

## Representation of the political antisemitism in the press of Budapest and Cluj between 1882 and 1918

Key-words:

*political antisemitism, political press, local newspapers, "Jewish question", comparison, Cluj, opposition and pro-government daily newspapers*

In my doctoral dissertation I wish to explore a section of the political antisemitism that has been present in Hungary as well during the last decades of the 19th century, and of the representations of the "Jewish question" in the political press. More specifically, I will examine the articles written about Jewish people between 1882 and 1918, published in opposition and pro-government papers in order to understand how the image and perception of Jews had changed and how the so-called "Jewish question" emerged during this period. In order to get a clearer picture of the public discourse and its possible alterations, I do consider studying issues of the most important local press products of a large rural town published through a longer period justified.

The Hungarian aspects of political antisemitism that has been a characteristic of the late-nineteenth century Europe is deficiently accounted for and rather incomplete, this being especially true regarding the political press published in major cities. Previous research focused primarily on investigating and reconstructing the leading anti-Semitic politicians (among others, Győző Istóczy<sup>1</sup>, Gyula Verhovay<sup>2</sup>, Géza Ónódy<sup>3</sup>, Iván Simonyi<sup>4</sup>), the main concepts, arguments

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<sup>1</sup> Győző Istóczy, lawyer, politician parliamentarian. Initially, he was a member of the Liberal Party, he held the first antisemitic speech in the Hungarian parliament in 1876. In the 1880s he became the most important and prominent leader of the antisemitic political movement: he founded the antisemitic monthly newspaper, the *12 Rőpirat* and he was one of the founders of the Antisemitic Party in 1883. *Hungarian Biographical Lexicon*. <https://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/index.html> downloaded on 15.07.2021.

<sup>2</sup> Gyula Verhovay, politician and journalist. He started his career as journalist at the newspaper *Ellenőr*, later he worked for the prominent newspaper, *Egyetértés* until 1878. In that year he was elected to the Hungarian parliament with independent program. In 1879 he founded his own newspaper, the *Függetlenség* which was used by the antisemitic movement during the Tiszaeszlár blood libel in 1882–83. In 1884 he became a member of the parliament with antisemitic political program. *Hungarian Biographical Lexicon*. <https://mek.oszk.hu/00300/00355/html/index.html> downloaded on 15.07.2021.

<sup>3</sup> Géza Ónódy, jurist and politician. Initially a paralegal, assistant Iudex nobilium, later Iudex nobilium of the Alsódada district. On the election of 1881 he was elected as a member of the Independent Party in Hajdúnánás district, later on the election of 1884 and 1887 he was elected in the same district but with antisemitic program. As a local, he had been one of the most active anti-Semitic politicians in the Tiszaeszlár libel. János Gyurgyák: *A zsidókérdés Magyarországon. Politikai eszméletörténet. ('The Jewish question in Hungary. History of Political Ideas')* Osiris Kiadó, Bp. 2001., 695. p.

and acts of anti-Semitic opinion leaders, as well as on documenting the operations of the National Anti-Semitic party established in 1883. However, these studies do not reveal much about the extent to which the anti-Semitic speeches of the House of Representatives or other anti-Jewish acts had reached and affected the society in general. My research can be considered as the first attempt to answer this question regarding Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár. At the same time, we can study 19th century anti-Semitism from a slightly new perspective, since I am not striving to reconstruct the ideologies of anti-Semitic politicians, rather examine the extent and impact of them in the political press of a given city. Two important incentives justify the choice of location. On the one hand, we are talking about a rural town, far from Budapest, the centre of political life and the proceedings of anti-Semitic representatives, so it is interesting to observe how the questions posed can be interpreted in a location far from the capital. On the other hand, we are talking about the former capital of Transylvania, which is commonly referred to as the bastion of tolerance, so it is particularly important to study whether anti-Semitism had worked into the Transylvanian local press from Budapest.

My research is based on texts from local, opposition and pro-government daily newspapers. I believe that these press products can give one insight into the ripple effect - if we can talk about one - of the politics of Budapest on society outside the capital. In my research I focused on the pro-government press (during the decades these newspapers changed their names a couple of times: *Kolozsvári Közlöny*<sup>5</sup>, *Kolozsvár*<sup>6</sup>, *Magyar Polgár*<sup>7</sup>) and from the opposite political side I focused on the *Ellenzékre*<sup>8</sup> (which was published until 1944 without any interruption). The above mentioned can be considered the most important locally published newspapers, reflecting the views of local journalists on the one hand, and on the other, they may have influenced the way readers think about Jewish people. Besides this, each individual paper (aligning with the political trends) had been published for longer periods, thus playing a decisive role in the public life of the city and the region. In the following subchapter, I will expound on these papers in more detail.

