Magyars and Political Discourses in the New Millennium

Changing Meanings in Hungary at the Start of the Twenty-First Century

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is such a close match to the FIDESZ agenda that it is a surprise that its results were not made public. Unless of course the surprise is on FIDESZ and their survey did not yield the results they were hoping for. If the questions do not bring forth answers deemed desirable, there is always the option of hiding the answers, in an odd constitutional Q&A.

Taking the perspective of hindsight to its logical conclusion, the question is whether the 2014 elections have provided some of the missing answers. As Mudde (2014) points out, FIDESZ emerged with a political victory but with or through an electoral setback: their share of all votes cast in 2014 dropped by over eight percentage points when compared to 2010. That there was no corresponding drop in parliamentary seats, is due to the fact that Parliament itself was overhauled and restructured (see chapter 6). Thus the discursive space in which FIDESZ can claim a strong mandate after the 2014 elections, becomes open only if the restructuring of Parliament is disregarded. And if the actual level of support for FIDESZ and its maneuvers remains hidden. It could be argued that the responses to the questionnaire *must* be kept under wraps from the perspective of FIDESZ and that they were certain to never see the light of day the moment the questionnaire was chosen over the customary measure of a referendum. With this move, FIDESZ has completed or cemented its evolution into a populist formation with anti-democratic tendencies. This is not how they started their political career: back in the 1990s, when there were efforts to create a new constitution, it was MDF and the Smallholders who wanted to include in it some parts of the Holy Crown doctrine, not FIDESZ (Fowler 2004: 66). That all began to change when FIDESZ got into government: the 1998–2002 FIDESZ administration criticized the Socialist-liberal coalition that governed from 1994 to 1998 for maintaining the non-national of Hungary as resulting from state socialism. Specifically, they were critical of the constitution and the lack of a public role for the Holy Crown as failures to be "national" enough (Fowler 2004: 61). Additionally, during their 1998–2002 administration, FIDESZ MPs were known for language use that pandered to the extreme right: "With the lines of decency breached, hate speech proliferated in the media and on the floor of Parliament" (Jordan 2010: 104). By the time FIDESZ opted away from the customary referendum on the new constitution, replaced it with an unconvincing questionnaire project under the label of "national consultation," and proceeded to suppress the results of the questionnaire project, it had established its "credentials" as a political force aiming at anything but democratic inclusion or procedures.

Conclusions

Homegrown Discourses and Post-Communism

The foregoing series of "biopsies" of Hungarian political discourse have revealed that in fact the three different "regions" in that discourse that I investigated offer different insights on the relevance of post-communism. The internal perspective that I am committed to, unveils differences in the importance of post-communism in the process of making, renegotiating, and delineating Hungarian political community during the period of analysis.

In part I, which focuses on two efforts at situating Hungary in political time, the first of those two efforts mostly avoids the issue of post-communism. Chapter 1 reviews how the advent of the year 2000 prompted celebration of Hungary's thousand-year statehood in the shape of fetishism centered on the Holy Crown and exclusion. In that "region of language," post-communism is not relevant. It is not chosen as an anchor for the understanding of Hungary or its place in political history. In this process of creating the meaning of the Hungarian polity in 1999–2000, post-communism is not a necessary element. The lesson from this finding is that given the chance for a millennial focus, the communist interlude of the twentieth century will not be what the polity itself will use to understand its own identity or to construct its own boundaries. Additionally, this early installment of discourse also identifies the strategy of ethno-nationalism that later chapters show as a growing trend.

As chapter 2 reveals, though, if for some reason the millennial perspective is not available, then post-communism quickly becomes a leitmotif. Or, to be more precise, the focus on and attitude towards, communism will be the anchor and the tool of distinction among various versions of discourse. Post-communism is the self-chosen and self-appointed frame of reference in 2006

as the scandal of the most dramatic proportions arises, leads to rioting and violence and contributes to a large extent to the political developments of 2010 (namely the victory for FIDESZ that led to a parliamentary majority greatly disproportionate to the percentage of votes secured). While the two characteristically different newspapers whose coverage of the breaking scandal I analyzed in detail both rely on communism and the repudiation of communism to delineate the politically possible, they also subscribe to and follow different norms of journalism. Their distinct brands of journalism co-occur with choices to focus on the repudiation of communism and with resulting distinct construals of post-communism. This co-occurrence ushers in lessons about how a blanket assumption of monolithic post-communism rather than an internal perspective would miss the differences in and among these newspapers, and, by extension, in locally generated conceptualizations. Which ought to matter if we are to carry out responsible, engaged social science.

