

MAPPING HUNGARIANNESS: CONFIGURATIONS OF COMMUNITY, PAST AND FUTURE

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The aim of this article is to explore the nature of ethno-national community, and how it might be understood in the Hungarian context. By the Hungarian context I mean the totality of those ethnic and/or national communities, which claim to be “Hungarian”: the Hungarian nation, national minorities and diaspora groups. It is important that during the communist era problems of identity-building and ethnicity were largely concealed or neglected. Hence, the Hungarian ethno-national community as a whole has not yet had a chance to confront fully the effects of the historical legacies of the 20th century. My analysis here is an attempt to explore, in a preliminary way, the scope for such a reconciliation. I do this by exploring general features of the formation and sustaining of communities, before considering the Hungarian case as a particular example.

The formation and maintenance of “community”

Membership in a collectivity provides individuals with a frame of reference, and a potential source of identity. Meanwhile, similarity and difference are expressed by fundamental cognitive processes—with the help of which, from birth, individuals define themselves in relation to others. From these processes of interaction something emerges which transcends the mere sum of atomized individuals or events: a “community”, or “collectivity”, which exists as a significant, distinctive entity in itself. These are two concepts, which are currently experiencing something of a renaissance in the social sciences (see, e.g. Malesevic, Haugaard 2002; Amit, Rapport 2002).

“[C]ollectivities are products rather than sums, geometric rather than arithmetic constructs” (Jenkins 2002, 13). Inter-group processes induce individuals to differentiate between those they perceive themselves to be similar with (the “ins”), and the “outs”: those who represent a contrast to the community-members’ perceived similarity. At this point I should note that, although the term group has been widely applied in this text, I do not think of groups as “discrete, sharply differentiated, internally homogeneous and externally bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis” (Brubaker 2002). In fact, “human society is [best] seen as

an ongoing and overlapping kaleidoscope of group-ness, rather than a “plural” system of separate groups,” while the term “group” refers to constructs which are “contingent and immanently changeable, an emergent product of interaction and of classificatory processes” (Jenkins 1997, 50-51). Groupness is reproduced and recreated while, as Weber pointed out, “similarity and contrast of physical type and custom, regardless of whether they are biologically inherited or culturally transmitted, are subject to the same conditions of group life, in origin as well as in effectiveness, and identical in their potential for group formation” (Weber 1996, 55).

Following this logic the basic assumption is that “where there is a group, there is some sort of boundary” (Nash 1996, 24). A boundary is defined as an eminently variable and historically determined category, a mental device for distinguishing between “them” and “us”. It is emblematic of the more general human tendency to construct both “symbolic” and “organizational” boundaries of social interaction. The distinction between the symbolic and the organizational is based on the analytical distinction between two ends of a continuum: a *communal* social relationship (*Gemeinschaft*), and an *associative* social relationship (*Gesellschaft*). While the crucial aspect of a communal relationship is a subjective feeling on the part of individuals that they belong together, in an associative social relationship the agreement is motivated by rational interests based on a perceived similarity (Weber 1922, Tönnies 1887; cf. the Introduction in Malesevic, Haugaard 2002). Durkheim’s distinction between “organic” and “mechanical” solidarity provides analogous categories, denoting two extreme forms of social organization in modern societies. Ethnic, ethno-national and national communities are situated in between these two ends of the continuum.

Ethnic and national collectivities

Ethnic identification is a socio-historical phenomenon, while emphasis is put on both group boundaries and group content (Edwards 1994, 127). The boundary approach to ethnic-group formation and maintenance, associated with Fredrik Barth, is founded on the notion that ethnic boundaries are maintained by a limited set of cultural features but most “cultural matter” is not constrained by such boundaries (Barth 1969, 38). Barth has tried to move attention away from culture as something discrete, tangible and definable, and towards the “social organization of culture difference” (Barth 1995). Cultural markers are deployed to differentiate a collectivity from others; however, it is not culture *in itself* (in an internal sense) but cultural *differences* that are important in the creation of boundaries, and these differences become salient through social interactions. Ethnic identifications are not eternally fixed. Identification with an ethnic group does not “necessarily result in the internal sameness, the distinctiveness, the bounded groupness that political entrepreneurs may seek to achieve” (Brubaker, Cooper 2000, 14). In this context it is felicitous to employ the term *identification*, rather than “identity”, as it incorporates a reference to ruptures and discontinuities and thus, it describes the phenomenon more precisely.

