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"Signs of Times" – A Semiotic Content-Analysis of 'Apocalypticizing' Rhetoric on Hungarian Conspiracist Websites –

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Abstract. There is an ever stronger interconnection between various forms of social anxieties, be they religious, political, national or even environmental and online forms of expression. People's fears and resentments (along with hope) precipitate in mythical narratives structured on the ancient oppositions of Good and Evil. Apocalyptic rhetoric represents the most crystallized form of verbal warfare against the evil forces (mundane or supernatural). In the processes of secularization and globalization these narratives have somewhat lost their religious character, but at the same time penetrated new reaches of the Irrational, and impregnated many beliefs and ideologies, from academic and philosophic heights down to popular mythology and urban legends. The easiest way for ancient sacral stories of antagonisms to get into the modern narratives was through symbols, mainly purported by visual signs. Although anxieties have always been present, showing certain patterns of rise and decrease, the electronic media of the past century have definitely contributed both to the perpetuation of a higher tension and to the wide spreading of such story-bearing visual symbols. Today, the Internet offers an excellent hotbed for both processes mentioned above: not only through unidirectional web pages but also, or even better, through the self-organizing virtual net-communities. There are countless such groups, religious or ethno-political, each with its own symbolic iconography, but most of these signs are quasi universal, same as the stories they bear. I have chosen some Hungarian websites through which I wish to present these symbols and narratives at work, with a hint to their universal character.

Keywords: apocalypticizing rhetoric & iconography, conspiracy theory, alternative historicism, xenophobia, topical Internet communities

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Before reading a word, the reader may ask: why does the title appear in quotation marks? Those marks indicate a double meaning, the expression is intended to bear the original apocalyptic connotation of the term (the events and miracles that precede the End Times) but at the same time the words ironically refer to their primary, denotative sense (semiotic signs used in our times). This title is meant to express exactly what the paper will investigate, namely *Signs of Times* perceived and communicated by various online communities through the *signs of* (our) *times:* textual and visual emblems on the Internet.

The paper performs a semiotic content-interpretation of visual and textual elements and the apocalypticist rhetoric on some Hungarian conspiracist or radical right-wing websites—as part of my preparatory investigations for a longer research into the study of ideological web-semiotics and -rhetoric. The idea was born from a fortunate coincidence, where my main personal research interest in the field of apocalyptic studies has met my present work in the domain of contemporary communication studies. For the present investigation I have chosen some Hungarian web-sites and online communities formed around them (www.kuruc.info, www.bar!kad.hu, www.hunhir.hu, www.maghar.gportal.hu . . .) through which I wish to present the mentioned symbols and narratives at work, with a hint to their universal character.

In our everyday life we tend to think that apocalypticism is a long-extinct extreme religious mentality centered on some catastrophic end-of-the-world scenario. We usually suppose that people thought this way only very long ago, or even if some still do today, they are very few, or very far away, maybe somewhere in America, or in underdeveloped Muslim fundamentalist countries, even farther away . . . In any case: not now, not here—not among us.

In this paper however, I would like to show that neither is there any need to think of apocalypticism and apocalypticists in such extreme terms, nor should we place away such phenomena in the distant past or the indefinite elsewhere. As we will see, the core narrative of apocalyptic discourse survives in many variations and similarly does its symbolism, with its visual or textual elements adapting to the ever newer contexts and to the necessities of their users. In our specific case I investigate how such stories and images of apocalyptic origin are imported and converted in some radical Hungarian online communities.

My paper consists of two larger sections: a theoretical part and one of applied research, where the summoned theories are tested on empirical data through content analysis. Thus, the first chapter is dedicated to the definition of the necessary key-terms, crucial to the understanding of this phenomenon. After having discussed theoretical issues as social anxieties, mythical narratives, apocalyptic and "apocalypticizing" rhetoric, ethnic eschatology, conspiracy beliefs and cultural mistrust, I will turn to the presentation and analysis of the narratives and images of this Virtual Imperium. I will call the attention upon the visual

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transfer of ancient emblems through electronic media, as well as the topical online community formation and ritual deliberation of net-communities, and then a short conclusion will be drawn, with a proposal for further investigations.

