



## **István Povedák (ed.), *Heroes and Celebrities in Central and Eastern Europe*<sup>1</sup>**

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This volume integrates studies that were presented in 2011 in a conference under the same name organized at the University of Szeged, Hungary. The book contains seventeen studies and it was published in 2014 with the support of the Hungarian National Research Fund in co-operation with the MTA-SZTE Research Group for the Study of Religious Culture. The conference itself was realized with the co-operation of the “Gál Ferenc” College in Szeged and the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Szeged.

The concepts of celebrity and star are presented in many aspects and meanings through personalities whose stories of becoming stars, celebrities or heroes might be stunning for the readers. The greatest significance of the studies is that they not only present heroes known from the history books, with glorious deeds, but also personalities of the everyday life, who had both good and bad deeds, and exactly these deeds made them become heroes of their own nations. This tome is also highly opportune because it presents contemporary heroes who live among us as well as heroes of the past who have become significant symbols for their nations today.

One of the most appealing aspects of this book is that the personalities presented in this collection of studies are not represented only as positive protagonists due to their heroic deeds, but the studies also reveal facts that are not known to the larger public, and they also present significant personalities, well-known and adored among their own nations, even if nobody says out loud that actually they are seen as heroes, be them any positive or negative ones. These scientific writings are also easily readable thanks to their accessible language, so the book offers a good comprehension for anybody who is interested in anthropology, sociology, ethnography and folklore, but it also provides some very interesting stories and myths about stars, celebrities and heroes. This collection of studies is also highly recommended for those who show interest in communication and media

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because, in most of the cases, the presented mass-media played an incontestable role in forming local and national heroes or celebrities, providing remarkable examples for the art and science of mass communication. The book has high interdisciplinary relevance for the fields of anthropology, communication, mass media and urban folklore because each of the studies presents the heroes and the cults built around them over time with a deep analytic insight.

István Povedák, the editor of the book, in the introduction writes about the similarities and differences of the concepts of celebrity and hero, giving many examples. The title of the book itself reveals that there are many differences between a hero and a celebrity although many people consider these terms as synonyms. The studies are proof to the fact that in contemporary meaning a hero is someone who stands out for his or her beliefs, religion or nation; in this way, that person becomes an iconic personality for those who are represented by his or her person. In opposition, a celebrity is mostly somebody whose fame is built up by the media in such a manner that the celebrity in question exists only thanks to it. Heroes live among the people in tales, songs and even jokes. There is a third term that also needs to be explained: the star. Just like the real celestial bodies, the stars always shine; so, being a star means being famous in a positive meaning. Stars also have behind themselves a stronger, more giving and passionate camp of fans or supporters than celebrities. Being a celebrity is not such a positive and outstanding thing as being a star. On a three-step scale, we can say that heroes are on the top and celebrities are at the bottom of it. Stars are somewhere in the middle: they are to become heroes, but already more than celebrities. Stars still belong to the world of mass media; they rise to the state of a hero when their fame exists even without the media.

István Povedák also enumerates a few famous personalities who might be called celebrities or heroes no matter whether they are politicians like Lech Kaczyński, the former Polish president, or football fans like Željko Ražnatović Arkan, the leader of the Serb hooligans, who rose from being an anti-social and destructive criminal to the state of a true hero and patriot thanks to his beliefs and, in a strange way, to his not so human ways. Robbers may also become heroes like Attila Ambrus did, who is also known in popular culture as the Whiskey Robber or as The Hungarian Robin Hood. He robbed several banks, but most people conceived his deeds as a favour to the Hungarian banks and even to the Police: he revealed the vulnerability of the banks and showed the impotence of the Police. It can be said that as a robber he contributed to the improvement of the security in most of the Hungarian banks and he also made the Police to improve their methods in order to be more effective. We have the case studies of musicians like the Croatian Marko Perković Thompson, who ended up as a hero thanks to his patriotic songs, or even religious rulers like György Bulányi, who accomplished the mission to bring the Church through the Communist era by

building and leading small underground congregations. The stories of all these people and of even more can be read in this collection of studies.

Let us overview shortly the studies. The first study presents heroes generally from all around the world. Alexandr Golozubov's study titled *Hero and Anti-hero in the Consumer Society and the Totalitarian States. Philosophical-Anthropological Analysis* gives us a brief description about the concept of the hero as well as about the mentalities concerning heroes or heroism. We can find out that there are many differences between the heroes of the Western and the Eastern societies: while in the Western societies there are a lot of heroes in the actual meaning of the word, in the Eastern societies, the concept of the hero is about to disappear.

