

Routledge Histories of Central and Eastern Europe

THE SOVIETIZATION OF RURAL HUNGARY, 1945–1980

SUBJUGATION IN THE NAME OF EQUALITY

Edited by
Gábor Csikós, Gergely Krisztián Horváth
and József Ö. Kovács



The Sovietization of Rural Hungary, 1945–1980

In this book the experiential history of the Soviet-style social transformation projects between 1945 and 1980 is discussed through the example of rural Hungary.

The book interprets state socialism as a (modernization) project. Existing socialism was a form of dictatorship in which authorities sought to transform the mentalities of their subjects from the individual level to the global scale. This project depended on socio-economic homogenization; one important method of asserting state power was the transformation of property rights (land redistribution, collectivization). Communist modernization discriminated against the inhabitants of rural areas, who were the primary victims of collectivization and the discriminatory effects of the rules implemented by policymakers. The resulting radical changes in peasant lifestyles would become a source of social pathologies. However, not the authorities but contemporary scholars considered the social costs of these actions. The book aims at Weberian disenchantment and contributes to the deconstruction of the common image of Hungarian socialism, “the happiest barrack.”

The intended audience includes readers at the graduate level in the fields of history, political science, and anthropology, general readers interested in the history of communism. It is hoped that the research questions inspire new research for exploring convergent and divergent elements in social transformation in former communist countries.

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**Edited by Gábor Csikós, Gergely
Krisztián Horváth and József Ö. Kovács**

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1 Introduction

Perspectives, Realms of Experience, and the Horizons of the Future

*Gábor Csikós, Gergely Krisztián Horváth and
József Ö. Kovács*

Posing a Question

It may be hard to believe that there are still areas of Hungary's post-World War II social history where scholars might find new paradigms for research or formulate genuinely novel theses; one might be even less inclined to accept that the area in question is rural history—which Hungarian scholars traditionally call “agrarian sociology” or “agrarian history”—given that this field is believed to be among the most thoroughly explored spheres of Hungarian social science. As many readers will know, by the 1970s Hungary was the one country in the Soviet bloc capable of producing a diverse array of agricultural crops in large quantities, a significant proportion of which it exported. Many contemporaneous observers attributed these surpluses to the success of collectivized agriculture; conclusions of this sort have influenced numerous post-socialist historians, and even English-language scholars seemed to have been charmed by the agricultural policies of the Kádár regime (1956–1988). Oddly, no one has analyzed the costs Hungary's rural society had to pay for these achievements, nor the extent to which state subsidies distorted the tax data associated with agricultural profits, and thus it has been impossible to determine whether these production numbers reflected actual successes. It is also surprising that post-1989 ethnographers have rarely confronted the official doctrines of the state-socialist era, even though their field is predicated on summaries of the experiences of individuals at the so-called bottom of the social pyramid. Terms like “land reform” and “the socialist reorganization of agriculture” have been employed in a manner more characteristic of political mythology than of scholarly reflection; like the uncritical use of the word “socialism,” such terminology often obscures state violence, destructive social practices, and the lived experience of the masses. Insofar as we tend to understand the historical realities of state socialism through the critical lenses of the era's Marxist authorities or the new capitalists of the post-1989 period, we also obviously distort or even falsify certain relationships and contexts. English-speaking interpreters of Hungarian-language research have gone so far as to present “former peasants” as the primary beneficiaries of the policies of Hungary's four decades of communist dictatorship.¹ Assertions like these stand in stark contrast to the conclusions of scholars who have spent the last decade publishing analyses of previously unexamined archival sources and oral histories.

The present volume is an attempt to use these sorts of micro-level sources—contemporaneous records of the experiences of individuals and communities—to reconstruct the changes which took place in rural Hungary in the two and a half decades following 1945. Our approach is not teleological; however, even if one accepts the most positive accounts of the pre-1989 state-socialist system—legitimizing narratives which still dominate contemporary historiography—one must nevertheless reconcile these readings with the fact that the 1960s were a period in which Hungary’s villages began to age significantly and to suffer sharp declines in birth rates, rising mortality rates among the working-age population, and massive depopulation—to mention just a few objective indicators of the social conditions there.

Despite their crucial importance to historical accounts of the Cold War era, the genuinely complicated issues of land ownership and state land policies are still relatively underexplored. In the following analysis, we use the term “Sovietization” as a kind of catch-all to denote the socio-economic processes, structural changes, and forms of individual and collective action—along with the real-life interactions between these factors—that characterized rural society in the countries of the former Soviet bloc. Furthermore, we distinguish between the ideals of communism (including the utopia its adherents promised would be achieved in the distant future) and the system its proponents actually implemented, which we describe variously as communism, state socialism, the socialist project, or actually existing socialism.