There is an ever stronger interconnection between various forms of personal or social anxieties, be they religious, political, national or even environmental. Such anxieties have never been absent in history, but in certain periods they get amplified and tend to impregnate the whole society. Calendar turning points, periods of cultural changes, traumatic events, but above all times of perceived moral, religious, political, or economic crisis offer as many opportunities to worry. These crises, whether real or imagined, are accompanied—if not quite caused—by the fading or loss of fundamental values governing community life. If such critical periods get prolonged or acute, individual unrests may conglomerate into social turmoil, or possibly even war. However, not always does anxiety overwhelm the entire society: it often remains restricted to only a part of the given community. Vulnerable social layers, age groups, subcultures, various minorities, defeated, oppressed people usually feel more exposed and more threatened by either the existential circumstances or by the ruling/surrounding culture—that is, by the(ir) whole World itself.

Anxious individuals or communities may perceive any ill circumstances, events as concerted actions deliberately directed against them by overtly malevolent or occult forces. The case is somewhat similar to that of really threatened communities living under the pressure of fear caused by genuine persecution. There is no clear boundary however between the consecutive degrees of threatenedness and, within exposed communities, subjective perception of threat counts heavier than the objective presence or gravity of the threat itself. In most cases they are or feel powerless and defenceless in the face of the threatening forces. As Alan Hunt (1999) puts it, many interpretive traditions "identify anxieties that reveal the experience of powerlessness, helplessness and social disintegration as manifesting apprehension in the face of social change and a generalized fear of modernity" (2).

I wish to emphasize that for this study a clear difference is made between anxiety in general and social anxiety, with a stress on the latter. Social anxiety will be interpreted here primarily not as a psychological term, referring to a feeling surfacing in individuals or—on a larger scale—in communities, but as a term of social psychology, in the sense Hunt uses it in his essay *Anxiety and social explanation*: "Anxiety is a psychic condition of heightened sensitivity to some perceived threat, risk, peril or danger" with a distinction made "between individual anxiety and social anxiety. An individual anxiety has no social significance unless it is a shared or social anxiety and, additionally, it results in some discernible action by significant numbers" (1-2).

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Anxiety as social behavior normally shows up not through physical action but through verbal expression. It is this aspect our study will investigate, since this analysis does not seek the origins or causes of such anxieties, it just looks at the narratives produced and used by the concerned communities. In Hunt's terms, it focuses on what he might call "symbolic interpretive strategy," namely when a certain anxiety is analyzed as a symbolic expression of more pervasive social processes (8-9)—with an important difference however: this study does not investigate nor doubt the actual social roots or reasons for the anxieties, limiting the search rather to the typology of the symbolic language elements themselves.

Anxiety should not necessarily be considered as a setback, on the contrary: it is one of the fundamental drives governing human culture, and it is a highly creative force that plays a fundamental role in producing myths. People's fears and resentments contributing to the anxiety complex conglomerate (along with desire and hope) in cognitive constructions through symbolic rationalization of mythical narratives structured on the ancient oppositions of Good and Evil. These stressing sentiments along with a sense of helplessness project the solution of the perceived crisis into the spiritual realm, where myths of some idealized place or time, offer a virtual salvation backed by the satisfaction of vengeful fantasies targeting the enemy—without leading to physical outbursts of aggression (see Strozier and Boyd 5). Although far from being the (only) scope of their cultural function, such mythical narratives may provide paradigms for social actions, but more often they serve to channel uncontrollable emotions, by solving immanent human problems in the transcendence of the imaginary.

The archetypal good-bad opposition is a very productive mythologem—in that it can be found in actually all types of myths from cosmogonic and anthropogonic creation myths to eschatologic and apocalyptic visions. Antagonistic values are usually organized into dualistic structures that unfold in tales of conflict. Whether origin-narratives, or stories of heroic quest, or fantasies of some final battle, combat myths seem to present the patterns that sooth human concerns regarding the presence of evil in our world. In fact, as Edith Humphrey (1996) explains, these universally present Chaos-Order narratives are powerful tools to keep the surrounding world under control, rationalizing, on the one hand, the incomprehensible by grasping the evil through personalization; on the other hand, overcoming evil by annihilating it virtually through the works of symbolic imagination (5-6). Illness, misery, death, suffering, plague, misfortune, war and all other fearful phenomena are personified into monsters, demonic beings only to be defeated by always superior positive personifications of the life-supporting principles or forces (see Ricoeur 175-260, also Hankiss 204).

Combat myths are universal and somewhat natural atavistic expressions of human thinking working on binary categorizations. There is however a later

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development in this paradigm, generally referred to as Manichaeistic dualism,[1] which is a radicalization of the binary symbolic structures. While the combat myth remains central to such narrative, evil and good is no more restricted to certain personages but projected to the whole world that is seen in sheer black & white, everything being either good or bad—there is no middle way. The conflict seen in such terms—as Michael Barkun argues (133)—bears a tendency to view the world as a battleground between pure good and pure evil; and this absolutistic mentality is transposed into apocalypticism.

