Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Humanities

Doctoral Theses

Krisztina Müllerné Lovas:
The memory related to the generation of the youth of March in the light of 15 March commemorative events. The commemorations of 15 March and 11 April between 1849 and 1898 (with outlook until 1918)

Doctoral School of History
Dr. Gábor Erdődy DSc, Head of the Doctoral School
Modern and Contemporary Hungarian History Doctoral Programme
Dr. Zsuzsanna Varga DSc, associate professor with habilitation, head of the programme

Members of the committee and scientific degrees thereof:
Chairperson: Dr. József Kardos, professor emeritus
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Notary: Dr. Orsolya Manhercz PhD, assistant lecturer
Member: Dr. Beatrix Cs. Lengyel PhD

Supervisor: Dr. Gábor Erdődy DSc, Doctor of Sciences

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The backgrounds of research
The main rational for the choice of topic has been that the development of the 15 March events commemorating the revolution and war for independence of 1848, which occupy such important and outstanding place in the collective historical memory of the Hungarian nation, the manifestations of the holiday of 11 April which was officially prescribed in 1898 in order to commemorate 1848, the history of the commemorative events in the era of dualism and the role thereof in the current historical and political situations have not been examined by historiography thoroughly so far.

Posing questions and the purposes
The fundamental questions are what role the holiday of 15 March played, how it became emphasised ‘site of memory’ and fundamental myth of 1848, how it reflected the current social-political tensions during the decades of dualism. Primarily, I wish to describe the way the commemorative events of the different groups under my survey integrated into the current political relations, the way the daily political events influenced the message of the holiday and the way certain political forces used the commemoration for the attainment of their own objectives and to send their own messages to the given target audience as effective as possible. I bear in mind to describe the most important slogans, brief messages recorded on placards, the historical personalities or political characters centred by certain commemorating groups on their own commemorative events in the given situation. Further, I examine the development of rites, ceremonies of the commemorative events, the use of symbols and the phenomena of symbolic space occupation.

In my dissertation, the description and analysis of commemorative events of 15 March and 11 April at the 50th anniversary in 1898 take a prominent place. At the same time, I wish to draft the way to the 50th anniversary by revealing the previous years’ commemorations of 15 March, while seeking to answer the question how 15 March has become the foremost national holiday embodying 1848 despite not being an official holiday and, in the early years, not being the only memorial day of ‘48 coming to prominence. In the chapter with outlook, I would like to draw attention to the most important internal political disputes erupting at commemorative events of 15 March in the period following 1898, highlighting how enormous relevance this holiday acquired in the increased political struggle of the turn of the century. I also examine the relationship 15 March had with other holidays related to 1848 likewise manifesting intensively. Primarily, I compare it to commemorations, assemblings in the cemetery arranged to the anniversary of Kossuth’s death after 1894. These commemorations in the era of dualism, with
massive participation, sometimes not free from tensions, turning into street fights, have escaped the attention of the representatives of historical science yet. In my dissertation, I also address the issue of the history of 11 April, which remained national holiday all along in that era, being an undiscovered field of the history of commemorations as well.

So far, the scholarly literature pertaining to the 50th anniversary has primarily examined the circumstances of the formation of the national holiday, based only on the debates of the House of Representatives. Meanwhile, the focus has missed the fact that 11 April was the first official national holiday in the course of Hungarian history stipulated in a separate act, the scope of which extended to nationality-inhabited areas and, due to the legislators’ original will, also to Croatia, thus, it was intended to become a mean of strengthening the bond to the Hungarian nation-state. Therefore, I set the focus in my dissertation on the nation-wide, comprehensive survey of the manifestations of the holiday of 15 March and the prescribed national holiday of 11 April in the year of the 50th anniversary in 1898. Regarding the 50th anniversary, I have revealed, examined, compared and analysed, with the support of contemporary national and local rural press and sources of archives, the spontaneous commemorative events of 15 March organised in the civil sphere and the phenomena of the prescribed state national holiday of 11 April which was held about three weeks later. I have examined the events of all 88 municipal centres existing at that time and followed, furthermore, the commemorations of several important large rural towns and smaller settlements, including certain nationality-inhabited regions as well.

In the course of my work, I have revealed the development of the capital’s commemorations of 15 March and 11 April between 1849 and 1918, occasionally involving one or two commemorations in the country into the examination if they were venues of any important event effecting and considerably reflecting the national large-scale politics. Basically, the history of commemoration on 15 March, which got into the crossfire of the government and the different political forces of opposition, has been drafted in the dissertation for the first time regarding the examined periods.

