



JOMEC Journal
Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies

Published by Cardiff University Press

**Nemzeti Rock:
The Radical Right and Music
in Contemporary Hungary**

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Keywords

**Nemzeti Rock
Nationalism
Populist Radical Right
Hungary
Jobbik**

Abstract

This article analyzes the phenomenon of nationalist rock in contemporary Hungary, by giving a brief account of its roots and history, starting from the bands of the skinhead movement in the 1980s and 1990s to the present day. The article underlines nationalist rock's interconnections with the political life of the radical right. It explores the content and style of Hungarian ultranationalist rock, focusing mainly on the lyrics of three of the most influential and well-known bands of the genre of Nemzeti Rock: Romantikus Erőszak, Kárpátia and Ismerős Arcok. The analysis shows how Nemzeti Rock expresses the main tropes and ideological themes of the political radical right – such as nativism, heroic masculinity, and populism – in a succinct and direct manner and with broad popular appeal, and therefore constitutes an ideal medium of conveying the ideology of the radical right to the public.

Contributor Note

Áron Szele is a historian who recently gained a Ph.D. from the Department of History of the Central European University in Budapest on the topic of fascist ideology and discourse in interwar Hungary. He has a B.A. from the Faculty of History of the University of Bucharest, and an M.A. in comparative history from the Department of History of the Central European University. His main themes of interest and expertise include entangled histories and relationships of Hungary and its neighbours, Romanian political history, the history and ideology of populist and right-wing radical movements, and minority issues in East-Central Europe.

Citation

Szele, Áron (2016), '*Nemzeti Rock: the Radical Right and Music in Contemporary Hungary*', *JOMEK Journal* 9, 'Expressive Culture and Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe', eds. Benjamin De Cleen and Torgeir Uberg Nærland.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18573/j.2016.10040>

Introduction

Right-wing populist politics and music have a sinuous connection in contemporary Hungary. This mix of politics and aesthetics has proven mutually beneficial for both parties involved. It has proven to be an effective means of mobilization for the radical right party, Jobbik (The Movement for a Better Hungary). Simultaneously, it has helped to infuse the music with a militant purpose and an anti-establishment attitude that has served to drive up record sales and concert attendance. Bands such as Romantikus Erőszak (Romantic Violence), Kárpátia (Carpathia), or Ismerős Arcok (Familiar Faces) have risen to prominence in the period between 2005 and the present day by capitalizing on political developments in the country: an unprecedented rise to power of the political right, both moderate and extreme, and an almost complete unravelling of the left. The music has gone hand in hand with politics, providing a 'soundtrack' to the events, synthesizing the political message into bite size pieces encapsulating their most important themes. Music, as a means of political communication and through the anti-establishment attitude it diffuses, contributes to the popularity of the radical right with younger age groups.

Looking upon the present-day situation, the casual onlooker might be tempted to say that the music is just an aesthetic reflection of, and perhaps a direct creation of the political movement. In many cases, radical right parties and organizations were indeed the main sponsors of radical right bands and music events, and the two are joined at the hip. However, the phenomenon of radical right music that developed into the contemporary phenomenon known

as Nemzeti Rock (National Rock) is far older than Jobbik, or even its predecessor party, MIÉP (Magyar Igazság és Élet Pártja, Hungarian Justice and Life Party, the most significant extreme right party of 1990s Hungary, led by the writer Csurka István).¹ In fact, as this article shows, the aesthetic movement with a political edge was a crucial source of the political movement, and was almost synonymous with radical right politics for decades (together with other radical right cultural expressions).

The first part of the article reveals the deep roots of radical right music and analyses it both historically and contextually in order to reveal some of the reasons behind its inner logic and outward strategies of functioning. The article shows the manner in which the message and the lyrical content were *strategically* and purposefully shifted by a particular and important sub-group of radical right bands – the ones that fall under the label of Nemzeti Rock – in order to achieve a greater measure of success. The second part of the article explores the themes of Nemzeti Rock, and compares them to the political message of the political parties and movements it supports. These sections expose the various sub-categories of nationalist rock in Hungary and link them to various political subcultures.

¹ Csurka István (27 March 1934 – 4 February 2012) was a right-wing Hungarian journalist, writer and politician. He was the founder and inaugural leader of the Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIÉP) from 1993 until his death. He was also a Member of Parliament from 1990 to 1994 and from 1998 to 2002.

Radical right music as political discourse

In order to define the concept of the populist radical right, I make use of Cas Mudde's (2007) definition of the party family. The Dutch political scientist utilizes the study of ideology to define political groups as 'populist radical right'. He contends that, while different in many respects, these parties form a family around the core ideas of nativism, authoritarianism and populism. At the very heart of populist radical right lies nativism. Nativism is an ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ('the nation') and that non-native elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the nation-state's homogeneity. Authoritarianism refers to the belief in a strictly ordered society in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely. And populism is a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite'. Populists argue that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people. Nativism and authoritarianism are central to the lyrics of the bands I analyse and to their self-representation, which makes it possible to classify them as radical right. The populist dimension is less clear-cut: radical right music (and politics in general) also has an elitist dimension, but populism does play an important role in contemporary radical right music in Hungary.

Of course, nativism, authoritarianism and populism are also present in mainstream Hungarian politics. But they are particularly central to populist radical right politics, which are largely structured around the intricate combination of

these three main elements. The populist radical right frames social issues through its nativism (social problems are caused by outsiders and minorities) and populism (current elites are responsible for social problems and their politics are opposed to the interests of the people), and argues that its nativist and authoritarian policies offer solutions to society's ills *and* represent the will of the people.

