

## **‘Rocking the nation’: the popular culture of neo-nationalism**

### **Introduction**

When scholars of nationalism think about ‘national culture’, they usually understand ‘high’, ‘official’ and ‘traditional’ culture and they investigate the role of elites in their ‘invention’ (Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm and Turner 1983). Theoretical approaches stressing the everyday, the banal and mundane forms of nationalism have recently appeared in works of sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists (Billig 1995; Brubaker et al. 2006, First and Hermann 2009, Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008, Skey 2011). Some of them became aware that everyday forms of national identification can be understood only if they take into consideration a new dimension of popular culture. Tim Edensor has expanded the subject of nationalism studies by asking how national culture and national narratives are spread through popular culture: “Traditional cultural forms and practices of the nation are supplemented, and increasingly replaced in their affective power, by meanings, images and activities drawn by popular culture” (Edensor 2002: 12).

For Edensor, ‘popular’ is synonymous with the everyday and the self-evident; it is something that is not conscious, not reflected upon, but evident and natural. Therefore, the question is through what kind of cultural mediation a situation emerges in which the nation is still considered a natural, evident framework in the imagination of individuals and communities and on the level of social organization. When talking about the nationalization of landscape, or of the media or architecture, Edensor focuses on everyday ways of learning and using culture produced within a national context.

This paper investigates new forms and practices of national culture as they are produced and spread by popular culture. Our empirical material will show that popular culture is not only a new medium or context for old forms of nationalism. The way in which old symbolic, narrative and sensual elements of nationalism are reinvented and reconfigured by popular culture generates new social meanings and political functions. The ultimate aim of this paper is to understand new forms and new meanings of nationalism both related to politics and the social identities of people living in the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We try to accomplish this by adopting the concept of new nationalism from social anthropologists Marcus Banks and

Andre Gingrich (2006) who argue that new nationalism is a phenomenon originating from politics but largely produced through cultural performances.

We focus in this paper on a specific segment of popular culture in Hungary that is organized around a specific genre of rock music, named “national rock” (*nemzeti rock*) by its founders. On the one hand, we are looking at the processes of production and the activities of its performers along with their relationship to the far-right political movement. On the other hand, we discuss the musical output, especially the lyrics and the musical events, concerts and festivals focusing on the common experiences and language provided by this music for its fans and supporters. Beyond its aesthetic aspects, ‘national rock’ music is presented as a cultural product that has a decisive role in the creation and acquisition of discourses and emotions related to a new form of nationalism.

Connections between music and nationalism and music and political mobilization have already been investigated. However, this literature mostly targets historical forms and musical genres belonging to high culture, more specifically the role of music in the creation of the cultural repertoire of nationalism (Brincker 2014). The musicologist Philip Bolhman uses the concept of ‘nationalistic music’ for compositions of cultural and political work in a ‘top-down’ direction (Bolhman 2004). Following Peter Stamatov’s suggestion in his essay on the political uses of Verdi’s operas in the 1840s we will pay special attention to the interactions between the users, the cultural objects and the contexts (Stamatov 2002).

To be able to study popular music together with its role in politics and identity formation, we cannot overlook the scholars of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies, who drew attention to the social meanings inscribed in music and the cultural codes produced by music and used for social and political ends. From this perspective, music first of all offers the means and resources for the creation of social identities: “In examining the aesthetics of popular music I want to reverse the usual academic and critical argument: the issue is not how a particular piece of music or a performance reflects the people, but how it produces them, how it creates and constructs an experience – a musical experience, an aesthetic experience – that we can only make sense of by taking on both a subjective and a collective identity.” (Firth 1996: 109)

The first important empirical insights concerning the relationship between current forms of nationalism and popular culture came from the former Yugoslavia. These works have drawn attention to the role certain music genres (the so-called turbo-folk) have played in post-socialist cultural production and the dominance of nationalist thinking and war propaganda in the nineties (on the Croatian case see Baker 2010; on the Serbian one see Gordy 2000, Grujic 2012). The Hungarian case which we analyse in this paper is on a much less spectacular level of politics; however, the connection between new forms of nationalism and popular culture created by certain musical performers and interpreted as well as supported by political and media actors makes the Hungarian case comparable with the post-Yugoslav cases and is of general interest.

Successful mobilization of cultural objects and performative events also make the Hungarian case comparable to white power and neo-fascist movements in Britain, Germany and the US. Research in political science and the sociology of far-right politics are relevant for us also from this broader perspective; we will first refer to culturalist approaches (Berezin 2009, Holmes 2000), pointing out **the legacy of certain cultural practices that help to explain the sudden success of far-right mobilization**. Our culturalist perspective aims to complement structural approaches by showing how the culture industry and certain actors and goods have created a symbolic and mental environment in which the political ideas of far-right actors can easily resonate.