Ethnic collectivities are characterized by a strong sense of a communal social relationship: a (mechanical) solidarity of resemblance (Aron 1990, 21). One

precursor of the social constructionist tradition, Everett Hughes, has pointed out that “[a]n ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups: it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the *ins* and the *outs* talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably what group he belongs to. If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group” (Hughes 1994, 91). In other words, individuals are not born with an ethnic identity but each and every person is conditioned to many of the possible markers of ethnicity—language, religion, non-verbal behaviour, etc.—at a primary stage of his or her socialization. The context of these processes of socialization and internalization is important. The salience of difference-making traits and the feeling of belonging is greatly influenced by *where*, *when* and *how* the individual is exposed to groupness (Bentley 1987).

While not necessarily eternal, ethnic collectivities are organized around a unifying link: a real or perceived common bond that appears as an essence to the sentiments of tradition and belonging (Edwards 1994, 125). These cultural and/or primordial markers are primordial in the sense that people are in one way or another conditioned to them from their birth and acquire them before they acquire their political and social identities. How the individual acquires the ability to *see* the above named traits as „primordial“ ties, a basis for community to which he or she is destined to be bound, is another complex question.

Culture and identity often appear as “well-defined-entities”: resource individual members of collectivities may share and can rely on. When a specific cultural element becomes a differentiating factor, around which the whole social and identificational system of the group is organized, one can speak about a core value (Conversi 1997, 165, referring to Smolitz). A core value provides a fundamental individual characteristic by which to signal one’s membership in a community. At the same time, a core value constitutes the superficial marker of one’s ethnic identification, by which group members can be said to share a common destiny and common will. There is a situational and historically determined character of each core value. Consequently, there is always the potential that another cultural element might become a core value, but it has to acquire the role of a profound differentiating value first.

The term ethnic “identification” is often interchangeably used with the term “national identification”. This indicates that the distinction between ethnic and national communities is not clear-cut. A paramount example is the term “ethno-nation”, frequently used in the literature of nationalism to refer to those processes where ethnic identifications are used to mobilize a community by nationalistic means. Still, for analytical purposes I find it useful to differentiate between national and ethnic identifications and choose to approach the question from the “national” angle, as the construction of a national identity is perhaps somewhat more tangible than the ethnic one and has some important political implications. Furthermore, as the national has been closely connected with the concept of the state I cannot by-pass the problem of the nation-state.

The term nation-state refers to a state whose territory corresponds to that occupied by a particular nation. Weber defined the modern state as “a human community that

(successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory” (cited in Conversi 2002, 6). To find a definition of a nation that is as widely accepted in social sciences as Weber’s definition of the state is a much more difficult task. At the general level, the answers to the enigmatic question “What is a nation?” can be aggregated under two distinctive headings: those which present “nation” as an abstraction, an ideal legitimization of political arguments (Hobsbawm, Breuille), and those which consider nation a reality (Connor, A. D. Smith, Fishman), a taken for granted entity formed by “natural laws”. The two camps seem to agree that “the nation is a collective subject” (Duara 1996, 151). The formation and maintenance of this particular form of collectivity—let it be an abstraction or reality—is always a political project.

