

# Politics, Culture and Social Symbolism

## Some Remarks on the Anthropology of Eastern European Nationalism

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The main subject of this paper is the interpretation of emerging nationalism in post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe. The first part of the study describes the conception and apprehension of national culture characteristic of Eastern Europe since the late 19th century. The main direction of the argumentation is to emphasize the social, political, and ideological functions of this perception of nationality. The second part of the paper tries to characterize post-socialism through general cultural feeling of uncertainty, and argues that the “new” nationalism can be interpreted only as a manifestation of cultural fundamentalism typical for Eastern Europe as a therapy in the periods of pervasive political and social changes.

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“The return of history is at the same time the return of the demons of nationalism, which we thought were buried a long time ago” (Rupnik 1990: 135). Jacques Rupnik’s remark made some years ago gains new and increasingly alarming dimensions in the wake of the murders of “tribal wars” overwhelming Eastern Europe. And the fact behind this keen announcement – the revival of nationalism – needs explanation, of course. Why, and how could it happen that the post-socialist countries have seemingly fallen back into the nationalisms typical of the 19th century with all the brutality of the 20th century; how was it possible that democracy looming in the wake of the collapse of socialism has led to murders, violence, and wars all the way from the Adria to the Caucasus. Can one interpret this situation at all? Probably not, since it is difficult to speak about murders in scientific terms. Nevertheless, the expanding ethnic tensions, the wars of the Balkan and the Caucasus, the incapability to handle the situation and the consequent feeling of helplessness draws attention –

at least of scientific research – significantly to something else, namely the other, more hidden forms of nationalism or rather the importance of their research as well.

Due to the brutality of local, ethnic wars, the associated rude nationalist ideologies, and the “philosophy” of the mass media common sense tends to regard nationalism as the manifestation of primitive political culture, or rather, generally the manifestation of some kind of social and/or cultural primitivism. In reality, however, the situation is much more compound, since nationalism and its manifestations in hidden or symbolic forms have become the most definitive or constitutive factor of the social and political changes in Eastern Europe. The queries of the present study are directed to this particular situation, i.e. the latent but still pervasive presence of Eastern European nationalism. This presence cannot be understood without discussing the historical constitution of nationalism. This is a process involving not only the historical, political, or ideological genesis of nationalism, but involving its

symbolic structure as well. The starting point of this analysis can be, what has already been expressed by many others in many ways, that is, nationalism is not something that exists inherently or originally. Nationalism primarily is a construction filled up with symbolic contents created by a group of people for the sake of reaching political, social, or cultural purposes in a given historical context (Gellner 1983: 125). An anthropological interpretation of nationalism demands the interpretation of this process of construction, or rather of the functions of this construction (cf. Spencer 1990: 288); and is unable or unwilling to deal with the historical and political dimensions of this field. Revealing the symbolic dimensions of nationalism demands primarily the interpretation of those categories and notions that constitute so to say the pillar of the conceptual system of Eastern European nationalism, that is, of national culture, the concept of cultural homogeneity, and a particular image of the past. Correspondingly, in the first part of the present paper I will analyze the concept of national culture and identity that emerged gradually from the first third of the 19th century, established at the turn of the century, and became dominant after the First World War – not from a historical point of view, rather with a concern to the cultural logic of this concept. Then I make an attempt to examine the way of how and in what forms this idea arose following the breakdown of socialism in Eastern and in Southeastern Europe.

### Nation and national culture: conceptions and their cultural logic

Nation has been one of the most frequently used, analyzed and interpreted category of the political, social and social-scientific discourse since the end of the 18th century.<sup>1</sup> A significant number of scientific approaches to nation origins from the assumption that nation, national state is the inevitable, essential consequence of social, historical development; a specific feature of human history that is inherently connected to modernization and modernity (cf. Giesen 1991: 10; Greenfeld

1990: 549; Gellner 1983: 55). Nation in the last two centuries was posed as the unchallengeable, single form of social existence – for the political ideologies, as well as for the scientific and the common-sense knowledge of everyday life; seemed as some natural or social property, as the only possible “historical fate” (Mommssen 1987: 162), as a “God-given way of classifying men” (Gellner 1983: 48) – behind which there has always been some kind of “myth of origin”. Thus, it is almost obvious, that in the political discourse of modernity, those political and cultural languages that see nation not as a motive of historical development, but rather some kind of metaphysical basis, “the basis of all historical events” (Estel 1991: 214), inhabit a significant place. The essence of perception of nation manifested in different historical, political, social, and cultural patterns. To draft generally and slightly simplified, there are two historical alternatives or two different political practices. On one hand, nations emerged that are characteristic rather of Western Europe, and are based on the political participation of citizens; on the other hand ideas of nation based on ethnicity and cultural determination appeared, that are characteristic of Eastern and Southeastern Europe (Hobsbawm 1991: 18–23). This latter idea of nation had and has presumed “objective” criteria, like e.g. common descent, common traditions, common religion, common language, and common culture. However, the real substance of nation is made up by a hardly identifiable subjective unity, collectivity, a “national spirit”, “the desire for living together” (cf. Estel 1991: 214–215; Finkelkraut 1990: 24–40) that is concealed behind the objective features.