**Applied methods, the scholarly literature and the sources**

At examining the phenomena of commemorative events of 15 March and 11 April of 1848, I have endeavoured to keep in mind the latest fundamentals of methodology for cult-research, the main findings of certain related disciplines, i.e. memory psychology, examining the phenomena of collective memory, and political anthropology, yet, I would like to emphasise that the primary purpose has been to reconstruct the happenings of commemorative events,
integrating those into the current politics-historical processes. At applying the methods of memory research, I have considered commemorative events as manifestations of collective memory and have taken into account that memory is not an individual accomplishment, but it develops in a person in connection with the social relationships existing in society and largely depends on the group the person belongs to at the given moment. A person always remembers from the viewpoint of the group, and his/her acts of remembering are always reconstructions, which conform to his/her momentary social situation. On the basis of the works of Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann, I myself also consider valid that the process of remembering is largely influenced by the ideology and the self-interpreting structures of the community. Based on the criteria of Pierre Nora, I interpret commemorations of 1848 as ‘sites of memory’, where the material, symbolic and functional nature always prevail together.

So far, many studies and volumes have dealt with the development of commemorative events of 15 March, and with specialities thereof manifesting in different historical eras. Herein, I only mention the scientific works which affected also the commemorative events of the eras I myself examined, the neoabsolutism and dualism. For the first time, the entire history of the holiday of 15 March was displayed by András Gerő who, on the basis of the collection of Hungarian National Museum’s Historical Photo Department, organised a separate exhibition of the phenomena of commemoration coming to the surface in the different historical eras until the change of regime in 1989-1990. He prepared also a brief study to the exhibition in which he formulated important general findings on how the political forces in government or in opposition used the holiday to support their own political objectives in the different political eras. Concerning a TV programme of the commemorative events prepared in 1998 on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the revolution, György Gyarmati thought the topic more thoroughly over and published his observations even in a separate volume. In his work, Gyarmati focused principally on the 20th century and paid less attention to commemorative events of 15 March in the dualism, in which the lack of available appropriate fundamental researches on the topic might have played a certain role as well. By examining some specific cases, Gábor Gyáni dealt with the cult of 1848 and the development of commemorative events of 15 March in more of his works construing the matter of memory research. Mónika Erdélyi and Béla Pálmány attempted to elaborate the first anniversary in 1849, both of them having taken the reports of the contemporary press as a primary base. It is difficult to reveal the commemorative events of 15 March in the era of neoabsolutism, hence, it was not possible to commemorate openly the memorial day of the revolution from the defeating the war of independence until the Compromise, except the short constitutional period beginning with the
1860 October Diploma, which period included 15 March 1861. In Hungary, data regarding the repressed, secretly commemorated events of 15 March can be found only among the documents of neoabsolutism emplaced in the National Archives of Hungary (MNL OL). In his work titled *A Magyar függetlenségi és alkotmányos mozgalmak* [The Hungarian independence and constitutional movements], Lajos Lukács also explored some cases regarding 15 March, the original sources of which work I also examined in the course of preparing my dissertation. It has also been useful to explore the classical work of Albert Berzeviczy construing the era of absolutism which delineated important Viennese documents related to the events of 1861 in Pest too. The novelty of my dissertation is that it delineates several cases emerging as a result of my own independent research work, providing examples for the manifestations of depressed national resistance appearing over and over again in the era of the neoabsolutism, which I selected primarily from the documents of IV.A fontes (public order and peace) of D51 (Imperial and Royal Locotenential Authority of Hungary), D96 (District Government of Pest) and D191 (Locotenental Council of Hungary) Presidential Records of MNL OL. Mónika Erdélyi attempted to describe also the commemorative events of 15 March in 1860 and 1861, relying only on the materials of contemporary press reports and on occasionally contradictory memoirs published in the press in the era of the dualism. However, it seemed necessary to reveal and describe these commemorative events again in this dissertation based on a wider range of sources, in a reliably way.

