

ÁGOTA LÍDIA ISPÁN

Letters of complaint and reports of public interest written to the people's control Committee

SUMMARY

The author investigates a certain group of documents from the Socialist era: public interest reports and letters of complaints submitted to a district level unit of the People's Control Committee (NEB) in North-East Hungary between 1968–1989. NEB was established at the end of 1957 with the primary objective to protect people's wealth and to disclose misuse and abuse (e.g. larceny, fraud, embezzlement, inappropriate management of common property and damages due to omission). The content analysis of the documents provides a down-to-top view into the conflict-stricken Socialist weekdays, and especially the major conflicts and power relations of local societies in the countryside. The change of values after ejection, the ambivalent relationship to common property and the differing social practices of the increasingly consumption-oriented life of the 1970s and 1980s can be revealed via the inspection of these documents. The most typical cases were as follows: reports criticising the operation of agricultural cooperatives, state and party organisations, the actual or supposed abuses of leaders and their clients, commercial units and services. With regard to these written reports the author examines, besides the formal-linguistic features of correspondence, the argumentative strategies applied by the correspondents in order to gain a positive evaluation, the impact these made on the NEB controllers, and the possible motivations of the correspondents having an attitude adjusted to the ideal of the new Socialist man.

Key words: letters of complaint, reports of public interest, common property, thefts, corruption of the local elite, formal-linguistic features, strategies and argumentation of letter writing

Introduction

According to Act VII on people's control, passed in December 1957, people's control committees were created at central, county and township levels.¹ Their tasks were the following: help provided for the state organisations in strengthening the discipline of citizens and at a state level and to protect people's property by revealing abuses including thefts, frauds, embezzlements and various damages coming from the careless treatment of the state's property and other misconducts (these were characteristic mostly of trade, construction and light industrial factories), to take steps against the hostile elements of whom they were informed by the reports of public interests and to prevent unyielding bureaucracy and corruption.² In the investigation of criminal cases and abuses great cooperation was expected of the 'workers', who were encouraged to make public reports either orally or written "if they experience any unlawfulness, irresponsibility or abuse".³

In the name of impeccability, the members of the People's Control Committee (its Hungarian abbreviation is NEB) were required to be loyal to the system, to have a clean criminal history and to show an exemplary attitude both in their private life and at work. The NEB could control a whole branch of the economy in the country or it could investigate a particular organisation in all aspects or it could address a certain type of act or carelessness. Therefore, based on the hierarchy of the organisation the lower level township or district committees had the full right to check the councils, enterprises, institutions and cooperatives operating in their territory, the activities of private small industrial and private trade businesses and the territorial/local branches of companies, institutions and offices controlled by ministries. When conducting an investigation of a concrete type of act or carelessness, so called theme investigations were conducted by the local authorities, according to a work plan drawn up by themselves or at a higher (country or county) level of the organisation. Moreover, reports of public interest on the abuses of public property and complaints of individuals about their private affairs were also investigated.⁴ During their investigations the NEB inspectors checked the documents of the organisation, the documents

¹ *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye 1957* [Official Collection of Acts and Decrees 1957], 1958, pp. 49–56; *Törvények és rendeletek hivatalos gyűjteménye 1958* [Official Collection of Acts and Decrees 1958], 1959, pp. 171–174.

² *A magyar állam szervei 1950–1970* [The Organisations of the Hungarian State], ch.ed. B. Boreczky, Budapest 1993, pp. 373. From 1948 on, several institutions were organised to control state economic institutions, which were dissolved later. See: *A magyar állam szervei 1944–1950. A–M.* [The Organisations of the Hungarian State], ch.ed. B. Boreczky, Budapest 1985, pp. 23–26; *A magyar állam szervei 1950–1970*, pp. 14–16.

³ *A népi ellenőrzésről* [On people's control]. Északmagyarország, 12 January 1958, p. 1.

⁴ M.F. Horváth, *A "népi ellenőrzés" Magyarországon 1957–1989* [The "People's Control" in Hungary 1957–1989], "Levéltári Szemle" 1990, vol. 40, no. 4, p. 34.

of the investigations concluded or in progress and they could request any oral or written information of the leaders or the workers. If they suspected a crime, they could officially report it to the police office or the attorney general competent in that given territory.⁵

In Hungary, NEB was not the only forum where citizens could turn to with their oral or written reports.⁶ Each ministry operated an office of complaints,⁷ there were correspondence columns in the newspapers,⁸ regular comments and questions were addressed to the television programmes but complaints could be made at the councils, companies, at the public sessions of cooperatives or in the books of complaints introduced in the trading units. Among these manifold forums the People's Control Committee was exceptional because due to its organisational structure, it could carry out investigations that were thematically more general compared to the particular profile of a company or a branch of industry and they were more concentrated than the scope of the television or the newspapers which operate at a country or county level.

A comprehensive study of the practical operation of NEB and its role at a country level and the categorization of the investigations conducted are still to be done, however, an assessment report of the People's Control Committee of Borsod County written in 1972 gives us some insight into their operation at

⁵ *Északmagyarország*, 12 January 1958, p. 1. Among the already existing goals, Act V of 1968 also mentioned that the scope of control should cover the objectives to be achieved in the fields of health care, social and cultural developments and the social and cultural tasks to be done that are in direct connection with the living circumstances of the people. *A magyar állam szervei 1950–1970*, p. 374. More details: M.F. Horváth, *A "népi ellenőrzés"...*

⁶ Offices with similar functions were to be found in other countries of the Socialist Block too. For instance, in East Germany in 1953 an act was passed to regulate the investigation of oral and written complaints and petitions (Eingaben) addressed to official authorities. The great number of German reports have drawn the attention of several researchers. The various approaches and directions of the research are summed up: E.G. Huneke, *Morality, Law and the Socialist Sexual Self in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1972*. Dissertation. University of Michigan 2013, pp. 18–31. (https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/97942/ehuneke_1.pdf?sequence=1) The NEB was established according to Soviet patterns. Among others, the reports sent to the Soviet fellow organisation are studied: G. Tsipursky, *As a Citizen, I Cannot Ignore These Facts*. *Whistleblowing in the Khrushchev Era*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas" 2010, vol. 58, pp. 52–69.

⁷ Cs. Kovács, *Complaints from the Final Period of Hungarian Collectivisation*, [in:] *Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe: Perceptions, Attitudes, Propaganda*, eds. S. Radu, C. Budeancă, Zürich 2016, pp. 296–334.

⁸ E. Pajor, *A közvélemény parancsnokai*. *A Szabad Nép munkás- és parasztlevelezési mozgalma* ["The masters of public opinion". The worker and peasant correspondence movement of Szabad Nép], "Új Forrás" 2012, vol. 44, no. 9, pp. 32–43; J.Ö. Kovács, *The "Rationalization of subjugation": Communication practices in correspondence in Hungary after 1956*, [in:] *Analele Universității din Oradea. Seria Istorie Arheologie tom XX*, eds. F. Antonio, R. Radu, S. Barbu, Oradea 2010, pp. 201–208.

lower levels.⁹ According to the report, 100–120 thematic and targeted investigations were carried out each year in the various economic branches. According to the 1972 report, each year 900–1000 complaints and reports were sent to the organisations of the People's Control Committee in the county, in 60% of the cases investigations were started, they concerned activities which were harmful to public interest according to the NEB, mostly in catering, butcheries, food stores and the premises of Tüzép (building material and solid fuel merchants). According to the summary, there was a rise in the number of reports concerning the protection of public property. Among them the abuse of various materials, the illegal use of the means of passenger and material transport, undeserved bonuses and innovation fees, and abuses of the lax adherence to the rules on documentation and inadequate inside control were the most common. Numerous reports were sent about the deficiencies in warranty repairs and in the fields of city or village management. Among the private complaints, controversies at work or with the salary and flats, problems with the activity of the building authorities, real estate management and issues concerning cooperative membership were the most common.

The location of my examination is the district in Borsod County with Mezőcsát at its centre, although later it was moved to Leninváros. Reports from all the villages and towns of the district were sent to the Mezőcsát and Leninváros People's Control Committee in the period between 1968 and 1989.¹⁰ The NEB was obliged to investigate them except for the repeated reports and the ones with unsatisfactory data, which sometimes resulted in lengthy records, hearings of witnesses and extensive correspondence with the organisations and individuals concerned. Although the documentation of the cases cannot always be found intact, the material is still so vast that I have not tried to process it completely, dealing

⁹ Az MSZMP Borsod megyei Párt- Végrehajtóbizottság 1972. szeptember 1-i ülésén elfogadott Tájékoztató a megyei Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság munkájáról [Report on the work of the People's Control Committee in Borsod county, approved by the Borsod County Executive Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party at its session on 1 September 1972]. Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén Megyei Levéltára [National Archives of Hungary Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County Archives] – hereafter cited as MNL BAZML, XVII. 1205. Néphatalmi és különleges feladatokra létrejött bizottságok. A Leninvárosi Járási Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság iratai [Committees formed for the people's power and diverse tasks. Documents of People's Control Committee of Leninváros] Box 2. (Közérdekű, 1972.) According to this document, 2034 people's inspectors were registered in the county and 1600–1800 of them were involved in the work a year. Due to the nature of the inspections, about 80% of those who participated in them were technical and book keeping experts or economists and 20% of them were blue collar workers. The activities of people's control was observed by the party committees, and the party organisations also participated in the sessions of the NEB, but the people's control committees cooperated most intensively with the organisations of councils as numerous council workers took part in the inspections and there were many controls led by them together too.

¹⁰ During my research in the archives, I could not find any documents from the first ten years of the operation of the NEB, between 1958 and 1968.

with each and every report. Yet, in my opinion, among the 239 mainly written reports selected to be researched, the most characteristic types of cases are represented, and this opinion of mine is supported by the inside reports on the work of the NEB and the newspaper articles which regularly observed the activities of the NEB.