As far as we consider nation a historical formation, which can be described along objective and subjective criteria, then we are compelled to agree the assertions that see nation as a “cultural unit” (Weber 1979: 95), as an “imagined order” (Lepsius 1990: 233), or as an “imagined community” (Anderson 1983). These metaphors indicate an apprehension that nation, as one form of social coexistence can be grasped inasmuch as there exist collective practices and representations filled up with symbolic contents, through which a na-

tion represents itself (Foster 1991: 239) and the fiction of nation as an imagined community appears (Mommsen 1987: 168–169; Bauman 1990: 153). Here the term “fiction” does not refer simply to the made-up, the false, the untrue, but involves the category of nation that has been *made* and *created*; it concerns the attitude of construction. Nation is not an inherently existing reality; it emerges always and in all historical situations through social and cultural mediums, and exists only as the result, and at the same time as the process of this constitution and construction (cf. Weber 1979: 493; Giesen 1991: 12; Hobsbawm 1991: 2223). This perception of nation is inseparable from the creation of “national reality”, the interpretation of political and cultural strategies conveying symbolic contents and meanings of this reality; it is inseparable from national culture itself (Kaschuba 1993: 239).

Nation and national culture are inseparable categories that mutually constitute each other, since society, as a mass of people living together is filled up with symbolic contents by national culture; this way, society is transformed into “nation” by a defined cultural substrate (Giesen 1991: 10). The construction of national culture rested on folk culture, on a certain perception of folk culture<sup>2</sup> everywhere in Europe; the structure and the content of this relation has become a central theme of ethnographic, anthropological, and social-historical inquiries during the last decade. To summarize this discussion it may be stated that four fundamental types of this link between national and folk or peasant culture can be distinguished in Europe:

(a) The first type – certainly I do not mean temporal priority – is represented by France, or rather by the attitude that is reflected in the title of Eugene Weber’s famous book: *Peasants into Frenchmen*. This approach is based on the profound difference between rural and urban population and reflects the “strangeness” of rural France. The nature of this relation is a kind of acculturation, whereas “urban” France “domesticates” the country; integrates local (provincial) cultures into the culture of modernity, the modern society; that is, the dominant elite culture colonialisises rural

France. In this case social and political integration accompanying economic modernization required a kind of cultural homogenization, and this homogenization manifested in the integration of “underdeveloped France” into modernity (cf. Weber 1979: 486–493).

(b) The next type can be best illustrated on the example of Sweden. The situation in Sweden was different in that peasant culture had preserved its symbolic autonomy, moreover, to a certain extent it was preserved as a kind of national tradition (remember the northern parts of Dalecarlia in the late 19th century for example). Yet still, Swedish national culture is not based on some kind of integration of folk or peasant culture; it is rather the emerge of the aspiring urban middle class from the turn of the century. That is to say, in the concept of Swedish national culture the symbolic sphere, the sphere of peasant culture is inseparably and simultaneously present; together with the sphere of actual or real cultural practice, the everyday life of urban middle class (cf. Löfgren 1989).

(c) A further type is represented by Germany. In the beginning of the 19th century, a novel interpretation of the category of “folk” emerged, that influenced the whole conception of nation and national culture. The nature of this change was that the notion of folk referred to a community expanding to, and encompassing everyone; which based on descent, and did not exclude anyone from this community because of one’s descent, education, or social belonging. In the wake of this process, a new category, the category of “Germanness” (*Deutschheit*) appears, which roots in the concept of the “folk” but is not equal to it, and the aim of which category is including, not excluding. The fundamental significance of “folk” and “folk culture” is preserved, but is not at all exclusive (cf. Kaschuba 1993: 245–246).

