András Gerő

NEITHER WOMAN NOR JEW

The Confluence of Prejudices in the Monarchy at the Turn of the Century

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Social Science Monographs, Boulder, Colorado
Center for Hungarian Studies and Publications, Inc.
Wayne, New Jersey

Distributed by Columbia University Press, New York

2010
We were talking about anti-Semitism and than Daddy said, “Naturally, naturally one does everything to protect the Jews but actually who is not an anti-Semite?”

Diary Entry of Maria Valeria, Francis Joseph’s Daughter, July 28, 1887

The woman in her entirety is nonsense.

Otto Weininger, 1903

Politics is magic. He who knows how to summon the forces from the deep, him will they follow....

Hugo von Hofmannsthal
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FOREWORD

The site was the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and within it German-Austria. The time was the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth century, late in the nineteenth century. The stars were racism, antifeminism, and misogyny. Together and jointly. The image that was presented by the German-Austrian world, prior to the turn of the century, is relatively unknown. Historical memory preferred to preserve those high cultural achievements which have proven to be permanent. Arthur Schnitzler, Hugo von Hofmannstahl, Sigmund Freud, Robert Musil, Karl Kraus, and others demonstrate that on the German-Austrian horizon, at the turn of the century and in the era just before it, there appeared outstanding creators and creations within the framework of the intellectually and politically creaking and cracking Monarchy. There is no doubt that then and there a creative crisis was under way.

There were other names as well. Once the problems of the established and functioning society and state became manifest a variety of sentiments and reactions were possible. Guido von List, Lanz von Liebenfels, Otto Weininger, Arthur Trebitsch, and others are intellectually also the sons and products of this era. Their names are generally not being considered as the representatives of one aspect of the Monarchy’s spiritual structure. During the past years some of them were mentioned increasingly as the spiritual precursors of German Nazism. Yet they also emerged from the Austrian reality and from its mentality and they also questioned, radically, the disintegrating values of the Monarchy, the very values, which they wished to dismantle.

Why would one face be historically more credible than the other? In this book I want to show this other face. I do not claim that it was
the only face and I could not make such a claim because it would be patently incorrect. I do claim, however, that it did exist and if it existed it must have had some effect. It is certain that its greatest effect was produced through an Austrian turned German named Adolf Hitler. Unless it is absolutely necessary I do not wish to discuss the history of effects nor the source from which these views arose in a sense of intellectual history or philology and to what they could be linked. Factual disclaimers are also not a part of my work. Disclaimers would be absurd because, for example, it is not necessary to say today that it is permissible to grant women the franchise. With the safety of retrospective knowledge it is also futile to argue that Zionism could not establish a Jewish state. It would also be redundant to try to disclaim the thesis that menstruation makes women incapable of coordinated, intellectually demanding activities.

I set myself a very simple goal. I want to show that in the world of the Monarchy at the turn of the century and at the beginning of the twentieth century there was a discourse which elevated racism, antifeminism, and misogyny to the rank of an ideological interpretation of reality and did it in a way that these prejudices existed together and jointly, not separately.

I want to accomplish this simple goal in the simplest way possible. I let the actors speak for themselves. Let them say what they think. Their words were uttered in German and with the exception of one author they are still not available in any other language. Most were published at the time of their composition and thus they gradually went into oblivion. I will attempt to fit the texts into a contemporary European and German-Austrian horizon and will also attempt to explain why they were an integral part of a colorful German-Austrian spiritual reality. The authors speak, I endeavor to contextualize.

You may ask why a book should be written with such a simple goal. The question would be legitimate, if we did not know that because of the increasing specialization of social science those who study racism are unlikely to write about antifeminism and misogyny. Conversely, those interested in women’s history will not discuss racism; if I could say that the evolution of the history of science, by its nature, divided formerly existing entities into a number of different areas; if we did not know that many believe that anti-Semitism is the
world’s oldest and continuous system of prejudices while antifeminism is as least as old as anti-Semitism; if in our intellectual memory of the Monarchy we would find a suitable place for a narrative of the separate and also jointly existing racism and misogyny, other than as a precursor to Nazism.

There is a secondary reason which justifies this simple goal. It is a matter of clarifying historical concepts and making them more precise.

At least in central Europe many are inclined to limit racism to the matter of anti-Semitism. We will see that historically, and on the level of the present discussion, this is not a valid assumption, particularly not in central Europe. Because of the multinational, multi-religious nature of the Monarchy other things could be the target of racist logic and anti-Semitism would not really be what some over-simplifiers seem to believe.

Because in this discourse women also play a role, again just historically, the manifestation we call racism today is difficult to distinguish from the mass of prejudices which we call cultural racism. We can see in it the unity of racial and cultural stigmatization which is considered archaic by today’s standards. The ones who were seen as inferior were viewed culturally not only different but “worse.” The woman is, according to the meaning of the term, not a race but she is biologically different from the male and this was sufficient reason for being culturally stigmatized.

Consequently, I believe that there is good reason for highlighting and placing in its proper context the misogyny and racism amalgamated in the German-Austrian discourse within the Monarchy.

The creation of this book has some technical aspects that relate to the reader.

Because I make the characters speak there are many quotations. Typography assists us in keeping the various parts of the text separate while the unity of the book, I hope, will be preserved. The biography of the principal actors is part of the text and this is why there is not a section of short biographies at the end of the book.

In the notes I endeavored to focus on the principal participants. I list the bibliographic data of most of their major works. In addition, I use notes when they serve as a source for a statement of fact. I frequently refer to works in the text proper.
The book was prepared in the Hapsburg Historical Institute with the support of the Habsburg-era Research Foundation.

I want to express my sincere appreciation to Katalin Fenyves, who rendered invaluable assistance in the research for this book.