Locality and long-distance nationalism: the invention of a “Hungarian Transylvania”
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The call for papers of this conference says transnationalism is not obviously limited to phenomena related to migration, but refers to a wider range of actions, processes and institutions that cross boundaries of states or national communities. Similarly the term diaspora has thus come a long way from its classical use for categories of persons forcefully dispersed from their homeland, having close symbolic or even social ties to the region of origin, and maintaining rather strong cultural boundaries, vis-à-vis the “host” countries. (See more about this perspective in Fast 1999, Bauböck 2003)

What I’m going to discuss in my presentation can be seen as a special case of transnationalism and diaspora. I’m focusing on a relative new form of nationalism connected to transnational social fields and the existence of diaspora: long-distance nationalism. (Anderson 1992) Scholars have already shown on many examples the political influence of diaspora communities over their country of origin (Basch at all 1994, and others) Something similar happens in the Hungarian case as well: the diaspora – the political organizations of the Hungarian minorities in the countries around Hungary as well of the first and second generation immigrants in Western Europe and North America, try to enhance their influence in Hungary. They concentrate on issues — like nationhood and citizenship — in close connection with the status of the ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary, and their relationship to the “mother country”. (Kovács and Tóth 2007). Moreover through the “national issue” they have influence over a brighter spectrum of internal political discussions. Similarly to some other cases – see the relation of China to the Chinese diaspora – the relation works in the other direction as well: the Hungarian diaspora, which was neglected by none Hungarian government since 1989, became though a distinguished issue for the Hungarian nationalist discourse present in political, civic and religious life alike. (Pieke et al. 2004, Stewart 2004) The thematic focus of their talk is not so much the co-ethnic people living in territories lost by Hungary for more than 80 years (as a consequence of the Trianon Treaty), but the lost territories, the imagined “national space” in itself. The main strategy of the Hungarian long distance nationalism is to recover – in a symbolic sense – these territories. As I will present in the following this happens through special symbolic acts of territorialization. After the symbolic meaning of these places is reconstructed they are put in practice as “real life” reference for national discourses on distress and danger, as well as “authentic locales” for ethnic tourism, religious and national rituals.

Identity discourses and locality

Over the past decades many social scientists have found that people’s lives and their views of themselves and the world are less and less determined by location or the feeling of belonging to a place. The spatial determination of identity is disappearing, as different forms of globalization and of transnational movements are accompanied by a re-evaluation of lifestyle and cultural identity (Gupta–Ferguson 1992; Appadurai 1996). However, there is a trend in the opposite direction as well. Territorialization means that certain places are (re)discovered
and invested with new symbolic meanings making them the target and locale of identity-search and creation. Imagined communities are tied to certain places, imagined landscapes or distant sacred places, especially if those communities live in diaspora or are nationalities with extra-territorial minorities not tied to a certain area or territory. The increasingly rich literature on diaspora has to a significant degree been influenced by an idea from William Safran (Safran 1991). Accordingly, the image of a distant homeland, living in the collective memory or recreated by a collective memory work determines the constitution of diaspora communities. The original source of this idea is, naturally, the Jewish diaspora and its relationship to the Holy Land, but this works in a similar way in the Chinese, Greek, Irish, Mahgreb, and Palestinian diaspora communities. In what follows, by examining the relationship of Hungarian people – mostly citizens of Hungary but partly assisted by local ethnic Hungarians as well – to Transylvania, I will come to the conclusion that reinvention and occupation of symbolic places – lost in political sense for 80 years – makes territorialization an important tool not only for identity politics of diasporas that come to being as a result of migration, but also for those that have come to being as a result of changes in state borders.

The symbolic strategies of territorialization or re-territorialization can be well appreciated through Arjun Appadurai’s analytical framework. Appadurai speaks of two strategies related to nation states: for the first part the nation state attempts to create “a flat, contiguous, and homogeneous space of nationness”; and simultaneously it creates “a set of places and spaces (prisons, barracks, airports, radio stations, secretariats, parks, marching ground, processional routes) calculated to create the internal distinctions and divisions necessary for state ceremony, surveillance, discipline and mobilization” (Appadurai 1996: 16). At first glance it appears as if Appadurai were describing the political and cultural process through which the territory of a country is turned into a homeland, more precisely into the homeland of one and only one nation, by clothing it with cultural, cognitive and emotional content. This generally happens through the cultural and symbolic domestication of territories lying within political boundaries. In our case, however, the situation is a little different. In what follows we will discuss how the symbolic expansion of national life, through the symbolic tools mentioned above, can occur on territories to which the nation belongs in historic sense, but not in a political sense of nation state. Another method to create locality, the marking of symbolic places necessary for the establishment of national movements and discipline, is most relevant in connection with Transylvania; especially through the creation of sacred places which are in themselves, and especially through associated rites, and performative acts strong transmitters of national sentiment. To make geographically bounded spaces and physically existing places able to transmit these symbolic messages they need to be “culturally worked.” (Hennig 1997) In what follows we will speak of three strategies used to this work on Transylvania as a geographic space: (1) the symbolization – historicizing or folklorizing – of places, which means at the same time the localization of certain symbols and discourses; (2) the occupation of symbolic places through sacred and secular rituals, which through personal and bodily participation in performative acts produces a high degree of identification and (3) the creation of a national imagination about the entire geographic area, that of an authentic national space.