In the first part of this paper we will analyse the emergence of the nationalist rock music scene in Hungary, discussing domestic antecedents and the influence of foreign patterns. We will use the approach of the Birmingham School of Cultural Studies (Morley, Chen 1996) to analyse the musical scene, the activity of bands, radio stations and producers; in some cases we draw attention to connections between cultural entrepreneurs and interpretative activists (Stamatov 2002), primarily from the far right. In the second part of our article, we will focus on the music itself, primarily on the lyrics, analysing them from the perspective of semantics and ideology. The analysis of song lyrics drew our attention to two important topics. Primarily, they show a mythic image of the nation; secondarily, they articulate a definite image of 'others' or enemies. In the third part of the paper we start with the description of a festival which exemplifies the crucial role of performative events and that of audiences in constructing political connotations in context. We search for the role of musical experience from the point of view of national identity and support for radical politics, which are

intertwined and considered to be the most important element of this music both by its authors and audiences. We are going to answer these questions by analysing lyrics and drawing on data from interviews with performers and organizers of concerts and festivals, concert visitors and followers of the national rock scene, and to a lesser extent by using Internet resources. Our more general intention is to integrate approaches of popular genres and subcultures into nationalism research.

### **Rock music and the far right: the emergence of a ‘national rock’ scene**

In their 2008 article, Corte and Edwards mention about 350 performers and groups related to ‘white power’ music in the US and Western Europe who, contrary to their particularistic ideology, form part of a global music world. Following Futrell, Simi and Gottschalk (2006), we will present a music scene that involves performers, performances, songs and listeners, and the interactions of these different participants. White power music is considered to be a cultural object used for three purposes: (1) to recruit new members, especially young people; (2) for the narrative framing of topics addressed by the movement, which play an important role in the creation of the collective identity of white power; and (3) for material gain (Corte, Ugo-Bob Edwards 2008: 5). Like other authors (Brown 2004, Dornbusch and Raabe 2002) we do not take politics as our starting point, but instead ask how a musical style or genre becomes the carrier of a political ideology. We will show how the musical scene has evolved, serving certain market interests, and we will investigate its artistic and political ambitions. We also raise the question of how the rock music scene intersects with far-right politics, and the effect the latter has had on the movement’s musical content and style and its social incorporation.

Performers of Hungarian rock music were in a relatively privileged position until the 1980s in terms of their ability to perform and release albums (the situation was similar for musicians in the former Yugoslavia but different in other East European countries; see Gordy 2000, Szemere 2001). This was a direct consequence of the permissive politics built on small compromises in most areas of cultural politics in the Kádár era. Official acceptance was marked by having an album officially produced by the record company *Hungaroton*, which enjoyed a state monopoly over music production until 1989. Many Hungarian bands enjoyed popularity and toured in different countries of the region, and a few of them also performed regularly in Western Europe. Politics was not far away from Hungarian rock music at that

time, either: some of the groups gained (at least some) popularity because of their supposed criticism of the state-socialist regime.

As a consequence of the opening up of markets during the political transition, many performers found themselves affected by increasing competition, and many of them lost large segments of their audiences.<sup>i</sup> Official record sales began to fall. Performers started to experiment with new styles and new content to tap into new markets. One form of innovation led to a shift toward new forms of social criticism. Performers expressed their disappointment with their new situation in the rock music scene, criticizing ‘consumerism’ – commonly expressed through concerns with the mass production of ‘stars’ or with musical forms that were produced by machines – and Americanism more generally. This reflected the disillusionment felt by many confronting post-1989 realities, which were considerably different to the ‘imagined West’ of state-socialist times (Yurchak 2003). Criticism of the emerging new regime, due to the lack of alternatives, and especially from the point of view of the ‘popular’ forms of social criticism, became increasingly associated with national identity and other forms of localisms articulated within a national framework. Rock music was one of the first areas in post-transition Hungary where a unity emerged between a (‘from below’) criticism connected to the post-89 establishment and discussions emphasizing national identity; this new connection could be detected within the framework of subcultures.

A more specific musical style and subculture emerging from this wave of protest was that of the skinheads, already operating in underground clubs in Budapest and other Hungarian cities in the 1980s. Because of official concerns with a Nazi revival, the groups and events of this scene were watched closely by the police and officially prohibited, which already provided a resource to various actors within the scene to present themselves in heroic terms. The anti-Black, anti-Roma and anti-Semitic lyrics of skinhead bands (Like *Oi-kor*, *Egészséges Fejbőr* [Healthy Skin], and *Magozott Cseresznye* [Seeded Cherry]) not only survived the crisis in rock music during the period of political transition, but managed to leave behind the world of the underground and, thanks to the inventiveness of a few musical producers, join forces with softer genres of rock music.<sup>ii</sup> This conversion of skinhead rock into ‘national rock’ is one of the major processes that contributed to the making of a new, broader and more diverse music scene from the early 2000s.

