

“BUDAPEST, THE CAPITAL OF HUNGARIANS”

Rhetoric, images and symbols of the Hungarian extreme right movements

FERENC ERŐS

This paper is a revised version of the paper I have presented at the “Nationalism and the Body Politic - Winter Symposium in Oslo”, March 25-27, 2011,¹ four months before the Breivik massacre. This tragic event has justified again the urgent need to examine right wing extremism from psychoanalytic and social psychological viewpoints.² My contribution deals with the rhetoric and symbols of the Hungarian extreme right movements, and was inspired originally by two posters from a municipal election campaign in Budapest in the autumn of 2010. These posters had been made visible for a couple of weeks all over in the streets of Budapest, advertised by the most influential extreme right wing party “Jobbik – The Movement for a Better Hungary.” (In Hungarian the word *Jobbik* literally means both “the Right” and “the better”.)

The inscription on the first picture reads *Budapest is the capital of the Hungarians*. **(Image 1)** At first sight it seems to be a completely harmless declaration. Who would deny that, for example, *Oslo is the capital of the Norwegians*? However, there is a simple rhetoric trick in it: instead of saying that “Budapest is the capital of *Hungary*”, which is an obvious geographical and administrative fact; the statement on the poster presupposes that if Budapest is the capital of the *Hungarians*, it cannot be the capital of *other peoples*. The sentence implies the exclusion of others, the non-ethnic Hungarian citizens, such as Romani and Jews, who are, by the force of this definition, “foreign occupants”.

The slogan “Budapest is the capital of the Hungarians” is a performative utterance which invokes tacit assumptions and age-old stereotypes. According to these, Budapest exists under the occupation by foreign forces since centuries. In the 1930s, a well-known “populist” writer, Gyula Illyés declared: “Budapest is not in Hungary. Above, under or beyond, only the good God knows where it is.” According to the ethno-nationalist, populist, rightist views, Budapest is a town ruled by “strangers”, a city that is a “foreign body in the heart of the nation”; “a sinful city”, a cosmopolitan city full of parasites, infected by a degenerate, alien culture. This kind of anti-urbanism contrasts superficial, alienated city life with a rural life that exists in organic unity with land, blood and soil (*Blut und Boden*).

¹ The original paper was published in the Norwegian journal *Impuls* 2-2012, 65, pp- 95-101.

² See L. Auestad’s inspirational ideas on this topic (2012).

Anti-urban ideology is, of course, not a special Hungarian invention. The French psychoanalyst Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel (1990, 167-176.) refers in her article *Reflections of a Psychoanalyst Upon the Nazi Biocracy* to Walter Darré, who was one of the expounders of the theory of *Blut und Boden*. Darré later became Minister of Agriculture in the Hitler's Nazi government. He wrote a book under the title *The Peasantry: Vital Source of the Nordic Race* (1928). As Chasseguet-Smirgel interprets Darré's ideas: "Racist ideology is based upon the idea of a symbiosis between the subject and Mother Nature. The city dweller is unable to attain this symbiosis with the Mother: he is too far removed from Nature. It is an idea found in all Utopias, where the city is felt to be an essentially hostile element. It is always (implicitly or explicitly) experienced as 'Babylon, the great whore', that is unless it obeys certain rules and follows an architectural plan which makes it an Ideal City, the Heavenly Jerusalem. But what distinguishes the cult of "Blut und Boden" from other Utopias, is the overtly biological nature of the link which binds the peasant to the earth." (p. 169.)

The text on the second poster (Image 2) reads: "Do you really want to stop parasitism? If yes, you *are* a Jobbik voter!" The slogan does not call any particular target group or person by name which can or should be metaphorised as "mosquitoes". It opens, however, a vast field of imagination and fantasies in the mind of the recipients of its message. The mosquito in the centre of a traffic sign is a classical icon of anti-Semitic propaganda that has been widely used by extreme right propaganda throughout modern history. The visual world of anti-Semitic propaganda is crowded with bloodsucking insects, vermin, spiders, rats and other repelling animals. The motive of the bloodthirsty animals has often been used as illustrations in various editions of the "Protocols of Elders of Zion", and appeared in many other places, such as newspapers, magazines, stamps, propaganda posters etc. (Image 3). Jewish world conspiracy is often represented by vampire-like Jewish figures - like Leon Trotsky's figure on Image 4.

