Chapter 4:
Ethnicity and Nationalism

Use of the term ethnicity is comparatively recent, but the issues explored in this chapter have been central to anthropology for a long time. In the past it was often taken for granted that behind each of the exotic cultures studied by anthropologists lay a collective identity, shared by all group members. The concept of the 'tribe' or 'community' was little discussed, and the validity of studying cultures as bounded units was seldom questioned. There is an interesting congruence between these assumptions in anthropology and the ideologies of nationalist movements, of which Eastern Europe has had a profusion in the last two centuries. Indeed, anthropologists have frequently been called upon to package and systematize cultural materials in support of the homogenizing goals of nationalists. The key question is whether or not modern social anthropology can improve upon the old 'national ethnography', and help to dismantle what earlier generations of scholars helped to assemble.

Ethnicity, Marxism and national minorities

Anthropologists have studied many different things under the heading of ethnicity (cf. Eriksen 1993). Early anthropologists thought in terms of racial groups, and it is not so many decades since the focus was still squarely upon 'primordial' group loyalties and descent from a common ancestor. It was assumed that an *ethnic* identity gave an individual his or her most basic and permanent sense of belonging. These certainties were only attacked decisively in the late 1960s. From this time onwards anthropologists have emphasized how ethnicity can be manipulated to serve particular social and economic goals, how it may be downplayed in favour of other forms of identity, and how individuals may change their ethnic identities, or present different identities according to context and situation. One of the pioneers of new approaches was Barth (1969), some of whose insights were anticipated in Eastern Europe by Obrębski (1936). Both stressed subjective elements in the formation and persistence of ethnic groups: it is enough that members and their neighbours should agree about a boundary, it does not have to be buttressed by 'objective' cultural differences.

Anthropologists have been less conspicuous in debates about nationalism, but in recent years the nationalist production of culture has been increasingly

subjected to critique. Older accounts tended to emphasize pre-existing cultural features, such as a common language and a common religion, and to see these as natural foundations for nation-states, given the need for greater communicative efficiency in modern society. More recent theorists have emphasized the artificial character of national movements, focusing not upon the *ideas* of nationalism but upon economic transformation and the interests and methods of the intellectuals responsible for the 'national revivals' (Anderson 1983; Cole 1981; Gellner 1983). Others have adopted a compromise position, arguing that although the emergence of the modern state structure in Eastern Europe is not a straightforward product of pre-existing cultural materials, those materials, and especially language and religion, did impose significant constraints on the inventive imaginations of nationalist intelligentsias (Smith 1986).

This is another field in which Marxism has been signally inadequate. Modern East European states were faced with the task of reconciling socialist principles with very powerful forces pulling them in contrary directions. The nineteenth century theorists did not devote much time to issues of national identity, and seem to have assumed that nations would wither away as socialism was constructed. The failure of Rosa Luxemburg, born in Poland, but Jewish and emphatically internationalist in her principles, to persuade Polish communists to make common cause with Russians, epitomizes the problem that has faced socialists in the twentieth century. To many it is *the* most important failure of socialist theory. Ernest Gellner has mockingly referred to the 'wrong address theory':

> The awakening message was intended for *classes*, but by some terrible postal error was delivered to *nations*. It is now necessary for revolutionary activists to persuade the wrongful recipient to hand over the message, and the zeal it engenders, to the rightful and intended recipient. The unwillingness of both the rightful and the usurping recipient to fall in with this requirement causes the activist great irritation. (1983: 129-30)

This criticism is not entirely fair, and there were in fact numerous attempts to revise and develop Marxist theory in this field. Some attempted to relate ethnic revolt to class struggle, in circumstances where the class and ethnic divisions seemed to coincide. Michael Hechter's model of 'internal colonialism'(1975), originally put forward to explain ethnic politics on the Celtic fringe of Great Britain, was adapted by Verdery (1979) to the Transylvanian case. However, the 'fit' between ethnic and class divisions has seldom been as close as the

Marxist would wish. There have been occasions when the oppressed of different nationalities have united against their oppressors. But there have also been numerous occasions when some of the oppressed have collaborated with 'ruling class interests' against those with whom, according to the Marxists, they ought to have been making common cause. These difficulties have persisted in the present day. Several socialist states inherited problematic frontiers and, in seeking increasingly to legitimate themselves in nationalist terms, they accentuated problems that should, according to Marxists, have been on the wane. The internationalism of traditional Marxist doctrine has been made to look hopelessly utopian.

The distribution of peoples in Eastern Europe, whatever criteria one takes, has never been conducive to the modern ideal of the nation-state. It has been estimated that there were nearly three times as many ethnic groups in Eastern as compared to Western Europe. Many ethnic groups have existed partially or wholly in diaspora communities: examples include not only Jews and Gypsies, but also Germans and Serbs. Other groups, while less scattered, have spread over two or more well-defined political units, creating the potential for irredentist friction. The number of groups of compact settlement which could even approximate to a history of monopolistic control over a given territory was always very small. The past was always a vital source of concern, and the claim to historical continuity in a given territory has been one of the most potent in the nationalist repertoire. This is why history, linguistics, archaeology, ethnography and folklore have all been politically important disciplines in Eastern Europe. For example, theories suggesting that modern Romanians can trace their descent back to the Roman population of Dacia were first put forward by intellectuals, many of them priests, in Transylvania. Such claims were intended to counter Hungarian claims to that territory, and they have remained prominent in the ideology of the Romanian Communist Party and its successors. Anthropologists have been interested in exploring the construction of these ideologies and their effects, often unintended, irrespective of what historians may agree to be their 'truth value'.

