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Ethnic Division and National Narratives among Romanians and Hungarians in Satu Mare / Szatmárnémeti

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Abstract

Research Questions

- How do ethnic and national narratives create an ethnic division among Hungarians and Romanians in Satu Mare / Szatmárnémeti?
- How are the Romanian and Hungarian narratives represented in Satu Mare / Szatmárnémeti in the following four arenas and institutions?
 - Educational system and teaching of history
 - Local political view on the city's history
 - Historical symbols, like street names, statues and signs
 - Local historiography

Theoretical Context

Historical narratives are connected to national and ethnic identities by virtue of defining boundaries for inclusion and exclusion. A national story is a grand narrative about the history of the nation. Broadly posited on heroes and golden ages as well as the birth, unity, survival and victory of the nation, the narrative serves to legitimise the nation's claim on the present or national territory and to mobilise the population for the national cause. The ethnic story is similar, but instead places emphasis on the cultural survival of the ethnic group.

Methodology

I used a combination of methods. One method was to observe different ethnic and national symbols, like statues, street names and signs, in relation to the national stories. Another was to read and analyse books and texts about the history of the city. A third method was to talk and conduct interviews with people regarding their views on historical narratives and their representation.

Empirical Results

The overall picture of the historical representation of the city is that there are Romanian and Hungarian conflicting views on history, which creates an ethnic division among the two groups. The main difference is apparent in the depictions of the early history: the Romanian city history explicitly makes reference to the Romanian national story, whereas the Hungarian city narrative makes only implicit references to its national story. Regarding the modern period, the narratives overlap more, but exist separately at all levels, from the schools, public spaces and local historiography to the mayor's office.

Interpretation

The main obstacle to a common and unified local history seems to be the strong position of the Romanian and Hungarian national stories. Members of the Hungarian minority stress their Hungarian cultural and linguistic identity, which includes the Hungarian historical perspective, over their Romanian civilian citizenship. The Romanian national story is mainly an ethnic one, connected to the struggle of the ethnic Romanians, and thereby excludes the Hungarian minority. The result is that the Romanian national story dominates the marginally competing ethnic Hungarian story. The Romanian story has not been re-narrated to include the Hungarian minority; instead, the Hungarians have been given space and arenas in which to disseminate their own ethnic story, which contains implicit references and elements from the Hungarian national story.

The notion of ethnicity is often associated with conflicts and violence, but ethnic strife can also take the form of a symbolic ‘war’, in which language, education, historical representation and identities are contested. The case of the Hungarian-Romanian ethnic conflict is a typical example in that the cultural and historical dimension forms the core of the conflict. The conflict is historical in the sense that it has a long history, but also in that the conflict itself is about contested historical perceptions of the past.

Even though the conflict has occasionally been violent, like in Târgu Mureş in 1990, when 8 persons were killed and several hundred were wounded, the major issues in the conflict have been education, the use of language and the symbolic representation of the past. Actually, it was the Hungarian commemoration of 1848 and Hungarian educational policy that provoked the violent conflict in Târgu Mureş. Violence has rarely surfaced in the conflict, and today’s Hungarian minority has gained important minority rights. It is well organised and has political representation in the government and several localities in Transylvania. Relations between Hungary and Romania have also improved, mainly since the integration of both countries into NATO and the EU. From an outside perspective, the status quo is perceived as a successful model of inter-ethnic co-operation and the avoidance of violence.¹

From an inside perspective, however, ethnicity has been stigmatised, reflected by ethnic tensions and divisions. The inter-ethnic friction has been institutionalised and perpetuated by élites. The political arena is divided between “Romanian” and “minority” parties.² The latter cater to Hungarian ethnic interests, and have received almost all of the Hungarians votes. They have been part of the government and have played an important role.³ In cultural life, both Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals are pushing for diverging agendas and competing for public space in order to voice their representations of the past. The core of the Hungarian-Romanian conflict is the Transylvanian question, which encompasses the past, the present and the future of the region.⁴

However, the problem of diverging perceptions of the past is acknowledged at the highest political levels. To that end, the Hungarian and Romanian governments have decided to publish a common history book as part of the reconciliation process.

By means of a local case study of the city of Satu Mare – Szatmárnémeti, this article will focus on how ethnic and national historical narratives and stories divide and unite Hungarians and Romanians and how these narratives are represented locally.

Satu Mare / Szatmárnémeti

The city is situated 11 kilometres from the Hungarian border in north-western Romania and is part of Transylvania (in its broader definition). According to Romanians, the city belongs to a smaller region called Crişana, but Hungarians consider it to be part of Partium (and therefore part of Hungary proper). The city has about 115,000 inhabitants, with a Romanian majority (58%) and a Hungarian minority (39%).⁵ For a long time previously, however, Hungarians constituted the majority; it was only in the 1960s and 1970s that the Romanians became the majority due to the forced urbanisation of the communist regime. Despite the Romanian majority, the city’s political leadership is Hungarian, because Romanians voted for the Hungar-

1 See McMahon, Patrice: *Transylvania as Triumph – Interethnic Cooperation*, in: *Taming Ethnic Hatred: Ethnic Cooperation and Transnational Networks in Eastern Europe*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007; Kostecki, Wojciech: *Lessons from Romania: Prevention of Ethnic Conflict*, in: *Berghof Occasional Paper*, August 2002, No. 19, pp. 1–83; Linden, Ronald: *Putting on Their Sunday Best: Romania and Hungary, and the Puzzle of Peace*, in *International Studies Quarterly*, 2000 (Vol. 44), No. 1, pp. 121–145.

