SCAPEGOATS IN POST-WORLD WAR I HUNGARIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Studying the history of twentieth-century Eastern and Central European political thought, one often comes across a basic stereotype that is common to both liberals and conservatives, communists and Fascists, nationalists and cosmopolitans, as well as to the ideologists of ruling and oppositional parties of Poles, Czechs, Slovaks, Hungarians, Romanians, Bulgarians, Croats, Serbs, and Slovenians. When they are trying to explain the defeats, losses, failures, and sufferings of their respective nations in the course of the centuries, they often make an attempt at blaming influential personalities, smaller or larger social groups (layers, classes) or even non-personal factors (such as ideologies, traditions, or prejudices). Whether these explanations take the form of detailed analyses, or very superficial argumentation, or even merely occasional cursory remarks, the result is often the same: the identification of a *scapegoat*. This paper will make an attempt at examining the peculiarities of Eastern and Central European scapegoating on the basis of a case study of one of the greatest national tragedies in Hungarian history: the collapse of the Hungarian state in the aftermath of World War I, which entailed the loss of two thirds of the country's territory and about forty percent of the Hungarian ethnic population. The justification for the choice of this topic lies not only in my own historical interests but also in several more current experiences. Since the "annus mirabilis" of 1989 and for the first time after many decades (or even centuries) most of the peoples of the region can indeed try to enjoy self-determination and sovereignty. However, the scope of action for these small nations is limited by numerous external and internal factors, and they will experience many more failures than they might have expected. Declining living standards, widespread corruption, the lack of substantial economic and political (or sometimes even moral, not to speak of military) aid from the "West" and the lack of a true, promising vision of the future make one ponder about the causes of these problems. All too often clear-cut, monocausal explanations are being demanded. Furthermore, social cohesion must also be strengthened and, as we shall see in a minute, both needs can be satisfied with the help of scapegoats. In difficult, critical situations

scapegoating has become a recurring motive in Eastern and Central European political thought. This trend toward finding scapegoats first fully emerged after World War I.

The Conceptual Framework of the Research

In describing the "Day of Atonement" the Old Testament presents a story in the Book of Leviticus. In the story the Lord tells Moses to make Aaron "come into the holy place: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering ... Aaron shall present the bull as a sin offering for himself and for his house ... And when he has made an act of atoning, for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat and Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over him all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and send him away into the wilderness ... The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land ... "[1] It is obvious here that there can be no scapegoat without a sense of guilt, and guilt means breaking the law. If being tortured by remorse, feeling qualms of conscience, a handy way out of this uncomfortable situation is to transfer the guilt onto someone else.

These ideas, however, are already the terrain of modern social psychology. It was mainly Allport, Heider and most recently Tom Douglas, who in their works on group-dynamics and prejudices extensively dwelt on this issue.[2] The analysis of the behavior of smaller and larger groups shows that whenever tensions of any kind accumulate, there also appears a demand for finding a scapegoat (one or several individuals or a group, category of people), who can be presented as the ultimate cause of all the troubles. Within the group the prevailing attitude toward the scapegoat is one of violence, and this violent attitude is often encouraged. The deeper-lying, social-psychological motives of this process seem to be two-fold: enforced attribution and the mobilizing-recruiting functions.

Enforced attribution refers to the socio-psychological need for calling for clear, monocausal explanations in the case of very complex events. As historians know, such explanations are in most cases impossible, and finding a scapegoat (be it an individual, or a smaller, or a larger group of people) is a comfortable way of satisfying this need. Responsibility is thus transferred onto the scapegoat. Responsibility, however, can be defined in at least three forms: legal, moral, and historical-political. The most fertile ground for creating scapegoats is the situation when these three types of responsibilities do not overlap: what is fair according to the current penal code can not always be tolerated by the standards of the Ten Commandments or on the basis of historical-political considerations.

The major element of the scapegoating process is the mobilizing-recruiting function, or the "prospective" creation of scapegoats. Scapegoats in the original,

Biblical sense of the word are not necessarily hated — one can even feel a little sympathy or sorrow for them. Most "mobilizing" scapegoats are substantially different. Their creation is part of the birth and emergence of every modern totalitarian movement. This scapegoat (be it "exploiters" or the Jews or the "others" – whoever they are) is the object of a common, collective hatred, and this feeling of hatred generally includes a certain amount of guilt as well. This might result in what E. H. Erikson called "pseudo speciation,"[3] where the scapegoat is considered to be a part of a "different species" such as an "inferior" race or class. Therefore the otherwise valid prohibition of aggression against members of one's "own species" does not apply when dealing with them.

