





# **Building Blocks for a Renewed Human Rights Narrative**

Gábor Bernáth

**abridged version**

## **Building Blocks for a Renewed Human Rights Narrative**

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*The present material builds on results both from a preliminary effort already concluded<sup>1</sup> and from work still in progress.<sup>2</sup> We have only started to address certain topics, whereas for others we are at least clear about the steps that need to be taken. Our work aims to lay the foundations of a collaboration that can be joined by other organisations still being formed, as well as by actors sharing human rights values who can reach out to additional potential supporters. This text is designed to be continuously expanded in the future, so as to further incorporate increasingly sensitive analyses along with a growing pool of creative ideas and recommendations.*

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- 1** Between June 2015 and April 2016, in cooperation with Political Capital Intézet (Political Capital Institute) and Tett és Védelem Alapítvány (Action and Protection Foundation), we organised about 30 focus group discussions on the question of whether those committed to defending classical human rights values should adopt a different discourse, and if so what the latter should sound like. A total of about two hundred individuals, including young activists, NGO staff, conservative thinkers, journalists, creative professionals, researchers, and members of the groups most exposed to the risk of exclusion participated in the discussions.
  - 2** In collaboration with Márta Varga and with the support of OSI, we have been working since the spring of 2017 with the leaders of the most important Hungarian NGOs in the scope of multi-day narrative-building workshops. We intend to get more actors on board in the near future.

## INTRODUCTION

# Narrative vs. message

## Origins

The human rights discourse as constructed after the Second World War has come under increasingly sweeping attacks both as a global explanation and with respect to the universality of its values. As a more or less general trend, it has been reduced to political correctness, identified as a repressive, taboo-generating discourse.<sup>3</sup> A number of elements, however, have been adopted, sometimes appropriated by extremists in Europe and in Hungary as well.<sup>4</sup> A number of analysts have described how legal advocacy organisations have become silent in public discourse,<sup>5</sup> failing to remain attractive to large groups of young people. Others point to a more profound turn, concerning not only politics but the role of truth in politics, and identifying a “post-truth era” as exemplified by the Brexit and Trump campaigns.<sup>6</sup>

Furthermore, these changes are taking place in the midst of a major shift in the media world that has led to the polarisation of public discourse. Due to the spread of the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies, the procurement of information is based increasingly on content created by people with a similar range of interests. This not only makes it harder to formulate challenges to prejudice or to reject them, but has also enabled the construction of strong subcultures based on xenophobia, anti-Roma attitudes

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3 Cf. Ádám Paár (n.d.): Meghasonlás? A politikai korrektség bírálata Nyugat-Európában. (Divided against “Themself”: The Critique of Political Correctness in Western Europe.) Méltányosság politikai elemző központ, <http://docplayer.hu/2799189-Meghasonlas-a-politikai-korrektseg-biralata-nyugat-europaban.html>.

4 Balibar, Etienne (1991): Is There a Neo-Racism? In: Étienne Balibar, Immanuel Wallerstein: Race, Nation, Class: *Ambiguous Identities*. Verso.

5 Gábor Bernáth – Vera Messing (2011): Szélre tolvá – Kutatási zárójelentés a roma közösségek többségi médiaképéről (Pushed to the Edge.: Research Report on the Representation of Roma Communities in the Hungarian Majority Media), 2011 (<http://www.amenca.hu/index.php?page=kutatas>), [http://pd.c.eu.hu/archive/00006844/01/cps-working-paper-pushed-to-the-edge-2013\\_0.pdf](http://pd.c.eu.hu/archive/00006844/01/cps-working-paper-pushed-to-the-edge-2013_0.pdf); as well as Gábor Bernáth (2014): Harc a jelenlétért és a jelentésért. (The Battle for Presence and Meaning) Médiakutató XV., Vol. 3. pp. 101–114.

6 One summary of positions concerning so-called post-truth series is provided by Tallis, Benjamin (2016): Editorial: Living in Post-Truth: Power/Knowledge/Responsibility, <http://ceenewperspectives.iir.cz/2016/07/30/012016-editorial-living-in-post-truth-powerknowledgeresponsibility/>. Other analyses also make reference to the propaganda war launched by Russia, spreading conspiracy theories in the forums of Western public opinion. “Building on the general loss of trust observed throughout Europe vis-à-vis politicians and institutions, conspiracy theories do not attempt to directly influence public opinion, but they intend to do so indirectly.” Cf. Political Capital (2016): Political Capital (2016): A legnépszerűbb orosz összeesküvés-elméletek a magyar kormánypárti sajtóban (The most popular conspiracy theories in the Hungarian government-affiliated media), <https://pcblog.atlatszo.hu/2016/07/13/a-legnepzserubb-orosz-osszeeskueves-elmeletek-a-magyar-kormanypart-i-sajtoban/> last accessed on: 2 September 2016.



and anti-Semitism in Hungary and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup> In Hungary, this goes hand-in-hand with attempts by the state to discredit organisations protecting human rights. These attacks are for the most part orchestrated by those in power, having launched attacks against several fundamental values, such as measures implemented against the homeless, the campaign against refugees,<sup>8</sup> phrases alluding to “vainglorious human rights banter”,<sup>9</sup> and the creation/import of a new anti-gender argumentation.<sup>10</sup> These trends make it clear that without protecting and reframing fundamental values, persuading their supporters to act and to speak up, and linking the available platforms of communication, the sphere of human rights protection could be further circumscribed in Hungary.

**Narrative** is used in the present context as an umbrella term that

- aligns otherwise isolated efforts and initiatives, placing them in a homogeneous framework of interpretation;
- formulates the morality driving action;
- pinpoints causal connections and links issues to broader themes;
- points the way to positive outcomes;
- makes room for emotional identification, and
- stimulates actions.

Glancing over this list suggests that we might have taken too much for granted in recent years, including the fundamental values. Getting more supporters on board may not have been taken seriously enough, and the same holds for plotting a positive vision for the future. Most participants in the focus groups have expressed the view that the human rights discourse generally:

- “protects the small and the marginal”;
- provides no opportunities for positive identification, as it “primarily operates through making people feel sorry and guilty”;
- cultivates high levels of commitment;
- believes too much in rational explanation, and therefore “remains too much in the head”;
- is hierarchical and often “talks down from above”; and
- “talks of the dichotomy of the oppressors and the oppressed, where criticism of the latter will immediately put you on the same page with the oppressors”.

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7 Cf. József Jeskó – Zoltán Tóth – Judit Bakó (2012): A radikális jobboldal webes hálózatai (Web-based Networks of the Radical Right) Politikatudományi Szemle 2012/1. pp. 81–105; along with Dániel Róna – Anett Sőrés (2012): A kuruc.info nemzedék. Miért népszerű a Jobbik a fiatalok között? (The www.kuruc.info Generation. Why is Jobbik popular among the youth?) In Szabó Andrea (ed.): *Racionálisan lázadó hallgatók*. (Rationally Revolting Students) Belvedere Meridionale <<http://moly.hu/kiadok/belvedere-meridionale>>, Szeged. [http://aktivfiatalok.hu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Racionalisn-lazado-hallgatok-\\_BCE-Belvedere.pdf](http://aktivfiatalok.hu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/Racionalisn-lazado-hallgatok-_BCE-Belvedere.pdf).

8 Gábor Bernáth – Vera Messing (2015): Bedarálva – A menekültekkel kapcsolatos kormányzati kampány és a tőle független megszólalás terei. (Subjugated – the government campaign on refugees and the platforms of independent speech), [http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2015\\_04\\_tel/01\\_menekultek\\_moralis\\_panic.pdf](http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2015_04_tel/01_menekultek_moralis_panic.pdf).

9 <https://444.hu/2017/03/07/orban-a-migransok-is-vonatkoznak-a-torvenyek-ezen-nem-segit-semmilyen-emberi-jogiszepelgo-handabanda>.

10 Eszter Kováts, Maari Pöim (eds.) (2015): Gender as symbolic glue. FES, <http://www.feps-europe.eu/assets/cae464d2-f4ca-468c-a93e-5d0dad365a83/feps-gender-as-symbolic-glu-wwwpdf.pdf>.

In the meantime, new narratives have emerged, organised around discrediting these very values.

### **A narrative in action: the white middle class. Emotional needs and demand for showing strength.**

Donald Trump's victory clearly indicated the force of what is generally interpreted as the frustration of the white middle class,<sup>11</sup> or of the white working class.<sup>12</sup> Several factors can be outlined that contribute to this frustration: (1) automatization and globalisation pose a real threat to the economic positions of these groups, with no significant improvement to be expected.<sup>13</sup> (2) On the other hand, this frustration is often reinforced by the various contributions, benefits, and programmes designed to foster the integration of visible minorities. The bulk of these programmes – taking for granted that their objectives are widely shared and on the assumption that there is a fundamental moral obligation to support the groups involved – have made no attempt to justify these support schemes and to persuade the middle class of their legitimacy. To the contrary, such criticism has usually been stifled by conventional mechanisms of stigmatisation, labeling critics as racists, etc. (3) At the same time, these are the groups most exposed to the potential failures of such integration programmes, and to the impact of generalising individual stories of failure to the entire group itself. (4) These factors reinforce welfare chauvinism, anti-Roma attitudes and xenophobia in Hungary and elsewhere<sup>14</sup> (how long have we heard that "the Roma get all the money"?). (5) A defence or counterargument against these lines of criticism is rendered even more difficult by the fact that this rebellion joined ranks with the upsurge against political correctness and with efforts to discredit those who support protecting human rights.

