SCAPEGOATING AND ANTISEMITISM AFTER WORLD WAR I

Hungarian Political Thought and Action

The title of this paper is, I am afraid, shockingly ambitious; however, what I have to say calls for a comprehensive and occasionally comparative context.

THE COMPLEXITY OF COMPLICITY

My point is that the use of the conceptual framework of scapegoating¹ can help us to understand one of the key problems of 20th century Hungarian history, the relationship between "traditional" antisemitism and Hungarian society's involvement in the implementation of the Hungarian Holocaust. If there had been a Hungarian 'Historikerstreit',² this issue should have been one of its focal points. To put the same question differently: Is the Hungarian Holocaust the ultimate stage of a long-term evolution of Hungarian antisemitism, rooted in early modern and modern Hungarian economic, social and cultural history or does the behaviour of Hungarian society during the Holocaust have shorter-term antecedents? Is it to be traced to what we might call the "Trianon-syndrome"? With a much simpler wording: I am trying to look into the complexity of complicity with the help of the social psychological tool of scapegoating.

In the choice of both method and sources I wear borrowed plumes – in the written version of this paper I will have to refer to the works of dozens of colleagues: historians, social psychologists, anthropologists, philosophers. Here I only would like to mention five authors whose ideas and insights were of great significance to me: Ferenc Pataki whose 1993 article³ first introduced me to scapegoating, György Hunyady who for decades has been trying to build bridges between history and social psychology and

¹ For a short introduction to these concepts cf. A. Pók: 'Atonement and Sacrifice: Scapegoats in Modern Eastern and Central Europe', *East European Quarterly*, XXXII, no. 4 (January 1999), pp. 533-6.

² For the *Historikerstreit* in Germany cf. Ch. Meier: *Vierzig Jahre nach Auschwitz. Deutsche Geschichtserinnerung heute* (Munich: Beck, 1987). For a broader perspective cf. the March-April 1996 issue of the French review *Le Debat.* For external views of the current Hungarian situation A. O. [Andreas Oplatka]: 'Politisierter Historikerstreit in Ungarn', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 24 November 1999, p. 3, A. Applebaum: 'Hungary's "House of Terror", *The Wall Street Journal Online (WSI.com)*, 1 March 2002.

³ F. Pataki: 'Bűnbakképzési folyamatok a társadalomban [Scapegoating Mechanisms in Society]', in *Rendszerváltás után: társadalom-lélektani terepszemle* [The Aftermath of the System Change from a Social Psychological Perspective] (Budapest, 1993).

whose 1998 book⁴ on stereotypes during the decline and fall of communism deserves greater attention among historians, Randolph Braham who invited me into the field of Holocaust studies and taught me how to combine scholarly expertise with humanitarian and democratic commitment, Omer Bortov of Rutgers University whose article⁵ helped me in putting the Hungarian case in a broad context and the PhD dissertation of Jeffrey S. Murer,⁶ a former CEU student, on the "Trianon Syndrome" who also called my attention to Julia Kristeva's work.

My last preliminary remark: I would not be honest if I stated that the choice of this topic is fully independent of current politically motivated debates on the various forms of terror and dictatorship in 20th-century Hungary.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

The original, classical meaning of the scapegoat is presented in the Third Book of the Old Testament. It describes how, in the course of a ritual, Aaron lays both his hands upon the head of a live goat, and confesses over it all the iniquities and transgressions of the people of Israel. This way all the sins of his kin are transferred on to the goat, which, in turn, is expelled into the wilderness. The message of the ritual is clear: the scapegoater is fully aware of his (their) guilt and is most consciously trying to get rid of it. The context also well defines the nature of the guilt: it means having broken the LAW. This digression might be due to an originally faulty character, sinful and irresponsible behaviour but also to inescapable emergencies. From this ritual's point of view, however, the background to the guilt does not matter: the scapegoater's problem is the remorse torturing him and his group, his community. Scapegoating is a comfortable way out of this troubling situation; it provides relief. It is obvious that the scapegoat of the Old Testament is not guilty, but it is carefully selected for carrying this burden. Mediaeval and early modern West European cultural history provides us with numerous more recent examples of this type of scapegoat. Numerous English sources, for example, write about the 'whipping boy', a young and/or lowranking person who accepted or rather was forced to accept punishment for crimes committed by his superiors. English and French sources also present 'sin-eaters' that 'ate up' the sins of the dead laid out in state.⁷ In this original form the ritual is in no way to be mixed up with a sacrifice, an offering to God that can also be a goat (or bull or ram).

