

Producing the nation through philanthropy: legitimizing co-ethnic and pro-refugee civic action in Hungary

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Abstract

This paper explores interconnections between nationhood and philanthropy: namely, how philanthropy works as a domain of meaningful social practice framed by national ideologies, and how interpretations born in the institutional contexts of philanthropy may play a central role in making sense of the nation. We observe how various divisions inherent in philanthropic practices – between helpers and the helped, and between those who take part in helping as opposed to those who do not – become reflected in concepts of nationhood shaped by these activities. The study of two cases – first, the philanthropic actions of Hungarian citizens towards Hungarian minority communities in Ukraine and Romania, and second, humanitarian volunteer initiatives aimed at supporting refugees during the summer of 2015 in Hungary – makes it possible to understand how philanthropic practices become a site for reproducing competing definitions of nationhood.

Keywords: everyday nationhood, categorization, philanthropy, volunteering, humanitarianism, refugees

Introduction

In this paper we uncover nationalism as a meaningful category of practice in the context of philanthropy, in relation to its manifestation as the thinking and talking about responsibility and belonging. More precisely, through the empirical investigation of two cases of philanthropy in the Hungarian context we seek to understand how ideas of nationhood and national belonging may be comprised of sets of categorisations that enable the pursuit of such activities; and how related ideas of nationhood are recreated and constituted through donating and volunteering as philanthropic practices.

The national identifications and categorisations at the heart of philanthropic giving have been documented by social scientists in various settings: philanthropy and volunteering in nineteenth century Germany (Cramer 2016; Quataert 2001), in diaspora philanthropy directed towards Israel during the 1940s (Lainer Vos 2014), and in volunteering for the Red Cross in several nineteenth century European states (Dromi 2016) have all been explored as core terrains for constituting and forming national categorisations and identities. Despite the manifold conjunctions of philanthropy and nationhood, neither mainstream research on philanthropy and volunteering nor nationalism studies have yet devoted sustained attention to these entanglements. In the research of nationalism, social constructionist approaches have made the notion of national solidarity (that is, benevolence towards co-nationals) a core assumption. They, however, have also conceptualised solidarity as an outcome: as an aspect of identity, emotions and attitudes,¹ saying little about national solidarity as actual practice and action. The questions what exactly are these benevolent actions, how they are produced, towards whom, among what circumstances, and how these solidarities are reproduced or transformed in these actions have received less attention. In this paper, our aim is to investigate further in this direction.

The interlaced relationship between concepts of nationhood and philanthropy will be analysed from two vantage points. First, the former will be regarded as pre-existing imageries that orient and influence how helping, and specifically philanthropy, donating and volunteering, is initiated, maintained and practised. Second, and more importantly, such benevolent practices, actions and interactions will be regarded as institutional terrains that enable – through interpretative processes – the construction and reconstruction of the social imagery, including national categorisations and identities.

Analysis of the role of nationhood in the context of helping actions follows recent calls to analyse nationalism not only as the top-down, elite-driven structural process of nation building but as the quotidian activities, interactions and practices of everyday actors (Brubaker et al. 2006; Fox - Miller-Idris 2008; Fox-Ginderachter 2018) embedded into discourses, institutions and organisations (Hearn-Antonsich 2018). Circumscribing goals and activities of helping in national terms allows volunteers and philanthropists to engage in ‘doing the nation’; that is, performing national roles, effectuating national choices, or talking using national categories.

The current article will provide empirical insights into the possible interconnections between philanthropy and nationhood on two terrains. Both types of philanthropic action have unfolded in social environments that have nationhood, national categorisation and national ideologies as their core ideological building blocks, although in contrasting ways. Philanthropic actions organized in postsocialist Hungary, framed by nationalist ideologies and targeted towards helping co-ethnic Hungarian minority communities in Ukraine and Romania, will be considered and contrasted with humanitarian volunteer initiatives organized in Hungary that were aimed at supporting refugees during the ‘refugee crisis’ of summer 2015. In the first case, the legitimacy of and commitment to help were prescribed primarily by an ethno-nationalist ideology built around the shared ethnicity of the helpers and addressees of help. In the second case, central ideological frames that organize the legitimacy of helping relied upon a larger set of universalist ideologies that referred to concepts of shared humanity, which however have close linkages with civic perceptions of nationhood and responsibilities. We show that in both cases philanthropic action and practices are coupled with ‘breaching’ (Fox 2017) – that is, not meeting the spoken or unspoken expectations of the actors concerned, thereby inciting the intense articulation on their part of categories and identities related to nationhood and national belonging.

Our empirical investigation reveals that among such circumstances of mobilised national categorisations, philanthropy is more than just another terrain for multiplying existing concepts of nationhood produced by national cultural or political institutions or the media. The institutional and practical context of philanthropy leaves its own mark on the ideas, cognitive schemas, or dispositions related to the nation: the latter mirror categorizations inherent in philanthropic giving and volunteering. Divisions between helper and helped, between deserving and non-deserving needy, and between those who

take part in helping and those who do not that are articulated by philanthropic actors will be reflected in how concepts of the nation and national categories and identifications are shaped by these activities.

In the following section we give a brief overview of the scholarly literature involving the potential intersection of research on nationhood and national belonging and research on philanthropy and volunteering. In the third and the fourth part of the paper we enter into our specific fields and describe how national categorisations and identifications unfold on the two terrains. In the final section we discuss results and draw conclusions.

Philanthropy and volunteering as sites of constructing national belonging

Nationalism studies have already dealt with the relationship between concepts of the nation and benevolent intentions towards others, although such solidary intentions in the institutional context of philanthropy and volunteering have not yet been extensively covered by the study of current forms of nationalism. This gap may be explained in various ways. First, voluntary association was part of the classical research on the historical formation of modern ideologies (Stamatov 2013) and modern nations. As Brubaker and his co-authors claimed, voluntary associations have been an important domain for organizations and the enactment of ethnicity and nationhood. Moreover, historians of Central and Eastern Europe (King 2002; Babejova 2003, Livezeanu 1995) have shown how a wide range of associations, including charity organizations, were key sites for the cultivation and diffusion of nationhood in the nineteenth and early twenty century (Brubaker et al. 2006). Nevertheless, except for a few examples (including Brubaker et al 2006) these studies lack a presentist perspective, and current forms of nationalism and ethnicity have rarely been seen as products or sites of civic and voluntary activity.

