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FERENC FODOR:
A HUNGARIAN GEOGRAPHER
IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY²

Introduction

Born on March 5, 1887 into a modest village family in Tenke (today: Tinca, Romania), Ferenc Fodor was one of the most prolific Hungarian geographers of the first half of the twentieth century. Having published his first serious scholarly studies during World War I, Fodor was part of Pál Teleki's inner circle for much of the interwar period, and made a name for himself as a scholar, educator, and editor in the 1920s and

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1930s. Though he was essentially demoted in 1939 when he was sent to Pécs as a school district superintendent, Fodor nevertheless continued to write and publish scholarly works, and, despite being socially and politically marginalized after the war, he even tried to remain academically relevant during the communist period. His last book on Hungarian hydrological engineers and their work in the Tisza watershed, titled *Magyar vízimérnököknek a Tisza-völgyben a kiegyezés koráig végzett felmérései, vízi munkálatai és azok eredményei* [‘Hungarian Hydrological Engineers of the Tisza Valley: A Record of their Surveying and Hydrological Work to 1867’], was awarded a history of science prize from the Hungarian Academy of Science in 1954, and was published in 1957, just five years before his death at the age of seventy-five.

Beyond being a prolific scholar who published numerous books and articles over the course of his long career, Fodor also left behind a very rich personal archive, complete with private letters, diaries, photo albums, scrapbooks, official correspondences, unpublished scholarly manuscripts, and a number of autobiographical narratives and fragments. These unpublished primary sources offer important insight into Fodor’s public and private life, and provide researchers with tools to better understand the lived experiences and historical context that shaped one of Hungary’s most important conservative-nationalist geographers.

It is not our intent to offer a complete biographical account or full overview of Fodor’s scholarly work here (for this see Hajdú 2006, 2009; Jobbitt 2008), but rather to outline some of the key events of his life, and how these events shaped and impacted him. Doing so provides important background for the autobiographical texts published in this volume, and helps to give voice to some of the dominant themes that run through these personal narratives and sketches.

Early Years

Fodor spent his early childhood in his birth town of Tenke, and moved with his family to Szatmárnémeti (today: Satu Mare, Romania) in 1898. Schooled between 1898 and 1906 in Szatmárnémeti’s Catholic gymnasi-

um, Fodor not only found himself amongst some of the better students, but also—as he would later suggest—became conscious of his duties as a Christian-nationalist man whose primary responsibility was to defend the nation against the numerous disintegrative forces working against it. As he would write much later in his life, “it was from behind the gates of Szatmár’s Christian schools, churches, and other Catholic institutions that the rootless and unpatriotic spirit of the liberal period was held at bay” [*hagyományos és gyökeresen magyar életét a liberális korszak gyökértelen és mindinkább nemzetietlen szelleme csak a szatmári keresztény egyházak és iskolák, meg a püspök intézményeinek kapuin belülre szorította vissza*].³

Fodor completed his gymnasium studies in Szatmárnémeti in 1906, and upon graduation applied to a college in Budapest where he intended to pursue his studies as an art teacher. His application to the college was rejected, however, at which point he decided to apply to the university’s faculty of philosophy, to study geography and biology. He began his university training in September 1906, and in 1908 was accepted into the St. Imre Collegium. His experiences there during his third and fourth years of study proved to be as formative as his formal academic training. In one of his scrapbooks, Fodor preserved a hand-written letter he had received from Gyula Glattfelder, the principal of the Collegium, who indicated that, as a resident and member of the college, he would receive free room and board [*szabad lakást (és reggelit)*], and in turn would be expected not only to “adhere strictly to the rules of the institution,” but also to “live a religious and moral life,” and to attend to his studies with “untiring diligence and zeal” [*hogy a támogatást hitbuzgó erkölcsös étellel, ernyedetlen szorgalommal s az intézet szabályainak pontos betartásával fogja meghálálni*].⁴ Fodor appears to have taken great pride in living up to the expectations he was presented with in 1908. In a formal letter sent to Fodor’s mother on the occasion of his graduation in 1910 (also preserved in his scrapbook), the same principal wrote:

³ Fodor Ferenc (1954): *Szatmár földje, Szatmár népe, Szatmár élete* [‘Szatmár’s Land, Szatmár’s People, Szatmár’s Life’]. MTA Könyvtár Kéziratár [‘Hungarian Academy of Sciences Library Manuscript Collection’], Ms 10.740/1. p. 169.

⁴ Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye [‘Fodor Family Collection’]. Fodor Ferenc-albumok [‘Ferenc Fodor albums’] Glattfelder Gyula levele Fodor Ferenchez [‘letter from Gyula Glattfelder to Ferenc Fodor’], Budapest, 1908. August 27.

It is my happy duty to inform you [...] that we are very satisfied with the way your son conducted himself while a member of our institution. We would also like to take the opportunity to express our confident hope that, having come to understand the ambitions of our institution under our loving tutelage, he will continue in his future endeavours to live a moral life according to the principles of the “Christian man”; that he will have a sense of duty to the nation; that he will be the pride of the Church; and that he will make our collegium and his family proud.⁵

[Szíves kötelességünknek tartjuk ez alkalomból értesíteni [...], hogy fiával a Kollégiumban töltött idő alatt meg voltunk elégedve. Egyben annak a reményünknek adunk kifejezést, hogy szeretetünkben élt fia, az intézet törekvéseit megértve az élet további szakáiban a keresztyén férfi hitvallásával, kötelességtudásával a hazának, egyháznak dísze, intézetünknek, családjának büszkesége lesz].

Fodor evidently took this moral responsibility quite seriously, involving himself almost immediately after graduation in projects aimed in various ways at the moral, spiritual, intellectual, as well as physical regeneration of the nation and its people. Beyond giving lectures on a variety of scientific, geographical, and cultural topics to various Catholic groups and reading circles in Budapest,⁶ Fodor also lent his support to cultural and educational organizations such as the *Szabad Lyceum* and gave lectures to groups like the *MÁV*-railway workers. Much of his time was spent organizing and leading excursions for both groups. Some of these trips, such

⁵ Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye. Fodor Ferenc-albumok, Glattfelder Gyula levele Fodor Ferenc édesanyjának [‘letter from Gyula Glattfelder to Ferenc Fodor’s mother’], Budapest, 1910. July 6.

⁶ On November 16, 1910, for example, Fodor gave a lecture to the Natural Science Section of the Saint Imre Circle [a *Szent Imre Kör Természettudományi Szakosztálya*] entitled “*Az evolúció kérdésének jelenlegi állása*” [‘The current state of the question of evolution’]. This was followed sometime later by another lecture entitled “*Valami a makrokosmosról*” [‘On the Macrocosm’]. Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye. Fodor Ferenc-albumok.

as the excursion he organized for the *Törekvés Sport Egylet* (the Physical Sports Section of the MÁV-railway workers) and the *Szabad Lyceum* in 1911, lasted up to a week or more in duration.⁷ Such lengthy treks into the Hungarian countryside, it was hoped, would help primarily city-dwelling Hungarians reconnect with nature, and thus also with essential elements of Hungarian history and tradition.⁸

Karánsebes, 1911–1919

Fodor's public work and cultural activism only intensified when he took up his first full-time teaching position at the state gymnasium in the ethnically mixed, predominantly Romanian town of Karánsebes (today: Caransebeș, Romania) in the autumn of 1911. Beyond his regular teaching duties, Fodor was instrumental in organizing and running Karánsebes's "people's" library [*Népkönyvtár*], its *Szabad Lyceum*, and its workers' gymnasium [*munkásgimnázium*], not to mention the town's very first boy scout troop, and beyond this also a local chapter of the *Magyar Turista Egyesület* (the Hungarian Tourist Society), an organization dedicated in large part to helping people reconnect with nature.⁹ Focusing on a number of very particular social groups (for example, workers, the middle-class, ethnic minorities, and Hungarian youth), the cultural organizations Fodor helped to establish and lead played specific yet overlapping roles in the broader struggle against the forces of degeneration and fragmentation

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ On the organization and role of the *Szabad Lyceum*, especially in provincial centers, see Fodor, 1913.