Emotions are provided by rebellion and fear, i.e. fear nourished both by real economic and labour market processes and by a loss of certainty in the wake of globalisation. This uncertainty may cause individuals to subordinate themselves to those in positions of strength who might offer protection. This may also account for the fact that the successful responses to the frustration of the white middle class in the West primarily come from the autocratic end of the political spectrum. The solutions they propose show strength in general, frequently displaying a disposition for the use of violence<sup>15</sup> ("bare-knuckled instead of hand-in-glove, we will solve the problem").

No further analysis is required to posit that this kind of challenge calls for a response that (1) can likewise offer emotional attachment; (2) showcases solutions while demonstrating that populists' solutions are no solutions at all; (3) shows strength; (4) is able to formulate its argument in a novel fashion.

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11 <https://afrosapiophile.com/2016/12/10/white-radicalization/>: "There is, on the one hand, a revolt on behalf of the middle-class. (...) Those left behind, the vulnerable are looking for a way out and their abandoned position is turned into a vote at the ballot." <http://www.kormany.hu/hu/a-miniszterelnok/beszedekek-publikaciok-interjuk/orban-viktor-interjuja-a-888-hu-n>.

12 <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/reports/europes-white-working-class-communities-report-six-eu-cities>.

13 This is not yet realised in Hungary due to large-scale emigration.

14 "Beginning sometime around the end of 2005, in many countries of Europe, there began a rather rapid shift in political discourse regarding Roma.(...) There has been a measurable increase in inter-ethnic violence and hate crimes against the Roma in a number of countries, a raft of new policies and initiatives have been introduced that more or less explicitly target this ethnic minority and the deteriorating language of public discourse on the Roma across the continent has become part of the disturbing reformulation of populist politics in a number of countries" writes Michael Stewart, one of the best-known researchers on Roma issues. Michael Stewart (2012): *New Forms of Anti-Gypsy Politics: a Challenge for Europe*. In: *The Gypsy 'Menace': Populism and the New Anti-Gypsy Politics*. Edited by Michael Stewart.

15 Political Capital (2015): *A politikai erőszak mérése (Measuring political violence)*. <[http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC\\_ISEC\\_political\\_violence\\_opinions\\_hun\\_web.pdf](http://www.politicalcapital.hu/wp-content/uploads/PC_ISEC_political_violence_opinions_hun_web.pdf)>.

## Links to other such efforts

Many people are currently working on constructing new narratives in Hungary. Political analysts have long made it clear that the political left must carry out this work (Lakner 2012).<sup>16</sup> This is the stated aim of the think tank organised around the online magazine *Új Egyenlőség* (“New Equality”).<sup>17</sup> The narrative constructed around the fundamental values of human rights and solidarity can also be linked to these initiatives. But it is nevertheless far from certain that such a narrative should give up on conservatives, for instance. The most pressing issues (poverty, the situation of the Roma, refugees and the issue of equal opportunities for women) will find advocates in very different places. While there are still many supporters to be found among conservatives,<sup>18</sup> those who would support a refugee policy based on universal human rights values have almost completely disappeared, even on the left of the political spectrum. At the same time, there are clear signs that there is thinking on these issues at many levels, including churches, trade unions and NGOs. Narrative building aims, among other things, to provide links for these various stages of thinking, as well as to identify higher-level interconnections.

There are at least **nine major sets of issues** that need to be explored in order for a new narrative to be constructed.

1. The argument pool
2. Overlapping themes
3. A worldview people can morally identify with
4. Locating supporters and spokespeople, bringing them on board and making them speak up
5. Solutions and positive scenarios
6. Storytelling
7. Redesigning the linguistic toolbox
8. Visibility, imagery and visual representation
9. Linking communication platforms

This is the structure we are going to follow.

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**16** Zoltán Lakner (2012) *Normalitás, működtetés, jövőkép. Egy baloldali szimbolikus politika lehetőségei* (Normality, operation, vision. The possibilities of symbolic politics for the left). Táncsics Alapítvány.

**17** <[http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20161205\\_pogatsa\\_uj\\_narrativat\\_kell\\_megfogalmaznunk](http://mandiner.hu/cikk/20161205_pogatsa_uj_narrativat_kell_megfogalmaznunk)>; as well as Zoltán Pogátsa (2014): *Közéleti vitáink nyomorúsága* (The misery of our debates on public issues), <<http://pogiblog.atlatszo.hu/2014/07/22/kozeleti-vitaink-nyomorusaga/>>.

**18** For this aim, it is sufficient, for example, to review the report from 2003 on the first year of the Civic Circles, where the majority of local initiatives had to do with helping the local poor. Antal Kiss (ed.) “... a köröket ne hagyd” – Polgári körök 2003 (“You shall not lose track of the circles” – Civic Circles 2003) published by Chair & man.

# 1. The argument pool

A given narrative will, at a minimum, provide a seemingly coherent worldview within which the arguments used to sustain and justify one another will in many cases even exclude the facts.

## 1.1. Narratives of the poor, the Roma and feminists: worldviews and justifications for deprivation

In present-day Hungary, a number of narratives are widely circulated, disseminated via a large-scale communication infrastructure by speakers who have assumed positions of authority. These narratives range from accounts of “the poor as responsible for their own poverty” and “the Roma constantly complaining of discrimination, stuck in the role of the victim” to rants about “migrants destroying Christian culture” and even “gender militants bent upon sacrificing the family on the altar of equal opportunities for women”. Quite a few of these have become international global explanatory worldviews, such as the narrative of “the poor responsible for their own poverty”<sup>19</sup> and the anti-gender narrative, which has become the primary recruitment tool for the European extreme right.<sup>20</sup>

It would be greatly mistaken to regard these narratives merely a construction of political messages. They are that as well, but it is at least as important that these narratives create a complete worldview and often fit into models of basic values that cannot be shaken by purely rational counterarguments. George Lakoff, a seminal thinker on the issue, offers the deeply ingrained model of the Strict Father and the Nurturant Parent in the thinking of Republicans and progressives, respectively, to explain the differences between the worldviews characteristic of the two political camps in the U.S.<sup>21</sup>

## 1.2. The supply of narratives in the marketplace of ideas

This does not mean that we should concentrate on the groups that are the most rampant and belligerent in undermining human rights values. Nevertheless, we should be mindful of their systems of argumentation, as they will in all likelihood be around for a long time. The reason we need to analyse their narratives is because this is the supply of explanations, arguments and knowledge that is being offered to those undecided individuals that we wish to bring on board or to convince.

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**19** Id. Loïc Wacquant (2009): *Prisons of Poverty*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2009.

**20** Eszter Kováts, Maari Põim (eds.) (2015): Gender as symbolic glue. FES. <http://www.feps-europe.eu/assets/cae464d2-f4ca-468c-a93e-5d0dad365a83/feps-gender-as-symbolic-glue-wwwpdf.pdf>.

**21** Cf. George Lakoff (2004): *Don't Think of an Elephant! Know Your Values and Frame the Debate: The Essential Guide for Progressives* Chelsea Green Publishing.

## 1.3. Constructing systems of argumentation

The above also shows that attempts focusing on simply repackaging previous messages in a more likable format can lead to only limited success. These ideas (1) consider a consensus on fundamental human rights values that might never have actually existed as a given and as shared by large numbers of people; (2) fail to take into consideration the fact that quite efficient alternative narratives have been constructed in recent years in Hungary as well; (3) moreover, several of these possess a much stronger communication infrastructure.

### 1.3.1. “Making the record skip”

Under these conditions, one would need to simultaneously reinforce fundamental values and find answers that can “make the record skip”. This could be achieved, for example, by incorporating knowledge which cannot be warded off by an immediate relativistic and discrediting response. In a narrative, a pre-existing answer is normally proffered to the counterarguments, and for this reason, the positive impact of rebuttals is limited.

From this perspective, the damage that can be done by labelling the adversary a “racist” becomes even more obvious, as instead of focusing on the argument this strategy attacks the person’s mental capacities or alleged psychological defects,<sup>22</sup> shuts down the debate, and attempts to rely on the power of stigmatisation. The first approach reflects propositions that discredit us ( e.g. i.e. “we look down on others”); the second gives up on those who are undecided and could potentially be convinced, closing ourselves in a discursive space that is much more limited than any of its predecessors. The third approach may entirely miss the target: those whom we label as racist and try to quarantine will become heroes “on the other side”.

### 1.3.2. Having something better to say

“Making the record skip” is nevertheless only the first step. Eventually, the representatives of human rights values need to find a **more attractive narrative**. This normally involves reframing the questions, i.e. mobilising our own values instead of getting stuck in rebuttals.

#### An example

George Lakoff presents the strategy of reframing in an imaginary debate on same-sex marriage. In his view, we have already lost once we adopt the existing phrases (i.e. gay marriage), and remain in the framework of whether or not we support same-sex marriage. Lakoff provides the following answer: “I believe in equal rights, period. I don’t think the state should be in the business of telling people who they can or can’t marry. Marriage is about love and commitment, and denying lovers the right to marry is a violation of human dignity.”

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. Lentin, Alana (2005): Replacing ‘race’, historicizing ‘culture’. In *Multiculturalism. Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 39, No. 4, pp. 379–396, [http://www.academia.edu/279099/Replacing\\_Race\\_Historicizing\\_CultureIn\\_Multiculturalism](http://www.academia.edu/279099/Replacing_Race_Historicizing_CultureIn_Multiculturalism) accessed on 6 November 2012.

## 2. Overlapping issues

Reframing leads the issue back to a set of explanations that is more familiar to a large swath of the public, reflecting the interests or emotional needs of certain groups. The basis of these often comes from values transferred in strong cultural stereotypes and moral imperatives. Let's start with the latter.