Apocalyptic is an answer of religious crisis communities typical for monotheism, where theoretically evil should not be a match for the One God. According to Stephen O'Leary (34), it has necessarily sprung out of the theodicy paradox uncomfortable in monotheistic traditions: if God is both willing and able to prevent evil, whence then is evil? In apocalyptic mentality the final resolution to the perceived tribulations or critical situation is postponed into the future, when all evil shall be wiped out and the perseverance of the few faithful will be rewarded by the Almighty.

Apocalyptic rhetoric represents the most crystallized form of verbal warfare against the evil forces. In apocalyptic narratives, since alienation results in the generalization of animosity towards the entire world, evil is no more restricted to the personifications of supernatural demonic powers, but surrounding mundane entities such as neighboring people, foreign nations, state authorities, ruling powers, or simply: the others are perceived as agents of Satan, consequently, as enemies. The rhetoric of apocalypses is thus often characterized by an undifferentiating animosity directed towards the others, and generally against the world, with an emphasis on self-victimization counterbalanced by a triumphalist discourse that reassures the faithful sufferers of God's (their) final victory over all enemies. There are several variations of apocalyptic discourse however, but interesting for us is that type which some authors describe with attributes as "paranoid style" (Werly 40) "tragic frame" (O'Leary 47) "pessimistic" (Brummett 59)—because this kind of approach was inherited by the modern conspiracism.

In the processes of secularization and globalization the apocalyptic narratives have lost something of their religious character, but at the same time penetrated new reaches of the Irrational, and impregnated many beliefs and ideologies, from academic and philosophic heights down to popular mythology and urban legends. The original salvage-message got transferred into the realm of ethnicity and politics, where—in lack of theology—it adopted peculiar nationalistic, social or economic teleology. Evil and enemy lost their transcendence, retreated in the here

[1] This kind of dualism is actually older than Manichaeism itself, originating from Zoroastrianism, but due to the fact that it has survived within Christianity through its ideas purported by similar Gnostic movements its name designates the characteristic type of antagonistic structure (see Culianu 170-176).

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and now. In case of major banes, such as social disorders, armed conflicts, or political repressions, the enemy is clearly visible, identifiable—thus it may be dealt with. In contrast, not so sharp historic moments or processes, economic breakdowns or social changes may lead to crises, where the cause or the foe is not so obviously recognizable. A state of social anxiety is thus generated, a sense of insecurity and unrest infecting certain, more vulnerable segments of society. In some cases, such anxieties may penetrate entire nations, countries or even whole cultures.

In disadvantaged or vulnerable groups' crisis-awareness backed by uncertainty there is a particular version of apocalyptic narratives circulating: conspiracy theory. In László Lakatos's brief formulation, the questions to be answered by it are the same as ever: "Why is there evil on Earth? The question is always the same—Why do bad things happen to us? And the answer is always the same—Because there are evil people who benefit from them" (1). But since these evil people are invisible, or better said unrecognizable, they constitute a very slippery enemy. As a consequence, people concerned about these issues are (see themselves as) virtually powerless victims, conscious of their continual threatenedness. American analyst Chip Berlet (2005) stresses the relation between the apocalyptic and conspiracism by pointing out the paranoid nature of the apocalyptic, which he believes underlies many conspiracy theories. He suggests that the paranoid style that describes conspiracism which distinctly identifies a scapegoat is related to the dualistic thinking promoted in the apocalyptic narrative. Dualistic thinking that is associated with an apocalyptic narrative "creates a dynamic that encourages the construction of conspiracy theories that blame a demonized and scapegoated 'other'" (21).

Still, conspiracist discourse is not to be identified with apocalyptic rhetoric (although they may often interfere). Not only because the first one lacks the transcendent dimension but also because it has no dénouement—it contains no consolatory message promising a solution to the present hardships. There is though an important similarity between the two modes: their revelatory nature—by being in the possession of ultimate truth both aim to unveil reality; but while the latter one offers a godly perspective, conspiracy theory only "unmasks" occult (but very worldly) machinations that secretly govern our life. Considering the basic differences and correspondences, I propose "*apocalypticizing rhetoric*" as a differentiating term for the language of conspiracism.

