

Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

The Polish and Hungarian echoes of the Katyń massacre

1943–1989

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Debrecen, 2015.

The Katyń massacre is one of the biggest tragedies that the Poles had to suffer in the 20th century, and therefore it is still alive in the common memory of the Polish society: not only as a faded away family story, and not even only as a part of history that is only important for historians or politicians, but as a "coexisting" symbol as well. If we only look at the death toll of this massacre, this tragic event could not have played such a leading role in Polish history, since much more people became victims of deportation to the Soviet Union, German war crimes, or the war itself. In the light of the above the question is simple: how and why Katyń became a symbol, why does it mean today much more than a simple "sad event" from the past? It is widely known, that the topic is still playing an important role in today's Poland. But it was a very long and hard way to get to the current conditions, when the topic is free to talk about and free to research. And thank to this long lasting struggle, not only the world became aware of the tragedy, but the whole issue regained such a great importance inside of Poland as well. The basic aim of the dissertation is to unfold the history of the struggle that took place between the Polish people and various political interests of superpowers that tried to conquer Poland, the struggle that's main goal was to be able to speak about the Katyń massacre as it was, and not according to the expectations of the German, Soviet and Western propaganda. Katyń namely played the role of a good instrument of propaganda for almost fifty years - the powers that tried to dominate Poland used it along their actual political interests without trying to reveal the truth. However it is very important to mention, that the history of the struggle against the Katyń lie is not only important from a Polish point of view, but it is also crucial that Katyń, the massacre that became a symbol for Polish freedom fight and martyrdom for independence, was well known in Hungary as well - mainly because of its Hungarian aspects. It's enough to mention a couple of them to underline the importance of Katyń in the Hungarian public opinion: the Hungarian commissioner for refugees, József Antall (sr.) offered a helping hand to the Polish organizations to find the "missing" (and already in fact dead) officers in the Hungarian refugee camps; the news of the massacre caused a major outrage amongst the Polish refugees in Hungary; at least one Hungarian man fell victim to the Katyń killings; the Hungarian news dealt with the issue in details; the main evidence to the Soviet Union's guilt was provided by a Hungarian pathologist in 1943 (dr. Ferenc Orsós) and the Katyń massacre remained important for the Hungarian opposition after the war as well. According to the above list it is clear, why the horrors of Katyń had a huge influence on the Hungarian public opinion and this is already a good reason to examine not only the Polish, but the Hungarian echoes of the Katyń massacre as well.

1. Aims of the dissertation

As we mentioned before, we will try to examine both the Polish and the Hungarian echoes of the Katyń massacre, and we will do it mainly via using the methods of reception history and history of effects - so most of all exploring how the above mentioned topic appeared in both countries, in the public opinion, in the official communications and in the press. By doing that we will clarify what kind of effects did this have on politics, common opinion and how it helped (or hindered) the clarification of the Katyń case, how it became some kind of symbol, and how it influenced the Hungarian public opinion. So to sum it up, the main goal of the dissertation is to describe the history of the Polish and Hungarian reception of the Katyń massacre in details - both in Poland and in Hungary, and both under and after the war, until the fall of communism.

As it immediately turns out from the above list, the topic is so far-reaching and diverse in time and complexity as well, that we need to set up some limits, a "framework" for our work, just to avoid the dissertation being over-long and diffuse. That is why this work does not (or rather only shortly does) expound neither the clashes and complications in the international politics caused by the massacre, nor the changes of the international public opinion and the world press (the Western "echo"), and not even the history and historiography of the incredible publication-wave after 1989. Sticking to this lastly mentioned timeframe is especially important, because the actual evolution of the case happened between the appearance of the first news in 1943 and between 1989. However the story of Katyń is still not ended, it is only the "era of the Katyń-lie", that got to an end in 1989. From this time on the archival sources became freely accessible and the history of the researches and the new publication-wave that had been triggered by this fact could form the basis of another monography. It is very important to underline, that the whole topic is still almost too large to handle, even if we stick to the above mentioned timeframe - so if we would like to examine the echoes of Katyń between 1943 and 1989, the size of our work still could easily reach 1000 pages. The Polish and Hungarian public opinion was only two of the media, that had been affected by the topic. Even though (due to the Polish-Hungarian orientation of our work) we have to mostly ignore the full history of the echoes of the topic in other countries, in the Western public opinion, in some cases it is in fact necessary to mention the different opinions of the superpowers that had been involved in the Katyń case. So we will add German, Soviet and "Western" opinions (even from the Polish and Hungarian emigration) to the Polish-Hungarian "spaceframe", just

to show how these influenced, affected each other. But it is also important to mention, that we will do this only until it is really necessary for the clarification of the effects of propaganda and foreign news regarding the two countries.