### 2.1.1. Fundamental human rights values

The literature on the fundamentals of human rights and their interconnections with dignity, self-determination and responsibility fill entire libraries. In public discourse, however, they are only occasionally mentioned, and the discourse on human rights tends to be dominated by rational argumentation and experts' declarations – this view was almost unanimous in the preliminary focus group discussions. Values, among other things, secure emotional involvement and often provide stronger motivation than the interests themselves. Concerning voters, George Lakoff notes: "A certain number of voters identify themselves with their self-interest and vote accordingly. But that is the exception rather than the rule. There are other forms of personal identification with one's ethnicity, with one's values, with cultural stereotypes, and with culture heroes. As far as elections are concerned, the most powerful forms of identification are with values and corresponding cultural stereotypes." (Lakoff, op. cit.)

The fundamental values of the human rights discourse can be traced back to the values of liberty, equality, fraternity/solidarity, as well as the basic Christian values which play a dominant role in Western culture. At the same time, it is also clear that these values are no longer necessarily connected to the upholding of human rights (the interrelationship is not evident) – perhaps in part because we have taken them too much for granted and have not focused enough on strengthening them. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Pope Francis's declarations on the poor,<sup>23</sup> on those seeking refuge<sup>24</sup> and the Roma<sup>25</sup> sound so fresh.

Furthermore, human rights fundamental values have encountered serious rivals in a number of cases (for example, the value of security). It is also clear how easy it has become to challenge fundamental beliefs such as the universality of human rights.<sup>26</sup>

Without reformulating and strengthening fundamental human rights values over and over again, those standing up for these values will not be able to grow in numbers. At the same time, these fundamental values are realised and spread not in their own explicit, declared form (otherwise they would be no more than abstract maxims), but rather through dilemmas, narratives and metaphors, as well as through images of action.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/pope-francis-seeing-poverty-in-the-flesh-challenges-us-to-help-those-in-nee>.

<sup>24</sup> <https://cruxnow.com/cns/2016/10/13/christians-reject-refugees-hypocrites-pope-says/>.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jun/05/pope-francis-defends-gypsies-vatican-address>.

<sup>26</sup> Concerning the dilemmas of this issue already raised at the time of framing the universal declaration of human rights, see Michael D. Higgins (2013): 'The Human Rights Discourse: its importance and its challenges'. The Human Rights Commission's Annual Lecture on International Human Rights Day, 10 December 2012, <http://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/the-human-rights-commissions-annual-lecture>.

## 2.1.2. Moral imperatives, general truths, cultural stereotypes

What might in fact be the hardest task: to translate fundamental values into the language of everyday truths, situations and stories shared by many people. Many of these can be termed cultural stereotypes. When we recall such a stereotype, we recall the entire framework that goes with it. For example, when the Hungarian government says “we want to decide for ourselves with whom we will live together in Hungary”, the state of affairs depicted is easy to relate to. However, it is unrealistic for several reasons; it is only made credible and palatable by a stereotype, the stereotype of self-determination. We can of course decide this – in our own home, in our own families. But not even in the apartment building we live in. Furthermore, it is not even clear whom the word “we” refers to. Do we decide on this issue together with the government? Do we do so, for instance, on the issue of the residency bonds? Or in the case of citizens freely relocating to Hungary from any other EU member state? Concerning cohabitation, the situation much more resembles an apartment building – as has been pointed out on one of the workshops. The metaphor of an apartment building mobilises additional meanings, however; when someone moves into the house, they have to accept the rules, but we will also let them to introduce themselves first.

## 2.2. Interests

When creating a new narrative, one of the greatest challenges probably is to find a way to demonstrate that a larger number of people than those directly impacted have an interest in doing something (and that it is not the case that “we are defending the small, the marginalised”). The ranks of citizens willing to speak up and take action on significant issues will never grow unless more and more people realise that we are looking for solutions that somehow also resonate with their own interests. These connections are never so self-evident that we should cease discussing them. Concerning the four specific issues (the integration of the Roma, reducing poverty, a fair process for refugees, equal opportunities for women), there are rather large differences in terms of how much these issues can be linked to the most pressing problems. Even such an acute issue as poverty does not receive the treatment it deserves – particularly in a country where fear of becoming poor is among the leading concerns, where the majority of the population reports living in deprivation,<sup>27</sup> and where statistical data demonstrate extended poverty.

The classic arguments for example on the future economic benefits of integrating marginalised minorities or refugees do not seem to be compelling for large swaths of society. It is also possible that in some cases future return is so remote that cannot attract the audience. At the same time, however, it is also worthwhile to think in a nuanced manner about this question, because there can be a multitude of diverse interests and different kinds of returns. There are always situations that present benefits which are already obvious today. Such is the dilemma of whether to detain people seeking refuge for long months or to integrate them. Given that a certain amount of public funds will be used up in any case, what is preferable: spending the money on their detention or helping them to find employment as, e.g., nurses?

On the other hand, a workable solution could consist in making people understand that these problems can neither be swept under the carpet nor postponed. This can be accomplished by sketching out the negative scenarios: “we need to take action right now to minimise the damage”. International surveys showing that our schools keep producing masses of functionally illiterate kids could have an effect. Although the situation could be even worse for Roma children, they are far from being the only impacted group, and this truly is our common problem. There are many areas where taking efficient action could help everyone, including the poor and the Roma.

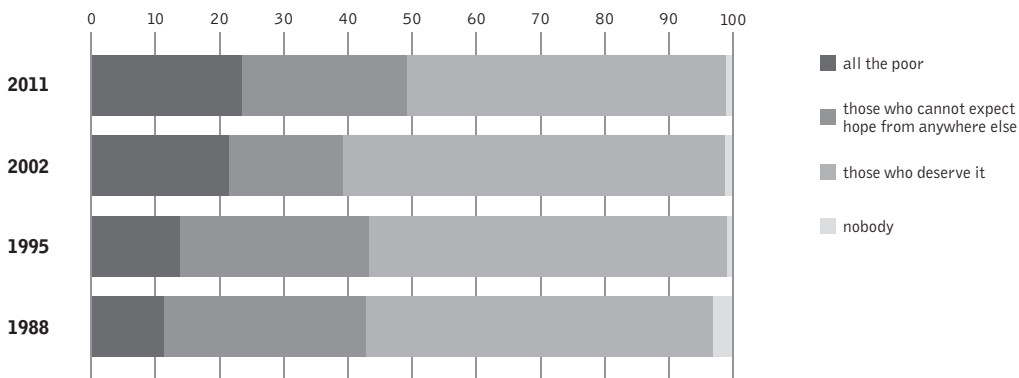
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**27** A 2012 study demonstrated that based on the assessment of respondents, four out of ten can barely make ends meet from their monthly wages, and only 1.6% said their salaries covered essential expenses (Egyenlőtlenség és polarizálódás a magyar társadalomban. Társki monitor jelentések 2012 – Inequalities and polarization in Hungary in society. Társki monitor reports 2012 52).

### 2.3. “Ambivalent groups”

Human rights organisations have been too often focusing on the depressing results of research on prejudices. It is sufficient to recall the context in which this kind of research is normally presented: most often in statements attempting to showcase the extent of the problem (which would purportedly justify the activities of the given organisation). The research on prejudices tends to focus on the scale of agreement with positions excluding certain groups – this is what their questions measure and what the diagrams in their reports illustrate. As one analyst pointed out in one of the preliminary focus groups, “when it comes to research, the money always goes to support research on prejudices, as opposed to studying good deeds”. Nevertheless, supporters of more inclusive policies showing greater solidarity will mainly be found among groups that can only be seen in the inverse of these diagrams. Both organisations and researchers who tend to pay less attention to these groups, even though the patterns of opinions and motivations they display could provide important information. After all, this is where supporters can be found, as well as potential supporters who could be brought on board if their emotional needs or pressing concerns are addressed. This question requires much deeper analysis, but we can venture a few preliminary conclusions based on what we know so far. For example, it can be assumed that a significant number of citizens think in a more nuanced manner than in the terms of the reductionist dichotomy setting “the deserving poor” against “the undeserving poor”.

#### Whom should the state support? Changing public opinion 1988–2011



Source: 1988-2011 TÁRKI, 2011: Medián. The question was the following: “Whom do you think state should support?” The third answer, with greater precision: “those who deserve it as a result of their work or behaviour.”

Half of survey respondents agreed in Hungary that the state should support all the poor, or the poor who may not expect help from elsewhere. According to a survey carried out by pollster Medián in 2013, there was a consensus of 85% of respondents agreeing that “the homeless should also be supported so that they can make a living from their work”, while 80% agreed that “there is a need for more humanitarian assistance and social care”, and almost two thirds (64%) agreed that “it would be useful to offer less comfortable social housing to the homeless”.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> [http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130422\\_Median\\_az\\_emberek\\_ketharmada\\_a\\_hajlektalan](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130422_Median_az_emberek_ketharmada_a_hajlektalan).



Research carried out in 2013 and 2015 in Heves County<sup>29</sup> demonstrates that nuanced opinions persist even concerning attitudes so central to prejudice against the Roma as the question of criminality (data show the degree of agreement, with higher figures indicating a stronger consensus):

**Table 1. Typology of approaches to the Russia-Ukraine conflict**

	2013	2015
Many people steal because their families are hungry.	29	36
Crime spreads as a result of poverty and misery.	52	58

completely agree = 100 units, somewhat agree = 50 units, doesn't know = 0 units, somewhat disagree = -50 units, completely disagree = -100 units.

