REVIEWS

Öllös, László: European Identity. Šamorín-Somorja, Forum Minority Research Institute, 2019, 240 p.

Does what we call Europe have a "soul"? Also, is there any fitting and legitimate heritage, any rational identity, where manifestations of backwardness and partnership, acceptance and compromise are in quest of their own completion amidst major temptations and compromises between nation-states…? What has filled it? And, what is it that ought to be replaced in order to fill what we could consider a more complex condition of identity?

László Öllös's *European Identity* is an attempt, as admitted by the author in his preface to the book. Or, if one prefers to put it that way, he analyses the contradictions as well as the opportunities of the period(s) of the nation-state, and not just from any old perspective, but in the form of entities determined by the ways of functioning, ways which originate from the opportunities, the realizations and the contradictions of the organization of the state. However, the basis of his approach is not the assumption that this model of state organization should be defined by unfair fighting; instead, by a mutual process of importing and following each other's examples which regards joined forces rather than disagreement, as well as new goals of innovative solutions in the sphere of cultural heritage, as the determining factors. Yet, this cultural "choice range" also requires that European nations contribute to the common cause from their own resources, considering the prospects of progress as part of their cultural heritage in a new era when what matters is yet another turn of progress in efficiency rather than the growth in size of one's own nation-state. Because what "Europe's soul" is, defining its opportunities, is the culture of that area, Europe; and its essential, "national cultural", contexts generate the cultural condition which is increasingly forming the perspectives of "rational heritage" as feeling the lack of something, a symptom of crisis, enhancing or hindering the European Union's chances concerning decision-making, legitimacy, constitutionality and competitiveness. In sum, Öllös "attempts to put together the elements and methodological points which may promote the development of a new European identity, one upon which European civic society and political community can be constructed". That is, the "People of Europe" may be born.

The author's venture is an enormous one. The eight chapters of the volume virtually cover the defining elements of key importance, including constitutional heritage, systems errors, national ideologies and conflicts, aggression, fear, ideological full speed, regional manifestations of a wish to show off, medieval tradition and political nation, common fate and legitimacy crisis, human life, progress, economic and political order, the brute force of the market, systems of values regarded as law, and issues of progress concerning political challenges. These are, on the one hand, the topics of separate chapters; on the other hand, the semantic elements, built upon each other, encourage a renewal in the direction of avoiding symptoms of crisis. The reason why this is necessary is that Europe itself stays behind in global competition while the refreshment of outdated administration and planning are becoming conditions for success or survival. If Europe fails in these aspects, "its backwardness will continue, it will be overtaken by others in more and more areas, which will be accompanied by economic, political and wholesale social consequences. The book aims at avoiding another fault of the Enlightenment by not wishing to create people's image of Europe linked to a single stream of ideas, considering Europe to be a complex of a variety of values. That is why the conception must contain the values of political pluralism. Our work does not aim at obliterating the distinctions between individual political ideological trends; neither does it aim at relativizing their values. At the same

time, however, it does not intend to call any one of them the sole repository of Europe's future, either. These views have been forming Europe's political history, and they will continue to form its future, too. We must avoid committing the mistake of Enlightenment whereby ideologies have mutually attempted one another from the circle of those which are deemed acceptable according to their values, co-operating only due to sheer necessity. At the same time, it is not sufficient to accommodate their compromises and their combinations within the boundaries of the new identity, but more of their differing basic values as well."

Öllös considers the effect of Renaissance scepticism on our modern image of humanity to be the basis of improvement, but his fundamental suggestion is to create a complex identity which "is rooted in today's world, yet its goal is to replace its internal weaknesses and contradictions by applying a number of new solutions and components." His project aims at connecting "Europeans, who have been greatly separated from each other in a cultural sense, mobilizing the creative spiritual capacity which has been latently present in their culture for centuries, and which can now be brought to life." In his plan he emphasizes the decrease of the population in the range of Europe's problems, since he considers "regaining its leading position in global competition illusory", while that is the real potential for success, even through failures and crises. That is why the creation of complex forms of identity is needed, founded on the preservation of balance that we can see today in its disrupted version. In order for it to change, "the aim is to form a constitutional harmony which is simultaneously rooted in rational thought and sentiment, the will to modernize and the respect of tradition, European unity and national features. The concept also examines the cultural sources of European competitiveness, based on the characteristics of the new identity. The concept does not wish to transgress, abandon, or dissolve national identities; instead, its goal is to connect them, that is, it relies on them, furthering their development. And its aim is not merely to integrate the most respected elements of individual national cultures (elements which can be called rational): instead, it suggests that their emotional components be connected as well. Europeans need to be connected not merely via their ideological beliefs and calculated interests, but in their hearts, too. This is made possible for them, according to the book, by a new view on, and experience of, their cultural heritage."

