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Gábor Kovács: *"…for silent amongst rogues, I share their vice" – the road of the inter-war Hungarian Jewry to the Shoa from the anti-Jewish legislation to the deportation*

Abstract:

The aim of my paper is to reconstruct the historical-cultural-psychological constellations of the inter-war Hungary in the context of the problem of responsibility. For the completion of this task I am going to use the seminal writing of István Bibó entitled '*Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944*' (1948) which has hitherto been the most comprehensive analysis including historical, cultural-religious, sociological and psychological aspects. The train of thought of his writing, in some respects runs parallel with Hannah Arendt's approach explained in the first part of '*The origins of totalitarianism*.' Both authors focus upon the problem of the relations of Jewish communities with their wider environment and their share the same hypothesis: distorted inter-communal relations involve distorted communicative situations and false experiences concerning the other party.

Key words: Shoah, Hungarian Jewry, complice, responsibility, false experience

Historical-social context

Hungary, similarly to the other Central-Eastern European countries in the 19th century, produced a lopsided social development. The old premodern social structures, the aristocracy,

the gentry and the peasantry forming the overwhelming majority of the country, were coexisting with the new ones, the entrepreneurial and working classes. This coexistence involved special ethnical constellations; the capitalist class was recruited from non-Hungarian ethnical population; first of all it was the Hungarian Jewry which played a main role in economic modernization (Berendt, 1985: 32). As a result of the Jewish emancipation after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867) the restricting premodern legal obstacles were removed from the way of the economic activity of Hungarian Jewry inhabited the socio-economic niches left empty by the Hungarian origin gentry possessing power positions of the state and public administration. There was a mutual interest-relation promising mutual benefits (Braham, 1985: 179): the traditional Hungarian elites needed an entrepreneurial class possessing the skills necessary for the smooth run of modern capitalist economy while the Jewry needed integration into Hungarian society which of course meant much than mere a possibility of unrestricted economic activity; it had social, cultural and emotional dimensions. All in all, these decades proved a Golden era in the history of the Hungarian Jewry (Braham, 1985: 178); but on the edge of the horizons were looming dark shades foreshadowing a much darker future.

The political strategy of state-induced assimilation, in really, proved successfully only in the case of one ethnical group: it was the Jewry, the majority of which adopted the Hungarian identity in linguistic as well as in cultural meaning. (The ideology of *Magyarization* in other cases kicked back; it fuelled the national awakening of other ethnic groups and it involved growing political tensions.) Victor Karády, the Hungarian sociologist, an expert of the history of Hungarian Jewry writes about a tacit assimilationist social contract:

"The "assimilationist contract" demanded, in return, for integration and protection, a measure of "nationalization" on the side of the Jews, including their support for major national goals set by the ruling elite. Linguistic Magyarization, and the acceptance of an unbalanced political partnership, i. e., an arrangement under which the Jewish bourgeoisie could not reach political leverage in line with its economic strength. Most of the stipulations of this unwritten "social contract" expressed both a relationship of reciprocal interests between Jewish and gentry elites and a measure of compulsion or constraint imposed upon Jews. It maintained not only the unchallengeable nature of the nobility's political hegemony but a subtly dosed – though in time somewhat diminishing – degree of exclusion of Jews from publicly controlled economic markets and civil service careers" (Karády, 1997: 148–149.)

The former antebellum political strategy of liberalism based assimilation was replaced by ethno-protective politics in the interwar Hungary. It was rooted in the concept of national

essence; (Trencsényi, 2012: 70-120) they supposed an original national character which can be deformed or diluted by outer foreign influences; assimilation was deemed the most pernicious one of them. The war defeat, the disintegration of Historic Greater Hungary and the 'Jewish question' linked together in a fatal way in the contemporary Hungarian public opinion fostered by opinion leader intellectuals and political decision makers as well. If we are inquiring into the causes of emerging of such distorted intellectual-cultural-political climate, besides the political hysteria generated by the above-mentioned shock of the Trianon Peace Treaty, (Kovacs, 2012) we have to mention the status anxiety of the so called Christian-national middle classes felt toward the Jewish-origin middle classes in the post-bellum shrank job market. (Karády, 1997) However, having accepted the logic of scapegoating seemed to be ineluctable the necessity of a segregative-discriminative anti-Jewish legislation.