This apocalypticizing style may be characteristic of conspiracism and also of various radical nationalistic, political or ideological discourses related to that. Fundamentalist religious conservatives, radical right-wing leaders or ultraliberal activists alike may make use of it, each adapting it to its own messages and purposes. The most prolific hotbed for conspiracist discourse however is provided by nationalism. Radical and xenophobic forms of nationalism abound in conflict-narratives (usually pointed against the evil neighboring nations, immigrants, or

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alien enclaves, minorities within the body of nation) even without conspiracy theories. But completed with the all-suspecting rhetoric of conspiracism the extreme nationalism can have an even greater lure to frustrated individuals.

Concluding the theoretical premises we can see that social anxieties as well as individual frustrations in crisis circumstances create and circulate various chaos-order narratives explaining the origin, sense and termination of evil. Special among these narratives are (Jewish, Christian, Muslim) apocalyptic myths radicalizing the antagonism to the extremes, with a promise of total eradication of evil by godly intervention in a close but indefinite future. Finally, theories of conspiracy as products of modernity inherit the radical patterns of apocalypticism emptied of all transcendence, and adapt them through an "apocalypticizing rhetoric" to explain national, or political, or economic failures by suspecting an occult evil global conspiration and scapegoating given groups (see Barkun 16).

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Since both apocalypticism and conspiracism are studied primarily in Anglophone countries (and the majority of theoretical works cited comes from there) it seems challenging to test the theory on home-ground, checking the theses in local connotations. In the case of nationalist variations of conspiration-discourse a peculiar development occurs: transcendence is regained in an occult and contorted way. There is no need to detail how the idea of nation (as a supra-communal entity) has gradually gained a mystic connotation throughout the past centuries. As in the West, so in the Eastern part of Europe—though with certain delay—the national idea was unfolding, building up its own discourse from historical, mythical and—not last—religious narratives. A whole range of competing mundane ethnic eschatologies have formed especially in the multiethnic Central and Eastern Europe, and within it, the Hungarian narratives hold a distinct position.

Modern history has decisively shaped the self-image and neighbor-visions of the nations inhabiting the Eastern part of Europe. Every nation had or has traumatic periods of tribulation, defeats, losses, oppressions by the hands of the neighboring nations, or by Western/Eastern powers—and all that contributed to the formation of resentful and vindicative narratives to the detriment of the others. Hungarians are no exception in this respect, and the main lines of the narrative are comparable to those of the surrounding nations. Common elements of these narratives are historic mission-consciousness, chosen-messianism, origin-discourses, fate-discourses, and in the more extreme variations, a kind of paranoid mysticism evolved.

Thanks to its peculiar situation in Europe as a singular non-Indo-European ethnic group among the surrounding Germanic, Slavic, Romanic nations, and given its ruptured status due to twentieth century history, Hungarian discourse is even

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stranger among the other ultra-nationalist discourses. Emphasis must be laid upon the fact that radical Hungarian nationalist narrative-variations radically differ indeed from the mainline Hungarian national discourse, not only in their rhetorical style but first of all in their content, their message. In contrast to the official national discourse, radical variations show quite divert, even opposite standpoints regarding mainly (but not exclusively) history, linguistics and anthropology. Main issues of dissent are the origins and anthropological affiliations of Hungarians, the geographic significance of the Carpathian-basin, linguistic issues including writing, and of course, history—both early and modern. In radical narratives mythology and religion acquire a crucial importance (naturally at odds with mainline theses), since these provide the necessary mystical background of certain radical nationalist narratives. Parallel variations of historic, social, scientific theories are natural, but in the case of the referred radical quasi-religious narrative variants there are strong links to conspiracy theory and apocalypticism.

First, radical narratives seem to be both originated in and at the same time causing conspiracist discourse. This is most visible in the phenomenon of *cultural mistrust*—a deep-rooted suspicion against elites and written culture. According to some unrecognized historians, linguists and anthropologists, their alternative theories (competing with the official Finno-Ugric and the AD 896 settling theories) have always been neglected not because of academic consideration but because of political pressure (see the self-evaluation of Badiny Jós, Ipolyi, Kiss, Kiszely, Marácz, Padányi, Pap, Vámos-Tóth, Varga, Végvári et alia).[2] This view then is distorted and magnified in popular interpretation to a very complex conspiracy theory.

