

# REVOLUTIONARIES, TRAVELERS, EMIGRANTS: QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY IN HUNGARIAN EMIGRANT ACCOUNTS

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Travel accounts do not only record the experience of a journey and present unfamiliar lands and people to armchair travelers but they tell just as much about the self-perception and identity of the travel writer. This paper examines a special form of travel writing by analyzing emigrant accounts written by Hungarian revolutionaries in North America after 1849. The travelogues unveil the attitude of Hungarians both towards the home country and the New World and address questions of identity, highlighting the position of emigrants caught between two spaces – still Hungarian but already becoming increasingly American. The paper focuses on two travel writers/emigrants, Károly László and János Xántus, who became American citizens but also visited and worked in Mexico and wrote about both places in books and newspaper articles before returning to Hungary years later. The study introduces the concept of triangulation in these accounts and discusses how the (national) identity of these writers became more complicated with time, and how this complexity was reflected in writing.

**Keywords:** travel writing, Hungarian Revolution, United States, Mexico, emigration

Most forms of travel entail a movement between familiar and unfamiliar, and travel accounts serve as a record of an encounter that necessitates comparisons between the self and the other. These accounts stand as witness to the travelers' thoughts on such contrasts and answers to questions related to the journey: where to travel and for what purpose? How does the home country compare to the visited land? How do foreign people and their customs differ? How can the self fit into the culture of the other? And, very importantly, how to position

oneself and the mother country compared to the destination of the journey? While travel writers consider these questions and document their answers to them, besides introducing their readers to foreign lands, they tell just as much about themselves and the culture they come from, to reinforce one of the major tenets of travel writing studies.

Such comparisons and contemplations are even more complex in the case of a special group of travelers, emigrants, who are forced to leave behind the mother country often without knowing if they could ever return. As a result of the circumstances of such “journeys,” these travelers carry (invisible) baggage that clearly influences their perceptions and accounts. Besides the questions mentioned above, these people have to address other issues as well. They ponder whether the foreign land will become their new home permanently, if such a change requires them to alter their way of life, and thus whether the journey requires leaving behind their home culture and identity, exchanging it for a new one. A study of these accounts can reveal questions of identity construction through the process of examining the representation of the self and the other and the shifting identity of these travelers/emigrants, resulting in a complex sense of belonging to two places.

This essay scrutinizes the issues mentioned above in the form of a case study, presenting travel accounts of Hungarian revolutionaries who were forced to leave behind their homes in 1849 and went to North America (the United States and Mexico), recording their experience in the form of letters, newspaper articles, and books. I examine the travelogues of selected authors to see what they tell us about the writers’ relationships to the motherland and the new country of residence, and their perceptions of their own position between the two locations.

## TRAVEL/EMIGRANT ACCOUNTS: TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

The term ‘travel writing’ (and ‘travel’ for that matter) can be used in a number of (sometimes exclusive) ways; thus it is necessary to introduce these terms as applied in this study. Carl Thompson provides a useful starting point for this, as he also sets out in his book-length study of travel writing by claiming that travel itself is a “negotiation between self and other that is brought about by movement in space” and “all travel writing is at some level a record or product of this encounter, and of the negotiation between similarity and difference that it entailed.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. Thompson, *Travel Writing*, New York 2011, pp. 9–10.

Such an encounter is going to be crucial in the case of accounts introduced in this essay as well, similarly to the fact that travel is an essential condition for travel writing (the latter serving as the record of the former).

At the same time, as the term travel itself “does not capture the diversity of reasons” why people leave the mother country, “or the variety of motivations behind recording one’s experiences [...] or the length of stay and the possibility of change in the viewpoint of the observer,” Jürgen Buchenau refuses to use the term “travel writing” as an all-encompassing expression.<sup>2</sup> Instead, he uses the phrase “foreign observer accounts” and recognizes three different categories within it: travel accounts (based on a relatively brief trip, with the objective of exploration and observation), immigrant accounts (referring to long-term emotional and financial engagement), and sojourner accounts (including “the rest,” soldiers, journalists, etc.).<sup>3</sup> This useful differentiation takes into consideration the influence of the actual motivation for leaving the mother country, time spent in a foreign land, and the objectives of the writer (i.e. different types of travel) on the level of terminology. These factors are considered in this paper and have become of crucial importance in my investigations, but I am not going to use such differentiation on the level of terminology, especially because the boundaries of these terms are just as flexible and hard to define as others (some of the texts discussed here would fall both within the group of immigrant and sojourner accounts, while others mentioned would qualify as both travel and immigrant accounts).

