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Navigating the Straits. Changing Borders, Changing Rules and Practices of Ethnicity and Loyalty in Romania after 1918

This study investigates the emergence of Greater Romania from below, paying attention to certain aspects of ethnicity and nationalizing. The establishment of the new state, with its rules and practices, was a slow process that left considerable room for local groups and individuals to negotiate their positions vis-à-vis the nationalizing efforts. The analysis of how citizenship options were used to individual advantage, the conflicts that arose regarding the nationalizing of border zones and their inhabitants, and the local differences of symbolic conquests reveal the importance of local contexts and their social elements. From the perspective of these events the realities of Greater Romania are best described as an overarching legal fiction that disguised a series of local settlements and compromises regarding the nationalizing attempts. Encounters usually interpreted as expressions of national indifference were also driven by ethnicity, only the meaning and content of ethnicity remained permanently contested. One can detect two types of "nationally indifferent" behavior. One was prevalent primarily among the middle class, a claim for the right to define one's ethnicity, and another was characteristic of the lower urban social strata and the peasantry, where it could have meant real indifference not only to the norms of proper behavior, but also to the categories used by the state, but not negligence of differences.

Keywords: ethnicity, nationalizing, national indifference, Romania, Transylvania

The railway mechanic Alexandru (Sándor) Czitrom arrived in Romania from Hungary in a period in which the traffic was supposed to be heavier in the opposite direction. Czitrom crossed the line between the territories under Hungarian and Romanian control in November 1919 and headed to Bucharest. His police file did not preserve the details regarding how he ended up in the city of Pascani in Moldova working in the important railway facilities. The state security police became suspicious of his presence only in 1924, but the final decision on his expulsion as a suspected spy had not yet been made even in 1930. However, the police recorded some interesting data on Czitrom, an ethnic Jew according to the official categorization, a Hungarian citizen who still spoke bad Romanian and—as the police file registered—a man who had crossed the

border both at Oradea (Nagyvárad in Hungarian) and Predeal—a mountain resort south of Braşov (Brassó, Kronstadt in German).[1]

Some of these details—unusual as they are in the light of the dominant perception of the period—raise intriguing questions concerning individual strategies in the changing world of post-World War I Central and Eastern Europe. Czitrom—who spoke Hungarian but no Hebrew or Yiddish—traveled to a country where he became part of one of the minorities, yet he made no effort to acquire citizenship, worked at a strategically important company in a strategically exposed facility for at least a decade (there is no information on his fate after 1930) despite suspicions regarding his loyalty, and—and this reveals something interesting about the perspectives of the Romanian nation state—entered the country twice during one journey, at border crossings that did not exist at that time.[2] According to the general perception of Greater Romania, it was a nationalizing state that encountered and overcame regionalist and minority resistance to its efforts.[3] Czitrom's journey, however, points to the existence of a certain space for individuals who were not complying with the rules of nationalizing and still were able to negotiate their position. Furthermore, it reveals the difficulties faced by the state (more precisely of its agents) in its efforts to act in accordance with its self-perception, while even its seemingly fixed and stable borders were becoming fluid and insecure.

The change of borders between states and sovereignty over vast territories in the wake of World War I, accompanied by the resulting mass migration, generated a rather fluid situation in territories that previously had belonged to Hungary. It did not simply mean a change of state authorities and legal frameworks, bringing new rules, norms and expectations. In addition to the adaptation efforts that

were necessary as a result of the changes, the gap between old and new, between legal norms and executive capacity, between imaginary societies and the realities on the spot opened up new possibilities to exploit—after a long war that already has taught people how to gain individual advantages in the face of an ever-growing state apparatus.

The focus of this study will be the adaptation process and this gap, and how the historical actors made use of it in Greater Romania. Individual and local cases showing how certain actors exploited the opening space and how certain social aspects—primarily ethnicity and national categorization—found expression. The overall framework of these cases remains a triadic relationship between nationalizing states and minorities,[4] with the slight modification that here the third pole of the relationship is not just one minority, but a periphery of both centers with many competing elites, often acting against their national centers.[5] But the main question does not concern the centers and state actors, but rather individuals and local communities who were trying (often forced to try) to negotiate their position after the collapse of one state and the slow emergence of another, with different rules, norms and expectations. It is also my aim to point out what is visible in terms of social agency, values and social structures beyond mere ethnic or national attempts to create a national state at every level.

Floating Borders

The transposition of the Romanian–Hungarian border and the change of sovereignty over more than 100,000 square kilometers of territory did not simply mean a new division of the geographic space and the reconfiguration of contacts between people, cultures and economies or simply new laws and rules of ethnicity and loyalty.[6] One of the most important legal aspects of the change for

2   In November 1919 the Romanian army still controlled the Eastern part of today's Hungary, up to the line of the river Tisza and the old border control in Predeal, on the border between Austria–Hungary and Romania, was already lifted and the facilities eliminated. Thus the officials who filled the formulary in 1924 projected back the actual border line with a crossing at Oradea (Nagyvárad in Hungarian), but probably realizing the ambiguity of the situation they also registered where Czitrom did enter the territory of the Kingdom of Romania. Even if it could have been true according to international law (the peace treaty was not signed and ratified at the time), it contradicted the legitimizing claims of Romania, which connected the sovereignty over Transylvania to the expression of popular will as early as December 1918.
3   See Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

4   Rogers Brubaker, "National Minorities, Nationalizing States and External National Homelands in the New Europe," in Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55–76.
5   For a more detailed explanation see Gábor Egry, "A Crossroad of Parallels: Regionalism and Nation-Building in Transylvania in the First Half of the Twentieth Century," in *Hungary and Romania Beyond National Narratives. Comparisons and Entanglements*, ed. Anders E. B. Blomqvist et al. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2013), 239–76; and Gábor Egry, "Két pogány közt? Régió, nemzet, őslakók és gyarmatosítók a két világháború közti Erdélyben," *Múltunk* 57, no. 4 (2012): 66–88.
6   For a summary of the border regime between Romania and Hungary see Péter Bencsik, "A kisebb határszéli forgalom Magyarország és a szomszédos államok között," *Magyar Kisebbség* 5, no. 2–3 (1999): 357–72, accessed July 5, 2013, http://www.jakabffy.ro/magyarkisebbseg/index.php?action=cimek&lapid=12&cikk=m990227.htm

individuals was citizenship, an institution that conferred rights and entitlements in one country but restricted movement and rights in the other. Without the possibility of dual citizenship, the issue created an exclusive bond, assigning each person to a single country, but the Trianon Treaty (1920) provided for a longer period during which individuals could make a choice and opt to move to the other country. In this case—theoretically—they were allowed to take with them their belongings and sell their real estate. It was not a complete ethnicization of citizenship, but as a substitute for the plebiscite demanded by the Hungarian actors its primary aim was to enable people to leave behind minority status and join their nation states. The idea was that more and not fewer national states would emerge as a result of this, and thus it bound citizenship more strongly to ethnicity.[7]

The most discussed aspect of the citizenship issue in the scholarship is the migration of Hungarians from the ceded territories to the rump country.[8] This is usually seen as forced or semi-voluntary movement at best, the result of the rapid and mass-scale loss of jobs among those employed in the state administration and public services. Despite the high standards of these publications, this uni-dimensional perspective bears strong affinities with the interwar propaganda and completely neglects any movement to Romania—apart from the case of leftist political émigrés—, or the possibility of moving between the two countries. Even if we lack a systematic survey of the latter phenomena, some individual cases point to the existence of a space offered by the system of citizenship options and the scarce resources of the state to control the population effectively. Some of these are very similar to the Greek–Bulgarian cases discussed by Theodora Dragostinova,[9] which show how people tried to negotiate their citizenship

choices according to what seemed advantageous and how they used arguments based on their perceptions of what decision-makers expected with regards to their ethnicity.