The concept of the nation was born in an era when the ideas of the cult of reason were blended with the passion of romanticism (Llobera 1994, 164-70). The epitome of the notion has been shaped accordingly. Anderson’s definition of a nation as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” pictures this ideal (Anderson 1997, 44). However, there is nothing logical or predetermined about states being nations or nations becoming states. As Duara rightly points out, “what is novel about modern nationalism is not political self-consciousness, but the world system of nation states”. At the same time, “[t]he term *nationalism* is often confused with the ideology of the nation-state, which seeks to fix or privilege political identification at the level of the nation-state” (Duara 1996, 157). The modern nation-state system provided an opportunity for states, built by conquest or political means, to claim the monopoly of one language, one set of ideas, one set of laws—and impose these by force or threat over the population residing within its territory. This encourages the formation of a “deep horizontal comradeship” (Anderson 1983, 7) among its subjects, so that one’s identification with the image of the nation would matter more than potential sources of division between citizens. However, as national collectivities are geometrical constructs, official bureaucratic criteria are insufficient to determine the rules of membership in the national community.

In addition to the instrumental means that provide the conditions of organic solidarity, national belonging is characterized by the presence of a national *habitus* that consists, in essence, in identification with relatively simple and concrete symbols: the flag or the “national” anthem of the state, the ceremonies of public life, or national holidays. Furthermore, national *habitus* comprises a texture of myths, memories, values and symbols: a cultural substance usually referred to as “collective memory”. Though the manifestations of collective memory—certain traditions of cultural heritage—have been invented, they are readily naturalized as “historical”. Moreover, collective memory is selective and exclusionary with regard to actual events, ideas, and memories of sets of persons who do not easily fit the alleged mainstream narrative of “who we were”.

Nationalization of the *habitus* is of particular importance, as “national we-identity”, through which “thinking, behaviour and feeling [are] fixed on one’s own nation state”, presents the nation state “as a social unit of survival” (Büchi 1996). Gellner points out that in modern societies, what really matters is education into membership of a community, that is, a nation (Gellner 1983, 8-14). State-promoted

education contributes to the construction of a national habitus through the endorsement of common perspectives on the national community. At the same time, national habitus is constructed so that it might strengthen the unity of the state as well as its economic and political control over its citizenry. The nation-state is typically presented as an imagined community and the national habitus as a mysterious, quasi-sacred element at the core of the collectivity. The national habitus is a discursively conscious construction. It is constructed as a complex of common beliefs, emotional attitudes and behavioural dispositions. What we tend to forget is that this construction is part of a political project of nation-building. At this point, it is worth shifting our focus to Hungary as a specific example.

The “ethnic” and the “national” in the Hungarian context

Ethnic and national identifications coexist, but do not entirely overlap, in the Hungarian context. To illustrate this thesis one has to recognize the historical context of ethnicization and nationalization. The history of Hungarians in the Carpathian basin can be traced back a thousand years. The coexistence of Hungarians with other ethnic groups living in the region was more or less unproblematic until the 19th century, when the originally rather broad conception of a Hungarian state was reinterpreted as the dominance of the Hungarian nation over all other nations. One of the key results of “Magyarization” was that the ethnic communities living in the Hungarian lands¹ became increasingly aware of their own ethnic distinctiveness and detached themselves from the idea of a common, multiethnic nation and state. Consequently, the Hungarian efforts at Magyarization ended up facilitating a process that reinforced existing ethnic boundaries, and rendered more pronounced the language-based differences between the emerging ethno-national communities. At the same time, in the multi-ethnic empire the national and political development and linguistic revival of different ethnic groups stirred up language conflicts when the formation of one nation offended the interests of others. In ethnically heterogeneous societies the one-dominant-language principle allows for a clear-cut division between the “core nation” and minority ethnic groups within the state. Moreover, since language is seen as a primordial bond through which an individual is attached to a particular community, attempts at linguistic normalization or assimilation are counterproductive. These developments contributed to the establishment of a contingent link between language, ethnicity and nationalism.

