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Coercion, Fear and Seeking for Amends in The Work's of Bibó's¹



ABSTRACT

István Bibó's works are focused on political hysteria. Political hysteria is characterised by fear caused by legitimacy crisis and the vicious cycle of coercion. Patterns of political culture and socialization dominated by hysteria are in lack of autonomy and self-responsibility. Instead, the cult of martyrdom, revenge and "escape from freedom" play a key role.

KEYWORDS

coercion, fear, freedom, hysteria, responsibility, amends

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Hungarian Democracy in Crisis, one of the most known essays of Bibó's, begins with the following sentences: "*Hungarian democracy is in crisis. It is in crisis because it is living in fear.*"² The author's statement is quite strange, but not in the first sentence. There nothing unusual is claimed: in political publicity it is a common rhetoric element to pose the problems intended to unfold as crises to attract the reader's attention. The astounding and at the same time telling assertion can be found in the second sentence. It is in crisis *because* it is living in fear? Of course fear is an awful thing, but why does it cause crisis? As we have known so far, a deep crisis emerges when there is war, revolution, counter-revolution or starvation, mass disaster etc. *indeed*. However, when people are only *afraid* of these things but in fact no guns are shooting and no dead men are lying on the streets, why would we call this a crisis?

Well, at this point we can find a fundamental feature of Bibó's way of thinking. Bibó believes indeed that there is *nothing worse than fear* itself. If in a society, in public life people are afraid of something, then – even if the feared events don't happen –, fear itself implicates the nightmare scenario. Therefore good politics has to strive to create a world without fear.

But why is fear this important? Well, at the beginning of his lecture from 1971 titled *The meaning of European social development* Bibó claims: *man is the only being aware of his death.*³ Thus fear is part of the human condition, and the worst one of all is to fear another person. That is to say to fear that *I, a subject can become a bare object in the hands of others more powerful than me* and this way I also lose my human dignity – after all, a person should not become the instrument of another.⁴ However, fear is also generated by – as he exposes it in his lectures on Political Science held at the Faculty of Law at the University of Szeged – that power relations are constantly changing which causes such an uncertainty that finally many rather opt for calculable submission than eternal incalculability.⁵

Basically Bibó was a specialist of the Great Fears arising from system and imperium changes, revolutions and counter-revolutions. He was inspired by his teacher, Guglielmo Ferrero, the great Italian historian.⁶ However, even before having read the works of Ferrero, in his dissertation on the philosophy of law *Coercion, Law, Freedom*⁷ in 1935 he was dealing, with a psychological, empathic approach typical for him, with the experience of coercion, the state of mind under constraint – which is very similar to being terrified.

As according to Bibó coercion is a phenomenon of human psyche, we should get familiar with our author's concept of man. According to Bibó in the human world causality is an extraneous principle, as the main, own principle here is spontaneity,⁸ personal determination⁹ which he explains in his draft lecture in manuscript: "*the condition of man: a fragile, complicated, weaker but still stronger, personal being. In the rough physical environment that is surrounding us it takes much*

² BIBÓ 1986. II. Vol. 1.

³ *The Art of Peacemaking*. 374.

⁴ DÉNES 2004. 224.

⁵ Op. cit. 136–137.

⁶ FERRERO 1941, 1961, 1972.

⁷ BIBÓ 1986. Op. cit. I. köt. 5–149.

⁸ Op. cit. 13, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22.

⁹ Op. cit. 58.

*longer to create a living being (9 months) than to destroy it (a moment). This justifies fear. The nature of man: gentle, curious, creative, adventurous and risk taking”.*¹⁰

However, spontaneity still doesn't guarantee freedom, which Bibó defines as the victory of our own principle over the extraneous principle in our approaches. (If the choice doesn't even emerge, if there is no other way, there is no freedom at all).¹¹ It is possible that in our approaches and experiences causality (representing an alien law) triumphs over spontaneity (representing an own law).¹²