Second, as pointed out by Lainer Vos (2014), models of nationalism in general emphasize nationhood as built upon the idea of sameness, similarity and equality of its members. Philanthropy and volunteering, which heavily rely upon divisions and hierarchies – between helpers and the helped, or between morally superior helpers and

morally inferior bystanders –, have not been convenient terrains for describing such egalitarian models of national belonging. Such models, while usually presupposing national solidarity to be a general, unspecified, unfocused aspect of identity and attitudes, usually overlook the links between these attitudes and the actual helping practices that necessarily operate with exclusions and hierarchies.

Third, scientific scrutiny of the coupling of national belonging and philanthropy and volunteering has also been hindered, especially concerning scholarly discussions about East-Central European societies, by the unspoken assumptions behind dominant conceptualisations of philanthropy and volunteering in recent decades. Mainstream research on voluntary giving in various East-Central European countries that started in the early 1990s was strongly influenced by the ‘nonprofit’ as well as by neo-Tocquevillian ‘civil society’ paradigms. In their own ways, both approaches tended to disregard acknowledgement of the possible role of boundary-making processes and collective categorisations in philanthropy and volunteering (Wagner 2012, Corry 2010, Calhoun 2007). Although the study of social movements involving East-Central Europe has taken an epistemological stance towards giving and volunteering, and has also problematised meaning construction processes such as identity-building and collective categorisations (while sharing the normative-philosophical background of the ‘civil society’ paradigm), it has favoured phenomena that are easily matched with universalist models of democratization and dismissed others – among them philanthropic giving and volunteering framed in national terms – that were found to diverge from these models (Gagyí 2015, Molnár 2016).

This paper argues that in spite of – or rather precisely because of – the major neglect in analysing the coupling of nationalism and philanthropy, there may be an important place for such endeavours. First, despite the initial focus on long-term historical, structural explanations of nation building and nationalism and ongoing strong interest in a narrowly defined political sphere, from the beginning there have been attempts to widen scholarly concern related to the production of nationhood and national belonging. Such attempts aimed to renew nationalism research along various dimensions: a focus on quotidian phenomena (as opposed to exceptional political events), on everyday actors (as opposed to elites), on micro-interactions (as opposed to social structure), on embodied and non-reflected practices (as opposed to reflected ideas and intentions), and on the working of national categorisations in heterogeneous

contexts and settings (as opposed to nationhood as an aim in itself), all swept up into the term of ‘everyday nationhood’, have been promoted and called for for decades (For a recent overview, see Bonikowski 2016). The analysis of the working of national categories, identities and belonging in the institutional context of philanthropy and volunteering meets these criteria: the quotidian activities and interactions of everyday actors as embodied experience and affects attached to giving to others (and its embedding, as we will see, into heterogeneous institutional practices) makes philanthropy an excellent site for understanding the nation from an everyday nationhood perspective.

Second, volunteering and philanthropy might be an important site for nation-building due to their powerful capacity to contribute to the social construction of social ties, meanings, and social structure. Although the extensive theorisation of the latter relationship is still missing, there are various strands of research from a diversity of empirical fields that underpin this claim. Marcel Mauss, in his classical work about gift-giving (Mauss 1989) in archaic societies, highlights the paradoxical effects of giving: the production and maintenance of ties and attachments between the givers and receivers, and, at the same time, the unequal distribution of recognition and the production of social hierarchies.² This approach is developed further in Bourdieu’s field theory of disinterested actions and gift-giving (Bourdieu 1998). His model highlights how actions that are interpreted as serving others contribute to the maintenance of common meanings and values in a community, while they at the same time are sites ‘par excellence’ of the production of symbolic capital (in relation to those who do not give and contribute) and thus become tools of the reproduction of social structure. Again concerning the terrain of gift-giving, Caillé (2000) – and in philanthropy Adloff-Mau (2006) – emphasize further how various social positions, and – additional to the recognition and symbolic capital of the giver – recognition of the recipients of helping and gifting are produced. In the specific form of helping others known as humanitarianism, Didier Fassin (2012) also describes how helping (and also volunteering and philanthropy) becomes a paradoxical site of producing solidarity, equality and attachments, while also producing hierarchies between givers and receivers, between deserving recipients and non-deserving others, and between givers and indifferent bystanders.

An analysis of giving in the institutional context of volunteering and philanthropy imbued with concepts of the nation thus offers a chance to identify the production of the ideas and common values that tie together members of a nation. In this way, we may pursue how the forceful capacity of volunteering and philanthropy to produce common identities, ties and attachments implies the production of national belonging, national ties and national attachments. Moreover, hierarchies inherent in philanthropy and volunteering may become constitutive elements of this production. Thus, in contrast to the usual approaches that emphasize the development and dissemination of unified and homogeneous concepts of the nation, we may see how various relative identities, recognition relationships and moral and symbolic hierarchies may become constitutive of such nation building.

Several scholarly works exist that have devoted attention to the coupling of national categorisation and philanthropic giving and volunteering. First, a more evident form of national solidarity is found in communitarian philanthropy and volunteering that explicitly emphasizes solidarity among co-nationals. (Cramer 2016, Quataert 2001, Lainer Vos 2013, Carter 2007, Shachar 2017). The related models directly link national categories with giving and receiving to the nationally same others. Second, inclusionary helping ideologies that deny collective categorisations of race, religion, ethnicity or nationhood in directing solidary intentions and practices, however, may also become building blocks in the creation of ideas about the nation. An explicit refusal to constrain helping to co-nationals, and an emphasis instead on the inclusion of groups and categories outside the national body become significant tools for implementing the liberal values of tolerance, inclusion and cosmopolitanism, which simultaneously can be interpreted in national frames. Through emphasizing civic responsibilities instead of ethnic ties, national belonging becomes infused with valuable moral characteristics associated with helping. (Dromi 2016, Goodman 2009, Haklai 2008) Moreover, as our case studies will show, volunteering can produce competing concepts of nation and thus contribute to the reproduction of previously existing debates about the nature, the role, and the reach of the nation.