The prelude was the *Law of Numerus Clausus* (1920) which restricted the proportion of the Jewish-origin students to 5% in the higher education. The anti-Jewish legislation took place in three steps and every one of them was a new development in the way of segregation and isolation. The first ant-Jewish law was enacted in 1938; it defined the legal category of Jew on denominational basis and reduced the proportions of the Jews to 20% in the business, trade and the professions, the second prescribed much lower proportions; the limit was drawn in 6%, while the third one used racial terms. A decree issued in March 31 of 1944 obliged the Jewish persons to wear a yellow Star of David. The ghettoization and the deportation of the Hungarian Jews took place after the German occupation of Hungary on March 19, 1944. Regent Horthy didn't resign and appointed a puppet government sustaining the pretence of legitimacy and legality. The deportation of the Hungarian Jewry of the countryside had been accomplished under German control, but by the direct participation of the Hungarian authorities; it was the Hungarian gendarmerie which played a main role in it. In the Nazi extermination camps, at last, about half a million Hungarian Jews had been died. The Jewry of Budapest escaped at the last minute in virtue of Regent Miklós Horthy who stopped the deportation.

This is the short historiography of the antecedents; it was the way leading to the Hungarian Holocaust, or Shoa, telling in a nutshell. It is a description which is not able to give an explication of this tragedy. What happened? Who should share the responsibility for it? These questions are needed an approach beyond the level of the horrible facts. István Bibó, the Hungarian political thinker, one of the forefathers of Hungarian sociology tried to find answers in his long essay entitled '*Jewish Question in Hungary after 1944*'. It was published in 1948. Bibó suggested an overall national self-examination which really began, mainly in

the circles of the Protestant churches. A debate took place in the contemporary press but it suffered an abrupt end after the communist takeover in 1949.

The interpretation of István Bibó

The way to Hungarian Holocaust was interpreted by Bibó in the referential framework of communal-political hysteria rooted in the shock of the dismemberment of the Historic Greater Hungary. His explicative model is a socio-psychological one moving on the level of inter-group relations and starting from the experiences got by the members of different communities from each other in social intercourse. (Bibó 1991) In this model the point of departure is the coexistence of a minority group of Jewish origin persons with a majority group of Gentile persons. These groups are constituted by the opposition of *We-consciousness* and *They-consciousness*. It is important that the assuming of we-consciousness for the members of minority group is, in many cases, goes no on a voluntary basis but it is ascribed to persons of special ethnic origins, peculiar behavioural patterns, profession, etc. by the members of the majority group. The genesis of anti-Semitism, in Bibó's model is due to the cooperative effect of three factors. The first of them is *prejudice* which, in Europe, has been originated in the medieval Christian antijudaism (The Jews as God-killers), the second one is the emerging of *distorted dehumanized social organization of society*; it is the situation which is labelled as a historical deadlock in Bibó's theory. These two factors in themselves are abstract; they are concretizing in the process of social intercourse when concrete persons encounter each other in concrete situations getting experiences about each other. *Experience*, in Bibó's model, the third and, in a sense, the most important factor because it is which actualizes and enlivens the potentialities are hidden in prejudice and distorted social organization of society.

Experience-gaining is a mutual process in the intercourse of inter-group contacts. The interpretation of experiences concerning out-group persons' behaviour patterns is accomplished by the referential codes of in-group rules, stereotypes and prejudices. This doesn't cause necessarily social troubles and dysfunctions in case there is a commonly accepted value-system which is able to function as a referential meta-framework transmitting between the different group codes. The self-correcting nature of experience-gaining, in this case, prevails; the ensuing experiences, statistically and in the long run, overwrites the former bad ones supposing that there are no lasting distorted social situations getting into contact

different groups in such a way that they inevitably acquire false and misleading experiences about each other.

Bibó's illuminating and very appropriate example illustrating the nature of inter-group conflicts in a distorted social environment is the parable of the relation between the *housewife* and the *domestic servant*. (Bibó, 1991: 212-213). It was a typical social relation in the interwar Hungary; it was accustomed that that the families of middle classes have their domestic servants. It was, in Bibó's concept, a typical case of a social contact based on distorted social organization; it blended a *Gesellschaft*-like contractual relation with a *Gemeinschaft*-like one. The speciality of it was the mingling of the rules of a premodern social contact with a modern one; as the main consequence of it the worst features of both dominated that hybrid relation but without their own advantages. Both parties acquired negative, unfavourable experiences about each other. The domestic servant, in the housewife's experience, was unreliable, lazy and had an inclination for lie and stealing, while the housewife, in the domestic servant experience, was domineering, capricious, with a predisposition for causeless sadistic behaviour toward her subordinate. These mutually disadvantageous negative experiences were real ones and the grievances of both parties caused by each other were real grievances, but this, emphasizes Bibó, doesn't mean the equality of these grievances. As the Hungarian sociologist, György Csepeli, in his analysis given about Bibó's theory of the genesis of Anti-Semitism points out:

"Bibó, of coarse does not forget to add that the relationship between the housewife and the domestic servant is an asymmetric one. Whatever they know and feel about each other, both partners are the captives of the structure, and their experience of each other is equally misleading. On the other hand, their grievances are not of equal seriousness. When it comes to a historical accounting of justice, their similar palpability will not prevent us from considering the complaint lodged by the domestic servant as the more valid," (Csepeli: 2001, 8)