However, we can also draw the conclusion from the data that locally, the **need for security** is one of the main issues. Security can be connected to fundamental human rights values in a variety of ways. However, it is raised more and more frequently in opposition to liberty, for example when the certain freedoms are encroached upon by certain security measures. In Hungary, the third item on the list of the values shared by the most people happens to be a strong state capable of protecting citizens.<sup>30</sup> Benjamin Franklin, among other outstanding and iconic individuals, famously spoke up against opposing freedom and security: "Those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety."<sup>31</sup> In other cases, security can overlap with certain human rights values such as equality and equal opportunities. It is not difficult to understand that great inequalities or the exclusion of certain groups from society can create security risks. Equal opportunities and solidarity may in fact increase security in a given society.

These are still fairly abstract concepts, however. The purveyors of fundamental human rights values will have to find ways to increase citizens' individual security by consistently defending these values. Certain issues raised by feminism can also be approached from the perspective of the demand for security, for example the right to safely deliver one's progeny, the issue of domestic violence, and the right not to be hurt.

<sup>29</sup> "Együtt az áldozatvédelemben" ("Together for the Protection of Victims") – in the context of project TÁMOP-5.6.1.C-11/2-2011-009.

<sup>30</sup> Based on the European Social Survey value research data. The questionnaire used the following formulation: "It is important to him that the government ensures his safety against all threats. He wants the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens." Thanks to Bence Ságvári.

<sup>31</sup> It is no coincidence that this quote has become contested and that some people say that the context of Franklin's letter within which he used this phrase gives an entirely different meaning to his words, <http://www.npr.org/2015/03/02/390245038/ben-franklins-famous-liberty-safety-quote-lost-its-context-in-21st-century>.

# 3. A worldview with which people can identify morally and emotionally

One feature that makes narratives much more than merely simple systems of arguments is that they provide a source of identity. They create community and engagement, and identity frequently becomes the driver of action. Organisations supporting human rights values are facing great challenges on this account: their networks of volunteers generally need to grow, their protest actions frequently lose their impetus, and a multitude of counter-narratives providing a strong source of emotional bonding have been deployed against them.

## 3.1. Anxiety management and power

The exercise of power politics increasingly goes hand-in-hand with offering a certain measure of anxiety management. Often there are very real fears that create the need for authority. The anxiety management approach requires a perpetual situation of risk or danger, and it is not infrequent for such a strategy to provide solutions to address fears which it has itself generated.<sup>32</sup> This logic has been described widely by theories of moral panic.<sup>33</sup>

### **Selling security – instances of moral panic**

The state is the actor best able to offer security. It is also the state that possesses the instruments, the money and the power to eliminate most hazards. Once a threat has been averted, support for the government will tend to increase; the same goes for unaverted natural disasters. Securitisation is a term used in the literature on migration to describe the method of turning migration first and foremost into a security policy issue.<sup>34</sup> Theories of moral panic, on the other hand, describe how the following dynamics can be created: (1) an action or characteristic feature attributed to a given group is perceived by the larger social group as a threat. (2) Not infrequently adopting the idiom of tabloids, simplistic messages presented in the media can play a dominant role in identifying the threat and the group, while also delimiting the range of problems and solutions. (3) These crude formulations often increase the sense of peril, while

<sup>32</sup> This is described with great sensibility by Anna Szilágyi (2008): A félelemkeltés nyelve (The language of fearmongering). *ÉS*, LII. évfolyam 18. szám, 2008. május 2, <<http://www.es.hu/cikk/2008-05-04/szilagy-i-anna/a-felelemkeltes-nyelve.html>>.

<sup>33</sup> A summary of these is provided by Kitzinger Dávid in: A morális pánik elmélete (A Theory of Moral Panic). *Replika* 40. szám (2000. június): pp 23–48.

<sup>34</sup> Jef Huysmans analyses presentations of refugees in the media in the two extremes of a security threat on the one hand and human rights/humanitarian issue on the other. Huysmans sees a contradiction in the coexistence of these two kinds of framing in the very fact that the EU and most of its member states have adopted a humanitarian framework as far as their official rhetoric is concerned, while treating the issue in a law enforcement context from the data collection to a wide range of interventions. Huysmans (2000): The European Union and the securitization of migration. *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol. 38, no. 5, pp. 751–777.

creating the expectation that the authorities will act immediately, mobilising resources on a massive scale. (4) All this provides legitimacy for the authorities to increase their scope of action, thereby returning to the original formula and validating the original fear.

While this should not be understood to suggest that security risks have not arisen across Europe in recent times, there are states that exploit such situations to eliminate potential critics. Foreign actors mobilise a large array of resources in order to spread conspiracy theories in Western public opinion. Western human rights organisations naturally cannot participate in this securitisation race, and, moreover, time is normally on the side of those trading in security: sooner or later, a robbery incidentally orchestrated by Roma or an act of terrorism executed by past or recent immigrants is bound to occur. The need for safety/security is one of the most important needs. This is recurrently exploited by populists, although their solutions are frequently no solutions at all.

### 3.2. Responses to fear – and to our own dogmas

There are thus several reasons why the organisations campaigning for human rights values should consider their own strategies in terms of their potential responses to fear-mongering. This requires checking the responses they have routinely provided hitherto, and examining their own dogmas which gave rise to them.

One widely promulgated response consists in “unveiling” fear-mongering by denying that the fears are justified, or, preferably, to shut down the issue by bringing up a few countervailing facts. Another approach hinges on labeling the people who share these fears as ignorant or racist. This is the worst thing we can do. Given that these political approaches often rely on existing, real-life dynamics and anxieties, the above responses cannot appease people’s fears, and can even provoke anger. On the other hand, it is unlikely that they can provide a more compelling argument for the undecided than what can be provided by a potent power offering a sense of security. Another dogma is that of fighting anger with anger, i.e. the “Let’s just throw the book at them” approach. It is an open question as to whether heated rhetoric can be answered by upping the ante. When citizens flocked to help refugees at Hungarian railway stations, this was a much more commensurate and long-lasting response to government fear-mongering than merely responding with anger, such as calls for concerned citizens to sabotage government billboards. The opportunity to actively help appealed to people’s basic values, which were very difficult to question. Moreover, it soothed, albeit temporarily, the fears and emotions evoked by government propaganda, and also reframed the latter’s interpretation. Furthermore, it mobilised those who acted out of political outrage, as well as those who offered help simply out of neighbourly love.<sup>35</sup> It demonstrated that maintaining hatred consumes large amounts of energy, while refusing to pass on hatred is free of charge. The strength of volunteering to help refugees is best illustrated by the fact that at a certain point, even the government gave the green light for major charities, previously silent and out of sight, to join in the work that had previously been carried out by volunteers. Even the wife of the prime minister volunteered.<sup>36</sup>

The summer of 2015 was an extraordinary moment both in terms of the state of affairs and the opportunities it provided. The lessons of reframing and emotional involvement can, however, be transferred to other causes as well.

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**35** On the intersection of various motivations, see the as yet unpublished research of Margit Feischmidt and colleagues. Cf. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RtcrLCAvRcI>> and <[http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/18/kiderult\\_kik\\_vedik\\_a\\_menekulteket/](http://index.hu/belfold/2016/10/18/kiderult_kik_vedik_a_menekulteket/)>, respectively.

**36** [http://index.hu/belfold/2015/07/02/orban\\_keritest\\_epit\\_a\\_felesege\\_adomanyt\\_visz\\_a\\_menekulteknek/](http://index.hu/belfold/2015/07/02/orban_keritest_epit_a_felesege_adomanyt_visz_a_menekulteknek/).

### 3.3. Building positive identities

An important aspect of anxiety management is that it provides more than a rational response or a top-down solution to the fears. Indeed, fear and anger alone are insufficient to construct a political identity; anxiety management also provides their members with positive emotional involvement, a sense of community, self-esteem and pride.

We know that emotions like self-esteem and the sense of belonging to a community are basic needs. And here some of our own dogmas may again come to light, starting with the dilemma of whether appealing to emotions is not in itself a form of manipulation. When the human rights narrative has adopted an emotional approach, this has normally taken the form of evoking pity for the victims, or a sense of guilt as illustrated by the abundance of dramatic images used by these organisations. (The chapter on visual representation will address how this has often turned out to be counter-productive). Nevertheless, a fleeting twinge of conscience does not forge long-term emotional identification.

The demolition of dogmas concerning emotional involvement is the first step in the work of organising supporters of fundamental human rights values into a new community. This is an extended task of identity building, on which a number of recommendations were raised during our workshops:

0. The dichotomies in terms of “them” and “us” should not automatically be accepted. (If refugees are beaten at the border, it is not “us” who beat them; we are the ones opposing violence.)
1. **Instead of problems, we should be in the business of selling solutions.** Nobody wants to “buy problems”, and furthermore, painting an overly dramatic picture of the troubles can paralyse our audience. (This leads to a number of conclusions, e.g. whether to spend the precious 3 to 4 minutes we are allotted on television to explain poverty indicators, or opportunities for how people can help. Furthermore, positive solutions can attract more supporters in the long run, even if such argumentation might be more complicated than the counterarguments.<sup>37</sup>)
2. **Community and anxiety management:** one opportunity for outreach is to link people with others facing similar challenges as well as with those who can help alleviate these problems. This is first and foremost facilitated by Web 2.0 technologies. Large numbers of groups need to be created to form communities, exchange information and facilitate debates.
3. **Community and resistance: to look for opportunities to show how collective joy can be generated by the realisation** that there are alternatives to the behaviours we are being induced to engage in.
4. **To give positive feedback.** To emphasise the results achieved thus far and the extent of assistance. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy: when we say that many people have already joined, but that we still need *You*, even more people will join. Conversely, if we stress the opposite (“how severe the problem is, and how widespread social apathy is”), fewer people will do so.
5. **To provide opportunities for those who join the cause to see themselves in a larger framework:** explain how is the cause we are inviting people to join linked to questions of “what our job is in the world” and “what my connection is to the cause”.
6. Yet nor should we dogmatically follow the advice to ignore the communication aiming to discredit us: we need to point out wherever the truth is distorted or people are led astray. The two are not mutually exclusive – **we are fully capable of simultaneously playing multiple lines of the melody.**
7. **To display strength.** People want to join the strong, not the weak. Communication in this context can be a self-fulfilling prophecy; those who come across as weak will remain weak, and vice versa.
8. **The example of appealing to people with a positive attitude can be just as attractive and forceful as that of fear-mongering.** Increasing opportunities to meet with the assisted groups can serve this objective.

