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Motives and Legacies Behind 2008-2009 Hungarian Roma Murders and Apologies

Introduction

The Roma murders are the most recent shocking hate crimes in Hungary against the Roma, or Gypsies,¹ the most disadvantaged ethnic minority group in Europe. They wandered from northern India to Europe in the 14th century. In a seven-month period during 2008-2009, extreme nationalists² carried out nine attacks on Roma/Gypsy houses in various Hungarian villages. Fifty-five individuals were injured, and six were murdered during a racist³ rampage that became known as: “the Roma murders” (Vágvölgyi, 2014).

The killings were meant to be part of a countrywide mass murder; the four extreme nationalists later charged with homicide planned to kill as many Gypsy people as they could (Verseck, 2013b). However, when we term the Roma murders “hate crimes,” not only personal motives but also broader social, cultural, political, and ideological factors must be examined. Hungarian legislation, in keeping with European law, defines hate crimes by the perpetrator's selection of a victim being based on a prejudice toward the group to which the victim belongs. The US statute defines hate crimes according to whether the perpetrator acts out of feelings of hate or hostility toward the victim, not the group (Goodall, 2013). Both models consider hate crimes more serious than others because such crimes violate principles of equal rights and equal protection of the law and affect whole communities (Link & Howe, 2014).

This analysis seeks to answer two questions: What motivations propelled the Roma murders? How did they support or were supported by Hungarian historic and cultural legacies associated with them and subsequent official apologies? This essay seeks to identify both the

motives and the cultural-historical traditions underlying them, while showing common dynamics at work in both the murders and apologies.

Past Research on Anti-Roma Violence, Hate Crimes, and Apologies

Previous research includes Mirga's (2009) study of hate speech and violence against the Roma; James' (2014) analysis of hate crimes against European Gypsies; Boromisza-Habashi's (2008) examination of hate speech as a cultural practice in Hungary; Celermajer and Kidman's (2012) research into the connection between national identity and state apology; and Holling, Moon, and Nevis' (2014) study of racialization and latent whiteness in apologies following white racist crimes. From a more global perspective, Vivian (2013) calls attention to the unique impact of historical tragedies as archetypal atrocities, as memory that acculturates a community to their violent past. Finally, Tomm, Endress and Diamond (1993) examine a shooting scene based on similar principles as those in this essay. However, while they based the tragedy on class antagonism, this study attributes the murders to racial hatred justified by extreme nationalist ideology – amplified by the myth of the nation-building power of tragedies and by the collective memory of Hungarian history as ill-fated and tragic. As will be demonstrated, these were intertwined in the motives of the murders and subsequent apologies.

Rhetorical tradition distinguishes between *apologia* and *apology*. *Apologia* can be defined as “a rhetorical oration that focuses on the defense of one’s self against negative accusations of one’s moral nature, motives or reputation” (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 2). On the other hand, *apology* is described by Tavuchis (1991) as “a speech act uttered by the wrongdoer to acknowledge responsibility for the offense and to request forgiveness” (p. 17). The difference is that *apologia* is public and an admission of guilt is not required, while *apology* can be public or private and an admission of guilt is required (Richards, 2017).

Tavuchis (1991) identifies the two pillars of interpersonal apology as taking responsibility and requesting forgiveness. Yet, components of apology can be intertwined; expressing responsibility might not include a request for forgiveness or *vice versa*. Saying, “I am sorry” can be “associated with admitting wrongdoing, expressing remorse, promising forbearance and offering reparation, but not acknowledging harm” (Dhami, 2016, p. 32). Hence, the goal of an apology should be to heal the effects of wrongdoing, to restore justice at the individual and/or communal level, and to symbolically purify those who committed the violence.

However, what should be the criteria for a state apology? How can states represent citizens with various political views who might agree or disagree with the apology? How can the state apologize for past wrongdoings? How does it, as an organization, have the agency to apologize? These issues make restoring social justice more difficult when states apologize for hate crimes against ethnic minorities.

In this analysis, the word *apology* (not *apologia*) is used for two reasons. First, while both apologies examined were public, they admitted some kind of guilt (in accordance with the Hungarian cultural-historical tradition). Second, since the examined apologies followed a series of hate crimes, their primary goal is to restore wholeness and eliminate harm. From a social-justice perspective, acknowledgement of wrongdoing must be included in the apology.

Materials and Methods

In broad terms, the present analysis focuses on the development of violence and the role of extreme nationalist rhetoric in it, the murders, and the Hungarian reaction to these hate crimes. With regard to Hungarians’ reactions, three prominent political group’s reflections are examined: the left-liberal apology by a politician in the name of his party, the Alliance of Free

Democrats (SZDSZ), the far-right response to this apology, and the official state apology from the current center-right administration of Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz party.⁴

Particularly, this essay pays close attention to the left-liberal apology by Miklós Gáspár Tamás' of July 25, 2013, published in a prominent economic journal, *HVG*, a 39-year-old periodical (printed and online); the same-day response to Tamás' article by an extreme nationalist blogger, who publishes under the screen name, Maroz (2013), in the extreme nationalist blog, "Kakukkfészek" ("Cuckoo's Nest"); and the Aug 2, 2016, official press release of the current center-right government.

Miklós Gáspár Tamás is an eminent opposition figure, the leader of the Alliance of Free Democrats, who represented his party in the Hungarian Parliament from 1989 to 1994 after the fall of the Communism ("Hatred and betrayal," 2007). Tamás apologized in the name of his party, in a coalition government with the Hungarian Socialist Party until 2008, the time of the first killings of the murder spree. Tamás' article was titled, "If this is not a national mourning, then this is not a real nation." It was a direct response to Keno Versech, a *Spiegel Online* journalist, who criticized the silence of Hungarian society regarding the murders in multiple articles. Since Tamás' article was the first official reaction, breaking the silence, the article spread rapidly in multiple online forums. Its significant effect is also demonstrated by the fact that the extreme nationalist Maroz (2013) read and responded polemically to the apology the day it was published.