In consideration of these, in this paper I am using Jan Borm’s approach, and thus the terms travel writing, travel account, and travelogue are used to refer to:

any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates [...] in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming or presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical.<sup>4</sup>

With the use of this definition, I would like to emphasize the importance of the *reader’s perception* of texts and journeys as non-fictional and undertaken by the writer. It is also crucial in our case that the journey does not refer

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<sup>2</sup> J. Buchenau, *Mexico Otherwise: Modern Mexico in the Eyes of Foreign Observers*, Albuquerque 2005, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> J. Borm, ‘Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology,’ in G. Hooper and T. Youngs, ed, *Perspectives on Travel Writing*, Aldershot 2004, p. 17. Emphasis added.

only to travel in the most common sense of the term (what we would usually associate with brief trips or tourism) but also includes (long-term) journeys undertaken by emigrants both physically (from the home country to and within the new land of residence) and psychologically. These accounts always address, sometimes unintentionally, differences between the self and the other, as Thompson claimed, even if, as we will see, such binary opposition is sometimes complicated by triangulation. It is also important that travel writing in this sense covers various forms of narratives, including letters, newspaper articles, and books.

## HUNGARIAN REVOLUTIONARIES IN NORTH AMERICA

After the defeat of the Hungarian War of Independence by the joint Austro-Russian forces in August 1849, many participants decided to leave the mother country to escape imprisonment, impressment or execution. Some went to Western Europe, while a significant group (including such people as Lajos Kossuth, leader of the Revolution, and Polish general Józef Bem) escaped to Turkey, living in Vidin, Sumla (Shumen), and Kütahya for months.<sup>5</sup> In September 1851, accepting an offer from the United States, several emigrants boarded the *USS Mississippi* and arrived in New York in November. Here they waited for Kossuth, who had interrupted his voyage to go to England, and were hoping to raise support to revive the Hungarian fight for freedom.<sup>6</sup> As this attempt failed, Kossuth left the United States while many Hungarians stayed there and started a new life in North America.

The United States became an important destination for these emigrants and the country occupied a significant position in Hungarian travel writing.<sup>7</sup> Besides the US, Hungarians moved to other parts of the world, introducing Hungarians to regions and countries they had not been familiar with before. In this paper I am going to focus on the texts of two revolutionaries visiting and writing

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<sup>5</sup> For a detailed study of the Turkish exile see, for example: I. Hajnal, *A Kossuth emigráció Törökországban*, Budapest 1927.

<sup>6</sup> For more information on Kossuth's American tour see, for example: I. Deák, 'Kossuth: the Vain Hopes of a Much Celebrated Exile,' *Hungarian Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 166 (2002). Available at: <http://www.hungarianquarterly.com/no166/10.html>; D.S. Spencer, *Louis Kossuth and Young America. A Study of Sectionalism and Foreign Policy, 1848–1852*, Columbia 1977.

<sup>7</sup> For a study of the image of the US in Hungarian travel writing see, for example: T. Glant, *Amerika, a csodák és csalódások földje*, Debrecen 2013.

about the United States and Mexico after the Hungarian Revolution, and who also became American citizens but returned to Hungary after years of living in the US. The fact that they visited both the United States and Mexico provides us with new insights into the ways they constructed their identity as Hungarian emigrants and American citizens and the way this is reflected in their accounts.

Using the travel account format, besides writing about distant lands and little-known traditions, Hungarians could also comment on the situation of the countries involved in the descriptions. This way they could inform Hungarians using a popular genre. One of the major goals of publication, as emphasized by the writers themselves, was to “serve” the country while living abroad and educate the Hungarian public about foreign lands, and thus continue their work as people struggling for the betterment of the country.

The travelogues themselves stand as witnesses to this objective. “There is no loss without gain,” claimed Károly László, who believed that one of the advantageous outcomes of the Hungarian defeat was that “hundreds, if not thousands of young Hungarian men were scattered in all parts of the world, those who otherwise would or could have never crossed the borders of the mother country.” They would study languages and gain experience abroad, claimed László, and would inform their compatriots about foreign events in private letters as well as in newspaper articles, this way providing pleasant reading while also contributing to the development of Hungary.<sup>8</sup>

Many emigrants thought similarly and believed that the only way for them to help the mother country was to send home reports and travel accounts to inform and “educate” Hungarians at home. Pál Rosti, who, like László, had to leave Hungary, wrote the following in the Preface to his travelogue presenting his journeys in Latin America:

During the tragic twelve years following the unfortunate events of 1849, all national aspirations, progress, development have been kept back and suppressed in our dear motherland: the shackled literature, science and arts were the only domains where one could prove his/her devotion to our beloved country, the only tool whose steady development we hoped would ensure the improvement, progress, what is more, the very existence of the Hungarian nation. Thus in this sad era it has become the solemn duty of all Hungarians to work for the benefit of the country with intense and untiring vigor in one of these domains, even if

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<sup>8</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából I,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 2 January 1859. All translations of Hungarian texts are mine.

one was less gifted with talent—as a grain of sand does not weigh too much on its own, but a pile of them grows into a hill and later on into a mountain.<sup>9</sup>

As seen above, there was a clear objective of helping the motherland through publication, of remaining good Hungarian patriots, but gradually emigrants settling in the United States were also becoming more and more American, and this can be seen in their accounts, as well; on the one hand, in their identification with US ideology in terms of expansion and, on the other hand, in their struggle to make sense of their own dual identity. Such changes are especially visible when they traveled to and wrote about a third country as well, in our case Mexico.