The Hungarian experience is illustrative of more general trends in the region. Evidence concerning the tribal groups which first entered the Carpathian basin more than a thousand years ago is scant. What is known is broadly consistent with what we know about other nomadic groups, e.g. the way in which identity was expressed through genealogies of the tribal leaders. To this typical nomadic-pastoral legitimating myth was added a new identity, that of a loyal Christian people, defending Europe against further marauders from the

east. Hungarians have drawn on both these sources of identity in later centuries (Armstrong 1982). Hungary was an 'historic nation', in the sense that there did exist a medieval state called Hungary, headed by its own king. This political entity never recovered fully from a century and a half of Ottoman occupation. Eventually, following this period of eclipse, aristocratic élites were successful in extracting extensive concessions from their new Habsburg political masters in Austria, and they shared in the running of a vast unwieldy empire after 1867. In the period down to 1919 they did their best to prevent other, would-be nations within their half of the empire from following the path blazed by the Hungarian national movement. The Hungarian treatment of minority groups was crude, and no doubt related to the insecurity they felt in constituting a minority in almost all of the regions they governed, including, for many years, in their own capital city. The British historian Robert Seton-Watson was the most trenchant critic of Hungarian 'racial' policies in this period (1908). He played a significant part in persuading the victorious powers to agree the radical dismemberment of Hungary at the Treaty of Trianon in 1919.

Austria-Hungary in the early twentieth century did contain some on the political left who showed great insight into the rising strength of national feeling; but the sort of federation favoured by Otto Bauer (1907) would scarcely have satisfied the aspirations of nationalist leaders by that time (especially if they detected in his work an undercurrent of sympathy for continued German hegemony). In Hungary, the liberal 'Danubian federalism' of Oszkár Jászi was not elaborated until the empire had collapsed, and it never attracted much political support.

The 'successor states' of 1919 by and large survived, though within boundaries that were significantly altered a generation later. Poland after the Second World War moved much closer to the nation-state ideal. Albania and Hungary could also claim to be close, though, to the extent that Gypsies were not recognized officially as an ethnic group, most countries were by no means as close as their statistics might indicate. Perhaps East Germany accomplished what most of the others were aiming to achieve: the Sorbs, the sole indigenous minority, were encouraged to preserve their distinctiveness for folklore display purposes only. (There were obviously special problems of national identity in the East German case; for further discussion of the state's efforts to inculcate a specifically socialist patriotism see Borneman 1992.)

In other East European countries potential sources of ethnic conflict remained. The influence of emigrant communities and outside opinion was often a powerful factor in the persistence of tensions. Seton-Watson's (1908)

accusation against Hungary was often repeated, especially against the Russians (see e.g. Allworth 1971). However, blanket condemnation is unwarranted, even for the former Soviet Union. Soviet-type political systems may have had more trouble coping with 'ethnopolitics' than pluralist polities in the west (Schöpflin 1984), but the position was by no means uniformly negative. Some ethnic tensions eased in the socialist period as a consequence of rapid modernization and high rates of social mobility for citizens of minority as well as majority groups. The scope for ethnic conflict has been diminished by the holocaust, massive population transfers (especially of Germans), further emigration by minority groups, and generations of assimilation in every state.

Many citizens, however, especially those who were unenthusiastic about socialism, remained stubbornly loyal to their national group. Acknowledging this, most socialist governments attempted to don the mantle of patriotism, and several enjoyed a measure of success. Only in the old problem zone of South-East Europe were major problems visible in the later socialist period. Here at least two possible 'flashpoints' could be identified. One was Kosovo, sacred to the Serbian national cause, where the Federal Government of Yugoslavia had to cope with a statistically dominant Albanian population. The other was Transylvania, where the power of the Romanian state was deployed against a large Hungarian minority. This region has been the subject of several anthropological studies and can therefore receive closer consideration here.

Ethnic divisions of labour in Transylvania

Transylvania is a geographically and historically distinctive region comparable in size to contemporary Hungary. Politically it was associated with Hungary for many centuries, before being allocated to Romania in 1919. Romanians refer to this as its unification with the fatherland. The term Transylvania is now usually taken to cover all the territories then acquired by Romania, although strictly speaking not all of these had formed part of the historic region. Intellectuals from Transylvania had played an important role in the Romanian national movement. They were more exposed to western ideas than the Romanians of other areas, and enjoyed sufficient liberty to develop subversive nationalist doctrines while living among Hungarian and German communities which enjoyed greater economic power and political rights.