Very little has been written on the relationship between radical right nationalism and music in Hungary in the post-communist period. While works by Anna Szemere (2010) and Sabrina Ramet (1994) explore the pre- and post-1989 musical scene, they mostly concentrate on the mainstream, or on bands that were critical of the regime before 1989. Borbála Kriza's 2007 documentary on Romantikus Erőszak, entitled 'Rocking the Nation' is one of the few deep explorations of the topic. The film takes an anthropological perspective – following the band for a year on their concerts, documenting their tours, interviewing – and constitutes an invaluable piece of oral and documentary history. In his exploration of post-communist Hungarian youth cultures, László Kürti describes the Hungarian skinhead scene of the mid-1990s, and his work provides some insight into how the early nationalist rock scene was formed (Kürti 1991, 2002; Kaplan and Bjørgo, 1998).

On the topic of the relationship between music and politics, the works mentioned above organize themselves into two schools of thought. Anna Szemere claims that the relationship between musical style, tonality, sound and the political message it conveys is important (Szemere 2010). To her, rock has an inherent revolutionary nature, and is

readily utilizable to convey strong political messages. Ramet takes a more logocentric approach, claiming that rock was an empty vessel, and its nature as a 'capitalist' cultural product made it revolutionary in the eyes of communist regimes and their opponents (Ramet 1994). Rock is still utilized as a form of cultural contestation (by the radical right) due to its historical legacy, but is otherwise, in itself not a 'radical' musical subtype. As there is also quite a large palette of rock that even the three bands analyzed in this article utilize (Romantic Violence: post-punk, Oi; Carpathia: heavy metal; Familiar Faces: hard rock with jazz influences, rock ballads), there is little evidence supporting Szemere's claims. I argue that while style is significant in the success of a revolutionary message of radical change within politically motivated music, its role is ultimately secondary to the lyrics themselves. The existence, in the Hungarian case, of nationalist hip-hop, however small, underpins the theory according to which it is the political message rather than musical style that creates the community of Nemzeti Rock. The historic variations of musical styles that conveyed a nationalist message (Oi, ska, and eventually rock and hip-hop) also support this idea.

Analysing music as political discourse

The main source for identifying the political ideology of a party or movement is its discursive output and its political actions. This may also be expanded to include the lyrical content of radical right music. Song lyrics may be viewed as synthesized and narrowed down versions of the main political message. Lyrics and music come together to form an efficient bond, and songs may be listened to over and over again, making them a powerful

device for transmitting political messages.

Lyrics also gain effectiveness through their relationship to an already learned, cognized symbolic culture. In other words, song lyrics in nationalist music touch upon already recognizable and learned narratives, such as the national narrative in Hungary. In this way, when the lyrics of Kárpátia refer to events such as the Trianon Treaty,² just by mentioning the name, they draw upon a pre-existing nationalist narrative on the subject, which they seek to reinforce and manipulate for their own political ends. Drawing on long-standing nationalist narratives is typical not only of nationalist rock music, but of the discursive strategies of the radical right (and other nationalists) in general (see Wodak et al. 2009). The article explores the relationship between these larger narratives and the nationalist bands, showing how they utilize and change what already exists, and moreover, how they seek to create their own narratives, and attempt to connect them to the overall nationalist saga.

I explore the inner logic of radical right discourses in radical right music by analysing the output of three of the most popular and representative bands belonging to the genre of Nemzeti Rock in Hungary: Romantikus Erőszak (Romantik Violence), Kárpátia (Carpathia) and Ismerős Arcok (Familiar Faces). I shall also make short references to the hip-hop artist FankaDeli. These artists are highly significant, as their discourses are typical of the genre of nationalist rock, and a consistent trend can be

² The post WWI peace treaty in 1920 whereby Hungary lost two thirds of its territory and people. It is one of the most important themes in Hungarian nationalist politics in the 20-21st centuries.

identified within them. I analyse these artists' entire discographies to date, and reference songs diachronically and thematically.

The article sets out to identify the main themes within the lyrics with occasional reference to the style of the bands (their outward appearance, the genre characteristics of their music). I use critical discourse analysis to analyse the lyrics (Fairclough 2010). I shall identify the manner in which the bands interpret central concepts, such as 'freedom', 'nation', 'gender' or 'community', and try to dissect the rationale within their ideology and political message (Lehmann and Richter 1996). I also look at the style of the music, and attempt to show the kind of messages it conveys, for example, a glorification of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Connell 2005) and themes of violence. Moreover, where there is an interplay between nationalist visual symbols and music, I shall shortly explain and analyse the relationship that produces so-called mental images.

The history of ultra-nationalist music and politics in Hungary until the regime change

Contrary to popular belief, nationalist music is not a new phenomenon in Hungary. As in other European countries, the connection between nationalist politics and expressive culture has a long history. Music was used to convey a nationalist message all throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Bohman 2004). Nationalist music was one of the prime expressions of the romantic nationalism of the 19th century, and an important tool of nation-building and community creation. Alongside other artists, Hungarian classical composers such as Liszt or Erkel utilized folk music and

ethnic themes in an attempt to aid the nation-building process.

The first case of music being used to convey a militant and much more directly political nationalist message was the so-called 'irredentist' music of the 1920 and 30s. Irredentist music bemoaned the loss of Hungarian territories following the Trianon Treaty, and connected the political radical right and popular music. The 'national prayer' of Papp-Váry Elemérné was put to music as early as 1921 by famous Hungarian composer Dohnányi Ernő (Miklós 2002: 37, 63-64). The typical products of this era were preserved in works such as Murgács Kálmán's songbook entitled *Songs for Greater Hungary*, which bemoaned the losses of Trianon and the fate of the country in short propagandistic poems, and revisionist slogans launched by the interwar Hungarian authorities and irredentist far right political movements. The poems were turned into lyrics and accompanied by popular music tunes of the period in Hungary.