In 1918 the historically multiethnic historical Hungarian state was replaced by one that was ethnically almost entirely homogeneous. However, this “remarkable result” was not achieved by the homogenization processes instituted in the 19th century. To

¹ The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, consisting of two states each with many ethnic groups, was created in 1867. It was made possible by the *Ausgleich*, a constitutional compromise between Hungarian aspirations for independence and Emperor Franz Josef’s desire for a strong, centralized empire as a source of power after Austria’s defeat in the Austro-Prussian War of 1866. The Hungarians gained control of their internal affairs in return for agreeing to a centralized foreign policy and continued union of the Austrian and Hungarian crowns in the Habsburg ruler. See: <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/history/A0856784.html>

a significant degree, Hungary lost its multiethnic character following the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, when the country lost 2/3 of her territory, 1/2 of her total population or 1/3 of her Hungarian-speaking population. The era of communism hindered the development of a debate about “who we are” following Trianon and the cataclysm of World War II. The space for reflections about national and ethnic identifications was limited and controlled. This is why the past fifteen years have brought considerable changes in the national discourse about *who* belongs *where* and *why*, while several versions of the definition of “the Hungarian nation” have been designed and then re-defined.

Nations and cultures have long been “conceived as something existing in ‘soil’” (Malkki 1996, 439). In the Hungarian case one can observe two parallel processes of nationalizing the soil: territorialization and historicization. The degree of territoriality is to a great degree influenced by where, when and how these attachments are expressed (Kolstø 1999). The Hungarian minorities “and diaspora communities” collective memory has been rooted in soil. Ethnic Hungarians identify themselves with the following territories: Hungary, Felvidek (Slovakia), Transylvania (Romania), Vojvodina (Serbia), Transcarpathia (Ukraine) Transmura Region (Croatia, Slovenia) and Burgenland (Austria). Thus the ethnic identifications of Hungarians are attached to those regions most likely to be inhabited by Hungarians: the “home-regions” of their own, regardless of the political borders of today.

In the Hungarian context the foundation of the medieval kingdom by Stephen I has been perceived as the most relevant historical event to “habitus Hungarianness”. The material manifestation of the kingdom of Stephen I is St. Stephen’s crown, widely known as the Holy Crown. The Holy Crown is perceived as the representation of the community of St. Stephen’s kingdom and the sovereignty of Hungarian statehood. The collective memory of belonging to the community of the Holy Crown—the symbol of the lands of St Stephen—has been internalized not only by those who live in the territory of post-Trianon Hungary but by the “lost” parts of the Hungarian-speaking population too.² The internalization process has been strengthened by concrete acts. One recent example was given on January 1, 2000 when the Holy Crown of Hungary was moved from the National Museum to the Hungarian Parliament. The unconcealed aim of the then government was to “re-appropriate” and “re-integrate” a historical treasure into the cultural heritage and consciousness of “Hungarians”. In his speech, on the occasion of the replacement of the Holy Crown, former prime minister Viktor Orbán stressed that common memories transcend boundaries and the Holy Crown of St. Stephen belongs not only to Hungarians living in Hungary, but to Hungarians outside Hungary’s borders too (Orbán 2000).

National minorities and diaspora communities

Territorial or national minorities are “products” of the nation-state system born out of the national reconfiguration of the political space in Europe. Brubaker defines a

² For the “naturalization” process see Kontler, “The Need for Pride”.

“national minority” as a set of dynamic, mutually competing political stances, with three characteristics. Its members claim to be part of an ethno-cultural nation, different from the politically and numerically dominant ethnocultural nation; its members demand state recognition of this standpoint; and its members assert, on the basis of their ethnocultural nationality, certain collective cultural and/or political rights (Brubaker 1996, 60). This definition is useful as it puts emphasis on the political, and this way it has created an analytical distinction between “ethnic” and “national” minorities. In the case of ethnic minorities ethnicity has no public significance, individuals are members of ethnic communities but they are at the same time constituent units of the nation-state they are citizens of (ibid., 36, 105). On the other hand identification of national minorities is defined in specifically national rather than merely ethnic terms (Smith 2002, 5). As László Szarka (2002) points out

The communal identity of linguistic, cultural national communities attaining mother nation status in the course of their original and minority development, in other words the primacy of national identity is one of the most important shared characteristics of the communities that can be described as national minorities.

