



## BOOK REVIEWS

A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe. By Béla Tomka.  
London: Routledge, 2013. xix + 524 pp.

Béla Tomka, a professor at the University of Szeged, is a well-known specialist in modern Hungarian and European economic and social history. In the past decade he has published numerous important comparative studies in Hungarian, English, and German focused on the modern history of the family, the household, and social welfare policy. His latest book, in which he seeks to sum up twentieth-century European social history, is not only integrally linked to his previous work but also represents its virtual synthesis.

*A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe* unequivocally represents a major achievement—one that, following its publication in Hungarian three years ago, has now appeared in English with Routledge. Its author has seen to his task with admirable diligence, the final result being an imposing, nearly 550-page volume that is readily utilizable as both a monograph and a college text. Synthesizing the latest scholarship while casting a fresh light upon it, it marks a major new opportunity for those researching social changes in Europe to pursue comparative analysis in the field.

The writing of such a comprehensive overview demands no little bravura, intellectually and otherwise; and of course a firm, broad grasp of the literature in the field, not to mention the ability to synthesize it all. Judging from Tomka's book, we can declare that its author is up to the task. Likewise of fundamental importance in undertaking such a project is thinking through conceptual issues with sufficient care so as to choose wisely from among the various modes of analysis and discourse that present themselves. Clearly one option is to proceed country by country, region by region—focusing on case studies of nation states, summing up and comparing by theme or chapter. Another sensible starting point is a continental, comparative approach that, by analyzing the development of different societies, draws conclusions as to general trends. Then there's a third possibility well grounded in scholarship, one built on the combined, comparative analysis of national and supranational development. This is what Béla Tomka has opted for here, presenting the development and distinguishing characteristics of individual nations while methodically comparing and contrasting.

Methodological concerns are of no small import in a scholarly undertaking of such size and significance. It seems evident that only through macrohistorical analysis could Tomka get a handle on the diverse range of issues comprising his chosen subject. Likewise indispensable: a broad application of sources and analyses from the realm of social science statistics—even if, as we are well aware, numbers sometimes “twist the truth”; are usually suitable only to reveal general trends; and only rarely allow for a detailed examination of background factors, of cause and effect. To what degree are such particulars necessary to describe social processes? Well, it must be said that they are hard to avoid when undertaking a comprehensive, comparative synthesis such as this even if they do pose a slight challenge to smooth reading. To his credit, Tomka here presents a resource replete with valuable data whose interpretation is made that much easier by way of well-edited tables and other graphics. His analytical methods are rich, employing interdisciplinary approaches where possible to make sense of the various social processes at issue. Given the wide-ranging scope of his project, he had to simultaneously apply methodologies and perspectives prevalent in the fields of history, demography, sociology, political science, and economics.

Tomka’s work may be thematic/chronological in structure, but in contrast with numerous similar works, he has placed not one, but multiple key themes from the realm of social history at the heart of his work. Likewise to his book’s benefit is that its author has not insisted on a single, all-embracing theory by which to interpret the social processes of the age, but instead presents the phenomena and the relationships between them, assigning theoretical interpretations on this basis.

The core question Tomka addresses is this: Just what does the concept “European society” mean? Is it possible to speak in terms of some sort of uniform European society on the basis of common traits? Is doing so valid only in the case of Western Europe, or does “European society” also embrace Eastern Europe? Tomka clearly concurs with those contemporary scholars—among them, Hartmut Kaelble—who have argued that European society is still very much developing, but the societies of individual national states have come in close proximity to each other in numerous respects; the similarities, the points of integration, have become ever stronger. For Eastern Europe, the opportunity for this transition was made possible by the political transition that unfolded more than two decades ago, a transition that will obviously take much longer yet before coming to fruition.

In its ten chapters and forty-six subchapters, *A Social History of Twentieth-Century Europe* analyses the social changes that unfolded in Europe over the

course of the twentieth century, seeking both their common traits and their singularities. Among the issues the author devotes special attention to are population, families and households, social stratification and mobility, the welfare state, labor, consumption, entertainment, politics and society, urbanization, culture, education, and religion. He closes with a theoretical recapping of European societies (and European society) and writings on social history. The very breadth of the examined subjects makes it impossible to address them all, and so below I shall focus on but a few of the book's key conclusions.

Summing up the shifts in Europe's population trends, Béla Tomka refers to the winding down of the demographic transition; the deterioration in the reproductive capacities of European societies following the end of the post-World War II baby boom, the falling mortality rate with improved living conditions, the rise in the average age, and the aging of West European societies. He likewise devotes special attention to the issue of migration, pointing out that while Europe's was primarily an emigrating population in the first decades of the twentieth century, from the early 1960s on the continent became an increasingly significant target of international migration. He also notes that the twentieth century saw a big increase in forced mass migrations precipitated by politics and wars, which redrew ethnic and denominational contours and social structures more broadly in certain countries and regions.

Of course, the shifting role and structure of the family also made its mark on demographic trends. The high age at marriage in the first half of the century fell notably by World War II, as marriage became more popular, as more value was placed on the family; whereas from the 1970s on an opposite trend gathered pace, with the average age at marriage quickly reaching the level it stood at the start of the century. Simplified family structures represented a general European trend from the mid-twentieth-century on, with multigenerational households virtually disappearing as the nuclear family took hold. Alongside the economic function of the family, its growing intimacy and "privatization" came to the fore along with the increasingly "symmetrical" relationship between couples that developed in the wake of women's emancipation. Naturally, these processes unfolded differently in various places, influenced fundamentally by the prevailing mindsets in particular countries and regions—not least, the degree of religious commitment versus secularization.

In terms of social inequalities, the countries on the western reaches of the continent underwent a modest degree of leveling in the first half of the century and a much stronger one after World War II through to the 1970s and 1980s. In

Eastern Europe, meanwhile, communist regimes imposed a rapid equalization of incomes, but the resumption of free market economy in the century's final decade saw an even faster rise in socioeconomic inequalities in post-communist states. And yet despite the presence of many more women in the labor force, the income gap between men and women narrowed only slightly.

In examining the division of occupational fields and economic activity, it is evident that in most of Europe, agriculture fell to the background, and that after initial growth, industry waned in the final third of the century while business and finance, the service industry, as well as information technology and telecommunication came to the fore as sources of income. All this also had a significant impact on the process of social stratification.

The dividing lines between social classes blurred increasingly after 1945 in nearly all countries. The presence of the historical aristocracy in the upper classes diminished while an ever more influential spectrum of managers arrived at a position almost akin to that of property owners, of capitalists. One particularly radical shift was that of the upper classes and the elite in the Soviet Bloc in the second half of the 1940s, and a similarly radical shift in the structure of the elite unfolded in the region at the end of the century.

The middle classes underwent major changes, too, as wage earners increased in number and proportion in contrast with the trends characterizing the property-holding classes. As for the lower middle classes, the social and income disparity between the petite bourgeoisie and high-skilled workers generally narrowed in the second half of the century. Ever more factors—including gender, ethnicity, education, professional qualifications, income, type of settlement, family status, and prestige—came to influence social positions and opportunities for mobility, with single-factor explanations of stratification losing all their validity by the close of the era. And it must not be forgotten that, while in a different form in each country, the welfare state emerged to play a decisive role in reducing social inequalities, especially in the second half of the century. With economic development there emerged a West European social model that may fairly be regarded as more uniform than not. In contrast, Eastern Europe in the wake of communist takeovers in the late 1940s saw full employment—ensured by the requirement to work—become the core of social welfare, complemented by state support to cover the cost of social welfare services and other core benefits.

The nature of employment transformed, too, with wage work becoming the norm as the proportion of those employed in family-based and individual

productive activities kept falling. This process was further reinforced by the shrinking numbers of agricultural workers. And from the 1970s on, the West European labor market underwent a major shift—with fewer opportunities for long-term employment and guaranteed careers as unemployment rose rapidly with changes in the structure of the economy. Shorter work times marked the most important change in working conditions, as the earlier twelve-hour norm gradually fell to eight hours and by the final third of the century the six-day work week slimmed to five days, and the number of years spent on the active labor force also lessened over the course of the era.

Consumption, however, came to be a decisive factor in social processes, one that indeed took on massive proportions over the century. The transformation in the structure of consumption demonstrates that the cost of living signified an ever smaller challenge for ever greater numbers of people. This was because the proportion of income devoted to maintaining the direct cost of living dwindled overall—depending, naturally, on one's social class/position—while the role of transportation, communications, entertainment, education, and culture kept growing.

