Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Social Analysis, **3**, 2 (2013) 235–242

On a Vojvodinian Researcher of the Psychological Relation between the Individual and the Society. Geiza Farkas's (1874–1942) Pioneering Socio-Psychological Studies

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Abstract. Geiza Farkas was an extraordinary researcher of the psychological relation between the individual and the society in Vojvodina. He was significant primarily as a writer, but sociology and social psychology were also his fields of study. This study presents his almost forgotten pioneering socio-psychological studies and books.

Keywords: Geiza Farkas, socio-psychological studies, individual and society

Introduction

In Vojvodina, Geiza Farkas is primarily recognized as a writer, while his significance in the history of science, predominantly his studies in the fields of sociology and social psychology, has so far been disregarded by scholars. As a consequence, his contribution in these latter fields has not yet been the subject of a more detailed research. Nevertheless, within his wide-ranging literary and scientific work, there is quite a significant opus of psychological/socio-psychological works and studies in which he analyses and interprets the relation between the individual and the society. What is more important is that in the methodology he propagated a personally viewed socio-psychological research, and thus he took up a groundbreaking role in Vojvodina's history of science. In fact, it is only in present times that we begin to appreciate and value his psychological papers, in which he presents the results of his research in the field of social psychology, the major themes being centred on the relationship between the individual, the group, the crowd, and the society; his research on the socio-psychological aspects of the notion of 'the mass' made him a pioneer ahead of his time.

Geiza Farkas's excellence is in the fact that in the 1920s and 30s he endeavoured on the borderline of two important disciplines – sociology and psychology – attracted by new interests, we could say, which he had developed as early as during World War I. The synthesis of these studies was published under the title *Az emberi csoportok lélektana* [*The Psychology of Human Groups, 1916*] (Bori 1971, 41–48). In this extensive work, he analysed, among others, the characteristics of group psychology, the relationship between 'I' and 'we,' the notion of public spirit, the historical development of human groups, their evolution, class struggles and revolutions, the role of social classes in the creation of the nation, the life of social groups, their ideologies, etc. (Farkas 1916).

Apparently, the tragic events of the First World War steered the sociologist towards socio-psychological researches, the results of which were published in the *Huszadik Század* [*Twentieth Century*] journal and other influential periodicals (Bori 1971, 41). According to Imre Bori, after Farkas had emigrated home in the 1920s, his interests were almost entirely directed to psychological issues, i.e.: 'He took interest in man's "demons," which so unequivocally showed their powers in people swept into the horrors of war' (ibidem). Later, his scientific work was fully developed in the field of social and child psychology.

Another reason of why his scientific studies are significant is that in the rough times of the 1920s any scientific research in Hungarian language in Vojvodina was banned, with workshops temporarily closed; so, Geiza Farkas's endeavours seem to have enabled not only the continuity of scientific research in general, but also substituted for the work of a whole institution of the time.

Who was Geiza Farkas in fact?

Geiza Farkas was the great-grandson of Ernő Kiss, a Martyr of Arad, a member of the richest landowner family in Banat, a descendant of the Bobor family (Gerold 2001, 84), whose extraordinary career did not start from the little village of Elemer in Banat, but it took off in Budapest. The ancient castle in Elemer (together with a 1,300-acre property) will only later be his second home (ibidem) – on account of a family inheritance – and the nearby Nagybecskerek will become the important setting of his literary and social scientific studies.

He was born in Budapest at 3 Sebestyén Square on 5th January 1874 (Németh 2000, 58–60). At that time, his parents were living in Budapest since his father, Geiza, a judge for the Royal Courts, took office there. After finishing high school, Geiza chose to study law and his interests turned to social sciences and later towards literature.