Our work is characterized primarily by a socio-historical approach, meaning that we have focused our analysis on the social effects of state violence. As we noted above, we have prioritized micro-level data in our investigations of the historical phenomena associated with rural society—that is, in decoding the information in official documents and publications, we have committed ourselves to approaching the subject “from below.” Though these official texts were intended primarily for intra-party use, the “experiential history” (*Erfahrungsgeschichte*) to be found in them contains details about almost every aspect of communist-era life in Hungary. We also consider experiential history to be an important historiographical paradigm because it allows scholars to form realistic historical images of subjects which were treated as undiscussable taboos during the decades of communist dictatorship. As a result of the party-state’s forcible indoctrination, official socialization practices, and the taboos they induced the Hungarian populace to internalize, certain historical factors which fundamentally influenced Hungarians’ lives are simply missing from the memories of the generations which came of age beginning in the 1960s.

As other scholars have discussed in detail, individual peasant farms constituted a fundamental obstacle to communist authorities’ efforts to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s. As the last bastions of private property, these farms symbolized society’s existential independence from the state. At the same time, it would not have been possible to implement the communists’ forced-industrialization program without incorporating the peasant workforce. In the interest of establishing a planned economy, communist authorities used terror as the chief means of bringing collective farms (*kolkhozy* in Russian)

into being. As was the case in other countries the Red Army invaded, these efforts to “gather” people and their land together and force them into “collectives” proved to be the most radical social operation of Hungary’s post-1945 communist dictatorship. At the same time, it is important to note that while these state-organized applications of collective violence affected the greatest proportion of Hungarian society, the experiences of the individuals who suffered during this process were treated as a taboo. The socially crippling effects of these taboos were intensified by the fact that communist authorities, like the leaders of most modern authoritarian systems, expected their citizens to participate actively in violent agitation, and thus—whether out of conviction or as a result of compulsion—many did take part, thereby creating an atmosphere of fractured identities, grievances, trauma, and uncertainty.

It should be noted that the ideologically motivated distortions and euphemistic discourse that historical researchers produced in the communist era—and have reproduced in the decades since—have also been “successful” insofar as the narrative they conveyed has made it possible for its proponents to ignore or reject any efforts to call it into question. This might also be attributable to the fact that there were initially very few researchers interested in agrarian and rural history, and the authors of synoptic studies of the subject—like Ferenc Donáth or Pál Romány—had in many cases been political decision-makers themselves (Bácskai, Gergely, Donáth, 1983 or Romány, 1979, 1985). Thus, for several generations, Hungarian textbooks and national histories avoided mention of the social operations associated with forced collectivization. Mainstream surveys of Hungarian political history generally focused on the break with pre-1956 repression, state policies designed to ameliorate the excesses of the Stalinist era, and positive accounts of “Kádár-era modernization,” even though assessments of this sort were refuted by communist-era works of social research and a wide range of archival sources which scholars have been free to examine since 1990.

In evaluating the relationship between social resistance and identity-fracturing state policies in post-1945 Hungary, one should consider the fact that by 1958, the country’s increasingly fragmented historical peasantry was the last social group still made up largely of individuals whose livelihoods and lifestyles continued to depend on private property. Hungary was among the few countries where communists had seized power before World War II, though they were in control there for only a short period. Even so, the effects of the 1919 Bolshevik coup were deeply etched into the memories of post-war Hungary’s older generations, and accounts of the Soviet horrors of the 1930s, including the Holodomor in Ukraine, also made their way across the Hungarian border. Thus, as the Red Army was preparing to invade at the end of World War II, Hungarians’ fears included concerns that private property would be liquidated and that they would be forced onto collective farms.²

The support of these invading Soviet forces put the leaders of the Hungarian Communist Party in a position to determine policy, and having made the tactical decision to cooperate with the leaders of other parties, they launched their land-reform initiative in the spring of 1945. Given the intensity of agricultural poverty in pre-World War II Hungary and the fact that virtually every post-war Hungarian political party agreed on the necessity of land redistribution, there was

clearly a demand for reform, though in actual social practice, the resultant land seizures and redistribution took place over the course of a few days, in many cases while the war was still raging.³ Three years later, in 1948, by which time the Hungarian Communist Party had achieved a formal monopoly on power, its leaders announced the collectivization of agriculture, which in practice meant not only a nationalization of land, but also the violent liquidation of Hungary's traditional peasant culture. Our volume is thus an analysis of a wide range of socio-economic issues—including the long-term consequences—associated with the period from 1945 to 1962.

