation-based model, Kolosi took a model into consideration that was based on a complex system of aspects and was condensed into the notion of "life situation." Social status, in his wording, was the "typical life situation of individuals and families" within the "inequality system," and argued against the clearly hierarchical nature of social stratification (Kolosi 1984: 11–12). As an alternative to the occupation-based model, Ágnes Utasi determined lifestyle groups, and thus distinguished certain social groups from one another.[12]

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[9] MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 41/1977/281. ő.e.
[10] MNL OL, M-KS. 288. f. 7/1985/727. ő.e.
[11] Kolosi 1987: 67.This model also referred to Max Weber's notion "Stand" (in English, "status group"), which was differentiated on the basis of non-economical qualities.
[12] Utasi 1984. Recent lifestyle investigations: Utasi 2000; Utasi–A. Gergely–Becskeházi 1996.

Obviously, the development of the Hungarian economy primarily affected those interpretations in the 1980s that represented the structure of society in terms of state redistribution and the market. Two theoretical models, by Tamás Kolosi (1988) and Iván Szelényi (1988, 1996), were constructed to depict the structural changes within the "socialist" society. These approaches attempted to describe mainly the specific features of Hungarian economic and social development in the state socialist system. They proposed the idea of two great forces shaping the social structure: state redistribution and the market. Thus, sociologists described Hungarian society of the time with the duality of the structure of redistribution and that of the market (Tamás Kolosi's L-model and Iván Szelényi's double triangle one).

Objectives of social research

In the state socialist system, sociology could establish its reason for existence and construct its identity by merely emphasizing the objectivity of its scientific investigations (since, to the "real" processes, even those in power had to pay attention). In this role-interpretation, which can be called socialist modernity, the missionary zeal of science, its faith in development, scientific objectivity and in the cognizable nature of social reality, concealed the inevitable, indirect efforts of the state ideology. The discipline has built up it myths in accordance with that concealment.

In this regard, Pál Tamás's analysis of the history of social science seems quite appropriate. Tamás claims that social research in the 1960s was "in the role of radical social criticism"; in the early 1970s, it proposed a social science for the study of society in its totality , while in the second half of the decade realized a "professional program" and, in the 1980s it grew into a "settled discipline" (Tamás 1985: 219–226). State ideology, nevertheless, still limited the latitude in which the social sciences could work. István Harcsa, professional advisor at the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, in an interview summarized the previous statement as follows: "Since sociology was very much an overburdened discipline, in order to survive it needed to make certain compromises and (not challenging higher authority) one of its survival strategies was to make certain compromises, and there was no point in *running head-on into* a *brick wall*" (Harcsa 1991: 41). However, other authors emphasize that sociology also has a history of being independent from politics (e.g. from direct political influence) and its development can be interpreted not only through institutionalization and through research possibilities, but also within a unique theoretical framework, such as the changes in the public sphere during state socialism (Becskeházi–Kuczi 1992).

Until the change of regime, a number of topics were also considered taboo. Officially, it was hardly possible to speak about poverty, and discriminated social groups were completely left out from the discourse.[13] Even when sociological works carefully referred to these phenomena, they were impelled to describe them euphemistically: individuals and groups were labelled as being "multipally disadvantaged" or "struggling with problems of adaptation" or they were disapprovingly referred to under the terms of faulty behaviour or deviance (Szalai, 2002: 35). Yet on this – ideologically pregnant – discursive ground, some literary pieces could accomplish a special mission, such as Endre Fejes's family novel *Rozsdatemető* (*Generation of Rust*), which tried to deconstruct the myth of the working class, or sociographies attempting to capture the everyday life of the discriminated.

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[13] When Isván Kemény held his famous academic lecture on poverty in 1970, this study started off with the euphemistic title *A survey on the life conditions of the members of the society having low income,* he was temporarily removed from the Institute of Sociology. The final study was encrypted, and placed in a safe-deposit of the president of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (Kemény 1991: 183).

In the absence of any other source, historiography, after the change of regime, could not take anything else into consideration when scrutinizing post-1945 social phenomena except for the previously mentioned models. Historians, however, while adapting the categories and achievements of social research seemed to have forgotten about the history and historicity of sociology. This could have happened due to the modernist approach of historiography: that historians tended to view sources as imprints of a reality that is factually absorbable.

