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The working of the ethno-neo nationalistic identity politics in postsocialist Hungary

One of the strongest legacies of the 20th century mental image of blue-collar workers that they form the working class and that the members of this class harbor Marxist, but at least left-wing political sympathies and support socialist, social democratic or Communist parties. In the state socialist countries Communist Parties claimed to rule in the name of the working class. In the pillarized societies of the West it was taken for granted that workers are voting for the left and until the 1980s the working-class areas was considered to be the electoral basis of the political left; this was true, for example, in Great Britain ((McAllister et al, 2001), in the Netherlands (Becker–Curperus, 2010); and it was also true for the Communist Parties, where these parties were important: in France (Platone 1977) or in Italy (Bibes-Alix 1963, Mezei 2012).

The 1980-1990s had undermined this image. In the 1980s and 1990s, embracement of so-called neo-liberal policies by social democratic and socialist parties across the continent had weakened the allegiance of trade unions and also that of workers' to these parties. The failure of actually existing socialism to create a society to match the socialist dream had widely discredited radical socialist ideas. Another disappointment awaited Western and Eastern leftists, who believed that the workers of the socialist countries, once liberated from the tutelage of the Communist parties, would support left-wing self-governing political alternatives, in 1989-1991. Workers instead of rushing to control the factories, like the Hungarian revolutionary workers in 1956, readily accepted the new, capitalist regimes, and there was very sporadic and weak resistance to full-scale privatization and the implementation of shock therapies in many countries.¹

¹ On the Hungarian workers' councils in 1989 see Szalai (1994); Nagy (2012), on the role of union in the transition see: Tóth, 2000.

Central and Eastern European nations happily embraced the Western style market economy in the hope that capitalism would bring better life and higher levels of consumption than did socialism.

The fading away of workers' support for socialist, social democratic and Communist Parties had unforeseen political consequences in the West: workers' turn to the radical right. The rising populist far-right parties became ever more popular among the workers (Taggart 1995). While some authors maintain the importance of economic factors, many observers prefer to stress cultural factors in explaining the willingness of workers to support parties with a nativist anti-immigrant, ethno-nationalistic rhetoric and populist political program (Lubbers et al, 2002 and Oesch 2008).²

A similar political trend took place in a number of Central and Eastern European countries, where radical populist right wing parties gained substantial workers' support. By studying the rise of the radical right in Poland, David Ost (2005) developed an argument, which focused more on rational choice theory than cultural explanations. Building on his previous study of the roots of Solidarity,³ he argued that the liberal intelligentsia betrayed the workers, and embarked upon a road of neoliberal capitalism, which effectively impoverished many workers, who either lost their jobs or had to be contented with very low wages in comparison with the earnings of the intellectuals. Thus, the workers voted for the right in order to punish the intelligentsia and the new neoliberal elite. Ost mainly blames the short-sightedness, selfishness and greediness of the liberal intelligentsia for the rise of the radical right in Poland. Kalb and Halmai (2011) offered a different perspective to understand why workers are attracted by the radical right in former post socialist countries. They developed a structural explanation, where the exploitation of the working class plays a key role in the rise of neonationalism. Contrary to the cultural explanations, the authors think that "current neo-nationalistic populisms

² The expression of nativist was borrowed from Mudde 2007.

³ See: Ost 1990

represent a systemic, structural, logically contingent and socially meaningful phenomena” (Kalb and Halmai 2011, 18). To simplify the key thesis of the book, globalization and neoliberal capitalism disrupted old, working-class communities and rendered workers more dependent on the whims of capitalists. Right-wing populism offers a panacea for the insecurity of the world and the everyday struggle to make a decent living. Feischmidt, following the argument of Kalb and Halmai, defined neo-nationalism as being responses to the global and local crises generated by semi-peripheral capitalism (Feischmidt et al 2014, 46).

In this paper, we would like to offer a more complex explanation for growing right wing appeal among workers than culturalist-nativist or structuralist, exploitation-based explanations. We take into account two important factors, which are affecting current political choices of workers, and which are related to their life experiences: 1) family history and life trajectories of the families, 2) actual life experiences of the respondents and their perception of fairness of the wider society and their position within society.

Earlier research of Tóth and Grajczjár (2001) shed light on the importance of the life-history trajectories of families, the primary organs of political and cultural socialization and the intragenerational transmission of life-experiences, political and cultural worldviews, which are shaping the political viewpoints of current generations to a considerable extent and constitute one of the most important personal factors in understanding attraction to the radical right. The second important factor is the actual life experience of the current generations, and how they perceive their own situation and the changes affecting their lives.⁴

Hungary is a fine example for a sudden outburst of support to the radical right following a deep political and economic crisis. Earlier research of Tóth and Grajczjár (2001) demonstrated that a widespread nationalist sentiment could comfortably co-exist with the political choice of voting for centrist, pro-European

⁴ See: Tóth and Grajczjár 2013.

moderate left-wing or moderate right wing parties almost in half-half split and with non-voting to radical right, save a small minority. This research showed that in a comparative context, amongst Hungarians nationalism was one of most widespread sentiments in Europe in the late 1990s, which co-existed with centrist vote and with one of the weakest radical right wing party in the Continent. None the less, the dramatic events of 2006, in the wake of the full-fledged political and economic crisis, during which the legitimacy of the ruling political left had been massively shaken, the underlying nationalistic feelings contributed to the shift in political choices towards a nationalist radical right. The same statement can be made as far as exploitation is concerned. In this paper, we are interested in the perception of exploitation by workers and how this perception, if it exists, shapes the political choices of employees. Since the marginalist revolution of economics, the Marxist exploitation theory, based on the labour value theory, is not part of mainstream economics. Exploitation theories, none the less, are still part of mainstream sociological theories, widespread in political life, and indeed many individuals conceptualize the working of our modern society through the lense of exploitation. Thus, the perception of exploitation and the perception of a mechanism of societal injustice could be one important driver in the support of the radical right, provided that a radical right political force exploited this perception to attract sympathizers.

In order to avoid the trap of an objectivist exploitation theory, we deliberately selected workers to be interviewed who could be considered to be „winners” of the regime change and not „losers” subject to hardship of poverty, insecurity and being at the mercy of the whim of erratic and autocratic employers. This selection was also important as earlier research on support for the Hungarian radical right already showed that not only „losers”, but also „winners” of postsocialist transition and economic changes can be attracted to the radical right (Tóth – Grajczjár, 2013).