Part II addresses issues of EU membership and provides different insights into what relevance post-communism may have once Hungarian political discourse is examined on its own terms. The first case study or "biopsy" in this section is the examination of the brochures that were intended to prepare the referendum on EU accession, in chapter 3. The discourse in the brochures does not rely on communism or post-communism to create a construal of the Hungarian polity and does not reference post-communism as a core element limiting the politically possible. The reason for this is the existence of a powerful alternative construal, and yet the alternative is not much better. Instead of communism or post-communism, this discourse relies on an unclear and mythic concept of EU expectations and an EU "self" to delineate identity. In a display of hyper-compliance, the materials avoid Hungary or any Hungarian experience as an anchor and instead opt for a fully other-identified subaltern position. The result does not reference or feature post-communism because the core of the EU that anchors this discourse, has no experience with it.

In chapter 4 I analyze two books that purport to provide information on the EU. In something of a departure from the case studies that I began with no clear pre-set notions of what I expected to find, I started the analysis in this chapter with a specific question. This "biopsy" was to reveal whether the EU was conceptualized as state-like and therefore as providing state-like functions like education. The inquiry was about finding an ontology of the EU, but it was not to be: the outcome is a chronicle of slippage, mythic contradictions and indecision or uncertainty in the community of discourse. There are vague indications of a domestic perspective and efforts to include experiences from within Hungary in the construals of the EU. Among the tensions and uncertainties, however, the lack of reference to post-communism is quite clear and certain.

Chapter 5 concludes the segment on EU membership and brings the analysis closest to the time of writing with its investigation of coverage of Hungary's turn as the country presiding over the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2011. This particular biopsy of/into Hungarian political discourse reveals an unprecedented element: sarcasm. The discursive strategy is neither the hyper-compliance of earlier construals of the EU nor an explicit referencing of post-communism. Instead, it is one of mocking the EU all the while taking it for granted as the most decisive influence on Hungary's fate through its policy powers.

Of course, 2011 is also the beginning of the end: this is the year when FIDESZ fully reveals and enacts its populist authoritarian tendencies and ushers Hungary out of most analysts' classification of a democracy on a path made plausible in and due to, increasingly ethno-nationalist discourse. This development places in a different light the very question of whether and how post-communism may be relevant in an internal perspective. Any country entering what appears to be authoritarianism light, if that country at one point was part of the communist bloc, will bolster arguments that democracy is not for everyone and nations with authoritarian pasts may not be fit to handle democracy.

These types of arguments provide a disturbing mixture of path dependency, teleology, Orientalism, and Othering. They may also sadly be the best introduction to part III, which raises the question of whether the twenty-first century has in fact brought some sort of watershed for Hungary. The first case study or "biopsy" in this part of the book investigates how the political parties in Parliament present themselves on their websites, in chapter 6. The initial data gathering for the analysis was done in 2011 and it revealed contradictions between the stated positions of the four parties on inclusion and their websites' inclusivity. The most inclusive website, with content in multiple languages and availability to audiences inside and outside Hungary, was operated by extreme right-wing Jobbik. At the same time, the Socialists in MSZP had no foreign language content at all, in contradiction to their messages and ideologies of inclusion. FIDESZ had messages of focusing on the nation, which may have been shorthand for the ethno-nationalism mentioned above and yet a website with halfhearted inclusion strategies that led to English language content being available but outdated. LMP had the highest level of congruence between its stated positions of inclusion and high-quality website.