⁴ Gy. Hunyady: Stereotypes during the Decline and Fall of Communism (London: Routledge, 1998).

⁵ O. Bartov: 'Defining Enemies, Making Victims: Germans, Jews, and the Holocaust', *The American Historical Review*, vol. 103, issue 3 (June 1998).

⁶ J. S. Murer: Pursuing the Familiar Foreigner: Resurgence of Anti-semitism and Nationalism in Hungary since 1989. PhD Thesis (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1999). (Manuscript.)

⁷ cf. Th. Douglas: Scapegoats. Transferring Blame (London-New York, 1995), Chapter 1.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

The scapegoat of modern social psychology that we are dealing with now is quite different. Modern 20th-century scapegoaters are fully convinced of the actual guilt of their victims and assume that they themselves are, indeed, innocent. Modern scapegoaters deal with most complex crisis situations due to social, economic, political or cultural factors on an individual, smaller or larger group or national level. In our region the loss of territory is the most important source of the greatest national traumas, therefore scapegoating on a national level is connected to this issue. It is at this point that some tools of the rich arsenal of social psychology can be brought into my argumentation.8 In the course of my investigations among the respective concepts of social psychology, enforced attribution turned out to be the most helpful means. It describes a most simple and common phenomenon, which historians have nevertheless neglected. Namely, it is an intrinsic part of human nature that both individuals and groups desperately need clear cut, monocausal explanations for all (especially, of course, negative) events, including complicated historical-political situations. Ouestions as to what explains a great military defeat, a deep economic crisis or cultural decline, etc. can, however, hardly be substantially and satisfactorily answered by clearly defining a perpetrator. Still, in order to preserve or reestablish the self-esteem or self-respect of the group (for example, society), the perpetrator (be it an individual, smaller or larger group of people or occasionally some kind of an abstract force) has to be named. This way the cohesion of the group/society is strengthened, which may be essential for the survival of the group or ethnic-national community. Instead of opening up internal cleavages, focusing hatred on a scapegoat can be an indispensable element in preserving the integrity and cohesion of the group. This takes us to the mobilising-recruiting function of scapegoating, a process which is a decisive part of emerging totalitarian-authoritarian regimes and the movements behind them. It includes what Eric Erickson called "pseudo-speciation,"9 i.e. the scapegoat is considered to belong to a species different from that of the scapegoater, as, for instance, an inferior race. A nearly perfect formulation of this idea can be found in Himmler's speech on 5 May 1944 in Sonthofen:

You can understand how difficult it was for me to carry out this military order which I was given and which I implemented out of a sense of obedience and conviction. If you say: "We can understand as far as men are concerned but not about the children" then I must remind you of what I said at the beginning. In this con-

⁸ cf. Pataki: 'Bűnbakképzési folyamatok', in Rendszerváltás után: társadalom-lélektani terepszemle; Douglas: Scapegoats. For a most complex approach: R. Girard: *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989). For the East Central European aspects: V. Tismaneanu: *Fantasies of Salvation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁹ E. Ericson: Insight and Responsibility (New York, 1964).

frontation with Asia we must get used to condemning to oblivion those rules and customs of past wars which we have got used to and prefer. In my view, we as Germans, however, deeply we may feel in our hearts are not entitled to allow a generation of avengers filled with hatred to grow up with whom our children and grandchildren will have to deal because we, too weak and cowardly, left it to them.¹⁰

This conception has the fateful consequence that the otherwise 'normal,' 'regular' prohibition of aggression against one's 'own specie' does not apply. So far we have approached scapegoating from the perspective of the scapegoater – but how is the ideal scapegoat found?