Maroz is a screen name; other bloggers use this name as well to address the anonymous author. Maroz is the second most popular extreme nationalist blogger in Hungary, with 497 posts and 12,885 comments in various blogs,⁵ among them, the extreme nationalist "Kakukkfészek"

(“Cuckoo’s Nest”). The blogger has nearly equal status with Tamás’ platform. The HVG has about 20,000 online readers, while Maroz has more than 15,000 followers.

Maroz’ reaction is significant since it highlights gaps in Tamás’ apology and rationalizes gaps in the government’s apology. Maroz addresses the growing group of extreme nationalists, usually self-identifying as “neo-Nazi,” a designation used by politicians. Posted on the same day that Tamás published his apology, with the title, “If this is not a national mourning, then this is not a real nation,” Maroz’s (2013) blog article is titled, “Fake nation in a fake country.”⁶ The article was a great success, given that many followers thought it should be distributed via flyers.

Finally, Zoltan Balog, the Minister for Human Resources, apologized in the name of the center-right Orban government on August 2, 2016, the anniversary of the Roma Holocaust and the Roma murders. The apology was posted on the government’s website, and the next day, it was published in all major media outlets. Accordingly, the authors of the texts quoted below are public political figures whose assessment of the murders had great value for their supporters. Yet, while Maroz’s and Tamás’ messages can be seen an interaction (Tamás addresses white Hungarians – among them the extreme nationalists – and Maroz (2013) directly answers Tamás’ message), the state’s apology is independent of both reactions.

What makes the Roma murders more than just another example of their vulnerable status in Hungary is that this was the first time the government and a political leader publicly apologized to the Roma. This is the immediate context of the analyzed commentaries.

“Extreme nationalist” here means a person who promotes an aggressive form of nationalism in the belief that national identity is the foundation of individual identity and should not be corrupted by foreign influences. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* equates extreme nationalism with fascism and Nazism; hence, the author uses these concepts interchangeably.

Results and Contribution

While the media identified the murders as a racial hate crime perpetrated by four extreme nationalists, this analysis demonstrates that we cannot reduce their motives to individual reasons. We cannot ignore the social, historical, and cultural issues that are the root of these violent acts. Moreover, we seek to demonstrate this awareness even in official apologies.

The author's novel contribution is to recognize the common dynamics in the hate crimes and the apologies that followed. These include multiple goals. The first is to raise awareness surrounding the question, "When will the judicial system defend those who self-identify (or are identified by others) as Roma?" It is an urgent question ("Remembering," 2014, para. 4). The second is to demand a new, detailed apology specifically to the Roma as equal citizens. The third is to demand greater efforts – including implementing hate-crime policies and guidelines at the national and local level – to prevent similar hate crimes in the future.

Contextual Background

The Roma are the largest European ethnic and linguistic minority. Out of 10 to 12 million European Roma, 5 to 6 percent live in Hungary. They are formerly nomadic people who wandered from northern India to Europe in the 14th century. The Roma were "aliens," bringing a foreign culture and visibly darker skin to a predominantly white Europe; in turn, they were expelled from most Western cultures throughout the centuries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2004). Yet, after multiple forced assimilative programs, Gypsies remained unsuccessfully assimilated. They still bear the stigma of "different" (Subert, 2017). The 2008-2009 violence is only one of the latest eruptions of hatred against the Roma/Gypsies. Distaste and hatred have

accumulated for hundreds of years, growing even faster after the fall of socialism, when jobs collapsed and the Roma became the most disadvantaged of ethnic minorities.

The 1989 fall of socialism in Hungary and a switch from strictly regulated capitalism to free-market capitalism that overlapped with it was shockingly rapid. With regime change, the Hungarian government stopped securing the national job market and no longer took responsibility for the wellbeing of all its citizens. The gap between the poor, including the impoverished former middle class, and the new rich, who took advantage of regime change, grew unbridgeable. The Roma became the poorest of the poor. During this period of growing economic and employment insecurity, many Hungarians adopted a far-right ideology – a conservative political view with revisionist ideas and a strong tone of white privilege. Unrestricted racist rhetoric proclaimed that the Roma do not belong in Hungarian society (Bayer, 2013). Roma civil rights leader Horváth (2011) noted that, in Hungary after the fall of socialism, social problems became ethnicized: “Poverty, deviance, and criminality received ‘a Gypsy face,’ and as a result, the far right had an easy time of it” (p. 1).

Consequently, Roma were designated “black sheep” (odd, outliers, with implications of bad behavior) long before they became targets of ethnic violence in the Roma murders. This analysis surveys the mounting violence from a resurgent far right in Hungary through the aftermath of these homicides. But first, it is important to set the scene for this re-emergent right ideology by reviewing the Hungarians’ bond to the 18th century *Volksgeist* movement.

Cultural Legacy and *Volksgeist*

The aim of *Volksgeist* is to keep order and provide rules to ensure the nation’s survival. *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2015 online edition, traces the concept to the Romantic Movement, in which German intellectuals linked the German people to their distinctive “national

spirit.” They supposed that a distinct national spirit differentiates one nation from another. They not only believed that this spirit is evident in the nation’s tales, songs, and beliefs, but also referred to this spirit in poems and national anthems composed around this time. In the end, *Volkgeist* became the foundational idea of a 20th-century extreme nationalist ideology. As will be demonstrated, *Volkgeist* plays a central role not only in neo-Nazi rhetoric but also in the general understanding of nationhood.

Many Hungarian cultural symbols reach back to the 18th century idea of the *Volkgeist*, which depicts the nation as a spiritual, racial, and ethnic community. Since *Volkgeist* fulfills a specific destiny, “fate” is part of Hungarian cultural heritage and national identity. It is the leitmotif of the most popular Hungarian historic patriotic poems and songs, among them the *Himnusz*⁷ (Hymn) – the National Anthem – and the “*Szózat*”⁸ (Appeal), considered a second national anthem. The *Himnusz* describes the Hungarian nation as “torn by tragic fate,” in which past suffering creates the nation (Loew, 1989, p. 196.). The *Szózat* calls upon Hungarians to remain “loyal to their nation to the end,” at any price, and the final vision is the nation’s grave (Makkai, 1996, p. 225). Hungarians can easily envision this “tragic fate” as the nation’s disintegration, since after World War I, Hungary lost three-fifths of its territory (Cornelius, 2011).

