

“We Belong to Them”

Narratives of Belonging, Homeland and Nationhood
in Territorial and Non-territorial Minority Settings

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Introduction

In 1998 a group of mayors from predominantly Hungarian-speaking municipalities in Southern Slovakia visited Sweden. I joined the group as a Hungarian-Swedish interpreter with no expectations of getting into contact with a new research field. The program of the study trip was packed with visits to service homes, daycare centres and sewage works, but the evenings were free. At the end of each day we were taken care of by the Hungarian organisations throughout Southern Sweden. Hungarians from Slovakia met Hungarians from Sweden. As a social researcher, a student of nationalism and ethnic relations, I could not help looking at what was going on during these Swedish-Hungarian-Slovak-Hungarian meetings. A new field of interest evolved before my eyes.

Wherever we went – Växjö, Eskilstuna, Tångagärde, Stockholm, Göteborg – the choreography of the meetings was astonishingly similar. We were accompanied to the local Hungarian organisation's clubhouse that was often decorated with the Hungarian colours and with pictures of great (historical) figures well-known to all of us from Hungarian history. We spoke the same language and the goulash¹ prepared by the local Hungarians tasted almost like back home. We ate Hungarian food, drank Hungarian wine and sang Hungarian songs. Either at the beginning or at the end of our meetings, all of us stood up and sang the Hungarian national anthem.

Hungarianness was a popular subject during the dinner-table discussions. Sometimes complaints were raised about “the others” Hungarianness; and Hungarians were categorised under two headings: “good Hungarians” and “bad Hungarians”. Who the “others” – often named as bad Hungarians – were, depended on the context. Sometimes the good ones were those who kept their Hungarianness intact, who resisted assimilation by every means; but another evening we met Swedish-Hungarians who were complaining about the opposite, that the newcomers, usually the ones who came from Romania (as it was said) did not want to integrate (not enough anyway) into the Swedish society and gave a negative picture of Swedish-Hungarians. There was only one thing everybody could agree about, namely that they were all Hungarians: good ones, bad ones, more or less Hungarian Hungarians, but they all were identified as Hungarians. The guests, the group of Hungarian

¹ A hot-tasting Hungarian dish of meat boiled with vegetables and paprika.

mayors from Slovakia, could tell similar stories about Hungarianness in Slovakia, so it was always easy to find a common ground for discussions. The Swedish-Hungarians were sometimes a bit patronising and encouraged the Hungarian mayors from Slovakia to hold on to their Hungarianness down there in Slovakia. In some places the guests were also reassured that they were better Hungarians than the Hungarians living in Hungary: more real ones.

What astonished me during this study trip were the omnipresent representations of the national: the transformation of individuals into co-nationals as soon as they entered “the Hungarian room”. This “room” was often a physical space, a clubhouse, but it could be constituted – with the help of the Hungarian language – practically anywhere. Getting into contact with a few Hungarian organisations in Sweden brought up several questions: *What makes these people so attached to the national symbols of a country that forced them to emigrate or which they have never lived in?*² *What unites Hungarians from Slovakia and Hungarians from Sweden under the Hungarian flag and worship the national unity of all Hungarians in the world (even though the above-mentioned “bad Hungarians” are sometimes excluded)?*

At the same time a few other questions made me think in comparative terms. What I saw were research questions which to my knowledge had not been addressed before: *what happens with identifications, built on the same ethnocultural grounds, under different socio-economic circumstances? How do a territorial minority and a diaspora community with the same ethnocultural background operate with the narratives of the national? How and why do Hungarians in Slovakia and Hungarians in Sweden articulate their Hungarianness in some contexts but not in others? Do they use the same building blocks – the Hungarian language, the Hungarian national symbols (the flag, the anthem) and certain elements of Hungarian historical memory – when identifying themselves as Hungarians?*

These questions provided an adequate point of departure but were gradually amended during the research process. In the theoretical and methodological part of this study I give a detailed description of the different stages of reformulating my research questions. The end product of the journey described below is the research goal to convey a constructive dialogue between my empirical findings on the identifications of Hungarians in Sweden and Hungarians in Slovakia and the theories which concern ethnocultural territorial minorities and ethnocultural diasporas. In a broader perspective my research aim is to enhance the

² Swedish-Hungarians can have different countries of origin (see below).

theories related to non-territorial minorities/diaspora and territorial minorities and their ethnocultural identifications.

The terms Hungarians in Sweden, alternatively Swedish-Hungarians, Hungarians in Slovakia, Hungarian-Hungarians, or Hungarians are difficult to replace with more dynamic terms. Nevertheless, when employing any of these terms I refer to categories of practice – which are characterised by dynamic processes and practices of group-construction and re-construction. Consequently, the following descriptions of Hungarians in Sweden and Hungarians in Slovakia should not be understood as descriptions of well-defined entities, characterised by internal same-ness and strong external boundaries. My intention here is to give an introduction into the history of those who today identify themselves or are identified by others as Hungarians in Slovakia/Sweden.

