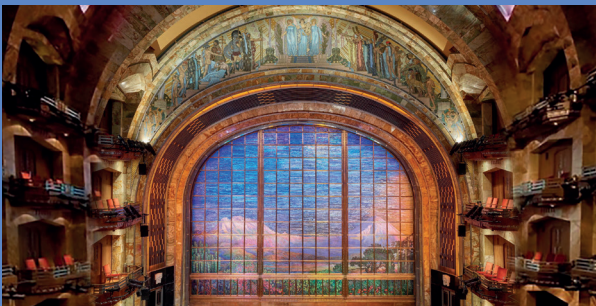


Latin America and Hungary Cultural Ties

América Latina y Hungría Contactos culturales



Editor:
MÓNIKA SZENTE-VARGA

dialóg Campus

LATIN AMERICA AND
HUNGARY
CULTURAL TIES

AMÉRICA LATINA
Y HUNGRÍA
CONTACTOS CULTURALES

Editor

Mónika Szente-Varga

Authors

Jorge Kristóf Asqui
Zsuzsanna Csikós
Barbara Hegedűs
Katalin Jancsó
Mercédesz Kutasy
András Lénárt
Vladimir Alexander Smith-Mesa
Béla Soltész
Mónika Szente-Varga
Ágnes Judit Szilágyi
Anna Urbanovics
Balázs Venkovits
Dávid Zelei

Text checked by
Fernando Portillo Alcántara
Timothy C. Dowling

Revised by
Emőke Horváth
Andrea Kökény
Bernadett Lehoczki
Gabriella Menczel

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Exiled for Political Reasons: Hungarian Actors in Latin America

András Lénárt

Introduction

Latin America has been the final destination of several migration flows from Europe throughout the centuries. Hungarians often took part in these movements; the explanations for embarking on such long journeys usually had economic or political backgrounds.¹ Artists, photographers, architects, stage and film actors belonged to these groups; the majority of them arrived in Latin America in the 1940s. The Hungarian historian Ágnes Judit Szilágyi published a study on the arrival and activity of some of these actors, making use of numerous valuable sources, like the articles and reports of the Hungarian newspapers published in Latin America.² The Hungarian filmmakers' exile was not a rare phenomenon; while most directors, screenwriters and actors emigrated to Great Britain, Germany and the United States of America, Spain also sheltered some of these artists.³

In the Hungarian film industry, “poison factory” existed alongside the so-called “dream factory” in the 1930s and 1940s.⁴ Contemporary cultural politics favoured ideological films, but this was more the expectation of the extreme right; the government did not want to invest in filmmaking, and private investors preferred movies that entertained the public. Among the more than two hundred films shot in Hungary between 1939 and 1945, only a dozen can be regarded as ideological or propaganda movies.⁵ The Hungarian film industry flourished between the two world wars, creating a local star system. There was a clear and easy flow between the worlds of theatre and film; Hungarian actors moved between the two without difficulty.

Personal letters sent to Hungarian relatives, friends, or colleagues by artists exiled to Latin America shed some light on the political, professional and social background of some outstanding actors' exile to Latin America in the 1930s and 1940s, the Hungarian society's reaction, and, in some cases, the circumstances of their return to Hungary and the re-evaluation of their life (and tragedy) from the perspective of the present. The

¹ See for instance CSIKÓS 1988, 82–87; NÉMETHY KESSERŰ 2003; SZENTE-VARGA 2012; SZENTE-VARGA 2007; TORBÁGYI 2004; TORBÁGYI 2009.

² The original study can be found in SZILÁGYI 2009, 141–150. Recently, the author has published a Spanish translation of the same article: SZILÁGYI 2017, 81–90.

³ LÉNÁRT 2010, 92–99; LÉNÁRT 2013, 167–185.

⁴ BALOGH et al. 2004, 55.