The paper is based on interviews done with workers conducted during 2015. The interviewed workers were well trained or even highly skilled, well paid employees of a large multinational company, which provides a practical life-time employment employment security, generous company welfare system and chance of continuous

learning and skill upgrading in Western Hungary, close to the Austrian border. Workers in this plant have established their own union, which effectively bargains on behalf of them and which gained a respectable institutionalised position at the company, indeed a rare situation in Central and Eastern Europe. Union presence added an additional layer of job security and provides considerable voice in workplace level issues for employees.

The major question of the research was why elite workers with secure position and „affluent” life are attracted by the radical right and how the nationalist sentiments and the perception of exploitation drove these workers to the right. The paper draws on 12 life-history interviews and two focus group discussions with workers of the multinational company and its subcontractor firms. Although the research only draws on a limited number of interviews, the authors of this paper have had ample research and work experience with workers in this geographical area and thus for them the environment was familiar.

We also stress one more novelty of our approach. Although among different types of work, industrial work has received the utmost attention by labour historians, studies focusing factory as a site of both industrial production and social relations of production is often taken as given and treated as the backdrop for the real action. We would like to contribute to an emergent literature, which calls for the reconsideration of this particular workplace as the site of one of the most important relationships among workers, and how they influence each other through debating actual political, economic and cultural issues in a densely networked environment.

The article is structured as follows. Firstly, it outlines the brief history of how an essentially segmented working-class structure was formed in Hungary. Secondly, it analyzes the interviews and the focus group discussions and, where it is relevant, it highlights similarities and differences with interviews conducted between 2002 and 2004 in the same area (Bartha 2011). In the conclusion, it seeks to offer an explanation for why workers are attracted to right-wing populism in one of the most developed areas of Hungary. Our explanation takes into account the specific enterprise culture, industrial relations and historical consciousness, which shaped neo-nationalism and a particular concept of exploitation, so typical in peripheral or semi-peripheral countries.

I. Workers and segmented workers' communities between political left and right in Hungary

Industrial capitalism began its trajectory in Hungary in the second half of 19th century, when feudalistic constraints over freedom of enterprising were abolished. The ensuing half century of liberal capitalism brought with itself spectacular growth and created a modern society composed of workers, capitalists, entrepreneurs, and growing middle classes out of the dominantly rural society of pre-industrial Hungary. Marxism, and the blueprint of intertwining social democratic party and trade unions were imported from Germany by emissaries of the Workers Internationals and by wandering journeymen, who gained experience of the German workers' movement during their travels. The trajectory towards cross-class coalition style welfare state oriented social democratic movement had been disrupted by the tragic events of WWI and the subsequent brief Communist regime, which was supported by the social democratic party. After the aborted socialist revolution in 1919, the social democratic party was closed into the strata of urbanized working classes, without the chance to develop welfare statist cross-class coalition (Sipos 1988). As Gyula Rézler (1938) demonstrated first, as a consequence, a segmented workers society had consolidated instead of having a socialist party dominated one working class culture. Mark Pittaway's studies well demonstrated the different political orientation of the different subgroups of worker communities (Pittaway 2012). One segment was the strata of urban workers, for whom the intertwined world of unions and social democratic party ensured a socialist oriented pillarized community within society. The second segment was composed of workers living in rural dwellings and employed by paternalistic employers, whose views could be characterized as conservative right-wing Christian nationalism. Finally, closely knit workers communities in industrial dwellings, like miners in Tatabánya, were open to radical social ideologies, be revolutionary socialism or social nationalism in the form of the Arrow Cross movement, the most important Hungarian national socialist party (Pittaway 2012).

After the Second World War, the newly established Communist regime attempted to impose a militant, left-wing class-consciousness from above on the reluctant workers.

Pittaway well demonstrates how this policy met the resistance of a workers, which was segmented along skills, age, gender, workplace, living place and indeed, along different political cultures and political orientations. The revolution of 1956, however, forced the Communist regime to make a compromise with workers, especially with the skilled workers elite and develop a new party policy towards labor (Pittaway 2014, Földes 1989, Bartha 2013). The essence of this policy was to ensure ever-increasing standard of level, provide for proper housing and education, and by enabling upward mobility. A new workplace policy was introduced, which respected the traditional elite position of skilled workers within the hierarchy of workers (Pittaway 2014).

The concept that the working class was a unified revolutionary force and it was the ruling class under socialism was central to the legitimizing ideology of the ruling Communist regime. Therefore, research on the workers was a sensitive field of ideology, and any scholar who violated the axiom, risked his or her academic career in socialist countries. To mention one famous example: Miklós Haraszti's manuscript, which was published in 1978 under the title *A Worker in the Workers' State* received a wide international publicity. However, it was enough to provoke a trial against the author because he claimed no less than that workers are exploited to the same effect under "actually existing" socialism as under capitalism, moreover, workers are very much conscious of their exploitation. Even though at the trial it was argued that workers actually give similar answers to sociologists, the trial showed the limits of the regime's tolerance. Thus research on workers was limited to lifestyle and satisfaction with the standard of living; workers' political opinions were monitored by party functionaries.

The fieldwork of István Kemény, before he was forced to immigrate, showed that the industrial working class was not homogenous either in its social composition or in its culture, and stratification manifests itself even the division of labor: commuting workers, who are usually less qualified than their native urban counterparts, occupy lower ranks in production hierarchy and specialists, who often come from traditional workers dynasties, monopolize the posts of functionaries, foremen and other key positions in production. Kemény (1990) called the attention not only to the fact that there is a great variety in workers life but also to the fact that there is a huge variation concerning other factors: e.g. the access to resources, relation to work, motivation, perspective, education, upward

social and occupational mobility, and social-political consciousness. Indeed, Földes (1989) and Pittaway (2014) argue that the urban, skilled workers were the basis of the social support for the party, and the party sought to win over primarily this stratum of workers.

