

# Representation and Ethnicity in the Literary Field

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IN  
CULTURAL SOCIOLOGY

Oszkár Roginer

**REPRESENTATION AND ETHNICITY  
IN THE LITERARY FIELD**

*How ethnicity influenced representation  
in the Hungarian literary field of Transylvania  
during the interbellum*

DIPLOMSKI RAD

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## Izjava o akademskoj čestitosti

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Zadar, 18. listopada 2016.

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## **Reprezentacija i etnicitet u književnom polju**

Teza se bavi ulogom etniciteta i njegovom uticaju u reprezentaciji Mađarskog književnog polja u Transilvaniji između dva svetska rata. Fokus je na pregovaračkim procesima koji su povezani sa pokretom Transilvanizma, i dimenzijama etniciteta mobiliziranih u argumentaciji radi (re)konstrukcije zasebnog književnog polja nakon raspada Habsburške Monarhije. Rad analizira kako je Mađarska zajednica definisala okvire svoje kulturne, a naročito književne produkcije kao novoetablirana manjina u Kraljevini Rumuniji nakon Prvog svetskog rata, te koji su elementi etničkog identiteta uvedeni u javnu sferu kada su se ovi okviri definirali. Teza razlikuje pregovore sa Bukureštom, Budimpeštom kao i interesničku argumentaciju u smeru Nemačke i Rumunske zajednice u Transilvaniji. Istraživanje je sprovedeno na časopisu za književnost i kritiku *Erdélyi Helikon*, koji je izlazio od maja 1928 do septembra 1944 u Cluju.

Ključne riječi: Erdélyi Helikon, mađarska kulturna produkcija, reprezentacija, Transilvanizam,

## **Representation and Ethnicity in the Literary Field**

The thesis deals with the question of how ethnicity influenced representation in the Hungarian literary field of Transylvania during the interbellum. It focuses on the negotiation processes connected to the Transylvanist movement, and on the dimensions of ethnicity mobilised in the various argumentation paths, utilising them to (re)construct a separate literary field after the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire. It examines how the Hungarian community reframed its cultural-, and especially literary production as a newly established minority in the Kingdom of Romania after the First World War, and which were the elements of ethnic identity to be introduced to the public sphere when this reframing occurred. The thesis differentiates between the negotiating paths towards Bucharest, Budapest and the inter-ethnic arguments utilising ethnicity towards the German and Romanian communities of Transylvania. The research was conducted on the literary and critical journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, which appeared between May 1928 and September 1944 in Cluj.

**Key words:** Erdélyi Helikon, Hungarian cultural production, representation, Transylvaniam,

## 1. Introduction

The thesis deals with the initial modes of representation in Hungarian cultural production from Transylvania during the interwar period. It examines how the Hungarian decision-makers reframed literary production as a newly established minority in the Kingdom of Romania after the First World War, and which were the elements of ethnic identity to be introduced to the public sphere when this framing occurred.

I am interested primarily how the cultural elites negotiated their role in the process of production of cultural goods, especially literature, and how this was conveyed in the press. In terms of their representation, I will be referring to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1994) notion of representation, where she makes an important difference between representation as "*Darstellen*" in terms of depicting, or writing on or about a Subject in art on the one hand, while on the other she writes about representation as "*Vertreten*" in a political sense. The thesis deals only with the latter one, where – in our case – a collective subject is being constructed, subsequently objectified and politicized for a new social reality, bearing an agenda throughout the examined period.

When discussing ethnicity I draw mainly upon Anthony D. Smith's (1986) notions of ethnic origins. Ethnicity became the most prevailing dimension of collective identity, nation building and state building in the interwar period, and thus proved to be the *modus operandi* of community building in a minority setting as well. Especially in Central-East Europe, where as the conclusion of the First World War a significant number of new nation states emerged. The mobilisation of "*ethnos*" as an organisational principle, its leading role in shaping the political discourse makes it crucial when we examine representation in the above described sense. The ethnic element within the representation mechanisms in the cultural and especially literary field played a central role in these fields. The description of its role within the processes, institutions and individual agencies is thus, of utmost importance.

Moreover, the thesis examines representation in the literary field. It is rather important how the field was shaped and redefined from a semi-dependent, semi-provincial and semi-peripheral phenomenon into an independent production entity, with its own mechanisms for canonization on the one side, and funding on the other. Although the literary field was far from being autonomous in terms of Pierre Bourdieu (1995: 47), the negotiation processes of

minority cultural politics occurring in relation to Bucharest and Budapest are an important element of this ethnically conditioned field. In this sense, it will also address the interwar period in relation to inner-Hungarian representational issues, as well as representation as an inter-ethnic argument.

The research was conducted on the literary and critical journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, which appeared between May 1928 and September 1944 in Kolozsvár (Cluj). The journal was picked because a number of reasons. Firstly, it was the most prestigious and most influential Hungarian literary periodical amongst all of print media in the Kingdom of Romania. Secondly, it spans throughout the whole period, and in this sense documents the arguments of the late twenties, the thirties and the years of the Second World War. This makes it the perfect medium to examine, since it concludes the changing discursive positions of the ruling elites of the time. Thirdly, the *Erdélyi Helikon* was closely associated with the *Helikon közösség* (Helikon Community), an annually organised symposium gathering authors, intellectuals, and supporters. The intelligentsia constituting this group was however, not only relevant because of the personal links between the journal and the group, but because of the *Erdélyi Cépmíves Céh*, a publishing house, and the *Minerva* printing house, both operating in Kolozsvár (Cluj). These relations within the field between individual agents and institutions of culture formed the base of Transylvanian cultural production, and operated as a firm platform for the coproduction networks stretching throughout the post-Habsburg space of Central-Eastern Europe. To conclude, the journal was the longest lasting, most widely spread and most esteemed periodical published in Hungarian in the Kingdom of Romania at the time, making it an influential medium of negotiations in the public sphere on the one hand, and on the other one documenting these developments at the same time.

## 2. Goals and objectives

According to the above described specificities, the research question is: *How ethnicity influenced representation in the Hungarian literary field of Transylvania?* It should address all of the above mentioned aspects of the problem, while clarifying the influence both of individual and collective agency in the sense of Transylvanian institutions of the time. On the one hand, the thesis should explain the role of ethnicity in the establishment of representation, while on the other, to look into the different aspects and modes of ethnicity shaping the coproduction networks and the literary field in its entirety. Representation as “*Vertreten*” or in the sense of “speaking for” (Spivak, 1994: 70) is in this case important because it uses a regional type of ethnicity on the one side to detach itself from the Romanian majority, and the newly established political and economic power structures. On the other side it uses the same regional ethnic argument to separate itself from the cultural hegemonic power structures of Budapest. The goal of the thesis is to try to map out this ethnic argument, while establishing a separate literary field and art world autonomous from the art worlds of Hungary and the rest of Romania.

In this sense I am interested in the ethnic element of representation within the discourse of Transylvanism, as coined, described and used by the group annually gathering in Marosvécs castle (Brâncovenești), comprising the canon of works published by the publishing house *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh*, and filling the pages of the monthly literary journal *Erdélyi Helikon*. The thesis should disseminate the various dimensions of ethnicity mobilised during the negotiation processes of representing the literary field, and interpret the relations of these dimensions of ethnicity to the concrete agents and institutions of culture connected to the movement. It should also shed light on how the Transylvanists utilised ethnicity as sub-political agency for altering the power relations within and beyond the literary field.

The research was conducted on the journal *Erdélyi Helikon* because it was the periodical which was the most associated with the movement, and because – through articles and polemical essays – it mirrored the overall opinion within the Transylvanist movement of the interbellum. The analysed texts were chosen on the basis of using ethnicity as an argument, and are either relevant manifestos, proclamations, debate articles or essays.



### **3. Limitations**

The thesis deals with the representation of the Hungarian collective self in the Transylvanian literary field (Vertereten) and not through it (Darstellen). Following Spivak's notions (1994), this means, that it reflects on the relational issues of representation in terms of other ethnic groups in Transylvania only as much it is necessary to nuance the general focus of the thesis. In this sense it will also not emphasize the convergences and divergences of Hungarian representation processes in relation to Romanian or Transylvanian-German literary representational mechanisms. The thesis is also not an account of social, political or art history. The complexity of the topic demands to clarify certain historical aspects of the thesis, it is also important to note however, that this background was written focusing on the time frame, relations in cultural politics and the agents in the literary field relevant in terms of Transylvanism and does not pretend to give a broader overview. With regard to the overall topic, and the overwhelming majority of Hungarian names, institutions and socio-political processes, it was also a conscious decision to stick to the Hungarian geographic names as well.

#### **4. Hungarians in Transylvania, a brief overview of the period**

*“The price of staying here cannot be  
the giving up of a Hungarian identity.”<sup>1</sup>*

Without going back to demographics, social or political history the Middle Ages, the Principality of Transylvania during the Ottoman Empire, or the time when the region was incorporated into the Habsburg lands, Transylvania was inhabited by three major ethnic groups, Hungarians, Germans and Romanians. The ethnic and religious structure gradually changed during the centuries, and so has the balance of power relations within the political field. Prior to the First World War, Transylvania was an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary and thus, part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire. According to the Treaty of Trianon the historical regions of Transylvania, and parts of East-Banat, the Criş-area and Maramureş were seeded to the Kingdom of Romania. However, while gaining around 166.000 km<sup>2</sup> of territory, along with the Romanians, who by the treaty became redefined as a majority, roughly half of the incorporated population were minorities, who were yet to become citizens. These vast differences in terms of the majority and minorities not just reproduced the problems of the previous Habsburg-era by only reversing the power relations in the political field. They also strained almost every communication channel within the field, where only the centre of power shifted from Budapest to Bucharest. The interwar period was thus, hallmarked by Hungarian nationalism and territorial revisionism on the one side, with Romanian nationalism and assimilationist minority policies on the other. Dialogue in the political field, or firm and long standing negotiation positions were an exception.

The population in the region and its alterations is well documented in the last census conducted under Habsburg administration in 1910, and after several rather problematic censuses after the war, which were clearly bearing the stamp of a political agenda, the first properly conducted Romanian census being the one of 1930. According to the census of 1910, Romanians made up 53, 84% (2 821 773), Hungarians 31,65% (1 658 736) and Germans 10,61% (556 009) of the population. After two decades this changed to Romanians 57, 84% (3 206 261), Hungarians 24,42% (1 353 675) and Germans 9,81% (543 662).<sup>2</sup> It is

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<sup>1</sup> Kós-Zágoni-Paál, 1920: 31.

<sup>2</sup> <http://varga.adatbank.transindex.ro/>

also important to note, that the three ethnic groups formed majorities in different parts of the region, the Hungarians comprising most of the population in Székelyföld (Szekler-land – Ținutul Secuiesc) and Partium, the Germans in Királyföld (Königsboden – Pământul Crăiesc) and East-Banat, and Romanians in Central Transylvania and the South-Eastern parts. There was also a Hungarian majority in the cities, Arad (Arad), Brassó (Braşov), Kolozsvár (Cluj), Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu-Mureş), Nagyvárad (Oradea) or Temesvár (Timișoara).<sup>3</sup> The changes can be traced back in the further censuses of 1941, 1956, 1966, 1977, 1992, 2002 and 2011. As to the social structure of the population, it is relevant to note, that large parts of land belonged to the Hungarian aristocracy and the traditional churches, while the upper middle class – controlling industry, trade and the banking sector – was also comprised of mostly Hungarians and Germans. Furthermore, city dwellers and the urban bourgeois, lateiner<sup>4</sup> middle class was also mostly Hungarian, German or Jewish. In this sense, while it is relevant, that huge parts of the rural population were Romanian, and they gained political and administrative control, the accumulated cultural, economic and social capital remained in the hands of the urban middle and upper-middle class, and the landed aristocracy well into the 1930's. This had a huge impact on political communication, sometimes blocking most of the channels of peaceful conduct, which is in our case relevant, one of the agendas of the Transylvanists being to relax and pacify the situation, initialising cultural mediation – with more, or less success – on a sub-political level.

The largest city in Transylvania was and is Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), being the second largest city in Romania after Bucharest.<sup>5</sup> The city served as the *de facto* cultural centre for Hungarians in the region in previous times as well, while its function as a cultural, educational and political point of gravity grew radically after the First World War. In the interwar period, the city has been rather relevant as a bearer of Hungarian cultural life, and as a continuation of Hungarian cultural production and political representation. Other cities with a distinguished Hungarian majority, such as Arad, Nagyvárad or Temesvár could not compete with the historical prestige and the political relevance. Its appeal for intellectuals made it the centre of interwar Hungarian art worlds in Transylvania, and, which is especially important for this thesis, a gathering point for opinion makers in the fields of media, publishing, literature, theatre, the fine arts and cultural politics in general. A number of decisions in terms

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<sup>3</sup> For further information refer to Varga's work (1998)

<sup>4</sup> Lateiner – an educated person, implying a training in classical languages and the humanities

<sup>5</sup> Until 1974 Cluj, after which it was renamed Cluj-Napoca

of cultural politics and collective agency were made in the city, making it especially relevant as an intersection of coproduction networks reaching far beyond Transylvanian frameworks.

Transylvanian print media of the interbellum had a pivotal role in representing Hungarians in Romania. Continuing the rich traditions of press of the Habsburg-era, minority periodicals were also the rare success stories of the time. As from Christmas 1918 press from Hungary was banned from Romania. Nevertheless, during the period 1919–1924, 330 newspapers were regularly published, of which 87 were established before, while 243 after 1919 (18 daily-, 53 weekly newspapers, 35 church periodicals, 70 magazines). The number is even more striking, if we take the strict Bucharest censorship into account, and if we know, that in order to survive, a daily and weekly newspaper had to reach 10.000 copies for it to be lucrative (Bárdi, 2013: 90).

Aside from the press however, if we disseminate the Hungarian institutions in Transylvania according to their function, and look into their operative force, we can easily conclude that public life was practically hibernating. Up until 1925 Hungarian minority political parties were essentially powerless, since public administration was led by appointed officials and civil servants on all positions. Civil organisations from the local to the regional level, being the backbone of public life were blocked, and some elements of martial law were still enforced. The school system, had lost 1600 schools previously administered by the state, the remaining 428 operating within the confines of the church have been thus complemented with another 270 to somewhat match the demand. This was nevertheless not just done without any governmental funding in the first years, but also heavily hindered by a number of administrative policies (Bárdi, 2013: 90). Additionally, the historic churches (Roman Catholic, Calvinist and Unitarian) were also heavily struck by the agrarian reform and lost more than eighty percent of their property (Bárdi, 2013: 91).

