

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE ANTI-SEMITE NARRATIVE of the migrant Jewish people in Hungary in the second half of nineteenth century

Absztrakt

Írásomban megkísérlem elemezni tizenkilencedik század második felének Magyarországon jelenlévő, a bevándorló, betelepülő zsidósággal szembeni antijudaista, antiszemita előítéleteket, sztereotípiákat. A vizsgálat egyik legfőbb eszköze a fennmaradt és elérhető történeti szövegek tanulmányozása (Istóczy Győző Országgyűlésben elmondott beszédei, a *12 Röpírat* című lap), hiszen ez a korszak volt a magyar politikai antiszemitizmus létrejöttének időszaka. Fejtegetésem másik pillérét a néprajzi tudás és etnográfiai leírások adják, segítségükkel megpróbálok kapcsolatot keresni a népi zsidóellenesség jelensége és a politikai diskurzus antiszemita irányultsága között.

Abstract

In my paper I would attempt to analyse the anti-Semitic, anti-Judaist stereotypes, prejudices of the migrant or settler Jewish people in Hungary in the second half of the nineteenth century. As this period was the birth of the political anti-Semitism in the country, one of my main tool is the analyses of the accessible historical documents (such as the journal „12 Pamphlet” of Győző Istóczy and his speeches in the National Assembly). On the other hand I am using ethnographies and folklore studies, to identify links between the anti-Semitic tendencies of the political discourse of that time and the phenomena of the so called popular anti-Judaist images.

“You always want someone to hate in order to feel justified in your own misery.

Hatred is the true primordial passion. It is love that's abnormal.

That is why Christ was killed: he spoke against nature.

You don't love someone for your whole life - that impossible hope is the source of adultery, matricide, betrayal of friends...

But you can hate someone for your whole life - provided he's always there to keep your hatred alive. Hatred warms the heart.”¹

Umberto Eco: The Prague Cemetery

1 Eco 2012:436-437

Introduction

In this short paper my main aim is to reconstruct the ideological narrative of the Hungarian political anti-Semitism about the real, or from time to time, the imagined or exaggerated Jewish immigration. The time frame of my research is the second half of the nineteenth century, mainly the seventies and the eighties. The key political actor of the time, from the anti-Semite movement was Győző Istóczy, a longtime member of the Hungarian National Assembly, and the founder of the National Anti-Semite Party, therefore his speeches and writings are the main subject of my analyses.

As a general philosophical prelude to this essay, firstly I will present some key ideas of Alfred Schütz about the unique role and status of the stranger and the complex phenomena of the strangeness. Then I will make an attempt to identify the ethnographical, folkloric roots of the anti-Semite construction of the migrant Jews, which can be regarded as the basis of the political narrative. At this point it is also necessary to reflect briefly to the anti-Judaist notion of the religious Christian interpretations, as the popular thinking was definitely shaped by these theological messages, revelations, throughout the medieval times but also in the marked period.

Then I would like to present a few historical facts about the Jewish migration of the time, to the then Hungarian territories, to show the background of the political, ideological slogans, and movements. And finally, the main and hence the longest part of my paper, will be the analyses of the speeches and writings of the mentioned Győző Istóczy and the anti-Semite journal titled „12 Pamphlet” which was also founded by him, and which also communicated the political anti-Semite narrative to the Hungarian population.

The phenomena of the stranger

The phenomenologist thinker Alfred Schütz in his 1944 essay, titled *The Stranger: an Essay on Social Psychology*, was aimed to analyse how a group, or the society constructs the stranger, what are the

basic attributes of this position. Firstly he analyses the opposite position, the way of the „normal” life, in his terminology, the „cultural pattern of group life”² which is composed by various ideas, values, and guidelines. This notion of common sense-like thinking is not homogeneous, according to Schütz, but has some general traits. Namely, it is „incoherent, only partially clear, and not at all free from contradictions”.³

However, for a member of the in-group, it appears as sufficient to navigate in the everyday life, because „it is knowledge of trustworthy *recipies* for interpreting the social world and for handling things and men in order to obtain the best results in every situation with a minimum of effort by avoiding undesirable consequences”.⁴ This natural conception and interpretation of the world is quite fragile. It can only be sustained if there is no change in the circumstances in social life, if it gives enough knowledge about the world, and probably most importantly, if these „recipies” are shared, and accepted by the other members of the group.