This train of thought in the Preface (in a somewhat shortened form in terms of content, too) rests on the professed concept, or should I say idea, that what is being discussed here is not a search for harmony within the hierarchy of primarily Europeans – secondarily nationally oriented ones, neither downright the other way round (primarily nationally oriented, secondarily European): "one can be simultaneously a European and a member of their own nation" (p. 15).

It is obviously useful to remark that highlighting some (albeit crucial) conceptual key sentences of a volume of 240 pages, even though they may be the author's own summarizing ones, can hardly serve as a basis of a polemical essay. In order to do that, one would need to proceed chapter by chapter, formulating key sentences and critical arguments right on the spot. Lacking this, I can only rely on what the author's concept is constructed upon. In a word, a detailed overview of the components of identity.

Now, I (from Budapest) do not claim that I am more familiar with this topic than Öllös himself is with his own environmental-cultural minority identity. The book, composed "around" Europe and the diversity of identities, successfully fulfils its role. It describes, characterizes, identifies a critical basis, and constructs an innovative product of its contents from incidental and connected motifs. It elaborates, refines, compares, constructs, plans, counterpoints, overwrites, provides alternatives, and draws bold conclusions. And it is all done well. But, having read the book, it also turns out to lack a thick bibliography: the

sources he relies upon are the same as his references (Giddens, Habermas, Wallerstein, Balibar, Jan Keller, Bernard Yack, etc.). Otherwise he builds a train of thought upon another or other ones, "running" them sensitively, moving in circles, in accordance with the rules of classical European essay writing, as it were. It is, thus, an essay: bold, thought-provoking, stimulating. At the same time, his references as well as the quality and quantity of the literature of his choice (scarce but essential) indicate that he has indeed chosen a range of topics, almost archaic, by now (or, as yet) prophetic ones, too. However, he does not seem to be open to further distinctions other than his own.

Let me give but one example. He says, "Insofar as the immigrants adopt present-day Europe's concept of the family, they, too, will gradually disappear. Thus, further waves of immigration would become necessary. Meanwhile, of course, one would need to accept (based on historical evidence) that European culture in its current form is a culture of decline and extinction. Should others adopt it, they will also decrease in number. In order to accept this, even today's Europe must be able to offer something fundamental: the best way of life in the world; and, with it, an unshakeable force and power. If, however, Europe is unable to become a world leader, or, indeed, to stop its decline, no one will even consider that offer sincere. And, if the real choice is between the two ways of backwardness, with one of them resulting in the disappearance of national culture, it can be assumed that many, very many, will decide on returning to old national values" (p. 196).

Now, the assumption originating from the hypothesis might be pure and noble, but it might also be false. What immigrants, where, for what reason or purpose would (if they would) adopt the European concept of the family? Is there a "European" (southern, eastern, northern, western?) concept of the family at all? And, should one include an African or a migrant Russian-Ukrainian-Turkish-Polish one, will that still count as (a different) concept of the family? Can it be unitary, or differing culture by culture, depending on the given minority? Also, why would they adopt it? In a desire to assimilate? Or, because it is fairer, or planned, or "more modern"? Do we then regard Macedonians, Greeks, Poles, Lithuanians, *Romungro*[1] Gypsies, or assimilated Jews as belonging to European culture? Could they be a part of the culture of extinction? And, if "Europe must be able to offer something fundamental: the best way of life in the world..." — but it would be unable to offer it to all, would that mean the end of "Europeanness", something he assumes, by the way, to be there, to exist practically "as an indivisible entity"? Yet, interpretations throughout centuries and millennia have shown, too, that there is no indivisible entity; indeed, does Europe, as an idealized image of itself, not consist of a mixture of ideas, practice, heritage, inheritance, dying or refreshing interactions of other cultures?

I would wish to wreathe Öllös's words, his hypothesis and entire construction with my questions. But, should I claim that his essay-like approach with its well-shaped statements, mildly put questions, and the options aiming at an ideal would serve as an urge towards a better Europeanness, would my own approach, apparently a kind of disagreement, not be equally overgeneralizing with a spell of complexity? Or, worse still, downright anti-European reviling? Indeed, it is hard to imagine anything better than what we have without ideals; but does this constructed version help Europe to define itself, or would it, instead, strengthen the hardly firm identity of today with further components? Öllös appears to regard dividedness as surpassable; he seems to think that the creation of new images of humanity, following the Enlightenment, is a requirement, just as the controllability of modernization's

1 The term *Romungro* refers to mostly Hungarian-speaking Romani people. (*Translator's note*)

machinery, or the entire complex system of mutual dependencies are required. He appears to deliberately contrast East with West, politics with tradition, backwardness with the interests of market development, modernization with the multi-polar world replacing the desired mono-polar world. While all of these are present in a mixed form at any one place, having a multi-national entity in a given "national" culture, with their diversity being subordinated to a variety of dependency relations, Öllös seems to conceptualize the way of surpassing Europe's dividedness by replacing the sinking concept of Europeanness with another, harmonizable, European identity of understanding and compromise, agreement and accordance... Yet, why should future harmony be stronger in character than it once was? Why should we expect humans to be more peaceful than what was possibly required in the past by their inherent solidarity? Or a state less nation-oriented, which would be required by Europe before painting the network of connections single-coloured, the network that has been shown to be divided and without hope by international politics and interests as well as for other reasons?