Localization: Hungarian symbolic places in Transylvania

Researchers of nationalism, particularly those who stress the similarities between national and religious communities, between the imaginary world of the nationalist and religious imagination, especially call attention to the similarities in the relationship of the two types of ideological and symbolic systems’ relationship to places (e.g. Anderson 1983; Hastings
2002). Sacred spaces are brought to being for the nation that work in a similar way to those of religion. And both arise from the very old folk belief that the sacred can come into contact with particular places. To visit these places is to meet the sacred, and they offer the possibility of washing away sins. According to Appadurai the sacred or cultic sites were brought into being by nation states in two ways: primarily, by filling already exiting sites of religious pilgrimage with national meaning. In other words, pilgrimage then is simultaneous sacred and national, and thus the sacred places where this happens are attractive in both a national and a religious sense. Second, by assigning mythos of origin or foundation of national history into geography – as Anthony D. Smith also points out, (Smith 1989) Excellent examples of this are the Serbian national cult of the battlefield of Kosovo Polje, or the Hungarian national shrine at Ópusztaszer. (Vucinich and Emmert, 1991; Zirojević, 1996; Kovács, 2006: 15-113).

Sacred national sites that lie outside the boundaries of the nation state, are under foreign occupation, or are in territories of disputed status, have particularly strong emotive power. Jerusalem is such a place, as is the holy site at Ayodhya in India over which Hindu and Muslim nationalist political and religious communities compete and are in conflict (Veer 1994; Brass 1996). The Catholic pilgrimage site at Csíksomlyó (Rom. Šumuleu) is another such place. Csíksomlyó lies at the foot of the Eastern Carpathians in Romania some 400 km from the Hungarian border, has been a pilgrimage site for the almost exclusively Catholic and ethnically Hungarian villagers of the Ciuc Basin for several hundred years. The pilgrimage was banned, for a time, under communism, but the tradition that was kept by a few hundred people gained a new life after the regime change in 1989. Participants came from farther and farther away, with most of them – numbering some 200-300 thousand – coming from Hungary. Regular television coverage over the past several years has made the pilgrimage a media event, and has spurred the Catholic Church to identify with pilgrims, who have taken on a nationalist character.

The unique attraction of Csíksomlyó comes from the sacred experience evoked by the traditional order of the pilgrimage, and the feeling of authenticity and community that arises from meeting with Csángós and Seklers (most traditional ethnic Hungarian groups living in Romania). The national symbols carried by participants or built into the surroundings – Hungarian national flags, symbols, songs and the great open altar whose shape imitates the triple hill and the double cross – ensure that national imagination is attached to the experience. Csíksomlyó has become for many the most important sacral center of the Hungarians. It is unique, because – as many participants and media coverage expresses – there is no other sacred place or ritual center on the territory of Hungary today that would be visited in such a great strength by all sorts of Hungarians, Catholic and Protestants, civic and religious alike.
The second largest category of symbolic places maintained by Hungarians – both Hungarian citizens and local ethnic Hungarians, sometimes involving even the Hungarian state – are, in the term used by Pierre Nora, national sites of memory (Nora 1990). We must not forget that the zenith of Hungary’s establishment of national memorials was at the end of the 19th and start of the 20th century, when Transylvania was still part of Hungary. However, a significant part of this Hungarian national monuments in Transylvanian towns were taken down after the changes of regime in 1919 and 1945. Some of them still stand, or were re-erected after 1990. From a Hungarian point of view, the national memorials of Transylvania that have been “liberated”, or “freed”, put back in their places and retaken, as well as those that need to be “protected” from the desire of the majority to take them over, re-name them or relocate them. The Martyrs’ Statue in Arad is an excellent example of the former, while the statue to King Matthias in Cluj-Napoca (Hun. Kolozsvár) is the best example of the latter, for it had to be
protected from attempts made against it by the Romanian nationalist mayor of the city (Brubaker at al. 2006).