The Domination of Language

The terminology and conceptual framework we have used in our attempts to unravel this tangle of problems have been determined by the fact that communists throughout the world generally characterized their initiatives as products of the ideology of modernization. The objectives and outcomes of the communists' extraordinarily ambitious schemes cannot be evaluated without a clear understanding of their modern-era precursors and the nineteenth-century notions of progress which were fundamentally influenced by the process of industrialization in Europe and North America. Communism held out the promise of rapid and all-encompassing industrialization, a transvaluation of traditional norms, and a radical transformation of existing social structures. For many, these aspirations lent the theory of communism a kind of magical power which obscured the fact that the Bolsheviks and their Stalinist successors were more interested in a dictatorship of the proletariat than in democracy.⁴

The first steps toward the establishment of a modern dictatorship are often taken in the realm of language, when authorities begin to use words in ways which confuse their meanings or divorce them from their original definitions. The initial phase of state violence often involves an erasure of the identities of its victims, which is achieved primarily by manipulating language, by confounding the meanings of words and concepts. According to Stalin's famous dictum, language is not simply a means of communication, but a weapon.⁵ The corruption of language is then followed by changes in thinking, and thus war becomes peace, slavery becomes freedom, exploitation becomes liberation, and murder becomes therapy (Hodgkinson, 1955; Terson, 1996: 78–80).⁶

One of our most important objectives in conducting this research has been to decode the language used in communist-era historical sources and to differentiate the layers of meaning in official parlance and everyday discourse (Cassirer, 1997: 37–50; Koselleck, 2006).⁷ Analyses of the practice of creating reality through language are particularly important in discussions of the world of political dictatorship, where there is no rule of law, and thus authorities can classify almost any form of communication as “subversion.” Dictatorial methods closely resemble the logic of military operations: isolating opponents, controlling perceptions of the enemy, and targeted criminalization are of decisive importance (Knabe, 1999: 203–208).⁸

As the experiences of many of our colleagues will attest, efforts to uncover and analyze historical sources which were produced during periods of political dictatorship will be most effective if researchers keep two things in mind while reading them. First, one must be aware of the information which has been omitted from these official texts. And second, accurate interpretations depend on constant acts of “translation.” For instance, the “gold standard” for the linguistic falsification of real-life incidents and situations was set by the state-security services of the communist world.⁹

The key to decoding the language used by Hungarian party-state functionaries is to focus primarily on the mindset of a document’s author rather than on its subject or the group of individuals under discussion (M. Szabó, 1998: 10).¹⁰ That is, the phrasing of these texts can convey a great deal about an official’s positionality, professional standing, socialization, and education (or lack thereof). The clearest historical examples of this phenomenon are apparatchiks’ descriptions and categorizations of the regime’s “opponents,” from kulaks to ecclesiastical leaders. In almost every case, the actual semantic function of these texts was superseded by the occult power of the “magic words” with which their authors conjured up enemies of the state. With the support of the Soviet military, the Hungarian Communist Party demonstrated so much resolve—and enjoyed so much success—in defining the terms of debate that in many cases even their political opponents made efforts to respond to them in their own language, thereby legitimizing the communists’ discursive practices. In this way, a whole range of concepts—such as the aforementioned “reform,” or the notion of a “cooperative”—acquired their own peculiar meanings.

The use of the word “cooperative” is one of the most misleading legacies of the manner in which concepts could be transmuted into political mythologies. As far back as the nineteenth century, “cooperatives” had helped individuals protect their private property, but the communists used this term as a kind of code-word to camouflage the practice of liquidating privately held peasant farms (Kurucz, 2012).¹¹ We might interpret the form of “collectivization” derived from this communist political mythology as a peculiar form of “development initiative”—and indeed, official discourse presented it to contemporary observers in precisely these terms.¹² Officials steeped in the bureaucratic state and culture which were established in this manner treated Hungarian society like an “administrative object.” Even so, decision-makers of the period did not speak publicly about the fact that every development initiative is characterized by uncertainty, bureaucratic maneuvering, barriers between organizational frameworks, and unintended consequences (Mike et al., 2012: 34).¹³ The conceptual categories invented by the architects of so-called socialist programs were burdened by numerous contradictions. For instance, authorities used such terminology to promote the notion of common ownership while in fact creating state monopolies. In any case, in analyzing the historical texts under discussion here, one must keep in mind that state socialism was not merely a social and economic system, but a worldview which prompted authorities to exclude—or more precisely, to attempt to exclude—certain fundamental elements of everyday life.