Hungarians in Sweden

In Sweden there are approximately 30,000-35,000 persons who claim or are claimed by others to have a Hungarian background.³ They, or their forefathers, migrated to Sweden in several waves. In the 20th century a limited number of Hungarians migrated to Sweden in the interwar period. Within the framework of the Bernadotte mission several hundred Hungarian Jews were saved from the German concentration and working camps.⁴ In 1947-1948 approximately 1,800 Hungarian persons arrived in Sweden.⁵ Following the 1956 uprising in Hungary, approximately 7,500-8,000 Hungarian refugees arrived in Sweden.⁶ Migration from Hungary was continuous throughout the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. According to the Swedish Statistical Office's statistics, in 1991 there lived 15,146 persons in Sweden who were born in Hungary. At the same time, there were 3,884 persons under seventeen who were classified as second-generation immigrants of Hungarian origin.⁷ In

³ Hamberg, Eva M. *Livsåskådningar, religion och värderingar i en invandrargrupp: En studie av sverigeungrare* [Worldviews and Value Systems Among Immigrants: A Study of Hungarian Immigrants in Sweden], Stockholm, CEIFOs skriftserie Nr 85, 2000, p. 21.

⁴ Szabó, Mátyás *A svédországi magyarok rövid története* [A Short History of Hungarians in Sweden], Available at: <http://www.smosz.org/tortenete.htm>. Last visited: April 21, 2008.

⁵ These were guest-workers and their families. The 550 men worked in the Swedish agriculture and wood industry. There are no exact numbers on how many of them have stayed in Sweden after their contracts expired. Svensson, Anders *Ungrare i folkhemmet: Svensk flyktingpolitik i det kalla krigets skugga* [Hungarians in the People's Home, Swedish Refugee Policy in the Shadow of the Cold War], Lund, Lund University Press, 1992, pp. 103-104.

⁶ Svensson, pp. 142-144.

⁷ Hamberg, p. 22.

1995, according to Mátyás Szabó’s calculations, there were approximately 27,000 persons who, or whose parents, were born in Hungary.⁸ In the past few years the pattern of migration from Hungary has changed, as it is no longer political but rather economic reasons that bring Hungarians to Sweden. In recent years, a great number of highly qualified physicians and other professionals have been recruited by the Swedish headhunting firms. During the period 2000-2005, between 169 and 292 persons migrated from Hungary to Sweden annually.⁹

In addition, there are Hungarians living in Sweden who do not belong to either of these categories. In the late 1980s and early 1990s approximately 5,000-10,000 persons who identify themselves as Hungarians but held no Hungarian citizenship – and this is why the official statistics do not consider them Hungarian – have migrated to Sweden from Transylvania (Romania) and Vojvodina (Serbia).¹⁰ As the above-presented picture shows, the community of Hungarians in Sweden is a very heterogeneous group: Hungarian Jews; Hungarians from Hungary, Hungarians from Transylvania and Hungarians from Vojvodina.¹¹ This heterogeneity is an additional factor that makes Hungarians in Sweden interesting as a research object.

At the same time it is important to note that the social stratum – middle class intellectuals – that are usually considered to be the national intelligentsia¹² are somehow overrepresented among Hungarians in Sweden. Writing on Hungarians who migrated to Sweden after 1956, several researchers pinpoint that their educational level was high.¹³

⁸ Szabó, Mátyás *Vägen mot medborgarskap. Studier i medborgarskapsbyte och integration* [The Road to Citizenship: Studies in Citizenship-changing and Integration], Stockholm, Arena, 1997, p. 199.

⁹ Under the same time period between 122 and 167 persons left Sweden for Hungary. Swedish Statistical Office Data, Available at: <http://www.ssd.scb.se/databaser/makro/SaveShow.asp>. Last visited: April 22, 2007.

¹⁰ According to the Hungarian Evangelical pastor in Sweden Pál Molnár Veress between 1990-1993 750 Hungarians from Vojvodina sought asylum in Sweden. Tófalvi, Zoltán *Északi változatok. Tófalvi Zoltán beszélgetései Skandináviában elő magyarokkal* [Nordic Variations. Zoltán Tófalvi’s interviews with Hungarians Living in Scandinavia], Marosvásárhely, Mentor Kiadó, 2000, p. 189.

¹¹ The number of Hungarians from (Czecho)Slovakia is not significant.

¹² Greenfeld, for example, argues that the social, political and cultural elites and the middle-class intellectuals play the main role in popularising nationalism. Greenfeld, Lian *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1992; see also Fishman, Joshua A. *Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective*, Clevedon, Multicultural Matters, 1989; Hroch, Miroslav “From National Movement to the Fully-formed Nation: The Nation-building Process in Europe”, in Balakrishnan, Gopal (ed.) *Mapping the Nation*, London, Verso, 1996, pp. 78-97.

¹³ Hamberg, p. 25; Svensson, p. 198; Szabó, 1997, p. 204.

