

## ON THE DYNAMICS OF CHANGES IN SOCIAL AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN SLOVAKIA IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES

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The author deals with the complicated problem of social and ethnic identity in Slovakia throughout the history of the country and pays special attention to its manipulation by the ruling elites.

Both social and ethnic/national identities belong to the dynamic quantities of the characteristics of an individual and a society. The character of the territory of Slovakia was in the past unique with regard to the non-democratic nature of the political regimes within which the Slovaks were gradually shaped into a modern nation. This uniqueness followed from the distribution of political power confined only to the highest "state-forming strata" of the society within the old feudal Kingdom of Hungary predetermined for this role through the noble descent of the ruling Magyars. Only this part of society had access to power – at the level of the central as well as the county institutions of a one-nation state.

This type of class affiliation was gained in feudal society by birth, by elevation to the nobility or *affinity* links. The status of a member of the highest social class was not enough for an individual to become a high state administrator with executive, political or judicial powers: it was also necessary to declare not only a Hungarian affiliation but also the support of the ideas shaping the political power in the country. Therefore, social ideas working with the concepts *people*, *nation*, *folk* and *national culture* became part of the political process which was also gradually joined by members of the "non-state-forming" lower strata of the non-Magyar nations.

The uniqueness of Slovakia consists not only in the fact that over approximately the last one hundred years Slovakia witnessed five significant changes of political regime which led to geopolitical changes (changes of state borders, changes of epicentres of political and cultural orientation) of far-reaching character but also in the fact that within the individual regimes the political power always endeavoured to influence the ethnic/national identity of individuals or whole social groups and

strata. With regard to the fact that these changes were not only an urban matter (but in the urban milieu they are more distinct and can thus be better studied there), Slovakia has a unique priority in European ethnography and folklorism: the changes of identity in the Slovak territory might become a basis for determining a unit of the change of ethnic identity in time and space. Bratislava/Pressburg/Pozsony can compete with Czech Tešín or Mukachevo, but there are also small towns in central Slovakia with an original predominance of the Slovak ethnic element (e.g. in Zvolen) where the development of ethnic identity in some groups of inhabitants was not without changes either, although it was not accompanied by changes in their social status.

Ethnic identity underwent its transformation in little active zones, to use ethnic and national terms. Not only the active Magyarization policy towards non-Magyar nationalities living in the Kingdom of Hungary but also various arbitrations of borderlands (e.g. annexation of 16 Spiš towns in 1412 to Poland, which lasted until 1772, changes of the boundaries of frontier counties and changes of county administrative headquarters in Zemplín and elsewhere, etc.), establishment of the first Czechoslovak republic and its disintegration, the Vienna arbitration on ceding the Slovak border territories to Hungary and Poland and their return, as well as the second split of Czechoslovakia in 1993 – all these directly influenced ethnic identity and led to its direct reactions to individual manifestations of political power.

Slovakia can thus be perceived as a classic country of identity transformations; it is very interesting to follow its changes within particular social classes – e.g. in various groups of the nobility, burghers, intelligentsia, clergy. It appears that the most stable group in this respect was the common people; but also within it, rather dramatic transformations are observable in some inter-ethnic active zones. I do not have in mind only frontier zones although these form a considerable part of the political and cultural territory of Slovakia.

An outlook on the dynamics of ethnic or rather linguistic identification and the degree of minority assimilation in Slovakia is interesting: namely our Gypsies/Romanies, Jews, Ukrainians/Ruthenians, and Hungarians. For instance, Romanies did not form one aggregate in Hungary; the Jewish people living in Slovakia were afflicted by Magyarization in approximately the same measure as other comparable groups of Slovak inhabitants, e.g. craftsmen, intelligentsia, etc. It is well-known that in the 19th century Jewish people also used the Slovak language in everyday communication in the regions with more developed Slovak national feelings (e.g. Turiec, Liptov, with nationally-oriented centres like Martin, Liptovský Mikuláš) more often than in the areas with domineering active Magyarization of the Slovak population (Novohrad, Šariš).

The same might be said about the degree of Magyarization, e.g. of the Ruthenian clergy and intelligentsia, its use of Great-Russian as the language of scholars and the language of instruction and later about post-war Ukrainianization. The picture is still more perplexing if we follow it at the level of religious groups,

religious minorities, in particular, creating, within the ethnic or, more precisely, national identity also their own identity. For instance, the identity of a Slovak Lutheran is different from that of a Slovak Catholic or Greek-Catholic, etc. These forms of identity also have regional level.

The most natural channels for manipulating the identity, its plastic shaping, used by all regimes in this territory are firstly the channels of education and secondly employment (e.g. the precondition for gaining a sinecure in an office was not only the necessity to belong to the nobility of at least the lowest rank but also to declare one's nationality to be Hungarian; later Czech and, then Slovak). The judgement of national quality and social class affiliation identifying itself with a certain political programme was more rigid than the qualification adequate for particular labour performance. In terms of the definition of an individual from the perspective of the relationship "foreign/our" and "we/they" it was a determining quality.