Beyond these musical and personal links to skinhead subculture, certain elements of folk music also contributed to the legitimization of ‘national rock’, which helped make the music more palatable for a broader audience. This adaptation of folk elements was not unprecedented in Hungarian (or Yugoslav) rock music. Since the 1970s it already existed under the label of ‘folk rock’. Some performers who had their origins in ‘folk rock’ are seen as veterans of national rock today (such as the band *Kormorán* [Cormorant]). One of the most successful such fusions was a rock opera staged in 1983 and dedicated to the first Hungarian king, Stephen (‘Stephen, the King’), the importance of which went far beyond rock music. It became part of the recovery of national themes, with a significant subsequent effect on cultural and political discourse. The rock opera’s lyrics contained many elements which would later become part of national rock music, including history and mythology, the cult of heroes, and the references to minority Hungarians outside Hungary’s borders. This same period witnessed the emergence of the first commercial success of rock music infused with rural popular music, the so-called *lakodalmas rock*.<sup>iii</sup> This music was originally performed at weddings (*lakodalom* means ‘wedding party’), and subsequently at other rural occasions and in village bars. Its breakthrough occurred when ‘3+2’, a band from the Hungarian-minority part of Yugoslavia sold its records cassettes at ‘flea markets’ in late socialist Hungary<sup>iv</sup>. This music drew from a late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century repertoire of Hungarian theatre and dance songs called *magyar nóta* (traditional ‘Hungarian songs’), but performed them with electronic instruments (similar to Serbian and Croatian turbo-folk).<sup>v</sup>

One small private radio station (*Pannon Rádió* [Pannonia Radio]) and the producer of one of its regular programmes (István G. Kirkovits) played an important role in establishing and popularising this genre. Hungarian rock music with “national feeling”, as he called it, received greater publicity than ever before through this radio station. This was the beginning of the 2000s, when the broader landscape of right-wing national radicalism started its transformation, as exemplified by the emergence of its own “parallel institutional system”, including newspapers, magazines, festivals, radio stations, fashion styles and other assets, all in opposition to the hostile exponents of mainstream cultural production. Five years later, the same music groups established a common internet forum using the infrastructure of the successor to the same radio station, *Szentkorona Rádió* (Holy Crown Radio), which became the main forum for the growing radical right-wing scene. One of the key personalities of this music scene, the frontman for the band *Romantikus Erőszak* (Romantic Violence), recalled these developments: “In Hungary, nationally-oriented music emerged in the early or mid-

*eighties. Skinhead bands were the only ones who along with underground new wave bands criticized the political establishment and openly stood out for national thinking...*” With the emergence of national rock, skinhead bands (with partly modified musical content) have gained access to a wider public and the respectable title of ‘vanguard’. They are no longer considered to be a marginal subculture, but rather those who have been “fighting for the nation” since long before other political players discovered this terminology.

The emerging national rock fused in the early 2000s various genres and performers associated with different groups (often football fan clubs) into a common framework. This can be understood only in relation to a generational change which took place in the burgeoning radical right scene from 2000s onwards, from an old-fashioned anti-Semitic party with an urban (Budapest) middle-class base (MIÉP [HTLP: The Hungarian Truth and Life Party]) to a new generation of the radical right espousing views similar to far-right parties in other parts of Europe (Jobbik [Movement for a Better Hungary]). This change occurred simultaneously with a generational takeover of the far right in Hungary. This rejuvenation of the radical right was favourable for the emergence of subcultural forms of political engagement, including music, fashion and festivals. **There was not only a heightened political commitment among the musicians, but also a demand for mobilizing music among actors on the far right.** The first public appearances of many bands can be connected to MIÉP demonstrations in the 1990s, but they became popular following their participation in the demonstrations and commemorations organized by Jobbik and other radical right-wing organizations after 2006. The Youth Movement for 64 Counties (*Hatvannégy Vármegye Ifjúsági Mozgalom*) stands out among the many organisations that provided not only ideology but also political ammunition for the bands as well, and also gave them important opportunities to perform their music (Molnár 2016).

The political and ideological message, however, became more important for the musical performers as well. Indeed, some of the leading members of national rock bands also double as politicians and believe their music has a political mission. “This music isn’t about entertainment, it’s an eye-opener urging deeds and power...” said frontman and chief ideologist of the whole national rock scene, Balázs Sziva, who spoke at many Jobbik events during their 2010 and 2014 election campaigns.