Katherine Verdery has carried out fieldwork in Transylvania since the early 1970s, and has published widely on both the history of ethnic relations in the region and on contemporary tensions. Under Habsburg rule (and in this respect

the situation was similar under the Ottomans) ethnic groups lived alongside and intermingled with each other, with different groups tending to specialize in different branches of the division of labour. In Transylvania Hungarians were associated with political office, the Saxon Germans with commerce and economic power in the towns, and the Romanians with the serf masses. These were the *general* tendencies. Many Germans and Hungarians also lived as peasants, and some Romanians became merchants and intellectuals. Those who were successful were liable to change their ethnic characteristics and assimilate to the higher status group. Such change of ethnic identity is not unique to Transylvania. Upwardly mobile East Slav peasants were in a very similar position vis-à-vis politically dominant Poles. The basic pattern, whereby ethnic and socio-economic boundaries coincided and remained stable despite many individuals crossing them, is characteristic of pre-modern Eastern Europe.

Verdery argues (1983, 1985) that an important phase in the history of Transylvania was its gradual incorporation into the international trading system. Specifically, from the seventeenth century onwards the German Saxons began to accentuate their ethnic identity in order to retain their hold over valuable trade against new rivals. Saxon ethnic cohesion helped to ensure the primacy of this group in the economic sphere, which thereafter remained the most basic marker of Saxon identity in the region down to the present day. A second turning point was the impact of the policies of the Habsburg State in the eighteenth century, when Transylvania's prosperity declined and the state began to encroach on feudal privileges. At this point the concept of the *natio*, which had previously designated the noble estate, began to take on the new meaning of 'nationality'. Hungarian landowners and Saxon traders reacted to Habsburg pressures as 'Hungarians' and 'Saxons'. Romanians, excluded from juridical status as *natio*, began to seek political and economic equality with other groups and used Romanian identity as a mobilizing weapon. Ethnicity, then, was neither the residue of ancient tribalism nor simply a creation of capitalism or of political centralization: it was the complex product of a variety of influences. It built upon cultural preconditions, but the new patterns were also the product of a changing world economy and of a particular political conjuncture.

The subsequent transfer of Transylvania from Hungary to Romania in 1919 marked the loss of special privileges for the Hungarians. Romanians took over political power at this point, but they remained poorly endowed in terms of economic resources. This was not remedied until after 1945, when private

capitalists and landowners were expropriated and the peasantry collectivized. Political conflict between Hungarians and Romanians was not so easily resolved, and this generated a sharp polemic concerning the conduct of anthropological research in Romania. The exchanges between Michael Sozan and the 'Romanian Research Group' in *Current Anthropology* (1977-79) alerted many anthropologists to the political implications of their work, and the special sensitivity of ethnic issues in this region. Sozan argued that the Romanian government was practising 'ethnocide' against the national minorities. However, other scholars saw the same trends as the natural concomitants of a shift to a nationally integrated, industrial economy.

In more recent work Verdery (e.g. 1993) has related contemporary ethnic relations to socialist political economy. To some observers, the hypernationalist policies of Ceauşescu's government were simply a diversion and a refuge for a singularly corrupt and economically inept regime (Shafir 1985). For Verdery (1991a) the prominence of nationalist rhetoric proved the enduring power of this discourse: the communists were mere pawns in its grasp, rather than the cynical exploiters of ethnic sentiment. This rather begs the question of why other socialist governments, e.g. the Polish, not that much more successful economically, did not resort to the same sort of rhetoric. Of course, the contemporary demographic profile was important: when Poland had large minorities in the past, it too was more fiercely nationalistic. A more complete answer would require further investigations of the histories of these 'nations'. A population lacking a clearly defined historic state and confronted by a rival which could lay claim to such status may be particularly susceptible to virulent nationalism. In Transylvania it is clear that the Hungarian minority has been too large and politically mobilized to assimilate, and in the post-socialist period it continues to derive encouragement from Hungary itself, and from energetic campaigning in the west.

To summarize: pre-modern Tranylvania presented a not unusual pattern of cohabiting ethnic groups (there were other smaller ones apart from those mentioned here). The details of which groups were on the scene first and in what numbers do not really concern the anthropologist, who is likely to be sceptical of the claims of all nationalists, and to stress that no group in the pre-modern settlement history can be compared to the state-bearing culturally homogenous nation of the modern age. (Medieval Hungary was certainly not such a nation, and in any case most of the Transylvanian Hungarians have to this day retained strong regional identities: they do not identify themselves unambiguously with the Hungarians of Hungary.) Ethnic groups in Transylvania

were not simply 'mixed-up', and they did not form an arbitrary 'mosaic' on the ground. Romanians, Saxons and Hungarians played complementary roles in the political economy of the region, though the details obviously underwent changes through time. As political and economic factors were transformed externally, so the character of Transylvania's ethnic division of labour came under pressure. A finely balanced situation, in terms not just of numbers but of external supports and of cultural identities dating back over centuries, has made the ethnic problem here particularly intractable. The history of Transylvania illustrates the main features of the transformation that swept away the old political structures everywhere – it almost offers a microcosm of Eastern Europe as a whole. Searching behind the cultural markers which distinguished the ethnic groups (religion and language were central) and behind the rhetorics of historical antecedence, Verdery has demonstrated that an anthropological understanding of the struggles over ethnic identity in this region must be located in a global framework of political and economic transformation.