Similarly, in the second biggest “contingent” of Hungarian migrants (those who came from Transylvania) well-educated middle-class intellectuals were overrepresented. In the late 1980s, it was primarily individuals with high education who left Transylvania because they were more exposed and at the same time more vulnerable to discrimination on ethnocultural grounds in their land of citizenship, Romania, than those who belonged to the working class.¹⁴ According to the Hungarian-born ethnologist Mátyás Szabó the circumstance that the majority of Hungarian individuals left Transylvania for Sweden because they felt themselves persecuted explains why the Hungarianness of Transylvanian-Hungarians in Sweden is “more intensive, firmer and is manifested and talked about more often”.¹⁵ Whether it is so or not is in my view an empirical question.

Szabó asserts that the integration of Hungarians into the Swedish society can be described as successful and their position in a “pyramid of migrants” is good or very good. In other words Hungarians in Sweden are acknowledged as a well-integrated migrant-group. This assertion is motivated by several factors: The employment and demographic structure of the Hungarian minority does not differ much from the national average. The standard of living and educational level of Hungarians is relatively high, at times higher than the Swedish average. There are proportionally many Hungarian-born individuals who have become very famous in Sweden for their achievements. Many Swedes associate Hungary with heroic deeds, mainly the 1956 uprising, an event that is very well documented in Sweden.¹⁶

On the other hand, far from all who identify themselves as Hungarians in Sweden, felt themselves welcome in Sweden at the time of their arrival. There are two factors which can explain the differences in experiences of migration to Sweden. Firstly, Hungarians from Romania and Yugoslavia were identified by the Swedish authorities as Romanians and Yugoslavs and their place in the “pyramid of migrants” was determined accordingly.¹⁷ Secondly, by the end of the 1980s and early 1990s Swedish migration policies and the Swedish society’s attitude

¹⁴ Szabó, 1997, p. 216.

¹⁵ Szabó, 1997, p. 216.

¹⁶ Szabó, Mátyás *A svédországi magyarok rövid története* [The Short History of Swedish-Hungarians].

¹⁷ On stigmatised citizenship see Brubaker, Rogers *et al.* *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2006, pp. 321-326.

towards immigrants had gone through considerable changes.¹⁸ In the 1950s, Hungarian migrants were given the glad hand and had great possibilities to get integrated in the labour market and in the society as a whole. By the 1980s the situation had changed and many Hungarians from Transylvania and Yugoslavia were placed in refugee camps isolated from the society as a whole, both physically and symbolically.¹⁹ The Hungarian organisations, described in the following, played an important role in easing both the physical and the symbolic isolation of migrant Hungarians in Sweden.

Swedish-Hungarians live territorially dispersed (see map 3) mainly in the capital and in a few other big cities and industrial towns. This is why the main ambition of the ethnocultural umbrella organisation is to hold Hungarians in Sweden together. The National Federation of Hungarians in Sweden (Ungerska Riksförbundet, the SMOSZ) has 34 Hungarian organisations, with 5,675 members, active in 18 towns in Sweden.²⁰ In the beginning of the 1960s there were up to 60 different Hungarian organisations (cultural, religious, sport) active in Sweden. These were concentrated to the big cities Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö and in industrial towns such as Västerås, Södertälje and Eskilstuna. The first country-wide Hungarian umbrella organisation was established in 1974 with two major aims: to be able to have an influence on Swedish migration policy and to fulfil the requirements for getting state support.²¹ Approximately two thirds of the member organisations of the SMOSZ carry out traditional association activities and, with their events and programs, serve the needs of the Hungarians living in their respective districts. Furthermore, they consider the popularisation of Hungarian traditions and culture, and the maintenance of contacts with the Swedish authorities an important task. In the past fifteen years the SMOSZ has started to create institutions. Hungarian Houses were established in three regions (Stockholm, Southern Sweden, and West-Sweden) so that anyone who is interested in getting involved in organisational work or participating in Hungarian events could reach a Hungarian House within a 100 km radius (see map 3). Hungarian Houses provide a home to various cultural, educational, and other activities.

¹⁸ Johansson, Christina *Välkomna till Sverige. Svenska migrationspolitiska diskurser under 1900-talets andra hälft* [Welcome to Sweden? Swedish Migration-policy Discourses in the Second Part of the 19th century], Malmö, Bokbox Förlag, 2005.

¹⁹ Svensson, p. 232.

²⁰ Homepage of the SMOSZ Available at: <http://www.the SMOSZ.org/szovetseg.htm>
Last visited: April 3, 2008.

²¹ Ungerska Rikskommittén was founded in 1974, and transformed to Ungerska Riksförbundet (the SMOSZ) in 1976.

In the past fifteen years, professional organisations performing special functions have been established in addition to the traditional associations. The Book Society of Transylvania (Transsylvanska Bokvänner) publishes one Hungarian book annually. The associations of doctors (Föreningen Ungerska Medicinare i Sverige) and engineers (Ungerska Donau Klubben) gather group members with similar professional interests. The SMOSZ established in 1994 the Society of Hungarian Young People in Sweden (Ungerska Ungdomsförbundet i Sverige) as a youth organisation embracing the whole country.