According to the *Declaration* issued on 1. December 1918 in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) by the Romanian National Committee, large scale minority rights and autonomies had been granted. A few years later however, the Constitution of 1923 neglected not just most of the rights claimed by the Hungarian or German minority, but to strengthen the centralist state, it turned away from practically every regionalist initiative as well, which was not just a negative turn for the minorities, but also for the Romanian elites in Transylvania as well (Lengyel, 2007: 24). By the restrictive policies blocking territorial and cultural autonomy, Hungarians in Transylvania had to search for other modes of extra-parliamentary, sub-political ethnic self-organisation, one of which was Transylvanism this thesis discusses. The

“Transylvanist thought” although starting off as an informal strategy with a strong cultural focus, most certainly did not lack political, social and economic implications. Counting on Romanian and German cooperation as well and more inclusive minority policies, the Transylvanist thought did have its matching counterparts in Romanian and German political circles as well. This originated from other schools of thought, and would search political remedies for other problems, but the outcome for the minorities would have had been favourable. *“If however, the movement would manage to institutionalise itself as an inter-ethnic initiative, it would also point towards functional cooperation on the level of constitutional rights. This would signal a way out of the contradictory relationship towards the majority, into which the anti-minority state ideology cast the Hungarians and Germans. Namely, some parts of the Romanian intellectual and political elite were not that far from the opinion, that the structure of the state should mirror every region’s particularities – not just Transylvania.”* (Lengyel, 2007: 30).

For Bucharest, an inter-ethnic political approach was not acceptable. Firstly, a dominant part of the Romanian political circles estimated, that the Hungarian ethnic component would be too strong within a regionalist, inter-ethnic Transylvanist political programme. Following a crisis within the Hungarian Transylvanist movement in the 1930’s, this ethnic component grew even stronger, making it even more distrustful for the other ethnic groups in terms of political cooperation. Moreover, this mode of ethnic representation strengthened even more with the approach of World War II. Secondly, the Germans had found the movement appealing only until their political and cultural elite haven’t got under the influence of Nationalist Socialism in the early 1930’s, which diverted them even more, than the radicalising ethnocentric organisational patterns of the Hungarians. Thirdly, the negotiating positions of those Romanian leaders, who were inclined to cooperate to some extent, were not that influential in the Bucharest political circles, where an inter-ethnic or geo-cultural initiative was in general much less desirable, than a clearly ethno-cultural one.

As conservative and assimilationist as the Hungarian supremacist political standpoint was in Transylvania at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and during the First World War (especially after the military conflict of 1916), was the Romanian one after the war. In terms of direct involvement this meant, that it was also as restrictive as the Hungarians in the last decades of the Monarchy, where bans and abolitions were not necessarily parts of cultural policies. The cultural fields were mostly managed by the availability of public funding, which meant, that the majority was generously provided with state funds, buildings, institutional support and

sometimes even freed from taxation (for example theatre production), while the minorities had mostly to provide for themselves and develop a self-sustaining institutional network, while taxation policies were highly disproportionate, since cultural activity was conducted in a “foreign language” (publishing, theatre, etc.)

The Transylvanian socio-political climate of the interwar period was thus very turbulent, and in many ways unpredictable in the long run. After the first years of political boycott from the Hungarian ruling elite, when neither in 1919, nor in 1920 a Hungarian ethnic party was running in the parliamentary elections, and when most of Hungarian citizens did not even have the right to vote, several parties were established.<sup>6</sup> After several internal quarrels, formations and reformations, bans, fusions and separations however, political representation was rather concentrated in the hands of the antebellum power structures. It was mostly divided between politicians, who had held positions already in the Habsburg era, local aristocrats, the landed gentry, the church and the urban upper middle-class. Initiatives to articulate ethnic political representation, which would incorporate other strata of society, workers and population from more rural areas remained marginalised. Accordingly, most of the coproduction with Romanian and German parties in the interwar period was termed to secure this status quo. However, the fact that representation in the political field was focusing on the upper and upper middle class, Transylvanism as a more literary programme, leaned mostly on the middle classes, the “Bildungsbürgertum”<sup>7</sup> in its traditional sense and the folk culture, thus trying to represent through art and cultural production the strata excluded from the political field.

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<sup>6</sup> A detailed account of Hungarian political organisation can be found in Bárdi’s work (2013: 87)

<sup>7</sup> Bildungsbürgertum – A highly educated part of the bourgeoisie, forming also a relevant urban political force in Central-Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century

## 5. Transylvaniam

*“The art of the three nations in Transylvania could expect different fates after the regime-change”<sup>8</sup>*

One of the key concepts of the time is the much allusive, indefinite, often contested nevertheless widely used concept of Transylvaniam, also referred to as Transylvanian thought (erdélyi gondolat), or Transylvanian idea (transzilvánista eszme). Coined and used by leading Transylvanian intellectuals of the time, it is the cornerstone of the current thesis as well. Although it was widely used in the interwar years, it has its roots in the decentralizing, regionalist and multicultural traditions of previous centuries, and it was latently present as an opposing force of the Budapest-centric organisational principles well before the First World War. Its first occurrences in its modern sense date back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, its first major appearance in the public sphere with a lasting and altering social impact was however, when Károly Kós, who later became one of the leading figures of the movement composed his manifesto *“Shouting Word”* in 1920. (Kós, et al.: 1920)

All intellectuals advocating for the cause shared the belief, that Transylvanians have a collective identity shaped throughout the centuries regardless of ethnicity. Its roots stemming from the Transylvanian geography, the connection to the landscape and its unique history – mostly with references to the high Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Reformation. Its basic principles being cohabitation of culturally different constitutive elements, ethnic and religious tolerance to otherness, and balance between the surrounding political entities. They argued that there is a separate Transylvanian collective identity, different, older and more relevant than the mono-ethnic and monolingual cultures of the surrounding nation states. In order to understand further arguments, it is rather necessary to briefly introduce the concept and contextualise its historical, social and cultural affiliations.

Transylvaniam as an answer to the newly established socio-political and cultural realities was, and is even today to some degree a vaguely defined phenomenon in the social sciences. Although it had an undeniable impact on the construction of the post-Versailles Hungarian collective identity in Romania, in comparison to the humanities, especially the literary sciences and historiography, it was less approached from the perspective of social

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<sup>8</sup> Vásárhelyi Z. Emil: Remete-művészek. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1937: 81.

sciences. This could come on the one hand from the movements emphasis on literature and literary production in general. On the other, it is also possible that, aside as one of the manifold manifestations of minority politics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Transylvaniam never became a dominant organising principle in policymaking, whereas in the different fields of cultural production – especially in literature – it yielded lasting implications for several decades. As an important concept of cultural history it was widely contested, supported and referred to in the 1920's and 1930's, nevertheless it remained ambiguous even today. Hence, it remained an interesting but less relevant term for sociology, political sciences or cultural studies. Describing the movement, Béla Pomogáts, a literary historian writes: “*They [the authors of Helikon] approached it with poetic enthusiasm, and not with scientifically conceptualised precision.*” (Pomogáts, 1983: 80). And later on “*The Transylvanian idea, as an »ideology« did not get a conceptual definition in the end. The historiographers of Hungarian literature from Romania perceived it also as more of an idealised attitude or a work programme, than a factual »theory« or – in the sense of a history of the concept – as an »ideology«*” (Pomogáts, 1983: 81) It would be however, a great mistake to reduce this movement to a simple literary manifestation or art group (such as Bauhaus, Dada, Expressionism, Fauvism, etc.). Firstly, it did not start as a simple art movement. Secondly, the radius of its effects has been much wider than literature. This thesis will try to look into these implications stretching beyond the literary field, as the movement defined and mobilised the ethnic elements of the new minority setting.

According to a number of scholars from the early 1920's and onwards, Transylvaniam was an authentic expression, furthermore a mode of social, cultural and political organisation of the middle classes. Nándor Bárdi defines it as the legitimising ideology of the minority elites, taking the forms of an aesthetic programme, political thought and ethical belief system (Bárdi, 2013: 447). Admittedly, it started off as a programme from the bourgeois circles, the landed gentry and the intelligentsia in general, backed partly by the church and a few individuals from the aristocratic families of Transylvania. This programme, movement, ideology, sum of political strategies – defined at the time by the hybrid-rhetorics of humanism, liberal democracy and enlightenment – was conceptualised to later on “trickle down” and spread among the lower strata of Hungarian society in Transylvania. Due to the short time period of only two decades, and the overall historical circumstances of the “age of nationalism”, where on the ruins of Central European imperial structures, new nation states



are formed, a concept like Transylvanism could not become popular, even if it was defined in a more elaborate manner and politically better articulated at the time.

In its sense of the Enlightenment, Transylvanism was conceptualised predominantly as a letter-centred cultural model, giving a leading role on the one hand to literature as a traditional way of cultivation and emancipation, while on the other to the research and description of ethnicities living in Transylvania. Thus the profile of the journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, overarching ideological differences in politics from both right and left, a multitude of genres in literature and the polemic tone in the negotiating processes between the ethnicities. The *Erdélyi Helikon* was of course not the only periodical promoting the Transylvanian agenda. However, newspapers, journals, magazines or publishing houses which did, and were part of the academic and literary discourse were run by intellectuals, who were in one way or the other associated with the journal. The *Erdélyi Helikon* and the publishing house *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* were only manifest forms of the movement, while agency contributing to it was dispersed all over the region. Historical topics of Hungarian past from Transylvania were thus, becoming more and more relevant. Genres as the historical novel or historical short story, political or intellectual biographies of renowned Transylvanian figures, monographic texts on traditional Transylvanian architecture, historical research of institutions, movements, fortresses, settlements, cities, battles were published not just in weekly or monthly print media, but as separate books as well. Over time, being associated with the movement started to bear a stamp of prestige, which in return contributed even more to the topics, and gave additional impetus to the Transylvanist idea.

Transylvanism, as an intersection of the regional, the cultural and the political in the interwar period, kept a distance from radical movements which were retracing the collective roots using national romanticism, ethnicity, and race; or the rural discourse of the simple, pure and atavistic. They tried to stay on this course even in the times of the approaching Second World War – with more, or less success. Transylvanism remained within the confines of representing the history of the ruling classes on the one hand, while on the other of high-brow culture and the ethnographic approach to folk culture. Moreover, as in other European socio-political contexts of the 1920's and 1930's where ethnic or religious minorities tried to shape the public discourse, Transylvanism had on the one hand much in common with movements or even political parties coming from the moderate left of the political spectrum, leaning on pan-European and Central-European (“Mitteleuropa”) traditions, or the Oszkár

Jászi type of the so-called Danube-federation.<sup>9</sup> On the other, it was intellectually also related to some regional modes of identification in Europe such as the “Landschaftstheorie” from the German speaking parts of the continent, or the francophone “régionalisme” referring respectively to a specific *spirit loci*. Imola Katalin Nagy summing up several Hungarian and Romanian approaches to Transylvaniam concludes: “*If we try to resume the main ideas that shaped the Transylvanian ideology, we must mention that it had two main pillars, relying on two main arguments, namely the geography and the history of Transylvania that gave birth to a special Transylvanian spirituality. The positive aspects of this spirituality and the main elements of Transylvanianism as an identity discourse are: tolerance, multiculturalism, multilingualism, readiness to take action, defensive tendencies, an urge to protect national identity, respect for the mother tongue, anti-central attitudes and a strong need for freedom, europenism etc.*” (Nagy, 2014: 323)

In the sense of political negotiation in Transylvania, and leaning on the liberal traditions of progressive Hungarian journals from Budapest such as *Huszadik Század* (Twentieth Century) for social sciences or *Nyugat* (West) for art, criticism and literature, *Erdélyi Helikon*, as the bearer of Transylvaniam was a compromise between two main collective agents in the political field. Due to this compromise however, there have had been inner conflicts within the editorial, which also became more and more apparent during the 1930’s. Furthermore, different interpretations of Transylvaniam exist and this is why, one should neither think of, nor define the movement as a uniform group or a homogenous school of thought. The main approaches came from the social-democratic and progressive block, synthesising only by the end of the 1920’s as a political option, but having an influence on the public sphere well before that. In this respect, several members of the movement came from the so-called bourgeois-radicals, who stood behind most of the newspapers, journals and institutions of the early 1920’s and came from the circles of Mihály Károlyi and Oszkár Jászi (Pomogáts, 1983: 40.). The other important political element were the “folk radicals”. In comparison to the bourgeois-radicals, who leaned more on the Central-European middle class and aristocratic traditions of progressive urban thought, the latter ones were ideologically more related to the Romanian, Bulgarian or Polish agrarian-democratic and Christian-

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<sup>9</sup> The main ideas of Jászi’s Danube-federation were laid down on the eve of the First World War in his book *A Monarchia jövője* (The Future of the Monarchy). As a solution to the problem of ethnic minorities he proposes the federalisation of the Habsburg Empire, where the different ethnic groups would diffuse the political field dominated by the dualist structure of Vienna and Budapest.

democratic political culture, and with a strong emphasis on the rural population, supported by intellectuals such as Károly Kós, Áron Tamási or Benedek Elek (Pomogáts, 1983: 41).

By creating a whole discourse in the late 1920's, Transylvanism had an enormous impact on shaping the collective identity throughout the twentieth century, and has contemporary implications as well. Its ethnic basis was however, not as exclusive that we would describe it with the contemporary term: ethnocentrism. Although ethnicity was in the forefront, and its mobilisation has been a crucial issue, the cooperation between ethnicities in the shared inhabited space was equally important. Despite the fact, that there were members of the movement, who were more radical from the beginning (for example József Nyírő), they did never express these views as the parts of it, or in the journal. This inter-ethnic line of argumentation was only abandoned in the 1940's. However not even then, neither the movement, nor the journal turned into a medium of Hungarian nationalist propaganda facing against the neighbouring ethnicities or publishing anything, which would contradict its liberal and progressive ideals. In the interpretation of leading intellectuals of the time, (especially the older generation: Károly Kós, Aladár Kuncz, Ernő Ligeti, Jenő Szentimrei...) who shaped the regional public sphere, Transylvania and thus Transylvanism was not just a geographic term, but an economic and political one as well, where three constitutive ethnicities, Hungarians, Romanians and Germans live side by side since the Middle Ages. Differing from the official and main stream geo-political interpretations from Budapest and Bucharest, distancing themselves from the national boundaries of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, they argued for a peaceful cohabitation of these three nations of Transylvania on a regional level. Transylvanism, as a multicultural and inter-ethnic movement in its essence, reached out to the two other major ethnic groups in Transylvania, the Romanians and Germans from the beginning. The interwar collective identity had thus, although politicising ethnicity, placed it into a minority discourse within a historically existing political model – Transylvania, with other ethnic communities living in the same politically defined space.