⁵ VAJDOVICH 2013, 69–70.

international investigations concerning their life have completed our knowledge. The three best-known Hungarian actors who chose to live in Latin America were Antal Páger, Katalin Karády and Zita Szelezcky; this region was either their main choice or only a temporary residence before proceeding to the United States. A crucial aspect of these investigations are the Hungarian and Latin American political and social circumstances, based on my recent research carried out in archives, libraries, databases, and the synthesis and evaluation of the new works by other Hungarian and foreign historians and film historians. Moreover, some exclusive sources have come to light recently that provide new information. Antal Páger, for example, sent several personal letters to his hometown, Makó, that are available with the help of the residents of the town and the local museum; also, the FBI declassified a couple of documents that disclose new details about Katalin Karády's arrival in the United States.

The lives and careers of Katalin Karády, Antal Páger and Zita Szelezcky have much in common. They were among Hungary's biggest stage and film stars in the 1930s and 1940s; their names were known to anyone familiar with culture and social life. Although they got involved in various political issues, and they appeared in gossips and even calumnies, they did not take part explicitly in any political activities. They usually sympathised with conservative politic circles, but close links to the extreme right cannot be proven.

Antal Páger

In the 1930s, a new type of actor emerged both in theatre and on film with Antal Páger. He was neither the conventional handsome gentleman nor the good-looking adventurer and love interest of the heroine (and the female members of the public); he was the embodiment of the ordinary Hungarian citizen. Especially when he played “the man of the countryside”, a member of the peasantry who worked for the everyday survival, his interpretation came across as authentic.

Film historians, but even viewers can identify the political and ideological messages in Hungarian movies of the 1930s and 1940s. Antal Páger had a key role in many of them. The most anti-democratic was *Takeover* (*Őrsékváltás*, Viktor Bánky, 1942), an anti-Semitic propaganda film where Páger was cast as the main character. *Dr. Kovács István* (Viktor Bánky, 1941) and *The Thirtieth* (*A harmincadik*, László Cserépy, 1942), which also starred Páger, included elements related to the Hungarian anti-Jewish laws, as well. Therefore, he became linked with these movies, although they represent only a minor portion of his abundant and diversified filmography.

Páger, although he never entered any political parties, frequently visited social meetings where politicians appeared. His political views and some of his declarations, mostly fragments of interviews, associated him with the right and the extreme right. When the left reproached him for his views, the right-wing newspapers defended him; later, this became “proof” of his collaboration with the far right. Páger believed that the main problem was that when the left attacked him, the right stood up for him without hesitation, and this brought about the semblance that he actually belonged to them.⁶

⁶ MOLNÁR GÁL 1988, 222.

These accusations were not groundless; he was a member of the Actor's Union that had been formed in 1938, right after the proclamation of the anti-Jewish laws, and the union's primary task was to remove Jewish actors from the theatre and film industry. He attended several parties organised by extremist magazines and political circles. His wife had various friends on the extreme right, and newspapers took several photos of him in the company of Ferenc Szálasi, leader of the fascist Arrow Cross Party. The government even wanted to appoint him as commissary of the film industry, but he turned down this offer.

In 1944, fearing he would be subject to recriminations for his (presumed) sympathy for the extreme right, Páger left Hungary and went to Austria; subsequently, he moved on to France and, in 1948, to Latin America. Nevertheless, the allegations followed him even to the New World; when he arrived in Buenos Aires, a Hungarian correspondent wrote about the "arrival of the infamous actor of the Arrow Cross Party, who was welcomed in the harbour by some of his friends, all war criminals."⁷ The new Hungarian Communist Government accused him of having collaborated with the philo-Nazi Hungarian regime. The authorities banned his films and his name was blacklisted. His house was confiscated and handed over to the film theoretician Béla Balázs.⁸

Páger settled in Argentina, but he also worked in Venezuela, Uruguay and Brazil. Letters sent to his Hungarian friends reveal that he never felt at home in any of these countries; he hoped one day to return to Hungary. His Hungarian friends sent him Hungarian newspaper articles where he was depicted as a Nazi collaborator; consequently, he stayed in Latin America for twelve years.