Ildikó Landgráf's study *Lajos Kossuth in Hungarian Folk Narratives* presents the importance of a Hungarian national hero for the contemporary nation. From the study, we can also find out that this historical personality appears as a hero of the battlefield. He was, however, the intellectual leader of the Hungarian Revolution and Fight for Independence from 1848, who became a hero of the nation in the wake of this independence war. He is nowadays remembered among Hungarians as a soldier and a king; he is also called "Hungary's Moses".

Lina Gergova's article *Enlightenment Leaders Day – Subjects and Objects* presents a Bulgarian feast that nowadays is held on the 1<sup>st</sup> of November. The study also presents how this feast has changed during time. This feast was originally meant to familiarize the Bulgarian youth with the personalities who contributed to the education and the development of the political and cultural life of Bulgaria. The most interesting about this celebration is that it had a very controversial history, but, although its meaning and content were changed, even banned by the authorities several times during the political regimes of the twentieth century, it still survived and even regained its original purpose.

Following the brief presentation of one of Bulgaria's national feasts, the book does not leave this country, presenting the stories of other national feasts of this nation: Kjetil Rå Hauge's study *Named or Unnamed, but not Unsung – Bulgarian National Heroes* reviews the most important national heroes of Bulgaria and the stories related to them. The main national celebrations are held on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March, the 24<sup>th</sup> of May, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of June and the 1<sup>st</sup> of November, each with different choreographies and in different locations. For instance, the celebrations on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of March are held in the memory of the Bulgarian heroes fallen in wars and according to the instructions of *The Field Manual of the Bulgarian Armed Forces*. This manual contains very detailed instructions so that there would be no complications during and after the celebrations. On this ceremony, the fallen heroes like Khan Kubrat, Yuvigi Khan Asparuh or Tsar Simeon the Great are called out as being present on the ceremony as active members of different battalions. The male members of the battalions call out the names of the heroes

and, in this way, the female members call out what the reputation of each hero was to the Bulgarian state and the Bulgarian nation.

The reader here faces a change in style: after the national feasts of historical heroes, there follows a study that presents us a hero who may not actually be considered a positive model. Eva Krekovicova, in her analysis *The Image of the Highwayman Juraj Janošík – Slovak National Hero or Bandit?* offers a brilliant example of how a person can be at the same time both a hero and an anti-hero. This study also lets us know that sometimes a hero does not become a hero because of his good deeds or virtues but for his rebellious behaviour; the actions against a persecuting state in the favour of his own community may raise someone to the status of a hero. The hero presented in this study, who lived between 1688 and 1713, had become a favourite personage for the Slovak and Polish romantic literature; he is still very famous even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Janošík often appears on the Internet, in different magazines, in arts and also in the political life as a model used by both the leading political party and the opposition in order to strengthen their own discourses. It is possible for both parties to use the same hero in their own favour because Juraj Janošík has a vast and open field of interpretation, and right from the beginnings he is being conceived on the ‘hero–anti-hero’ axis. The mythical figure of this hero used in the political communication as an anti-hero continued at the end of the Robert Fico’s government and even contributed to the victory of the coalition of centre-right parties in the parliamentary elections of 2010.

The case study written by István Kósa, László-Attila Hubbes and Csilla-Dalma Zsigmond<sup>2</sup> introduces us into the contribution of the world of social networking on the Internet to the popularity of an anti-hero. In their article *A Postmodern Hero in Hungarian Social Media. Attila Ambrus, the “Hungarian Robin Hood” – A Comparative Analysis of the “IWIW” Profiles of the “Whisky Robber”* the three authors present the comparison of three IWIW profiles of Attila Ambrus, the so-called “Whisky Robber”.<sup>3</sup> These three profiles were supposed to be the personal profiles of the “Hungarian Robin Hood”. The study focuses on the pictures uploaded onto these profiles, the titles given and the comments posted to them, the authors using comparative analysis for the three IWIW profiles of the Whiskey Robber. The fact that these three profiles had a very similar content and were registered close to each other in time offered a great opportunity to analyse three profiles on the same social network in order to create a unique comparative research in new visual media analysis, semiotics and discourse interpretation. The study also contains discussions about how provocative the pictures posted and their titles

2 Current professors at the University of the Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania.

3 IWIW used to be a Hungarian social network that has recently been closed. Its name comes from the first letters of its full name: International Who Is Who. It used to be very famous among the Hungarian people; it survived even when the world-wide social network, the Hi5, was on the top. Soon after Hi5 lost against Facebook, IWIW was also closed.

are, but the comments are also studied in details. The three researchers classify the comments according to the speech act typology of Austin and Searle, introducing a new speech act type: the qualificative/emotional-verdictive. The comments tell us a lot about their posters, for instance, the commenter's level of education. The case study also wants to show us the way how a media celebrity is reflected in the online social media and to find out how a single picture could produce a positive discourse when the Whiskey Robber's popularity was in a serious decline.