Both the form and content of this music proved to be highly inspirational for the radical right music scene in the latter part of the 20th century. Many of these songs were collected after 1989, and continue to be published as compilations of nationalist music. For example, the compilation of irredentist songs entitled *Updated Revisionary Songs* became a gold album due to its sustained high sales in 2006 (15,000 copies). It was edited by the Young Hungarians Society, a youth group of MIÉP (the most important representative of the Hungarian radical right in 2002). The members of the Young Hungarians Society responsible for the album (president Kovács Dávid, spokesperson Novák Előd and party director Szabó

Gábor) all became leading figures in Jobbik. Indeed, one of the first projects of the embryonic Jobbik was the release of nationalist music records.

Hungarian nationalist rock has a history stretching back to the second half of the 1980s. Hungarian nationalist rock of today is a product of the interplay between elements imported from skinhead subcultures in the West (especially Great Britain) and the autochthonous milieu (topics concerning the Hungarian minorities abroad, irredentism and anti-Roma sentiments). In the last decade of the communist regime, a series of new stylistic approaches to music began to be imported from the West, including punk, ska and Oi. These styles of music were associated with the punk, reggae, and most significantly, skinhead subcultures. By the time these styles of popular music began to make their way toward Eastern Europe, they had acquired a significant political baggage. For post-punk style rock, entitled Oi, this meant its association with radical right bands such as Skrewdriver (though not all Oi bands were radical right). This British band, led by singer Ian Steward Donaldson, was instrumental in the association of the skinhead subculture with Neo-Nazism. The first skinhead bands from Hungary adopted not only the musical style, but also the political stance of Oi. The first of such bands was called Mos-oi (a wordplay, the name is translated as 'smile' in Hungarian) and emerged around 1983 (Ramet 1994). While it existed for only a short time and only had a handful of songs in its repertoire, it provided the blueprint for many future nationalist rock bands. It featured a simple, crass style of rock, and lyrics filled with the glorification of violence, the nation and racism (for example, in songs such as 'Gypsy-free Strip', 'The Price of

Immigrants', 'Romania'). It was disbanded in show trials alongside other bands that were critical to the regime, such as the well-known Common Punk Group.

Afterwards, a number of bands latched on to the legacy of Mos-Oi, carrying it further. By the late 1980s, the musical subcultures imported from the West became increasingly popular and naturalized. Some of the products of the Western scene, such as punk melodic ska (a derivative of reggae, actually pre-dating punk) and Oi, grabbed the imagination of Hungarian youth interested in exploring foreign subcultures. Ska and Oi shared the same target audience: young rebellious members of society. The ambiguity and interflow of the two was also a characteristic of the original imported material, since in the UK the same types of bands had similar, shared fan-bases. The divide was a blurry one, since a number of elements, most important of which was the political message, were quite similar. The ska and Oi bands often organized concerts and happenings together, and their audience perceived them as two sides of the same coin. The first in the long line of such happenings, called 'Tánc Órület' (Dance Mania), was a typical example of the mish-mash of styles of the late 1980s skinhead culture in Hungary. The poster advertising the event featured a caricature of a smiling, dancing skinhead, wearing a typical working-class British bowler hat, boots and checkered, ska-style braces. The bands featured richly represented both ska and Oi, with names such as Fals (False), Skanzelizé (a wordplay on Champs Elysées), Flúgos Futam (Wacky Races), Ballagó Idő (Rolling Times), 88-as Csoport (Group 88),³ Egészséges Fejbőr

³ 88 refers to the 8th letter of the alphabet, H; HH stands for Heil Hitler.

(Healthy Scalp), Magozott Cseresznye (Peeled Cherry, a Hungarian metaphor for shaven heads), and Oi-Kor (Oi-Time). They were not prominent, and the only measure of notoriety they gained was by engaging in fights against punks and being clamped down by the police.

The lyrics of these early bands from the late 1980s to the 1990s were mainly concerned with the pains of transition from a totalitarian to a democratic and pluralistic society. The bands and their audiences perceived the shortcomings of both regimes and were openly critical in their lyrics. Topics such as various social problems, the disenchantment with the political leadership, unresolved issues of nationalism and ethnic identity are a constant presence in their songs. For example, anger at changing lifestyles and social upheaval was directed against immigrants in songs such as Fals' 'Cairo', the lyrics of which read:

Budapest is changing / and I fear
that it might turn into / Cairo, If I
only knew how they live so well /
because they don't work at all / ...
Because it doesn't matter if one's
great or small / fat or skinny /
even if they are beautiful or ugly /
the important thing is that [he]
shouldn't be brown, Budapest is
changing/ and I fear that it might
turn into / Cairo.

In these passages, we can identify fear of a changing living environment and xenophobia. Revanchist irredentist nationalism became apparent in Skanzelizé's track 'Armored IBUSZ' (Bus), which mused on the possibility of war against neighboring Romania, where the Hungarian minority (in what was Hungary before the Trianon Treaty) was being mistreated. The song was covered on the 2012 Romantikus Erőszak album,

Hardcore. These types of songs, alongside others that targeted the Roma, were a common feature of these early skinhead bands.

The bands that survived the regime change came to prominence in the Hungarian underground music scene in the 1990s. They created the Hungarian radical right rock scene, in which the practice of mixing radical politics and music started to become common practice. However, until the advent of Jobbik as a force to be reckoned with in Hungarian politics, there was no substantial discernable connection between these bands and radical right political parties (such as MIÉP, the main representative of the far right at the time). The political radical right did not recognize the value of music to convey its message and vice versa, the bands found the parties to be insufficiently radical.