Argentina was a popular destination for Hungarian immigrants, who fostered and maintained an active cultural life there. Páger acted, directed and worked as a set designer in one of the most important theatre companies there. He also worked as a painter and a graphic artist, and he held exhibitions in various Latin American countries where he sold his paintings and illustrations at a high price. He worked in various theatres, restaging plays he knew from his Hungarian years. In 1951, he received the Argentine citizenship.⁹

He always yearned for home though, not only his mother country, but also his hometown of Makó. His letters note that he wanted to see his parents' graveyard, and to visit his brother and sister, who had financial difficulties. The Hungarian communist authorities were aware of this homesickness. For the Hungarian Government it was important to bring him home; they wanted to use him in the fight and propaganda against the Hungarian fascists living abroad. They entered into long negotiations. Páger imposed several conditions, and finally they came to terms; the actor returned to Hungary in 1956, one month before the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution.¹⁰ He was granted amnesty. This was a great success for the communist cultural diplomacy, and Páger's arrival served as a model for the homecoming of other Hungarian actors, like Pál Jávör.¹¹

Páger's return to Hungary met with disapproval from both political sides. The exiled colonies thought he had betrayed them and came to an understanding with the Hungarian

⁷ Quoted in MOLNÁR GÁL 1988, 234.

⁸ See the sources from Hungarian archives in ÓLMOSI 2008.

⁹ HALÁSZ 1992, 9–11.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* 12; MOLNÁR GÁL 1988, 241–251.

¹¹ Pál Jávör returned to Hungary in 1957 after having spent 11 years in the United States.

Communist Government, while other segments of the Hungarian society still looked upon him as a fascist and traitor.¹²

Páger was well aware of the difficulties that were awaiting him in Hungary. In a letter written to one of his friends in Makó in 1956, just months before arriving in Hungary, he recalled the calumnies and assaults that he had to endure both in his home country and in exile, because his enemies kept defaming him even in Latin American newspapers, claiming that he was anti-Semitic.¹³ He declared that some years before a Jewish group had wanted to lynch him in Uruguay (but instead they attacked two Hungarian actresses by mistake, provoking a violent clash between Hungarian and Jewish groups), while in Venezuela the Jews denounced him as a murderer; the local authorities had to take him under protection. He stated explicitly that he was afraid of the Hungarian Jews who were violently attacking him in articles and letters, and he vigorously criticised the world's Jewish communities for taking part in this "war" against him. He complained, for example, about an article that was published in Argentina in a newspaper that was issued by Jewish editors; it was written about the mass murders and mass graves during the Holocaust, and the text was illustrated with a still photo about a scene from his above-mentioned film *Takeover*, explaining: "Antal Páger calls upon the workers to slaughter the Jews" and under the image of the mass grave the following subtitle stated: "The results." Although he maintained that during World War II he had helped some Jews who got into trouble, in this letter he could not hide his disdain against this minority. Páger related in detail how he and his family lived in Latin America and how his feelings about his fatherland had not changed. Although he was pondering over returning to Hungary, he was worried about his family's safety, not being convinced of the Hungarian Government's, the colleagues' and the society's real feelings and intentions. In this letter he was recollecting his thoughts on the reasons why he had become one of the most hated men in Hungary – and also among some exiled communities –, whether it was for the roles he had accepted in the 1940s or his public behaviour.

Finally, he decided to go back to Hungary despite his fears, and returned to the stage, although some of his former colleagues refused to work with him. He made no political statements, but frequently performed in plays; Páger appeared in more than one hundred movies, both on the big and the small screen, until his death in 1986.

One of these movies had a strange relation to his past and his years in Latin America. In 1967, Zoltán Fábri directed *Late Season (Utószezon)*, one of the best Hungarian films of these decades, although it has always divided its audience and the critics. The main character of the film, played by Páger, accidentally cooperated in the deportation of a Jewish couple in 1944. When Adolf Eichmann, one of the major organisers of the Holocaust is brought to trial in Israel, Páger's character in Hungary is stricken by remorse; he considers himself a Nazi collaborator. Although Fábri thought that this film was one of his best movies, some Hungarian critics disapproved of this kind of representation of the genocide and accused the director of formalism.¹⁴ Foreign critics admired the film, and it received great acclaim at the Venice Film Festival. One jury member, however, the American filmmaker and writer Susan Sontag, attacked the film publicly because of Páger's involvement; she declared that

¹² NÉMETHY KESSERŰ 2003, 191.