The origin-stories of the Soviet-style dictatorships of Eastern Europe are organized around two basic narratives. According to the first—still not generally accepted—version, Soviet tanks allowed a radical minority to seize control over the region’s societies, whose systems of government were thus illegitimate. As the Soviets’ military power began to deteriorate in the 1980s, so too did the power of the party-states of Eastern Europe. The second version of this story, on the other hand, is rooted in Marxist tradition and the notion that everything which happened in the region was the necessary result of historical inevitabilities: the state-socialist project offered these societies opportunities to find solutions—quickly—to problems like economic backwardness and urban-development gaps, to achieve the social emancipation of their peasant masses and working classes, and, in the short term, to atone for the various ways in which these nations had collaborated with the Nazis. The topos of inevitability, however, necessarily raises the following questions: Did goals like these justify the systematic use of state violence against innocent individuals? That is, was terror a legitimate tool of statecraft?¹⁴ Is it ethical to regard human suffering as an incidental expense, as collateral damage? In the case of extreme-right dictatorships, this sort of justification would be rejected out of hand. Conclusions such as these depend on the assumption that the communists’ practice of power was derived, implicitly or explicitly, from an immutable utopia located in the world of ideas, and that the communists’ actions could be justified by working backward from the axiomatic inevitability of this future utopia, which ideological perspective necessarily limits analysts’ ability to criticize communist authorities’ methods.

The historiographical tradition which promulgates the narrative that forced collectivization was “successful” lacks theoretical coherence, and thus insofar as we understand violent collectivization to have been a socio-historical phenomenon which affected the great mass of Hungarian society and led to long-term structural changes, we ultimately have to ask another set of questions: In what sense can we describe the outcomes of this process as successes? Who enjoyed these successes? How long did they last? What were the social and environmental costs of these successes?¹⁵ And if these ideologically motivated assertions actually correspond to the realities of the era, does it follow that the social researchers of the period (who analyzed neuroses associated with collective farms, conducted sociological surveys, and composed sociographies) were mistaken?

We know this was not the case; thus, in the interest of finding a common denominator, we might proceed to examine the context of contemporary Europe and ask why there continue to be significant differences between the regions that were collectivized and those that were not.¹⁶ It is also worth referring to the tradition of comparisons between Finland and Hungary—or, if we limit our investigations to countries within the Soviet bloc, we might juxtapose Polish society (which by the 1970s was indebted and impoverished, but still resistant to forced collectivization) and Hungarian society, which was considered a frontrunner in the collectivization process at that time. Approaching the subject from a micro-level perspective, we might wonder how to evaluate the currently disintegrating milieu of *Átány*, the site of Edit Fél and Tamás Hofer’s internationally recognized ethnographic-anthropological “community study” (Fél and Hofer, 1969). The

inhabitants of this village, many of whom were members of the Reformed Church and considered themselves “proper peasants,” maintained their three-sited farming operations up to the 1950s; however, forced collectivization led to a massive exodus, and the Hungarian Roma who have moved in since then have struggled with unemployment and now form a segregated subpopulation of the community. We might also engage in a counterfactual thought experiment and ask what might have happened if violent collectivization had never come to pass.¹⁷ We might imagine situations fraught with discord and extraordinary tensions, which should caution researchers to remember that the Hungarians of the state-socialist era struggled with a host of traumatic phenomena and their consequences.

Even so, these factors are not the only reasons land redistribution and forced collectivization need to be discussed outside the narrow context of agrarian history; the state-socialist project and the social practices associated with it also had serious consequences for Hungarian society as a whole. In analyzing this historical situation, we have thus focused on the political socialization of authoritarian norms—that is, the specific ways in which individual members of society participated in these projects. Whether communist authorities acknowledged their objectives publicly or not, social programs involving forced participation achieved essentially the same goals between 1958 and 1961 (the period which brought an end to forced collectivization) as they had in the somewhat different conditions of the early 1950s. And we should emphasize that the effects of these phenomena extended far beyond the forced collectivization of agriculture. The most realistic conceptual framework for discussing these violent structural changes and the liquidation of traditional life-worlds is that of internal colonialism; these conditions might also be described as an “everyday civil war.”