The importance of leisure time changed fundamentally amid all this for Europeans. The electronic transmission of news and cultural information became decisive in mass culture. Increased leisure time, less energy devoted to meeting the cost of living, and enhanced material wealth together signified a notable improvement in the quality of life in twentieth-century Europe. This was also bound up with the spatial restructuring of populations, for right up through the 1970s and 1980s, the twentieth century represented the modern era of urbanization on the old continent. The expansion of cities and the rapid rise in their populations also suggested that Europe closed the century with a transformed civilization. In parallel with this, urban societies became ever more heterogeneous—both in view of economic and ethnic-cultural differences. Thanks to well-planned urban development policies, most European cities successfully managed to retain in large part their historic/architectural singularities. Likewise a general trend in European countries over the century was a leveling of cultural and educational disparities—thanks mainly to expanded educational opportunities, especially as regards post-World War II higher education. As for the transformation of value systems, most noteworthy was the plummeting number of actively religious persons; the partial devaluation of the role of nation states and, consequently, individuals' commitment to them; and the increasing emphasis on the individual. Naturally, the general transformations

in the European social order outlined briefly above had numerous variants, as Tomka discusses in detail in his book.

One key merit of this work lies in its being a “living” history; that is, in its analysis of numerous problems that have been of decisive importance in recent years right up to the present day in the life of European society and societies. To name one salient example: the fundamental impact of aging, migration, and immigration on population trends.

Béla Tomka wholly realizes the objectives articulated in his introduction. The result is a work of substantial benefit to a broad readership; one that, now that it is available in English, can be expected to be high on the radar screens of those engaged in the writing of (social) histories of contemporary Europe.

*Translated by Paul Olchváry.*  
Tibor Valuch

Rückkehr nach Ungarn 1946–1950. Erlebnisberichte ungarndeutscher Vertriebener [Returning Home to Hungary 1946–1950. Testimonies of Hungarian German Expellees]. By Ágnes Tóth. München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2012. 389 pp.

Ágnes Tóth's impressive book examines a moment in Hungarian history which has heretofore gone essentially unmentioned in the secondary literature on the history of the German speaking minority of Hungary and the expulsion of this minority following the Second World War, a moment in history that has been preserved really only in the memories of those who were directly affected and their immediate family members. The history that Tóth has made the subject of her inquiry is something of a blank spot in European history, in spite of the fact that so-called literature of memory is already enjoying its second golden age.

In her book on the forced migrations that took place in Hungary following the Second World War, a book that was published some twenty years ago,<sup>1</sup> Tóth examined the political, demographic, and economic causes and conditions of the expulsion of the German speaking communities. In her new book, she considers the human and social problems of the resettlements from an entirely new perspective, bringing the memories of those affected into her discussion. The book was published in Hungarian in 2008<sup>2</sup> and German in 2012, and thus represents a significant contribution both to the Hungarian and the German and international historical discourse on the expulsion of these communities.

The long process of forced migration of large communities in Europe following the Second World War began as early as January 1945. Ultimately, at least from the perspective of numbers, this process affected the lives of almost as many people as the events of the war.<sup>3</sup> Between January 19, 1946 and June 15, 1948 some 180,000 members of the German speaking minority in Hungary were expelled to the Soviet and American occupation zones in Germany. Of the

1 Tóth, Ágnes, *Migrationsen in Ungarn 1945–1948. Vertreibung der Ungarndeutschen, Binnenwanderungen und slowakisch-ungarischer Bevölkerungsaustausch* (München: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2001); Tóth, Ágnes: *Telepítések Magyarországon 1945–1948 között* [Deportations in Hungary between 1945–1948] (Kecskemét: Bács-Kiskun Megyei Levéltár, 1993).

2 Tóth, Ágnes, *Hazátértek. A németországi kitelepítésből visszatért magyarországi németek megpróbáltatásainak emlékezete* [Returning Home. Hungarian Germans who were Expelled to Germany but Chose to Return and their Memories of their Ordeals] (Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó, 2008).

3 Beer, Matthias, *Flucht und Vertreibung der Deutschen. Voraussetzungen, Verlauf, Folgen* (München: Verlag Ch. Beck, 2011), 12–13.

German speaking Hungarians who were displaced persons at the time or who had fled during the war (some 220,000 people in total), 5-6 percent, or roughly 10,000 people, decided to leave Germany, which in the official Hungarian documents of the time was referred to as their “land of origin,” and return to Hungary as quickly as possible (pp.13–19).

It was not simple to return, however. In their struggles to retake possession of the homes they had only so recently lost, those who chose to come back to Hungary found themselves compelled to confront measures taken by those in power, shifting laws, and the actions of organs of the police and border guards. Upon arrival in Hungary, they again were faced with expulsion, interrogation, imprisonment, social exclusion, and discrimination. People took refuge for months at a time in what once had been their dwellings while struggling to regain possession, piece by piece, of the homes they had lost, but they were continuously forced to contend with the power of the state and were treated like strangers in their own land.

The book offers not only an understanding of the process of return and the many trials that accompanied it, but also gives some insight into the ways in which the expulsion were perceived by those who experienced them. It does this from the micro-social perspective, the perspective of the village and everyday life. The German minority communities of Hungary faced the questions and paradoxes of identity, mother tongue, nationality, and loyalty many times over the course of the first half of the twentieth century. This question, however, was never more pressing or problematic than at the end of the Second World War, or rather during the expulsion of the early post-War years. Indeed it came to be part of a struggle fought by the members of the German minority for their very existence. The first experiences of members of this community in Germany and the often unwelcoming reactions with which they were met again raised the question, “so, who are we?” Those who chose to return to Hungary in spite of the perils and risks again found themselves in a hostile environment. Their home communities had been disrupted and scattered, both physically and socially, and in many cases simply no longer existed.

The book is divided into four larger parts that present the history of those who returned. The first gives an informative, thorough summary of the events of the expulsion and the return, essentially from the perspective of those in power (pp.11–68). It exposes the political interests at work, the intentions and goals of national and local figures, the processes by which the political decisions behind the expulsion were reached, and the legal regulations, frequently inadequate



and contradictory, that applied to the process of forced migration and to the individuals who chose to return. The question of the expulsion of the German speaking communities was determined by the principle of collective guilt. Furthermore, the political leaders of the country strove to place responsibility for the expulsion on the decisions of the victorious powers. In addition to the goal of achieving ethnic homogenization, the redistribution of the properties of the German communities in the course of the land reform was also a significant factor in the process of expulsion. The organs of the state did not quite know what to do about the German speakers who chose to return to Hungary. They were surprised to say the least to see that people who months or in some cases only weeks earlier had been compelled to leave the country nonetheless wished to return, even after the trials they had endured, to the places from which they had been expelled.

The second chapter, which contains thematic analyses of interviews that were done with people who had chosen to return, is the real kernel of the book, offering essentially the results of Tóth's research (pp.69–172). The fundamental question of the chapter, which consists in part of a discussion of questions regarding methodology and in part of analyses and assessments of the texts, is simply what motivated the recently expelled members of the German speaking community to return, and what kinds of conclusions can be drawn, on the basis of their decisions, regarding their identities and conceptions of themselves. Tóth's research rests on 54 interviews that were done with people who had been expelled, but who had chosen nonetheless to return to Hungary, 46 of which are part of her analysis.

The people who were interviewed were asked questions about the events of the process of return, their identities, their mother tongues, their use of language, schooling, family and local holidays, their relationships with German culture, and the conflicts and experiences that came with cohabitation with members of other nationalities.<sup>4</sup> The statistical analysis of the information from the interviews is one of the weak points of the book. The number of cases is too small to bear statistical relevance, and the table contains nothing that cannot be easily gleaned from a reading of the thematic analyses of the selected interviews and personal histories themselves (pp.77–92).

---

4 In the fourth chapter of the book, entitled Appendix, one finds the tables of data, the categories that were used in the interpretations of the interviews, and the questions that were raised in the course of the interviews (pp.379–83).

In order to better understand the decision to return to Hungary, one must know a bit about the experiences the people who chose to return endured in the years preceding their expulsion. The questions that were raised in the interviews therefore also touch on the attempts that were made before the outbreak of war to mobilize members of these communities politically, the activities, for instance, of the *Volksbund der Deutschen in Ungarn* (People's Alliance of Germans in Hungary), as well as the experiences of the war itself, including efforts that were made to recruit German speakers into the SS, the events that took place in Hungary just before the expulsion began, the experiences people had as victims of expulsion in Germany, and the reasons they had for leaving Germany, their "ancestral homeland," to return to Hungary. Specifically because they are not limited solely to questions regarding the events of the journeys back to and resettlement in Hungary, the interviews further a more nuanced analysis and understanding of the motives underlying the decision to return, situating these motives in a broader historical context.

In the subchapter containing the analysis of the interviews the author discusses the motivations behind the decision to return (pp.92–172). The subchapter itself is divided into five thematic parts, depending on the emphasis of the individual interviews, and each individual part is given a kind of title, a citation selected from one of the interviews. The first part, which bears the title "Back home we are stinky Swabians, here we are Gypsies! So what are we?" examines the question of the "home" (and the memory of "home") that was one of the loci of identity, a locus that was lost with the process of expulsion (pp.92–112). The victims of the expulsion lost not only their houses, smallholdings, possessions, and sources of livelihood, but also their identities. When they arrived in Germany, a country that was essentially unknown to them, they were received neither as Germans nor as Swabians. Their manner of dress was ridiculed, they were unable to make themselves understood in their dialect of German, and their skills, knowledge, and abilities were not acknowledged.