There was also a rich literature of industrial sociology during the socialist period, which dealt with the role, strategies and bargaining power of workers in production. An early survey was conducted by Lajos Héthy and Csaba Makó in the Rába factory (Héthy-Makó 1975) on workers and automation. This survey also contained questions about the workers' trust in enterprise democracy, trade union, and even in the party itself. It is perhaps not surprising that workers were less satisfied with the trade union than with the party, nor did they hold enterprise democracy to be a participatory one. They in fact thought that they don't have much say in enterprise decisions. But the majority likewise argued that they can't influence even their immediate environment: only one third of the respondents thought that the management is interested in the proposals and innovations of the workers and less than one third agreed with the statement that the enterprise takes an interest in the welfare of the employees. This opinion continued to prevail among the older generation of Rába workers whom Bartha interviewed between 2002 and 2004 (Bartha 2011): many of them claimed that workers were only seen as part of the machines. It is worth recalling that the Red Star Tractor Factory, where Haraszti worked was also part of Rába at that time and he found the same phenomena. In several other works Makó and Héthy demonstrated that there was a wage bargain between the core highly skilled workers and the management; this well demonstrated the survival of the old hierarchies, which Communists sought to disrupt (see. e.g. Héthy-Makó 1976, Héthy-Makó 1978) according to the work of Pittaway (2014).

Albeit she did not study working-class communities directly, Erzsébet Szalai had an important insight into the political orientation of the workers under the Kádár regime. From the end of the 1970s, the regime encountered substantial financial difficulties and it made new and new concessions to the market to enable workers to supplement their income through extra work as small-scale entrepreneurs. The consequence of these multiple liberalizations was a newly emerging stratification between those who had access to the limited private economy and those, who had not and the increasing

individualization of life strategies of workers. Szalai observed the rise of a new individualism among the workers already in the mid 1980s (Szalai 1986). To this we would add that the lack of the credibility of the socialist ideology as observed by Bartha (2013). Thus, the conditions of socialism made workers ready to accept the return to capitalism (Szalai 2004), when global political changes allowed. Individualization of life strategies have had a lasting impact on workplaces, and shaped the post-socialist societal system as rendered organization efforts of unions almost impossible, save few local cases after the collapse of compulsory unionism of the socialist regime (Tóth 2000).

After the change of regimes, the post-socialist crisis and the destruction of state socialist industrial model, including the life time employment security had disrupted the earlier security of socialist regimes. Anthropologists studying workers in Central and Eastern Europe, indeed, argued that the workers became the new subaltern class (Kideckel 2002; 2008; Buchowski 2001; Kalb 2009; Kalb and Halmai 2011). While subalternity was used by Rudolph Bahro (1977) to explain workers' location at the bottom of a knowledge-based division of labor in socialism,⁵ the transformation of socialist political economies to market economy have deepened the subalternization of labor according to this stream of authors. Indeed, there was not so much research done on workers after the transition. It is in this direction to which seek to contribute this paper by exploring why workers are attracted towards the radical right.

Győr-Moson-Sopron county, where the interviews were conducted, encompasses the region Kisalföld, which is traditionally renowned for its land and good agriculture products. The region has been traditionally a stronghold for the right because the short-lived People's Republic in 1919 left a traumatic memory of the red terror. Later, during the Communist times, the collectivization campaigns caused much suffering because many smallholders lived in the region. In addition, many of the people interviewed come from families, who lived in the neighboring villages (the so-called worker-peasants), whose parents were seen as "difficult to be organized" and "backward" by the reports of the party functionaries during the socialist period (Bartha 2013). Most of the interview

⁵ See also Konrád and Szelényi (1979).

partners worked for one large multinational company; the others worked for subcontractors. They were all organized, skilled workers, most of them below 40. They were all male because the industry is still male-dominated. Many worked as shop stewards and some as trade union leaders.

Before getting to the interviews, it is worth noting that quantitative research found that the right wing party FIDESZ and the radical right-wing party Jobbik were over-represented in the workers quarters of Budapest in the parliamentary elections of 2010 (Ignácz-Szabó 2014) which suggests that our results are not necessarily idiosyncratic.

To start with the end: workers' political opinions varied but those who expressed leftist political leanings are constituted a minority among our interview partners. The majority actually expressed right wing political orientation. They even wondered why workers and trade unions should vote for the left. Most of them said that they supported FIDESZ, the mainstream right-wing conservative party at the election of 2010 but they would also argue that they got disappointed with this party during the past years. While only a minority admitted explicitly that they sympathize with Jobbik, the radical-right wing party, other answers suggested that in fact, Jobbik would be the choice of many of them for a new election. According to one trade union leader, one third of the employees of the plant would vote for the right, one third for the left and one third for the radical right. He, however, was also reluctant to refer to Jobbik as radical right; firstly he said, the last third voted "otherwise". As he later admitted, he also sympathized with Jobbik after he got disappointed with FIDESZ.

During the processing of the interviews we sought to answer two basic questions. Firstly, we asked why the left has lost its appeal among people, who can be seen as opinion leaders in their social stratum and also at the workplace. Secondly, and more analytically, we seek to map what are the main common elements of a right-wing neo-nationalist political discourse among workers.

II. The overview of interviews

To be sure, many of our interview partners identified themselves as workers, albeit they all agreed that the prestige of the blue-collar workers were lower than that of the white-collar employees and engineers. In their eye the undue wage differential was

seen as particularly unjust, especially between highly skilled good workers, as they considered themselves to belong to this group and that of young freshly trained engineers, who first saw modern machines entering into the factory.

This criticism of unjust inequalities and perception of exploitation, however, failed to translate into a left-wing political discourse; instead, the radical right-wing, neonationalistic discourses and ideologies were preferred by the majority of our interview partners.

One of the reasons is the rejection of the political left due to bitter memories of the fifties, the period of high Stalinism in Hungary. In the region many workers came from peasant families, which suffered heavily during the forced and brutal collectivization campaigns of the Communist Party. These family histories obviously contributed to the anti-Communist stance of the speaker. Thus, many family histories were explicitly constructed around the grievances, which the family suffered under Communism. One of our interview partners complained that the life of his family and also his personal career was wrecked by the repressions after the 1956 revolution. His father participated in the revolution and as a consequence, he a decade later could not go to university to study despite his good marks, but had to go to work as a worker. An apparently energetic and hard-working man, the interview partner later recouped this disadvantage, but the bitter memory of this discrimination is the key organizing experience of him as far as political choices are concerned. Thus, despite the fact that he even became the member of the Communist Party during the socialist regime, he harbours staunch anti-communist sentiments and is voting for the most radical anti-communist right wing political force.