In 2006, when a political crisis developed around the actions of the then socialist prime minister, new and formerly unseen opportunities emerged for bands belonging to the genre of ‘national rock’. Their strong mobilising power supplied the background music for demonstrations and street politics, and in so doing they also reached out to those who would not have been fans of these bands on account of their age group or class. Performers of national rock also took up the role of ‘chroniclers’, recalling in their songs the significant events, struggles and victories in which their broader community of ‘national radicals’ had been involved, thus actively contributing to the actual making of this community. After the conservative Fidesz came to the power in 2010 the growth of the genre continued, though their *modus operandi* changed. Following complaints from many of followers of national rock earlier that their genre was not allowed to enter public media, Echo TV, the channel associated with the far-right, announced a separate programme for it.<sup>vi</sup> This is the first sign of official recognition, with the lead musicians of *Ismerős Arcok* (Familiar Faces) and *Kárpátia* (Carpathia) given high state awards in 2011 and in 2012.

These performers often emphasize that the politics found at their concerts and in their lyrics is not the same as those found in party politics, and sometimes they articulate willingness, were they to be asked, to be hosted by anyone, irrespective of party affiliation. However, such invitations arrive mainly from the radical right party *Jobbik* and its partner organizations, and their party representatives have often protested the exclusion of “bands with national sentiments” from public and commercial media, demanding they be given their “rightful place”. National rock music is not simply connected to extreme right politics (and sometimes moderate right-wing politics), however; it has created an extreme right popular culture (“rechtsextreme Alltagskultur”) as scholars working on the German *Rechtsrock* (‘Right-rock’) call it (Langebach and Raabe 2009). This can be seen in Hungary in the outlets for the sale of tickets for national rock concerts: bookshops, traditional crafts and handicraft shops, and shops selling ‘radical national’ clothes.<sup>vii</sup> Music is only one part of this kind of popular culture, which uses ‘national’ (*nemzeti*) as a brand name. Moreover, thanks to its longstanding relationship with the two biggest networks of white power and neo-Nazi organizations, the US-based Hammerskins and the UK-based Blood and Honour (which also has a following in Germany), Hungarian national rock music has also managed to step onto the international skinhead rock scene. The Hungarian Island Festival (*Magyar Sziget Fesztivál*), which was fighting for its survival a few years back hosted Saga, one of the best-known white power rock stars in the world, in 2011. This fitted the attempts of political and civil actors to

establish a Europe-wide network of like-minded far-right political organizations and music performers.

Not only because of its direct relations with but also because of its embeddedness in an international network of radical right organizations, we can understand the Hungarian phenomenon only in comparison with similar institutions globally. As in Hungary, the international career of white power music originating from the UK is to a great extent connected to neo-Nazi political organizations (Shekovstov 2012). Greek white power music is the closest to the German *Rechtsrock* in its genealogy, but its interconnectedness with politics displays a close similarity to the Hungarian case. While many were stunned by the huge success of Golden Dawn during the 2012 elections in Greece, a researcher into Greek neo-Nazi rock points out that the political victory was preceded by the emergence of a radical right-wing subculture in Greece. More than a dozen white power groups together form a common music scene, which, similarly to Hungary, unequivocally supports the neo-Nazi politics represented by Golden Dawn (Tipaldou 2012).

If one searches for regional parallels, one can spot relatively weak Romanian, Slovak, and Polish white power-type rock music scenes (Szele 2012). But there also exists a relatively strong Czech scene, fuelled by the power of neo-Nazi and anti-Roma organizations. Particular genres of politically-supported music have also emerged in in Serbia and Croatia. One stream of this music, incorporating elements from war songs, functioned as ‘agit-prop’ music in Serbia and served as a successful tool for mobilization during the war. Another stream of new folk music is Serbian ‘turbo-folk’, which includes various non-political bands fusing traditional folk melodies with different new popular elements (primarily disco music).

In an excellent book about the career of the latter genre, Eric Gordy (2000: 104-5) interprets its social and political context as follows: “The new nationalist elite began to search for a musical culture appropriate to the changed social order and appealing to its rural and semirural bases of support. State-controlled media outlets began to intensively promote neo-folk music and the transformation of neo-folk into a dance-pop-folk commercial melange under the name of ‘turbo-folk’. With the resources of the state media monopoly available to it, neo-folk quickly occupied the cultural spaces once dominated by rock and roll and even became established in the city of Belgrade, where folk and neo-folk forms had long been marginalized.”<sup>viii</sup>

## Restoring the myth of the nation in lyrics

An analysis of lyrics is a typical method for popular music research on white power and skinhead groups. A researcher into the lyrics of German *Rechtsrock* found the dominance of two themes: firstly, a celebration of a great German past, usually interpreted in contrast to the losses of the present, and, secondly, references to enemies and the damage they caused. Therefore, any action against the latter was justified and heroic, and required behaviour worthy of the past and its glory (Pierobon 2012: 12). Certain conservative values are emphasized in songs (like honour, faith, and unity) which are all connected to the past, while all the problems are related to the present (like the power of money, American dominance, uniformization of a divided nation, a condemnation of German values) (Pierobon 2012: 18). Cort and Edwards, who analyse primarily British and American white power music, also state the text-centric nature of the genre and the strong presence of certain themes for some performers. They describe ‘1) the rhetoric of racial and/or national uniqueness and common destiny, 2) the ideas of racial supremacy, superiority and separation, 3) a repertoire of conceptions of racial otherness, 4) a utopian revolutionary world view that aims to overthrow the “existing order” (Back 2002: 97) and 5) a clear opposition to immigration’ (Corte-Edwards 2008: 7).