Nemzeti Rock and its connection to radical right politics

The relative disconnection between radical right music and radical right politics was remedied by the mid-2000s. Nemzeti Rock played a crucial role in mending these closer ties between the radical right music scene and radical right political actors. As we have seen above, the early 1990s featured a rich subculture of radical right bands, all of which adopted elements of the skinhead cult, in musical style, dress and political message, blending nationalism, chauvinism and racism in various forms. According to Laszlo Kürti, the skinhead cult was at the height of its popularity around the year 1996 against the backdrop of post-communism, when the economic and social upheaval was at its highest (Kürti 2002). It is at this point that

nationalist music, and the skinhead subculture, which was associated with it, changed, breaking up into hardline racist white power bands and nationalist-ethnicist bands grouped under the category of Nemzeti Rock (National Rock) that sought a wider audience. In this article, I concentrate on this sub-group of Nemzeti Rock bands that has had the largest public impact and has been most closely and most explicitly connected to radical right politics (see Szele 2012).

At present, the radical right music scene contains Nemzeti Rock, white power music and a large number of bands that move in between the two categories. Even though these different categories are not clearly distinct, Nemzeti Rock can be seen as a specific category of bands with a specific role in the radical right music scene. Firstly, it differs from white power music in terms of the political message it conveys. In contrast to white power music, Nemzeti Rock does not contain outspoken racism, but instead it concentrates on nationalism. Motivated by the desire to go mainstream, popular Nemzeti Rock bands have avoided racist extremes, preferring to err on the side of caution. The nationalism of Nemzeti Rock does have a strong ethnic component and retains a close link to racist ideologies, but it focuses on the faith of the Hungarians rather than that of the white 'race'. Secondly, Nemzeti Rock is more explicitly politically activist. Shekovtsov (2009) and Shekhovtsov and Jackson (2012) have described white power music as 'apoliteic', a music in which myth-making is more important than actual political activity. For Shekovtsov, white power music is an expression of postwar 'metapolitical fascism' which dominates the neo-Nazi movement. In contrast, Nemzeti Rock is explicitly politically activist through its

participation in the political events of populist radical right organizations such as Jobbik. Connected to its less extreme political message and to its political activism, Nemzeti Rock actively seeks to inject itself in the mainstream, although it does preserve some of the elitist and isolationist attitudes of white power music in the construction of its own image, as a revolutionary vanguard of the nationalist movement.

In what follows, I will analyse the three most important Nemzeti Rock bands to provide insight into the main features of Nemzeti Rock: Romantikus Erőszak, Ismerős Arcok and Kárpátia. In his book entitled *15 Years of Nationalist Rock*, Sziva Balázs (2012), the lead singer and frontman of Romantikus Erőszak dates the change from skinhead subculture to nationalist rock to 1995. Though it is impossible to pinpoint exactly when it happened, it is certain that bands such as Romantikus Erőszak, Ismerős Arcok and Kárpátia started to publish albums with a nationalist content around the turn of the century or a few years after (2002-2003). Kárpátia, for example, was formed out of members of the former heavy metal band Cool Head Klan, which had very few songs that could be considered nationalist. The 2003-2004 period coincides with the rise to prominence of the radical right party Jobbik. Jobbik rose out of the ashes of the increasingly decrepit and decaying MIÉP (Daniel and Andras 2010; Karácsony and Róna 2010). One of the reasons for the increased association between music and politics was the fact that the politicians of the future Jobbik and the band members belonged to the same milieu. As we have seen above, the future Jobbik leaders also published compilations of nationalist music and mixed with the rockers at concerts. One of the future MP's of Jobbik, Sneider

Tamás was a skinhead leader in Eger under the nickname of Roi (Balázs 2012).

The distribution networks of radical right music scene are varied. These include the Blood and Honour network (for the neo-Nazi bands), the Hadak Útja record label (an independent confederation of nationalist bands who self-publish their records), and the Exkluziv Music record label. It also includes online presence on radical right websites and shops, where some of the bands self-publish (e.g. turania.hu). The music is also heavily present and promoted on social networking and media sharing sites (Facebook, YouTube, and various Hungarian social networking sites). The connection to 'old' media is also strong. For example, the far right *Holy Crown* radio station (which also functions as internet radio and news portal and is closely connected to Jobbik) is in large part a means of diffusion of nationalist music. There are also connections between more mainstream media and radical right music. Especially the role of the right-wing news channel ECHO TV is of relevance here, as the channel dedicated a special weekly television program to Nemzeti Rock, and promoted the artists on many occasions in talk shows (during 2009-2010).

Jobbik itself has also promoted radical right music in a conspicuous manner, strengthening the relationship. The first official Jobbik Mayday celebration in 2005 featured a line-up of the Nemzeti Rockers of Ismerős Arcok, Romantikus Erőszak, and Kárpátia, alongside other bands that moved between Nemzeti Rock and white power music (Oi-Kor, Egeszseges Fejbor).⁴ With the exception of 2006, one or all of the three bands

⁴ <https://goo.gl/4BqeMx>, accessed on 13.10.2015.

studied in this article participated in Jobbik Mayday celebrations and other party rallies (on March 15th, the national holiday, for example).

The three bands frequently tour together, in Hungary and abroad, performing also at Jobbik-organized events. In fact, most of the radical right bands, regardless of their particular orientation, come together in the two largest forums of Hungarian radical right nationalist music: the Magyar Sziget (Hungarian Island) and Székely Sziget (Szekler Island) held in Transylvania (Romania). These showcases of Hungarian nationalism are organized as the alternative versions of the Budapest Sziget Festival (which is multicultural in its nature) and the Fél-sziget Festival in Transsylvania (the Sziget's sister event in Transsylvania in Romania). Both festivals are organized by Jobbik, through its various subsidiaries (including the *Holy Crown* radio station and the 64 Counties Youth Movement)⁵ and are important radical right gatherings and moments of political mobilization.

