

ANDRÁS TARNÓC

TIBOR FRANK: ETHNICITY, PROPAGANDA, MYTH-
MAKING: STUDIES ON HUNGARIAN CONNECTIONS TO
BRITAIN AND AMERICA 1848–1945
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*“Multunk mind össze van torlódva
s mint szorongó kivándorlókra,
ránk is úgy vár az új világ*

(József Attila “Hazám”)

The focus of Tibor Frank’s ambitious and extremely valuable study bears relevance to today as well since in an age when the international agenda is dominated by such issues as globalization versus the preservation of national identities and cultures, propaganda and mythmaking can function as effective tools of identity preservation. In his book Frank focuses on a critical period of world history as in the virtual century between 1848–1945 both the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Anglo-Saxon world underwent tremendous changes including a revolutionary wave shaking the feudal system in Central Europe and the birth and fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy along with the shift of geopolitical dominance from Britain to the United States.

Whereas the subtitle of the book might imply that the author assigns priority to the Hungarian point of view in his inquiry, the essays covering three large areas: nativism and immigration restriction, propaganda and politics, and a reevaluation of the relationship between Marx and Kossuth reveal a mutual dependence

in the international relations explored. Frank describes his own approach as historical philology entailing the identification and rigorous analysis of historical documents via multiple readings. The twenty two articles comprising this truly significant volume represent intercultural communication and appear to share one unifying theme, culture projection. Whereas the term defined by Merelman as “the conscious and unconscious effort by a social group and its allies to place new images of itself before other social groups and the general public” (3) is originally applicable within a macro-social context, the author’s scholarly scope suggests the expansion of the culture projection concept on to the global scene recasting the image exchange process not between social groups, but countries. One of the main values of Frank’s work is that he does not examine the topics in isolation, but places its subjects in an interactive context.

Culture projection can take place in four forms: hegemonic culture projection entails the instigation of the projection process by the privileged group, syncretization means the fusion of various cultural impulses on the part of the initiator, the counter-hegemonic mode sees the less favored or subordinate group as the principal provider of the new images, and polarization suggests a mutual rejection of culture projection. Whereas this approach on the surface appears to suggest a simplified zero-sum game outlook and a hierarchic categorization of countries, it must be noted that culture projection is a highly fluid and volatile process, during which both the image creator and receiver are defined and redefined.

Similarly to the societal scene, the question of the (re)establishment of identity is applicable to the book’s context. The internal dynamics of a multicultural society can be discerned in the international framework too, as in the present work instead of one multicultural society, three multicultural entities or countries are juxtaposed to each other. Similarly to minority groups victimized by stereotyping, distorted images, or the “a disruption of the organic set of human features for manipulative functions” (Virágos 132) can be applied to nations as well. Consequently, following the pattern of the representatives of minority groups struggling against distorted images, the destruction of Hungarian stereotypes maintained by England and the U.S. was the primary goal of Hungary’s political decision makers. The book, however, reveals the principal paradox of culture

projection, that is, its categorization primarily depends on the position of the observer. Namely, if a social group or country perceives itself in a subordinate position, the image projection qualifies as counter hegemonic. Similarly, a nation presenting primarily counter hegemonic impulses can also be a source of hegemonic culture projection demonstrated by the insistence on the pre-eminence of the “Hungarian race” in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

While in Hungary the decline of the old order is paralleled with a painful adjustment to a post-World War One era, the American side also displays the growing pains of a prospective superpower. Consequently, both sides are in a crisis searching for their identity in the new world order. In this crisis situation both countries experience the need to define their identity or protect it from outsiders and it is the volatile issue of race and ethnicity that emerges as the key component of the identity protection process. One of the added values of the work is its theoretical framework facilitating a simultaneous examination of the conflicting and competing histories, thereby demonstrating the interdependence of the two worlds. Whereas the author grouped the articles into three different categories, the analysis of the respective culture projection processes yields a different conceptual apparatus.