2 Alinescu, Ciprian-Calin: *Parliamentary Representation of Minorities in Romania*, in: *Southeast European Politics*, 2004 (Vol.5), No. 1, pp. 60–75.

3 Blomqvist, Anders: *Den ungerska minoriteten i Rumänien: Från våldsam konflikt till gemensamt styre [The Hungarian Minority in Romania: From Violent Conflict to Joint Governance]*, in: *Nordisk Östforum*, 2006 (Vol. 20), No. 2, pp. 178–200.

4 Transylvania in a broader definition, including the historic Transylvania with Crişana, Maramureş and the Banat.

5 Romanian census 2002.

ian mayor. The city is marked by a fairly peaceful co-existence and counterbalance between the two ethnic groups. Despite the ethnic interaction, the city is divided into two distinct communities.⁶ My previous research indicates that this division can be explained in terms of:⁷

- *Language.* Romanian is a Romance language; Hungarian is part of the Finno-Ugric family.
- *Religion.* Most Romanians are Orthodox or Greek Catholic, whereas most Hungarians are Roman Catholic or Protestant.
- *Ethnocentrism.* This is especially prevalent among Hungarians, who sometimes feel that their cultural and linguistic existence is threatened by virtue of their minority status.
- *Historical representation.* There are two competing versions of the city's history.

Apart from these factors, institutional divisions regarding ethnic schools and political parties also serve to demarcate the communities.

Previous Research

There are several studies of the Hungarian-Romanian conflict that include a historical dimension, either as background⁸ or as the main thrust of the study, whereby the significance of the two competing historical perceptions is investigated.⁹ Victoria Cordoneanu and Alina Mungiu-Pippidi have both reached the conclusion that the perceptions of history differ significantly within the two groups, but that there are also distinct Hungarian and Romanian perceptions of the past.¹⁰ Studies on the content of Hungarian-Romanian political discourse show that the issues of language, education and historical representations form the core of the ethno-political conflict.¹¹

History has been an important instrument for state-sponsored nationalism and political mobilisation; historians have served political aims on both sides.¹² Constantin Iordachi concludes that the lack of reform vis-à-vis historiography has blocked the process of reconciliation.¹³ Cristian Romocea points to the roles of the churches and the state in the reconciliation process, noting the state's control over education and history textbooks.¹⁴ The 1999 debate on an alternative textbook with a constructivist approach on national-

6 Szilágyi, Levente: Város, terek, szimbólumok [City, squares, symbols], <http://www.szatmar.ro/content/view/980/85/>, 2005-09-06.

7 Blomqvist, Anders: One city with two images and two communities: the case of the Romanian-Hungarian city of Satu Mare/Szatmárnémeti. In Thomas Lundén (ed.), *Crossing the border. Human local interaction across international boundaries* Baltic and East European Studies 9. Huddinge: Centre for Baltic and East European Studies, 2006.

8 See Kürti, László: *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination*, 2001. New York: State University of New York; CEDIME-SE: *Minorities in Southeastern Europe: Hungarians of Romania*. Athen: Center for Documentation and Information on Minorities in Europe, 2001.

9 Van de Vyver, Greet: The Importance of Historical Myths for the Ethnic Consciousness of Romanians and Ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania., in: *Dialectical Anthropology*, 1996 (Vol. 21), No. 3–4 Sept, pp. 381–398.

10 Cordoneanu, Victoria: *Cultural Identities and Research About the Recent Romanian Past*, in *Southeastern Europe/L'Europe du Sud-Est*, 2002 (Vol. 29), pp. 1–15; Mungiu-Pippidi, Alina: *Subjective Transylvania: A Case Study of Post Communist Nationalism*. Bucharest, 1999; Mungiu-Pippidi, Alina: *Testing the Legacy of Ethnic Conflict: The Case of Transylvania*. Budapest: OSI-IPF Policy Papers, 2000.

11 Chiribucă, Dan / Magyari, Tivadar: The Impact of Minority Participation in Romanian Government, in Monica Robotin and Levente Salat (eds), *A New Balance: Democracy and Minorities in Post-Communist Europe*. Budapest : Open Society Institute, 2003, p. 82.

12 Deletant, Dennis / Hanak, Harry: *Historians as Nation-builders : Central and South-East Europe*, Basingstoke : Macmillan, 1988. László, Péter (ed.): *Historians and the History of Transylvania*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.

13 Iordachi, Constantin: "Entangled Histories:" Re-thinking the History of Central and Southeastern Europe from Relational Perspective. *Regio, Yearbook* 2004, pp. 113–147.