This is the phenomenon of coercion which means also viewing own and alien law together but in a reverse way compared to the case of freedom. In the case of coercion we experience in our view that we have been overcome, we recognize our weaknesses: namely that on the basis of our own principle, i. e. spontaneously we obey the extraneous will as if we were only physical beings without own subjectivity and ruled by the doctrine of causality.¹³ This also means that coercion ends up in dehumanization: man is brought to lose control – but man, who learns reality through experience as a feeling and willing creature, who lives among risks can really live only as a person, as a free subject, not as an object or instrument.¹⁴ In the latter case, due to vulnerability and being exposed to danger we can give up our freedom and be subservient to the forces opposed to our willing. “*Coactus tamen volui!*” (Constrained, nevertheless by my own will) – he cites the Latin phrase,¹⁵ by which he underlines that under pressure and frightened we are able to convince ourselves of things and want things we originally didn't want to.

What does the idea of dehumanization consist of, what are the components of experiencing coercion? First of all it leads to trauma, as besides fear it causes harm as well, and we consider it as injustice when we are constrained on something against our will. Furthermore, we feel ourselves impotent: as if we reached an impasse. This means that one being constrained considers himself a victim. However, besides victimization there is another dimension of being constrained: the own responsibility of the one being constrained! This is a test of understanding Bibó, as we have to indicate in advance that what Bibó says might appear as blaming the victim at first sight.

An unavoidable component of being constrained is something similar to schizophrenia. Since at the beginning of suffering from coercion we don't want what others try to press on us, but if after being controlled by and surrendering to the pressure and “*identify ourselves with the aggressor*”. That is to say, finally we reconcile ourselves to the situation: “*that's it, you've got to get used to it*”.¹⁶ Bibó illustrates it as following: “*The one being constrained surrenders to coercion not because it determines his action inevitably as causality, but because from the actor's spontaneity and the irrational or conscious reality of his own instincts, intentions and precepts it follows a surrendering standpoint towards coercion*”.¹⁷ It is also recognizable in the following:

¹⁰ Bibó István *hagyatéka*. 1–71.

¹¹ BIBÓ 1986. Op. cit. I. köt. 46., 60.

¹² In his argumentation Bibó mainly relies on *Bergson* (BERGSON 1911) and *Hartmann* (HARTMANN 1926).

¹³ Op. cit.. 45., 47.

¹⁴ See Bibó's lecture: *Ellentétpárok*: Bibó István op. cit., *MTAKK Ms 5116/39–86*. 1–71.

¹⁵ BIBÓ 1986. Op. cit. I. köt. 18.

¹⁶ Cp. the following concept from the lecture outline from the *Ellentétpárok*: “*Sense: able to think the opposite of itself. Fear: makes to do the opposite of itself!*” BIBÓ Op. cit , *MTAKK Ms 5116/39–86*. 1–71.

*“According to common generalization the constrained action is the action of the one being constrained, however, it can be imputed to the coercing one. The true part of this is that the action of the forced one doesn’t fully count towards him. The final move in every case of coercion is still made by the spontaneity of the actor. Even the strongest coercion can be imputed to the actor which is best illustrated by the fact that a standpoint taken under coercion can be regretted. And usually resistance towards the constraining tools held to be the most effective is evaluated morally the highest”.*¹⁸ That is to say, the one being constrained is also responsible – however, compared to the constraining one only just a little – for finally willing to do what he rejected in the beginning and this, namely giving up his conviction, was decided by himself!

However, traumas, sufferings and becoming a victim can hinder taking this responsibility which in turn – as we could see above – is the indispensable condition of achieving freedom. According to Bibó that’s how it can be realized: *“Much like a healthy individual.¹⁹ a community capable of putting its abilities to good and safe use, however great or small, is strengthened when encountering catastrophe²⁰ because it makes a reasonable assessment of the causes of its troubles, draws lessons from them, bears what it deems elemental calamity, assumes the moral responsibility it recognizes as its own fault, finds redress for the injustices committed against it, resigns itself to what cannot be undone, renounces dreams impossible to attain, and defines and performs its duties. [...] A balanced community will finally solve its problems.”*²¹ Actually in this sentence Bibó sets out the criteria of resilience, the proactive, prosocial reaction to a crisis. These are the following: consideration of real power relations (no matter how strong or weak a political community is, it is realism that matters), revealing the real reasons for failure and drawing the lesson, taking moral responsibility for our own mistakes, gaining compensation for the injustice suffered, enduring the unchangeable and solving our problems.