Arad (Romania) is the site of memory of the defeat of the Hungarian revolution of 1848, and can be seen as a ritual center of a different sort. The statue, raised in 1890 to commemorate the leaders of the 1848 Hungarian revolution executed in the city, is considered a great work of historical art (its creator, György Zala, designed the Millennial Memorial at Budapest’s Heroes’ Square). After the change of borders due to the Treaty of Trianon, the Romanian leadership had the statue removed, but did not destroy it. After 1990 it was given to the Catholic Minorite Order and then, as a result of the initiative of conservative parties in Hungary and the Democratic Alliance of Romanian Hungarians (RMDSZ), it was put back into its original place. The agreement between the Hungarian and Romanian government to raise the statue again came about as a result of the positive mood created by Romania’s accession to the European Union. Thus, in April 2004, the statue, then called the Statue of Liberty, was unveiled in the so-called Park of Reconciliation, created to evoke the European spirit in this region near the border between the two countries. However, this statue of liberty is not an “ordinary” statue of liberty: it represents the victorious, or resurrected Hungaria (the female symbol of Hungary), as the leader of the Hungarian party MDF, Ibolya Dávid, confirmed in her dedicatory speech: “This marvelous statue of liberty is also the symbol of the resurrection of the Hungarians of the Carpathian Basin, of our common liberation.” Since its restitution the statue became the central site of the Hungarian national holyday on October 6th - the National Day of Grief - held for decades in Arad. Unlike the pilgrimage in Csiksomlyó which excels with its popularity, mobilizing hundred of thousands of people yearly, the significance of the national day of grief’s commemoration, which never had more than a couple of thousands of participants is ensued by the rank of the event in the Hungarian calendar of political rituals. The main commemorative speeches are hold every year by Hungarian state officials – and the political leaders of Transylvanian Hungarians – and transmitted by national television channels. (Feischmidt 2006)
The significance of symbols and symbolic places grows greater if they are threatened – or perceived as threatened – or used for commemorative practices. There are, however, other objects and places – churches, castles, cemeteries, statues and memorials – that are significant only because they are considered to be parts of a national cultural heritage. They are associated with individuals (authors, poets, politicians, revolutionaries), or events (national assemblies, battles, etc.) taught in the Hungarian public schools as part of the Hungarian national history. Other places have become important because they represent the material folk-culture considered the most traditional in the territories once belonged to the historical Hungary. (Some Sekler villages with their adorned gates and headstones, Korond with its pottery, the villages from Kalotaszeg region marked by their needlecraft.)

The last category of symbolic places is the product of what Anthony Smith calls the naturalization of the homeland and nation through places. (Smith 1989) Zoltán Ilyés has given us the most vivid description of how the “millennial borders” at Gyimes (Rom. Ghimeş), the only part of the historic boundary of old Hungary that has an ethnic-Hungarian populace, has been incorporated into the repertoire of nostalgic Hungarian ethno-tourism (Ilyés 2005). The “millennial borders” are a mnemotopos (as Jan Assmann put it); a sign that the culture of memory plants into the environment, which in this case serves to remind one of a history that centers on losses and tragedies. The process of creation of symbolic places has not ended. A recent study describes how tourism provides a strong impetus for the creation of new places and objects to fit within the system. (Gagyí 2005)

**The occupation of symbolic places: tourism and pilgrimage to Transylvania**
Most of the examples presented above can be considered as acts of invention of tradition. As such they are initiated and designed by the state authorities, in our case by the Hungarian state or other institutions with high prestige – the Catholic Church, political parties or civic organizations. However, as Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out the invention is successful if followers are found which seems to be the case here (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). We have studied all sorts of activities both of locals and those coming from other parts, with a special attention to the cultural practices of people who come to visit Transylvania from Hungary. Concerning their physical movement and their acts of symbolic appropriation we found that three social practices play the main role in this regard: a folk-culture movement (the so called dance-house movement), the ethnic or heritage tourism, and a nationally recoded catholic pilgrimage.

In the 1970s, in defiance of the bans by both communist countries, hundreds of young people from Hungary set out for the villages in Romania said by folklorists to maintain the most archaic Hungarian folk culture: Szék (Rom. Sic), Méra (Mera), Válaszút (Răscruci), Gyimes, and the Csángó villages of Moldavia. Solidarity against a common enemy, the communist party system, with the politically oppressed and economically depressed Hungarians of Transylvania, motivated opposition intellectuals in Hungary and Transylvania alike (Gal 1991). Some two and a half or three decades after the first appearance of dance-house followers these Transylvanian villages have gone through great economic transformation. The dances, which were carried out according to tradition when they were discovered in Szék, have disappeared in the village due to the quick economic change, or have “moved” to Budapest. While the majority of young villagers in Szék go to discos, some of the migrants from Szék working in construction in Budapest take part in intellectual efforts to bring dance-house culture to clubs in Hungarian cities and, through camps, to take them “back” to their villages of origin (Molnár 2005, Pulay 2005).