Regarding the era of dualism, Lajos Szögi, in his brief study titled *1848 utóélete a magyar felsőoktatásban* [The afterlife of 1848 in the Hungarian higher education], provided a general overview on the commemorative events of the university youth of Pest in the period between 1849 and 1998, in which study the author concerns only two specific commemorations regarding the era of dualism, examined also in my dissertation. Besides, researchers have undertaken to reveal only some rural towns’ commemorative events of 15 March in the era of dualism. Using primarily the reports of the local press, Ádám Erdész described the commemorative events of 15 March of Gyula, Gábor Patyi described those of Sopron, Zoltán Hegedűs described those of certain localities of Moson County. Albert Zsolt Jakab who, regarding the commemorations of 1848, described some commemorative events of 15 March in Kolozsvár from the era, concerns also the commemoration of 1848 in Kolozsvár in the era of dualism in his book titled *Emlékállítás és emlékezési gyakorlat. A kulturális emlékezet reprezentációi Kolozsváron* [Memory construction and practice. Representations of cultural memory in Kolozsvár]. The works mentioned above examined primarily the local specialities, and did not deal with the role the commemorative events played in the storms of the national
daily politics in the era of dualism. I myself published two brief studies on the commemorations of the university youth of Pest in the era of dualism, regarding the period between 1867 and 1898, examining the development of the events of each year and placing them among the national political relationships.

Commemorating the 50th anniversary of 1848 has been the subject of only a few studies so far. Péter Hanák, in his work titled 1898. A nemzeti és állampatrióta értékrend frontális ütközése a Monarchiában [1898. Frontal clash between the national and the state-patriotic value order in the Monarchy], has primarily construed the heated debate erupted in the House of Representatives between the government and the public law opposition around the mandatory commemoration of 11 April. In another study related to the 50th anniversary, Miklós Bényei has delineated the commemorations of 15 March and 11 April in Debrecen, 1898, describing the specific natures of commemorative events arranged among local social groups. I myself compared the 50th anniversary commemorations of 15 March and 11 April nationwide, revealing the commemorative events of the then municipal centres and several other rural settlements in a detailed study based on the researches conducted to my doctoral dissertation. In the course of my research, I had a chance to find substantial, hitherto unknown sources pertaining to the development of the national holiday of 11 April, by means of which the formation of the national holiday and the first commemoration thereof can be described based on a wider range of sources. The documents related to the prime minister’s office regarding the commemorations of 1848 in 1898, handled in a separate item in the National Archives of Hungary titled „Az 1848. évi törvények szentesítésének 50. évfordulójára rendezett ünnepségek ügyei” [Affairs of commemorating the 50th anniversary of sanctioning the 1848 laws], include immensely important new information on the formation of the 11 April national holiday, which hitherto has not been used by historiography in the course of elaborating the topic. Likewise, researchers have so far overlooked the petitions addressed to the House of Representatives, which are emplaced in the Presidential and General Records in the Archives of the Parliament, House of Representatives (MNL OL K2) and in the above mentioned Archives of the Prime Minister’s Office (MNL OL K26 473. cs.), pertaining to the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of 1848. These petitions provide outstanding reflection of the opinion formulated by municipalities pertaining to the two holidays.

In order to reveal the events of the capital city commemorations accurately, in certain cases the holdings of the Hungarian Royal State Police Budapest Police Headquarters in the Budapest City Archives also proved beneficial, especially the included presidential reserved
documents. The research has been encumbered by the partial loss of the said documentary material and the original registers, due to the transportation thereof to Romania in August 1919.

The structure of the dissertation
In the course of describing the history of the commemorative events, the pertaining chapters are in chronological order. In the introductory chapter, beside the formulation of the purpose of the research, I have summarized the fundamental cult-research methodological findings having been taken into account at examining and analyzing the commemorative events, moreover, I have endeavoured to find out wherefore 1848 could have occupied such a prominent place in the collective memory of Hungarians. The commemorative events of 15 March which had previously been delineated by scholarly literature and rediscovered by myself have been described in the chapter construing the age of absolutism. The discussion of the chapters construing the Compromise has been adjusted to historical periods, taking the intensity and significance of the commemorative events of 15 March into account. In the summary, beside a synopsis of the political-history-related significance of the 15 March holiday, the rites, ceremonies, symbols and the phenomena of symbolic space occupation which had manifested at the commemorial events have been taken stock of.