### KÁROLY LÁSZLÓ: “ALREADY AN AMERICAN CITIZEN, STILL A HUNGARIAN PATRIOT”

Károly László (1815–1894) was an engineer, revolutionary, secretary to Lajos Kossuth, businessman, and the first Hungarian to write about Mexico in detail in a series of published articles. He was instrumental in establishing the image of the Latin American country at home, and we may claim that many Hungarians learnt about various aspects of life in the United States from his letters. László studied law and theology in Debrecen but later went to Pest to become an engineer, which proved to be a beneficial choice later on in his life, as his education and skills provided him with opportunities for work in the United States and Mexico, an issue many Hungarian emigrants of the Revolution struggled with as they had no other qualifications besides being professional soldiers.<sup>10</sup>

When the Revolution broke out, László “quickly recognized that the country needed soldiers more than engineers and joined the Hunyady troop as a common soldier.”<sup>11</sup> Later he joined the artillery and became a second lieutenant. After the final battles and the defeat of the War of Independence, he joined Bem on August 22, 1849 and escaped from Hungary to Turkey. He arrived in Kütahya with Lajos Kossuth and his followers in April 1850. In subsequent years, he

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<sup>9</sup> P. Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek Amerikából*, Budapest 1861, Preface, n.p. Here I used the reprint facsimile edition: P. Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek Amerikából*, Budapest 1992. Hereafter cited as Rosti, *Úti emlékezetek*.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on Hungarian revolutionaries in the United States see: I. Vida, *Világostól Appomatoxig. Magyarok az amerikai polgárháborúban*, Budapest 2011 and *Hungarian Émigrés in the American Civil War: A History and Biographical Dictionary*, Jefferson, N.C. 2011.

<sup>11</sup> ‘László Károly,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 12 January 1868.

lived close to Kossuth as his friend and secretary. In 1851 he arrived in New York on the *USS Mississippi*. László traveled with Kossuth everywhere during the Governor's famous tour in the United States, but the former freedom fighters soon were forced to realize that although the Hungarian leader had gained popular support, he was not able to change the official US policy of non-intervention in European affairs. Kossuth left the country in July 1852 while László stayed in the United States and began a new life in the New World.

He worked as an engineer in canal building and railway projects and applied for US citizenship in 1853. Four years later, "similarly to other Hungarian forty-eighters, [László] made use of his skills in the survey of the new Mexican-American border established by the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 and the railway construction started in Tehuantepec."<sup>12</sup> He began his own business ventures as well (growing mahogany and dye-wood) with another Hungarian emigrant, Bódog Nemegyei.<sup>13</sup> This proved lucrative and helped establish Károly László as a well-to-do and respected citizen. In 1867, only a few days after his wedding, László moved back to Hungary with his wife, as amnesty had already been granted to Kossuth emigrants. We know less about his life after their return. In 1892 László visited Kossuth in Turin, but after his return to Hungary he became sick and passed away in 1894.

László wrote extensively about his experiences in the New World. He recorded details of his life in exile in his unique diary<sup>14</sup> and also wrote articles to be published in Hungarian newspapers. *Vasárnapi Újság* published his letters between 1859 and 1862 and articles also appeared in 1866 and 1868 (I will focus on the articles published in this paper). *Kecskemét* published accounts in 1873 and 1876 as well as fragments from his diary between 1876 and 1881. He wrote about New York, Niagara Falls, and other places as well as life in general in the United States. His Mexican letters were sent from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, an area largely unknown by readers.

László was "mapping" the Isthmus of Tehuantepec in a literal sense (by working as an engineer and land surveyor) and through his travel accounts for his Hungarian audience as well, making it available for "armchair travelers." The

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<sup>12</sup> P. Torbágyi, *Magyar kivándorlás Latin-Amerikába az első világháború előtt*, Szeged 2009, p. 255. Hereafter cited as Torbágyi, *Magyar kivándorlás*.

<sup>13</sup> He sent the mahogany used for the decoration of the Grand Hall of the Hungarian Academy of Arts and Sciences, as well as the mahogany tables to the National Museum. See: *Vasárnapi Újság*, 10 July 1864 and 9 October 1864.