One of the pivotal events for Transylvanists was the annual gathering in Marosvécs (Brâncovenești) in baron János Kemény's castle, who was one of the founders of the movement. The gathering named "*Helkoni közösség*" or "*Helikon Community*" existed between 1926 and 1944, while meeting annually in the castle for a few days until 1939. During the war they met there only once in 1942. However there were several, unofficial meetings in Kolozsvár as well. The gathering was conceptualised as a meeting to discuss the previous, and to make plans for the upcoming year, and was preceded with a personal

invitation of János Kemény. It was organised partly as a conference, but partly also as a literary festival, where on the last day the newest and unpublished works have been presented by the authors. It was primarily however, a working meeting usually covering editing decisions of the journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, publishing agenda for the *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh*, formulating open calls for drama texts, novels and other literary contributions for publishing or theatre. The usual proclamations of the movement were also prepared here, and signed by the members. The outcomes of the meetings were usually publicised in the upcoming autumn issue of *Erdélyi Helikon*.

As the Helikon in Marosvécs came into being by overarching different political options, its coalitional nature demanded refrained and patient literary politics as well (Pomogáts, 1983: 133). This meant that party politics and in a broader sense, belief systems connected to ideologies or religions had to be left out of the discussions in order to reach a pan-Hungarian understanding in the minority setting. Compromise, in sense of the political spectrum was also mirrored in picking the editor-in-chief of the periodical. To find a common ground between folk- and bourgeois radicals, the movement agreed upon count Miklós Bánffy. A man with abundant cultural, economic and social capital, who returned from Budapest as an ex-foreign minister of Hungary, thoroughly educated and had been previously associated with literature, opera, theatre and painting at the court and in his private life. He was a shareholder in the newspaper *Ellenzék*, and the printing house *Minerva*, one of the biggest landowners in Transylvania, a bank director in Kolozsvár, and one of the leading figures in the Calvinist Church. As a renowned figure, his headship automatically gave the periodical enough prestige to gather authors from differing political beliefs. Complemented with the annual gatherings in Marosvécs hallmarked by another important, yet politically also neutral figure, baron János Kemény, furthermore the work of Károly Kós's editing policies and aesthetic core in the journal and the publishing house kept the movement together.

To conclude, Transylvaniamobilised ethnicity when it realised, that a minority position in the negotiation processes is inevitable. It shifted from an intra-ethnic to an inter-ethnic representation and production model in the fields of culture, while it redefined its institutional network as well. Moreover, it hoped to bridge inter-ethnic conflict by promoting ethnicity, and at the same time encouraging other ethnicities within the shared inhabited space to do the same. In short, Transylvaniamobilised ethnicity was a set of guidelines comprising progressive Hungarian cultural politics of the time in Transylvania. The rules were set at the annual Helikon gathering in the Kemény-castle in Marosvécs, while its objective manifestations

were on the one hand the monthly journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, and on the other the publishing house *Erdélyi Szépművés Céh* and the *Minerva* printing house as specialised institutions of these art worlds.

## **6. Cultural production and the aspects of minority representation**

*“A minority is a minority only in politics,  
in its literature and culture it is universality itself”<sup>10</sup>*

Connected to the disoriented, devalued and “centre-less” literary field of the early and mid 1920’s, the Transylvanist movement tried to implement a structure in the field by inventing a political tradition of multicultural Transylvania by referring to past cooperation between the ethnicities within a shared political and economic terrain. This invention, as described by Eric Hobsbawm (1983), means implementation of certain practices which correspond to unquestionable and accepted references in the past. They are “*responses to novel situations, which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition.*” (Hobsbawm, 1983: 2) The construction of a Transylvanist tradition based on inter-ethnic ties, ethnic differences but cultural similarities in the shared inhabited space tried to structure cultural production, especially the literary field by operationalising ethnicity as an element of an inclusive collective identity to serve as an organisational principle for the neighbouring Germans and Romanians as well. Transylvanism, as a letter-based cultural model was primarily delimited by language, but by representing language it represented the myths, symbols and narratives of ethnicity as well.

One of the most important issues of this particular setting of the 1920’s and 1930’s was to define and perform minority, and since the intelligentsia connected to the Transylvanist movement had a vast input to this matter, this process is very much connected to the literary field. The number of novels, short stories, poems or dramatic works dealing with the collective trauma of becoming a minority is remarkable. It had become a literary trend to have a Transylvanian protagonist if it was fiction, to publish memoirs, recollections or historical documents from the canonised political past of various Transylvanian – mostly

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<sup>10</sup> Aladár Kuncz: Tíz év. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1928: 3.

Hungarian and Saxon – artists, travellers, noblemen and scholars. This type of representation and textual utterance is not however, the current thesis is analysing. Thus, leaning on the essay *Can the Subaltern Speak* by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, it is crucial to divide the modes of representation, and thoroughly explain the one we will be focusing on. According to Spivak (1994: 70), “*Two senses of representation are being run together: representation as »speaking for«, as in politics, and representation as »re-presentation«, as in art or philosophy. [...] These two senses of representation – within state formation and the law, on the one hand, and in subject-predication, on the other – are related but irreducibly discontinuous.*” She then continues to deconstruct the term by referring to the first one as a “proxy”, naming it with the German word “Vertreten”, and the other one as a “portrait”, naming it “Darstellen”. To negotiate for and construct a Subject, which was confined to a provincial, regional, “vicinal” literary field, with much lower prestige in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century than the Budapest one, whereas this changed to a minority socio-political context of cultural production only after 1920, meant, that they had to construct a literary field comprised of agents and institutions which could “*speak, act and know for themselves*” (Spivak, 1994: 71.). Meaning, they had to represent themselves in the sense of “Vertreten”, appearing as the highest authority in the literary field they constructed themselves, where neither the hegemonic power structures from institutions of culture centred in Budapest, nor the structural political-economic oppression from Bucharest could successfully intervene. A Subject constructed like this could voice its own preferences, define its own boundaries, positively discriminate its own language, myths, symbols, values and norms. The Subject could this way turn the tables and re-label the reference points previously defined as provincial, while producing works of art to support this claim. The arguments of these negotiation processes were formulated in the essays and debate-articles in the press, most notably the *Erdélyi Helikon*, and were complemented by producing the book series of the publishing house *Erdélyi Szépművés Céh*. The goal of this thesis is thus, to look into these textual references in the journal, and outline the ethnic argument within these representation mechanisms.

After the Great War the literary field had to be not only reorganised because of the deficit of artists who lost their lives or emigrated, and the cultural capital these writers as individual agents could have brought into the field, but as mentioned, it also had to be restructured as a minority one. Ethnicity, previously a taken-for-granted quality thus, gained a central position. The Transylvanist movement in this “minoritarian” sense primarily installed

a new aesthetic regime into the field as they restructured it, and by taking one step back from the avant-garde, leaned actually on the turn of the century traditions of the literary journal *Nyugat* (West) from Budapest. As a regionalist, minority cultural programme however, it shifted the balance of topics at the same time, making ethnic Transylvanian life as its primary focus. Furthermore, in this specific climate of cultural production, the movement also had to claim the right to define itself, and the principles of its legitimacy between the power structures of Budapest and Bucharest.<sup>11</sup> Instead of an autarchic and exclusive negotiating position however, they constructed an open ended field with options of input from both parties, but clear delimitations from them as well. Since this way literary production was conditioned by agents within and beyond the field, its representation (*Vertreten*) had to address the centres of power outside the field as well, while the other type of representation (*Darstellen*) had to stay within the boundaries of the field. Maintaining a position as this one, did not primarily represent ethnicity because they defined Transylvanism as such, but because the field was dominated by a remarkable literary production along their arguments in the negotiating process. As an established hierarchy of values, norms, myths and symbols was reached, and a market of symbolic goods already in sway, representation (*Vertreten*) beyond the field, and a defensible negotiating position was more than needed. In Bourdieu's terms, "*The discourse on the work is not a simple side-effect, designed to encourage its apprehension and appreciation, but a moment which is part of the production of the work, of its meaning and its value.*" (Bourdieu, 1996: 17). This discourse as a negotiating process, and as a "*production of belief*" (Bourdieu, 1996: 166) in criticism, manifestos and polemic articles nevertheless, had to contain the dimensions of ethnicity as a delimiting argument by default. Ethnicity as a concept was thus, implemented in the field not only as a neutral cultural marker, but as a signifier pointing towards a community amongst "Others", and to a literary production authentic within this socio-political milieu. Ethnicity was a key term of diversity, represented (*Vertreten*) as the basic unit of the literary field, the values and norms it conveyed were however represented (*Darstellen*) as universal values, thus including the neighbouring Others into the field. The members of the Transylvanist movement and the movement itself were naturally not the only agents of cultural production in Transylvania. Nevertheless, they were the only ones capable of creating an independent Hungarian literary field, and a prestigious canon of works relevant both within and beyond its borders.

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<sup>11</sup> A similar logic is described by Bourdieu (1996: 61)

To link ethnic representation to a letter-based cultural model had several advantages. A literary journal, such as the *Erdélyi Helikon* was able not just to give a compact monthly recollection as a single unit of the literary field, accumulating and reflecting on the cultural production during a thirty-day period. It was also capable of representing (Vertreten) a regional coproduction network and a market of symbolic goods with clear delimitations from other networks and other markets of symbolic goods at the same time. A journal like this was thus, a synthesis of a spatial and temporal production of a month presented to the reader, who as a consumer could not just identify with the represented (Darstellen) myths, memories, symbols and values Anthony D. Smith (1986: 15) is referring to, but also imagine the other readers within the same inhabited space this issue – as every past issue of the same journal – is distributed. Imagining the community of readers as representatives of the whole ethnic community means, conceptualising the world of letters as a vehicle of *pars pro toto* imagination, projecting – in our case – more than one and a half million people during the two decades (Anderson, 1991: 32.).

The complexities of the negotiation processes, the manifoldness of arguments and counterarguments branching out to both sides of the political spectrum, can be grasped in the following quote. *“It is more than interesting, from which sides the vehement attacks come from against the Transylvanian idea itself and the struggling Transylvanian literature working on its evolvement. The superficial quasi-progression of the extreme left accuses it to be enclosed and regressive. The right wing ill-considered quasi-nationalism blows the whistle, that it is not national enough. Quasi-criticism left outside the inner circles of literature says it is an artificial customs-barrier, protecting illegitimately the advantages for success of a protectionist clique. The most impressive statement is however the one which claims, that the Transylvanist idea, and its bearer, the Transylvanian literature simply does not exist.”*<sup>12</sup> When Jürgen Habermas discusses the institutions of the public sphere, he mentions, that *“The issues discussed became »general« not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility, everyone had to be able to participate.”* (Habermas, 1989: 37). Although he connects this to early 18<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe, similar can be said to late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Europe. Due to the centralised nature of the Habsburg Empire, the provincial cities and regions had to bare a certain belatedness even after the dualistic structure dissolved. The necessity of everyone to participate in the discussion on

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<sup>12</sup> Kádár Imre: Az erdélyi gondolat és ellenfelei. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1929: 161.



representation was however a crucial factor. This manifested itself on the one hand, in public announcements in the press throughout the 1920's and 1930's, which resulted in opinions published from different registers of Transylvanian society. It was of utmost importance to map the intellectual terrain within the field and hear as much opinions as possible. Similarly, the discussions were focusing on the Hungarian representation possibilities in the literary field, but to some extent German and Romanian arguments were also received. On the other hand, as already mentioned, the initial design of *Erdélyi Helikon*'s editorial was conceptualised as a print medium, which should gather political opinion from the larger portion of the political spectrum. It had to address general issues of minority publishing, and if not everyone, but a relevant part of the Hungarian intelligentsia was invited to participate. It was a compromise, which brought different ideologies from moderate left to moderate right, different schools of thought and different aesthetic concepts to one table. It was crucial to open this platform in the public sphere, where ethnic and minority representation should be openly negotiated, defined and performed. The writers gathered around the idea of Transylvaniam were in this sense a loosely interconnected group of private people, which came together to form a public in the castle of Marosvécs or the journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, negotiating the relationship with the state, and the possibilities of minority representation through cultural production, which stood as the core of the movement. As individuals, most of them met only in print and once a year at the gathering, their opinion – along with other opinions – was nevertheless part of this debate on how the literary field should look like and how the restructured ethnic dimensions of a minority should shape this field in representing it.<sup>13</sup> Production and consumption of culture was never primarily discussed nor perceived as a

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<sup>13</sup> A good reference of the social composition of this elite, and the combinations of capital they invested in the movement is the list of the people invited to the first meeting at Marosvécs castle by baron János Kemény: Lajos Áprily (professor), Count Miklós Bánffy de Losoncz (landowner), Oszkár Bárd (physician), Lajos Bartalis (professor), Mária Berde (professor), Jenő Dsida (journalist), Károly Endre (civil servant), Irén Gulácsy (journalist), Domokos Gyallay (newspaper editor), Sándor Hunyady (journalist), Sándor Kacsó (journalist), Imre Kádár (journalist), Benő Karácsony (attorney), János Kemény (landowner), Károly Kós (architect), Dénes Kovács (professor), Aladár Kuncz (journalist), Imre Lakatos (journalist), Ernő Ligeti (journalist), Sándor Makkai (bishop), Rodion Markovits (journalist), Károly Molter (professor), Dániel Nagy (journalist), József Nyírő (journalist), Lajos Olosz (attorney), Sándor Reményik (professor), Domokos Sipos (journalist), György Szántó (journalist), Jenő Szentimrei (military officer), István Szabó-Szombati (pastor), Géza Tabéry (journalist), Áron Tamási (journalist), László Tompa (journalist). The list expanded along the years, but the general outline of the social background remained.

part of the economy or as a private enterprise. Due to the segregating policies of the Romanian state it was in the beginning not at all lucrative. This somewhat changed in the 1930's with the expanding export to the Budapest markets, but even then it was not primarily done for financial gain. Nevertheless, during its existence of almost two decades more than two million books of the editions of *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* were sold, which not only means, that despite of a minority setting, intensive censorship, a financial crisis and war, the publishing house operated as a moderately successful enterprise, but also, that there was a demand both in Transylvania and beyond the borders for products coming from the such a literary field.<sup>14</sup>

This specific letter-based Hungarian culture in Transylvania had to be re-evaluated and legitimised in the 1920's both in relation to Bucharest and Budapest. Literature and cultural production in general stopped being taken for granted and perceived as pure leisure behaviour. Entering the public sphere it became public interest, defined as a minority issue by the urban bourgeois reading public. In his memoirs Ernő Ligeti points out how literature in a minority setting is more than a branch of entertainment industry, and how it seizes to be (only) a form of pastime activity. (Ligeti, 1941: 35) Similarly, Aladár Kuncz also points out, when explaining contemporary literary politics in 1928 to the Budapest readers, that with literary production, a construction of Transylvanian identity inevitably ensued. (Kuncz, 1928: 20) To be a writer, a poet, a dramatist, moreover a literary or theatre critic in a minority social setting surpasses the purely aesthetic – it becomes political in its core. It joins both senses of representation, while the aesthetic and political agenda become often inseparable as well. Dimensions of the ethnic argument entered the public sphere through the press, precisely because Hungarian literature in Transylvania grew beyond the private sphere of pure entertainment, and since it became a public interest through the socio-political setting, ethnic representation (in its both senses) occurred repeatedly in the negotiating processes in print media. Negotiating minority, and representing this process in the press would be nevertheless insufficient, if the regional power structures and the broader political field are unsupportive. Transylvanism as a programme, remained mainly a cultural model precisely, because daily politics often saw and represented ethnicity differently. *“The press, especially the Keleti Újság steered the Hungarian community step-by-step to the understanding, to consider itself institutionally as a minority as well. For an activity to evolve however, it was not an*

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<sup>14</sup> László Kovács: Két millió könyv. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1944: 315.