14 Romocea, Cristian: Reconciliation in the Ethnic Conflict in Transylvania: Theological, Political and Social Aspects, in *Religion, State and Society*, June 2004 (Vol. 32), No. 2, pp. 159–176. For nationalism within the Romanian Orthodox Church, see Andreescu, Gabriel: *Right-wing Extremism in Romania*. Cluj: Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, 2003.

ism caused a political scandal: the Romanian parliament did not approve the book, because it supposedly relativised Romanian nationalism.¹⁵ The Transylvanian dispute has been marked by a positivistic paradigm, with both sides claiming to have the “true facts” and dismissing the opposing side’s arguments as “myths”.¹⁶ The Hungarian and Romanian governments have acknowledged the importance of re-narrating the common past by agreeing to produce a textbook by 2010, a decision inspired by the German-French reconciliation process.¹⁷

Apart from the general picture sketched above, there are some other case studies of interest. Elke-Nicole Kappus has investigated how the history of Trieste is conceptualised and used in the process of ethnic self-definition; the memory of the ethnic conflict functions as a symbolic marker of ethnic boundaries, allowing stable ethnic relations as well as elite accommodation. In this scenario, political hegemony is ensured for the Italians, as is the existence of a largely autonomous ethnic universe for the Slovenes. It is essentially an ethnic conflict without ethnic confrontation, nourished by nationalistic perspectives that give priority to ethnic/national boundaries at the expense of other social, ideological or political divisions.¹⁸ The Italian-Slovene conflict has many similarities with the Hungarian-Romanian one.

In the Hungarian-Romanian context, Levente Salat and Valér Veres have compared the main problems for the Romanians in a Hungarian-dominated city (Sfântu-Gheorghe/ Sepsiszentgyörgy) with those of Hungarians in a Romanian-dominated city (Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár). They conclude that language use, church placement, street names, bilingual signs, historic monuments and statues cause the most tension between the two groups.¹⁹ Rogers Brubaker et al have also studied Cluj in their investigation of everyday ethnicity and nationalist politics. Taking a historical and ethnographic perspective, they examine historical and political symbols and their meanings as well as how ethnicity works. History is a major part of Hungarian and Romanian ethnicity, and the authors conclude that the “historiographical debates have been ethnicised”.²⁰ In Cluj, the historical and ethnic/national debates about statues, flags, signs, etc and the symbolic struggle over public spaces have been quite intense. With his local case study on Arad and the Statue of Liberty commemorating 1848, Iordachi shows how the conflict on historical memories is of interest mainly to the intellectual and political elites.²¹

Ethnic and National Identities

Ethnicity is a collective identity and social construction, which has meaning only in a relative context. It motivates action and articulates boundaries between “us” and “them” by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion. The construction of boundaries is shaped by actions and discourse alike. Ethnicity has political and organisational aspects as well as a symbolic dimension.²² Ethnicity is a collective feeling of affinity,

15 Pârâianu, Răzvan: National Prejudices, Mass Media and History Textbooks: The Mitu Controversy, in Balázs Trencsényi et al (eds): *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*. Budapest: Regio Books, 2001.

16 Blomqvist, Anders: *Competing Stories about Transylvania’s Past: National Stories in an International Context?* in Egle Rindzeviciute (ed): *Re-approaching East Central Europe: Old Region, New Institutions?* East European Studies No. 7, Huddinge: Center for Baltic and East European Studies Baltic and East European Studies, 2006, p. 280.

17 For opinions on the possibilities for this kind of reconciliation process, see Salat, Levente / Enache, Smaranda (eds): *Romanian-Hungarian Relations and the French-German Reconciliation*. Cluj-Napoca: Ethnocultural Diversity Resource Center, 2004.

18 Kappus, Elke-Nicole: *Changing History: Ethnic Identity Management in Trieste*, in Cora Govers / Hans Vermeulen: *The Politics of Ethnic Consciousness*. London: Macmillan, 1997, pp. 90–120.

19 Salat, Levente / Veres, Valér: *Ethnic Minorities and Local Public Administration in Romania. Cases of Ethnocultural Tension and Segregation*, <http://adatbank.transindex.ro/vendeg/htmlk/pdf4098.pdf>, accessed 2007-05-31.

20 Brubaker, Rogers / Feischmidt, Margit / Fox, Jon / Grancea, Liana: *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 23.

21 Iordachi, Constantin: “Entangled Histories:” *Re-thinking the History of Central and Southeastern Europe from Relational Perspective*. Regio, Yearbook 2004, pp. 113–147.