Hungarian national rock music is powerful not only because the aesthetic value of its rhythms or melodies but partly because of its lyrics and partly because of its performance at festivals, events, and concerts which create communities and identities. We have read and listened to the lyrics of many different bands, undertaking a more systematic analysis of four of them (*Kárpátia [Carpathia]*, *Titkolt Ellenállás [Hidden Resistance]*, *Hunnia*, and *Romantikus Erőszak [Romantic Violence]*), which are representative of the main trends in ‘national rock’. The first is mainly inspired by the previously mentioned folk rock and the topics of national history; the second by British and German skinhead music; the third is a Hungarian version of Nazi Rock; and the fourth combines elements from all of these with a strong political message added. Using a searchable online database for Hungarian popular music (<http://www.zeneszoveg.hu/>) we undertook a semantic and ideological analysis of their lyrics (Stockes 2010).

Hungarian lyrics of this genre indicate two central themes very similar to those found in German *Rechtsrock* celebrating the past and referencing enemies. The first and most important theme is ‘the nation’ (‘Hungary’, ‘homeland’, ‘Hungarianness’) which usually appears in a historical context and restores an ethnic mythology aiming to revive a glorious and powerful nation. “The nation’s losses” are also often remembered (especially the loss of “national territories”) either by pointing out the “enemies” responsible for the historic losses (neighbouring countries, great powers), or the mechanisms behind the losses (market competition, globalization, and liberal democracy). The main point is a controversial relation of the two: the enemies are those who threaten the nation and national identity, and therefore it is legitimate to call for war against them. National rock musicians are like bards who tell the stories of these struggles, whilst at the same time nurturing them with emotional and symbolic power.

Due to the musical parallels mentioned above, song lyrics are in direct intertextual relation with a larger textual world. One of them is rock music, including skinhead rock. The other is an ethno-national mythology rooted in the Romantic nationalism of the late nineteenth century combined with the popular culture of revisionist nationalism in the interwar period. Analysts of the German and British version of this genre have noted that not all bands are openly national socialist, with some of them rather conspicuously avoiding any mention of Hitler or the Third Reich. In any case, the myths of the German past and national heroes represent an important point of reference for them. Images of heroes rooted in the historical past are usually completed with idolisation of masculinity. Another important resource for Hungarian nationalist rock lyrics and music is the revisionist propaganda of the interwar period as reproduced to a large extent in statues, pictures, songs, and activities sustaining Hungary’s aspiration for its lost territories.

Many ‘national rock’ songs reach their emotional peak by recalling the losses brought about by the Trianon Peace Treaty which ended the First World War and led to the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and Hungary. These songs invoke names of “lost” Hungarian regions, localities and people (ignoring their multi-ethnic reality), thus creating a sense of grief and anxiety surrounding the loss places of national heritage. At the same time, a triumphant historic *Gegenwelt* is envisaged; an image of the old, historic Hungary, whose power had emerged from the territorial unity of the nation. While songs refer only allegorically or indirectly to the illegitimacy of the current political borders and to territorial

demands against the neighbouring states, it is at concerts that some revisionist slogans are expressed more forthrightly. In recent years, direct references to revisionist demands have become more frequent. An album was released in 2010 called ‘The Highlands<sup>ix</sup> are not part of Slovakia’ (*Felvidék nem Szlovákia*); the title soon appeared on T-shirts and in various shops and online stores as an unambiguously revisionist slogan.

National rock musicians try to legitimise the revision of current state borders by suggesting that neighbouring nations have no history to be proud of, or are not worthy of having their own state. While lamenting the suffering of the Hungarian diaspora in the neighbouring countries, national rock songs simultaneously disparage neighbouring nations, giving a free hand to hatred against Romanians, Slovaks and Serbs. This language had previously been reserved for hard-core football fans, recalling (for older generations) the revisionist propaganda from the interwar period. In other instances, lyrics revive old images and innuendos of anti-Semitism by referring to Jews as “parasites” who are “endangering the natural and organic life of the nation”. “Our nation is like an old oak tree/ it’s rooted deep in the soil/ All its leaves spring from the ancient soil wetted with blood/ Though the leaves fall and wind carries them far away/ Children of oak remain under the leaf-litter/ Usurers with kippas on their heads stole all that you had/ they have cut out your tree trunk/ Let us provide justice finally, it can’t happen again/ foreign hands should not touch the ancient Hungarian nation again.” (Hunnia: The old oak, 2012)