This implies that a political project is infiltrated in the mechanisms by which ethnic boundaries are created and maintained. In other words, in the case of national minorities the sense of co-ethnicity is reinforced by the national habitus of the external homeland, to which the minority community is linked by a common historical legacy. National minorities are seen as remnants of a great historical past and as the basis for a claim upon which the spiritual extension of the external homeland’s political borders can be seen to be legitimate.

Diaspora groups represent another specific form of community. The term “diaspora” derives from Greek, meaning dispersion through sowing or scattering, and referred initially to the exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and their dispersion throughout many lands, signifying as well the oppression and moral degradation implied by that dispersion” (Safran 1991, 83). In recent years this narrow definition of a diaspora has been extended, and it has been acknowledged that its meaning may vary greatly. Cohen identifies some generic features: “all diasporic communities settled outside their natal (or imagined natal) territories, acknowledge that “The old country—a notion always buried deep in language, religion, custom or folklore—always has some claim on their loyalty and emotions”. Furthermore: “a member’s adherence to a diasporic community is demonstrated by an acceptance of an inescapable link with their past migration history and a sense of co-ethnicity with others of a similar background” (Cohen 1997, ix). Similarly to national minorities,³ diaspora groups are characterized by a “triadic relationship” between (a) globally dispersed yet collectively self-identified ethnic groups, (b) territorial states and contexts where such groups reside, and (c) the homeland states and contexts whence they or their forebears came” (Sheffer 1986; Safran 1991, referred to in Vertovec 1999, 3).

National minorities and diaspora communities share a few basic characteristics. Firstly, their present is overshadowed by the memories of a traumatic past. Members

³ See the description of the triadic nexus in: Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed*.

of these groups at some point became residents of a nation-state other than their own within a short period of time. Secondly, in one specific historical moment or period they have both faced the same challenge: how to organize themselves from an abstract ethnic formation into a community. Thirdly, both national minorities and diasporic communities acknowledge that their external homeland—natal or imagined—has some prior claim on loyalty and emotions, and that their members share a sense of co-ethnicity and/or co-nationality with others with a similar background.

In recent years the concept of diaspora has been extended to include groups that have not migrated, but live in territories adjacent to their external homelands. But this extension of the concept may be misleading. In spite of these similarities national minorities and diaspora groups are seen very differently from the perspective of their external homelands. Nation-states are territorially bounded entities but the spiritual borders of the polity can be extended through a sense of national attachment to the territories preserved in the identifications of national minorities. Members of national minorities often see themselves as “sons of the soil” and claim that their identity is “rooted” in the land. On the other hand, diaspora communities do not possess this capacity: they lack “a territorial base within a given polity” (Armstrong, quoted in Kolstø 1999, 607). This can be an explanation of why it is that often, unlike national minorities, diaspora groups get only a marginal role in the narration of the nation.

National minorities and diaspora communities in the Hungarian context

The Hungarian communities outside Hungary are “products” of the country’s 20th century history. All seven of Hungary’s neighbouring states have got a Hungarian minority. The size of these minority collectivities varies greatly. Regardless of the exact numbers, post-communist discourse talks about 10 million Hungarians in Hungary and 5 million Hungarians outside Hungary’s borders. Michael Stewart aptly calls these five millions “now-you-see-them-now you-don’t Hungarians”, as their presence in the Hungarian national discourse depends on the political climate in Hungary (Stewart 2002) Hungary’s first Prime Minister after communism, Jozsef Antall, started a new political paradigm in 1990, when saying that, in spirit, he was prime minister not of 10, but of 15 million Hungarians (Borbély 2002). In 1994, Gyula Horn stated that he was the prime minister of 10.5 million Hungarians. In 1999, at the 19 August inauguration of the new Office for Hungarians Beyond the Borders, Prime Minister Orbán said all the citizens of Hungary and the Hungarians beyond its borders are members of one single and indivisible nation” (Nemes 1999). On July 6, 2002 Prime Minister Medgyessy said that he was “the prime minister of ten million Hungarians from the constitutional law point of view, however, he feels a historical responsibility for the 15 million Hungarians who form the entire Hungarian nation.”⁴ This way the community of Hungarians is reproduced as a conscious sense