These pictures are prone to evoke strong feelings of anxiety, since mosquitoes and other parasites may be dangerous to our bodies. Furthermore, they may bring to the surface of our minds myths about vampires and other threatening creatures penetrating under the surface of the skin, inflicting pain, intoxicating our blood, causing infectious diseases and eventually death. Our biological skin is a natural defense shield against external stimuli and threats. Analogously, our "skin ego" is, as the French psychoanalyst Didier Anzieu (1989) called it, a psychological defense shield against penetrations that endanger our integrity or self identity. Social groups also have a "skin", a protective membrane which divides the internal and

external world and defends group integrity. As the main function of the biological skin is *abjection*, that is, eliminating impure, toxic, undesirable substances and bodily products, a similar function can be attributed to the psychological and social “skin”. The process of getting rid of the parasites and other similar objects may be the source of intensive pleasure inasmuch as it can signify a non-traumatic repetition of the original trauma of the separation from the mother’s body. The idea goes back to the early works of the Hungarian psychoanalyst Imre Hermann who introduced the notion of a contrasting pair of drives “clinging – going-in-search” (by other theorists referred to as “clinging-exploring”) – starting out from contemporary observations of the behavior of apes, small children, and neurotic or psychotic patients. (Hermann, 1976)

For Hermann, skin is a surface where the contrasting pair of drives may meet and fight each other. “In terms of those parts of his epidermis that can be separated from it or are already almost detached from it, the individual is indeed in a state of dual unity, corresponding to the original state. Small cracks in the skin, scabs, nails, hair, are already alien, in a minimal way, to the living ego. In the forced, often bloody detachment of this minimally alien object, a familiar motive is asserting itself: [...] the ego's striving to experience the trauma—in this case, detachment, not traumatically imposed from outside, as was the case with that prototype of all separation, the detachment of the clinging child from the mother, but as a self-intended, self-apportioned action by a free 'adult'. The pain that arises with these beginnings of self-mutilation is an incentive to carry out the final separation; and at the same time, it is a sign of that liberation which may [...] make itself felt in a state that can only be described as narcissistic intoxication. As such, this liberation may enter consciousness as an emotion, in an eerily pleasurable feeling. Thus, in this group of phenomena, pain arises in connection with the separation that is striven for, while its successful accomplishment brings pleasure.” (p. 31.)

In his book *On the Psychology of Anti-Semitism* Hermann (1945) applied the concepts on clinging, going-in-search and separation to an explanation of the psychic roots of anti-Semitism, drawing an analogy between the urge to eliminate parasites from the skin, the “delousing” practices, and the persecution of Jews.

Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel also connects abjection to the trauma of separation. In her article quoted above she writes: “I have postulated the existence of a primary wish—immediate and inborn—to strip the mother's body of its contents in order to regain possession of the place one occupied before birth. All obstacles which, after birth, make access to the mother's body impossible to achieve, have to be removed. These obstacles are identified with

reality and are represented by the father and the father's derivatives: his penis, children. In my opinion the difference between my concept and that of Melanie Klein is that this fantasy is a structural one that forms part of the organization of the human mind. Thought is born from the encounter with the obstacle that thwarts the wish to return to the mother's body. Ridding oneself of obstacles is also directed at retrieving a mode of mental functioning governed by the pleasure principle where free-flowing energy circulates unimpeded. Ridding oneself of paternal obstacles by emptying the maternal body, fighting against reality and thought, form a single, identical wish: that of returning to a world without organization, to primeval chaos, to a universe marked by homogeneity and the continuum present before birth.” (Chasseguet-Smirgel, op. cit., p. 167)

The purity of blood is one of the most salient motives in *purification fantasies*. Preoccupation with the purity of blood was one of the main features of Nazi ideology; it was not, however, a privilege of Nazism, since it is generally present in racist thinking and imagery. Psychoanalysts and psychoanalytically oriented authors have repeatedly pointed out this specific feature of racist imagery. For example, Adorno and his associates in the interview section of *The Authoritarian Personality* quote a number of examples in which the subjects refer to Jews and other “inferior races” as “rats” or “vermin”, that must be annihilated in order to defend the purity of blood. (Adorno et al., 1950) Wilhelm Reich in *Mass Psychology of Fascism* argues that fascist race theory is “a mortal fear of natural sexuality and of its orgasm function” (Reich, 1970, p. 84). According to Reich, fascist irrationalism, manifested in the sanctification of the family and the celebration of the women’s chastity, is closely related to the myth of purity of blood as a symptom of sexual repression brought about by a patriarchal society.