A broad spectrum of antagonistic images can be reconstructed even within the repertoire of the same music band, including an ethnically defined image of the enemy, the representation of social inequalities, and criticism of the unfair accumulation of wealth and power. The latter is usually told from the perspective of honest working people in lyrics like these: ‘Everywhere as far as eyes can reach/ Pests, small kings suck our blood/ They hold all capital in their hands and not the working people/ Hey, you rich men, this won’t work/ I have the profit, he says/ I have the profit, and thus you can’t reach me/ I have the profit; the cheating has worked/ I have the profit; nothing else matters’ (Egészséges Fejbőr: ‘Profit’, 2010). Anti-Americanism has also appeared recently, along with criticism of those in power and of social inequalities more generally: ‘it’s a scam/ that those who fight/ against terror/terrorize me/ stamp on/ my human rights.’ (Hungarica: ‘Scam’, 2007). Voices of the underdog often dominate the songs. The nation in such cases is not articulated in the form of the triumph of national myths or cultural supremacy; on the contrary, it appears in the role of the voiceless victim left without

representation. This attitude is also found among political actors of the far-right, who have successfully appropriated some of these more ‘leftist’ themes in their political discourse.

The emotional and lyrical elements of national rock songs are effective because they present the nation and national heritage as an object of worship, something to be envied, and something also constantly threatened by aliens and powerful ‘others’, thus requiring an immediate defence. National rock also has an important performative function: there are songs which are calls to arms, and, as our interviews confirm, they are indeed effective in this regard. The emotional impact of songs is also carried through nostalgia, which commemorates ‘national traumas’ and vindicates a glorious history for the nation. This anti-modernist, anti-republican perception of the past, powerfully infused with ethnic mythologies, now penetrates not only the discourse of the extreme right but more recently that of mainstream public culture as well. This is all accomplished through the individual consumption of national rock music in the same way it is for other musical genres, but the social meaning of national rock emerges much more profoundly through public events (concerts and festivals); it is on these occasions that their performative power is at its strongest. We try to present this in the next section.

### **Performing the nation: from the enjoyment of music to political conviction**

The significance of music performances, concerts and festivals for radical music has been emphasized by many. Futrell, Simi and Gottschalk (2006), analysing the American white power scene, argue that this is characterised by two types of events: concerts held in small bars where 3-4 bands play in the same evening with political speeches between performances, and festivals lasting for several days, usually far from the big cities, where a few hundred people participate and a broader cultural and entertainment repertoire is available beyond music and politics (Futrell, Simi and Gottschalk, 2006: 288). Pierobon (2012) also emphasizes the importance of concerts in the German *Rechtsrock*. These sorts of events are very similar to those found in Hungary, though there are important differences in magnitude. Most of the bands (three of the four included in our sample) hold regular concerts in bars and small locales, while they have a couple of performances each year in big concert halls and/or festivals. (Romantikus Erőszak for example had three festival appearances and two concerts in connection with public political events in 2015; see <http://www.romantikuserozsak.hu/>.) Audience numbers at these events are augmented by other bands playing more popular

versions of national rock: *Kárpátia* for example holds about one hundred concerts a year. As their online concert calendar shows, they have a concert every third day of a year and every second concert is in a different locality, most often in local community centres. They are on continuous tour and travel around the entire country, reaching people for whom their concert might be the only cultural event of the year. (For their concert calendar, see <http://www.karpatiazenekar.hu/index.php?mpc=konzert.>)

The ‘Hungarian Island’ (*Magyar Sziget*) has been the most important Hungarian national rock music festival since 2001, when it was first organized in a picturesque valley about 50 km north of Budapest. It was at this festival where we did fieldwork over three consecutive years (2005-2007), making observations, talking to organisers and participants, and conducting a limited number of semi-structured and focus group interviews (in 2010-2011 we conducted an additional fourteen focus groups). *Magyar Sziget is often seen by the members of the nationalist subculture as the most important event of the year for ‘nationally minded Hungarians’.* It was first organised by the radical-right youth organization, *Movement for 64 Counties*. One of leading figures, active in the early years in the organisation of the festival, went on to become an MP representing the radical right in the Hungarian Parliament beginning in 2010. *Pannon Rádió* the small radio station mentioned above, became the main sponsor of the event and its only media outlet. Rock concerts form the central part of the programme; however, political presentations closely connected with the radical-right movement, discussions of historical and political themes, and entertainment events are also part of the programme, including military shows and handicrafts. In the beginning, *Magyar Sziget* was predominantly a youth festival (which can still be seen in the dominance of national rock concerts in the programme) but with time its generational profile has expanded towards middle-aged people and families, who attend the festival just as they might any summer resort or camping site.