"In the meantime, there appears the publicity campaign about being highly developed to conceal backwardness. This will probably be more significant in Western Europe than in the central parts of the continent, where the experience of the most highly developed area is an essential part of political and cultural tradition. It is against this that the factors causing backwardness must be concealed and made accepted. The ideological trends built upon the concept of modernization would be subject to a grave crisis of values. That is because the conditions advocated nowadays are those of gradual lagging behind. It is high time for the West, in its current position of neglect and disinterest, to thoroughly familiarize itself with what has traditionally been called Central-Europeanness, with the combination of repeated attempts to catch up as well as the subsequent falls, and the success or failure of learning and cultural adaptation" (p. 234).

Backwardness, and questions about development, interpreting them from "outside and upside" are by no means that recent. There existed no concept of Europe when "games of distinguishing ourselves from others" divided what may have seemed unified as seen from Africa or the steppes of Russia. The "condition of gradual backwardness" has been used as a tool by the current victorious power — anytime and anywhere, right against those living under the spell of "lagging behind". Moreover, even if we "demand", or expect, a more flexible attitude concerning the disinterest of the western part of Europe and the enforcement of the policy of openness, — whom would we favour then? Also, to get acquainted with "Central-Europeanness" is not a task to be tackled by "the West", but by Central or Eastern European entities as well, to the same degree. Let us face the question, "Do we actually know ourselves, or, each other?" Then, which part of that is the "West" supposed to come to know and respect? Furthermore, which "West"? London, where the Polish immigrants could fill a major city? Or Paris, with its countyful of East European Gypsies? Or Madrid, with its provinceful of Romanian immigrants? Berlin, perhaps, with its former Jewish Quarter re-inhabited by Russian immigrants? Do all of these, then, constitute a mere interpretational piece of the puzzle called "the migration issue"? Finally, what about Malta, where rich Russians outnumber locals — in that case, who must familiarize themselves with whom?

Öllös's book is an attempt, an experiment, to focus on a new form of identity, while our existing identities are being lost or transformed. This bit, just like the book in its entirety, is "part of a fundamental debate about the future of Europe, hoping to contribute to solving a range of issues concerning the current crisis" (pp. 13–16), written the Preface to his book, outlining the whole volume. While he says nothing about whether debates about EU Identity are part of the new identity, one thing is undeniable: without debates, it would certainly be impossible for us to get that far — not

even as far as practising the well-established principles of tolerance, partnership, acceptance and respect.

My questions are, of course, fake ones. They present the wide range of multi-layered problematic issues raised by Öllös's book — and by European identity. Despite this, since we are talking about identity, mutual idealizing, and never-ceasing interactions, this range of issues abound, and will continue to do so, in what could be called the seduction of answerability and the rationale of a new start. At least, we will — being loyal to new theories of ever newer enlightenments — have something to write about.

András A.Gergely

Lampl, Zsuzsanna: The political identity of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, 1989-1990. Šamorín/Somorja, Forum Minority Research Institute, 2020, 240 p.

Zsuzsanna Lampl's latest book makes a somewhat nostalgic reading: the well-known sociologist that she is, examines the political identity of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia during the period of what is known as "regime change"[1]. The way she discusses her topic is as informal and familiar as how one discusses public issues with friends. Professional though it is, it is not primarily aimed at addressing researchers and professionals — they are, after all, familiar with the issues raised in the book as well as the literature cited. Instead, her primary intended audience is those non-professionals who wish to receive a concise and systematic presentation of specific past events. Also, and equally importantly, they all share some experience of the regime change, including those who were born later, for they, too, can now live in a freer and more open world thanks to the events of 1989-1990. This book, too, is a product of this free and open world, exhibiting cover photographs of Kálmán Janics, Miklós Duray, and Károly Tóth, making it visible at the outset that as many as three ethnic Hungarian parties took an active part in the historic regime change of the time in Czechoslovakia, notably, Independent Hungarian Initiative (FMK), Coexistence, and Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (MKDM). None of these exist today by the same name or in the same form, but their mentality, or, let us say, ideological basis, still lingers on. And, of course, there still exists a community of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia who represent national, Christian, and liberal values, obviously in this order as far as their number is concerned, which is not merely due to internal evolution or dissection — in the year 2021, more than 30 years after the regime change, they are bound more extensively and organically to the existing governmental trend in Hungary than before: borders are free to cross, Hungary's media can be freely accessed, so the current, centralized, national-conservative collective identity in Hungary is closest to ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia as an ideological option. Yet, what we also learn from Zsuzsanna Lampl's book is that it was the national-conservative bias that predominated amongst Slovakia's ethnic Hungarians as early as the first quarter of the year 1990. She quotes, with indignation, the liberal view saying "we are not going to ruin ourselves by being Hungarians" — admittedly, the intelligentsia (for that is what the author calls them, too) might have put it more cautiously. As for today's concept of the nation, often extremely radical, may I quote Márai's note in his diary dating from 1968: "homeland is too important a thing to be left to the care of patriots".[2]