The 2013 follow-up in chapter 6 shows that the only changes from 2011 to 2013 are changes for the worse: while the MSZP and FIDESZ websites did not improve, the Jobbik and LMP websites deteriorated somewhat. To the extent that the Internet in general and party websites in particular are symptoms or indicators of how technology has become central to political discourse in Hungary, there is no watershed or jump into "modernity" in the

technological sense. This finding need not be a cause for concern since a teleological march into ever-more technologically minded and ever-more technically savvy versions of politics is not a desideratum. However, as a finding in a discursive biopsy, the level of inclusion or inclusivity going down is in fact a reason for concern—not to mention that a glance at the 2014 elections also hints that deterioration may reach beyond the Internet. The politically possible in Hungary increasingly includes not worrying about making information about the main forces of Hungarian politics available to those who do not speak Hungarian. This development contextualizes and is congruent with, the findings in chapter 7.

The last case study of the book analyzes the questionnaire that was sent to Hungarian households in early 2011 with the stated intention to survey the population about the new Constitution in the making at that time. That Constitution went into effect at the start of 2012 in the midst of significant criticism inside and outside of Hungary. One of the specific targets of criticism was the fact that the Hungarian population was not invited to participate in a referendum regarding the new constitution and that the questionnaire analyzed in chapter 7 was supposed to stand in for a referendum. Discourse analysis allows me to add a somewhat different insight to the considerations regarding that development. It is my position that the questionnaire was not aimed at surveying the population but instead, was a tool to create and prepare discursive plausibility for the new Constitution. The fact that the results of the survey/questionnaire project were not made public may be seen as supporting two conclusions: either the results were not what sponsoring FIDESZ had hoped they would be and therefore were covered up, or in fact the project was not aimed at surveying the population but rather at acquainting the population with certain discursive strategies of exclusionary ethnonationalism that would later seem familiar and acceptable when they appeared in the Constitution, and would also be easily identifiable as akin to strategies identified in chapter 1.

The description of Hungary in 2012–2013 that would ring most true to me would have to include discussions of populism, ethno-nationalism, and authoritarianism. The developments that led to this new characterization of the country brought back a renewed focus on, or obsession with, qualifying countries as democratic. Once a central focus of the social scientific exercise that we came to call transitology (along with its occasional endorsement of teleological thinking), diagnosing democracy becomes newly relevant when a country exits the coveted category or diagnosis. And Hungary has made its exit.

The homegrown discourses I analyzed here I contend made that exit plausible. In a way, this finding is not an answer to the two-part question I started with, which was roughly "what does discourse tell us about Hungary at the start of the twenty-first century and how relevant is post-communism

in that discourse?" And yet in a way it is a perfect answer to that question. Post-communism varies in relevance depending on the site of the specific biopsy-like analyses I carried out in each of the chapters.

What the overall analysis also tells us is that when something like the authoritarian populist maneuvers of FIDESZ happens, we have no reason to be surprised. Their moves had been prepared and made plausible by significant discursive production. Realizing this inspires us to keep analyzing discourse, especially in times when the rise of authoritarianism in Hungary suggests to some that the project of turning eastern European countries into stable versions of liberal democracy is at best a partial failure (Pogány 2013). While Pogány's position is not necessarily free from all teleology, his analysis along with Birdwell et al. (2013) points out that democracy is doing increasingly poorly in western Europe also. Thus it is not the case that post-communism is inversely proportionate to democracy just as it is also not the case that post-communism can be used as an easy shorthand for an entire category of history and identity. Therefore, there is no easy assumption to be made about the relevance of post-communism, and the impossibility of easy assumptions is a testimony to the internal perspective that I subscribe to. Analyzing discourse on its own terms reveals the differences summarized above. It also promotes justice through inclusion: the political realities of a country are described more justly if the analysis builds on the concepts in use within that political reality.

My methodological credo stems from an understanding of my project as an attempt to account for a language game. I carried out the case studies above as a way of biopsying political culture/discourse. That I do not consider those to be separate or distinct is my take on the theory/practice divide. A specific theoretical framework that undergirds and launches an empirical research program has allowed me to imagine myself responding to Wittgenstein's indictment when he says "A main source of our failure to understand is that we do not command a clear view of the use of our words" (*Philosophical Investigations*, no. 122). The response is that we now have a much clearer view of homegrown Hungarian discourses and we can account for a lot of the use that has taken place. The clearer view is not necessarily attractive, but lucidity is choiceworthy in itself.