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ABSTRACT

Transylvanian ideology between the two World Wars

The majority of Hungarians living outside the present-day borders of Hungary live in the Romanian territory, mainly in Transylvania

In the interwar period, Transylvanism has generally been viewed as the main regional ideology of Transylvanian cultural and spiritual life. It was elaborated by Hungarian writers, historians and journalists in Romania immediately after 1919. However, its roots can be traced back to the Hungarian national movement of the nineteenth century. The emergence of interwar Transylvanism was the consequence of geopolitical changes after World War I. It happened as a reaction of Hungarian intellectuals to the fact that Transylvania was attached to Romania through the Treaty of Trianon.

This complex ideology has aimed to reinforce the collective identity of the ethnic and linguistic minority of Hungarians in Romania who have ever since held onto their own language and cultural heritage.

The representatives of Transylvanism have not advocated a well defined or systematic ideology. There are different variants of Transylvanism, which have implied and tolerated contradictory thoughts. Transylvanism has been a flexible idea, adjustable to the personal convictions of its representatives.

However, the main issue has been the political self-determination as an ethno-national entity in Romania and being part of the Hungarian nation culturally.

In my lecture I will focus on the main characteristics of Transylvanism, like making virtue out of necessity, the activism it promoted and the fact that it is based upon the idea that space can shape the spirit, and region is a particular outcome of its intercultural relations and diversity variety although the culture of the minority's mother tongue must have a special place.

Transylvanian ideology between the two World Wars

A short history of Transylvania

Transylvania (*Erdély* in Hungarian) is situated in the southeastern corner of the Carpathian Basin, and it belongs to the Romanian territory. During the Middle Ages it was part of the Kingdom of Hungary. After the Battle of Mohács in 1526 it became an independent Principality of Transylvania until 1690, when the Habsburgs gained possession of Transylvania through the Hungarian Crown. Transylvania had a separate status within the Habsburg Empire until 1867. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, Transylvania was formally re-annexed to Hungary as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After World War I, Transylvania was annexed to Romania in the Peace Treaty of Trianon (June 4, 1920) by the victorious Entente Powers. In 1940, Northern Transylvania was re-annexed by Hungary as a result of the Second Vienna Award and remained part of Hungary until 1944, when the borders of 1920 were re-established. The borders have not been modified since then.

The majority of Hungarians living outside the present-day borders of Hungary live in the Romanian territory, mainly in Transylvania (total pop./Hungarians in Transylvania 1,227,623 according to the census in 2011 conducted by the National Institute of Statistics in Romania).

Transylvania has had a complex ethno-linguistic, cultural and religious structure, including Romanians (Romanian-speaking ethnic Romanians), Hungarians, Germans, Roma, Ukrainians, and Serbs amongst others.

Transylvanism

In the interwar period, Transylvanism has generally been viewed as the main regional ideology of Transylvanian cultural and spiritual life. It was elaborated by Hungarian writers, historians and journalists in Romania immediately after 1919. However, its roots can be traced back to the Hungarian national movement of the nineteenth century. Since then, Transylvania has been characterized by multiethnicity and multiculturalism.

This complex ideology has aimed to reinforce the collective identity of the ethnic and linguistic minority of Hungarians in Romania who have ever since held onto their own language and cultural heritage.

It is important to mention that the representatives of Transylvaniam have not advocated a well defined or systematic ideology. There are different variants of Transylvaniam, which have implied and tolerated contradictory thoughts. Transylvaniam has been a flexible idea, adjustable to the personal convictions of its representatives. However, the main issue has been the political self-determination as an ethno-national entity in Romania and being part of the Hungarian nation culturally.

Transylvaniam has mainly been considered as a political ideology but the phenomenon is more than that. Literary historian Gusztáv Láng notes that “Transylvaniam is a historical variant of the Hungarian national consciousness”.¹ (1998: 5) According to Láng, it was meant to give answers to the questions raised by the identity crisis that Hungarians in Transylvania had to encounter in their new, unexpected minority situation. Without political independence and power, the only means of preserving their identity as a community was their own culture, based on national traditions and adjusted to the new situation.

According to this ideology Transylvania had a specific spirituality which has been shaped throughout the centuries rooted in the landscape, history and cultural diversity. Tolerance towards otherness was considered to be the basic feature of this spirituality.