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<sup>37</sup> Emmanuel Macron based his counter-strategy partially on this specific strategy when he accused Marine Le Pen in the last instalment of the French presidential election debate of being a defeatist, given that the French are more successful than this and thus they deserve better, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SpHQF01VXUU&t=621s>.

# 4. Finding supporters, bringing them on board, making them speak up

## 4.1. From fixating on the enemy to addressing supporters

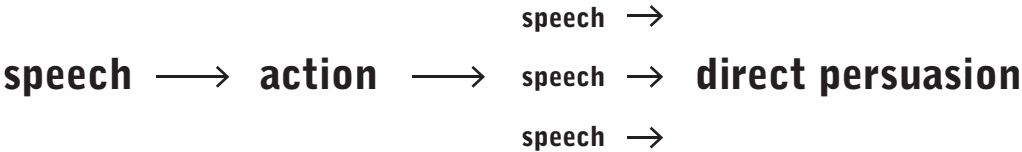
On many accounts, the human rights discourse has been focused on changing people harbouring prejudices, and when this does not work to shame them and exclude them. The radical restructuring of public discourse forums and in particular the increased weight of Web 2.0 platforms have made it impossible to exclude certain specific groups from the flow of communication. Furthermore, web-based platforms normally amplify the voices of those whose very credo is exclusion. However, if we keep giving up the ground to them in the arena of comment threads, *the undecided* will be inclined to think that the extremists represent the position of the majority. This can easily launch the dynamics of a spiral of silence,<sup>38</sup> where supporters fall silent for fear of becoming isolated.

Where the basic experience received is that "tolerant speakers" have been confined to minority positions, the situation can only be improved by increasing the pool of well-prepared debaters. In such a situation, actors who are surrounded by more undecided individuals – the network of those who are "officially" representing this discourse (such as legal advocacy organisations) – will sooner or later be *filtered out* from this perspective. Thus, we need to find ways to compel our *supporters* to speak up precisely for the purpose of convincing the undecided. In order to be able to ensure their engagement, however, is far from simple. It is not sufficient just to win Internet battles – is at least as important to have personal encounters and to find channels and forms of personal involvement that will induce them to action.

This is a point where we should step aside from conventional themes of communication to issues that have more to do with community building and developing organisations, but are still connected to a new narrative through numerous threads. This can multiply the number of speakers and the efficiency of discourse.

**Summarised in a single formula:**

**speech** → ~~**direct persuasion**~~



38 See [http://www.utwente.nl/cw/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Mass%20Media/spiral\\_of\\_silence/](http://www.utwente.nl/cw/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20clusters/Mass%20Media/spiral_of_silence/).

## 4.2. Action as anxiety management

One of the most powerful forms of engagement is action, and successful methods of involving people stimulate real activity. Identifying supporters and bringing them on board requires at least three things: they should (1) identify with the cause as their own, (2) see their own role in the solution, and (3) see the outcome of their action.

### 4.2.1. A cause of one's own

In reviewing the literature on the social psychology of action and engagement, analysts have found that commitment to collective action is first and foremost defined by the following kinds of individual motivation:<sup>39</sup> (A) a politicised collective identity which is influenced by (B) the experience of perceived injustice and (C) ideas concerning the efficiency of the group. It is a defining step in shaping a collective identity for people to recognise that they are facing similar problems. These problems are not individual, but collective ones, meaning that the solutions can also be collective. The Hungarian government's recent National Consultations followed a similar logic, at least in part, as they aimed to convince their audience that their individual fears are actually collective fears shared by many.

### 4.2.2. A role of one's own

Action can engender new role-models. One participant at the preliminary focus groups raised an example from the field of environmental protection: "one can go on and on about the benefits of selective waste disposal, but it's hard to beat the argument that your neighbour is already doing it". This leads us to reconsider another "dogma": do we necessarily have to require our target group to put themselves in the shoes of refugees, Roma, gay people in every single instance? Might it not be much easier for them to identify with those whom they might more easily become, i.e. members of the social majority living alongside refugees, or non-Roma parents adopting Roma children?

### 4.2.3. Low barriers to entry

Most of the human rights' NGO-s systematically demand a "high level of commitment" and "strong style" from those asked to join. High levels of commitment and a strong style are frustrating and alienating for many. To the contrary, it might be worthwhile to look for models where getting involved does not entail a large investment (there is the option of increasing one's level of commitment later). For example, by attaching value only to demonstrations, we have already given up on those potentially open to less radical ways of advancing the cause. This is why there is elevated communicative significance in creating platforms to demonstrate that many people share our values. Our recent history provides abundant examples of actions aiming to increase visibility in such a fashion – even in locations where standing up for certain values has involved high levels of risk. The movement in Pinochet's dictatorship originally grew out of car drivers and pedestrians decreasing their speed to publicly demonstrate their resistance and to highlight the large number of people sharing this sentiment. This could not be punished even under that regime. Low barriers to entry enable even the meek to experience the strength of the community.<sup>40</sup>

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**39** Anna Kende – Adrienn Ujhelyi – Nóra Anna Lantos (2014): A közösségi média szerepe a folyamatos részvételt igénylő politikai tüntetések fenntartásában – a 2013-as budapesti egyetemfoglalás szociálpszichológiai elemzése. (The role of community media in maintaining political demonstrations requiring continuous participation – A social psychological analysis of the 2013 Budapest university sit-in) *Alkalmazott pszichológia* 2014, 14(1):163–188.

**40** For further examples, also on how the force of irony in itself can challenge false authorities, see Srdja Popovic (2015): *Blueprint for Revolution*. Spiegel & Grau Trade.

At the same time, reducing barriers to entry undisputedly entails the risk that much of the energy will be exhausted by a single action. Many people will have finished helping the poor in a single action, such as giving donations around Christmas. The real question is whether we can appreciate these engagements but also create the conditions to foster deeper involvement on the part of those who may be willing to go further.

### 4.3. Strength in results

It is well-known phenomena in social psychology that “events accompanied by strong emotions may after a while elicit emotional fatigue, while participants in actions organised on an instrumental basis can become disheartened by the lack of results (...) in contrast, the perception of success may even boost long-term commitment”.<sup>41</sup> Thus, formulating (partial) goals and identifying (partial) successes that also display the force of the organisers is a necessary condition for increasing the number of people joining us.

### 4.4. Even more talk: community, strength, going step-by-step

It also follows from the above that both the sense of support from a community as well as actions demonstrating success are needed in order for people to be willing to stand up for what they consider as the truth. This presupposes more emphasis on community building also in our media platforms: dialogue, real questions instead calling on people to “like us if...”, and other opportunities to become active.

Another question is whether this community will offer enough strength and confidence to induce supporters to take action and speak up in areas where the noncommittal or those harbouring opposing viewpoints are in the majority. One precondition is to recognise that normally we represent higher numbers even in these environments than we would have thought: in fact, it is taking action and speaking up that will reveal potential allies.

### 4.5. Local cooperation and identities

Several workshops and focus group discussions raised the issue of the increasing value of local identities. Local public discourse offers the greatest opportunity to encounter opinions different from our own: at the local level, we do not only interact with people who happen to share our own ideological views.

For instance, the extremely low level of the confidence index concerning state actors and services<sup>42</sup> could motivate people in many places to construct forms of local solidarity – even though many still think we can only rely on ourselves. What is unclear is whether there are issues where this “we, ourselves” could be larger and more inclusive than our own families. Ideas were raised in the course of the workshops on how to build upon the above-mentioned instances of community. For example, a the discussion with feminist organisations gave rise to the idea of launching a movement to ensure that mothers on maternity leave – who spend their days alone at home – receive more attention, that neighbours help each other, and that programmes are organised for mothers together with their kids.

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**41** Kende – Újhelyi – Lantos 2014, op. cit.

**42** See the summary of the 2009 TÁRKI research: [http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/gazdkult/osszefoglalo\\_kepviselok\\_091026.pdf](http://www.tarki.hu/hu/research/gazdkult/osszefoglalo_kepviselok_091026.pdf), as well as an article published by senior researcher István György Tóth in 2017: <http://index.hu/gazdasag/penzbeszel/2017/06/12/turanbanya/>.

Even though it has been common knowledge since the experiments conducted by Sherif and colleagues<sup>43</sup> that cooperation and interdependence reduce inter-group antagonism more efficiently than any other factors, opportunities to create cooperative platforms are rare. There are also areas where this local cooperation can be stimulated, for example in smaller settlements, within the scope of various “favour banks”, where people can offer their expertise and time to the community on a voluntarily basis. It is of fundamental importance for organisations dedicated to human rights that they be able to foster forms of cooperation at the local level. Such cooperation can help create platforms where our voices can be multiplied by local supporters and endowed with credibility.