(d) The last type is shown by the relation of folk and national culture, which is characteristic of the Eastern part of Central Europe, Eastern, and Southeastern Europe. The present paper deals only with the analysis of this latter type. In this case national culture is identical with folk culture, or rather with the image of folk culture, more precisely with a

peculiar understanding of “popularism” – with exclusive validity. In Eastern and Southeastern Europe the distinctiveness of this relation meant that peasant culture did not bear significance in itself, in its historical reality; rather the views, ideas and convictions concerning folk culture widespread in the society became definitive and served as points of reference throughout the creation of the concept of national culture (cf. Hofer 1991). The ideological tie among folk culture, national culture and popularism is not very easily apprehendable. That is to say, the concept of popularism – based on imagined reality of folk culture, on national character, and on absolute belonging to the folk – appeared as the antipode of something in the cultural dichotomy of modernization in this region of Europe (cf. Köstlin 1984: 25); and represented a kind of ideal.

Due to this motive, the political, ideological and cultural concept of folk culture and popularism was enriched by an important symbolic dimension.

“In all cultures there is something more ‘solid’ and something more ‘fluid’. Something that is brought, and then wasted by everyday; and something that is preserved as a common property through generations. The ‘fluid’ part is considered as everyday, the ‘solid’ as feast. The language of everyday is that of closeness, which connects us to our contemporaries; the language of feasts is that of the distance, which connects us to our predecessors. According to the extent one possesses the language of everyday and of one’s contemporaries, is one part of a communicative society, according to the extent one possesses the language of feasts and of one’s predecessors is one part of a cultural community” (Assmann 1991: 11).

This image of folk culture grafted on national culture fulfilled (and fulfills today) precisely the same function as the above mentioned “solidity”, permanence, common property, feast in its symbolic sense, the language, the knowledge of which is indispensable for being a member of a cultural community. Folk culture was – in this perception of national culture – not a historically existing way of life; it func-

tioned as an absolute and only point of orientation in sociocultural space. This way a kind of cultural community and ideology of popularism came into being, a member of which cannot be everyone naturally; the knowledge and the exclusive use of the adequate cultural language established a symbolic grid or raster which outlines the symbolic borders inside of the society automatically. This cultural language and this symbolic grid contributed to the structuring of societies the way, that – resulting from its own cultural logic – created the category of cultural otherness within one and the same culture. The cultural logic of popularism postulated the imagined reality of folk culture as an absolute point of reference and defined cultural differences in terms of this reference. In other words: the imagined reality of folk culture described and defined cultural otherness through exclusion of all kinds of other cultural strategies, as inherent and unchangeable strangeness; defined cultural differences in terms, and in the context of political, ideological, social relations as a “we/they” opposition. Cultural difference and “self-other relations are matters of power and rhetoric rather than of essence” (Clifford, 1988: 14, cf. Clifford 1983, 1986). James Clifford’s statement is fitting here as well. To sum it up: in Eastern Europe national culture was not built on the historical reality of folk culture, but rather on its imagined reality; which later was claimed as the single authentic one. The feeling of belonging to a nation, national identity meant (and means even today) to belong to a symbolic construction, and disregarding the really existing cultural worlds.

Thus, national identity is primarily based on a reference to a cultural tradition, a cultural identity in this region; it is constructed in a field of tension between culture and politics (Giesen 1991: 13–15). However, this culturally defined identity does not refer to the cultural tradition of a concrete social group, a historically existing life-world, rather to a mental, psycho-cultural state, which Max Weber called an “imagined uniformity” (*geglaubte Gemeinsamkeit*, Weber 1922: 219). This term touches exactly the essence, namely the fact, that this uniformity in itself – at least from the point of

view of political usefulness – is not a sufficiently enduring category; this collectivity and/or uniformity has to be established, has to be created (cf. Bauman 1990: 162). That this collectivity is not at all some “gift of nature” is shown well by the example of language as a group-symbol (cf. Steger 1987; Bausinger 1991); more explicitly by the categories of “common history” and “common culture”. That is to say, these latter concepts cannot ignore the more and more obvious recognition of modern social sciences, that the categories of “common culture”, “common history”, “collective memory”, etc. are of a very limited use. Not only because cultural differences between social groups are much more subtly patterned, much more subtly worked out than common sense supposed and politics and ideology presumed, but primarily because even social groups thought to be identical are not homogeneous; individuals always “stand at different positions”, see events and the world from “different point of views”, that is, they use different kind of “optics”. I do not mean only social differences, which are present in each group, and their result, the diverge worldviews, but the diverge perceptions of the world, rooting in psychic states of age, sex, and of the individual. In other words, I refer to those various, socially, culturally and psychically determined modes of perception, with the help of which the individual is able to perceive and to acknowledge the world surrounding him, and the history constituting the frames of his life. In the above mentioned term from Max Weber the adjective “*geglaubte*” signifies too, that – in social and cultural respect – there are no authentic communities and uniformities (neither in the sense of *Gemeinschaft*, nor of *Gemeinsamkeit*); rather there is an inherent diversity, from which with the support of various symbolic instruments – for the sake of various political, social, and ideological aims – something “common” is created (cf. Marcus/Fischer 1986: 45–77; Knorr-Cetina/Grathoff 1988).