⁹ See Fodor Ferencné Fenczik Vira (1963): *Fodor Ferenc geográfus életének főbb eredményei és állomásai* ['The Significant Achievements and Stages in the Life of the Geographer Ferenc Fodor']. MTA Könyvtár Kéziratár, Ms 10.740/77; see also Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye. Fodor Ferenc-albumok. Amongst other things, Fodor was also an active member of the *Karánsebes Dal- és Zeneegylet* ['the Karánsebes Song and Music Society'], for whom Fodor often gave performances on the *tárogató* (a traditional Hungarian reed instrument not unlike the oboe), and volunteered for committees like the *karánsebesi Erzsébet királyné szobor* committee, which was dedicated to having a statue of the Austro-Hungarian Empress Elizabeth built in Karánsebes.

that conservative-nationalists thought were threatening Hungarian society (on this broader phenomenon, see Behrendt 2014).

Despite his first teaching position and his active—even enthusiastic—involvement in the community, Fodor was in fact quite miserable in Karánsebes, a provincial, backwater town which he described as a “nest”¹⁰ of Romanians [*oláh fészek*] nestled within a Romanian sea [*az egykori határőrvidéki oláh tenger*].¹¹ Falling back into the siege mentality that had preoccupied him as a gymnasium student in Szatmárnémeti, Fodor would later write: “life became difficult amidst the Romanians of Karánsebes in the final years of the seemingly endless war. I myself also felt that, for Hungarians, the once-pure Hungarian landscape was fading away [A végtelenül tartó világháború vége felé már nagyon nehéz világ volt Karánsebes oláhjai között is. Magam is éreztem, hogy a magyarság számára veszendőbe megy ez az egykor színmagyar táj].”¹² Making note of the defensive position he was once again “forced” to adopt, Fodor wrote in almost heroic tones about the immense energy and self-sacrifice that this vigilant stance required, and even lamented the toll that it took on him physically and emotionally.

The “great sadness”¹³ Fodor felt in his first years in Karánsebes [*az első évek nagyon szomorúan teltek*] was amplified by his “on-again off-again” courtship with Vira Fenczik, the daughter of a prominent Greek Catholic family from Ungvár (today: Uzhhorod, Ukraine) who he met for the first time during a field naturalist’s outing at Lake Ozirnya in the summer of 1908. Despite agreeing on New Year’s Eve, 1910, that they would get engaged, the young couple only announced their engagement publicly on December 24, 1912. Though they would eventually marry on August 23, 1913, and would soon after have two children (Vira, who was known

¹⁰ Fodor Ferenc (1931): *Emlékezetül* [‘Recollections’]. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény [‘The Document Collection of the Hungarian Museum of Water Administration and Environmental Protection’] H-20/1 28-97. 1/4., p. 6.

¹¹ Fodor Ferenc (1941–1950): *Élettörténet* [‘Life History’]. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/3., p. 57.

¹² Fodor Ferenc (1931): *Emlékezetül*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/4., p. 9.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

to the family as Baba, was born in May 1914, and Zoltán in the summer of 1916), their relationship was—at least from Fodor’s point of view—an often stormy one, something which troubled him greatly, not only in Karánsebes, but also in later periods of his life.

It was in Karánsebes in 1915 that Fodor first discovered the scouting movement. Reflecting later in his life on his “conversion” to the boy scout movement in 1915, Fodor noted that he had first turned to the boy scouts out of desperation, in particular over the “declining ideals and spiritual weakness” that he perceived in his male students. Noting that the scouting movement provided him with an effective “educational tool” that he could use to “reach out to the spirit of the youth,” Fodor wrote:

There was no ideal [prior to 1915] with which I could kindle the otherwise tired souls of the younger generation. Something needed to happen, something needed to be produced so that, for the good of the nation’s youth, we could eradicate the feeling of want that lingered in their souls. So, when I first became aware of the scouting movement, I eagerly enlisted...and began leading my spiritually listless students down this new path (Fodor 1943, 24).

[1915-ben, a világháború közepette, annak a színtelen, hanyatló, eszmék nélküli és lelki szegénységgel meggyötört kornak idején, mint fiatal erdélyi tanár döbbsentem rá, hogy nincsen nevelő eszköz a kezemben, amellyel hozzáférhetnék az ifjúság lelkéhez. Nincsen eszmény, amely felszíthatná az akkor már ifjan is fáradt lelkeket. Kellett valaminek történnie, valaminek megteremnie, hogy betölthessük az ifjúság javának lelkében zsibbasztó hiányérzeteket. És amikor megismertem, mohón kaptam a cserkészlet után, és elkezdtem járni kevés mozdítható lelkű tanítványommal a cserkészlet ösvényeit.]

World War I

Fodor was called before a draft board in 1908 and again in 1912, but was not taken into the army on either occasion. He served briefly in a reserve unit based out of Nagyvárad (today: Oradea, Romania), but was discharged in 1913 for health reasons. When the war broke out in 1914, he reported to his former unit, but was soon dismissed, again for health reasons. In 1915 his health recovered, and he was called before an army draft board one last time, but it was deemed that he was performing an “essential” service as a teacher and community leader in Karánsebes, and was thus exempted. In retrospect, Fodor would later realize that he had quite literally dodged a bullet (or many bullets) during World War I. Writing in “*Emlékezetül*” [‘Recollections’] in 1931, for example, Fodor noted that his rejection by the army in 1914 “saved” him from a horrible fate as a soldier. “It was because of the mysterious will of God,” he wrote, “that I remained amongst the living at a time when so many million men were being laid to waste amidst the horror of war” [*Így a jó Isten kifürkészhetetlen akaratából megmaradtam az élők sorában akkor, mikor oly sok millió pusztult el a világháború borzalmai között*].¹⁴

Despite the war and his many duties on the home front between 1914 and 1919, Fodor nevertheless found time to produce scholarly articles that were of a high enough quality for him to be “discovered” as a geographer. As he wrote in his entry for February 1, 1916 in “*Életem eseményei*” [‘Events of My Life’]: “My article ‘The Adriatic Question and the Hungarian Coast’ was published in *Catholic Review*. It has been noticed by Rezső Havas, who has written to me, and in so doing has brought me into contact with the circle of geographers” [*Megjelenik a Katolikus Szemlében: ‘Az Adria-kérdés és a Magyar Tengerpart’ című értekezésem. Feltűnik Havas Rezsőnek, ír nekem, és így kapcsolatba kerülök a geográfus körökkel*].¹⁵ This success was followed up with a lecture he gave in Budapest in April of the same year to the *Természettudományi Társulat Növénytani Szakosztály*

¹⁴ Uo., p. 7.

¹⁵ Fodor Ferenc (1959): *Életem eseményei (1887–1959)* [‘Events of My Life (1887–1959)’]. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/2., p. 14.

(the botanical section of the Natural History Association). Rezső Havas and Béla Gonda were there, and invited him to write more geography articles. On December 9, 1916, he was accepted into the *Földrajzi Társaság* (Geographical Society), and soon after became known to Teleki. As he later wrote: "I began work on my regional geographical study of the Szörénység, and have been put into contact with Teleki" [*dolgozni kezdek a Szörénység tájrajzán, Telekivel összeköttetésbe lépek*].¹⁶

Austria-Hungary's defeat in the war, and the subsequent occupation of Karánsebes by three different allied armies in 1918–1919, not surprisingly proved to be trying times for Fodor and his family. And yet, it was in the midst of his family's misery and suffering that he received an important, arguably life-changing letter from Teleki inviting him to come to Budapest to work on compiling the maps and statistics necessary to present Hungary's case at the Paris Peace Talks. Leaving his family with his sister in Törökszentmiklós (which at the time was under Romanian occupation), Fodor continued on alone to Budapest in the autumn of 1919 to take up his position at the *Külgügyminisztérium Béke-előkészítő Irodája* (the Foreign Ministry's Office for Peace Preparations).