22 Eriksen, Thomas Hylland: *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, London: Pluto, 2002, pp 12–13.

kinship and solidarity, in which one's own group is perceived as culturally distinct in relation to other groups. The self-identity of the groups is important, as are social markers like language, customs, religion and myths. Within the ethnic group, there is a high degree of trust, and in the same way, nationalism can be seen as an imagined community.²³ Both concepts deal with relations between groups, but an important difference is that nationalism demands that the political boundaries should be the same as the cultural ones. This means that nationalism is an ethnic group's claim for politically autonomous governance over a certain territory in order to create a nation.²⁴

In the Hungarian-Romanian case, there is triadic relationship between the Hungarian minority, its external homeland (Hungary) and its host state (Romania).²⁵ The Hungarian minority usually defines itself as Hungarians from Romania or Transylvania. They therefore emphasise their cultural and linguistic national identity with Hungarians over their common citizenship and territory with Romanians.²⁶ This process of affiliation with Hungary, combined with the downplaying of the Romanian national identity, creates mistrust between the Hungarian minority and Romanians. Romanians themselves emphasise citizenship and national territory in their national identity and believe that the Hungarian minority is making a political statement when it stresses its Hungarian identity. Romanians are afraid that this kind of revisionism will lead to demands for redrawing the borders of Transylvania. However, the Hungarian minority perceives itself as an ethnic group distinct both from Romanians and Hungarians from Hungary, even though they share certain elements with both.²⁷ Much of the Hungarian ethnic party's (Democratic Alliance of Hungarians from Romania, DAHR) political platform has involved the protection of the minority's identity in the form of linguistic and historical representation. Even though almost all Hungarians vote for the Hungarian ethnic party, the stress on Hungarian identity is greater among the Hungarian elite; the lower a Hungarian's social status is, the less important his/her Hungarian identity is and the more he/she identifies with the Romanian civilian citizenry.²⁸ Much of the ethnic tension and division can therefore be interpreted as elite-driven.²⁹

Ethnic and National Narratives and Stories

One important element of ethnic identity is a shared or common history. Some authors refer to myths in this context, but I prefer to use the term 'narrative' or 'story' instead, as it is usually difficult to categorise historical claims as either 'myths' or 'facts'. Usually, there is a grey zone in which the historical claim is 'true' from a certain perspective. However, historical claims are almost always selective, serving to prove a present political point or as the basis for a future demand.

According to Jörn Rüsen, a historical narrative gives meaning to time and transforms the past into history, thereby combining experience and expectation. A narrative focussed on the subjective particularity of a group's interpretation of the past gives its members an understanding of their own world and themselves, as it reflects the value system of their cultural orientation.

23 Andersson, Benedict: *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, London: Verso, 2006.

24 Eriksen, Thomas Hylland: *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, London: Pluto, 2002, p. 19.

25 For a theoretical discussion on the triadic relationship, see Brubaker, Rogers: *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

26 Culic, Irina: *Nationhood and Identity: Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania*, in Balázs Trencsényi et al (eds): *Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies*. Budapest: Regio Books, 2001

27 Blomqvist, Anders: *Den ungerska minoriteten i Rumänien: Från våldsam konflikt till gemensamt styre* [The Hungarian Minority in Romania: From Violent Conflict to Joint Governance], in: *Nordisk Östforum*, 2006 (Vol. 20), No. 2, pp. 178–200.

28 Veres, Valér: *Az erdélyi magyarok és románok közösségi identitása a társadalmi struktúra tükrében* [The Transylvanian Hungarians' and Romanians' common identity in the mirror of the society], in: *Szociológiai Szemle*, 2000 (Vol 10), No. 4, pp. 57–86.

29 Blomqvist, Anders: *Den ungerska minoriteten i Rumänien: Från våldsam konflikt till gemensamt styre* [The Hungarian Minority in Romania: From Violent Conflict to Joint Governance], in: *Nordisk Östforum*, 2006 (Vol. 20), No. 2, pp. 178–200.

The historical narrative always involves the process of transferring norms, meaning and identity from the author to the reader or listener through the narrative. The historical narrative gives meaning to time and real experiences, and the past becomes relevant for present life and influences the future.³⁰

Rüsen argues that historical narratives should be scrutinised according to three criteria: empirical reliability, normative reliability and narrative reliability.³¹ The national story usually fulfils these criteria because the 'historical facts' are selected from the normative perspective to fit the narrative structure of the story.

The national story is defined here as a historical grand narrative about the history of the nation that is broadly posited on heroes and golden ages as well as the birth, unity, survival and victory of the nation. As such, the narrative serves to legitimise the claim on the present or national territory and mobilise the population for the national cause.³² The national story usually justifies the historic right to a certain territory and includes the story of the birth of the nation and its relationship to the territory.³³ In this way, a nation is constructed through its national story. The national story is a collective commemoration of the past that has been institutionalised by historians. It connects the present identity with the past and creates a kind of imagined community with its ancestors.³⁴

The national story is supported by the government and retold in different contexts, both consciously and unconsciously, in schools, at commemorations or ceremonies, by the erection of statues or plaques, etc. The national story is also a kind of meta-narrative that holds a hegemonic status and dominant position, as other narratives have to confirm, modify or reject it; it may not simply be ignored.

The definition of an ethnic story or narrative is similar to that of its national counterpart. However, it differs in that it does not revolve around a nation-state, but rather places emphasis on the cultural survival of the ethnic group as well as its birth, unity and territory. Because the members of the Hungarian minority in Romania perceive themselves as an ethnic minority, it remains to be seen whether they have constructed an ethnic story of their own, identify with the Hungarian national story or have created an integrated local story with the Romanians.