The main consequence of the notion of national culture widespread in Eastern and Southeastern Europe since the middle of the 19th century – which equalled the symbolically loaded category of popularism to the idea

of national culture – was the establishment of symbolic borders, which are fundamental and even today have still perceivable consequences in these societies; symbolic borders, the primary function of which was opposing to and separating from others. Separation from others, based on the sacredness and the invulnerability of tradition and national culture, served as “the most significant symbolic regulator of social, political, and cultural life” (cf. Eisenstadt 1991: 29). First of all, resulting from the fact, that this collectivity constructed by national culture can be defined exclusively against something or someone; one characteristic of symbolic borders is that they settle unbridgeable abysses within the very same society. Cultural uniformity, the laying down, the definition, the hidden existence of symbolic borders, the idea of collectivity, and the consequent “comparison of different cultures” (cf. Kaschuba 1993: 246) – at least in Eastern Europe – meant the creation and the declaration of the overt or latent, direct or symbolic images of the enemies, set up a kind of modern political witch hunt; all these factors were – within this concept of national culture – inherently connected to the construction, and to the symbolization of enemies. This concept of national culture cannot exist without symbolic enemies; the imagined “we”, and the symbolic “they” are ontologically coherent.

This notion of national culture certainly has a powerful integrative function as well. On the one hand, national culture facilitates the individuals on different levels of social structure the *recognition*: they all *belong* to the same community. On the other hand, it offers the individuals living in different social situations the *possibility*: they *may* all belong to the same community. Thus, national identity is theoretically optional, theoretically open. Nevertheless, this choice has a compulsory character: either “we”, or “they”; moreover, openness is incidental and is of a limited validity, that is, it is open only if the “candidate” owns the adequate “features”. That is to say, this concept of national culture always serves the same goal: it offers such constructed patterns of identity for the individual, behind which there are no real social, political and cultural background.

This concept of national culture, and national identity split the societies of Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War decisively. On the one side, there was the “national” part of the society where the members were connected not by actual social and sociological qualities, but by the symbolic web of “national”. This web is woven by the concept, by the ideology of “popularism” to which ideology the image of history possessing a defined and exclusive authenticity belonged organically. On the other side there were all the outsiders, the strangers, who could not belong, or did not want to belong under this web. The popularism, the “picture” of national past served as a kind of identification. One who knows this picture, who is included in it, or has “acquaintances” or “relatives” in it, is part of the nation. The others are not.

Let us make the point here: national culture as such does not necessarily lead to nationalism. Yet still, the concept of national culture dominant in Eastern and Southeastern Europe did necessarily lead to nationalism(s), since the use, the symbolic manifestation, the declaration of national culture as a mental and political concept, occurred always against (cultural, political, social, ethnic, etc.) otherness. In this part of Europe, where after the First World War an explosive melting pot of political, social, ethnic, and cultural differences emerged, this concept of national culture was of a fundamental importance, rooting in everyday life, and was a determining factor from the point of view of political behaviour. How deep the roots of this view, of this “tradition” were, is shown well by the current situation of the post-socialist countries.

### Nationalism and post-socialism: the past in the present or the present of the past

Besides the well-known political and economic level of the all-embracing social changes in Eastern Europe there is another dimension which is constituted by the radical change of everyday life, the change of the cultural world of “ordinary people”.<sup>3</sup> Several dimensions of this change can be grasped from which I wish