The uncritical, automatic acceptance of the conclusions of sociological works that were created in the various periods led to a historical image of the development of Hungarian society according to which this society was homogenized in the 1950s, then gradually transformed from the 1960s onwards, with further differentiation during the coming decades (Romsics 2000: 473). Studies on the subject undeniably reflect viewpoints of the 1960s that made possible the scrutiny of social structures and mobility through the utilization of the worker-peasant-intellectual categorical trinity, serving the dominant state ideology. It is this lack of conceptual self-reflection with regard to historiography that explains why several historians believe they are discussing social reality, but are in fact only interpreting categories formulated in the wake of various party decrees.

Conclusions of historical studies on state socialism – seemingly well-grounded and referenced – are often not only based on the phenomena examined, but are also coloured by the period's accepted conceptual framework. Our present knowledge about the society of the age is, to a large extent, is based on these concepts, too. The abovementioned theoretical models that defined solutions of empirical studies for decades were, in fact, based on a multi-scalar categorization of occupation. Tibor Valuch, social historian and author of a recapitulation on Hungarian social history, could not but conclude: "since research on the subject is only relatively accessible, social strata can solely be divided by the character of occupation and the social position that comes with it" (Valuch 2001: 118).

SOCIAL CHANGE – INVESTIGATIONS ON SOCIAL MOTIONS

Social mobility

The possibilities for Hungarian sociology were determined by limited scientific liberty, which was slightly extended by "pro-science" politicians of the party, and which researchers – under the compulsion to accept certain ideological bounds – tried to widen.

It is due to this special ideologically constrained situation that investigations of social mobility attained such a high priority in the period. Since, according to the ideology of the system, there was equality in "socialist society," sociologists had fewer possibilities to conduct investigations on stratification than they could with social mobility, as the latter marked the lessening of inequalities (Kolosi 1982: 4). Sociologists researching social mobility aimed to analyze possible directions within mobility ("social rising and declining") that were thought to be found between social strata. It was assumedly the dominating liberal philosophy of the 19th century that idealized high degrees of social mobility (Róbert 1982).[14] Social mobility is thus interpreted as a measure of openness in a society. In Hungary, the

[14] In democratic societies, this means the possibility of a socially non-predetermined course of life where individuals could pursue paths that they are set on, or have skills in.

openness of society could not be demonstrated in any other way; one could only present a hierarchy and the motions between subordinated and superior social groups. Structural changes were thus only made visible on this model through social mobility processes.

Thus, those studies that were to prove the myth of equality eventually underlined the very hierarchical approach of sociology. This phenomenon, therefore, demonstrates that sociological research adjusted itself to state socialist ideology and mainstream Western methodology at once. Kolosi's description of those social groups that "produce and mediate worth" goes as follows: "It is better to live in a suburban area than in a homestead, to live in comfort than discomfort, to go on vacation when possible than to work, to eat more meat than to eat less, to earn a degree than to be an uneducated worker; society works like this, independently from whether everyone agrees with these statements or not." This description seems typical of the mid-1980s (Kolosi 1984: 14–15).

On the basis of the conceptual trinity, mobility-research originally depicted the motions between the peasant and worker classes and the intellectual stratum. Later, the status model proved an opportunity for deeper investigation of social changes. Rudolf Andorka differentiated work-character groups when investigating social mobility; this model offered room for international comparison where the referred English and American pieces of research also used a similar categorization (Andorka 1970), and data from the pre-war general census were also taken into consideration in a historical analysis (Andorka 1982: 265). However, the principle thesis of mobility-investigations has not changed: one of the main directions of Hungarian mobility since the Second World War was the motion from the working class and from the peasantry towards the white-collar and intellectual professions (Andorka 1982: 73), and the high percentage of mobility indicated an openness and a democratization of the "socialist society". The potential success of this openness would thus be measured by the "eventual access of other social groups to the intellectual stratum" (Andorka 1978: 71). Since then, this argument and, that social change was generally positive and produced worth, has been questioned several times, which will be pointed out further on in this paper.

The thesis of equality was perverted in 1967 for the first time. Based on 1963 data, István Kemény showed that upward mobility was smaller in Hungary than in Western countries and, that the mobility ratio was itself an outcome of a changing employment system. The number of technical employees and those in production is also a direct consequence of extensive industrialization. The study implied that the growing number of intellectual employees and social mobility were stemming from economic growth, not political intention (Kemény 1991: 182).