One such case was "discovered" by the police in 1923 in a village in Sălăj (in Hungarian Szilágy) county, relatively close to the border. The 25-year-old Károly Rácz was interrogated by the police because it turned out that he had opted for Hungary in 1921, when he had been conscripted in the Romanian army, but never actually attempted to move there. Rácz explained his behavior with reference to the influence of Samu Bartha, the Calvinist schoolteacher in the village, who also tried to avoid conscription by renouncing his Romanian citizenship. According to Rácz, Bartha prompted others to follow his example.[10] Bartha basically verified part of the story, though he denied having instigated others. But the details reveal an elaborate way of avoiding conscription without losing the potential benefits of being in Romania and not jobless in Hungary. He admitted to renouncing citizenship as early as 1920 in order to avoid being called up for military service. He was given one year to leave the country, but he appeared again in front of the enlistment committee the following May. There he revoked the option and was granted a reprieve until he graduated as schoolteacher. According to his version, the officer in charge of the committee had promised to send the documents by post, but they never arrived. Nevertheless, he was convinced he was a Romanian citizen.[11] Even if Bartha was caught red handed in this awkward situation, the decision of the authorities was very protracted; he was only expelled in September 1924,[12] returning later every year as a visitor.

While Bartha obviously tried to gain something from the shift of borders and his decision to remain in one place, the case of Ákos Hirsch, a restaurateur in Aiud (Nagyenyed in Hungarian), exemplifies the potential to move physically between Hungary and Romania. Hirsch was charged with having insulted and beaten an official, an agent of the local State Security Police (*Siguranța*) under very dubious circumstances.[13] When the investigation started the police realized that Hirsch had neither Romanian citizenship nor a proper residence permit—despite running a restaurant for two years. The investigation discovered that

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7 For the effects of the system of citizenship options see also Annamarie H. Sammartino, *The Impossible Border. Germany and the East 1914–1922* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), 105–6; 118–19.

8 Still the best overview is István Mócsy, *The Effects of World War I: The Uprooted: Hungarian Refugees and their Impact on Domestic Politics, 1918–1921* (New York: Social Sciences Monographs–Brooklyn College Press, 1983). See also István Gergely Szüts, "Barakkok és tisztviselővillák. A trianoni menekülteket befogadó telepek helyzete Miskolcon az 1920-as években," *Kisebbségkutatás* 18, no. 3 (2009): 435–52; Balázs Ablonczy, "Sérelem, jogfolytonosság, frusztráció. Alsó-Fehér vármegye menekült törvényhatósága Budapesten," in Balázs Ablonczy, *Nyombiztosítás. Letűnt magyarok* (Pozsony: Kalligram, 2010), 159–76. However, all of these works are based on the official statistics compiled by the National Office of Refugees (*Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal*, OMH), which tends to give much higher figures regarding occupations in the state sector among the refugees than the official statistics show for the last years of Hungary as the total number of state employees.

9 Theodora Dragostinova, "Speaking National: Nationalizing the Greeks of Bulgaria 1900–1939," *Slavic Review* 67 (2008): 154–81, esp. 174–79.

10 Arhivele Naționale Secția Județeană Cluj (ANSJ CJ), fond 209, inventar 399, Inspectoratul de Poliției Cluj, dosar 786. f. 1.

11 Ibid., f. 27.

12 Ibid., f. 14.

13 ANSJ CJ fond 209, inventar 399, Inspectoratul de Poliție Cluj, dosar 182, f. 63. The agent tried to blackmail Hirsch, who refused and threw him out.

Hirsch had served in the Honvéd regiment in Aiud and had returned from the war in November 1918. A year later he moved to Budapest, as he had not found a job. In Budapest he joined his brother, a bank director, who employed him as a traveling agent. However, he missed the deadline to apply for Hungarian citizenship and even though he lived in Budapest undisturbed until 1926, that year he was asked by the police to "clarify" his legal status. (He suspected a denunciation.) The police instructed him to collect the necessary documentation to apply for citizenship—most importantly a certificate from Aiud, proving his birth and residence there. To travel to Romania he needed a passport, but the Hungarian authorities refused to issue one, as he was not able to prove his Hungarian citizenship. The Romanian consulate also refused to issue him passport on the grounds that he lacked documentation proving his Romanian citizenship.[14]

Nevertheless, the police—with the help of a personal acquaintance from Aiud—gave him permission to cross the border—valid for 5 days in order to gain the documents. Hirsch entered Romania on June 14, 1926, but did not seem to bother himself too much with the time limits set by the police. It took him six days to reach Aiud. He claimed that it was his friends who had advised him to remain there, where according to them he would have less difficulty finding a job than in Budapest. Here his lack of identification documents was seen as an advantage. At least it would make it harder for the Romanian army to find Hirsch, whom they sought as deserter, at least this was the reasoning. After a police inspection in September, he reported himself at the local branch of the police and was given a certificate and residency permit. The *Siguranţa* also asked him for clarification, and after a detailed explanation of his situation the local chief ensured him that he could remain in Aiud until he received a different order. A year later he even successfully acquired a soldier's book and reservist status. The situation only changed after his conflict with the police agent, which led to his expulsion in 1929.[15]

Although he was expelled from the country, Hirsch's case—which is only one of many[16]—points to the potential to use the gaps in bureaucratic control

and probably the rivalry between different state organs. He was already under the radar in Budapest—probably avoiding the many duties of a citizen. He admitted to capitalizing deliberately on his lack of documentation in Romania to avoid military service, and it is highly probable that he managed to bribe the *Siguranţa* chief. This set up enabled him to play a relatively prominent role in the local community, taking over the management of a popular restaurant from his earlier employer, hardly the act of someone hiding from the authorities. Had he not made the mistake of not bribing the insulted police agent, he probably would have been able to remain in Aiud for many more years. However, as soon as he was exposed, his dubious status worked against him. He was Jewish, a non-citizen, and had lived for a long time in Hungary—all factors that proved his non-Romanian nature and made him suspicious. But the most important conclusion to be drawn from these cases concerns not the potential of repressive action from the side of the state, but the surprisingly large room for individuals to exploit the citizenship regimes, the border, and not least of all the apparent incapacity of the state to exert the control it claimed to have over its inhabitants, citizens and territory. It is hard to fail to notice that the lack of coordination among different authorities also played a significant role in the success of individual ventures.