The second part of the analysis, "Even before we had left others had come," narrates the chaotic and humiliating events of expulsion, including the process by which the members of the community were deprived of their rights and their property (pp.112–29). The German speakers of Hungary were stripped of their rights, their homes, and their homesteads before the expulsion began, and whether they were allowed to reside temporarily in the sheds or summer kitchens on their properties or possibly one of the back rooms of their houses depended on the goodwill of the new owners. It was quite clear to them

that the organs of state power were giving the new owners, who profited from their expulsion, favorable treatment, allowing them to take possession of their houses, gardens, assets, and means of livelihood.

The third section, “They did not welcome us,” examines the experiences that the expellees endured upon arrival in Germany, experiences that essentially were colored by the sense that they were unwelcome (pp.129–42). Among their most painful memories were recollections of the Germans with whom they came into contact: “They said, ‘the fugitives are coming.’ We are not fugitives, I said, they drove us out, we are not fugitives.” They were even regarded as criminals: “The people there looked on us as if we had committed some sort of nefarious deed in Hungary, and that’s why we had been expelled” (p.135).

The fourth section, “We longed to return home, to our cradles, not to another country,” deals with homesickness and the expellee’s memories of their homes, in the most literal sense of the word (pp.142–57). The quandary the expellees faced, however, was not simply a question of homesickness, however, but rather a question of belonging. Were the members of the German speaking minority of Hungary German or Hungarian, and which identity should they claim as their own and work to preserve? For those who were unable to imagine living the rest of their lives in Germany it seemed simpler to choose to return to Hungary, even if it might be more difficult and uncertain than simply to remain in the country to which they had been expelled.

The fifth section of Tóth’s thematic discussion of the interviews, “We had nothing but the clothes on our backs,” examines the recollections of those who came back to Hungary regarding the conditions in which they lived following their return (pp.157–69). Often they were compelled to earn their livings as manual laborers, their presence only tolerated by the rest of Hungarian society, and they lived under difficult circumstances and had to endure strict police oversight. Relying on the help of extended family members, they had to rebuild their lives from nothing, yet they managed to retake their homes surprisingly quickly, in a period of only a few years, or at least to purchase a house in the villages of their birth.

The third section of the book, “Realities existing in parallel,” consists of selected interviews that offer complete accounts of the lives of the interviewees and also insights into the distinctive aspects of the ways in which they used language (pp.173–378). Their use of language itself creates other perspectives from which to understand their perceptions of their fates. Thus it was a particularly fortuitous decision on the part of the author to allow the reader to

learn of their individual stories not only on the basis of the passages cited in the thematically arranged analyses of the interviews, but also by reading the entire texts of the interviews themselves. One cannot help but be impressed by the ability of these people, victims of expulsion, to regard the painful loss of their homes as a reason, whether comprehensible or not, to undertake the struggle to preserve their identities, values, and traditions.

The life stories again demonstrate clearly that the question of identity is determined not simply on the basis of language, traditions, customs, or lifestyle, but also the geographical space where these various aspects all comingled. The physical space that figured as the backdrop for everyday life in the villages created the palpable, observable frames for the recollections of the average villager, frames that memory often conjured forth in idealized forms. These frames become the bearers of a shared past. If the geographical space, the site of the common history of the village community and a kind of physical embodiment of everyday life, has, along with the community itself, ceased to exist in its original form or undergone drastic transformation then one of the fundamental elements of the identity of the individual has ceased to exist as well.

The life stories of the victims of the expulsion naturally did not simply come to an end at the end of the four-year period under examination here (1946–1950). The integration of the expellees into German society, both in the former West Germany and East Germany, has been the subject of research and scholarly inquiry, and there is now a wealth of information available. The question of the fates of those who chose to return to Hungary, however, has been largely neglected by historians, as has the question of the ways in which those who remained but who had been deprived of their social status dealt with the changes they faced and the strategies they adopted in order to regain their places in the village communities.

The principal strength of the book is that it gives the reader a chance to familiarize him or herself not only with the archival documents (which reveal the political aims, interests, and decisions) and texts that were published in organs of the press (which offer a glimpse into the ways in which public opinion was manipulated), but also with the tragic personal stories of those whose lives were directly affected. It is not limited strictly to a narrative of the events themselves, but rather examines the intentions and aims of political actors and representatives of state power, the personal motives of the victims of the expulsion who chose to return, and often their emotional inducements and attachments. This incorporation of a variety of kinds of historical sources offers

a nuanced overview of the privations and hardships endured by the German speaking Hungarians who chose to return to their homes in Hungary and suffer the vicissitudes of conflicting national and local, political and personal interests. Finally, it is to Tóth's credit that she gives this overview without dividing her study into two separate sections, one situated at the macro-social level, the other at the micro-social, but rather manages to integrate the history both as it happened and as it was experienced and remembered into a single unified picture.

*Translated by Thomas Cooper.*  
Krisztina Slachta

## Books on Twentieth-Century Transylvania

Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town.  
By Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea.  
Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006. 504 pp.

Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea  
during World War II. By Holly Case. Stanford: Stanford University Press,  
2009. xix + 349 pp.

The reviewer who undertakes to write about books important to his field years after their publication faces an unenviable task. And yet he can turn this into an advantage, too, by analyzing not only the works themselves but also the scholarly debates that have emerged about them. This is my aim below in the case of a book by Rogers Brubaker and his coauthors, as well as one by Holly Case. Notwithstanding differences in theme and methodology—Brubaker and his coauthors are sociologists and anthropologists, Case a historian specializing in twentieth-century Eastern and Central Europe—identifying the similarity between the two works' main areas of interest is easy enough. At the core of both is the question of how everyday people have experienced Romanian-Hungarian ethnic conflicts in Transylvania, especially in Cluj-Napoca, the region's unofficial capital as well as its cultural center.

What theoretical context do the authors set their research in? Brubaker's starting point is a thesis he'd developed in previous essays—namely, that understanding twentieth-century ethnic conflicts means abandoning the traditional perspective of groupism, which posits majority and minority populations alike as comprising compact, homogenous communities. In his view, in Transylvania—which he considers one of Europe's "ethnic border zones"—identity, and group identity in particular, is fundamentally a constructed, continuously rearticulated and reinterpreted concept. This is not at all surprising in light of various identity theories prevalent today.

Brubaker et al. focus primarily on a microanalysis of Cluj in the transitional decade after Romania's 1989 revolution. They proceed on the basis of the notion that an ethnic group's workings are determined not by the rational acts of individuals or by the groups and "identities" themselves, but by external circumstances and processes. They undertake an analytical disaggregation of

the cornerstones of both the Hungarian and Romanian communities under the administration of nationalist mayor Gheorghe Funar. Their methodology is thus novel in some notable respects. In contrast with most scholarship, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* examines not the nationalist discourse of elites, but rather seeks to determine when and how ethnicity emerges in the everyday discourse of “everyday people.”

The book comprises two sharply different sections. The first chapters cast the lens of political and diplomatic history on a summing up of the Hungarian-Romanian rivalry over Transylvania as it has unfolded since 1848, while the remaining two-thirds of the work present the results of anthropological fieldwork. Several critics (e.g., D. József Lőrincz and Andrew Ludányi) have noted that the book’s historical overview fails to form an organic whole with the anthropological analysis that follows.<sup>1</sup> In their view, this is because that early section addresses the issue solely from “above”—presenting the methods and outcomes of nationalist politics from the era of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, which established a dual monarchy, to that of national communism—and in doing so it runs counter to the book’s regularly expressed objectives. I concur that the quality of the historical narrative does fall victim to the “dialogue of the deaf” represented by Hungarian historiography on the one hand and Romanian on the other, while not taking a stance on most of the issues disputed to this day; and that this section consequently falls far short of the relatively nuanced anthropological and sociological analysis that follows. The very posing of the question—Transylvania as an “ethnic periphery,” as borrowed from the work of László Kürti—seems problematical.<sup>2</sup> After all, is it its peripheral nature that Transylvania has to thank for its status as a multinational region? Or rather, is this status the result of the region having long represented a strategic, “central” territory not only for Hungarian and Romanian nation-building that unfolded simultaneously, but also in the struggle between the Habsburg and Ottoman empires?

The book’s chronicling of events includes some debatable conclusions: according to the authors, it was Hitler who forced the Romanian government to

---

1 József D. Lőrincz, “A kolozsvári magyarok társadalma” [The Cluj Hungarian Community], *Regio* 19, no. 2 (2008): 240–56; Andrew Ludányi, “Rezension zu: Case, Holly: *Between States. The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II*. Stanford 2009.” *H-Soz-u-Kult*, April 6, 2010, <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2010-2-015>, accessed December 17, 2012.

