

Gábor Egry

Phantom Menaces? Ethnic Categorization, Loyalty and State Security in Interwar Romania

In this article, I analyze practices of defining and applying concepts of ethnicity, loyalty and state security in Greater Romania. While state policies were based on a basic assumption of the equation of ethnic belonging and loyalty (Romanians being loyal, non-Romanians disloyal), the complexity of the very administrative apparatus and the problems of unification opened up a space in which the concepts of loyalty and ethnicity were contested. The case studies of the use of the term *irredentist* and the language exams of minority officials in the mid-1930s shed light on a related but different question. The basic equation of loyalty and ethnicity resulted in the use of an otherwise empty concept of *irredentism* as a term to denote little more than ethnic “otherness,” a vagueness that enabled local authorities to apply it deliberately, either to restrict or to permit members of minorities to engage in activities that had some bearing on questions of identity. The ways in which the language exams were administered indicate the existence of a large group of non-Romanian public officials who were treated by their colleagues and immediate superiors as equal members of a public body serving the nation state, people who in exchange redefined their loyalty and identity as one based primarily on this professional group membership while still preserving their ethnic belonging. These deviations from the basic equation also reveal how the layered and geographically diverse nature of the state administration influenced the contested nature of the ethnic categories.

Keywords: ethnicity, loyalty, security, Greater Romania, minorities, Transylvania

Ethnicity, loyalty and state security, concepts central to this study, were and are intricately interwoven. Their relationship, far from straight and simple in a given period and in the specific context of a newly enlarged nation-state after World War I, will be the main concern of my work. This approach presumes that what I try to outline is a story of construction and negotiation, addressing how these concepts were understood, defined, redefined and instrumentalized by different actors, and always relating these concepts to one another. Not only were these concepts used in descriptions of society, they also underpinned certain policies and administrative practices and legitimized different forms of control over the population. They therefore inevitably became topics of contestation in their content and their practical consequences for the lives of individuals. Success in defining what loyalty consisted of, how loyalty was related to ethnic belonging,

and what constituted a threat to the security of the state meant power, because definitions of loyalty and threat were used to legitimate restrictions on or extensions of liberties, and these liberties were never simply abstractions, but rather always involved smaller or larger spheres of personal activity.

The construction of ideals and abstractions is usually accompanied by contestation, and contestation always means more than one actor, but historical actors are rarely equal in terms of resources, power, or efficiency, and their asymmetric relationships often mean that one of them can limit the others. Concerning loyalty and state security, it is usually the state that has the strongest power to establish definitions, both as a matter of law and a matter of public opinion, as was the case, for instance, in interwar Romania. Obviously, the state had the necessary means to define (what it perceived as) threats to the existing order (including the very existence of the state) and what constituted the proper behavior of a citizen with a single word: loyalty. In some cases, this power to define loyalty was unilateral, for instance in the case of ethnic categorization, which was usually legally or structurally defined, leaving the individual little room to negotiate his or her membership, except when a census was taken.¹ Thus the logic of the state and how it approached ethnicity, loyalty and state security had a considerable impact on the behavior of other actors.

However, states are rarely homogeneous entities. Indeed one of their chief characteristics is their complexity. As a consequence, even when a given state has a clearly defined goal accompanied by a well-articulated concept of state security and loyalty, many actors are responsible for the implementation of policies and the administration of society at different levels and under different circumstances.² This plural nature of the (single) state and the resulting potential for varying interpretations and understandings of security, and ethnicity opens up spaces for redefinitions of the concept of loyalty, either entirely or at least with regards to part(s) of its content. Add to this the personal flexibility of individual administrative officials and the fact that even totalitarian regimes were never fully able to control individual responses to and attitudes towards their expectations and the result is often a surprisingly large semantic space in which

1 For the contestation of census categories in general see David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel, "Census, Identity Formation and Political Power," in *Census and Identity: The Politics of Race, Ethnicity and Language in National Censuses*, ed. David I. Kertzer and Dominique Arel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1–4.

2 Gábor Egry, "Tükörpolitika. Magyarok, románok és nemzetiségpolitika Észak-Erdélyben, 1940–1944," *Limes* 23, no. 2 (2010): 97–111. See also James J. Sheehan, "The Problem of Sovereignty in European History," *American Historical Review* 111, no. 1 (2006): 1–15, esp. 3.

contestation of these concepts (security, ethnicity, and loyalty) took place with very different outcomes, depending on various factors. Thus even in the case of state security (which is usually associated with strict control and enforcement) and its relationship to ethnicity and loyalty one can expect dynamic stories with varying trajectories, the usual narrative of political and/or national oppression notwithstanding.

In this study I attempt to trace the dynamics of the concepts under investigation in interwar Romania, firstly as an exemplary case of a wider phenomenon (nowadays a popular topic of historical research), namely the notion of ethnicity as a social construct³ and then as an alternative to the usual narratives of the specific history of the Hungarian minority in interwar Romania. Concerning the latter aim, I do not intend to rewrite this story.⁴ I would rather provide a complementary narrative and demonstrate why it is necessary to go beyond the generalized view of historical actors in order to understand even broader social processes within the ethnic minority communities.

I also intend to offer a tacit challenge to the existing secondary literature, Hungarian and Romanian alike. There is, however, an important difference between Hungarian and Romanian works dealing with minorities and minority policy. The bulk of Hungarian historiography since the 1960s employs more constructive methodologies in the creation of this macro perspective, and works that were written after the late 1980s implement important theoretical insights from nationalism studies and social sciences. With a few notable exceptions,⁵ Romanian historiography lags behind. Most of the scholarship in question is descriptive or consists of individual source publications, and articles compiled

3 Of the vast literature on the theoretical aspects, see in particular Margit Feischmidt, “Megismerés és elismerés: elméletek, módszerek, politikák az etnicitás kutatásában,” in *Etnicitás. Különbégtéremető társadalom*, ed. Margit Feischmidt (Budapest: Gondolat–MTA ENKI, 2010), 7–29; Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity without groups,” *European Journal of Sociology* 43, no. 2 (2002): 163–89; Rogers Brubaker and Frederic Cooper, “Beyond Identity,” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 1–47. Of the historical works, I was particularly inspired by Pieter M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006) and the 2012 special issue of the *Austrian History Yearbook* dedicated to national indifference.

4 See for example Nándor Bárdi, Csilla Fedinec, and László Szarka, eds., *Hungarian Minority Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Boulder, Co.–Highland Lakes, New Jersey: Social Science Monographs–Atlantic Research Publications, 2011)

5 For example Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest–New York: Central European University Press, 2004); Ovidiu Buruiana, “Partidul Național Liberal și minoritarii etnici în România interbelică. Problema naționalismului liberal,” in *Partide politice și minoritari naționale în România în secolul XX*, vol. 3, ed. Vasile Ciobanu and Sorin Radu (Sibiu: Editura Techno-Media, 2008), 103–16.

from transcripts of documents without contextualization.⁶ Some of the most prominent works are uncritical of their sources, repetitively reproducing their perspectives, opinions and assessments, and this is also true of the source publications.⁷ This does not mean that these works do not contain a huge amount of information and data, but the way they narrate the history of minorities is centered on politics and framed by a perspective from above.

In contrast, I intend to dissociate my story from what we usually understand as politics, the activity of political actors at national level or that of members of political parties in a given context, or the even narrower perspectives of legal texts produced by politicians. First, my aim is to show how lower levels of the administration dealt with their immediate subjects, so I offer insights into the practical meaning of certain concepts and policies and not political intentions in the aforementioned sense. Second, my point of departure is state security, not minority policy, which is usually based on the very existence of the state, irrespective of its nature (be it democratic, authoritarian, or dictatorial) or dominant ideology (be it liberal, nationalist, communist or fascist etc.). Every state has an understanding of state security and every state uses similar practices to further this aim.

