



Shaping Ethnic Identities. Ethnic Minorities in Northern and East Central European States and Communities, c.1450-2000, Marko Lamberg ed., East-West Books: Helsinki 2007. 354 pp.

This book is a compilation of eight contributions from a group of young historians dealing with ethnic issues. The themes of the book, as it reads on the back, deal "with stereotypes and identities, migration and refugee movements, interaction or alienation or even suppression caused by differences in religion, language, geographic origin or other cultural features". The book uses empirical evidence to demonstrate a number of approaches to issues concerning ethnic minorities in two areas of Europe, which are superficially not similar.

The eight articles have at least one thing in common: "they show how ethnic identity takes shape in human interaction and how this identity-shaping is constructed as a process. Ethnic identity remains a complex study object, but by looking at it closer and at different levels it is possible to trace its core structure. We are able to detect external and internal factors which cause an ethnic identity to become active and to allow us human beings to perceive some of our species as closer to us, whereas some others appear as more remote. Thus we have got our ideas of social boundaries as well as minorities and majorities".¹ I will now discuss the various articles in the sequence of their appearance in the book.

First is the introduction written by Marko Lambert, Satu Matikainen and Anssi Halmesvirta, discussing the various approaches to ethnicity and to ethnic groups more specifically. They also point out that there is great public interest in the ethnicity debate. In their opinion there are two main approaches: one in which ethnicity is approached at a general or theoretical

¹ Marko Lamberg, Satu Matikainen, and Anssi Halmesvirta in *Shaping Ethnic Identities*, 32.

level, and another in which the history of a specific ethnic group is observed with regard to ethnicity. According to their definition, "an ethnic group refers to members of a social group who are readily distinguishable on the basis of racial, national, linguistic or religious traits and who are presumed to share some cultural and genetic similarities".² Ethnic groups are not the same as minorities; the reverse, however, can be true. After clarifying the concepts of ethnicity and minorities, the introduction gives a short and compact overview of what the reader will find in the various articles.

In his article "Discoursing Boundaries: Hungarian Greek Catholic Identity Creation in the Inter-War Period", Bertalan Puztai discusses the processes and strategies which were applied in identity formation. He explains how a relatively small group of people tried to influence a complex situation by publishing articles with the purpose of building a strong, cohesive minority-community within Hungarian Greek Catholics, and of thereby gaining the acceptance of the surrounding majority. This was a typical top-down process, performed mainly through the medium of the press. Puztai observes this process and the strategies that backed it in a very interesting and exciting way.

In "Shaping Historical Identity: The Hungarian Minority in Romanian Banat", Anssi Halmesvirta, in contrast to the other contributors, uses a special interview technique named "deep interview". He wants to show that language is not the only constituting and important factor in identity-formation, as the traditional point of view suggests, but that history, and reflection upon it, are also very significant.

Teemu Ryymin, in his article "The Making of an Ethnic Identity: From Finns to Kvens", deals mainly with the identity-building of the ethnic Finnish minority of the Kvens, who live in northern Norway. He therefore takes into account the viewpoints of the Kvens themselves and of outsiders. He also takes a close look at the political scene and its handling of this minority.

In his article "Constructing Sami Ethnic Identity Within Shifting Finnish Territories: How Did the Land-Owners Become Landless Sami?", Jukka Nyssönen discusses the building of an ethnic Sami identity. He argues that identities are constructed and negotiated processes,³ and that cultural contact on the same level between two cultures can only happen in the absence of special rights for either of the cultural groups.

² Lamberg, Matikainen, and Halmesvirta in *Shaping Ethnic Identities*, 20.

³ Jukka Nyssönen, "Constructing Sami Ethnic Identity Within Shifting Finnish Territories: How Did the Land-Owners Become Landless Sami?" in *Shaping Ethnic Identities*, 159.

In his article "Ethnic Imagery and Social Boundaries in Early Modern Urban Communities: The Case of Finns in Swedish Towns, c.1450-1650", Marko Lamberg examines the image of Finnish migrants in Swedish towns in the early modern age. With the help of local court records he attempts to uncover the everyday life of the migrants in their new environment. The manner in which he reveals informal, hidden networks which acted behind the scenes, and which allowed the migrants to be very well integrated in ways which were not apparent, is quite exciting.

Anu Mai Kõll was inspired to write her article "Ethnic Traditions and Gender Relations: Estonian Refugees in Post-War Sweden" by the discovery that there was a notable group of Estonian refugee women in Sweden who were struggling with their identity and position in society. This informative article describes how these women found their own ways of coping with their special situation, first as refugees in another country, and then with the somewhat new position within the family as a necessary earner of money.