The Transylvanian Dispute

The Transylvanian dispute is the Hungarian-Romanian conflict about Transylvania's past and its future fate. According to the national stories of both ethnic groups, Transylvania has made a crucial contribution to the autonomous survival of both nations. Romanians perceive Transylvania as their nation's cradle; Hungarians regard it as the region in which their civilisation survived during Ottoman occupation in the 16–18th centuries, when Hungary was tripartite. Both Hungarian and Romanian narratives treat Transylvania as a 'natural' part of their history and national territory. In historiography circles, the issue of Transylvania has caused a long and heated debate between Hungarian and the Romanian historians. The following questions about Transylvania's past have been disputed:³⁵

30 Rüsen, Jörn: *History: Narration – Interpretation – Orientation*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn, 2005, pp. 10–12.

31 Rüsen, Jörn: *Geschichte und Norm: Wahrheitskriterien des historischen Denkens*, in: *Zeit und Sinn: Strategien historischen denkens*. Frankfurt: Fischer-Taschenbuch-Vlg, 1990, pp. 77–105.

32 Blomqvist, Anders: *Competing Stories about Transylvania's Past: National Stories in an International Context?* in Egle Rindzeviciute (ed): *Re-approaching East Central Europe: Old Region, New Institutions?* East European Studies No. 7, Huddinge: Center for Baltic and East European Studies Baltic and East European Studies, 2006, pp. 269–274.

33 Smith, Anthony: *Myth and Memories of the Nation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 63–67.

34 Eriksen, Thomas Hylland: *Historia, myt och identitet [History, Myth and Identity]*. Stockholm: Bonnier Alba, 1996, p. 75.

35 Blomqvist, Anders: *Competing Stories about Transylvania's Past: National Stories in an International Context?* in Egle Rindzeviciute (ed): *Re-approaching East Central Europe: Old Region, New Institutions?* East European Studies No. 7, Huddinge: Center for Baltic and East European Studies Baltic and East European Studies, 2006, pp. 307–308; Ludanyi, Andrew: *Transylvanian Dispute*, in: Richard Frucht (ed): *Encyclopaedia*, New York: Garland, 2000, pp. 804–805.

- Who settled there first, and who is the autochthonous population of the region? Which group constituted the majority when the Hungarians arrived? Did a Romanian *voivod* (governor) exist at the time (i.e., was there any Romanian political organisation)?
- What was the status of Transylvania vis-à-vis the Hungarian kingdom and the Romanian principalities of Moldavia and Wallachia?
- Why was Transylvania united with the Hungarian part of Austria-Hungary in 1867, Romania in 1918, Hungary in 1940 and Romania in 1945?
- What were the consequences of the Magyarisation policy (1867–1918, 1940–45) and Romanisation policy (1919–1940, 1945–1989, 1990)?

Romanian National Story

The Romanian national story is built upon four sacred pillars: the ancient heritage from antiquity, the continuity of the population, Romanian unity and the struggle for independence.³⁶ The first pillar is linked to the theory of Daco-Roman-Romanian ancient heritage, according to which the Romanians originated from the assimilation of Dacians and Romans in the Roman province of Dacia, which includes Transylvania, during the second and third centuries. The Romans left in A.D. 271, but the Romanians remained in the region and are therefore considered the autochthonous population of the Transylvanian territory. The Romanians survived the attacks of foreign rulers and remained the majority population in Transylvania throughout the centuries. The Hungarians were only able to incorporate Transylvania into the Hungarian kingdom in the 12th or 13th century after a couple of centuries of fierce struggles. Transylvania was established as a separate political entity because of its Romanian character. Romanians in Transylvania suffered discrimination in that they were deprived of any political rights.

The third pillar of the Romanian national story is the desire for unity among Romanians, which is also reflected in the fourth pillar, the national struggle for independence. Highlights of the story include Michael the Brave's unification of Romanian lands in 1600 and Horea's revolt against the Hapsburg emperor in 1784. The Romanian lands were finally able to *re-unite* following the establishment of Greater Romania in 1918, which had been the desire of all Romanians all along. In 1940, Romania lost northern Transylvania as a result of Nazi-Germany's Vienna Diktat. After the war, Transylvania was rightfully restored to Romania. The Romanian majority and the Hungarian minority both suffered during the communist period.³⁷

Hungarian National Story

The Hungarian story regarding Transylvania differs entirely from the Romanian one. According to Hungarian historians, Transylvania was sparsely populated and there were no major signs of any Latin-speaking population when Hungarians conquered the region in the 11th century. Because Hungarians were the majority, Transylvania was Hungarian in character. The Latin-speaking Vlachs were nomadic shepherds (Romanians) who were part of another barbaric tribe and did not exhibit any signs of Roman civilisation or culture. Romanians only became the majority in Transylvania in the 18th century, mainly due to immigration. Transylvania was an integrated part of the Hungarian kingdom until the tripartition in 1526. The Romanians were denied political rights because of their socio-economic position as peasants. During the tripartition of Hungary, Transylvanian princes strived to unite Hungary again, but it was only after the establishment of the Dual Monarchy in Austria-Hungary in 1867 that Transylvania was re-united with the rest of Hungary. Up to the First World War, Hungary flourished and developed rapidly. Then it lost two

36 Murgescu, Bogdan The Romanian Historiography in the 1990's, in Romanian Journal of Political Science, 2003, No. 1, pp. 1–13. For a critique of Romanian historical myths, see Boia, Lucian: History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2001.