Sexual repression, the horror and at the same time a secret desire for sexual abuse are implied in the ancient accusations of ritual murders committed by Jews for ritual purposes. Ritual murder scenes appear on a large variety of visual representations, too. In 1882 the corpse of a young peasant girl, Eszter Solymosi, was found drowned in the river Tisza near the East Hungarian village Tiszaeszlár. Based on stories and gossips which had started to spread over immediately among the peasants of Tiszaeszlár and the neighboring villages, the local Jewish community had been accused of murdering the girl for ritual reasons: they sacrificed her to use her blood for preparing the Pesach matzo. After a long investigation procedure in which verbal and physical force as well as blackmailing were equally used against the alleged crown witness, a 15 years old, psychologically rather instable Jewish boy and his family, a group of the members of the Tiszaeszlár Jewish community were found

guilty and put on trial. However, after a long and controversial process, the defendants had been completely acquitted by the higher court. The acquittal of the defendants was celebrated as a major victory of the progressive, liberal social and political forces over the anti-Semitic movements which already started to flourish in that period in Hungary. However, the infamous “Tiszaeszlár Affair” set off a wave of hysteric anti-Semitism across the Austro-Hungarian empire – and much of Europe – in the 1880s. (Kövér, 2011).

Eszter Solymosi’s name became a symbol, and her story became a recurrent topic in the mythology of the Hungarian extreme right movements. A well known Hungarian poet of the 1930s and ‘40s, József Erdélyi published a poem under the title “Eszter Solymosi’s blood”, which became a kind of “fascist hymn” during the years of Shoah. [Image 5](#)
Is a picture you of a scene of the commemoration of Eszter Solymosi in 2010 in her native village?

Blood libel is often associated with fantasies of rape committed by Jews – not only on concrete persons but on a whole nation, like Germany. Adolf Hitler suggests in *Mein Kampf* that the epidemics of syphilis in Germany were caused by the Jews who “jewificated” the soul of the German people, committing the crime of racial mixing, also known as “miscegenation”. The Jews, according to Hitler, raped mother Germany. “One often says, it is written in ‘Mein Kampf,’ that the Jews are human, too. But if someone violated your mother, would you then say that he, too, was human?” (Fenichel 1940, p. 37)

Let us compare Hitler’s words with a statement coming from a young Hungarian extreme right activist in 2004 commenting the peace treaty of Trianon, near Versailles in 1920. The treaty redefined the borders of Hungary so that the country lost significant parts of its earlier territory and population. The loss of territories, the division and mutilation of the historical Hungary is still regarded as a major traumatic event in the Hungarian collective memory. The historical trauma of Trianon has been continuously revitalized by ethno-nationalist and chauvinistic rhetoric. (See [Image 6](#))

“Greater Hungary looks like a fetus in the womb of a mother. ...so what happened in 1920 was an abortion, a catastrophe” – said the fore mentioned activist. What is most striking about these kinds of statements is that the difference between fantasy and reality disappears. The nation becomes a biological entity. Janine Chasseguet-Smirgel quotes Rudolf Hess who said that “National Socialism is nothing but applied biology”. In this context Chasseguet-Smirgel speaks about the “loss of symbolism” in the Nazi thinking.

“It is a well-known fact that Nazi propaganda, mass demonstrations and enrolment in the different Party organizations are all aimed at creating the same feeling of identity. However,

the doctrine of 'Blood and Soil' brings another dimension to this need for homogeneity. It introduces a biological dimension, an expression of concrete thought, without transposition, without substitution, as if the human race had returned to a form of mental functioning without symbols, to a time when no ram had as yet taken the place of Isaac as the promised sacrifice." (Chasseguet-Smirgel, op. cit. p. 171.)

In another study (Chasseguet-Smirgel, 1989) she argues: "The aim of every extremist ideology [...] is to attain a union with the mother and to annihilate the paternal dimension of the psyche. Ideology is the promise of returning to paradise, to the mother's womb from which we were expelled at birth. From this moment on, we live in the knowledge that the mother's body is given over to the father's penis, his children that her psyche is taken up with thoughts that do not exclusively center around ourselves. It follows then that whatever does not conform to ideology has to be pitilessly eliminated. In other words, facts and events that endanger ideological thinking are decreed 'non-existent'" (p. 18) That is the point where, according to Julia Kristeva (1982) "the abject does indeed draw the subject towards the place where language gives up and meaning collapses" (p. 13).

The need for homogeneity, the elimination of differences, is a central part of Imre Hermann's analysis of anti-Semitism, too. In his above mentioned book he quotes a Hungarian popular rhyme which reads in a rough translation like this:

*Erger, Berger, Schlossberger,
All the Jews are bastards.
A Jew bought two geese,
One white, and one brindle,
The bloody Jew,
Why does he need two geese?
And if he did buy two,
Why didn't he buy two similar ones?* (Hermann, 1990, p. 66).