<sup>14</sup> László's diaries can be found at the National Széchenyi Library in Budapest, together with several daguerreotypes and an ambrotype of the author (under reference number Oct. Hung 720). Hereafter cited the following way: Original diary, Vol. no, László's pagination.

significance of the area lay in the fact that it represented the shortest distance between the Gulf of Mexico and the Pacific Ocean, and as such it was one of the principal lines (besides Panama and Nicaragua) recommended as a possible interoceanic route.<sup>15</sup> It occupied a geographical and cultural territory that provided an opportunity for contrasting László's previous experience in the United States with life in Mexico. It also served as a basis for the discussion of various issues addressed by the engineer: the nature of progress, the role of technology and its links to superiority, the "sad" state of the Mexican population, the influence and interests of the United States in Mexico, as well as the clash of US and Mexican culture, economy, and politics. Such comparisons also reveal László's identification with the United States and call attention to a special form of triangulation that reveals his attitude both towards Hungary and his new home, the United States. While reading about Mexico in László's letters, we learn just as much about the United States and Hungary and this triangulation also reveals how László is caught between two spaces, his Hungarian and US identities.

In his letters, László intended to inform Hungarians about Mexico primarily, even though he had lived and worked in the United States and traveled between the two North American countries on several occasions. However, his accounts of the Latin-American country are full of references to the US and comparisons. From diary entries and letters we know that László did not see the United States with unconditional admiration: in the diary he often expressed his "disgust with slavery and slave markets"<sup>16</sup> as well as "US aristocracy," and claimed that "the longer I stay in America [i.e. the US] the more alienated I become."<sup>17</sup> Such a negative view is visible in his articles as well, mostly when he wrote about corruption in US politics and the enslavement and treatment of African-Americans. Still, in an inter-American context, the United States always occupied a superior position. This superiority manifested itself in descriptions of the population, technological development, and László's view of the future of Mexico.

Once arriving in Mexico, the Hungarian completely identified with the United States and the imperial attitude towards the southern neighbor and its population. He did not leave his Hungarian identity behind, but he also often identified himself as an American (a US citizen). Travel accounts, as has been mentioned before, are often based on binaries: comparisons between the self and the other, the familiar and the unfamiliar. This usually involves contrasting the mother culture and

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<sup>15</sup> R. Fity-Roy, 'Considerations on the Great Isthmus of Central America,' *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, Vol. 20 (1850), p. 166.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example: *Original Diary*, Vol. VI, 60–61.

<sup>17</sup> *Original Diary*, Vol. VIII, 70–71.

the country being visited. In certain cases the purpose is to bring the familiar closer, to help the reader understand the unfamiliar. László used this method to describe clothes, dances, and Mexican food. For example, he states: Mexicans eat “beef cooked with potatoes (known in Hungary as *gulyás*);”<sup>18</sup> or when describing a cave, he notes that it is “similar to that in *Aggtelek* [in Hungary] with regard to its shape and parts but it is not that beautiful, grandiose, or interesting.”<sup>19</sup> In other cases, contrasts are used not only to help the reader but to express the superiority of the mother country: “Indians usually live in such miserable sheds that a Hungarian stable is a palace compared to them” or “the furniture of the poorest Hungarian serf is luxurious compared to these.”<sup>20</sup> What is noteworthy here, however, is that the United States enters these comparisons, taking a superior position and providing a model both for Mexico and Hungary, and in this way complicating the usual self-other binary; thus the image of Mexico is not painted only in terms of binaries between mother country and the unfamiliar land but emerges in a triangle where Hungary and the US both serve as reference points: “In North America [i.e. the US] people dress in the same manner, clothing does not differentiate and create classes, while at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, just like in Hungary, people of different ranks and classes dress differently.”<sup>21</sup> Hungary seems to occupy a middle position between the US and Mexico and when talking about the future of Mexicans, Hungary is completely missing, while the US serves as the major reference point, indicating László’s identification with his new home, including the belief in and propagation of its superiority.

While Mexico was identified with nature and wilderness (see his letters about the dense forests, waterfalls, and exotic animals),<sup>22</sup> when László wrote about the US, industry and technological development occupied the dominant position: he described ships and ferries (which he recommends using on the Hungarian Tisza River)<sup>23</sup> and even when writing about the natural beauties of Niagara Falls he emphasized the diligence and wealth of the people, and described factories, the railroad, and quickly expanding cities.<sup>24</sup> He called attention to the lack of technological development in Mexico on several occasions (“there

<sup>18</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából VI,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 17 July 1859.

<sup>19</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából VII,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 28 August 1859.

<sup>20</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából II,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 30 January 1859.

<sup>21</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából III,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 27 February 1859.

<sup>22</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából XIII,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 23 and 30 September 1860.

<sup>23</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából XII,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 12 August 1860.