37 Blomqvist, Anders: Competing Stories about Transylvania's Past: National Stories in an International Context? in Egle Rindzeviciute (ed): Re-approaching East Central Europe: Old Region, New Institutions? East European Studies No. 7, Huddinge: Center for Baltic and East European Studies Baltic and East European Studies, 2006, pp. 289–294.

thirds of its territory, including Transylvania, and 60% of its population in the Treaty of Trianon. The Trianon tragedy is a central national trauma for the Hungarians. The Hungarian minority was subsequently discriminated against during the interwar period as well as the communist period.

Hungary received northern Transylvania as part of the Vienna Treaty, signed by all Western great powers, only to see it returned to Romania after the war. The Hungarian nation has been divided ever since.³⁸

Methodology

In the following sections, I present my study, which entailed the use of a combination of methods. One method was to observe different ethnic and national symbols, like statues, street names and signs, etc, in relation to the national stories. Another was to read and analyse books and texts about the history of the city. A third involved talking to and conducting interviews with people regarding their views on historical narratives and their representation.

Arenas and Institutions

The national and ethnic stories are retold and disseminated through a variety of different channels in the local setting of Satu Mare. I investigated four different arenas and institutions in order to find out which stories they supported:

- Educational system and teaching of history
- Local political view on the city's history
- Historical symbols, like street names, statues and signs
- Local historiography

Educational System and the Teaching of History in Satu Mare

The Romanian educational system and the subject of history are closely regulated by the state. Romanian history is a separate subject and compulsory for all students in the 12th form. By law, Romanian history must be taught in the Romanian language, even though there are Hungarian schools in Satu Mare. The content of the curriculum is regulated and all students have to pass a final exam that is centralised, standardised and given nation-wide. Romanian history textbooks are constructed around the four pillars of the Romanian national story, and regulations ensure that all students learn it. In 1999, a scandal erupted when the parliament refused to approve an alternative history textbook because it allegedly relativised Romanian nationalism and thereby compromised the four pillars.³⁹ There is little room for teaching local or regional history, because these subjects are not on the final exam.

According to a Hungarian history teacher as well as former students, Hungarian history teachers sometimes offer the Hungarian national story 'off the record', asking the students not to take notes in case there is an inspection. In this way, Hungarian students receive an alternative story that they can claim as their own.

38 Blomqvist, Anders: Competing Stories about Transylvania's Past: National Stories in an International Context? in Egle Rindzeviciute (ed): Re-approaching East Central Europe: Old Region, New Institutions? East European Studies No. 7, Huddinge: Center for Baltic and East European Studies Baltic and East European Studies, 2006, pp. 294–301.

39 Pârâianu, Răzvan: National Prejudices, Mass Media and History Textbooks: The Mitu Controversy, in Balázs Trencsényi et al (eds): Nation-Building and Contested Identities: Romanian and Hungarian Case Studies. Budapest: Regio Books, 2001.

Hungarian students in the 6th and 7th forms are offered a separate academic course that covers Hungarian cultural traditions and history with its own Hungarian-language textbook.⁴⁰ This textbook gives an ethnic story of Transylvania that contradicts the Romanian version.⁴¹

In sum, the schools disseminate the Romanian national story to all students, but all Hungarian students receive an ethnic Hungarian story; some Hungarian students might even receive a Hungarian national story, depending on their teacher.

Political View on the City's History

The city has had a Hungarian mayor since 2000 despite the Romanian majority, because Romanians voted for him. His victory signalled a sea change vis-à-vis ethnic division in local politics. The mayor's home page features two versions of the city's history, a Hungarian version and a Romanian one; the latter has been translated into German and English. This means that although there are two separate, different official city histories, the Romanian one seems 'more' official by virtue of having been translated into two other languages.

The Romanian history of the city has clear connections with the Romanian national story; it references the Daco-Roman-Romanian theory of continuity and suggests that the Romanians are the autochthonous population of the city. The Romanian city history also asserts that the city was part of the Romanian voivodship (territory ruled by the voivod) led by Menumorut, which implies that the city was Romanian in character from that point forward. However, as the history approaches the present time, it becomes less nationalistic, even though it states that the loss of northern Transylvania in 1940 was one of the "most tragic pages in the history of the Romanian people". The modern period is described in more social and economic terms, in which both interwar and Austro-Hungarian developments are praised. The narrative avoids sensitive topics; on the other hand, it also refrains from indicating to which political entity the city belonged, which makes the story difficult for an outsider to understand. Overall, however, the Romanian city history supports the Romanian national story.⁴²