Ethnic interaction in Burgenland and Bosnia

Approaches from political economy by no means exhaust modern anthropological understandings of ethnicity. Ethnographers are concerned to document ethnic interaction in both formal and informal contexts, to show *how* ethnic identities are maintained, in addition to exploring the structural reasons *why* they should take the form they do. In Central Europe the Austrian Burgenland contains interesting examples of how Eastern European groups have been integrated into predominantly German-speaking communities. Susan Gál (1981) has focused upon language use and language switching to show the specific domains in which a Hungarian ethnic identity has been preserved. Similarly, Lockwood (1981) has shown how the 'integration' of Slovenes in the province has not led to the elimination of a separate Slovene identity (cf. Minnich 1992 on Slovenes inside the Italian state).

The work for which Lockwood is better known concerns the Moslem population of Bosnia (1975). His monograph addressed a classic problem in economic anthropology, namely the extent to which personal, kin and ethnic ties influence economic relations. He found that little concession was made to ethnicity in the Bosnian market place. Ethnic groups did specialize and the market did help to integrate them, but it was 'functional' or 'mechanical' integration, rather than 'organic' integration into some more complex unity.

To find integration of the latter sort you needed to look deeper into the workings of the relatively homogenous village social structures, and at the particular cultural features which distinguished Moslem Slavs from their neighbours, users of the same Serbo-Croat language. The essential distinguishing feature here was religion, with other cultural markers stemming from it (food taboos, marriage customs, green as main colour symbol, etc.). The Bosnian case is a remarkable example of the power of religion, even a religion which is no longer so enthusiastically practised, to provide the basis for an ethnic group. It clearly did so for many centuries in the eyes of group members and their neighbours, and there is much irony in the fact that this identity was finally ratified by a secular socialist polity (the Bosnian Moslems were finally accorded full nationality status in 1971). It was almost as if socialist Yugoslavia was determined to defy the modern world and maintain pre-modern structures intact.

The Bosnian realities were unusually complicated. The strength of the identity in the later socialist years, and of religion more generally, was an embarrassment to the authorities. Political and economic factors were also important: the resource allocation model of the federal Yugoslav state created incentives to remain fully autonomous of both Serbian and Croat neighbours. Since Moslems had initially become distinguished from Slav Christians as a strategy for claiming preferential treatment from Istanbul, this was a kind of continuity with the political economy and regional power structures of the Ottomans. In other words, religion was the essential vehicle for ethnic identity, but the establishment and maintenance of a distinct group also carried various secular advantages. However, the strength of religious beliefs among Bosnian Moslems should not be underestimated (cf. Gellner 1983: 71-2). Sorabji's research in Sarajevo (1989) shed further light on the specifically religious aspects of Bosnian Moslem identity, and showed it to have a dynamic of its own, and a creative ability to draw on developments in Islamic culture elsewhere. The presence of a material or political rationale, bearing unevenly on different members of the group and fluctuating through time, does not make the experience of this identity any less strong or less 'authentic'. Most ethnic identities are founded on more or less complex combinations of interest and emotion, of collective and individual needs. The Bosnian Moslems are exceptional only in the extent to which religion was and remains the main defining feature of the group.

Tone Bringa (1991) worked in a mixed Moslem-Croat village in Bosnia shortly before the collapse of the Yugoslav state. She found that ethnic

boundaries were clearly demarcated, but that the traditions of tolerance which had prevailed over centuries were still respected. There was some intermarriage. A few years later she returned to the village to make a film that revealed how the former neighbours had begun to murder each other. The pressures had originated from outside the village, and they can be partially explained in the context of the collapse of the central power. The resort to ethnicity as the only available basis of certainty also had its political and economic dimensions: but it could only work as it did because the *differences* that groups had maintained over the centuries created that potential for mobilization by extremists. The diversity that Lockwood described in the 1970s as 'the living legacy of the Ottoman empire' has been transformed in a few years of ethnic cleansing into more or less homogenized mini-states.

Strangers and pariahs: Jews and Gypsies

A special form of ethnic interaction observable in many societies involves 'total strangers' and pariah groups. Such 'exotic' groups have figured prominently in work on Eastern Europe. Rightly or wrongly, Jews were often popularly identified with power-holding élites, and certainly with vital spheres of the economy. Yet they formed a pariah group to the extent that they were excluded, segregated in caste-like manner from the body of society, their strong religious base accentuating their 'otherness'. This was not just another ethnic boundary, it was a gulf that very few could ever cross. Many Jews of the *shtetl*, typically a small town and market centre, lived in the same poverty as their peasant neighbours; but they were associated as a group with different economic roles and a different political status, and together with religion these factors enabled them to preserve their identity and their cultural vitality through the centuries (Zborowski and Herzog 1962). Much of modern Judaism can be traced back to the vagaries of East European history; for example, the Hasidic sect had its origins in a crisis of the Polish state, historically one of the most tolerant towards Jews, in the mid-seventeenth century.