<sup>24</sup> ‘Kirándulás a Niagara Zuhataghoz,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 14, 21, and 28 October 1866.

is not a single plow in this province nor a cart”<sup>25</sup>) and compared Mexico unfavorably to her northern neighbor in his letters: “When these rough and clumsy [Mexican] wheelbarrows passed the road building company’s nicely painted North American [i.e. US] carts it was interesting to notice the great difference between the two structures and I thought to myself: if the steam engine had not been in use by now, when would these folk invent it?”<sup>26</sup> It is the result of such a contrast (coupled with the negative view of the local population) that entailed the necessity, in László’s opinion, of foreign, especially US, intervention and assistance in Mexico’s development. The future of Mexico depended on the United States in László’s letters:

The hard-working North Americans will flock into this area; they will dig up the treasures hidden in the ‘fat’ plains and rocky mountains, will bring them to the surface, and the wilderness of today that is not aware of its wealth will be turned into a rich, civilized, industrious country and may be annexed to the United States, which is the wish of the majority of those in the United States, in fact a plan that can hardly be concealed.<sup>27</sup>

In his attitude regarding the relationship of the United States and Mexico and the question of US expansion southwards (instead of westwards), László adopted the point of view of the Southern elite and projected it onto the general public of the United States. We have to bear in mind that after the US-Mexican war the United States could have annexed Mexico but chose not to. László ignores this historical fact.

As regards the role of the United States in the Western Hemisphere, László also identified with American myths and ideologies in general, such as a perceived uniqueness, expansion, and Manifest Destiny. Progress, the key notion of the time in US culture, often appeared in László’s texts. The United States was represented as a nation bringing civilization into the Latin American region, in particular to Mexico, both in his diary and letters. This was perceived as a kind of obligation for the United States, a superior nation, and a process that would benefit Mexicans as well. As opposed to the lazy Mexicans, US citizens were introduced as rich, diligent people (cf. their “magically” growing cities) with good taste; they were seen as representatives of real advancement.

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<sup>25</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából II,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 30 January 1859.

<sup>26</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából VI,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 24 July 1859.

<sup>27</sup> ‘László Károly levelei Amerikából V,’ *Vasárnapi Újság*, 19 June 1859.

Technology and machines were used as symbols of progress in the nineteenth century and in László's diary and letters they were presented as a sign of superiority, as well. Mexicans were equipped with only the simplest of tools and were not interested in technology or in "exploiting" their resources. "Machine civilization" was not only an expression of supremacy in a cultural, social, and political sense but it also served as the embodiment of the US way of life for Mexicans. László stated that United States citizens (and the technology they would bring along) were necessary for the development of Mexico and that Mexicans should follow the example set by the United States. Similar ideas and attitudes were shared by other travelers of the time and this image prevailed for a relatively long time.<sup>28</sup>

It can already be seen from László's comparisons with the United States that he had an unfavorable view of the Mexican population and did not perceive them as capable of improving the country on their own. László expressed his low regard for Mexicans; nature was also seen as dangerous, partly due to bandits attacking people and the "creatures" living there, and it was to be conquered by (US or Anglo-Saxon) civilization and technology. Nature was both uncivilized and uncultivated and the population did nothing to improve it; thus providing justification for the presence of US engineers, settlers, and businessmen.

Such an identification with and support of US expansion, coupled with the low regard of the Mexican populace in László's accounts is especially interesting knowing the Hungarian's background as a revolutionary. While at home he fought for Hungarian sovereignty and independence from the influence of neighboring great powers, in his Mexican accounts he propagates foreign intervention using the imperial view. He expresses no sympathy or empathy towards Mexicans and draws no parallels whatsoever between the situation of Mexicans and Hungarians (while using some comparisons between the two countries only to provide explanation to the readers as seen above). The assumption of this role is also remarkable because Westerners often wrote about Hungary in a similar way and László took no notice of this. Western European travelers, for example, introduced Hungary "as a country overflowing with riches, 'which the Natives are too idle or too awkward to make themselves masters of.'"<sup>29</sup> As we will see below, Xántus assumed a similar position in this regard.

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<sup>28</sup> For more details see: B. Venkovits, 'Describing the Other, Struggling with the Self: Hungarian Travel Writers in Mexico and the Revision of Western Images,' *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2011), pp. 28–47.

<sup>29</sup> I.V. Popova-Nowak, 'The Odyssey of National Discovery: Hungarians in Hungary and Abroad, 1750–1850' in W. Bracewell, A. Drace-Francis, eds, *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*, Budapest 2008, p. 215.

László emphasized the need for foreign involvement and provided a justification for it. He stressed the necessity for the arrival of US citizens and capital and did not invite Hungarian settlers or emphasize business opportunities for Hungary (or Austria-Hungary).<sup>30</sup> The United States was the model to be followed. This attitude seems to be in line with Alexander Kiossev's theory of self-colonizing cultures: László considers the US as the standard of civilization (both for Mexico and Hungary) and "imports" this country as a civilizational model when writing about Mexico (also supported by his own position as an American citizen). He identifies with the West (with the United States in particular) and not his mother country in this regard, while in other cases he keeps emphasizing the importance of his Hungarian background.