It seems evident that an internal or external crisis can erase this common sense. In the times of chaos, those accustomed actions and interpretations of the daily life are inherently useless, and new paths and new ideas emerge as a consequence. For the stranger or for the migrant (to start focusing on the main topic of this essay) this is a personal crisis, because he or she has to question everything which is evident for the group, or society which accommodates them. In the arguments of Schütz, the stranger has two main traits: the objectivity, and the doubtful loyalty. The previous conception refers to the experience, when he or she encountered the total fallacy and uselessness of his or her own conception about the world. The latter derives from the rejection of assimilation, or the learning of the new culture, which is seen by the in-group as a hostile behaviour, although in the most cases it only comes from the extremely hard adaptation of a totally new mindset. And in some cases, argues Schütz it “originates in the astonishment of the members of the in-group that the stranger does not accept the total of its cultural pattern as the natural and appropriate way of life and as the best of all possible solutions of any problem”.⁵

2 Schütz 1944:499.

3 Schütz 1944:500.

4 Schütz 1944:501.

5 Schütz 1944:507.

From this last quotation we can easily see one of the possible root, or basis of any xenophobic, or in this case anti-Semite political narrative, which in my opinion creatively uses the above mentioned traits of the in-group, and the inherent attributes and the liminal position of the stranger.

The myth of the Wandering Jew

After this philosophical, psychological grounding of the topic, I will enter the field of ethnography and folklore study, to identify some of the popular images about the European, and especially the Central Eastern European Jewish population. One of the elemental mythological appearances of the motif of the migrant Jews is the myth of the Wandering Jew. The story derives from the biblical story of Jesus (there is clearly no mention of it in the Gospels, and not any sign of it in any known apocryphal text). In the European folk poetry, and in traditional stories, the basis, the core of the myth is as follows: when Jesus carried his cross, he wanted to rest a little in front of the house of a Jewish cobbler, Ahasver. But he insulted him, sent away him, in some versions he even hit him. After these events, Jesus cursed him to wander in the world, where Ahasver should not find his home, his peace nor his death, until the Last Judgement.⁶

This myth with some variations was born in the medieval times in Europe; it was the most popular in the sixteenth century, when its publishing can be connected to Martin Luther and to other lutherarian writers.⁷ And it was still alive in the nineteenth century, in folk tales, and folk songs. Although there is a sinner in the Bible who was condemned to eternal wandering, who was the first murderer, Cain, who received the same stigma, the punishment. (Or perhaps the gift...?) In the Christian Europe the story of Ahasver could offer an explanation of the existence of the Jewish diaspora, the exodus from Western Europe in the XIV–XVI centuries to the Eastern parts of the continent (which were mostly occurred as a result of expulsion and aggression). It could be also easily connected to another common theological and mythical trope, the gravest sin possible, the decide, the murder of god.⁸

6 Oişteanu 2005:289.

7 Oişteanu 2005:295.

8 Oişteanu 2005:290-291.

The myth of the Wanderer Jew was not only referenced by anti-Judaist, or anti-Semite texts, and religious or political actors, but on the contrary, also by politicians who were in favour, or sometimes the champions of emancipation, for example József Eötvös, who argues that only the extension of political and economical rights could end the misery of the ridden Jewish community.⁹

The folk tales and the religious adaptation of this myth colourfully illustrates the nature of the anti-Judaist thinking, and discourse, which, in my opinion, serves as the first, most traditional layer of the political anti-Semite narratives. As Andrei Oișteanu, a Romanian ethnologist, cultural anthropologist puts it: „We are witnessing an interesting cultural feedback. The prejudices of the popular anti-Judaism, as the 'Jews are clever but cunning and like to cheat' have been taken over by leading innovators of political anti-Semitism, who were re-activating, ideologizing, disseminating these motifs ten times stronger through the press into the cultural medium, from which it came from”.¹⁰

Jewish migration in the 18th and 19th century

Now I would like to briefly present the second layer, the actual historical background of the Jewish migration to the then Hungarian territories throughout the nineteenth century. As I mentioned above, in the medieval ages, but basically from the time dated back to the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, the Jewish communities lived in scattered groups in Europe, from time to time expelled from a territory and migrating to another country. The exodus from Western Europe in the XIV–XVI centuries, to the eastern parts of the continent, is the antecedent of the movements which are in my focus in this research. We can learn statistical data from state censuses which specially focused on the Hungarian Jewish population in the eighteenth century. Notably, from the census of 1735.