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<sup>4</sup> Iván Simonyi, jurist and politician. In 1872 he founded together with Jókai Mór and Horn Ede the newspaper, *Westungarischer Grenzboten* in Pozsony (today Bratislava, Slovakia). In 1878 and 1881 he was elected in the parliament with the program of the Independent Party but in 1884 he won a mandate with antisemitic program.. Ibid. p. 700.

<sup>5</sup>*Kolozsvári Közlöny (Kolozsvár Gazette)*: printed in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca between 1882 and 1886.

<sup>6</sup>*Kolozsvár*: printed in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca between 1886 and 1898.

<sup>7</sup>*Magyar Polgár (Hungarian Citizen)*: printed in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca between 1898 and 1904.

<sup>8</sup>*Ellenzék (Opposition)*: printed in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca between 1880 and 1944.

However, the topic of this dissertation justifies the inclusion of two more press products in the study: the neolog<sup>9</sup> Jewish social and political weekly newspaper *Egyenlőség* ("Equality") and the anti-Semitic *12 Röpirat* ("12 Pamphlets"). Despite the fact that these were printed in Budapest, they can enrich this study with important aspects. *Egyenlőség*, printed until 1938 (later *Magyar Zsidók Lapja* ("Hungarian Jewish Newspaper")) had been the most important denominational paper of the Hungarian Jewish community and had been especially focused on forming opinions about public life. It is therefore worth outlining how the politically conscious members of the neolog Jewish community in Hungary reacted to certain events, e.g. the Tiszaeszlár libel or the elections in the House of Representatives, examining possible common points or differences in relation to the text published in the Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca newspapers. I consider the studying of the paper *12 Röpirat* ("12 Pamphlets") for the same reason, obviously, taking into consideration that the publication analyses the events of political life from an anti-Semite perspective, the only topic of the newspaper being the so-called "Jewish question".

Although in Hungary anti-Semitic policies were only introduced and risen to the rank of official politics in the 1920s, with the so-called *numerus clausus* law<sup>10</sup>, but this does not mean that a discourse about Jews or anti-Semitic language had not previously been present in the relevant forums of political and public life and in the press. My investigations distinctly show that the daily newspapers of Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca that I have studied, had aligned with the political debates of the capital regarding the Jewish question and anti-Semitism – we have seen that articles have been republished on several occasions, and opinion essays had been written in response to politically important events like the Tiszaeszlár libel, but the questions and events have been presented in accordance with each paper's political affiliation. The pro-government *Kolozsvári Közlöny* (later *Kolozsvár*, and *Magyar Polgár*) had been publishing articles in a very balanced and subdued manner over the decades on issues concerning Jewish people, and did not get carried away by anti-Semitic outbursts. This is consistent with the policy of the governments

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<sup>9</sup> Neolog Judaism: at the 1868 Jewish Universal Congress called by József Eötvös with the purpose of unifying the Jewish religion and creating a centralized organization, representatives of the Jews of Hungary were divided, taking three sides. From then on, we distinguish communities supporting the Status Quo (hereinafter: status quo ante) - that wished to maintain religious life through adhering to religious traditions and to reforms made up to that time, the orthodox stance - that called for the strictest possible adherence to religious traditions, and the neolog stance - in favour of further reforms and a more relaxed approach to religious traditions.

<sup>10</sup> Article XXV of the 1920 law regulates enrolment to the universities of sciences, the technical university, the faculty of economics and the law academy in Budapest. Forrás: *1000 év törvényei*. <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=92000025.TV&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D38>, letöltve: 2021. 06. 17.

of the era that supported the assimilation of Jewish people. A good example of this is the support of those fleeing Russia on the event of persecution of Jewish people and the uncritical support of laws on clerical policies. It is interesting how the pro-government position can be observed, for example, during the trial of the Jewish-Christian marriage bill in 1883-84, when the paper, in line with the government's position, supported the proposal itself, but rejected the introduction of civil marriage that had been advocated for by the opposition.