We will examine the topic from many aspects, from the viewpoint of politics (how it affected the memory of Katyń), from the viewpoint of the society (what was the people's relation to the propaganda, how they could build and express their own opinion), and from the viewpoint of the history as a science (how historians related to the tragedy, how could they express their own opinion).

2. Sources, bibliography and the methods of the research

As the case in Poland and in Hungary too was used by the propaganda of superpowers (with different motives of course) just until 1989, we will pay a great attention to the official, "mainstream" press and media. We will add to this the reactions of the public opinion, that could be measured by looking at various publications (released by underground press or the emigration) or by examining the archival documents of state security services in both countries. So we will use the sources of the contemporary official and unofficial press, archives of state security services and even sources of contemporary literature (works of both publicists, writers and historians as well). This lately mentioned part is not only significant because it shows us the limits that had been set up by the censorship, but it also guides us through the historiography of the topic as well. In order to not make our dissertation to a dry analysis of contemporary censorship and press, we will use other sources of public memory as well, like memoirs, diaries, recollections. These, beyond that they make the picture about the effects, echo of the massacre more "colorful", will also help us to understand what Katyń meant for the individuals, between what limits could they speak about the topic. So basically it will show us a picture according to the narrative of "history from the bottom up", that is serving as a basic element of reception historical researches.

To present the above in details, we will use various sources: in addition to documents accessible in libraries, archives and museums (for example Biblioteka Jagiellońska and Muzeum Armii Krajowej in Cracow, Muzeum Katyńskie in Warsaw), document collections released after 1989 provide a great help as well. The topic of Katyń in Poland literally has such a big amount of works released in the past decades that could easily fill a library and that could answer almost all of our questions. Just to mention the latest year's releases we can name quite a lot of work about the topic, like for example "Katyń. Zbrodnia, prawda, pamięć"

(Katyń. Massacre, Turth, Memory) by Andrzej Przewoźnik (2010), "Katyń. Zbrodnia i kłamstwo" (Katyń. Massacre and Lie) by Tadeusz A. Kisielewski (2010), "Mord Katyński. Siedemdziesiąt lat drogi do prawdy" (The Katyń Massacre. A Seventy Years Way to the Truth) by Wojciech Materski (2010). As it already might turned out from the above titles, the majority of the listed works mentions the reception historic aspect of the topic, but rather from the viewpoint of the superpowers, so from the usually as "only important" treated postions. Especially from this angle presents the story Franz Kadell, ("Katyń w oczach zachodu" - Katyń the Eyes of the West, 2010), Eugenia Maresch ("Katyń 1940"), and Anna Dzienkiewicz too ("Rosja a Katyń" - Russia and Katyń).