to stress only one – the cultural order of socialism, which might be the most significant for the interpretation of reviving nationalism. The Eastern European socialism created not only one type of political and economic systems, but produced, constituted a cultural world as well; established the rules of living and communicating within this cultural world, and the various repertoires of behaviour, it set the “stages” of social life, worked out its cultural and social dramaturgy, etc. For ordinary people other possibility than accepting this world and these rules was not – and following from the logic of cultural worlds could not be – offered. Accepting a cultural world, a cultural system of rules equals to its internalization to a certain degree; that is, the cultural world and the system of rules of socialism became parts of individual lives and life-histories – totally independent of the particular individuals’ commitments to socialist ideology. Confronting and turning against socialism politically, or – what was primarily specific of Hungary – resistance manifesting in the private spheres of life did not alter the cultural world itself: we all were partakers and at the same time we are inheritors and survivors of this world. Therefore attempts bearing political, ideological or other implications, directed to demolish this cultural world meant the symbolic annihilation of individual life-histories as well. Hardly can it be seen a coincidence that in the case of significant layers of the society, the political, social change of the system was accompanied by the experience of losing one’s own history – here I stress again: independently of the individual ideological commitments. The breakdown of a familiar, accustomed cultural world in itself results in the loss of the identity which is especially the case when the collapse of a cultural world is not the consequence of inside moves or developments rather it is the result of the destructive effects of political and ideological motives. The struggle of post-socialist administrations, governments and ideologists to present the age of socialism as a “vicious era” lacking all positive values became a fundamental topic in ordinary people’s increasing crises of identity. First of all because the experience of losing one’s own history is accompa-

nied by the questionability of the cultural knowledge used up to the given time, and of the further useability of this knowledge. Consequently, one becomes a stranger in one's own life-history, since what vanishes from behind individual actions is the history that had furnished the happenings of individual lives with meaning, as the single and sole authentic context. The only result of these politically motivated efforts is a crisis of identity, which more and more profoundly masters over everyday life, the awakening of remorse, and the reinforcement of inner contrasts in the society; since for other social groups just the opposite of the referred process became definitive, that is, the experience of recovering of history. In the wake of the upset of everyday life-worlds, the consequent political conflicts that seem to escalate and to endanger social normality, the increasingly unmanageable economic crisis, the total uncertainty and confusement towards all aspects of life is what has become a general and definitive experience, a dramatic cultural feeling following the collapse of socialism. The vision of post-modern philosophy and social theory about the end of "grands récits", the ceasing of the metadiscourses, the ensuing instability of social space, the loosening of familiar borders and accepted rules has become a historical experience here, in Eastern Europe, among the "ruins of socialism", on the threshold of mass pauperization and the total economic breakdown – and this fact has (and will have in the future) considerable consequences. The new owners of political power – supposedly uniformly all over Eastern and Southeastern Europe – in this situation consider past and the relation to past a (symbolic) tool, through which the uncertainty and confusion of social and political space can be diminished. Past certainly is not uniform, is not a homogeneous entity; past is of an uncertain expanse from the point of view not only of political systems, but of social strata and cultural worlds as well, it is a soft and flexible formation. That is why past is not reachable at hand every time and for everyone the same way; this past has to be created with the help of a retrospective mythology. The most significant phase in creating the past is the reestab-

lishment of history as the only authentic point of reference for the present (cf. Elwert 1989: 441; Schiel 1985). However, history can be re-established the time and the way historical or social memory (cf. Wachtel 1986; Halbwachs 1967) can be reconstructed. Nowadays there is nothing that would characterize Eastern and Southeastern Europe better, than this "reordering" of historical and/or social memory. But recalling past, rewriting history and reordering social memory are not at all "innocent" procedures; on the contrary, they involve serious consequences. One of the most significant consequences of these processes – at least from the point of view of nationalism – is the emergence of the category of collective identity (cf. Anthias 1992), the above mentioned cultural identity, and the "feeling of we" (cf. Kuzmics 1993) connecting closely to these identities.

There are two extremely deeply rooted forms of cultural identity today in Eastern and Southeastern Europe: the ethnic and the national identity. The most specific factor of the logic of these identities is the image of "we". The issue is, that this view can comprehend culture and cultural phenomena only in the terms of "our culture", and sees homogeneity, that is, sameness and uniformity as the most significant definitive quality of culture. The rewriting of the past, the colonization of history has not only political but cultural dimensions, as well, as it revives the historical concept of culture and identity from the 19th century, which has homogeneity as its main principle. The significance of the whole process in post-socialist countries is guaranteed such a way, that cultural identity, the "feeling of we" creates "the intimate feeling of protection" (cf. Finkelkraut 1990: 75), which is insured by a rediscovered authenticity and an obligatory homogeneity. *Cultural homogeneity*, created by symbolic instruments, the constancy, unchangedness of cultural identity rooting in it, the introduction of *past* into present through this constancy; *continuity*, as the guarantee of social, political and cultural legitimacy, and, at the same time, as the tool of insuring cultural hegemony and political power – all together constitute a space in society and in history, which functions as a protected and a protect-