After the Treaty of Trianon (1920) the political state proved to depend on historical chance while the birthplace was not, initially, influenced by the change in political power. This is why the minority could undertake the identity building role of the homeland.

However, the minority identity did not manifest itself as an ideology but rather as a collective feeling, in which the earlier national identity could be preserved in a slightly modified form and turn into an ethnic identity. The stability of the natural environment compensated for the fragile and unstable political status. In the Hungarian literature of this time, Transylvanian nature appears as the bearer of moral values: steadiness, loyalty and invincibility (see the poems of TOMPA László, ÁPRILY Lajos, DSIDA Jenő, TAMÁSI Áron, BERDE Mária, KUNCZ Aladár).

¹ „A transzilvanizmus a magyarságtudat történelmi változata.”

Transylvaniam was seeking the basis of national unity in cultural values, which proved to be more stable than the political criteria. These values had a strong moral charge. A nation was a moral community that manifested itself in its collective culture and demanded from all its members the assumption of a common mission. This messianism constituted one of the central themes of Hungarian literature in Transylvania.

DSIDA Jenő, for example, combined in his genius poem *Maundy Thursday* a religious topic (the suffering of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane) with the topic of the loneliness and spiritual distress of an individual belonging to the Hungarian community in Romania. The parallelism between Jesus and the member of an ethnic minority is composed tangibly: “it would have been so good to speak a little/ to close friends, a few words to men you trust,/ but there was only damp night, dark and chill,/ Peter was now asleep, and James and John/ asleep, and Matthew, all of them asleep...”. (Gömöri 2013) The ambiguity and the iterative passage between the concrete and the symbolic situation makes the poem so rich in meaning.

It is also worth mentioning in the inter-war period Transylvanian history of literature the so called Helicon Triad. They were TOMPA László, ÁPRILY Lajos, and REMÉNYIK Sándor. Their poems were not largely translated probably due to the fact that their symbolism is so tightly related to the Transylvanian culture that they might not be working in another language, losing too much of their cultural context. Their poems are deeply rooted in Transylvanian history and tradition. Typical examples are *A Lonely Pine Tree* or *Horse Bathing* belonging to Tompa’s work which have become emblematic expressions of a historical moral standard having become as permanent as homeland itself. In these poems, the Transylvanian county-side becomes a symbol of human virtue, as well as of faith in a living future of their community.

The main characteristics of Transylvaniam

1. One of the main characteristics of Transylvaniam was making virtue out of necessity. To replace the negatively charged minority status with positive options that are true to Transylvanian values. The symbol of the pearl and sand has become very common in Hungarian literature in Transylvania since the beginning of the 1920s. It is the symbol of the “productive pain” caused to Hungarians by the Treaty of Trianon, a kind of moral answer to the historical and psychological shock they had experienced (Cs. Gyimesi 1992: 10). Thus, it

is used as a moral symbol, involving a disharmony between a negative cause and a positive effect.

2. Another main feature of Transylvaniam has been the activism it promoted.

The Transylvanists and among them architect, writer, ethnologist and politician KÓOS Károly, the most notable advocate of the Transylvanist ideology, have striven to inspire the members of their communities to build a better future.

“We have waken up. We want to see clearly. We want to face Life and be clear on our own situation. We want to know ourselves. We have to review our forces, organize our work and we have to know the goal we want to achieve.” (Kós 1921, 3 – transl. by E.M.B.)²

3. Transylvaniam is based upon the idea that space can shape the spirit, and region is particular outcome of its intercultural relations and diversity variety although the culture of the minority’s mother tongue must have a special place.

4. Transylvania is, besides a geographical and historical area, also a cultural concept.

The Hungarians in Transylvania have loyalties to Romania, the state within which their home territory is situated and to Hungary, the state which their mother tongue and culture is part of. Having been part of the Hungarian nation, the Hungarian minority came under foreign rule. Nevertheless, their national culture and spiritual life persisted. They did not represent a regional variant of Hungarian culture but were its heirs and developers in a new political situation. Thus, minority literature was able to create values which could enrich the national culture.