During the transformation of the lifestyle, the socialist system deliberately attempted to transform the mental attitudes too besides changing the objects and the circumstances. An important element of this was the ‘elimination of the smallholders’ way of thinking’, which was characteristic of the peasants too, by changing the existing type of the occupancy of property. As the secretary of the Sátoraljaújhely county committee put it in 1962: “For creating a socialist consciousness, it is highly important to create a new attitude towards public property. Therefore it is an important part of our political work to encourage the respect of public property. People in cooperatives should be helped so that they could arrive at a conclusion that the welfare of members does not depend on the private allotment, it only plays a complementary role, but on common estates, which should be regularly strengthened and protected. This type of political work also has some results, which is shown by the fact that there are fewer and fewer cases when common property is infringed, the protection of common property is getting ever stronger and stronger”.¹¹ As opposed to this optimistic view expressed after the building of the system of cooperatives was completed, the reports reveal the fact that the infringements of public property could be observed throughout the whole era and not only in the cooperatives.¹² In the first section of my paper by analysing the content of the reports I intend to show these phenomena from below while the publication of the findings of the NEB investigations gives information about their official assessment. After that, in connection with the written reports, besides the formal-linguistic features of letter writing, the strategies and argumentation deployed by the letter writers and their effects on the NEB

¹¹ Eredmények, feladatok a sátoraljaújhelyi járásban a szocialista szellemű, egységes szövetkezeti parasztság kialakításában [Achievements and tasks in the Sátoraljaújhely district, in creating a unified peasantry with Socialist views]. Északmagyarország, 1 June 1962, p. 3.

¹² Consumption, especially buying and the difficulties of purchasing through the traditional trade channels, is the topic of the reports concerning commerce. In their case, private grievances were emphasized instead of the protection of state properties, and due to this, the NEB as an organisation started to carry out consumer protection. In this paper I will not discuss the reports concerning trade, about them see: Á. L. Ispán, “*It’s hard to do your duty here.*” *Cultured Retail Trade in Hungary*, [in:] *Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe: Perceptions, Attitudes, Propaganda*, eds. S. Radu, C. Budeancă, Zürich 2016, pp. 568–577. I will also leave out the reports on abuses in factories which make up a small proportion of the reports (but from other sources we know that they were quite common), and the reports about the distribution of flats, which emerged as a problem mainly in big cities and the complaints about making a living, situation of the family and about working conditions.

inspectors will be analysed and I will make an attempt to reveal the possible motivations of those complainants who could be described by an attitude characteristic of the socialist ideal (self-respecting, not willing to overlook any abuse, intending to make things better).

The topics of the reports

“Awful thefts are being committed in our cooperative” – complaints against the cooperatives

A great number of the reports complain about the operation of cooperatives, revealing the real or supposed abuses committed by the leaders of the cooperatives and their entourages. The circulars sent by the Mezőcsát District Office to the agricultural cooperatives of the district, following the reports of the Ministry of Agriculture and Food for the years 1971, 1972 and 1973, provide great help in overseeing the reports of this kind as they summarized the main types of crimes, similarly to the reports.¹³

According to these circulars, the number of thefts and their value increased, compared to the previous year, in which careless inventory management, storage and watching also played a role. Mostly field crops, products and materials stored in the open air were affected by these thefts, but stealing livestock, machines and fuel was also important.¹⁴ “We are the workers of the Augustus 20 TSz [cooperative]. We implore your kind help. We are not conversant in such cases. There are terrible thefts going on in our cooperative. Many of the chiefs have been heating with fuel in their oil stoves for years. It is delivered directly to their homes in tank wagons. On top of that they are selling it for 300–400 HUF by the barrel. Gy. B., an engineer has been heating with it for years and his neighbours [...] and many of their relatives in the village. They laugh at us in the face as we have no

¹³ A BAZ Megyei Tanács VB Mezőcsáti Járási Hivatal Élelmiszergazdasági és Kereskedelmi Osztályának körlevelei: A társadalmi tulajdon védelme a mezőgazdasági üzemekben [The circulars of the Commercial and Food Department of the Mezőcsát District Office of the Executive Committee of the BAZ County Council: The protection of public property in agricultural cooperatives] 25 September 1972. MNL BAZML XXX. 1113. Box 12.; A mezőgazdasági üzemek, vállalatok társadalmi tulajdon védelmi és tűzrendészeti helyzete [The protection of public property and fire safety regulations in the agricultural cooperatives and companies], 8 January 1974, *ibidem*. Box 15; A mezőgazdasági üzemek, vállalatok társadalmi tulajdon védelmi és tűzrendészeti helyzete [The protection of public property and fire safety regulations in the agricultural cooperatives and companies] 30 September 1974, *ibidem*. Box 16.

¹⁴ Körlevél [Circular], 25 September 1972, p. 2, 8 January 1974, p. 1, 30 September 1974, p. 4.

opportunity to do this. Those responsible for the fodder have sold whole stacks of hay and straw in several places in the village, all of it was stolen”.¹⁵ According to the 1974 report of the ministry, as opposed to the excessive consumption of alcohol in earlier years, it was the acquisition of durable goods, the satisfaction of needs in connection with private constructions and the desire to become rich were the main driving forces of crimes aiming at material gains.¹⁶

Besides false bookkeeping, the circular of 1974 also makes mention of the unjust requisition and use of state subsidies and subventions.¹⁷ A report referring to such a case was sent in from Tiszababolna, in 1978, although later it was declared unsound: “I would like to draw your kind attention to the balance sheet of the Tiszababolna cooperative for the year 1974. In order to gain the state subsidy, the calves kept being born in December in the logbook of births until the birth rate of calves exceeded 85%. The purchased calves are also registered as newborn calves [...]”.¹⁸ They deemed illegal racketing within the cooperative’s framework, when some recognized merchants with license, besides processing the cooperative’s material, manufactured products from their purchased materials and distributed them under the name of the cooperative. Activities of private transportation, which was prohibited until 1982, were also classified into this category, when private persons bought vehicles in the name of a cooperative and they delivered goods in an illegal way by these vehicles.

The illegal use of cars is a recurring element in reports, although mostly it was the private use of vehicles owned by the co-ops and the unlawful fuel fee compensations that were remonstrated against. According to a 1985 report in Tiszakeszi, “the wife of the cooperative’s managing director was taken by the company car to and fro for days to find building materials”.¹⁹ A report from 1986 against the managing director of the Mezőcsát agricultural cooperative said that he had illegally been using the company car for years to go to work (as his home in Miskolc was more than 25 km away from his workplace), and he had completely

¹⁵ The hand written letter of complaint forwarded from the correspondence column of Népszabadság to the NEB had already been analysed by the District Police Department, but as the NEB did not request any further information on the case, the findings of the investigation are not known. MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 31. 1979. Hand-written reports have been preserved in their original form or in a typed version in the archives. For reasons of personal data protection, I indicated only the initials of the names in my publication.

¹⁶ Körlevél [Circular], 8 January 1974, p. 2.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 3.

¹⁸ After the investigation it was stated by the NEB that the coop required the state support in accordance with the regulation. MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Néphatalmi és különleges feladatokra létrejött bizottságok. A Mezőcsáti Járási Népi Ellenőrzési Bizottság iratai [Committees formed for the people’s power and diverse tasks. Documents of People’s Control Committee of Mezőcsát] Box 19. 1978.

¹⁹ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1985.

appropriated it: “On Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays, the Dacia is always in Miskolc, he can go on excursions anywhere he wants to”.²⁰

The charge of abusing the material and personal assets of the cooperative is regularly worded whenever the leaders *build* something (houses or cottages),²¹ as in the report dating from 1978 below. “Nyékládháza is in the suburbia of Miskolc, many workers build their houses with the help of the family and relatives or private entrepreneurs, the leaders, especially the cooperative’s leaders have the workers of the cooperative’s building brigade, the cooperative’s means of transport and machines on weekdays, on Saturdays, on Sundays alike. That’s the way the managing director of the cooperative in Hejőbába is building a two-storeyed house.” According to the anonymous complainant, the remuneration for the work on Sunday was compensated by the pay rise given by the cooperative and the extra money for the overtime. “The material can also be obtained as the cooperative is also carrying out construction works. They buy some materials so that they can prove it with invoices, but they sell the material to the cooperative. The house will be built as they have invoices”.²² Although the investigation revealed that the director of the cooperative who was accused could prove the origin of the materials he had bought for building his house with invoices, and he had received aggregate and delivery at a discount price from the cooperative lawfully, which he had paid, other report writers also alluded similar cases. *Drivers* are mentioned in many reports, the complainants usually suggested that they should be interrogated in connection with the abuses. This was recommended by the writer of the report against the director of the cooperative in Hejőkeresztúr in 1989: “He has 3 plots in Tiszavasvári, where the vehicles of the cooperative delivered the aggregate, certainly free of charge. Please ask the drivers, but not B., who is the director’s right hand in private work”.²³ Due to the transport of materials, illegal deliveries and other private businesses, the drivers must have been confidential men of

²⁰ The investigation came to the conclusion that although there had been a decision made by the leadership about the use of the car, it was not illicit. However, it was justified from an economic point of view as the managing director of the cooperative could manage the Miskolc and Budapest branches without hiring a driver, which was more cost-effective and flexible. Moreover, the NEB suggested that the car should be sold, which was soon carried out. MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1986.

²¹ Sometimes the members of the cooperative who worked in the private allotments of the directors were also mentioned: “*There are two or three people who work regularly in the private plot of the comrade director* [in Mezőcsát – Á. L. I.], *caring for the livestock, feeding the pigs and the bulls.*”; in 1989, a report was written on the director of the cooperative in Hejőkeresztúr: “*Well, he has three ‘holds’ [1,73 hectares] of pepper and onion and he makes the members of the cooperative hoe them, and it is registered under someone else’s name, besides a field of melon where he works with several friends of his and has his friends work on it so that he can remain clean.*” MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1975. (Mezőcsát); 1205. Box 41. 1989. (Hejőkeresztúr).

²² MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1978.

²³ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 58. 1989.

the leaders, but according to the writers of the letters, due to their position, they were much more exposed to lay-offs or threats. “It enough to know about the director’s driver that he is terrorized, threatened not to talk as he had done something earlier”.²⁴

The case of *sand and stone quarries* started by the cooperatives in several villages and towns of the district at that time is characteristic of this region. The reports on the quarries stated that pebble mining was such a profitable industry that it is more lucrative than the production of the cooperatives, therefore the leaders also pay more attention to them. The report below, which was rejected as malevolent, complained about the careless work of the Tiszapalkonya cooperative in 1975 (they were accused of having let the harvested wheat rot): “as they sell the soil, the don’t care if the mown wheat rot on the ground, so they do not care much about production as they have money from the transports and the aggregate and the soil they sell from the top of the aggregate, please investigate and reprimand them for their carelessness”.²⁵ In Emőd, the Budget Department (Költségvetési Üzem)²⁶ of the council operated the mine, therefore the director of the council’s executive committee was reported in 1969: “The director does not do his duties as at the council because he only pays attention to the mine, he does not listen to us, workers as he no time for that, but for the sake of the quarry he is always in the confectionery and the pub.” According to the charges, the director trusted one of his confidential people to run the mine, in exchange for aggregate they received building materials, they regularly failed to give receipts for the price of the aggregate, they pocketed the revenue, they shared it and financed their constructions. The investigation could prove the financial irregularities in connection with handling cash and the way the council managed materials.²⁷ The reports concerning the quarries regularly accuse the leadership and their confidential people of transporting the materials free of charge to their own construction site or those of their acquaintances: “Sz. Z. is a leader in the mine factory manager – the secretary of the party leadership in Hejőszalonta, a propagandist – since 1976, when he started to build his house in the village of Hejőkeresztúr, which is still not complete, it has not yet been finished as apparently he was unable to steal from the stone quarry what is necessary to finish it and the workers of the stone quarry worked long hours at comrade Sz.’s place at the expense of the coop and it was seen by the secretary of the party leadership, and the managing director of the cooperative and everyone and they didn’t say a word. The cooperative has survived

²⁴ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1975 (Mezőcsát).

²⁵ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1975.

²⁶ An organisation financed by the council, carrying out communal and construction works.

²⁷ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 20. 1969.

this one too, as this was the second apartment which has been built at the expense of the cooperative”.²⁸

According to the reports, *malfeasance and malpractice, fraud and embezzlement* (fraud of wages, frauds committed during the purchases and sales, illegal use of company stamps) were the crimes of the greatest magnitude. The inspections explained the embezzlements and frauds committed by the technical and administrative workers and the middle level leaders mainly by the excessive confidence shown by the leaders, the superficial controls and the careless adherence to the rules on documentation and the lax discipline, although the administration was gradually becoming more and more professional.²⁹ Malpractices were observed in the detection of big damages too, which were “due to the incorrect attitude of some leaders”.³⁰ A complainant who wrote when an embezzling payroll accountant was fired without being called to account in 1978, revealed some of the possible motivating factors of this, quoting how the party secretary in Hejőkeresztúr responded: “it is not necessary that the case should be revealed, this cooperative has been dragged through the mire enough times and what would the district authorities say.” As has been shown in this case too, the strict hierarchy of the bureaucracy of the party state, the need to meet the requirements of the leaders and the fear of the personal and collective consequences encouraged hiding the deficiencies.³¹ The writer of this report jumped to the consequence that this attitude gives rise to further abuses: “So those will benefit who commit embezzlement as there are good opportunities for it, especially here in the cooperative, as the discipline and the control is so lax in the whole area from the office to the garage, the storehouse, the granary, the stone quarry etc. that they cannot be overlooked”.³²

The *careless, corrupt leadership* overlooking the mistakes (it could include the chief agronomist, the key accountant and the chief caretaker of the livestock as

²⁸ The controllers found the financial support for house building provided for the factory manager of the stone quarry, the stone purchase proved with invoices and the delivery at a discount price which was granted to the co-op members righteous and in proportion with the support provided for other members of the cooperative. They also investigated who, when and for what remuneration worked at the construction site of the factory manager’s house among the workers in the mine. According to this, the house was built by the cooperative method common in that area. Besides the experts, the acquaintances and colleagues – usually after work, on free Saturdays, on Sundays or taking a day off – did the unskilled work, without any remuneration, for food and for the future return of their help. MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1978.

²⁹ Körlevél [Circular], 25 September 1972, p. 2, 8 January 1974, p. 2, 30 September 1974, p. 4.

³⁰ Körlevél [Circular], 30 September 1974, p. 2.

³¹ On the nature of the bureaucracy of the party state see: J. Kornai, *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*, Oxford 1992, pp. 65–80, 89–91, 128–131.

³² After a detailed investigation, the NEB classified this report as unsound. MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1978.

well as the managing director of the cooperative) is a recurring element of these reports. In 1976 a report against the managing director of the Ároktő cooperative was sent to the NEB: "It is intolerable what they dare to do with the consent of the managing director. So many illegal ploughing, sowing, fertilizing at the expense of the coop and for their benefit going on for years. They can also cheat as they want with the cars as the meters are broken in almost all of them. The salaries are not defined in accordance with the law. There is a huge loss of livestock as they are not given food. As opposed to this, the caretakers of the animals build palaces without taking loans. For the tractor drivers, their fellow drunkards, 2–3 'holds' [1,15–1,73 ha] of illegally used plot and corn are provided free of charge. The members, however, are tricked as the grains that are sown for the private farmers, the brother-in-laws and the friends are stolen from their land. [...] The fuel also goes into the oil stove of the tractor drivers. There is absolutely no control along the whole line".³³ The managing directors were often accused of tyranny and bossing about, saying that they treat the unit which they were to lead as their own property or personal possession, neglecting the common property and the democracy of the cooperative. "As coop members we cannot tolerate any longer what some of the leaders are doing with the common property. [...] Neglecting the coop democracy, through stealing public property, the cooperative is neglected, degraded, there are various manipulations".³⁴ "The managing director gives away the fish kept in the stone quarry and the stones as if they were his. Well, I have to say that it's not the way I interpret democracy [...] Well, in the previous system only the landlord was allowed to do this [...]".³⁵ The behaviour of some co-op leaders was criticized both in the circulars and in the complaints (rude, bossy attitude), the exaggerated representation and hosting.³⁶

³³ In his response, the managing director refuted the charges item by item. He emphasized that in exchange for a fee he allows the cultivation of the co-op members' private plots and the outsiders' plots as it is in the interest of the state economy. The vehicles of the co-op continuously deliver transports for a fee, the job that was done is proved with invoices, and the inside controller regularly checks the fuel consumption. To the best of his knowledge, one of the caretakers of the livestock has been building a house for five years, he is supported by his parents. The livestock is checked by various authorities as well as the veterinary. MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1976.

³⁴ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1975 (Mezőcsát).

³⁵ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1984 (Hejőkeresztúr).

³⁶ Körlevél [Circular], 25 September 1972, p. 3. For more on this, see: S. Borbély, *Informális gazdasági stratégiák a magyar–ukrán határvidéken* [Informal Economic Strategies in the Hungarian-Ukrainian Border Zone], [in:] *Hármas határok néprajzi értelmezésben* [An Ethnographic Interpretation of Tri-Border Areas], ed. T. Turai, Budapest 2015, pp. 223–225. According to Sheila Fitzpatrick's research, in the Soviet Union of the 30s most derogatory reports were sent by the peasants complaining about the directors of the kolkhozes. Their content and style shows a lot of similarities to the Hungarian reports. S. Fitzpatrick, *Suppliants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, "Slavic Review" 1996, vol. 55, no. 1, p. 86.

These charges against the co-op managers can be observed through the whole era. Due to Zsuzsanna Varga's research, it has come to light that in the wake of the 1968 economic reforms, the cooperatives, which gradually became a successful sector, were in the centre of the struggle between the reformist agrarian lobby and the anti-reformist heavy industrial lobby in the first half of the 1970s. The anti-reformists launched attacks in several fields, both in the press and in the ideology, against the cooperatives and after the economic reforms were slowed down, those successful leaders of cooperatives who were the most dedicated supporters of the reforms were targeted by them. In the trials that were like show trials and started in great numbers after the investigations of the general attorney and the people's control inspections, the same charges were repeated, mainly crimes against public property, and sentences of several years of imprisonment were passed in the first instance.³⁷

Despite the similar charges, the letters most of which were anonymous or written in the name of the members of the co-ops give an insight into conflicts of a somewhat different nature. As has been seen, the appropriation of state and cooperative property was common practice not only among the leaders. The widespread thefts and their relative judgement might have gone back to the forced deliveries and collectivisation of the 50s and the changed attitude towards the land and work. An important element in the research of Netta Nagy – analysing the system of compulsory deliveries in the 50s – is that the heavy duties of compulsory delivery that threatened even the living of people forced the farmers to hide the produce (to hide the products and the income from the state) despite the strict regulations and controls. The expression “we were stealing what belonged to us” is a returning element in the interviews collected by the author and this alludes to the discrepancy between violently changed property rights and the sense of property of the peasants.³⁸ Sándor Oláh, researching the collectivisation in the villages in the Szeklerland, classifies theft as a reappropriation done to counter-balance the appropriation carried out by the state, which could have been motivated by the wish to fight against injustice, rage and a hope to take revenge as well as the materialistic self-interest (survival).³⁹ Miklós Szilágyi says that according to the peasant values, the order of “Thou shalt not steal” could be interpreted as a crime, or as an obligatory, but shameful deed or even as an exploit (see

³⁷ Zs. Varga, *Why Is Success a Crime? Trials of Managers of Agricultural Cooperatives in the Hungary of the 1970s*, “Hungarian Studies Review” 2013, vol. 40, no. 2, pp. 49–176.