1 The term refers to the transition from the Communist regime to democracy, cf. Hungarian *rendszerváltás*. (*Translator's note*)

2 It might be more appropriate to refer to *homeland* by the Latin word *patria*, from which English *patriot* also derives, in

The book, of almost two hundred pages, contains seven comprehensive chapters, the first of which — concerned with the Hungarian political elite in Slovakia — amounts to almost half of the volume. This nostalgia is, of course, appropriate, since it can be seen, in a well-documented way, that we wish our then problems and divisions were those of today. Alas, that is not the case at present: there is a huge ideological gap between two to three ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia; the media and public discussions suggest that the differences between present-day political identities are unbridgeable. Indeed, compared to the year 1989, it is not only the tone of public discussions and the media that have become more extreme or even rude, but interpersonal relationships, too.

Zsuzsanna Lampl, having clarified the distinction between a party and a movement, provides a precise characterization of the three leading Hungarian political lines. FMK undoubtedly acted as a determining factor in the regime change, also in the sense that its programme focussed on the creation of a pluralistic democracy; everything else was co-ordinated or subordinated. FMK's major idea that every party representing ethnic Hungarian interests should ally with its Slovak ideological counterpart (for one could only succeed together with a Slovak partner) remained unheard. Indeed, FMK itself was forced to face the fact that its regime-changing Slovak counterpart, Public Against Violence (VPN) abandoned its original liberal goals. (VPN itself, during the first days and weeks of the regime change, benefited greatly from the fact that FMK members, educated in the more democratic and more open Hungary by Hungarian opposition members, had a much clearer idea of democracy and the rule of law than any Slovak member of the opposition.)

Coexistence regarded the representation of ethnic Hungarian interests as primary, and insisted on it; indeed, it formed an alliance with MKDM (considering itself to represent Christian values), opposing FMK. It was chiefly the election coalition formed by MKDM and Coexistence that FMK found hard to tolerate — alongside with the support given to that line by Hungary. There existed, of course, a political left as well, but right in the years 1989 to 1990, the word “left” had undesirable connotations, and all of the three ethnic Hungarian parties did distance themselves from it. Károly Tóth himself, looking back on the then events from 1996, formed a more shaded view on the role played by the regime-changing liberals. Concerning the idea that minority rights should be ensured institutionally and in a legal form, he said, “no democracy by itself guarantees minority rights”.

The author points out the fact, giving a detailed analysis, that the majority of Czechoslovakia's population at the time had no regime change in mind, but merely a reform of “party leadership”, another form of “Socialism with a human face”. Needless to say, all of the three parties had some ex-Communist members; yet, when the paragraph establishing the leading role of Czechoslovakia's Communist Party had been removed from the country's constitution, the space available for the Communist reformers, removed in 1968, narrowed down spectacularly. Then, there also existed an idea of a “third way”, one between socialism and capitalism, but that choice remained theoretical. Zsuzsanna Lampl calls the reader's attention at this point to the cryptic nature of the concepts of the time. She writes, “We cannot tell what was meant by socialism, capitalism, or the third way, but it can be assumed that the interpretation of these concepts was as manifold as that of democracy”.

Moreover, the difficulty in outlining the concepts back then has, by now, turned into a relativity and permeability of concepts.

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order to make the connection between the two linguistically clearer, too. In Hungarian, *haza* (homeland) and *hazafi* (patriot, lit. ‘son of the *haza*’) are transparently related. (*Translator's note*)

Concerning the former Eastern Bloc, for example, the economic and ideological self-characterization of the political left or right does not inevitably involve an unconditional adherence to rightist or leftist values. At any rate, the author argues convincingly that the first stage of regime change, discussed in her book, is characterized by a predominant vision whereby people emphasized the need for change, but not necessarily expressing the desire for a radical change of regime. As far as the constitutional system was concerned towards the end of the year 1989, ethnic Hungarians had by and large the same ideas as Slovaks, although, as the author notes, "there was a significant difference. FMK laid its cards on the table right from the outset, making it clear that its goal was to destroy socialism and introduce a liberal model of capitalism".