It should be noted that in this age group (mostly below 40) mainly the grievances were listed when they spoke about the socialist past. While in the previous research (Bartha 2011) workers would recognize some aspects of the Kádár regime, which were good, or express an explicit desire for its return, in this research Kádár-nostalgia was altogether dismissed by our interview partners. The “workerist” ideology of the Communist party was equated with the discredited legitimating ideology, and workers made a conscious effort to distance themselves from the past regime. We can draw a clear

parallel with Erzsébet Szalai (2011), who found that many radical right wing activists had grandparents, who – according to the constructed family histories – have suffered repression from the left-wing political power. The common findings suggest that family histories can be decisive in the development of political sympathies even in the second and third generation. It is, however, important to point out the inconsistency in the narratives. For some reason (that will be discussed later) workers chose the grievances to stress even in situations when the family obviously made also good experience with the Kádár regime during the late sixties onwards. Family histories were thus consciously constructed solely around the grievances and losses that the family suffered during the Communist times:

“I was young when the regime changed but I consider its impacts very positive. You may not believe but I belonged to an ethnicity, which was considered to be unreliable, my father was a Croat, and he could not even become a soldier, and my teachers knew this very well, they belonged to a different camp, they followed different principles and they made me feel that you don’t belong to us, well, after the change of regimes their attitude to me has changed as well. And that’s why I think that the change of regime was a good thing that happened, it was needed and it had many positive impacts.” (Tamás, 32, skilled worker).

“I come from a Catholic family, if I vote for the socialists that would imply my exclusion from the family. I would never ever vote for a socialist, this is something that I would never change. I vote for FIDESZ. There are many things I don’t like, for example that they distribute wealth among their friend and clientele but I think that all parties are doing this. It will always be the same that we distribute the money among our friends. However, I am convinced that they also do something exemplary because the foreign countries are paying attention to what is going on in Hungary and the visit of Merkel and Putin proves that our politics is well received abroad.” (Mátyás, 37, skilled worker).

“I am trying to pick up from every party’s programme what is good for the workers and I am trying to balance the things but if you would talk to my brother-in-laws – my wife comes from a very Catholic family – than you would only hear of Communist bastards and the horrible crimes that they committed when in power.”

(Zsolt, 40, skilled worker)

“The Gyurcsány-speech [the “lie-speech”]⁶ would have never ever come to light in the past regime because he said it in a completely narrow circle. At that time when the communist regime built up its nomenklatura, its terror system, it organized the whole public life, everyone was persecuted, everyone had to belong to somewhere, to the socialist regime, to the camp, to the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party because there was only one party, the ever-lasting, you could not support anything else, then we have to accept that if you wanted to achieve anything in that regime, you had to be a member of the party or at least sympathize with the left. That’s why it had such a wide support. Those times won’t pass...there still exist mammoths, who keep in life this dead theory that the socialist party would again have a great social support – no, this would never happen because the Soviet brothers cant intervene as they did in 1956. I would never ever vote for the socialists because they caused so much bitterness and sadness to my family, this regime deported them to Czechoslovakia, if it were up to me, I would deport them to the moon. “

(Zsombor, 39, skilled worker)

Another explanation for the loss of appeal of the political left can be traced back to the association of the reformed moderate left (the Hungarian Socialist Party) with the discredited state socialist regime. Since 1989 there has been a massive ideological war

⁶ The speech of 2006 is also nicknamed as the „lie-speech” since the Prime Minister admitted that during the electoral campaign his party cheated the electors. This speech largely contributed to the loss of legitimacy of his government.

around the nature of state socialism; both MSZP (MSZP, the Socialist Party) and FIDESZ considered the history of the past regime as a contested ideological terrain for the forthcoming elections. Thus, there was a massive ideological campaign to connect the reformed socialist party to the discredited socialist regime in the media. This campaign heavily contributed to the general belief that the current leaders of moderate socialist party leaders were direct heirs of the hated Stalinist leader, Rákosi and the ÁVH, the secret police. Those, who openly admitted their sympathy with Jobbik would typically argue that the change of regimes did not bring real changes in the composition of the political elite and that a revolution would have been needed to sweep out the hated Communists from power. The criminalization of post-socialist moderate left thus further nourished anti-Communist and anti-socialist sentiments and increased the appeal of Jobbik, which advertises itself as the “corruption-free, clean” political force.

“Both of my parents were shop stewards and they were very active in the trade union. I remember the stamps and the money that they collected for the newly born babies...since I am also active in the trade union, I frequently talk with my mother about the old times. It is interesting that even though I am not young, I know this period only from my readings...my family did not talk of politics, they were not members of the party, they would only discuss the things of the trade union...I really don't know anything of what was going in the past regime, only from readings....Kádár and the politics – these were taboo topics in our family or I did not pay attention when they would talk of these things. That's why I am happy that this new project is going to start with IG Metall because I only learn the past of trade unions from this project. There was this classical demagogy that it was better in the past regime because we could go on holiday twice a year. The holiday resorts of the trade unions, two week at Balatonfenyves, this was always planned well in advance and we went there every year.”

(Károly, 42, skilled worker)

While the Kádár regime received an ambiguous evaluation from the older workers who had work experience under socialism, in an earlier research (Bartha 2013), in the eye of

the younger workers in this research, it was the era of a dictatorship, which could not even provide them with the moderate standard of living. Thanks to the growing consumption, they experienced better standard of living and could have the modern goods, like cell phones, better cars, full shelves in the supermarkets, etc. than did their parents. Thus, “Communism” was often dismissed alongside the moderate political left as a regime, which only brought impoverishment and political tyranny. This explanation was frequently evoked to justify their right-wing political leaning:

“My mother still thinks that life was easier in the past regime but I think that the needs were much lower at that time. My uncle, who was a college teacher, had a telephone, and we all thought that it was a very big thing...In my view the past regime was unsustainable. A black car could always stop in front of your house and take you away. Now, those, who don't need to fear anymore are satisfied with the change of regimes, those, who lost their former power, complain...I think that the politics is the same today as it was in the past regime. They [the Communists] trained a new generation of politicians. In the past regime everything was decided on an ideological basis. Now politicians change if new winds are blowing...

I think that the present system is freer, I can go wherever I want to, I don't need to register, if I want to go to Austria, I can do that, no one asks me stupid questions – the world has opened up. In my view the change of regimes was really a must. ”

(Károly, 42, skilled worker)

“I see socialism as an artificial society. In '79 I migrated from Hungary although I came from a cadre family, on one side of the family everyone was ardent Communists. An average Swiss worker did the job for which 3-4 people were needed in Hungary, it was an artificial society...but there was solidarity, they supported culture, at the workplace you got less reprimand than nowadays although if you did not want to join KISZ (communist young organization – BA-TA) or the party, you were sometimes blackmailed.