Cultural mistrust sees that during modern history the Habsburg governance, later a German influence, then Soviet and now EU interests have been covering actually some occult malevolent interference into history research, trying to break down, neutralize and distort Hungarian historic consciousness and self-knowledge. Ruling and intellectual elite has always been subservient to and manipulated by foreign powers—so it cannot be trusted, nor is it legitimate! Academic history and linguistics is at least suspect if not utterly false, only to blind and fool and humiliate and enslave the Hungarian people! This is the general suspicion, or better said conviction of many semi-cultured radical nationalists. It is important to highlight the semi-cultured nature (see Adorno) of the adepts of the conspiracy theories. They are neither illiterate, nor undereducated people. Usually they come from middle class, with a high-school or even college education background—and most of them are young.

[2] I do not refer explicitly to each of the mentioned authors' works. Their more significant ideas mentioned here and further on are contained in their representative works listed in bibliography.

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Beyond youth's already regular animosity towards the older generation, and the grounded accusation of ideological brainwashing of the past decades (for which the latter is held responsible), there is another source of suspicion and alienation among the younger generation: information technology development. Used to the Internet, digital natives—as Prensky (2001) calls this generation—do not lean any more on printed culture, which they perceive as monotonous and slow. They acquire information fast online, from a multitude of sources but at the same time very superficially and randomly, both from authentic and unreliable sources, the latter being the more frequent. In relation to our issue this phenomenon implies that radical nationalist discourse, being seductive mainly among younger people, goes hand in hand with a superficial knowledge being ever more characteristic to online communities. Thus, although not overtly expressed, there is a trend of suspicion against book-culture, seen as representing the official academic (that is: manipulated and manipulating) discourse on Hungarian history, language, geopolitics, as opposed to the alternative, underground (that is: trustworthy) hypotheses presenting the real story of Hungarians, hidden from us by conspirating malevolent forces, but revealed by the uncensorable independent radical nationalist websites. At the same time, it is not an irrelevant aspect that alternative histories appear much more interesting and more majestic than the one known from school-books.

On the other hand, regardless of the actual religiousness or atheism of radical nationalist narratives, a certain quasi-religious discourse is often characteristic of their rhetoric. Generally, mainline nationalist discourses ascribe an (over)emphasized historical and geopolitical importance to the Nation (whichever it may be). In radical narratives, this natural highlighted importance is often turned into a magnified mission-awareness: the particular nation or group has not only a central historical-geopolitical role, but it bears a sacred mission to save the world from some perceived evil—with or without the prospect of leading it gloriously ever after. We could see the most extreme cases of this paradigm in both extreme rightist and leftist ideologies of the last century leading to the Second World War and later to Cold War. This mindset, though modern in its appearance, has ancient and deeply religious provenance: the ideas of messianism and chosenness of Judaism and Christianity. Mystical trends of radical discourse often build their narratives on a transcendent conception according to which the ethnos bears a sacral mission throughout history—from its mysterious origins to some utopian future. It is a common development in modernity, especially within the frame of New Age occultism and Neo-Paganism (see Aryans, Druids, Zalmoxians, Rodnovery movements etc.), even under the wings of Christianity (often linked with a dispensationalist fundamentalism—see Barkun, *A Culture* 4-6). As such, it forms an organic unity with conspiracy theory, which assures the image of the enemy to overcome: found in a xenophobic view of other nations or a paranoid vision of secret societies. This rather loose conglomerate of ideas still forms

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together a very coherent narrative of ethnic eschatology, in which the Nation will finally prevail over the evil and inferior Others.

This is the set in which Hungarian radical nationalist narratives are to be read. In the following lines I resume in brief the variations[3] that converge into a backbone of the plot constituting the ethnic eschatology. In regard to origins, as opposed to the official Uralic, Finno-Ugric version, Hungarians descend either from Proto-Asian people(s) and/or Sumerians, Huns, Scythians, Parthians, Sabirs (see Badiny Jós, Bobula, Kiszely, Pap) or—according to some newer theories—from primaeval Proto-European (Carpathian-Danubian) populations (Cser and Darai). Further on, the Hungarian language preserves the most ancient form of the original protolanguage in its perfection (see Kiss, Varga), and based upon the clear logical peculiarities of this language the Hungarian runic *rovás* was the first form of writing ever, from which all other alphabets later evolved (see Varga)—consequently this nation is the direct descendant of the prehistoric proto-culture, while other nations diverged and degenerated from it (see the Tamana-theory of Vámos-Tóth). Following this logic it should be no surprise that also the Hungarians were the originators and only perpetuators of the real (Parthian) "Pre-Christian Christianity". Jesus himself would have been a Parthian prince bringing the message of Light into the world, which was then spoiled by the "Jewish Bible" (see Badiny Jós). Against all odds, and being "Christianized" by force, Hungarians still have succeeded to save their creed by the mystical program of the Holy Crown and keep a sacral order in the Carpathian-basin through the past millennium (Pap). The sacral mission of Hungary—dedicated by its first king Saint Stephen to Mary the Virgin—has always been to serve as guardian of Light and Truth and to assure the spiritual bridge between East and West, at the same time warding off from the crucially central Carpathian area both the eastern intruding people and the western aggressive imperialist powers (see Balogh).