ing zone where one can retire in unstable, confused historical and political situations. National culture and national identity have become categories serving to name this “safe site”, although this safety is only imagined, as well as the pillars supporting these categories are imaginary. Post-socialism is a situation which is characterized by a confusion deriving from social and political problems, the unexpected freedom, and instability caused by these two factors. In this moment of social history those social movements, political ideas possessing “historical traditions” appear again, which place the return, the belonging to a linguistic and cultural community in the center of their ideology, as the single guarantee of social and cultural safety. Native language, the home-country, “ancient traditions” and norms fixed in them are again drawn in political usage, and are presented as instruments that are capable of ordering and stabilizing the world (cf. Hobsbawm 1991: 6). That this stability can be obtained only through the symbolic (and actual) exclusion of certain groups from the society, since this is the nature of its logic; that this logic necessarily – though certainly not always consciously – leads to xenophobia, murders and wars is denied by these movements and ideologies. Nevertheless, this denial does not alter the historical fact, that the struggle of the imagined “we” and the symbolic “they” results in real deaths; so that “we” could live, “they” have to be expelled or killed (cf. Gellner 1983: 2).

In Eastern and Southeastern Europe those forms and patterns of national identity are dominant today which were characteristic of the period between the two World Wars. These patterns of traditional national identity aim that “folk” as the standard conception of the political, social space should be filled up again with those conceptions, which had marked it in historical times preceding socialism. “Folk” in the context of modernity is a sociologically inarticulate and theoretically uninterpretable category; which becomes the main “subject” of belonging to a nation, the basis of collective solidarity due precisely to the fact, that by its inarticulateness, it goes beyond concrete social stratification and classification, cuts through

the borders that separate social strata, and turns to be the symbol of that imaginary historical continuity, which is responsible for its birth (cf. Greenfeld 1990: 549–550; Estel 1991: 222). This understanding of folk and its representation on different stages of society is parallel with the earlier mentioned political, ideological effort to see nation as a cultural community or the desire to define it as a cultural community. Whenever nation is defined as a cultural community – as it is common in Eastern Europe, there is no need for the sociologically more specific description of the members of a nation and of the society; folk is a much more sufficient category for this aim.

At the same time, this unarticulated category of folk is closely connected to another element of national identity mentioned in the first part of this paper, which was present in the bud in the ideas of the 19th century. National ideologies strengthening after the breakdown of socialism made part of their argumentation the not particularly novel social-philosophical premiss, that is, people do not exist generally, humanity does not have a general cultural paradigm, there are only people, systems of value and life-worlds pertaining to particular nations.<sup>4</sup> Put it differently, the devotion to national culture, national traditions and national identity is not some manifestation of an ideology, rather the single possible mode of the social existence of man. It seems, that with the end of socialism, 19th century has returned to Eastern Europe. The struggle against universal self, global values, laws and norms has revived. In this struggle, the uniqueness of “popularism”, the idea of “the spirit of the folk” gained a specific role (cf. Finkelkraut 1990: 17–19). Since socialism professed a kind of globality and universalism, therefore the new world following socialism could not follow a principle other than a special philosophy of “multiculturalism” based on national separateness and national differences. This specifically Eastern European version of multiculturalism follows a special logic. Outward, towards others, it insists on separation based on diversity, the importance of borders promoting the preservation of differences, and the independence and sovereignty of cul-

tural worlds. But inward, in the direction of its own society it stresses the opposite of all. It demands uniformity and cultural homogeneity of the society, and does not endure cultural and social differences within the society, rather postulates inarticulateness – or, as national rhetoric puts it – unity, as the fundamental criteria of national existence. It is precisely this paradoxical logic that insures the efficacy of this system of thought. That is, on the one hand it claims that everyone has the right for cultural difference, moreover, that this is the basis of living in a society. However, on the other hand it demands that everyone should live among the similar; that there should be unambiguous borders between the dissimilar. This deformed concept of multiculturalism shows the mosaic-like order of separate, different, but inside ethnically and culturally “pure” worlds. The consequences of this philosophy are shown well by the current reality of the Eastern and Southeastern part of Europe.

### Post-socialism and nationalism: a symbolic interpretation

One specific ideological foundation of resistance against socialism as a political system was the insistence upon national traditions, national identities, national rhetoric and national philosophy all over Eastern Europe. In the era of socialism national ideology and insistence upon national culture and identity appeared as such a unified worldview, which – in that particular social and political context – was capable of presenting itself as an actual political, social, and cultural alternative. However, as it obtained an authoritative, dominant position after the collapse of socialism, with the constant reference to national traditions and values, with their representation as models to be followed contributed not only to the revival of nationalism(s), but itself materialized as a nationalist ideology. This motive has to be emphasized: on the surface the social discourse is about national culture, traditions, identity, but this “language” in the depth – following from historical traditions necessarily, brings the idea, the ideology of nationalism

into action. That is, it does not only mean that the “vacuum” left behind by socialism is filled up with nationalist ideologies, rather, that these ideas existed under the socialism as well imply different meanings in changing social and political context. The national ideology functioned under the socialism as an effective tool of political resistance turned after the breakdown of socialism into a powerful symbolical technique of political regime, of ideological domination.