Nevertheless, the context of minority politics in interwar Romania is significant in order to highlight the potential differences between situations that resulted from the varying acts of different actors. Most works on this issue draw a distinction between the first and the second decade of the interwar era and they also point out the different stances of National Liberal and National Peasant Governments. The 1920s, dominated by the liberals, are usually characterized as an era of legal unification based on the notion of the equality of all citizens and rejection of the necessity of specific minority rights (with all the consequences this entailed for minorities that were accustomed to particular legal systems). In other words, the dismissal of minority rights as a legitimate state concern notwithstanding, the period is regarded as one in which liberal policies prevailed concerning the citizens' status, peaking in the decentralizing accommodation

6 Vasile Ciobanu, *Contribuții la cunoașterea istoriei sașilor transilvăneni* (Sibiu: Hora, 2001). See for example Alin Spânu, "Huțanii (huțuli) în studiul Serviciului de Informații al Jandarmeriei (1943)," in *Partide politice și minorități naționale în România în secolul XX*, vol. 4, ed. Vasile Ciobanu and Sorin Radu (Sibiu: Editura Techno-Media, 2009), 197–211.; Ibid., "Lipovenii în studiul lui Mihail Moruzov, șeful Serviciului Special de Siguranță din Dobrogea (1919)," in *Partide politice și minorități naționale în România în secolul XX*, vol. 3, ed. Vasile Ciobanu and Sorin Radu (Editura Techno-Media: Sibiu, 2008), 50–59.

7 Lucian Leuștean, *România și Ungaria în cadrul "Noii Europe" (1920–1923)* (Iași: Polirom, 2003), 91–92. As an example see Virgil Păna, *Minoritățile etnice din Transilvania între anii 1918–1940. Drepturi și privilegii* (Târgu Mureș: Editura Tipomur, 1995).

attempts of the National Peasant governments between 1928 and 1933. In contrast, the 1930s is usually seen as an era of growing nationalist sentiment, during which mainstream parties tacked to the right, adopting increasingly extreme positions under pressure from the extreme right movements.⁸ The distance between politics and implementation, minority policy and state security allows one to test this general opinion as a hypothesis at the lower levels of the administration and from the perspective of state security organs, which I intend to do in the following sections.⁹

A Triangle of Concepts

The point of departure for this essay is the concept of loyalty, a notion that was potentially directly connected both to ethnicity and state security. According to Peter Haslinger and Joachim von Puttkamer,¹⁰ loyalty as a social phenomenon (a set of norms, expectations and practices) has three important aspects. The first one is an emotional-ethical one, which entails individual and collective activity, while mutuality of the relationship between individuals and groups or states remains central. The second one is a relational aspect, concerning the acceptance or rejection of a state, which enables the actors to perform, demand, control and sanction loyalty. The third one is a discursive one, (re)interpreting loyalty in relation to the usually stable discursive identity that makes it possible to gain room for maneuver despite the fixed assumptions of behavior and practices usually associated with identity. The three aspects not only situate loyalty as a discourse but also make it distinguishable in most social contexts, beyond a mere speech-act and also as an often embedded practice.

8 There are, however, some dissenting voices, for example Ovidiu Buruiana pointed out how the self-perception of the National Liberal Party as the administrative party of the nation state (*partidul administrativ al statului național*) made it hard to make concessions to minorities and integrate them into the party, while the wholly politicized working of the state run by the liberals disadvantaged other political organizations and their members. See Ovidiu Buruiana, “Partidul Național Liberal și minoritarii etnici.”

9 In order to achieve these goals I used a set of sources produced by security organs (police, gendarmerie, State Security Service – *Serviciul de Siguranța Statului*) combined with documents of political and administrative organs. The ones I collected and studied cover most of the territory of Transylvania. In case of certain types, however, mainly among situation reports, there was no specific difference among them, so I only used a few examples that I found characteristic of the general tone of these sources.

10 Peter Haslinger and Joachim von Puttkamer, “Staatsmacht, Minderheit, Loyalität – konzeptionelle Grundlagen am Beispiel Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa in der Zwischenkriegszeit,” in *Staat, Loyalität und Minderheiten in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1918–1941*, ed. Peter Haslinger and Joachim von Puttkamer (Münich: Oldenbourg Verlag, 2007), 1–16, esp. 2–3.

A close relationship between loyalty and ethnicity was characteristic to the new nation states of interwar Europe. It was exemplified by rhetoric that often confounded ethnic belonging with a presupposed attitude towards the existence and goals of the nation states.¹¹ It did not, however, necessarily mean a complete identification of these concepts. They were seen rather as existing in a causal relationship between one's ethnicity and one's loyalty. According to the principle of national self-determination, a cornerstone of the new European order after World War I, ethnicity implied a tendency towards the establishment of new entities and the striving for sovereignty. Additionally, since the states that had lost the war sought at least partial revision of the peace treaties, revisionism based on claims on behalf of ethnic kin in other states represented another form of politics that made loyalty questionable on the basis of ethnicity. Irredentism and revisionism, the two frequently mentioned threats to the territorial integrity of the successor states, were sometimes complemented with a third problem that also put ethnic minorities in the limelight as sources of danger: the minority treaties signed by the new nation states of Eastern Europe. Successive Romanian governments saw these documents as a result of unjust Great Power pressure and an infringement on their own sovereignty. They were therefore reluctant to give them precedence over national legislation, first and foremost the Constitution of 1923, which declared the equality of every citizen irrespective of ethnicity and failed to incorporate the few specific rights listed in the Minority Treaty.¹² It is not surprising that minority organizations were vulnerable to allegations that they were undermining the state, especially when they based their claims on the Minority Treaty.¹³

Under these circumstances, ethnic categorization became crucial in determining one's loyalty, and in accordance with the essentialist logic of ethnicity, suspicions concerning loyalty were easily extended to the whole ethnic group. If ethnicity implied an attachment to or longing for a different form of statehood, then ethnic minorities were inevitably suspected of subversion. State security demanded observation and control of ethnic groups and their activity. Cultural practices that were regarded as peculiar to (and possibly essential to) a particular ethnic group were easily seen as expressions or rejections of the state

11 Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees and Minorities* (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge UP, 2012).

12 See Lucian Leuștean, *România, Ungaria și tratatul de Trianon, 1919–1920* (Iași: Polirom, 2002).

13 For a broader European perspective see Ferenc Eiler, *Kisebbségvédelem és revízió. Magyar törekvések az Európai Nemzetiégi Kongresszuson (1925–1939)* (Budapest: Gondolat–MTA ENKI, 2007).

precisely because of they were interpreted as representations of one ethnicity in a state that was perceived as the embodiment of another. Thus the three concepts were connected to one another in a complex triangle of relationships in which ethnicity had a bearing on one's presumable behavior and this presumption easily made a person seem disloyal in the eyes of the authorities, thus automatically making him or her a threat to the state. Those responsible for the security of the state could all too easily equate ethnicity with loyalty (or disloyalty in the case of a minority) and define minorities as dangers. As a consequence, ethnic categorization was often about determining or at least alleging varying degrees of loyalty.¹⁴

Beyond this gaze from above, the complexity of the state and society and the limitations of the state's executive capacity allowed for contestation of these concepts and also their relationship to one another, which was regarded as straightforward by most security organs. Perceptions and expectations were not necessarily accepted and fulfilled, while the approach of the state security organs and their practice of categorization inevitably impacted on the activity of those affected. However, the impact itself depended on many factors and sometimes resulted in unexpected outcomes, as other actors made other contributions to the process of defining ethnicity and loyalty and how ethnicity and loyalty affected state security. The contingent, fluid nature of ethnicity in particular posed a challenge to the simplistic causality implied in the action of state organs, as it often disrupted the connection between ethnicity and loyalty.