Fodor's positive reaction to this invitation, and the more or less enthusiastic and optimistic attitude that he managed to maintain in the face of the numerous hardships and uncertainties that had plagued his family and the nation since 1918, is an indication that, despite the indignities his family had suffered under the Romanian occupation at the end of the war, and despite the fact they had been compelled to flee from Karánsebes, Fodor was in no way discouraged, at least according to his private papers. Even the violence and uncertainty of the liberal and communist revolutions of 1918-1919, and of the counterrevolution that followed, failed to dishearten Fodor, a young scholar whose academic promise was finally being recognized. For Fodor, the end of the war and the national upheaval that followed offered important personal, professional, and even social opportunities.

Fodor's enthusiastic embracing of the opportunities that presented themselves to him was tempered by a profound sense of duty to the nation. Even as he strove to construct a career at the nation's intellectual

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

center, and to build a secure home life for himself and his family, he dove into work aimed at the moral rebuilding of a nation weakened by what he and other conservative-nationalists saw as decades of decadence and neglect. Though these cultural activities were by no means devoid of some form of opportunism on Fodor's part, it would be a mistake to regard them as the hollow or cynical gestures of a man focused solely on his own social status or material well-being. Personal ambition was certainly a driving factor for Fodor, but so too was the nation-building work that he saw himself a part of.

The Interwar Period

As a young geographer very much at the beginning of his academic career, Fodor was just one of many public intellectuals who devoted himself to the conservative-nationalist rebuilding of Hungary in the wake of the nation's dismemberment in 1920. In addition to writing revisionist articles for foreign audiences (like, for example, "The Geographical Impossibility of the Czech State" published in 1920) or shorter, nation-building essays, Fodor also produced popular nationalist works like *Világostól Trianonig. A mai Magyarország kialakulásának története* ['From Világos to Trianon: The History of Contemporary Developments in Hungary'] (co-authored with Sándor Pethő in 1925), and threw himself into the boy scout work he had begun in Karánsebes during the war. As one of Teleki's key allies in the 1920s, Fodor rose to become second-in-command of the Hungarian Boy Scouts (Teleki was Hungary's Chief Scout for much of the interwar period), and in this way played a significant role in one of Hungary's most important conservative-nationalist youth movements in the two decades leading up to World War II.

Though he remained devoted to many different nation-building projects after World War I, Fodor was also able to establish himself as a significant scholar in the interwar period.¹⁷ By January 1, 1920, in fact, he took over as editor of *Földrajzi Közlemények*, Hungary's oldest geographical journal, and by 1921 had secured a teaching position as an adjunct at

¹⁷ For a comprehensive assessment of Fodor's geographical work see Hajdú 2006.

the Faculty of Economics. He was appointed as an assistant professor in the same faculty in 1925, and was made a full professor in 1929. When taking into consideration his published and unpublished books and articles, Fodor was one of the most productive geographers of the interwar period (perhaps only Jenő Cholnoky produced more). Given his early interest in botany, Fodor's first published studies were on geobotanical topics, and it was only later, under the influence of Teleki, that he turned his attention to regional geography. It was from this thematic perspective that Fodor wrote his first major work on the Szörénység (Fodor 1930a), as well as his still-relevant study *Jászság életrajza* ['A Biography of the Region of Jászság'] (Fodor 1942a). Equally important from both a socio-political and scholarly point of view was his village exploration [*falukutatás*] and *Heimatskunde* [*honismeret*, or 'local history'] work (Fodor 1926). Fodor published a number of these studies, ones which, according to today's classification, might well be categorized as "settlement geography" [*településföldrajz*] (Fodor 1930b, 1942b). Alongside the work he published between the wars on political geography, the history of geography, and historical geography, the textbooks Fodor produced were also important.

Alongside Fodor's published scholarship, it is also worth highlighting his work at the Eötvös Collegium. Quite likely at the behest of Teleki, who was a supervisor [*kurátor*] of the Collegium at the time, Fodor began teaching at the elite institution in 1923. From very humble beginnings, Fodor built the Collegium's geography workshop from the ground up. During his sixteen years at the Collegium, Fodor developed and implemented a carefully-considered, systematic curriculum, one that paid particular attention to students' academic work. It was in this way that Fodor built one of the top training centres for geography students at the time, a virtual workshop in which an entire generation of the best interwar geographers (among them Tibor Mendöl, Béla Bulla, and László Kádár) were taught (Győri 2014). Fodor himself was particularly proud of the work he did, mentioning in each of his autobiographical sources the successes of the workshop (and its members). Upon his leaving of the Collegium, Fodor wrote to the director, Miklós Szabó, summarizing his experiences, noting: "This position [as head of the workshop] was close to my heart, because, in my mind, work of only the highest intellectual level was produced by students who have been well-chosen from amongst the Colle-

gium's finest" [*Ez a munkakör nagyon a szívemhez nőtt, mert számomra a legmagasabb szellemi munkát jelentette a Collegium mindenkor válogatott ifjúsága körében*].¹⁸

Fodor also played an important role in the foundation of Hungarian economic geography, a field that emerged under the direction of Teleki (Győri 2001). Of the two textbooks Fodor published on this topic (Fodor 1924, 1933), it was the second in particular that became the centre of the most significant debate of the interwar period. What began in 1934 in articles in the *Földrajzi Közlemények* as a critical discussion over the problems related to mapping economic geography soon evolved into a personal attack on Fodor. The debate that unfolded was often vulgar and charged with emotion (Czirfusz 2014), so much so that Fodor challenged one of his detractors to a duel. This caught the attention of the entire geographical community, and only contributed to the worsening relationship between Fodor and Teleki in the mid-1930s.¹⁹

Despite the breakdown of some of his personal relationships, Fodor's scholarly production proved to be profitable from a financial point of view, especially between 1927 and 1930, when nine of the eleven books he wrote for the *Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda* (Royal Hungarian University Press) were published. According to an itemized listing of his income for the years 1925-1940, the initial payments and additional royalties he received for these works accounted for roughly a third of his total annual income for the years 1927, 1928, 1929, and 1930.²⁰ This extra income provided Fodor with the opportunity he had long been waiting for: to build a family house of his own. As luck would have it, the Great Depression actually aided him in attaining his dream. An acute housing shortage in Budapest prompted the government to offer favourable terms on loans for

¹⁸ Fodor Ferenc levele Szabó Miklósnak az Eötvös Collegium igazgatójának ['letter from Ferenc Fodor to Miklós Szabó, director of the Eötvös Collegium'], Budapest 1939. November 24. ELTE Egyetemi Levéltár, Eötvös Collegium Levéltára ['ELTE University Archives, Eötvös Collegium Archives'] 26/a 41. d. 72/1 dosszié.

¹⁹ Fodor Ferenc (1959): *Életem eseményei (1887-1959)*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/2., pp. 28-29.

²⁰ Fodor Ferenc (1925-1940): *Összes keresetünk 1925-1940* ['Our Total Income, 1925-1940']. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 27-97 1/6.

anyone willing to build a house with extra rooms to rent. Fodor jumped at this opportunity. Paying cash for a lot on Ábel Jenő Street in Buda in 1929, Fodor began construction on his house in March 1931. With the Depression creating conditions in which materials were cheap and labour readily available, Fodor was able to complete construction on the house by the end of the summer.²¹ Though Fodor may have seen the financial success of his scholarly work as a “blessing,” his construction project raised a number of eyebrows, in particular amongst some of his closest colleagues. It is very likely, in fact, that his professional and financial successes created envy amongst his contemporaries, something that is worth taking into consideration when trying to explain the deteriorating relationship with his colleagues and former students (Hajdú 2014, Lendvai Timár 2014).

By the end of the 1930s, Fodor had few high-ranking allies left in Budapest. Teleki had effectively distanced himself from his erstwhile friend and disciple, while some of Fodor’s brightest students—and most notably Tibor Mendöl and Béla Bulla—had achieved the academic credentials necessary to compete with and even replace him within the academy. Bulla, for example, was made head of the geography division at the Eötvös Collegium in 1939,²² while Mendöl would soon after be awarded the Chair of Human Geography at Pázmány Péter University (today’s ELTE). It is within this context that we need to understand his transfer to and perceived “exile” in Pécs at the beginning of World War II.