2 László Kürti, *Remote Borderland. Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2001).

accept the re-assign Northern Transylvania, and with it, Cluj, to Hungary—as set forth in the Second Vienna Award on August 30, 1940. In contrast, Béni L. Balogh convincingly argues that in fact it was Bucharest that initiated the arbitration by Germany and Italy concerning the contested territories, though he acknowledges that the ensuing decision caught Romanian public opinion off guard to say the least.<sup>3</sup> I myself have likewise found lacking the chapter addressing the effects of the 1956 Hungarian revolution on Transylvania, including Cluj-Napoca (in Hungarian *Kolozsvár*; hereinafter referred to as Cluj, as commonly known), as it pertains to the ethnic politics of the Romanian communist regime; for example, more attention might have been devoted to the emaciation of Hungarian-language higher education and/or judicial measures that spread fear through the Hungarian intelligentsia. It seems that the sort of mixed ideological-autocratic regime represented by Romanian national communism from the 1960s is still a formidable challenge for scholars of nationalism. Indeed, the Romanian regime departed only in part from the Soviet model in successfully integrating society with a modernizing, nation-building paradigm, while increasingly isolating and forcing to the sidelines members of non-Romanian ethnic groups (but without ever openly persecuting them).

The book's historical overview draws on works that for decades now have shaped scholars' conceptions of Transylvania. It should be added, however, that the authors cite neither the "literature of offense"—which aimed chiefly to expose the Ceaușescu regime's most egregious policies toward ethnic Hungarians—nor analyses that appeared on the subject in international journals, penned by scholars of the sociology of nationalism and by political scientists.<sup>4</sup>

The second half of *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* examines the everyday relations between ethnic groups in Cluj in the late 1990s. While most would assume that ethnicity is experienced in similar fashion by the city's Romanian majority and its Hungarian minority (which comprises nearly a fifth of the population), the authors argue that this is far from being

---

3 Béni L. Balogh, *A magyar román kapcsolatok 1939–1940-ben és a második bécsi döntés* [Hungarian-Romanian Relations and the Second Vienna Award, 1939–1940] (Csíkszereda: Pro Print, 2002), appeared in English in a revised and expanded edition: *The Second Vienna Award and the Hungarian–Romanian Relations, 1940–1944* (Boulder, Colo.: Social Science Monographs; New York: Distributed by Columbia University Press, 2011).

4 Robert R. King, *Minorities under Communism: Nationalities as a Source of Tension among Balkan Communist States* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973); Robert R. King, *A History of the Romanian Communist Party* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980); Bennet Kovrig, *Communism in Hungary: From Kun to Kadar* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1979); Stephen Borsody, ed., *Hungarians: A Divided Nation* (New Haven: Yale Center for International and Area Studies, 1988).



the case. Various modes of research—including conversations with focus groups, unstructured dialogues, public opinion surveys, and formal interviews—show that the Romanian identity of the majority population remains virtually “unmarked.” Its near imperceptibility may stem from the fact that to the city’s Romanian residents, their own community is self-evident; indeed, they perceive even the rhetoric of their nationalist mayor with a surprising indifference even while having re-elected him no fewer than three times. (Yet another question left unexamined by Brubaker et al. is the state’s role in developing and reinforcing the “natural” majority identity.)

In contrast, the experience of minority, Hungarian identity—especially in the Funar era, what with its nationalist and anti-Hungarian rhetoric and reprisals against ethnic Hungarians—means that their own ethnic identity is far more on the minds of members of the Hungarian community than it is for their ethnic Romanian peers. In sum: the city’s Hungarians are more “ethnic” in their overall behavior and, more specifically, in reacting to various challenges life throws at them than are their Romanian counterparts. Amid these observations, Brubaker et al. also articulate two important theses concerning the strategies by which persons living in interethnic communities navigate their way about their everyday lives. According to the first, field research does not support the rather popular assertion among Hungarians that having the “appropriate” ethnic background is a determining factor in the local, Romanian business sector and labor market. Brubaker and his coauthors argue that personal connections (including those made in the course of higher education) are far more determinative in the professional networks of present-day Cluj, and indeed they observe that on this front the field of movement between the two ethnic communities is surprisingly wide—as suggested also by the high rate of intermarriage and, more generally, the increasingly tendency to look beyond one’s own ethnic group in selecting a significant other). In this respect (too), the post-1989 situation differs considerably from the parallel and mutually exclusive efforts at nation-building that prevailed between the two world wars and during the Ceaușescu era. And yet in unstructured conversations, elusive replies are surprisingly frequent among everyday people when asked to comment on identity or ethnic conflicts. It might be added that avoiding conflict situations or deliberately understating their significance is part and parcel of the tacit “live and let live” philosophy that has come to prevail in Transylvania over the course of history. Indeed, not even when it seems that the Hungarian-language media is saturated with news reinforcing the idea of mutually exclusive ethnic discourse do such persons

fully accept this. The rich fabric of interethnic personal connections no doubt contributes substantially to this skepticism.

The second key thesis concerns the regeneration of local and “pan-national” Hungarian identity. According to Brubaker et al. this is not some sort of elite-oriented political project but simply a matter of everyday practice. Hungarians in Cluj defend their institutions not out of a “sense of mission” or because that’s what the Hungarian-language media and the Hungarian political party suggest that they do. Rather, they do so much more so because the existence of a “Hungarian world”—one neither exclusive or ghettoizing, yet still demarcates a certain ethnic dividing line—renders Hungarian ethnic identity natural and erases attendant fears. Of course, the question thus arises: if the Hungarian identity held by Cluj Hungarians is not the result of conscious decision-making but simply that of their socialization, can it be pronounced that it is a “spontaneous” and imperceptible process by which most people become “ethnic”? To quote Walker Connor, we might even say that ethnic identity sometimes becomes vitally important, while at other times it is a secondary factor in everyday life.<sup>5</sup>

On the whole, the second half of the book provides an incomparably rich analysis of the everyday lives of the residents of Cluj and of the problems they face; not least, their hopes and disappointments amid the country’s political and economic transformation. Given its sensitive portrayal of the new discourse that has developed about the social role of ethnicity, the striking omission of local, Transylvanian scholarship is hard to fathom. For instance, the coauthors do not so much as mention the work of the most important centers of sociological research in Transylvania, the Center for Regional and Anthropological Research in Miercurea-Ciuc (in Hungarian *Csík-székelyreda*), led by Zoltán A. Biró—namely, its research into the relationship between the “upper” and the “lower” world and the everyday reception of elite discourse in Hungarian-majority Szekler Land (in Hungarian *Székelyföld*). Not only do Biró’s insights from the 1990s echo those of Brubaker et al., but they also came well before them and evidently inspired them, too. It would thus have been more appropriate to acknowledge this. Further, Cluj might have been analyzed in comparison with another “ethnic” region of symbolic significance in an effort to identify similarities and differences. But the most salient theoretical and methodological issue arising from *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* is its failure to address the workings of state institutions from the local level on up—especially striking given that

---

5 Walker Connor, “When is a Nation?” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 13 (1990): 92–103.

one consequence of state involvement is the “identity-less” local Romanian population. In my assessment, the book’s close-up analysis of individual Cluj resident need not have excluded consideration of the state workings vis-à-vis the issue of ethnicity. This is mainly because internal surveys taken in the 1990s showed that the mayor’s office, as well as the county administration and other branches of government (e.g., the tax agency, the court, the police, and the military) were far from “neutral”—neither in their make-up (ethnic Hungarians are underrepresented several times over relative to their proportion of the population) nor in their relations with the public/clients. All this is pertinent here not because it serves to maintain a “discourse of offense” among Hungarians, but rather, because without an analysis of everyday conflicts—not infrequently, small acts of ethnically motivated humiliation—Hungarians’ palpable “sensitivity” would remain inexplicable. And this sensitivity stems from Hungarians’ experience of the everyday workings of the arms of the state, not from sheer prejudice.