This closer association between music and politics went hand in hand with a change in the political message of part of the radical right bands. As they became known outside of the small, albeit vocal, subculture, they started to shift their message away from outspoken racism, and develop a more elaborate Hungarian nationalist rhetoric. This concentrated more on extreme patriotism, territorial revanchism and socio-political topics, and opposition to

⁵ An autonomous nationalist organization associated with Jobbik, founded by Toroczka László in 2001. It started supporting Jobbik around 2006-2007, but maintains a separate identity. It has branches in Hungary and all of the countries in the Hungarian neighborhood that have Hungarian minorities.

the Left. They started to focus their attention on the Hungarian minorities in Slovakia and Romania, and refined their message. The bands started to curb their outspokenness on certain topics, such as ethnic and sexual minorities, in many cases, steering clear of these topics altogether. For example, on the 2001 Romantikus Erőszak album, *Hungarian History X*,⁶ the listener is greeted with the Hungarian Hymn, followed by a barrage of patriotic and nationalistic songs. The change from white power music to nationalist rock was not total, however, as the band still included old 1990s live recordings of songs 'White Hungary' and 'Skinhead' on the LP. With its 2003 album the shift was complete: the band chose to explore Hungarian nationalism and national mythology, while also hailing the Hungarian revolutionary tradition of anti-communist rebellion with songs such as 'To arms!' In 2003, Kárpátia also released their first LP, entitled *Where Are You, Szeklers?*⁷ dedicated almost entirely to irredentism and romantic explorations of the Hungarian national mythos and symbolic geography.

The influence of Kárpátia on other types of bands was highly significant. While one may argue that Romantikus Erőszak released their album first, Kárpátia's effect was greater because of the success it achieved. With three of its four members having a great previous musical experience (they were part of a popular metal band named Cool Head Klan in the 1990s, which featured some patriotic content, but was overall apolitical), and lyrics that are 'safe' enough to be palatable for a larger

audience, they are the only one of the nationalist rock bands that produced, as of yet, two albums that topped the Hungarian billboard chart. The style of the band also contributed greatly, as they play a polished blend of hard rock and heavy metal, more mainstream than the noisy Oi of the white power bands. Ismerős Arcok jumped on the bandwagon around the same time, publishing its first album in 2003, entitled *Our Country Is One*, playing a mix of hard rock, groove and jazz.

A curious development in nationalist music was the appearance of a new sub-genre, that of nationalist hip-hop music. This musical niche has only one prominent representative, a rapper calling himself by the stage name FankaDeli (Kóházy Ferenc). The only thing really setting him apart from nationalist rock is the music style he chose to convey the nationalist message. Whilst there appears to be a contradiction between the radical right's racism and the use of hip hop with its history as an African-American form of cultural expression, FankaDeli felt that hip hop, being used by African-Americans for their own nationalism, was a proper form of expression for Hungarian nationalism as well.⁸ Otherwise, the lyrics deal with the same topics and themes, and FankaDeli targets the same audiences as Nemzeti Rock.

The main themes and strategies of Nemzeti Rock

Nemzeti Rock can be seen as contributing to the 'discursive construction of national identity' in the terms of Wodak et al. (2009). This discursive construction operates through

⁶ Possibly a reference to the eponymous American film, which deals with skinhead culture in the US (in a critical way).

⁷ Hungarian minority population in central Romania.

⁸ <http://goo.gl/kIRqAv>

three components: contents, strategies, and means and forms of realization (Wodak et al. 2009). The *contents* are the elements that make up the narrative of the nation. These include the common myths that define the Hungarian nation: the idea of the common space of the Carpathian basin, shared history, traditions and the myth of sameness. The *strategies* consist mainly of the promotion of ultranationalist and nativist solutions to social issues (such as poverty) and political problems (for example, corruption and the dissociation of the political establishment from the mass of the people). The *means* are the cultural products of the bands themselves: music is utilized as a vehicle of political mobilization. The songs are deployed with the goal of recreating the imagined community anew (Anderson 2006), by utilizing personal, spatial and temporal references. The songs are mini-narratives, and together form a larger story that is connected to and also somewhat expands on the political message of Hungarian populist radical right political actors. Throughout the song lyrics, the radical right's central dichotomies are constructed: the division and opposition of people and elite, of majority against ethnic minorities. The bands utilize metaphor, allegory and metonymy to associate their targeted enemies with adjectives such as decadent, putrid, treacherous, corrupt et cetera, while on the other hand, promoting their cause as pure, organic and natural.

In the following section I shall analyse the main themes in the lyrics of Nemzeti Rock. The main themes espoused are nationalist irredentism, heroic masculinity and populism. All three, I will show, are animated by a deep-seated nativism, which filters and orients them. In this way, the bemoaning of lost

Hungarian territories and the fate of Hungarian minorities abroad, together with social issues are all framed in a nativist manner, against the backdrop of the national-foreign divide. The problems of the lost territories and the divide between the people and the elite are all the latter's fault, because of their anti- and a-national character. It is the role of the heroes and the nationalist vanguard to combat this current elite and create a revolutionary situation in a teleological good-evil struggle.

Irredentism

The most important theme to be found in the various albums put out by the nationalist rockers is the topic of irredentism. Irredentism is the political goal of recovering territories lost to Hungary's neighbouring states of Romania, Slovakia, present-day Ukraine and Serbia, which all contain a sizeable Hungarian minority. This has been a topic of radical right politics since the 1920s. The centrality of irredentism is not surprising, as it is the main theme around which radical (right) nationalism in Hungary has traditionally coagulated. The bands usually prominently utilize a number of symbols in their shows, including the outline or map of Greater Hungary, the Arpad striped flag, and Hungarian runic script. These symbols are an integral part of the visual politics of the radical right in Hungary. Each of them is a visual representation of a larger narrative, to which the bands' lyrics also contribute.