At the start of the 1990s tourists arriving by bus, and families who came for a quiet vacation joined backpacking youth traveling to Transylvania. In our research so far we have seen how tourism from Hungary takes on two forms. In the first case tourists primarily stay in villages and peasant houses in the Sekler lands or Kalotaszeg region, or buy such houses for themselves, because they are attracted by the beauties of nature and the natural mode of life of the villages. However, those who stay in village houses also spend a significant amount of their time visiting sites mentioned as parts of the national heritage by Hungarian guide books and local tourist guides. So we can say that Hungarian tourism to Transylvania is well on the way to becoming a sort of heritage tourism. Heritage tourism in Transylvania focuses on folk tradition and historical memorials. The primary point of view with regard to memorials, churches and village houses is – as a tourist interviewed by us put it in 2002 – that they should be “beautiful, interesting places with a Hungarian background that are worth seeing.” So we are faced with a special sort of heritage tourism – which I call ethnic tourism – in which an important motivation is to meet with and experience a shared ethnic and cultural background with people from distant “Hungarian regions”.

Heritage tourism is a sort of pilgrimage in the search for authenticity. We experienced in many cases how difficult is to distinguish between the two sorts of motivation and action, the profane – tourism – and the sacred – pilgrimage. Religious tourism usually connects the two, people generally visit sacred places or shrines on the occasion of religious festivals. This sort of pilgrimage, which has a spiritual side, is comprised in Catholic tradition of a sort of penitence through which grace can be won. At the same time, sightseeing along the way provides it with a secular side as well.
In the 1990s, following the fall of communism, Hungarian pilgrim-tourists discovered the pilgrimage site in the Sekler lands, Csíksomlyó and, as we have seen, turned it into a national pilgrimage site. This is how a pilgrim put it to one of my colleagues: “Not everyone comes here because for the Catholic religious thing. There were a lot of Calvinists and Lutherans on our bus. ... The few hours here are, practically, the site of meeting for Hungarians from throughout the world. This is what brings us. We show we are here, and every year there are more of us.” An examination of speeches made at the pilgrimage, and its media representation show that nationalist statements are to be found above all in the statements made by religious leaders from Hungary and the diaspora, and in the comments made by politicians to the press. “The nation must be forged into one body and one soul through its faith and its Hungarianness” is how a Hungarian Bishop living in emigration put it in 1994. The assistant bishop of Kalocsa-Kecskemét (Hungary) put it in a similar way in 2001: “We stand at the foot of the Virgin Mother of Csíksomlyó, where the solidarity of the nation is expressed not merely as a theory, but in practice.” Csíksomlyó is represented as the most significant religious-national celebration by the Hungarian satellite channel, Duna TV. One of the directors of the station put it this way in an interview: “More than half of the people here come because of their Hungarian identity. In fact, this is the greatest Hungarian celebration. ... People cannot experience the power of collectivity anywhere else. National holidays in Hungary, even March 15th, have been emptied of meaning and have become protocol events where various organizations lay wreaths. ... Csíksomlyó did not used to play such a significant role, it wasn’t even in the public’s consciousness. Now it is the prime pilgrimage ... certainly from the point of view of the media in terms of numbers of visitors and interest. This is precisely why I say that here faith and the nation are intertwined.” (Vörös 2006)

The combined roles of the media, politics and the Catholic Church enable us to describe the pilgrimage to Csíksomlyó as a national celebration. But the great number of participants and the emotional behavior of the crowd cannot be explained solely by the efforts of these institutions. The numbers, behavior, national rhetoric and politics of symbols also come from below, and are based on the experience of commonality arising from the participation and work of congregations, civic and religious organizations, informal groups in villages and cities all over Hungary and Transylvania. National symbols play an important role in the development of this collective national experience. “Just imagine, I went up and saw the Hungarian flag flying, and I started crying!” – said one interviewee. Over the past several years, as the result of changes in meaning Csíksomlyó became more than an ordinary national celebration, it is a showing up ritual of the Hungarianness, of those who identify themselves with an ethno-national discourse recreating the unity of all ethnic Hungarians who live inside the country and outside it, on the “lost” territories once belonged to Hungary.