Security and Ethnicity

If one examines the concept of security in interwar Romania from the perspective of the state, i.e. the higher levels of administration, it is easy to discern signs of the blurring of the concept of ethnicity and loyalty. The loyalty of ethnic others was a permanent concern for the administration and in particular for the organs of security, such as the police, the gendarmerie and the State Security Police (*Siguranța*, a branch of the police). But as the local outlets of these organs were politically subordinated to the county prefects, (politicians who had administrative duties, were invested with extensive powers, and represented the central government), the problem was an important issue in the political sphere as well. As a consequence, in addition to the regular reports

14 Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation Building*.

of the police and gendarmerie, the political reports of the prefects also gave extensive descriptions of alleged subversive activities among members of the ethnic minority population.

The readiness with which the implicit assumption that the minority population as such posed a danger to the state was adopted and accepted is illustrated by how this concern figured in tens of thousands of political reports (of which I could only gain access to more than one-thousand from all over Romania) over the course of the two decades in question. Not only did these reports consistently contain separate sections on the activities of these minorities in the respective counties, the headings of these sections often explicitly labeled the groups as problems (*problemă minoritară, maghiară, etc.*), questions (*chestiunea minoritară, germană, etc.*) or movements (*mișcarea minoritară, maghiară, etc.*), terms suggesting something that should be overseen and kept under control.¹⁵ It is also noteworthy how much these fears and the resulting perception of minorities as threats was characteristic for Romanian political thinking and discourse in their entirety, creating a situation in which views dominant in the public sphere and state practices reinforced one another, even on the level of semantics.¹⁶

Two important things stand out concerning this labeling. First, they did not draw any distinction between the various minorities. Even minorities without an external homeland or territorial claims, such as Jews, appeared regularly in these reports. Thus there was a clear distinction between the majority and the minorities in terms of potential threat, and minority status alone sufficed as a substantiation of the subversive potential of these ethnic groups. The generalization that underlies this practice is important for the conceptualization of loyalty too, because it makes plausible and palpable how non-Romanians were essentially seen as more or less incompatible with the existing order, much like other subversive groups, and this is the second point concerning the categorization of minorities in the reports. That they posed a potential threat went without saying, as was the case with communists, fascists, and workers, but it was also regarded as self-evident that the workers' problem or student problem was equally important, not least because of the violence associated

15 See for example Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale, București (ANIC) Direcția Generală (DGP) a Poliției dosar 6/1927, f. 295, *Ibid.*, 49/1921 vol. I. f. 236.; Arhivele Naționale Secția Județeană Cluj (ANSJ CJ) Inspectoratul de Poliție Cluj, inventar 399, dosar 16. f. 1. Raport informativ lunar, 25. martie 1935.

16 For a more detailed argument see Gábor Egry, "Sérelmek, félelmek és kisállami szuverenitásdogma. A román külpolitikai gondolkodás magyarságképe a két világháború között," *Limes* 21, no. 2 (2008): 81–92; Irina Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics in Greater Romania: Regionalism, Nation Building and Ethnic Struggle, 1918–1930* (Ithaca–London: Cornell University Press, 1995).

with these movements.¹⁷ The fact that minorities figured alongside them in the reports certainly meant that they were also seen as suspicious and even potentially capable of violence.

But however simple and effective this categorization seems (minorities are disloyal and the majority is loyal simply because of their ethnicity, thus ethnicity is a reliable marker of loyalty), it did not remain unproblematic. Especially in the new provinces of Greater Romania (Transylvania, the Banat, Bukovina, Bessarabia) and more markedly at the fringes, often along the borders, the loyalty of the Romanian population was also called into question.¹⁸ On the basis of observations made by the authorities and complaints lodged by individuals, they were increasingly seen as unreliable, dangerous, and a challenge to the authority of the state. However, with a strange twist the bond between ethnicity and loyalty was maintained intact with the claim that these Romanians were not actually Romanians. They were either “denationalized” (Magyarized, Russianized, Polonized, Ukrainianized etc.) Romanians or they were not Romanians at all, but rather a mixed population, and this was reflected in their everyday practices: language use, attitude towards official celebrations, and consumption of cultural material goods.

Thus the strong link between ethnicity and loyalty was restored with the categorization of people on the basis of their behavior and the identification of certain practices with a specific ethnicity. But when the notion of behavior and cultural practices as the litmus test of ethnicity was applied on a day-to-day basis, it did not prove sufficient to determine one’s loyalty or disloyalty in a viable manner. At least this is what an exchange of letters between the central apparatus of the Siguranța and the local police units located in the smaller cities around Cluj (Kolozsvár) suggests. In a letter, the central administration not only complained that the local police failed to report the threats posed by the regular activities of minorities in the respective cities, but also instructed the police as to what it meant to be irredentist and, as such, disloyal. The letter practically claimed that every single activity of a minority organization was part of irredentist propaganda and conspiracy, so the police had to report on them in detail and hinder them, whether they regarded these activities as potentially dangerous

17 On the student violence mainly against Jews and other ethnic minorities see Beáta Kulcsár, “Köznelharc a Park szállóban és a ‘hős zászlótartó’ legendája,” *Pro Minoritate* 20, no. 2 (2012): 31–53 and Máté Rigó, “A felejtető pogrom. Az 1927-es nagyváradai zavargások fogadtatása,” *BUKSZ* 24, no. 2 (2012): 126–41.

18 See Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*; 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.

or not.¹⁹ While this approach concurred entirely with the simple equation of ethnicity and loyalty that prevailed in police and political reports, it was clear to the local police that it would have created an unmanageable situation on the ground. The reaction of the police, who *de facto* neglected the order (as I discuss below), reveals that the discrepancy between local and central actors concerning the definition of loyalty and the relationship between loyalty and ethnicity could not be eliminated by simple order. It also sheds light on the practices through which concepts were redefined, which I address in more detail later.

Not surprisingly the simple equation of ethnicity and loyalty pervaded other fields of ethnic categorization, seemingly farther from the immediate concerns of state security. But in a paradoxical way, to a certain extent these practices showed that according to the specific situation and the immediate aims of the state there was a chance of loosening the strong bond connecting ethnicity and loyalty. Census taking is one of the obvious examples, especially as it was the moment when one's ethnicity was formally registered in a legally binding form. But while police and political reports suggest no differences among minorities as far as their potentially dangerous nature was concerned, the census contradicted to this strict rule and revealed a certain pecking order of dangerousness. In this case, the aim of the state was to weaken the (allegedly) most dangerous ethnic groups by strengthening others by revealing the "true" ethnicity of people who (purportedly) had been Magyarized or Russianized before World War I. In Transylvania, the most important groups subject to this practice were Germans and urban Jews. They were often compelled to register as Jews and Germans and were threatened with fines if they failed to comply.²⁰

However, once again the case was less straightforward than it seems. Individual census commissioners often did not entirely share the official view and treated every minority as equally dangerous. One of them even saw the census as an opportunity to search the home of every Hungarian and to reveal hidden depots of arms and ammunition, their supposed armed conspiracy against Romania,²¹ once again highlighting the practical importance of what the executors of state policies actually thought of these issues. On the other hand, the police reports imply that the differences in the danger these groups posed could only have been a difference of degree, for example in the practice of

19 ANSJ CJ Inspectoratul de Poliție Cluj, inventar 399, dosar 680, f. 209. No. 25505/937, Cluj, 7 August, 1937.

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

21 ANIC Fond Manuilă dosar X. 48. 1. f. Toma Mahara's letter from December 3, 1930.

Bessarabian police organs the Jews as an ethnicity were equated with ethnic danger and communism simultaneously, making them probably the most subversive group in the eyes of the authorities.²²

While recent secondary literature suggests that actual policy towards minorities in interwar South Eastern Europe was mainly influenced by the relationship between the kin-state, the home state, and Great Power influence if its support was important for the homeland,²³ such considerations do not seem to have had an impact on the perception of ethnicity as a threat to the state. At least in the case of Germans neither Romanian attempts to gain German support at the end of the 1930s nor the Antonescu regime's alliance with the Third Reich diminished concerns or reduced the amount of paperwork dealing with the supervision and control of the German minority as a permanent danger, despite significant political concessions to their demands.²⁴ The reports still related every detail of the German problem, and the police continued to devote considerable attention to German activity in the country.