The paper also held a coherent position during the progress of the Tiszaeszlár case. In the beginning, they were also eager to reprint articles previously published in Budapest newspapers, which, especially in the weeks following the original outburst, were more often sensational news and reports than objective articles, thus fitting the patterns set by national newspapers and, in particular, the ones published in the capital.<sup>11</sup> It is clear from these articles that the investigation of the incident was biased from the beginning, and instead of clarifying the disappearance of the girl, the main objective of the case was raising evidence against the suspect Jewish people.<sup>12</sup> Although the *Kolozsvári Közlöny* also published accounts of blood libels from previous centuries – such as the Libel of Orkuta from 1764, or the Nagykálló case from 1790<sup>13</sup> – that were obviously not necessary for informing the readers, the paper presented these cases by pointing out the inhumane torture of innocently accused Jewish people and the fact that most of the cases ended in acquittal. It was also evident in the paper that the suspicion of the blood libel was rejected by the editorial, and the opinion pieces published, strongly opposing medieval superstitions and anti-Semitism also confirm this notion. A good example of the latter is the article written by Albert Berzeviczy, and the publications following the verdict, in which the editors pointed out that the harsh public repercussions should, first of all, be attributed to anti-Semitic politicians and agitators and not to the population.<sup>14</sup> During the studied period, in essence, the only problematic statement on behalf of the paper was when it gave credence to the

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<sup>11</sup> Kubinszky also highlights the importance of daily sensational news having no foundation whatsoever, both in the capital and around the country. Kubinszky 1976, p. 93-94.

<sup>12</sup> Kubinszky 1976, p. 91. In his monograph, János Gyurgyák points out how Károly Eötvös emphasises the anti-Semitism and corruption of the investigative authorities (Gyurgyák 2001, p. 284), as seen in Kövér 2011, p. 389.

<sup>13</sup> The cases are also described by Tamás Kende in his Ph.D. dissertation. Tamás Kende : *Együttélés–Együttfélés. ("Living Together – Parallel Fears") Libels and pogroms in Modern Eastern Europe*. Miskolc, 2012. p. 93-94. <http://phd.lib.uni-miskolc.hu/document/14008/12765.pdf> downloaded on: 2021. 04. 04. and Péter Kónya: Az orkutai vérvád ("The Blood Libel of Orkuta"). In: Judit Pieldner et al (ed.): *Kulturális identitás és alteritás az időben* ("Cultural identity and alterity in time"). University of Debrecen, Institute of History, Debrecen, 2013. p. 43–50.

<sup>14</sup> It is well-known that after the court sentence, anti-Jewish riots broke out in several parts of the country, a lot of them in Transdanubia and around Bratislava. Kubinszky 1976, p. 105-130.

murder charge on the accused in Tiszaeszlár, but after the verdict had been delivered, the editorial stood firmly by the stance of the accused Jewish people being innocent and placed the abuses surrounding the proceedings at the heart of their publications.

By comparison, during the period I studied it, Miklós Bartha's paper, the *Ellenzék*, while being firmly and consistently critical of the government, had a very contradictory attitude towards anti-Semitism, Jewish people and the "Jewish question". It is important to note that he did not even address the persecution of Jewish people in Russia as often and as thoroughly as the *Kolozsvári Közlöny*. In addition, in the context of the Tiszaeszlár case articles attacking Hungarian Jews were published in the journal, and in this respect, the *Ellenzék* went so far as to blame Jewish people for the rapidly unfolding anti-Semitism in Hungary and for the libel dominating the public discourse. The *Ellenzék*, similarly to *Kolozsvári Közlöny*, in the absence of an on-site correspondent, regularly reprinted articles from Budapest newspapers, but a significant difference can be acknowledged between *Kolozsvári Közlöny* and *Ellenzék* on this account. The former criticised some sources – especially the paper *Függetlenség* ("Independence") – and was more inclined to producing objective information. In contrast, *Ellenzék* for example did not refuse to noncritically reprint articles from the anti-Semitic paper *Függetlenség*. The articles published and some of the introductions preceding these indicate that, from the beginning, even without evidence, the paper had given credit to the murder charge, not ruling out the possibility that the blood libel had a basis for truth. The articles published in *Ellenzék*, compared to the ones in *Kolozsvári Közlöny* show a more controversial picture. Some texts are clearly anti-Semitic, blaming the Jewish people for the established public morale and anti-Semitism. An interesting counter-approach to this is the two-piece article of Miklós Bartha, which also covers the responsibility of the Christian society and stands for Károly Eötvös and the fundamental element of justice, the right to a defence. In spite of their controversial attitude, however, the paper strongly condemned the proceedings of Győző Istóczy and supported Jewish-Christian marriages, although in principle, in line with the Independence Party, they petitioned for the introduction of civil marriage.