His literary work commenced in 1897 with a treatise entitled *A fényűzés* [*Opulence*] (Gulyás 1992, 270). Until World War I, he was mostly engaged in

economic issues: *A nemzet gazdálkodása* [*The Nation's Economizing*, 1901], *A kisgazda* [*The Smallholder,* 1912], and *Az úri rend* [*The Gentry Class,* 1912] (Bódy 2000). In these years, he also published a youth play in 1908 under the title *Veszélyben a haza* [*Threatened Motherland*] (Gerold 2001, 84; Gulyás 1992, 270). He was one of the founders and contributors of the *Huszadik Század* journal, member of the Social Sciences Society, friend of Oszkár Jászi; and Jászi claimed about this friendship that 'it belonged to one of the few great assets of his life' (Németh 1996). They also conducted correspondence, and among Jászi's selected letters we can find the ones written to Geiza Farkas (Litván and Varga 1991, 349–351).

At the beginning of the 20th century, he published not only in the *Huszadik Század* journal but also in journals and periodicals like *Közgazdasági Szemle [Economic Review]*, *Munkásügyi Szemle [Workers' Review]*, *Fővárosi Lapok [The Capital's Papers]*, and *Köztelek [Public Property]* (Gulyás 1992, 270).

His works were mostly theoretical and philosophical rather than practical-empirical. His last work in the field of agricultural policy, published in Budapest in 1919 during the Károlyi era, was *A mezőgazdasági kérdés [The Agricultural Issue]* (ibidem). In addition, Farkas, who was a lawyer by education, engaged also in economic and sociological studies, and at the Law School of the University of Budapest he lectured as professor of agricultural policy (ibidem). For a certain period, he was appointed Lord Lieutenant of Torontal County (Gerold 2001, 84–85). However, all these lasted briefly. After Károlyi's fall, he emigrated to Vienna, from where he later moved back to his property in Elemer (ibidem). From there, he often went to Nagybecskerek. From thereon, he became predominantly interested in literary-aesthetic and psychological matters (Bori 1971, 41–48). In the 1920s and 30s, he was often in the circle around Kornél Szenteleky, i.e. the Hungarian literary movement in Vojvodina. He considered Szenteleky his friend and his leader (Farkas 1933, 615–616).

The individual's struggle with the 'demons' of the society

The literary acquaintance growing into friendship was possibly initiated in April 1923 by Szenteleky's appraisal in *Bácsmegyei Napló [Bácsmegye Journal]* (Szenteleky 1923) of Farkas Geiza's 'study on social psychology' with the title *Démonok közt [Among Demons],* published in Budapest. Among others, he wrote: 'Matter, the lifeless mass also has influence, puts weight on us; there is something spiritual, something demonic in everything: in people, animals, tales, religion, in love, and thus Geiza Farkas can rightfully say that we live among demons. Demon does not mean devil, demon does not mean evil spirit but a mystic, inconsistent and not yet explained force "which – as Goethe put it – can be found in living and non-living nature." This demonic force is scrutinized and explored by Geiza

Farkas, who has already been published by *Bácsmegyei Napló* too and whose highly acclaimed name must not be forgotten above all because he lives here, in Yugoslavia, where we are so poor in men of cultural eminence. […] Farkas points out that there are demons as early as in our childhood: the feeding bottle, the wall clock, the icon, the cat, and almost everything that surrounds a child. However, the mystery, the demonic character vanishes with age, the horrors fade away, the old demons die, but they emerge in a different form. Later the demonic character is hidden in the teacher, the friend, the boss in the office, the passed away relative, or the close acquaintance. Also, demons haunt us in love, they rule in faith, in poetry, in religion, in the arts. A man constantly frees himself of demonic influences, repeatedly falling under the power of others, and that is why it is impossible to imagine without demons a man of love, hate, struggle, and action' (ibidem).

It is interesting to read into Geiza Farkas's volume on demons (Farkas 1923) because in this way we can make sure of his scientific argumentation, his vision-like images and almost inexhaustible curiosity in socio-psychological matters. His necessary starting point is literature: most importantly Goethe, Wahle, Nietzsche, Spencer, Schopenhauer, Weininger, Barbusse, Mauthner, Leopold, Le Bon, Coppée, Ruskin, Bergson, Tagore, and others, who are referred for their psychological studies, researches, and findings. Farkas starts off from Goethe's interpretations of demons, which he later uses to build on his own specific views and explanations. After Goethe, what Farkas defines as demonic is 'the being which (…) steps between everything, divides and connects everything' (Farkas 1923, 2). His fundamental theory is that the 'demonic manifests itself in every body and bodiless, what is more, in animals it shows various peculiarities; still it is with humans that it has most fantastic connections and forms an authority, which unless it is in opposition with universal morality, it traverses it' (ibidem, 3). Thereafter, he does not talk about *demons* like 'specific entities' but about the *demonic* as a feature that can appear in various beings, even in lifeless objects (ibidem).