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**43** For a summary of the experiment conducted by Muzafer Sherif & Carolyn W. Sherif, see: <http://psychclassics.yorku.ca/Sherif/chap1.htm>.



# 5. Solutions and positive scenarios

If there is one factor that prevents active involvement and assistance with impeding cooperation, it is fatalism. Experts often contribute to this fatalism: “Instead of discussing how best to fight diarrhoea or dengue, many of the most vocal experts tend to be fixated on the ‘big questions’: What is the ultimate cause of poverty?”<sup>44</sup> The various patterns of how we justify failing to get involved have been widely documented: “the problem is so large that my small contribution would be no help at all”, “how could centuries of disadvantages possibly be remedied in the course of the present government’s term?”, etc. Indeed, no miracle cure will instantaneously solve our deepest social problems, but this does not mean that we should not take immediate action or that many small contributions will not make a difference. A key element of a narrative for effective cooperation and solidarity consists in making it plausible that (1) solutions *do exist*, (2) many of the solutions presently on offer are fake, and (3) even a small contribution can make a difference.

## 5.1. Solutions *do exist*

People want to be part of a solution rather than part of a problem. Thus, instead of persuading them of the severity of the problems, we should persuade them of the possibilities of solutions. What prevents us from realising this is often rooted in the deeply ingrained habit of seeing overly dramatic descriptions of the situation as a guarantee that people can be convinced. Seeing suffering will shock, but it will not necessarily mobilise – this is the point where self-justifying patterns along the lines of “I can’t help things anyhow” become activated.

In order to deliver results, achievable objectives are needed – even if these will sometimes seem like lukewarm, half-hearted solutions in the eyes of the organisations wrestling with large-scale social challenges. They surely are, but a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step, and the people who make small commitments may become those who eventually dedicate themselves in the larger scheme of things.

## 5.2. The solutions offered are not solutions / are fake solutions / only exacerbate the problem

Suppressive responses and law enforcement solutions have taken centre stage in addressing issues of poverty, the Roma, as well as the influx of refugees. The trend is obviously not limited to Hungary – with respect to the Roma, it is relevant at least throughout Central Europe,<sup>45</sup> while with respect to

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<sup>44</sup> Abhijit V. Banerjee – Esther Duflo (2011): *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*. Random House India.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Stewart, op. cit.

the poor<sup>46</sup> and refugees<sup>47</sup> it is even more general. Rising demand for order and instantaneous solutions from the authorities and law enforcement appear to be real solutions in the eyes of many. We know that criminalising homelessness will not solve the housing problem. People are aware that forcing the Roma into public work schemes and making them completely and totally vulnerable to the local authorities in charge will not provide a sustainable remedy to poverty. But these kinds of law enforcement solutions – which treat the symptoms instead of the root cause – have saturated the market even for undecided groups. A fundamental question is therefore whether while showcasing our own solutions, we can also demonstrate the falsehood of other approaches.

### 5.3. Changing the world one step at a time, with a little help from... you

How deeply ingrained altruism is in our culture is illustrated clearly by the strength of the internal drive to offer donations to the poor at least once a year, around Christmas. On the other hand, when people see that someone else will solve the problem without their help, they will not necessarily join. A working model of involvement provides a platform to those who are not yet taking action, but feel guilty about it. It involves framing an ongoing effort as something that can be joined: “We’re doing it, but how far we get depends on you.”

The low barrier to entry can, however, provide too much of a reinforcement, as clearly happens with those who only make donations around Christmas. The dominant media image at this time of year, which invariably shows poverty and in such a context, undoubtedly reinforces this state of affairs. Instead of trying to apply a quick fix to our pangs of conscience, however, a real solution might consist in finding ways to ensure that those willing to take further steps get a chance to do so. (Citizens buying two extra litres of oil at the mall probably do not really think they have contributed significantly to resolving problems. But if they could see, or even just receive feedback once in a while on what has been collected, maybe they would be willing to provide greater assistance.) Making the results a visible and symbolic acknowledgment of people’s efforts is of paramount importance for bringing on board those who may potentially support us.

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**46** Cf. Wacquant, op. cit.

**47** Cf. Huysmans, op. cit.

# 6. Telling stories

Storytelling is looked upon by everyone from business consultants to PR gurus as a kind of silver bullet.<sup>48</sup> The literature on storytelling primarily highlights a personal touch, the authenticity of personal communication, the transfer of an emotional experience, and persuasion through greater ease of identification. But a narrative can illustrate a point at best; it will never perfectly fit a message. The reception of *The Cosby Show*, one of the greatest success stories in American television, demonstrated that a positive story will not automatically go hand-in-hand with changing attitudes.<sup>49</sup>

A wisely chosen set of stories consisting of multiple elements could also subtly demonstrate the force of solidarity, cooperation and effort in the context of fundamental human rights values. In addition, stories have the added benefit that they can easily be spread in the way that memes can: it is much easier to pass on a story than to pass on a complicated argument.

Storytelling can also have a therapeutic effect as well. People can recover from trauma through storytelling, and can find solace in other people's stories of coping – as illustrated by the personal narratives on childbirth collected and told by EMMA.<sup>50</sup>

## 6.1. Storytelling and the infrastructure of memory

It is also clear that certain stories will be lost unless they are regularly retold. The longevity of stories is ensured mainly by institutions. We remember them in the context of commemorative ceremonies, exhibitions of public institutions, street names, statues, and so on. In order for these stories to go viral, they would have to be repeated often and in many places, finding new creative formats from drama classes, to bringing parents together with people in positions of authority and credibility, and in certain cases even through the involvement of popular celebrities at school events or on platforms such as postage stamps. This, however, requires storytelling organisations to be more numerous and more efficient than is presently the case.

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48 For a good summary with abundant examples, see <http://www.sasistvan.hu/files/eloadasok/storytellingkurt.pdf>.

49 A good example is provided by an analysis of the impact of *The Cosby Show*, extremely popular with American whites as well. The show featured a successful African American family of intellectuals, but it could not mitigate prejudice even though millions watched each of its episodes. Many viewers reconciled the contradiction between a likable family and the prejudice on coloured people with the conclusion along the lines of "See? It all goes to show that African Americans can only blame themselves. Were they as much willing to work, they could achieve as much success as the Huxtable family did." See Jhally and Lewis. 1992: *Enlightened Racism: The Cosby Show, Audiences & the Myth of the American Dream*.

50 <http://pestimagyarszinhas.hu/szulestortenetek-felolvaso-maron/>.

# 7. Redesigning the linguistic toolbox

Frequently repeated and highlighted words can mobilise whole interpretative frameworks and sets of value judgments. It is not a coincidence that such heavy artillery is mobilised in the battles of the public discourse. In recent years, human rights organisations have been mostly concerned with the language of extremists and populists, instead of addressing their own use of language – at least this was one of the clearest instances of consensus in the preliminary discussions.

We are all familiar with the story of how the battle over expressions enabled those attempting to defend human dignity through linguistic decency to be portrayed as privileged snobs, or as the oppressors of the truth. This trend is not only dominant in Hungary; Donald Trump often made the point during his election campaign that “we cannot afford to be so politically correct anymore”<sup>51</sup> – as if refraining from stigmatising people would somehow entail financial costs. This has led to the emergence of widespread, vague and manipulative counter-concepts such as “calling things by their names”. Some of the criticisms of linguistic political correctness might even deserve consideration, but these criticisms are often not about questions of language use; rather, they represent a desire to legitimise the use of generalisations and stigmatisation. Defenders of human rights cannot win this battle by banning certain linguistic practices. Such a policy would further alienate many undecided observers. It might be more useful to avoid concentrating on what others should not say and instead to focus on how we could speak differently. What are the values we stand for, and how could all of this be best presented, using what language and what cue words? And which of our words have become stigmatised to a point where they need to be replaced?

## 7.1. Words that identify and words that shut down

In Hungary it generated huge debate when a dictionary leaked from the Ministry of Human Resources in 2015.<sup>52</sup> The glossary, among other things, purported to eliminate terminology related to “poverty” by replacing “poor person” with “person in need”, to mitigate expressions concerning “equal opportunities”, and to circumvent the concept of “segregation” by using characterisations such as “backward” and “peripheral”. (The list of banned words also included the term “civil/civic”, proposing the use of the alternative “self-organising communities of citizens” instead.)

The same symbolic battle is being waged on the most fundamental expressions. Let us recall how the expression “refugees” was replaced first in government jargon and later in the rhetoric of independent institutions, the police and the state health care system. This is how people fleeing atrocities in their homelands first became “immigrants”, then “economic migrants”, then “illegal entrants”, only to eventually be subsumed under the harsh-sounding label of “migrants”, a loanword that sounds rather alien to the Hungarian ear.<sup>53</sup>

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51 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2AFqVaX3oI>.

52 <http://index.hu/documents/belfold/emmiszotar.pdf>.

53 Cf. Bernáth-Messing 2016 i.m.

Human rights NGO-s lack alternative expressions for being underprivileged, for discrimination or segregation. This deficiency hinders our ability to persuade large groups of people. At the same time, it is also difficult to construct a positive vision when the term most commonly used to describe peaceful individuals who accept others and respect their dignity is “tolerant”.