The dramatic imaginary of a tragic, wounded nation and its past suffering also evokes heavy feelings of guilt for, as well as denial of, wrongdoing during and after World War II (“Persecution and genocide,” 2011). In both patriotic poems, for Hungarians, death opens the prospect of a better era enabled by common suffering. These cultural determinants are part of the emotional backdrop of “nation” in collective national identity, memory, as *Volkgeist* or guilt, social rituals, as grief, and a redemptive agent as a “therapeutic alternative to historical

discourse” (Doss, 2010, p. 49). This cultural heritage plays a significant role in Hungarian extreme nationalism.

Discussion

The Evolution of Violence and the Murders

In addition to growing anti-Roma sentiments, the Roma murders were preceded by multiple extreme nationalist demonstrations. For example, in one of the villages where killings took place, a neo-Nazi paramilitary group, the Hungarian Guard (*Magyar Gárda*), held nationalist-power demonstrations threatening, harassing, and intimidating Roma residents a few months before the homicides. These marchers emphasized that Roma are savages who don't fit into civilized societies; criminals who must be disciplined; and strangers (aliens) who don't belong to the Hungarian nation. Racist rhetoric was tolerated as freedom of speech even after Bajai, the leader of the popular far-right party, *Jobbik*,⁹ said: “The gypsies are animals; they should be not allowed to exist” (Verseck, 2013a).

As Boromisza-Habashi (2008) points out, to save freedom of speech, “the criminal sanctioning of ‘derogatory remarks’ directed at particular groups” was declared unconstitutional in 1992, 1999, and in 2004 by the Hungarian Constitutional Court. Therefore, in 2008-2009 when hate speech, constitutionally, was again a crime, it was difficult to enforce this restriction (p. 1). There was a tendency to overlook the ban of Nazi symbols. Ultimately, the Hungarian Constitutional Court annulled the ban of the public use of the Nazi swastika because, as the court stated, the ban violated the right to freedom of speech in 2013 (“Hungary: Swastikas, SS symbols legal to display as of May,” 2013).¹⁰ This 2013 court order was a result of the growing extreme nationalist presence during the preceding years, when hate speech and the incitement of violence against Roma was a tool to gain political power and legitimize far-right parties in

mainstream politics (Mirga, 2009). Nationalist-power demonstrations against “Gypsy criminality” were parts of a patriotic image the *Jobbik* Party used to attract more sympathisers. The party then won three seats in the 2009 European Parliamentary elections and became the most powerful alternative to the current administration of Viktor Orbán and the Fidesz party in the 2018 election.

For the four right-wing extremist groups, doing “heroic things” translated into killing as many Gypsy people as they could. Their self-assigned role was that of the vigilant hero. They believed that the Roma degraded Hungary’s cultural and economic standards and wanted to save the nation from that (Verseck, 2013b). The Roma themselves could not alter the stigma of being “degrading elements.”

On the other hand, extreme nationalists assumed quasi-supernatural power as the exclusive owners of the Hungarian land (nation) and as hunters who are superior to their prey (Roma) by a “fated order” (Tamás, 2013, para. 10), so the series of tragedies was presented as part of a gradual progress toward greater self-realization of a triumphant *Volksgeist*. This view was a natural consequence of membership in the extreme right party, *Jobbik*, and the paramilitary group, Hungarian Guard promoting a *Volksgeist* style of nationalism, revisionism, and white supremacy.

Volksgeist is also able to unify and fulfill the psychological need that moves people to prefer acting as a group over acting as individuals. In a group, they can remove themselves from their daily experiences and dramatize events based on “indirect signifiers of larger social structures” (Bormann, 1982, p. 48). Influenced by such a group spirit, the killers were ready to restore territorial order through a psychological scenario that transformed Roma villages into “unlawfully” occupied territory. The Hungarian killers acted as owners of the territory, including

the Roma homes. In his verdict, Judge Miszori concluded that “the killers regarded themselves as vigilantes, bringing order to lawless communities” (“How to get out,” 2013).

As the investigation revealed, over 14 months in 2008-2009, the four men guilty of killing Roma people visited many Roma communities in different villages. The first murder scene was Nagycsécs, an East Hungarian village, where the Hungarian Guard had held their first anti-Roma demonstration just a few months before the killings (“Hungary’s far-right,” 2008).¹¹ The four men charged with murder returned to this village, already marked as extreme-nationalist territory, based on the Hungarian Guard’s far-right nationalist-power demonstrations.

Also, the neo-Nazis did not consider the Roma dwellings as “homes.” Where the killings took place, the Roma buildings were in isolated locations, on the outskirts of town, where several Roma families lived in rundown huts. Two of the victims, a father and his 5-year-old son, lived right at the edge of the forest, in a house with no fence in Tatárszentgyörgy (the village where the second murders happened). As the killers admitted, the location of the house was one reason they chose it, as it was an easy target. After throwing Molotov cocktails on the small house, two men stayed in the yard and two others engaged in an ambush, waiting with loaded weapons to shoot the escaping Roma. To the extreme nationalists, Roma homes in this area seemed not “homes” but part of a lawless wilderness. So neither the sanctity of *home* nor the sanctity of *homeland* applied. (Parallel to this, the Hungarian Criminal Code does not cover the destruction of Roma properties as a hate crime.)

Six Roma lives were sacrificed in a representative ritual that followed a political-ideological drama. The neo-Nazi drama assigned specific characteristics and roles and re-constructed the scene, all according to the myth of the *Volksgeist*.

In this process of scapegoating, the Roma became “the ‘essence’ of evil,” and “the principle of the discord felt by those who are to be purified by the sacrifice” (Burke, 1969, p. 407). Therefore, the 2008-2009 Roma murders may be seen as the culmination of a long-developing process that followed both the inner and outer logic of an ideology and a society. Further insight into the symbolic meanings of this tragedy may be found in Hungarian responses to the murders.