⁴Prime Minister in Cluj-Napoca—Meeting With Romanian PM, available: http://www.kancellaria.gov.hu/tevekenysege/ese meny/2002/07/0706_e.htm

of national “belongingness”, and a feeling of solidarity between the members of the nation.

The presence of Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian basin has been problematic for both the Hungarian nation-state and neighbouring states with large numbers of ethnic Hungarians for two reasons. On the one hand, as Raymond Pearson points out, the nationalist ideal presupposes that the nation-state simultaneously excludes all non-nationals and includes all co-nationals: “Hungary’s predicament in the 1990s (as for most of the twentieth century) lies not in the first but the second criterion” (Pearson 1996, 89). On the other hand, the neighbouring nation states with Hungarian minorities of considerable size—like Slovakia, where approximately 10 percent of the population is of Hungarian origin—have been troubled by fulfilling the first criterion; namely, how to exclude or assimilate all non-nationals.

The Hungarian national discourse makes a clear distinction between “Hungarians beyond the borders” of the Hungarian state, often referred to as national minorities, and the Hungarian diaspora communities. The motherland, as Hungary is frequently referred to in minority and diaspora contexts, takes very seriously its role as a homeland *vis-à-vis* its national minorities in the Carpathian Basin. According to article 6, paragraph 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary, the country “bears a sense of responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living outside its borders and shall promote and foster their relations with Hungary”.⁵ One of the main tasks of the Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad is to promote Hungarian-Hungarian relations. In 1999 the Hungarian Standing Conference (HSC) was established with the involvement of Hungarian organizations of democratic legitimacy operating outside the borders of Hungary and the Hungarian parliamentary parties, as well as the Government.

The law concerning Hungarians who live in neighbouring states, often referred to as the Status Law, was adopted on 19 June 2001. The Status Law defines a number of goals. In this context the main focus is on the cultural aim “to preserve the national identity of Hungarians in the neighbouring states of Hungary”. The Status Law has provoked a debate—within and outside Hungary—about who counts as ethnic Hungarian. The Hungarian Certificate can be applied for by any person who is a citizen of Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, Yugoslavia, Slovenia or Croatia,⁶ and who declares him/herself to be Hungarian.⁷ According to the law, the Certificate of Hungarianness is to be issued if “the applicant is in possession of a recommendation which has been issued by a recommending organization representing the Hungarian

⁵ The Hungarian Constitution, available: <http://www.meh.hu/nekh/Angol/6-1-1.htm>

⁶ The Austrian Hungarians were excluded by an amendment to the Law.

⁷ About the implementation of ‘The Law Concerning the Hungarians who live in neighbouring States,’ see: *Monitoring of the Hungarian Status Law in Slovakia: Implementation Report Comparative analysis of the Act on Legal Status of Ethnic Hungarians and Slovaks* at: http://www.cla.sk/projects/project.php?melyik=comparative_statuslaw&nyelv=en

national community in the neighbouring country concerned and being recognized by the Government of the Republic of Hungary as a recommending organization”.⁸