Dangerous Border Zones

In light of such cases, even the spy or irredentist hysteria of the interwar period seems a bit more understandable. All the more so, because in many senses it was just a perpetuation of the hysteric actions of the state during World War I. In particular following the Romanian invasion of Transylvania, the Hungarian authorities tended to treat many Romanian as suspicious, and even if judiciary organs often successfully restored the position of the wrongly accused, the population was definitely instructed to see members of other ethnic groups as enemies, without differentiation.[17] Sometimes individuals became victims of this

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14   Ibid., f. 60–62.

15   Ibid.

16   A striking example of how easily some people avoided state control or at least the implementation of orders was Antal Papp, an important Hungarian official in Cluj (Kolozsvár), who later became a high official in the Prime Minister's office responsible for policymaking regarding Hungarian minorities. Papp was expulsed five times in 1919–1920, but he simply ignored the decision. In the end it was the Hungarian

government that requested Papp's expatriation, and he duly complied. Nándor Bárdi, "A budapesti kormányzatok magyarságpolitikai intézményrendszere és stratégiája, 1918–1938," *Limes* 25, no.1 (2012): 69–110; 104, endnote 70.

17   The cases of Romanian schoolteachers from Braşov county are very instructive in this sense. Here the county administration and the educational authorities fired everyone on the basis of the slightest suspicion, often against testimonies supporting the case of the indicted, while higher authorities or the courts usually acquitted them. See Arhivele Naţionale Secţia Judeţeană Braşov (ANSJ BV), Fond Prefectură Braşov, Serviciul Administrativ, dosar 44/1918, 51/1918, 56/1918.

hysteria well after the war, like Sándor Kulcsár from the Szeklerland [Székely Land], who was collecting donations in January and February 1925 in the region around Turda (Torda in Hungarian) and Aiud for a new Calvinist church in his home village. Here he encountered Inocan Clemente, an old Romanian peasant, who—sensing danger in the presence of a foreigner—pretended to be a Hungarian. After their long discussion on Kulcsár and his mission, when Kulcsár also spoke of his confused views on international politics, Clemente concocted a weird story of a large scale conspiracy, rooted in Kulcsár's village. Even if the gendarmes in the Szeklerland warned against this pure nonsense, Kulcsár was forced to "admit" to being part of an irredentist network.[18] Not only was geographic and ethnic "foreignness" turned into proof of a crime, but Clemente used his knowledge of Hungarian to lure Kulcsár into a trap, highlighting how national belonging became an issue of secrecy, confidence and security for many "ordinary people" with the events of the war and its aftermath.

However, foreigners and strangers were not necessarily specific persons, they could have been everywhere, in particular in the border zones. These areas were usually seen as exposed to the danger of denationalization or even already having suffered the process of denationalization, which from Bucharest's perspective meant a de-Romanianization. Such assumptions were usually based on a series of individual encounters, revealing differences between Old Kingdom and Transylvanian Romanians, Hungarians and Romanians.[19] One of the most notable cases was that of Vasile Gioara, who, having begun but not completing his secondary school studies, arrived in the northwestern corner of Greater Romania on December 1, 1922. After finding employment at the local court he supplemented his earnings by teaching Romanian to minority officials—quite successfully according to his self-evaluation. Half a year later he was accused of stealing underwear from a local merchant. During the investigation he was abused and insulted, and also beaten up by the accuser and the Romanian gendarmes. Even if Sieni (Szinérváralja in Hungarian) was a marketplace with a Romanian majority and a local center of Romanian cultural and political activity during the dual monarchy of Austria–Hungary, he saw around him Hungarians and Jews and Romanians whose "souls" had been completely Magyarized, i.e. they had pro-Hungarian sentiments or were at most a "mixture" of ethnicities. In a complaint and request submitted to Queen Mary, in order to emphasize

how foreign these regions were in Romania he contended that there were only three Old Kingdom Romanians in Sieni, and according to him the population assumed that Old Kingdom rule would soon disappear.[20]

Lack of proper knowledge and the failure of locals to meet expectations of travelers concerning how proper Hungarians or Romanians should behave were not specific to Romanians. Hungarian travelers were sometimes misled too. Mihály Török, an inhabitant of Budapest and an engineer by profession, was so enraged by his fellow traveler between Oradea and Cluj (Kolozsvár) that he submitted a complaint at the border police after returning from Cluj in 1939. He described a conversation with a certain Antal Kornél, a decent person who talked to him all the way. However decent the companion was, Török concluded that he must have been a Romanophile Hungarian, since during their journey he narrated the Romanian version of Transylvanian history. The fact that such a Hungarian can exist outraged the official in the Prime Minister's office who read the report, but before having Antal Kornél expelled he requested information on his person. It turned out that he was in fact not Antal Kornél, but Cornel Anton, a Romanian lawyer from Lugoj (Lugos in Hungarian), an old member of the Romanian National Party.[21] He spoke perfect Hungarian (as demonstrated by the fact that Török had not noticed any accent) because he was socialized before World War I and kept close contacts with the local Hungarian middle class. Furthermore, indirectly reinforcing the claim of many Romanians that these areas were denationalized, his wife—a "dame of fashion"[22]—loved to wear clothes bought from Budapest tailors. This was the reason for his frequent trips to the Hungarian capital.

These individual cases exemplify how fixed expectations of proper ethnic behavior encountered realities on the ground. But the result was not a reassessment of what it meant to be Romanian or Hungarian (for example accepting proper national history, speaking Romanian, favoring co-ethnics over others etc.), but rather an even stronger desire to transform people into proper nationals. It was similar in the case of many state organs, and these attitudes often mutually reflected each other. At least people very soon learned what their

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18   ANIC Ministerul Justiţiei Direcţia Judiciară, Inventar 1116, dosar 91/1925.

19   See Gábor Egry, "A Crossroad of Parallels," 251–60.

20   ANIC Ministerul Justiţiei Direcţia Judiciară, Inventar 1116, dosar 103/1923, f. 6–7.

21   Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MOL) K 28 155. csomó 260. tétel 1939-O-15375, f. 2–4. It is highly ironic that simultaneously the Romanian State Security also kept note of Cornel as a suspicious adherent of Iuliu Maniu. Arhivele Naţionale Secţia Judeţeană Timiş (ANSJ TM) fond 193, inventar 828, Legiunea Jandarmilor Severin, dosar 16/1940, f. 89–90.