THE IDEAL SCAPEGOAT

Researchers are agreed that the exemplary scapegoat must be substantially different from the majority – either in the negative or in the positive sense of the word. Both falling short of and exceeding the group's norms can stir up the hostile, exclusionist instincts of human groups. Minorities of all kind can thus very well serve this purpose. It was mainly René Girard who pointed out that the potential of violence based on this phenomenon is part of most cultural environments. It is also his most interesting observation that it is not only the deviation from the group's norms that incites hatred and violence but perhaps even more the perceivable signs of the willingness for accommodation or even complete assimilation. Investigations have shown that, for example, antisemitic agitation frequently aims more at Jews who are supposed to only 'imitate' assimilation than their co-religionists who openly declare and accept their Jewish identities. In the positive sense.

THE TRIANON SYNDROME

This point takes us to the core of this paper, the significance of the Trianon syndrome in the shaping of political, social and cultural attitudes towards Jews in Hungary. A careful examination of selected scapegoats of all kind shows that the scapegoat-victim incorporates the most hated elements of one's own self. The members of the group project their internal tensions, worries, and fears onto the scapegoat. For example, in smaller groups of adolescent children those with a mature physical appearance and sexual attraction frequently become scapegoats. Namely, the group punishes the member who deviates from tradition-determined norms of behaviour. They punish the scapegoat for what they secretly longed to be themselves

¹⁰ Cited by Bartov: 'Defining Enemies, Making Victims', p. 785.

¹¹ R. Girard: The Scapegoat.

¹² cf. R. Fischer: *Entwicklungsstufen des Antisemitismus in Ungarn 1867–1939* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg Verlag, 1988), p. 61.

and this way they disown their own desires.¹³ It is also an important psychological observation that "blame allocation" means not only the evasion of responsibility but also obscuring the original problem. This is not to suggest, however, that the scapegoater is always fully aware of the true causes of the problem, wants consciously to hide them and divert the attention from his own responsibility. No, the scapegoater is also a prisoner of enforced attribution, an act of simplistic, monocausal explanation of a complex situation.

Let us at this point return to Trianon. Why was the ire of Horthy's associates (the "national government" and the "national army") primarily aimed at Hungarian Jewry? First of all, because the dimensions of national disaster were far beyond imagination. Who or what can bring about such a fundamental change in the life of a nation, of a state, taking one thousand-vearold Hungary to the brink of complete destruction?¹⁴ That force must be of some extreme, rationally hardly conceivable strength. Resurrection is hardly possible without self-examination and atonement, as some kind of guilt must be definitely lurking in the air. If an individual or a small group is struck to a comparable extent, the first step towards recovery is the ritual of mourning. Mourning and its rituals, funerals express sadness and unhappiness but at the same time acceptance and acknowledgement of the tragic loss. This "adaptive mourning" 15 frees the individual or the larger group or community from an obsession with the past and opens up the possibility of contemplating a vision of the future. This "adaptive mourning" was not a feasible alternative for Hungarian society after World War I - no nation in the world would have acknowledged the loss of two thirds of the homeland and more than one third of the national community. Still, even without this "adaptive mourning," the causes of the tragedy, the culprits, had to be determined. To blame the victorious entente-powers or the new neighbours, thus exclusively external factors (as is the case with the Bulgarians), was not a realistic alternative, as in case of strong movements against them, they were still in a position to impose further losses on the country. There remained just one realistic option: the national community should find "some part of itself that it can cut off or remove and then project the guilt onto the amputated part, onto the abject..."16. That part of the Hungarian self which became the abject was the "familiar foreigner," Hungarian Jewry. Hungarian Jewry was sufficiently familiar to be seen as part of the self, and yet sufficiently foreign for exclusion from the new con-

¹³ Douglas: Scapegoats, chapter 8.

¹⁴ For details of the Trianon Treaty cf. I. Romsics: *The Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920.* Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Hungarian Authors Series, No. 3. Social Science Monographs (Colorado: Boulder, distributed by Columbia University Press, 2003).

¹⁵ The concept was introduced into the "Trianon-discourse" by Murer: Pursuing the Familiar Foreigner, esp. chapters V and VI.