Holly Case’s *Between States* likewise analyzes Transylvania at a critical stage of its modern history along with the related Romanian-Hungarian competition. Her methodology, however, stands closer to that employed in the fields of social history and the history of ideas when addressing World War II as a truly “total” phenomenon in Eastern and Central Europe.<sup>6</sup> Her volume—a substantially revised version of the PhD dissertation she defended in 2004—focuses chiefly on events between 1940 and 1944, in what is a stellar blend of classic diplomatic history with microhistory. With the collapse of the peace that prevailed after Versailles and the start of World War II, both Romania—as the defender of the prevailing territorial status quo—and Hungary, one of the big losers of the post-World War I peace, each found themselves in uncharted waters. Even before the Second Vienna Award, the two countries were struggling to gain the favor of an expanding Germany promulgating a “new European order,” and from autumn 1940 to summer 1944 they engaged in a mostly weaponless, but not victimless battle for possession of a divided Transylvania; and within it, the region’s capital, Cluj. The book’s opening chapters authoritatively introduce the

---

6 Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: the Destruction of the Jewish Community at Jevabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Mark Mazower, *Hitler’s Empire. Hitler’s Empire: Nazi Rule in Occupied Europe* (London: Allen Lane/The Penguin Press, 2008); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010). For the Holocaust in Romania and the Jewish policies of the Antonescu regime, see Vladimir Solonari, *Purifying the Nation: Population Exchange and Ethnic Cleansing in Nazi-Allied Romania* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010).

reader to the diplomatic and historical background of the Transylvania question. Drawing on an imposing range of archival material and scholarship in several languages, Case handily demonstrates that while a state of war never did formally exist between Romania and Hungary, throughout World War II they prepared to attack each other while at the same time waging war on the German side on the Soviet front. Indeed, the two allies entered the war primarily not against the USSR or Bolshevism, but above all for Transylvania. As early as the end of 1941, Hungarian propaganda organs directed journalists not to take a position on the preferred outcome of the war. Meanwhile, in Romania in March 1942, Prime Minister Mihai Antonescu admitted to German negotiators that his country's sole true war objective was regaining control of Northern Transylvania. According to Case, in the interest of the "matter" the sides approached ideological nihilism several times. When, after the Second Vienna Award, the foreign minister of the far-right Iron Guard-backed Romanian government raised the issue of the famous British historian R. W. Seton-Watson, who had long been in the employ of Bucharest but who was regarded by intelligence as an "English spy." Ion Antonescu personally intervened on behalf of Seton-Watson, saying he "has been a good friend of Romania," who "always supported us in the matter of Transylvania." He added "his democratic activities don't interest me" (p.65). Case argues that even on the Hungarian side, the defense of Transylvania was capable of overriding every other ideological debate; for, she says, between the two world wars the whole of Hungary's political elite, from the far left to the far right, concurred when it came to territorial revisionism. Case demonstrates this through the example of a military officer who first served the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (aka the Hungarian Republic of Councils) in 1919 and subsequently the regime of Admiral Miklós Horthy, and took part in Hungary's military operation in Northern Transylvania. (It would have been more exact to take Martin Mevius's research into account and thus make more nuanced assertions as regards leftist parties' take on territorial revisionism; for the Budapest communist movement and the Transylvanian left were equally divided when it came to the Horthy regime's policies toward Romania.<sup>7</sup>) Albeit in varying tones, Hungarian and Romanian opinion-makers—politicians, diplomats, scholars, and journalists—employed similar reasoning in discussing the nation-building role of Transylvania. Roland Clark rightly pointed out that one of the

---

<sup>7</sup> Martin Mevius, *Agents of Moscow: The Hungarian Communist Party and the Origins of Socialist Patriotism, 1941–1953* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

daring arguments Case makes in her book is that underlying the struggle for Transylvania—as with many other twentieth-century conflicts—was not some sort of ideological incompatibility, but much rather a fundamental agreement as to the framework of what constituted a legitimate nation-state.<sup>8</sup> It is precisely this, in her view, that led to mutually exclusive conceptions as to the borders of a future Europe. Indeed, Case places the Transylvania question in a much wider context than has scholarship to date, examining the Hungarian-Romanian conflict in the context of the military and diplomatic battle waged over the “idea of Europe.” Not surprisingly, from 1940 to 1944 hundreds of newspaper and magazine articles, special issues of periodicals, and speeches drew a link between the fate of Transylvania and the structure of the emerging “new Europe.” Such figures as Anton Golopenția and Sabin Manuilă, along with their Hungarian foes, Pál Teleki and András Rónai, were thus not only nationalist cartographers and geographers but also public officials who saw their own nation’s territorial disputes in a pan-European context.

While Case’s book is a must for those who study this region, rather than presenting a more detailed summary I would now draw attention to the book’s key strengths and a few, minor deficiencies. In my assessment the high point comes in the third chapter, which examines the everyday consequences of the 1940 territorial revision on Cluj following its re-assignment to Hungary. With striking sensitivity and empathy Case analyzes the dilemmas of “the four years.” She examines refugee issues, property disputes, racial discrimination, attempts at assimilation, the fate of Greek Orthodox residents, the state’s “nation-building” apparatus, and the increasingly strained relationship between everyday citizens inhabiting the gray zone between ethnic groups. Drawing on research she conducted in the state archives in Cluj, Case lavishly documents the relentless battle for people’s loyalty. Pointing to the several hundred criminal cases brought between 1940 and 1942 for “offending the nation,” she demonstrates that often it was not ideologically motivated deliberateness that caused the “crime” (usually an offensive remark against Hungarians or Hungarianness), but small missteps of everyday life, such as inebriation or an otherwise innocent verbal spat on the street. The least successful part of the book comes, I think, in the fifth chapter: a discussion of the Romanian and the Hungarian Holocaust. While even here, Case demonstrates an impressive command of the facts, drawing on an exceptionally

---

8 Roland Clark, “Review of Case, Holly, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II*,” HABSBURG, H-Net Reviews. September, 2010. <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=30001>, accessed December 17, 2012.

wide breadth of sources, her book falls short in its less than suitable positioning of the tragedy befell Romanian and Hungarian citizens identified as Jews into the struggle waged between Romanians and Hungarians for the “European idea.” While true that the competition to gain favor with the great powers—a race in which the possession of Transylvania played a key role—it also determined the two countries’ policies toward the Jews. In 1941, Hungary and Romania, each wanting to gain the favor of Nazi Germany, simultaneously—and with an eye constantly on each other—enacted numerous anti-Jewish civil and economic measures. In the wake of this, as a “gesture” toward the Western powers, from autumn 1942 Bucharest halted the deportation of Transnistrian Jews that had been underway since summer 1941; while in Budapest, for nearly two years the government led by Miklós Kállay successfully resisted Germany’s deportation plans.<sup>9</sup> Case makes a noteworthy observation in writing that during World War II the “solution” of the “Jewish question” was often bound up with efforts to settle the territorial issues inherited from the post-World War I peace. It is not worth depicting World War II diplomacy as an anomaly in international relations, according to Case. To the contrary, she says, it must be acknowledged that Nazi Germany—and, at least until the start of the war, even fascist Italy—wove plans for serious “pan-European” diplomacy. It was in keeping with this that its Eastern and Central European allies shaped their relations with the European great powers. And yet the link drawn between the Holocaust in Northern Transylvania and the “European idea”—or, rather, the references to “Europe” that occur throughout the work, especially as regards the political analysis of the post-1989 Hungarian-Romanian relationship—seem dubious. Perhaps it was at the request of the publisher that Case sought to render the Transylvania issue particularly timely in this respect in the published volume, but she would have been better to keep following through on the research she began in her exceptional PhD dissertation rather than undertake a less than wholly successful attempt to refocus as she does.

Notwithstanding every bit of criticism, and similarly to Brubaker’s book, Holly Case’s microhistorical analysis of Cluj serves to caution us that ethnic identity, often depicted as static, is indeed hardly spontaneous; instead it is the product of a state-supported or state-obstructed situative process of identification. Case’s book offers much not only to those Hungarian historians

---

9 András Joó, *Kállay Miklós külpolitikája. Magyarország és a háborús diplomácia, 1942–1944* [The Foreign Policy of Miklós Kállay: Hungary and Wartime Diplomacy, 1942–1944] (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2008).

engaged in re-elaborating our understanding of the 1940–40 era—among them Balázs Ablonczy, Gábor Egry, Tamás Sárándi, and András Tóth-Bartos—but also to scholars of the region who seek to finally supersede the national narratives that followed the collapse of state socialism with another approach, that of transnational and comparative social history.

*Translated by Paul Olchváry.*  
Stefano Bottoni

A visszatért Erdély 1940–1944 [Transylvania Returned, 1940–1944]. By Balázs Ablonczy. Budapest: Jaffa Kiadó, 2011. 280 pp.

Although this relatively short period of history was to determine the fates of Transylvanian Hungarians for a long time, according to Balázs Ablonczy Hungarian historians have nonetheless handled it with “remarkable modesty” (p.13). Due to the lack of basic research and the negligible number of related studies, this period has remained something of a “gray” patch.<sup>1</sup> The increasing interest historians have begun to take in the era since the fall of communism in Hungary, however, and the research that has been done over the course of the past few decades has brought new information and interconnections to light, or at the very least offered a more nuanced understanding of old interpretations.<sup>2</sup>

These new results and insights are the main focus of Balázs Ablonczy’s recent volume, published in 2011. According to the author, his work “is not the thorough monograph that Hungarian historiography has badly needed for so long.” (p.15.) The volume is essentially a summary of previous knowledge of the topic complemented with the findings of Ablonczy’s own research. The genre itself attests to this: although it was written with the demanding fastidiousness of a work of scholarship, its easy-flowing style and the small number of footnotes give the reader the impression that he or she is reading a book for a general readership. This is also suggested by the slightly unusual prologue (entitled “Two accidents”), which doesn’t quite seem to correspond to the topic of the book, but which prepares the reader for a less rigid manner of presentation.