²¹ Fodor wrote: “God has brought us through very sad times, and with his help I have been able to build a house for my family. It has been ten years since the signing of Trianon. We have been inundated by a complete economic collapse. The unemployment is incredible. But it is precisely because of this that the building of the house was as cheap as it was.” [*Nagyon szomorú időkben segített hozzá a jó Isten, hogy hajlékot emeljek családomnak. Trianon tizedik évfordulójának idejében vagyunk. A gazdasági válság hullámai mindent elborítottak már. A munkanélküliség óriási. De éppen emiatt olcsóbb az építkezés.*] See Fodor Ferenc (1931): *Emlékezetül*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/4., p. 12.

²² Szabó Miklósnak az Eötvös Collegium igazgatójának levele Incze Péterhez, Teleki Pál miniszterelnök titkárához [‘letter from Miklós Szabó to Péter Incze, secretary to Prime Minister Pál Teleki’], Budapest 1940. January 10. ELTE Egyetemi Levéltár, Eötvös Collegium Levéltára 26/a, 41. d. 72/1 dosszié.

World War II

Beginning in January 1940 with his transfer to the provincial city of Pécs to act as school district superintendent (an appointment which lasted until February 1943), and ending with the Siege of Budapest in the winter of 1944-45, the war years were a time of great uncertainty and sadness for Fodor, not just because of the violent military conflict that consumed Hungary and all of Europe at the time, but also because of his own personal disappointments and perceived professional defeats.

It was sometime in the middle of October 1939 that Fodor learned through a third party that Bálint Hóman, the Minister of Culture and Education, wanted to appoint him as school district superintendent in Pécs, which was at centre of a school district that included a significant number of ethnic Germans. As Vira would later suggest in her biography of Fodor, concern over the agitation being stirred up by the German population in the Pécs area had reached such a point that Teleki required a “strong-handed, thoroughly trustworthy Hungarian personality” to shoulder the burden of Hungarian cultural politics in the region [*egy erőskezű, feltétlenül megbízható magyar egyéniségre volt szükség ehhez a munkához, és Teleki férjében látta ezt az egyéniséget*].²³ Fodor also spoke publicly of his appointment in this light, but whatever pride he may have expressed in his new position was undermined by feelings of inadequacy, disappointment, and even betrayal. Given the fact that he had to move to Pécs and give up his university professorship in Budapest, this appointment was less of an honour than it was an imposition. Though he attempted to play up the importance of his work from a nationalist point of view, Fodor no doubt regarded the transfer as a professional demotion, an unmistakable step backwards in his career, and a waste of his scholarly talents.²⁴ Pres-

²³ Fodor Ferencné Fenczik Vira (1963): *Fodor Ferenc geográfus életének főbb eredményei és állomásai*. MTA Könyvtár Kéziratár, Ms 10.740/77, p. 24; see also Fodor Ferenc (1946): *A magyar lét földrajza* [‘The Geography of Hungarian Being’]. MTA Könyvtár Kéziratár, Ms 10739/I. szöveg, 689 p., Ms 10739/II. ábrák., p. 1.

²⁴ The move to Pécs certainly must have evoked memories of his move to Karánsebes in 1911. Reflecting in December 1944 on his transfer to Pécs in 1940, Fodor referred to the region as a last line of Hungarian defence [*végvidék*]. See Fodor Ferenc (1946): *A magyar lét földrajza*. MTA Könyvtár Kéziratár, Ms 10739/I. szöveg, 689 p., Ms 10739/II. ábrák., p. 1.

sured to accept the position by Teleki (who at the time was serving as prime minister), Fodor resigned himself to his fate. Indeed, it was not as if he really had any choice in the matter.

In the end, Fodor was neither able, nor evidently even willing, to completely ignore or conceal the profound sense of alienation, loneliness, and despair that he felt now that he had been returned to the “margins” of the nation. An excerpt from a letter written to his wife on January 28, 1940 illustrates the melancholic depths to which he was so prone to sinking:

Dear Vira,

My entire day was so difficult for me. It pains me so deeply that I am not able to go home. The work days pass somehow, but the weekends are so incredibly difficult to bear. Yesterday, Saturday afternoon, I was completely out of sorts, though the day passed somehow. But today has been really hard. I was at mass this morning, and then spent half an hour walking with two professors in the falling snow. At noon I went to visit the bishop, but by the afternoon I hardly knew what to do with myself. In the evening I went to the movies, so that I wouldn't be so terribly alone. I saw Zilahy's film. It was wonderful, and you should go see it as soon as possible. And now, after a sad supper, I am writing to you. But I don't want to complain. Why should I make both our situations worse?²⁵

[Drága Virám!]

Ma egész nap nagyon nehéz volt nekem! Úgy fájt, hogy nem tudtam hazamenni. A munkanapok még csak eltelnek valahogyan, de az ünnepek már nagyon nehezek. Tegnap, szombat délután is nagyon nyugtalan voltam, de ez még csak eltelt valahogy. De a mai nap igen nehéz

²⁵ Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye. Fodor Ferenc levele feleségének, Virának [‘letter from Ferenc Fodor to his wife Vira’]. Pécs, 1940. January 28.

*volt. Reggel misén voltam a Maurinumban, azután egy félórát elsétálgattam két professzorral a hóesésben. Délben a püspöknél voltam látogatáson, de már délután alig tudtam mit csinálni. Estefelé azután elmentem egy mozi-
ba, hogy ne legyek olyan szörnyen egyedül. Zilahy film-
jét néztem meg. Csodálatos film, nézzétek meg mielőbb.
Most azután a szomorú vacsora után neked írok. De
panaszkodni nem akarok, miért nehezítsem mindket-
tőnk életét?]*

In the midst of all the hardship and misery, however, Fodor held out hope that his “exile” in Pécs would be short-lived. Clinging to the belief that he was far too valuable as a pedagogue and scholar to be used indefinitely in such a peripheral social, cultural, and political capacity, he comforted himself with thoughts of returning to Budapest to resume his scholarly, nation-building work. Fodor’s optimism peaked in the summer of 1940 when he learned that the Chair of Human Geography at the University of Budapest had recently been created within the Institute of Geography. On May 27th, Fodor discussed the possibility of being appointed to the position with Bálint Hóman. According to Fodor’s account of the meeting, Hóman responded positively, encouraging Fodor to apply [*Felhívlak, hogy add be pályázatodat!*].²⁶ Teleki was also supportive, at least from Fodor’s point of view.²⁷

Buoyed by the reassurances of both men, Fodor immediately began preparing his application, ever conscious in the six-page autobiographical essay that was to serve as his *Curriculum Vitae* of casting himself as a patriotic Hungarian scholar whose life’s work had been dedicated to furthering the cultural, moral, and spiritual development of the nation. Though Fodor admitted to his wife in a letter dated May 31, 1940 that the application process itself entailed “a great deal of work” [*ez bizony elég nagy munka*], he was quite obviously energized, and even relieved, by the prospect of returning home to such a prestigious teaching position. Ac-

²⁶ Fodor Ferenc (1959): *Életem eseményei (1887–1959)*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/2., p. 34.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

knowledging the loneliness that they had both been feeling, Fodor wrote: “perhaps the difficult situation won’t last much longer. I myself truly believe that I will be able to move back to Budapest sooner than you think” [*Mégis talán már nem sokáig tart ez a nehéz helyzet. Én most nagyon bízom benne, hogy sikerül mielőbb visszakerülni Pécsre*]. He concluded the letter with the same sense of optimism, asking her “not to worry,” adding that “you’ll see that everything will be fine, that there won’t be any problem. You just need to hold out a bit longer” [*ne nyugtalankodj, meglátod, minden jó lesz, és nem lesz semmi baj, csak még kissé tarts ki*].²⁸

On January 2, 1941, however, Fodor received the shocking news that his application had failed. Hóman had broken his promise, appointing one of Fodor’s former students, Tibor Mendöl, to the position instead.²⁹ The rejection was a bitter pill to swallow, especially since Fodor had interpreted Hóman’s and Teleki’s encouragement as a guarantee that the appointment would be his. The feeling that he had been betrayed only served to heighten his sense of estrangement from everything he had achieved prior to the war in his personal and professional life. In “*Életem eseményei*” Fodor would later write: “The year began with the terrible disappointment that the chair had been given to someone else, despite Hóman’s and Teleki’s assurances. Now the prospects of returning to Budapest seemed dismal indeed” [*Az év azzal a szörnyű csalódással kezdődött, hogy az emberföldrajzi tanszéket mással töltötték be, Hóman és Teleki biztatása ellenére. Most már igen borúsak a Budapestre visszakerülés kilátásai*].³⁰

²⁸ Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye. Fodor Ferenc levele feleségének, Virának [‘letter from Ferenc Fodor to his wife Vira’]. Pécs, 1940. May 31. This optimism was echoed in a letter written twelve days earlier, perhaps in response to news that a new chair was to be created. In it he asks Vira not to worry, that God will help them in these dark times, concluding that “I believe that we will pass through these times peacefully” [*Én hiszem, hogy mi békésen kihúzzuk az időt*]. Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye. Fodor Ferenc levele feleségének, Virának [‘letter from Ferenc Fodor to his wife Vira’]. Pécs, 1940. May 19.