However the modern Polish literature is dealing with Katyń and its echoes, reception-history in details, only rather few of the authors mention the Hungarian aspects of Katyń, and who does, does it only very shortly. No wonder that we should turn to the Hungarian literature if we want to learn more about the Hungarian aspects of the massacre. The most important Hungarian works about the topic are the following ones: "Csoda a Visztulánál és a Balti-tengernél. Piłsudski... Katyń... Szolidaritás" (Miracle on the Vistula and at the Baltic Sea. Piłsudski... Katyń... Solidarity) by Istán Kovács (2010), "Katyń, 1940 Lengyelország a Szovjetunió és Németország "életterében" (1914–1945)" (Katyń, 1940 Poland in the "living space" of the Soviet Union and Germany (1914-1945)) by István Németh (2013), and "Az én Katyńom - Mój Katyń" (My Katyń - Mój Katyń) by Konrad Sutarski. It is also important to underline the work of Károly Kapronczay, who was the first after the fall of communism to carry out deeper researches in the topic of the Hungarian aspects of Katyń. His most important works in this field are: "Katyń magyar vonatkozásai" (Hungarian aspects of Katyń - published in "Élet és tudomány", in 1990) and "Katyń és Magyarország" (Katyń and Hungary - published in "Tekintet", in 1991). Besides all these, Kapronczay as a medical historian revealed the role of prof. Ferenc Orsós as well. The Hungarian aspects of the massacre were published in some other studies as well, such as "Magyarok és Katyń" (Hungarians and Katyń - written by the former Hungarian ambassador in Poland, Ákos Engelmayer), "Katyń magyar áldozata" (The Hungarian Victim of Katyń - a work about Emánuel Korompay, written by Konrád Mattheidesz in 2004) and "Orsós-ügy" avagy a tudós felelőssége" (The Orsós-Case and the Responsibility of a Scientist - by Szilveszter Vizi E., 1994). As it turns out from the above listing, the authors who wrote about the Hungarian aspects of the topic mainly focused on two subjects: the role of Ferenc Orsós and Emánuel Korompay, and they only slightly touch other parts of the story, like for example its relations to the Hungarian public opinion. Besides the fact that there are quite a lot of inaccuracies in the early publications, for example

regarding the role of Ferenc Orsós, the above listed works mainly does not even mention (or just shortly mention) the Hungarian reception history of Katyń and the appearance of the topic in the contemporary press and how it influenced the public opinion. Quite a little is said about the relations between the Hungarian and Polish reception of the topic, and about the differences between the propaganda carried out in the two countries about the case. It is worth to mention that instead of the Polish literature most of the Hungarian works does not pay attention neither to the postwar reception history of the massacre, nor to the influence of the efforts of Polish underground movements on the Hungarian public opinion. This present dissertation will try to provide a full view of the Polish and Hungarian echoes, reception history and memory of the Katyń massacre - not only for the war era, but until the fall of communism, when the topic of Katyń became free to research and talk about.

3. The theses of the dissertation and the results of the research

So the main goal of the dissertation is to get a full view of the Polish and Hungarian reception history and memory of the Katyń massacre between 1943 and 1989. To achieve this, we examined in details how the topic appeared in both countries in the official communications, in the press, and how this all influenced the public opinion and politics, how this helped (or hindered) the clarification of the case, what made it turn to some kind of a symbol, and how this Polish tragedy affected the Hungarian public opinion. We researched the topic inbetween the "timeframe" of the era of the "Katyń lie", so until the admission of the Soviet Union's guilt, and of course keeping in mind the "spaceframe" required by the Polish-Hungarian reception history of the topic.

1. After we became familiar with the prequels and the history of the massacre itself, and shortly with its Hungarian aspects (including the role of Ferenc Orsós), as the first big chapter of our study we we began our work with the Polish wartime recetipon history of the massacre. We went through this part mainly focusing on three main aspects - the goals of the propaganda, the way how the topic appeared in front of the public opinion, and the effects it triggered. To put it in a nutshell, we were looking for answers to the question, how the case appeared in the German and Soviet propaganda in Poland and what kind of reactions did it spark in the Polish society. As a result of our investigation we can definitely say, that the one and only significant result of the propaganda-campaign lead by Goebbels regarding Katyń was the breakdown of the Polish-Soviet relations, as Germans could not persuade neither the international, nor the Polish public opinion about their truth, and they also failed in glossing

their own war crimes over by mentioning only the Katyń case. As Marian Kukiel, Polish ambassador remarked: *"the standpoint of the Poles has not been changed, because the faults of the German politics rooted too deeply. The Katyń case gave nothing for the Germans, neither a Quisling, nor soldiers, workers, and the underground actions did not rarefied as well."*¹ In general we can say that neither the German, not the Soviet propaganda could not achieve to gather supporters and establish their own credibility. Only the press and propaganda of the Home Army and other patriotic resistant organisations remained acceptable for the majority of the Polish people, and the communist underground organisations seriously compromised themselves in the eyes of the Polish public opinion and the above mentioned other organisations by standing up for the Soviet opinion. So it clearly can be stated, that as the result of the "propaganda-war" in Poland regarding the Katyń case, there were no "winners": neither its initiator, the propaganda-machine of Goebbels, nor the "accused" of the case, the Soviet Union could reach almost nothing and got in a losing position in the eyes of the Polish public opinion.

