

Levente Polyák  
**Nostalgias of veracity and revolution**  
- on the Budapest riots

A few people probably still remember the advertisement campaign of the Hungarian Television launched this spring. The series commercials presented diverse scenarios in which the distinguished importance of the state television was highlighted. One of the advertisements, scattered around the city posed the question: "Which TV would you annex in case of a revolution?" One could read the answer below: „Hungarian Television. We transmit values". A few months later the same campaign uses different words: „We transmit values. If they let us to do so.“

None of the designers of the campaign imagined that the scenarios they played with may ever become true. Nor could they have guessed, what sort of context to imagine for the materialization of their slogan.

From indignation to sympathy, from consternation to understanding, from fury to fear: it is not surprising that reactions to the famous speech of Mr. Gyurcsány, Hungarian Prime Minister, differ from each other to the extremes. In the speech taped at a May Socialist Party meeting, Gyurcsány declared to have „fucked up“ the state budget, a confession that a week and a half ago, when published, provoked a week of rioting in the streets of Budapest. The main questions of the last days, topics ranging from the behaviour of the ruling party to that of the opposition, from moral dilemmas of lying to the etiquett of street demonstrations, have highly divided the public opinion, mostly along lines of political preferences. It is clearly visible where the frontiers lie between those thinking in the frame of revolution and others refusing all „street politics“. According to these politically rooted contexts, the siege of the National Television building is seen as revolutionary fight, cultural happening, fascist riot or football hooliganism.

The clear division of the society into right-conservative or left-liberal voters, witnessed by previous elections, seems to lose of its totality, though. To experience this dissolution, it was enough to mingle with the crowd demonstrating opposite to the Parliament. A collective haze and ideological confusion challanged the spectator's gaze: people wearing medieval clothes, others waving national flags, housing estate skinheads and farmers cooking Goulash soup, right wing politicians and former communist party leaders racing for the microphones. To deepen the disorder of opinions, universities were closed in the middle of the week, because of a planned anarchist demonstration.

Echoing the words of the opposition leader Viktor Orbán, these voices claim that the government is illegitim, since the Prime Minister admitted that his party won the elections by lying: outraged voices of discontent, drunk with the taste of instability and a promise of political change. Rumours are accumulating conspiracy theories: streetfighters are provocateurs paid by the government, in the first version, demonstrators are paid by the opposition to sleep out, in the second.

In the course of demonstrations visual references to the 1956 uprising are obligatory common places. Flags with centres cut out, public readings of revolutionary poetry, the mutilation of the 1945 Soviet monument, these symbols are all used to create a narrative continuity with the 1956 events, and to stress that the fall of communism has

not taken place yet. Weekend market rumours say that rightwing activists are preparing for the revolution's jubilee celebrations with weapons.

However, this revolutionary upheaval is hardly shared by everyone. A public letter signed by 1956 convicts and family members of victims refuses any association between the 1956 acts and the present riots: *„The abusement of the memory of the 1956 revolution is an affray committed by the ensemble of extreme right activists and football hooligans. Using symbols of 1956 in order to mask the pure violence against democracy, flourishing flags of 1956, ravaging the soviet memorial, calling the police AVO (secret state-police in the socialist era), exploiting the 50. anniversary for campaign reasons against the legitim, democratic government are all fake. The siege of the Hungarian Television was a self-display of aimless violence, irreconcilable with the memory of the revolution.“*

Whether Hungary is in a moral crisis, is a question frequently raised in the recent days. President László Sólyom's reasoning, saying that the country is not in a moral crisis, but people, inspired a lot of arguments. In his television interview, articulating the general liberal opinion, the internationally known Péter Nádás described the Gyurcsány speech as straightforward: *„In the speech a determined man, disposing good rhetoric abilities, is trying to convince his comrades that the country can no longer be governed according to the system of privileges. In these last 16 years governments ruled in a feudal or socialist system of privileges, thus distributes something that was not theirs. In the European practice it is not acceptable.“* In Nádás's view, this may be a turning point to shake up the society, but not to send people to the streets: *„I don't see any legal or constitutional reason for Gyurcsany to go, it can only be a result of a mass spirit, street movements or clashes, but let God and ourselves save us from this, because this is not a form of politics, especially not that of democratic politics. By all means, it would open ill scopes.“*

As the mass demonstrations have gradually disappeared from the Budapest streets, debates on side-effects came to the front. Apparently the biggest losers of the events, police officers are now accused to have incarcerated innocent people among the rioters arrested. The petitions written in order to reconsider detentions may help for a while to bias public attention from ceaseless conjectures: what will be the political consequences of the confession or the lie, the riot or the revolution? In what measure do people on strike represent the country's population? We do not need to guess much: all this will be clarified at this weekends local elections.

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