The processes through which that traditional tolerance came to be replaced by bitter anti-Semitism were linked with the emergence of the modern nation-state system. The intensified competition for economic resources left many Jews in new relationships of oppression. Of course, ethnic stereotyping drew on images that had been developed much earlier. Władysław Bartoszewski (1984) explored this in depth in the case of Jewish-Polish relations. He followed a structuralist approach, drawing on sources such as folktales and

proverbs as well as oral history to show that, for Catholic peasant farmers, the Jews were the archetypal aliens and ambivalent mediators with the 'other world' and with death. Understanding the otherness of the Jews provides the key to the whole 'closed system' of Polish folk cosmology in the pre-modern period. For both the Jews themselves and for Polish peasants, ethnicity was inextricably bound up with these systems of beliefs. Bartoszewski provided a lot of background information about the great changes that took place in the nineteenth century in the demographic distribution of the Jews, and about the economic pressures which followed the emancipation of the peasants and the impact of new market forces. He argued, nevertheless, that such empirical realities could be divorced from the reality of mythical thinking, citing evidence of a kind very common in ethnic stereotyping elsewhere to show that Polish peasants who had complex but generally very cordial relations with 'their Jews' locally, could at the same time believe the most incredible tales about Jews in general, including behaviour which involved the ritual murder of Christian children. Logic and elegance characterized the mythical reality, and also Bartoszewski's exposition of it. Although they have vanished from the villages and few remain in the towns, traces of anti-Semitism did not vanish in socialist Eastern Europe, when the stereotype of the greedy usurer was replaced by that of the scheming socialist bureaucrat. The 'phantom-limb syndrome' can still be noted in post-socialist Poland (Lehman 1994, cf. Wisse 1987). However, it is not enough to point out that these mythical images of Jews are without foundation in reality: anthropologists need to examine the empirical realities in order to understand the mutations and resurgences of age-old stereotypes.

Gypsies nowadays form a much more numerous pariah group, and they too have attracted the attention of western anthropologists. They are almost everywhere classified at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Under socialism they were everywhere put under pressure to abandon travelling and conform to the residence and work patterns of dominant groups. Often they were not officially recognized as an ethnic group, but instead treated as a sort of sub-class, devoid of culture. The roots of these attitudes date back many centuries. Before the impact of industrialization the Gypsies too, like the Jews, had their special place in the ethnic division of labour; their specialities required skills and earned them a measure of respect from other groups, even though social barriers were always strong.

Under socialism, as demonstrated in the work of Stewart (1987), the state undermined the bases of Gypsy ethnicity, ostensibly through a much trumpeted

concern with their welfare (e.g. improving health and educational standards), but with the additional goal of securing a more satisfactory flow of compliant proletarians into the labour force. Stewart studied the consequences of state policies for Vlach (Romany speaking) Gypsies in a medium-sized Hungarian town. While many Gypsies elsewhere adopted Hungarian speech and customs, i.e. followed the approved route toward assimilation, the Vlach Gypsies remained attached to their language and, as far as possible, to their traditional occupations. Even when forced to work for socialist wages, they could not settle down in what to them was a quite inhuman way of life. They were forever changing their formal jobs and following the horse markets, on the lookout for opportunities to outsmart a Hungarian peasant with some astute wheeler-dealing. Gypsy resistance to *Gažo* (non-Gypsy) norms obtained its full ritual expression in men's singing. Stewart argued that women were excluded from such celebrations because, being responsible for day to day household maintenance, they were necessarily more compromised by Hungarian society than their menfolk, and therefore more polluting.

Although their purposes are quite different and Stewart makes little use of data from Hungarian ethnographers to illuminate the position of the Gypsies, he too, like Bartoszewski, directs attention to a more fundamental 'them: us' divide than a more standard ethnic boundary. It is possible that Gypsies would rank before the Jews as the preeminent 'Other' in Hungarian folk culture (for a comparison of the two see Kenedi 1986). Both Bartoszewski and Stewart stress a dominant binary opposition rather than some continuum of degrees of otherness. One group despises the other for its excessive hard work and thrift, whilst in the other direction prejudice typically focuses on lack of culture and education, and over-indulgence in alcohol. Hungarian peasants condemn in contemporary Gypsies more or less exactly what was condemned among Polish peasants by Jews. Given that the fundamental behavioural pattterns of peasants in Hungary and Poland are very similar, it follows that what these stereotypes reveal is simply the continued importance of these sharp binary classifications in changing social contexts; but since Stewart, relies almost entirely on his own fieldwork materials and is more interested in the pariah group than the 'dominant other', he is more successful in revealing the links between the stereotypes and the changing material realities.