Three elements should be underlined: taking responsibility for the mistakes, seeking for amends and enduring the unchangeable. Due to the existence of the own mistakes and the unchangeable it is obvious that the amends gained for the injustice can’t be unlimited, even if the feeling of duty to have sympathy with the victim would at first make us believe so. Actually this is what brings us to the state of political hysteria. *“Political hysteria always starts out from a traumatic historical experience, in the life of a community, particularly one the members of the community believe to be intolerable and think the solution to the problems to which it gave rise is beyond the abilities of the community. As a result of such an exceedingly great trauma, political thinking, emotions, and intentions of a community become obdurate and paralyzed, the memory of the trauma, the lesson drawn from it for good or ill, and the desire that the community be fully guaranteed that the catastrophe will not be repeated predominate. Thoughts, feeling, and activity are thus*

¹⁷ BIBÓ 1986. I. 17.

¹⁸ Op. cit. 31.

¹⁹ Although Bibó draws a parallel between the individual and the community, he rejects the metaphysics of the community. He remonstrates: he is also aware that only the individual can have a soul, will and emotions. Consequently, in his interpretation “community” means relations based on the interactions of the individuals. (*The Art of Peacemaking*. 45.)

²⁰ Obviously this doesn’t mean a natural disaster or personal tragedy (disease, loss of a relative) but political cataclysm, of which the source is/are another person/people and the constraining tools applied by him/them.

²¹ *The Art of Peacemaking*. 46.

*morbidly attached to one interpretation of a single experience.²² In this petrified and lame state, pressing problems become irrelevant if in some way they have a bearing on the critical issue.*²³

This is still the side-effect of victimization, the tragedies experienced. While looking for the justifiable amends one gets quite easily to the (mis)conclusion: the one who has been committed injustice against, is always right, therefore the whole world is in debt to the victim, (s)he just has a demand to everyone, but can't have any responsibility for anything. Otherwise, the deeds committed against him would gain confirmation and the offenders would be encouraged again. This in turn means a great and at the same time dead cert psychological gain which is equivalent to neither taking responsibility for the own mistakes nor tolerating the unchangeable or solving the problems. However, this way seemingly logical pseudo solutions come to the front which implicate the normalization of hysteria by generating the illusion of moral invulnerability: *"The worldview of hysteria is closed and perfect. Everything tallies with everything in it. There is only one thing amiss. Everything concurs in it not because it corresponds to genuine values and actual facts but because it systematizes the requirements of the false situation and says precisely what the one living in falsity wants to hear."*²⁴

The false situation and the misleading experience generated by it appears and reproduces in habits, conventions, patterns and behaviour to such an extent that it becomes the norm.²⁵ It gets normalised, confirmed by everyday experiences, and behaviour contrary to this will be stigmatized as deviance and will be marginalized. This very kind of consolidation paralyses the managing of the most severe crisis and impasses, as the false situations and misleading experiences reproduced by forms and processes of interaction become evident and get infiltrated into inter-personal communication and the personality as well. Added to that is the loss of political instinct and judgement and the systematical making of wrong decisions in the most important situations: the members of the political class are not capable of *"instilling in people a sense of security in the face of the chimeras of fear, objective courage against actual danger"*.²⁶

Instead, seeking for amends spreads which becomes self-reproducing as a consequence of the gratification offered by the attitudes in relation with it on the one hand and the identity based on suffering on the other. Like this the seeking for recompense intensifies (!) after receiving amends because it enables to experience justification, apotheosis and the feeling of symbolic satisfaction over and over again: *"Should that environment decide to make amends, the hysteric will regard it as a justification of his own worldview, and he will lose restraint the moment the longed-for amends are offered. He will no longer be satisfied by any compensation, and his exceeding moral complacency and bullying will challenge his environment to fight. [...] As the pursuer runs amok, the factors that helped him until his cause had some genuine basis and justification or that he forced or imagined to side with him fall away."*²⁷ The former victim becomes Michael Kohlhaas whose

²² Cf. with the following: *"in the case of coercion instead of considering all the reasons, only one reason emerges which is regarded as the reason for coercion."* (BIBÓ Op. cit., 15.)