Demonic is what he calls certain natural and social force, a driving force present in everything which we personify as demons (ibidem, 5). He characterizes 'a demon as never indifferent, rarely objective or righteous; as a rule, it almost blindly serves someone or engages in his corruption, and is highly subjective. The moral viewpoint is not strange to it; a good demon will guide a man along the path of virtue, while a bad demon will lure him into sin. The demon sometimes changes its conduct, takes shape to fit the deeds of man; it even lets one bargain, negotiate with itself' (ibidem, 4–5).

In his further elaborations, Geiza Farkas looks at the demon images of a young child, for which he largely uses the work by Wahle, *Der Mechanismus des geistigen Lebens* (ibidem, 6–7). He outlines the development of the child's intellectual sphere, its phases, stating that in the first stage of the child's development 'there are only influences, and later events that are pleasant for him – and only for him,

they are good, or unpleasant and bad' (ibidem). Actually, we can only talk about 'chains of sensations,' and at this stage the child is 'surrounded by such kinds of beings which, if he could speak in an adult's language, he would call demons. (…) The small child will always feel his 'demons' unpredictable, although he soon notices that (…) the mother-demon finally always conjures up what is needed, or a mischievous sibling-demon regularly or quite frequently irritates, frightens, and agitates. (…) For the infant, nevertheless, (…) 'demons' are not only represented in human beings around him and animals in his vicinity, but also every single object, (…) be it the feeding bottle, the pillow or a piece of furniture. (…) In this age, a man still lives among all kinds of demons since he comprehends everyone and everything as a demon' (ibidem, 7–8). It is only later that he frees himself from this, during the intellectual development and towards adulthood.

Geiza Farkas sets a high value on 'humanizing the demon' in an adult's life, especially love life (ibidem, 11). He claims that 'regarding a man, every other man is in fact once a fellow-man, once a demon all along' (ibidem, 12). According to him, 'women usually experience the demonic view of people and things longer and more intensively' (ibidem, 13).

Farkas attributes certain subjective human sensations to the results of demonic effects. First of all, 'the not completely explicable predilections, animosities, feelings of fright and disgust, idiosyncrasy towards certain objects and persons, 'making impressions' not quite justifiably, the majority of attractions and repugnancies qualified as hysteria, dread caused (…) by evil-eyed people, and finally the crippling fears which occasionally distract masses of people from seeing their prompt situation clearly, and swirl them into fatal deeds or inaction, thus detouring the flow of world history off its regular course' (ibidem). At the same time, 'regarding every man, demonic are images in dreams, feverish states and hallucinations, voices and their supposed causers' (ibidem).

As the author puts it, 'the demonic concept of the fellow man and freeing oneself from it (…) raises another huge wave in love. (…) Real, demonic love primarily seeks in its object that he should unite both the traits and even the flaws of the other sex in him as perfectly and purely as possible' (ibidem, 15). Within this framework, Farkas analyses homosexual relationships, love liaisons seen as eccentric or pervert, as well as fetishism, sadism, and masochism (ibidem, 15–17).

In an interesting part of Geiza Farkas's collection of socio-psychological studies, he deals with the demonic character of the language. As he puts it, 'it is often the matter of one word whether the majority of people should see a person more as a man or as a demon. In this respect, among our parts of speech, nouns are definitely 'more demonic' than verbs' (ibidem, 19). He proves this with an example: 'A soldier who fought and died as a knight' is still a man in our eyes, but 'a hero' is more than that' (ibidem).

In Farkas's interpretation, one can become a demon by means of a certain name, a garment, a badge, a profession, or a position, since 'in a soldier's uniform in an office (…) most people will act differently than in casual clothes among family or friends. Various insignia, flattering or disgraceful names and addresses, as well as ceremonies do make a person different, less of a man but more of a demon' (ibidem, 20).