Ironically, the economic strategy of the Hungarian socialist state came to depend less on proletarianization and more upon the very individualist and non-productive networking skills that the Gypsies had always cultivated and valued most highly. However, Vlach Gypsies were not prominent among

socialist entrepreneurs, and it is doubtful whether post-socialist conditions will lead to any change in their pariah group status. Hungary went to some trouble to treat German and South-Slav minority groups with considerable respect in the later socialist period. Yet until 1986 the country's much larger Gypsy population did not even have a newspaper, let alone the dignity of some form of cultural recognition. Formal recognition as a minority in the 1990s has done little to alleviate popular feelings of suspicion and prejudice toward the Gypsy population, particularly toward those who explicitly uphold their traditional identities and reject assimilation. More recently, Stewart has documented similar prejudice among well educated citizens of the Czech Republic (Stewart 1994).

Disappearing groups: Saxons and Lemkos

Given the ethnic diversity of Eastern Europe in the pre-modern period it was inevitable that, while some nations became clearly identified with states or maintained a clear ethnic identity within a federal state, other groups would fail and become casualties of the nationalist revolution. The interest of such groups for anthropologists may, as in the case of the pariah groups, be quite disproportionate to their numerical strength. For example, the Karaim minority in northeastern Poland was a Turkic-speaking community which had adopted the religion and many of the customs of Jews they had encountered in their migrations. True to their racialist principles, the Nazis decided that they were not 'really' Jews, and they were spared from the gas chambers. But the attractions of assimilation into Polish society have proved strong, and it is probably too late for an anthropological study today.

Some of the smaller peoples of Transylvania have also faded from the scene, and the Saxon Germans constitute a well-documented case (see McArthur 1976; 1990; see also Verdery 1985). Faced with a dramatic change in their economic role after the imposition of collectivization and rapid industrialization with a bias towards heavy sectors, many members of the group migrated to West Germany. Instead of mobilizing as the Hungarians did, the Saxon German response under socialism was to keep a low profile, for fear of jeopardizing an exit visa. This was consistent with their history of abstention from the major political contest for supremacy in Transylvania, and preoccupation instead with solid bourgeois economic virtues. More and more marriages took place outside the group, and their opportunities to retain German language and culture were limited. From the point of view of

Romanian governments, they posed no threat. The feelings of group members, whose presence in Transylvania dates back to the twelfth century, were not entirely clear. McArthur (1976) criticized groups in the west for creating a climate of opinion hostile to the Romanian state. She was among those anthropologists who argued that assimilation followed from general forces of modernization, rather than from particular policies of oppression. Opinion in West Germany, and willingness to pay compensation to the Romanian government, were decisive in enabling migration to proceed on a significant scale. One imagines, however, that decisions to emigrate were also influenced by the Saxons' own assessment of the unpromising political and economic situation in Romania, and of the uncompromising nationalism of its government. A rather different pattern was reported for Germans in Hungary, where the economic prospects under mature socialism were so much more attractive to all citizens (Reining 1983).

A different solution was attempted in the case of the people I term the Lemko-Ukrainians (see also Chapter Eight). These people were formerly the main group (almost the sole inhabitants) in a section of the Carpathian Mountains in southern Poland. Nationalist ideas took a long time to filter through to remote mountain regions, lacking cities, where only the village priests were literate. Lemkovina was one of many such areas in Eastern Europe. Its inhabitants, who spoke an Eastern Slav language and used the Orthodox liturgy in their wooden churches, received many confusing messages in the closing decades of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Some were loyal to their sovereign the Austrian Emperor, and fought for him on the eastern front during the First World War. Others, for whom the Russian Czar was the prime focus of an Eastern Slav or indeed a pan-Slav identity, were branded as traitors by Austria. Still others, including significant numbers of the clergy, took their inspiration from the nationalist movement in the Ukraine, and insisted that the 'Lemkos' (a name devised by nineteenth century ethnographers, mimicking a feature of one local dialect) were simply the westernmost fragment of the Ukrainian people. When the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed, there were those who argued that the Lemkos should form a separate Carpathian state of their own. More realistically, later in 1919, leaders asked to be attached to the new state of Czechoslovakia, along with closely related 'Ruthenian' people on the other side of the mountains. Eventually, after a brief period of 'independence', the Lemkos were reassigned to Poland, where the inter-war government did its best to persuade them that they were really Poles.

Ethnographers working in the period when this propaganda was at its height found, not surprisingly, that there was considerable confusion about ethnic and

national identity. Most peasants were reluctant to acknowledge the Lemko, 'regional' level of identity. The label was not theirs and its passing into general use was to a significant degree the consequence of external ethnographic and political attention. In answer to questions probing their identity, many peasants as late as the 1930s would say simply that they were 'local', perhaps naming the village or valley where the ethnographer was interviewing them; sometimes they would cite a cluster of villages or group of valleys as defining the outer limits of their group identity (Reinfuss 1948).