¹³ PÁGER 1992, 18–27.

¹⁴ MÁTYÁS 2006.

he was a war criminal, a Nazi collaborator, therefore the film had to be dismissed.¹⁵ Páger's career did not suffer much, and he earned the most important honours of the Hungarian state throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Katalin Karády

At the beginning of the 1940s, Katalin Karády counted among the most popular actresses in Hungary, appearing in successful films like *Deadly Spring* (*Halálos tavasz*, László Kalmár, 1939) or *Queen Elisabeth* (*Erzsébet királyné*, Félix Podmaniczky, 1940). Although she did not want to be typecast as a Hungarian *femme fatale*, in the majority of her films she was given the role of a mysterious woman with obscure intentions who brings about the ruin of the men who yearn for her. But sometimes she managed to break out from the well-known patterns, like when she played the beloved Queen Elisabeth. Although she cannot be regarded as a highly talented actress, she became an icon, one of the most popular film stars of the period. Her success became restricted to the screen: on stage she was destined to fail, because through live performances Karády's force of attraction was not strong enough, she lacked the talent to enchant the audience of the theatres.¹⁶ She did not play roles in propaganda films or ideological movies during World War II, but she performed at military concerts, attended charity events in regions that, before 1920, had belonged to Hungary, and she appeared in some short films shot for the Hungarian army. She visited military hospitals and sang for the injured soldiers.¹⁷ She accepted the existing administration in Hungary, and did not express any political views. She refused to join any political party, and maintained friendships with people of all political leanings. Various legends, gossips and calumnies surrounded her, provoking the multiplication of her enemies from all sides. Karády wanted to keep distance from the political parties, but she also yearned to have friends, no matter to which side they belonged. The right therefore accused her of belonging to the left, and the left accused her of belonging to the right. Her romantic relationship with a Hungarian officer only worsened the situation.

General István Ujszászy had an important role in the Hungarian foreign policy. He served as a military attaché in Warsaw and Prague, and he gradually achieved higher ranks in both the political and military hierarchy in the 1930s. During World War II, he worked for the Hungarian military intelligence service and, between 1942 and 1944, he headed this service. His activities are unclear and yet controversial; his major principle seems to have been survival, no matter the costs. According to available sources, he had a crucial role in two secret diplomatic missions: establishing contacts with the Allies and preparing the way for the country's possible withdrawal from the war. When the German troops invaded Hungary, they arrested Ujszászy and interrogated him on suspicion of treason. After the war, the NKVD (*Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennih Del*, meaning *People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs*, which was the Soviet secret police) arrested him; for whatever reasons, Ujszászy collaborated with the new communist administration, handing over valuable

¹⁵ FÁBIÁN 2016.

¹⁶ KELECSÉNYI 2010, 46.

¹⁷ KELECSÉNYI 1989, 42–44.

information on the former governments' operations and their key figures. He remained in custody and his fate is unknown; it is quite probable that he died a violent death. The details of his activities are ambiguous, filled with lots of ungrounded "facts" and even gossips, the majority of sources (including his own records) slanted, and even academic works backed by archival investigations necessarily contain suppositions.¹⁸

As Ujszászy's love interest during this delicate political period, Karády was involved in politics, however unwillingly. She never took political sides, but public opinion, the press and the authorities regarded her as having several friends from the left and among the Jewish minority. Accusations also arose about her spying for the British, being the lover of various politicians, being a nymphomaniac or being a lesbian. Her private life was not approved by the contemporary moral ethics. Professionally she reached the highest popularity, but she found herself in a trap: for the left, she was too right-wing and for the right she was too left-wing, although she never made clear political statements. Her personal relationships, her philo-Semitic behaviour, and her willingness to assist the social and political outcasts nevertheless made her an ideal target for both sides.