The characteristics of the housewife – domestic servant relationship, mutatis mutandis, are can be found in the Gentile – Jew relationship as well. As a consequence of the distorted social organization both parties offer their negative qualities for each other. The experiences acquired about each other, moreover, are interpreted by different interpretative codes between which there is no possible mediation or passage. The Jews, in sociological meaning, are among the causes of Anti-Semitism; their special, segregated social existence gives possibility for gaining false, misleading experiences for a wider society imbued with historic-origin anti-Judaism and burdened with the situations of a modern distorted social organization. The self-correcting nature of the process of experience-gaining in the case of Anti-Semites doesn't

function properly. Experience, in this case, enlivens the abstract, inherited prejudice. The result is a fixation; it is cannot be dispelled by the ensuing experiences. Every later encounter with Jews will be interpreted in the light of this fixation. However, it is important to add that, in Bibó's theory, the anti-Semite is not who doesn't like Jews. To be anti-Semite, for him, means to ascribe plots and conspiracies to Jews, to be convinced that they seek for dominate the world and demand special measures against them

When Bibó asserts, that the behavioural patterns predetermined by a distorted social organization has been petrified into constant typical collective traits his theory runs parallel with Hannah Arendt's concept about typical Jewish social roles emerging in the minority Jewish society embedding in the majority Gentile society. (Arendt, 1958; Arendt, 1997). Both authors focus upon the problem of the relations of Jewish communities with their wider environment and their share the same hypothesis: distorted inter-communal relations involve distorted communicative situations and false experiences concerning the other party. What is apperceived by the social environment as greedy money making or hypercritical attitude are traits emerging as responses of Jewish communities having been forced to marginal existence in premodern Europe, Bibó argues. Arendt, writing about the dichotomous Jewish types of *parvenu* and *pariah*, ascribes their emergence, as well as, to the pressure of wider social environment inducing typical behavioural patterns which can serve as survival strategies in a more or less hostile society.

Conclusion

Value-free sociological analysis and moral approach run together in Bibó's writing. The latter emerges on the basis of a sociopsychological model of inter-group relations in the interwar Hungarian society. The scientific method, for Bibó, is an intellectual tool helping him to pose the moral question of responsibility. His train of thought, according to this problem, runs on two levels. He insists, on the one hand, that responsibility can be assumed only personally by individuals; it makes no sense to allocate responsibility for wicked deeds committed by individuals to the whole community. The ideas of collective guilty and collective responsibility are not able to reach the goal of delivering usable criteria for a valid and well-founded moral judgement. When a nation is collectively declared guilty and it is collectively qualified responsible for wicked deeds the inevitable result will be the dispersion of guilty and responsibility. These moral categories can be used only for assessing individual acts performed by individuals. (Bibó's opinion, in this respect, very similar to Hannah

Arendt's one; after the World War II she also finds so that meaningless to speak about collective German responsibility.) But the thing it is not as simple as that. Bibó definitely calls for a national self-examination; it must be performed simultaneously with individual self-examination accomplished by the single members of the community. It is true that guilty and responsibility are the categories of individual morality but the multitudinous moral failure of individuals in a critical situation indicates the pathological, unhealthy state of the whole national community, This happened, Bibó asserts, in Hungary during the time of the persecution of the Hungarian Jewry. The most aching symptom was not the exceedingly great number of the direct perpetrators, but the exceedingly great number of the passive bystanders and onlookers who, either because of in hope of material and existential advantages or because of moral indifference, didn't give helping hand to the persecuted Jews There were Hungarians of course saving and hiding the persecuted Jews and their number was not negligible but general moral climate of the contemporary Hungarian society didn't foster and encourage such kind brave behaviour. Bibó raises the question of responsibility concerning the representatives of such vital social institutions as the public service and the churches who, in his opinion, all in all displayed an insufficient and ambiguous behaviour. A great deal of intellectual elite of the interwar decades shared the traditional middle class origin cultural anti-Semitism and was not able in time to recognize the fatal consequences of the new type racial anti-Semitism. (Ozsváth, 1997) All signs points to the direction that there was no a generally accepted moral value system giving sure guidelines and moral supports in crisis-situation. However, the basic moral message of Bibó's writing is simple. It is the same which was expressed by Mihály Babits, the great Hungarian poet who before the war, in 1938 seeing that the country runs toward a catastrophe in his monumental poem written about Jonah who was reluctant to accept God's calling, put into the prophet's mouth the basic moral maxim:

"for silent amongst rogues, I share their vice.

Kin will be responsible for kin;

Each man must go the way Thou sendest him."

(Translated by István Tótfalusi/

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