2. We will examine the wartime Hungarian reception history of the topic using similar questions and similar methods, but assuming that Katyń in the contemporary Hungarian press and in the eyes of the Hungarian public opinion was nothing more than actual news, a horrific story, that however got quickly blurred by other news of the world war. We will find out what effects the German propaganda had on Hungarians, and besides that we will mention as well, how it influenced the Polish refugees living in Hungary. We investigated the credibility of the German claims and the Katyń news via examining the role and credibility of Ferenc Orsós in detail. According to the sources used we can come to the conclusion, that the Hungarian public opinion (just like the Polish people as well) treated the case as a Soviet crime. However it is important to mention that compared to Poland, German propaganda could achieve a bit more in Hungary, even if it was not based on sympathy, but plain fear. The official press, the officially present opposition (and anti-Nazi) newspapers, the foreign radio communications, the informations of the Polish refugees living in Hungary and other "independent" sources of information also clearly referred to the guilt of the NKVD, and so there was no need to prove the guilt of the Soviet Union in Hungary again and again - even without a strong anti-communist climate (like in Poland). The news of the massacre acted as an "alarm", as a wrong omen in Hungary, and this explains, why could it turn to a symbol in our country as well, to a symbol of mass murder, that remained in use even when it was already officially

¹ Czajkowski: Niemiecka gra polską tragedią. 42.

forbidden to mention, even when the Polish tragedy already seemed to be so far away in the past - just like Auschwitz (symbolizing German war crimes) or the Don-bend (symbolizing the miseries of Hungarian soldiers). Besides the differences between the Hungarian and Polish mass media and public opinion we will reveal some similarities as well. In general we can say, that both the Hungarian and the Polish public opinion was unwilling to accept the statements of the German and Soviet propaganda, and tried to gain authentic information on their own. It became clear very quickly for everyone in the two countries that only the Soviet Union can be blamed for the mass murder of the Polish officers, and as the war front got closer and closer to the borders, the so called Katyń-sydrom appeared both in Poland and in Hungary. And after the war the people (both Hungarians and Poles) taking part in the exhumation works of Katyń had to face charges of serving Germans - some of them managed to avoid this fate (as Ferenc Orsós did by fleeing to Germany), and some of them (like the Polish Jan Zygmunt Robel) could not. In general we can clearly state, that despite the fluctuating and then fading out interest of the Hungarian press and despite the "distance" of the tragedy to the Hungarian public opinion, Katyń meant for Hungarians far more than a rumor or a "war-sensation", and its Hungarian aspects (for example the findings and fate of Ferenc Orsós) could maintain interest in the topic for a long time - and the horrors of the Katyń graves not only shocked and disgusted the public opinion, but made the whole case to a symbol of the Soviet Union's guilt in Hungary as well.

3. We reviewed the postwar Polish reception history of the case divided into two main chapters, focusing first on the stalinist Bierut-system, then on the People's Republic of Poland (1956-1989). As a result of our investigation we received answers for several questions, for example for the following ones: what kind of role played the Katyń-propaganda of the Soviet Union and the Polish communists in this period of time, in what kind of forms had the censorship appeared besides this, and how did the Polish people react to these lies and methods? We have even listed what kind of groups of the basically anti-Soviet Polish society could protest against the Katyń lie forced upon them, and what kind of punishment, retaliation they had to face. We have stated that in opposite to the widespreadly appearing misbelief, in the first decade of the communist led Poland the system of censorship and oppression regarding the topic of Katyń was still not consistent, namely the state power was willing to mention and deal with the Katyń case in connection with foreign events (Nuremberg, Madden-committee) just to try proving his own "right" - of course only as far as it could fulfill this task, not going too deeply in the topic. We could see that all initiatives reaching for more were immediately shut down, banned, even if it did in fact come from the ranks of the

communist party. The anti-communist behaviour of the Polish public opinion and the fact that Katyń remained a highly "sensitive" topic for the Polish communists and the Soviets as well made the politics to bury the topic underneath the veil of censorship again and again. And after it turned out that the counterpropaganda against the foreign "accusations" is not only ineffective, but even increases the internal tensions of the society, after 1956 the leadership of the communist party decided to not even mention the case once again, even if they had a chance to unveil the truth twice - once moreover recommended by Soviet authorities.