Irredentists and Minority Officials

In the previous section, I mentioned how the perspective of central organs was characteristic of the state apparatus and how the equation of loyalty and ethnicity was embedded in the workings of its organs. But even at this macro level and in spite of the simplicity of the premise, it was not always easy to apply, although the equation remained the basis on which many of the acts and policies of the organs of state security were based. However, it is not always possible to discern on the basis of these sources alone how the concepts of loyalty, ethnicity and state security were contested, reshaped, and reconstructed through the interactions of different actors.

In the following section, I use two exemplary cases to highlight this process in more detail. The cases I have chosen represent two different situations for the participants. The first one, which concerns how the concept of irredentism was used by organs responsible for state security, shows the effects of unilateral,

22 Kathrine Sorrels, "Ethnicity as Evidence of Subversion: National Stereotypes and the Secret Police Investigation of Jews in Interwar Bessarabia," *Transversaal* 3, no. 2 (2003): 3–18.

23 Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation Building*.

24 See the extensive documentation published by Klaus Popa, *Akten um die "Deutsche Volksgruppe in Rumänien." Eine Auswahl. 1937–1945* (Frankfurt a. M.–Berlin–Bern–Bruxelles–New York–Oxford–Vienna: Peter Lang Verlag, 2005).

often secret categorization, while the second one, which involves the language exams taken by minority public officials in 1934–1935, shows how a supposedly fixed identification was often successfully negotiated in its content throughout this process. The unilateral nature of categorization and the secrecy, which was only broken by often politically motivated trials that were not intended to reveal the “truth” about the accused but rather to reinforce state legitimacy through the discovery of enemies, made it almost impossible to negotiate the content or label of irredentism. Individuals registered as irredentists remained passive in the face of this charge, except in the case of a trial, but the concepts were still not used uniformly. The differences in the ways in which the notion was defined and applied are very instructive concerning the working of categorization within a complex structure. Thus they shed some light on the differences in definitions within the state and also on the basic definition of nation/ethnicity.

The second example, which involves language exams, offers a look at a more dynamic and complex context in which every actor gained a certain level of agency in determining and defining ethnicity. Although the basic equation of ethnicity and loyalty remained seemingly uncontested, the many variations of what really constituted ethnicity in the case of minority officials, whose minority position and identity was a fixed element of the process, often led to a *de facto* redefinition of their ethnic belonging. In this case, many actors exerted influence one way or another on the result, the central state organs, local politicians, representatives of the public officials as a profession, and the examinees themselves, resulting in a very intriguing set of tactics and strategies.

Irredentism and Irredentists

The basic equation of ethnicity and (dis)loyalty made it seemingly quite simple for the authorities to identify dangerous people and groups whose often permanent supervision was necessary for the security of the state. Earlier research has already demonstrated that police practice applied the uniform view of ethnic groups as dangerous *per se*. Kathrine Sorrels analyzes how Jews were seen in Bessarabia and concludes that the police practically bound their ethnicity with subversive activity, be it bolshevism or ethnic secession.²⁵ However, she concentrated on the group as a whole, implicitly accepting the contemporaneous official perspective, and did not attempt to look for differences within the state

25 Sorrels, “Ethnicity as Evidence.”

or interrogate the practical content and meaning of concepts like irredentist and Bolshevik. She used only police reports, while different types of sources, combined with the paper trail of individual cases, offer a glimpse at both the meaning of the concept of irredentism as it was used by state authorities and the process of construction/application of this concept in a complex administrative system. Lists of people to intern in case of military mobilization as of 1933,²⁶ a period of internal politics that was still relatively peaceful,²⁷ provides a basis for an analysis of the social backgrounds of irredentists in comparison with other allegedly subversive groups and also data that can shed some light on the meanings of the concept.

Reports on the activity of lower level police organs reveal that the lists were not exhaustive. In other words, there were more people suspected of irredentist activity than actually on the lists. Thus we can take the lists as a register of a “core” group, the presence of which was seen as the most acute potential danger to military efforts due to its social activity and influence on the minority population. In this sense, the lists were not really inventories of potential irredentists not even of people who had fallen under the suspicion of the authorities. Rather, they were records of people believed by the authorities to constitute a group the removal of which would forestall any potential irredentist political activities among the members of minority groups.

The lists consist of 1,262 people suspected or accused of having engaged in all kinds of subversive activity. While data from some Transylvanian counties are missing, a summary of the number of people to intern as of 1936 and scattered lists from individual counties from other years suggest that the overall number for Transylvania was not much higher than the number found in these partial lists, making the sample a legitimate basis of analysis.²⁸ There was no consistent use of the label irredentist among state organs, so it is not possible to determine precisely who was treated as a dangerous irredentist. Nevertheless, the use of two different filters could certainly include everyone whom the authorities classified as an irredentist. One should therefore draw a distinction between “hard” or “core” irredentists, who were registered explicitly as irredentists, and “soft”

26 ANIC DGP dosar 5/1933.

27 On how Romanian politics in general shifted to the right in the 1930s see Rebecca Haynes, “Reluctant allies? Iuliu Maniu and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu against King Carol II of Romania,” *Slavonic and East European Review* 85, no. 1 (2007): 105–34.

28 The summary from 1936 gave 1,130 people for the same set of counties and 1,392 for the historic region of Transylvania, excluding the three counties of the Banat. ANIC DGP dosar 5/1933 f. 160.

irredentists, who figured on the list as chauvinists who held some anti-Romanian sentiment or were labeled with some similar accusation. 440 people belonged to the core and an additional 178 people to the soft irredentist group, comprising almost 49 percent of all registered people. Even if one adds the 23 spies, the number is hardly half of the dangerous elements in the register, suggesting that irredentism was less of a concern for the authorities than is usually presumed.²⁹

In the eyes of the authorities, the phenomenon of irredentism was not solely an urban one, but was also found in a concentrated form in a few larger localities. 383 people, 62 percent of the combined, soft and hard irredentist group, lived in only 13 cities across Transylvania. However, there was no straight correlation between the size of a city or the proportion of Hungarians living there and the number of irredentists registered. The authorities needed a certain number of Hungarians to “find” a larger group of irredentists among them, but a larger group of Hungarians did not automatically mean a larger group of irredentists. This finding suggests that the authorities were not obliged or under pressure to produce a certain number or percentage of irredentists. Also, there is no visible tendency indicating that the presence of non-Hungarian minority groups proportionally raised the number of irredentists in the particular locality. This suggests that Hungarians were somewhat more likely to fall under such suspicion than members of other nationalities, a hypothesis further corroborated by the internal division of the irredentist groups according to ethnicity. In this regard Hungarians, made up around 80 percent of both “core” irredentists and the combined “core” and “soft” irredentist groups, while their share of the minority population in these counties was only 65.6 percent.³⁰

The social composition of Hungarian irredentists shown in tables 1 and 2³¹ reveals the extent to which the concept, when applied, was limited to a small and very specific group of Hungarians.