5. Identification processes imply the construction of concrete and symbolic frontiers. Hungarians in Transylvania discuss the separation of the in-group and out-group in their literature. The main distinctive feature of the in-group is the minority language.

6. Transylvanist writers agree that minority literature has to be written in the minority language of the community. The availability of literature written in the minority language can

² “Fölebredtünk. Látni akarunk tisztán. Szembe akarunk nézni az Élettel, tisztában akarunk lenni helyzetünkkel. Ösmerni akarjuk *magunkat*. Számba kell vennünk erőinket, szerveznünk kell a munkát, tudnunk kell a célt, amit el akarunk érni.”

make the minority revise their belief, forced upon them by the majority, that their language is worthless.

The trauma of Romanian assimilation politics against Hungarians in Transylvania is a recurring theme in the literature of this minority.

7. The hierarchy of values is: birthplace – homeland – universal. Local values are believed to enrich values at the homeland level as well as those on the largest scale (universal). According to Transylvanism, minority literature is most closely linked to universal values through the topics it deals with. The “minority humanism” often mentioned by the Transylvanists is interpreted as protecting against nationalism. As MAKKAI Sándor presents it, the culture of independent states (i.e. majority culture) inevitably obeys the prevailing political interests while the minority culture is free of them. Minorities are predestinated, through the suffering they are experiencing, to prepare a universal human spirituality. (Makkai 1937)

8. The Transylvanists have not elaborated a well-defined or systematised ideology. Their ideologies can be most appropriately interpreted as flexible ideas adjusted to the personal convictions of the people they represent.

Conclusions

In conclusion, before the second half of the nineteenth century, the term Transylvanism was used in a cultural sense, meaning the uniqueness of Transylvanian cultural and political traditions. It became politically charged only after 1867 (when Transylvania and Hungary united). The emergence of interwar Transylvanism was the consequence of geopolitical changes after World War I. It happened as a reaction of Hungarian intellectuals to the fact that Transylvania was attached to Romania through the Treaty of Trianon. According to the intellectuals, Transylvanism meant autonomous Transylvania.

Many people from Western cultures might consider Transylvanist ideology provincial. In the common thinking the proper word for the cult of local values is provincialism. Most minority cultures are subject to being called provincialist in a world striving to globalize. I myself as a researcher accept the view according to which province can enrich national and universal culture as well, and when Transylvanism implies a kind of captiveness, at the same time it protects the community from being assimilated in a melting pot of universalism.

DSIDA Jenő: MAUNDY THURSDAY

No connection. The train would be six hours late, it was announced, and that Maundy Thursday

I sat for six hours in the airless dark of the waiting room of Kocsárd's tiny station. My soul was heavy and my body broken – I felt like one who, on a secret journey, sets out in darkness, summoned by the stars on fateful earth, braving yet fleeing doom; whose nerves are so alert that he can sense enemies, far off, tracking him by stealth. Outside the window engines rumbled by and dense smoke like the wing of a huge bat brushed my face. I felt dull horror, gripped by a deep bestial fear. I looked around: it would have been so good to speak a little to close friends, a few words to men you trust, but there was only damp night, dark and chill, Peter was now asleep, and James and John asleep, and Matthew, all of them asleep... Thick beads of cold sweat broke out on my brow and then streamed down over my crumpled face.

Translated by George Gömöri and Clive Wilmer

Dsida Jenő: NAGYCSÜTÖRTÖK

Nem volt csatlakozás. Hat óra késést jeleztek és a fullatag sötétben hat órát üldögéltem a kocsárdi váróteremben, nagycsütörtökön. Testem törött volt és nehéz a lelkem, mint ki sötétben titkos útnak indult, végzetes földön csillagok szavára, sors elől szökve, mégis szembe sorssal s finom ideggel érzi messziről nyomán lopódzó ellenségeit. Az ablakon túl mozdonyok zörögtek, a sűrű füst, mint roppant denevérszárny, legyintett arcul. Tompa borzalom fogott el, mély állati félelem. Körülnéztem: szerettem volna néhány szót váltani jó, meghitt emberekkel, de nyirkos éj volt és hideg sötét volt, Péter aludt, János aludt, Jakab aludt, Máté aludt és mind aludtak... Kövér csöppek indultak homlokomról s végigcsurogtak gyűrött arcomon.