Hungarians in Slovakia

In 1918, when Czechoslovakia was established, a piece of territory inhabited mostly by Hungarians also became part of the new state. In the most recent census held in the Slovak Republic (May, 2001), according to nationality, 520,000 inhabitants declared themselves to be Hungarian; that is approximately ten percent of Slovakia's total population. Hungarians in Slovakia inhabit the southern parts of Slovakia, bordering to Hungary, so their contacts with the "mother nation" have been very lively, especially in the past fifteen years.

The history of Hungarians in Slovakia (until 1993 Czechoslovakia) has been turbulent. The minority status of Hungarian-speakers was a result of artificially-created political borders, which separated them from the bulk of the Hungarian nation. Consequently, the "new" Hungarian minority (similarly to the Sudeten-Germans in the Czech lands) rejected the new state of Czechoslovakia in its essence, because it was a state which made them a national minority.²² In 1938, under the first Vienna Award which was a result of the Munich agreement, Czechoslovakia was forced to cede the southern part of the Slovak territories to Hungary. Hungary received 11,927 square kilometres in southern Slovakia and southern Transcarpathia. The areas transferred to Hungary included approximately 840,000 Hungarians.²³ The post-World War II settlements restored the political borders established in 1918 with some modifications. The region called Transcarpathia²⁴ which before 1918 was under Hungarian rule, and between 1920-1938 was part of Czechoslovakia was in 1945 transferred to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist

²² Kováč, Dušan "National Minorities in Central Europe as an Instrument and Activity-force in European Politics", in Plichtová, Jana (ed.) *Minorities in Politics: Cultural and Language Rights*, Bratislava Symposium II, held on November 13-16, 1991, p. 83.

²³ Simon, Attila "A szlovákiai magyarság. Történelem" [Hungarians in Slovakia: History], in Bihari, Zoltán (ed.) *Magyarok a Világban: Kárpát-medence*, Budapest, Ceba kiadó, 2000, p. 46.

²⁴ Also known as Subcarpathia or Subcarpathian Rus.

Republic (see map 4). According to the 1930 Czechoslovak census 15.4 percent of Transcarpathia’s population (109,472 persons) identified themselves as Hungarians. These Hungarians became citizens of the Soviet Union²⁵ in 1945 and disappeared from Czechoslovak statistics.

In 1947-1948 a protracted population exchange took place between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Approximately 74,000 Hungarians were deported from Slovakia and 73,273 inhabitants that qualified as Slovaks resettled from Hungary within the frame of this population exchange. At the same time approximately 44,000 Hungarians were resettled throughout the Western Czech (Sudeten) Lands. On the whole, between 1945 and 1948, 120,490 Hungarians were forced to leave their home-settlements.²⁶ Moreover, a specific form of ethnic expansion was introduced, the so-called re-slovakisation,²⁷ that gave individuals who identified themselves as Hungarians the right to repudiate their ethnocultural affiliation and profess themselves Slovaks, while referring to their (often non-existent) Slovak ancestors. Re-slovakisation provided a chance to acquire Czechoslovak citizenship and equality with those who identified themselves as Slovaks before the law. As a consequence of population transfers and re-slovakisation, according to the 1950 census, 367,733 persons professed themselves Hungarians. It can be compared with the 1921 census that reported about 657,646 Hungarians in Slovakia and the 1961 census that reported about 533,934 Hungarians living in Slovakia.²⁸

Between 1945 and 1948, the Hungarians in Slovakia were deprived of the rights to retain or establish any political or cultural organisations. The Hungarian schools were closed and education in Hungarian was prohibited. The voluntary exodus and forced settlement into Hungary deprived the Hungarian minority in Slovakia of a sizable part of its “national” intelligentsia. This open discrimination gradually eased and in the 1950s the Hungarian infrastructure gradually expanded. The two most important institutions became the Cultural Organisation of Hungarian Workers in Czechoslovakia (Csemadok) and the Hungarian daily

²⁵ Ferdinec, Csilla *A kárpátaljai magyarság történeti kronológiája 1918-44* [Historical Chronology of Hungarians in Transcarpathia], Lilium Aurum, Tempora Nova, 2002, p. 188.

²⁶ Kocsis, Károly and Kocsis-Hodosi, Eszter, Hungarian Minorities in the Carpathian Basin, Available at: <http://www.hungarian-history.hu/lib/hmcb/hmcb03.htm#fn1>. Last visited: April 21, 2008.

²⁷ Reslovakisation was set off by the declaration Nr. 20 000/I-IV/1-1946 of the Ministry of the Interior in Bratislava.

²⁸ Gyönyör, József “Csehszlovákia népességének nemzetiségi megoszlása”, in Zalabai, Zsigmond (ed.) *A hűség nyelve* [The Language of Faith], Bratislava, Madách, 1987, p. 41.

Új Szó. Until December 1989, both institutions worked under the supervision of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. Throughout the communist era the interests of the Hungarian minority were supported by a few individuals who held senior positions in the Communist party, in the education system, in the public administration and in the Csemadok.