#### JÁNOS XÁNTUS:

"NOT ONLY BY NATURALIZATION DEED AN AMERICAN"

Discussing questions of identity in the case of Xántus is even more complicated, as the Hungarian often very consciously used different writing personas and switched between various identities depending on his objectives and needs. It is already difficult to introduce his life (especially in North America), as "verifiable biographical facts about Xántus are few"<sup>31</sup> and we have to rely on the life stories popularized by Xántus himself, often having little basis in fact. Although he should be praised for his work as a collector,<sup>32</sup> it also has to be noted that he often wrote about places he never visited (or visited only at later points in time) or borrowed liberally from other travel writers, as shown by Henry Miller Madden.<sup>33</sup> His life as an emigrant and as a person constantly looking for career opportunities and recognition influenced his writing, and the

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<sup>30</sup> This attitude might also have been influenced by his status as an exile who did not want to get involved in the economic issues of the home country that he was forced to leave or did not want to bring up topics (i.e. requiring steps to be taken by Austria-Hungary concerning international affairs) that could have been deemed political and could have influenced the publication of his letters.

<sup>31</sup> A. Zwinger, *Xantus: Letters of John Xántus to Spencer Fullerton Baird from San Francisco and Cabo San Lucas, 1859–1861*, Los Angeles 1986, p. 11.

<sup>32</sup> Baird claimed: "It will be sufficient to say ... that his collections are believed to have been much larger and more complete, than any ever made before in America, during the same period of time by any person." Quoted in: H.M. Madden, *Xántus, Hungarian Naturalist in the Pioneer West*, Palo Alto 1949, p. 49.

<sup>33</sup> See the previous note.

analysis of his published letters and books reveals an identity shifting between two spaces, Hungary and the United States. This is indicated by his identification with US expansion in his accounts (just as in László's case) and is also shown in his writing about his own (national) identity.

Xántus was born in 1825; he attended the academy of law and passed the bar in Pest in 1847.<sup>34</sup> He joined the national guard when the Hungarian Revolution started and fought in the artillery and the infantry. In 1849 he was captured, imprisoned, and later impressed by the Austrians. After his release, he joined émigrés in Dresden and the Hungarian was arrested again. He escaped and sailed for America in 1851.<sup>35</sup> The period between 1851 and 1857 is referred to by Madden as "Wanderjahre," an obscure period in Xántus's life: "Year after year Xántus consciously deceived his family by inventing situations gratifying his vanity and departing further from the truth."<sup>36</sup> Similarly to other Hungarian emigrants of the time, Xántus struggled at the beginning of his stay in the United States, assuming numerous different positions. He became a naturalized citizen and in September 1855 enlisted in the US army in St. Louis, starting army service at Fort Riley under the assumed name of Louis Vésey (which he used until 1859). This decision to enlist marked the beginning of his rise to fame. It was at Fort Riley that Xántus met Assistant Surgeon William Alexander Hammond, one of the many medical officers who collected for Spencer F. Baird, Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution. Xántus started collecting and sent specimens to the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (where he was elected to life membership in 1856) and to Baird in the Smithsonian (and later to Hungary as well). His work as a collector was acknowledged quickly and he began correspondence with Baird, who Xántus hoped would help improve his fortunes.

Xántus received an assignment in California (hospital steward), at Fort Tejon, and later in Lower California, in the territory of Mexico (as tidal observer for the US Coast Survey). At both locations he worked with great enthusiasm and provided unparalleled collections, winning the praise of Baird and other scientists. In August 1861, however, he received orders to close the station. He left for San Francisco, and later returned to Hungary where he remained for a year. At home, he was already in the center of public attention as a result of his specimens sent to the National Museum and his publications that were already available in

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<sup>34</sup> Unless otherwise noted, the biographical overview is based on Madden's book.

<sup>35</sup> As can be seen in the books published by Zwinger, Xántus told a very different story in his letters.

<sup>36</sup> Madden, *Xántus*, 32.

Hungary. Although he was “lionized in a number of ways,”<sup>37</sup> in 1862 Xántus left Hungary and returned to the United States. With the help of Baird, Xántus was appointed US consul at Manzanillo (state of Colima, on the West coast of Mexico).<sup>38</sup> However, he was quickly dismissed by the State Department.<sup>39</sup> Xántus remained in Mexico for a few months to collect, but his fiasco as consul (and the Civil War in the United States and French intervention in Mexico) put an end to his career in North America and he returned to Hungary permanently.