29 Memoires or diaries of active politicians of this era tend to corroborate this assumption. Neither Armand Călinescu, in 1933 secretary of state at the ministry of interior, nor Constantin Argetoianu, who served many times as minister in interwar governments, dwells much on the minority problem in their respective diaries. Béla Borsi-Kálmán, “‘Regátiak,’ ‘erdélyiek’ és ‘magyarok’ Ion Gheorghe Duca, Constantin Argetoianu, Armand Călinescu, Grigore Gafencu, valamint Alexandru Vaida Voevod emlékirataiban,” in *Emlékirat és történelem*, ed. Pál Pritz and Jenő Horváth (Budapest: Magyar Történelmi Társulat–Nemzetközi Magyarástudományi Társaság, 2012), 36–60.

30 See Varga E. Árpád, “Az erdélyi magyarság főbb statisztikai adatai az 1910 utáni népszámlálások tükrében,” in *Magyarságkutatás. Magyarágkutató Intézet Évkönyve 1988*, ed. Juhász Gyula (Budapest: Magyarágkutató Intézet, 1988), 37–65.

31 All data are based on my own calculations from the registers.

	Hungarian	German	Jew	Romanian	Other	Total
Worker	10	1	–	–	–	11
Peasant, agricultural laborer	6	–	–	–	–	6
Artisan, skilled worker, trader, smallholder	32	5	–	–	–	37
Public services	29	4	1	–	–	34
Education, religion	60	4	2	–	–	66
Liberal professions	82	4	17	–	1	104
Proprietor	26	2	–	–	–	28
Private official	19	2	1	–	–	22
Commerce, restoration, pharmacist	23	8	9	–	–	40
Politics	4	–	–	–	–	4
Housewife, pensioner	16	5	2	1	–	24
n. a.	–	–	1	–	–	1
Total	307	35	33	1	1	377

Table 1: Occupational division of registered “core” irredentists according to ethnicity

	Hungarian	German	Jew	Romanian	Other	Total
Worker	32	2	–	4	4	42
Peasant, agricultural laborer	7	6	–	2	–	15
Artisan, skilled worker, trader, smallholder	56	15	–	4	1	76
Public services	36	6	1	–	–	43
Education, religion	75	10	3	–	–	88
Liberal professions	98	6	21	–	1	126
Proprietor	32	2	–	–	–	34
Private official	25	5	4	–	–	34
Commerce, restoration, pharmacist	34	10	10	–	1	55
Politics	4	–	–	–	–	4
Housewife, pensioner	26	8	2	1	–	37
n. a.		–	1			1
Total	425	70	42	11	7	555

Table 2: Occupational division of registered “core” and “soft” irredentists, according to ethnicity

The most important characteristic of these groups was the reduced presence of workers and peasants, although together they represented the largest occupational group among Hungarians.³² The absence of these categories from the group of irredentists is even more striking considering that 44 percent of all Hungarians assigned to internment were registered as communists, showing that ethnicity alone did not determine one's categorization. But a tendency to become communist according to official categorizations was even more prevalent in the case of lower middle class or petty bourgeois groups.³³ In this case, 63 percent of all registered individuals were classified as communists.

On the other hand, representatives of the liberal professions and the intelligentsia were significantly overrepresented among irredentists, irrespective of their nationality. Among Hungarians 40 percent of irredentists, whether core or soft, belonged to this occupational category, compared to 13 percent among the Hungarian population. If one adopts a broad definition of middle class, adding private officials, some proprietors, and independent entrepreneurs in commerce, restoration, pharmacist or public servants it is safe to conclude that at least 60 percent of those categorized as irredentists belonged to the middle class. If we bundle together middle class defined in this manner, the elite and the better situated part of the lower middle class, their ratio together could reach as much as 80% of registered irredentists of Hungarian nationality. Therefore, it seems that irredentism was not really equal with ethnicity alone, but with ethnicity and profession or social status. Belonging to the middle-class meant that one either was not seen as suspicious or, if you were, you were still only perceived as an irredentist by the authorities.

A look at the gender aspect and some paradoxical cases corroborates this finding. Regarding gender, not only did a mere sixth of women registered belong to the "core" irredentist category, almost without exception their social roles were classic middle class housewife, while many working women figured among communists. It is also telling that a few individuals who otherwise either were leaders of the legal Social Democratic Party (associated with the workers' problem in police reports) or already known to the authorities as communists

32 Pál Opra, "Erdély lakosságának foglalkozások szerinti megoszlása az 1930-as népszámlálás alapján," *Pro Minoritate* 18, no. 2 (2010): 29–40.

33 Artisans, smallholders, skilled workers.

still figured among irredentists. In all likelihood, this was due to their occupation, namely journalism.³⁴

Obviously, stereotypes played an important role in the practice of categorization. While ethnicity was not unrelated to the decisions of authorities, it was only one factor. It was necessary but not adequate to qualify someone as irredentist. As in the case of Jews, who were associated with bolshevism due to their nationality and the respective stereotypes (for this reason mainly people from lower and lower-middle class groups are found on the lists as alleged communists), irredentist Hungarians were predominantly middle class, often well educated people, in harmony with the stereotypical image of Hungarians.³⁵

Looking behind the often simplistic labels on the list, which were intended to describe the threats these people posed to state security, irredentism, as is clear from the two-tier analysis of the social composition of this group, reveals a wide range of meanings beyond the non-Romanian ethnic middle class status. Irredentist was not the only term used by the state authorities to designate people who were suspected of irredentism. The authorities applied a number of synonymous words, often arbitrarily or just to avoid the negative stylistic effect of the accumulation or repetition of a word. Sometimes the modification was only a phrase attached to or involving a derived form of “irredentism,” like “Hungarian irredentist, feverishly zealous, great propagandist.”³⁶ In other cases it was a substitution or a synonym, often used in analogous phrases, like “great chauvinist, hates everything Romanian,” “irredentist and Hungarian propagandist.”³⁷ There was a third type, namely the seemingly accurate description of a particular case, but these descriptions often rested on stereotypes, and there was also a very pliant label, subversive, which could refer to irredentism or other potentially dangerous activities as well.

The concept of irredentism was to a certain extent treated as a matter of common knowledge. The term was used with minimal or no explanation, implying

34 Ferenc Bruder, János Demeter and Gábor Gaál. For Demeter's known communist sympathies see Arhivele Naționale Secția Județeană Mureș (ANSJ MS) Direcția Regioanlă MAI MAM inventar 1235, dosar 2910. f. 27.

35 Sorrels, “Ethnicity as Evidence,” 9–11; Nicoleta Hegedűs, “Imaginea maghiarilor în cultura Românească din Transilvania (1867–1918)” Teza de doctorat (Cluj-Napoca: Universitatea Babeș Bolyai, 2010); Gábor Egry, “Sérelmek, félelmek és kisállami szuverenitásdogma”; Sorin Mitu, “Local Identities from Transylvania in the Modern Epoch,” in *Western Civilization, Politics, Ideologies, Dystopias*, ed. Marius Jucan, Sorin Mitu, and Cosmin Braga, *Transilvanian Review* 23, Supplementum (2013): 237–48.