The first obvious starting point for our analyses was shared historical experience, insofar as the overwhelming majority of Hungary’s peasants clearly did not want to join collective farms, but were nevertheless forced to do so. Secondly, our novel approach to forced collectivization is also significant because it has allowed us to discuss its effects on society as a whole, rather than limiting ourselves to the more narrow field of rural history. Perhaps more importantly, this perspective reflects the earlier findings of international scholars of intellectual, social, and cultural history (Giordano and Hettlage, 1989; Bauerkämper, 2002),¹⁸ whose work necessitates a critical reappraisal of the mythologized—but almost universally accepted—notion of “the success of the Hungarian model.” Thirdly, collectivization should also be analyzed as a dynamic process which involved the interaction of numerous factors and phenomena; in fact, discussions of it will help explain several lacunae in the work of contemporary historical researchers, such as forced urbanization; rural poverty; proletarianization and the accumulation of wealth; local and regional disparities; social participation in the construction and operation of the communist regime; opportunistic resistance; and the environmental effects of large-scale chemicalization (Trencsényi and Apor, 2007).

Collectivization might be the only subject with connections to such a wide range of issues, and thus this new discursive approach will make it possible for us to evaluate a whole host of phenomena associated with the process of Sovietization in Central and Eastern Europe.¹⁹

The Domination of Society: A Historical Analysis of Forced Collectivization

One of the fundamental issues here is the conceptual content scholars assign to the phrase “forced collectivization.” In the present volume, we have used the term “forced collectivization” to denote the process by which collective farms were imposed on the Hungarian countryside between 1948 and 1961, as well as the system of forcibly collectivized agriculture which functioned there for another three decades, with a particular focus on the period between 1945 and 1980.

As is the case with all historical phenomena, researchers who want to understand forced collectivization have to identify the root causes that brought it into being, as well as the short- and long-term functions it served. In formulating our initial, panoramic representation of this process, we should mention a few factors which typically shaped the historical accounts produced under Stalinist dictatorships, in particular:

- the existence of an established ideology (Marxism–Leninism);
- the notion—rooted in Marxist doctrine—of a planned, rational society, along with aspirations to impose forms of order associated with it;
- violent modernization;
- a shifting of the symbolic boundaries (or frontiers) which delimited social life, resulting in “internal conquests” of various symbolic fields, including geographical spaces, followed by
- the thorough disciplining of the individual and
- the forcible homogenization of society.

Critics of the specifics of this system will note that it was not interactive, insofar as it did not allow individual members of society to take autonomous action. In social practice, one’s presence *within* this dictatorship—that is, one’s participation and cooperation in its everyday events—was important, if not unavoidable; individuals were thus confronted with a variety of behavioral expectations, from collaboration to dissimulation. Of the foregoing factors, three are particularly important to the fundamental message of the present volume: as a result of the social weight of traditional peasant masses, forced collectivization was simultaneously a process of violent modernization, an internal conquest, and the state’s most important tool for social homogenization.

The act—and the consequences—of nationalizing Hungarian peasants’ private property and lifestyles in accordance with the “Soviet model” must be examined as part of the *concrete* socio-political milieu in which this process was embedded. To say that the “Soviet model” was implemented in Central and Eastern Europe does not mean simply that the Red Army conquered the region with the assistance of its vassals in the communist parties there, but rather that a range of Soviet-style policies and processes were adapted and modified for use on several socio-economic levels. Soviet decisions were motivated by utopian ideals which established the political parameters for these countries and required them to adopt labor-centric social structures based on equality and productivity. Industrialization and forced

collectivization were closely linked state policies in which the decisive motivating factors were the need to provide sustenance to urban populations while simultaneously liquidating private property in the agrarian world. Soviet Europe's social and economic worlds were thus reengineered by means of radical interventions of extraordinary magnitude; those who suffered in the process protested and even revolted. And here we are referring not only to the success of resistance movements in Poland and Yugoslavia, where authorities eventually gave up on the idea of complete collectivization, but also to the protests in Bulgaria and Romania, which elicited brutally repressive government responses.

The fundamental questions we have attempted to answer in this volume are as follows: In what ways might forced collectivization be considered a socio-historical event—that is, a traumatic paradigm-shift of collective proportions? How can we demonstrate that it affected every segment of Hungarian society? And what sorts of individual and collective forms of behavior characterized the process of forced collectivization?