*easily avoidable obstruction that a political circle, which could have filled the gap, was missing.*” (Ligeti, 1941: 57) In this sense, even if the polarised opinions in the public sphere would have resulted in viable options of ethnic representation, Transylvaniam as a catalyst but also as a product of the literary field could hardly ever transgress its own boundaries. Yet if we perceive Transylvaniam as a programme of a specific high brow culture, as a cultural model constructed by the elites of the time, who perceived this culture not as pure leisure behaviour any longer, but as sub-political agency hoping to bypass party-politics and the realm of daily politics in the long run, then it is justified to look at some print media of the time, such as *Erdélyi Helikon* as mechanisms to introduce minority issues into the public sphere by critical reflections on culture. As Habermas states “*The public sphere assumes advertising functions. The more it can be deployed as a vehicle for political and economic propaganda, the more it becomes unpolitical as a whole and pseudo-privatized.*” (Habermas, 1989: 175.). *Erdélyi Helikon* however, could precisely remain political because it stayed a medium of cultural liaison throughout the 1920’s and most of the 1930’s. Its function changed gradually during the late 1930’s as the inter-ethnic negotiation paths were slowly abandoned. A shared Transylvanist agenda became anachronistic as the Germans came more and more under influence of the foreign policies of the Third Reich from 1933, after which also Hungarian revisionist politics became steadily a threat to Romanian daily politics on the long run. The final disruption was the Second Vienna Award, when public opinion in print media was irrevocably re-politicised, privatised by mainstream political agendas, while genuine private opinion became precariously auto-censored. This made even prestigious journals like *Erdélyi Helikon* – previously one of the rare examples of a forum for the middle- and upper middle class reading public – in the 1940’s impossible.

In order to understand however, the concept of ethnicity within the Transylvanist argumentation paths it would be important to look into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century rhetoric these arguments are formed in. Ethnicity as a concept – although almost never referred to directly as such – is being mobilised as part of a framework for national survival after the Great War. As Transylvaniam has been proposed as a letter-centred cultural model for minorities, this framework leaned on the one hand on the Central-European traditions of social and political sciences, most notably on the work of Oszkár Jászi. On the other, since these arguments were mostly formulated by scholars also active in the literary field it is very important to note the profound impact of Hyppolite Taine and the French positivist traditions Taine himself was subjected to. Notably, Taine’s theory of literary production outlined in his seminal work,

*History of English Literature*, focuses on three major elements: race, milieu, and moment, denoting the time, place and social context of the author. In this sense, when we think of ethnicity as a vital element of negotiating Transylvaniam during the interwar years, we have to bear in mind, that it was not just following the political discourse of Central European *fin de siècle* liberal-democracy, but was also coined using Taine's terminology. In Taine's theory (1871: 7) there is "a system in human sentiments and ideas; and this system has for its motive power certain general traits, certain marks of the intellect and the heart common to men of one race, age, or country.". Later on he continues "What we call race are the innate and hereditary dispositions which man brings with him to the light, and which, as a rule, are united with the marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body. They vary with various peoples." (Taine, 1871: 10). When focusing on, what we would today call the socio-political context, he writes "Beside the permanent impulse and the given surroundings, there is the acquired momentum. When the national character and the surrounding circumstances operate, it is not upon a *t a b u l a r a s a*, but on a ground on which marks are already impressed. According as one takes the ground at one moment or another, the imprint is different; and this is the cause that the total effect is different. (Taine, 1871: 12) Comparing this to Károly Kós, the editor-in-chief of *Erdélyi Helikon*, and one of the most agile proponents of Transylvaniam, when answering whether Transylvanian literary production is different, we can read how he balances ethnic and cultural identity according to Taine's theoretical framework, moreover, how he connects territory to "predestination". "The Transylvanian man is in every aspect determined by this land, which does not have a separate, specific past without any reason proved by history [...] There is a Transylvanian psyche, which is nevertheless not a privilege of only Transylvanian Hungarians, but also a predestination of Germans and Romanians also"<sup>15</sup>

Although anachronistic today, the romanticised proto-national notion of ethnic identity referred to as race, can be translated into Anthony D. Smith's theory of ethnic origins. By ethnicity he understands an element of national identity, in the non-Western conception of the nation prevalent in Eastern-Europe and Asia. Moreover, he states "Its distinguishing feature is its emphasis on a community of birth and native culture [...] A nation, in other words, was first and foremost a community of common descent. (Smith, 1991: 11.). Hungarian national identity, especially as it was (re)constructed after 1920, but in some

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<sup>15</sup> Károly Kós. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1928: 57.

cases even before that, gave a prominent role to ethnicity as a *differentia specifica*. This is even more apparent in the Hungarian minority constellations of Romania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, where the notion of ethnic descent was often prevalent and exclusive in both minority and majority politics of the time as well. In his earlier book, focusing only on ethnicity Smith disseminates the term, separates ethnicity from other collective identities, and puts it into a political and socio-historical perspective. (Smith, 1986.) What he argues – and what is of importance not just for this inquiry, but what connects it to Taine’s work as well – is that there are several dimensions of “ethnie”, which “*are derived, less from »objective« indicators like fertility, literacy or urbanization rates (important though these are in given circumstances), than from the meanings conferred by a number of men and women over some generations on certain cultural, spatial and temporal properties of their interaction and shared experiences.*” (Smith, 1986: 22.) These meanings, passed on through generations are modified and reinterpreted. Their accumulation forms these dimensions of ethnicity, articulating not just the way a community is imagined – in the sense of Benedict Anderson – and delimited from other, neighbouring communities, but also, how institutions are regulated on the macro level or day-to-day agency is conducted on the micro level. In this sense, it is rather important how these various dimensions were operationalised and politicised in the press during the interbellum in Transylvania, and how this relation set the tone of representation (Vertreten) towards the political entities of Romania and Hungary in cultural production.

Anthony D. Smith thus, defines six dimensions of “ethnie”, first of which is the *collective name*. (Smith, 1986: 22) Hungarians in Transylvania (transzilván, erdélyi) developed this sense of community and difference long before 1920, and it was used by its ruling elites in political discourse for the past several centuries. Its usage however, intensified by the turn of the century, and gained even more importance after the Great War. They have also passed on *a common myth of descent*, connected primarily to the political culture of the Principality of Transylvania, the aristocratic family lineages, the wide range Saxon and Szekler autonomies of the high Middle Ages, but also to the distinctive Hungarian ethnographic heritage. This highly political dimension was however, not just an important reference point in negotiating representation, it was also an important element in the other sense of representation (Darstellen), which we will not be dealing with in this thesis, but it was conveyed through literature, making it rather important to note. “*There is also an important aesthetic dimension; ethnic symbols provide satisfying forms, and ethnic myths are*

conveyed in apt genres, for communication and mobilization. As they emerge from the collective experiences of successive generations, the myths coalesce and are edited into chronicles, epics and ballads, which combine cognitive maps of the community's history and situation with poetic metaphors of its sense of dignity and identity." (Smith, 1986: 24). This connects to the next dimension of "ethnie", which is the *shared history* of the ethnic community, which at this point does not need further elaboration. Another important dimension however, conveyed extensively through both the journal *Erdélyi Helikon* and the publications of the *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* is the *distinctive shared culture*. Its representation transgressing state borders towards Hungary and language barriers towards Romania played a key role when ethnicity was mobilised and the regional Hungarian identity was constructed. "The most common shared and distinctive traits are those of language and religion; but customs, institutions, laws, folklore, architecture, dress, food, music and the arts, even colour and physique, may augment the differences or take their place." (Smith, 1986: 26). The most important dimension of all was nevertheless the *association with a specific territory*, which in the case of Hungarians in Transylvania was not only perceived as the cradle of a specific socio-cultural community, but it was also proposed as a negotiating platform for an inter-ethnic argument, reaching towards the German and Romanian speaking population of the region. This "alleged and felt symbiosis between a certain piece of earth and »its« community" (Smith, 1986: 28). has been conceptualised as a shared inhabited space with Germans traditionally referring to it as Siebenbürgen and Romanians naming it Ardeal. This is closely connected to what Smith calls *sense of solidarity* and which is also relevant when we discuss ethnic mobilisation for the sake of representational agency. "To qualify, therefore, as an ethnic community or *e t h n i e* (as opposed to just an ethnic category), there must also emerge a strong sense of belonging and an active solidarity, which in time of stress and danger can override class, factional or regional divisions within the community. In practice, the sense of active solidarity and co-operation varies considerably, as it does in latter-day fully-fledged and recognized nations. But, if we are to speak of a genuine ethnie, this sense of solidarity and community must animate at least the educated upper strata, who can, if need be, communicate it to other strata and regions in the community." (Smith, 1986: 30)

As a platform of negotiating practices in the multi-national system of cultural production we are analysing, it has been of utmost importance to define the literary field as an ethnic minority one on the one hand, while at the same time to detach the representation mechanisms from previous affiliations, thus decentralising the pre-war Hungarian literary

field. On the other hand, it was also relevant in terms of representation to stress the shared political association of the inhabited space of Romania. The utilisation of the ethnic element in this inter-state and intra-state dichotomy was thus, a cautiously tuned negotiating process communicated through the Hungarian press of Transylvania, particularly by *Erdélyi Helikon*, the official medium of the movement, and the publications associated with the movement. The movement has thus outlined a universalist and maximalist programme, which although not political in its manifest form, reached nevertheless far beyond political implications in its impact on practically every aspect of social life.

## 7. Milestones

*“Before the war, the Transylvanian artist came home only for vacation, most of them worked in Budapest; today, they work at home, going away only for vacation”<sup>16</sup>*

In order to look into the ethnic argument we have to analyse the preconditions and the limits of it within the negotiation process. Keeping this in mind, we will briefly introduce three far-reaching texts connected to the movement, but published decades apart. The first two of these texts came from figures, who had opinion-making influences in the movement, and had immense impact on-, but were nevertheless not published in *Erdélyi Helikon*. The last text however, stands for the shift in the ideological blueprint of the movement, and was published in the journal in a time when its editing policies were drastically changing as well. In a continuum of meaning production, these texts are milestones containing the accumulated connotations and the shift itself, resulting from the historical turning points in Transylvania. They utilise various dimensions of the ethnic argument referring to several things at different points of time, one of which is literary production we are interested in. This way we will be able to look diachronically into the negotiating processes, and how this ethnic-consciousness as an important part of collective identity changed.

Analysing the political jargon of the Student Movement of 1968, connected to the self-portrayals of Rudi Dutschke and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, Ruth Wodak points out the following. *“Political groups need their own language and portray themselves via this language; they define their territory by means of their language; they signal their ideology through certain slogans and stereotypes; their ideological structure is joined together in a certain way and so is their argumentation. Dependent on rules and programs respectively, this use of language may serve to produce provocation, or to incite reflection, or to effect the emergence of a ghetto.”*(Wodak, 1989: 137). If we perceive individual, but reflexive verbalisations of ethnicity in this political sense as presentations of a collective self, then it is also important how this ethnic argument is constructed, and which are the elements the writer himself considers relevant. Some texts were written to trigger public opinion, to provoke a reaction, to mobilise, to gain indirect political relevance through written language, to

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<sup>16</sup> Kós Károly: Erdélyi garfika, erdélyi grafikusok. In. *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1929: 335.



influence politics without being a part of the political field, to represent (Vertreten) through articles in the press, or to advocate for an ethnic minority by the means of literature.

### 7.1 Shouting Word!

As a prelude to the movement, published well before an idea of a journal, a publishing house or an autonomous literary field, the manifesto titled *Kiáltó Szó* (Shouting Word) appeared, written by Károly Kós, István Zágoni and Árpád Paál. It was published by the daily newspaper *Keleti Újság* in 10.000 copies in 1920 in Kolozsvár. (Ligeti, 1941: 57.) Comprised of three shorter texts from three different authors, it was a reaction to passive resistance, a protest of the Hungarian elites to participate in the political life of the new Romanian state, which would legitimise it. Passive resistance would however not have brought beneficial outcomes in the long run. The manifesto was the first structured call for action, and the first one, which had an impact.

Written in a form of a manifest, and giving the overall title of the publication, the first one of these three texts is by Károly Kós. On the one hand, he is one of the first ones to acknowledge, that historic decisions had been made, and the political realities have changed also. He neither provides the reader with clear directions of agency, nor is that his intention. He concludes however, that whatever the future may bring, Hungarians from Transylvania have to work together for a national autonomy promised in the peace agreements. Moreover, he also proposes already in 1920, that this autonomy should be followed by the Transylvanian Germans and Romanians also. The main focus of the manifest is nevertheless, on the Hungarians of “Erdély, Bánság, Kőrösvidék és Máramaros” already indicated by the subtitle, and later on reoccurring several times in the text. *“Two million Hungarians of Transylvania, Banat, Criş-area and Maramureş, it is not I that uttered it, but the truncated Hungary uttered the sentence on us: I cannot do other, only to accept this verdict, which was read, announced and enforced against my will and faith: You, who were torn away from me with violence, I renounce you.”* (Kós, et al., 1920: 2.)

