

Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem Bölcsészettudományi Kar

DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

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Catholic Religious Education and elite training in the Kádár era. – The analysis of the case, code-named ‘Black Ravens’

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The choice of topic

The 'Black Ravens' code-named case is considered to be the largest police operation in the Kádár era: there was not a more extensive police case influencing so many people between 1956 and 1989 – apart from the reprisal for the revolution – than this one in 1961. The name of the action was given by the State Security, in which religious and secular people involved in religious education were arrested. The implementation of the action started in February 1961 with nationwide house raids and many people being arrested. After the expiry of remand, most of the people in pre-trial detention were sentenced to imprisonment in the legal proceedings conducted during the summer. Along with the convicts there was a much larger number of people, even though their proceedings were discontinued, their lives were hamstrung by being forced to leave their job or being expelled from university for years, decades. These lawsuits are also significant because of their size and complexity compared to other police cases of the Kádár era. The 'Black Ravens' trial series is seen as the last large attempt to break the Church which practically achieved its earlier aim: the harassment of the people who persevered in their profession the longest. After the 1961 trials the majority of convicts were released in 1963, but after the events they had experienced, only a small number of them continued to work in the field of religious education. It played a crucial role in the decline of small community work that many of the released were sentenced to prison twice or even three times - it is understandable that the generation was broken. The existence of the 'Black Ravens' action is the evidence that we need to extend our knowledge and the 1961 proceedings must be recorded as a step towards the annihilation of the Church.

The sources of the topic

The writing of the dissertation was preceded by several years of research, which was primarily carried out in the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security. The vast majority of documents of the 'Black Ravens' code-named case was recorded by the State Security, therefore most of the resources - considered as secret or top secret in the era - concerning this case can be found in this archive. The records about the legal proceedings against the 'Black Ravens' can be found in the Budapest City Archives. Our most important sources are –in many cases the verbatim reports of arraignments, suits; judgements, summons of the witnesses. Those cases, where appeals were lodged and therefore the proceedings stepped up to a higher level, the judgements delivered by the Supreme Court are usually found among the legal materials. Clemency petitions represent special sources among the

legal materials which were submitted by the relatives of the convicts, possibly several times. We have not found a single clemency petition that was accepted and approved of by the court. In the National Archives of Hungary key documents can be found regarding the 'Black Ravens' which helped to put the police operation in a wider context. Based on the records kept here it turns out that the 'Black Ravens' action did not start on the initiative of the State Security, but the house raids, arrests and lawsuits were carried out as the implementation of the decision made by the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Labour Party (MSZMP PB). With the help of the documents we could trace the structure of the power of the party-state: the party gives the orders which is carried out by the relevant lower state bodies. While the political background of the action was reconstructed from the records of the party organisations, we traced the evaluation of the implementation of the action and the summary of the experiences on one hand from the records of the State Office for Church Affairs, and from the documents of the Ministry of Home Affairs on the other hand. The examination of the participants' memoirs gives another approach to the era. Some of the participants have written down their own stories, others told researchers what had happened to them, which were processed based on various criteria and the results were published by the researchers. The author has also interviewed a few participants, for which she is immensely grateful.

The structure of the thesis

In the introductory part we tried to explain and justify the choice of dissertation topic. During the research, and having held dialogues with experts - historians, archivists – it has become clearer that dealing with the 'Black Ravens' fills a real gap. The knowledge of the sources used and research methodology can help the reader to be familiar with the background of the research, to be aware of the arising difficulties and the results obtained.

After a general introduction there come the more specialised introductory chapters. Before the historical parts a chapter about religious education seemed necessary and also the analysis of the process in which compulsory religious education has become illegal. Between the two world wars religious education was part of the primary and secondary education, so every student took part in compulsory religious education. Compared to this, the imposition of optional religious education in 1949 meant a big change, and at the same time the people who felt responsible for the youth to get religious education had to find their way. The religious education permitted by the state was so restricted by administrative limitations that many

pastors and parents tried to find a more personal, effective way of religious education which was found in the form of small groups. In the second chapter after the introduction of the different types of groups - already at this stage of the dissertation – we can suppose a summary statement that every form of religious education which did not fit in the limits was considered illegal and sooner or later the authorities acted against them accordingly.

