

Name magyarization and Hungarianness.

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► **To cite this version:**

Slávka Otčenášová, Csaba Zahorán, Mátyás Erdélyi. Name magyarization and Hungarianness.: The reception of magyarized names in the dualist period (1867-1919). Shifting discourses on Central European Histories Slávka Otčenášová, Czsaba Zahorán (eds.)? Terra Recognita Foundation, Terra Recognita Foundation, 2015, 978-963-89185-4-3. halshs-02196050

HAL Id: halshs-02196050

<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02196050>

Submitted on 26 Jul 2019

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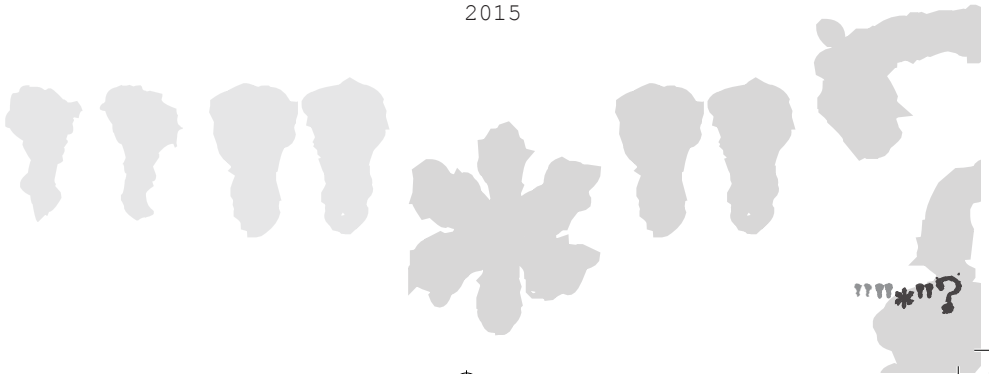
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SHIFTING DISCOURSES ON CENTRAL EUROPEAN HISTORIES

Slávka Otčenášová – Csaba Zahorán (eds.)
Terra Recognita Foundation, Budapest
2015



Mátyás Erdélyi

NAME MAGYARIZATION
AND HUNGARIANNESS:
THE RECEPTION OF MAGYARIZED
NAMES IN THE DUALIST PERIOD
(1867–1919)

Name changes, and the phenomenon of Magyarizing surnames can be described from a socio-historical perspective as “an act performed in a web of relations comprised of three different agents.”¹ Each act of name Magyarization implies an interaction between two actors, the petitioner and an administrative unit. However, the social historian may take into account a third actor—in Bourdieuan terms—a field of power that influences individual choices and that is equivalent to the “historically given, concrete social, linguistic-cultural, political and ideological environment.”² The comprehensive study of name Magyarization (carried out by Viktor Karády and István Kozma) already presented the petitioners’ social and cultural background, described the legislation concerning the procedure of name changes, and analyzed the contemporary ideological discourse of the problem under scrutiny. This paper aims at analyzing some aspects of the reception of Magyarized family names in the dualist period, aspects which might even seem marginal but could emphasize the ambiguities of contemporary expectations, especially assumptions about name Magyariza-

1 Tamás Farkas, “Szempontok, irányok, feladatok és lehetőségek a családnév-változtatások vizsgálatában [Aspects, directions, tasks and opportunities for the study of family name changes],” in *A családnév-változtatások története i időben, térben, társadalomban* [The history of family name changes in time, space, society], ed. Tamás Farkas and István Kozma (Budapest: Magyar Nyelvtudományi Társaság, 2009), 11.

2 Ibid., 12.

tion as a "patriotic imperative"³ and the related political, cultural, and ideological field that contained several competing and often self-contradictory claims vis-à-vis the Magyarizers.