22   MOL K 28 155. csomó 260. tétel 1939-O-15375. f. 2–4.

superiors expected from them, and even when they acted differently, they usually tried to justify their behavior with explanations garbed in the proper national language.[23] On the other hand, the closeness of the border and the distance from Bucharest provided for a certain freedom from the power of the center, at least in the early years of Greater Romania. This was expressed by defiant gestures, such as that of Matei Gheorghe, a judge in Oradea. He was presiding over a case in which the court wanted to auction the house of the accused in order to pay the costs of defense. In the face of protest from the accused, the judge told him not to nurture any hope of avoiding his fate, he—the judge—had earlier dealt with ministers from Budapest, who were all counts, not nobodies like General Avarescu (the prime minister), and nonetheless he had not given ground. Maybe—the judge advised—it would be better for him to seek refuge in Hungary.

But the dangerous nature of border zones made state organs intervene often enough to encounter again and again the resistance generated by their lack of knowledge of local contexts. The most telling example of this kind of conflict is probably the attempt of the army general staff to ban every single firefighter organization in Transylvania. The soldiers argued that these organizations were popular in Transylvanian towns and villages, but even though they were recruited from among the locals they offered charitable services only in limited cases. Furthermore, during the period of Hungarian rule they had served as a means of Hungarian propaganda, so Romanians had been excluded from these associations in the Romanian villages. They continued to function in 1919–1921, with the exception of Satu Mare (Szatmárnémeti), where well known Hungarian irredentists reestablished the association only in September 1921. They spread the network of associations into pure Hungarian villages, especially along the border. For the army staff this often false information seemed to prove irrefutably that

these organizations were the backbone of a dangerous irredentist organization that posed a threat to the security of Romania, all the more so because in the villages they were useless without the necessary facilities.[24]

The order caused a scandal, practically all of the prefects in Transylvania protested. It was revoked, but the general staff received a long letter from the mayor of Caransebeş (Karánsebes in Hungarian), a German–Romanian city. The anger of the official is palpable in every word of the text, in which he contests everything presumed by the general staff. He was infuriated by the categorization of the firefighters as irredentists, especially as Caransebeş had been free of Hungarians when they had established the association in the mid-nineteenth century, and during its fifty years of its existence it had been dominated by Germans and Romanians. But he also protested the allegation of uselessness and portrayed the association as the embodiment of utmost altruism and humanist heroism.[25] "Every good son of the country should have a place among the voluntary firefighters, irrespective of his language"—concluded the letter. Given this courageous defense, it is not surprising that the Caransebeş Voluntary Firefighter Association still existed a decade later and its members still used Hungarian as their internal language, both in formal and informal situations.[26]

Despite occasional setbacks, like the firefighter problem, the border zone remained an area of constant danger to the security of the state in the official imaginary. It was transformed in this sense not only by the threat from abroad, but also by perceptions of its inhabitants, who in general were seen as not Romanians or "bad" Romanians. On the other hand, somewhat surprisingly, Hungarian officials tended to invoke a similar view of the respective area, with the difference that for them it was the nationalizing activity of Romania that represented danger. It threatened the national consciousness of Hungarians, and as a result it threatened to separate Hungarians from Hungary. However, the greater the danger posed by these zones, the less well they were known. Increasingly they came to be seen by both sides as alien areas that needed to be transformed into safe and secure sites of national existence—places to reconquer. In this struggle, language and loyalty became crucial for everyone, setting expectations that too often remained unfulfilled. This kind of simultaneous—spatial and social—

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23 See the case of state prosecutor Fabius Rezei, who did not thoroughly censor some issues of the journal Magyar Kisebbség, very probably because of his personal ties to its editor in chief, Elemér Jakabffy, a prominent figure in Lugoj's middle-class world. But when he was denounced in June 1924, Rezei denied even being acquainted with him. He pointed out instead his credentials as a faithful Romanian, in this capacity as chauvinist as Jakabffy was a chauvinist Hungarian. ANIC Ministerul Justiţiei Direcţia Judiciară, inventar 1116, dosar 103/1924, f. 15. However, a report of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry from the same month on censorship in Lugoj listed other reasons. First, the local military commander requested self-censorship from the press instead of effective censoring by the authorities. Second, the officials in the county were adherents of the Romanian National Party and they hated the liberals in power so much that they allowed any kind of attack on them to be printed, even if it was harmful to Romania, too. Ignác Romsics, ed., *Magyarok kisebbségben és szórványban. A magyar Miniszterelnökség Nemzetiségi és Kisebbségpolitikai Osztályának válogatott iratai 1919–1944* (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 1995), 168–70.

24 ANSJ TM fond 223, Prefectură Judeţului Severin, dosar 24/1924, f. 172–73. The firefighters in the Old Kingdom were subordinated to the army.

25 Ibid., f. 190–91.

26 ANSJ TM, fond 223, Prefectură Judeţului Severin, dosar 40/1932, f. 1.

liminality and the permanent tension between the self-confident nationalizing attempts on the one hand and the very different local realities on the other contributed to the emergence of a space that enabled individuals and locals to find a different modus vivendi, often more relaxed than the legal fictions of Greater Romania.

Symbolic Conquests and Uneasy Peaces: The Renaming of Streets

In order to transform the border zone, its symbolic conquest seemed part of the solution. Especially as the symbolic reconfiguration of the whole province had already started in 1919. The changes of memorials and statues, the building of "national" edifices, the new language regimes in the cities—these were all aimed at demonstrating Romanian presence and conferring a sense of Romanian homeland to the otherwise alien areas. The desired result was a new urban and rural space that would fulfill expectations in this regard, losing its foreign character. Many small details were taken care of, many devices used to achieve this goal, shop signs in Hungarian or German were replaced with Romanians or bilingual ones, street names were changed, statues and memorials were replaced, administrative buildings were furnished with warnings: We only speak Romanian! But again, local realities often visibly contradicted nationalizing projects. Shop signs, inscriptions, and advertisements were grammatically incorrect even after two decades, prompting repeated complaints from the local authorities.[27] Statues were hard to finance based only on private donations, and often polite state pressure was ineffective.[28] The use of Romanian street names was sometimes deemed impractical, for example when public health issues were at stake and the authorities did not want to risk the outbreak of an epidemic.[29]

The conflict between full fledged nationalizing projects and individual efforts or local realities was as frequent in this respect as in the cases above. The importance of local contexts is best shown by a comparison of street renaming practices across Transylvania. In some cities it started in 1919, and the regional inspectorate of the Ministry of Interior urged localities in May

1920 to finish renaming. They also gave instructions regarding the new street names. Historical names, such as the names of members of the royal family or significant personalities of Romania from past and present, were seen as the best choice. For practical reasons they also ordered the indication of the old street names in minority languages.[30] Despite the central instructions, the outcome of the process of renaming varied in every locality, reflecting not only the different nationalist inclinations of the new Romanian leaders, but also their own relationship with the local space and society.