³⁸ N. Nagy, *A cserevilágtól a padlássöprésig. Falusi hétköznapiak a beszolgáltatás éveiben* [From the Age of Barter to the Clean-Swept Attic: Everyday Life During the Years of Compulsory Redistribution], Budapest 2013, pp. 164–171.

³⁹ S. Oláh, *Csendes csatatér. Kollektivizálás és túlélési stratégiák a két Homoród mentén* [Silent battlefield: Collectivisation and survival strategies in the region of the two Rivers Homoród] (1949–1962), Csíkszereda 2001, pp. 199–257, especially 241–242.

the outlaws), depending on the context, and researching the different periods he comes to the conclusion that before World War II, in the case of agrarian workers and agricultural servants the opposition of the rich and the poor, after the co-operatives were organised the opposition of mine and yours overrode the principle of ‘stealing is sin’.⁴⁰ Aranka Kocsis wrote about Martos in Slovakia that in time the property of the cooperative was treated as a common private property and it was considered natural if a worker took something home from what they were working with. The appropriation of the property of the cooperative, the acquisition indicated the cleverness of a person, and it was not deemed as morally wrong, especially as the same attitude was characteristic of the simple co-op members and the leadership in this respect.⁴¹

If stealing from the common property was general and was considered to be a received practice, what made the complainants write their reports? From the obviously multiple answers I would only like to emphasize two (later I will discuss the possible motivations of the report writers). On the one hand, the sense of ownership – which had many reasons (such as lands, tools, livestock etc. taken into the cooperative) – and the emotional bond towards the cooperative developed the protective and controlling attitude of the good farmer in the members.⁴² The unequal access to the property of the cooperative was another motivation, which enhanced the opposition between the ‘simple’ members

⁴⁰ M. Szilágyi, *Törvények, szokásjog, jogszokás* [Laws, customs, customary law], [in:] *Magyar néprajz* [Hungarian Ethnography] VIII. *Társadalom* [Society], ch. ed. A. Paládi-Kovács, Budapest 2000, pp. 747–750.

⁴¹ A. Kocsis, *A gazda, a családja, a munka és a hatalom. Értékváltozások egy kisalföldi faluban* [The farmer, his family, work and power. Value changes in a village in the Little Plain], Pozsony 2006, pp. 99–102. In the 1980s Polish researchers differentiated various forms of abusing the infrastructure of factories, material properties and working time. It was supposed that public property will overshadow the difference between the concepts of ‘mine’ and ‘not mine’, which are always present in moral conscience. Even if the owner of something is not known, the knowledge that it does not belong to us is enough (therefore shoplifting can always be considered theft). However, at a state company there are several factors which make this distinction very vague: the fact that they are co-owners and employees at the same time; continuously seeing the waste of tools, materials and working time; personal gains – abstract losses. E. Firlit, J. Chłopecki, *When Theft is Not Theft*, [in:] *The Unplanned Society. Poland during and after Communism*, ed. J.R. Wedel, New York 1992, pp. 97–100.

⁴² The formation of the sense of ownership was studied during various researches focusing on cooperatives at that time. E.g. A. Szijjártó, *A tagság társadalmi összetételének, szak-képzettségének és a szövetkezeti demokrácia érvényesülésének szerepe a létavértesi Aranykalász Termelőszövetkezet nagyüzemi fejlődésében* [The role of the social composition of the members, their qualifications and the prevalence of democracy in the development of Aranykalász Cooperative in Létavértes], [in:] *Termelőszövetkezetektörténeti tanulmányok* [Studies on the History of Agricultural Cooperatives] no. 2, ed. F. Donáth, Budapest 1973, pp. 98–100, L. Lőkös, *Az alsószuhai “Új Élet” Termelőszövetkezet története* [The history of “Új Élet” cooperative in Alsószuha], [in:] *Termelőszövetkezetektörténeti tanulmányok* [Studies on the History of Agricultural Cooperatives] no. 2, ed. F. Donáth, Budapest 1973, pp. 164–165.

and those who were in leading, controlling positions in the wider sense of the word. The reports mentioned managing directors of cooperatives who treated the property of the cooperative as their own property, tractor drivers heating with tractor fuel, caretakers of the crops who traded with hay and storekeepers who stole from the supplies on store, these positions provided better opportunities to appropriate cooperative property. The report concerning the cooperative called Augustus 20 TSz in Mezőcsát in 1979 was signed by “a co-op worker with low wages in the name of many” was not aimed at the leaders but “the chiefs of the members”: “They laugh at us in the face as we have no opportunity to do this”.⁴³ Although the ring of beneficiaries might have been extended, but it was usually based mainly on family relationship (the often cited *‘principle of sons-in-law and godparents’*), friendship or the habit of drinking and playing cards together. The charges against the directors of cooperatives proved to be unsound in many cases after the NEB investigation. So these letters tell a lot about the lack of information on regulations, responsibilities, organisational procedure etc., and even more on the various inner discrepancies dividing the membership of the cooperative.

Although the official circulars summarizing the most common types of abuses committed in the co-ops did not mention it, it was milk purchase that constituted one of the most tense area in the village, as the cattle keeping farmers accused the milk purchasers employed by the local cooperative of fraud and rude, bossy behaviours. According to the reports sent from many villages of the district, some of them were several times repeated, the farmers did not get the correct price for their milk as the milk purchasers cheated in some ways: for instance the specific weight and the fat content of the milk were defined incorrectly, without taking samples regularly; they did not do the administrative work regularly/correctly; they did not pay attention to hygiene; due to the improper treatment, the milk turned sour several times and they watered down the milk for their own benefit. The charges of gaining benefits in illegal ways were even stronger if the milk purchaser also kept cattle. The complaints made by cattle owners drew attention to the deficiencies of controls, which seem to be proved by the various measures taken after the NEB investigations. It could also cause some problems that the farmers did not have enough knowledge about the methods of milk analysis.

⁴³ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 31. 1979 (Handwritten letter).

“There has been no other president of the council leading the town during this political system, who is so greedy” – reports against local potentates

Concerning their content, the reports about the activities of state and party organizations show a lot of similarities to the charges against the co-op leaders. The peremptory behaviour of the leaders (“their dictatorial attitude”), the abuse of the personal and material supply of the council (especially the maintenance and building brigades), mentioning the driver as witnesses in connection with the transport of materials, and as new elements complaints about the practice shown by the organizations of councils at the distribution of social benefits, the slowness of bureaucracy and the careless working methods at the offices were returning items in these complaints. The activities of the local elite and nomenclature supporting one another are also highlighted as well as the favouritism shown towards the circle of relatives and friends.

In the mid-eighties, several letters with similar contents were sent from Mezőcsát supposedly by the same person or company complaining about the local leaders.⁴⁴ According to the charges that were to some extent proved, the members of the group that was dubbed maffia – the secretary of the party committee of the village, the president of the council, “the manager of the machine park”,⁴⁵ the head of the budget department of the council and the manager of the co-op – favoured themselves or one another in numerous cases. The NEB investigation was focussed on the party secretary and the president of the council. According to the letter writer, the party secretary, who ruled the village as a mafia leader or a Napoleon, took away the building material that was taken from the demolition of two outbuildings during the extension works of the school and used it to build his own house in Miskolc free of charge. Moreover, he wanted to sell his “patched-up rundown apartment” in Mezőcsát as a company flat and following his order, the procession on 1 May was cancelled. The investigation came to the conclusion that the recycled aggregate was paid for, but it could not be decided whether the correct amount was paid as the quantity and the quality of the materials were not registered. The judgement of the party secretary, who was suspended for the time of the investigation, mainly for the aforementioned issues, was negatively influenced by the fact that there was a law court procedure in progress against his wife, who worked in the local kindergarten for endangering an under-aged person. The purchase of the fallen county party secretary’s house was vetoed

⁴⁴ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 31. 1983, Box 41. 1985, Box 58. 1987/1, 1987/2.

⁴⁵ The letter writer must have mixed up the positions as there had been no machine parks around for about twenty years, they were transformed into repair stations. J. Honvári, *A gépállomások története* [The history of machine stations] 1947–1964, Budapest 2003, pp. 81–93, 547–557.

by the county council. The main problem with the president of the local council was that he gave positions to his relatives: “his relatives are everywhere, he is the president of the council, his wife is a party secretary at the secondary school, his brother-in-law is the party secretary at the co-op, his sister-in-law is an official at the gamesz (organisation to supply economic and technical supply and services).” Although this charge, together with others, could not be proved (his relatives had the right qualifications and applied for vacancies), the investigation found fault with the president of the council in two other cases. The president wanted to provide his mother with a rented council flat, but the president of the NEB warned him not to do so during the NEB investigation that began in the meantime. Though some parts of the later development of the case are not known, it is clear that the executive committee of the county council started a disciplinary proceeding against the president of the council for providing rented flats to persons in an unlawful way. In a report, the same council president was accused of buying a rotation hoe for the Cultural Centre and Library when he was the director of the institution and he had stored it in his flat from the beginning – even after he left that leading position – and used it for his own purpose.⁴⁶ Despite the aforementioned cases, the confidence in the council president was unabated as he remained the leader of the village.