4. Regarding the Hungarian reception, echoes and effects of the massacre between 1945-1956 we have also investigated its influence on the official press, politics and public opinion. Among other things we were looking for answer for the following questions: for how long was the German version of the Katyń case present in the Hungarian public opinion after the war, and how communists tried to take action against the "anti-Soviet accusations". As to this we could state that the memory of the Soviet mass murder was still present and "alive" in the Hungarian public opinion - even despite the fact that the Hungarian communists did not try to explain and defend their point of view, but on the contrary they decided to ban the whole topic. As it turned out of the recollections, the case was not only kept in mind because of its anti-Soviet meaning or because of the shock evoked by the German propaganda, but it remained a mean of expressing solidarity towards the Poles for many people. But we can consider as a fact however, that in Hungary the topic was not anywhere of such importance as in Poland - simply because the Hungarian society was not affected. So as a result of this the Hungarian Communist Party was not forced to prove the Soviet Union's innocence in the Katyń case, they could only simply remain silent on this matter - and this attitude remained dominant in the Hungarian politics for decades - and also in the press, literature and public life as well. But it is also important to mention that despite the fact that the memory of Katyń did not become a case forging opposition movements, did not become a case of high importance, it in fact remained in the memory of the Hungarians, namely as a crime committed by the Soviet Union.

5. As for the reception history of the Katyń case in the People's Republic of Poland after 1956, we were looking for the answer mainly to the following question: what changes happened regarding this issue after the death of Stalin and the revolutionary year of 1956, and what events led to Katyń becoming a symbol, and the truth becoming officially accepted. In order to get to the answers, we have investigated the history of Polish opposition movements, their role in the Katyń case, and their reactions to the censorship and lies of the communist

party as well. As we could see, the standpoint of the government regarding the Katyń case got stuck between two endpoints after 1956: they were unwilling to unveil the truth, but they were not able to ban the topic and successfully silence the opposition as well. As a result of this, the issue lived a "double life" later: the government officially censored the topic, and the underground movements broke the censorship by publishing their own opinion, the truth. The communist leaders of Poland have chosen the "third way", that proved to be the worst option in terms of conservating their leading role: as they could neither publish the truth, nor successfully ban the topic, they had to face continuous conflicts, and these continuously weakened their power - more drastically than any confession of the truth. All in all we can say, that Katyń became such an effective symbol in this period of time, that managed to bring the protesters together to a strong, common unity. Making the government to confess the truth would have been certainly much more difficult without this powerful unity supported by the majority of the Polish society. Katyń not only played a unifying role, but the struggle with the Katyń lie also enforced hope in getting to the common goal, since the topic raised the interest of more and more people, and parallel to this, as it became widespreadly known and discussed, it became more and more free to speak about as well - as to the point when it became completely free to speak about by cancelling censorship and allowing researches. The progress of this process was very promising for everyone who tried to achieve suzerainty, and who tried to change the system. To summarize the above mentioned facts, we found out that the Katyń issue served as a catalyst of resistance movements, and at the same time it had a positive effect on the unveiling of the truth as well, since the truth about Katyń became more and more discussed and accepted as well through this process. Katyń filled an important role in the thinking of the opposition in the People's Republic of Poland - for various (historical, political, religious and even personal) reasons and it became a cohesive factor and catalyst of movements that finally achieved the situation when the communist party just could not maintain the system of lies and oppression anymore.

6. In the next big chapter we investigated the Hungarian memory of the Katyń massacre between 1956-1989 by using the sources of literature, the Hungarian emigration, the public opinion and state security organisations. We also found out how the Polish opposition movements influenced the Hungarian opposition, first of all in relation to samizdat literature. Finally we ended our investigation with presenting how the topic in Hungary became freely researchable and discussable. In conclusion we can say, that the fact of the Katyń massacre remained in the common memory of the Hungarians even under the Kádár-era - despite that it was far not as so popular and well known as in Poland. We could see that with the help of

Polish underground organisations Hungarian intellectuals managed to release a translated book of "Western" origins about Katyń. Although the Hungarian "official history" and political literature lied about the issue, the tragedy of Polish officers did not get forgotten in Hungary, neither. However it is true in fact, that it obviously did not become as important as in Poland. It only remained in the collective memory without playing a unifying role, without becoming a symbol that brings thousands of people together against the untruthful regime. As we could see, the "liberation" of the Katyń topic in Hungary took place only in 1989, the year of transition.