**Imagining an authentic national space in Transylvania**

Michel Foucault uses the term “heterotypes” for places simultaneously representing and localizing utopia and authenticity. Time also works differently here; they are places of movelessness and stationarity within a word in permanent movement. Late modern societies have however created cultural practices in which people living their everyday in the later can come in their holydays in contact with the first. Tourism as a cultural phenomenon is that it creates a sort of alternative world that serves as a place of refuge from our everyday lives, gives security and protection by offering an alternative way to organize life. For tourists from Hungary, Transylvania serves in this sense as an alternative world, as an escape. In the discourse about this alternative world, however, grows far beyond the experiences of tourism.
Tourism merely brings a far broader discourse closer and makes it palpable, a discourse on authenticity. The admission of one who once backpacked through Transylvania demonstrates what I mean: “People still walk in Transylvania, they drink well water, and live in houses designed for humans. Their Hungarian identity is still important to them. There’s something there that we don’t have.” (Bárdi 1992)

Tourism to Transylvania is an excellent example of the search for authenticity of the sort that, along the general lines laid out by Dean MacCannel, is considered the essence of a tourist’s behavior. In Transylvania, or at least in the villages of Transylvania that are the goal of Hungarian tourists, there are not yet (or rather, they are ignored) many of the things that have come to be part of human life with modernity. Nature is untouched, and people live in communities where they help one another. This is why people have the feeling – expressed by many of our interviewees – that: “A trip to Transylvania is different.”

Discourses of authenticity that evoke nature and a golden age of human relations center on certain values and ideals. The discourse on authenticity associated with Transylvania stresses national culture in an essential way that has been characteristic of this region since Herder. It transmits the idea that the nation expresses its essence in “a” culture, “a” tradition that is more authentically represented by certain parts of the nation than others, for example by villagers as opposed to city dwellers, or by Hungarians who live as minorities outside of Hungary as opposed to the majority. People at the center of this discourse are “real Hungarians”, and the place where “real Hungarians” live is Transylvania. There are further distinctions within this. A century ago Kalotaszeg was considered the ideal region; now the villages of the Sekler lands are regarded as the most authentic form of “Hungarian being.” This discourse also contains a very important dimension in time. Transylvania is a remnant of a one-time Hungary, now filled with nostalgia, a memento of “the old Hungarian world.” This is what Nándor Bárdi has called the Fairy-garden vision that appears in Hungarian discourse about Hungarian minorities outside Hungary; that is the imagination that “the old world of Hungarians still exists beyond Hungary’s borders.” (Bárdi 2004).

The historical background of this idea is the romantic ideal of the Hungarian village, established by folklore and grounded in popular culture. In his book about Transylvania László Kürti shows how a “Transylvanian myth” entered Hungary through the dance-house movement and contributed to a transformation of the language and symbols of national culture (Kürti 2001: esp. 137–165). I believe this process has continued, even with the fall of popularity of the dance-house movement, and is in the motivation for never before experienced numbers of tourists and pilgrims to areas that it evokes and creates. Just as the village is imagined as an island in a sea of modernity represented by the city, so the constant, stable image of Transylvania is contrasted to indifference to the nation in this age of moving, hybrid identities. This Transylvania is a world opposed to changing and modernizing urban Hungary.

Summary

Above we examined how symbolic and expropriating practices directed towards Transylvania have created an area thick with symbolism. Representations of Transylvania follow a strategy nation creation by attempting to show a place that is to be copied and disseminated, where the nation exists in an “unspoiled”, “original” nature. Richard Handler, in his book about French cultural policies in Quebec and their selection on ethnic bases, says that for nationalists authenticity is the “proof of national existence.” (Handler 1988; Linnekin 1991). This
authenticity – the proof of the existence of the nation – is construed to Transylvania, more precisely to that image of Transylvania which was created by Hungarian discourses. This “Transylvania” – the “imagined homeland” that lies at the symbolic centre of the Hungarian nationalism today – is an invention of transnational national groupings. What Appadurai and Anderson found characteristic for long-distance nationalism generally, here is also relevant: different diaspora and local groups are active in the invention and have different interests in reconstruction of the lost territories as “national homeland”. Our analyses emphasized the presence and the role of institutions and persons from Hungary, who are the most active and the most numerous in political, religious, memory and leisure activities directed towards “homeland Transylvania”. Their position – visa vie the locals – is however marked by the fact, they live 500-600 km far from there, as citizens of an other country, so they do not vote, do not pay taxes, can not be arrested, will not be brought before the courts there. As Anderson calls it their politics is without responsibility or accountability. (Anderson 1992: 11)
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