Helping co-ethnics abroad

The flow of donations, private gifts and volunteer work from Hungary towards the Hungarian minority communities in neighbouring countries started as early as in the 1980s in restricted forms, while often persecuted by the authorities of the affected socialist states (Koenig 2000; in a wider East-European context, Capotescu 2018). Engagement boomed after 1989 with the legalisation of these activities and the creation of various large NGOs and programs that targeted their activities at specific regions and localities in Ukraine, Romania, Yugoslavia/Serbia and Slovakia (Zakariás 2018, p. 114).

This philanthropic action has mostly been linked to the working of national ideologies; more specifically, the imperative of helping the ethnic Hungarian minorities of these neighbouring countries. Since the end of the 1980s, the principle of transborder responsibility was evoked by government programs and reflected in legal regulations.³ Besides the diversity of actual form and content, wide consensus has emerged among different governments about the necessity of such support (Bárdi 2013). This helping imperative is based on the idea that minority societies and their national Hungarian culture are under constant threat by assimilationist majoritarian states. Reference to the banning of Hungarian language use in public, the lack of Hungarian-language public education, minority stigmatisation and discrimination can all become grounds for organising philanthropic initiatives. School twinning programs, summer camps for promoting the use of the (Hungarian) mother-tongue, teacher training events, and book donations have been organised in significant numbers. Large philanthropic organisations such as the Maltese and the Hungarian Red Cross often have specific divisions or programmes targeted at Hungarian minority communities in neighbouring states, and there is a multitude of smaller associations, family, church, and workplace communities that organise such support.⁴

Between 2009-2014 the present authors carried out ethnographic research in three such programs, all of which targeted the Hungarian-language education of children in minority communities: two of these involving voluntary school partnerships initiated by teachers at two schools in Hungarian cities, and another in the form of a child sponsorship network involving donors who become symbolic godparents of selected children. All three programs were designed to support different ethnic Hungarian or Hungarian-speaking children, their families, and their larger

communities, as well as Hungarian schools and their students and teachers in Romania and Ukraine. Activities promoted by these initiatives include student exchange programs between Hungarian schools and schools in the neighbouring countries that teach Hungarian pupils, including extracurricular activities such as summer camps, the collection and distribution of material goods to students in need, as well as personal mentoring programs called ‘godparent programs’. The empirical basis of the present analysis consists of about 35 interviews and six short periods of participant observation in these programs lasting 4 -7 days each.

The ideology of preserving the nation in minority

The ideology of national survival, and the ideology of ‘saving the Hungarianness’ of the supported communities is a central pillar of organisational missions in these programs. The ideology prevailing in the Hungarian national imagery described above is reproduced in everyday speeches and rituals. Needs and suffering framed in national terms are complemented with ideas about the responsibility of philanthropic actors from Hungary that are derived from the common national belonging of the helpers and the helped. The following excerpt, extracted from an interview with a volunteer teacher from Budapest, reveals how the oppression of Hungarian minorities by the majority Ukrainian state and society and the need to support the co-ethnics from Hungary to resist oppression prove in tandem the legitimacy and the significance of helping.

‘Among these kids it is important, this kind of support, so that they feel that they are not alone. (...) Now there are rumours that their high school is to be turned into a Ukrainian-language high school. It’s a great danger.’

Worthiness is also often framed in national terms. The merits of heroic resistance to assimilation, implying a more real, more pure, more intense national belonging (that is, national authenticity) compared to that of the Hungarians living in Hungary – i.e. of those in a majority position – are vividly mirrored in the following sentences by one of the main organisers of the godparent network: *‘This program can not be abandoned to its death. This is such a fantastic thing. (...) They deserve it. You know why? This is my opinion. That for fifty, or whatever, years (...) they were forced to assimilate. There was no education [in Hungarian], nothing. And still. This language, it has been preserved! Guys, this is the most ancient Hungarian language, they have been able to*

preserve it, it has not disappeared, it has not died! So, this must be a sign that this community is strong, and does not deserve to die.'

Apart from the everyday speech acts and interactions of the participants, these narratives of common nationhood and national authenticity are also powerfully reproduced through rituals. Besides the everyday activities of studying, camping, travelling and tourism, these programs all include formal cultural events that become sites of the emphatic performance of national belonging. Either focusing on Hungarian high culture (that is, literature, history and arts canonised as part of the national Hungarian culture) or on folklore (singing and dancing folk songs and dances, wearing folk costumes, or talking in specific regional dialects), these events are carefully assembled and orchestrated by the organisers to support the performance of the Hungarianness of the participants. The recipients of these support programs, usually on stage, and the donors and volunteers, usually among the audience, are all expected to join in these cathartic rituals of common national belonging (Fox-Miller Idriss 2008). Performing national symbols in these moments of collective effervescence not only strengthens the emotional commitment of those already involved as helpers and recipients, but also supports fund-raising and the recruitment of new volunteers.

These programs, having the 'helping' of minority Hungarian communities at the focus of their ideologies, also aim at forming national identities and shaping national culture and national belonging, both of the addressees of help (ethnic Hungarian minority communities in Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania), and of those individuals who are doing, contributing to or witnessing the helping activities (i.e. Hungarians in Hungary). According to the mission of these programs, such volunteering and philanthropy educate the helped as well as the helpers: the improvement of their national consciousness contributes to their moral development. Language programs and training carried out in camps for children, schools in Hungary, or in minority Hungarian communities aim at the education of the helped, while personal encounters with these minority Hungarians, as well as travel to these communities, are assumed to immerse volunteers and philanthropists in an experience of national authenticity and thus make them more fully embrace the idea of belonging to the Hungarian nation, extended beyond state borders.