The main goal is to bring ‘Hungarian heritage’ and far-right politics as well as different music subcultures together in the same place. The obvious intention of the festival organizers is to form a single community out of the followers of these various groups and to create for them a parallel public sphere of ‘nationally minded’ or ‘nationally committed’ people. As we noted earlier, the creation of this parallel institutional universe has been a crucial project of far-right mobilization in Hungary, especially since the early 2000s, with its own media, book publishers and producers, various consumer goods bearing national and far-right symbols.

These symbols, tattooed on bodies, posted on tents, and pasted to express a common identity. In the ritual context of festivals, one might even have the feeling that, unlike in everyday life, someone *not* wearing or displaying these symbols and artefacts is the exception rather than the rule. ‘National T-shirts’ are particularly important in this regard as they, according to festival goers, serve to identify each other: “*we recognize each other through the T-shirts*”.. The most important message seen on badges and tattoos is national belonging and pride: “*It’s good to be Hungarian!*”, “*I’m Hungarian; there’s no shame in it*”, and “*I’m Hungarian, not a tourist*”. The vilification and ridicule of undesired others, including minorities or neighbouring nations can also be found on T-shirts, such as with “*I’m older than Slovakia*”. Two visual motifs dominate: the national tricolour and the map of historic Hungary. There are also many slogans related to Trianon (e.g. *Down with Trianon! Don’t give up!*). White Christmas T-shirts, SS badges and Nazi propaganda literature are all also part of this repertoire.

The festival works as ritual, the performative elements of which – shouting, flag-waving, communal singing and dancing – successfully contribute to the creation of *communitas* amongst those who consider themselves to be “proper Hungarians”. We have already addressed the emotional aspects of this music, which is collectively experienced, and contains mostly reactive feelings (anger, contempt), defining the participants in opposition to others and the mainstream generally. Concert slogans facilitate this process, for instance. Some other feelings are positive, such as pride or triumphalism, which became connected to the positive concert experience (pleasure) and a feeling of belonging together. One fan talked to us about the nature of his involvement in the scene, referring to his national emotions and political conviction, linking the two as follows: “*I want to hear big names. This was the first song I heard from Kárpátia; afterward it was evident that I want this music. Within two days I had all of their albums; I fell in love with them. This was during the 2006 ‘events’<sup>x</sup> when along thousands of others I woke up and wanted to break out of the matrix.*”

Similar to other case where individual motivations have been analysed (Maiwald 2014), our interviewees also spoke about the synergy of music and politics and their lives: “*I was entirely uninterested in these things, I hated politics, and one fine morning I said, damn it, they took away my life! They took everything, it was all a lie. For 42 years I lived a lie, but now the door has opened and I have entered. There I was. And now I feel good because I have found what I was searching for through the lyrics of Jani<sup>xi</sup> or through any message... Now, it is not*

*only Kárpátia or Fejbőr, but whichever band says who Emese<sup>xii</sup> was. Or what the 'turul'<sup>xiii</sup> was. So I start reading about it, and it has already proved useful. Thus more and more such people exist."*

When Jobbik first gained seats in the European Parliament (2009) and one year later the Hungarian Parliament (2010) surveys on far-right support in Hungary showed a steady flow of young voters towards Jobbik, whilst at the same time the party enjoyed increased support urban voters and higher-than-average earners (Krekó-Juhász-Molnár 2011). This was the generation we met at festivals and concerts of the national rock scene, which included not only youth, but also people in their late thirties. The organizers and core fan were young workers or temporarily unemployed skilled workers who were not only less educated but also politically alienated. At the same time some concert visitors and music consumers included graduates of elite secondary schools. During our fieldwork in 2007 the president of the Hungarian National Bank confessed in an interview that he was a fan of a national rock band, which a couple of years later received a high state award. The middle class was more attracted by the soft versions of the genre (*Kárpátia, Ismerős Arcok*), but the influence of the radical and hard versions was not insignificant. Two of the four perpetrators of the series of racist lynchings against Roma in 2008 and 2009 that resulted in the death of six victims (Feischmidt-Szombati-Szuhay 2014) wore Nazi symbols and were personally linked not only to neo-Nazi organizations, but also to national rock bands (the place where they regularly met was a club belonging to the national rock scene).

As a later focus group analysis of far right support has shown (Feischmidt 2014), not only social deprivation and the experience of disempowerment fueled increased support for the far right, evolving trends in popular culture have also created a new language for expressing indignation and revenge. Young respondents were willing to voice their distrust and frustration, or to express their ideals and hopes, by adopting a nationalist and racist discourse. This was influenced not only by political actors on the far right, but also by actors in the field of media and popular culture. The close relationship in Hungary between the popular culture of nationalism and the commitment to far right politics is very similar to that which has been written about youth in Germany (Miller-Idriss, 2009). In both cases, actors redefined national belonging in relation to far right politics through a process of cultural subversion so they could appropriate the nation with their symbols and codes.