The two extremes were Cluj and Oradea.[31] In the former a commission consisting of 12 people proposed eighteen street names for immediate change. After long planning, every street was renamed in March 1920.[32] The prefect signed the decree on March 15, 1920, the Hungarian national day, stressing the symbolic importance of the act. The result was peculiar, as neither Hungarian personalities nor original street names were preserved, but the new system of street names was an almost exact mirror image of the Hungarian nomenclature. Not only did the main arteries retain the names of the Romanian counterparts of the Hungarian dignitaries after whom the streets had been originally named (for instance the street leading from the railway station, Francis Joseph, was renamed King Ferdinand), but in every other case the committee tried to find the corresponding Romanian personality or institution. Honvéd Street (the Hungarian word for "home defense," or the military) was renamed strada Dorobanților, after a Romanian infantry unit. Gróf Kun (Count Kun) street, named after the founder of a famous secondary school in Orăştie (Szászváros), was renamed Gojdu, after Emanoil Gojdu, a nineteenth-century lawyer from Pest-Buda, who established a foundation supporting Romanian students in the Hungarian capital. Hunyadi Street, named after the fifteenth-century military leader and a hero in the wars with the Ottoman Empire, was renamed Stefan cel Mare, the Prince of Moldova, who also fought against the Turks in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The symbolic text of the city remained very similar, but was completely re-nationalized. It preserved the local specificities, the geographic distribution of different types of names in a city where Romanians

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27   ANSJ BV fond 2, Prefectură Judeţului Braşov, Cabinetul Prefectului, dosar 57/1941, f. 24; ANIC DGP dosar 56/1921, f. 69; ANIC Ministerul Propagandei Naţionale, Presa Interna, dosar 186, f. 98.

28   Arhivele Naţionale Secţia Judeţeană Mureş (ANSJ MS) Prefectură Judeţului Mureş, inventar 460, dosar 17/1921, f. 1–2; Ibid., dosar 11/1923, f. 42.

29   ANSJ TM fond 160, Chestura Poliţiei Municipiului Timişoara, inventar 122, dosar 12/1934, f. 102. The order of the interim mayor of the city regarding the location and time of vaccination gave Romanian and Hungarian street names in six cases.

30   ANSJ TM fond 233. Prefectură Judeţului Severin, dosar 162/1920, f. 1, f. 31.

31   For the street names in Cluj see Lajos Asztalos, *Kolozsvár. Helynév és településtörténeti adattár* (Kolozsvár: Kolozsvár Társaság–Polis Könyvkiadó, 2004).

32   ANIC Consiliul Dirigent (CD), Secţia Administraţia Judeţene şi Comunale, dosar 66/1920, f. 44, f. 221–27.

were not numerous enough to have had an impact on such decisions, but simply "flipping" it, from Hungarian to Romanian.

Simultaneously, the new leaders of Oradea embarked on a street renaming project, but with a more limited scope.[33] Their list consisted of only fifty streets, and the names were clearly selected with less sophistication and consideration. The city council even retained some Hungarian names, for example Ferenc Deák or Kálmán Rimanóczy, and proposed other ones that were very much at odds with the "nationalization of street names", as the decision claimed. As street names, Saint Ladislaus or Calvin would not convey "Romanianness." Nevertheless, the changes were enough to erect a new symbolic space, fundamentally different from the pre-World War I space, highlighting the city's alleged Romanianness, but leaving a hodgepodge of symbolic geography, with large areas still bearing Hungarian street names.

But these extremes were far from being the mainstream solution, especially as both Cluj and Oradea were basically Hungarian cities, with predominantly Hungarian and assimilated Jewish populations. Other cases reveal much more clearly how the local Romanian elites—if there was one—navigated between nationalizing efforts and local traditions. In Făgăraş (Fogaras in Hungarian), a small county seat with a Romanian majority, surrounded by Romanian and German villages, and featuring a seventeenth-century fortress, the new city council finished the renaming spontaneously as soon as October 1919. Thus they could refute the abovementioned request of the Ministry concerning the indication of the old street names in the language of the minorities. Their argumentation frankly expressed the nationalizing aim: there were too many chauvinist Hungarian names among them, contrary to the spirit of the new Romanian state.[34] However, the new system of street names was still not entirely Romanian and—and this was probably even more important—it addressed some symbolic deficiencies of the Hungarians. The strategy of the council was to merge the local, traditional Romanian street names with more symbolic new ones. Often they re-baptized the streets, simply making the local name official (like Tobacconists Street or strada Galatului). In other cases they just translated and preserved the nationally neutral one (Mill Street, strada Inului, Livezii – Meadow Street). There were the usual additions of Romanian national figures, although here the selection was made from Transylvanian and cultural

figures, neglecting the politicians and the personalities of the Old Kingdom. And finally, two street names referred to the German and Hungarian minorities, strada Luterana (Lutheran Street) and strada Săcuilor (Szekler's [Székely] Street). The latter was the object of the symbolic elevation of the Hungarians. A street with this name had existed before the war, but its local Romanian name was—probably not without reason—Ţigania de Jos, Lower Gypsy quarter. Now the council renamed this street Cemetery Street and transferred the name Szekler's [Székely] street to another street in a more decent part of the city.[35]

A bit surprisingly, the Romanian elite from Lugoj, which had strong civic traditions and enjoyed a relatively high, middle-class social status (exemplified by Cornel Anton), executed the central order almost to the letter, adding only a small number of local Romanian personalities to the new nomenclature of streets,[36] unlike their counterparts from Caransebeş, where the street names reflected the strong local consciousness already shown by the mayor's letter concerning the voluntary firefighters. Here the new names consisted of only a handful of personalities, mainly local ones, and the council usually translated the original, mostly neutral names into Romanian. It was all the more simple, as quite a few Romanians had figured among the earlier street names too, due to the strong Romanian presence in the city before the war.[37] Probably the most conscious effort to employ street names in the attempt to transform the border zone from a foreign area into a "Romanian" zone was made in Sânnicolau Mare (Nagyszentmiklós in Hungarian, Groß Sankt Nikolaus in German), a city with a 40 percent Romanian, 20 percent Hungarian, 30 percent German and 10 percent Serbian speaking population. Here the local Romanian schoolteacher, who drafted the proposal, suggested exclusively Romanian historic figures. He argued that street names are means of educating the people, and the city should be made Romanian. He thought that everyday encounters with street names would make the inhabitants learn Romanian history.[38]

Another different pattern emerged in localities without significant Romanian populations, where the local administration was not taken over by Romanians. All around the Banat in German villages the main thrust of street renaming

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33   ANIC CD, Secţia Administraţia Judeţene şi Comunale, dosar 46/1920, f. 130–35.

34   ANSJ BV fond 3, Inventar 672, Prefectură Judeţului Făgăraş, Serviciul Administrativ, dosar 20/1922, f. 5.

35   Ibid. Despite the obvious gesture, the relocation instead of the elimination of the street name and thus the concession to the symbolic presence of Hungarians were still part of the symbolic conquest and made this attempt even more profound. While before World War I the prestige of certain parts of the city was decided by the Hungarians, now the Romanians successfully claimed authority over this.