The ideology of national leading to hidden nationalism, fulfills important functions in post-socialist societies, which is the result of at least two causes. On the one hand, post-socialist societies see world as something to be reconstructed. The world has to be reconstructed, because socialism was merely a historical cul-de-sac, that is, it does not constitute a part of (national) history, from which it has to be excluded; the world during the decades of socialism has gone so wrong, that it cannot be repaired further, this way the world has to be restituted – with the assistance of national ideology. However, on the other hand the change of Eastern European political systems means a transitory, a kind of *liminal* period burdened with symbolic dangers, in which the rules and laws of social structuring, social communication, and moving in social space become unstable, unoutlined, and obscure. The inside logic of the transitory situation and the feeling of threat deriving from it demands the same as the desire for the symbolic reconstruction of the world requires: that the unarticulated image of society, that is, nation, which can be described along one single parameter – along ethnicity or culture, suggesting symbolic equality, should be created and represented. Precisely in this particular social-historical moment of post-socialism appears or is revived the symbolic category of “Hungarian” (“Polish”, “Slovak”, “Romanian”, etc.). These are not actually existing social roles or self-definitions, which convey actual cultural contents; rather, concepts created with the support of collective symbols and symbolic actions. The main function of these concepts is the introduction of a single – and dominant of all accidental criteria – structural factor, that

is, "Hungarianness" (and imaginary national identity generally) in the transitory situation without explicit borders, roles and structures. "Hungarian" ("Polish", "Romanian", "Croatian", etc.) is a symbolic instrument, which in the liminal periods and crises of modern historical, social progress is capable of the creation of an unarticulated community. "Hungarian" – and national identity in this sense generally – serves as the ontology of the transitory situation as the primary tool of unarticulated orientation in the world. "Hungarian" is the symbolic concept, with the help of which social disintegration is abridgeable, this way an all-encompassing and all-pervasive "total", "whole" identity can be created. Through this instrument the individual will be linked to the imaginary community – not only in political, but in moral sense as well (cf. Finkelkraut 1990: 74, Estel 1991: 225). In the transitory situation this particular belonging to the imaginary community, the moral impact of this belonging is the motive of political action and the basis of the political field – and this particular element conveys the danger of the imaginary national identity. The dictatory of imaginary communities, the moral impact and force of national identities combined with the emotionalization and heroization of history, with the conscience of endangerment, with the conception of national history as subsequent tragedies, with the perpetual struggle against foreign enemies, and linked to the lack of rational intellectualism and critical traditions – these are the conditions of today's Eastern European political and social transition; the social-historical and cultural context of "Hungarian" as a symbolic concept. This symbolic concept has another important connotation as well. It is obvious nowadays, that in modern societies that are based on functional differentiation neither the ethnic, nor the national identity are able to fulfil the social functions of a well shaped social subsystem – the way like for example economy does. From this it follows, that nation cannot be seen other than a marker of identity, based on the consensus of adscriptive, collective values, which stands as an obstacle for the individual to get integrated into the increasingly compound social pro-

cesses (cf. Nassehi 1990: 268–269). In other words, the question of "Hungarianness", of "What is Hungarian" is one striking symptom of anti-modernization, of counter-modernization for it only requires the identification with the above mentioned unarticulated community, and it does not demand from the individual the continual adaptation to changes expected by modern society; since "Hungarian" – and this interpretation of national identity generally – is a constant, everlasting, and unchanging factor of national existence.