The foundations of the present network of Hungarian schools were laid down in the 1950s, and by the 1960s the number of Hungarian schools primary and secondary schools was more or less sufficient. However, “as the 1970s drew on, it became increasingly clear that the Slovak authorities were proposing to dismantle Hungarian educational and cultural institutions, in the expectation that this would speed up the integration and assimilation of the minority”.²⁹ These problems and measures were not openly discussed, because under the communist era it was objectionable to discuss minority problems in concrete terms. As any mentioning of ethnic demands or tensions was taboo during the communist era (except for some time during the 1968 Prague spring), Hungarians and Slovaks did not have a chance to face their antagonistic stereotypes and the troubled historical legacy they share.

The 1990s have brought significant changes in the life of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The democratisation process reopened questions which had been avoided and suppressed under the communist regime. Slovakia emerged as an independent national state. The Hungarian minority’s political representation has emerged as a considerable political force in the Slovak political space. Between 1989-1997 three major Hungarian parties represented the interests of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Generally, the electoral results of the three Hungarian parties showed that for the voters the ideological profile of these parties was of secondary importance, the voters’ support depended rather on the fact that these parties presented themselves as “defenders” of the interests of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.³⁰ In the 1990s the divisions following ethnic boundaries were reinforced. In order to be able to promote the interests of the Hungarian minority more effectively, in 1998 the three Hungarian parties merged into one single Hungarian party the Hungarian Coalition Party (Magyar Koalíció Pártja, MKP).³¹

²⁹ Schöpflin, George “National Minorities in Eastern Europe”, in Schöpflin, George (ed.) *The Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, New York, Facts on File, 1986, p. 305.

³⁰ Ishiyama, John T. and Breuning, Marijke “The Hungarian parties in Slovakia”, in Ishiyama, John T. and Breuning, Marijke, *Ethnopolitics in the New Europe*, London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998, pp. 73-74.

³¹ In the following I will use the Hungarian abbreviation MKP when referring to the Hungarian Coalition Party. The Slovak name of the party is Strana maďarskej koalície, SMK.

Until the 1998 elections, the MKP was “uncoalitionable”³², but after the 1998 elections the winning coalition badly needed the MKP’s support in holding the line against the authoritarian politics of the parties in the populist Mečiar government.³³ In September 2004 – as a result of a long political struggle – the first Hungarian-language University in Slovakia was opened in the border town with Hungary Révkomárom (Komárno). Another recent event of great symbolic importance is that in May 2004 both Slovakia and Hungary joined the European Union and the political-administrative borders between Hungary and Slovakia became less significant than in the past. However, the most important aspect of the MKP’s participation in the Slovak government was that for the first time in its history the Hungarian minority, through its political representation, had got a chance to take responsibility not only for its own but also for Slovakia’s future. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the MKP in the two government coalitions led by Mikulás Dzurinda (1998-2002, 2002-2006) does not change the fact that part of Slovak political life is built up on the ethnic cleavage between Slovaks and Hungarians. Stable electoral results equalling the size of the Hungarian minority and opinion poll data confirm that ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia consider themselves represented by the MKP.

A number of statistical particularities concerning the Hungarian minority in Slovakia should be highlighted for the sake of clarity. As has been mentioned before, the Hungarian population of Slovakia is concentrated along the border to Hungary, but basically divided into three major areas. The westernmost area, stretching roughly from the very outskirts of the capital Bratislava in the West to the river Ipoly (Ipel)³⁴ in the East is by far the biggest in terms of population. In round terms, almost two thirds of Hungarians in Slovakia live in this area. The other two Hungarian-populated areas, one in the vicinity of the town of Rimavská Sobota (Rimavská Sobota) and the other in the very south-east of the country, are significantly smaller, but are almost equal in size of population (see map 1).

³² The idea of including the Hungarian party in a government was taboo, as the Slovak parties feared that a close association with the Hungarian Party(ies) would damage their own “national” credentials.

³³ In 1998 there were two arguments that weighted down the nationalistic argument: First, excluding a party on an ethnic basis would have impeded Slovakia’s integration in the EU, which was a common goal of the Slovak democratic parties and the MKP. Second, there was a fear that if the MKP’s natural political allies rejected the cooperation, the MKP would have become isolated in Slovak politics and that could have had severe consequences for the nature of interethnic relations.

³⁴ The names in the brackets are in Slovak.

The Hungarian population is predominantly rural. Only some forty percent of the Hungarians in Slovakia live in municipalities which are defined as towns in statistics.³⁵ Several of these towns are very small. The Hungarian presence in the big cities of Slovakia is negligible. The number of Hungarians in Pozsony (Bratislava) is less than 20,000, comprising four percent of the population. The corresponding figures for the second biggest city, Kassa (Košice), is 9,000, 4 percent of the city's total population. The biggest town with a predominantly Hungarian population is the border town of Révkomárom (Komárno) with a total population of 37,000, of which some 60 percent are Hungarians. The second biggest predominantly Hungarian-speaking town is Dunaszerdahely (Dunajská Streda), with a total population of 23,000³⁶ (see map 1).