However firmly had it held its stance though, it could not resist to the plague from within: the infiltrated *foreign-hearted* people, Germans, Slavs, Walachians, Jews, Gypsies and other newcomers have spoiled the Hungarian nation. Inner subversion, outer invasions and imposed foreign domination finally has brought the nation to its humiliating Doom. After two lost world wars enforced by alien powers, the Regnum has been broken, torn away to pieces by the surrounding countries. And now the remaining last hold has ever since been under continuous threat as all the Western Powers, Soviets, Communists, Liberals, Jews, Free-Masons, Gypsies, Feminists and Homosexuals try to break down the last nation keeping the sacral order on earth. Lastly the occult masters of globalization have

[3] The mentioned variations do not cover the whole range, are not universally accepted by all alternative groups, and in certain cases even are at odds with each other (e.g., Central-Asian and Old-European origins). Paradoxically however, one can observe that on numerous alternative websites such variations are gathered, presented or linked in even if contradictory.

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lured and forced Hungary into the hurdle of the EU only to crumble and annihilate what is still left from the Nation.[4] Therefore Hungarians must awake, get to know their real history, and build up resistance against all the overwhelming occult forces, inner parasites and hostile nations. In the end—overtly or latently—the ultimate goal would be no less than liberating and purifying the Nation, and reuniting the old Regnum under the Holy Crown.

Still there is no clear ending, except that Sacral Order of the world must be restored finally. The discourse is centered simply on resentment and different levels of struggle. Although these latter elements—in proper adapted variations—are common to practically all (Central and Eastern) European nations, Hungarian radical discourse of ethnic eschatology is somewhat distinct and unique amidst the others. Its narratives are directed rather to the past and the present than to future—and in that respect differ from genuine apocalypticism. There is no catastrophic *the-End-of-the-World-as-we-know-it* resolution involved, not even politically, and eventual glimpses of the utopian future are very misty. Eventually Hungary may resurrect as a spiritual Nation, a *Homeland in the High* with the help of the Holy Crown and Virgin Mary. All that is clear and unequivocal in these narratives is that due to their provenance Hungarians have a mystic messianic mission, while there is an evil worldwide hidden conspiracy and an overt hostility to thwart it, against which the truehearted must fight. And the key element (if not weapon) in this battle is language.

Given the Hungarians' linguistically insular character in the region, particular stress is laid upon language itself. Hungarian language plays a central role in the ethnic eschatology, since it bears a sacral charge both as an issue of origin (and in this respect, a clear sign of separateness as non-Aryan and non-Semitic affiliation) and as a resort of final salvation. Ultimate spiritual triumph is achieved only by discovering the real roots of Hungarian language—it is almost an inverted apocalypticism: victory is sought not in the (uncertain) future, but in the prehistoric past. The origins and mystical construction of Hungarian language convey the Nation a spiritual supremacy over the other (now unworthily dominant) nations. The *apocalypticizing* character of this rhetoric is even more emphasized by the language used: simultaneously revealing and concealing through the many metaphoric word-plays the Hungarian language makes possible by its agglutinative character and root-word structure; as well as through the abundant presence of visual (even visionary) symbolism.

The easiest way of the ancient sacral stories of antagonisms into the modern narratives was through symbols, mainly purported by visual signs. I would like to emphasize the importance of visual metaphors in language, and through it in the

[4] Some however, see the EU still in some positive light, as a hope for re-uniting the Hungarian Nation by the virtualization of political borders.

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formation of the narratives. In the Hungarian national eschatology there are more incoherent, even contradicting theories that are held together by an elaborate language of quite eclectic imagery. Since even an inventory of the emblems building up this radical symbolism would far exceed the limits of this study, in the following paragraphs I will only highlight some representative elements of the dualistic image-thesaurus.