It was not change of regimes, I don't call it that way. It was only a change of methods. Because it was very far from a real systemic change. The same nomenklatura survived, in a different cloth or their children – this is the story. The transfer of political and economic power within families and interest groups. This is just the change of methods.”

(István, 54, skilled worker)

The argument that the Communist elite succeeded to preserve its political and economic power was also frequently used in the interviews that Bartha conducted between 2002 and 2004 (Bartha 2011). Thus, leaders of the moderate left are portrayed both as “ideologically committed” politicians responsible for collectivization and nationalization (the taking away of the property from small peasantry) and as a modern plundering political elite, which serves foreign interests and sells the country to the multinational companies. While the propaganda of FIDESZ often depicts the Socialist Party as the “enemy” of Hungarians, the supporters of Jobbik would typically argue that Fidesz is also penetrated by former Communists or is anyway corrupt and Jobbik is the only clean force, which represents true Hungarian interests. In this discourse, nationalism is not only the panacea of “imagined community” for the “little” man suffering from injustices, but a powerful mobilizing word-view combatting perceived exploitation by foreign multinationals and financial circles. The topic of exploitation came up in the interviews in relation to the huge wage differentials in the Hungarian subsidiary compared to the German headquarters of the same firm. Interview partners viewed this as exploitation as the multinational company pays considerably more in Germany than in Hungary for less working hours. Neo-nationalism for them is a means of expressing their grievances: it offers a language and symbols through which workers can voice their dissatisfaction with their lower wages. Thus despite the fact that they all stressed that the multinational company treats them better than the domestic enterprises, and some added that no one forced them to work for a multinational company, they expressed discontent because of the wide wage gap between the Hungarian subsidiary and the wage level at the headquarters of the company.

Another explanation that we offer for the workers' right-wing leaning is more hidden and this is the loss of the set of the symbolic tools of the left, which could address everyday, face-to-face grievances at the workplace and in life. One of the reasons for this loss of credibility is the embracement of neo-liberal, pro-market economy practices and stabilization policies enacted by the last socialist government in wake of the credit crunch, while the political right opted for rejecting these measures and defending the welfare state. Corruption scandals further eroded the credibility of the left. The former Communist elite lost its legitimacy and moral stance; and indeed, the alleged corruption of the old-new political nomenklatura was frequently evoked to justify why workers turned away from the political parties of 1989. There is a clear perception that something is wrong with the moral order of the postsocialist arena: the Gyurcsány-speech was frequently recalled in this respect as evidence of the moral decline of the old left. One can, indeed, argue that the left has lost *both* its symbolic language and its moral respectability – this went so far that workers were actually ashamed to admit that they voted for MSZP and this was markedly different in the previous research conducted in early 2000.

Thus, after that socialist world explanations lost their relevance and credibility for workers, the MSZP failed to consolidate a new social-democratic image, which could be attractive. Thus, our interview partners do not see the reason to return to the discredited political left, which is associated both with the criminalized system of Communism and the selling out of Hungary to the foreign capital and embracing neo-liberal policies, which fail to address their own grievances. This disappointment is exploited by the mainstream and radical right, which strongly condemns both liberalism, neo-liberalism and promises to end exploitation by foreign capital.

Thus, in our explanation for the workers' turning away from the political left we combine economic and cultural factors with family background. We stress the importance of the family background and the particular political-cultural milieu, conditioned by bitter historical experiences, which our interview partners have recalled. In this respect it is an important factor that the grievances were suffered by the families during Communism, especially in the high Stalinist period, and they consequently developed a "victim" narrative. This is one of the main messages of the radical right, which promises to restore

pride through nationalism as well as to end exploitation by foreign companies. Thus, the demand for more social justice, welfare state and the restoration of what had been the essentially (or traditionally) left-wing political values were channeled into a form of neo-nationalistic discourse expressed by the radical right:

“I don’t think that it was a good thing that we sold the whole country. We had milling industry, meat industry, shoe factories, we sold everything to the foreigners and now we are buying agricultural products from abroad. Why do we produce cars when this is an agricultural country? Why do we produce rape for the Austrians? Why not wheat for Hungarians? This is what annoys me in the change of regimes. This can only be solved like in World War II. To destroy everything and to reconstruct everything. Otherwise I don’t see a way out. “

(Tamás, 32, skilled worker).

“I think that the 45-50 years what the Russians spent here, provided for a contra-selection of the people. Servile people were promoted everywhere and today it is the same. You cannot stand up for your rights because you will be kicked out tomorrow. This Eastern part has been very much degraded. Self-determination, self-knowledge – zero. They don’t know their past, what symbols they have, what they should be proud of.

Our friend, Viktor, is trying to build a bourgeois Hungary and his father was amongst those, who exterminated the bourgeoisie. We don’t have a native bourgeoisie, there are only workers in Hungary, or leaders who come from the working class. But the real working class has no real future in Hungary until we don’t have a strong industry of Hungarian capital. Or Hungarian agriculture...While we serve the West in these multinational companies, we cannot speak of workers, we can only speak of a society of slaves. And now you are talking to one of these slaves [he laughs].

(Tibor, 56, former engineer, skilled worker)

The extent of the loss of the left' symbolic capital is best shown by their efforts to distance trade unions from their left-wing heritage. Here we can see that shop stewards and trade union leaders make conscious efforts to distinguish themselves from the political left, and assume an independence from all political forces, while they personally rather sympathize with the right or the radical right.

We have to note, however that people can often hold simultaneously completely contradictory views: most of the interview partners argued that workers are exploited while recognizing that they earn well above the Hungarian average. Neo-nationalistic views were sometimes presented alongside the explicit praise of the German discipline and work ethos:

“I would never go abroad. I think that you should earn your money in the country, where you live. You can make money everywhere. If you don't have the right education or training, you have to go after it and gain it. It is not true that people don't have opportunities. You have to have the will and then you can solve everything.

I don't think that Jobbik gets to power because there are lobby interests here, which would not allow that a multi would leave the country. Whose interest is to produce 30,000 unemployed, only in our town? And the rhetoric of the Jobbik is that multies should go home. Because they are not needed. Of course they are needed. They maintain Hungary's economy. Alone our company produces 7% of the Hungarian GDP. The best is when one of our colleagues start to complain how much he hates the multies. Then why did he come to work for us? The money is good. This is a Hungarian custom. We always have to hate somebody, we are never satisfied with what we have, even the good is bad but I accept the money. Hungarians like complaining. They complain about their shifts but they have been working in the same shift for 12 years... we socialized in this culture. I was very surprised how the Germans are talking. They have such a positive energy that it is unbelievable. Hungarians are always complaining while the Germans are working without a word of complaint.