7. To summarize the results of our work we can say, that after the discovery of the Katyń graves in 1943, the horrific tragedy of the Polish officers became a mean of propaganda in the eyes of the superpowers that ruled both countries - and they even tried to change public opinion as well - in Poland and in Hungary, too. It is clear, that the mass murder of Polish officers remained a painful memory mainly in the common sense of the Polish society, and so the motivation of the Hungarian public opinion is hard to compare to that. Yet it is unquestionable as well, that the Hungarian public opinion was aware of the importance of the Katyń case and the guilt of the Soviet Union, too. However (because of their relations to the tragedy) the Poles were the most committed and resolute defenders of the truth about Katyń, and they were the ones who finally achieved free discussion of the issue, we should not forget about the fact, that lot of Hungarians stood up for the truth of the Polish people - some because of their anti-Soviet convictions, some because of their sympathy to Poles, and some simply because of their sense of justice. So (besides its Hungarian aspects and the influence of the Polish opposition movements) that is why the topic of the Katyń massacre could remain in the common memory of the Hungarian public opinion as well.



Registry number: DEENK/1/2016.PL
Subject: Ph.D. List of Publications

Candidate: Attila Mester
Neptun ID: COGY4N
Doctoral School: Doctoral School of History and Ethnology

List of publications related to the dissertation

Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (3)

1. **Mester A.**: A kátyóni mészárlás megítélésének változása Orsós Ferenc szakvéleménye tükrében.
Halg. Műtanulm. 2, 209-226, 2013. ISSN: 2063-6024.
2. **Mester A.**: Orsós Ferenc professzor és a politika.
Halg. Műtanulm. 1, 181-199, 2012. ISSN: 2063-6024.
3. **Mester A.**: Orsós Ferenc - A kátyóni vizsgálóbizottság debreceni tagja.
Debreceni Szle. 19 (3), 304-311, 2011. ISSN: 1218-022X.

Hungarian book chapter(s) (1)

4. **Mester A.**: Orvos a Nagy Háborúban : Orsós Ferenc professzor háborús élményei.
In: A "Nagy Háború" és emlékezete. Püski Levente, Kerepeszki Róbert, Barta Róbert, Berzsényi Tamás, Boros László, Csákvári Sándor, Erős Vilmos, Hajdúfi Orsolya, Kaló József, Kollányi Irén, Kónya Péter, Lévai Csaba, Martinkovics Katalin, Mester Attila, Pusztai Gábor, Romsics Ignác, Suslik Ádám, Szeghő Patrik, Szóts Zoltán Oszkár, Tóró László, Debreceni Egyetem Történelmi Intézete, Debrecen, 141-154, 2015. ISBN: 9789634738855





Hungarian scientific article(s) in Hungarian journal(s) (3)

5. **Mester A.:** Katyn "magyar áldozatai" a Rákosi-korszakban, 1945-1956.

Debreceni Széle. "Közlésre elfogadva", 1-12, 2016. ISSN: 1218-022X.

6. **Mester A.:** Lengyel-magyar kapcsolatokat illető elképzelések a vilnai "Słowo" hasábjain (1922-1939).

Klió. 23 (4), 36-41, 2014. ISSN: 1216-2965.

(Ismertetett mű : Jacek Gzella : Koncepcje stosunków polsko-węgierskich na łamach wileńskiego Słowa (1922-1939).. In: Rocznik historii prasy Polskiej. - 15 (2012) p. 87-108)

7. **Mester A.:** A balatonboglári lengyel menekültek iskolai folyóiratai, 1943-1944.

Klió. 23 (3), 36-40, 2014. ISSN: 1216-2965.

(Ismertetett mű : Krzysztof Woźniakowski : "Młodzież" i kontynuacje - uchodźcze szkolne periodyki z Balatonboglár. In: Rocznik historii prasy Polskiej. - 13 (2010) p. 151-182)

The Candidate's publication data submitted to the IDEa Tudóstér have been validated by DEENK on the basis of Web of Science, Scopus and Journal Citation Report (Impact Factor) databases.

05 January, 2016

