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PhD Dissertation – Theses

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Satirical Magazines and Caricatures in Hungary and Germany 1919–1944

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Aims and Methods of the Research

My thesis focuses on the satirical magazines and the political cartoons published in newspapers during the Hungarian Horthy and Szálasi era, as well as the Weimar Republic and Third Reich. The importance of the thesis lies in the fact that only a few scientific papers deal with Hungarian satirical magazines of this time period, furthermore, with a few exceptions, the German journals are mostly unknown to Hungarian historiography. By processing and analyzing these sources we can get a new perspective to deepen our knowledge about this historical period, that was full of political, social, economical tensions and tragedies in both countries.

In the dissertation I used comparative methods, but also integrate a transnational approach by examining the cultural transfers between Hungarian and German caricature art, which processes were significant in both directions. Besides the similarities there are also differences between the satirical press of the two countries. I will draw attention to the reasons of these differences, looking at the general phenomena of press history and political history. The study is comparative in many ways: it not only compares the Hungarian and German tendencies, but also parallels the visual expression forms of different political directions, and lastly, it observes the caricature art of the earlier and later historical eras in order to put the period between 1919 and 1944 on a broader timeline. This helps us to understand, what influences shaped the above mentioned time frame, and how this period shaped the later periods.

In the course of my research of the satirical press I mainly focused on visual material along with supplementary texts, but also dealt with other textual content. The dissertation analyzes the complex iconography of the caricatures, presenting their frequently used symbols and topoi, describing their origins, and explaining what kind of political messages they sent to their readers.

During the research I considered three main topics which helped me to create the most important conclusions. These topics are the following:

1. Depiction of the enemy and the self

The interwar period and the years of World War II coincided with the expansion of political extremism. The far left and far right movements created their own satirical magazines, which were very keen on exposing their political enemies. In the meantime, the moderate magazines ridiculed extremism. Therefore, I examined how these journals depicted their political opponents, and, in parallel, how they defined themselves visually. I devoted great attention to the representation of the Jewish question, as it was a key aspect for many satirical magazines

and newspapers. I found Koselleck's theory of asymmetrical counter-concepts especially helpful to interpret these depictions of enemy and self: in my opinion many caricatures can be considered as a visual manifestation of these semantic counter-concepts (such as hellenes – barbarians and Übermensch – Untermensch).

2. Relationship between satirical press and authority

In this regard I will present how the journals related to the current state authorities, and what expectations and reflections those authorities had on the satirical press. The thesis examines the restrictions and legal actions against the journals, as well as the press regulations and the satire's reactions on them. In short, I give an overview of the opportunities and constraints of satire, and show the role of satirical press in the public political sphere.

3. Intermediality

The political parties of the era attached great importance to the propaganda cartoons. I will compare these political cartoons with the propaganda messages of other visual media, such as posters, movies and books of various political movements, examining the mechanism of propaganda and the satire's significance in it.

Sources

During the research I processed a total of 6 Hungarian and 15 German satirical magazines. These originated from Budapest, Berlin and München, and were the most significant ones of their era. Beside of these satirical magazines many more that existed I haven't dealt with, since most of those only appeared a few times. I also processed 6 Hungarian and 5 German political daily and weekly newspapers that published caricatures on a regular basis.

In some cases we cannot draw appropriate analogies between the journals of the two countries. so the systematic comparison is not always possible. For example, left wing satire didn't exist in printed media, while in Germany communist and social democratic satirical magazines (*Die Pleite, Der Knüppel, Eulenspiegel, Roter Pfeffer, Die Ente, Der wahre Jacob*) prospered until 1933. Another example: in Hungary a satirical magazine against anti-semitism called *Pesti Posta* could uniquely exist in 1944, despite the fact that press was dominated and controlled by right-wing extremists and the German occupants. I think it's important to deal with such anomalies too.

Both Hungary and Germany had their own long-standing satirical magazines, such as *Borsszem Jankó* and *Magyar Herkó Páter* in Hungary, or *Fliegende Blätter, Kladderadatsch, Lustige Blätter, Ulk, Simplicissimus* or *Satyr* in Germany. I found it interesting to observe how these magazines were transformed in these two and a half decades, how they tried to adapt to

changing conditions of the political climate (or how they failed to do so). Also a newly created Jewish satirical journal called *Az Ojság* informs us about these political changes and about the status of Jews in Hungary.