In the third chapter we looked at the events of the Fifties regarding Church, especially from the aspect of small groups providing religious education. In this era Hungarian Working People's' Party founded in 1948 was the only ruling party, and after having formed the structure of the Party State, we presented the relationship between the state and the church by analysing the activity of the state and party organisations. We definitely had to mention the content and the conditions of the origin of the treaty concluded in 1950 between the Hungarian Catholic Church and the Hungarian Labour Party, as it played a huge role not only in the events of the following years, decades, but it also had an impact on the whole era. The treaty was concluded not between equals, so from the moment of signing, it meant continuous potential of blackmail by the State, which the State did as far as it could.

The relationship between the State and the Church has undergone fundamental changes in the sixties, so after the events of the church politics in the fifties, the sixties were also presented in the thesis. The historians talk about 'long sixties', so we have set out the relation between the church and the revolution starting from the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. This part is essential, because the thought of the whole 'Black Ravens' action originated from this period. The dynamics of the post-revolution retaliation –action against the clergy - can be found in the subsections that present the events between 1956 and 1958, as well as the events between 1958 and 1961. Between these two subsections there is a part about the decrees of 1958, since the decrees of the summer of 1958 by MSZMP PB affected the Church politics of the party just as much as the treaty of 1950 affected the relation between the state and the church. The last subsection of the fourth chapter presents the direct antecedent of the 'Black Ravens' issue concerning the State Security.

The fifth chapter summarises the preparatory works of the 'Black Ravens' action. We touched upon the aspects of the long-term preparation; we presented the secret ways of obtaining data. According to the archival documents brokerage reports were in the possession of the State Security already during 1957-58, in which some of the participants of the later "Black Ravens" case appeared.

In terms of concrete data and comparative data sets, chapter six is undoubtedly the richest. Here we dealt with the event of the 'Black Ravens' case which is considered the starting point as well as the high point. The following belong to the chronicles of 6 February 1961: the arrests of 22 November, 1960 which is seen as the 'rehearsal' for the nationwide action, as well as the direct preparation of the police for taking people into custody all over the country at the same time. Huge security forces were mobilized by the state in order to carry out house raids at more than a hundred places and take many people in pre-trial detention during this night. The numbers presented in the chapter are based on the current state of research, and yet we have to note that because the data is not located in one place among the resources, we can easily imagine that there are people, or places that were unintentionally left out of our database.

Chapter seven presents the next part of the 'Black Ravens' case that followed the arrests: the open phase of the investigative work. The Investigation Department of the Ministry of Home Affairs conducted interviews with the accused, in close cooperation with the Counter Interior Reaction Division which used to be the centre of the criminal investigation. We touched on the usefulness of the sources produced during the investigation and we gave examples to point out the contradictions and uncertainties.

Chapter eight describes the series of the lawsuits. The need to give a detailed presentation of the lawsuits was present while writing the dissertation, but the sources available provided so much information that they could fill a dissertation on their own. It was necessary to conduct fundamental research for most trials: therefore we found out the number of convicts and the seriousness of their sentences. In the final subsection of this chapter we touched upon other forms of retaliation.

In the last chapter we covered three topics – we analysed the consequences of the 'Black Ravens' action from various aspects. First, we analysed the lives of individuals in a wider context, then we presented some typical ways for life after prison. We delineated the effects of the 'Black Ravens' on the Church, especially the Bishops' declaration issued on 15 March 1961. This document hit most of the believers, but especially the arrested. Mostly because it condemned the organizers when it was officially only the beginning of the police investigation, and there was no legitimate court judgment. The circumstances of the birth of the circular were rather inconsistent, and therefore we have tried to refine our knowledge by presenting relevant resources. The "Black Ravens" case has become even more significant

when it became 'curriculum' for the employees of the State Security over the years. Based on the reports of the former police and Ministry of Home Affairs, we drew the direct conclusions regarding the State Security. In the coming years, a number of case studies and methodological reviews were made by the field-officers working on the case and the notes compiled based on the experiences of the action were used by the students of the Political Investigation Department of the Police College.