36   ANSJ TM fond 223, Prefectură Judeţului Severin, dosar 162/1919, f. 4–8.

37   ANSJ TM fond 223, Prefectură Judeţului Severin, dosar 162/1919, f. 9.

38   ANSJ TM fond 69, Prefectură Timiş-Torontal, dosar 1/1919, f. 42.

was to replace the Magyarizing street names, which in general dated from the last two decades of dualism, with the ones they had born precedingly, and these proposals were usually approved by the county administration.[39]

In general the first factor influencing the outcome and nature of the renaming process was the presence and size of a Romanian middle class that would be able to take over the administration of the cities easily. Their stance regarding the expectations of Bucharest and the Ruling Council (Consiliul Dirgent) and regarding the minorities partly depended on the pre-history of the change of sovereignty. In Făgăraş, where Hungarian–Romanian political competition had even led to violence in the late dualist period, the relatively strong Romanians implemented a more exclusivist symbolic map than their counterparts in Caransebeş, where the Hungarian challenge was weaker earlier. Meanwhile in Lugoj, a city similar to Făgăraş the new nomenclature was more nationalistic and laid more emphasis on Old Kingdom personalities. It was probably a result of the stronger Hungarian presence than in Caransebeş and the protracted change of sovereignty, both of which made external help indispensable.[40] In the case of Cluj and Oradea, neither of which had had any socially or symbolically significant Romanian presence before 1918, the symbolic importance of Cluj and the closeness of the border to Oradea could have been decisive in determining the outcome of the street renaming.

Nevertheless, the transformation of city nomenclatures brought about neither the inevitable reconfiguration of mental maps nor the practical use of the new street names. Even if publicly the new names were used, often only due to the pressure of the administration, individuals could choose either set of names, and many users, irrespective of their nationality, often shifted between new and old names in everyday usage.[41] Despite the efforts of the authorities, the postal service rarely refused to deliver letters and parcels with non-Romanian addresses, including street names. This practice lasted well into World War II, when the Făgăraş State Security Service reported the arrival of "irredentist" postal materials that were labeled with pre-World War I addresses.[42]

It is worth noting, without going into detail, that local factors also affected the fate of statues and memorials. In cities that were seen as crucial for the nationalizing project Hungarian signs were soon removed and replaced with Romanian ones. In other places—here Caransebeş, where the local citizenry defended the statue of Francis Joseph from being removed,[43] again is a good example—the local civic culture deflected these efforts. Once again there were localities in which either the weight of Romanians or the connections binding different groups of the local society led to a more balanced topography of memorials, like in Oradea.[44]

As in the case of the efforts to pacify the allegedly dangerous border zone, expectations regarding symbolic practices and rituals on the one hand and local realities on the other often contradicted each other. The demand and obligation to flag houses at festive occasions with pennants kept in a proper state was inherited from pre-World War I Hungary and kept intact by the Romanian administration. (Even the Hungarian legal provision remained in force.)[45] Nevertheless, to execute such an order was always problematic. Not only did the inhabitants rarely care for the flags, there were again informal local arrangements that reduced the burden on the population. In this regard, Hungarians or Germans were relieved of this burdensome duty, but so were Romanians, even if the authorities devoted more attention to the deviant practices of minorities. In the city of Abrud (Abrudbánya in Hungarian), at the heart of the symbolic Romanian area of Ţară Moţilor, the display of flags was limited to the main arteries. As Vlad Florian, a gendarme (!), explained in 1941 when he was indicted for having failed to display a flag on his house on Constitution Day, he did not even have a pennant, as local custom did not expect this from inhabitants of secondary streets.[46]

In other cases the unfamiliarity of Old Kingdom Romanians with Transylvania caused misunderstandings. Hungarian and German priests tended to refuse to officiate masses on the occasion of Romanian national holidays, including Kings Day.[47] Nevertheless, when the prefect of Timişoara (Temesvár) proposed the indictment of the Hungarian Roman Catholic Bishop, Gyula Glattfelder, on charges of slander against the nation, the Ministry of Justice

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39 Ibid., f. 17–41.

40 Lugoj was among the cities where the French occupation forces reestablished Hungarian administration under the terms of the Belgrade military convention in the Spring of 1919. See Elemér Jakabffy and György Páll, *A bánsági magyarság húsz éve Romániában (1919–1939)* (Budapest: Stúdium, 1939), 29–30.

41 Gábor Egry, "Keresztező párhuzamosok. Etnicitás és középosztálybeli kultúra a két világháború közti Erdélyben," in *Határokon túl. Tanulmányok Mark Pittaway (1971–2010) emlékére,* ed. Eszter Bartha and Zsuzsanna Varga (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2012), 282–301.

42 ANIC Ministerul de Interne, Cabinetul Ministeriului dosar 22/1941, vol. I, f. 56.

43 ANIC DGP dosar 8/1919, f. 240.

44 ANIC DGP dosar 56/1921, f. 311.

45 ANSJ MS, Prefectură Judeţului Mureş, inventar 460, dosar 28/1923, f. 1.

46 ANSJ CJ fond 209, inventar 399, Inspectoratul de Poliţiei Cluj, dosar 69, f. 6.

47 ANSJ MS, fond Prefectură Judeţului Mureş, inventar 460, dosar 11/1923, f. 20–22.

refused. The county chief objected, contending that Glattfelder had refused to celebrate a mass on the name day of the king, but he always did hold mass to honor Hungary's first king, Saint Stephen. The experts in the ministry concluded that the "prefect has no idea of the principles of the Catholic religion" and this practice is "neither an insult nor the expression of malevolence."[48]

In the end, full-fledged Romanianization of the dangerous border zone was exchanged for a series of local compromises, sometimes uneasy balances between competing claims. Shop signs written in incorrect Romanian and accompanied by flawless Hungarian and German inscriptions, Hungarian and German memorials and statues scattered over the cities, or the extremely varied use of different street names were all signs of the partial failure of nationalizing efforts, at least temporarily. However, what emerged was not a stable and lasting solution, but rather an uneasy peace that was too influenced by local and regional factors and definitely contradicted the legal fiction of the state. It rested on informal arrangements, on how certain local or regional actors tried to find a space between the nationalizing claims of the central state and the possibilities on the ground, and it was too easily swept away by any sudden turn of fortunes.

Loyal Servants

In this confusing world of strangers and suspicions loyalty became crucial for the success of nationalizing projects. But as we have seen not many ideal typical Romanians (or Hungarians) were to be found, while public services nonetheless had to be provided. As the new administration faced a serious lack of human resources, it was often forced to retain even people who refused to take the oath or pledge of obedience demanded in 1919. This was particularly true in public services where professional knowledge and experience was necessary for smooth operation. This situation inevitably raised some questions, such as how to ensure one's loyalty or how to prove suspicions regarding some officials.

It was impossible to make ethnic belonging a decisive criterion, at least at the time. Thus language use emerged as the crucial factor, much as it had in dualist Hungary. This was in line with the symbolic efforts and the emerging language regime too, making it an obvious choice. Nevertheless, given the high

number of public servants without sufficient knowledge of Romanian and the lack of resources to provide them with opportunities to learn the official language,[49] in the first few years an effort to learn the basics of Romanian turned out to be enough. After the mid-1920s, the situation was informally settled. Minority officials could remain at their posts with a basic knowledge of Romanian.