Results and conclusions
1. The dissertation underpins the view generally accepted among historians dealing with the era of dualism, that the legitimacy of the dualist regime established by the Compromise had rather poor foundation. The attempt of developing a representative national holiday which could have enhanced such legitimacy and became popular enough among citizens failed. Peculiarly, a twofold emotional approach developed among Hungarian society to the regime, characterised by accepting, loyal state patriotism on the one hand, yet by oppositionist Hungarian patriotism, living on widely, on the other, accompanied by the specific rites shaped by its own self. My researches confirm the existence of such twofold approach, which had become exceedingly apparent at the official and prescribed 11 April national holidays which I surveyed, and which had been generated by the cooperation of the government and the ruler, and at the unofficial, yet popular 15 March commemorative events capable of producing positive emotional identification.

2. It can be ascertained that, notwithstanding the intention of the government and the ruler, the 11 April national holiday, likewise carrying the substance of 1848, has not been capable of
becoming an accepted, popular holiday serving the purpose of legitimising the regime established by the Compromise effectively.

3. Against the official 11 April national holiday, 15 March has been a merely tolerated holiday during the decades of dualism. The governments intending to sustain the regime established by the Compromise, having considered Francis Joseph’s sensitivity, could not bear responsibility for 15 March officially, yet, since it had become an increasingly popular mass commemorative event originating from the civil sphere, they were forced to interpret it and made an effort to tame it to suit their own purposes. The primal message regarding 15 March of official politics has become that the Compromise of 1867 had finally realized the acquisitions of 1848, the ’48 constitution had been restored, thus the heroes of the war of independence and the victims of repression had not died in vain. (Fully legitimating 15 March and accomplishing its national holiday status has failed even when the independence opposition was governing.) However, at brief intervals, certain steps taken by the government in order to bear official responsibility for 15 March is observable. In the first years of Kálmán Széll’s serving as prime minister, at the period of temporary peace made with the independence opposition, the head of government and his fellow ministers appeared on several occasions at the journalists’ events of 15 March. Again, both in 1911 and 1912, István Tisza sent his influential politicians to the 15 March commemorative events of the university youth of Pest traditionally sympathizing with the politics of the independence opposition, in order to endeavour to win the youth over for his own political purposes at the occasion of the popular holiday. Yet, apart from these brief periods, the decisive observation is that 15 March has mostly been espoused basically by the independence opposition, and later by the representatives of social democracy and civil radicalism and political powers unsatisfied with the Compromise in any respect and to any extent.

4. During the decades of the dualism, by means of the spontaneously evolving commemorative events originating from civil society, the memorial day of 15 March had become the primal symbolic embodiment of the fundamental myth of 1848, which has been capable of becoming a benchmark for contemporaries, in other words the revolution was not commemorated merely for itself, but because of its capability of providing grounds for the present or even for the future. The capability of a myth to effect the ‘self-image’ of a group, to influence and guide the actions thereof, is called the ‘mythomotor role’, a mythical propelling force, by Assmann. In my dissertation it is revealed and proven, that the ‘mythomotor role’ of the commemorative events of 15 March is rather effective, i.e. it has an enormous power of driving into action. Such power has been promoted by the fact that the public law acquisitions of 1848 were not entirely
accomplished by the arrangement of the dualistic state, thus these fundamental principles of 1848 kept on gaining new, current meaning subsequently, especially in the course of the combat for the national Hungarian acquisitions, led by the independence opposition, or the struggle for voting rights, becoming widespread from the turn of the century. This phenomenon is proven outstandingly by one of the most significant fundamental texts ‘canonised’ in the course of commemorative events: the 12 points of March 1848. The principles pertaining to the extension of right formulated in them gained new, current formulation countless times at the commemorative events during the decades of the dualism. Throughout the period under my survey, 1848 has appeared as an unfulfilled expectation at the commemorative events of 15 March to the ones unsatisfied with the regime established by the Compromise, the nature of whose commemoration, according to Assmann’s interpretation, can be qualified as ‘contra-present’, i.e. the said memorial day has been capable of questioning the given present and of inspiring participants to alter it. At such occasions, the past appears as political utopia worth fighting for, in this case, commemoration turns into anticipation which takes aim at a remote target. At such occasions, commemorating groups express the denial of the present, galvanised into physical action by the utopia of 1848 to fight the present in order to accomplish the utopian goal. This phenomenon can frequently be observed at the commemorative events of 15 March in the era of the dualism, as it is presented in my dissertation. Consequently, the myth of 1848, including the 15 March holiday (unlike the mandatory 11 April holiday), has been capable of becoming enriched by new content for the commemorating groups in the political conflicts of the dualism over and over again, which groups could thereby discover the current political message at every occasion. Hence 15 March has been capable of becoming such a living and vivid holiday in that period.