These programs are thus initiated with the assumption that the supported communities all share the goal of preserving Hungarian identity, language and culture. One of the programs consists of participants (both helpers and recipients) who share this discourse of the threatened Hungarian national culture. As narratives and symbols of preserving the nation are familiar to everyone in the program, in philanthropic encounters all affected parties are capable of acting according to this pre-existing imagery. In other programs, however, many of the targeted groups are in late phases of assimilation, in particular of language change.⁵ These children occasionally or never use Hungarian in their everyday lives, and attend majoritarian (Ukrainian- or Romanian-language) state schools. Thus, they are not acquainted with Hungarian national discourses and related symbols and narratives, and they lack the knowledge of acting according to the roles prescribed by these. Besides difficulties with communication, a poor command of Hungarian or refusal to use it may bring into question these children's national belonging in the eyes of the donors and volunteers, thus questioning the legitimacy of such programs based on the preservation of the Hungarian native language.

In the following extract of an interview with an active godmother it can be clearly seen how pre-existing expectations based on Hungarian national discourses (on the heroic and conscious preservation of the Hungarian culture by ethnic Hungarians in the minority) becomes problematic and hinders cooperation between donors and recipients. *'And then she [the teacher for the program] said that the little girl does not deserve our support because she's not attending folk singing and dancing programs, nor the Hungarian language courses. (...) And then the girl said, "I am Romanian," and she showed us how she could speak English. (...) So I will have to deal with this, to ask for another child to support.'*

The intense talk and interpretations of volunteers and donors in these programs may be perceived as reactions to such 'breaches' (Fox 2017) of pre-existing expectations about national identification and the categorisation of their recipients. In what follows, we briefly outline possible responses to such encounters that challenge the imagined national order of things as the strategies and mechanisms that enable the continuation of philanthropic practices, besides these challenges. Two major narrative forms will be outlined (see also Zakariás 2015): the enhancement of ideologies

formulated in terms related to poverty-relief and development; and the re-creation of fragmented narratives of nationhood and national belonging.

Economic disadvantage and the slope of civilisation

Ideologies that support Hungarian minority communities are not restricted to the national domain: although much less elaborately and explicitly formulated, images of poverty and the under-development of ethnic minority communities are also included in the former. In the Hungarian national imagery, a hierarchy operates (described by Melegh [2006] in the context of Central and Eastern Europe) which involves the measurement of positions according to perceived levels of modernisation and civilisation compared to Western Europe. This hierarchy projected onto the Hungarian nation creates internal East-West hierarchies: it identifies the challenging economic circumstances, underdevelopment, and lack of civilisation of ethnic Hungarian minority communities residing in the 'less modernised' countries of Ukraine, Romania and Serbia vis-à-vis the more modern, developed and civilised Hungarian society.⁶ Based on common national belonging, the responsibility of Hungarians in Hungary should thus cover not only the preservation of national identity and culture in these minority groups, but should also include their material support, modernisation and development.

The initiators of such philanthropic actions are middle-class health-, education-, and cultural professionals, entrepreneurs and managers, all of whom are able to afford to participate in the programs. They have the financial means to offer donations, the free time to participate in fund-raising, the material means and free time to offer accommodation in their homes, and to travel great distances to visit the supported communities in their settlements. Encounters between donors and recipients all depend upon such offers of material and time by the donors. The majority of the recipients are less wealthy: they are also less well educated and live in economically depressed rural areas in Romania and Ukraine, while the majority of adults work as part of the secondary labour market and are able to afford long-distance travel only as part of labour migration to Western Europe or Ukrainian and Russian industrial areas.

Personal encounters between donors/volunteers and recipients often take place in localities in Romania or Ukraine. Pre-existing imageries of (economic and structural)

underdevelopment that interact with an experience of poverty on the journeys of the former may intensely bring to the fore helping intentions and practices that target poverty and aim at ‘development’. Moreover, the ideology of modernisation, poverty relief and development also gains emphasis due to ruptures and tensions arising in relation to the ideology of the need for the preservation of the Hungarian culture, as described above. The focus on underdevelopment and poverty-related needs implies the emergence of self-evident and unquestioned philanthropic goals that enable the silencing of legitimacy issues that could challenge these programs.

The focus on poverty and modernisation implies not only material donations of money or consumption goods, but also the re-framing of educational programs as contributing not only to the preservation of Hungarian culture, language and communities, but to the modernisation and the social mobility of their members. In the words of one godparent:

‘The Hungarian House [the community house of the program in a Romanian Moldavian village] is equipped according to Hungarian standards. So there are computers, TV-sets, DVDs, books. So kids there have more opportunity than others attending only public schools. (...) Without the program my godchild would have a five percent chance of obtaining a higher education diploma; now he has forty. So this is great news, because in a region without educational opportunities we have the chance to mobilize a great load of kids. (...) Even if they leave [the community], they will presumably support their parents and whatever, so not only those kids, but the whole region will develop at a greater speed.’

Recreating nationhood and national belonging

Experiences with discord in relation to romanticizing ideologies of heroic resistance and the preservation of national identities and culture are not problematised on an institutional level – that is, through formal discussions among donors and volunteers, and are not translated into organisational documents such as mission statements or the web page of the program. Active members and volunteers have to cope with such discrepancies on their own, in informal discussions among themselves, or with other parties, outside the program. These result in informally negotiated narratives, created individually or in small-scale discussions that remain fragmented, non-standardised,

and incoherent on both the individual and institutional level. First, donors and volunteers attempt to redefine the levels and content of the Hungarianness of their protégées, and tend to establish a ‘lesser’ membership in the imagined community of the Hungarian nation. *‘For five hundred years these people did not have a Hungarian language education. (...) So their Hungarian identities have been squeezed out.’* (Founder of the godparent program)

On the other hand, and paradoxically in parallel with loosening ties, volunteers and donors may also complement such strategies by continuously recreating national authenticity. Everyday speech acts, often passionately linking the cultural characteristics of recipients and their communities (local dialect, folklore, religion) to nationhood and Hungarianness, as well as extraordinary events involving rituals staging the recipients as bearers of canonised Hungarian culture and of ‘national’ folklore, as described above, may both be directed at resolving the emotional tensions experienced by donors and volunteers that is implied by the ambivalence of the national identities of the recipients. *‘The boy from the Transcarpathian school started to recite a poem. He was so incredibly sweet, and all of a sudden the audience was silenced, even the buzzing of a bee could be heard. (...) And I said, just think about how many dialects are there.’* (Main organiser, Budapest program)