Nevertheless, this issue was easy to raise and soon became a favorite method of contesting someone's loyalty. The case of the Post Office in Reşiţa (Resicabánya in Hungarian) is a telling example in this regard. Here the district administration was taken over by Cornel Grofşorean, a Romanian notability from Severin County (Krassó-Szörény in Hungarian). His office communicated with the seat of the county, Caransebeş, by post and over the telephone, the latter of which was also managed by the post office. The postmaster was Antal Heinrich, and the officials who were mentioned in the case were Anna Velcselán (or Velcelan) and Emilia Papp (or Pop). After a series of conflicts, Grofşorean submitted a complaint against Heinrich and the officials in early 1920. He described an occasion on which his call to the county seat was supposedly sabotaged by Velcselán, who had not been available for 20-30 minutes. According to Grofşorean, Heinrich showed opposition from the first day of Romanian administration. He refused to install Romanian inscriptions, put a Romanian sign over the entrance, display the Romanian flag, or learn Romanian. He infused his subordinates with this spirit, who also refused to sign the pledge of obedience, and Velcselán, whose name was Romanian, was filled with pro-Hungarian sentiment,[50] just like Emilia Papp, who traveled to Budapest after refusing the oath.

It is hardly surprising that the testimonies of Heinrich and Velcselán painted a different picture of the case, emphasizing the brutish and uncivilized behavior of Grofşorean and his companions, who even called Velcselán a "bitch."[51] Heinrich's superior, V. Cornea, the regional postal director, refused to accept Grofşorean's accusations and denied his claim to replace Heinrich with a Romanian. His main argument was the lack of sufficient Romanian personnel, since the post demanded educated professionals. Nevertheless, the whole

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48   ANIC Ministerul Justitiei Direcţia Judiciară, inventar 1116, dosar 98/1922, f. 15.

49   ANSJ BV fond 3, inventar 672, Prefectură Judeţului Făgăraş, Serviciul Administrativ dosar 6/1921, f. 1–4. The vice-prefect of Trei Scaune county made a request to his counterpart in Făgăraş, asking whether the localities could host Hungarian officials who would like to learn Romanian as trainees. Even though the number of candidates was small, only 6, the village authorities refused due to the lack of necessary financial means.

50   ANSJ TM fond 223, Prefectură Judeţului Severin, dosar 19/1919, f. 12–13.

51   Ibid. f. 6, f. 14–15, f. 17–18.

encounter offers insight into the different interpretations of (dis)loyalty when someone's ethnicity was not considered "sufficient." Grofşorean's claims and accusations offer a list of criteria, of which the use of Romanian was only one, followed by the refusal of the pledge, the use of Hungarian letterhead and the Hungarian uniform, the lack of Romanian flags on the edifice of the post, and not least of all the lack of enthusiasm in the post. Furthermore, he perceived Velcselán and probably also Papp as renegade Romanians.

These claims were countered with a multiplicity of arguments. Firstly, Heinrich stressed his professional loyalty to the postal service and emphasized that every time Grofşorean requested something he had not refused to do it, but rather had dutifully consulted his superiors in order to avoid a conflict of loyalties before fulfilling the demands. Secondly, they highlighted how Grofşorean maintained an uncivilized regime, how he or his colleagues used swearwords and shouted at female employees. Probably it was also quite pointed when Velcselán mentioned that she responded in Hungarian because Grofşorean's office had requested the connection with Caransebeş in this language, turning one of his accusations against him. Thirdly, Cornea highlighted that, contrary to Grofşorean's assumption, Emilia Papp was the daughter of an Orthodox priest, thus completely reliable and beyond all doubt concerning her loyalty.

But all of these arguments still accepted Grofşorean's implicit assumption that ethnicity has something to do with loyalty. However, Heinrich's closing argument shed light on a different concept, a civic one, deriving from the traditional *Landespatriotismus* of Banat Swabians. Closing his report, he refuted Grofşorean's charge that he would have been an "angry Hungarian chauvinist" before the war, especially as he was descended from German parents and he had never abandoned his German roots, even when he had been called upon to Magyarize his family name. But—he continued—this self-consciousness made it comprehensible that he did not become an "angry Romanian chauvinist" either. "I want to be a loyal citizen of my new country, I want to work in my homeland, but I do not want to make politics," he wrote, pointing to honest work as a public servant, the introduction of Romanian language instruction at the post office and the fulfillment of his responsibilities as a reservist lieutenant as proof of his loyalty.

Nevertheless, ethnicity remained the key to loyalty, and language use, as its most easily detectable aspect, became the central criterion of its assessment. Hence the frequent reference in reports to the practice of speaking Hungarian as a sign of disloyalty, especially among those whom the observers saw as

Romanians.[52] But if being Romanian equaled being loyal, then nationality could serve as the foundation for many types of different claims—opening up a specific model of justification. In this argumentation, Romanianness meant sharing the sufferings of the nation and its glory, irrespective of the real life stories of individuals.

An excellent example is given by the complaint of the members of the Timişoara police from 1922.[53] In this document the rank and file and non-commissioned officers of the police listed their material hardships and grievances, the low salary, the lack of suitable winter clothing, and poor housing. They asked the Minister of Interior to intervene. In order to make their demand more justified, they detailed how they were suffering under Hungarian rule and how they expected the new, free Romania to provide them with a better standard of living. However, they painstakingly added the details of their service records to the petition, thereby revealing that most of them had been employed at the city police under Hungarian rule—not really proof of having been oppressed.

This kind of argumentative strategy did not even require Romanian ethnicity from the petitioners. Under certain circumstances communities organized around other characteristics of identity could also employ it. For example, people living on the outskirts of the city Turda, who were often harassed by armed groups in 1918–1919, requested a new gendarme post in order to ensure their protection. In their petition they invoked the role their forbears had played in the glorious days of Horea, Closca and Avram Iancu—typical historical references for Transylvanian Romanians.[54] However, among the petitioners one finds a significant number of Hungarian names, and as the region was mixed in the ethnic sense it is reasonable to think that not all of the petitioners were Romanian, much as in the case of an initiative to erect

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52 For example ANIC Ministerul Justitiei Direcţia Judiciară, inventar 1116, dosar 160/1920, f. 11. In this report the Romanian leaders of Abrud were described as renegades, primarily because they used Hungarian publicly, usually in defiance of the Old Kingdom rule.