This volume will serve as an introduction to the clearly defined stages of the Hungarian communist dictatorship's anti-peasant and anti-rural political practices and their consequences, from the so-called land reform of March 1945 all the way up to the settlement policies of the 1970s. We have augmented this chronologically arranged survey with historical research on the subject of state violence, which approach might lead us far afield; however, this outcome is unavoidable given that such brutality was a decisive factor in the liquidation of the traditional peasant world.

At this point, we should clarify that scholars tend to differentiate violence into three generally accepted categories: individual (or direct), institutional, and structural.²⁰ In the course of forced collectivization, Hungarian peasants suffered substantially from all three types of violence, which authorities justified by invoking the principle of necessity. While Marx and Engels cited the objective of eliminating disparities between the city and the village in providing the theoretical foundation for this approach, Leninist interpretations of communist doctrine expanded this system of argumentation to justify the use of state violence against the peasantry. According to Lenin, commodity-producing peasants were already exhibiting bourgeois, capitalist, and even exploitative tendencies, and thus Leninist-Stalinist doctrine represented their collectivization as an inevitable necessity (Wittfogel, 1958: 427, 443).²¹ We should point out that contemporary historians regularly describe routine occurrences as “inevitable”; many scholars' systems of argumentation prioritize “inevitability” over any other consideration. The notion of inevitability is almost always accompanied by an approach known as *histoire totale*, which often omits the interpretations and perspectives of a large majority of the individuals who experienced these events. Their omission is even more problematic if we evaluate these events and the associated phenomena in light of their relationship to the end of this era—that is, from the perspective of their consequences.

Though “class struggle” might be understood in a sociological or political-scientific sense as a communist framework for describing the way in which societies function, in reality, Leninist-Stalinist dictatorships used policies of social marginalization and even annihilation to target specific individuals and groups from the outset.

Class warfare was less brutal than other Soviet methods, which led to the deaths of millions, but it nevertheless definitively shredded the fabric of Hungarian peasant society as it was instrumentalized in the course of forced collectivization. Class warfare initially appeared in the guise of the property seizures of the 1945 “land reform,” then lived on from 1948 to 1956 as the persecution of kulaks, anti-peasant tax policies, and the persistence of the wartime system of compulsory deliveries. From 1959 to 1961, under the name “forced collectivization,” it again manifested itself as the confiscation of peasant land, which process took place in conditions suggestive of a civil war. In the 1960s and 1970s, it took more subtle forms, such as welfare provisions which put the members of production cooperatives at a disadvantage and settlement policies which denied villages the resources they needed for development initiatives. Thus, it was only by means of brute force that the machinery of the party-state managed to take control of the territories it designated for incorporation into the planned economy, though there is nothing in the official statements of the lower-level communist authorities of the era to indicate that this was the case. It should also be noted that there were numerous locales in which even state violence was not enough to impose collectivization on Hungarian peasants.

In analyzing forced collectivization, it is important to follow the classical procedure of discussing phenomena as social facts. We could cite numerous cases which arose during the period of violent collectivization—as well as examples of the mutual learning process that characterized the Hungarian party-state and its society in the decades that followed—in which a kind of social consensus made it possible to circumvent official norms, invest local officials with new powers, and sometimes even create solidarity between communist authorities and their subjects. Party-state norms were thus enacted on the same stage as the everyday social practices of simulating compliance with them and otherwise undermining them. The Hungarian communist dictatorship—particularly in the period historians misleadingly describe as the “consolidation” of the Kádár era—was in reality an age of charades staged by the state and society, typified by a widespread capacity for mutual manipulation and opportunistic exploitation. Researchers must thus appraise the extent to which the Hungarian public was convinced by the numerous promises communist authorities made in the name of “popular democracy,” such as “economic and social advancement,” and how much they might have wanted to ignore communist practices rooted in theories of “equality.”²² The relevant historical sources feature many of these sorts of pragmatic responses to the party-state’s ideological propaganda campaigns, as well as forms of behavior consistent with such reactions. In this way, individuals outside the political power structure strove to make their own—ideologically contrarian, or sometimes simply incomprehensible—uses of government programs (Figes and Kolonitskii, 1999: 127–130). Thus, the prominent propaganda messages of the era should be understood as processes which unfolded over time and involved interaction between their authors and their audience. A traditional social-anthropological approach also recommends conceiving of these messages as constellations of interactive phenomena. Thus, for instance, the ownership of land, which was extraordinarily important in the life-world of Hungary’s peasants, was the basis of a system of rights—to make use of material goods, human labor, and land itself—which rights existed in