The abuses of the headmaster of the Tiszatarján primary school were reported to the NEB in 1980. Some of the charges were proved: the plots allotted to teachers were cultivated even in the names of those teachers who had not required land and the extra income was spent on the expenses of the community (such as the costs of representation at events, presents) or for the benefit of the school, with the consent of the majority of the teachers’ community. The management of the practice garden under the headmaster also fell short of the regulations, as he did not register the produce (according to the complainant he sell them for a lot of money). The director of the cultural house (“Many teacher-parent meetings are announced as cultural performances and they receive money for them.”) and the tax expert of the council (he operated the grinder whose license was registered for the name of his mother even after she died, but he did not pay any tax for that) were also charged. The complainant could explain why the headmaster who was punished with a disciplinary by the NEB and the other accused persons were not called to account: “All this is suppressed by the council as the secretary drinks together with the debtor and the debtor’s wife is a librarian at the cultural house where she neglects her work and she receives her money for nothing. That’s the way things are getting entangled here”.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ They joined the gardening movement that was spreading in the country at that time and this made it possible for them to buy the tool.

⁴⁷ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 31. 1980.

In 1989, a report about the building of the house of the secretary of the executive committee in Sajószöged complained that he was having the employees of the council build his house: “The whole brigade works there day by day. It is easy to build a house this way, they are paid by the council.” In the complainant’s opinion it is useless to turn to higher authorities in this case, “as the leadership keeps saying that they have good friends at county level. S. P, a Member of the Parliament also built his house here, so we could not turn to him either as they have arranged some things for him too.” The president of the council emphasized in his reply that expecting the complaints of the people, they agreed on the question beforehand at the sessions of both the council and the executive committee, and the employees took some days off for the duration of the construction works, and he highlighted that even a council leader can only build a house like others – requiring the help of his colleagues who he is in an everyday connection with.⁴⁸

Overlooking one another’s little cheats and the mutual favours are often repeated in the letters. As has already been mentioned, the president of the executive committee in Emőd was reported mainly for his mining businesses in 1969, and he was reproved for this. He was also said to seek only the company of high ranked people. “Once he said that anything can be achieved with presents, everyone can be bribed. Certainly, we can also see that it is easy to give brandy, wine and pork from the stolen materials to the president of the district.” The NEB controllers investigated the case of the wine given as present. It was revealed that following the order given by the president of the executive committee of the village council, five employees of the council picked grapes on the vineyard of the State Cooperative and the 50–60 litres of must made from the grapes were stored in the president’s home for the purpose of having the district leaders over as guests and temporarily the president of the executive committee of the district council also kept there the must he made from the grapes he had bought from the co-op. The president of the executive committee in Emőd also ordered five members of the construction brigade to hoe for a day in the vineyard rented by four employees of the District Council from the Emőd co-op.⁴⁹

Concerning the aforementioned facts I would like to emphasize one thing. Corruption could be the means of the enforcement of either public or group interests. Depending on the situation, keeping up connections with the leaders at council, district and even higher levels strengthened in an informal way the ability of a village, town, cooperative or company to enforce their interests and

⁴⁸ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 58. 1989.

⁴⁹ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 20. 1969.

their positions.⁵⁰ In 1984 an anonymous employee of the Leninvárosi Építőipari Szövetkezet (Leninváros Construction Cooperative) is supposed to have written two letters to the Leninváros NEB, blaming O. Gy., the former manager of the technical department, the supervisor of the cooperative for the 'hopeless' situation of the cooperative. Since his weekend cottage on the bank of the River Tisza was built by using the materials of the cooperative during official working time and his boat was delivered to that place, "our cooperative has been beaten again like a naughty child. He is no longer interested. Up to that time we had such a good reputation, but it is over, although we did so many good things to O."⁵¹ In the sociography written by Árpád Pünkösti, the co-op managers also emphasized the importance of these contacts which could provide advantages to gain subsidies, loan or investment as well as when the qualifications, salaries and awards were given. Known this, the local and district leaders tended to turn to them asking for various favours that could be anything according to the answers given by the co-op managers. These included the acquisition of the products or the materials of the co-ops for free or at discount prices, deliveries, distributing family-run or cheap plots, arranging land issues, employing relatives and organising drinking parties etc.⁵² In many cases the investigations of such cases remained one-sided as Pünkösti experienced it, these connections were suppressed. The party secretary of the Construction Cooperative also mentioned it to the president of the NEB that at the renovation of the flats in Leninváros "serious people carried the wall-to-wall carpets and various materials", but he did not want to name anyone and the issue was closed this way.

⁵⁰ C. Hann, *Két tudományág összemosódása? Néprajz és szociálanropológia a szocialista és poszt-szocialista időszakokban* [The merger of two sciences? Folklore and social anthropology in the Socialist and Post-Socialist era], [in:] *Fehéren, feketén. Varsánytól Rititiig. Tanulmányok Sárkány Mihály tiszteletére* [Black and white. From Varsány to Rititi. Papers in honour of Mihály Sárkány] no. 1, eds. B. Borsos, Zs. Szarvas, G. Vargyas, Budapest 2004, pp. 49–51.

⁵¹ Both the head of the department and the manager of the cooperative tried to justify the compliancy of the works with requests for licences and invoices. The head of the department found the only fault with himself that he asked for the help of the cooperative to deliver the wood and the boat to his place. The inspector of the NEB involved the town party committee, the president of the council in the investigation and the party secretary of the cooperative. As a result of the investigation, the manager of the cooperative was released of his job and a letter that was written later reveals that the head of the department was also placed to another workplace. MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1984/1, 1984/2.

⁵² Á. Pünkösti, *Kiválasztottak* [The chosen ones], Budapest 1988, pp. 218–232.

The formal characteristics and style of the letters

Most letters follow the official requirements of letter writing: the addressing (e.g. Dear Comrade, Dear People's Control Commission), the introduction of the topic was followed by the explication of the subject of the letter and then the ending of the letter with a closing expression and farewell (e.g. With regards of a Comrade, Yours faithfully). Their style ranged from the objective through desperate, angry and wishing an account to ironic. Many of them apologised for the spelling mistakes and in some letters the writers mentioned the difficulties of expressing themselves in writing.

Besides following the requirements of official letters with more or less success, it can be observed that the deferential tone of petitions and letters of complaint characteristic of the earlier periods receded in this era, befitting to the ideological requirements of the new system.⁵³ Studying the greeting, addressing and closing expressions in the so called folk (private) letters written during World War I, Péter Hanák arrived at the conclusion that their origins go back to the medieval and mainly the 16th–17th century correspondences between the serfs and the landlords.⁵⁴ In view of this – although it is far from our researched era in time – it is worth calling to mind the observations made by Sándor Eckhardt on the style of the 16th century letters of complaint. According to them, the whole peasant community spoke a common language, complaining in the same style of the community about their poverty. The letters were usually started off with a polite, servile greeting and a good wish and they went on to say that they did not want to disturb or 'to bore' the gentlemen if it wasn't necessary and that the address was their only protector, if they didn't help, there was no one for them to turn to. It was also common to mention that they were unable to defend themselves and to express the sadness of the peasants by verbs or adverbs with condensed meanings.⁵⁵ These stylistic elements – while the language underwent huge changes – can still be observed in the petitions written in the period between the two world wars.⁵⁶ The beseeching, imploring tone characteristic of these letters did not disappear without a trace even in the Socialist era. The co-op members in Tiszakeszi

⁵³ One of the correspondence manual of that era also mentions that although some people still expect their petition to be judged favourably owing to its servile tone, emotional style, or conversely, its demanding tone, these are hardly taken into account in their judgement. P. Honffy, Á. Szabolcs, *Levelezési tanácsadó* [Correspondence manual], Budapest 1979, pp. 208–209.

⁵⁴ P. Hanák, *Népi levelek az első világháborúból* [People's letters from World War One], [in:] P. Hanák, *A kert és a műhely* [The garden and the workshop], Budapest 1988, pp. 247–252.

⁵⁵ S. Eckhardt, *A legrégebb parasztlevelek nyelve és stílusa* [The language and style of the oldest peasant letters], "Magyar Nyelvőr" 1950, vol. 74, no. 2–3, pp. 113–123.

⁵⁶ *Parasztsors – parasztgond* [Peasant Fate – Peasant Concern], 1919–1944, comp. D. Kiss, 1960, pp. 73–74.

who were convicted for illegal cutting of trees in 1984 addressed their letter directly to the Hungarian Television. “Dear Legal Department! I kindly implore You to help us, it concerns 25 people. Please, dear comrades, in the Tiszakeszi Cooperative such a case happened that we cannot tolerate what they did to us.” After describing the case, they went on: “This co-op was founded by us, the people of Tiszakeszi, but unfortunately, we have come to such length that the co-op won’t give us even a little kindling wood, if they do give, then they fine us so hard that we cannot pay it. I repeat it again and ask You kindly to be so kind and investigate the case”.⁵⁷ Despite the simple and clumsy wording – which may be explained by the fact that these letters were probably written by the complainants themselves instead of the local intelligentsia – these lines express the hierarchical relations between the communicating parties and the respect.

In 1968 a letter writer in Nagycséc wrote at least four letters relating the inner transactions of the local farmers’ cooperative,⁵⁸ the offences committed against the old founders and the peremptory attitude of the local shopkeeper to the NEB president. It is difficult to read and to understand the letter because of the confluence of words and sentences and the basic spelling mistakes, which leads us to suppose an uneducated writer inexperienced in writing and it is confirmed by the writer of the letter too. Although due to his old age, sometimes the writer addresses the president of the NEB as ‘Dear son’, the deferential, respectful tone due to an educated official can be seen through the letters. Moreover, a constant adjective is also attached to the person of the president: “Who likes the truth”. Despite the difficulties of writing, it has an expressive ability that is strong and emotional at the same time: “Dear tari Pál I read your Article with tears in my eyes that I like the truth As a founding member of the cooperative I was a leading member of the farmers’ cooperative in Nagycséc. Some of us suffered a lot. But Seeking the truth You have left. I am 61 years old but I may as well die for the truth I can’t bear the rogues. I have found my fellow.” It is not just some figures of speech (“I am starting to write these lines of mine with tears in my eyes”; “It has been an intolerable situation what is going on with us since the beginning complaining weeping”), the apology for disturbing and the addressee as a last resort that remind us of the style of the old letters of the serfs, but also the best wishes in the letter, this time at the end of it. Whereas the form and the style contain several old-fashioned elements, the content (it characterizes the reported people and his relationship as that of the landlord and the serf) tries to meet the expectations of the present time.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1984.