It has been recurrently pointed out that social change in Hungary was a direct outcome of structural social mobility; thus, it can be interpreted through the structure of production and employment. The occurrence of circular mobility, which would have proved an open social structure, in fact was atypical and rarer in the period than in 1949 (Andorka 1982: 251). (It is worth noting, however, that this claim is also built on the presupposition that society is hierarchically structured, where entities may move "upward" or "downward".[15]) This interpretation is also underlined by other comparative analyses, which argue that changes applied to educational systems and the handling of social equality in former state socialist countries did not make a coherent "pattern of mobility" (Müller–Lüttinger–König–Karle 1989). It is known that, in the analysis of economical and social relations, a

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[15] However, this mechanical approach of social motions was criticized already in the 1970s, for example by Rudolf Andorka (Andorka 1970; Róbert 1982; Kozák 2002:12, 19–21).

political reading is also possible, for – as a consequence of economical and political priorities — the educational system was itself shaped by political intentions. Nevertheless, for the aforementioned reasons and as, it is "not socialism per se, which triggered new forms of social mobility" (Andorka 1995a: 420).

Modernization, modernity

Partly under political influence, and partly under the influence of international compulsions, the thesis of modernization was formulated in 1980's Hungary. It concerned with social development in Hungary after 1945. According to this argument, industrialization determined the main characteristics of social development, and in spite of different political systems, social changes in the Western and state socialist countries could be compared and investigated under the same terminology and concepts.[16] Under the banner of modernization, Kálmán Kulcsár (1980, 1986) argued that the state had become the exclusive actor of economic and social life, and the number of white-collar workers had increased along with bureaucracy. By emphasizing the modernizing function of the state, sociologists obviously wished to have an influence on politics, but at the same time, they also created a legitimate basis for reforms to be carried out by the system. Expansion of the modernization thesis can also be interpreted as proof that sociology spoke a common language with state power even in the 1980s, and, that through the "widening of public opinion," sociology started to gain an influential, mediatory role (Szalai 1994: 475; Léderer 2002: 148–149). In light of this, the rapid popularity of the modernization thesis is reasonable; however, the claim according to which there is a causal relationship between modernization and social change — which is held by many historians even today (Romsics 2000: 471) — can be challenged.

According to a more dynamic interpretation of modernization, it was not the central power but rather the modernization movement of individuals (agricultural small-scale production and rebirth of private enterprises) that stimulated development. According to this view, modernization can be best viewed as an interaction of social self-organizations and the efforts of the party-state. The factor that the state did not limit – in reaction to changes in society and sociology – a persuasion of interest among individuals, in fact helped sustain the operation of the system. The common message between the state and sociology was that the state was headed in a stable, harmonious direction while in fact trying to legitimize its reign through a support of spontaneous modernization (Szalai 1994: 475). Those who gained interest from "modernization" were considered by party leaders as the base of the system's legitimacy; thus, propaganda and the politics of life-standards served as vehicles to widen this base. Nonetheless, it can be debated whether the apparent or real balance of these efforts were actually the product of contemporaneous discourses and the result of a continuous dialogue between power and science. It should also be mentioned that the thesis on modernization – looking at its genealogy and not its validity – did not take notice of numerous actors in society of the era. People living on the periphery of society, the discriminated and the underdogs of the transformations; in other words, those who experienced the *de facto* shrillness of state socialism were neglected in the modernization concept.

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[16] Aron 1964. The volume was published in 1967 in Hungarian, and it could also influence sociology of the era.

Changing objectives and revised concepts

After the change of regime, when circumstances would have allowed an investigation into the parallels between social development in Hungary and the West, scientific discourse was overwhelmed by the sharp criticism of the previous political system. In the new political and ideological situation historians – in light of theories on totalitarianism – rather concentrated on the description and the unveiling of evils of the past system, and underlined those negative tendencies that were related to economic and social phenomena. That is why the concept of "directed mobility" has been so popular in historical analyses. Antal Örkény, when scrutinizing mobility processes, defined "directed mobility" as a phenomenon typically occurring in state socialist countries, based on overall volunteerism and, which was a product of strict central control, by a limitation on general mobility. He also added, that "this change was largely motivated by a large-scale uncertainty, a sense of incomplete transition, a steady fear and the motivation to be liberated from something" (Örkény 1989: 23, 26).