Thus, the Hungarian Certificate represents a kind of signifier for the national discourse of Hungarianness. By “national”, I mean the constituencies of the Hungarian nation as referred to in that discourse, meaning not only ethnic Hungarians living in Hungary, but also the national minorities outside of Hungary’s borders. The Status Law presupposes that Hungarianness is something “declarable” and “provable”. In order to be accepted and qualified as a Hungarian, one has to be affiliated with authentically “Hungarian” institutions (Hungarian-medium schools, Hungarian cultural or political organizations or NGOs), and/or, even if this is not explicitly stated in the Law, one has to speak Hungarian. The application procedure provides for an institutionalized mechanism for creating and maintaining boundaries. At the same time, the symbolism expressed on the cover of the Certificate—the picture of the Holy Crown—reinforces the power of that emblem as the symbol of national unity. On the other hand, this way, ethnic Hungarians living in diaspora have been excluded from the “national community”.

The Hungarian diaspora communities received very little attention before the end of communism, and they have remained peripheral to post-communist conceptions of Hungary’s “national interest”. Nevertheless, these diaspora communities do exist and function as ethno-cultural communities. Recent studies show that in diaspora situations the cultural contents of ethnic identifications are somewhat different than in the case of ethnic Hungarians who are seen as part of the Hungarian nation (see Sík, Tóth 2000; Kovács, Szarka 2000). Their “cultural representations” are engaged when expressing difference. Expressing difference is a symbolic act and, in the diaspora context, it is concentrated in a limited number of institutionalized forms (building cultural- and interest-organizations, literary- and study-circles etc.). Here the Hungarian language has lost its role as a boundary-maintaining mechanism, and has become part of cultural representations. Use of the Hungarian language has become symbolic and ceremonial; it has only an attenuated role as an effective means of communication within diaspora groups. At the same time it has lost its role as a means of mobilization too. Hungarianness, in the diasporic context, is sustained in collective memories about the homeland, represented by “St Stephen’s Hungary” along with a few cultural traditions⁹ and deep-rooted values. An interesting example is the Association of Hungarians in Norrköping (in Sweden): this bears the name of St Stephen, referring to the symbolism provided by essentialized historical tradition.

Conclusions

“Hungarianness” is not some essential set of traits shared by all ethnic Hungarians in the world. It is rather a tool of differentiation, marking a difference between

⁸ *The Law Concerning the Hungarians who Live in Neighbouring States*, Article 20, at: <http://htmh.hu/law.htm> The Certificate is issued in Hungary, and its cover is decorated with the picture of the Holy Crown of Stephen I.

⁹ A few examples: organizing Catalin ball on Catalin day; Christmas food; the St Nicolaus tradition on 5 December, etc.

Hungarians and “the rest”, wherever and whenever it is deployed. In the past two hundred years language has played a functional role in marking a difference between “us” and “them”. The Hungarian ethno-national community has been defined as an ethno-linguistic community. At the same time, when used by the nationalist movements—whether the 1848 revolution or the fight for minority rights in Slovakia in the 1990s—language as the cultural base of ethno-national movements has been essentialized. This way, within the Hungarian national discourse, language has become a core value and an essential part of Hungarianness.

The solidarity of resemblance within the community of „all Hungarians of the world“ has been strengthened during the post-communist era. The Hungarian ethno-linguistic communities outside Hungary’s borders have been mobilized as ethno-national minorities, while the Hungarian language has played a functional role when expressing difference, and the national symbols of the Hungarian state have served as additional means of mobilization. The community of Hungarians in the Carpathian basin has been defined in specifically *national*, rather than merely ethnic, terms. On the other hand, the Hungarian diaspora communities—in Western Europe and outside Europe—are first and foremost constituent units of the nation-state they are citizens of. Ethnicity in the Hungarian diaspora context has no public and/or political significance. The role of language as a boundary-maintaining mechanism has been diminishing, and in some cases it has ceased to function. What has been used as a cultural content of ethnic identifications are a few cultural traditions that survive as symbolical representations of the past. The expression of difference is what makes it possible for these diaspora communities to exist, and to function as ethno-cultural communities in their own right.

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