Nonetheless, it is a fact (as illustrated by the author's figures) that the political and economic feeling of security amongst Slovakia's populace did not start to deteriorate at the time of regime change. The tendency was observable as early as 1980; from 1975 on, "people's sense of security kept decreasing — simultaneously, up to the year 1989, their sense of insecurity was growing." To be sure, the years after the regime change saw a raising insecurity of additional social groups, primarily in the sphere of social security due to increasing unemployment and the liberalization of costs and prices. At the same time, this transitional period was essentially socialist in nature, especially in the sphere of available services. The author quotes a newspaper report dating from May, 1990, informing readers that the number of telephone stations in Czechoslovakia was over four million, with an increasing number of subscribers; yet, there was further demand for more than three hundred thousand (we mean landline stations, of course). It is also worth drawing your attention to a sociological study carried out 25 years after the regime change, a period of time sufficient to enable the population to distance themselves from the socialist era and to have a taste of capitalism, too: twice as many people thought that socialism guaranteed human dignity more than capitalism.

The revolutionary unity — quite soon, in fact — was disrupted by the advance of nationalism, the degree of which can be seen in the deterioration of Czecho-Slovak relations leading to the breakup of the country, as well as Slovak-Hungarian relations. Surprising though it may sound, we must trust the author's data, referring to contemporary surveys, according to which issues about national minorities became the leading ones among social problems to be solved by late 1990, ahead of every other issue (including economics, society and unemployment). Needless to say, no solution was found as three quarters of Slovaks resented Prague's overwhelming dominance; the opinion that unity with Czechs was a disadvantage for Slovaks had become predominant, just like another, no less absurd claim that ethnic Hungarians aimed at Magyarizing Slovaks living in southern Slovakia. In October 1990, "47 percent thought that the co-existence of Slovaks and Hungarians would never become any better".

I must definitely note another one of the numerous details of interest: there were some deviating points in the joint declarations of VPN and its Hungarian ally, FMK. Often, the latter put forward statements and numbered lists of decrees, the Slovak versions of which were slightly different from the Hungarian ones; not every part of the Hungarian version found its way into the Slovak one, and — just to give an example — the Slovak version used the term "ethnicity" rather than "national minority"[3]. In other words, the regime-changing liberal VPN itself was in trouble handling the minority issue: not wishing to lose votes in the

3 In the Hungarian original, the word *nemzetiség* is used for what has been translated here as *ethnicity*. The Hungarian term might also translate into English as *nationality*, but that would fail to emphasize the difference. (*Translator's note*)

increasingly nationalistic climate, it "refined" the Hungarian version of the text. It turned out quite soon, of course, that VPN did not only have members like Fedor Gál or Peter Zajac; indeed, they were the ones to be excluded by the majority later on. (Fedor Gál was even forced to leave Slovakia.)

The book, as mentioned, has a great advantage, notably, the informal style the author achieves by using quite simple methods including an openness to all opinions, pointing out correlations (but never pedantically), as well as by providing the appropriate quotes in the appropriate places. Actually, rarely does she give a direct assessment; instead, she transmits her conclusions indirectly, allowing her readers to discover them for themselves. What I also find really likeable is that she quotes, besides opinion polls, a great deal of contemporary statements, opinions, and news and comments from the press. Another respectable aspect of her book is that (while watching events closely) she keeps a historical distance — by comparing the surveys of the period under investigation to later ones. Another contribution to her informality is the reference to her own personal experience, e.g. "I have experienced this attitude several times in my own personal environment", "I remember a conversation towards the end of 1990 myself", or "I heard about it from others, too", etc.

The Czechoslovak regime change (and Zsuzsanna Lampl's book) concludes with the first free parliamentary elections, taking place on the 8th and 9th of June, 1990, with an astonishingly high voter turnout of 95.39%. The winner in Slovakia was VPN, allied with FMK, with 29.34% of votes. From the joint list of VPN and FMK, six Hungarian candidates became representatives in the Slovak National Council[4], while the coalition of Coexistence and MKDM, with 8.66% of votes, provided more than twice as many representatives, notably, thirteen.