The symbols of Greater Hungary are evocations of the narrative of past greatness, and the ideal state of the nation and society. Many songs are dedicated to the symbolic geography of the Carpathian Basin (the area which

roughly coincides with the territory of Greater Hungary). Examples are Kárpátia's 'Kárpátok zengjete' (Carpathians sing), or 'Ott ahol zúg az a négy folyó' (Where the four rivers meet – a reference to the historical four rivers that surrounded and defined Hungary). The space is described in bucolic, romanticized terms, and its organic connection to the nation and the Hungarian ethnos is strongly highlighted.

The Hungarian nationalist narrative speaks not only of past greatness, but also gives a prominent place to historical tragedy. The story of Hungary's territorial and population losses are central to many of the bands' songs. Most of the bands tour in Transylvania (Romania) and Slovakia⁹ regularly. Going to the Hungarian communities in the neighboring countries is considered by the bands as a sort of holy rite of passage and sacred pilgrimage at the same time. Nationalist rock bands feel that it is their duty to bring the message of nationalism to these communities of Hungarians which, according to them, fell victim to the vicissitudes of history and have been in a tragic predicament ever since. A great number of songs, such as Ismerős Arcok's 'Nélküled' (Without you) or Kárpátia's 'Erdély Szabad' (Free Transylvania) and 'Így volt, Így lesz' (Thus it was, thus it shall be) or Romantikus Erőszak's 'A Kárpátok Dala' (Song of the Carpathians) or '1920' bemoan the tragic loss of these territories and their Hungarian population, whom they consider to be brothers.

Foggy scenery of Felvidék,¹⁰ A bitter, cold December wind flows through it. I caress the roadside pines, A

⁹ Romantikus Erőszak was banned in the country.

¹⁰ Felvidék is a Hungarian-populated area, nowadays belonging to Slovakia.

heavy tear runs down my cheek. Foggy scenery of Felvidék, Dry husks of sunflowers stand by themselves. Their flowers, seeds were cut off from their bodies. Its fate and suffering like Hungary's. I watch the clouds, I watch the mountains, That no one from Trianon could see! I Ask the Sun – I ask him – What was my people's terrible crime!¹¹

A prominent visual feature of nationalist rock albums and concerts is the Arpad Stripe flag. The Arpad stripes, as they are known in colloquial language, refer to the ancient flag of Hungary's founding dynasty of Arpad, and have been in constant use since the 13th century, as one of the main heraldic components of the Hungarian flag and coat of arms. Composed of four red and four white stripes, the stripes are a prominent element in the official coat of arms of Hungary today, and so are part of the official national canon. They are prominently used by a number of towns and institutions in the country as well. However, the Arpad Stripes carry within them important historical connotations of the radical right. In the interwar period, they were a part of the official symbols of Hungary's most significant fascist party, the Arrow Cross Party. The Arrow Cross used the Arpad stripes to distinguish itself from the rest of the nationalist parties, as well as to suggest historical consciousness and refer to the old historical roots of Hungary (since the Arpad striped flag was considered to be older than the national tricolour).

The participation of the Arrow Cross party in the Holocaust and the Budapest pogroms has left this symbol highly charged and full of negative

¹¹ Kárpátia: Felvidéki táj.

connotations in the political mainstream. However, this did not stop the radical right from reusing it after 1990. The stripes, often used together with the official national banner of the country, were a mainstay of radical right manifestations after 1990. They remain so today as a prominent part of the symbolism of Jobbik. The party adopted it as its official banner and colours in 2006. Both the party and the Nemzeti Rock bands utilize these symbols on a regular basis. The party even went on a campaign of 'educating' the masses on the nature of the flag. The negative historical connotations are heightened even more due to the use of a modified version of the Arpad Stripes by the paramilitary defence unit of Jobbik, the Hungarian Guard. The Guard has used the stripes as an emblem on its uniform, when marching through Gypsy villages and in other political actions. Today, due to its constant use by radical and ultranationalist political formations, the Arpad stripes are recognized throughout the country as signifiers of the radical right, and are sometimes combined with the Greater Hungary outline (Greater Hungary coloured in Arpad stripes is an image often seen on banners at demonstrations, on T-shirts with the radical right messages, and so on).

Runic script is also often utilized by the three bands in question, as well as by Jobbik and the 64 Counties Youth Movement. The message is that of an ancient authenticity, since Runic script harkens back to the pagan Hungarian historical tradition. This is in contradiction with the radical right's celebration of the Christian identity of Hungary, as, for example, in Romantikus Erőszak's songs dedicated to saint Stephen and saint László. Another reason is that the radical right music scene and, to a lesser extent, political

imagery of the Hungarian far right is highly susceptible to the white power movement abroad, which uses runic script to evoke some sort of imaginary ancient Aryan past.

Heroism, masculinity and the history of Hungarian revolutions

Another important element in Nemzeti Rock as well as Hungarian nationalist rhetoric in general is the cult of heroes and heroic masculinity. This cult actively utilizes the national historical narrative. It refers especially to important moments such as the revolutions of 1848 and 1956, which are of crucial importance in the self-definition of the Hungarian radical right. The radical right imagines itself as continuator of these tendencies. It sees itself as a movement by the people, for the people and nation, opposed to a corrupted elite.

The radical right presents itself as the force that will get the people and the nation out of crisis. The solution is voluntary heroic action, in which the masculinity of the hero and his historical role are affirmed, and violence is a sacred rite of passage. Songs such as Kárpátia's *Nem engedünk 48-ból* (We will not let 1848 go)¹² or Romantikus Erőszak's 'A piros, a fehér, a zöld' (The red, the white and the green),¹³ Hungarica's¹⁴ 'Szabadság betűi' (The words of Freedom) and Ismerős Arcok's 'Költők és kígyóbüvölők' (Poets and snake charmers) express this attitude:

¹² A reference to the 1848 revolution, one of the founding Hungarian historical myths of resistance against outsiders and a fight for national emancipation.