A main distinguishing mark of the adepts of radical nationalism is the heraldic use of the *red and white Árpád-stripes* that serve as a clear distancing from the official national discourse (represented by the traditional red-white-green flag) but also designate a return to the original Hungarian values.[5] *Green* is also used in a positive sense, as a strong reference to old Hungarist movements.[6] As negative emblematic counter-colors *yellow* and *red*[7] must be mentioned as symbols of Jews and Communists, as well as the stripes of the *rainbow* alluding to the international movement of homosexual emancipation. Lately *blue* has also acquired negative connotations as the color of the European Union. Geometrical signs abound in both sides of the binary imagery: the *cross*—whether straight or slant, simple or double (in extreme cases even the arrowed one)[8] —, the *circle* and various combinations of them purport a positive meaning, while the *star* (whether penta- or hexagram) and the *pyramid*, as Jewish, Masonic, Communist or EU symbols, are usually used for defamation and blame. Closely related to geometry, some geographical representations are also of great importance. The *Carpathian-basin* is often visualized as metaphor for the lost Greater Hungary,[9] and there are frequent representations of various maps of *Central Asia*, as showing the Altaic liaison—referring to both the sacral cradle and the life-space of present spiritual allies (Turkic peoples) of the Hungarian Nation. Maps of *Middle-East* or the *Globe*, or sometimes the *North American* continent are evoked usually in connection with the conspiracist narrative. Nor do the contours of the *European continent* always appear in positive context lately. Objects play an important role too. Whether real palpable objects, or only abstractions—such signs can focus and evoke strong emotions, and there is a whole arsenal of them, both with positive and negative connotations (from nationalist narrative aspect). Among the most characteristic, some objects of authority must be first mentioned, such as the *Holy Crown*—comprising all the positive meanings that the ethnic eschatology implies.[10]

[5] see http://www.maghar.gportal.hu/ or http://mariaorszaga.hu/index.php
[6] see http://www.nemzszoc.esmartdesign.com/index.html
[7] see http://www.hunhir.hu/index.php?pid=hirek&id=33945
[8] See http://magyarsors.hu/index.php
[9] E.g., http://www.magyarharcos.hu/ or http://magokvagyunk.blogspot.com/ Mention that the map of dismembered Greater Hungary represents concomitantly the death of the Nation by the Trianon/Treaty and the glorious resurrection of the Nation through reuniting the disjoint Parts.
[10] See http://www.szkosz.com/ or http://szentkoronatarsasagbaratikore.ning.com/profiles/blogs-/keseru-igazsag-vigyazzatok-az

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On the other side the *book* has acquired some negative connotations, often symbolizing the Bible, or more specifically: the Old Testament; or the Torah that stand for a coercive, spoiled alien religion forced onto Hungarians; or in other cases the Law or the State with its imposed illegitimate order. Again, other representative symbolic objects are weapons! Among these, *bows and arrows* are the most common—being so specific for the ancient Magyar warfare, they evoke the glorious millennial Hungarian history, and lately together with the *horse & rider* these represent the special Hungarian martial art: the *Baranta*, meant to resuscitate the national spirituality.[11] On the opposite end, *machine guns and tanks and missiles* represent the imperialist powers, and bear absolute negative connotations. An interesting status, as almost authoritative and still perceived as weapon-like instrument is *money*: represented in the form of dollar bills (or lately even euro bills) it symbolizes the evil material power of globalization dominated by the US, the West, the international Jewish bankers' organization—in one idea, the Occult Conspiracy itself. In close relation to money, another universal token is worth mentioning, namely the *bar code* bearing real apocalyptic connotations. This sign, with its negative interpretation imported primordially from American religious fundamentalism and extreme rightist conspiracism, represents the evil sign *per se*: being identified explicitly with the Mark (and Number) of the Beast from Rev 13:18.

In a short glimpse to the bestiary, from the many creatures invoked on both sides of the narratives I pick out only three. On the good side, there is the well-known *Turul* falcon (identified usually with the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug*), the mythical raptor of Hungarian legends representing nobility and freedom, and the *horse*, again as an allusion to the glorious history. As to a negatively charged symbol, I call the attention upon a very recent development: the *hedgehog*. This poor little animal attracted negative connotations during the latest anti-government street manifestations (2007-2009), when police applied a specific formation for isolating a demonstrator from the crowd. This formation, called "*sün*" in Hungarian (hedgehog) came to denote police, and through it an evil and illegitimate government. Fantastic-chimerical creatures usually do not participate in this bestiary, but among the few present one particular must be mentioned: an underhuman, inhuman monster, which is the typical case of demonization. This too is a very recent development, in the wake of the *Lord of the Rings* Tolkien-trilogy played in theaters in the first half of this decade:[12] as a very close at hand figure,

[11] See http://www.dunakanyar.net/~baranta/

[12] It is typical that although the novel-trilogy had previously been very popular already as a book, still the *Ork* figure, possibly because of its spectacular ugliness, entered the thesaurus of this rhetoric only after the *LOTR* movie-trilogy.