According to the three anti-Jewish laws (1938, 1939 and 1941), Jewish people could not work in theatres or movies, and their involvement in the cultural field was reduced.¹⁹ Jewish screenwriters had the possibility to stay in the film industry, but only under a pseudonym or making use of the help of a so-called *front man*.²⁰ In any case, the name of the most renowned scriptwriters disappeared from the film credits. However, Karády did not break relations with her Jewish friends and colleagues, for which some of her fellow workers reported her to the authorities and she was fined. Some members of the entertainment industry thought that she had communist and socialist friends, yet her only dubious involvement was that she helped organise meetings between Ujszászy and some leftist circles; sometimes she acted as a mediator.²¹ Her situation became even more complicated when she played the title role in *Machita* (Endre Rodriguez, 1943), a film about a female spy who tries to seduce various men in order to achieve her goal: obtain the plans of an anti-aircraft gun. The audience thought that this could be regarded as a sort of confession.

In 1944, the Gestapo (*Geheime Staatspolizei*, meaning the Nazi Germany's *Secret State Police*) arrested her together with Ujszászy, as they thought that she was involved in his fiancé's suspicious activities. She was deprived of food, kept under inhuman conditions and the German officials tortured her brutally. They accused her of spying for the Allies and possessing classified documents. Her interrogators failed to extort a confession, and she was released after three months of imprisonment, but she was kept under supervision of the police.²² She remained silent until the end of the war.

¹⁸ HARASZTI 2007; SZITA 2006, 4–30; PUSZTASZERI 2008.

¹⁹ See details in VÁGI et al. 2013, 3–22.

²⁰ The front man was the person whose name appeared as the author of a screenplay or a novel instead of the real author who was blacklisted or whose name could not be published for some reason. This trick was quite common in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s to avoid the harassment of the extreme right and also in the United States of America, due to the activity of the *House Un-American Activities Committee* which took aim at several film directors, scriptwriters and actors in Hollywood, accusing them of collaborating with the communists.

²¹ PUSZTASZERI 2008, 165–167; 216.

²² KELECSÉNYI 1989, 48–49.

After the Soviet takeover, Karády could not find a place in the new Hungary. The authorities resented her relations with representatives of the former government. She earned some interesting parts on stage, but received only minor roles in movies, which were mostly of low quality. At the end of the 1940s, even theatre directors stopped employing her, and in 1951 she decided to leave the country. Her desired destination was the United States, but rumours of communist connections kept her from settling there: in the U.S., in the heyday of *House Un-American Activities Committee* (HUAC), a Central European actress with confused relations had little chance to establish in that country. After travelling through Austria, Switzerland and France, she arrived in Sao Paulo in 1951 with two close friends. Some Hungarian immigrants who had been living in Brazil for some time helped them obtain the required documents. In Hungary, the government blacklisted her songs and films, and put her relatives in internment camps, where they were forced to work on construction sites. After 1956, these relatives could return to Budapest, but they spent several years under surveillance.²³

In Brazil, Karády returned to the stage occasionally, but she wanted to do something else, far from the unpredictable world of the artists. In the beginning, she did not work, she just wrote letters to her friends who still lived in Hungary. She wanted to re-invent herself before starting a new life. Later she opened a hat salon with her friend and spent seventeen years in São Paulo. Her shop became a popular meeting-place for the upper-class Brazilian women. Karády usually worked in the background, not willing to meet the clients. She did not attend any meetings with the Hungarian immigrant circles.

Finally, as a wealthy woman with good relations to influential businessmen, a Hungarian lawyer, and some Hungarians who lived in the U.S., she received her visa to the United States and a residence permit. In New York she opened another hat salon, this one on Madison Avenue, for upper-class women. First Lady Nancy Reagan was one of her VIP clients. Sometimes she performed at concerts with a couple of songs or poems, but she never returned to plays or films.²⁴

According to some recently declassified documents, Karády's emigration to the U.S. was more complicated than previously believed. An FBI agent wrote that she was "a communist collaborator, lesbian and prostitute" and a close friend of the head of the Hungarian Nazi intelligence. Robert and Edward Kennedy personally intervened on her behalf, however, at the behest of Karády's influential Hungarian friends.²⁵

At the end of the 1960s, according to documents stored in archives,²⁶ Karády contacted the Hungarian embassy in an attempt to return home. After negotiations, however, she remained undecided and finally she did not leave the United States. She died in New York in 1990 and, after having received the American last honours in the same city, she was buried in Budapest. Her return to Hungary was a historical moment: she was given the Hungarian last honours in the capital's St. Stephen's Basilica, no such thing had happened there since the 1940s. Karády's return marked a turning point, it became a symbol for the beginning of a new political era in her home country, just one month before the first democratic

²³ See details in KARÁDY 1989.