¹³ The colors of the Hungarian flag.

¹⁴ Sziva is also the lead singer and lyricist of this band, which operates as a subsidiary to Romantikus Erőszak.

A few bottles of petroleum and a few determined kids, Tanks roll through the city, On your feet, Hungarian! Now or never! The Revolution has broken out, The Red, the White, the Green, The Red, the White, the Green, The Red, the White, the Green!¹⁵

Tear gas is choking me, I cover my face with a scarf, I'm being beaten with a baton, My friend, oh where are you? My brothers are being shot on the streets, Magyar blood flows in Pest, I'm being trampled by police horses, My friend, oh where are you?¹⁶

The nationalist discursive strategy exemplified by these songs is an attempt to draw a direct line between past upheavals and the present day. 2006 is seen by many as being the official debut of the new radical right on the Hungarian political scene, in the violence and clashes with the police that occurred on several occasions.¹⁷ The radical right has successfully attempted to gain ownership of these events, claiming them for its own birth-narrative. Many of the songs described above romanticize the events, describing the participants as heroes, fighting against the oppressive and anti-national forces of the leftist government of those years.

¹⁵ These two phrases are borrowed from the national poet Petöfi Sándor's famous call to arms read on 15 of March 1848, thereby drawing a parallel between past and present events.

¹⁶ Kárpátia, 'Barátom mondd mere vagy?'

¹⁷ Several serious incidents occurred in the 2006 protests against the socialist government, including street riots, bridge barricades, and the state television headquarters being sieged and taken over by radical right nationalist rioters.

The most important characteristic of a hero fit to defend the nation is his masculinity, and radical right music glorifies masculinity. A first prominent characteristic in the radical right ideal of masculinity is the male body; its physical traits are highly important for the male identity in general. We may take as an example the song entitled 'Skinhead-boar' by the band Healthy Scalp (a band oscillating between Nemzeti Rock and white power music, although it usually identifies itself as belonging to the former category):

Skinhead- wild boar he's my mate
/ Skinhead- wild boar let me
introduce him / Skinhead- wild
boar I only drink with him / he
likes to wallow, to drink and
feast/the aggressive big-drinker
Skinhead- wild boar / he's a big
guy / Compared to him I'm only an
amateur drinker / I swear he's a
nice guy, but I warn you / If you
drink his wine, he'll break your face
in / the aggressive big-drinker
Skinhead- wild boar / he's got big
muscle / strong belly, and a hard
head... the aggressive big-drinker
Skinhead- wild boar.

The song continues by praising the sexual prowess of skinheads, their stamina and so forth. This song expresses the prototype of what a male should be; he has strength, toughness, stamina and a dominant presence. The physical characteristics are highly important and underlined, for an important feature of the radical right understanding of masculinity is the connection between the body and the mind, between the physical and the psychological. The body must be an expression of the inner characteristics.

Another feature, as we can discover from this song, is the obligatory proclivity of men toward aggression and violence. This is a departure from the traditional, bourgeois apprehension of masculinity, which paired strength, stamina, and bravery with control, and a lack of sentiment. The open presence of sentiments was a prominent feature of nationalist music since its inception in Hungary. The lyrics of Mos-oi's 'Skinhead-song' from the 1980's read:

They hate and they love / Long-live
the skinheads / They are the best
of men / They will be there to
brawl/ Whether win or lose.

This is continued in such present-day tunes as 'Oh, Hungary' by Romantikus Erőszak, which has the chorus "To Arms!", and other songs such as 'Fradidrukker'. In the latter we hear:

Break, smash / Long live the
turmoil. The Carpathian Basin is
our home ground / All of it
Hungarian land / On the terraces
and out on the streets / We rule
the field.

Bravery, together with the willingness to sacrifice and violence, make up a triad of traits to be found in a high number of nationalist rock songs. The very name of Romantikus Erőszak is a legitimization of violence, for it may be translated as Romantic Violence, or Romantic Aggression. The glorification of violence and the legitimization of it under certain circumstances (the songs about revolution and the 2006 riots, interpreted as aborted revolutions) is an important feature of their songs, which indeed romanticize violent acts.

Populism and the radical right as counterculture

The last important, and often overlooked theme in Nemzeti Rock is populism. The people-elite antagonism, according to Ernesto Laclau (2005), structures populist politics. Populism and nationalism are closely connected in Hungarian radical right rhetoric in general, and this is also visible in Nemzeti Rock. The Nemzeti Rock bands are successful in spreading a populist message because they are seen by the general public as not being directly affiliated with radical right party politics. In this way, they escape the 'taint' of politics. Moreover, Jobbik itself also presents itself as political movement rather than as a political party like the others.

The idea of party politics as problematic is one of the central themes of populism, which strives toward a direct connection between a leader figure and the greater mass of 'the people'. In this way, the bands present themselves as connected to 'the people', and as conveying the 'vox populi'. Many of the Nemzeti Rock songs go out of their way to present the tales of everyday heroes in opposition to a central authority, or to narrate the tales of the common folk.

One prominent way of combining nationalism and populism is through the myth of the revolution from below. The radical right presents the nation as the underdog, engaged in a fight for its freedom and existence against outside forces. This is connected to the revolutions of the past, which were also fought, in the apprehension of nationalist rockers, for national emancipation. In such situations, violence is justified, and even called for if the nation is to triumph

over its adversaries (see the previous section).