During the period prior to the First World War, it is worth highlighting the editor-in-chief, Miklós Bartha, and his work in connection to the newspaper, since his identity clearly influenced the published articles and the political standpoint of the paper. Bartha himself wrote

several articles related to the "Jewish question", the content of which are similarly ambivalent. A good example of this is that, in connection with the Tiszaeszlár trial, he supported Eötvös and the right to defense of the accused, and he attributed the slow assimilation of Jewish people – contrary to the articles previously published in the paper – not the Jews but to Christian society. On the other hand, in 1884, in connection with the establishment of the Hungarian Cultural Society of Transylvania, he criticised the Jewish community for not providing the association with enough financial support, and in the same year he devoted a lead article to the question of why the local Jewish community celebrated Passover "excluding Christians".

One of the most important views of both Bartha and the *Ellenzék* regarding the "Jewish question" was brought forward in his work titled *Kazárföldön* ("On Khazar land"), published in several parts. The text *Kazárföldön* was a distinctly new type of content both in *Ellenzék* and in general, in contemporary anti-Semitic literature. The reason for this is the choice of subject, for ever since the Tiszaeszlár trial and the refugees arriving from Russian territories, there has not been this amount of attention focused on Orthodox Jewish communities in the north-eastern parts of Hungary. On the other hand, the author tries to isolate himself as much as possible from anti-Semitism, which has been one of the first similar stances, as Istóczy and his circle were very proud of their anti-Semitic views. However, the book and the author's anti-Semitism are supported by a number of quotations comparing Jewish people to crawlers, reptiles, or invasive plant species that suffocate local vegetation. Bartha clearly presents the Jewish people who live there as repulsive, who, in effect, can hardly be regarded as human beings, portraying them as "calculating, streetwise, but a scum which, on moral regards, is no superior to wild animals". The author's anti-Semitism is reinforced by the fact that in the book he treats local Jewish people – calling them Khazars – as a unified community, giving the reader the impression that the Jewish community as a whole is made up of Galician immigrants, as well as being criminals who had brought the local inhabitants, Ruthenians, to the brink of destruction. By doing so, it necessarily simplifies the problems actually present in the region.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gyurgyák also draws attention to the fact that Bartha did not understand – and did not want to understand – the traditional Jewish community and culture he had encountered in Carpathian Ruthenia, which gave rise to the ideological construction that there were two kinds of Jewish people in the country: the patriotic, Hungarian-speaking community, who he considered to be part of the Hungarian society, and the Khazars, whose assimilation should have been facilitated by the former group. Gyurgy, 2001. p. 360–361.

In view of all this, it is not surprising that during World War I, the *Ellenzék*, which at that time was practically the most important press product in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca," drifted far from its former Liberal values and, essentially, became a radical nationalist newspaper by the end of the war. Their shift to the right is also evident in the fact that from then on one would regularly find articles by the bishop Ottokár Prohászka (held in high regards by the editorial), as well as summaries of his works. Additionally, the main subject of articles became the resurrected and heroically-fighting, remarkably Christian Hungarian nation. The editorial expressed their respect oftentimes in articles about the importance of the bishop and/or the Christian (primarily Catholic) Church, being rather generous with exalted qualifiers. "Words of the persecuted, loving Christ were conveyed to us by the lips of a sublime spirit, a high-minded, Hungarian Catholic high priest. Ottokár Prohászka, whose name has become a concept around the Carpathians, rose to speak. We listened to him, our hats in our hands."<sup>16</sup> Besides this, anti-Semitism had also been included in the paper, virtually all of the anti-Semitic terms, phrases and accusations of the time can be found in the *Ellenzék*, examples include "war profiteers", "galicians", "army transporters", or articles that criticised Jewish people striving to avoid the front. According to the articles on abuses of military supplies and foodstuffs in general, the country was fighting a two-front war: not only speaking of soldiers in arms, but also of the ones who stayed at home, fighting the so-called 'internal enemy', battling against food producers and distributors in the hinterland.<sup>17</sup> In addition, it should be noted that the *Ellenzék* strongly supported the establishment of the Central