Silence and Cover-up

Based on the rising presence of the extreme right in Hungary in 2008-2009, officials could have connected the murders to the far right in the first place, but until 2016, handled them as individual crimes, not as linked hate crimes (Verseck, 2014). The four suspects were arrested only in August 2009 (12 months after the first attack). In June 2010, the investigation was complete, and investigators recommended they be charged with multiple counts of misuse of weapons, murder, robbery and vandalism – but not for hate crimes. The court proceedings started in March 2011 (Verseck, 2013c). Five years after the murders, and after two and a half years in court, in an interview with Verseck, Horváth, a Roma politician and civil rights activist, complained:

These murders were crimes against humanity, yet they didn't shake Hungarian society . . . On the part of the government, of the political elite, no one has paid their respects to the victims and their families. No one has taken responsibility, neither symbolically nor legally nor politically. (Verseck, 2013b, para. 10)

There have been many examples in history when political elites kept silence surrounding injustices of the past. This happened in Germany and Hungary after the Second World War

(Langenbacher, 2005). In 2008-2009, the political elite still had not apologized to the Jewish and Roma people for Hungary's role in the Holocaust; this happened only in 2014 and 2016. Thus, the so-called Roma question (the growth of supposed "Roma criminality" and how long Hungarians have to "tolerate" it) was a sensitive topic. The left-liberals, who included many Jewish intellectuals, lost their popularity and, with the spread of extreme nationalism, were forced out of the coalition government in April 2008. They had to protect themselves from the growing anti-Semitism and had no power to stand up for the Roma. Finally, while the succeeding conservative-nationalist government under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán wanted to separate itself from the right wing's anti-Roma and anti-Semitic narrative – to remain politically correct in the eyes of the West, liberals, and the Roma – they did not want to alienate their potential far-right voters before the upcoming election. Therefore, the political elite extended the silence created around past hate crimes to present crimes until an image-reparation became unavoidable.

Second, the delay in investigation was identified as due to a lack of protocols and guidelines that could help police and prosecuting attorneys investigate hate crimes (Amnesty International, 2012). However, more than lack of protocol, the attitudes of the police, emergency personnel, investigators, and the prosecutor revealed persistent biases. The police destroyed many of the Roma crime scenes. For example, they urinated on evidence at the scene and warned one of the families not to report the crime. In spite of visible wounds, the police considered the deaths to be caused by domestic fire. An ambulance arrived at one of the scenes one hour after the murder. In another case, detectives started investigating the case 10 hours after the crime had been committed (Verseck, 2013b).

Biases had been identified in the investigation as well. Two defendants had been surveyed by the Hungarian National Security agency because of their right-wing activity, but

officials had halted this monitoring before the killing spree began. Another defendant was identified as an informant for a secret service unit, but this was not confirmed by the Hungarian intelligence community. In the end, the suspects were charged with murder, not with acts of terrorism or hate crimes (Veseck, 2013c).

Finally, the prosecutor stated that the motive of the murders was racial hatred only after the international human rights organization, Amnesty International, demanded that the perpetrators' motivation be reassessed (“Hungary makes historic apology,” 2014). Accordingly, it was the escalating attention from international media and human rights organizations (such as *Spiegel Online*, the *Times* of London, *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, BBC News, Amnesty International, Human Rights First) that led to the two apologies. Hungarian public outcry was limited to the a small number of civil-rights activists and lawyers representing the victims.

The Left-liberal Apology after the Roma Murders

Apology is especially important after violence that affects a whole ethnic community. Yet, after law enforcement acknowledged biases, official acknowledgment of wrongdoing still was not made (Verseck, 2014, p. 1). The first official apology for the Roma murders came five years after the first homicide, from Tamás. He offered an apology because his party (Alliance of Free Democrats) was in the government during the 2008 Roma murders.

The apology was published on July 25, 2013, in *HVG*, a prominent economic magazine, under the title, “If this is not a national mourning, then this is not a real nation.”¹² Tamás (2013) apologized in the name of liberals:

We apologize. It is self-evident, it should be self-evident, that racism cannot and should not be overlooked and excused. But if this is not common knowledge, then it is all right if

we tell it for the ten thousandth time. But now is not the time for appeals and exhortations, but for mourning. For national mourning. (para. 13-14.)

Tamás takes responsibility for not speaking out early enough and letting racism grow “so strong and widespread that, in the case of Roma victims, we cannot even expect the natural responses of grief, shock, and anger” (para. 5).

According to Tamás (2013), the motive for the Roma murders was racism. His conclusion is that it is not the Romas’ appearance, behavior, or beliefs that provided motivation for the killers, but that the Romas’ role as the “stranger,” or alien, assigned by nationalists and their ideology, exposes them to ethnic violence. He says, “Just because they [the Roma] belong to a group which the former [Hungarians] deem less appealing from the fated order,” they had been killed (para. 9). Only because Roma otherness carries a negative connotation in heterogeneous white Europe does the Roma’s fate become tragic. Tamás apologizes for existing racial prejudice. This is exactly what is expected to heal wounds in this historical moment and social milieu.

Second, Tamás (2013) links the Roma murders to 20th century Nazism:

[T]errorism has appeared in our country. . . . Of course, not the tyrannicidal terrorism that has been valued by the Greco-Roman and Renaissance (and of course the Jesuit) tradition, but a series of political – in this case racist and Nazi – killing-sprees against the weakest. . . . but the national memory does not safeguard any poignant, cathartic rhetorical performance. (para. 2-3)

During World War II, the Hungarian government sent innocent fathers, mothers, and children to

the Nazi gas chambers. In 2008-2009, innocent fathers, mothers and children were murdered by the neo-Nazis. The common thread linking the two atrocities is that people remained silent when they should have spoken out. Just as today, at that point, there “wasn’t any moving, cathartic rhetorical performance kept in the national memory” (para. 3). While Hungary’s assistance to the Nazi genocide is repressed in the collective memory, this latest unexpressed grief led to suppressed public responsibility. Tamás says that suppressed guilt disables and paralyzes society.