The Hungarian history of the city has an implicit connection to the Hungarian national story; in contrast to the Romanian version, it indicates that Hungarians founded the city. It does not follow the chronological approach of the Romanian account; instead, it makes references to famous persons from the city, buildings, schools and churches. Although Hungarian local personalities and Hungarian national heroes dominate the narrative, some Romanians are mentioned, too. The Hungarian account observes that few documents about the city from the medieval period have survived; therefore, its main focus is on the 18th and 19th centuries, when the city was part of Hungary. It is interesting to note that an old Hungarian street name that is no longer in use is mentioned in the account. The Hotel Dacia is also referred to by its earlier Hungarian name, Pannonia. The hotel's name change mirrors the shift in the name of the Roman province from Pannonia (Hungarian) to Dacia (Romanian). Like its Romanian counterpart, the Hungarian city history harbours very little content from the 20th century.⁴³

The local political view on the city's history is that there are two versions. The Romanian version explicitly supports the Romanian national story regarding the earlier period, whereas the Hungarian account more implicitly supports the Hungarian national story. Both versions provide elements of a common regional story, especially with respect to the modern period.

40 László, László / Vince, Zoltán: A romániai magyar nemzeti kisebbség történelme és hagyományai [The Romanian Hungarian national minority's history and traditions], Stúdió: Kolozsvár, 2005.

41 Romocea, Cristian Reconciliation in the Ethnic Conflict in Transylvania: Theological, Political and Social Aspects, in Religion, State and Society, June 2004 (Vol. 32), No. 2, pp. 159–176.

42 Ong, Gruco / Primăria municipiului Satu Mare: History of Satu Mare city, <http://www.satu-mare.ro/despre/istorie.html>, 2005-07-21.

43 Primăria municipiului Satu Mare: Szatmárnémeti történelme [The history of Szatmárnémeti], <http://www.satu-mare.ro/despre/istorie.html.hu>, 2005-07-21.

Historical Symbols: Street Names, Bridges and Statues

The main roads in the city have been named after Romanian heroes, like Michael the Brave, Stephen the Great, etc. Romanian historical names dominate the city. There is only one major road with a Hungarian name, Ady Endre; Endre was a Hungarian poet and writer. However, some Hungarians use the old Hungarian street names, and an old street map from 1907 is re-printed in a book about the city's history.⁴⁴ The Hungarians complained that in 2003, only 3% of the streets, or 9 out of 350, had Hungarian names, despite the fact that Hungarians constituted 39% of city's population.⁴⁵ The majority of these names denote Hungarians with a local connection either to the city or the county, like János Hám, Domokos Szilágyi, etc. The Roman Garden's former Hungarian name, Kossuth Garden, memorialised the leader of the Hungarian revolution of 1848. The commemoration of 1848 and the Partium Hungarian Days, a kind of ethno-regional festival, are the main historical symbolic manifestations. According to Levente Szilágyi, the representation of the Hungarian past has improved, as evidenced by several Hungarian memorial signs in the city centre, probably thanks to the local Hungarian leadership. Even though there is a symbolic struggle over public space, compared to Cluj, the city's atmosphere is less strained.⁴⁶

The two bridges in the city are named for Golescu, a 19th-century Romanian politician from Wallachia, and Decebalus, a first-century Dacian king. Romanian street names also tend to reflect the Romanian national story. There are also statues that celebrate the Romanian national story, such as the statue of the she-wolf with Romulus and Remus, which, according to the authors of a city guide, "is a symbol of the Latinity of the Romanians and proof of their continuation on this territory".⁴⁷ Statues of Romanian politicians also grace the city, including one of Vasile Lucaciu, who was part of the Memorandum Movement of 1892, which fought for political improvements for Romanians within the Dual Monarchy. There are also statues of artists and writers, both Romanian (Mihai Eminescu and Ioan Slavici) and Hungarian (Ferenc Kölcsey and Jenő Dsida). There are no public statues of Hungarian politicians, unless one counts the statue on the Roman Catholic Cathedral of Saint Stephen, who happened to be the first Hungarian king as well as a saint.

The city is dominated by references to the Romanian national story, but the majority of names bear no connection to Satu Mare. The Hungarian element, mainly artists and writers with a local connection, reflects the Hungarians' minority status and thus represents the creation of an ethnic story.

Local Historiography

The local historiography is divided into Hungarian and Romanian publications. However, the county museum has a yearbook in which both Hungarians and Romanians publish.⁴⁸ Traditionally, the historiography tended to represent the Romanian national story, especially during the communist period; to offset the imbalance, the Hungarians started their own series of publications in the 1990s.⁴⁹ Of the most recent

44 Bura, László et al: Szatmárnémeti kialakulása és fejlődése épületei és műemlékei tükrében [The development of Szatmárnémeti in the mirror of its buildings and historical monuments], Szatmárnémeti: Identitas, 2005.

45 Hámos, László: Systematic Policies of Forced Assimilation Against Rumania's Hungarian Minority 1965–1989, in Steven Béla Várdy / Hunt Tooley: Ethnic Cleansing in Twentieth-Century Europe. New York: Boulder, 2003, p. 677.

46 Szilágyi, Levente: Város, terek, szimbólumok [City, squares, symbols], <http://www.szatmar.ro/content/view/980/85/2005-09-06>.