The notion of assimilation and acculturation and the problem of linguistic *Magyarization* bear a considerable relevance to describe the field of force for our purposes. For example, Karády and Kozma summed up the connections between the process of linguistic Magyarization and that of Magyarizing family names as follows: "Most of those who Magyarized family names did not only Magyarize under direct social pressure; they did so, because choosing a Hungarian family name fitted their own change of self-identity still in progress, which incorporated an 'aimed' or on-going process of Magyarization."⁴ If we are to incorporate assimilation and acculturation in our theoretical framework, Magyarizing family names can be apprehended as the last stage of the "process of assimilation." At one side of the "field of forces" the decisive features are the petitioner's cultural and social status, including aspirations of social and economic mobility, while, at the other side, the political and ideological environment influences the reception of Magyarized family names, and the prospect of any actual status mobility. In the present paper, only one feature of the field of force will be analyzed, namely, contemporary expectations concerning the nature of the newly obtained "Magyar" surname.

The corpus of guidebooks published to establish the rules of name Magyarization provides the

³ Gusztáv Csányi, *A névmagyarosítás szabályai* [Conventions for the Magyarization of names] (Budapest: Hedvig Ny., 1915), 4.

⁴ Viktor Karády and István Kozma, *Név és Nemzet - Család-név-változtatás, névpolitika és nemzetiségi erőviszonyok Magyarországon a feudalizmustól a kommunizmusig* [Name and nationality - Surname changes, name policies, ethnic power relations in Hungary from feudalism to communism] (Budapest: Osiris, 2002).

principal source for our inquiry. According to a prevalent guidebook by Simon Telkes, for example, "Hungarian names are *the* political credo of the Hungarian people."⁵ In a spirit of practical guidance, the author declares that "the chosen name should be consistent with the linguistic style of the time; surnames should be perfectly Hungarian and should not jeopardize anyone's interest. Let the new name be short, euphonic, Hungarian, pretty, and easily pronounceable even for foreigners!"

⁶ In his account, it is possible to change Wagner to Bognár ("wheelwright"), Weber to Takács ("weaver"), since the literal translation bears an appropriate Hungarian sound in such cases. However, one cannot change Buchberger to Könyvhegyi ("mountain of books") because the new name would sound strange. The case of Buchberger and Könyvhegyi is a perfect illustration for the ambiguities concerning expectations towards Magyarizers: the fact that the famous poet Sándor Petőfi (formerly Petrovics) Magyarized his name carried particular importance in the eyes of the Hungarian public, because, in that way, foreigners could surely recognize him as a *Hungarian* poet and a *Hungarian* revolutionary figure. Nevertheless, one would also have to admit that the name "Könyvhegyi" entirely fulfilled the same criterion.

Gusztáv Csányi in his guidebook, *A névmagyarosítás szabályai* (Conventions for the Magyarization of names) emphasized the same ideas, namely, that "a Hungarian name unites the individual and the Hungarian nation," and "name Magyarization is a patriotic action, a patriotic duty, and those who fulfill it carry the same stone to build a united Hungarian nation, and restore the building of the Hungarian state."⁷ Csányi differed from Tel-

5 Simon Telkes, *Hogyan magyarosítsuk a vezetékneveket?* [How do we Magyarize the surnames?](Budapest: M. Kir. Állami Ny., 1906), 3.

6 *Ibid.*, 8.