Satu Matikainen, in her article "International Protection and Minority Rights: Romanian Jews before the First World War", discusses the situation of Romanian Jews before 1914 from the perspective of minority rights. She compares the situation of the Romanian Jews with those of other neighbouring countries, and with other major players in Europe and international Jewish organizations. She also points out that the situation in Romania and the general situation of minorities in Eastern Europe were connected.

Finally, in his article "From an Independent Nation to a Suppressed Minority: Estonians, Ostland, and the Viewpoint of the Finnish Authorities", Heikki Roiko-Jokela discusses German-Finnish relations during the time of the German occupation of Estonia in the Second World War. He uses external viewpoints and the Finnish and German sides, and examines how these two sides felt about the Estonians. The author further illuminates fragments of the self-identity of the Finnish people.

All in all this compilation of articles is a very valuable contribution to the current debate on ethnic issues. The researchers tackle the topic using new methods and a wide variety of different procedures. All of them manage to first of all incorporate their own research, and additionally offer the intrigued reader a new perspective on the various themes. These are further explored from multiple sides of a number of historical branches, as the articles deal with various eras and areas of Europe. I am primarily engaged with Eastern European topics of the Early Modern Age and Late Middle Ages. I will therefore allow myself some statements concerning the

articles about Hungarian Greek Catholics, the Hungarian minority in Romanian Banat, and the Romanian Jews.

The situation of Eastern European minorities was a problematic one throughout most of history. In whichever historical time we look at, we discover blind prejudices and wrongdoing towards nearly every minority living in the area. These three articles demonstrate these conditions, as well as the ways in which patterns of behaviour towards minorities were emphasized at informal or unofficial levels. Every nation-state in Eastern Europe had to deal with one or more minorities; this had not changed since the genesis of nation-states in the nineteenth century. The emancipation of nation-states from the Habsburg and the Ottoman dynasties, the First and Second World Wars, and the time of communism was not enough, it seems, to allow better relations with the various minorities. The three minorities in question – two of which are Hungarian minorities – are good examples of this policy of half-heartedness in Eastern European politics throughout a good portion of history. There are indeed good counter-examples of so-called sustained minority politics, but the situation these three articles describe would not exist in a 'perfect' world.⁴

In this context I would like to point out that the authors left out a major issue concerning many countries in Eastern Europe: the Roma and Sinti. Their situation in Eastern Europe is a very precarious one in every aspect of their lives. It would have been a valuable contribution to introduce their situation as a minority in Eastern Europe as well. But it is evident, and also legitimate, that the authors wanted to put the focus on the situation of the Hungarian minority in different countries and contexts, of the Jews in Romania and the overall situation of minority rights in Romania. The topics of these three articles are limited to a rather narrow timeframe beginning in the 19th century. With the Hungarian minorities in particular in mind, I would like to mention a book from Bethke Carl in which he deals with German and Hungarian minorities in Croatia and Voivodina between 1918 and 1941.⁵ It makes for a rather good comparison with the situation of the Hungarians in Banat, and I would therefore recommend it as an excellent source for further information and a broader view of the subject. A second book which is also worth mentioning was written by Mihok Brigitte, and

⁴ I would like to acknowledge that I do not consider most of the minority politics of Western European countries to be favorable - there are many mistakes and negative examples too. Take for example the current debate and especially incidents concerning the Roma and Sinti in Italy and France.

⁵ Carl Bethke, *Deutsche und ungarische Minderheiten in Kroatien und der Vojvodina 1918–1941. Identitätsentwürfe und ethnopolitische Mobilisierung* (Balkanologische Veröffentlichungen des Osteuropa-Instituts an der Freien Universität Berlin 47), Wiesbaden 2009.

deals with the situation of minorities in Romania and Hungary in the 1990s, with a particular focus on the Roma minority⁶.

In contrast with the contributions concerning Eastern Europe, the next five articles deal with Finnish minorities in neighbouring countries, the Sami minority, and the situation of Estonians, in a wider chronological context. They begin in the Early Modern Age with the situation of the Finnish minority in Swedish towns, and end with the present day situation of the Kvens (a Finnish minority in Norway) and the Sami and Estonian people. It is not surprising that there are striking similarities between the ethnic minority policies in Northern and Eastern Europe. As stated in the introduction to the book, one of this collection's goals is the revelation of the patterns of ethnic minority policy, or more generally the handling of ethnic minorities in the various countries.

This book and all of the eight articles therein can be recommended to any reader who wants to deepen his knowledge concerning ethnic minorities in Eastern and Northern Europe. The reader will gain, from different perspectives and points of view, valuable insight into the situations of the various minorities discussed. In my opinion this is a very well constructed anthology, and it was a real pleasure to read.

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⁶ Brigitte Mihok, *Vergleichende Studie zur Situation der Minderheiten in Ungarn und Rumänien (1989–1996) unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Roma*, Peter Lang: Frankfurt am Main–Wien 1999.