Szekfű and Jászi

With the help of this conceptual framework I should like to focus on three different analyses of Hungary's post-World War I situation.

The most important and most influential book in twentieth-century Hungarian political literature was published in 1920[4] and aimed at pointing out the deeper-lying causes of Hungary's post World War I tragedy. The author, Gyula Szekfű was 37 years old at that time and a well known archivist and historian. A few years earlier Szekfű had risen to prominence with a book on Ferenc Rákóczi, the leader of an important early eighteenth-century Hungarian anti-Habsburg uprising. Dispensing with the glorification typical of the previous Hungarian secondary literature, he gave a most realistic picture of Ferenc Rákóczi during his years of exile after the defeat of his anti-Habsburg war for the independence of Hungary. This led to widespread accusations leveled at Szekfű as a "traitor" to the sacred Hungarian national traditions. The accusations were further inflamed by the circumstance that Szekfű had worked for several years in Viennese archives. Szekfű was shocked by these reactions; and in his monumental historical essay written in the tragic mood of the aftermath of Hungary's disintegration after World War I, he found the main causes of Hungary's tragedy in the series of the futile attempts at the liberal transformation of Hungary. "Three generations" (that is also the title of his book) were misled by the illusions of Western liberalism, which could not take root in Hungary. The book reads as a medical constat and therapy. The patient, which is Hungarian society, has become infected by the disease of liberalism. Szekfű's argumentation can be interpreted as a peculiar case of enforced attribution, where the liberal generation that adopted alien political institutions, that might apply in England but not in Hungary, are being blamed. As a consequence, Szekfű argues, the backbone of the Hungarian nation, the Hungarian nobility, turned out to be a loser in the emerging liberal market economy, no indigenous Hungarian bourgeoisie could develop, and the economic and cultural

gap was filled by the alien Jewish middle and upper class. Thus, Szekfű put the main responsibility for the national tragedy on the liberal nobility. Nevertheless, quite a number of his readers interpreted the chapters on the rule of the Jewry as the presentation of a mobilizing-recruiting scapegoat. Szekfű's very self-critical approach appealed little to the wider public; and the alien Eastern Jews seemed to be a much more proper scapegoat for the Hungarian society.

In his book Szekfű devoted a special chapter to those tendencies in later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Hungarian political and intellectual life that one way or another were in opposition to the dominant liberalism. In it he analyzed the so-called bourgeois radicals, who from a leftist platform had systematically criticized the pre-World War I Hungarian political regimes. The members of this group had consisted mainly of Jewish middle class intellectuals; most of whom had been born between 1875 and 1885. Among their ranks we can find some of the best, most widely traveled, and most widely read Hungarian writers of the time. They studied modern French, English and American sociology and wanted to apply their newly acquired intellectual arsenal in order to work out a plan for the modernization of Hungarian society. They concentrated their attacks on the antiquated feudal structure of Hungarian agricultural society the "reactionary" (their favorite term was always contrasted with "progressive") economic, social and political role of large feudal holdings. They had also called their contemporaries' attention to the possible fateful consequences of the maltreatment of the ethnic minorities living in Hungary. In 1918–1919 Jászi and some of his comrades found themselves in prominent political positions. From 1 November 1918 to 19 January 1919 Jászi served as minister in charge of negotiating with the politicians of the minorities. Thus, during that time he was in a position to try to put his ideas concerning the territorial autonomy of the national minorities into practice. Under the given circumstances Jászi's efforts in this area were obviously doomed to failure. Afterwards Jászi and a number of his friends had to go into exile.

In 1920, same year that Szekfű published his book on the failures of liberalism in Hungary, Jászi also summarized his views concerning the responsibility for Hungary's post-World War I tragedy. His book[5] argued that the deepest root of problems was the fact that true liberalism could not gain ground in Hungary: "... all serious intellectuals were subsided into silence during the last quarter of century; all cultural and liberal aspirations were trampled down by drunken patriots, plundering gang-leaders and ... adventurers ..."[6] This revealed the total and the final failure of historical Hungary because it demonstrated that the noble-plutocratic class-rule had not been able to do any organizational and creative work.[1] Despite their conflicting premises Jászi then arrived at a conclusion that was surprisingly close to that of Szekfű. "The Hungarian soul turned out to be sterile and the thinning ranks of the cultural elite were increasingly filled by aliens, first of all Jews ..." which in turn led to a disgusting mixture of "feudalism and usury." [7]

If we now interpret Jászi's argumentation in terms of enforced attribution, he also came up with a scapegoat that had lurked within Hungarian society: the "feudal-clerical" reactionary groups. Szekfű had blamed a rootless liberalism for the misfortunes of Hungary, whereas Jászi had explained the national tragedy by concentrating on the lack of true liberalism. Still, Jászi's conclusion could also be understood as pointing to the responsibility of the infiltrating, alien Jews as mobilizing-recruiting scapegoats.