Next, Tamás (2013) charges that neo-fascist (neo-Nazi) ideology has a palpable presence in Hungary; this contributes to the nation’s silence and its inability to exhibit any sympathy for the victims:

The statement that says that in Hungary, there is [political] fascism, is false. But ... it is correct to say that in Hungary, there is [cultural] fascism. This is not because there are a few misguided, unbalanced, ill-advised people (they, although differently, also deserve our empathy ...) – in a healthy society these people can be justified, healed and (eventually) comforted -- but there is fascism because our community could not express its repugnance [toward fascism], penance, and love [toward the victims of racial hate crimes]. (para. 2-3)

Tamás recognizes the country’s need to purge guilt. He calls on Hungarians to hold a day of national mourning. Tamás positions Roma as equals, as brothers and sisters and co-sufferers, co-victims of the Holocaust.

Although the analogy between the Holocaust and the Roma murders is reasonable, in this part of the apology, the audience is the non-Roma, who must learn

from recurring tragedies and not repeat the same mistakes. Tamás' apology reduced shared history to the Holocaust alone. He apologized for the tragedy the Roma shared with the Jewish people (as caused by Hungarians); this made the apology less effective in healing Roma communities in their specifically Roma grief.

Finally, Tamás (2013) recognizes that various versions of national identity can lead to deep-seated division and fuel political or racist violence. Therefore, he emphasizes that Hungarian society is responsible for the rhetoric tolerated and to what extent it is tolerated. People accustomed to racist rhetoric don't believe it is wrong. So Tamás calls for brotherly love and a "collective ritual" (grief) to reestablish social justice. This pious language further limited the effect of apology to the Roma.

Tamás builds on cultural symbols of a wounded nation and its suffering, along with the suppressed guilt, the nation's tragic fate, and the vision of a nation in mourning, in which mourning opens up a better era. These are also the motives in the *Volkgeist* movement that contributed to the murders. Tamás also recalls tragic history. Yet, he did not apologize for the government's complicity in delaying the investigation, its lack of hate-crime legislation, or for the bad political decisions that led to the new wave of anti-Roma sentiment.

Tamás' apology addressed his fellow Hungarians, not the Roma victims. This made his apology inherently insufficient to restore justice in the harmed Roma communities. However, he stirred up a slowly developing social engagement promoting criticism toward the government – thus, functioning as a "speech of accusation" (Ryan, 1982).

In the following, we shift from Tamás' apology to a second document, the extreme nationalist blogger's answer to both the Roma murders and his apology.

The Far Right and Apology as a Sign of Weakness

Tamás' statement was immediately followed by a blog article from Maroz (2013; actual blogger unknown). Maroz's arguments help answer the question, "What motivations propelled the Roma murders?" They also reveal additional gaps in Tamás' apology. Lastly, Maroz' comments disclose the reasons for gaps in the state apology, viz. that the Hungarian government, while apologizing for the hate crime, inherently represents different citizens with various political views (among them the extreme nationalists who disagree with the state apology).

The extreme nationalist "argument" in this section is far removed from an apologetic stance. As discussed earlier, fanatically extreme Hungarian nationalists framed the crime as an act of heroism by responsible citizens to clear the nation of criminals (Verseck, 2013b). Consequently, the far right sees any apology for the Roma murders as a sign of weakness. This attitude appears in Maroz's (2013) response to Tamás' apology. Maroz sarcastically suggested that, instead of criticizing neo-Nazis, "a person might have . . . respectfully asked to perhaps not love the gypsy who robbed him/her in bright daylight" (para. 13). Society should be grateful for the perpetrators because they eliminated these Roma 'criminals.'"

While collective memory of common suffering in the past creates group cohesion in an idealist – albeit anti-racist – form for Tamás and the liberal humanists, the emphasis on present suffering (alleged gypsy criminality, discrimination against neo-Nazis, political struggle, living in chaos and insecurity), and conceptualizing existing antagonisms as racial and cultural differences, facilitate Maroz in his racism and chauvinism (Gunn, 2003).

The blogger is angry at both Roma criminality and the political elite who abandoned Hungarian citizens. He (2013) argues that nations can be victorious only if led by strong leaders,

not fake intellectuals such as the left-liberal elite. According to Maroz, the Roma murders are not the result of lovelessness but the outcome of bad decisions by the political elite that led to widespread unemployment, extreme poverty, and, ultimately, to the rise of alleged Roma crimes.

He writes:

So let us not even consider that what we have here is a result of lovelessness; it is because our elite, the regime changer, then the regime reverter, and of course the regime reverter-reverter as well, through his actions, made a good number of decisions, and these decisions have subsequently been shown to be bad. . . . Is it a wonder that a counter-culture has developed as an answer to the downtown liberal elite's culture, and that it has shown to be victorious? Who is responsible for everything? Who made a mistake? (para. 9)

This doesn't sound apologetic. Instead, the blogger complains that the liberal elite is insensitive toward real social issues and tolerates a growing Roma criminality, and, even in apology, it discriminates against citizens who act as neo-Nazis in their nation's interests.

Maroz's same-day response is an attempt to deconstruct Tamás' apology as fast as possible by pointing out what Tamás did not apologize for: his complicity in creating the socio-economic situation that revitalized centuries-old anti-Roma sentiments.

[T]hese problems do not just *exist*, but they *became*. . . I don't want to get into the specifics right now . . . but anyone who so chooses can easily look up, for example, the effect that the termination of mostly-gypsy-held jobs from one day to the next had on working gypsies who had just begun to get settled into these very jobs that provided them with bread and maintenance. Where was this so-called elite at that time? . . . I'll tell you: in the parliament. (para 8)

So for Maroz, common suffering includes that from bad decisions by an impotent political elite, as well as from gypsy criminality. Because of this alleged gypsy criminality, Hungarians cannot feel at home in their own neighborhoods or their own country. Hungarians' common suffering from imagined gypsy criminality is based on the myth of nativist-Aryan supremacy. Maroz envisions a white supremacist society where self-appointed leaders, as vigilant everyday citizens, take responsibility for keeping order, and act in the Hungarian nation's interest to fulfill the nation's victorious destiny.

Viewed this way, events justify the presence and activities of extreme nationalists; it makes them fit this depiction of social reality and renders them heroes. In turn, spontaneous acts born in the unique spirit of a people can be justified by the moral and political authority of the *Volksggeist*. Those who know history can easily associate the birth of Nazism in the 20th century with these premises.