## 7.2. Hierarchy

The use of words is only one tool in our linguistic toolbox, however. One of the clearest instances of consensus in the focus groups was the statement that the conventional arguments used by defenders of human rights and antiracist activists are hierarchical, and this has contributed significantly to their crisis of legitimacy. These arguments have often been delivered from a superior, omniscient position and have employed the technique of labelling, which in turn has evoked frustrations that often alienate ‘people in the middle’. This superiority complex is manifested through a much wider linguistic apparatus of the human rights paradigm: we organise “awareness trainings” (where in order to take part participants must first acknowledge that their awareness is not fine-tuned enough) and “prejudice-clearing” meetings. This is complemented by the use of technical terms borrowed primarily from the language of jurisprudence, which again conveys to many a sense of cultural superiority. Creating a more attractive, more inclusive language begins with reflecting on these approaches.

## 7.3. Elements of style

Questions of style and the tone in which we voice our messages came up frequently in the preliminary focus group discussions. Several people, primarily journalists, referred to the dilemma over the need for nuanced, moderated discussion of certain issues on the one hand, and on the other the fact that in the media and on other platforms there is a persistent desire to use forceful speech. As a participant stated: “there is a need to adopt a nuanced idiom, but everyone wants to come across as a tough speaker today. This is the vicious circle that we need to break.” Several respondents associated a derogatory style with the legal advocacy role. An employee of a Christian group noted the following: “The role of the legal advocate, defining the agenda and formulating demands, generates negative feelings and resistance.”

According to George Lakoff, language inducing strong affective states, even when it is used with counterarguments, will only support the adversary because it sets the tone for a primarily emotional treatment of the issue. The expression “human rights banter” reflects creatively on this desire of using forceful language<sup>54</sup> while at the same time also discrediting the message itself. It is not worth engaging in a contest with the fear-mongers; only calm but confident strength can challenge fear-mongering. We cannot counter panic with panic.

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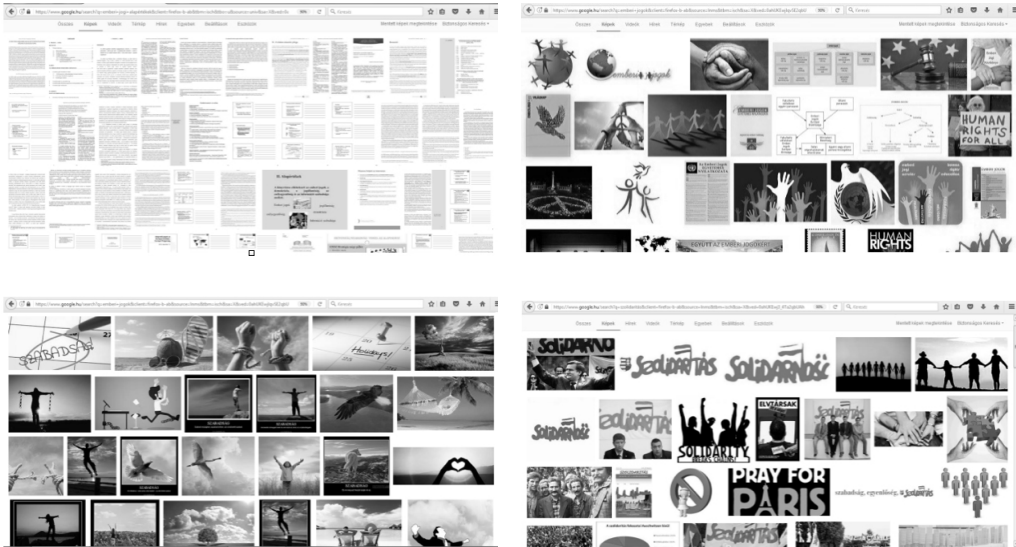
<sup>54</sup> The prime minister’s speech at the oath taking ceremony of border rangers, 7 March 2017, <http://24.hu/belfold/2017/03/07/orban-ebben-a-pillanatban-is-ostrom-alatt-allunk/>.

# 8. Visibility, imagery and visual representation

## 8.1. A void to be filled

Developing a new, consciously shaped world of visual imagery and representation is an essential element in constructing a new narrative. This involves not only finding iconic images, but also reflecting on visibility, the forms of visual representation and the processes of manufacturing images.

Those who are sceptical about the global *visual transformation* in recent decades should consider the everyday example of the chances of an imageless Facebook post going viral compared to the chances for the same post accompanied by a well-chosen image. It is hard to find more telling examples of how human rights values are represented as an abstract world than when one tries to search for images of them in Google. The examples speak for themselves:<sup>55</sup>



<sup>55</sup> Search words entered: emberi jogi alapértékek"; „emberi jogok”; „szabadság”; „szolidaritás (“fundamental human rights values”; “human rights”; “freedom”; “solidarity”). Accessed on 5 June 2017.

The first three screenshots demonstrate the fact that visual representations of basic human rights values are not in widespread public circulation. Compared to these, the fourth screenshot proves that this is not impossible to achieve: the Hungarian Solidarity Movement (Magyar Szolidaritás Mozgalom) has managed to achieve placement among the first 20 images in the course of only a few years. An effective policy of visual representation will ultimately hinge on whether one or two years down the road we will have managed to define at least one of the first 10 to 15 images to come up in our web search.

## 8.2. Image and dogma

The policy of imagery and visual representation of human rights organisations is also held captive by a number of stubborn dogmas. One assumes that shocking images exert greater influence and mobilise people more effectively. But the impacts of shock last for shorter and shorter periods of time, and cause many people to turn away. Even worse, we have gradually become accustomed to violence over time. The point at which we have had enough occurs at different times for different people, but it is no exaggeration to say that with regard to the images from Aleppo this point has been reached for many citizens in the past two years.

Another such dogma is related to the dramatic tone of the images: the more we show situations of oppression or deprivation, the better we can mobilise empathy and solidarity. However, a study<sup>56</sup> demonstrates that this assumption is far from being true: in fact, these dramatic representations have incited interpretations asserting that the people represented in the images are in fact responsible for their plight. Overly dramatic visual representations of poverty will quickly be associated with neglect, or the lack of determination or motivation. Even more disturbingly, such images can significantly affect how people conceive of solidarity.

## 8.3. Creating visibility

Images serve as evidence both for and against the positions represented: the extent of the battles waged over blocking certain images while striving to imprint others in the public mind is not coincidental. This was perhaps most salient during the 2015 refugee crisis when the government blocked pictures *en masse*, i.e. by denying photographers and journalists access to refugee camps which amid reports of overcrowding and inhumane accommodation. Meanwhile, images documenting reports of hazards were mass-produced, e.g. making it mandatory for professionals interacting with refugees to wear protective gloves and medical masks.

Such a conscious policy of visual representation is difficult to compete with, especially if it is backed by administrative power – difficult, but not impossible. In a certain sense, this was successfully demonstrated by the volunteers helping the refugees. Merely taking action created masses of images that collectively overcame the hegemony of government propaganda. These volunteers did not wear gloves or masks. They offered images of caring and solidarity rather than the imagery of fear-mongering. In the same way, images of the hungry lining up at impromptu soup kitchens on Budapest's Blaha Lujza Square provided irrefutable counterevidence to government propaganda denying the existence of poverty. This demonstrates that even if the funds available are scarce, important matters can be still be represented in ways defying obfuscation, and iconic images can still be produced. This was the case of

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**56** Béla Janky – Boglarka Bakó – Péter Szilágyi – Adrienn Bognár: Stigmatising the Poor Without Negative Images: Images of Extreme Poverty and the Formation of Welfare Attitudes. <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/19/3/4.html>

a photograph taken in December 2016, where people started to line up at 3 a.m. for a soup kitchen on Blaha Lujza Square scheduled to open at 11 a.m. Such pictures are surely worth thousands of words.<sup>57</sup> Another example of a strategy to generate visibility was offered by the right wing extremist, uniformed Hungarian Guard, with its intimidating marches across Roma settlements. The Hungarian Guard received publicity even when their actions were criticised by the mainstream media. The Guard's marches showcased the strength of "taking matters into one's own hands" while also sending a message of novelty as they kept reappearing at different settlements. In contrast, a repeated feature on the contemporary stage of human rights activism consists in recurring demonstrations with some dozens of participants as they send out the message that not many people care about their issues.

A conscious, well-designed strategy of visual imagery is an essential part of communication-planning. If it is in fact true that "everything we know is physically instantiated in the neural systems of our brains,"<sup>58</sup> then *action* is surely the image that can mobilise others to take action. If we find it unjust and damaging to our efforts that the debate on homelessness is often dominated by pictures of shabby people camping under an overpass, then it might be a good idea to perhaps invest energy into producing images documenting the everyday lives of forest dwellers.

The impact of truly iconic images is often generated by pointing the way to something beyond the quotidian routine. This is the technique employed by role-reversal and cross-classification approaches,<sup>59</sup> as well as by experiments exploring the effects of our stereotypes.<sup>60</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that people's tendency to cling to their stereotypes often limits the impact of images that would directly challenge these beliefs. An experiment involving a commercial featuring Roma actors demonstrated that viewers would not identify them as Roma (but rather as southerners or people from the Mediterranean) when their roles did not conform to stereotypes about the community.<sup>61</sup>

## 8.4. Manufacturing and dissemination

### 8.4.1. Memes and counter-memes

Images also spread the same way memes do – by being modified, shared and recollected. In the same vein, irony and creativity is frequently used to challenge the original meaning, which also spreads memes. Humour and the joy of creativity are forces that can in the long run erode even a campaign mobilising large-scale forces. It would be worthwhile to think about what actions the proponents of human rights values could use to enable these energies to come to the surface more regularly.