The book leads us next to the territory of the interconnections of sports with war and violence. The study of Alexandar Ivanovic titled *From the Stands onto the Frontline – The Story of How Hooligans Became Heroes* introduces us into the world of the football hooliganism in the Balkans. This is an exciting time travel from the beginnings to the present, including points like the relation of football and politics, the subjectivity of the press and the game itself as the field of the ethnic clashes. This study also reveals the fact that press and electronic media have an incontestable and very important role in creating heroes. The different interpretations of the deeds of football hooligans, the language they use to describe their lives and actions (for instance, the use of many military phrases), and even the subjectivity of the press and the terminology used also contributes to expand their fame. The press of that time also encouraged football hooliganism. The power and the ability of creating heroes of media are shown once again in this case study. Also, the connection between the elites, club management, media and fan club leaders cannot be missed.

In some way, the next case study belongs together to the previous one because they both discuss the same phenomenon in the same historical time and place. The hooligans belong to the marginal society although they have a powerful impact on central society. Maria Vivod's study titled *Heroes of the Serbian Nation – How Flamboyant Nationalism Influenced the Rise of Socially Marginal Individuals* explains on two levels how did certain individuals from the edge of society become national heroes. We can also find out that the leaders of the different paramilitary units, just like the convicts, can easily become heroes in case they support the expectancies of their society with their deeds. These men became heroes by acting for the society: the aim was the only thing that mattered instead of the human lives and the means to use. Militarized convicts became symbols of the liberation of nation. The semiotic sense of the 'hero' concept in the Serbian culture also has its interesting points: in Serbian folklore, the violent temper of a hero is an admirable mark. Politics and press also profit from this interpretation.

We take a turn, and the next example comes from the field of religion. The study written by András Máthé-Tóth titled *Heroes of the Faith in the Hungarian Underground Church* presents us the story of father György Bulányi, the founder of the so-called "bush-churches", which were small religious communities. These small grass-roots communities were founded in order to save and sustain

the message of the Christian religion through the period of the state socialism so it can rise again once the suppressing political system has fallen. Father György Bulányi has an important role in saving the Christian religion: as a leader, he was the one that these small communities had relied on, who had trusted him that he could bear his duty. He became a hero just by his role of a leader: he had to show courage and devotion towards his followers, but not only. The suppressing system, the one that wanted to eliminate him reached the exact opposite of it: as a rebel, who stood out for his communities and their targets, he truly became a hero quite in the reflection of the suppressing political ideology.

In close relation to the heroes of the underground church, in the next article we can read the story of Professor Sándor Bálint, a personality similar to Rev. György Bulányi. Gábor Barna's study titled *Why a Scholar Is Regarded as a Saint in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century? The Case of Sándor Bálint* tells us how an intellectual from the city of Szeged stands out for his family, his city and its treasures against the Communist regime. He has been punished several times for his intransigence and perseverance; this is why after his death he became a symbol and one of the most significant personalities of Szeged. His beatification is in progress.

We turn to the field of politics in this next study that presents us the tragic story of a statesperson. Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska's article *The Third Twin: A Post-Mortem Image of the Polish President Lech Kaczyński – On the Preformative Power of Mourning* shows us the case of the tragically deceased Polish president, Lech Kaczyński. The tragedy changed the image of the President even in the opposition; the mourning actually touched everybody and each segment of the society. The tragedy seemed to ensure the unification of the Polish society, but unfortunately this was only the appearance, so it did not become reality. His being a hero consists in this: besides his role of a leader, when he deceased, he was on a mission for his nation. In this interpretation of the disaster by the media, the whole country started to consider him as a hero who died in duty for his people. The interpretation of one's death as a heroic one also gives birth to a so-called 'post-mortem hero'.