Xántus wrote extensively about his journeys and life in North America. He published two books, *Xántus János levelei Éjszakamerikából* [Letters of János Xántus from North America] in 1858 (hereafter referred to as *Letters*),<sup>40</sup> including letters sent to his family and not intended for publication originally, and in 1860 *Utazás Kalifornia déli részeiben* [Travels in Southern California] (hereafter referred to as *Travels*),<sup>41</sup> which was written specifically for the public. Xántus published accounts on the US and Mexico in numerous newspapers as well, some of which were based on imaginary journeys, while others were sections borrowed from his books.<sup>42</sup>

It seems that Xántus always wanted to please his reading audience and thus wrote in a way that could achieve this result and advance his career. As Madden has shown, Xántus often wrote about made-up journeys for a Hungarian audience and plagiarized from various authors that were not recognized by contemporary readers and scholars (in the long run, however, this overshadowed his otherwise spectacular achievements as a collector). As a result of his work and his popularization of them, Xántus was celebrated in Hungary and was accepted as a successful scientist. He propagated himself in his letters in the United States as well, often assuming a different identity than in the cases when he was writing to a Hungarian audience. The publications reveal this to a certain extent and are especially notable when writing about Mexico, when similarly to László, Xántus writes both as a Hungarian and an American. Triangular references and the identification with US superiority are also dominant.

<sup>37</sup> Madden, *Xántus*, 156.

<sup>38</sup> The location was important, as it was a little-known area for science.

<sup>39</sup> Zwinger, *Cabo San Lucas*, 31.

<sup>40</sup> J. Xántus, *Levelei Éjszakamerikából*, Pest 1858.

<sup>41</sup> J. Xántus, *Utazás Kalifornia déli részeiben*, Pest 1860.

<sup>42</sup> Xántus published extensively in *Győri Közlöny* [Győr Gazette], *Pesti Hírnök* [Pest Messenger], and *Magyar Sajtó* [Hungarian Press]. He also continued writing after his return to Hungary and his publications appeared in *Természetbarátok és Vadászok Évkönyve* [Yearbook of Hunters and Friends of Nature], *Hazánk s a Külföld* [Hungary and Abroad], and *Földrajzi Közlemények* [Geographical Review].

Similarly to László's publications, and almost all travel accounts, Hungary (the self) serves as a constant example in comparisons, again, to bring the unfamiliar closer to the reading audience. A small village in Mexico reminded Xántus "of the marshy meadows of Hungary during October and April when the moles are active, except of course that the hills here are much taller."<sup>43</sup> He also stated: "On the [California] peninsula, just as in Hungary in former times, instruction is thrust haphazardly at the pupils, without regard for age and capacity."<sup>44</sup> Hungary also serves as a reference point when presenting various data and statistics on Mexico. This practice, however, is made more ambiguous by the fact that Xántus in many cases simply replaced references to the United States in the publications he had consulted (written for an American audience) with Hungary or changed the text to hide his original sources, as Madden claimed.

Several sections in *Travels* highlight Xántus's unconditional support of American expansion and Manifest Destiny and his identification with such ideas. Similarly to László, he contemplates the necessity of American intervention in Mexican affairs and supports such ideas. No sympathy or empathy is expressed with Mexicans and no parallels are presented with regard to Hungary and Mexico in terms of struggles with great powers, national independence, etc. This is clearly reflected in Xántus's treatment of La Paz after his arrival:

In the evening of May 7 we arrived at La Paz, the capital of the peninsula and the seat of the government and bishopric. Its population is not yet 10,000 but it is steadily growing for its harbor is the best and safest in the entire Purple Sea. With the exception of the harbors of Constantinople and New York, there is hardly another in the world that can accommodate as many ships as the one at La Paz. [...] It requires no prophet to state with certainty that in a few years La Paz will be one of the most important cities on the shores of the Pacific Ocean.<sup>45</sup>

Similarly to "imperial travelers," Xántus emphasizes the need for changes to take place in order to exploit the resources of the country and to develop it. However, he adds: "Such a change can only come about at a snail's pace, as long as the peninsula belongs to the Mexican Republic, for flourishing commerce

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<sup>43</sup> Xántus' two travel books were translated into English by Theodore and Helen Benedec Schoenman: *Letters from North America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1975) and *Travels in Southern California* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1976). I will use these translations for quotations, cited as Xántus, *Letters* and Xántus, *Travel in Southern California* respectively. Xántus, *Travels in Southern California*, 139.

<sup>44</sup> Xántus, *Travels in Southern California*, 149.

<sup>45</sup> Xántus, *Travels in Southern California*, 128.

in Mexico is unimaginable.” Mexico is often depicted as a politically unstable country (which it really was at the time) and this volatility resulted in its inability to govern itself successfully, according to Xántus.

If [...] the peninsula should become the property of the North American Union, which is only a matter of time, for it will inevitably happen before long, then La Paz will become one of the main depositories of American industry; [...] Furthermore, due to its geographical location, La Paz could become for the North American Union what, for example, St. Helena, Gibraltar, Malta, or Bermuda constitute in the hands of the British.<sup>46</sup>

In this respect, Xántus identifies with the US expansionist approach and emphasizes the significance of “progress” above all. As a result of such identification, triangulation occurs again. Hungary often serves as a reference point, but in terms of the future of Mexico or the relationship with the Northern neighbor, Xántus completely adopts the American position and writes accordingly. As a naturalized citizen, he identifies with the US point of view and seems to disregard his Hungarian background as a revolutionary. Such a dual identity is visible not only when describing US-Mexican relations but also when explicitly discussing his identity in different writings.