The clear, public definition of the state socialist system as totalitarian eventually led to a new, but still normative-based reading of social mobility on the part of historians. Certain authors, thus, interpret social mobility and social processes in general through the dichotomic lens of present democracy and the past totalitarian system, in which, results based on the one-dimensional, occupation-based structure analyses are accepted without criticism. In contradiction, Rudolf Andorka (1982) in his monograph repeatedly shed light on the shortcomings of adopted theories and methods.

Starting from the years of transformation in 1989, sociologists were leading in an attempt to answer as to what had happened with the Hungarian pre-World War II middle class (Gáti–Horváth 1992; Róbert–Sági–Utasi–Kovách 1995; Utasi–A. Gergely–Becskeházi 1996), and if the development of the middle class had continued after 1948 (Szelényi 1980a, 1980b; Kovách 1991). Studies on these historical issues can be read as documents revealing how the conceptual language of social history can be employed to understand the sociological categories of the time (Csite 1997).[17] For a long time, historiography concerned with pre-transition Hungary could not follow the new formations of sociology after 1989, as it strictly fixed its attention on the analysis of the past system, and while doing so, absorbed the conceptual language of then-contemporary sociology.[18]

Horribile dictu, the differentia specifica of the state socialist era, in the eyes of historians, resided in the terminology created under state socialist ideology; therefore, historiography tied its own conceptual language to the very heritage of socialism.

RECENT HISTORICAL APPROACHES TO THE PERIOD

Several studies reflect on the question as to how governments of Western democracies managed to influence social processes. Governmental impact is a definitive question in case of state socialist systems even more, where the principal goal was a redefinition and reorganization of the whole of society. In state socialism, the most salient ambition of the system was – in order to legitimize itself – to launch radical social change, which, consequently, was much articulated by propaganda as

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[17] In this case, the dual structure of society of the era – represented by the traditions of Hungarian sociology and historiography – echoes the duality of conceptual language and ideology.

[18] In contrast to this, it is worthwhile to note that if sociological categories used in the state socialist era are completely discredited, realities occurring in Hungarian and Western democracy, the comparison of social processes before and after 1945 and, the answering of the question as to whether there is continuity or discontinuity, are also corrupted.

a huge success.[19] The directed nature of social processes – in my view – not only meant the forced alteration of everyday habits of individuals, but the modification of social discourse from above and, consequently, the very destruction of past structures through it.

Identity politics of the system – emerging on the political landscape of the dictatorship and constructing prevailing ideas about social classes – eventually suppressed self-organization in society in the sense that it made these social groupings invisible by the means of these discourses. The mission is, accordingly, to revise theories on mobility and modernization and to revisit old structures based on the worker-peasant-intellectual Stalinist model. However, the question is whether or not, by emphasizing continuity in social processes and by accepting the conceptual language of the social history, and the sociology of today, we should make room for a new discourse and the exclusivity thereof. Are we not ignoring effects of discourses from the past? In general, the question is: what models are there to describe the state socialist society by combining the angles of small actors and interaction, but also adding the new aspect of the competitive portrayals of society of the era?

A totalitarian perspective

Hungary has its own extensive literature on the era of state socialism, with a steady stream of monographs (re)evaluating the whole of the period. Previously well-established ideas on the state and society of state socialism have come under review in the last decade. It is worth, therefore, surveying the approach of most recent studies on the subject. The application of a totalitarian paradigm in Hungary is intertwined with a rightist, ideologist and anticommunist rhetoric. It is typical that the society of the era is depicted solely and exclusively through the machinery of terror and metaphors of oppression and resistance. In contradiction to this tendency, the frequently quoted Hannah Arendt (1958) herself did not mainly investigate the operation of state-directed terror, but analyzed the historical context in which totalitarianism could evolve in the first place.

According to Arendt's analysis, totalitarianism developed in modern mass societies that offered grounds for anti-humanitarian ideas, and later the totalitarian systems also affected these societies. Arendt described the world of totalitarianism as a system in which social classes do not exist. However, Hungarian historians have largely ignored the main thesis of this theory: that the sustainability of the system was interpreted and comprehended through the lack of traditional self-organization. In the beginnings, there was no other explanation for the sustainability of the system, apart from its suppressive nature and the organization of terror. From a totalitarian perspective, the system and its operation were depicted in a motionless state. According to this approach, the society of Hungarian state socialism was also suppressed by totalitarian power, and social inequalities were also determined mainly by power relationships. However, it was a more essentialist view on state socialist society of Hungary than the former sociological analyses; for example the investigation of stratification by the "character of the work done", which was a combination of working conditions, power/authority, knowledge, etc.