At this point the usual interpretation of nationalism is broadened, and appears as a kind of worldview, which continuously reduces the diversity of the cultural context by establishing symbolic borders, outlining symbolic areas, integrating "the identical" and excluding "the others". This view strives to identify the world with small, apparent worlds, where clarity is guaranteed by sameness, uniformity, and homogeneity. The easier its borders are recognizable, the smaller the areas pressed between them, the less tolerance of "Otherness" needed; the safer the world (cf. Hobsbawm 1991: 199–200). For this particular reason the post-socialist version of nationalism is directed not only against other peoples and other cultures, but makes the awareness, understanding, interpretation, and acknowledgement of cultural otherness impossible within the society. Due to the myth of national culture, national identity, and the imaginary national community, cultural otherness in Eastern Europe equals to social and cultural marginality based on symbolic exclusion from the society, which manifests through this symbolic exclusion. Nationalism – in this interpretation – is not a "purely" historical or sociological category. Nationalism is rather to be seen as a "cultural system" (Kaschuba 1993: 269); as a special "style of thinking" (Greenfeld 1990: 549), as a kind of "knowledge postulated as a social property" (Estel 1991: 220), or as the "genre of collective imagination" (Spencer 1990: 285). There is a general social philosophy in Eastern Europe based on various thoughts like (a) struggle against globalization, (b) national uniqueness, (c) cultural homogeneity, (d) separation based on diversity, (e) preservation of

differences against others, (f) a mosaic-like order of the world. This philosophy says, the only therapy against the infected world of socialism, and at the same time the only help in this dangerous situation of transition is the returning to the national roots, to the "natural" order of this world, to knit together ethnic and cultural homogeneity, moral order and symbolic purity. This approach and comprehension of the world represents a "new" cultural fundamentalism, and the new Eastern European nationalism is a striking manifestation of this fundamentalism. Cultural fundamentalism and the above mentioned Eastern European version of multiculturalism have a common philosophical background, "the idea of the bad outside and the good inside, the inside under attack and in need of protection" (Douglas 1970: 114). This is a philosophy, a worldview, an ideology based on "cathartic explanation" which means that social tensions, conflicts are "drained off by being displaced onto symbolic enemies". At the same time this is an ideology of "morale explanation" which means "the ability of an ideology to sustain individuals (or groups) in the face of chronic strains, either by denying it outright or by legitimizing it in terms of higher values" (Geertz 1973: 205). These theoretical statements turned into tragic reality on the Eastern European scene of political and social changes.

This cultural fundamentalism and "nationalism conveyed by culture" as a manifestation of it lives on as a "social myth" (cf. Barth 1959) profoundly impregnated in the everyday life of Eastern European societies, which manifests through prejudices, a false historical conscience, and ethnic stereotypes, and it becomes an unchallengeable and unverifiable experience originating from "the history". This social myth has been implicitly underlying the everyday life of Eastern European societies at least since the turn of the century and breaks to the surface in various historical eras with various intensity. When in history catastrophes and wars loom; when fundamental social and political changes initiate, when the pillars of social identity shake – at this moment this social myth flashes a vision of the future, the promise of a new and better world, the possibility of

a mythic community. This myth lived its first real golden age after the First World War in Eastern Europe. At the time after the decline of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy the "redistribution of the world" took place, when new social structures and political systems emerged. The second "golden age" is taking place in front of our eyes. This social myth is the sign and the symptom of a total political, philosophical, and ideological disorientation and confusion. It is an ideology, which attempts to find an answer and a cure for the confusion and the hopelessness stemming from it. It is a continual desperate effort to raise barricades against the modernizing world (cf. Hobsbawm 1991: 195). History, or the turmoil that is called so in Eastern Europe is unable to give a better device in this situation. Modernization that has never ended in Eastern Europe, the failure and the collapse of socialism lead to that "post-modern" that except the myth of cultural fundamentalism, of nationalism – it seems – cannot offer a different ideology.

This analysis may be gloomy, but is free from illusions. However, being free from illusions it points to the responsibility of social sciences and of the ethnographers or anthropologists. We can not alter the world but live in the conviction that it is possible and worth speaking and writing about it, and that this mode of writing can be acceptable epistemologically as well as morally. That is, we can contribute to the creation of a morally more acceptable world by speaking about it adequately. This is not much, but not little either; this is the duty of all of us.

## Notes

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1. I do not attempt here to review the whole litera-

ture concerning the concept of nation. As an example I refer only to the most recent summary of a broad perspective: Estel 1991.

2. I do not intend here to discuss the notion of folk culture. To the ethnographic discussion of this concept see Köstlin 1981, Köstlin 1984, Kaschuba 1988, Kaschuba 1990, Niedermüller 1991.
3. With a concern to this particular question significant researches have been effected first of all in Germany recently. Cf. Niethammer/von Plato/Wierling 1991, Geiling-Maul and others 1992.
4. "There are no people generally in the world. I have only seen French, Italians, Russians in my life ... Concerning man in general sense, on the basis of my own experiences, I have to declare, that in case it does exist at all, it does so without me knowing about it." Joseph de Maistre: *Œuvres complètes*, I. Lyon, 1884. 75.

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