I think that there is a great difference between the attitudes. Are you satisfied? No. What do you do to improve your situation? Nothing. I never understand when I see a poor

family with 6 children at the Great Plain and they complain that they need support that why on earth they don't do something to improve their situation. There is work here. You only have to come here. Even in Germany people often travel 200 km in order to be able to work.

I believe in what I can do myself. I think that if something is wrong in my environment, then I will change it. If I am not satisfied with what I have, I am trying to change it so that I can have enough. I like to be successful. Money does not interest me so much, I like to be successful in what I am doing. This is what drives me.

(Csaba, 37, skilled worker)

As we can see from the above citation, the enterprise, and indeed the post-socialist culture strongly supports the image of the “self-made man”, and indeed, this image palpably influenced the self-evaluation of the interviewed workers. This is another element of the empowerment, which *could* be channeled into a leftist discourse; however, given the overall loss of the symbolic capital of the political left, the reasons of which we explained above, criticism will be part and parcel of an essentially right-wing owned nationalist political discourse:

“I would not go abroad. What happens if everyone leaves, who is fighting for his Hungarianness and is Hungarian? The end will be that we continue Trianon and eradicate Hungary from the map? We have to struggle here, and we have to live from what we have – we have to change things here. I would find it very hard to cope with homesickness.

(Károly, 42, skilled worker)

It should be noted that Károly identified himself as a staunch person, who devoted himself to fighting against injustices and worked hard as a shop steward to organize a trade union independent of the influence of political parties:

When I encountered any injustice, I tried to voice it and change it. I was always an organized worker in this plant. I did not agree with the former alliance to which we belonged and I resigned my membership. Then a guy came from the independent trade union and said that you have to belong to somewhere and I said that OK, then I will belong to you. It is interesting because there was a football game, which was organized by the Austrian trade union, and that's why I joined. And ever since I am a member here. I worked in the Motor Plant – the assembly shops employ the highest number of people. There are 100-120 people in one shift. I saw that people don't dare to stand up for their rights, they are afraid that they can lose their jobs. I was not afraid because I thought that as a tool maker I can find a job anytime – so I had a bigger mouth. I spent 11,5 years in the assembly shop and I saw that people were already afraid at that time, in the beginning of the 2000s that you should not stand up because if you lose the job, you won't find a new one where you can make this money, the family needs the money, etc. I was surprised that they are so silent. When I started the organization in the assembly shop, it was 18-20%. I talked to the colleagues, I asked, what is the problem and it turned out that they would like to tell it but only to one person and not to the boss. So I thought that labor representation is needed. I asked the chair and I was elected to be shop steward. In one year I increased union organization to 80% in the assembly shop. I came to the shop one hour before my shift so I could talk to everybody and then waited for the next shift. Where I saw that there is interest, I encouraged the person to elect himself to be a shop steward. This is how my career started. Even today I like talking to people although now I have less time for it...

Our organization is independent of political parties. We are making politics but we are completely independent. I never understood how a trade union can support a political party. We never examined, never asked where do you belong because the workers have only one interest. They want to make the most money by the least work. We all have our

own political views but we know that we have only one way to follow. When I vote, I always examine how the workers' situation changed under a given government.

(Károly, 42, skilled worker)

Others explicitly argued that the belief that trade unions were controlled by the political left, held back many workers from joining the union:

“In my view the left could not defend the interests that the workers expected. There was a welfare model which they connected with the left, then things changed and now we cannot connect this model with it. I think that today's labor interest representation – if I look at the big alliances – is characterized by corruption, mutual hatred, constant money-grubbing and chaos – this is the present state of labor representation. They wasted money on stupidities, and now when the cash-box is empty then they complain that they cannot preserve even their capital because they ran out of reserves. When a Vasas officer can only talk about the lack of money and the little trade unions only vegetate because they are afraid of joining the large alliances because they just waste their money...A trade union should defend the interests of the members but the daily work of the large alliances is completely different. That's why we don't belong anywhere. We are an independent trade union...We can address the people, even those, who were never members of any trade union. Because people are skeptical. But we focus on the actual labor interest representation, we are credible and our membership increases. So we are doing something really well... If a worker is satisfied with whatever he has then he is working well. And then it is all the same if he is cheap or not. Our plant would not move even if the directors wanted it because they built up such a base of knowledge here. People are well paid, they are satisfied and they work effectively. We provide the whole world with motors and we achieved this by being the best.

Our membership represents everybody. The leaders cannot commit themselves to a political party. We won't belong anywhere, that is sure. That would be a great breach like religion. It is all the same, who is in power, if his decisions violate our interests, we

have to stand up for our rights. I don't think that it is a good idea that I make a pact with the government and I am waiting for its support. Because then I have to support laws and regulations, which are otherwise harmful for our interests. I don't think that it is a good idea for trade union leaders to express their political sympathies.

(Csaba, 37, skilled worker)

“How the trade unions started – we discussed this today. The change of regimes, communism after 1945, people were forced into various organizations, and they [the communists] completely took over the control over the trade unions, which was not trade union, everyone knows this because there was no labor interest whatsoever, those, who worked well, could go on holiday. My grandmother...their land was nationalized, I explain with this that even today people don't trust the trade unions because they don't feel that they do something for them. Do they want only the positions or do they want to represent the workers adequately? Our trade union works well but I would not trust another union even myself...Since they came from the old regime. Until they are in their place, there won't be well functioning trade union in Hungary.”

(Balázs, 28, skilled worker)

The leftist heritage was occasionally linked with the alleged “Jewishness” of trade unions, from which the workers also sought to distance “their” trade union:

“What is good about Jobbik? They are young, they say what people want to hear. They bring order. Taxation – dictatorship. The American model. I would also strengthen public safety, there is no public safety in Hungary, things have become so loose...and the other thing is that you can read of the strengthening of the trade unions' rights only in the program of Jobbik, and this is very positive. And the other thing: Jobbik will remove the trade union leaders, who made a pact with the political parties. They should be completely independent and they should represent only the workers' rights. Many people even today believe that all trade unions are Communist and Jewish – there would be a

chance to prove that it is not like that. Workers say that the trade unions were first established by the Jews, there are many Jews in the trade unions – such talks. They would also call me a Jew. If they knew that I am such an ardent Catholic...