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the *Ork* has entered the bestiary for denoting primarily Roma[13] but rarely also Jewish people.

Finally, I would like to note one last, but very important supernatural element—beside the long row of historical heroes and leaders—present in a significant number of the radical narratives: the person of *Virgin Mary*. Through Her the whole discourse of ethnic eschatology acquires a real apocalyptic dimension! Marian apocalypticism is popular not only among Roman-Catholic Hungarians as would be expected, but also Protestants and—even more interestingly—unreligious people as well! Due to numerous Marian apparitions (see Baji Lázár) in the Carpathian-basin often containing restoration messages,[14] the Queen of Heavens holding the Hungarian Holy Crown in Her hands represented on various websites alludes to the central meaning of the Hungarian eschatologic narrative, the resurrection of the Sacral Hungarian Regnum—if politically impossible, then "at least" on a spiritual level, as a *Homeland in the High*.

Although the narratives purporting anxieties expressed in such emblems have always been present, showing certain patterns of rise and decrease, the electronic media of the past century have definitely contributed both to the perpetuation of higher tensions and to the succession, visual transfer, wide spreading or even rediscovery of these story-bearing icons. However, the real penetrating power of these mediated symbols was facilitated by the re-emergence of visuality in the virtual world of hypermedia. Today, the Internet offers an excellent hotbed for both processes mentioned above: not only through unidirectional web pages but also, or even better through the self-organizing virtual net-communities. Relatively free and general access to the Internet (and implicitly the prevalence of computer literacy among the younger generation) together with the premise of online anonymousness contributes to the daring responsibility- and consequence-free action on the net. The Internet offers a virtual space, where—due to the relative lack of "gatekeeping" usual for traditional electronic media (Cardone 11-12)—radical narratives may freely circulate and proliferate without practically any setbacks. It enhances what Howard (2009) calls "topical community formation" where, based on a shared competence or common knowledge, individuals involved in a certain narrative discuss the relevancy of a specific fact to a larger shared issue of concern without any expectation of a final solution or resulting action emerging from the discussion (19). These topical online communities—in our case radical nationalist conspiracist groups—perform a so called "ritual deliberation" (see Howard, *Blogging*) that has multiple functions. In the sense of Austin's and Searle's speech

[13] See http://kuruc.info/r/35/67053/
[14] See http://lendvaykati.freeblog.hu/archives/2009/07/11/Maria_uzenete/

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acts theory, these narratives operated within such groups' ritual deliberation work as verbal warfare by which a virtual annihilation of the antagonists is achieved.

There are countless anxious topical groups online, religious or ethno-political, each with its own symbolic iconography, but most of these signs are quasi universal, same as the stories they bear. Social crises, collective traumas perpetually revive mythical apocalyptic narratives promising that the righteous will overcome evil. Radical extreme rightists, extreme leftists, traumatized ethnic minorities, fundamentalist religious minorities, pseudo-racial communities all make use of the elements of the apocalyptic, actualizing them in apocalypticizing narratives to denounce the evil worldwide conspiracy aimed against their collectives—and Hungarians are no exception. The visual symbolism of Hungarian online topical communities investigated in this study reveal the power of these emblems to re-actualize apocalyptic myths in the National eschatology with the promise of some final victory. For those possessing digital literacy, the signs of our times purport the Signs of Times providing a powerful instrument of verbal warfare, calling the true devotees of the Nation now separated by political borders to unite in a spiritual community in the virtual world, and heralding the possibility of victory over the unreachable and undefeatable conspirating enemy.

Within this short analysis I could only offer a brief review of this much diversified and relatively unexplored phenomenon of online apocalypticizing rhetoric, hoping that it opened ground for further investigations into the issue. The results will be integrated into the wider course of our online communication research, which focuses on the image of the Other in intercultural and inter-confessional dialogue on a larger scale in international environment, and attempts to call the attention upon the importance of investigating the uncontrollable aspects of computer mediated social interaction, and the role that symbols and narratives play in these phenomena.

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