Three Hungarian candidates also became representatives from the party list of the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), while Coexistence had one Ukrainian representative. As far as the 300 seats of the Federal Assembly[5] is concerned, 15 of them were won by Hungarians (with Coexistence-MKDM's 11 seats, and VPN-FMK's 4 seats); in addition, one Polish representative of Coexistence had also been elected. Municipal elections were held on the 23rd and 24th of November of the same year, with a significantly lower voter turnout of 63.75%. Amongst ethnic Hungarians, it was the nationalist line that proved victorious: Coexistence, with 6.3% of votes, won the mayor's seat in 102 municipalities; MKDM's 3.1% amounted to 35 seats, while FMK's 1.3% equalled 27. Needless to say, the results of the elections reflect the identity of ethnic Hungarians at the time of regime change.

The résumés in Slovak and in English are followed by a bibliography and, finally, a useful index. The politicians referred to, and quoted, with the highest frequency are Miklós Duray and Károly Tóth, while Péter Miklósi leads amongst journalists; amongst historians, it is Árpád Popély, a well-known expert on the period. The book makes an intelligent and thought-provoking reading that I warmly recommend to everyone.

Gábor Csanda

Gecse, Annabella: The Heart of Gemer/Gömör. Studies on the popular religious practice of Gemer/Gömör in Southern Slovakia. Komárno/Komárom and Šamorín/Somorja, Forum Minority Research Institute, Centre for European Ethnology, 2021, 368 p.

4 The term refers to the Parliament of Slovakia. Since October 1, 1992, it has been called *The National Council of the Slovak Republic*. (Translator's note.)

5 The term *Federal Assembly* refers to the parliament of the Czechoslovak federation in Prague. (Translator's note.)

The region traditionally known as *Gemer* (in Slovak) or *Gömör* (in Hungarian) is a good place for one to study indeed, considering the literature on its history and ethnology.[1] The validity of this statement is supported by Annabella Gecse's recent book *The Heart of Gemer/ Gömör. Studies on the popular religious practice of Gemer/Gömör in Southern Slovakia*, published by The Centre for European Ethnology with Forum Minority Research Institute. The ninth volume in the series "Local and regional monographs", it examines the nine villages of the Gemer/ Gömör basin with a Roman Catholic majority, including their religious practice, since the early days of the 20th century. The villages under scrutiny include Abovce/Abafalva, Barca/Baraca, Cakov/Cakó, Figa/Füge, Včelince/ Méhi, Rimavská Seč/ Rimaszécs, Kráľ/ Sajószentkirály, Uzovská Panica/Uzapanyit, and Vlkiňa/Velkenye in the basin formed by the rivers Rimava/Rima, Blh/Balog, and Slaná/Sajó.

Put differently, the book is concerned with the local religious minority (or minorities). Today, the opposition between Roman Catholics and Protestants[2] is far less emphasized than, say, in the early 20th century, i.e. the beginning of the period covered by the book; yet, it seems appropriate to regard the then situation as a starting point. In order to illustrate the above point, let us refer to a letter sent to the bishop of Rožnava/Rozsnyó by the parish priest at Včelince/Méhi in the year 1914, in which he calls the congregation in the village "an oasis of Roman Catholic believers living in a Protestant environment". The inhabitants of the villages discussed in the book may as well be considered as sporadic Roman Catholic settlements surrounded by predominantly Protestant ones; due to their geographical position as far as religious adherence is concerned, they certainly deserve the attention paid to them by Annabella Gecse in her book. Before this volume appeared, we have had but scarce information on the religious practice in the villages involved, which is why Gecse's book fills a gap, indeed.

The text itself can be divided into four main parts. The two introductory chapters are followed by a presentation of life around parishes and filial churches, often with a strong emphasis on their material and financial issues. In the next part, the reader is presented with a chronological, village-by- village, database, which is basically a systematized presentation of archival material relating to the first half of the 20th century. The third part contains a registry of small sacral monuments. Finally, a list of popular religious songs sung at masses at Barca/Baraca from 2009 through 2012 is presented — video recordings of several of them are at the disposal of those who are interested, using QR Codes.

It seems advantageous for us to concentrate on the first major chapter: this is where the reader is presented with the most informative data set. On the one hand, Annabella Gecse, drawing on voluminous archival material, provides an outline, or a detailed analysis,

1 The region will, from now on, be referred to *Gemer/Gömör*. Now a traditional cultural region in Slovakia without any official administrative status, it used to be a county in the pre-1920 Kingdom of Hungary. (*Translator's note*)

2 In the present English translation, I use the term *Protestant* to mean to non-Catholics. Strictly speaking, this is not quite accurate: the Protestants referred to in the text are members of the *Reformed Church*, which is used for followers of Calvin, i.e. Calvinists. This term, however, has (or may have) some negative connotations. On the other hand, the term *Protestant* has no such connotations for the potential English-speaking reader — indeed, with no other Protestant denomination discussed, I do not assume this "simplification" might give rise to miscomprehension. (*Translator's note*)

of individual 20th century episodes or processes in the religious life of these villages. On the other hand, she summarizes the processes of their recent past, and also the current ones, based on interviews as well as her own observations.