The thirteen chapters of the book offer a chronological presentation of the four years in question, but they address the most important questions of these fifty months thematically. The historic antecedents are introduced in the

---

1 Gábor Egry uses this characterization in his book on the history of the Transylvanian Party. Gábor Egry, *Az erdélyiség „színeváltozása”. Kísérlet az Erdélyi Párt identitásának és identitáspolitikájának elemzésére 1940–1944.* [An Analysis of the Identity and the Identity Politics of the Transylvanian Party] (Politikatörténeti füzetek XXV) (Budapest: Napvilág Kiadó, 2008).

2 One finds a thorough summary of the secondary literature in the Transylvanian Hungarian Database: Tamás Sárándi and András Tóth-Bartos, eds. “*Kis magyar világ*” Észak-Erdély 1940–1944 között [“Little Hungarian World” Northern Transylvania between 1940 and 1944]. <http://www.adatbank.ro/belso.php?alk=66&k=5>, accessed December 17, 2012. For a further survey of the secondary literature and research see András Tóth-Bartos, “Észak-Erdély 1940–1944. Szakirodalmi áttekintés” [Northern Transylvania 1940–1944. Survey of the Secondary Literature], in *Határhelyzetek III*, ed. István Fábri and Emőke Kötél. (Budapest: Balassi Intézet Márton Áron Szakkollégium, 2010), 326–46.



second chapter (entitled “The Fight for Transylvania”), from the nineteenth century up to the Second Vienna Award. Ablonczy examines issues that served as “precursors” to the politics of Transylvania during the era in question. The most significant of these questions concern the formation of pre-war notions of Transylvania, the efforts to further Hungarian nationalist goals before 1918, debates over territorial revision, and—to use Ablonczy’s wording—the triple (political, economic, and educational-cultural) discrimination endured by Transylvanian Hungarians as a consequence of Romanian nation building. It is essential to present these problems, since in the course of implementing Hungarian national politics in Transylvania following the Vienna Award those responsible for shaping policy often drew on the nation building strivings of the pre-war period (for instance in questions regarding the possession of estates), but they also placed considerable emphasis on the task of remedying the grievances suffered by Transylvanian Hungarians.

The second half of the book examines the four years of Hungarian government in Transylvania in detail. Ablonczy devotes separate chapters to the most important problems. In his analysis of the formation of the military administration following the occupation of the area, he offers an unbiased comparison of the atrocities committed by the Roman and Hungarian armies respectively, some of which resulted in bloodshed. He also deals separately with the economic and nationality policies that were implemented by the military commanders who led the counties and districts. Three of the chapters address questions of economic policy. In order to compensate for the failings of the pre-1918 liberal governments and help remedy some of the grievances that had been suffered by Hungarians when they had lived as members of a minority in the Romanian state, particular emphasis was given to the economic development of Transylvania in the interests of reducing differences between regions. The program of investment and financial aid (the chapter entitled “Bureaus, fields, and electric wires”) had two principal aims: first, the revitalization of the economy (agricultural and industrial activities, professional training) and the promotion of social policy and second, the improvement of infrastructure (“Paths beyond Sylvan Lands”). The railway line between Déda and Szeretfalva offers an example of the latter. Built in record time, it linked the Székely Land, an area that since the shift of borders in 1918-1920 had been left without any railway connection, to the larger railway network. One could also mention the Székely Land Electrical Works, which considerably furthered industrial development and the spread of electric power in the Székely counties. According to Ablonczy,

during the four years in question the Hungarian state devoted an amount of money to investment in Northern Transylvania (the part of the historical region that had been re-annexed in accordance with the Second Vienna Award) equal roughly to the state budget for an entire year.

This section also contains a chapter dealing with tourism. The title (The Hungarian Switzerland) is not incidental, since in Transylvania, Switzerland was considered an example to be followed, in particular in the field of tourism as a source of great economic potential. During those four years, the improvement of the tourist industry was handled with great care: hotels and hospices were built, roads with significant touristic importance were renovated, and great emphasis was put on promoting tourism. According to Ablonczy's observations, this also functioned as implicit political propaganda the effects of which are still palpable: the touristic profile that was created during the period (the sights of the Kalotaszeg region, the city of Cluj, and the Székely Land) continues to determine the image many Hungarians have of Transylvania today.

The author discusses the political history of Northern-Transylvania in six chapters, at least if one includes the last chapter, entitled "Frontal passage" (the title is a pun, since in Hungarian it can refer to weather or to battle), which deals with the events that took place in the Transylvanian arena of war. The political interests of the region were formulated by the Transylvanian Party. Ablonczy carefully details the history of the party (in a chapter entitled "Fields of force"), its relationship with the government and other parties, as well as its regional policy, which gave expression to a kind of local identity referred to as the "Transylvanian spirit." Although this could be seen simply as a form of regionalism, on the local level at the aim was to achieve dominance over the rival Transylvanian ethnic groups (Romanians and Jews) with the state machinery of a ruling nation. Ablonczy gives particular consideration to the presentation of the various endeavors that were undertaken or promoted with the intention of strengthening the nation, the logic of which shaped religious and educational policy ("Church and school"), demographic policy ("The age of obsessions"), and economic policy ("Life at the border castle"). The reader also learns about the measures that in many cases were accompanied by atrocities ("Bitter years"). Here Ablonczy discusses the conditions of Hungarians living in southern Transylvania, whose everyday lives were embittered by the practice of a reciprocal kind of ethnic policy.<sup>3</sup> He also describes the discriminative measures

---

3 The political division of Transylvania into a northern part belonging to Hungary and a southern

that were taken against Transylvanian Jewish communities and Hungarian citizens who had “returned” but who were regarded as Jewish, not to mention the Transylvanian Roma, and finally the deportations that affected a significant proportion of the population of the region.

This volume is not Ablonczy’s first publication<sup>4</sup> on Northern Transylvania, although his main field of study is not the history of Transylvania or the ethnic minorities, but rather the social and cultural-historical background of the Hungarian nation building efforts of the interwar period. In his monograph on Pál Teleki he gave a thorough analysis of the processes that took place in Transylvania, focusing on the problems that personally or indirectly affected the prime minister. In another essay on tourism he offers a more radical interpretation of “Transylvania imagery” pointing out that Transylvanian tourism promoted “prominent national interests,”<sup>5</sup> in other words, it served as an excellent basis for often discriminative nationalist measures. The essential thesis of *Transylvania Returned* builds on the train of thought in the aforementioned two works. Thus here too Ablonczy gives particular attention to the role of Pál Teleki in giving voice to the problems of Transylvania and designing long-term, extensive programs intended to help address these problems. Furthermore, Ablonczy emphasizes that the question of Northern Transylvania constituted the last attempt to create a Transylvanian Hungarian national space. The Second Vienna Award offered an opportunity to put the Hungarians of Transylvania in a socially and economically more advantageous position. In the background to this was the realization that the questions that were important to the Hungarians of Transylvania could only be solved from a position of power.<sup>6</sup> The system

---

part belonging to Romania exercised a considerable influence on domestic politics on both sides of the border. Thus in the case of both Hungarian and Romanian politics, nationality policies were influenced by the principle of reciprocity. The circumstances of the Romanians of Northern Transylvania changed depending on how the Hungarians of Southern Transylvania were treated, and vice versa. Repression was answered with repression on both sides of the border.

4 Balázs Ablonczy’s works on this subject: *Teleki Pál* [Pál Teleki] (Budapest: Osiris Kiadó, 2005), 456–91; “Teleki Pál ismeretlen memoranduma az erdélyi kérdéstről 1940” [Pál Teleki’s Unknown Memorandum on the Transylvanian Question 1940]. *Pro Minoritate* no. autumn-winter (2004): 64–85; “Teleki Pál nemzetéről és társadalomról – a visszacsatolások előtt és után” [Pál Teleki on the Nation and on Society – Before and After the Re-annexations], in *A nemzet a társadalomban* [The Nation in Society], ed. Csilla Fedinec, 151–73. (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 2004); “Védkunyhó. Idegenforgalmi fejlesztés és nemzetépítés Észak-Erdélyben 1940–1944 között” [Hikers’ Hut. Tourist Development and Nation Building in Northern Transylvania, 1940–1944], *Történelmi Szemle* 50, no. 4. (2008): 507–33.

5 Ablonczy, “*Védkunyhó*,” 528.

6 The politics of economic revitalization offers a good example of this, as does the question of the treatment of the areas in which Transylvanian Hungarians lived scattered. For instance a survey based on

of public support, economic and social assistance, and educational policies all served this goal, as did for instance the granting of official permission to take certain jobs, the issue of licenses to pursue a trade, etc. According to Ablonczy, however, the goal of achieving Hungarian supremacy did not mean forceful assimilation.<sup>7</sup> Hungarian hegemony may have been the goal, but in a multiethnic state. The measures were usually intended simply to minimize the economic and political power of the nationalities (p.165; p.231).