²⁹ Ironically, Fodor had made a point in his *Curriculum Vitae* of singling out Mendöl as one of his more successful former students. Two other former students he singled out were Béla Bulla and László Kádár. See Fodor Ferenc (1940): *Önéletrajz/Curriculum Vitae*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/1., p. 5.

³⁰ Fodor Ferenc (1959): *Életem eseményei (1887–1959)*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/2., p. 35.

Despite how dismal his prospects may have seemed in 1941, Fodor managed to secure a new position in 1943 as the Director of the Budapest Region School District [*budapestvidéki tankerületi főigazgató*]. It was, obviously, a “great relief” [*nagy megnyugvás*]³¹ for Fodor to return to the capital, to be reunited with his family and friends, and to have an opportunity to get his career back on track. A series of honours and successes in the first half of 1943, in fact, gave the impression of a triumphant return. Fodor’s “triumphs,” many of which were reported in local newspapers, came in quick succession.³² On February 15, Fodor officially took up his position as school district superintendent for the Pest region. Four days later, he was elected head of the youth branch of the Hungarian Red Cross, a position of some national import that drew public attention to a lifetime of nation-building work.³³ Only two-and-a-half weeks after this, Fodor’s book on *Jászság* was published to favourable reviews. Later, in May, it was announced that *A Jászság életrajza* had won the Serbán prize from the Hungarian Academy of Science.

However, no matter what respite his reassignment to Budapest and subsequent triumphs may have offered, his introspective ruminations over the deeply interconnected future of both nation and self did not wane. Indeed, a host of hostile and overtly destructive forces, both internal and external, threatened to overwhelm the nation, and him with it. On the home front, the political ascendancy of radical right-wing factions during the war contributed to rising tensions throughout the country, and even in Budapest itself, a city that Fodor found to be as socially and politically volatile as the Dél-Dunántúl region (in which Pécs is situated).³⁴ Fodor’s

³¹ Ibid., p. 40. Summarizing the year 1943, Fodor wrote: “I finally, at long last, found a position back in Budapest. It was a great relief” [*Végre véglegesen megtaláltam a munkakörömet. Nagy megnyugvás*].

³² Fodor Ferenc családjának gyűjteménye. Fodor Ferenc-albumok, Újságvivágások [‘newspaper clippings’] 1940–1944.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Of his experiences in Dél-Dunántúl, he wrote: “It was there, in the incandescent ground of the nationalities, that I lived Hungarian political geography, not in theory, but in the course of every day events” [*Ott nem elméletileg, de a napi eseményekben, minden ízzel éltem a politikai földrajzot az akkor már izzó nemzetiségi talajon*]. Fodor Ferenc (1946): *A magyar lét földrajza*. MTA Könyvtár Kéziratár, Ms 10739/I. szöveg, 689 p., Ms 10739/II. ábrák., p. 1.

concern over Hungary's internal instability—whether this was understood in social, cultural, political, or existential terms—was only exacerbated by the growing realization that Germany, and Hungary with it, was on the verge of losing the war. Like many Hungarians, Fodor worried as news of German and Hungarian military disasters poured in from the Russian front, and could only guess at what might become of a nation squeezed between the advancing Soviets bent on total victory, and the retreating remnants of a once-mighty German army ordered to fight to the bitter end.

Hungary itself became a battleground in 1944, with the fighting reaching the outskirts of Budapest by late autumn of the same year. Though defeat seemed inevitable, Hitler nevertheless ordered his forces to make a final stand in Budapest against the Red Army, thus sealing the fate of the city, and with it the nation.³⁵ Barricaded alongside German and Hungarian troops within Hitler's so-called "*Festung* [Fortress] Budapest," the people of the Hungarian capital found themselves caught in the middle of a prolonged siege whose duration and ferocity were surpassed only by the sieges of Leningrad and Stalingrad earlier in the war (Ungváry 2003). Beginning with the successful encirclement of the city in December 1944, the Siege of Budapest began in earnest on December 25, and did not lift until February 1945 when the Soviets finally managed to crush the last pockets of German resistance. It is worth noting that, by the time of the siege, Fodor was no longer working in the service of the state. After the Arrow Cross Party [*Nyilaskeresztes Párt*] came to power in October 1944, Fodor (who rejected their fascist principles) was relieved of his position as school district superintendent and "forced into temporary retirement" [*rendelkezési állományba helyezték*]. Following the occupation of Budapest by the Soviets at the end of February 1945, Fodor was reinstated, if only briefly, to his former position.³⁶

³⁵ As Fodor wrote in his unpublished diary of the Siege of Budapest, Hungary had virtually escaped Allied bombs until April 1944, when Germany occupied a recalcitrant Hungary in response to the Horthy government's attempts to negotiate a separate peace with the allies, and their simultaneous reluctance to fully implement the Final Solution, especially in Budapest. Fodor Ferenc (1944–1945): *Buda ostromának naplója* ["Diary of the Siege of Budapest"]. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/7., p. 1.

³⁶ Fodor Ferenc (1959): *Életem eseményei (1887–1959)*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/2., p. 42., 44.

The Communist Period

For Fodor and his family, the years immediately following the communist takeover in 1948-49 marked a difficult, miserable, and ultimately frightening period—as Hajdú writes, these marked Fodor’s “anxious retirement years” [*nyugdíjas nyugtalanság évei*] (Hajdú 2006, XXI). In 1945, Fodor underwent political screening, both at the Ministry of Religion and Public Education [*Vallás- és Közoktatásügyi Minisztérium*], and at the university. Though his name was cleared in both cases, the Secretary of State for Culture informed Fodor that he “must submit his request for retirement,” as the minister required his position in order to fulfill “party obligations” [*be kell adnom nyugdíjazási kérvényemet, mert a miniszternek politikai okokból szüksége van helyemre a pártok követeléseit folytán*].³⁷ Fodor was assured that he would be reappointed as a professor to the Faculty of Economics at the university once he resigned his position as school district superintendent, but this never happened, and so in July 1946 he found himself officially retired.

Under the leadership of Mátyás Rákosi, the Hungarian Workers Party [*Magyar Dolgozók Pártja*] began implementing a repressive system modelled on the Stalinist example already in place in the Soviet Union. The profound hopelessness and even fear that Fodor had felt in the period of political and economic uncertainty that followed the war now became much more palpable. Watching as the communists implemented increasingly oppressive measures against Hungarian society at large, and the middle class in particular, Fodor was again left to wonder what possible future there could be for himself, his loved ones, and the nation.

Though Fodor and his family escaped the mass deportations from Budapest that began at the end of June 1951 (an action that affected between 14,000 and 15,000 people primarily in the more affluent middle-class districts of the city; see Mark 2005, 967), their house was eventually nationalized in February 1952, after which he was forced to pay rent for a home that he and his family had once owned outright. His pension, in turn, was not paid out to him in full, and was even briefly suspended. Perhaps the greatest personal indignity he suffered, however, was having to apply to

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

the *Tudományos Minősítő Bizottság* (Academic Accreditation Committee, or TMB) for academic reaccreditation. His first application to the TMB was submitted on December 31, 1952, not long after the establishment of the board itself. After waiting two years without receiving a response, Fodor again applied, only to be rejected once more. Undeterred, Fodor tried his luck again two years later, this time soliciting the assistance of the geographer and Academician Béla Bulla, a former Eötvös Collegium student and colleague from the interwar period who he considered to be a friend, and who had clearly been much more successful than Fodor at integrating himself into the new academic order (on Bulla see Györi and Gyuris 2012; Marosi 2006; Hajdú 2009, XIII). Despite whatever efforts Bulla may have made on Fodor's behalf (we have no information as to what action Bulla took), the application failed. This was followed by yet another unsuccessful application the following year when Fodor submitted a much longer manuscript on the history of Hungarian geography to be considered as his doctoral dissertation. Yet another application—Fodor's fifth in eight years—was filed three years later, in February 1960. Like each of his earlier attempts at re-accreditation, this one also failed (for more on Fodor's attempts to remain academically relevant see Jobbitt 2014 and 2015).