47 Iancu, Ștefan / Gavrița, Ioan: Satu Mare: Present Memories, Satu Mare: Editura Solstițiu, 2005, p. 5.

48 Muzeul Județean Satu Mare: Satu Mare – Studii și Comunicări – Istorie, Etnografie, Artă [Satu Mare – Studies and Communication – History, Ethnography and Art] Satu Mare: Editura Muzeului Sătmărean.

49 Csirák, Csaba: Otthonom Szatmár megye [My home county of Szatmár].

publications on the history of the city, three are Hungarian⁵⁰ and one is Romanian.⁵¹ One of the differences between these is that the Romanian publication explicitly connects to the Romanian national story by stating that Romanians were the city's first inhabitants and have lived there continuously,⁵² whereas the Hungarian works implicitly reference the Hungarian national story. The Romanian one states that the city's first ruler was Romanian⁵³; one of the Hungarian publications counters that it is difficult to know what nationality he had.⁵⁴ All four publications avoid connections to the relevant national stories for the modern history segment. All of them are connected with buildings in the presentation, which provides a kind of regional and local story. The division between the two stories are linguistically 'segregated' in the sense that the Hungarian books are only in Hungarian, whereas the Romanian book is a multi-linguistic edition that includes Romanian, English, German and French, but not Hungarian. This linguistic pattern mirrors the mayoral office's presentation of the city's histories: a Romanian 'official' version that clearly connects to the Romanian national story and is translated into foreign languages, alongside the Hungarian minority version, which gives more of an ethnic story, with implicit references to the Hungarian national story.

On the Internet, there are both Romanian and Hungarian home pages about the city's history. The two Romanian home pages make explicit reference to the Daco-Roman-Romanian theory of continuity, but are less nationalistic in their treatment of the modern period.⁵⁵ The Hungarian home page contains minor articles about municipal history that provide pieces of a Hungarian ethnic story.⁵⁶

Conclusion

The overall picture of the historical representation of the city of Satu Mare is that there are Romanian and Hungarian conflicting views on history, which creates an ethnic division among the two groups. The Romanian versions of the city's history and historical symbols make explicit references to the Romanian national story (especially regarding antiquity and the theory on Daco-Roman-Romanian continuity) and state that Romanians are the autochthonous population. In the description of the modern period of the city's history, the Romanian nationalistic claims are downplayed and there are more elements of a regional story, in which local economic and social developments are stressed. The Hungarian versions of the city's history make only implicit reference to the Hungarian national story, which asserts that the Hungarians came first. The Hungarian versions are more of an ethnic Hungarian minority story, but for the modern period, there are also elements of a regional story, similar to the Romanian ones. Despite the similarities, the stories have not been integrated into one local story; instead, they exist separately at all levels, from the schools, public spaces and local historiography to the mayor's office.

The main obstacle for a common and unified local history seems to be the strong position of the Romanian and Hungarian national stories. The members of the Hungarian minority stress their Hungarian cultural and linguistic identity, which includes a Hungarian historical perspective, over their Romanian civilian citizenship. The Romanian national story is mainly an ethnic one, connected to the struggle of the ethnic Romanians, and thereby excludes the Hungarian minority. The result is that the Romanian national story

50 Muhi, Sándor: Szatmárnémeti városismertető [Szatmárnémeti cityguide], Szatmárnémeti, 2003; Bura, László et al: Szatmárnémeti kialakulása és fejlődése épületei és műemlékei tükrében [The development of Szatmárnémeti in the mirror of its buildings and historical monuments], Szatmárnémeti: Identitas, 2005; Iancu, Ștefan / Gavrița, Ioan: Satu Mare: Present Memories, Satu Mare: Editura Solștițiu, 2005; Lajos, Sike: Szatmárnémeti – Várostörténet ege falevélen / Satu Mare – Town-story on leaf. Szatmárnémeti: Identitas, 2004.

51 Iancu, Ștefan / Gavrița, Ioan: Satu Mare: Present Memories, Satu Mare: Editura Solștițiu, 2005.

52 Iancu, Ștefan / Gavrița, Ioan: Satu Mare: Present Memories, Satu Mare: Editura Solștițiu, 2005, p. 5.

53 Iancu, Ștefan / Gavrița, Ioan: Satu Mare: Present Memories, Satu Mare: Editura Solștițiu, 2005, p. 5.

54 Bura, László: Szatmárnémeti kialakulása és fejlődése épületei és műemlékei tükrében, Szatmárnémeti: Identitas, 2005, p. 10.

55 Satu Mare – istoric, <http://www.satumare.ro/pages/istoric.htm>; Gheorghiu, Adrian: History of the County, <http://www.satumareonline.com/jsm/ejsmhisto.htm>, accessed 2007-05-31.

56 Szűcs, Péter: Péter Szűcs' column, <http://www.szatmar.ro/content/category/12/47/85/>, accessed 2007-05-31.

dominates the marginally competing ethnic Hungarian story. The Romanian story has not been re-narrated to include the Hungarian minority; instead, the Hungarians have been given space and arenas in which to disseminate their own ethnic story, which contains implicit references and elements from the Hungarian national story.