For Maroz (2013), "fated order" means that the fate of the weak – in this case white Hungarians lead by a weak government – is to vanish from history, and this is not what extreme nationalists want. In this regard, the Roma murders were a "practical solution," a "positive answer" to tragic circumstances. With this perspective change, Maroz (2013) recasts the role of neo-Nazis from negative to positive:

It is as if the feelings of those people who, because of their life situation, just happen to be incapable of unconditionally loving every single gypsy, do not also exist, or could not also exist. . . . [T]he downtown liberal calls him/her a Nazi, and decrees: but, indeed, you must love! I repeat, if the "love every gypsy!" command is valid,

then don't we also have to love these people [Nazis] as well? Or at least understand them? (para 13)

For Maroz, "necessity" is supported by a moral relativism, where nothing can condemn Roma hatred as morally wrong, unless one includes rules and regulations that limit people's negative feelings for abused minorities, limits which, as such, must be respected.

Maroz (2013) recalls that the nation suffered many injustices in history, such as the 1920 Trianon Treaty that ended World War I, in which Hungary lost three-fifths of its territories to neighboring countries. Maroz translates "foreign" as "threat." He argues that the Holocaust was reasonable. He blames Gypsies and Jews for their fate. He understands and identifies with the killers' sentiments and motives. The blogger argues that a counter-culture must arise that has the courage to state that "the foreign is not beautiful," and that "honest" and "responsible" citizens must save their nation from them and terminate the "foreign" and the "criminal" (that is, gypsies) (para. 8). This view creates a rhetorical community of unsung Hungarian heroes in which Roma are rendered legitimate targets of hate crimes. For Maroz, national identity is based on blood family, race, and shared culture. Ultimately, in the extreme nationalist mindset, those included in "the nation" is a choice of Hungarians.

Maroz's (2013) comments reveal that the collective memory of common suffering in the historical past – a motif used in Tamás apology – does not resonate with many Hungarians. For them, "common suffering" means present suffering. Maroz describes Tamás as idealist and detached from real problems and criticizes him for not admitting wrongdoing in political decisions that led to the Roma's massive unemployment and deep poverty.

Although Maroz criticizes Tamás for his idealism, we must recognize that Maroz manipulates elements of the tragic history (the dissolution of “Greater Hungary”), and the Hungarian cultural legacy, such as Hungarians’ moral obligation to be loyal to their nation until the end, to save the nation at any cost, and to fulfill a fated order where the hunters (white Hungarians) are superior to their prey (the Roma). We identified these as motives that contributed to the hate crimes; they also appear prominently in Maroz’s rhetoric. Next we turn to the third source, the official state apology.

The Official State Apology

Considering that apologies are “persuasive attempts to reshape the audience’s attitudes, creating or changing beliefs about the accused’s responsibility for an act, or creating or changing values about the offensiveness of those acts,” they are defensive in nature, as they respond to some perceived damage to reputation (Benoit, 2015, p. 3). As with individuals, states want to manage their reputation and have a favorable self image. Such an interest can lead them to apologize. However, since their political interest is multi-layered and might change, state apologies are complex issues.

Hate-crime legislation in the US is defined as offenses motivated by hatred against a victim based on his or her race, color, religion, national origin, disability, gender identity, or sexual orientation (Streissguth, 2003; Holden et al., 1999). In Hungary, a hate crime is defined as “a violent action, cruelty, and coercion by threat made on the basis of the victim’s actual or perceived national, ethnic, religious status or membership in a particular social group” (McClintock, 2005, p. X). In both models, it is alleged that the state’s responsibility is to protect every person from threats and physical harm caused by activities of groups and individuals regardless of race, color, and ethnicity (this is endorsed by the concept of a “human right” that

includes providing minimal protection and empowerment for all). Nevertheless, several authors (Bilder, 2008; Gibney and Roxstom, 2001) argue that the laws on state responsibility and corporate responsibility are very new and exist mostly at the international level (such as “The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020,” n. d.), while an “apology” is part of restorative justice determined at a national level (Freeman, 2008; James, 2014).

Therefore, when we presume that the state’s responsibility is to protect every person from threats regardless of race, color, and ethnicity, we still have to consider an apology voluntary, and therefore strategic and political.

While most of the blame for the silence and the biased investigation lay with the socialist-liberal government of 2008 and 2009 (although the liberals left the government in 2008), the succeeding conservative center-right Fidesz government under Viktor Orban has also done nothing to find out the truth. The intensive critique from the international media and human rights communities forced the Orban government to apologize on the anniversary of the Roma Holocaust and the Kisléta murders – on August 2, 2016, eight years after the first murder. Remarkably, the Minister for Human Resources, Zoltán Balog, not the prime minister, apologized in the name of the recent government.

As we saw in Tamás’s apology, “official apologies (usually) touch upon questions of national identity, the emotional fabric of the nation such as pride, shame, guilt, anger, feelings of betrayal, responsibility etc.” (Celermajer & Kidman, 2012, p. 219). Compared to this prescription, the Hungarian government’s apology was very limited. Balog (2016) states:

The Roma Holocaust is the shared tragedy of Hungary and Europe. We will not forget the victims, nor our duties. The Government of Hungary condemns any act of violence and hatred that makes any nation or ethnic group collectively responsible based on racial

discrimination. We must remember and remind others of this, so as to avoid a repetition of past horrors. Such tragedies can be defeated by remembrance, facing the past, honesty, awareness, the culture of respect, and if everyone involved takes their duty seriously by learning and by making efforts towards inclusion. *Tua res agitur* – it concerns you.¹³ We here in Europe fight to avoid that the external challenges of migration overshadow the issues of the poor and those falling behind in Europe. (Balog, 2016)

This limited content and the fact that the official state apology came one year before a general election and eight years after the first homicide in the murder spree suggests that it was a strategic political apology. Balog wanted to lose neither potential Roma voters nor extreme nationalist allies.

Balog (2016) expressed that the Hungarian state takes partial responsibility for the murders. He acknowledges wrongdoing by government offices as neglect of their duties during the investigations, and the Hungarian state's complicity in “failing to protect its citizens from annihilation,” and the “destruction of evidences” on the scene by the police (Verseck, 2013b). However, while apologizing, Balog (2016) referenced the Roma as “poor” and “those falling behind,” confirming their low economic, social, and moral position, which contributed to the hate crimes in the first place.