36 ANIC DGP 5/1933 f. 83–86.

37 Ibid., 22–30, 50–58. f.

the self-evidence of its meaning.³⁸ When the term was used in a context in which it went beyond this simplistic formulation and suggested something concrete, this implied meaning could have been a general attitude, a permanent activity or a single case. The most intriguing of its implied meanings was simply the notion of a general attitude that was usually summarized as hostility to Romania and discontent with the situation in the country, and this attitude always involved a critical stance with regards to the prevailing circumstances. Sometimes even oblique, general criticism (for example in the form of a theater play in which state officials were depicted in a negative light, even if the setting of the play was not specified) was enough to raise the suspicion of the authorities.³⁹ These kinds of manifestations of alleged disloyalty were usually seen through the lens of ethnicity. If criticism came from a non-Romanian, it was easy to assume that the reason was the alien soul of the critic who imagined a solution outside the framework of the Romanian nation state. Social roles or positions were often confounded with pursuits in attempts to define irredentism. Although in many cases the authorities substantiated their categorizations with mention of the specific acts of the accused, as these actions usually were closely related to the profession of the person concerned the decision to designate him or her as “irredentist” was a condemnation of his or her pursuits in their entirety. These activities were usually carried out in civic societies and associations, and logically the activity of these institutions was also categorized as irredentist.⁴⁰ As a consequence, everyone involved automatically became an irredentist.⁴¹

Concerning specific acts that were regarded by the organs of the state as irredentist, apart from cases of violence against the authorities, open rebellion or participation in the Hungarian-Romanian armed conflict during and after World War I (i.e. in the past), these acts consisted primarily of banal expressions of nationalist sentiment and everyday gestures of ethnic belonging.⁴² Singing

38 A police report from Oradea from 1920, which argued that only 25 percent of the city’s population (middle-class Hungarians) were irredentists, i.e. the “real” Hungarians and not the workers or Jews, illustrates this effect and how it was bound to the social determinants of irredentism. ANIC DGP 5/1920, f. 41–42.

39 Arhivele Naționale Secția Județeană Brașov (ANSJ BV) Legiunea de Jandarmi Brașov, Biroul Poliției, inventar 24. 10/1936 f. 48. Nota informativă Nr. 10, February 26, 1936.

40 ANSJ CJ Inspectoratul de Poliție Cluj, inventar 399 dosar 432, f. 23.

41 Ibid, dosar 680, f. 209, No. 25505/937, Cluj, August, 7, 1937.

42 Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995); Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, “Everyday Nationhood,” *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (2008): 536–63.

the wrong songs, wearing the wrong clothes, using the wrong paints, or buying or selling the wrong bouquet figured on the long list of potential transgressions of the law. These cases are interesting from an analytical perspective in part because of the possibility that Romanians could commit mistakes that qualified them as Hungarian irredentists.⁴³ However, this did not loosen the tie between ethnicity and loyalty, since the gestures or acts that could make a Romanian seem “Hungarian” in the eyes of the authorities were gestures and acts specifically associated with Hungarian identity and culture.

One of the main consequences of this diversity of applications was the fuzzy character of the definition itself. Due to the multiple uses of the term and the lack of clear-cut guidelines, the police apparatus created a vague concept that could apply to anyone if necessary. As the pervading view of the minorities and especially the Hungarian minority was characterized by growing paranoia and hysteria throughout the interwar period, the emerging discourse (or at least part of it) posited every act of a member of a minority as a sign of irredentism. However, even in the late 1930s one still found expressions in this discourse of the hope that workers and peasants could be separated from the Hungarian “oligarchs,” highlighting the extent to which the police practice of categorization reflected political perceptions of the minorities.⁴⁴

Paranoia was prevalent in police documents as well, not least because of the unfamiliarity of the police and gendarmerie with Hungarian (and sometimes Transylvanian Romanian) milieus.⁴⁵ There was a language barrier too. Often police officers from the Old Kingdom even confused German with Hungarian, and they were rarely able to detect negative references in translated texts.⁴⁶ But this reinforced the determination of the authorities, who often treated irredentism

43 Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) K28 4. cs. 10. t. 1923-T-85, A romániai magyar kisebbség sérelmei December 24–25, 1922; ANSJ Timiș (ANSJ TM) Prefectură Județului Severin, dosar 24/1924, f. 172–73, 176–90.

44 Police reports were full of nonsensical claims of imaginary danger, like the contention that Budapest had given an order to the Hungarian Party according to which every Hungarian should hide a gun. (ANIC DGP 122/1936, f. 83.) Meanwhile Romanian newspapers reported almost everything as part of an alleged irredentist network and conspiracy. “Amire a magyarak készülnek. Román lapok rémlátása,” *Brassói Lapok*, 27, no. 29, February 9, 1921.

45 Ioan Scurtu and Liviu Boar, eds., *Minoritățile naționale în România 1918–1925* (București: Arhivele Statului România, 1995), document 47, 225–26.

46 Gábor Egry, “A megértés határán. Nemzetiségek és mindennapok Háromszéken a két világháború között,” *Limes* 25, no. 2 (2012): 40–41; ANIC Ministerul Justiției, Direcția Judiciară, inventar 1116, 98/1922. f. 15.

as a one way street. Once something led to the registration of a person as an irredentist, it was impossible for him or her ever to be granted absolution for this qualification. One small deed remained a permanent stigma.⁴⁷

However, the vague definition of the concept, the inability of the center to apply it in a consistent manner, and the discrepancies between certain local contexts led to an unexpected result, namely the emergence of a space in which the definition of irredentism depended entirely on the local representatives of the state. Although nominally a serious problem and a reason for strict observation and control of anyone suspected of disloyalty, irredentism became an arbitrary category often used without any consequences, even if on other occasions it was the justification for severe punishments. There was no automatic classification of people with the same profession or occupation. For example, while in Cluj or Odorhei Secuiesc (Székelyudvarhely) the most important Hungarian politicians were labeled irredentists, in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely) only one man, György Bernády, was regarded as meriting this designation. At the time, Bernády had been in opposition to the Hungarian party, although he was also an opponent of the governing National Peasant Party.⁴⁸ Similar discrepancies were frequent concerning secondary school teachers or priests, and in individual cases there is evidence indicating that the authorities (the gendarmerie and the Prosecutor's Office, for example in Zălău) tried to bury denunciations.⁴⁹

The importance of local contexts highlights the problems and contingency of categorization even in a seemingly simple case and shows how individuals who had access to the police personnel via networks or because of their social position were able to negotiate the content of an operative term, in this case irredentism. Local police representatives still had to take official expectations into account, but at times they also found ways of feigning compliance without actually carrying out orders. As soon as they realized that compliance with orders to exercise permanent control over every minority activity would disrupt everyday life, they started to pay lip service to central demands, often imitating the exact wording

47 ANSJ TM Legiune Jandarmilor Severin, inventar 828, 42/1943, f. 426. The authorities in 1943 still kept a register of János Perjési, from Făget (Facsád), as a suspicious person, although the offence he committed was having refused to take the oath of allegiance in 1919.

48 János Fodor, "Egy helyi társadalomszervezési kísérlet. Bernády György és a Magyar Polgári Demokratikus Blokk kísérlete," *Transindex.ro*, accessed May 30, 2014, <http://itthon.transindex.ro/?cikk=21305>.

49 ANIC Ministerul Justiției, Direcția Judiciară, inventar 1117. 85/1934. f. 201–06.

of their superiors.⁵⁰ The most illustrative example of this tactic was the manner in which the Dej (Dés) police handled an order issued by the regional police inspectorate in 1937. The police units in the cities around Cluj were warned to abandon their usual habit of filing lapidary reports in which they described the activity of Hungarians only vaguely and with reference to stereotypes, usually saying little more than something like, “Hungarians behave like they used to.” They were instructed in harsh terms that every organization and every event that was in some way attached to Hungarian identity or Hungarian culture served the goal of collecting money for territorial revision and propaganda. It is not clear how the other police chiefs reacted, but the Dej reports remained largely unchanged, with verbatim repetition of the phrases used in earlier reports with the addition of a half-sentence that affirmed the revisionist nature of these (perfectly ordinary) events.⁵¹ Thus while the concept of irredentism remained seemingly unaltered, in reality it became extremely fragmented and retained only one element: a correlation with ethnicity and social status.