Hegemonic culture projection, in which the image originates from the dominant country, is primarily applicable to U.S.—Hungarian relations. Since during culture projection the image creator is defined as well, the main motivator of this type of intercultural communication was the American fear of the social and political consequences of New Immigration. The arrival of the immigrants not conforming to the WASP model appeared to threaten the cultural foundation of the U.S. and elicited a nativist response best summed up by Madison Grant’s infamous words: “If the melting pot is allowed to boil without control, and we continue to follow our national motto and deliberately blind ourselves to all ‘distinctions of race, creed, or color,’ the type of native American of Colonial descent will become as extinct as the Athenian of the age of Pericles, and the Viking of the days of Rollo” (qtd. in Frank 154). Franz Boas’ anthropological examination of Austro-Hungarian immigrants contributed to the Dillingham Report and to the principal product of this culture projection process, the subsequent immigration restriction legislation clearly considered

hegemonic to minority communities within and without the U.S. The U.S. government sponsored investigation of immigration from Austro-Hungary achieved mixed results. On the one hand the inquiry reinforced the similarities between the two nations and came to a somewhat arguable conclusion that Hungarians were “the most contented and happy people of all” (115). Also, it reiterated that the principal source of immigration to the U.S. was the Slovak region and the Carpathian Mountains “where the people are the most ignorant and the soil the most unproductive in the country” (115). It is natural that the creator of the projected image preconditioned by its own values and historical experience posited the target country with a similar multicultural framework. This type of hegemonic culture projection offers a blue print or action pattern to which the image creator expects conformity. However, the initiator of intercultural communication, being aware of the limits of this desire, resorts to a conative approach describing the target country in terms it wants it to be seen.

Hegemonic culture projection takes place within Austro-Hungary as well demonstrated by the government’s insistence on an “indivisible, single, Hungarian nation” (74) and by the assertion of the “superiority of the Hungarian race” (82) Frank reveals the paradox of Hungarian immigration, while considered superior at home, relegated to second class citizenship in the host country (82). The author’s research helps to ascertain the efficiency of the culture projection process as well. The goals of immigration restriction legislation, if indirectly and partially, had been realized after all as responding to the nativist outcry Hungary began to regulate its own immigration policy screening potential applicants and allowing only “eligible candidates” to leave (117). The argument maintained by U.S. immigration officials that the Hungarian (and Italian) government’s policy encouraging temporary immigration over permanent dislocation amounts to a modern day colonization process (117), reveals a unique sense of national self-doubt casting the U.S. in the unlikely role of the colony and offers proof to the assertion that the categorization of the culture projection process, whether it qualifies as hegemonic or counter hegemonic mainly depends on the vantage point of the observer.

Syncretization, the fusion of opposing cultural impulses, or the mutual acceptance of the pictures or images projected by two nations or cultures can also be identified in Frank’s book. Naturally, this is the

most successful type of culture projection, as both the image sender and receiver appear to share a common denominator. Syncretization can be discerned in the acceptance of the importance of the study of anthropology and its application to the respective multicultural scene by the Hungarian educational and political establishment. Frank aptly quotes the acclaimed Minister of Hungarian Education, Ágoston Trefort: "Anthropology is a fertile field in Hungary which was and is inhabited by different races in times ancient and modern" (25). The question posed by Aurél von Török the Ponor "whether or not the Hungarian type progressed in a physical sense due to this continuous mixing of the blood" (28) reminds one of the quandary of the American nativists. Consequently, anthropology on both sides of the Atlantic was far from being value neutral and during the examined period it was used to prove the superiority of one group over another. Kossuth's self-promoted image of an Anglo-Saxon ideas inspired freedom fighter acquiring English proficiency during his readings of Shakespeare while imprisoned as a martyr for the cause of the freedom of the press is another example of syncretization and naturally, of a successful culture projection. It is important to realize, however, that Kossuth did not represent the official Hungarian government, yet his monumental tour of Britain and the U.S. established an eternal connection between him and Hungary in the American mind. The "mythological transformation of Kossuth's autobiography" (216) was a carefully designed public relations campaign successfully appealing to the heart of the Anglo-Saxon public. The image created by Kossuth is the reification of the basic ideals of Anglo-Saxon democracy and functions as a living proof of the viability of the English and American ideal