In his volume, he specifically refers to the dead, too, as a unique group of human demon world. In his wording, 'very soon we cease to see the ones passed away as men; their 'other self,' as Spencer put it, stands before us on course of which reflection we increasingly deal with demons. (…) The dead, much more than the living, get to be credited with more experience, knowledge, even foresight, together with superhuman and supernatural powers' (ibidem, 22–23).

Thereinafter, we can read that certain moral concepts, like homeland, freedom, humaneness, enlightenment, rights, righteousness, oppression, unjustness, lies, darkness, or inhumanity, affect many people's reasoning as a good or a bad demon (ibidem, 29).

Geiza Farkas talks also about collective demons, i.e. group demons, as he sees to be the following: aristocracy, camarilla, clergy, officer corps, the government, the nation, or the mob (ibidem, 30). Simultaneously, in connection with demons, he analyses religious thought (ibidem, 38).

Summing up Geiza Farkas's socio-psychological study, we can conclude that it represented a groundbreaking scientific endeavour among the Yugoslav/Vojvodinian Hungarians after the Trianon Peace Treaty had made them a minority nation. After interpreting the relationship between the individual and the society in his work *Démonok közt [Among Demons, 1923]*, he authored a number of other serious socio-psychological studies in which – much ahead of his times – he again attempted to draw daring conclusions. Thus, he devoted several articles to the psychological aspects of the relationship between the individual and the society. Apparently, many of the phenomena studied by him came to be in the focus of psychological analyses only now, at the beginning of the 21st century. In addition, it is only today that we realize that a number of his important findings, mostly those concerning youth psychology, are provided evidence in present-day life. His interest in psychological issues – as we have already mentioned – began as early as during the First World War.

It should be pointed out here that as a volunteer of the first Budapest Infantry Regiment he fought throughout the First World War. In 1916, he published his study in the Social Sciences Library, *Az emberi csoportok lélektana [The Psychology of Human Groups]*, and after that came out the volume *Démonok közt [Among Demons]* (1923) both in Hungarian and German. Afterwards, in 1925, he published three of his lectures under the title *A társadalmi lélektan köréből [On Social Psychology].* In 1927, he attempted a psychological aesthetic essay,

Mi tetszik, és miért? [What We Like and Why] (Gerold 2001, 84–85; Gulyás 1992, 270; Kalapis 2002, 281–282).

In 1933, as the first volume of Kalangya Library, his novel *A fejnélküli ember* [The Headless Man] was published (Csetvei 1974, 670–677). In it, as said by Kornél Szenteleky, 'the raised psychopathological problem is highly interesting' and 'from the medical-psychological point of view there is nothing to object to' (Bisztray and Csuka 1943, 315). According to Szenteleky's appraisal, 'there has never been such an impressive, pathopsychologically structured novel written, not only in Vojvodina but in the whole Hungarian-speaking region as well' (ibidem). In the *Nyugat* magazine, Kázmér Ernő wrote the following about the novel: 'The reputable polyhistor Geiza Farkas's novel (…) scrutinizes the infinite mystery of one body, two souls,' while the strengths of the novel, in his opinion, are the 'psychological, almost laboratory study, completely separate from the story, and a landscape description done with a few leaden-coloured streaks' (Kázmér 1933, 612–614).

In the 1930's, Geiza Farkas sold his properties in Elemer, and moved to Vienna. He met the outbreak of the Second World War there (Csuka, 1942). Eventually, he moved to Budapest, more precisely to Budatétény, and commuted from there to the libraries on a daily basis. He lived lonely and forlorn, having almost no contact with anybody by the end of his life. He died on 24th September 1942 at the age of 68, in a quiet street in Budatétény, having been found by his housekeeper only a day later (ibidem). He was walked to his last journey by no more than a few people. He was buried in Budapest in the family crypt at the Kerepesi Street cemetery (ibidem).

His socio-psychological opus belongs to 'scientific masterpieces worth diving into and instructive up to the present day' (ibidem).

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