⁵⁸ Farmers’ cooperatives mainly dealt with the trade of goods in villages: on the one hand, by purchasing agricultural produces, on the other hand, by selling consumer goods through the catering units and the network of village shops mostly operated by this organisation.

⁵⁹ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 20. 1968/1, 1968/2, 1968/3, 1968/4 (Handwritten letters).

During the continuous search for enemies, which mainly characterized the Rákosi era and the early Kádár era, the official public speeches depicted the enemy by using a unified and unique language and the most characteristic elements of this can sometimes be found in the reports too.⁶⁰ Comparing the reported people to parasites is such an element (“pests”, “they are parasites on other people’s skin”), just like showing them as violent and oppressive (“he abuses the community”, “It is deception, ransacking the property of the people.”), the aggressive fight against them (“it will be easy to drive him into a corner”, “an example has to be shown on them without mercy in the press and on TV.”, “I am asking why such a man is not revealed”). Besides some elements taken over from the Socialist political language, some traits of the folk style can also be seen – sometimes in the same letter – and some call the enlightening power of the proverbs to help them interpret certain situations.

Another characteristic feature of the reports of public interest is their anonymity.⁶¹ Although the NEB was obliged to investigate the anonymous reports too, both the inspectors and the letter writers treated them with reservation because this way it was easier to spread accusations and slanders. According to a journalist, anonymous reports are considered to be detestable, dishonest things by their opponents, their place would be in the rubbish bin. Therefore the writers of anonymous letters often tried to assure the addressees about their benevolence, promising to reveal their identity as the investigation was progressing and they felt a need to give some explanation too: most often they omitted their signature to avoid revenge, reprisal and stigmatization.⁶² The letter writers used the opportunity of giving a more open criticism, which anonymity provided them, about the reported person, their workplace, a service provider or their activities, but their argumentation always remained within the limits allowed by the political system, the criticism of the regime/political system was not characteristic of them. It can be observed in the case of both anonymous and private complaints, the latter of which were usually signed, that some people tried to gain credit for themselves by admitting that they were party members (or in some cases members of the Workers’ Militia or they had been in service for a long time and had been awarded for it) and to receive a just decision by describing their

⁶⁰ On the language and conceptual techniques applied in construing the enemy see: Á. Jobst, *Önmegjelentés és ellenségkép a Szabad Nép 1946-os vezércikkeiben* [Self-image and the picture of the enemy in the leading articles of Szabad Nép in 1946], [in:] *A politikai diktatúra társadalmiasítása. Nyelv, erőszak, kollaboráció, ellenállás, alkalmazkodás* [The socialisation of political dictatorship. Language, violence, collaboration, resistance, adaptation], eds. J.Ö. Kovács, G. Kunt, Miskolc 2009, pp. 185–189.

⁶¹ In 1985, the number of anonymous reports sent to the people’s control was 25–32% in the average of ten years and most of them turned out to contained some truths. *Bejelentők – inkognitóban* [Complainants – in disguise]. *Észak-Magyarország*, 9 April 1985, p. 3.

⁶² Although those who tried to take revenge for a report of public interest could be prosecuted, it rarely occurred due to the difficulties of proving it. *Ibidem*.

social status (“they are good working people”, with several children, “retired people with little money”), and to highlight their point by using plural forms (“several members of the party and the co-op”, “Tiszaszederkény residents”, “in the name of the members of the cooperative” etc.). The latter cases lead us to the system of argumentation used by the letter writers.

Argumentative strategies⁶³

The complainants described any hierarchical relationship or position in the context of the rich and the poor, the exploited and the exploiting ones and the master and servant, where the reported people reproduced the hierarchy of the past threatening the concept of social equality. For example the letter complaining about the president of the executive committee in Emőd in 1969 started with the following sentence: “We have been waiting for something to happen in our village as the rule of the kulaks cannot be tolerated any longer.” Concerning the party membership of the president of the executive committee, the charges were repeated: “I don’t know who might recommend such a person to the party, as he is a class enemy, a kulak, he only appreciates those who work at least at some ministry and the district president here as he does his shifty businesses with that man”.⁶⁴ In 1968 the complainant in Nagycsécs, who has already been cited in connection with the formal requirements of letter writing, related in several letters the rude behaviour shown by the manager of the shop of the farmers’ cooperative and the denial of serving the buyers, which caused them damages, especially the local Gypsies and he described the shopkeeper in the following way: “Dear son it cannot go on like this and they shout like the lord shouted at the poor

⁶³ Analysing the rhetoric of the German reports, distinguishes five strategies, which can be observed in the Hungarian examples too. 1. *defining a role*: e.g. the common ideology can be expressed already in the salutation; attaching a protective role or the role of father to the addressee or depicting themselves as equal to the letter writer etc. 2. *self representation*, which can induce sympathy or compassion. 3. *referring to norms and values*: quoting cultural-moral basic values and official (legal, ideological) texts. 4. *describing needs*: the letter writer understands the deficiencies and hardships but they cannot tolerate any longer the scarcity of a certain product. 5. *threats*: defection; turning to higher authorities; denying the duties and rituals of a citizen; turning to the publicity of the press or television. F. Mühlberg, *Informelle Konfliktbewältigung. Zur Geschichte der Eingabe in der DDR*. Dissertationsschrift zur Erlangung des Dr. phil. 1999, pp. 253–307. (<http://monarch.qucosa.de/api/qucosa%3A17641/attachment/ATT-0/>). For more on this, see: M. Fulbrook, *The People’s State. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, New Haven and London 2005, p. 283; P. Betts, *Within Walls. Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, Oxford 2012, pp. 185–188; G. Tsipursky, “As a Citizen, I cannot Ignore These Facts”.

⁶⁴ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 20. 1969 (Emőd).

field hands,⁶⁵ leaving out the term scoundrel. However, he doesn't swear on God as Lord Zsadányi. he rather takes his prayerbook and goes to the holy mass, he has to pray for what he takes from the poor people". "The other day the Gypsies were complaining that he served his relative but not them, he is not compassionate with the poor, he comes from a wealthy family, not a field hands or a menial".

Independently of whether the case was of public interest, mentioning the past or the political attitude of a person, which do not fit to a Socialist man, were arguments that could be used to besmear the reported person's reputation. In connection with a dispute over the borders of a plot in 1969, one complainant held it important to note about his neighbour that "[m]oreover the aforementioned person has strong anti-democratic attitude, criticizing the red star, communism and sometimes the system, the only question is who he opposes." Then he continued the description: "[a]lthough this system has already paid him for his sick leave and 3 times the expenses of his medical treatment at a sanatorium and he also receives old age pension", although he could not prove a continuous employment. "He has been a wanderer all his life and he could not stay at any workplace for a longer period".⁶⁶ The motive of the migratory bird, which was contrary to the values of the system, is mentioned in other letters too, to enhance the negative traits of a person. In 1987 the recently appointed manager lady of a Cultural Home was reported for providing rewards unlawfully and the report, besides saying that she did not have the necessary qualifications, found further faults with her personality: "she has been employed in the institution for 3 years at most, she has worked at 15–20 places all over the country, she is a well-known conspirator and gossip and she doesn't refrain from consuming alcoholic drinks! She treats her late born [...] child quite carelessly, mainly leaving it to her old parents".⁶⁷

As could be seen in the last section of the letter, scorning morally did not only concern the behaviour of the reported people in public, in politics or at their workplace, describing their private life was also a part of it. As the representative of the power, a political functionary or a leader was to set an example by following the Socialist moral norms in their private lives as well as by their ideological commitment. A behaviour that broke the norms provided arguments to prove the person's inadequacy at work. In most cases the letters mentioned excessive drinking, playing cards, womanizing and rude behaviour. The brief description of the co-op manager in Mezőcsát in 1975 listed the illegal actions and the moral excesses as things with equal consequences: "From the forgery of closing balances, enlarging the average quantity of crops, endless drinking parties and overnight debaucheries to driving the co-op's car drunk. Comrade president's women acquaintances are carried in the

⁶⁵ Special agrarian workers who worked in exchange for part of the crops.

⁶⁶ Ibidem (Mezőcsát).

⁶⁷ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 58. 1987 (Mezőcsát).

car, mainly drunk. [...] He gets many people at district level drunk, bribing them. He leads a life that is not acceptable from a co-op president.” In 1985 a report writer accusing the whole leadership of the co-op in Tiszakeszi of theft and carelessness connected the changes to the person of the manager, who had been appointed a few years earlier, and his lenient attitude: “Here there are laxness, drinking, women partners and thefts now. As now there is no need to be afraid. F. Gy. keeps saying that 10 have to swallow and 1 speak.” According to a 1987 report complaining about the manager and the key accountant of the co-op in Nemesbikk, they are responsible for bringing the co-op to the verge of bankruptcy: “Here there is only continuous drinking. They are rude and harsh with the members. They have absolutely no qualifications. [...] The co-op is considered by two or three leaders as their own property and little by little they waste everything. Everything can be arranged in the pub and outside the village at fancy places. On top of that they can be bribed.” Some council leaders were also accused of immoral and careless behaviour that impeded work, like in Sajószöged in 1989: “The leaders of the council are careless, they don’t care about anything but drinking and wandering about”.⁶⁸

So the moral stigmatization of the reported people was part of the argumentation of some letter writers. The question may arise as to how successful their strategy was in influencing the objectivity of the inspectors. Usually, the records of investigations do not discuss moral matters, their statements are intended to reveal irregularities and deficiencies or the lack of them in almost all the cases. Careless remarks could easily turn back the attempts of the letter writers. The report of a writer, possibly an elderly lady with her complaints that seemed to be worth investigating them, was rejected as slander as she accused the employees of a shop of making sexual intercourse at their workplace and suggested replacing the inscription of the sign with ‘brothel’.⁶⁹

Sometimes the NEB rebuked the complainant too for their behaviour. In the aforementioned dispute about the border of two plots the NEB president left the settlement of the case to the competent authorities with the following remark: “I do not hold your remarks about your neighbour right, it reveals malevolence. It would be better to find a more simple human contact that could help settle this case”.⁷⁰ In 1985 the letters of the retired veterinary of the co-op in Ároktő discussing in detail (in 18 points) the issues at the co-op were thoroughly investigated, but in his letter addressed to the doctor, the NEB president pointed out that besides the real problems, there were some that could not be proved due to the long time passed by, some were unsound and others exaggerated. “However, I have to

⁶⁸ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1975 (Mezőcsát); 1205. Box 41. 1985 (Tiszakeszi); 1205. Box 58. 1987 (Nemesbikk); *ibidem*. 1989 (Sajószöged).