In this first text Kós emphasises almost exclusively the territorial dimension of ethnicity, and the Hungarian connection to it. Unlike his later writings, which connect this territoriality with ancestry, language and history, in this initial text the link is between the

collective name (Hungarians) as a predominant signifier and the inhabited space. He makes a distinction however already in 1920 between Hungary-Transylvania and Hungarians-Transylvanians. In its rather allegoric language of the manifest this is mentioned as the gaze towards the West, which in case of Transylvanian geography is the direction towards Hungary. In the further text he also writes about the streams flowing downwards to the Great Hungarian Plain (Alföld), and pointing towards those, who left Transylvania and repatriated to Hungary. *“And who departed along the waters cannot return here, who is no longer amongst us, should not even wish to be a part of us; he will neither have a place, nor a legacy here.”*(Kós, et al., 1920: 3)

The ethnic argument in his representation is moreover connected to a wider political collective identity of Romania, where the Hungarian ethnic community would have certain rights but also obligations as citizens. Within this framework of western or territorial nationalism, although Romania is the classic example of the “eastern” nation-to-state model, ethnicity is grasped as a possible element in state building but not nation building. Citizens of Hungarian ethnicity would in this sense be loyal taxpayers to Bucharest, striving to cohabitation and political participation on a regional level on the one hand, while on the other, it would be a condition to treat the signifiers of ethnicity intact for further development. *“We, the two million working and taxpaying citizens, who produce material and cultural goods are an outstanding gain of strength to Romania. But we, the two million not working, unproductive, loathing, sneaky, inner enemy: we are a horrible sore to Romania. We declare however openly and sincerely: we are rather loyal, than rebellious, rather building, than tearing, rather fair friends, than secret enemies. But with the condition, that a minimum is granted to us within the new outline, which is on the basis of our millennial past for our national culture, ancient traditions, racial identity, social sentiment, economic development necessary.”* (Kós, et al., 1920: 4) Kós aims to mobilise the Hungarian population by politicising a distinctive culture, a collective regional identity and specific traditions tied to a distinctive descent. He also refers to the Hungarian race (*“magyar faj”*), which could only be understood within Taine’s above mentioned framework of cultural production. It is however interesting, that although Károly Kós names the dimensions of ethnicity he aims to defend, he mostly avoids doing it in a concentrated form like this, when some years later he has to define the roots of Transylvanist thought. It is also relevant, that this is one of the rare texts where Kós advocates openly political goals: *“I shout openly and bravely to the Romania which got bigger with us: we, Romanian citizens of Hungarian race,*

*Hungarian faith and Hungarian language demand national autonomy, with the help of which Greater Romania will secure us as reliable civilians. We will not bargain.*”(Kós, et al., 1920: 5)

The second text, written by István Zágoni puts his arguments of ethnic representation in a more legal framework connected to the two or threefold political history of Transylvania in relation to Romanian and Hungarian politics of previous centuries. In his case, representation means active participation. And although, along with Kós and Paál he sees the passive resistance of the past years justified, the time for ethnic self-organization and a solidarity built on ethnic ties has come, and has to be acted upon without any further ado. *“We prepare our spiritual strength, ourselves to accept this, for to hold our lands, to stand our ground and to develop Hungarian culture – that is our bidding national obligation”.* (Kós, et al., 1920: 7) A few lines later he connects this land to the genealogic heritage. *“The land, where our family lineages are deeply rooted, has only now been rightfully inscribed into the Romanian land register”* (Kós, et al., 1920: 7)

With this he links responsible individual agency with an institutional, systemic level, which still has to be conceptualised, but he also links this present responsibility to preserve the past. For Zágoni, individual agency in the sense of political and social participation is of crucial importance. In his terms is ethnic mobilisation for political organisations as much important, as it is in the cultural and educational field, where passive resistance would be even more disastrous than in political representation. Reading the press, visiting theatre, book clubs, public readings and concerts, participating in public church and school manifestations are all signifiers of ethnic representation and this stands in the centre of Zágoni’s part of the manifesto. In Zágoni’s pragmatic framework, securing objective living conditions (életlehetőség) for the Hungarians in Transylvania would set a stable base for future development. Ethnicity in his argumentation apparatus is tied to “economic soil” (gazdasági talajt) and a “road to cultural development” (a kulturfejlődés útját). (Kós, et al., 1920: 30) His choice of words are no coincidence. Liberal agrarian reforms of the late-Habsburg era and the imperatives of private ownership shine throughout the whole text. He makes private economic enterprise and individual independence tied to an ethnic base a secure starting point of minority representation in political and cultural activity. This is of course connected to an autonomous cultural development, conditioned with the long Hungarian cultivation processes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the traditional high brow and folk cultures of Hungarians in Transylvania.

Moreover, he stands by his lateral democratic principles reflecting on the general responsibilities and obligations, meaning a community interconnected horizontally by ethnicities, and not by the traditional stratification mechanisms and segregating power structures of an estate society. *“Today, the nation does not only consist of the seven-plum-tree honourables and lords of even higher titles, but we are all members with equal rights. We claim the same national rights, but we are also all ready to sacrifice ourselves for them.”* (Kós, et al., 1920: 31) In the further sections of the text he connects ethnic representation to the rule of law, progressive international legal norms and values of the time, which would secure autonomous internal production for all citizens organised in ethnic communities. Political representation would thus be tied to ethnicity, it would however have implications of citizenship in terms of individual participatory practices. This can be seen in the final sections of the text, under the title, *What to do? (Mit kell tenni?)*, where he elaborates how representation as he proposes it is directly and in some cases (for example: cultural production) exclusively tied to ethnicity. Amongst other things, he speaks for a national autonomy, with national register of names (*nemzeti kataszter*) for the mixed regions, and territorial autonomy where one or the other ethnic community forms a majority. Later on he connects language rights, education and cultural production to these. The connection of an ethnic community to a certain territory, and its political organisation within it are the main concepts István Zágoni operates with. Ethnicity is thus conditioned and conditioning an ancestral homeland, a territorial claim co-dependent with active political participation for *all* of its members defined by a shared common culture, language and descent.

The third part of the manifesto is written by Árpád Paál, whose position in the negotiating process anticipates however, rather institutional remedies. Paál writes that ethnic representation should be an outcome of democratic processes in the Western world, meaning the changes in policies, altering the inherited power structures and elites, which survived the World War and the broadening of institutional frameworks for more inclusive political participation on the one hand, and global transparency on the other. *“We have to prepare ourselves to the arrival of world democracy.”* Ethnicity, and especially Transylvanian Hungarians are connected to this global process as “ones of many”, where the system itself would guarantee the safety of the constituent ethnic groups. Within this system Hungarians would *“voluntarily and with proper agreements correct the ill constitution of the peace treaty. We would this way connect the future of the Hungarians who were torn away, into the uplifting securities of word-democracy.”* (Kós, et al., 1920: 44) Ethnic mobilisation is

however, in this last section of the Manifesto focused on the political field, especially on parliamentarianism, political parties, administrative policies and minority rights. Ethnic dimensions of cultural production are not parts of this treatise.

## 7.2 Our revision?

Another seminal publication is a collection of essays, originally a series of lectures held by the Calvinist bishop Sándor Makkai in Kolozsvár. They are titled: *Magunk revíziója* (Our Revision) They were published by the *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh*, also in Kolozsvár in 1931. Károly Kós, who visited these lectures, recollects Makkai's words as a "*sober warning and exact definition of possibilities of life-sustaining Hungarian work*"<sup>17</sup> Kós also concludes, that Makkai did not say anything radically new, and that these ideas have been already present in Transylvanian public discourse for some time. There has been however, no one from the Hungarian elite – so Kós continues – who, by a concise diagnosis and with a sufficient amount of symbolic capital, would generate any kind of impact. Sándor Makkai, as a bishop, a senator in the Romanian parliament in Bucharest, a publicist and a renowned writer had this kind of moral high ground, and was able to have some effect on the public sphere. Furthermore, Károly Kós adds two more relevant thoughts. First, that in a printed form, the genre of the five lectures changes into a manifesto (röpirat). Second, that this book is actually the book of political conscience of one and a half million Hungarians of Transylvania, and that the elites should keep this in mind.

If we look into the five lectures, they stand out because – as its title also states – a radical revision of concepts is needed. By the late 1920's it became apparent, that the political culture, as it has been known from before the war, could not be maintained further. Hungarian representation in Transylvania could not follow adapted norms, values, distinctions, definitions, policies, which had been still based on political agendas of the Habsburg era. Ethnicity, as one of the signifiers of this representation had also had to be reconceptualised, and in a structural sense, it had to be politicised another way to take accordingly its position in another, newly defined representational mechanism. The role of inherited virtues, work-ethics, obedience, morals and diligence is however in the centre of this ethnic myth Makkai utilizes. "*All these reckoning attempts are roads of self-deceit and*

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<sup>17</sup> Károly Kós: Programadás és programvállalás. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1931: 257.

*delusion, mistake and misapprehension for us, who stayed here, who are here, and have to stay here obeying the lawful order – as Hungarians forever. We became citizens of Romania; law and lawful order of this country became an imperative in our lives. We have to maintain our Hungarian identity, within the framework of this order, fitting into it not against others, but to justify our own inherited intellectual and spiritual individuality through work and peace.”* (Makkai, 1931: 8)

Cultural representation plays a central role in Makkai’s arguments. The redefinition of communal ties, in terms of reproducing the human pool of resources for this representation is thus an important issue throughout the lectures. The most striking fact about his arguments, and proposed solutions, is that although ten years have passed since the *Shouting word*, the most suggestions of the text from 1920 were still apposite. To his question, *What does it mean to be Hungarian?* He answers the following: *“To develop and nurture the values of work, study, discipline and unconditional love in a community joined and embodied in the mother tongue. The awareness of such a community guards the heritage and passes it on to its children in a way, that they do not have to live a borrowed life, but also that this life does never isolate itself from universal, great concerns of humanity and its solidarity. [...] The revision of our minority Hungarian national identity, thus primarily demands two big spiritual transformations: one is to remodel our worldly imperial Hungarian identity into a spiritual one in ourselves; the other is, that this liberated, eternal Hungarian identity should not be perceived weaker from the one tied and supported by an external Hungarian identity, and we should not bargain away a single atom, for it is harder to be a Hungarian like this, because we have to be Hungarians relying only on ourselves. Naturally, this awareness results in self-sustaining and self-affirmation for every individual of the Hungarian community – provided, that he is a part of this community in spirit – securing him the material and spiritual, cultural and moral existence and thus legitimizing itself.”* (Makkai, 1931: 17)

In its rather metaphysical and poetic language, Makkai touches on the very core of ethnic identity and its mobilisation potentials in relation to Romanians on the one hand, where this identity cannot be a Hungarian national identity, with its economic, administrative and bureaucratic implications, hence it can only be a virtual, implied collective identity. On the other hand, towards Hungarians in Hungary, where one has a continuity of the contested concepts he proposes to revise, especially during the interbellum. Makkai’s notion of a Hungarian collective identity as one connected by language, but divided by borders is a

precursor of an idea of a *Homeland in the sky* (Illyés Gyula: Haza a magasban), which gained importance especially after the Second World War, but where ethnicity in terms of culture mediated through language played a central role as well. Literary production, as one relying a great deal on language, made this dimension of ethnicity one of the most important ones. This meant not only maintaining the literary field by the active use of language, but also communicating the shared myths, symbols, territorial identities and shared history over the borders. The use of language is thus not just an operational gesture; it is a signifier of representation (Vertreten), as well as a signifier of the signifier himself within this representation (Vertreten) process.

Furthermore, Makkai also points out how the nation as a “social association” should attain a more democratic outline, and should thus include every single member of the ethnic community. Moreover, this should happen without any kind of social stratification, which is, so he continues not just politically important, but in terms of representing (Vertreten) cultural survival as well. “*Our whole intellectual and spiritual life, our whole culture should lean back to the depths of the folk-spirit, and to bring it to consciousness, to foster the reasons why Hungarians have the right to live, and to show this to the world*” (Makkai, 1931: 23.) This permanent focus on folk-culture gave an additional impetus to ethnicity, and especially an emphasis on the common myth of descent, and the imaginary of the symbolic signifiers of the inhabited space through a diachronic prism. It became an unofficial, unwritten rule of Transylvaniam, that art, architecture and literature should focus on these dimensions of ethnicity, and to communicate them through representation (Darstellen). To mobilize ethnicity for cultural production was however, not as self-explanatory as it appeared sporadically in the late 1920’s and during the 1930’s.

### 7.3 Shift: 1940’s.

The 1942 *Proclamation* of the Writers Association and the *Report* on the Marosvécs gathering from the same year were published in the following issue of *Erdélyi Helikon* one after the other. Both texts originate from the annual conference at the castle. It is important to note, that three years had passed since the last official meeting, due to the war. It was thus rather important to publish a formal statement on the ideological standpoint, editing policies and publishing priorities of the movement. These two texts are however, a great example of

how ethnicity seized to be a signifier in a representation process in the sense of “Vertreten”, while in the other sense (Darstellen) it remained one of the most stressed topics in cultural/literary representation. As Hungarians in North-Transylvania shifted back to being a majority, the modes of ethnic mobilisation altered drastically. *“It is not a coincidence, that in public discourse and amongst the directly involved Transylvanian writers also, some questions emerged: will this community of writers continue the work it undertook and conducted under the occupation years now in the free Hungarian life-form as well? Will it find its new tasks in the new conditions? Or will it end its life together with the era which created it, with its specific circumstances and specific tasks?!...”*<sup>18</sup>

Based on the *Report*, mobilising ethnicity after the Second Vienna Award (on 30. August 1940) was completely different, than at any point during the interbellum. Concluding the annual Marosvécs gathering on August 14-16 1942, they had to voice the experiences of the last year. A meeting which came into being as a necessity of representation however, lost its purpose in the eyes of the participants. At this point Transylvaniam could not adjust to the new socio-political developments not just because ethnicity was less of an issue of cultural politics towards the Romanian populous on the one hand, while on the other, in a literary field of a majority setting ethnicity was more-or-less considered as a settled manner. Ethnicity was also not addressed as a signifier because during its two decades of existence, the movement itself changed. Some of the leading figures of the first generation passed away, or left Transylvania, while a generational turn in the early thirties brought also a paradigm shift, where opinion coming from the right extremes of the political spectrum often prevailed against the inter-ethnic arguments of the founding generation. Furthermore, due to the re-emerged central role of Budapest, the literary field itself got restructured, hence ethnicity did not play as much of a differing role in the production cycle. The focus of representation thus shifted more to regional culture and territory, while gradually surpassing the ethnic arguments in the negotiation process. As a side effect, the literary field lost its political function as well.

The *Proclamation* of the Writers Association begins similarly, with stating *“North-Transylvania was in high spirits two years ago, when it got freed from the twenty-two year long Romanian rule.”*<sup>19</sup> And continues after a few sentences, emphasising the past tense: *“The Erdélyi Helikon was a friendly work-community of Hungarian writers on Hungarian*

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<sup>18</sup> László Kovács: A marosvécsi napok. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1942: 593.

<sup>19</sup> Az írói közösség nyilatkozata. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1942: 596.