(Károly, 42, skilled worker)

As we can see from the above, the criminalization of the moderate left alongside the loss of its moral capital effectively contributed to the rise of a neonationalistic discourse, where grievances are essentially interpreted as part and parcel of a national victimhood narrative. We have to stress that we don't believe in the solely economic explanations; in fact, we tried to show that why workers, whose grievances could have placed them at the political left, choose to support radical right-wing ideologies. We argued that the family and national victimhood narrative that they developed nicely fit in with the world explanations offered by the radical right; further, the latter could assume a moral stance, which the left had lost alongside its symbolic capital. Another element of the right-wing political ideology that we found is the anti-Roma discourse. While anti-Jewish sentiments were sometimes voiced in the previous research (Bartha 2011), the Roma issue was rarely mentioned. In 2015, however, overt problematization of the Roma population became very widespread and publicly voiced both in the interviews and in the focus groups. The "Roma question" was openly and frequently discussed, while concerning the Jews, a more rare and coded speech can be observed:

"I am deeply shocked by the manipulation of the masses, e.g. in the Doneck-basin 5000 civilians are murdered and no one gives a shit. Because this is the Western worldview and media manipulation, the media is controlled by the great lobbies, and they cannot afford to bring to light the real things, people are completely corrupted...the bombing of Dresden, no one cares, but if it serves the American-Israeli interests, they provoke an event from anything..."

I have many gypsy friends and also Jews despite the fact that I am a member of Jobbik...I call the cheating, lying white-skinned worker also gypsy, if he does not live and

act according to my norms. Otherwise there is a great problem with the gypsies. Communism had a very good, very beneficial provision: they gave work to everybody. When I was a trainee, we were full of gypsy unskilled laborers. There were many gypsies in the construction industry, brick factories employed only gypsies, many worked in cooperatives... then after 1989 they destroyed the Hungarian economy so that we should buy Western products, enrich the Westerners and the gypsies lost their formerly privileged position. Construction industry was demolished, large cooperatives were dissolved, agriculture was declining. And now the third generation of gypsies are growing up, who are dangerous for the Hungarian society. And as despair, unemployment and the loss of perspective increases, gypsy criminality increases, too. This is a social issue. An economic, social and political issue and no one does anything. Solution? We are not forced to buy Western and Slovakian and other products, we can also produce our own food. Krone Zucker Vienna. Why do we need sugar from Vienna? When we used to be one of the largest sugar producers of Europe. All gypsies could find work in agriculture if it were restored.

(István, 54, skilled worker)

It is a typical argument that the Roma cannot get integrated into the “Hungarian” society. Their culture prevents them from finding work and living like “decent” Hungarians. It is worth noting that even those who sympathized with FIDESZ shared the view that Roma people can be divided into a small layer, who are working “decently” and the large majority, who live from social and family subsidies and/or theft. The mental image of the Roma, who is unable to get integrated and won’t work were present in almost all interviews. The issue of Gipsy crime and welfare-dependence of gypsies is one of the main themes of Jobbik. For some of our interview partners, the Jobbik is the party which finally have the courage to speak out the “reality” and tell the truth, while the left is obfuscating the problem and let people alone with their problems.

It is a far-reaching debate to what extent workers identify themselves with the middle class – since the stratum whom we examined earns well above the Hungarian average, enjoys relative job safety and is even encouraged to have trade unions. It seems, however,

safe to argue that in the appeal of Jobbik there is a mix of the desire of a better, more just world, where hard work is more proportionally rewarded and the aspiration to clearly distinguish between the worthy working and the unworthy welfare dependent “lazy”, who therefore deserves no sympathy and social and material support from the society.

“The radical right always comes when there is a crisis and we can still feel the effects of the latest crisis...Hungarian nationalism, Hungarian sentiments...it is very easy to attract the people with nationalism. In the US there is no movie where you can't see a flag. It is easy to conquer people's heart with the nationalistic feelings....this patriotism works really well. And it is easy to appeal to the Hungarian youth with this nationalistic feeling...I think that Jobbik is becoming stronger and stronger, it is not sure that they are going to win but they have increasing chances...I don't want to scold the gypsies, but they would always come with this topic, you mentioned the Guard, they also targeted at the gypsies. They don't want to get integrated. My mother-in-law lives close to Miskolc, I see that they don't want to get integrated. They had enough time for that... Jobbik has an issue when they say that we arrange them. Subsidy, no work, the gypsy has no other choice but to burgle to the house of an old woman, kill her and steal her last 20,000 HUF. Jobbik says that we take revenge and people believe this...”

(Gyula, 33, skilled worker)

“I think that Jobbik and the gypsies are good friends because Jobbik would not have been in Parliament without the gypsies. I have my opinion of the gypsies because I never heard that a gypsy would have suffered an electric shock because he wanted to cultivate a garden but because he wanted to enter in order to steal from the peasants, who installed the electric wire. But in my view Jobbik... I would not expect them to be much stronger, they can never be such a determining force as FIDESZ. It is very easy to be in the opposition but if they would be in power, they likewise could not do anything with the Eastern part of the county. They want to get into the Parliament because then it would be their turn to steal. I think that the old friends distance themselves from the Guard because it is no longer PC. I think that they would be durably a parliamentary party but they

would never be a leading party because Brussels would never allow this. And Hungarian politics is dictated from Brussels. Hungary does not have a good foreign media now and this would be much worse if Jobbik would be in power. I don't consider them suitable to govern...they would not accept us abroad...this is what I think. They don't have such a professional guard, which could run and represent the country, solve the unsolvable problems."

(Zsolt, 40, skilled worker)

"There are moments when if you have a machine gun then you would shoot. In Olaszliszka I would – well, not shoot but I would have beaten the gypsies. What the gypsy kid learns first: to count the social subsidy. They give birth to 86 children because they make a living from their children. It is not that they love children but they would make a living from them. Sometimes you need fear.... It is enough that Jobbik is in the Parliament and the Guard is in the background so that the old woman...whatever she does, they will steal her last money. There is no window which they would not break, and they steal everything. Jobbik is needed, I only don't want them to govern.

(Mihály, 35, skilled worker)

„Gypsies are an eternal topic everywhere. I see good examples in Germany: the Turks. They could integrate into the German society, all men are working. They are there and they are working, and pay taxes. They could catch up with the more developed culture regardless of where they come from. I think that it is only a question of perspective that someone can go to work, and can get integrated. It is no excuse that I don't have education, I don't want to learn because I am gypsy. To this I say: Turks, integration, taxation, equal treatment, nothing else."