## Conclusions

Far-right politics has become a well-researched area of political science and partly also of nationalism studies in recent years; however, scholars rarely touch upon the cultural and social environment of the phenomenon. Even when they do, they tend to emphasize the role of social and economic deprivation, which is without doubt a central structural reason that helps to explain why certain segments of society are drawn to radical and fundamentalist alternatives. But as this paper demonstrates, we need to analyse culture as well, from the perspectives of both production and consumption. This is a case study which was aimed at reconstructing the emergence of a specific genre of popular culture and the music scene that grew out of it, which has played an important role in creating a new language of nationalism and political radicalism in Hungary.

We have emphasized those circumstances under which the fusion of skinhead rock music and folk rock music took place, which entailed moving beyond marginalisation and provided an opportunity for public appearance outside the competitive pressures of the global music industry. We analysed the lyrics of songs belonging to this scene, pointing out the synchrony of radical social and political critique (anti-establishment, anti-globalism, anti-liberalism) and of a reshaped but basically very old national mythology. We also stressed that this national music obtains a large mobilizing force through confronting and earlier taboos (e.g. the revision of state borders, anti-Semitism). Freeing those taboos endowed the national rock music scene with power.

This paper has also shown how the return to nationalism and its connection to the far right has been accomplished through subcultures. Our proposition has been that a new genre of nationalist music has played a leading role in the emergence of the political and symbolic language of extreme right politics. We claim that the key to the success of the far right in Hungary is that it was anteceded by new subcultural forms of nationalism, meaning that politics could become rooted in these pre-fabricated cultural conditions. The new popular culture of nationalism, perhaps set in opposition to a high culture built on universal aesthetic and moral values and supported by the European Union, European nation-states and artists themselves, emerges from grass-roots cultural initiatives. In most cases, European governments and their cultural policies resisted these grass-root forms of popular nationalism,

which were often considered retrograde. We have encountered an entirely different practice only in Serbia and Croatia, where the state took over a peripheral genre (turbo-folk) that had been shunned by professional pop musicians, and turned it into a tool of soft power, defining daily lives and the most banal practices of their citizens (Gordy 2000, Baker 2010).

The relationship between popular nationalist music and the nationalizing politics of the state in Hungary is characterized by a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, the state tries to keep popular and lower-class forms of nationalism at arm's length from the mainstream public sphere. On the other hand, the state allows the linguistic, symbolic and narrative elements of this popular form of nationalism to infiltrate public discourses on the nation; indeed, at times, parties and public institutions consciously borrow this form of nationalism. If we want to identify the place and role of nationalist popular culture in Hungary, we will not find a clear definition. Nationalist popular culture forms a parallel public sphere, drawing its power from radical speeches, challenging social taboos, and generating hope in its ability to constitute and control discourses on the nation. This is an alternative culture, whose many claims and goals are presented as exaggerations, while the themes and approaches presented by national popular culture are used by the state, thereby also creating its symbolic legitimacy through a national discourse.

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<sup>i</sup> For a detailed description of the post-socialist Hungarian popular music scene and of different strands of rock music, see Kürti 2012.

<sup>ii</sup> The most important music bands in this transformation were: *Ismerős Arcok* (Known Faces), *Kárpátia*, *Romantikus Erőszak* (Romantic Violence).

<sup>iii</sup> Kürti gives a broader descriptions of different revival waves of folk music in the late state-socialist and the post-socialist period (Kürti 2012).

<sup>iv</sup> On so-called *lakodalmás rock* and its antecedents in Yugoslavia see: Barbara Rose Lange 1996, Szerbhorváth 2012.

<sup>v</sup> About this genre in Serbia see Gordy 2000, Grujic 2012; in Croatia see Baker 2010.

<sup>vi</sup> Echo TV is a commercial news channel initiated by Gábor Széles a businessman known from his far right sympathy who owns further far-right printed media products as well. It is received by most households in Hungary, transmitted by all cable TV providers, but its audience share is still relatively low in comparison with other public and commercial TV channels.

<sup>vii</sup> Molnár (2015) writes about the same shops in her analysis of what she describes as an uncivil civil society.

<sup>viii</sup> For a somewhat different interpretation of turbo-folk and its connection to late socialist Yugoslav and post-socialist Serbian popular culture see Gordic 2012. On parallel phenomena from Croatia, see Baker 2010.

<sup>ix</sup> The 'Uplands' was previously the northern part of Hungary, which became Slovakia in 1920.

<sup>x</sup> The demonstrations in 2006, organized by different and at that time still uncoordinated far-right organizations against the governing left-liberal coalition, was a formative event for the political far right in Hungary.

<sup>xi</sup> Jani is the name of the founder of *Kárpátia*.

<sup>xii</sup> A female figure in the founding mythology of the Hungarians.

<sup>xiii</sup> An myth bird in the Hungarian origin myth.