Some of these uncertainties were resolved in the last years of the Second World War and the first years of the People's Republic. During this period, initially with Nazi connivance, Ukrainian resistance fighters ('bandits', or 'terrorists') drew some recruits and support from sympathizers in the mountain villages. Lemko territories were scarcely implicated. Still, those Lemko peasants not despatched to the USSR when new borders were agreed in 1945 found themselves forcibly evacuated to the far north and west of Poland in 1947. This was how most members of this group had their 'Ukrainian' status brought home to them, and this has remained their official status in Poland. Relatively small numbers of Lemkos have been able to return to their homeland since the 1960s (until then not even visits were permitted). These were mostly older people, and they were heavily outnumbered by immigrant Poles. Both in Lemkovina and in the new diaspora the Lemkos often complained of discrimination. The Polish media continued to foment anti-Ukrainian prejudice. In the early 1980s many Lemkos were particularly concerned by the strength of Polish nationalist sentiment associated with the *Solidarity* movement. In such a climate, assimilation often presented itself as the most sensible course of action, especially for the young. The children of mixed marriages seldom acquired the Lemko dialect, and facilities for learning literary Ukrainian were always inadequate. Many preferred to keep a low profile, both to avoid trouble at home, and so as not to prejudice close links with relatives abroad (in their case, almost all in North America).

However, major differences of opinion among Lemko-Ukrainians have become apparent after the end of socialism, when it became possible to organize freely. Some continue to stress the original unity of all Eastern Slavs (*Rus'*) and to justify conversion to the Orthodox Church as an expression of this unity. Others have continued to stress Ukrainian links, and these have tended to remain loyal to the Greek Catholic or Uniate Church (see Chapter Three). Some emphasize with pride a specifically Lemko identity, and have apparently been able to reconcile this with a Polish identity which is also meaningful to them (Kwilecki 1974). Many seem to have no trouble in admitting to multiple

levels and spheres of identity, e.g. Lemko at one level, Ukrainian at another, and perhaps Polish in another sphere altogether, where identity is an aspect of state citizenship. In this respect, from being one of the most backward groups on the continent in terms of collective awareness, they may be assuming the position of one of the most advanced: the nationalist revolution having passed them by, they can now move from the diversity of the agrarian age to the post-modern fragmentation of identities. But they have not lost their roots. Indeed, the Lemko-Ukrainian identity may have lingered all the longer in Poland, much as the Crimean Tatar problem has lingered in the USSR (Allworth 1988), as a direct consequence of the traumatic circumstances in which people had their ethnicity forcibly imposed upon them by the state in the course of separation from their homelands.

Regional and local identities

The case of the Lemko-Ukrainians suggests that analyses of collective identity need to move beyond an exclusive preoccupation with nationality and include other levels of identity, such as regional and local levels. These, too, have been extensively explored by anthropologists. Although it is much too soon to speak of the disintegration of nationalist identities in Eastern Europe, a decomposition and reversion to more complex patterns may already be under way. Many anthropological community studies have brought out a strong sense of attachment to locality. This is sometimes assumed to be universal in agrarian societies, but it is in fact far from universally or uniformly distributed. The 'proper peasants' described by Fél and Hofer (1969) did not simply reside in the village of Átány; they *belonged* to it, believed it to be the centre of the world, and were careful to maintain the boundaries which separated them from the outside world. Boundaries also existed *within* the village, for still more particularist 'patriotisms' developed around the upper and lower ends. Internal boundaries were not simply spatial, for sections of the populace within the territorial units could still be excluded from the 'we' group. This was the fate not only of Gypsies but also of poor *tanya* dwellers and other landless peasants who could not afford to keep a team of horses, and thereby failed to satisfy a major criterion for full community membership in Átány. Socio-economic stratification was a significant factor affecting identity, and only a minority of village residents actually approach the required standards of the 'proper peasant'. However, the divisive forces in this community were partly countered by religion, which united the vast majority of village residents.

Huseby-Darvas (1983) provides a comparable case-study conducted by a western anthropologist. Whereas Fél and Hofer's account effectively stops at the beginning of the socialist period, Huseby-Darvas demonstrated that local attachments were able to survive collectivization and the expansion of various forms of wage-labour. Where other anthropologists (e.g. Kideckel 1993) have found that collectivization severely weakened the unity of the local community, Huseby-Darvas's work implies that it is precisely in periods of great dislocation that people have most need to feel secure in some local identity. It does not necessarily have to be sought at the level of nationality. Again, a major factor in the persistence of the local identity in this case was the Calvinist faith, which distinguished the village from neighbouring Catholic villages.

Between the level of the nation and the level of the rural community, other sources may also generate a strong sense of belonging. Regional identities focused on cities, and even on small market towns, are sometimes very strong. Highly developed local identities can be found in working class districts of industrial cities, such as Wola in Warsaw, or Angyalföld in Budapest. There is a more substantial anthropological literature on district or regional identities in predominantly rural areas. Beneath the complex ethnic map of Yugoslavia, there was always another level of identity simultaneously and perhaps just as strongly felt: Minnich's work on West Haloze in Slovenia (1979) provides a notable example. Such identities may be strengthened by governments which, as we have seen in Chapter Three, although concerned to stress the basic unity of all the people within their territory, may also find it advantageous to promote the recognition of a regional 'folk' culture. Much of what is now taken to be characteristic of local and regional identities would seem spurious to earlier generations, but it may nonetheless become meaningful for new generations, particularly in view of the constraints in the socialist period on other potential foci for identity, such as political pressure groups.