⁶⁹ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1975 (Szakáld).

⁷⁰ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 20. 1969.

add that we would have considered it correct if you had informed us about your observations, which is your duty as a citizen, when you suffered those real or supposed offences. Taking it into consideration, it seems that you also remained silent when it was in your interest, and what's more you also helped them [...]. You also made some remarks that you must have only known about by hearsay. In the future I would recommend you to make such remarks with due consideration as You are also aware of the fact that slander is a punishable crime [...].⁷¹

Argumentation also included quoting the official speech made by party leadership, or in the newspapers, on television or in the radio. Using a figure of speech, a slogan or an idea – whose concepts induced the complainants to write letters – they could prove that their cause was right and important (independently of the real motivation of the report), and they could hope to draw bigger attention to the investigation of the case.⁷² In these reports they also referred to *interests of people's economy*, then requesting the competent authorities to stop the *theft*, the *waste* and the *lavishing* of the property of the people. In 1985 the report writer emphasizes his criticism against the leadership of the Tiszakeszi co-op (thefts, distributing the property of the co-op) by quoting János Kádár's speech: "the leadership does not meet the expectations voiced by Comrade János Kádár 1 year ago. As we could understand well that he highlighted the troubles of the country. And the further difficult tasks of our country. That's why all Hungarian citizens are to do the work they are committed with honestly, I believe and hope that you agree with me that leaders are not leaders so that they can take away anything movable from its place but to drive lawbreakers back to the right way". They refer several times to the cases of similar nature they had read or heard about in the media ("We implore you, as we read a lot in the newspaper about such disclosures, help us"), but in many cases the peremptory tone is dominating asking why the NEB, the party etc. had not done their job in the cases they had revealed. According to the writer of a 1979 report, the wages a mason in Hejőszalonta earned by private work were too high and he did not pay the tax after it. "I don't understand that living in a Socialist society such things are allowed to happen, although it is only one of the many cases, and they keep talking about the unjust material advantages, it said in the radio and the press, still, they let these private workers who live on other people's like parasites".⁷³

⁷¹ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1985 (Ároktő).

⁷² In the East-German complaints about shopping, the complainants' point was highlighted by contrasting the ideological, social and economic targets voiced in the official speeches with real life experiences. J. Stitzel, *Shopping, Sewing, Networking, Complaining. Consumer Culture and the Relationship between State and Society in the GDR*, [in:] *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, eds. K. Pence, P. Betts, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan 2008, pp. 267–271.

⁷³ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1985. (Tiszakeszi); Box 58. 1989. (Sajószöged); Box 31. 1980. (Emőd); Box 31. 1979. (Mezőcsát); Box 31. 1979. (Sajószöged); Box 31. 1979. (Hejőszalonta); Box 41. 1985. (Mezőcsát).

Due to their worries about the improper treatment of the cases, or other underlying factors, some complainants threatened to turn to higher forums or the wider public if no measures were to be taken. The latter case was not a rare occurrence, letters were often addressed to the correspondence columns of a newspaper or some radio or television programmes – from which they were forwarded to the NEB and it also happened quite often that they were sent to several organizations at the same time. The letter written on the case of the Hejőszalonta co-op in 1969 was directly addressed to “Comrade Kádár János”, which was forwarded by the secretary of the head secretary of the party eventually landing on the desk of the district NEB.⁷⁴ The complainant who wrote his letter in 1984 because of the abuses committed by the leaders of the Hejőkeresztúr co-op also trusted in Kádár. “Well, it’s not the way I interpret democracy and now I have written it to Comrade Kádár in Pest as he is a just man, but these are all cheaters here”.⁷⁵ In 1979 a complainant revealing the thefts committed in the Mezőcsát co-op finished his letter in the following way: “It is the truth, don’t throw it into the rubbish bin. If you don’t help, we will write to Kádár!”⁷⁶ In these letters János Kádár appears as a just leader (reminding us of King Matthias) who – in contrast with the local apparatus whose members can be bribed and consider only their own interests – will not overlook the abuses and the inequalities.⁷⁷ The great degree of distrust towards the local functionaries was rarely shown towards the NEB’s members and according to some letters, it seems that it was not rare that an unconditional and honest trust was expressed towards them. During the 1977 investigation concerning reports and complaints of public interest, the NEB stated based upon its own experiences that “especially among the simple village people, a reassuring trust can be seen in the decisions and measures of the top leadership”.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 20. 1969.

⁷⁵ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 41. 1984.

⁷⁶ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 31. 1979.

⁷⁷ In the time of the one party system it was not rare that a citizen wrote a letter to the leader of the state party in some matter: A. Kö, J.L. Nagy, *Levelek Rákosihoz* [Letters to Rákosi], Budapest 2002; *Kedves jó Kádár elvtárs! Válogatás Kádár János levelezéséből, 1954–1989* [My dear comrade Kádár! Extracts from the correspondence of János Kádár], ed. T. Huszár, Budapest 2002. Depicting the highest ranking political leaders as benevolent, loved fathers protecting their children and country was characteristic both the East German and the Soviet letters. S. Fitzpatrick, *Supplicants...*, pp. 91–92 and F. Mühlberg, *Informelle...*, pp. 103–112. Judd Stitzel explains the myth of the lack of knowledge of leaders, which was a frequent trope in the East German letters by the paternal relationship between the state and its citizens. On the other hand, he comes to the conclusion that emphasizing that the leaders did not know the local situation created opportunities to pen sharper criticism without the danger of being called to account. J. Stitzel, *Shopping...*, pp. 273–274.

⁷⁸ MNL BAZML XVII. 1205. Box 30. A közérdekű bejelentésekről és panaszokról szóló 1977. I. törvény. végrehajtása c. célvizsgálat [The targeted research called the execution of Act I of 1977 on the reports and complaints of public interest].

Conclusion

When the People's Control Committee was established in 1957, the protection of public property was considered to be the primary task of the organisation. In accordance with this, the first examples in the press encouraged reporting and taking measures against "factory thieves, speculators, the vampires of working people, embezzlers, lazy good-for-nothing people, those who damage public property".⁷⁹ Being a co-owner often involved careless and lazy attitudes instead of a sense of responsibility. The impossibility of increasing one's private property did not result in the acceptance of collectivism, but an increased desire for consumer goods defined as personal possessions (especially houses, cottages, cars, power boats) and the local functionaries and cooperative leaders were in very good positions to gain them.⁸⁰

As has been pointed out by the researches in Germany too, the cases of the individual 'culprits' found at workplaces, in the local apparatus or the trading units were reduced to the felonies committed by single functionaries, local and private crimes instead of the faults of the political system and the disfunctionality of the state (which could be felt in connection with the lack of goods and the housing situation). The act of writing a letter itself, by the fact that the letter writers require the help of the caring state to solve their problems, strengthens the position of the power. Researches have pointed out the system stabilizing function of these letters in several cases. The individualization and privatization of the culture of making complaints hindered the potentially more effective community methods of resisting law infringements.⁸¹

Many letter writers acquired and applied the figures of speech and ideas used in the official language and public speech, which might have served the purpose of identifying themselves honestly with the socialist state and ideology or trying to pretend it. Using elements of the official public speech for strategic purposes (which provided grounds for expressing loyalty as well as accounting for keeping the promises) reproduced and strengthened the official discourse, and the criticism within these limitations legitimated the existing political system.⁸²

We cannot answer the question exactly what might have motivated the writers of letters. The charges worded under the pretext of public interest might have been motivated by personal conflicts, envy, malevolence, revenge, offences as well

⁷⁹ A Lenin Kohászati Művek dolgozóinak felhívása a társadalmi tulajdon védelmére az ország dolgozóihoz [The appeal of the Lenin Metallurgical Works to the workers of the country to protect public property]. *Északmagyarország*, 16 January 1958, p. 1.

⁸⁰ Civil Law distinguished three types of property rights: public property; private property; personal property.

⁸¹ E.G. Huneke, *Morality...*, pp. 24, 26; P. Betts, *Within Walls...*, pp. 191–192.

⁸² J. Stitzel, *Shopping...*, pp. 272–273.

as worries. The reports that were often full of emotions and moods enabled the writers to let out their frustration and rage and made it possible to express their responsibility towards society (e.g. in our case the protection of people's property and in the letters connected to commerce, the regulation of alcohol consumption) and that they belonged to society.⁸³ In accordance with this, the writers of the letters often explained their action by saying they were fighting against injustice, by their duties as citizens and in several cases depicted themselves as the champions of justice; that is what a letter writer did in 1976 who was fired, trying to reveal the shifty businesses in connection with the stone quarry in Emőd, grossly overestimating his possibilities. "During the short period of three weeks while I was working there, I tried to investigate and to stop the many unfairness and abuses I experienced at the cooperative. Without boasting I can say that I wanted to do this job as well as I could".⁸⁴ The cases that were quite often described as *intolerable* or *outrageous* might really have offended the people's sense of justice and they seem to have caused a lot of inside tension since several people made allusions that they had to live under nervous pressure.