Volunteer help for refugees: universal solidarities in a national context

Our second case study focuses on philanthropic aid provided to refugees crossing Hungary in spring-autumn 2015. During this period, hundreds of thousands of people, arriving mainly from Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, transited the country aiming to reach Western Europe. The majority of them had to interrupt their journey on the territory of Hungary, and while looking for opportunities to continue their journey became stuck in public spaces such as railway stations and parks for a period lasting from a few days to a few weeks. While state institutions denied responsibility and refused action outside of refugee camps and classical professional aid organisations were reluctant to help, a spontaneous humanitarian reaction on the part of everyday actors arose (Bernát et al. 2016; Kallius et al. 2016). A significant number of people⁷ offered donations and volunteer work individually or through informal groups and networks and formal

NGOs to meet the basic physical needs of refugees, such as for food, clothes and medical care (Feischmidt – Zakariás 2019).

To systematically map the ideologies and individual motivations behind such activities, between October 2015 and January 2016 we carried out qualitative research among volunteers and philanthropic donors active in helping refugees during spring-autumn 2015. The present analysis relies on 32 semi-structured interviews. Snowball sampling was applied based on existing personal contacts with the field, as well as by approaching online social media groups established for the sake of organizing these helping activities.

As opposed to the case of help for ethnic Hungarians in minority communities, these philanthropic activities were initiated in a social context where public ideologies denied the ‘moral worth’ of the recipients of support. The public sphere (national and local media, newspapers, television, social media, physical public spaces, etc.) during the respective period was pervaded by a securitization discourse controlled and initiated by the Hungarian government (Szalai-Göbl 2015, Messing-Bernáth 2016). Media analyses have revealed that the frame of securitization depicted refugees and migrants as potential threats to Hungarian society through various narratives (in terms of disease and threats to health, cultural differences, physical attacks, violence and terrorism, and demographic characteristics related to their number or fertility rates) which were all assigned to refugees to emphasize their inherent threat to Hungarian society (and also to Europe, ‘European culture’ and Christianity at large). Alternative framings emphasizing war and conflict as major sources of mass emigration, the insufficiency of legal frameworks of protection, as well as the living standards of and insufficient humanitarian supplies for people on the move were marginalized in the media and in public discourse.

Hegemonic securitization discourses constantly delegitimized the activities of philanthropic actors and volunteers. This evoked continuous demand for the latter to justify their activities towards the larger public: media outlets (Barta-Tóth 2016) and social media (Bernát et al. 2016) as well as everyday interactions were all sites of communicating and legitimizing the ideologies and concepts underpinning refugee-humanitarianism. In our present paper we focus on the latter; that is, on legitimising ideologies as they appeared in the personal narratives of the volunteers.⁸

According to our interviews, the hegemonic character of the securitizing discourse with ‘unworthy migrants’ at its core was typically countered by universalist ideologies. These ideologies emphasized the need to reject (and the immorality) of any type of distinction between potential targets of helping: classifications of different attributes, merits, and decisions about the worth or deservingness of the sufferers. Thoroughly formulated universalist claims were most eloquently embedded into this humanitarian ideology, confining the application of such a lack of judgement to an extraordinary moment in time and space. The ‘state of emergency’ in these narratives legitimized life saving beyond the norms and obligations of the everyday functioning of society.

‘When there is an earthquake and people are under the rubble, we don’t ask whether they are good or bad people. We equally rescue people from beneath the rubble of a prison building and people from beneath the rubble of the hospital or of a kindergarten building. (...) There are moments in life when we do not pose this question. There is a person in front of you who has travelled across the sea, who is afraid, who doesn’t really know what the future will look like. We don’t ask them these kind of questions. We ask them if they are hungry, or cold.’ (Volunteer, main organizer of one initiative)

Besides humanitarianism, universalist ideologies may also be woven into ideologies about professional duties (mainly in the case of doctors, health professionals, social workers, and teachers); these are evoked in the frames of Christian universalism, in reference to the universal responsibility of caring for the vulnerable (the old, the sick, children), as well as by understanding the situation through collective memories of historical trauma, in particular the Holocaust and the persecution of Jews. Such universalist ideologies of legitimating refugee support and the rejection of constraints on solidarity along cultural (ethnic, national, religious) boundaries, however, were closely coupled with reflections upon the nation as a political or civic community. Philanthropic and volunteer accounts not only stressed the counter-ideologies of the deservingness of refugees, but also interpreted it in relation to the wider social context of securitization and xenophobia that was understood in national frames by the majority of respondents. In what follows, we briefly describe such nationalizing of volunteer narratives. First, we describe how national categorisations were evoked and recited in relation to the securitizing discourses prevalent in the public sphere; second, we show how volunteer support for refugees was interpreted as a possible means of amending

and rectifying national characteristics and assigning and restituting the moral worth and civic responsibility of the Hungarian nation.

In the volunteer accounts that describe the context and content of refugee support, formal elements of civic nationalism dominate the imagery: connections between citizens and their relationship with the government of the country, public discourses and national media are the focus of these narratives (Feischmidt-Zakariás 2019). However, culturalising aspects are also included: ideas about political relations among citizens, and between citizens and political actors are often closely intertwined with essentialized substantive characteristics associated with Hungarianness.

Critique of the nation and national shame

Limited compassion and significant indifference towards refugees, anti-refugee stereotypes and sentiments and open aggression towards volunteers (physical aggression like spitting, or verbal aggression and psychological pressure such as anger and hostility) are often interpreted in national terms as the reactions of ‘Hungarian society’. National belonging thus becomes a central interpretative frame and a concern for the volunteers. *‘A Hungarian person reacts to problems only if they are pushed into their face, if there is a little girl sleeping on the street, they help. But if there are just pictures of ten thousand kids sleeping on Greek seashores, or afloat on the sea, they are just not touched by that at all.’* (Organizer of a social enterprise for migrants, volunteer and donor)

Such narratives of Hungarianness often deconstruct an essentialist view of ‘national culture’ by explaining it as formed and shaped through national-level social processes: governance techniques and media manipulation, political ideological divisions related to national-level party politics, or national-level redistribution constraints may all become social explanations for the attitudes and behaviour of ‘Hungarian society’.