Despite his many difficulties under communism as well as his deteriorating health, Fodor actively sought out academic projects in the public sphere. In fact, between 1949 and 1957 (the year of his last publication), Fodor managed to publish no less than five books and lengthy essays, as well as thirteen scholarly articles. Though this body of work admittedly paled in comparison to the massive corpus he had compiled in the interwar period, it nevertheless marked an important scholarly contribution. Equally important were his unpublished manuscripts and autobiographical works (two of which are published in this volume).

The Documents

Though there is clear overlap between these four documents, each of them is unique in terms of its purpose, and even its style, and each of them

adds something new to our understanding of the life and times of Ferenc Fodor. Taken together, an introspective and often intimate picture emerges of Fodor as a scholar and individual whose life and work spanned important and in some ways radically different periods of Hungarian history from the late nineteenth century to the immediate post-1956 era.

As evidenced in the documents themselves, Fodor paid close attention to detail, and was able to provide remarkably precise dates for events that happened early on in his life (his “*Életem eseményei*” is remarkable in this sense). Beyond the details he provides, his commentary, and the language he employs, is of particular interest. So much is revealed about how Fodor saw himself, the world, and his place in it. These documents provide excellent insight into the way a middle-class conservative-nationalist intellectual of admittedly humble origins dealt not only with the immediate concerns of his personal and professional life, but also with pressing issues like economic hardship, political change, social marginalization, Hungary’s territorial dismemberment, and the trauma of war more generally. Indeed, one crucial aspect that each of these documents shares is that they were produced during very difficult periods in Fodor’s life, periods in which he appears to have retreated into the past and into his own life narrative as a way to counteract the many disappointments and anxieties of the present.

These documents originally belonged to the collection of Fodor’s writings kept by his family, and are today held in the archives of the *Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum* (The Hungarian Museum of Water Administration and Environmental Protection) in Esztergom. The original documents are themselves preserved in good condition and are easily readable. Of the four, “*Emlékeztül*,” “*Curriculum Vitae*,” and “*Életem eseményei*” are type-written, while “*Élettörténet*” is hand-written. Similar to his unpublished scholarly manuscripts, there are sections of both “*Életem eseményei*” and “*Élettörténet*” in which Fodor added updated pages to his completed text in order to include additional information or to correct inaccuracies and mistakes that he had discovered. The documents are published here in their full length with neither major alterations nor omissions. The only changes that we made while editing the texts were to correct the syntax where it did not conform to current grammatical conventions. We also corrected proper names (of people and places) where

necessary. As editors we feel that these documents are understandable without commentary, which is why the reader will not find any explanatory footnotes accompanying the text.

Emlékezetül (1931)

This is a short, 13-page type-written document that Fodor composed in Budapest. Dated June 21, 1931, Fodor clearly intended this autobiographical time capsule to be rediscovered sometime in the future. As he wrote in pencil on the top of the first page of the archival source: “This is a copy of the document that was placed in the cornerstone of our house” [*Házunk zárkövében 1931-ben elhelyezett okmány másolata*].³⁸ The document begins with Fodor explaining to whoever finds it that it has been written for his descendants. It is a story of his own past, and of the hard work he had done to get where he was at that stage of his life. It is significant from a gendered point of view that “*Emlékezetül*” is about him, and not Vira (she is virtually absent from the story he tells). His ancestors, however, are central to the story he relates at the very beginning of his narrative. He also clearly links his own family history to Hungarian history, and to his own vision of an authentic Hungarian past.

Central to the text are his reflections on the post-WWI period up to 1931. The language he employs reveals how he endeavoured to convey not just the bleakness of the present, but also the uncertainty the future, despite the fact that individuals like Lord Rothermere in Britain and Mussolini in Italy supported Hungary’s calls for a revision of the Treaty of Trianon. Fodor also defends the building of his house during desperate economic times, indicating that only Christians were involved in its construction. The theme of hard work in the face of great difficulties runs through the text as well, as do his religious convictions (his house, for example, was built “with the help of God” [*Ezt a házat Isten segítségével saját erőmre támaszkodva emeltem*]).³⁹ As in all other documents pub-

³⁸ Fodor Ferenc (1931): *Emlékezetül*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/4., p. 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

lished here, he mentions the work he did at the Eötvös Collegium, casting, as he does later in his “*Curriculum Vitae*,” the importance of this work in explicitly nation-building terms.

Curriculum Vitae (1940)

This short document was written in Pécs and dated 1940. In all likelihood, it was the CV that he sent as part of his application for the Chair of Human Geography in Budapest in 1940. The structure of the CV may also have been influenced by the Second Jewish Law [*második zsidótörvény*] passed by the Hungarian parliament on May 5, 1939. Article 5 of the law stated that “Jews shall not be allowed to work as civil servants or as staff in the service of the state, municipal authorities, or village entities; likewise they shall be barred from employment with other public bodies, public institutions, and public utilities” [*Tisztviselőként vagy egyéb alkalmazottként zsidó nem léphet az állam, törvényhatóság, község, úgyszintén bármely más közttestület, közintézet vagy közüzem szolgálatába*].⁴⁰ It is no wonder, then, why Fodor placed great emphasis on his family’s history at the very beginning of the document. He also briefly mentions his work at the Eötvös Collegium on pages 3 and 5, noting that he had a hand in producing great scholars like Tibor Mendöl, Béla Bulla, and László Kádár.

Életem eseményei (post-WWII)

It is hard to determine exactly when Fodor began writing this document, though it is likely he began compiling it in Pécs in the early 1940s. All we can know for certain is that he stopped working on this sometime after Christmas 1959, which was the last entry in the document.

Though “*Életem eseményei*” is not written in narrative form, it provides important factual and chronological information that helps us to situate Fodor’s life in a broader historical context. Writing of his life in the

⁴⁰ <http://www.1000ev.hu/index.php?a=3¶m=8098>

pre-Trianon period, for example, Fodor makes note of significant international events like the assassination of Queen Elisabeth (*Erzsébet királyné*) in 1898 and the murder of the King of Serbia in 1903, not to mention the First and Second Balkan Wars in 1912 and 1913, as well as the outbreak of the war between Russia and Japan in February 1904 (he indicates that Hungary had great sympathy for Japan in this conflict). He also mentions internal political issues (see, for example, his entry for January 1906, in which he writes: “The coalition wars have reached a climax. A concerted resistance is being mounted, the Tulip Movement [a movement to encourage Hungarians to buy Hungarian products] has begun” [*A koalíciós harcok tetőpontjukon vannak. Megindul a végső ellenállás, megkezdődik tulipán-mozgalom*]).⁴¹ In addition, he notes the deaths of prominent Hungarian figures like Kossuth and Jókai. The fact he mentions these domestic and international events prior to WWI suggests how formative they may have been in his life.

The document also provides some key insight into the way that a member of what might usefully be called the newly enfranchised middle class experienced Hungary’s transition into the twentieth century. Fodor’s observations on what he thought was important about his own past provide us with a window on the life of someone who was in many ways upwardly mobile and breaking into a world from which members of his own class were previously excluded.

In addition, this autobiographical text sheds important light on how, as a young man, he went about “discovering” Hungary on his own terms, and with his own eyes (he mentions, for example, his first trip to Budapest in 1904; his first glimpse of Balaton on Nov. 27, 1909; his first real visit to Debrecen in 1910; and his many excursions to places in the Hungarian countryside where he had never been before). What emerges, therefore, is a picture of a man who doesn’t just want “to see” the country, but “to know” it completely and intimately.