7 Csányi, *A névmagyarosítás szabályai*, 4.

kes in being hostile towards the "fifty-kreutzer"⁸ Hungarians who took the name of great Hungarian writers and artists, spelled their names in noble style, or took historical names. In the same vein, Kálmán Wesszprémy, in a quantitative study on Hungarian Jewry, referred to the problem of Magyarizing family names as follows: "the son of *nyakigláb* (gangling) has thus become Báthori or Rozgonyi, the son of the *kajla* (crooked) Jew is now called Rákóczi. The negligence of not caring about, at least, Hungarian names against this invasion is incomprehensible; if the only point is to have Hungarian family names and Jews do not show some modesty in picking up names, then, the state should discipline them a little bit more severely."⁹ The *Magyar névkönyv* (Book of Hungarian names), edited by Zoltán Lengyel during the Great War, estimated the number of potential Hungarian names around 7 million through the combination of family names and forenames enumerated in the book. According to Lengyel, "the firm and steely sounding Hungarian names are highly advisable," and the usage of the letter *cs*, because it is "one of the main characteristics of Hungarian spelling."¹⁰ Lengyel went beyond the concept of Magyarization conceived as a simple political credo when he stated: "It is not true that a name alone can make someone a Hungarian! And we might seem different from the outside if, instead of Weisz, Schwartz, 'ics', 'vics', 'iczki', 'viczki', there does not arise Fehér (White), Fekete (Black), Radó, and Salgó—but the whole history of the nation would be embodied in *Hungarian* names, and it could echo all the intonation of Hungarian language. This gives force, inspires, and encour-

8 This is a reference to the amount of the administrative fee for name changes.

9 Kálmán Wesszprémy, *A magyarországi zsidók statisztikája* [The statistics of Jews in Hungary] (Debreczen: Debreczen sz. kir. város könyvnyomda-vállalata, 1907), 136.

10 Zoltán Lengyel, *Magyar Névkönyv* [Book of Hungarian names] (Budapest: Nap Ny., 1917), 17, 19.

ages one to become Hungarian just like our name could become Hungarian."¹¹ This position is a complete break with Eötvös's conception of *political nation*, since, according to the *Magyar névkönyv*, the goal is no longer the assertion of a certain political credo, but the establishment and support of a certain national community. Accordingly, it is expected from the members of the nation to become *perfect* Hungarians inside and outside.

Contemporary newspapers, pamphlets, and essays provide another source to analyze the reception of name Magyarization. Ignác Kató perceived the ultimate goal of name changes in choosing a "good Hungarian name" that has to be distinguishable. According to Kató's arguments, it is nonsense to change Deutsch to Németh ("German") or Spitzer to Hegyi ("from the mountain"), since in this case, the Magyarizer only proves that "the affection for his old and alien sounding name influenced his choice of the new name, in which he pays tribute in seeking the reminiscence of the old in the new one."¹² Names should be Hungarian not only in sound but in origin as well; the advised solution is to assimilate the sound or reproduce the meaning. Two other examples from Zemplén County could illustrate this expectation. In the social and political periodical *Közművelődés*, there were complaints about name Magyarizations that took place in "an improper and annoying way."¹³ Let me quote some examples of these annoying and improper incidents: Grünzweig was changed to Zöldág ("green branch"), Grünberger to Zöldhegyi ("green mountain"), Feuerstein to Tűzkövi ("flint stone"), and Lieberman to Lelkes ("enthusiastic"). According to the complaint, these changes were more harmful than useful because the new name should not jar the

11 Ibid., 11.

12 Ignác Kató, *A névmagyarosítás kérdéséhez* [On the question of name Magyarization] (Győr: Nitsmann Ny., 1901), 3.

13 *Közművelődés*, no. 13 (1905).

ears of native Magyars. Criticism was also centered on the Magyarization of place names: the village, Mernyik changed its name to Merézszipatak ("bold river"), which created considerable indignation. "Meszeszipatak (chalky river), Mészszipatak (river of chalk), or even Sebeszipatak (fast river), Csendeszipatak (quiet river)—all are possible, but how could a river become bold? Never again! The innovators should not venture such things, because, soon, Borsipatak will become Csípősbors (hot pepper), and the Ronyva will rise from its quiescent hole and will assail the innovators—be glorious Merézszipatak!"¹⁴ Although this issue is not about surnames, it is similarly expected to harmonize the name with "the Hungarian spirit" beyond the Hungarian sound.