‘The form of government in Hungary is that of a closed psychiatric ward, as I saw in a caricature of Orbán [the prime minister of Hungary] sitting inside a fenced off country. And yet the government is supported by many, (...) people in the countryside who are closed off to information, who get government news from the state-owned media.’ (Social worker in the field of refugee support, volunteer)

Such everyday sociological models operating with analytical categories related to the nation state, however, often refer to cultural traits – national characteristics of Hungarians – in a less deconstructed and more essentializing manner. According to these narratives, political and structural mechanisms operate in tandem with a population that is responsive to and puts up with such a politics.

'(The people) just eat what has been served to them, at least according to opinion polls. (...) They never do anything. [Laughing] This twentieth century history is all about whatever is done to us, we just watch and say 'oops'. OK, we succeeded in putting together a revolution in 1956, but apart from that, nothing. Fidesz rule is similar, everyone is just watching it (...)' (Donor)

According to these narratives, Hungary is not only characterized by a xenophobic and authoritarian government and a compliant electorate – a xenophobic or indifferent 'people' –, but it is also perceived as a backward place where a 'lack of civil society' and a general lack of solidarity prevail. These allusions implicitly or explicitly echo the liberal discourse about the insufficient democratization processes of postsocialist Hungary and East-Central Europe in general that is produced by political and cultural elites in Western Europe as well as in Hungary. Similarly to the discourse of co-ethnic philanthropy contrasting Hungary with its eastern neighbour states, this discourse also builds upon the concept of East-West geographical hierarchies of civilisation: Hungarian 'backwardness' is understood in relation to Western European states and nations that represent the desired level of modernization, democracy and civilisation. Concerning our volunteer interviews, the reference point against which xenophobia, a lack of civil society and a low appreciation for universal morals may be measured often remains implicit. When openly revealed, it is always Western Europe, France, the UK, Germany and Austria that are circumscribed as the ultimate places in the social imagery, where such universal morals are anchored. *'I find (the government) inhumane. Austria and Germany are exemplary, they treat refugees as human beings. People (in Hungary) just don't have a clue what's going on in the world, they see everything through the filter of Hungarian internal politics. There is a huge difference between Europe and us (...)' (Volunteer)*

Such interpretations may remain descriptive-interpretative schemes that volunteers employ to understand the social phenomena they are surrounded by. However, such

reflection on the securitizing policy actions of the Hungarian government and on everyday xenophobic reactions on the part of individuals frequently also generates feelings – feelings of shame. Anti-refugee attitudes, emotions, and actions all associated with Hungarianness may threaten the identity of individuals by projecting the potential of characteristics such as xenophobia in particular and an uncivilized nature in general on all members of the nation, including respondents. Such evocations of shame dominate the following extract, as formulated by a volunteer:

'I really felt ashamed, actually I was ashamed of my Hungarianness. If you look at it, we really are xenophobes, and I just don't know why, I've been thinking so much about this. While I was giving help, I was bullied a lot, and I asked myself, why is it a problem that I behave humanely? Even those who supported me, even they didn't take it for granted, they just said "oh my God, what a saint you are!" and the others were like "shame on you, you are helping the terrorists!" There were really few people who said that "OK, they (refugees) are in big shit, I will go there, help them, offer them money, because that's the humane way to do it." At that moment I really felt ashamed that I was Hungarian, when we were together on the underground, and they [the people around me] were just watching us with contempt, and at that moment, I just wanted to apologise, in their name.'

Restituting national identities and restoring national solidarity in the context of refugee support

National categorization – through a threatening negative identity – became a part of the motivating and legitimizing ideologies of philanthropy and pro-refugee activism. Donating goods and volunteering became major tools for actively resisting such negative categorizations. Shame, in this case, may have incited the intention and action of expressing solidarity, and may have become a major pillar of engagement and the maintenance of helping activities.

Such threatened collective identities were found to incite individualistic strategies: an alternative personal identity detached individuals from the government's xenophobia, and the cruel and uncivilized character of the Hungarian nation could be negated and reconstructed through acts of philanthropy – as suggested in a statement by the spokesperson of one of the major philanthropic initiatives: *'I wanted to show*

that I was not like this.' (Volunteer, spokesperson of one initiative) However, the majority of the volunteers we interviewed pursued the collective strategy of redefining the nation through refugee support. While taking part in practices of helping, solidarity expressed was understood and interpreted in national terms, and became a characteristic of the Hungarian nation as a whole. *'I think that it is highly important what they (the volunteers) are doing, and as for my Hungarian compatriots, I'm deeply proud of them.'* (Donor, individually and through a corporate social responsibility program)

Such narrative reinterpretations of national identities based on the abundance of volunteer support may be imagined through the perspectives of a general other; in other cases, the significant others whose appreciation becomes crucial in self-identification are explicitly named: the reshaping of identities through the perspective of the supported refugees, as well as in the eyes of a global/Western public is prevalent in the interviews. *'The international media is full of statements that despite all this the people still help refugees. (...) When the riot at Röszke [asylum centre] happened, and at the borders all these things happened, there were loads of media broadcasters here. CNN, German, French, English, I couldn't go out of our house without seeing some of them there.'* (Volunteer)

We have shown above how national identities are the stakes of volunteer support for refugees, embedded in a transnational space of nations and European East-West geographies. Through the mere existence of volunteer support perceived in national frames, negative categorisations may be contested, and identities may be restored. Volunteering, moreover, may become imagined not only as an apparatus for expressing and visualizing the plurality and multiplicity of positions regarding the refugee issue in Hungary, but as a tool for changing – improving – the nation as a whole. According to the main organiser of a helping network: *'We agreed right from the beginning that we have a double goal: helping refugees operatively however we can, and by doing so (...) shaping Hungarian public discourse.'* This pedagogical habitus may be evoked by specific contextual factors including liberal cosmopolitan lifestyles and identities, or professional identities related to helping those in need (in particular, those with a social worker- or social scientist biographical background) which all imply an identification with discourses of volunteering and civil society, and an entitlement to shape and influence individuals and communities in line with these values through the practice of civic helping.