*land under Romanian rule.*"<sup>20</sup> In comparison to the inter-ethnic arguments of the previous decades, the writer(s) of the *Proclamation* stress ethnicity as an importance of language, shared culture and traditions, while they draw attention to life "*scattered amongst an enemy folk*"<sup>21</sup> (ellenséges nép között szétszórtan), and consequently referring to current political developments as liberation (felszabadulás, hazatérés). The *Proclamation* nevertheless, expresses the grievance that under the aegis of centralisation, a number of institutions and experts from Budapest conducted their work in Transylvania during the past two years, although there were suitable associations and cadres already there. This of course inherently raises the question of representation, and the perception of the Transylvanian elites from Budapest. The editorial of the journal thus leans further on the ethnic arguments of the past decades, but converts them to representing the unrepresented, meaning the ones not affected by the Second Vienna Award. This means they emphasised not only their North-Transylvanian negotiating position in relation to Budapest, and Kolozsvár as the centre of these coproduction networks, but also their mission to represent the Hungarian literary field and the institutions associated with it in the southern parts of Transylvania, which remained under Antonescu's Romanian rule. By focusing on the special regional profile of Hungarian institutions in Transylvania, developed during the past decades, they stress the ethnic argument of representation in theatre, publishing, education, the traditional churches, and the overall cultural mission of the movement as it evolved during the 1920's and 1930's.

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<sup>20</sup> Az írói közösség nyilatkozata. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1942: 596.

<sup>21</sup> Az írói közösség nyilatkozata. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1942: 597.

## 8. The schism of ethnic representation in cultural production

*“True, these were only small booklets, in simple, meagre quality, but they contained the Transylvanian voice and the line of beginning inertia”<sup>22</sup>*

One of the most considerable challenges of the 1920's was to establish a detached representational mechanism from Budapest. A separate Hungarian literary field in Transylvania however, did not evoke only positive reactions in Budapest. Secessionist as it had to be, and emerging with a virulent cultural programme for a whole community, a literary agenda to publish at least twelve books per year, and clear cut editing policies with a respectable and innovative aesthetic profile for a periodical, which could compete even with the better literary journals of the capital triggered positive and negative responses. The real, unvoiced problem for the circles of the literary field opposing it was decentralisation. Perceived as fragmentation, it instantly induced the question of representation, which was both contested and defended – amongst others – with differing arguments of ethnicity.

The first major debate in *Erdélyi Helikon* was unleashed when László Ravasz, a Calvinist bishop and publicist from Budapest criticised the movement by accusing it that *“The Hungarian language can bear only one literature, because two literatures can create two souls”* Furthermore, he fears, that in Hungary *“new literature fits into the development of the past thousand years”* while *“Transylvania lacks the ancient connecting force, and this is why further development would occur only with a great deviation”<sup>23</sup>* Interestingly enough, he is the one, who will open the public reading of the Transylvanists in Budapest later that year. Ravasz constructed his argument on the basis of language, and in order to correct himself later, he continues to use this specific signifier of ethnicity, but puts it in a positive light as a connective force, and refines it with mentioning the elusive quality of the folks *“genius”* (az illető nép géniusza).<sup>24</sup> This genius, as regional as it is, carries the *“core”* of ethnicity, which will be able to reproduce the myths, symbols, values, norms and inherited narratives, which

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<sup>22</sup> Kuncz Aladár: Tíz év. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1928: 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ravasz László: Irodalmi schizma. In: *Könyvbarátok Lapja*, 1928, jan-marc. Cited by Benedek Elek: *Erdélyi írók a magyar irodalom egységéről*. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1928: 56.

<sup>24</sup> Ravasz László: Ravasz László beszéde az Erdélyi Helikon budapesti estélyén. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1928: 546.

are necessary for minority survival. Representing a literary field, according to him, is not connected only to language, but how this “genius of the people” is mirrored in it. Ravasz defines the core of representation as this myth of shared virtues, a distinctive ethnic quality based on the accumulated knowledge of the masses bound together by heritage, tradition, but above all language.

Before his opening words in Budapest however, his article about a possible schism in the literary field resulted in a series of official reactions in Transylvania. Mária R. Berde for example constructed her counter-argument by stating, that “*It is not two literatures producing two souls, but two souls two literatures*”<sup>25</sup> By turning the logic the other way, she gives priority precisely to what Ravasz himself will reflect to: soul-genius. Furthermore, she is proud to have a literary field developed by the “Transylvanian spirit” (erdélyi szellem) on the “ancient soil” (ősi talaj). The ethnic element of shared territory is also what Károly Kós is referring to, when defining the authentic literary production of the region. According to him, authors who represent this literature draw upon this land and its history, which determines them as a community. This difference is not just necessary, it is otherwise impossible. As the previous intellectuals, he also refers to a vague, nevertheless ethnically laden concept: the Transylvanian psyche. In Kós’s theoretical framework however, this distinctive feature is as a common denominator also present in the collective subject of Romanians and Germans of the region as well. Sándor Makkai, who also responded does not see a schism in the literary field, he mobilizes however also ethnic arguments regarding Transylvanian literary production. According to him, the connection which makes this literary field Transylvanian is the native land’s soil, history, and – connecting to the previous ones – the “Transylvanian soul” (erdélyi lélek) and “Transylvanian fate” (erdélyi sors).<sup>26</sup>

While the first group of this discussion followed a more romanticised, literary, less scientific line of argumentation, another group of respondents focused on a more pragmatic, administrative-political element of representation, which although did not primarily mobilise ethnic dimensions as the previous ones did, it addressed more specific, operational elements of ethnic representation. Károly Molter, Sándor Reményik and Spectator (Miklós Krenner) wrote about difference, but within a unity. They annul the ethnic argument by stating, that only the current experiences differ, while the basis of history and traditions of classical Hungarian literature are the same. Jenő Szentimrei and Géza Tabéry grasp the sheer existence

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<sup>25</sup> R. Berde Mária. In. Erdélyi Helikon, 1928: 56.

<sup>26</sup> R. Berde Mária. In. Erdélyi Helikon, 1928: 55-58.

of a semi-separate Hungarian literary field in Transylvania as an act of necessary political activity. Representation for them means an institutional or semi-institutional Hungarian cultural network beyond the borders of Hungary. In this sense, representation is less of how literature was written, but how it was published, and which were the individual preconditions of producing a piece of text.

As we can see already in these early reactions, on the one side, when not referring to concrete topics, protagonists or symbols in the sense of “Darstellen”, but when forced to form arguments about the literary field itself, about cultural politics or literary production in the sense of “Vertreten”, mobilising the ethnic argument to underpin representation usually ends up in references rooted in mythical affiliation with spaces, times or events of the past. On the other side, when pointing towards an institutional network, political agency and in some cases even direct policies, ethnicity is only briefly addressed in terms of language and history, while more relevant nation-building and administrative instances, such as education, taxation, language rights and specialised institutions of culture gain relevance.<sup>27</sup>

The 1920's were generally hallmarked by the legitimization processes of Hungarian decentralisation and regionalisation, not just in Romania, but in Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia also. Tensions between Budapest and Kolozsvár, both positive and negative, continued throughout the 1930's. Mihály Babits from Budapest, as one of the most prominent writers and editors of the era, when introducing a book from the *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh*, writes about contemporary literary decentralisation and its values. (Babits, 1931: 21) Aladár Kuncz as a later editor of *Erdélyi Helikon* publishes *The Transylvanian Idea in the Hungarian Literature in Transylvania*, where he introduces the historical background and the main figures of the movement to the readership of Budapest. (Kuncz, 1928: 20) This is later criticised in another Kolozsvár journal, the *Korunk* by Gábor Gaál, where he tries to map out the contents and limitations of Transylvaniam. (Gaál, 1928: 907) Critical and creative tensions arose and calmed down repeatedly during the interwar years, the negotiation paths of Transylvanist representation on a Budapest-Kolozsvár relation however, stayed contested.

Ernő Ligeti, when trying to explain the origins of Transylvaniam and how these could be conveyed towards Budapest, writes about a certain sense of existence of the people, which searches for forms, relations and balance.<sup>28</sup> This ambiguous vocabulary – in its original Hungarian form *életérzés* – could be somewhat clarified by naming the closest corresponding

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<sup>27</sup> An account of the whole discussion in the press see: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1928: 79.

<sup>28</sup> Ligeti Ernő: *Eszménykeresések az erdélyi magyar irodalomban*. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1931: 688.

word, which would be the German *Lebesgefühl*, and which is also as problematic as the ones mentioned above, struggling further to define this connection of literature and its production cycles. Ligeti, following the deterministic traditions of turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century positivist literary thought, continues to use phrases as “community of fate” (sorsközösség) or “community of culture” (kultúrközösség), the first being a shared social and historic experience with Romanians and Germans in the region, and the latter a pan-Hungarian culture connecting Transylvania with Budapest. He also points out the overrepresented genre of the historical novel in Hungarian literature Transylvania, which he explains with notions of a shared culture and inhabited territory, a distinctive historical perception of ancestry and other usual dimensions of ethnic representation. However, although he states that the aim of literature would be to serve the goals of a national minority, and the ideals of Transylvanian literature being essentially political,<sup>29</sup> he fails to connect the practical level of representation as “Vertreten” in a Budapest relation, with ethnic dimensions of representation as “Darstellen”. Ligeti as many others points out how representation in the latter sense is a reality manifested in cultural products, which according to a positivist logic legitimises the “sense of existence”, a “community of fate” or “community of culture” referred to as a latent ethnic force creating these symbolic goods. The usual problem of representation remains that its two senses remain discontinuous, while in the negotiating processes they are consequently reduced to one another, making Transylvanism remain a vaguely described organisational principle of the literary field, which nevertheless continuously produces for the market of symbolic goods.

A few years later, the journal *Nyugat* from Budapest publishes an essay on Transylvanian literature by Elemér Jancsó, which is actually an abstract of his book of the same title, *Literary life of Transylvania from 1918 until today*. (Jancsó, 1935: 283) Jancsó similarly tries to summarise the ideological roots of the movement and the traditions they are leaning on, the essay nevertheless misses to achieve this along practically all the approaches Jancsó proposes. A reaction in *Erdélyi Helikon* follows immediately.<sup>30</sup> One amongst the many objections on Jancsó’s analysis was, that he pointed out how Transylvanism was hard to define. If we read however, through the articles, both authors (the one questioning and the one defending it) as many before them refer to it as a stable fact without defining it in the first place. Nevertheless, both of them state, that Transylvanism as a representation mechanism

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<sup>29</sup> Ligeti Ernő: Esménykeresések az erdélyi magyar irodalomban. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1931: 686.

<sup>30</sup> NN. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1931: 379.

had an enormous impact, and the number of publications representing the work of *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh* is impressive, thus proving the obvious existence of a regional creative force. This logic of an implied ethnic *perpetuum mobile* of the literary field gained more and more relevance in the years to follow. “*I only acknowledge the results: we have undeniably a living and a producing literature today, which is ours, stands on its own feet and is different from those mass products, which was until now exclusively and without sampling consumed by the whole Hungarian speaking area made available by the large producers of Budapest. It is possible, that those critics are right who constantly conclude, that the Transylvanian writing is in form and presentation more primitive, poorly dressed, less salon-fitting, as the centralised Hungarian is. But we are not ashamed of our self-woven clothes, we produced its fabric and we did not import readymade clothes from abroad either, we are sufficiently self-conscious also to believe that this literature is not lighter nor in weight neither in inner value, than the one from Hungary, but in its aims, soul-nurturing effect more, while in Hungarianness it is more sincere and realistic, than that one. The Transylvanian writing is not l'art pour l'art for its own sake, it is not there to serve the gourmandry of aesthetes, but it wants to be the everyday bread of the Hungarian of today.*”<sup>31</sup>

As from the early 1930's onwards, the Budapest readership and Hungarian readers in general, had more and more access both to the journal *Erdélyi Helikon*, and the publications of *Erdélyi Szépmíves Céh*. Aside from Romanian Lei, the prices of both were occasionally indicated also in Hungarian Pengő, Czechoslovak Koruna and Yugoslav Dinar on the back cover. From the cultural news section of the journal we are informed about guest readings, book fairs and book signings in various Hungarian cities. The Transylvanists put a large emphasis in personally representing the cause, thus legitimising it on a broader platform. Ethnic ties, language and common history signified these processes, the insistence on regional culture and regional solidarity, inter-ethnicity however made it crucial to advocate for a literary field as a separate one. After a while Budapest acknowledged this, but not necessarily because of the obvious socio-political realities, but because of exotic and unknown qualities of both aristocratic and rural culture this literary field was communicating. Ethnic representation thus attained some market value also. In 1935 for example, Kálmán Lantos, head of the publishing house *Révai* from Budapest, known for marketing and promotion of the publications across Hungary in the previous years, took part in the

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<sup>31</sup> Kós Károly: Énekes madár. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1936: 209.

Marosvécs gathering at the castle. The question of ethnicity was however mobilised in another way, when the socio-political situation changed with the Second Vienna Award in 1940. A whole section representing contemporary Romanian literary production, previously edited with great care, vanished from the journal. In the meanwhile, the relevance of the Hungarian literary field, and the representation of Transylvanian cultural production as a parallel symbolic universe on the one hand gained prestige, but lost its autonomous position in the negotiating processes, which was anew disbalanced by Budapest. Additionally, the art worlds centred in Kolozsvár, the mobilisation of ethnic arguments, their distinctive meaning and position in the negotiation process had to be legitimised as well. The first doubts about this tense relationship are uttered as early as 1940. *“The Hungarian from Transylvania turns with hope and great respect towards the cultural life of the motherland, and it hurts twice, when one is disappointed. We always sustain some kind of prejudice towards cultural phenomena from Hungary, sometimes because of childish affection, sometimes because of our habitual acknowledgment which we feel towards our state-constituent siblings. Nevertheless, the Hungarian cultural life does not deserve undivided admiration of Transylvania.”*<sup>32</sup>

In the period between the Second Vienna Award and the end of the Second World War, when the movement, the journal and the publishing house all came to an end, mobilisation of ethnicity in terms of representation occurred in a rather peripheral register. It was harder and harder to represent (Vertreten) the two literary fields separately. A majority position on the one hand, and the market of cultural goods on the other transformed representation as “Vertreten” into a narrow set of regional editing and marketing policies. Nevertheless, these were further leaning on representation as “Darstellen” in terms of topics, symbols, themes and narrative frameworks used in literature. An ethnic argument concerning literary production or cultural politics to somehow “speak for” the regional literary field was rarely formulated. Despite the fact, that they knew that the movement had to match the new circumstances, it was hard to imagine how a framework like Transylvaniam, which was conceptualised for the specificities of a minority literary field, should work without its main argument: ethnic difference. The lack of it can be seen already at the end of 1940, when the movement released a formal statement representing their position in the field. *“It is the Writers Association’s firm belief, that as a result of the great historical event of liberation,*

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<sup>32</sup> Szenczei László: Kisebbségben. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1940: 45.