Of real interest in this document is the way different periods of his life are framed and characterized “emotionally.” No doubt this was unintentional on his part, but the relative balance of historical with per-

⁴¹ Fodor Ferenc (1959): *Életem eseményei (1887–1959)*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/2., p. 4.

sonal details provides us with a sense of how he understood—and even periodized—his life in emotional terms. The pages dedicated to his early childhood and teenage years in Transylvania are (perhaps unsurprisingly) remembered fondly, even “hopefully,” as if the future was wide open to him. The period of his life between his graduation from university up to the outbreak of WWI is marked by painful memories of his relationship with Vira in the years leading up to their marriage in 1913. These appear to have been emotionally tortured years for Fodor (see Jobbitt 2008, 68–75). The 1930s was marked by some unmentioned conflict with Teleki, and thus also by increased levels of stress, depression, and emotional anxiety. Fodor notes that his relationship with Teleki seriously deteriorated in 1931, and only worsened in 1934 and again in 1935. This and other personal and professional troubles affected his health, so much so that he spent almost a month in a sanatorium [*idegszanatórium*] between January 15 and February 12, 1936. As he wrote: “I was in the Hárshegyí Sanatorium, completely worn out by the campaign being waged against me, by my troubles with Teleki, by our financial difficulties, and because of my inability to get ahead at the university” [*A hárshegyí idegszanatóriumban voltam, teljesen kimerültem az ellenem folytatott hajsza, Telekivel való bajok, anyagi nehézségek és az egyetemen való elrekedés miatt*].⁴² Fodor in turn remembered the post-WWII period through a fog of existential gloom, and because of this we get a full sense of the fear and uncertainty that consumed him after the consolidation of communism in Hungary in 1948–49 (see Jobbitt 2014 and 2015).

Élettörténet (1941–1950)

Unlike the other documents published in this collection, “*Élettörténet*” [‘Life History’] has no cover page and so we have used the title given it by the Danube Museum [*Duna Múzeum*] archivists. It is likely that Fodor had a proper title in mind but there no evidence available to us to discern what this might have been.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

Fodor began writing this autobiographical text in Pécs on January 8, 1941, returning to it only sporadically over the course of nearly a full decade. Given the space he devotes to tracing his family's roots, as well as the detailed, year-by-year account of the major events of his life to 1924, we can only assume that his intention was to write a full history of his life, but that the project was abandoned for some reason in December 1950, and that it remained incomplete upon his death in 1962. Despite the fact that this is very much a fragment of a much longer story, Fodor's account is nevertheless a valuable one, and tells us much not only about his frame of mind during the 1940s, but also about what he considered to be significant developments in his life (at least up to 1924), and perhaps more importantly, about how he wanted to be remembered by future generations.

Fodor's "*Élettörténet*" was written in four separate bursts of writing. The first was between January and March 1941 when he wrote twenty-three handwritten pages. The opening entry, written on January 8, 1941, displays Fodor's penchant for the dramatic, but also lays bare the broader existential concerns that consumed him throughout his life and especially in his later years. Affected not only by the war, but also by his recent scholarly demotion and "exile" in Pécs, Fodor was consumed by questions of the meaning of his own life, as well as the nature of his origins and his family's roots in Hungarian history. He was preoccupied, as well, by the fear that he, too, may one day be forgotten. As he wrote: "It is pleasing to reminisce, and to scrutinize the path my life has taken. I examine myself, and I record my memories for those who later might appreciate remembering me when they read what I have written. I know how much it hurts sometimes, how, in the absence of memory, the lives, fates, and struggles of my ancestors have been cloaked in obscurity by the past. I know very little about them; I hardly know where they came from, and where I came from" [*Jólesik visszanéznem, és vizsgálnom életem útjait. Vizsgálom magamnak, és emlékszem azok számára, akiknek majd talán kedves lesz visszaemlékezni ezekből a sorokból reám is. Tudom, mennyire fáj néha, hogy elődeim életét, sorsát, küzdelmeit homályba takarja a múlt, az emlékezet hiánya. Keveset tudok róluk, alig tudom, honnan*

jöttek, honnan jöttem].⁴³ As in his unpublished monographs “Szatmár’s Land, Szatmár’s People, Szatmár’s Life” [*Szatmár földje, Szatmár népe, Szatmár élete*] and “The Geography of Hungarian Being” [*A magyar lét földrajza*], the epic quality of his writing speaks volumes not just about his literary disposition, but also about how he viewed himself as a historical figure. It also speaks to his desire to “properly” remember the past in order to be “properly” remembered in the future (for more on this see Jobbitt 2011a, 2013).

Alongside fond memories of his childhood in Tenke, Fodor wrote in this first section about his family roots. Concerned, perhaps, that future generations might question his Hungarianness, and anxious to relate his fond childhood memories of Tenke, Fodor dedicated the first pages of his “*Élettörténet*” to a sustained genealogical discussion of his family and its history, concluding that, as far as he could tell, the “blood” that flowed through his veins was without a doubt Hungarian. There may admittedly have been “some Pecheneg blood” in him, but he was convinced of the purity of his Hungarian roots [*Az kétségtelen, hogy családomban kizárólag magyar, legföljebb besenyő vér lehet, de más nem*].⁴⁴ He was certain, as well, that his relatives on both sides of the family had been in the Körös Valley for at least four generations, and concludes that he can feel the land [*táj*] deep in his soul, and especially in his blood. As he concludes: “In the final analysis, all of my ancestors have been members of the Hungarian population of the Körös Valley for at least four generations. I myself feel this land deeply in my soul, it courses through my blood, this is my homeland” [*Végeredményben azonban visszamenőleg legalább 4 nemzedéke minden őszámomnak a Körös-völgyi magyarság része volt. Magam is ezt a tájat érzem legközelebb a lelkemhez, ezt érzem leginkább véremben, ez a szülőföldem*].^{45, 46}

⁴³ Fodor Ferenc (1941–1950): *Élettörténet*. Magyar Környezetvédelmi és Vízügyi Múzeum (MKVM) Dokumentációs Gyűjtemény H-20/1 28-97. 1/3., p. 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁶ The idea of being embedded or rooted in the land is repeated in a very interesting passage that Fodor wrote on May 19, 1948, when he reflected on a trip he took to England with Hungarian boy scouts in the summer of 1922. As he notes: “I owe a great deal to my trip to England. This provided me with my first glimpse into life in Western Europe. What I saw and experienced there lured me towards such a life; it tempted me to abandon our beggarly existence. This desire, however, remained a mere rootless daydream.

For almost a year, Fodor wrote nothing, and only returned to his narrative on January 20, 1942, when he wrote five and a half pages that dealt with his family's move to Szatmár in September 1898, as well as with his first three years in the Catholic gymnasium there. Another five years would pass before he picked up his pen again in Budapest in October 1947, writing more or less consistently until July 7, 1948. This section of the document is the longest, and is dedicated to a year-by-year overview of his life as a student in Szatmár and Budapest, as a teacher in Karánsebes, and then as a scholar back in Budapest after WWI. Covering the years 1901 to 1924, this remarkably rich and introspective section of the text provides a glimpse into conservative-nationalist life on the geographical margins of pre-Trianon Hungary, and also documents important events and social and political changes in rump Hungary [*Csonka-Magyarország*] after WWI.