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[19] It was politics, thus, that ordered scientific discourse in these directions, by means of the multiple devices of compulsion and financial pressure.

Modernization revisited

Another theory of Western historiography finds a rationale for the existence and operation of Soviet systems in the processes of modernization. According to this interpretation, the reason behind the sustainable nature of these systems lies in this very point: it was modernization that served as support for the legitimization of state socialism. However, this theory does not seem to offer a full description of social and economic models of state socialism. Attempts at modernization during the years of state socialism highly prioritized the state sector within the economy, and thus the industrial sector; while the so-called "second economy" (the partially permitted private sector), especially that of households, was generally ignored. According to empirical studies, state socialism was a stillborn attempt at modernization, for it was not able to stimulate aggregation and dissolve Hungary's peripheral position against the West (Laki 2009).

Béla Tomka's analysis, which investigates economic growth from a wider perspective and on a greater temporal scale, shows that economical distance between Hungary and Western Europe, in contrast with claims from the state socialist era, only grew. This was mainly due to an ineffective system of investments, a failure to develop human resources, and the absence of an open attitude towards international commerce and foreign capital. Hungary's political climate, in which economic relations to the West were limited, largely contributed to this failure and burdened long-term development (Tomka 2011: 220).

Nevertheless, it can also be claimed on the basis of "multiple modernity" theory, that social, economic processes cannot be interpreted uniformly. Earlier, social scientists attached the evolution of modernity to certain phenomena such as technical development, industrialization and urbanization, which were seen as inevitable and essential factors in unilinear modern economic and social development (Niedmüller et al. 2008). Historians of today, however, seem to deny this claim and refuse the idea of a homogeneous western modernity that eventually spread in Europe. Followers of multiple modernity theory attempt to prove that the monolithic view of modernization is not pre-ordained and the process of modernization occurred in different ways; different patterns of modernization can be observed in Europe and other continents, within regions and even societies (Niedermüller et al. 2008; Hroch–Miroslav–Klusakova–Luda 1996). The theory of modernization was mainly applied to legitimize modern state power, and it still has a similar connotation. Theories on convergence (an investigation on development differences between regions and countries) have, thus, also been revised in European history (Kaelble 1987; Tomka 2008).

Even among those historians that object to the theory of modernization, some link the long-term operation of state socialism in Hungary to its social achievements. Eszter Bartha (2009, 2013), for instance, sees legitimacy in the civilizational and social achievements of the Kádár system and describes it as welfare dictatorship. This statement is contradicted by those claims that point out the incomparable nature of Hungarian and Western social development. Official discourses from the Kádár era point to the conclusion that standards of living were growing and that the period could be characterized by relative welfare. Most recent research, carried out by Tomka or Sándor Horváth, show the contrary. The basis of comparison, in case of new analyses, is no longer composed of countries of the Soviet system but social policies of Western democracies. Since in post-1956 Hungary, the main function of socio-politics was to legitimize state-institutions, the state, and "socialist" system itself, the very structure and goals of the social system differed from those in the West (Horváth 2012; Tomka 2003a; Tomka 2003b). This

system did not allow the pursuit of interests and above all, collective action. Characteristics of the regime followed those reigning practices that evoked the discrimination of minority groups and the poor.[20]

Mobility revisited

Another approach to historiography was that of revisionism, which viewed the characteristics of Soviet states as detached from previous interpretations. The paradigm-shift occurred in the 1980s, with Sheila Fitzpatrick among the participating historians. She defined Stalinism as a "cultural revolution," which, due to the great degree of social mobility in the Soviet Union, not only absorbed the whole of society but also managed to build a social base for itself. Fitzpatrick interpreted the subsistence and legitimization of the system through the lens of ordinary people who in fact benefitted from social mobilization (Fitzpatrick 1979). The investigation into social mobility is also a crucial question of Hungarian social history. The deconstruction of state socialist-era descriptions of society pinpoints the fact that the conceptual trinity of worker-peasant-intellectual has never been truly capable of capturing experiences of the time. Consequently, this conceptual trinity is the least useful for historical analysis today, since its main goal was to legitimize the state socialist system by tracking mobility between the mentioned categories (Majtényi 2005).