Another striking feature of the Hungarian population in Slovakia is that more than three quarters live in municipalities where they form a majority of the total population.³⁷ Consequently, for a large number of Hungarians, daily contact with the Slovak language is limited. Put differently, the majority of Hungarians in Slovakia live their everyday lives in Hungarian. At the same time, as result of the above-mentioned demographic characteristics, there is no "traditional" hub-and-spoke feature of Hungarian population dispersion, i.e. a big city surrounded by countryside, both sharing the same language. Hungarians going or moving to a bigger city will always have to be prepared to switch their everyday language to Slovak. On the other hand, from any point in the Hungarian-populated areas, the Hungarian border can be reached within one hour by car.

It should also be stressed that population data from modern censuses in Slovakia point at relative stability in population proportions between Hungarians and Slovaks in the Hungarian-populated areas. Between 1980 and 2001 there was no significant shift in proportions in any sizeable municipality, while some moderate proportional shifts can be attributed to the definitions used in the various censuses (made in 1980, 1991 and 2001).³⁸ In the most recent census (2001) when native language was separated from nationality, it turned out that the number of

³⁵ Gyurgyik, László *Népszámlálás 2001: A szlovákiai magyarság demografikai, valamint település- és társadalomszerkezetének változásai az 1990-es években* [The 2001 Census Changes in the Demographic, Settlement, and Social Structure of the Hungarian Minority in Slovakia in the 1990s], Pozsony, Kalligram, 2006, p. 32.

³⁶ Gyurgyik, 2006, pp. 171-184.

³⁷ Gyurgyik, 2006, p. 29.

³⁸ Gyurgyik, László *Magyar mérleg: A szlovákiai magyarság a népszámlálási és a népmozgalmi adatok tükrében* [Hungarian Balance. Hungarians of Slovakia in the View of Census and Demographic Figures], Pozsony, Kalligram, 1994.

Hungarians was significantly smaller than the number of people who considered Hungarian as their native language. Such features indicate that any statement of population changes should be handled with great care. For example, in 1980 the share of Hungarians in the town of Révkomárom was 61.57 percent, in 1991 the corresponding figure was 63.58 percent and in 2001 the figure was 60.1 percent. Thus, at a first glance there seems to have been a decline of Hungarians. However, by applying the concept of native language, the share of people whose native language is Hungarian turned out to be 63.6 percent, i.e. there had been no actual change in this respect. Such phenomena are at least in part a consequence of how the Roma minority is categorised.

According to the censuses of 1991 and 2001, the number of those who officially declared their affiliation with the Roma minority was 80,000-90,000. However, according to some estimates there are about 350,000-370,000 Roma in Slovakia today. Before 1991 Roma was not available as an ethnic category and thus the Roma population had to choose between the Slovak and the Hungarian categories. About 80 percent preferred the Slovak category while about 20 percent of the Roma declared themselves to be ethnic Hungarians. This study does not elaborate further on the category of Hungarian-Roma or Hungarian-speaking Roma in Slovakia.

Introduction to Hungarian Nation Politics

It can be assumed that Hungarianness in both Slovakia and Sweden is constructed in relation to how the nation is constructed and the national discourse is disseminated by the Hungarian national elite in Hungary. This is why the understanding of the narratives of “what it means to be Hungarian” in Sweden/Slovakia requires some knowledge of Hungarian nation politics. Here I will present a short introduction to the Hungarian nation-building strategy that culminated in the 2001 Status Law and the referendum on dual citizenship in December 2004. A comprehensive analysis of the most conspicuous discursive constructions, shortly presented here, is included in the empirical part of this text.

The Hungarian state makes a clear difference between Hungarians who live in a minority position in the Carpathian Basin³⁹ (see map 2),

³⁹ The Carpathian basin is roughly bounded by the Carpathian Mountains, the Alps, the Dinaric Alps and the Balkan Mountains. The term uses a geographical feature to naturalise the idea of Hungarian unity since it is within this basin that “Hungarian” tribes settled over a thousand years ago – thus the term Carpathian Basin suggests a kind of natural unity of a “great” Hungary which other states today, with claims over the same territory, lack. Stewart, Michael “The Hungarian Status Law: A New European Form of Transnational Politics?” *Diaspora*, 12(1), 2003, p. 95.

and Hungarians who live in a minority position elsewhere. This difference-making strategy has been clearly manifested in the Hungarian governments' nation policies, most of which are directed towards Hungarians beyond the borders, i.e. Hungarians outside Hungary's political borders but within the Carpathian basin. The Hungarian nation politics of the past fifteen years embraces the establishment of a system of Hungarian institutions in Transylvania, Slovakia, Transcarpathia and Vojvodina⁴⁰ and the political institutionalisation of the so-called Hungarian-Hungarian relations, the most visible manifestation of which is the Law Concerning Hungarians Living in Neighbouring Countries of 2001 that is usually referred to as the "Status Law" or the "Benefit Law".