²⁴ HÁMORI 2004, 95–103.

²⁵ U.S. Department of Justice 2011.

²⁶ These documents were published and summarised by PUSZTASZERI 2008, 276–285.

elections that were going to be held after the fall of socialism.²⁷ Her unforgettable film and stage interpretations form iconic components of the Hungarian film history, and her legend became immortalised by the biographical film *Smouldering Cigarette* (*Hamvadó cigarettavég*, Péter Bacsó, 2001), making use of the title of one of Karády's most famous songs from 1942.

Zita Szelezcky

Although Antal Páger and Katalin Karády were the most important members of the Hungarian artists' community exiled to Latin America, Zita Szelezcky also serves as a significant example. Her fate resembles that of Páger's. Even though she played important roles in various films and was considered a film star, her real world was the stage. She thought of herself primarily as a theatre actress. Contemporary articles about her mixed facts with rumours, false deductions, or even lies. When she turned down a role in the Hungarian National Theatre and the conflict between the actress and the directors became acrimonious, both sides tried to find political explanations. Szelezcky claimed she simply did not want to play that role. She was fired from the theatre, but a new director rehired her.²⁸

Some newspapers on the extreme right claimed Szelezcky had expressed her sympathy for National Socialism, but there is no evidence to support this allegation. Leftist groups wanted to place Szelezcky on their side as well. It is also true that Szelezcky was not careful about what she said or to whom. As one of her biographers puts it though, Szelezcky was not a member of the Arrow Cross Party and she was not anti-Semitic, but her strong Hungarian conscience made her an easy target in the interwar period. She was popular in society, and did not deal with political issues until the 1940s.²⁹ She was almost as celebrated as Katalin Karády, they both had fan clubs and sometimes they were competing for the same role, although their looks were completely different. Between 1936 and 1944 Szelezcky played in twenty seven films which received mixed reviews, but she entered the Hungarian stardom, just like Karády.³⁰

When the outcome of World War II was clear, she escaped to South Tirol. She moved on to other countries, arriving in Argentina in 1948. She could not return to Hungary because the new administration issued a warrant for her arrest as a war criminal. According to the authorities, she carried out activities to continue the war and to assist the fascist movements. Antal Páger's name also appeared on this list. In 1948, Szelezcky was accused officially of supporting Nazism, inciting against the Soviet Union with songs and poems in radio programmes, and attending concerts, both in Budapest and Warsaw, that popularised the war, the anti-democratic regimes and the Axis powers. Several witnesses, including colleagues from theatre, testified against her, claiming they were aware of Szelezcky's Nazi sympathies and her anti-Semitic attitude. Her situation was worsened by those eulogistic articles that were published on her by the most popular newspapers of the extreme right. Among the possible punishments, there were the most serious ones, death penalty and

²⁷ KELECSÉNYI 2010, 104–105.

²⁸ ÁBEL 2012, 27–28.

²⁹ PUSZTASZERI 2011, 67–68.