¹⁶ Murer: Pursuing the Familiar Foreigner, p. 176.

ception of Hungarians. This amputation, unfortunately, turned out to be very concrete, as not very long after the Red Terror of the Hungarian Soviet Republic (which also had Jewish victims¹⁷) hundreds of Jews were killed by the White Terror: a completely new phenomenon in Hungary, as politically motivated pogroms demanding a high death toll of Jews were not part of former Jewish-Gentile relations in Hungary. 18 Let me make the point more strongly: it is not the frequently referred to numerus clausus law of 1920¹⁹ (that with the pudency of the remnants of Hungarian liberalism did not use the word Jew or Israelite when limiting the number of Jewish students in Hungarian higher education), but the anti-Jewish brutality of the White Terror that introduces a qualitative turn in the history of antisemitism in Hungary and can be defined as a major step on the road to the Holocaust. The Holocaust is thus much more connected to nationalism than to traditions of anti-Judaism and modern antisemitism. If we study the anti-Jewish arguments of the period of World War II, they have their roots much more in the social, political and economic realities of World War I and the post-World War I Hungary than in the anti-Judaic intellectual heritage of the nation.

JEWS - FREEMASONS - COMMUNISTS

In this respect the frequent references to the Jewish-Freemasonic-Bolshevik conspiracy played a decisive role in the "intellectual stimulation" of the anti-Jewish ire. Most antisemitic treatises refer to freemasonry as the major destructive organisational framework of the domestic traitors of national interests. The most important source of this view is Friedrich Wichtl's book entitled *World Freemasonry, World Revolution, World Republic* first published in 1919. This book together with publications of Karl Heise²⁰ and similar-minded writers offered powerful, clearly definable, visible objects of common hatred that could be blamed for all the sufferings of the Great War and the ensuing revolutionary anarchy. The motive of connecting Jews to freemasonry as allies in the struggle for world hegemony was rooted in France's Third Republic with Jews giving the orders and freemasons carry-

¹⁷ L. Karsai: Holokauszt (Budapest: Pannonica, 2001), p. 215.

¹⁸ cf. Murer: Pursuing the Familiar Foreigner, p. 179; *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary] 1918–1919, 1919–1945, gen. ed. Gy. Ránki (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976), pp. 397. 1310–11.

¹⁹ V. Karády: 'A *numerus clausus* és a zsidó értelmiség [The numerus clausus and Jewish Intellectuals]', in V. Karády: *Iskolarendszer és felekezeti egyenlőtlenségek Magyarországon* [Schoolsystem and Denominational Inequalities in Hungary]1867–1945 (Budapest: Replika, 1997), pp. 235–45.

²⁰ e.g. K. Heise: Entente-Freimaurerei und Weltkrieg. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des Weltkrieges und um Verstandnis der wahren Freimaurerei (Basel, 1919). For an analysis of respective works with a focus on "conspiracy theories": J. Rogalla von Bieberstein: Der Mythos von der Weltverschwörung 1776–1945, 2. Auflage (Flensburg, 1992).

ing them out (*Protocols of the Elders of Zion*).²¹ From the point of view of the adaptability of these arguments it is absolutely negligible that the overwhelming majority of Hungarian Jews were not involved in the Hungarian Soviet Republic and antisemitism was widespread among freemasons (especially in Germany). The recovery, the resurrection of the nation called for clearly definable perpetrators. Countless publications and political statements in post-World War I Hungary echoed the identification of Jews and freemasons as closest allies of destructive communists. Let me limit myself here to one single quotation from Ottokár Prohászka, perhaps the most influential public personality of the early 1920s who argued:

The eyes of numerous people were blindfolded and they did not see the true face of freemasonry. They were told that they [the freemasons] were an innocent, philanthropic association. Now we see that they are an internationalist, defeatist gang that hates the church and [...] opened the gates to Jewish infiltration and tramples upon Christian national traditions.²²