The conclusions of the dissertation

There are more possible interpretations of the 'Black Ravens' case presented in the thesis. The action can be seen as the last desperate attempt to break the Catholic Church, so it fits into the process of the church being excluded from the society. In this case, the aim of the Party State was to break those - clergy or lay people - who did not wish to assimilate into the system that Party State forced upon them. The "Black Ravens" case, however has 'outgrown' the Church's political and historical significance as it has become the largest police operation of the Kádár era, the State Security acted relatively quickly and focused on the participants of the case. Moreover the 'Black Ravens' can also be viewed as an episode of the retaliation of the 1956 revolution. After 4 November, 1956, Kádár had to fight for his power and the stabilization of his system. In order to do this, his first step was between 1956 and 1959 when he did away with the participants in the revolution and the party's left wing (latter only in a political sense). In the next period he turned against the Catholic Church, and the most significant element in this battle was the "Black Ravens" case, the subject of the dissertation. (Finally, he pushed the orthodox Marxists in the background between 1961 – 1962.) As the third possible interpretation of the State Security case we pondered about to what extent the role of the State Security can be regarded as independent, proactive in the 'Black Ravens' case. Many scholars argue that in 1961 the State Security itself 'created' cases – emphasising its own importance – because after the retaliation of the revolution the investigative bodies having less tasks had to prove the legitimacy of their existence in some way. This view is supported by the fact that the State Security began mapping out the religious affairs in 1957, which was processed under the name "Black Ravens" later. So the operational bodies certainly had plenty of 'raw material' out of which they could build as big a deal as needed. In this context, we can talk about the 'creation' of cases. The State Security proposed the 'Black Ravens' action to start already in 1958, that is, to arrest and prosecute the leaders, which had not been done yet. This episode shows us that the State Security could operate, but could not act independently. The party's highest leading bodies, and even János Kádár agreed that no

police operation should be taken against the Church during 1958-1959. After the changes in the political climate in the summer of 1960, however, it was decided at a meeting of the Political Committee of MSZMP by the party leaders that action should be initiated against the "Black Ravens". After this, the operational and investigative bodies started to work together on the development of the operation in details.

The publications published by the author in this topic

A pécsi „Fekete Hollók”, avagy a hitoktatás elméleti és gyakorlati keretei az 1960-as években. ('Black Ravens' in Pécs or theoretical and practical framework for religious education in the 1960s.) In: „Alattad a föld, fölötted az ég...” Források, módszerek és útkeresések a történetírásban. ("The ground is under you, above you is the sky..." sources, methods and seeking ways in writing history.) Ed.: Margit Balogh. Budapest ELTE University Faculty of Humanities, Doctoral School of History, 2010, 291-310.

„Fekete Hollók” a budapesti Szentimrevárosban ('Black Ravens' in Szentimreváros, Budapest). In: *Visszatekintés a 19–20. századra.* (A look back on the 19-20th century.) Ed.: Eszter Cúthné Gyóni - Bernadett Wirthné Diera. Budapest, ELTE Doctoral School of History, Modern and Contemporary Hungarian History Program, 2011. 223-234.

Az egri „Fekete Hollók”. ('Black Ravens in Eger'). In: *Mából a tegnapról.* (From today about yesterday.) Ed.: Eszter Cúthné Gyóni - Adrienn Szilágyi - Bernadett Wirthné Diera. Budapest, ELTE Doctoral School of History, Modern and Contemporary Hungarian History Program, 227-238, 2012.

Fekete Hollók. Megjegyzések egy rendőrségi ügy geneziséhez. (Black Ravens. Comments on the genesis of a police case.) In: *Rendszerváltások kortársa és kutatója.* (Contemporary and researcher of the end of Communism.) Ed.: István Feitl- Balázs Sipos - Zsuzsanna Varga. Budapest, Eötvös Press, 2013. 339-344.