Concerning the earliest period she discusses, i.e. the first half of the 20th century, it will certainly prove useful for the reader to be familiar with the organization of the Church, the nature and use of the (material) objects used by the parishes, as well as the measurements and methods of production related to land ownership. These aspects assume some essential historical familiarity —and interest — on the reader's part; at the same time, we are offered some vivid micro-historical "gems", or "delicacies", about the individual villages under scrutiny. A good example is the argument between the inhabitants of Figa/Füge and their priest, János Hegedűs, around 1920; the villagers complained about how poorly he performed his duties as a parish priest, while he was dissatisfied with his income. Such conflicts go to show the local ways in a given historical situation. In their letter sent to the Bishopric of Rožnava/Rozsnyó, the villagers of Figa/Füge mentioned as an instance of "a scandal unheard of in this world", referring to the fact that children at the local school were taught Catholic religious education by a Protestant teacher because, the villagers claimed, the priest refused to teach it. It is also interesting to note that the villagers at Cakov/Cakó embarked on building their own Roman Catholic church building despite the official ecclesiastical ban, but (!) supported by their priest — even selling the local pub in order to raise money. Besides conflicts, one finds nice instances of solidarity amongst villagers in the same community. At Vlkiňa/ Velkenye, for example, landowners allied to help the poorest families of the village in December, 1931: eight Roma families were provided with food throughout the winter; other families were given new boots, holiday costumes, or medicines. We can find a number of similar episodes from each of these villages, showing, in a nutshell, the hardships as well as the beauties of locals' lives. The limited access to sources will not, generally speaking, enable the researcher to give a complete picture of each single case, which, in turn, can often be presented by way of illustration. Nevertheless, should Annabella Gecse have access to any related (and relevant) source that makes a deep analysis of such cases, we can expect her to write terrifically vivid and informative micro-historical accounts on them.

The description of the situation after World War II, as well as the one after the fall of the communist regime, might play a less emphatic role at some places vis-à-vis the earlier periods as described on the basis of archival sources. The various, often traumatic, turning points and political changes, however, had some effects on religious practice, effects that can still be traced — even though the overall image might be fragmentary. As for the recent past, and the present, are concerned, Annabella Gecse often provides a clear description of the customs and practices of believers. A social group that deserves specific mention is that of Hungarian-speaking Roma, accounting for the majority of the young generations in several of these villages. Due to their special social and cultural situation, they have a range of different attitudes to Roman Catholic faith; at some places, they have become active participants in the community, but not in some other places. The data and information provided by the book is very important regarding the current social position of Roma people — indeed, we can only hope that the topic will be taken up by further research.

The book, apart from professionals, will most probably be welcome by the inhabitants of these villages, including emigrants, for whom images of early 20th century religious life, or even the huge chronological database, might hold some unexpected curiosities or surprises, possibly involving their ancestry. At the same time, as the author herself remarks in her conclusion, we get a "characteristic image" of each village.

Péter Vataščin

Liszka, József (ed.): Acta Ethnologica Danubiana 22. – Az Etnológiai Központ Évkönyve – Ročenka Výskumného centra európskej etnológie – Jahrbuch des Forschungszentrums für Europäische Ethnologie [Yearbook of the Centre for European Ethnology]. Komárno/Komárom and Šamorín/Somorja, Forum Minority Research Institute, 2020, 356 p.

The 22nd Yearbook of the Centre for European Ethnology of Forum Minority Research Institute, now published, is also a festschrift to three colleagues, Kincső Verebély, Ilona L. Juhász, and Vilmos Voigt, to honour their 75th, 60th, and 80th birthday, respectively. The book, like the earlier ones in the series, contains papers based on current research on people(s) along and around the River Danube, as well as the ethnography of Hungarians in Slovakia. The present volume includes 17 academic papers and two minor ones, written in Hungarian, German, and French. On the one hand, however, no primary sources have been published in the volume, which, on the other hand, includes some (critical) reviews, and (despite the COVID-19 situation) *The Chronicle*, too, has some recent news to share with the audience. Some of the papers published in this volume are written versions of oral presentations held at the conference entitled *1918/1920–2019 - Neue Staatsgrenzen und die Folgen für gewachsene Kulturlandschaften im Donau-Karpatenraum. Eine Bilanz nach 100 Jahren* (*Az új államhatárok (1918/1920) következményei a Kárpát-medencében,* New state boundaries and their consequences for the existing cultural landscape in the Carpathian Basin) Komárno/ Komárom, 25-26 September, 2019. The conference was bilingual, i.e. German and English.