Statistics from the period, as well as sources from archives, tend to describe situations in which people from the country eventually urbanized, or where peasants became workers, and workers intellectuals. Personal experiences, naturally, are manifold to a greater extent, which can be observed through diaries, interviews, and oral history in general (Majtényi 2005). Nonetheless, this does not mean that only the individual self-interpretations and -representations could be analyzed as empirical "facts", since elements of collective life ("social facts") can also exist independently and are able to exert an influence on the individual. Furthermore, ordinary people also had to reflect on concepts and discourses promoted by state power. It is questionable, however, as to what extent entities of society accommodated expectations more than only to the use of prefixed terms and language. To pin down social processes, a call for the notion of "acculturation" might be of use. Through acculturation, the analysis of how entities, families, and communities, voluntarily or forcedly, adapted to and shaped the dominant culture, could be carried out.

Bringing a Western perspective

In the portrayal of society, the chief aim is not to set out statistical data, but much rather to deconstruct categories carried from the state socialist system and to recreate a new conceptual framework for analysis. Our question is how social categories were constructed and how they managed to form new group identities, if at all. The introduction of these concepts triggers numerous crucial ideological questions. The author of this paper finds it problematic that Hungarian historians rarely touch upon the ideological background of the subject of their research.[21] In Hungary, ideological discussions, therefore, appear under the veil of some scholarship and scientific discourses, as though historians were debating over objectively interpretable processes. Personal reflections and perspectives are thus left invisible and obscure. In modernity, according to Hannah Arendt,

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[20] Due to the high rates of poverty among the *ROMA* population in Hungary, this group was seen as a "social group" with problems of adaptation of "socialist" norms in the official discourses. See Dupcsik 2009; Majtényi–Majtényi 2012.

[21] This stands in contradiction with German traditions of historical debate, where researchers have mostly demonstrated their ideological viewpoints.

we can give meaning to our own time by recreating and reviving the past. The pearl diver does not dive to the bottom of the sea to discover everything there; his interest is only pearls and coral. This applies even if the one sets out to present nearly every phenomenon, including those less important for his own interpretation.[22]

In Eszter Bartha's above-mentioned analysis (2009, 2013), workers in 1956 acted as a revolutionary class,[23] in reaction to which the state offered better standards of consumption in the Kádár era, which predominantly made workers accept the system. However, it is questionable, whether the working class existed as a unified, homogeneous entity in the era at all. Marxist criticism against the system seems to automatically validate the Marxist model *per se* in the portrayal of society. The author of this essay finds the interpretation of "working class" as an analytical category problematic. Workers, state employees really, tended to refer to themselves as members of the working class, but this process was directed by state ideology and primarily represented in the level of public discourse. Though this phenomenon inevitably affected the self-definition of ordinary people in the public sphere, however, it did not necessarily determine social processes, and the formation of social groups.

Another method to capture and accurately portray social processes in state socialist Hungary is an application of those models that allow a comparison between processes in different countries and historical periods. Though these concepts would not represent the core of state socialist-era discourses, on occasion, they might be accurate in pinning down elements of collective experiences. The author of this research does not deny viewing Hungary's state socialist past from the perspective of liberal democracy. In effect, the author offers a scholarly angle, using categories to allow a comparison with the democratic societies and only slightly reflecting on the self-legitimacy of the past system. However, these concepts can only be applied with careful criticism and self-reflection. If we truly want to reflect on social processes that bridge political systems, we look for historical continuity; the society of pre-1989 Hungary cannot be treated as an improper part of history. Social and cultural continuities are in force to a much greater extent than we would assume by the evaluation of successive historical eras. It is typical that, while scrutinizing schemas of classification in the pre-World War II society of Stalinism, Sheila Fitzpatrick (2000) observed that class status was not only defined by an individual's current relation to production mechanisms, but also by a pre-revolution status and the status of ancestors of the individual. This view implies that state socialist society did not exist in its own time, but shows temporal continuity. It is, therefore, interpretable from a different temporal scale and in the context of extended social processes.