In Germany the Nazi Party had its own satirical magazine called *Die Brennessel*, and as well as the main national socialist newspapers that published satire (*Der Angriff*, *Völkischer Beobachter*, *Das Schwarze Korps*, *Der Stürmer*). My dissertation shows how the nazis used caricature as a propaganda tool both as an opposition party and as a governing party. *Der Stürmer* had its Hungarian replica since 1944, called *Harc*, which is a good example for cultural transfer. In Hungary since the Gömbös era also the press of governing parties used caricatures for propaganda purposes. I examined three pro-government newspapers (*Függetlenség*, *Uj Magyarország*, *Esti Ujság*) to see how government policy and propaganda changed over time, until the last phase of World War II. Besides the above mentioned journals I deal with further magazines that existed in the years of the war, such as *Rakéta* or *Drótkefe*, and also with the political cartoons of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party's newspapers (*Magyarország*, *Ősszertartás*). For the sake of temporal comparison I will mention satirical magazines that ceased already in the 19th century (*Füstölő*) and post-war era communist journals as well (*Frischer Wind*, *Ludas Matyi*).

In order to increase my understanding of the dissertation's main topic, I extended my research on several other sources. I overviewed how other type of newspapers and politicians reacted on satirical press (a couple examples on the latter: official records of parliamentary debates, diaries of Joseph Goebbels, Mihály Kolosváry-Borcsa's book about jewish question), or what contemporary caricaturist thought of these historical periods (for example the communist Jolán Szilágyi). I examined the relevant archival documents, for example files about the criminal cases connected to satirical magazines and caricatures (Budapest Capital City Archive, Bundesarchiv Berlin), and the censorship instructions of Goebbels (among documents of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, Bundesarchiv Koblenz) and the Hungarian Committee for Press Control. Also I studied every official regulations which had an impact on satirical press in some way. In the interest of intermediality, I give the reader an insight in the world of contemporary propaganda posters, movies and other publications containing elements.

Structure and Main Conclusions

The first chapter gives a basic introduction of the primary sources and discusses the methodology of the dissertation, moreover gives a press historical, political historical and

historiographical overview. The second chapter generally characterizes the satirical magazines and newspapers.

The third chapter deals with the criminal cases of magazines. These cases give us information about the enemy concepts of the magazines and their relationship to the authorities. Most of the cases were connected to defamatory notes and caricatures against politicians or representatives of state authority. Therefore I analyze the depictions of the politicians, especially the heads of state (Horthy, Ebert and Hindenburg – drawings of Hitler will be introduced in the fourth and fifth chapter).

The fourth chapter deals with the fascisation process in Hungary and Germany 1933–1939, examining the government's satirical press. My aim is to prove that the so called „dumping press” of Gyula Gömbös and István Antal deliberately used propaganda cartoons for promoting the government policy. These caricatures were not really comparable to the propaganda cartoons of totalitarian regimes, but rather to the drawings from traditional civic-minded satirical magazines. After the death of Gömbös the government's magazines used the same caricaturistic methods as before, but focused more and more on the Jewish question and they preferred anti-semitic expressions. The chapter also discusses how the satirical magazines of „Jewish press” reacted on anti-semitic government actions, how they ridiculed the enemy concept of the anti-semitic press, and how anti-Jewish laws affected them. I examine the situation in Germany as well: how the Nazi Party eliminated press freedom and took over control of satirical press step by step. I highlighted the similarities between Hungarian and German anti-Jewish actions.

Finally, the fifth chapter focuses on the role of satirical press as a propaganda tool in World War II. Censorship instructions regarding the caricatures are presented as well. I discuss the message of propaganda by mainly focusing the appearance of three motifs on the caricatures, connected to mythological stories: Atlas and the globe, Europe and the bull, as well as Adam and Eve in the (Soviet) Paradise. Besides I observe reactions on the enemy's propaganda messages, and also deal with propagandistic cultural transfers between Hungary and Germany, introducing the mediators of these transfers.

In the time-frame 1919–1944 the political authorities and their opposition used caricature in an increasingly purposeful manner, moreover they wanted more and more control over satirical press. The main task became delivering political messages instead of making the readers laugh. Caricature was an integral part of visual cultures represented by various political movements. Different political directions used the same allegories and topoi in many cases, but changing

their context. Self-depictions of the caricatures varied based on self-reflection capacities of the represented political direction. Motifs and political messages reused, rearranged several elements of the previous decades. The caricature art of the two countries have many similarities, especially relating to the World War II propaganda, thanks to cultural transfers. Sometimes the transferred elements transformed and adapted to the receiving system.

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