The omnipresent nationality policies and the dominance of public discourse related to it resulted in some contradictory situations. One could well ask, for instance, to what extent the references to national goals became one of the tools for survival in a world in which everyday life had been embittered by war. One might also ask to what extent this nation building spirit permeated the rigid practices of administration that were characteristic of the system, or to what extent bureaucratic practice or economic interests prevailed in the resolution of issues seen as important from the perspective of national concerns.

There is very little scholarship on these questions. The concise histories that were written in the 1960s cannot be ignored, in spite of their ideological biases, but they only address specific questions of detail (regarding the left-wing, for instance, or revision).<sup>8</sup> Most of the more recent scholarship dealing with the

---

questionnaires was ordered to allow an examination of the circumstances of Hungarians in areas in which Romanians constituted the majority (for more on this see Pál Péter Tóth: *Szórányban* [Scattered] (Budapest: Püski, 1999), but they saw serious potential for the strengthening of the Hungarian presence in the policies regarding the possession of estates (for instance the purchase of land and the creation of land divisions) or state-directed resettlements in the interests of creating an ethnically Hungarian corridor linking the Székely Land and the so-called Alföld, the lowland region of Hungary.

7 Nationality policies that were based on the hopes of complete revision (meaning the re-annexation of all of Transylvania) were characteristic for the most part of the military administration that was developed following the entry into Northern Transylvania of the Hungarian army. Some of the measures that were implemented are clear manifestations of the desire to return to the pre-1918 state of affairs. This depended primarily on the personal decisions of individual commanders. Following the introduction of a civil administration most of the measures were rescinded. For more on this topic see Tamás Sárándi, “Kisebbségpolitika a közigazgatási gyakorlatban a katonai közigazgatás idején Észak-Erdélyben” [Minority Policy in Administrative Practice at the Time of the Military Administration in Northern Transylvania], *Limes* 23, no. 2 (2010): 75–95. After this, nationality policies were shaped by a politics that favored Hungarian national interests, seeking first and foremost to strengthen the position of the Hungarians and bring conflicts with the nationalities to an end. See Gábor Egrý: “Tükörpolitika” [Mirror politics], *Limes* 23, no. 2 (2010): 97–111.

8 Dániel Csatári, *Forgószélben. A magyar–román viszony 1940–1945* [In a Whirlwind. Hungarian-Romanian Relations 1940–1944] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1968); Loránt Tilkovszky, *Revízió és nemzetiségpolitika Magyarországon 1938–1941* [Revision and Nationality Policy in Hungary 1938–1941] (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1967), 255–334.

problems of Northern Transylvania is also limited to specific questions, seen primarily from the perspective of political history. At the same time, there are no case studies that examine the activity of Transylvanian Hungarian politicians from a national perspective. Except for the cooperatives and individual financial institutions, we have very little information regarding the network of institutions that was built at the time or the relationships and conflicts between the central and local institutions. Our knowledge of the economic and social processes that took place at the time is also limited. For example, with the exception of a few individual counties we know little regarding the politics of pecuniary assistance that was evolving at the time, and we have no larger view of the national or regional structure. Very few case studies have been done that offer any deep insight into specific local problems. This book contains some attempts to address this. In addition to the aforementioned case study on tourism, the case of the pioneers (district road-surveyors, road laborers) is also interesting, both from the perspective of minority politics and as a point of departure for future socio-historical analyses. The history of the Székely Land Electrical Works would also merit separate analysis, as it would offer an illustrative example of the interconnections and conflicts between local economic initiatives, efforts on the part of the state to modernize, and the business politics of large enterprises.

The book does reflect the lacunae of the secondary literature upon which is based, since the gap left unaddressed by previous scholarship is too vast to be bridged by a short summary. However, it constitutes an essential contribution to the secondary literature on Northern Transylvania. It offers a useful point of departure for specialists on the subject, as well as an opportunity for the larger reading public to familiarize itself with an impartial and highly readable account of the “little Hungarian world” of Transylvania between 1940 and 1944, a world that was often rife with paradox and contradiction.

*Translated by Thomas Cooper.*

András Tóth-Bartos

Sztálin a székelyeknél. A Magyar Autonóm Tartomány története (1952–1960) [Stalin and the Székelys: History of the Hungarian Autonomous District]. By Stefano Bottoni. Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 2008. 445 pp.

During the period of communist dictatorship, research regarding the post-1945 history of the Hungarian minority living in Romania was strictly subordinated to party ideology. Therefore the only historical works dealing with the Hungarians living in Transylvania that could be published during this period were those that more or less served a given ideological objective.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, beginning in the 1980s Hungary and Romania began to wage their increasingly vehement ideological battles through historiography. Historical writing on the theme of Hungarians in Romania gained momentum after 1989, though the previous historical period and increasing political tension in the 1990s were not favorable to rigorously academic analysis. The historical canon from both countries was concealed behind the tried and tested assertion of national grievances. The narration of political-historical events invested with outstanding significance and journalistic martyrology held sway over Transylvanian Hungarian history writing as well.

Beginning in the late 1990s, the increasing accessibility of archival material in Romania and the appearance of new people dealing with the issue of the Hungarian minority in Romania produced a change in the interpretation of the period 1945–1989.<sup>2</sup> The volume of studies from several authors, though reflecting disparity in thematic emphasis, clearly indicated that the customary canons had expanded to include a new type of discourse departing from the previous historiographical traditions in their rigorously scientific approach, new interpretations (Hungarian, Romanian and international comparative

---

1 See the following works, for example: János Fazekas, *A Román Kommunista Párt – a bazea fiai testvériségének és barátságának, társadalmi és nemzeti egyenlőségének következetes harcosa. Tanulmányok és cikkek* [The Romanian Communist Party—the Persistent Defender of Patriotic Brotherhood and Friendship and Social and National Equality] (Bucharest: Politikai Könyvkiadó, 1980) and László Bányai, Bodor András, and Bitay Ödön, eds., *A magyar nemzetiség története és testvéri együttműködése a román nemzettel. Tanulmányok. I* [History of the Hungarian Nationality and its Fraternal Cooperation with the Romanian Nation. Studies I] (Bucharest: Politikai Könyvkiadó, 1976).

2 See Nándor Bárdi, ed., *Autonóm magyarok? A Székelyföld változása az ötvenes években* [Autonomous Hungarians? Change in the Székelyföld in the 1950s] (Pro-Print Könyvkiadó: Csíkszereda, 2005).

approaches) and use of a greater variety of sources. Stefano Bottoni's book belongs to this category.

In his book *Stalin and the Székelys*, Bottoni introduces the milieu of Székelyföld (a historical region of modern Romania inhabited by the Hungarian-speaking Székelys) in the 1950s, an era when not only so-called socialism, but the Stalinist minority-policy model had arrived to the Székelys via the Hungarian Autonomous District (HAD). This model had been used successfully in the Soviet Union to implement the socialist integration of national minorities in that country. This model entailed the use of a trained élite selected from the local population to carry out socialist political, economic and social transformation (the elimination of historical parties, the nationalization of agriculture, industry and education, the waging of class warfare).

Bottoni introduces the Székelyföld of the 1950s and the history of the Hungarian Autonomous District in five fairly long chapters. The first chapter examines the genesis of this district, attendant administrative changes, the district's reorganization as well as the Soviet role in these affairs and, not least importantly, the reaction of the population to them. Bottoni offers an objective analysis of the events that took place during the summer of 1952 in which both Soviet "advisors" and the Romania political élite participated to such a significant degree. The author displays a keen sense of proportion in his examination of the international (such as the role of the Soviet Union) and local contexts surrounding the establishment of the HAD. However, in his analysis of domestic political events in Romania, Bottoni could have given more thorough consideration to the so-called transitional period (1945–1948) and to Romanian nationality policy in the years before the foundation of the Hungarian Autonomous District and to a comparison of how this policy was implemented toward Hungarians and non-Hungarian minorities in the country (Germans, Jews, Serbs, Ukrainians, Tatar-Turks).

In the second chapter, Bottoni considers fundamental issues connected to the existence of the Hungarian Autonomous District as well as the Stalinist model itself within the context of Romanian domestic politics. Contrary to the established approach, the author analyzes the function of the HAD not only from the ethnic perspective (the Romanian-Hungarian power struggle), but from the standpoint of center-periphery relations and the place the district occupied in Romania's political and economic system as well. Bottoni provides a detailed introduction of the Hungarian Autonomous District's so-called "Statute" affair, which clearly defined the possibilities and limitations of this new administrative

unit. In the second half of the 1950s, local specialists prepared cultural- and economic-development projects to be implemented in the HAD that portrayed the district as a specific (culturally Hungarian) entity. This approach did not win approval from the Romanian party leadership, which by this time had begun to think in terms of social homogenization.