Psychoanalytical studies may help to understand the underlying assumptions, needs and motifs of racist imagery expressed in visual representations. This imagery has a self-generating capacity to activate passions and emotions, over and above the hatred against Jews. However, in contemporary Hungary the main target of the "Jobbik" party posters is not only and even not primarily Jews. Although the whole campaign of the party were based on the patterns and symbolism of Nazi-like anti-Semitism, the main target of the present day

extreme right propaganda is in fact the Roma population (which does not exclude a simultaneously presence of anti-Semitic hatred).

They years 2008-2009 had been a fatal period for Hungarian Romas. A wave of extremely violent attacks against them swept over the country. Explosions, arsons, shootings and other atrocities had been committed in several villages and towns, causing many victims. Six people (including children) were killed, several others were seriously injured. After a year long investigation the suspected assassins (or at least a few of them) had been arrested. However, their real motives and connections with extremist organizations remained unclear, and the process is still going on (the first degree sentence, life long imprisonment for the perpetrators was announced recently, in May 2013). In any case, the series of killings and other atrocities must be regarded as extreme manifestations of a growing hatred. One election poster, for example, focuses on the so called “Gypsy criminality”. These words, in the vocabulary of the right wing activists, are closely related term written in one word: “*gypsycriminality*”. (See image 7) However, the question arises: what are the appeals of this kind of propaganda? To what extent is the extreme right able to mobilize larger segments of the population to vote and to give support for them?

At the national elections in 2010 the conservative party alliance FIDESZ-KDNP (“young democrats” and Christian democrats) obtained two-third majority (68.13%). In the national parliament at the present there are three opposition’s parties: Jobbik (12.18%) Socialists (15.28%) and ecologists (LMP = Lehet Más a Politika [“Politics Can Be Different”], 4.15%)³ The overwhelming majority of the ruling party alliance allows them to get passed any law they wish, and, moreover, to change fundamental laws, including the constitution of the country. Therefore, FIDESZ can govern the country without brakes and counterbalances that is practically without an effective opposition thus introducing a *de facto* one party system, and, creating a new, more authoritarian constitution which limits seriously the working of the democratic institutions and fundamental rights. In the last few years, Hungary became more isolated in the European Union, and several actions of the government have been harshly criticized by different European bodies and committees.⁴

³ In 2012 LMP split off for two factions: the „old” LMP and a new group called „Dialogue for Hungary”.

⁴ See e.g. the recent report of Rui Tovaes, a Portuguese member of the European Parliament to the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs “ on the situation of fundamental rights: standards and practices in Hungary”. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-%2F%2fEP%2F%2fNONSGML%2bCOMPARL%2bPE-508.211%2b02%2bDOC%2bPDF%2bV0%2f%2fEN>

The relative success of the Jobbik (that reached its culmination point at the European election in 2009, still under the Socialist government) was a story of rapid emergence on the ruins of other small right wing extremist parties. Their rise from early 2000 and onwards was partly due to the impact of the world economic crisis, to the restrictive budget policy of the Socialist government and to a legitimacy crisis as a consequence of the then right wing opposition's ceaseless attacks against the ruling Socialist-Liberal coalition. This situation led to several demonstrations, riots and even violent street fights during the autumn of 2006.

Jobbik is now one of the strongest extreme right wing parties in European comparison, and on the basis of DEREK (Demand for Right-Wing Extremism Index) poll results⁵ it seems that Hungary is extremely high on all factors of DEREK scale: “prejudice and welfare chauvinism”, “anti-establishment attitudes”, “right-wing value orientation. (Image 8 and 9) It should be emphasized, however, that Jobbik is not satisfied with purely “political” methods: it has organized its own paramilitary units, the so-called “Hungarian Guard”, equipped with its own uniforms, marches, symbols and rituals which evoke in many people a strong association to the Arrow Cross movement (a Fascist movement in Hungary in the 1940s). The Guard – now officially banned – has been involved in several violent conflicts with Roma inhabitants all over the country.

The now ruling government led by Viktor Orbán has made several promises to stop or at least push back extreme right activities, its hostile rhetoric and its violence. However, there are several signs that might lead us to imply that Orbán and his government at least partly share “the underlying frame of interpretation” of Jobbik: ethno-nationalism, anticommunism, and “Euro-skepticism”. In Hungary, according to the recent polls, Jobbik enjoys more than 20 percent popularity among those citizens who expressed their willingness to vote at the forthcoming election that will be held in 2014.

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⁵ The DEREK index is issued regularly by the Political Capital Risk Forecast Division (PC RFD), an international network of analysts (macroeconomists and econometric experts, political scientists, sociologists and social psychologists, mathematicians) who analyse various fields of political risks that can have an impact on political stability or the economic environment of a given country or region. See <http://www.riskandforecast.com/>

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