Accordingly, Balog's (2016) apology accepted responsibility for professional (technical and methodological) lapses during the investigation into the Roma murders. But he took no responsibility for letting racism grow in Hungarian society, for complicity in creating the socio-economic environment that revived xenophobia and anti-Roma sentiments. Furthermore, the government did not apologize for other historic wrongdoings against the Roma. Brooks (1999)

asserts that if an injustice happens where victims are members of a distinct group who continuously suffer and past injustices are among the causes of the present harm, the injustice can be identified as *historical injustice* (Brooks, 1999). Roma invisibility in Hungarian history as taught in Hungarian schools, which completely denies the Roma's contribution to the country despite more than six centuries of residence, is part in the historic injustice. Gal (2016) reminds us that the traditional meaning of the term "community" signified "communities related to geographically defined populations sharing similar goals, values, and daily routines" (p. 290), an experience consistently withheld from Roma communities. So the government's official apology explicates the situation Dhami (2016) outlined by asserting that one can say, "I am sorry," without acknowledging harm.

Additionally, this apology was "recycled" from a previous apology. In 2014, two years before the government's apology to the Roma, Csaba Körösi, Hungarian Ambassador to the UN, offered a similar official apology at the New York headquarters of the United Nations. During a press conference, Körösi acknowledged that the Hungarian Government's role in the Holocaust was wrong:

We owe the victims an apology because the Hungarian state was guilty of the Holocaust, on the one hand because the state did not manage to protect its citizens from annihilation, and on the other hand because it aided their mass murder and provided financial resources for it. ("Hungary makes historic apology," 2014, para. 4)

This 2014 apology has many similarities to the 2016 state apology to the Roma. Both admit that the government failed to protect citizens from annihilation and (technically or financially) aided the murderers. The government took no ethical responsibility for failing to protect Roma citizens

from racist hate crimes, historically overlooking everyday micro- and macro-aggressions against them. The government apology to the Roma thus appears to be a generic (recyclable) apology that can be offered to both Roma and Jews. It was not uniquely tailored to the Roma or to the situation (the Roma Murders). The Hungarian government's apology condemned "any violent act based on racial discrimination of others," not specifically this ethnic violence. The call for awareness and educating ourselves about the past seems empty because, as this statement shows, the speaker is unaware of the Hungarian history that positions Roma as either victims or unrecognized citizens. This phenomena is what Holling, Moon, and Nevis (2014) call "latent whiteness" in apologies following white racist crimes. These made the official apology not only limited but insufficient.

In the end, the government offered some compensation for the funeral of one of the victims' husbands, who died "after being overcome by grief about the murders" (Verseck, 2013b, 2014). Balog established financial support for the families (Verseck, 2014, p.1).¹⁴ Yet after the apology, nothing changed; Hungarian society was characterized by deep divisions between Roma and non-Roma. The government's official apology changed neither the situation of the Roma nor of Hungarian national identity, which meant assigned positions remained the same (Celermajer & Kidman, 2014). Until this changes, there is a good chance of future hate crimes.

Practical and Moral Implications

As this analysis revealed, neo-Nazis refer to Roma as savages, criminals, degrading elements, strangers, and internal enemies; this assigns them the role of victim and makes them vulnerable to hate crimes. Similarly, the official apology referring to them as vulnerable (poor, left behind) further accentuates their feeble position and assigns them a social location where

they are obliged to accept a dishonest (strategic) apology from the powerful. As Harré (2015) advises, this not only makes apology ineffective but renders it unethical. Thus, to restore the harm caused by hate crimes by making an effective apology, we must establish different positions of reference. To break with the cultural-historical heritage of “tragic fate” and Hungarian *Volksgeist*, Hungarians must pledge that they will not let similar hate crimes (as the Roma murders) happen, knowing that these function as archetypal atrocities that acculturate a community to their violent past (Vivian, 2013). To do this, they must realize the power of extreme nationalist rhetoric.

Far-right rhetoric is powerful because it offers what is missing from the cultural legacy: the image of the strong nation and a victorious future. So nationalist rhetoric juxtaposes the tragic cultural legacy by positioning Hungarians as winners, not constant losers. *Volksgeist* is re-imagined victoriously, creating a common vision of a strong nation, and generating group cohesion for action. The extreme nationalist killers imagined that they honestly confronted the problem of alleged Roma criminality by representing the strong leadership needed to keep order in Hungarian society. Significantly, in Hungary today, only the extreme nationalists manipulate opinion with the idea of a victorious future.

While the left-liberal rhetorical moralizing, offering mostly lip service, is only one discourse among others operating horizontally without authority, extreme nationalist rhetoric functions in a vertical authoritarian mode (Gunn, 2003). Extreme nationalist rhetoric bases its argument on existing social dissatisfaction, hierarchies, and antagonisms, takes them to the extreme, and conceptualizes them as cultural differences. This creates a psychic reality that becomes the cornerstone of moral and political authority (Žižek, 2008). Extreme nationalist rhetoric produces moral relativism; the moral imperative of “do not kill” is suspended when

“tragic destiny” and the *Volksgeist* are given power to overwrite it. Consequently, the myth of Aryan nationalism enables significant numbers of people who, although they were not physically present, nonetheless participate symbolically in the Roma murders. As the Roma civil-rights leader, Setét, states in his interview with Czene (2013): “The deaths of the victims are not the sole responsibility of the perpetrators . . . it is also the responsibility of those who have created a social environment with hate speech, that serial killing might have occurred” (para. 14).

“Reading” the Roma murders uproar as a sign of a new, strong, rising leadership who seize the Roma issue has had (and still has) power to evoke further hatred.

Hungarian extreme nationalists who did participate in the Roma killings became heroes not only in their own eyes but in the eyes of many of their party-members and sympathizers. By contrast, the Roma people can rarely attain heroic status in either their own or Hungarian eyes. This is, indeed, their real tragedy. Therefore, it is important to clarify that, while the Declaration of the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance acknowledges that the word “race” is used to reference “groups of people considered distinct due to physical characteristics, such as skin color,” it rejects the idea that distinct human races exist. Instead, the Declaration emphasizes that race is socially (and rhetorically) constructed (“Declaration,” 2001, p. 4).