Xántus adopted different attitudes towards the US and US citizenship depending on the purpose of his texts. Sometimes he clearly identified with the United States. When he wrote about the US and wanted to emphasize the country’s progress compared to Europe, he clearly expressed his own “Americanness”: “by the time the Europeans reach *our* present state of progress,” he wrote, “*we* shall be traveling at least in airships, or perhaps even in canon shells with telegraphic speed.”<sup>47</sup> In other cases (in *Travels*, for example), he emphasized his Hungarian background and identification with the motherland even while in the Americas:

Believe me, my friends, the Hungarian can never become American, for his heart and soul can never become as hard as the metal from which the dollar is minted. There is only one place for us in this great wide world: ‘Home,’ which may not be great, magnificent or famous, and though poor, is still the most potent magnet for its wandering sons.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>46</sup> J. Xántus, *Travels in Southern California*, 129.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted in Madden, *Xántus*, 160. Emphasis added.

<sup>48</sup> J. Xántus, *Travels in Southern California*, 94.

His letters to Baird tell yet another story: “I am not only by my naturalization deed an American,” emphasized Xántus, “but with all my heart and soul; and should be always happy to serve under the stars & stripes, *no matter where or in what capacity*, provided I was allowed a reasonable subsistence, a reasonable indepen(den)ce, and should be fairly dealt with always.”<sup>49</sup> This appears to be an inconsistency in Xántus’ accounts; yet, it fits into his style of changing his texts according to the effect he wanted to achieve. Identification with the US shifted depending on whom he wrote to, but identification with (or sympathy towards) Mexicans was never present in his texts. This might be seen as a reflection of Hungarians’ perception of being caught between East and West: Xántus also wanted to pose as a representative of the West (the US specifically) while rejecting any identification with the less developed part of the world. His adaptation of the imperial view of the US also supports this, and similarly to László no empathy with Mexico and Mexicans is expressed.

## CONCLUSION

The emigrant/travel accounts discussed here show that the self-other dichotomy characteristic of travel accounts (and noted in Anglophone travel writing studies) can be disturbed in certain cases. The Hungarians introduced in this paper were caught between two spaces – already living in the United States (as naturalized citizens) but still connected to Hungary in many ways (and hoping to return someday). This is exposed in their travel accounts as well, especially when writing about a third country: they emphasize the importance of being Hungarians, of remaining Hungarian and helping the nation even while living abroad, but at the same time they increasingly identify with the United States. In this case triangulation occurs as both Hungary and the United States serve as reference points in their publications and they identify with the ideology of the latter when writing about their journeys in Mexico.

The triangulation often applied by Hungarian travel writers is similar to the method used by mariners.<sup>50</sup> “Navigators relate an unknown position to the known location of two others by mapping an imaginary triangle. The triangle

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Madden, *Xántus*, 142.

<sup>50</sup> I found the metaphor of such triangulation in David J. Vázquez’s book on narrative strategies for Latino identity and use it here because it adeptly describes the process of Hungarian travel writing on Mexico. See: D.J. Vázquez, *Triangulations: Narrative Strategies for Navigating Latino Identity*, Minneapolis, 2011.

then yields coordinates for the unknown position based on the distance from and angle of the other two.”<sup>51</sup> Besides using Hungary, the home culture, as one of the known positions, these people often included the United States as the other familiar point when providing accounts of Mexico. Thus, the country is not depicted only in terms of binary oppositions like familiar/unfamiliar, self/other, home/abroad. Mexico was judged based on its “distance and angle” from the two known positions on the map and the preconceptions and stereotypes related to them. Such triangulation was due to the geographical proximity of the United States and the acceptance of the belief that the US should serve as a model for their Southern neighbor, showing what can be achieved in the Americas in terms of political and economic progress. Their background as naturalized US citizens influenced such inter-American comparisons even if the identification with the superiority of the US seems to go against their heritage as Hungarian revolutionaries. While in Mexico, the United States was seen as a model, and these Hungarians adopted it as an example to be followed, providing a manifestation of Kiossev’s idea of self-colonizing cultures – accepting the supremacy of a foreign power and adopting its values and ideology willingly.

The negative view of Mexico (the country and its population) is especially interesting in view of the background of these writers. The fact that they did not express any sympathy with Mexicans and supported American expansion reflects a dual identity, an in-between state. In their writing they adopt the imperial view and write accordingly, assuming an American identity while their Hungarian background (and the fact that they want to return to Hungary later) also influences the image of North America presented by them. Their feelings and attitude could best be summarized with a quote from László himself. Reflecting on his own role and position as an emigrant, László stated: “I am also one of these travelers, already an American citizen, but will never be a bad Hungarian patriot.”

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<sup>51</sup> D.J. Vázquez, *Triangulations*, 3.