³⁰ KELECSÉNYI 2010, 69.

life sentence. A court found her guilty *in absentia*, and she was sentenced to three years imprisonment and the confiscation of her property. A Hungarian court cleared her name of these charges in 1994.³¹

When she arrived in Buenos Aires in 1948, several Hungarian artists were already living there, but under constant pressure because of their political views. Right after World War II, several Nazi war criminals (like Adolph Eichmann or Joseph Mengele) and sympathisers fled to Latin America, mainly to Juan Domingo Perón's Argentina. When Hungarian exile groups arrived, some segments of the society, including some of those Hungarian immigrants who had entered the country much earlier, thought that the new arrivals all belonged to the far right. Szelezky recalls with disappointment that many people accused them of being Nazis, fascists and murderers, while those who arrived after the revolution of 1956 were treated as freedom fighters and heroes.³²

Szelezky, in the year of her arrival, started to appear in local plays, first in German, later in Hungarian. She joined the Hungarian Theatre Society, but soon left it because there were constant, countless conflicts among the members. The actress maintained that the principal problem was that she was accustomed to the traditions of the Hungarian National Theatre, while the others had experiences mainly from private theatres. She went on several tours that included poetry readings, literary recitals and even Hungarian folk songs. She played an important role in an Argentine film, *To Live a Moment (Vivir un instante*, Tulio Demicheli, 1951) and in that same year she founded the Argentine Hungarian National Theatre, where she staged various classic Hungarian plays, including Imre Madách's *The Tragedy of Man*. This company dissolved one year later, so she continued her own touring programmes across the American continent; she also visited Australia. Afterwards she settled in the U.S. with her sister; she performed in clubs and released albums that included songs and poems. Argentina's Hungarian newspapers followed her career closely.³³ When Hungary went through fundamental political transformations, in the 1990s Szelezky returned several times, first in 1990, primarily to undergo medical treatments. She died in Hungary in 1999.

Conclusion

Páger, Karády and Szelezky were only three of the many artists who left Hungary for Latin America primarily for political reasons. They can be regarded as "prototypes" of this kind of political-artistic exile. A Hungarian website, making use of the Family Search database, made a selection of the provisional residence permits issued in Latin America to famous Hungarians, including actors and other artists.³⁴ This database offers information on, for example, the actors Romola Németh, László Szilassy, Piroska Vaszary, Miklós Hajmássy and László Pálóczy – their life and artistic activity in Latin America show how the exiled communities fought for their survival in those distant lands. The Hungarian immigrants

³¹ PUSZTASZERI 2011, 106–112; 116; 123–124; 131.

³² JÁVOR 2012, 61.

³³ ÁBEL 2012, 29–32; PUSZTASZERI 2011, 153–158. JÁVOR 2012 gives a thorough summary of articles written on Szelezky in Hungary and in Latin America.

³⁴ See FamilySearch s. a.; Hangosfilm 2015.

who had arrived in Latin America earlier knew them through various channels, including earlier plays or movies in Hungary. Before and during World War II, several Hungarian films were shown in Latin American cinemas or clubs, especially in Brazil and Argentina; this tradition did not end after the war. The Hungarian immigrant groups nonetheless were divided on their attitude toward the new arrivals. The social status, ideological viewpoint and the date of their arrival all helped determine the stance of the “old-timers”. Hungarian actors also had dissensions within their artistic community, bringing about the dissolution of some Hungarian theatre companies in Latin America.³⁵ As the Hungarian historian, Julianna Puskás, specialised in the life of the Hungarian exiled communities in North America, points it out: “The isolation of their associations and social organizations also expresses the social, ideological, political and cultural differences between the Hungarians established in America in different seasons.”³⁶ The same observation holds true for Latin America’s Hungarian exiled communities as well.

This phenomenon is not exceptional: after several flows of migrations, it is common to a certain extent that in the foreign country, where diverse groups settle down in different periods, cooperation between members of the same nation is not easy, usually for political reasons. Páger, Szelezcky and several other actors and playwrights became embroiled in the Hungarian communities’ and theatre companies’ spats and were unable to withdraw, either in Hungary or abroad. Their life and tragedy prove what the Hungarian actor Géza D. Hegedűs mentioned in his eulogy to Páger during his colleague’s funeral: “...he knew the dreadful hatred that hides in men, and he learned (because he had to learn) at the cost of bitter and painful lessons that, where politics begin, art should end.”³⁷

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³⁵ SZILÁGYI 2009; SZILÁGYI 2017. The author also writes about other artists, as well who lived and worked in Latin America after World War II.

³⁶ Quoted by SZILÁGYI 2017, 85.

³⁷ HEGEDŰS 1992, 28.

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