Likewise, although the author has traced the psychological-emotional motives and dramatic development of the Roma murders, ultimately, from a moral standpoint, those murders cannot be justified. It is hoped that this analysis will at least partially fulfill its aim of raising public awareness of the tasks that remain until the Roma are acknowledged as fully equal citizens of Hungary.

Conclusion

To answer the questions at the outset: “What motivations propelled the Roma murders?” and “How did they support or were supported by Hungarian historic and cultural legacies in the murders and in two subsequent official apologies?” we can conclude that the 2008-2009 Roma murders were the culmination of a long-developing process influenced by cultural myths and the collective memory of historic tragedies that made Hungarians receptive to an ideology that envisions the victorious future of the *Volksgeist*.

The Hungarian cultural legacy includes the idea that Hungarians have a tragic fate and should sacrifice themselves for their nation, and that the Hungarian Spirit (*Volksgeist*) fulfills a certain metaphysical destiny. These elements of cultural heritage became a catalyst, aiding the spread of a racist ideology that played a part in the growing violence and the Roma murders. This legacy of a tragic fate and history also influenced the two subsequent apologies.

Tamás took the position of shared vulnerability and assigned equal rights and duties to both Roma and Hungarian; but he did not talk to the Roma but to the non-Roma Hungarians (with this, rendering the Roma invisible). The state apology, on the other hand, assigned the vulnerable position exclusively to the Roma and the powerful position to themselves. None of these apologies opened a pathway to social justice, equal citizenship, and less future violence because they uphold the initial power structure (based on the legacy of *Volksgeist*) that is inherently racist and holds the possibility of further violence. Apology fulfilled the role of “collective ritual” (grief) for Tamás, and the “redemptive agent” or a “therapeutic alternative to historical discourse” for Balog (Doss, 2010, p. 49).

At this point, it is necessary to mention that, although taking the position of shared vulnerability is an effective start, this is just a beginning in the long walk to social justice. Shared

pride (which requires more shared rights, and acknowledging Roma's contribution to a shared culture and history) should be the ultimate goal; it would bring significant changes.

After calling attention to the problem, there are many things to do. First, Hungarians need to educate themselves and others about the dangers of extreme nationalist rhetoric that activates a nation's historic-cultural heritage while offering an idealized "heroic" solution to real problems. Second, Hungarian society must reject "those pseudo-patriotic politicians who urge the adoption of nationalist simplifications as official history" (Acton, 2005, p. 28). Third, the story line of Roma as a foreign, savage, criminal, degrading element, and internal enemy who is to blame for the Hungarian's "tragic fate" and suffering must be dropped on both the Roma and Hungarian sides. A new story line is needed in which the Roma are positioned as equal citizens and integral parts of Hungarian society (Harré & Moghaddam, 2003). Fourth, the Hungarian criminal justice system requires multiple transformations.

An equitable policy recommendation would be that Hungary follow the US example, where most states and large cities have hate crime task forces coordinating across government and working with community organizations. The Hungarian criminal justice system needs to train the police and to organize victim support and diversity-education programs for citizens (Holden et al., 1999).

Finally, considering that the perpetrators (not some outside interest) must be the apologist, the Roma murders, as hate crimes, represent a specific case. Nobody initiated mediation between the extreme nationalists, as perpetrators, and the victims' families (and, realistically, it seems unimaginable). Since also the official state apology was insufficient, an apology very specific to the Roma should follow these apologies. The new apology should position the Roma as partners in past and present history, equally capable people who have their

own agency and can contribute to society. This would substantially alter both the Roma's social and economic situation and Hungarian national identity.

Notes

- [1] "Roma" is the politically correct umbrella term for the various groups and communities considered here. In Hungary, many Roma self-identify as *Gypsy*. In this essay I use both names with the same non-pejorative attitude. I differentiate between the two according to the original context. The lower-case version suggests that the speaker uses "gypsy" in pejorative terms.
- [2] Extreme nationalists are also called far-right, neo-Nazi, and neo-fascist. These words denote the same right-wing extremist group.
- [3] According to the international media, such as the *BBC News UK*, the fundamental motive of the murders was racism ("Hungarian gang jailed," 2013).
- [4] The left-liberal party, the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) left the Cabinet on 20 April 2008.
- [5] Maroz's user profile is available at <https://blog.hu/user/186793/tab/data>
- [6] Maroz's (2013) article was published on July 25, 2013, in the "Kakukkfészek" blog with the heading, "Álnemzet egy álországban" [Fake nation in a fake country].
- [7] The author of the National Anthem is Ferenc Kölcsey (1790-1838).
- [8] The author of the Szózat is Mihály Vörösmarty (1800-1855).
- [9] *Jobbik* in Hungarian means both "right" and "the better."
- [10] The Hungarian Constitutional Court voided a ban on public use of symbols of totalitarian power, such as the red star, hammer and sickle, and the Nazi swastika. As the court stated, the ban violated the right to freedom of speech. These symbols became legal in Hungary on April 30, 2013. ("Hungary: Swastikas, SS symbols legal to display as of May," 2013, p. 1). Retrieved from <http://www.romea.cz/en/news/hungary-swastikas-ss-symbols-legal-to-display-as-of-may>
- [11] The same article reports that the paramilitary group, *Magyar Garda*, was founded to frighten and discipline the Roma population. It was dissolved by a court order in 2012 during the investigation of the "Roma murders." However, the *Magyar Garda* Association said it was a movement, not a party, and that they will continue their activities ("Hungary's far-right to defy court," 2008).
- [12] The article with the Hungarian title, "Ha ez nem nemzeti gyász akkor ez nem nation." [If this is not a national mourning, then this is not a real nation] was published July 25, 2013, in *hvg.hu*.
- [13] "*Tua res agitur paries cum proximus ardet.*" The English translation of this quote from Horace is: "It concerns you when your neighbor's wall is on fire."
- [14] The fund recently received a payout of between 4,000 and 7,000 euros from the government (Verseck, 2014).

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