The third chapter of *Stalin and the Székelys* is one of the most colorful in the book, examining the least investigated topics surrounding the Hungarian Autonomous District, such as culture, politics, economic life, cultural institutions and social changes that took place in the Székelyföld in the 1950s. This chapter is also extremely important, because it contains the majority of the fundamental interpretations upon which the research is based. This represents the episode in the history of the HAD in which it was possible to attain genuine benefit, primarily at the cultural level, from the district's "autonomous" status. In this chapter, Bottoni also explores the evolution of the "factious mentality" that played a role in both the preservation of tradition and the transformation to socialism (the periodical *Igaz Szó*) in the HAD and the development of theatrical life that provided "combative entertainment" to the inhabitants of the district (the Székely Theater). After completing chapter three, the reader may well determine that it was worth getting through the perhaps somewhat slowly developing first two chapters of the book, since it is in this chapter that a true picture of the HAD emerges.

In the fourth chapter, Bottoni examines the long- and short-term impact of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Romania and, specifically, Transylvania—how the revolution influenced general political mood, the official and grassroots response to the uprising, etc. This chapter shows that the reaction to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution in Transylvania represents one of Bottoni's basic research themes. The author's analysis of a wider range of sources (including state-security documents) than have been used in previous works on this topic offer the reader a valuable insight into the reaction to the revolution in both the HAD and within the complex world of Romanian politics in the 1950s.

The fifth and final chapter of the book deals with the final phase in the history of the Hungarian Autonomous District. Bottoni utilizes previously unknown sources to take stock of the retaliatory measures that took place over a period of several years in response to the 1956 Hungarian Revolution and examine the function of these reprisals. The late 1950s represent a period of forms without shape for the HAD. As a result of the revolution, Romania's political leadership abandoned the Stalinist model that it had never really liked



to begin with. In 1960, the Hungarian Autonomous District was reorganized in such a way as to eliminate its characteristic features.

*Stalin and the Székelys* is the product of several years of research, which the author complemented through many more years study and experience gained through travel, interviews and meetings that provided him with an insight into the mental realm lying beyond the historical sources. Bottoni's efforts transformed him over time from a complete outsider to one of the greatest authorities and most well-known historians dealing with Romanian political life and the Transylvanian microcosm at the time of the Hungarian Autonomous District.

The qualitative and quantitative diversity of Bottoni's sources have already been mentioned. The author worked painstakingly to uncover local sources regarding the Hungarian Autonomous District, supplementing them with material from archives in Bucharest. Bottoni was the first author to base his research regarding the district on documents stemming from the National Council for the Study of Securitate Archives (*Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității*), sources which opened new dimensions for interpretations of the era of the HAD.

The greatest merit of *Stalin and the Székelys* is that it portrays and interprets the Hungarian Autonomous District and the period in which existed as a unique phenomenon. Although not lacking empathy, Bottoni is capable of breaking with the established canon of grievance (which as an outsider may, perhaps, be easier for him to some degree) and investigating the entire historical period within the Romanian and eastern European historical context. The author presents the results of his research in modern, yet comprehensible language built upon a theoretical foundation. Bottoni offers an exemplary introduction of the events of 1956 at such a time (the 50th anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution took place in 2006) when dozens of works have been published that have followed the established historical passion-narrative.

Another virtue of the book is that Bottoni proves capable of analyzing events at both the level of the "greater story" as well as that of the microcosm. In his examination of the Hungarian Autonomous District in particular and of the 1950s in general, the author utilizes the results of microhistorical research (Sándor Oláh and József Gagyí produced lasting works of microhistory regarding this period).<sup>3</sup> The author occasionally embarks upon very perceptive

---

3 See József Gagyí, "Határ, amely összeköt" [Border that Binds], *Regio* 14, no. 3 (2003): 126–49; József

reconstructions of minor events that stand as very characteristic episodes in the history of the HAD. Such narratives include descriptions of the debate that took place among intellectuals in the district in 1956 regarding the so-called “Statute” affair and depictions of the lives of important cadres and party activists. Bottoni is very familiar with the central figures of the era, utilizing minute biographical detail to place their roles and importance precisely within their historical context. Several chapters of the book contain illustrations that serve to evince the mood of the era.

Stefano Bottoni’s book is in many regards a groundbreaking and definitive work dealing with the history of the Hungarians living in Romania from 1945 to 1989. The author cleverly fuses previous scholarly research with new knowledge, forming his fundamental theses through this synthesis. From its point of departure as a history of the Hungarian Autonomous District, the perspective of *Stalin and the Székelys* gradually expands to include post-1956 Romanian political life and policy toward the Hungarian minority.

One of the fundamental issues connected to historiography regarding Transylvania and other subjects is the degree to which the author of the work is able to break free from the confines of the ivory tower and convey the newest research done on the topic to relevant cultural forums and the broader reading public. Bottoni is a pioneer in this regard as well, having made his presence felt in Transylvanian public life not only in his capacity as a researcher, but as an active player in the region’s intellectual and opinion-making scene as well. The author’s public appearances and opinions have generated debate and divided various Transylvanian intellectual factions on several occasions.<sup>4</sup> Bottoni has in this way initiated an ongoing discussion and analysis of previously taboo issues such as the relationship between political power and the intelligentsia.

Bottoni often moved across rough terrain in writing *Stalin and the Székelys* as a result of a lack of basic research on numerous subjects, particularly

---

Gagyí, “Szocialista modernizáció Romániában, az ötvenes években” [Socialist Modernization in Romania in the 1950s] in *Történelmünk a Kárpát-medencében (1926–1956–2006)*, ed. Gyöngyi Kiss Kovács [Our History in the Carpathian Basin (1926–1956–2006)] (Kolozsvár: Komp-Press Kiadó, 2006), 185–96; Sándor Oláh, “A Magyar Autonóm Tartomány a Román Népköztársaságban” [The Hungarian Autonomous District in the Romanian People’s Republic] in *Autonóm magyarok? A Székelyföld változása az ötvenes években* [Autonomous Hungarians? Change in the Székelyföld in the 1950s], ed. Nándor Bárdi (Pro-Print Könyvkiadó: Csíkszereda, 2005), 617–27; and Sándor Oláh, “Élitrekrutáció a szocializmusban” [Elite Recruitment in Socialism] in *Fényes tegnapunk. Tanulmányok a szocializmus korszakáról* [Our Golden Yesterday. Studies on the Era of Socialism], ed. Julianna Bodó (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print Könyvkiadó, 1998).

4 See, for example, <http://adatbank.transindex.ro/inchtm.php?kod=126>, accessed December 17, 2012.

those concerning economic life and the process of social transformation. The modest imbalances that exist between various chapters in the book stem from this deficiency. The first chapter of the book does not provide sufficient context surrounding Romanian nationality policy. Although Bottoni succeeds in expanding the perspective from “the periphery” to the “center” with regard to the termination of the Hungarian Autonomous District, the introduction of such perspective in reverse (changes in Romanian nationality policy at the end of the 1940s, the operations of minority organizations) would have lent greater nuance to the book’s description of the birth of the HAD. *Stalin and the Székelys* would have benefited in the same way from a more detailed analysis of the social changes stemming from the collectivization of agriculture and the perception of the HAD among Romanians living in the district.<sup>5</sup> (Public discourse that emerged following the collapse of communism in 1989 and the Hungarian-Romanian ethnic conflict of 1990 revealed that Romanians living in the Hungarian Autonomous District considered introduction of the HAD to be discriminatory.)

The history of the Hungarian Autonomous District did not and indeed could not have concluded with the publication of *Stalin and the Székelys*. The book does, however, open new perspectives for the next generation of researchers focusing on the HAD. Local interior-ministry sources preserved in the city of Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş) have, for example, just recently become accessible.

*Translated by Sean Lambert.*  
Zoltán Novák

---

<sup>5</sup> For information regarding the social changes stemming from collectivization see Sándor Oláh’s research.

## Notes on Contributors

ABLONCZY, BALÁZS (Hungarian Institute Paris)

BOTTONI, STEFANO (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of History)

FRANK, TIBOR (School of English and American Studies, Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest)

GYÁNI, GÁBOR (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute of History)

HITES, SÁNDOR (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Research Centre for the Humanities, Institute for Literary Studies)

LÉNÁRT, ANDRÁS (National Széchényi Library, Institute of 1956)

MELEGH, ATTILA (Demographic Research Institute; Corvinus University of Budapest)

NOVÁK, ZOLTÁN (Gheorghe Sincai Institute for Social Studies and the Humanities of the Romanian Academy in Târgu Mureş)

SLACHTA, KRISZTINA (University of Pécs)

SPURNÝ, MATĚJ (Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Contemporary History)

TÓTH, HELÉNA (University of Munich, Centre for Advanced Studies)

TÓTH-BARTOS, ANDRÁS (Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest)

TROEBST, STEFAN (University of Leipzig)

VALUCH, TIBOR (Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Centre for Social Sciences, Institute for Political Science)