Discussion and conclusion

In the form of unravelling the working of national legitimation at the heart of two types of philanthropic support in present-day Hungary, in this paper we show how ideas of nationhood and national belonging may ground and shape civic helping, donating and volunteering. Also, we reveal how different forms of philanthropic helping create institutional terrains which make national belonging and national categorisations relevant and practicable.

The first case study provides a rich illustration of how ideas about nationhood, national community, national sameness and authenticity may become the foundations of intra-group solidarity: of philanthropic giving towards co-nationals and co-ethnics. Moreover, it shows how hierarchies of deservingness based on moral worth tied to national authenticity orient helping intentions and prioritize categories and groups among the potentially needy. The second case study shows how a universal morality that denies the significance of any type of cultural boundaries may function as a core component in terms of providing substance for abstractions about national sameness, implying that universalist philanthropic helping can become embedded into national imageries. Accordingly, we not only reveal how nationalism may lay the foundations for communitarian, intra-group helping, but – in a somewhat similar vein to that shown by Dromi (2016) in an analysis of the development of the International Red Cross – we have also contributed to understanding universalism as intimately related to national imageries.

Nationhood and national belonging, however, are not only pre-existing fixed constructs that function as background factors for enabling solidarity and helping: they are also implications of these philanthropic practices. First, in line with recent scholarly research on everyday nationalism, we claim that such philanthropic actions allow for the reproduction of national identities and categorisations through everyday talk, rituals and performances. In planning and carrying out the actual helping – volunteers and donors among themselves, or interacting with outsiders in their social environment, including us, the researchers – actors recreate meanings attached to nationhood through

their everyday interpretations, illustrations of which we have presented in the extracts throughout this article.

Second, ideas of nationhood are constituted in these philanthropic activities not only as enactments and performances of pre-existing ideas and concepts. Helping activities and practices are closely intertwined with ‘breaching’ the nation – i.e. violating taken-for-granted concepts of the nation. Coethnic philanthropy (focusing its attention on minority communities affected by processes of assimilation) and refugee philanthropy (taking place among hegemonic discourses of xenophobia and securitization) invite wide-ranging reflections on the part of actors, and thus become incubating contexts for the birth of new interpretations related to nationhood and national belonging. Thus, these philanthropic ‘breaching’ encounters are shown to have strong transformative potential, ‘stretching the national imaginary beyond its consolidated boundaries’ (Hearn – Antonsich 2018).

Third, beyond the national concepts that function as contextual, mediating elements of helping – exemplified by talking about the nation and talking with the nation (Fox-Idriss) while carrying out helping – in both cases the nation may become an explicit abstracted end in itself for these activities. Although the actual long-term effects of these attempts remain to be investigated in future research, we claim that on both terrains, beyond addressing the needy, volunteering and philanthropic action explicitly aims at forming the nation. That is, these actions aim at inculcating in nationals specific values, dispositions and behaviour considered as desirable for the nation as a whole by philanthropic actors.

These three ways of reconstructing the national domain may hold true in general in various institutional fields and various types of practices beyond volunteering or philanthropy. The reproduction of nationhood and national belonging through everyday talk and everyday actions in philanthropy, moreover, has its own specificities within the broader working of everyday nationhood, intimately tied to institutional specificities of philanthropy and volunteering. The national domain as reconstructed through philanthropic ideas and practices mirrors the categorizations and divisions inherent in philanthropic giving and volunteering. Divisions between helpers and the helped, between deserving and non-deserving needy, and between those who take part

in helping and those who do not become inscribed into national categories and identifications shaped by these activities.

In our first case study involving philanthropic help directed towards ethnic Hungarian minority communities we see how a nation is reproduced based on paradoxical helper-recipient distinctions of ‘unequal commonality’ (Lainer-Vos 2014): the addressees of philanthropic giving, although belonging to the same nation, are imagined as more disadvantaged and poor compared to other segments of the Hungarian nation, yet more deserving based on their national authenticity compared to other Hungarians. Thus common Hungarianness provides one layer for solidary intentions and practices, while inequalities and differences within the Hungarian nation complement this imagery. In the second case, a study of refugee support, the Hungarian nation is reproduced mirroring the antagonism between those who help and those who refuse to help. Solidarity between the helpers and the recipients of help and the responsibility of the former for the latter contribute to the articulation and performance of values of tolerance and universality. This position of anti-nationalism, however, through opposition and contestation of the Hungarian – securitizing and anti-refugee – national politics and mainstream everyday xenophobia, becomes the stake of symbolic struggles to establish and reconstruct the Hungarian nation as solidary, tolerant, and universally inclusive.

It would seem convenient to conclude that these two forms of invoking national concepts reflect the two ideal-typical models of civic and ethnic nationalism. In the case of helping ethnic Hungarian minorities, emphasis is laid on cultural substance: common history, ancestry, and common national culture, and opposition with other potentially dangerous nations is assumed; in the case of refugee support, formal procedures such as resolving problems together, volunteering for and with others, and a commitment towards procedural aspects of societal integration – that is, democratic values, tolerance, and an explicit refusal of exclusionary ethnic solidarities – are at the core of ideologies behind helping.

However, looking closer at our cases a more complex picture unfolds. Both philanthropic terrains, civic help for ethnic Hungarians living in minority communities, as well as volunteer help provided for refugees, rely on the discourse of civilization imagined along West-East (North-South) geographies. The general suggestion made by

many (Kiossev 2008, Todorova 1997, Melegh 2006) that the cognitive framework of a geographical-cultural hierarchy of Western (and Northern) cultural-civilisational superiority deeply affects not only symbolic constructs and ideologies but actions as well has been specified here in the institutional field of philanthropy and volunteering. The reference to a civilisational discourse in both cases is intertwined with collective identity struggles in the name of the nation aimed at acquiring better positions along the civilisational axis. However, specific forms of the discourse create and fund moral ideologies and thus helper identities in specific ways.