The American view of Miklós Horthy also offers a proof of syncretization. Frank demonstrates that the Regent of Hungary was seen by the American government as a guarantee of political stability and a bulwark against the potential restoration of the Habsburg monarchy in the post World War One era. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the American observers, General Harry Hill Bandholtz, Nicholas Roosevelt, and John F. Montgomery allude to the decadence and anachronistic nature of the Hungarian aristocracy and to the refreshingly middle class values of the gentry represented by Horthy. While Bandholtz emphasizes Horthy as a guarantee against

the return of the Habsburgs, N. Roosevelt sees the Regent as a staunch foe of Bolshevism. Captain Roosevelt also welcomes that Horthy displays the same values that are held in high esteem in America, as he describes Horthy and his brother as “men of force, energy, and character— simple, practical, and intelligent at the same time. that they were well-bred and courteous” (242). John F. Montgomery, the strongest supporter of Horthy cast him as a politician supporting Britain and the United States over Nazi Germany. Horthy appeared to American observers as a person espousing American values, sympathizing with Franklin Roosevelt and the fact that he sent his son to work for a year in Detroit, at the Ford Motor Company further improved his American perception.

Another example of syncretization, or the mutual acceptance of culture projection originating from Hungary toward the Anglo-Saxon world, primarily to Great Britain, is the establishment of the *Hungarian Quarterly* through the efforts of Count István Bethlen and mainly, József Balogh in 1936. The motivation behind the launching of the periodical: the promotion of the policies of Hungary, the acquisition of support for the revision of the Treaty of Trianon, and the achievement of an overall improvement of Hungary’s image may present the *Hungarian Quarterly* as an example of counter hegemonic culture projection. However, the incorporation of the values and stylistic elements emphasized by the target countries suggest syncretization. Whereas represented by the long list of contributors Balogh’s painstaking efforts and editorial rigor resulted in the acceptance of the periodical in England, the culture projection process toward the U.S. was not as successful, mainly due to the Anglophile attitudes of the editorial board. The *Hungarian Quarterly* also contained literary pieces and managed to maintain a creative connection with the reading public of the Anglo-Saxon world.

The author also retraces the fluctuation of the image of Hungary in the United States. First Hungary in the beginning of the 19th century appeared as an “exotic curiosity” (309) and as a result of the Revolution and War of Independence in 1848–49, and the highly acclaimed visit of Lajos Kossuth in 1851–52, the country became a romantic and idolized symbol of freedom. Frank, on the other hand, notes the principal paradox of the American perception of Hungary, namely while its exiled political leaders were considered heroes of

liberty, the immigration policies of the official government and the immigrants themselves were given a hostile reception. Following World War One the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, as one of the defeated powers was seen as an anachronism incompatible with the values of democracy. This is aptly demonstrated by Nicholas Roosevelt's allusion to the anecdote recalling of a Hungarian Count confessing to his useless life on his deathbed, by the infamous statement: "Just shot hares, Lord. Shot hares. Shot hares. Shot hares" (317). It is no wonder that the emergence of Horthy, representing the lesser gentry and being a proponent of American values struck a sympathetic cord with the U.S. public and helped to rework his image as a potential buffer against Bolshevism and a guarantee against the return of the monarchy. The American view of Hungary's World War Two role was also ambiguous at best, describing it as a nation caught between the need to fight against Communism and the insistence on the gains achieved through an alliance with Nazi Germany.

A significant section of the essays suggest *counter hegemonic culture projection*. Hungary, or the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy due to historical and geopolitical reasons was seen in a less superior position compared to Great Britain and the United States. Consequently, counter hegemonic culture projection can be observed in Vienna's efforts to popularize the Dual Monarchy in England between 1866–70. The main purpose of this campaign was to convince the British public and indirectly the country's policy makers of the desirability of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as a commercial and political partner. Furthermore, while Kossuth's monumental speaking campaign in Britain and in the U.S. also started as a counter hegemonic impulse as discussed above it eventually turned into syncretization. Frank's treatment of the censorial career of János Reseta between 1832–1848 reveals a counter hegemonic culture projection displaying the efforts of a person originally entrusted with the control of the press, thereby limiting a fundamental civil liberty, evolving into an indirect protector of the freedom of the press and speech, core values of the Anglo-Saxon democracies. Reseta's efforts included suggesting revisions in the Hungarian translations of British and American works, preventing libelous publications from reaching the press, or excluding texts promoting anti-Semitism and ethnic hatred from circulation.