An everyday life perspective

For a relatively ideologically neutral interpretation of state socialist Hungarian society, the portrayal of everyday life and everyday situations might offer a solution. Recently, Tibor Valuch – the author of the first scientific synthesis on the subject of post-1945 social history (2001) – has conducted research into everyday life history (Valuch 2004, 2006, 2013). This approach can

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[22] "Like a pearl diver who descends to the bottom of the sea, not to excavate the bottom and bring it to light but to pry loose the rich and the strange, the pearls and the coral in the depths, and to carry them to the surface, this thinking delves into the depths of the past, but not in order to resuscitate it the way it was and to contribute to the renewal of extinct ages." Arendt 1969: 50–51.

[23] Hannah Arendt (1958a) claimed in her classic work that there was almost no robbery or looting in 1956, i.e. mob rule did not take hold. Relying on published sources, Standeisky presents some of the more carnival-like moments of the revolution. She shows that revolutionary and workers' councils did not form immediately, and all kinds of things happened from day to day (Standeisky 2010). Several, following Arendt, described Hungary's uprising as a workers' revolution against a totalitarian regime which called itself a workers' state. Bill Lomax directly described the Hungarian revolutionary workers' organisations as a self-administering state of workers' councils (Lomax 1976; Lomax 1990). For the latest criticism of this view, see Pittaway 2012: 230–56.

be taken as a breakthrough in Hungarian social history, since the overall structure of society can also be pinned down by interpreting the social distinctions in the area of everyday life (how the individuals and the groups constructed their lifestyles, following former social and cultural traditions). Such an analysis offers the possibility to take over the concepts of elite, middle, lower- and underclass into the Hungarian social historical discourse on state socialism. However, a number of methodological problems can be named concerning this approach, as well. Some researchers do not consider cadres of state socialism part of the elite, for in their rise, there was no such competition or professional competence involved that would have had them qualified under the same principles as in case of Western elite groups, though this group clearly separated from the rest of society via its separable standard of living an exceptional status (Majtényi 2009). Furthermore, certain social phenomena can be interpreted as an extension of the middle class: the formation of a wide employee's society, predictable lifestyles, and provisions seemingly promoting welfare. On the contrary, we hardly find exemplars of financial independence, persuasion of civil autonomy, or social practices typical of the middle class and the bourgeoisie (Dupcsik, 2008). Another possibility for researchers is to capture Hungarian society of the era through the category of gender (Bakó–Tóth eds. 2009; Tóth 2010).

The question is how these concepts relate to a society in whose glossary these terms do not exist at all; in other words, does the concept exist because it is verbalized (talked about) and, can it possibly exist when it is not? On the one hand, it is questionable whether the categories evolving in the discourses of the era are capable of portraying the proper social processes or not; and neither is it obvious whether the concepts of any era can be applied to describe the society of another period and mindset, or whether they are reflections of contemporary ideas.

Stephen Kotkin's monograph on Soviet cities was undeniably a great influence on Hungarian historians. Kotkin claimed, that "Stalinism was not just a political system, let alone the rule of an individual. It was a set of values, a social identity, a way of life. When it comes to Stalinism, what needs to be explained and subjected to detailed scrutiny are the mechanisms by which the dreams of ordinary people and those of the individuals directing the state found common ground in this Soviet version of the welfare state." (Kotkin 1995: 23.) According to this, state socialism was primarily a practice of habits, attitude, and linguistic terms. A similar piece was written on the Hungarian city of Sztálinváros (Horváth 2004), and the everyday life of a socialist brigade (Tóth, 2007). The power and degree of authority depends on the actions and character of its subordinated individuals. Using Foucauldian concepts of power relations, revisionist historians argue that in order to comprehend the system, the underlying collective and individual motives of action need to be considered as well. Individuals subordinated to dictatorial systems do not solely subordinate themselves, but through their actions accept, shape, and recreate the system in their habitual, everyday environment. József Ö. Kovács's piece (2012), which surveys employed and experienced violence in collectivization, implies that this approach does not actually contradict the essential claims of totalitarianism theories (which link the substance of dictatorship to modern forms of violence), but examines the everyday implementation of totalitarianism and seeks the explanation of the sustained existence of totalitarian systems in everyday life.