53 ANIC CD, II: Secţia Siguranţa Generală, dosar 1/1922, f. 28–29, f. 30–31.

54 See Maria Bucur, *Heroes and Victims. Remembering War in Twentieth-Century Romania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 98–143 and Gábor Egry, "An Obscure Object of Desire: the Myth of Alba Iulia and Its Social Functions in Past and Present," in *Proceedings of the Conference Myth-Making and Myth Breaking in History and the Humanities*, ed. Claudia-Florentina Dobre, Ionuţ Epurescu-Pascovici, and Cristian Emilian Ghiţă, accessed August 29, 2013, http://www.unibuc.ro/n/resurse/myth-maki-and-myth-brea-in-hist-and-the-huma/docs/2012/iul/02_12_54_31Proceedings_Myth_Making_and_Myth_Breaking_in_History.pdf.

a statue for Avram Iancu in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely in Hungarian), a predominantly Hungarian speaking city.[55]

Taking ethnicity and using as an argument was primarily a practical issue, but it also betrays a more relaxed attitude towards nationality, as was the case among the middle class.[56] Still, it is worth noting that while in most cases national indifference or amphibiousness is detected in the form of rejection of strong ethnic statements or overly rigid expectations,[57] subscribing to an exclusivist national argumentation could also suit and simultaneously disguise such attitudes as well. Both non-compliance and compliance with expectations could serve the purpose of negotiating the exact form and content of nationalizing projects, opening up an unexpectedly large room for individuals in their quest for a place between nationalizing states.

Conclusions

In this study I attempted to discover how individuals and local societies negotiated their places vis-à-vis nationalizing projects in interwar Transylvania, especially in the first few years of Romanian administration. The new border brought a new citizenship regime, a fear of instability, and insecurity among the part of the state that was represented by the new agents of state power, who were often unfamiliar with local contexts. The former enabled individuals to capitalize on the changes, escape state control and gain personal advantages. The latter often materialized in ill-devised attempts to restructure society. The common characteristic of both aspects was a failure to meet or conform to expectations that were based on a normative view of ethnicity: how members of certain ethnic groups "should" behave.

Something similar accompanied the attempts of symbolic conquest, and the half-success of these projects certainly reinforced the permanent state of war felt in the centers. Under these circumstances loyalty gained significance beyond its usual importance and was fused with ethnicity in the eyes of many, making it a useful tool of argumentation used to obtain personal advantages.

However, it was possible to cross supposed ethnic boundaries and use this ethnic argumentation on behalf of members of different nationalities too.

In the light of this situation, the realities of Greater Romania are best described as an overarching legal fiction that disguised a series of local settlements and compromises regarding the nationalizing attempts. The local situation often deviated from what the legal framework would have implied and what its initiators would have imagined—contributing to the failure to meet their expectations.

What does this story tell us about ethnicity? Given the importance of nationalizing in Greater Romania, any deviation is easy to interpret as a sign of national indifference or amphibiousness. Paradoxically, the state the national nature of which is often challenged by later analytical approaches acted with similar premises, trying to "correct" faulty national behavior according to what they saw as properly Romanian, for instance by writing Romanian names into declarations that were later signed differently by the individuals who were supposed to submit them.[58] Such gestures suggest that it was not necessarily the existence or acceptance of categories like Romanian, Hungarian or German that was being challenged, but rather its content that was being contested. Differences seen as ethnic peculiarities played a significant role in most of the cases outlined above, but the dividing lines were not necessarily identical with the lines imagined by state actors. Furthermore, the content of ethnic categories was usually related to specific social groups, mainly the middle class,[59] who were as eager to reassert their ethnicity as they were ready to transgress the borders set by actors from outside. In this process of negotiation they were often helped by the structures crystallized during the dualist era, and the readiness for compromise also depended on the symbolic importance of localities.

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55 ANSJ MS, fond Prefectură Judeţului Mureş, inventar 460, dosar 11/1923, f. 42.

56 See Attila Seres and Gábor Egry, *Magyar levéltári források az 1930. évi romániai népszámlálás nemzetiségi adatsorainak értékeléséhez* (Kolozsvár: Nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet–Kriterion, 2011), esp. 39–47.

57 See Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation. Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 2006), 2–11; Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69 (2010): 93–119.

58 ANSJ BV fond 2, Prefectură Judeţului Braşov, Serviciul Administrativ, dosar 60/1940, f. 1–55. Here the Romanian authorities collected declarations from villages along the new Hungarian–Romanian border in 1942. These documents were supposed to express the experience of locals regarding the good treatment of minorities. The name of the Romanian individuals was inserted by a clerk into a previously prepared text and later signed by the respective inhabitant. In many cases the signature differed from the name inserted, often in a way that not only suggests problematic literacy, but also "name analysis", a common practice that was supposed to discover "Magyarized" Romanians. For example, the declaration from V. Crihălmean Maria was signed by Király Halmi Mári. But even when the individuals signing the declaration might well have been Romanians, the fact that they still used their names in the form they perhaps had started to use in the dualist era (Fekete instead of Negru, Földvári instead of Feldioreanu) suggests a less straightforward and complicated relation to this issue than was presumed by the authorities.

59 Seres and Egry, *Magyar levéltári források;* Egry Gábor, "*Keresztező párhuzamosok.*"

Taking into account this social aspect of ethnicity, at least two different types of nationally indifferent or amphibious behavior emerge. One was prevalent primarily among the middle class, where it was rather a claim for the power to define one's ethnicity, and another was characteristic of the lower urban social strata and the peasantry, where it could have meant real neglect or indifference not only to the norms of proper behavior, but also to the categories used by the state. Nevertheless, it was still not necessarily a lack of the sense of difference along ethnic lines.

Beyond the wider phenomena of indifference, the key to an understanding of why Greater Romania was a series of local compromises and negotiated (although often changing) balances is familiarity with the society of the region. Given the scarcity of resources at its disposal, the state often was confronted with the limits of its power, and in such situations local elites were able to influence realities. It also brought about a redefinition of loyalty that was less focused on ethnicity as the official one and provided for an integration of people from the ranks of minorities who were ready to accept the basics of the existence of the new state.

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Note on Nomenclature: City and Place Names

I have used place names in this article either in their English form—if one exists—or in the form officially adopted by the states in control (Romania) during the time period in question. For the first reference to each place, I give alternative versions of the place name for that location. Here are the most frequently mentioned city and other place names in their various forms, for quick reference.

Abrud (Hungarian: Abrudbánya)
Aiud (Hungarian: Nagyenyed)
Banat (Hungarian: Bánság, German: Banat)
Braşov (Hungarian: Brassó, German: Kronstadt)
Caransebeş (Hungarian: Karánsebes, German: Karansebesch)
Cluj (Hungarian: Kolozsvár)
Făgăraş (Hungarian: Fogaras)
Lugoj (Hungarian: Lugos)

Oradea (Hungarian: Nagyvárad)

Oraştie (Hungarian: Szászváros, German: Broos)

Reşiţa (Hungarian: Resicabánya, German: Reschitza)

Satu Mare (Hungarian: Szatmárnémeti)

Sălăj (Hungarian: Szilágy)

Sânnicolau Mare (Hungarian: Nagyszentmiklós, German: Groß-Sankt Niklaus)

Severin (Hungarian: Krassó-Szörény)

Sieni (Hungarian: Szinérváralja)

Târgu Mureş (Hungarian: Marosvásárhely)

Timişoara (Hungarian: Temesvár, German: Temeschwar)

Turda (Hungarian: Torda)