He also makes note of his very early work at the Eötvös Collegium, indicating that he was invited to teach there in September 1923. As in his "*Curriculum Vitae*," he mentions that he taught Mendöl, Bulla, and Kádár. He writes that the lectures he gave were on a very high level [*ezek az előadások igen magas színvonalon mozogtak*],⁴⁷ and indicates that the students were exceptional. He also mentions who the directors were at the time (namely Géza Bartoniek, Zoltán Gombocz, and Miklós Szabó), and notes that the supervisor [*kurátor*] was Teleki. He then writes: "Being able to lecture at the most prestigious institute in Hungary, I accomplished a great deal with my fellow teachers, though from a financial point of view this hardly amounted to anything" [*Igen sokat értem el ezzel a tanársággal, hiszen a legmagasabb színvonalú magyar intézetben adhattam elő, bár anyagilag ez alig jelentett valamit*].⁴⁸

Though opportunities often presented themselves, I could not bring myself to forsake my homeland, because I was so deeply rooted in Hungarian life and in the Hungarian land [*Angliai utazásomnak igen sokat köszönhettem. Itt nyílt először kilátás számomra a nyugat-európai élet felé. Amit láttam, ott megéltem, egész életemen át mély sóvárgással vonzott ilyen életre, kiszakadni a mi koldus-kicsiségünkéből, de ez a vágy mindig csak gyökértelen ábrándozás maradt, mert ha még alkalmam nyílt volna is erre, mint ahogy sokszor nyílt, annyira mélyen volt minden gyökerezve a magyar földben és életben, hogy nem tudhattam volna talajt változtatni*]. *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

Accounts of Fodor's involvement in the Hungarian Boy Scout movement also run through the entries composed in 1947 and 1948, as well as in the handful of pages he added on November 28 and December 3, 1950. As in documents like “*Életem eseményei*,” which dedicates a great deal of space to his boy scout work, Fodor's narrative illustrates just how important and central the boy scouts were to his life after WWI. Scouting was not just something he “did,” it was something he lived deeply. Scouting provided a moral code for him, and was something that he projected onto others (see Jobbitt 2011b). Remembering his son, who died tragically in 1936, Fodor wrote: “My dear son remained a devoted and pure scout until the last moments of his life. I will always be grateful to God that my son was able to grow up within this moral Hungarian youth movement, as it left its mark both physically and spiritually on his entire being” [*Drága jó kis fiam élete utolsó pillanatáig hűséges és tiszta cserkész maradt. Mindig hálás leszek az Úristennek, hogy az én fiam ebben a magas erkölcsi színvonalú ifjúsági mozgalomban nőhetet fel, hiszen testileg-lelkileg ez nyomta rá bélyegét egész lényére*].⁴⁹

From our point of view as scholars of Fodor's work, “*Élettörténet*” is the most melancholic, self-critical, and perhaps even honest of the four autobiographical accounts published here. Unlike “*Emlékezetül*,” which was written more than a decade earlier and records Fodor's self-perceived personal triumphs and professional successes, “*Élettörténet*” reflects on his many disappointments and failures, especially those of the 1930s and 1940s. Notably, he even reevaluates earlier periods of his life, admitting for example his shortcomings as a secondary school pupil and his sometimes unhappy relationship with his wife. We can assume, moreover, that the intended audience for at least parts of the manuscript would have been his immediate family. Certain passages, especially those that make direct reference to Vira, were likely intended as sharp, even bitter remarks.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Fodor's rediscovery since 1989

With his appointment as the superintendent of the Pécs School District in 1939, Fodor found himself on the periphery of the Hungarian scholarly world, and after World War II there was no real chance of regaining his prewar academic position. Hungarian geography, along with all other scholarly fields, was faced with the growing Sovietization of the discipline in the second half of the 1940s. (In his history of Hungarian geography written after the war, Fodor described the Soviet-style transformation of the field, writing that: "What has happened since 1944 is not the history of science, but rather politics, and it marked first the breaking, and ultimately the burial, of our science. The history of science can not speak of this today, but there can be no doubt that one day it must, and will, speak of it" [*Ami 1944 óta történt, az már nem tudománytörténet, az már politika, és tudományunk derékbatörése, majd elhantolása. Erről ma még nem szólhat a tudománytörténet, de egykor kétségtelenül szólania kell és szólani fog*] (Fodor 2006, 285)). Fodor himself was largely ignored after the war, and after his death, completely forgotten. No obituaries of him appeared in any Hungarian geographical journals in the year he died, nor were there any attempts to publish works in his memory, or critical evaluations of his life's work. As Zoltán Dövényi accurately put it: "When Ferenc Fodor died in May 1962, the entire Hungarian geographical community acted as if nothing had happened, as if one of the discipline's most prolific geographer's had not just gone to his grave" [*Amikor 1962 májusában Fodor Ferenc meghalt, az akkori magyar földrajztudomány úgy tett, mintha semmi sem történt volna, mintha nem is az egyik legnagyobb életművel rendelkező geográfusunk szállt volna a sírba*] (Dövényi 2006, IX).

Under socialism, Fodor's work was no longer cited, not even in the bibliographies of university courses. Though a few geographers who were interested in the history of geography did read Fodor's handwritten *A magyar földrajztudomány története* ['The History of Hungarian Geography'] (Hajdú 2006, XII), it was not until the end of the 1990s that interest in Fodor's life's work began to grow. It is worth noting, in fact, how the editors of this volume first became acquainted with Fodor and his geographical scholarship. It was as a student of Professor Ferenc Probáld at ELTE

in 1998 that Róbert Győri was introduced to some of Fodor's interwar work. At the end of his seminar, Probáld lent Robi a number of folders full of photocopied archival material that had only recently come into his possession: it was Fodor's *A magyar földrajztudomány története*. Robi read these sources with great excitement; it was as if he was reading banned *samizdat* publications, with the enigmatic nature of these documents—ones that had languished for decades in obscurity—only amplifying the intriguing nature of Fodor's work. When Steven Jobbitt arrived in Hungary as a doctoral candidate from the University of Toronto in 2003, Robi suggested that he might want to focus on Fodor as a case study for his research on knowledge production and the impact of the Trianon trauma in post-WWI Hungary. As Steve discovered, Fodor had left behind a voluminous archive, one that allowed him to conduct research on the career and identity formation of one of Hungary's more prominent geographers from the first half of the twentieth century. Completing his archival research in 2004, Steve defended his dissertation on Fodor in 2008.

As the two examples above suggest, there are a number of reasons why Fodor's oeuvre has drawn the attention of researchers since the regime change in 1989. It is not much of an exaggeration to suggest, in fact, that it has been the very richness of his archive—one which includes unpublished scholarly manuscripts, numerous private papers, photo albums, personal recollections, and autobiographical fragments—that is largely responsible for his rediscovery. Simply put, there was much to discover. In many ways, it was as if in the last years of his life Fodor consciously endeavored to make materials available to future generations of researchers who would later engage in the study of his life's work. Researchers from different fields have, of course, utilized Fodor's very rich archive in different ways. For political historians, Fodor's professional relationship as a close colleague of Pál Teleki has proven interesting, while geographers have focused primarily on his scholarly work. Others see in Fodor an intellectual who was silenced under communism, and virtually exiled from scholarly life. In this context it is important to keep in mind that some of his published work has stood the test of time. This is especially true of *A Jászság életrajza*, which remains even today one of the key sources for regional historians studying the Jászság (there is even a street in Jászberény named after Fodor).

The renewed interest in Fodor's work has resulted not only in the republication of some of his earlier books, but also in the publication of a couple of rather large, previously unpublished manuscripts. The list of works published since 1989 begins with the reprinting of *A Jászság életrajza* in 1991 (Fodor 1991), which was followed by the publication of Fodor's biography of Teleki in 2001 (Fodor 2001). Written by Fodor in the late 1940s, the book was edited by Ferenc Tibor Szávai, and includes an essay by Lóránt Tilkovszky. Fodor's *A magyar földrajztudomány története* (Fodor 2006) appeared five years later. Published by MTA FKI, this monumental, 800-page study was edited by Zoltán Dövényi, and is accompanied by an introductory essay by Zoltán Hajdú. In 2009, Fodor's *Az elnemsodort falu* ['The Village That Was Not Swept Away'] was reprinted by the Department of Ethnography at the University of Debrecen. Edited by Róbert Keményfi, this volume also included an introductory essay by Zoltán Hajdú. At a conference held in 2012 at the Eötvös Collegium, scholars commemorated the 125th anniversary of Fodor's birth (and the 50th anniversary of his death) with critical examinations of the life and work of a one-time leading expert and teacher in the field (Győri 2012). Many of the papers presented at this conference were published as part of an Eötvös Collegium series in 2014 (Győri 2014). What we offer here as an overview of recent works related to Fodor merely scratches the surface, as close to three dozen studies on him and his work have been published in the last two and a half decades.

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