From this document one can deduce that the Jewish migration had two easily separated main courses, the migration from the north-eastern direction and from a western orientation.¹¹ This two sided movement, evidently had cultural, social implications. While the western migration, main-

ly from Moravia was composed by citizens or migrants who wanted to assimilate, wanted to be part of the bourgeoisie, the main sociological actors of the north-eastern migration were orthodox or Hasidic Jewish groups who had different relationship with their own traditions, religion and a different stance toward assimilation.¹²

The causes of the eastern and north-eastern migration were many, but we can assume that the partitions of Poland and Lithuania, and the varying stance of the Tsarist Empire about the Jewish population was a significant factor.¹³ This eastern north-eastern movement to Hungary from 1740–1848, originated from Galicia and Bukovina, which were the poorer and economically the most undeveloped part of the Habsburg Empire, with a high density of Jewish population.¹⁴ As in the Habsburg Empire there were no internal borders, the migration from the disadvantageous parts was possible to the regions which offered a possibly more opportunity.¹⁵ (It is hard not to compare this motive with one of the legal basis of the European Union, the freedom of movement and the current humanitarian questions and political problems about refugees, migrants and the possible solutions).

Even from a scientific, historical viewpoint, the intensity and sometimes even the existence of the Jewish migration was under debate, especially the movements in the second half of the nineteenth century. Which debate, one can assume, probably did not lack the political and ideological considerations. The arguments were varied from the stance that there was absolutely no Jewish migration to Hungarian lands, from the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, to the totally opposite statement, that masses of refugees appeared in this period.¹⁶

Now, in this essay I accept the arguments of László Varga who argues that the largest Jewish migration to the Hungarian lands occurred in 1846 to 1850, and after this movement, the western migration basically stopped, and in the years following the Compromise of 1867 that can be said about the eastern migration also.¹⁷ And another significant orientation of that time was the emigration from Hungary to Austria, and moreover from the Mon-

9 Oișteanu 2005:295.

10 Oișteanu 2005:129.

11 Varga 2005:15.

12 Varga 2005:16.

13 Haumann 2002:80.

14 Karády 2000:93.

15 Karády 2000:93.

16 Varga 2005:17-18.

17 Varga 2005:23-24.

archy to the United States of America.¹⁸ As Varga states, the fear of a possible migration from Galicia and Bukovina during the time of the Dualism were feeding upon the fact that these territories still had a large Jewish population.¹⁹ In the next part of my essay I will try to show how those fears were harnessed, articulated and sometimes created by Hungarian political actors, namely by Győző Istóczy.

The anti-Semite narrative of the migrant Jewish people

Firstly, Győző Istóczy was the member of the Liberal Party which was created after the Deák party was divided into two different political groups, and then he created the National Anti-Semite Party in 1883.²⁰ He, his background and his career can be characterized as the typical representative of the so called gentry, as his family owned a small land in the western part of Hungary.²¹ He studied law and had a career as an office-holder in a county. Naturally we cannot determine the origins of his anti-Semite feelings with certainty, the following story can be seen as a significant element in his personal and political thinking. When he was a judge in an auction of a demesne, the son of a rich Jewish family told his father name, not his own, therefore the father annulled the results. In the next auction the worth was lower so the creditors sued Istóczy for their apparent disadvantage, who also sued the son who made false claims. Finally, after legal battles Istóczy was cleared by the Supreme Court (then and now Curia) but he publicly referred to this episode as a motivating factor in his anti-Semite campaigns.²²

His first speech in the Hungarian National Assembly was in 1875 April 8, when he spoke about the „Jewish question and the nationalization law”.²³ In this speech, in this interpellation he gave a systematic account of the anti-Semite narrative which was also a unique in Europe.²⁴ However, he was not the first political actor in Europe to present such an ideology, but its systematic nature was special. (Later I will briefly try to point out the main attach-

ments, and similarities between other European anti-Semite ideologists, and movements and their Hungarian counterparts.) In this address, he characterizes the internal and external factors which were resulting in the growth of the Jewish population, which threatens the then Hungarian nation with oppression in his own country.