Counter hegemonic culture projections toward the U.S. primarily fall into two categories, immigration related issues and aspirations designed to gain political support for the causes of the post-1848 exile community and for the revision of the Treaty of Trianon. The counter hegemonic culture projection process entails the reception or acknowledgement of the image sent by the less privileged entity on the part of the dominant country. In Frank's analysis of the picture of the U. S. created by returning immigrant inmates of mental asylums the duality of intercultural communication can be discerned, as the America image of mentally unstable immigrants is a result of the U.S. showing its "inhospitable, unaccommodating face" (140). These broken and shattered dreams are produced by two groups of people, either suffering from mental illness prior to emigration, or developing mental instability during the American experience. Frank's investigation reveals that the condition defined by Dr. László Epstein as "emigration psychosis" (137) is usually brought on by financial strain. Another example of a counter hegemonic impulse is the failed effort to publish a historical overview of Hungary tailor-made to the tastes and preferences of Anglo-Saxon readers, to counteract the potentially damaging consequences of the publication of R. W. Seton-Watson's *A History of the Rumanians: From Roman Times to the Completion of Unity* (1934). Whereas the purported work was an example in therapeutic historiography, it is worthwhile to note that Seton-Watson's book amounted to hegemonic culture projection eliciting a counter hegemonic response in Hungary. The planned publication of the English and French version of *The History of Hungary* however, fell victim to backbiting and to professional and personal tensions between the organizer of the publishing efforts, József Balogh and its chief contributors, the noted historian, Gyula Szekfű. Despite these failed efforts works aiming to familiarize the Anglo-Saxon reading public with the Hungarian past were produced by Domokos Kosáry and Joseph Eugene Tersánszky.

Polarization, or the rejection of culture projection can be discerned in Frank's analysis of the relationship between Marx and Kossuth. The author provides a detailed analysis of the political and cultural dynamics of the post 1848 émigré world. The Hungarian immigrant community divided between Kossuth and Szemere is juxtaposed to Marx's exile career. Taking advantage of the misinformation

campaign conducted by two infamous police agents Gusztáv Zerffi and János Bangya, the alleged long-held hostility between Marx and Kossuth is utilized by the Habsburgs. In his assessment of the exchanged images Frank reveals that the purpose of the Habsburgs was to divide and undermine the credibility of the Hungarian émigré community, thereby to discredit and eliminate a potential threat. Frank, however, proves that the hostility between Marx and Kossuth appears to be an exaggeration, as Marx considered the Hungarian leader his “fellow fighter” (344). In this case the intercultural communication process takes place not between countries, but individuals suffering a similar political fate. Thus the culture projection process is carried out between two refugees as neither Marx, nor Kossuth represent the official government of their countries. Whereas Marx was residing in England, Kossuth in Turkey, and Szemere in Paris, neither of them attempted to convey images in order to change the international perception of their chosen home. Consequently, culture projection only takes place on the individual level, and the end result is the mutual rejection of the projected images.

One of the basic values of Frank’s book is that it displays the objectivity of the scholar and provides an analysis of the main issues not only from the Hungarian point of view, but from the American and British one, too. “It is his questions that make a historian” (7) as Frank quotes László Németh. Indeed the author poses many questions, forcing the reader to re-evaluate Hungarian connections with the Anglo-Saxon world. However, Frank should not limit himself to being a professional historian as the work reviewed here offers a major contribution not only to the field of history, but to American studies and cultural studies as well. As a result of the historical philologist approach Frank does not simply examine historical events, but investigates the forces that help to shape the perception of those events. By focusing on the perception of events and the reception of certain historical developments both in Hungary and in the Anglo-Saxon countries he reinforces the fact that these cultures are interrelated and interdependent. In fact, the author’s research methodology of finding sources, and reading and rereading them are instructions to heed for those encountering this truly significant achievement because a work of this magnitude indeed should be read

and reread several times by historian, scholar of American studies and interested observer alike.

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