The portrayal of individuals

German everyday-life historians developed a highly influential theory to describe the legitimacy of dictatorships and the effect and significance of individual actions in these regimes. This theory borrows the concept of *Eigensinn* ("sense of one's own interests") from German literature and philosophy to describe the behaviour and motivations of the "majority" (i.e. people who

were neither enthusiastic disciples nor active opponents of the Nazi or Soviet dictatorships but whose everyday work and passive behaviour, by not presenting resistance, helped these systems to build up and endure). The word implies a kind of self-sufficiency and independence; not the free will of free persons, but the will of citizens who can (and do) adapt to various kinds of regime while keeping their own direct interests in view (Lüdtke 1994). Set against this is the concept of autonomy, the kind of everyday behaviour which inhibits the emergence and persistence of totalitarianism and which should, in principle, be typical behaviour in a democracy. It is a perplexing question as to whether it is democracy which creates autonomous behaviour, and dictatorship which creates *Eigensinn* and everyday forms of collaboration, or whether these processes are carried out reversely. Naturally, the perspective of study obviously has a bearing on the answer. In adopting the notion of Eigensinn Hungarian social historians also analyzed how ordinary people adopted the political and social aims declared by the state socialist system in the framework of their own worlds (Majtényi 2005).

The portrayal of individuals in the formation of social processes can only be accurately carried out through the study of everyday practices, over which the state power did not have omnipotent surveillance at all. Individuals, in fact, were able to define themselves and their environment in full possession of this power and in accordance with their possibilities. Personal reflections and interpretations did not, however, get very much publicity and could barely affect social discourses; while the state, given its power over discourses and interpretations, could impose a conceptual-linguistic dictatorship on individuals. In the last decade, micro-historical and oral history research projects attempted to revise the earlier portrayal of state socialist society, which had been mainly based on representative sociological surveys (although sociological interview-making has been also practiced since the early 1970s). The experience of unskilled women workers in state socialist Hungary was studied on the basis of oral history interviews, and it was investigated how they constructed their multiple identities as workers, consumers, and women (Tóth, 2007). In a micro-historical monograph, it was also analysed how the social identities of youth gangs had been constructed since the 1960s, and how Hungarian hippies could express their alternative identities (Horváth 2009). Sociologists published hermeneutic case studies, such as the book edited by Éva Kovács (2008) on the Kádár period conducting narrative life-story interviews and analysing them through the adoption of methods of hermeneutic interpretive phenomenology.

However, a use of discourse analytic methods in social history also could lead to a more complex understanding of the processes of social construction and their implications in state socialist Hungary. Unless we are able to uncover the effects of the identity politics that worked to create the virtual reality of state socialist society, and we recognize the nature and operation of the various discourses of power and science, we cannot reach a reliable understanding of the period's phenomena. Therefore, the question is not only whether individual interpretations of the age appear, or even can appear at all on the discursive levels of historical and sociological conceptualization, but also the extent to which the effects of these discourses transformed the empirical world of individuals.

DISCUSSION

In conclusion, recent social historical research has shown that the historian must keep in mind a set of realities when portraying state socialist society: firstly, a linguistic "reality", as an indirect imprint of dominant ideology which framed then-contemporary social conceptualizations; secondly, realities of everyday situations that formed collective behaviour and sets of rules, but which cannot be automatically described using sociological concepts of the time due to their ideological nature; and thirdly, those individual practices which could be formulated by the ideological language of state socialism but adjusted to the rules of everyday life.

In this reading, the researcher finds him or herself in an epistemological labyrinth. The fact, that applied categories are constructs that intertwine with different eras and ideologies, follows from the analysis of conceptual history; these categories not only describe but also shape the subject of analysis. On the other hand, if enough attention is devoted to experiential analysis, a type of scrutiny which is rarely part of descriptions of greater social structures, we might reach Hannah Arendt's conclusion. The limitation of personal liberties evokes such conformist actions that go against individual self-expression and collective action. In such a limitation, a lessening of formation of will (i.e. self-organization) can be envisioned; where the language and, thus, freedom for democratic organization ceases to exist. Ultimately, the application of any system of categories will flatten this message of our past. Personal and collective forms of behaviour in such a reading, though integral part of historical events, are not considered landmarks in history. Reaching back to the pearl-diver metaphor: neither are they pearls nor corals in the eye of the historian. It is for this very reason that we must persist in approaching our past according to our own perspectives and concepts.

Archival records

- National Archives of Hungary (MNL OL)

- Documents of Central Committee of Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Hungarian: Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, MSzMP) (M-KS.)

- Documents of Agit. Prop. Committee of MSzMP (M-KS. 288–41)

- Documents of Central Committee of MSzMP (M-KS. 288–4)

- Documents of Central Committee's Secretary of MSzMP (M-KS. 288–7)

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