5. Summarizing the main stages in the history of the 15 March commemorative events, it can be ascertained that the success of the bloodless revolution has encouraged the residents of the country to spontaneously celebrate even in 1848, when local administrative provisions have stipulated thanksgiving worship services and other forms of celebration. Regarding the periods I have surveyed, 1849 had been the only year in the history of the holiday when 15 March borne all requisites of an official national holiday, when its commemoration had been stipulated and arranged by the implementing authority, the National Defence Committee. Beside revealing traces of several events commemorating 15 March covertly in the era of absolutism, I have pointed out that in 1861, the only year prior to the Compromise when the commemoration of 15 March was relatively free, primarily heroes who had fallen in the war of independence and the victims of repression were commemorated by means of cemetery visits and bereavement
worship services, thus the cult of the dead manifesting at the time overshadowed the role played by 15 March at civil transformation. I have pointed out in the dissertation that it was the restoration of the constitution wherein the new government, as early as at the moment of its establishment in 1867, found the segment of 1848 presumed to be worth of official commemoration considering Francis Joseph’s sensitivity, and I have remarked that the governing party made its first prominent statement on the occasion of 15 March in 1872, reinterpreting the conceptions of 1848 in order to underpin its own politics. Since, subsequent to the Compromise, the government has not taken the arrangement of the commemoration of 15 March into its own hands, the initiative of commemoration has been taken by civil associations and politicians of the independence opposition, accordingly, the principal message of the commemoration became the criticism of the regime established by the Compromise, thus the memorial day became inseparable from Lajos Kossuth’s name, in whose person the denial of the dualism manifested until his death in 1894, and in his cult living on throughout the period thereafter. It has been revealed in the dissertation that politicians of the independence opposition have increasingly seized the potential inherent in the 15 March holiday from the 1890’s on, and cooperation with the university youth of Pest at the 15 March commemorations in the capital city is detectable throughout the period (except the years 1910, 1911, 1912). Yet it was not only the university youth of Pest they wished to influence but also the country’s public opinion, now not merely by commemorating March 15 but also by arranging memorial events of the anniversary of Lajos Kossuth’s death near the date of 20 March. On the 50th anniversary in 1898, the majority of the House of Representatives distanced themselves from 15 March and, in conjunction with the ruler, made 11 April the national holiday which would embody the time of 1848. The government stipulated that municipalities shall commemorate 11 April at official honorary assemblies. By revealing the sources of archives, I have pointed out that prime minister Dezső Bánffy feared that enthusiasm will be greater for commemorating 15 March in Hungary than for the mandatory holiday of 11 April, thus invited the főispáns (county governors) in a circular to favour 11 April. Yet, the arrangement of honorary assemblies commemorating 15 March at 22 county seats has still been inevitable. On the memorial day of the revolution, local independence party members of the national assembly occasionally made speeches with current political connotations before 10-20 thousand people at the traditionally oppositionist constituencies, while the commemoration of 11 April has primarily been restricted to official circles. In the capital city, public commemorations of 15 March have been arranged by the university youth of Pest throughout the period. Having revealed these, it has been ascertained at the dissertation that the radicalisation of youth of the capital city occurred on the
occasion of the holiday, along questions of national politics, in the spirit of public law opposition. At the commemorial events, the youth, just as the country’s public opinion and the independence opposition, had primarily been occupied with the problems generated by the dissatisfaction with the public law status of Hungary, the demand for greater economic autonomy, the enhancement of the Hungarian nature of the common army and the broadening of the right to vote. It has been has delineated in the dissertation that, from the turn of the century, March 15 commemorations of the devotees of Hungarian social democracy and civil radicalism had become increasingly intense, indicating that such newly evolving political forces could also discover the precursor of their own politics in the 15 March holiday inherently related to 1848, which they did use to communicate their political messages.

The permanent endeavour to find one’s own roots in the past and the attempt to connect one’s own political legitimation to a mythicized time is observable also in the case of modern societies. The same has been performed by the different social-political groups in the era of dualism, connecting that certain mythical past to a common, basically positive experience of Hungarians, erupting with elemental force, namely 1848. This attempt is detectable both on the government and opposition side. Thus, the common origin, the common past had been given in the myth of 1848, differences occurred only in interpretation. In the dissertation, such attempts of interpretation are revealed, in the context of 15 March and 11 April national holidays.

**The author’s publications in the topic of the dissertation**