This is the same line of argumentation that was in the centre of Josef Goebbels' frequently aired view, who in February 1939 explained that driving forces of the campaign against "peace-loving" Germany were "international Jewry, international Freemasonry and international Marxism."23 There seems to be absolutely no historical evidence for these connections or at least they have never been presented. These views reflect the social psychological phenomenon of enforced attribution. Critical, conflictloaded situations such as the aftermath of World War I, the period of the Great Depression or the international political situation of 1938-39 are a most fertile hotbed for the creation of scapegoats. The anti-Judaic and antisemitic traditions offer a potential to put Jews into the position of the scapegoat. Leszek Kołakowski's famous formulation is very much to my point: the seemingly harmless, separate, dispersed, and in themselves weak elements of antisemitism can easily and quickly be combined and blended into an explosive mixture.²⁴ This takes me to what, as I said in the introduction, should be (should have been) the key issue of a Hungarian "Historikerstreit": Hungarian society's involvement in the implementation of the Holocaust, a debate which would also have addressed the reception of anti-Jewish legislation. The peculiar vacuum situation of the Hungary of

²¹ cf. J. Katz: *Jews and Freemasons in Europe 1723–1939* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970); J. Katz: *From Prejudice to Destruction* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), chapter 11.

²² Cited by I. Somogyi: *A szabadkőművesség igazi arca* [The True Face of Freemasonry] (Budapest, 1929), vol. I, p. 181.

²³ Cited by J. Regalia von Bieberstein: 'Die These von der jüdisch-freimaurerischen Weltverschwörung', Flensburger Hefte, (Sonderheft 8) p. 39.

²⁴ L. Kołakowski: Az antiszemiták. Öt, semmiképpen sem új tézis, figyelmeztetőül [The Antisemites. Five, Not at All New Points as a Warning]. Cited by: P. Kende: *Röpirat a zsidó-kérdésről* [A Broschure about the Jewish Question] (Budapest: Magvető, 1989), p. 146.

1944, the lack of perspective was a perfect soil for enforced attribution. I am convinced that without a German occupation there would have never been deportations of the well-known scale in Hungary but once the Germans were in control they did not lack helpers. The most tragic examples of a fully distorted nationalism are well documented in Gábor Kádár's recent PhD thesis on the economic exploitation of Hungarian Jews. Let me quote here also only one example: the gendarmes at Kolozsvár railway station - in the course of beating up the Jews to be deported - confiscate part of their luggage with the following 'patriotic' argument: "You should not take everything to the Germans, something should also be left for the Hungarians."25 My preliminary conclusion at this point: there is nothing like a national character of antisemitic inclination but there exist crisis situations in which the scapegoating potential can 'optimally' be manifested in antisemitism. The antisemitic intellectual potential leads to anti-Jewish action as a result of numerous factors in situations when the tragedy and the sins are most visible but the causes are most complex and hard to define. In this case, that is, the greatest tragedy of modern Hungarian history, it was the Nazi regime's pressure and then direct intervention that laid down the planks over the fairly wide gulf between antisemitism and the Holocaust, and that blended elements of nationalism and antisemitism into a most dangerous mixture.

ANTISEMITISM IN 1956 AND AFTER 1989-90

It was in vain that following the war and trials of Hungarian Nazis, István Bibó and some other outstanding Hungarian intellectuals called for a thorough national self-examination. Instead, throughout decades of Communist rule, the issue was swept under the carpet. Still, when the lid was temporarily taken off, during the revolution of 1956, the Jewish question practically did not surface. Why? If the answer is formulated with the help of the scapegoating theory, my assumption is that in 1956 the frontlines were clear, the causes of revolution seemed to be much less complex than in the aftermath of World War I or in the 1944-45 situation. The overwhelming majority of the country's population blamed the Soviets; they were the obvious subject of common hatred in spite of the fact that everyone was aware of the high percentage of Jews in the communist leadership. The lack of antisemitism in 1956 is to be explained not by the fact that there were considerable numbers of Jews among both the reform communists and other revolutionaries as well as the Rákosi and Kádár 'teams', but that the Soviets presented themselves as the obvious enemy of national interests. This statement, however, does not mean that the potential for an out-

²⁵ G. Kádár: A magyarországi Vészkorszak gazdasági vetületei [Economic Aspects of the Shoah in Hungary] (Debrecen, 2002), (Manuscript), p. 57.

burst of antisemitism was not there. Such a potential was clearly reflected in the fears of those Jews who decided to emigrate or to join the Kádár group.²⁶