Examining Minority Officials

Loyalty was crucial in the process of language exams for minority officials too. While nominally they were obliged as of the early 1920s to pass an exam (the first nationwide, compulsory exam was organized in 1924) in order to be employed in the public sector, examinees were often treated leniently⁵² and retained even when they did not possess adequate language skills. A decade later, amidst growing political pressure from stronger nationalist currents, the government decided to oblige minority public officials to take another language exam, without exception. The situation was seemingly unambiguous. Only minority officials were obliged to pass the exam. That is, ethnicity was the sole criterion

50 ANSJ CJ Inspectoratul de Poliție Cluj, inventar 399 dosar 680, 25505/937, Cluj, August 7, 1937, and *ibid.* dosar 255. f. 168; ANSJ CJ Inspectoratul de Poliție, Cluj, dosar 680, f. 462; ANSJ MS Direcția Regională MAI MAM, inventar 1235, Comisariatul de Poliție Târnaveni, dosar 1, f. 1–2.

51 “[T]he minorities behave like they used to, especially the Hungarians, who organize festivities and cultural venues with a well-known purpose, in order to gather the minority and collect financial means for propaganda.” ANSJ CJ Inspectoratul de Poliție, Cluj, dosar 680, f. 462.

52 Andreas Möckel, *Umkämpfte Volkskirche: Leben und Wirken des evangelisch-sächsischen Pfarrers Konrad Möckel (1892–1965)* (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2011), 36–38; Florin Andrei Sora, “Étre fonctionnaire ‘minoritaire’ en Roumanie. Ideologie de la nation et pratiques d’état (1918–1940),” in *New Europe College Ștefan Odobleja Program Yearbook 2009–2010*, ed. Irina Vainovski-Mihai (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2011), 210.

and ethnicity, regarded as an unchangeable, fixed characteristic of individuals, itself was a mark of potential disloyalty.

Without describing the process in detail or analyzing the composition of the group of minority officials (a group that was much larger than it was portrayed in the contemporaneous discourse and much larger than is usually presumed in the secondary literature),⁵³ I will focus on two aspects: the identification of minority officials as it can be examined on the basis of the exams and the ways in which prefects reacted to the explicit demand for mass layoffs from Bucharest. The first aspect involves the question of loyalty and ethnicity because the exams were potentially an expression of different forms of loyalty to the state. The second shows how different actors in different positions interpreted state security and loyalty.

The potential to test and express one's loyalty arose from the structure of the exams. Examinees were subject to an oral and a written examination. Officials with higher levels of education had to speak about a topic selected by the committee and compose an essay. Those with lower levels of education only had to write down a text. The topics varied greatly across Transylvania, but they basically revolved around three larger issues: a rather general one with certain national content, a professional one, and a question that involved some aspect of the applicant's personal life. The first dealt with history, geography, or culture, inviting the candidates to talk about national issues. They were free to decide whether to tell a boiler-plate version or deviate from it, and in case of the latter they could also choose the extent of the deviation. This usually was not surprising, especially for those who entered public service after 1919, because they were requested to take a competency exam that usually contained similar questions.⁵⁴ A language exam, however, was slightly different. Manner of expression was the main issue in principle, not content.⁵⁵

The second type, the professional question, was either strictly professional (a description of one's working day or an outline of the rights and duties of the communal administration) or obliged the applicant to discuss the social roles

53 Sora, "Étre fonctionnaire 'minoritaire'" relates figures of contemporaneous Romanian statistics that seem to be supported by the material on the language exams, but contradicts the bulk of secondary literature; see also the statistics of runaway Hungarians from Southern Transylvania after the Second Vienna Award, in which almost 1,600 public officials, and almost twice as much public employees figured. "A romániai menekültek főbb adatai az 1944. februári összeírás alapján," *Statisztikai Szemle* 25, no. 9–12 (1944): 394–411, Table 6: 406, Table 7: 408.

54 ANSJ BV fond 2, Prefectura Judetului Brasov, Serviciul Administrativ, inventar 374, dosar 1/1934.

55 ANIC Ministerul de Interne, inventar 754, dosar 175/1935.

of public servants, especially in rural areas, where the state was perceived as the main driver of modernization and progress. It certainly reflected the self-perception of the state and created a situation in which the candidates could prove their loyalty to the state project through the imaginary enactment of these duties. Essay topics in this category ranged from the role of village notaries in the fight against alcoholism to their role in the peaceful coexistence of minorities and Romanians.⁵⁶

The third type of language exam question, which involved some aspect of the applicant's personal life, was often posed in a general manner to rural officials and usually more specifically to urban officials, implicitly differentiating the role of the state in the two social spaces. While rural officials were seen as missionaries of modernization, urban ones were expected to set an example of urban middle-class life. Thus, examinees in urban areas were sometimes asked to describe how they had spent their most recent holidays or to summarize the content of a novel they had recently read, while village employees were asked to give general description of their personal lives or recount a few significant events from them.⁵⁷

How could these different types of questions trigger broader questions of identification? The topics themselves were certainly indicators of the expectations of the examiners. The candidates could decide how to frame their answers and themselves, i.e. whether to portray themselves as mere professionals or whether to relate to national issues in their discussions of the foundations of the nation-state in history and culture, indicating loyalty and identification beyond the obvious sense of duty. While in principle the exams were not about the content of the text but rather only the mastery of the language, the applicants could hardly have failed to consider the perceived expectations of those assessing the essays.

In the light of this general pattern, it is not surprising that most candidates tried to portray themselves as professionals and members of a specialized professional body. Within this general framework, however, there was significant room to express how exceptionally attached and loyal some applicants were. It was customary to emphasize one's long and dutiful public service⁵⁸ or for an applicant to boast of his or her credentials as a competent administrator,

56 Ibid., Trei Scaune, Tighina, ANIC Ministerul de Interne, inventar 754, dosar 176/1935, f. 71.

57 ANSJ TM fond 69, Prefectura Judetului Timiș-Torontal, dosar 34/1935, ANIC Ministerul de Interne, inventar 754, dosar 175/1935, f. 126. For a few titles see Sora, "Étre fonctionnaire 'minoritaire,'" 216.

58 ANIC Ministerul de Interne, inventar 754, dosar 175/1935, f. 100.

indispensable to the future of the country. One finds a very interesting variety of this professional identification with the state in the essay by applicant David Eugen.⁵⁹ Eugen expressed his extraordinary devotion to Romania by portraying himself as an orphan who had found his new family and home in the community of Romanian public servants.

Although a detailed analysis of essays written by a large enough number of examinees from different backgrounds on the same topic⁶⁰ reveals intriguing, small deviations from a general pattern of identification, the exams offered primarily a relatively easy and comfortable strategy of identification as a professional public servant whose loyalty was strong without necessarily containing any unambiguous acceptance of Romanian nationalist discourse. The whole process was designed to steer the candidates towards this kind of professional identification, and even in situations in which other possibilities were available most of them opted for this one. There was also a clear difference between the urban and rural personnel. In the case of the former, they had to act as role models of middle-class life, while in the case of the latter they were supposed to serve as pioneers of the state in improving conditions in the villages. In this world, the city as characterized in the essays was a world of progress driven by the state where the nationalities coexisted peacefully, enjoying the equality of civic rights (again a reproduction of the state's perception of itself).