Some articles published in the *Magyar Nyelvőr* could also reflect the ideological changes that took place between the 1870s and the Great War, namely, that the ideal of the political nation transformed into an imperative towards the Hungarian nation-state. It is still possible in 1881 to "be non-Hungarian in one's name and language but Hungarian in one's body and spirit,"¹⁵ which is no longer the case in 1917, because, by that time, name Magyarization became "a means for founding the unitary Hungarian state."¹⁶ At the beginning of the dualist period, popular names invented by the common people were accepted, and it could be also accepted that a Hungarian sound was added to a non-Hungarian name, e.g., Ankerschmidt could become Akkorsincs ("it still does not exist"), but it could not become Vasmacs-kakovácsi ("forger of iron cats"), and in the same way, Schallkammer could become Sarkament ("its heel has gone").¹⁷ Later,

¹⁴ *Felsőmagyarország*, no. 20 (1905).

¹⁵ Gábor Szarvas, "A névmagyarosítás kérdése" [The question of name Magyarization], *Magyar Nyelvőr* 10. (1885): 2.

¹⁶ Zsigmond Simonyi, "Magyar név" [Hungarian name], *Magyar Nyelvőr* 46 (1917): 202.

¹⁷ Andor Turcsányi, "A névmagyarosításokról" [About the magyarization of names], *Magyar Nyelvőr* 3 (1874): 308.

a Hungarian sounding name became sufficient in itself, since "one can form non-Hungarian names out of Hungarian words," still the new name will not reveal its origins.¹⁸ These allusions could support a more sociological interpretation that states, "non-Hungarian or Hungarian names are those ... that are considered as such by the people."¹⁹

Based on this argument, one of the goals of further research should be the analysis of the mechanisms and private reasons for name Magyarization on the level of individuals. Quantitative studies have been carried out on the group specific characteristics of the choice of Hungarian names, and on the distinction between typically heterogeneous and homogenous family names by social origin;²⁰ nevertheless, the qualitative analysis of the question is still awaited. In my view, micro-level sources (memoirs, autobiographies, correspondences) could provide evidence of the extent and ways Magyarizers were influenced by the political propaganda and discourse on Magyarization, and in the case of individual names, these sources could describe the social pressure Magyarizers had to face when choosing "too Jewish" or "too Slav" names. The dilemma is amply illustrated by the Jewish joke in which a Jew changed his name twice in order to give the right answer to the question, "and what was your name before?"

18 Iván Szigetvári, "A névmagyarosítás," *Magyar Nyelvőr* 20 (1891): 499.

19 Farkas, "Szempontok, irányok, feladatok," 21.

20 See: István Kozma, "Közeledés, vagy az elkülönülés reprodukálása másként? Zsidó és keresztény névválasztás a századfordulón (1897-1908)" [Reproducing attachment or detachment differently? Jewish and Christian name choice at the turn of the century (1897-1908)], in *A család-név-változtatások történetei időben*, 153-172.



Project Partners:

Terra Recognita Foundation

Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs

of the Slovak Republic (Project no: 30/2011

Hľadanie spoločného jazyka o spoločnej minulosti:

dialóg mladej generácie slovenských a maďarských

historikov - POSU and EUGO MZV SR)

Hungarian Institute in Bratislava

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice

Published by: Terra Recognita Foundation, 2015

English translation: Miron Breznoščák (text of Breznoščák), Mátyás Erdélyi (text of Erdélyi), Gergely Galantha (texts of Tamás, Demmel, Kómives, Szeghy-Gayer, Binder, Zahorán), Slávka Otčenášová (texts of Otčenášová, Škulecová, Kurhajcová, Regináčová, Gergely), Mária Tömösváryová (text of Tömösváryová)

Consultants: László Szarka and Štefan Šutaj

Proof-read by: Tom Szerecz and Miroslav Mavra

Book cover: Jana Migašová

Layout: Zsuzsa Szenczi Németh

ISBN: 978-963-89185-4-3

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