²³ *The Art of Peacemaking*. 47.

²⁴ *The Art of Peacemaking*. 47.

²⁵ See *The Art of Peacemaking*. 45.

²⁶ *The Art of Peacemaking*. 28.

²⁷ *The Art of Peacemaking* 48.

fate is an example for the following: “*nobody tends to commit injustice as much as the one who regards himself the innocent victim of injustice.*”²⁸ Finally this process ends up in a disaster.²⁹ “*In the final count the individual or community that goes berserk runs his or its head against a wall of facts harder than any magic, spell, or illusion.*”³⁰

All this seems to be such an unstoppable vicious cycle that the question arises: is there any remedy, and if there is, what is it? Bibó first of all clarifies what we should not do. It isn't possible and it isn't worth to criticize or condemn the hysterical views, because this would cause another harm to the ones bearing hysteria, that is: we would give new impulses for them to go on playing their games – the analysis of hysteria is about self-responsibility and empowerment – and it makes no sense either to try to exclude the ‘hysterical’ from the political community.³¹ So what to do then, what is it what we can do at all? Well, above all the most important aim is the achievement of autonomy, as the seeking for amends, which is focused on the image of the enemy and considers suffering, rather than decision making, a merit. However, these can't be worked out by self-contradicting messages as “*be free*”, “*be spontaneous*”, “*take the responsibility*” because this is nonsensical if based on duty. But it is already clear from “*Coercion, Law, Freedom*” that ‘constrained freedom’ is absurd.³² Recognizing this, we can find the solution: on the basis of duty only *punishing others* is possible. However, virtue ethics³³ builds on public good, not on the obligations of man.

²⁸ BIBÓ 1990. 587.

²⁹ “*Men commit their most gruesome hair-raising acts not when they give free reign to their natural beastly savagery. Savagery is quick to spend its fury, even the wildest bloodbath ending in physical nausea, and men have tame, not only wild, instincts. Men are most wicked when they believe they are threatened, morally justified, and exonerated, and particularly when they feel they are entitled and obliged to punish others. This is when they are capable of throwing off all vestiges of shame, of overcoming their physical nausea, and becoming massacrers, of being inveterate even when stones soften – not to mention men who give reign to beastly savagery.*” *The Art of Peacemaking*. 194.

³⁰ *The Art of Peacemaking*. 48.

³¹ “*For those who shape the hysterical manifestations of that community, whether by direct political action, approval or mere acquiescence, taking a common political stand often engages only one area of their mental world; moreover, they themselves may personally be of sound mind and spirit, very appealing even, and whatever they do, profess or think in the name of their community, may seem perfectly reasonable, practical, or inevitable under the given circumstances.*

Naturally, community hysterias generate their blind, furious, and obtuse type of man, primarily prone to falling for and ranting their characteristic self-deceiving follies; their beneficiaries, who swim with the hysteric tide and profit by it; as well as their gangsters and henchmen. [...] Plans seeking to cure hysteria by destroying, isolating or casting out its carriers grouped or whatever basis, will not help at all. Community hysteria is the condition of the community as a whole, and there is no use in eliminating the visible carriers of hysteria when its conditions and grounds remain untouched, its initial traumas are unrelieved, and the make-believe situation on which it is actually founded is unresolved. There is no use in eliminating all »evil men«: the delusions and false responses of hysteria will live on in peaceful patresfamilias; in mothers of six; in clean-headed persons who would not kill a fly; in noble, lofty, exalted minds; and the community will bring forth the madmen, the beneficiaries and thugs of hysteria in a generation.” *The Art of Peacemaking* 45. The statement that hysteria is the status of the whole community is emphasized by the French interpreter of Bibó, Emmanuel Terray: Emmanuel Terray: *La question du voile: une hystérie politique*. http://reseau-ipam.org/article.php3?id_article=94. 2004. Last download: 1st January 2016.

³² BIBÓ 1986. Op.cit. I. 45.

³³ Cf. RÁCZ 2014. 87–155.

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