His main objective in this speech was to refute the then common categorization of the Jewish people, which was the category of a religious group. Istóczy's ideological innovation was the classification: „closed societal caste”.²⁵ This exclusiveness in his conception originates from three major attributes: the so called „blood-unity”, the ancient traditions, and the religion, the Judaism itself. He denied that the Jewish minority could be regarded as a nationality; he insisted that the caste-like, closed group characterization is the best, if he wanted to present his political narrative. He also described the relationship between the Jewish “caste” (to use his own terminology) and the political conception, liberalism. He stated that they are the most conservative group, and to maintain their special status they are using the ideology of liberalism to constantly change and disturb the institutions, moreover, the whole society. The goal of the Jews in this discourse is to exclude and to eliminate every other group, beside theirs. The only role of the non-Jewish population, that they can be the target of the economical oppression and exploitation. He also cited the common anti-Semite motif, that the Jews control the journals, beside their economical control.

With all these elements and parameters he concluded that the Jewish population cannot be assimilated, their reception in to the Hungarian nation is a dangerous notion, which can be resulted in the total annihilation of the Hungarian people. As in the case of liberalism and conservatism above, he presented the same line of thinking, and arguments about the division of the Hungarian Jewish population to Orthodox Judaism and to Neolog Judaism. In his coherent narrative, this was also just the strategy of this essentially one closed group, to reach its goal.

As he puts it: „The two contrasting shades are the two intersecting branches of the scissor, whose starting point and purpose is one, and the better they confront each other, the better we feel the edges on our neck”.²⁶ The Orthodox wing assures the clean survival of the ancient traditions, and with their high

18 Varga 2005:24.

19 Varga 2005:24.

20 Gyurgyák 2001:320.

21 Kubinszky 1976:54.

22 Kubinszky 1976:55.

23 Istóczy 1904:1.

24 Gyurgyák 2001:316.

25 Istóczy 1904:2.

26 Istóczy 1904:6.

reproduction rate insures that in the future they can finally outnumber the then majority population. The Neolog branch was characterized as the one who uses the trends of assimilation, and the legality of the mixed marriages to take the wealth, influence and power of the majority, step by step, brick by brick. Then, he argued about the need of a movement in the spirituality of the self defense, against this „internationally organized, attacking caste”.²⁷

After his long and detailed argumentation (which was interrupted by the President of the Assembly) he finally presented the interpellation itself, in which he asked the government about their intentions of changing the nationalization procedure, the possibility of the organization of a movement in self defense of the Hungarian nation, and their overall attitude to the emancipation.

After this presentation of his first, programmatic speech, which can be labeled as his creed (in my opinion) in this subject, I will collect the parts of other parliamentary speeches where he refers to the Jewish migration. In his 1875 December 17th speech about the Romanian situation he outlined the working of the Jewish „occupation”. In this narrative the migrants monopolized the trade, small-scale industry. „This race, especially Western Moldavia, completely replaced in all cities the native traders and craftsmen, and even penetrated some villages”.²⁸

In another speech, that Istóczy made in 1878 June 24th about the foundation of an independent Jewish state, he covered the topic of the rising population of the Hungarian Jews (naturally, this was true from his viewpoint, and with his convictions). He put the whole issue in a historical frame or context; he paralleled the then current European situation to the medieval times, when the Christian civilization was attacked by – in his terminology – “mohamedan” forces. Naturally, his main point was the similarity of the attacking Islam and the offensive Jewish caste, which was the “last alien element in the Christian Europe”.²⁹ He also cited statistical data about the population of Hungary to confirm the worrying multiplication of the Jewish people. In his calculation he founded that the Hungarian Jewry multiplies itself in every thirty years. (His prediction was that with this rate, the Hungarian Jewish population in 2020 would be around seventeen million.)