### 8.4.2. Platforms of representation – promoting self-representation

Constructing a new visual world may at times only require that the right platforms be made available. Such a forum could be created by promoting the self-representation of communities. Over time, visual stereotypes can be diluted by the diversity of the community's images, and self-representation can play an important role in this. Such images possess an extraordinary aura of credibility: it is no coincidence

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<sup>57</sup> For an example of this, see <https://444.hu/2016/12/24/hajnali-harom-ota-gyulnek-a-raszorulok-a-blahan-az-ingyenebedert>.

<sup>58</sup> Lakoff, op. cit., p. 52.

<sup>59</sup> For a striking visual example for this approach, see <https://nytlive.nytimes.com/womenintheworld/2017/05/18/photos-featuring-racial-role-reversals-of-american-women-spark-strong-reactions-online/>.

<sup>60</sup> See Judging America, a project by Joel Parés, (<http://www.joelpares.com/judging-america-1/>), or its adaptation to Hungary, <http://gallery8.org/hu/news/2/73/a-roma-test-politikaja-i-nincs-artatlan-kep>.

<sup>61</sup> István Siklákai (2010): Sztereotípiák, reklám, identitás. *Alkalmazott Pszichológia* XII. évf. 1–2. szám. 113–133, [http://ap.elte.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/APA\\_2010\\_1\\_2\\_SIKLAKAI.pdf](http://ap.elte.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/APA_2010_1_2_SIKLAKAI.pdf).



# 9. Linking communication platforms

that the anti-gypsy discourses often try to reinforce characterisations of the “abject character of the Roma” or “Roma criminality” by means of images handpicked from community websites.<sup>62</sup> Fostering a dignified self-image could be an important element for a world of visual imagery promoting fundamental human rights values.

## 9.1. The new media environment

The space of public discourse has undergone radical changes over the past decade. A new media environment has emerged, amplifying the role of Web 2.0 platforms while decreasing coverage by the mainstream media. This has become commonplace. However, a lot of tools and reflexes of human rights organisations are still linked to the previous era of the media world. This can be observed in the communication strategies built upon the strategies of excluding extremists from the public discourse. The change in the media environment is best illustrated by the way Jobbik has been able to grow in Hungary since the beginning of the 2000s despite its poor representation in the mainstream media.<sup>63</sup> In their case, linking Web 2.0 platforms was even able to compensate for their underrepresentation in the mainstream media.

At the same time, recent years have seen unprecedented political concentration of the mainstream media in Hungary since the regime change,<sup>64</sup> where distorting the truth on a number of issues has become part of the established daily practice. Given that such a system will never provide 100% airtight coverage, there are a number of examples demonstrating that this alternative political reality can only be maintained at the cost of multiplying very robust lies and omissions. People do not like to be treated like imbeciles, as is proven by the fact that the media operating fully in line with the propaganda have been unable to increase their audiences despite any amount of subsidies.

## 9.2. Opportunities

There is still room for action even in such a concentrated and often hostile media environment, however. There are independent media outlets that can be reinforced if we continually provide them with credible information. And where there is no money for billboards, we might still be able to find funds for stickers.

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**62** Entering the words “Gypsy” or “Roma person” in Google’s image search will often display the Roma self-portraits widely redistributed by the websites of the extreme right.

**63** Gábor Bernáth (2014): *Harc a jelenlétért és a jelentésért* (The Battle for Presence and Meaning), *Médiakutató* XV., vol. 3, pp. 101–114, [http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2014\\_03\\_osz/08\\_szelsosegesek\\_media.pdf](http://www.mediakutato.hu/cikk/2014_03_osz/08_szelsosegesek_media.pdf).

**64** Cf. Pál Dániel Rényi (2017): *Ez nem újságírás, ez politikai nehézfegyverzet* (This is no journalism, this is political heavy artillery), <https://tldr.444.hu/2017/05/18/fideszmedia>.

If the local media keep ignoring us, we can always organise actions – not only in Budapest, but in rural cities as well. Such actions can also be ignored, but if they keep being repeated in front of our allies in the street, this will continue to erode the credibility of the propaganda-media. The tabloid media are a potential resource as well, as one of the organising principles of the tabloids – the focus on celebrities – can also contribute to popularising human rights values.<sup>65</sup>

Furthermore, Web 2.0 platforms cannot be controlled, but taken together they can provide an unprecedented degree of outreach – the number of followers of the largest Hungarian Facebook pages outweighs the majority of Hungarian mainstream media.<sup>66</sup>

### 9.2.1. Coordinating our own platforms

Web 2.0 platforms normally facilitate a continuous dialogue with their members or supporters. This community could be expanded even today by organising joint actions, and listening to each other better. Some individuals have a wide range of interests ranging from minority issues to the green movement, but, even in this more receptive environment, the majority is not interested in the totality of issues. In order to ensure that even under such conditions more and more people will find attractive contents, major organisations should opt for a more aggressive strategy of posting and sharing information online.

### 9.2.2. A more inclusive worldview instead of the logic of programmes and organisations

Studying campaigns launched on community websites, some analysts have concluded<sup>67</sup> that in 2010 Facebook contributed significantly to Jobbik still being excluded from the mainstream media. Far-right party Jobbik built its identity by using websites as an alternative channel. The worldview which has been worked out this way is a diverse world, offering great internal cohesion with its own language, heroes, clothes and accessories, as well as business. (This is best illustrated by how new paganism and Christianity, or folk music and skinhead bands, coexist as the periphery of the worldview.) This was demonstrated by a research project conducted in 2012, which was among the first to document the “small universe created on the radical right stage that was sealed off externally, but characterised by lots of internal connections and was very diverse with respect to content”.<sup>68</sup>

This does not mean, however, that human rights organisations should start creating a worldview that is similarly controversial, yet still growing dynamically in diverse settings. What it does mean is that these cross-references and the practice of sharing online content can be based on a more conscious strategy. Instead of lean, recognisable and unique contours, they display a new communal identity by encouraging people facing similar problems to meet, and further creating platforms that trigger the production, sharing and dissemination of images, stories and thoughts. This happened a few years ago when a forum on hospital food provided an opportunity for many people to engage in constructive criticism instead of helpless ranting.

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65 This happened in the summer of 2015 in the course of helping the refugees. Celebrities also turned up sooner or later at the railway stations to help, to play, and to sing. And they were followed by the tabloid press, e. g. the daily *Blikk* even organised the collection of funds among its readers.

66 *Feedstripes és MTE: Tartalomfogyasztás és -megosztás a Facebookon 2016* (Consuming and sharing content on Facebook 2016), [http://mte.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MTE-LyZR\\_Elemz%C3%A9s.pdf](http://mte.hu/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/MTE-LyZR_Elemz%C3%A9s.pdf). For a summary of the study, see: [http://index.hu/tech/2017/05/12/kadar-kori\\_nosztalgia\\_hajtja\\_a\\_magyar\\_internetet/](http://index.hu/tech/2017/05/12/kadar-kori_nosztalgia_hajtja_a_magyar_internetet/).

67 Kornél Myatt (2015): *Remény, forradalom, kiábrándulás?* (Hope, revolution, and disillusionment?) *Politikai aktivitás a közösségi média színterein*. (Political activity in the community media scene.), *Médiakutató* XVI, vol. 3.

68 Cf. Jeskó József – Tóth Zoltán – Bakó Judit (2012): *A radikális jobboldal webes hálózatai*. (Web networks of the radical right.), *Politikatudományi Szemle* 2012/1. pp. 81–105. The research analysed the network connections of about 300 Hungarian extreme right-wing websites.

### 9.2.3. Membership and bonding

Over time, this shifting in the way communities interact can contribute to human rights values being disseminated across widely divergent platforms. For example, literary adaptations of fundamental human rights,<sup>69</sup> or of the most absurd cases of people being fined,<sup>70</sup> can result in the multiplication of such platforms. But these are just arbitrary examples. Further shared strategic thinking is required to identify the areas, authentic causes and people, through which and through whom attention can, at least in part, be redirected to our own agenda. This, of course, requires us once again to be able to show the various connections, for example between our values and their application in everyday life.

### 9.2.4. Respecting debate

As a result of over-filtering, Web 2.0 platforms are less suitable for convincing the noncommittal or those harbouring opposing viewpoints. There is a scarcity of platforms that provide venues for real debate, and we usually share content among friends and those who share our values.<sup>71</sup> If not for other reasons, in order to test and improve our own set of argumentation, we should respect critical or non-committal followers and stand up for our beliefs on platforms followed by many users. The goal is not to convince the trolls who will sooner or later appear anyway; the undecided audiences silently following the dialogue are much more important.

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**69** [http://helsinkifigyelo.blog.hu/tags/kort%C3%A1rs\\_irodalom?desktop=.](http://helsinkifigyelo.blog.hu/tags/kort%C3%A1rs_irodalom?desktop=)

**70** [http://index.hu/belfold/2016/04/22/roma\\_sajtokozpont\\_abszurd\\_rendorsegi\\_birsagolasok/.](http://index.hu/belfold/2016/04/22/roma_sajtokozpont_abszurd_rendorsegi_birsagolasok/)

**71** "According to research carried out by Eytan Bakshy and colleagues, analysing data on more than 10 million users, the average user is most frequently exposed to news conforming to his or her ideological and political convictions, and thus news from outside this sphere will be underrepresented on their newsfeed." (Bakshy et al., 2015). (Myat, 2015, op. cit.).

# 10. In lieu of conclusions

As pointed out in the introduction, the points made above should be considered more as the foundational document of a new narrative still awaiting elaboration, rather than the description of such a narrative. The description of an offering from the side of human rights organisations is still forthcoming. The experience these organisations can mobilise in order to create this narrative, however, is available, as is the dedication expressed to continue with the programme.





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