Alternative identities may be manipulated and invented, but like national identities they are most likely to be developed when there is a solid cultural and historical basis. There have been signs of this happening in Moravia at various times (Schöpflin 1984). The Highlanders (*Górale*) of the Tatra zone of the Polish Carpathians are another interesting example. Physically quite isolated and long associated with a pastoral economy quite different from that of the lowlands, they speak a dialect that was problematic for most Poles. For a time in the nineteenth century it seemed as if their cultural distinctiveness might be eroded, as population growth induced changes in the economy and high levels of migration. However, attracted by the ethnographic colour, the intellectuals

who contributed to Poland's national awakening established the notion that the Highlanders were uniquely separate, and that their distinctiveness should be preserved. High out-migration proved to be perfectly compatible with a strong sense of group identity, and the funds earned in North America were used to subsidize the old economic base in the Tatra foothills. As incorporation into the modern Polish state proceeded and Highlanders spread to other towns as well as overseas, they maintained their regional loyalty. They found it possible to reconcile being Polish with being a Highlander, and context determines which identity is prioritized.

Conclusions

Eastern Europe has made a momentous transition over the last two centuries. In the agrarian age diverse cultural groups lived in close proximity and were mutually dependent economically, but ethnic and national identities were seldom made explicit in ideologies. In Gellner's words, 'The social organization of agrarian society ... is not at all favourable to the nationalist principle, to the convergence of political and cultural units, and to the homogeneity and school-transmitted nature of culture within each political unit' (1983: 39). Religion was usually a much more vital marker of identity. However, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Eastern Europe has become a region in which the ideals of nationalism have acquired a dominant, even sacred character.

For Gellner, economic structures are fundamental in accounting for this transition (as they are for Marxists, though Gellner is careful to dissociate his own position from theirs). He sees the transition to industrial society as uneven, but ultimately unproblematic. Amending his model to explain the 'East European time zone', one might suggest that it has been the *failure* of the countries of this region to integrate their populations through modern political and economic systems that has given rise to the most virulent expressions of national hatreds. However, abstract models that emphasize the material circumstances in which new forms of identity emerge are unlikely to be considered sufficient by most anthropologists. Ethnicity and nationalism can indeed serve as convenient vehicles for the pursuit of political and economic objectives: several of the cases discussed in this chapter are suggestive in this regard. But these identities cannot be entirely reduced to interest-group political organization, any more than the persistence local and regional identities, such as that of Polish Highlanders, can be reduced to a utility-maximizing calculus.

The role of intellectual élites in imagining or a past to suit current needs or tastes is abundantly illustrated in Eastern Europe (cf. Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). There is little new in this. The past is always needed to legitimate the present, and anthropologists are very familiar with such 'invention' in oral cultures. However, the outcome of ethnic struggles in Eastern Europe was not determined solely, or even primarily, by the imaginations of their élites. Gellner emphasizes the creative role of the 'awakeners', but acknowledges that they worked with given cultural materials, whether 'garden' or 'wild' (i.e. associated with a literate 'high culture' or not). Nation builders had an easier task if they could point back to a medieval state and identify it as their own. Physical reminders of that past were very helpful. Numbers certainly mattered, as did geographical location, the nature of the settlement pattern (compact or dispersed), and the state of the economy. But the most basic markers of ethnic identity were language and religion: not immune to manipulation from above, but slow to change and never to be discounted.

Some of the conflicts that have arisen in the post-socialist years, notably in the former Yugoslavia, reflect very old cultural 'fault lines', above all the boundary between Latin and Orthodox Christianity. It would be foolish if, having finally abandoned the notion that nation-states are constituted by bounded groups of racial purity, anthropologists proceed to argue that groups can be formed and reformed, invented and reinvented at will, without reference both to cultural continuities and to impinging economic and political structures. Anthropologists must work closely with historians and other scholars to work out the relative strengths of these factors in particular cases, including the element of intellectual forgery. New forms and levels of collective identity are continuously emerging, including local and regional identities. It is even possible that supra-national East European or Central European identities will be forged in the future, an outcome that becomes more probable if these countries are denied entry to the so-called European Union.

Further reading

The collections edited by Sugar (1980), Smith (1992) and Bremmer and Taras (1993) provide useful introductions to ethnic and national minority issues in the region. Pearson (1993) compiles readings on European nationalism. The most detailed analysis of Marxist writings on the 'national question' is Connor (1984); but see also Benner (1995) for an interesting re-evaluation of Marx's own perspective and its application to post-communist nationalism. Verdery

(1991a) gives a detailed analysis of the construction of nationalist ideology in socialist Romania, while several of the studies in Watson (1994) show the demands of nationalist historiography to be fully as constraining as those of the socialist philosophy of history. The crucial role of historians is also examined by Deletant and Hanak (1988). *The Anthropology of East Europe Review* has published a very useful set of papers, 'War among the Yugoslavs': Vol. 11, Nos. 1-2 (1993). The journal *Nationalities Papers* is devoted entirely to the territories covered by Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

**Plate 2. Displaying National Symbols on St. Stephen's Day
in Budapest (1991)**