The questions related to Hungarians outside Hungary and more specifically to the Hungarians beyond the borders (*határon túli magyarok*) have been an organic part of Hungary's foreign policy and domestic politics of the past twenty years. Beginning from the late 1980s, but especially in the beginning of the 1990s, several foundations were set up in Hungary with the purpose of providing economic help to Hungarian institutions and organisations and individuals beyond the borders. According to Nándor Bárdi's calculations, between 1990 and 2004 the Hungarian government allocated more than 79 billion Hungarian forints (approximately 316 million Euros) for different projects, the purpose of which was to support Hungarians beyond the borders. One fourth of the money financed the Hungarian TV channel Duna TV which is directed primarily towards Hungarians beyond the borders, but which is accessible all over the world.

There are various educational programs financed by Hungary. These include the development/improvement of Hungarian language education possibilities in the neighbouring countries, and different stipends available for those who would like to pursue university studies or research in Hungary. Stipends for conducting academic studies are available even for "persons of Hungarian origin in diaspora", that is outside the Carpathian basin,⁴¹ but the great majority of programs is directed primarily

⁴⁰ Nándor Bárdi argues that the organisations and institutions of Hungarians in Austria, Slovenia and Croatia are similar to the organisations and institutions set up by/for non-territorial minorities and they "can only be interpreted within the conceptual framework of diaspora research". Bárdi, Nándor, "The History of Relations Between Hungarian Governments and Ethnic Hungarians Living Beyond the Borders of Hungary", in Kántor, Zoltán *et al.* (eds.) *The Hungarian Status Law: Nation Building and/or Minority Protection*, Slavic Research Center Hokkaido University, 21st Century COE Program Slavic Eurasian Studies, 4, 2004, p. 60. More about the research on territorial and non-territorial minorities in the theoretical part.

⁴¹ The phrase containing the word diaspora is used by the Hungarian Ministry of Education.

towards Hungarians beyond the borders. These educational programs stand for one fifth of the total sum. A large proportion of the money (approximately 20 percent) was used for providing for the governmental institutions and those funds and non-governmental institutions which administered the money, and only a smaller proportion was used to support different special projects. Bárdi's qualified assumption is that approximately 40-46 percent of the total sum was used in Hungary, while the rest of the money was made use of in the areas where Hungarians beyond the borders live. The third biggest part of the total sum financed the implementation of the goals formulated in the Status Law (approximately 14 percent of the sum).⁴²

The Status Law was adopted in the Hungarian Parliament on the June 19, 2001 by a 93 percent majority.⁴³ The explicit goal of the law is to support Hungarians “living in the neighbouring countries” who, according to the law “form part of the Hungarian nation”.⁴⁴ According to the Status Law, citizens of Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine, Croatia and Slovenia, who live in the country of their citizenship, identify themselves as Hungarian and are in possession of a recommendation which has been issued by an organisation representing the Hungarian minority in one of those countries which are eligible for the Hungarian Certificate. The Hungarian Certificate, or as it is widely known the Hungarian ID, provides for various benefits in Hungary.⁴⁵

⁴² Bárdi, Nándor *Tényleges és valós A budapesti kormányzatok és a határon túli magyarság kapcsolattörténete* [Fact and Reality The History of the Relationship between the Governments in Budapest and the Hungarians Beyond Borders], Pozsony, Kalligram, 2004b.

⁴³ Only the liberal SZDSZ faction voted against, even if the law was widely criticised by the Socialists for its economic risks for Hungary. By the time of its adoption the Law was so overpoliticised and overnationalised that the biggest opposition party, the Socialists, did not want to risk being identified as the non-national alternative to the right-wing Fidesz government that treated the Status law as its cherished baby. Waterbury, Myra A., “Internal Exclusion, External Inclusion: Diaspora Politics and Party Building in Post-Communist Hungary”, *East European Politics and Societies*, 20(3), 2006, p. 509. and Kis, János, “The Status Law: Hungary at the Crossroads”, in Kantor, Zoltán *et al.* (eds.), 2004, p. 152.

⁴⁴ Act LXII of 2001 on Hungarians Living in Neighbouring Countries at: http://www.htmh.hu/en/?menuid=03&news007_id=1149. Last visited: November 16, 2006.

⁴⁵ According to the provisions of the Status Law as of 2002, families with two or more children attending Hungarian language schools could get economic benefits that could be used for books or school uniforms. In accordance with the 2003 revised version of the Status Law, subsidies are not given to individuals but to parent-school institutions. Travel and health benefits in Hungary are available to all individuals who hold a Hungarian ID and teachers in Hungarian schools beyond the borders (with a Hungarian ID) are entitled to a certain amount of money every year to spend on books in Hungary. More on the relevant provisions of the status law in the empirical part.