These two typical and – to say the least – conflicting views thus seem to share a peculiar feature. Their conclusions concerning the role of Hungarian Jewry, most likely contrary to the two very different authors' intentions, both emerged in the eyes of numerous contemporaries as advocates of mobilizing-recruiting scapegoats. The primary subject of this paper is not, however, the tracing the history of anti-Semitism in Hungary, and so I would like to emphasize a different point. What I should like to call the reader's attention to is that different as these two analyses of the causes of Hungary's post-World War I tragedy might be, they share the convention that pre-World War I Hungary was fatally sick and the flawed, cruel and poorly prepared decisions of the victorious Great Powers only gave the final blow to a society that was already in agony. Thus, the deepest roots of the collapse were to be found within the state and society of Hungary.

Negotiations in Paris

During approximately the same months, when Jászi and Szekfű were working on their books, the "official" Hungarian analysis was also being prepared. Albert Apponyi, head of the Hungarian delegation sent to the Paris peace talks, delivered an excellent summation of his views in a speech on 10 January 1920;[8] and his explanation also echoed the main points of his previously developed line of argumentation. In Apponyi's version the emphasis was on the *external* factors of the national tragedy. He went back to the time of the wars against Ottoman expansion. Hungary had taken a lion's share in defending the Christian West from barbarism. This sacrifice in the service of European interests had at least two fateful and disastrous consequences in the long run. On the one hand, Hungary had lost the dominantly Hungarian character of its population, and on the other hand it had become dependent on the Habsburgs. Even the Compromise of 1867 had only been a formal restitution of independence. Responsibility for the participation in the war thus solely lay with the Habsburgs; it had been contrary to the will of the Hungarians. When, however, the final decision to start the war was made, the traditionally loyal Hungarians had no choice left but to fight on the side of their old allies. The relationship between Hungarians and the national minorities in Hungary had always been fraternal and the conflicts had been due to Viennese

intrigues. Hungarian tolerance and liberalism were well reflected by the 1868 law on the status of nationalities in Hungary.

The redrawing of borders in Eastern and Central Europe cannot be based on the ethnic principle, Apponyi argued. This would be contrary to economic rational-ism and will only result in the upsurge of intolerant nationalism in the region. Consequently, the responsibility for the open conflicts, which may arise, rests entirely with the victorious great powers, which were dictating the conditions of the peace settlement. The "official" scapegoats are thus the Habsburgs, the victo-rious great powers, and the misled national minorities. In effect these constituted external, not internal, factors.

Let me now conclude by referring back to my introductory remarks about the topicality of scapegoating in post-1989 Hungary in particular and in Eastern and Central Europe in general. There is a desperate need in these societies to find explanations for past and current failures. As a result, both the leading politicians and the average citizens frequently think in terms of simplifying stereotypes. We can only hope that the newly established democratic institutions guarantee that realistic and sober self-criticism, combined with the representation of Hungarian interests in the international political arena will not give way to scapegoating with all its possible fateful consequences.

Notes

1. Leviticus, 16. 3, 5, 6, 15, 16, 20, 21, 22. *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version (Toronto–New York–Edinburgh, 1953), 119–120.
2. Gordon Willard Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Reading, MA, 1949); F. Heider, "Social Per-ception and Phenomenal Causality" in R. Taguiri and L. Petruib, eds, *Person, Perception and Interpersonal Behavior* (Stanford, CA, 1958), first published in *Psychological Review* 51 (1944): 358–374; Thomas Douglas, *Scapegoats: Transferring Blame* (London–New York, 1995).
3. E. H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility* (New York, 1964).
4. Gyula Szekfű, *Három nemzedék* [Three Generations] (Budapest, 1920).
5. Oszkár Jászi, *Magyar kálvária – magyar feltámadás* [Hungarian Calvary – Hungarian Resurrec-tion] (Vienna, 1920). In English: *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Hungary* (London, 1925).
6. Jászi, *op. cit.,* 154.
7. *Ibid.*
8. Albert Apponyi, *Lutte pour la paix juste. Expose verbal du comte Albert Apponyi* (Budapest, 1933), 10–32. Cf. Anikó Kovács-Bertrand, *Der ungarische Revisionismus nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg* (München, 1997), 78–83.