He also referred to the old folkloric anti-Jewish stereotype, that the Jews are more resistant to cholera and other epidemics than the non-Jewish population. He argued that in the case of the successful foundation of a Jewish state, the Jews in Europe and in Hungary would migrate there in a year leaving the Christian civilization to be itself. „Because in the present time the nomadic Jewish people are the most mobile elements in the world, as their wealth are mostly invested in moveable properties, most of them could change their residence in forty-eight hours”.³⁰ In addition he insisted that it is a biological, anthropological, physiological fact that the Jewish people can acclimatized to every geographical and climatic zone.

In another speech in 1882 he attacked the notion of emancipation (as usual from Istóczy) as the weakness of the democratic and liberal European countries. He showed the example of the Russian Empire as where are no democratic system, parliament and rights, and argued that only one order from the current tsar could result in millions of Jewish refugees, whom would swarm the country as *locusts*. In the same year he gave another speech on the subject of the migration of the Russian Jews. Firstly, he told the Assembly that he was right, when few months ago prophetically foreseen the problem of the nearly four million refugees. Then he characterized the Polish and Russian pogroms, and anti-Jewish movements as „[...]they used the same tools, as the farmer who is cleaning his house and trying to wipe out the *insects, parasites*[...]”.³¹ Here he also posed the poetic question that who are the Russian Jews. Of course, he answered his proposition, with a then actual reference, as he stated that they are the same types as the ones who orchestrated the alleged ritual murder in Tiszaeszlár. He also refers to the Darwinism (naturally, not with a scientific approach, more like the vulgar version of the theory) as he said „as a short time ago the eastern wharf-rat expelled the German rat: that is how a more mobile, resourceful Jewish race expels the native proprietor class”.³²

After these examples from the rhetorical achievements of Győző Istóczy I would like to present some other reference to the migrant Jewish people, and the common anti-Semite narrative from the journal *12 Pamphlets*. Here, my aim is also

27 Istóczy 1904:9.

28 Istóczy 1904:34.

29 Istóczy 1904:44.

30 Istóczy 1904:55.

31 Istóczy 1904:129.

32 Istóczy 1904:134.

to discover the relationship, similarities and cooperation with other European nations, especially with Germany. In the first edition there is an article about the Talmud which refers to the book of August Rohling, the „Talmudic Jew” in which Rohling described the content of these religious writings and interpretations, as essentially anti-Christian. As a book which legitimize all the crimes and misdemeanours against the non-Jews.³³ In this first journal the editors also published a German petition which was directed to Bismarck and one of the demand is the „annulation of the Jewish immigration, especially from the East”.³⁴

In another edition, the speech of a certain Dr. Hanel was published, who was apparently the member of the Prussian Assembly. He also touched upon the subject of the eastern migration, and he categorized the migrants as „such elements who cannot be seen as a productive and honest workforce”.³⁵ In a column, which had the title „From the Jewish battlefield” there were news about the international anti-Semite movements in every month. Sometimes parts of speeches, citations and general informations about anti-Semite organizations, associations, mainly with a German focus.

Summary

In the end of this essay I will try to summarize the mentioned examples of the political anti-Semite narrative, about the Jews in general, and about the migrant Jews too. (Although, I think it is quite clear now, that these two are sometimes absolutely interconnected in this discourse, and it is hard to separate them. In the construction of the threatening picture of the migrant Jew, we can see that the real issues were totally mixed with the ultimately false stereotypes, prejudices and myths. The image of the enemy was constructed (once again) as superior and inferior in the same time. The manoeuvres of the international organizations, secret societies and unbelievably rich Jewish bankers equalled the inferiority of the petty, but still cunning ways of the poor Jews. The dichotomy as we have seen is a dominant part of the thinking of Istóczy and therefore, regarding his influence at the analysed time, in the Hungarian anti-Semite ideology too. He drew

the inherently offensive and invasive nature of the Jewish people, who cannot be assimilated.

Therefore the only way, according to Istóczy, is the expulsion, or in his terminology a national movement of self defence. (At first sight, paradoxically – as I also pointed it out above – he was the propagator of a sovereign Jewish state.) The typical character of the migrant Jew was the eastern, orthodox, Hasidic Jew, who always comes as a conqueror (firstly in the field economy, and culture). Who always arrives in masses, characterized in the speeches as locusts, and insects. In the end of this essay, I have the apparent feeling that the construction of the stranger and the fearful enemy has not changed throughout our history, and I see no indication that it would ever change in our future.

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