In line with Jobbik's rhetoric, nationalist rock attempts to sketch a caricature of a narrative in which two sides, the people and the corrupt elite, are locked in a teleological battle for survival, the fate of the nation being at stake. The corrupt elite consists of traitorous leaders (contemporary politicians, or in the past, Communist leadership) and their foreign and domestic masters. For example, the Romantikus Erőszak song 'Patriot' speaks of 'a slave on the throne', the rich getting richer and the 'bankers making laws'. The bands identify this corrupt rule with the dictatorship of the past, often referring to its repressive police practices, for example, in 'Ruszkik Haza' (Russians (go) Home) by Ismerős Arcok. In songs such as Romantikus Erőszak's 'Hungarian History X', big business is repudiated with equal strength, as the silent partner in the 'anti-national' conspiracy:

I was born here, and if I die I shall be buried here, But I fear that no one cares about the real things which happen, The capital is a destructive force, and poor people always suffer from it, On the ruins of our world they will build their better tomorrow, Money talks, power barks, Open palms waiting for stolen treasures, The road leading nowhere is straight, Hungarian History X.¹⁸

Ismerős Arcok also paints a similar picture in their song, 'The last Hungarian':

Bureaucrats and financiers lead us / Liars, they do not believe in keeping their word /.../ Pauperized, giving everything up,

our end will be pitiful / ...We do not know our past, in order to not be able to learn from it / they take away our desires so we may not look forward to anything /our brothers pushed away from us are behind walls / without their mothers, they cannot expect a brighter future / Chorus: If you come here years later, dear wonderer / and you see what is left of this country / tell the world that we don't mind / for the last Hungarian has died.

The binomial of a political movement versus the establishment serves to highlight even more the grassroots and alternative characteristic of nationalist rock, and by consequence of the radical right. This is one of the main topics that is buried between the lines in both nationalist rock and the message of the radical right in Hungary: that it is a novel, youthful, counter-cultural and anti-establishment political group. The defining feature of a counter-culture is its systematic opposition to the larger sphere of culture (Gelder 2005, 2007).

Nationalist rock is counter-cultural and populist at the same time. This creates some tension within the message of the bands themselves (as well as of Jobbik) and to some extent also even between the musicians and radical right party politics. Owing to its 'metapolitical fascist' past, radical right music still exhibits certain elements of elitism: claiming to be a revolutionary elite, the vanguard of the nation. Michael Barkun (2003) defines this as 'stigmatized knowledge'. This refers to a type of perceived knowledge that only an esoteric group possesses and that is rejected by the majority of society. This group views itself as belonging to a privileged elite because of its possession of this

¹⁸ Romantikus Erőszak, 'Magyar Historia X'.

information. The Nemzeti rockers, the extremists know what reality is really like, even though the majority of the people do not realize it. They are the ones that see that social reality revolves around the opposition between the nation and the elites and outsiders that threaten it. The bands present themselves as part of a revolutionary elite, a vanguard of the change to come. The best expression of this is the Romantikus Erőszak album *Keménymag* (Hard Core, or Die-Hard), with songs such as 'Riot Police' and 'Cheer' (i.e. for a team) and 'Riot'.

Jobbik, through the use of voluntarism, seeks to spread the message that it is not a political party in the traditional sense, but a political movement. This message is also diffused by Nemzeti Rock through the political message of the songs, which consist of rebellion against authority, a recalcitrant style of the bands and the fans themselves. The overall image formed is that of an alternative style of life, which encapsulates both music and politics. I theorize that this, for a lack of a better term, 'cool factor', is what contributes a lot to the continued success of nationalist rock bands. They consciously associate themselves with a set of attitudes and political strategies (which include violence and an opposition toward authority) that are unacceptable to the mainstream, and define them as alternative. On the other hand, the content of their message is formatted in a specific manner, so as to make possible the claim of representing the true center and normalcy. Their demarche is an assault on the norm, with the claim of upholding it. Normalcy resides within the imagined people, and decadence in the imagined elite.

Conclusions

Radical nationalist politics and rock music have a deep connection in the Western world, where the underground music scene is one of the main forums where white power and radical right groups gather. In Hungary, certain parts of the radical right music scene have contributed to the mainstreaming of radical right politics. Nemzeti Rock has made the active and conscious choice of whitewashing some of its content, pushing racial hate to the background, and embracing nationalist romanticist rhetoric in order to reach a large section of the public. This evolution can be noticed in the development of Jobbik as well, which in the 2014 electoral campaign chose to market itself as conservative and family-friendly. Packaging the radical right message in a palatable, seductive and easily understandable form has helped the political movement garner increasing support among the audiences of popular music (especially youth). And the utilization of popular music has helped to crystalize the image of Jobbik as a political movement, as opposed to a classical party.

Like Jobbik, Hungarian nationalist rock has created a triad of topics, in which socio-economic problems are filtered through nativism and funnelled toward a nativist-authoritarian agenda. This helps radicalize the listeners and create a framework for the skewed interpretation of reality. It also makes them feel that they are privy to some sort of insider knowledge, which makes them (through the mediation of the nationalist rock bands themselves) at the same time part of a revolutionary elite.

There is a certain degree of tension within their discourse, as they also

present themselves in a populist fashion as part of the mass of the people, which opposes a corrupt, anti-national elite. Nationalist rock plays on the duality of being a popular, grassroots phenomenon and at the same time existing as a counter-culture, reaping the benefits of both. Whilst this creates tensions, it is also one of the factors that explains its success. Nationalist rock bands in contemporary Hungary have managed to negotiate the opposition between the refusal of the norms of contemporary society and the need for popular

support. They have successfully navigated away from the 'apoliteic' cul-de-sac which grips white power music in Western Europe, and (no doubt helped also by political circumstances) have placed themselves at the edges of the mainstream of Hungarian politics and music. This is illustrated by the fact that on 11 of November 2015, Romantikus Erőszak's new album *A hazáért* (For the Fatherland) became number 2 on the Hungarian album billboard (with Ismerős Arcok's *Csak a zene!* (Only the music) at number 23).

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This article was first published in *JOMEC Journal*

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ISSN: ISSN 2049-2340

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