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<sup>16</sup> Portik Andor: A szent kereszt fénye ("The Light of the Holy Cross"). *Ellenzék* ("Opposition") vol. 37. (1916. April 15th.) issue 87. p. 1. In his study, Peter Bihari mentions that Prohászka really becomes active towards the end of the war in 1918, but the article I quoted shows that he has spoken before regarding social and political issues. Péter Bihari: Antiszeizitizmus az első világháború Magyarországon ("Anti-Semitism during the First World War in Hungary"). *Beszélő* ("Speaker"), 2008. Feb., no. 2., p. 74. [https://adtplus-arcantum-hu.web.bcucluj.ro:2443/en/view/Beszelo\\_2008\\_1/?query=proh%C3%A1szka&pg=203&layout=s](https://adtplus-arcantum-hu.web.bcucluj.ro:2443/en/view/Beszelo_2008_1/?query=proh%C3%A1szka&pg=203&layout=s) downloaded on: 2021. 02. 21. In his study, Máté Gárdonyi points out that Prohászka was an enlightened, and generous bishop of Székesfehérvár until the First World War, open to the modern world and the sciences. His anti-Semitism became a major element of his publications for the first time during the second half of the 1890s, his arguments at the time based on the reception of Jewish culture and laws regarding church policy. After this, anti-Semitism became a major element of his publications after the First World War. Máté Gárdonyi: *Az antiszeizitizmus funkciója Prohászka Ottokár és Bangha Béla társadalom- és egyházképében ("The function of anti-Semitism in the views on society and the church of Ottokár Prohász and Béla Bangha")*. [http://hdke.hu/files/csatolmanyok/12\\_GardonyiMate\\_Azantiszeizitizmus\\_Funkcioja\\_ProhaszkaOttokar.pdf](http://hdke.hu/files/csatolmanyok/12_GardonyiMate_Azantiszeizitizmus_Funkcioja_ProhaszkaOttokar.pdf) downloaded on: 2021. 07. 11.

<sup>17</sup> Of course, the actual problems with the transport of military were much more complicated than the *Ellenzék* presented it to its readers. The main source of these problems had been the badly organized supply of the monarchy and the rapid advance of the Russian armies, which led to the need to provide supplies with the help of local distributors, some of whom were indeed taking advantage of the opportunity. Bihari, 2008. p. 145–146.

Press Company, advocating that it was absolutely necessary in order to free the Christian Press from "foreign" repression. The articles about the press company essentially convey the same message, that being, the need to fight the "Jewish spirit", the need for protection of Christian Hungary from the Jewish Press. Overall, these proceedings make it clear that by this time the paper was no longer following the liberal traditions of Kossuth, instead approaching the Christian-nationalist and anti-Semitic principles reflected in the press of the Horthy era.

Overall, it can be said that the "Jewish question" was constantly present in the segment of the press I studied published in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca between 1882 and 1918, so public sentiment could also be greatly influenced by the newspapers. The political and other questions related to Jewish people, and the Tiszaeszlár blood libel appeared prominently in both the pro-government press and that of the opposition in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, similarly to the press of the capital. It can be said that, in terms of the newspapers published in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca, the pro-government press products have always spoken in a more balanced and subdued tone about questions concerning the Jewish community, clearly in line with the stance of the government, in support of the assimilation of Jewish people. In contrast, the *Ellenzék*, until the first World War, although condemning the phenomenon of anti-Semitism itself, often published content that could be described as anti-Semitic, the most prominent of these being the war the publication of "Kazárföldön". Regarding their background, it is not surprising that the *Ellenzék* shifted to the right during the First World War and can essentially be considered a radical nationalist press product at the time. Reviewing the activities of the paper during the period, it is clear that one can find anti-Semitic and nationalist works in the columns of the *Ellenzék* (which became a mouthpiece of the government and the Transylvanian Party after the Vienna Diktat) already during the time of the dual monarchy. These can be considered the background of the role the paper had filled during the period of re-annexation.

However, in its present form, the topic I examined can only be considered a beginning. It would be necessary to study the press of additional Transylvanian towns in order to get a bigger picture of the Transylvanian local and regional political views and the convergences of anti-Semitism. Besides studying the "Jewish question", it would be an interesting addition to examine the relationship of Transylvanian intellectuals and the press to other minorities, meaning the survey of articles about Transylvanian Romanians and Saxons. Aggregating these, we could get



a better picture of how, in the light of an era officially defined by liberalism and the inclusive spirit, the press and intellectuals manifested themselves regarding nationalities. It should be noted that it would also be necessary to further explore the Romanian and German press published in Transylvania in order to better understand the dynamics of the position of the Romanian and German press on Hungarian nationality, as well as the "Jewish question" and anti-Semitism, and to provide a comparative analysis of the "Jewish question" in relation to the Romanian and German press.

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