The yearbook, somewhat irregularly, opens with the personal notes by József Liszka, greeting the celebrated honoured ones by remembering an old story that all participants share. The paper to follow is concerned with the current situation, as well as the issues of Romanian ethnological research by folklorist and ethnologist Ioana Fruntelată. The first thematic section includes a paper written in French, by Robert M. Kerr — an etymological study of the relationship between Hebrew *Tophet* “Valley of Hinnom” (i.e. “Gehenna”) and *Mophet* “Divine Miracle”. Lars Dencik, writing in German, discusses the religious, social, and political changes affecting Slovakia’s Jews in the period between the two World Wars. Finally, Szilvia Czingel discusses the relationship of Hungarian-speaking Jews to philanthropism, describing the practice of *Mitzvah* during the period between the early 19th century through the Holocaust. She uses personal communication as a means of investigation.

The next part starts with Annabella Gecse’s essay, providing an overview of researchers’ options as far as the religious and erthnographic analysis of Gemer/ Gömör’s[1] Roman Catholic settlements (villages) is concerned. The essay to follow, by Zoltán Klamár, supplements his paper in the 2019 volume of the series, written about the sacral small monuments at Kartal and the inhabitants’ making use of available space and room, by providing information about the current trends and practices, observable since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The first paper of the volume on popular culture, by Máté Csanda, analyzes Szabolcs Kiss Pál’s docu-fiction video *The Rise of the Fallen Feather* (A lehullott toll felemelkedése) reflecting upon how (ethnic) nationalism appears in fine art genres. Next, Zoltán Magyar’s paper studies the motif of giving a gift in Hungarian folklore. As far as the material aspects of ethnology are concerned, the reader is introduced to the topic by Krisztián Ungváry, writing on the cultural landscape of the Tokaj region, including the changes it has undergone. Gyula Viga,

1 The terms *Gemer* (Slovak) and *Gömör* (Hungarian) refer to the same region, a county of the Kingdom of Hungary before 1920. (Translator’s note.)

then, shows to the reader the world of small restaurants and cafés in the region known as Bodrogköz[2], scrutinizing, most of all, how they have affected culinary culture in the recent decades. Finally, Péter Vataščin gives interested readers a press review on the appearance of the idea of collectivization in *Új Szó*.[3]

The last part includes papers, chiefly in German, that are written versions of oral papers presented at the conference we mentioned above. The first author to mention is László Öllös, writing on the issue of multiple identity, who explains that the nation-state, if it defines itself with reference to a predominant national identity, regards multiple identities as transitional phenomena, which leads to assimilation, i.e. the disappearance of non-predominant identities in two or three generations' time. This point of view fails to take into consideration that identities cannot be strictly separated, as people with a double identity are familiar with both cultures, understanding and regarding both as their own. The author concludes his paper by expressing his hope that the principle of mutually non-exclusive identities may even enable the creation of a supra-national European political community.

Erzsébet D. Molnár's essay discusses the deportation of Germans and Hungarians from the region of Subcarpathia (also known as Transcarpathia) between 1944 and 1946. Michael Geistlinger discusses the effect of the Ukrainian Language Act of 2019 on the language use of the country's minorities. Meinolf Arens gives an overview of the history of Ruthenians in the Carpathian Basin. Hans Hedrich provides an exciting travel report in the area around the Hungarian-Ukrainian-Romanian border. Finally, Viktor Fehér's analysis (in Hungarian) attempts to capture the revival processes of local identity and the phenomena connected to collective local memory by giving a presentation of the memorial park known as Mini-Yugoslavia in Subotica/ Szabadka (Serbia).

Franz Sz. Horváth, using an illuminating example, gives a presentation on the "narrative of victimization", still predominant in the Hungarian interpretation of history. The volume also includes a Hungarian translation of Daniela Kapitáňová's excellent essay *Their Komárno, my Trianon*. Her paper is a faithful reflection of the atmosphere that dominated the Hungarian-Slovak relations during the Mečiar era and some years after.

The volume, then, after a historiographic translation, contains studies on Jewish culture and phenomena concerning popular religious practice. The reader is then presented with the results of research on topics such as folklore and material aspects of ethnography (culinary and winemaking culture), as well as (connected to the above-mentioned conference) the history in the past century of European communities that found themselves in a minority situation after World War and the current issues they are facing. To sum up, the yearbook presents research on the ethnology of the Carpathian Basin, seeking answers to topical questions, and contributing to an understanding and interpretation of the culture (cultures) of the region.

Katalin Pajor

2 The term *Bodrogköz* refers to the area enclosed by the rivers Tisza and Bodrog. (*Translator's note*)

3 One of Slovakia's newspapers, in Hungarian, aimed at Hungarian readers in Slovakia and, needless to say, worldwide. Cf. https://ujszo.com/ (*Translator's note*)