The government was not content with the number of examinees who failed the exams, and Secretary of State Dumitru Iuca raised the threshold for passing after the examinations were finished and the results had already been announced.⁶¹ He wanted to see a more sweeping purge of the minority officials. His subordinates, the county prefects, reacted with surprising consternation and almost unanimously tried to parry the order, adopting a wide variety of tactics. Some of them openly stated that without the minority officials county administration would stall.⁶² Others challenged the order with legal arguments and engaged their superior in negotiations, in the end gaining significant concessions.⁶³ Often prefects tried to sabotage or at least circumvent the order

59 Ibid., f. 129.

60 ANIC Ministerul de Interne, inventar 754. dosar 175/1935, f. 190–260.

61 Ibid., f. 3.

62 Ibid., dosar 176/1935, f. 33.

63 Ibid., dosar 175/1935, f. 137–38.

by various means, among them tricky reevaluations of past exams,⁶⁴ pretending not to know the relevant sentences of the Supreme Court of Cassation⁶⁵ or blaming the previous administration for having created a legal trap that made the layoffs impossible.⁶⁶

Another frequently used tactic was transferring responsibility to other organs that were either reluctant to carry out the order or sometimes neglected it entirely. Prefects subjected their failed subordinates to disciplinary procedures in which Disciplinary Committees reexamined and reinstated them,⁶⁷ and Local and National Commissions of Revision overturned the ministerial order en masse.⁶⁸ Sometimes prefects replied to the inquiries of their superiors with the contention that other officials (city mayors, ministerial directors, etc.) were responsible for the failures to comply with the order, and they claimed to have no influence on them at all.⁶⁹ Even if they failed to save some people's careers, they did manage to offer escape routes (for example pensioning) that the ministry also tried to block.⁷⁰

The last method of subverting the order was reexamination itself. It was unusually lenient. Most of the examinees who initially had passed the exam passed it again, but Iuca's order obliged them to take it yet again. Committees tried to give them topics tailored to their fields of activity.⁷¹ Often examinees with poor written essays were given exceptionally high grades on their oral exams.⁷² In general officials who did the exams again got much higher average grades than their initial results. Furthermore, many of those who failed were still retained in their positions with or without the consent of Bucharest.⁷³ It seems that in the end only between 15 and 20 percent of the minority officials were laid off, a significantly lower ratio than Bucharest would have wanted.

64 Ibid., f. 37, 84–87.

65 Ibid., dosar 176/1935, f. 75.

66 Ibid., f. 111–21.

67 Ibid., dosar 175/1935, f. 134.

68 Ibid., f. 82, 110.

69 Ibid., dosar 176/1935, f. 47.

70 ANSJ TM fond 69, Prefectură Județului Timiș-Torontal inventar 171, dosar 32/1935, f. 140–59.

71 ANIC Ministerul de Interne, inventar 754, dosar 175/1935, f. 142.

72 For example 56 out of 256 in Timișoara. ANSJ TM fond 69, Prefectura Timiș-Torontal, inventar 171, dosar 35/1935, f. 16–26.

73 In Bihor (Bihar) county 45 out of 81 rural officials. ANIC Ministerul de Interne Inv. 754, dosar 27/1937, f. 10–18.; In Timiș oara 24 out of 46 failed German officials. ANSJ TM fond 69, Prefectura Timiș-Torontal, inventar 171, dosar 35/1935, f. 46.

Taken together, the process, the essays, and the aftermath of the exams proved the existence of a professional identity among minority public officials and the strength of professional solidarity among public servants, irrespective of nationality. The exam topics and written exams point to the primacy of professional identification too. It made the minority officials, who were suspicious simply as members of a minority, an asset worth fighting for. The successful tactics of the prefects highlights how misleading it is to treat the Romanian state as monolithic entity that only pursued nationalizing goals. It is impossible to understand how and why nationalizing policies were executed, hindered, and sometimes even sabotaged if one fails to account for the local contexts and the different logics that prevailed at different levels of the administration.

Below the Surface, on the Fringes

In the public discourse and the workings of the organs of state security the relationship of the three aspects of loyalty was based on the simple equation of ethnicity with loyalty. Ethnicity was seen as conducive to loyalty or disloyalty. Despite initial attempts by the minorities to establish a relationship with the Romanians based on mutual recognition of civic rights and duties⁷⁴ and a shared hope to arrive at a common, regionalist concept of statehood and belonging (both of which would have led to a new understanding of loyalty),⁷⁵ the understanding of ethnicity as (dis)loyalty remained dominant and unchanged, despite differences in minority policies under the alternating governments. There are also signs that this indiscriminating stance with regards to loyalty was universal on the whole territory of Greater Romania.⁷⁶

At the lower levels of administration, in everyday practice neither the more relaxed nor the hardliner versions of policy led to much systematic difference. The divergent approaches to implementation depended on other factors. On the other hand, the organs of state security did not abandon their often paranoid view of minorities. Thus “practicing” one’s ethnicity became a sign of disloyalty,

74 Károly Kós, “Kiáltó szó!,” in *Trianon. Nemzet és emlékezet*, ed. Miklós Zeidler (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), 498–502.

75 Gábor Egrý, “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, Ionuț Epurescu-Pascovici, and Cristian Emilian Ghiță. Accessed August 29, 2013, http://www.unibuc.ro/n/resurse/myth-maki-and-myth-breain-hist-and-the-huma/docs/2012/iul/02_12_54_31Proceedings_Myth_Making_and_Myth_Breaking_in_History.pdf.

76 Sorrels, “Ethnicity as Evidence,” Livezeanu, *Cultural Politics*, 140–41.

and this left little space for a citizen to be a non-Romanian who was loyal to the Romanian state. Furthermore, if one sought to express or demonstrate loyalty, practically this meant the acceptance of Romanian ethnicity at least in praxis. But this expectation was not applied uniformly to every social group. The concept of irredentism, as it was used by the authorities, defined Hungarian ethnicity as the sum of the middle-class and its activities, while workers and peasants were seen as inclined to become communists.

A closer look also reveals that at local/micro level the relationship of the three aspects was easily reconfigured and replaced with a more balanced one. Obviously this depended on the local context and on the personal attitudes of those who were responsible for the implementation of state policies.⁷⁷ But in the end it was possible to establish an informal setting in which mutual recognition played a larger role than the public discourse would have suggested. The strong link between ethnicity and loyalty was loosened on the basis of common norms, values and the social practices of the middle-class, and these were often determined by Hungarians or Germans, as they held dominant positions in Transylvanian urban societies.

The language exams exemplify another means of redefining loyalty and ethnicity and generating a sphere in which mutual recognition determined the understanding of loyalty, while here alternative discourses also emerged. In exchange for accepting a specific identification which paired professional self-perception and a modified version of Hungarian ethnicity, minority officials were regarded as equal members of a professional body. Their loyalty was not questionable in the eyes of their immediate superiors and colleagues. Their contributions were indispensable for the good conduct of administration and they shared the modernizing goals of the state. Even if their ethnicity was regarded as fixed and unalterable (because it was the foundation on which their group was constructed as the cohort of *minority* officials), they were not treated with the same suspicion that was felt towards ethnic minorities in general.

Such informal reconfigurations certainly relieved individuals of pressure and sometimes even made it possible to develop alternative discourses of identity and loyalty. But these discourses always remained within a closed

⁷⁷ Two telling examples were the classification of Hungarian associations in Turda (Torda) and Mureş (Maros) counties by the police in 1938 regarding whether they were subversive or not. While in the former administrative unit the responsible police officer made a decision on a case-by-case basis, in the latter every association categorized as Hungarian automatically was regarded as subversive. ANIC CJ Inspectoratul de Poliție Cluj, inventar 399, dosar 432.

sphere or the boundaries of a locality, and they rarely challenged the dominant public discourse. In order to resolve the resulting tensions, such settlements were rarely spoken of and were excluded from larger public discourses. As a result, sometimes the respective groups, for instance minority public officials, remained hidden, figuring in the public discourse only when they were the target of nationalizing policies. It was possible to be a loyal Hungarian in Romania, but only below the surface and on the fringes.

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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.

Cluj (Hungarian: Kolozsvár)

Odorheiu Secuiesc (Hungarian: Székelyudvarhely)

Târgu Mureș (Hungarian: Marosvásárhely)

Zălău (Hungarian: Zilah)

Dej (Hungarian: Dés)

Făget (Hungarian: Facsád)