*intensified tasks and obligations await the Helikon's writers; firstly, to defend and nurture the noble traditions of the Transylvanian spirit, and secondly, to serve in the living community of the universal Hungarian genius, the fruitful intellectual interaction between Transylvania and the Motherland.*"<sup>33</sup>

In the general socio-political chaos of the time, it became a reoccurring problem, that although cultural production carried on, utilising the usual representational practices, it was not quite clear what to represent in terms of "Vertreten". In a bipolar, inter-ethnic system, the distinctions were rather clear, but as the situation and more importantly, the power relations changed, aside from the clear market value of the cultural goods, the by then mainstream minority and inter-ethnic discourse became redundant, thus was left out of the public sphere.

## **9. Representing ethnicity in negotiating minority**

*"Will our belief in Transylvanism, in the sanctity of the word, in Hungarian language, in solidarity of the spirit survive?"*<sup>34</sup>

Ethnic arguments in the representation process were more apparent in an intra-Transylvanian, or even more in a Kolozsvár-Bucharest relation. Redefining cultural production to satisfy regional consumption demands into a self-sustaining system, and to reconstruct a collective identity parallel, fitting it into a context of minority representational practices was a process which lasted almost a decade. To change the parameters, set the goals and values of the literary field, and to utilise various dimensions of ethnicity to comply with the newly established socio-political situation was a negotiating process tied to a number of agents and institutions of culture. This post-war reconstruction had to occur according to a twofold path. On the one hand, the literary field had to represent (in both senses) Hungarians in Transylvania in the sense that the movement had to mobilise certain ethnic arguments as signifiers for internal use as part of a self-legitimation process towards a Hungarian readership. On the other hand, this had to be congruent with the arguments aimed at the centres of power in Bucharest. These dimensions of ethnicity had to be uttered in an authentic

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<sup>33</sup> Az Erdélyi Helikon íróinak határozata. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1941: 60.

<sup>34</sup> Tompa László's address on the seventh Marosvécs gathering, published in Erdélyi Helikon, 1931: 500.



voice, representing (in both senses) an authentic socio-political reality and they had to be articulated on the newly defined autonomous platform of cultural production.

It is interesting how the right of free speech is bound together with the negotiating processes. Starting with Károly Kós's *Shouting word*, the ones associated with the minority discourse were repeatedly returning to the metaphors denoting language and the rights of free speech. "*As much as, or the more we, minority writers are nourished by national or racial roots, when voicing our artistic form-searching and view of the world, not for a moment are we to forget our relationship to the majority nation, nor to the mother-culture, nor to western literatures.*"<sup>35</sup> In a period of censorship, control, symbolic violence, mass observation, it was rather important to bring this system to some kind of disjunction, and to claim the right to verbalise, thus represent in the sense of "Vertreten". This however, had to reach out and become part of a wider public opinion, meaning, that it had to transgress the realms of language by still referring to it. Successful communication beyond ethnic boundaries was one of the aims, and it hallmarked the entire period of the movement's activity. As the tone was set through the press and publications issued or in some way influenced by the Transylvanists, representing ethnicity always had points of reference connected to the majority society. In comparison to the less categorical and usually unclear ethnic signifiers, which were politicised in the Kolozsvár-Budapest relation, the ones introduced to the public sphere in the Kolozsvár-Bucharest negotiation processes on concrete matters (such as the Hungarian theatre in Kolozsvár or the PEN club membership) were usually explicit and operational. As the Transylvanist agenda became clearer and clearer, these signifiers of regional cultural distinctions and above all language were aimed at the freedom of press, primary and secondary education and cultural production in terms of literature and theatre.

Representing ethnicity nonetheless had to be done bypassing daily politics, and via the literary field. In this manner, a partly intra-ethnic, but in a great deal also inter-national representational problem emerged in the mid twenties, when membership in the PEN-Club was discussed in the press. Shortly after the Hungarian PEN-Club was founded by Antal Radó in 1926, the Hungarian writers of Transylvania proposed to form a regional organisation. The suggestion was widely debated both in the Hungarian and Romanian press of Transylvania. In the meantime however the editorial of *Erdélyi Helikon* met in Kolozsvár and formed the club independently. The role of the movement in this particular case of

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<sup>35</sup> Kuncz Aladár: A Pen-klub és a kisebbségi magyar írók. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1928: 245.

minority representation is undeniable, not just because it was mediated by the *Helikon* community, especially by Miklós Bánffy and Aladár Kuncz, but because the president of the Transylvanian PEN became Bánffy himself, and the key positions were also filled with members of the movement. (Ligeti, 1941: 113.) The Hungarian regional club however did not get institutional recognition from the Romanian PEN-Club until 1932, and whenever the discussion in the press flared up, other matters of representation entered the discussion as well. *“No Romanian writer can be a Pen-club member, who supports the persecution of minority schools, the suffocation of minority press by censorship, death sentences of minority theatre by taxing, who wants to suppress natural givens like language, and no minority writer can be a member either, if he represents irredentism and aggressive nationalism.”*<sup>36</sup>

The mobilisation of ethnic arguments in these negotiation processes and afterwards, moreover the necessity of a regional club and its connection to Transylvaniam is an integral part of the overall problem of representation. Aside of this however, it was often a problem of cultural politics that, when representation (*Vertereten*) had to be negotiated – aside from the few occasions, when it shifted to a rather legal matter – the romanticised reference points of Transylvanist thought filled the gap of concrete social facts. The relatedness of the two logics of representation shines through precisely in the practical level of a long term sub-political processes such as the movement’s active agency in the literary field. As Spivak states, that although related, the two types of representation are *“irreducibly discontinuous”* (Spivak, 1994: 70). In the argumentation strategies of Transylvaniam, this discontinuity – as in the case of the Budapest-Kolozsvár negotiation processes also – was bridged by cross-referencing from the literary political field of *“Vertreten”* to the literary production processes of *“Darstellen”*. In plain words, whenever the legitimacy of the movement or their goals were questioned, a reference to literary production was made. If a literature this distinct, with its authentic topics, symbols and myths can be produced, then a set of ethnic traditions of ancestry, history, inhabited space and above all solidarity has to stand in the root of it. Without these ethnic traditions, one could not talk about a homogenous and interrelated ethnic community. Since this literary production is possible, and it can be traced back in past times as well, then it is also necessary to represent it in the public sphere, thus utilising it to translate and fit these arguments into the fields of minority politics. The legitimising effect of production was nevertheless often a sufficient argument which, since it could be proven with

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<sup>36</sup> Spectator: A Pen-klub és az erdélyi kisebbségek. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1928: 428.

materialised results – books as objects – implied deeper ethnic links, and these proved to be strong enough no one from the Romanian political elite could successfully challenge representation in literary or cultural politics either.

A pivotal aim of Transylvanist representation practices was preserving ethnicity, which in the socio-political circumstances of the interbellum above all meant, that the literary field had to fulfil a cultivating function as well. This did not mean reproducing the already available possibilities of the literary field, thus only conserving them, but by leaning on Transylvanian traditions creatively work on new forms of expression. The movement was advocating for cultural goods, which should serve as an ethnic cohesive force, a regional pull-factor, preserving, refining and cultivating the language, while passing on traditions and respect for the ancestral homeland to future generations. This was also seen as a duty and voluntary work for the community. Partly paraphrasing what Sándor Makkai was talking about in his already discussed lectures, Károly Kós also points out this type of importance when it comes to work: *“What he says: is not a dead dogma, but living practice; not a command, which demands blind obedience, but opening our eyes and seeing reality, sober warning and exact definition of possibilities of life-sustaining Hungarian work”*<sup>37</sup> This mode of shaping the literary field and producing literature however, drew the attention of the Romanian literary circles as well. In the usual, monthly introduction of Romanian literary and art journals, Ferenc Szemlér gives a short abstract of an essay by Ion Chinezu, with a few quotes underlining the viewpoint of one of the most influential journals in Bucharest, the *Revista Fundațiilor Regale*. *“He [Chinezu] concludes, that Transylvanian literature is not only pastime activity of aesthetic art-lovers, but he concludes also, that Transylvanian literature is a national mission, national cultivation, and Chinezu is right: it is t h a t t o o! But if he looks around better, then he can also conclude, that Transylvanian literature today is not only that, but above all, genuine art with serious intentions.”*<sup>38</sup>

Anthony D. Smith analyses ethnic communities by introducing the term myth-symbol complex, which is also useful to understand this aspect of mobilising ethnicity for representation. *“one has to look at the nature (forms and content) of their myths and symbols, their historical memories and central values, which we can summarize as the »myth-symbol« complex, at the mechanisms of their diffusion (or lack of it) through a given population, and their transmission to future generations.”* (Smith, 1986: 15.) In the case of Transylvanist,

<sup>37</sup> Kós Károly: Programadás és programvállalás. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1931: 258. (emphasis in the original)

<sup>38</sup> Szemlér Ferenc: Román folyóiratszemle. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1935: 383.

the mission to preserve this myth-symbol complex has a past and contemporary element as well, and the literary field had to be constructed in a way, that both are manifestly distributed and available in the public sphere. The element of the past consisted of the already mentioned topics, myths and symbols of Hungarian political history in Transylvania on the one hand, while on the other of folk-culture in its widest possible sense. While the past was more of a latent knowledge, which had to be conveyed (partly through the literary field), the contemporary element was the active, creative agency of the intelligentsia. This meant contemporary commentaries and criticism concerning the literary field itself, its organisational problems, form and content. Furthermore, it was essential to actively use and advocate for Hungarian language in the public sphere, education and in institutions of culture. Lastly, it was understood to demonstratively perpetuate both urban and rural Hungarian lifestyle. This meant advocating for public gatherings, manifestations, access to museums, libraries and theatres as well as fairs, church holidays and traditional celebrations in the countryside.<sup>39</sup> Smith also points out, that, when a population gets absorbed by another one, *“what actually is terminated is not the physical existence of populations, but their distinctive cultures and life-styles and their sense of independent community.”* (Smith, 1986: 96) Representation in terms of “Vertreten” and its ethnic element meant thus, a continuity of urban and rural lifestyles on the one hand, and a continuity of reflexive literary practices on the implied values, norms and principles of the myth-symbol complex. Nevertheless, this was perceived as one of the credos of the movement, while reproducing ethnicity was one of the most important functions of representation in the literary field. *“The best, most artistic Hungarian writers from Transylvania are all devoted to the nation (nemzetnevelők). And the Hungarian writers of Transylvania are good writers to the same extent, as they are devoted to the nation. This distinctive feature of Hungarian literature from Transylvania did not develop due to external influence. National devotion was not added to literature in the sense, that the only good Hungarian literature is the one devoted to the nation, but the inner structure of our Transylvanian literature depends on it, it is its ancient life-form, and it*

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<sup>39</sup> The prohibition of public use of language in the institutions was as a collective trauma, as for example the confiscation of the theatre building in Kolozsvár from the Hungarian ensemble, so it could be assigned to the Romanian one. The same examples can be considered when the building was given back in 1940, and when Romanian was banned from the institutions.

*becomes the most universal way and mode of this devotedness according to its artistic level.*”<sup>40</sup>

Without going into the hazy logic of the argument, and the reoccurring romanticised notions of ethnicity and its implications to art and literature, the point of this quote is to shed light on the described mission of minority representation, and the link between the literary field and minority politics. It is also important however, that Transylvaniam mobilised ethnicity as an argument, to unite and internalise the myth-symbol complex on the vertical and horizontal axis of society as well. The aim was to reach out to every local identity in the cities, to every sub-regional identity in the countryside, to include every strata of the then still heavily divided estate-society fragmented also in major religious groups, but also to implement a pan-generational cultural model. The literary field was thus conceptualised as a tool to diffuse this ethnic myth-symbol complex. This cohesive force was however rarely directed explicitly against the majority population and the aggressive segregation policies of Bucharest – it also could not have been because of the extensive censorship of the press –, but towards inner-community encouragement to work, create and produce. Minority representation towards the majority was thus always an open call for centripetal organisation on the widest platform possible. *“[The movement] was devoted to, and declared as a goal since the beginning, to manage the spiritual life of Hungarians in Transylvania; to develop and strengthen the Hungarian spirit and identity, a reason and will to live. It devoted itself to the undivided Hungarian entity above religions, worldviews, social and economic classes, by working continuously on the millennial Hungarian spirit under foreign rule. It desired peace between the Transylvanian peoples as necessary and beneficial for all. It emphasised the universal responsibilities of spiritual culture above peoples and nations, politics and worldviews as well.*”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Tavaszy Sándor: Gondolatok egy anthológia olvasása közben. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1935: 456.

<sup>41</sup> N.N.: Az írói közösség nyilatkozata. In Erdélyi Helikon: 1942: 597.

## 10. Ethnicity as an inter-cultural argument

*“The Saxons are the first Transylvanists, who although less selfless and theoretical as the Hungarians after the war, it is beyond doubt, that the experience of a Transylvanian homeland and fate was born amongst them”<sup>42</sup>*

The imagination of otherness and diversity, and the reaching out to the two largest ethnic group was voiced already in 1921. *“What we are asking for ourselves today, what we will be fighting for tomorrow and maybe suffer for the day after tomorrow, but we believe what we will win for ourselves, that is what is going to be asked, fought and suffered for, and in the end, that will be won by our Saxon and Romanian national siblings in Transylvania.”* (Kós, et al., 1920: 5.) Transylvanist perceived itself foremost as a Hungarian minority movement in a multi-ethnic system of cultural production, which presupposed, that interrelations of lifestyles and interplay of cultural codes of past centuries are accumulated in current, contemporary practices, which can, and should be mirrored in art. The slippage of Transylvanist occurred amongst others, within the discontinuity of the two senses of representation. As they mobilised their own ethnic dimensions while successfully advocating multiculturalism in the sense of “Vertreten”, in the sense of “Darstellen” – aside from a few works – they represented mostly their own ethnicity only. Transylvanist nevertheless, structured an open ended literary field of representation, where the movement should have been only one building block among three. However, although there were gestures from the Germans and Romanians as well, such as the presence of Erwin Wittstock and Emanoil Bucuța on some of the Marosvécs gatherings, or joint public readings in Kolozsvár and Brassó, or translations in and thematic publications of *Klingsor* and *Darul Vremii*, as they were approaching towards the 1940’s the three communities searched connections more and more towards their own vernacular cultures. Until the early 1930’s however, mutual representation and the mobilisation of ethnicity for a noble, humanistic cause, for a shared Transylvanian school of thought seemed to be a possibility. *“Our life in Transylvania. Our fate as a minority, with its social, psychological, literary and every other implication. Transylvania as such a problem, as our Hungarian writer colleagues in the Erdélyi Helikon voiced it already several times – on the widest scale of the idea. As they defend or attack*

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<sup>42</sup> Makkai László: Két száz könyv. In Erdélyi Helikon, 1935: 450.