As a type of source, the reports mainly inform us about conflicts. Behind the cases that were often described as the conflicts of the state and an individual or some individuals who are in opposition in some way (morally, ideologically or damaging the state economy), an inner division of the local society can be observed, although in a biased way as the social background of the complainants and report writers remains unknown due to their anonymity or their desire to fit in the schematic social categories. Concerning the personality of the letter writers the most useful data is the place where the letter was written, the type of settlement and the workplace. Although only few of the inhabitants could turn to the People's Control Committee with their reports or complaints, the reports that often had similar contents – thus justifying the phenomenon beyond the scope of a single case – revealed the change in the esteem of values, the ambivalent attitude towards common property following the appropriation of properties and they give insights into the social practices (such as playing tricks, using loopholes) that characterized the more and more consumption centred everyday life of the 1970s and 1980s. The letters testify that their writers learned and understood the way of thinking and the logic of the system or even identified themselves with it and they could also make use of this knowledge for the benefit of themselves or the public. Nevertheless, based upon the NEB's investigations it can also be seen that the efficiency and significance of the ideological-moral argumentation were limited.

⁸³ M. Fulbrook, *The People's State...*, p. 270; E.G. Huneke, *Morality...*, p. 25.

⁸⁴ MNL BAZML XVII. 1206. Box 19. 1976 (Emőd).

Bibliography

- A magyar állam szervei* [The organisations of the Hungarian state]. 1944–1950. A–M, ed. B. Boreczky, Budapest 1985.
- A magyar állam szervei* [The organisations of the Hungarian state]. 1950–1970, ed. B. Boreczky, Budapest 1993.
- Betts P., *Within Walls. Private Life in the German Democratic Republic*, Oxford 2012.
- Borbély S., *Informális gazdasági stratégiák a magyar–ukrán határvidéken* [Informal Economic Strategies in the Hungarian-Ukrainian Border Zone], [in:] *Hármas határok néprajzi értelmezésben* [An Ethnographic Interpretation of Tri-Border Areas], ed. T. Turai, Budapest 2015.
- Eckhardt S., *A legrégebb parasztlevelek nyelve és stílusa* [The language and style of the oldest peasant letters], “Magyar Nyelvőr” 1950, vol. 74, no. 2–3, pp. 113–123.
- Firlit E., Chłopecki J., *When Theft is Not Theft*, [in:] *The Unplanned Society. Poland during and after Communism*, ed. J.R. Wedel, New York 1992.
- Fitzpatrick S., *Supplicants and Citizens: Public Letter-Writing in Soviet Russia in the 1930s*, “Slavic Review” 1996, vol. 55, no. 1, pp. 78–105.
- Fulbrook M., *The People’s State. East German Society from Hitler to Honecker*, New Haven and London 2005.
- Hanák P., *Népi levelek az első világháborúból* [People’s letters from World War One], [in:] P. Hanák, *A kert és a műhely* [The garden and the workshop], Budapest 1988.
- Hann C., *Két tudományág összemosódása? Néprajz és szociálanropológia a szocialista és posztszocialista időszakokban* [The merger of two sciences? Folklore and social anthropology in the Socialist and Post-Socialist era], [in:] *Fehéren, feketén. Varsánytól Rititiig. Tanulmányok Sárkány Mihály tiszteletére* [Black and white. From Varsány to Rititi. Papers in honour of Mihály Sárkány] no. 1., eds. B. Borsos, Zs. Szarvas, G. Vargyas, Budapest 2004.
- Honffy P., Szabolcs Á., *Levelezési tanácsadó* [Correspondence manual], Budapest 1979.
- Honvári J., *A gépállomások története* [The history of machine stations]. 1947–1964, Budapest 2003.
- Horváth M.F., *A “népi ellenőrzés” Magyarországon 1957–1989* [The “People’s Control” in Hungary 1957–1989], “Levéltári Szemle” 1990, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 29–40.
- Huneke E.G., *Morality, Law and the Socialist Sexual Self in the German Democratic Republic, 1945–1972*, Dissertation, University of Michigan 2013. https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/bitstream/handle/2027.42/97942/ehuneke_1.pdf?sequence=1.
- Ispán Á.L., *“It’s hard to do your duty here.” Cultured Retail Trade in Hungary*, [in:] *Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe. Perceptions, Attitudes, Propaganda*, eds. S. Radu, C. Budeancă, Zürich 2016.
- Jobst Á., *Önmegjelenítés és ellenségkép a Szabad Nép 1946-os vezércikkeiben* [Self-image and the picture of the enemy in the leading articles of Szabad Nép in 1946], [in:] *A politikai diktatúra társadalmiasítása. Nyelv, erőszak, kollaboráció, ellenállás, alkalmazkodás*

- [The socialisation of political dictatorship. Language, violence, collaboration, resistance, adaptation], eds. J.Ö. Kovács, G. Kunt, Miskolc 2009.
- Kedves jó Kádár elvtárs! Válogatás Kádár János levelezéséből* [Dear Comrade Kádár! A selection of the correspondence of János Kádár], 1954–1989, ed. T. Huszár, Budapest 2002.
- Kocsis A., *A gazda, a családja, a munka és a hatalom. Értékváltozások egy kisalföldi faluban* [The farmer, his family, work and power. Value changes in a village in the Little Plain], Pozsony 2006.
- Kornai J., *The Socialist System: The Political Economy of Communism*, Oxford 1992.
- Kovács Cs., *Complaints from the Final Period of Hungarian Collectivisation*, [in:] *Countryside and Communism in Eastern Europe. Perceptions, Attitudes, Propaganda*, eds. S. Radu, C. Budeancă, Zürich 2016.
- Kő A., Nagy J.L., *Levelek Rákosihoz* [Letters to Rákosi], Budapest 2002.
- Lőkös L., *Az alsószuhai “Új Élet” Termelőszövetkezet története* [The history of “Új Élet” cooperative in Alsószuha], [in:] *Termelőszövetkezettörténeti tanulmányok* [Studies on the History of Agricultural Cooperatives] no. 2, ed. F. Donáth, Budapest 1973.
- Mühlberg F., *Informelle Konfliktbewältigung. Zur Geschichte der Eingabe in der DDR*. Dissertationsschrift zur Erlangung des Dr. phil. 1999, <http://monarch.qucosa.de/api/qucosa%3A17641/attachment/ATT-0/>.
- Nagy N., *A cserevilágtól a padlássöpítésig. Falusi hétköznapiak a beszolgáltatás éveiben* [From the Age of Barter to the Clean-Swept Attic: Everyday Life During the Years of Compulsory Redistribution], Budapest 2013.
- Oláh S., *Csendes csatatér. Kollektivizálás és túlélési stratégiák a két Homoród mentén* [Silent battlefield. Collectivisation and survival strategies in the region of the two Rivers Homoród] (1949–1962), Csíkszereda 2001.
- Ö. Kovács J., *The “Rationalization of subjugation”: Communication practices in correspondence in Hungary after 1956*, [in:] *Analele Universității din Oradea. Seria Istorie Arheologie tom XX*, eds. F. Antonio, R. Radu, S. Barbu, Oradea 2010.
- Pajor E., *“A közvélemény parancsnokai”. A Szabad Nép munkás- és parasztlevelezési mozgalma* [“The masters of public opinion”. The worker and peasant correspondence movement of Szabad Nép], “Új Forrás” 2012, vol. 44, no. 9, pp. 32–43.
- Paraszsors – parasztgond* [Peasant fate – peasant trouble], 1919–1944, compile by D. Kiss, Budapest 1960.
- Püskösti Á., *Kiválasztottak* [The chosen ones], Budapest 1988.
- Stitzel J., *Shopping, Sewing, Networking, Complaining. Consumer Culture and the Relationship between State and Society in the GDR*, [in:] *Socialist Modern. East German Everyday Culture and Politics*, eds. K. Pence, P. Betts, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan 2008, pp. 253–286.
- Szijjártó A., *A tagság társadalmi összetételének, szakképzettségének és a szövetkezeti demokrácia érvényesülésének szerepe a létavértesi Aranykalász Termelőszövetkezet nagyüzemi fejlődésében* [The role of the social composition of the members, their qualifications

and the prevalence of democracy in the development of Aranykalász Cooperative in Létavértes], [in:] *Termelőszövetkezettörténeti tanulmányok* [Studies on the History of Agricultural Cooperatives] no. 2, ed. F. Donáth, Budapest 1973.

Szilágyi M., *Törvények, szokásjog, jogszokás* [Laws, customs, customary law], [in:] *Magyar néprajz* [Hungarian Ethnography] VIII. *Társadalom* [Society], ch. ed. A. Paládi-Kovács, Budapest 2000.

Tsipursky G., "As a Citizen, I Cannot Ignore These Facts". *Whistleblowing in the Khrushchev Era*, "Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas" 2010, vol. 58.

Varga Zs., *Why Is Success a Crime? Trials of Managers of Agricultural Cooperatives in the Hungary of the 1970's*, "Hungarian Studies Review" 2013, vol. 40, no. 2.

Ágota Lídia Ispán is a research fellow at the Research Centre for the Humanities, the Institute of Ethnology, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. She holds a PhD in Historical Science from Eötvös Loránd University (2015). The title of her PhD dissertation is *A város vidéke. A falusi lakosság életmódváltása 1945 után az urbanizáció hatására* (The Countryside of the Town. Lifestyle change of the rural society after 1945 under the influence of urbanization). Her research interests focus on the lifestyle changing in the framework of socialist modernization, the socialist city, history of everyday life, village power elite.
