

Vigilante militias and activities against roma and migrants in Hungary

(p. 104–128.)

Introduction

As a country, Hungary has witnessed a long tradition of far right movements and political parties as well as paramilitary and military organizations. Together they represent combatant nationalist and social conservative reactions to diverse political and social trends in different historical periods. The goal of these Janus-faced movements who considered themselves vigilante organizations was much less about the prevention of crime than the persecution of persons and groups they called “parasites”, “degenerates” or “internal enemies” (Gellner, 2009). These groups were considered to oppose the majority’s value set and to represent a threat to the ruling political and ethnic community. The roots of such movements go back to the end of the nineteenth century when in the course of capitalist development, social tensions widened, and nationalism became the leading idea of politics in whole of Europe. In a certain parallelism, a number of political movements came to life that claimed to unify and achieve social and national goals through a great “national social” revolution, destroying the cosmopolite communists and the not less destructive power of finance capitalism at the same time (Szabó, 2015).

This was particularly typical in Eastern-Middle-Europe because this region was not only multiethnic but also suffered under heavy social antagonisms and continuous waves of immigration. Attracted to the intensive economic development, liberalism and safety of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, Jewish immigrants arrived in large numbers from politically, economically and socially underdeveloped regions of Eastern Europe, particularly from Russia. In Austria, the Jewish Emancipation Law of 1890 and in Hungary, the Law XLII of 1895 secured the equal status of the Hebrew community with other confessions. The Jewish community contributed far more to the economic development of Hungary than its population rate would have suggested. However, the immigration of Jews and their fast and spectacular social rise triggered resentments within a social strata who felt threatened by capitalism (Komoróczy, 2012). Even though, at the time, Hungary was witnessing a great capitalist transition; this phenomenon had its dark sides too. Both the capitalist economic modernity and the early socialist movements attacked and weakened the old social structure rooted in late feudal circumstances, particularly the ruling position of the conservative agrarian, the catholic aristocracy and gentry landowners. With the Jewish minority being overrepresented in the finance and investment business and at the same time playing an active role in socialist movements, they soon became the personalized symbol of both the destructive and cosmopolite economic liberalism and the anti-national and cosmopolite i.e. internationalist communism. Beyond them, other ethnic groups with separatist aims were treated as potential threats too. In this era a great number of Romany (called Gypsy, Zigan, Cigány at that time) immigrated to Hungary from Eastern regions who sustained their vagrant (peripatetic) ways of life and according to the public opinion were overrepresented in criminality (Póczik, 2016). The ideologies of xenophobia, anti-minority and anti-migratory far right initiatives in today’s Hungary are rooted in the historical development described above. These protest movements do not essentially differ from other current extreme right movements of neighbouring countries (Slovenská národná strana, Partidul România-Mare etc.), but definitely show some variability in their presence and weight from other countries’ far right movements. They communicate in terms of an antidemocratic and anti-modernist political agenda – including anti-finance capitalism, anti-liberalism, anti-feminism (anti-genderism) and homophobic

attitudes. Their attitudes are determined by sharp anti-communism, racism, as well as racial or cultural anti-Semitism, militant nationalism, ethno-centric attitudes and a deepseated antipathy towards foreigners. These groups demand “law and order”, national and political unity and closed and regulated national economy based on small enterprises instead of corporations. They also demand the maintenance of a great power vision including the idea of – biological or cultural – national superiority (supremacy) based on pre-eminent national (ethnic) abilities, a heroic past determined by religious and family values and symbols of rigorous military organizations. The core elements of the activities of these movements are a kind of social control, political(ly) motivated violence and other hate crimes as well as propaganda.