The referendum on granting a second, Hungarian, citizenship⁴⁶ to Hungarians beyond the borders, was held on the December 5, 2004. The referendum was preceded by an agitated campaign led by the two largest political blocks: the right wing oppositional parties, and the socialists and liberals in the government.⁴⁷ While the two parties in the social-liberal government (the socialist MSZP and the liberal SZDSZ) openly turned against the referendum, the right wing parties (FIDESZ, MDF) and the President of the Hungarian Republic, Ferenc Mádl, declared their support for the idea of dual citizenship.⁴⁸ 81 percent of the Hungarian electorate either stayed away from voting or was against granting non-resident Hungarian citizenship to fellow Hungarians.⁴⁹

The failed referendum generated a crisis of confidence in Hungarian-Hungarian relations and led to a situation in which the work of the Hungarian Standing Conference – the institutional embodiment of relations between the political representations of Hungarians within and outside Hungary – got bogged down. The Hungarian Standing Conference (Magyar Allandó Értekezlet, MÁÉRT) was initiated in 1996 under the social-liberal Horn-government but had its heyday under the right wing Orbán government (1998-2002). The members of the MÁÉRT are “the representatives of ethnic Hungarian organisations beyond Hungary’s borders with parliamentary or provincial representation, Hungary’s political parties, the government of Hungary, and Hungarians in the West, but in all instances guaranteeing the participation of each Hungarian national minority community in the region”⁵⁰. The MÁÉRT’s explicit task is to function as a consultative body the Hungarian government would turn to with questions concerning legislation which affects the Hungarian minorities. However, at times, and specifically in connection with the Status Law, the MÁÉRT went far beyond its consultative function, and played a central role in its development. After the failed referendum on dual citizenship, the representatives of Hungary were not invited to the “little” MÁÉRT’s meeting held in Vojvodina.⁵¹ This is a remarkable development because until this meeting Hungary was the centre of Hungarian-Hungarian relations.

⁴⁶ It is often referred to as “dual citizenship”.

⁴⁷ The two political blocks are approximately of the same size.

⁴⁸ Kovács, Mária M., “The Politics of Dual Citizenship in Hungary”, *Citizenship Studies* 10(4), 2006, pp. 433-435.

⁴⁹ Kovács, 2006, p. 435.

⁵⁰ Statement Issued by the Conference of Hungary and Ethnic Hungarian Communities beyond the Borders – February 20, 1999 Available at: http://www.htmh.hu/konferencia/nyil_en.html. Last visited: April 23, 2007.

⁵¹ It is called “little MÁÉRT” because only representatives of Hungarians beyond the borders were invited.

In spite of the difficulties, Hungarian-Hungarian relations have not ceased to exist, even if they do so in other organisational forms than the MÁÉRT. It is also important to emphasise that Hungarian-Hungarian relations have never replaced state-to-state relations fostered between Hungary and its neighbours. The alternative strategy to the transsovereign nationalism⁵² represented by the right-wing policies was the one based on “the politics of basic agreements”.⁵³ This strategy aimed to improve the situation of Hungarians in each country bordering on Hungary by exerting pressure on the national governments of these countries.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, “however fully [Slovakia] fulfils its minority rights obligations, their cultural needs as Hungarians can ultimately only be fulfilled via a relationship with a state which is “of and for” the Hungarian nation”.⁵⁵ This is one way Hungary continues to play a national homeland role, no matter if a left-wing or a right-wing government is in power.

Disposition

This text consists of three parts. The introduction is followed by a theoretical discussion about those meta-theoretical and theoretical issues which I consider relevant for the analysis of my empirical material. My primary focus is on the ethnic and national modes of identifications. I draw on the most recent theories of ethnicity and nationalism while elaborating on issues such as the possibility of understanding ethnicity as a way of seeing, thinking and doing. I will discuss what the national way of thinking comprises and the interconnections of the ethnic and national ways of thinking, knowing and acting. This part also includes a method chapter which focuses on how this study has been accomplished. I contemplate how the comparative method can be fruitfully combined with a qualitative study based on interviews. In addition, some reflections on my own role as a researcher/insider will be presented.

⁵² For the definition of transsovereign nationalism see Csergő, Zsuzsa and Goldgeier, James M. “Nationalist Strategies and European Integration”, *Perspectives on Politics* 2(1), 2004, p. 26.

⁵³ The most important articulations of these state-to-state relations are the bilateral treaties signed between Hungary and Slovakia in 1995 and Hungary and Romania in 1996. See for example Fowler, Brigid “Fuzzing Citizenship, Nationalising Political Space: A Framework for Interpreting the Hungarian ‘Status Law’ as a New Form of Kin-State Policy in Central and Eastern Europe”, ESCR “One Europe or Several” Program Working Paper 40/02, p. 43.

⁵⁴ Bárdi, 2004a, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Fowler, p. 44.

The second part of this text presents an account of the empirical part of my study. It starts with an introduction to the Hungarian national discourse as it is formulated in Hungary. This chapter is not based on interviews but on document analysis and also on my readings of secondary literature. The aim of this chapter is to give a detailed introduction to the public narratives which are of primary importance for a deeper understanding of the collective stories of Hungarianness. The focus of the following empirical chapter is on nation-talk in territorial- and non-territorial minority contexts. The fifth chapter concentrates on the public narratives built around ethnic and national categories. The sixth empirical chapter focuses on how ethnicity is done in the two contexts. It is followed by a chapter on how language dilemmas and ideologies are narrated. The last empirical chapter revolves around the different understandings of the homeland concept.

The last, concluding chapter is a summary of narratives of belonging, homeland and nationhood in territorial and non-territorial minority settings.