An analogous phenomenon was the enforcement of Christianity in the Middle Ages e.g. on burghers who could have fully consumed the privileges of municipal rights only if they had adopted christening (e.g. only Christians could be members of guilds, no Jews, etc.). This principle was also used during harsh re-Catholization efforts to affect the religious affiliation of the inhabitants before the adoption of the Tolerance Patent, which functioned mostly on the basis of the ban on the performance of sacraments, i.e. impossibility to give baptism, to wed, bury, etc. The share of the Church in political (judicial, executive) power was not negligible either. It should, however, be kept in mind that great differences in the dynamics of national identity of particular religious groups are also due to the differentiated attitude of the political power towards them.

The fight between Hurban and Count Zay against the unification of Lutherans in the old Kingdom of Hungary with the Calvinists was on the Hurban's part a well thought-out struggle for the Slovak ethnic identity of the Lutherans in Slovakia – in the opposite case, they would have had a faint chance to preserve it.

Other channels for influencing social and ethnic/national identity were ambitions in the economic and political life of the country and ambitions in the fields of science and culture. The last issue concerns individuals, not whole large groups of people, but this is a significant group in view of the quality and the degree of their further use and abuse. **IF IN A PARTICULAR FUNCTION, A PARTICULAR RELIGIOUS, SOCIAL, OR ETHNIC (political) IDENTITY IS REQUIRED AS A PRIMARY QUALIFICATION, WHICH, WITHIN A PARTICULAR SOCIETY, CAN ALSO BE ACQUIRED IN A WAY OTHER THAN THROUGH THE DESCENT (by accepting christening/converting, through marital policy, declaring national or class political affiliation, etc.), THERE IS USUALLY NO OBSTACLE TO SUCH A WAY OF GAINING THE FUNCTION.**

The declaration proceeded through the Magyarization of the orthography of family names (Thurzo to Thurzó, Klanica to Klaniczay, Chorvát to Horváth), by using fashionable Hungarian Christian names as well as by demonstrative communication in the required language, declaring one's descent from a certain social class

(emphasizing peasant ancestors and forgetting the family branches which belonged to less desirable social strata, hiding the Hungarian, German, Jewish or noble and burgher descent, etc.)

Ethnic and social identity is nothing abstract, quite the reverse, with all its subtlety it is almost real and, unfortunately, often not so noble as it pretends to be. Moreover, the nature of the identity can appear heterogeneous or even diffuse.

The ethnic coordinates of cultural elements, except for language, are often dubious and the validity of their ethnicity is mostly time-limited according to the extent to which their bearers identify themselves ethnically with the particular element by means of them. Bilingualism or trilingualism lead to multiculturalism and, even if they cannot be documented by the same amount and the same standard of the acquisition of languages and cultures, they unambiguously lead to the communication between cultures and thus to the enrichment of the identity which absorbs the greater number of elements. They are often assigned an incompatible nature, actually they are complementary and their combinations give new qualities.

It is not only a professional but also an ethical duty of an ethnographer, ethnologist or social anthropologist to state that the changes in identity were generated by political regimes ascribing different social status not only to social classes but also to individual ethnicities. Their brutal interferences in ethnic/national and cultural identities made the regimes unstable when the "constitutional life did not provide any opportunities for the implementation of the national idea or its natural guarantees" (Holák). The erroneous national policy of the 19th and 20th centuries eroded the over thousand-year-old Kingdom of Hungary and the improper application of the national principle decomposed the Czechoslovak state twice in its history. The share of national issues in the disintegration of the Soviet Union is still awaiting evaluation.

Holák's quotation referring to the politics of old Hungary with respect to non-Magyar nationalities stimulates significantly the study of ethnic and social identity also in relation to the first Czechoslovak Republic and the first Slovak State. The historical development at that time provided, often at least temporarily and as needed, an opportunity to play "an ethnic card" even contradictorily and inconsistently. This was the case for example of the Slovak State, the regime, which was established with the aid of a world power at the time when "Slovak autonomy was nearing its collapse" (Prcan); this world power, German fascism, had on its agenda the liquidation of the Slavs as an inferior race.

Ethnic and social identity is thus strongly manipulated by political power – both by the one which is in power and by that which wants to become legitimate. To achieve this is the aim, it is necessary to shape a political background in longer or shorter perspective, which can never dispense with the cultural, economic, and social basis.

This background realizes and makes use of the possibility to control and influence political power in different measure: it "abuses" it to various extents (if common civic rights are distributed only as a mercy on the basis of the declaration of the required identity) and thus its identity is regulated retrospectively.