(Balázs, 28, skilled worker)

"I think that the gypsies don't want to get integrated. We don't need to decide what to do with them – they need to decide what they want to do with themselves. I saw a

report...about Roma integration, a Roma leader was invited and they don't have answers – Romas should be integrated, they love this term but there is no willingness, no matter what we do. The problem is that they constitute a layer, which is a problem everywhere. Their culture is such that they don't want to get integrated, they don't want to work. The best example. There is a gypsy in our assembly shop, he is seen as a role model because he is a gypsy and he is still working. He is still working! No one praises me that he is a Hungarian and still working decently. Until this wont change, and I don't see that any change is likely to come.... the gypsies themselves cannot solve this problem.”

Lajos, 30, skilled worker)

In my opinion there is a small part, which does not need to be integrated because they live normally. The rest is hopeless...Their culture is such that they don't want to live normally, you can see it on the 5-year-old kid that this culture is stronger than any other influence, they don't know work, they don't know that you have to work, they just parasite on the state and live from the social subsidies and they are consciously trying to give birth to sick children because then they get more money...”

Géza, 37, skilled worker

One can, indeed argue that the world of the workers is divided into the employed and the unemployed, especially Roma, and the latter – instead of evoking sympathy and solidarity – only serve as scapegoat for the high taxes and as violator of the moral world, where people get rewarded on the basis of their work. By engaging in an anti-Roma discourse, workers seem to demonstrate their respectability as wage earners.

Finally, it is worth noting that the interviewed persons expressed their aspiration for more order, less chaos and a more strong hand in political rule. Liberalism appeared almost as a curse word; most interview partners connected with corruption, and the selling of the country to foreign interests and allowing companies to treat their employees as bad as they want.

Conclusion

The major question of the research was why elite workers with secure position and „affluent” life are attracted by the radical right and how the nationalist sentiments and the perception of exploitation drove these workers to the right, why these subjective feelings are exploited by the radical right and not by the moderate left?

The historical overview demonstrated that in the prewar period, the social-democratic party was unable to solidify her position as the legitimate representative of a fairly unified working class. Rather, we can see the rise of segmented workers communities, with distinct political cultures. Only among the urban skilled workers we can demonstrate a pillarized segment of socialist culture underpinned by the twin presence of strong unions and political representation through the socialdemocratic party.

The socialist period further complicated the relationship between workers and the political left. Commuting peasant workers were alienated by the brutal collectivization efforts of the Communist state. The strata of urban skilled workers also experienced a lower standard of living during the high Stalinist period, when the Communist regime attempted to build a new working class. The compromise of the kádárist regime after the 1956 revolution had contributed substantially to the individualization of workers.

No wonder, that family history and life trajectories of the families of workers have conditioned their current political choices to a considerable extent. Bitter experiences in their family history related to the state socialist period are conditioning their attraction towards the right wing political forces. The present research also demonstrated that the delegitimization and criminalization of the moderate left has substantially contributed to the support of the radical right-wing party, Jobbik.

Secondly, we should consider the actual life experiences of respondents and their perception of fairness of the wider society and their position within the society. In this context, it is very important to take into account *the shift of perceptions of political left and right*, sometimes in the wake of dramatic effects of a crisis, to be able to explain the rapid rise of the radical right out of nothing, or at least from an outcast minority position to be a major popular political force with wide mass-

appeal, and how widely shared nationalistic or ethno-nationalistic sentiments and perceptions of exploitation become driver to develop sympathy towards a radical right political force. This approach allowed us to go beyond the structuralist (exploitation based) and culturalist explanations (the latter mainly viewing nationalism as a cultural code, which empowers the little man and provides for an ideal community with which he can identify).

Neo-nationalism for the little man is a means of voicing his/her grievances: it offers a language and symbols through which workers can express their dissatisfaction with their exploitation by the foreign capital. Thus, after the socialist world explanations lost their relevance and credibility for workers, the MSZP failed to consolidate a new social-democratic image, which could be attractive. Furthermore, the stabilization policies implemented after the credit crunch and the stigma of employing neo-liberal policies, accompanied by corruption scandals, have eroded the legitimacy of MSZP. Thus, our interview partners do not see the reason to return to the discredited political left, which is associated both with the criminalized regime of Stalinism and the selling out of Hungary to the foreign capital.

Finally, we should mention that nationalist sentiments, especially strong anti-Roma feelings and occasional rants against Jews also conditioned our respondents' attraction towards the radical right. The issue of "Gipsy crime" and "welfare-dependence of gypsies" are one of the main themes of Jobbik. For some of our interview partners, the Jobbik is the party, which finally has the courage to speak out the "truth" while the left is obfuscating the problem and is letting people alone with their problem. The liberal discourse of Roma emancipation is viewed as the concern of a highly educated middle-class strata living in exclusive areas far away from the Roma neighborhoods.

This leads to the issue of preferring the policy of strong state and law and order, which is connected to the rejection of neo-liberalism, or liberalism (see Bartha 2013). Liberalism appeared almost as a curse word; most interview partners connected with it corruption, and the selling of the country to foreign interests and allowing companies to treat their employees as bad as they want to.

The interconnection of these themes have created a strong appeal towards the radical right, which for many seems the only party, which is not plagued by corruption and the only party, which really expresses the concerns of hard working people and is finally “speaking out” the truth.

Ethnicity was, indeed, frequently evoked (mainly by contrasting Hungarians and Roma but some would contrast Hungarian with Jewish capital). Hungary’s social and political problems were often directly linked with the “Roma question”. Although very often the interview partners had no direct experience of living with Roma people, they all had overtly racist ideas of the Roma’s inability to integrate. We would argue that the evocation of Trianon, the great Hungary and Transsylvania were equally elements in this symbolic code of empowerment as the Roma issue. Workers felt a need to emphasize that they belonged to the “respected” members of the middle class – although their income was considerably lower than their Western counterparts. By participating in the majority discourse they could demonstrate that they were “still” respected members of society. It is worth stressing that while biases existed even before (Binder 2010), in the previous research the “Roma question” was not an issue for most of the interview partners. The importance of ethnicity clearly increased in the younger cohort of skilled workers – showing a further erosion of traditional, “old-fashioned” left-wing political values such as solidarity or universal emancipation.

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