Finally, before I make a conclusion, let me also ask the following question: Why did antisemitism surface following the next major turning point of Hungarian history, after the transition of 1989-90. If we again utilise the scapegoating theory in our search for the answer, this is quite understandable and logical. A rich literature and numerous empirical investigations prove that the very short-lived euphoria of the summer of 1989 and the spring of 1990 was followed by a substantial disappointment of broad strata of Hungarian society due to the severity of the omnipresent market-economy and declining living standards.²⁷ Both society and social science had to face the task of understanding the causes of the collapse of the communist system and the roots of social and economic problems emerging after the transition. In spite of the departure of the Soviet troops (whose function as a subject of common hatred was anyway gradually vanishing during the second half of the Kádár-era) no miracle happened - what is more, paradoxically, for many people the security of a protected cage gave way to the dangers of a free jungle. This is the perfect environment for the proliferation of scapegoats: the problems are visibly most powerful and some of them (unemployment, new forms of violent criminality, abject poverty) totally unfamiliar. With Soviet-type mind control gone, this was the ideal case for enforced attribution, a situation that could mobilise Hungarian society. Let me again be very thrifty with the examples. As early as the beginning of 1990, a new weekly explained that the antisemites of "old Hungary" hated not the capitalist businessman but the "bespectacled Marxist freemasonic intellectual" "who sold Transylvania and brought the communists into power."28 The point about the lack of "adaptive mourning" is well illustrated with the slogans of the 27 October 1996 rightist demonstration. The crowd chanted: Down with Pető! Down with Horn! Down with Trianon!29

26 cf. Gy. Litván: 'Jewish Role in Hungarian Communism, Anti-Stalinism and 1956', in *Király Béla emlékkönyv* [Festschrift Dedicated to Béla Király], ed. P. Jónás, P. Pastor and P. Tóth Pál (Budapest, 1992), p. 241.

²⁷ cf. e.g. Gy. Csepeli and T. Závecz: 'Várakozások, remények, félelmek: az Európai Unió képe a magyar közvéleményben [Expectations, Hopes, Fears: the Image of the European Union in Hungarian Public Opinion]', in *Magyarország politikai évkönyve* [Hungary's Political Yearbook] 1997, (Budapest, 1998), pp. 650–68. For a broad perspective: R. L. Tőkés: *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution. Economic reform, social change and political succession, 1957–1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); G. Mink and J.-Ch. Szurek: *La grande conversion. Le destin des communistes en Europe de l'Est* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999); *Perspectives on Political and Economic Transitions after Communism*, ed. J. S. Micgiel (New York: Institute on East Central Europe, Columbia University, 1997).

²⁸ Szent Korona, 21 February 1990, pp. 6–7. Cited by *Kirekesztők* [Exclusionists], ed. L. Karsai (Budapest: Aura, 1992), pp. 150–51.

²⁹ cf. Murer: Pursuing the Familiar Foreigner, p. 12.

CONCLUSION

For the formulation of my final conclusion, I shall again cite István Bibó. Some time during 1943 or early 1944 he wrote the following:

Collective hysteria is a state of the whole community and it is useless to separate or remove the visible carriers of hysteria, if in the meantime the preconditions and basic situations conducive to hysteria survive, the traumas experienced at the beginning of the hysteria do not dissipate, the phoney situation at the core of the hysteria is not resolved. Even if we destruct all 'evil' people, the community within one generation will again reproduce the madmen of hysteria, its beneficiaries, its hangmen...³⁰

With my investigations presented here, I would like to contribute to the development of an awareness of the potential for evil in us all, so classically put into words by Gyula Illyés:

"Where seek tyranny, think again: Everyone is a link in the chain: Of tyranny's stench you are not free: You yourself are tyranny."³¹

³⁰ I. Bibó: 'Az európai egyensúlyról és békéről [On Peace and Equilibrium in Europe]', in I. Bibó: *Válogatott tanulmányok* [Selected Studies] (Budapest: Magyető, 1986), vol. I, p. 376.

³¹ Gy. Illyés: 'One Sentence on Tyranny', in *On Quest for the Miraculous Stag: The Poetry of Hungary*, ed. Á. Makkai (Budapest–Chicago–London, 1996), p. 649.