In the case of co-ethnic philanthropy, suffering and needs and the legitimacy of helping actions are tied to lower levels of civilization and the economic underdevelopment of recipients, reestablishing the superior position of the helpers – at least in the helper-helped dyadic relationship. The focus on and sensitivity to suffering and needs, as well as the benevolent intention of helping those in need, is reinforced, however, by a reversal of this slope of civilization that claims the more valuable (national) authenticity and traditionality of the recipients of helping. These actions thus paradoxically imply the reaffirmation of the slope of civilization and in parallel, resistance to its discourse.

The slope of civilization also has a constitutive role in the moral economy of refugee help. Universalist norms and obligations are considered by the volunteers as core substantive characteristics of being civilized. The cruelty of anti-refugee measures taken by the Hungarian government, through activating national identification, threaten the collective self-identity of everyday actors, which threat is intensified by an imagined European public (and often a real one; see Messing-Bernáth 2016 for the case of Austria) that condemns and thus pushes down the Hungarian nation as a whole on the slope of civilization. A commitment to volunteering thus attempts to reinstate the moral worth of the Hungarian nation as civilized on the global map of nations. These narratives identify Western Europe and countries such as Germany or France as unequivocal supporters of unconditional solidarity, inclusive of refugees and migrants from the Middle East, and regard them as ultimate representatives of civilization (ignoring entirely the decades-old discourses of ‘Fortress Europe’). Civilisation, in this context, exhibits similarities to ethnic nationalism, inasmuch as it is formulated as the substantive moral characteristics of essentialized national belonging, conceived of in antagonistic relationship to other nations.

Mainstream nationalism research emphasizes the centrality of constructing the idea of national unity through national sameness. Our research complements these perspectives by revealing how specific internal boundaries and hierarchies within the nation may become constitutive elements in its reconstruction. Lainer-Vos (2014) in the case of Jewish diaspora philanthropy in the USA in the 1940s showed how diaspora philanthropy contributed to the reconstruction of the nation based on internal national differences. In a similar vein, we found that internal divisions within the nation constituted core resources in both cases: in the organisation of co-ethnic philanthropy towards Hungarian minority communities, as well as, paradoxically, in philanthropy supporting refugees, primarily built upon universalist ideologies.

We have also enlarged Lainer-Vos's inquiries in various ways. First, beyond helper-recipient opposition, we have looked at other possible categorisations inherent in philanthropy and volunteering, mainly among helpers and bystanders, and the deserving and non-deserving needy, and have departed from the assumption that all these distinctions may be analytically perceived as moral hierarchies of these categories. Second, by revealing how these moral hierarchies may find their analogies in various national imageries, we showed how philanthropic practices may become the sites of the production of competing concepts of nationhood and national belonging.⁹ Third, we also pointed out the role of a common moral discourse – that is, the discourse of East-West civilizational hierarchies – in producing these competing concepts. Through its inherent divisions and categorisations, philanthropy has the powerful potential to create moral worth. When organised in a transnational context in ways that these divisions overlap with various categorisations within and between nations, philanthropy may become a site for creating specific moral values of civilisation and authenticity, as mediated by the nation, by its internal divisions, and external contrasts.

These statements lead us to an important remark: although revealing the significance of national categorization inherent in the philanthropic forms thus analysed, we do not seek to downplay the importance of other, non-national concerns in the process of philanthropy and volunteering. On the contrary, in both cases the multivocality of categorisations and ideologies are constitutive elements of organizing philanthropic endeavours. In co-ethnic philanthropy, national sameness and national authenticity prescribed co-ethnic helping in order to support the preservation of

Hungarian identity, Hungarian culture and Hungarian communities in Ukraine and Romania; on a secondary level, however, material help offered to economically disadvantaged communities, often based on universalist ideas of humanity, have enabled the maintenance of the philanthropic process. In refugee support, universalist ideologies of humanitarianism, Christianity, or universalist professional ideologies (of healthcare or social work) are prevalent, all of which are opposed to securitization; the pursuit of these ideas in the form of philanthropic practices, however, is also formulated as a quest for the moral development of the Hungarian nation as a whole.

As such, in this article we reveal how ideas about the nation work in tandem with non-national categorisations and ideologies and thus provide a potential framework for those aiming to ‘do good’ and ‘help others’ that may help with imagining concrete, legitimate ways of such helping activities. By bringing to the fore nationhood and national belonging, while also revealing their intimate coupling with non-national – universalistic – ideologies, we also contribute to the broader project of re-embedding philanthropy and volunteering into their socio-historical context.

¹ Some important examples: Anderson (2006 [1983]); Calhoun (2007); Eriksen (1991).

² For the relevance of the Maussian concept in contemporary philanthropy, see Silber 1998.

³ The principle of transborder responsibility forms part of both constitutions of postsocialist Hungary: See the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary, 6. §. and the The Fundamental Law of Hungary, Foundations, Article D. 2010.

⁴ Regarding the magnitude of philanthropic donations directed towards ethnic Hungarian minority communities, a nationally representative 2004 survey found that 3.2% of the total amount of money donated was directed towards these communities (Czike et al. 2006). Regarding such programs as embedded in schools, research from 2010 found that 28% of public schools in Hungary (about half of the institutions that responded to the questionnaire) have a connection of this type with one or more ethnic Hungarian schools abroad (Lettner 2011, cited by Zakariás 2018).

⁵ Besides inter- and intra-generational language change, assimilation refers here to specific processes of intermarriage and inter- and intragenerational changes of national identification.

⁶ For the case of the ethnic Hungarians of Romania, see Feischmidt 2005.

⁷ According to a nationally representative survey, around 3.5% of the adult population offered either donations of goods and money or voluntary work between spring and autumn 2015 to support refugees and migrants crossing Hungary (Zakariás 2016).

⁸ As our reviewers have pointed out, it remains an important scientific endeavour to investigate the specific role of social media in the reproduction of these ideologies and concepts.

⁹ Thanks to one of our anonymous reviewers for this emphasis.

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