After the story of a deceased politician-hero, we find a study presenting a still active politician. Povedák István's study titled *One from Us, One for Us: Viktor Orbán in Vernacular Culture* gives us a view of Viktor Orbán's presence in folklore. This political personality strongly divides the Hungarian society, although his role in the country's politics following the 1989 events is incontestable. The proper communication of his actions, his TV performances also contribute to making him a very symbolic and important personality in the political and social life of Hungary.

We have already read about heroes of the nation, heroes of sports, heroes from the politics, so we cannot miss the "heroes" from the music. In the next article, the notion of 'star' is introduced, a term that defines famous personalities exclusively in the sphere of media and entertainment. This case study is written by Francesca

Rolandi and it is titled *Between West and East: The Case Study of Đorđe Marjanović*. This study gives us a view of the progress of some of the former Yugoslavia's singers, actors and sportsmen, resisting against the suppressing ideology and the critics that came from the country's political system but also from the highly educated and properly skilled competition. Some of these celebrities managed to record the greatest annual income in the country. They were supported by the community, who raised special demands that were fulfilled by these musicians. This was the key to the fame; so, they first became stars, then idols. This study shows us this process through the story of a rock singer.

The next study gives us another example for a star that became a hero, but this time the story is strongly related to the battlefield. Neven Duvnjak's study is titled *Marco Petrović Thompson – National Hero or Croatia's Troublemaker?* This study shows us how a little melody born on the battlefield became the foundation stone of a whole system of traditions. The singer's style is very close to the folk-rock and was inspired by The Beatles, and it also embodies many religious and historical themes. He sang openly about the genocide of the Serbian nation, and there were used so many nationalist symbols by the audience on each of his concerts that the authorities banned the usage of such symbols during the performances. Talking about concerts and music performances, the presence of the media on these events is certain, just like in the process of elevating Marco Petrović Thompson. The foreign interpretations of his music make him a national hero of Croatia.

Ana Stefanova's *The Phenomenon of the Metal Mayor* gives us the story of a rock-music-fan Bulgarian mayor, who invited the most famous rock bands and singers from all around the world to give concerts in the small city governed by him. At the beginning, the citizens argued saying "we want asphalt instead of rock music", but the mayor replied this way: "the asphalt is about to come by the rock music". And so it was: he built up an infrastructure of the city based upon rock music by establishing a series of rock festivals. These festivals "brought the asphalt" for real and they founded many new jobs too. This study shows us that if you stick to your dreams they really do come true and everything becomes possible. It describes the pattern of becoming a hero as a leader and a media star, a person standing out for his or her beliefs.

There exist many kinds of celebrities, a fact that is proven by the next study. Dan Podjed's writing titled *Slovenian Bubble Celebrities: Establishing and Maintaining Celebrity Status on the Internet* gives us a parallel: it presents the stories of three "bubble celebrities" from Slovenia in parallel with the story of a star known worldwide. We can read what actually these bubble celebrities are and how they keep up their fame after their explosive appearance. The "bubble celebrity" word construction refers to the sudden appearance and disappearance of such celebrities. Just like bubbles, they rise up very fast in a very short period of time, but the decrease of their fame is even faster. Just like the bubbles, their fame



also explodes and gets forgotten very fast. They mostly publish autobiographies and try to have a lot of appearances in different TV shows. We can also read about how the online media affects them and what hazards does the Internet have for them. The Internet is the place of the easiest way to spread and promote you, but the Internet's blessings are also its curse because it can be used in the same way by other such celebrities too. Bubble celebrities, Internet and media seem to have a mutual fellowship or co-operation: Internet and media create these celebrities, but they also keep creating new ones; so, it can be said that the soil that gives life is also the soil that buries them. This sphere of celebrities needs continuous rejuvenation; this is why celebrity on Internet and media is so ephemeral.

This book gives the reader the opportunity to know how ordinary people become heroes, stars and celebrities; beside this, it teaches us what the differences are between these concepts. It is a very interesting and entertaining volume of essays; the reader has nothing else to do than to wonder about how many kinds of people can become heroes in how many strange places and circumstances. The role of the media, press and the Internet is obligatory in the process of creating heroes; the different interpretations and the dramatization of their uncommon deeds also contributes to the success of this process. Certain terms can have different interpretations in foreign cultures, which can also be an influential factor in creating heroes. The certain thing is that there are more kinds of heroes, stars and celebrities; they may have lots of followers and supporters although the support of the media is crucial. One of the main concepts of this book is that besides beliefs and devotion media is the only soil that one needs to become what we call today a hero, a celebrity or a star.