*these series of problems, when they name it with faith or ridicule »Transylvanian thought«. As it was held high as a flag by our Saxon writer colleague Heinrich Zillich, and how it is contemplated, hefted, sensed by Romanian writers like Nichifor Crainic, Rebreanu or Chinezu, who is in sections publishing his thorough and excellent essay in Societate de Máine right now, where he mentions Transylvanism as well.*”<sup>43</sup>

In contrast to the openly segregationist politics of turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Vienna and Budapest, this inter-ethnic model proposed knowledge on the Other. Not negation, but negotiation – in terms of postcolonial thought. In the literary field this meant translations, ethnographic articles, bi- or trilateral coproduction and multilingual journals. Abdallah-Preteuille states that “*An individual is rarely in contact with the »whole« of the culture of the Other, but is at the very most confronted with a »concentrate«.*” (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2006: 478). Transylvanism approached the Romanian and German literary field in this precise sense with the representation of this “concentrate”, and hoped to receive the same in return. Thus the primary aim was not to represent Hungarian high-brow culture of the past centuries or contemporary mainstream literary production in its entirety, but to showcase a sum total of monthly fragments referring to territorial identity, language and regional culture, and with performing these ethnic dimensions to pacify the public sphere. In order to have a Hungarian presence, it was essential to connect positive connotations to ethnicity, when representing it as this “concentrate”. These positive connotations were partly references to the shared Transylvanian past, but it was more important to produce contemporary connotations in order to avoid mentioning the past, when creating ethnic interrelations was a priority.

Disseminating the movement, Sándor Kacsó points out how through history, Transylvanism was always a programme of the ethnic group not occupying the positions of power. And concludes after this, by giving one example after the other, how this favourable pluralist cohabitation failed every time. “*Transylvanism contains politics indeed, yet not a political, but an intellectual reality, not a literary form, but a writer’s attitude and not this or that, never seen, never discovered, never confessed political or intellectual trend, but a historical power-formula, which found its most suitable operational space in the Transylvanian flask, where it has to accustom three – unwilling to become a compound – peoples-nations for peaceful cohabitation. The flask itself can be a terrain, the work however, which is maintained within, the powers searching for an inner balance, are very, very far*

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<sup>43</sup> Kuncz Aladár: Erdély az én hazám. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1929: 486.

*from regionalism.*"<sup>44</sup> Aside from the arguments of the past, the Hungarian inter-ethnic argument of the interwar years comes from the liberal and progressive traditions of Central European political thought, where Transylvania was conceptualised as one methodological unit, with a multitude of ethnicities inhabiting it. This model acknowledged cultural pluralism; nevertheless it essentialised ethnicity as the sole quality of self-determination and organisation. If we apply this to representation in the literary field, then we can see, that – aside from the minimal positive involvement of the relevant parties – the ethnic argument prevailed over the regionalist one. As much as the Transylvanists struggled to translate contemporary Romanian and German literature from Transylvania, to be present on the book fairs in Bucharest, to be guests and to host public readings and to publish articles on the relevance of inter-ethnic cultural ties – it mostly remained on the level of personal contact between writers. As the beginning of the Second World War approached, even these acquaintances faded. Moreover, since the impact of Transylvanism was to “trickle down” to mass culture and spread over time, the overall influence of the literary field as an inter-ethnic cohesive mechanism failed in practice. This essentialist particularity of ethnicity was also mentioned by Aladár Kuncz on the eve of the first crises’ of the movement in the early thirties foreshadowing the ethnic radicalisation and strengthening of the conservative block within the movement in the late thirties. When explaining to the Budapest reader, he points out: “*Aside from the common western base, the culture of all three nations had tight connections to their motherland along their historical development. This connection did not only consist of taking over certain influences, but Transylvanist thought often achieved a leading and controlling role in Romanian literature, and not to a minor degree in Hungarian literature as well. Despite of these shared features and shared missions however, all three cultures of Transylvania stayed explicitly national, not giving up on their original colours and popular features.*” (Kuncz, 1928: 20)

It was a radical change of paradigms to shift from a homogenising cultural model, to a one acknowledging heterogeneous social realities. When mobilising ethnicity however, in order to preserve it, while advocating pluralism, one could only hope for a similar response from the other ethnic groups in the shared inhabited space. The goal was nevertheless, to introduce this new multi-ethnic paradigm to the public sphere, to negotiate its possibilities and to approach the Hungarian intelligentsia of Transylvania with a new mode of

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<sup>44</sup> Kacsó Sándor: Az igazi erdélyi szellemiség. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1938: 41.



coproduction, where the Hungarian and German network of cultural institutions was no longer in the position of power. To represent ethnicity in a literary field, which is no longer in the dominant position, had to be done with great diplomatic care on the one hand, while on the other, it had to be reconstructed from within. *“Intercultural reasoning, often confused with a cultural or even multicultural approach, emphasizes the processes and interactions which unite and define the individuals and the groups in relation to each other. It is not a question of dwelling on the self-attributed or hetero-attributed characteristics of others, but of simultaneously carrying out a return to one’s self. Indeed, any excessive focusing on the characteristics of others leads to exoticism as well as to cultural dead-ends, by overemphasizing cultural differences and by enhancing, consciously or otherwise, stereotypes or even prejudices. The questioning of one’s identity in relation to others is an integral part of the intercultural approach. The work of analysis and of acquiring knowledge applies to others as much as to oneself.”* (Abdallah-Preteuille, 2006: 476)

The journal *Erdélyi Helikon* fulfilled thus, a twofold task as a communication channel mediating between these three ethnicities. Firstly, it was a platform for gaining knowledge on the Other, to familiarise the readership with the neighbouring literary fields and their current conditions, institutions and agents. Secondly, to represent the reconstructed collective Self and the reconstruction process itself, primarily towards the Hungarian community, but partly towards the Bucharest policy makers as well. The accumulation of knowledge on the Other is mirrored in the translations and essays published in the journal. To track other developments along the decades however, it is important to look also into the news sections of the journal. In the end of every issue, we can find how the Romanian, German, but also the Hungarian press represents Transylvaniam, and the literary field connected to it. One can read about the impact of books, cultural events, debates and reactions to press articles and political moves directed towards the movement. These abstracts of Romanian and German articles are also the optic through which the Transylvanists represent (Vertreten) the view of the Other, what kind of articles they are choosing, which is the language they are using and which comments are attached to these representations. These article summaries demonstrate how parts of the Romanian and German public saw the mobilisation of ethnicity on the one hand, but we can also see which were the elements of ethnicity promoted by the Hungarian minority, and which the reactions to these representations were. Aside of these short accounts and announcements, which only deal with the surface of the problem, there are longer essays on representation of Hungarians and the Hungarian literary field in the Romanian public sphere.

Admittedly, these texts were often sources of conflict and debate, they are however very valuable if we examine them as argument-fragments in the negotiating processes. One of these longer text is, *Transylvaniam in Romanian literature* by Zsigmond Vita, where he examines the way Transylvaniam is perceived by the young Romanian intelligentsia in Transylvania as represented in their journal *Abecedar*. Vita focuses on one article in the journal, where the author of the article (Teodor Murășanu) concludes “*Transylvaniam is perceived by the Romanians as literary regionalism, as ethnic specificities, as the life of a distinctive area, which deserves to be eternalised in art. In opposition to this, the Hungarians have political goals. What they primarily want to create is a buffer state.*”<sup>45</sup> Similarly, Károly Kós answers in *Erdélyi Helikon* to Ernst Jekelius by analysing his article which appeared in the German journal *Klingsor*.<sup>46</sup> In his article titled, *The Saxons and Us*, Kós refers to the text “*Jekelius reminds us of Otto Folberth, who in his heavy articles full of spirit and heart, declared and defended his beliefs, who examining the Transylvanian past and professing the future sees and believes the Saxon and Hungarian fate undividable.*”<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, as Jekelius writes, that although the *Erdélyi Helikon* received a formal invitation, no representative showed up on the celebration of the journals tenth anniversary. It is also important to note, that this article was written after 1933, when the German elites in Transylvania already started to align themselves according to the politics of the Third Reich, which was also included in Kós’s reaction.

As we can see, the mobilisation of ethnicity in the literary field was neither unproblematic, nor ridden of the attacks of daily politics. The arguments which were inserted into the public sphere, and which were to represent, but also transcend ethnicity, transgressing the barriers of exclusive ancestry, myths of descent and language did not always prove to be successful. As the quotes above can show, the usual platform for negotiation was the common history, the current global political situation on the European periphery, the shared territory and the attachment to Transylvania as a homeland.

On an operational level, the same can be said about the coproduction networks as defined by Howard S. Becker. „*Art worlds consist of all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art.*“ (Becker: 1982. 35.) Furthermore, „*The artist thus works in the center*

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<sup>45</sup> Vita Zsigmond: Transzilvánizmus a román irodalomban. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1934: 74.

<sup>46</sup> Ungarisch-Sächsische Literaturbeziehungen in Siebenbürgen

<sup>47</sup> Kós Károly: A szászok és mi. In: *Erdélyi Helikon*, 1935: 617.

*of a network of cooperating people, all of whose work is essential to the final outcome. Wherever he depends on others, a cooperative link exists.*“ (Becker: 1982. 25.) Mobilising ethnicity, in order to make these art worlds operative after the Great War, restructuring and recentralising them for autonomous minority production for cultural goods, while striving for self-sustainable, self-reliant and autarchic production cycles in a culturally hostile and segregationist environment was complicated in itself. Nevertheless, we can also conclude, that cultural production in terms of these art worlds in this multi-national system was probably never as dynamic as in the 1920's. Aside from the Germans, who had their own autonomous literary field and supporting art worlds already developed, and did not have to reposition much due to the new circumstances, the Romanians and Hungarians switched their positions. The availability of public funding, institutional networks and institutional support, the possibility to use certain buildings and facilities, censorship and the option to import and export cultural goods changed on a vast scale within a few years. Additionally we cannot forget the pool of human resources either, where the repatriating and emigrating mostly middle class Hungarians were a huge loss both as participants but also as consumers, while the huge influx of Romanian population had an absolute positive effect on the art worlds connected to Romanian cultural production. Trying to implement an inter-ethnic argument in the negotiating processes of the 1920's, and emphasising transnational coproduction in a socio-political environment, where everything but that was favoured in the higher political circles in Bucharest, was hard to legitimise from a position where ethnic representation (in both senses) was also demonstrated. These representation struggles, in order to broaden the coproduction networks, but also to construct an autarchic literary field were unprecedented in the Hungarian literary field, yet in the interwar era this was an integral part both of the movement and the journals editing policies from the very beginnings. *“The outward-facing working plan also casts new tasks on the Helikon. The prominent representative of Saxon literature Heinrich Zillich was the guest of Helikon this year for the first time, and offered numerous valuable advices for our future work. In return for the Saxon night in Kolozsvár, the Saxon writers are going to organise a Hungarian night at the end of September in Brassó, and their journal, the Klingsor will honour our literature with a Hungarian issue. Anthologies, in translations of the best Hungarian and Saxon writers of Saxon literature in Hungarian, and of Hungarian literature in German will be published this year also. This is how the eternal, above of the passing nature of political connections is being made, because they are conceived in the harmony of internal freedom between these two cultures.*

*The established pure and friendly link with Romanian literature will be further strengthened with a Helikon night in Bucharest in the winter. The Romanian writers had voiced this year – especially in terms of equalising the theatre tax – their courageous and firm decision, to advocate for cultural peace and establishing the country’s creative harmony. The Erdélyi Helikon will continue to familiarise the finest of Romanian culture to Hungarians in the future, working this way further on the free exchange of cultures.”<sup>48</sup>*

As we can see, the Hungarian approach and the ethnic representation of the connection is an open ended and very subtle process, which opens the literary field towards unofficial agents of cultural diplomacy. The movement used the severely controlled public sphere to introduce sub-political mechanisms of reconciliation and hoped, that the German, and especially the Romanian side will respond accordingly, while Hungarian ethnic representation was also focused on managing the literary field and the market of symbolic goods from within. As however mentioned above, since Transylvaniam was conceptualised as a top-to-bottom cultural scheme, anchored in a letter-based cultural model, it had too short of an impact on a wider scale to have lasting consequences. Furthermore, ethnic radicalisation on a European scale made these efforts unpopular and peripheral as well.

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<sup>48</sup> Kádár Imre: A negyedik marosvécsi találkozó. In: Erdélyi Helikon, 1929: 558.

## 11. Conclusion

The representation mechanisms of Transylvanism in terms of “Vertreten” mobilised various dimensions of ethnicity through the literary field for several reasons. During the interwar years this literary field had to detach itself from the centralised, yet restricted literary field of Budapest. It had to gain relevance and provoke a disjuncture in the Romanian public sphere as well, in order to gain autonomous representation possibilities and develop this literary field. Furthermore, it had to negotiate representation as a minority in the shared inhabited space together with Germans and Romanians, thus to address the problem as an inter-ethnic one.

Ethnic representation in this literary field leaned mostly on the common name (Hungarians of Transylvania), language (Hungarian) and the association with the specific ancestral, yet shared territory (Transylvania). In the negotiation processes however, other dimensions, which were harder to define on the level of social sciences or policy making were also employed. Traditional values, historical rights and cultural differences, furthermore myths, symbols, narratives of common descent and universal attributes (work, honesty, solidarity) became points of reference. In comparison to the first group of arguments however, which was often sufficient for a debate in the press, the second group would have remained incomplete if the market of symbolic goods – meaning the obvious literary production of the time – would not exist parallel to strengthen this argument. The two senses of representation were thus often used as a continuum, and cross-referenced when the ethnic argument in the negotiation process was too ambiguous. Transylvanist representation essentialised ethnicity as the core when it constructed the collective minority subject. This core was later addressed as a stable, coherent and rational reference point, despite that they did not completely managed to define it in a comprehensive and legally rationalised way. Considering however, that it produced results even beyond the literary field, that a journal and a wide array of books were presented as objects of this existence, the “core” remained a set of not completely defined set of rules, norms, symbols and myths, which found its place rather successfully in practice, but less in theory.

A further problem of representation was to mobilise ethnicity, but at the same time to form an inter-ethnic argument as well. Although it may seem contradictory, it was essential to fit inter-ethnic reasoning into the minority setting by advocating for ethnic priorities on the one hand, while in the meantime to negotiate modes of cohabitation with the Germans and

Romanians on the other. To represent ethnicity for the sake of preserving it meant in practice nevertheless, an open ended literary field and an inclusive public sphere only from the Hungarian side, but since Transylvaniam was conceptualised as a cultural model of diversity, it was assumed that the same inter-ethnic gesture would enter and strengthen public discourse from the Romanian and German side as well. The movement was however, also thought of as a long term “top-to-bottom” cultural model, the brief period of twenty years, and the overall radicalisation of ethnicity in the socio-political relations of the time hindered however this process to spread on a regional plain.

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Editors: Károly Kós, Aladár Kuncz, László Kovács

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