

# Slovak Perspectives on the Hungarian Minority: The Possibility of an Ethnographic Approach to Nationalism and Multi-ethnic Experiences<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

Central Europe has often experienced changes to state borders. This has meant that, historically, some territories and their inhabitants have ended up outside the borders of their traditional states and that other peoples have been able to inhabit newly acquired regions. It has thus become difficult to align the ethnic identification of inhabitants with the territory they inhabit. In spite of this fact (or because of it), nationalism was the most pertinent concern of the 19th and 20th centuries in Central and Eastern Europe, as revealed by many famous studies on nationalism.<sup>2</sup> Indeed,

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1 This paper is a developed and revised version of my earlier study, Kambara, Yuko (2008) “Slovakia ni okeru Hungary-kei Minority: Nationalism to Kyousei no Dilemma” [The Hungarian Minority in the Slovak Republic: The Dilemma between Nationalism and Coexistence], in *Nihongo no Tankyu: Kagirinaki Kotoba no Chie* [Research in the Japanese Language: The Infinite Possibilities of Language], Tetero Ikeda (ed.), pp. 85–94, Kyoto: Hokuto Shobo.

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2 For example, Kohn, Hans (1994/1945) “Western and Eastern Nationalism,”

it is not simply a concern belonging to the past: problems of ethnic identity, ethnic conflict, and nationalism persist. The end of socialism in particular triggered an ethnic backlash because ethnic problems had been hidden during the socialist period in Central and Eastern Europe.

The Slovak Republic has an ethnic problem with its Hungarian minority because Slovakia was a part of the Hungarian Kingdom, and then the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, for 900 years. Slovaks first gained independence alongside the Czechs, as Czechoslovakia, in 1918 and later separated from Czechoslovakia in 1993. The end of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy left many ethnic Hungarian minorities inside neighboring countries, including Slovakia. The population of Slovakia is around 5.4 million, of which the Slovak majority accounts for 80%.<sup>3</sup> The minorities are Roma, Ruthenians, and Hungarians, the last of whom comprise the biggest minority in southern Slovakia, numbering around 458,000 people and accounting for 8.5% of the Slovak whole population.<sup>4</sup>

The aim of this paper is to explain the problem of the Hungarian minority from a Slovak perspective in order to explore the possibilities and limits of ethnic tolerance from the majority side. The Slovak situation is not as severe as that of the former Yugoslavia, but ethnic problems between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority have been highly controversial. Issues about minority language rights are often raised in the political sphere, details of which are taken up in the next section. In addition, the expansion of ethnic prejudice and hostility has become one of the biggest social problems in Slovakia. In fact, 42% of ethnic Slovaks admitted to “having some prejudice against the Hungarian minority” in a survey carried out in 2003.<sup>5</sup>

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in *Nationalism*, John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds), pp. 162–165, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Seton-Watson, Hugh (1950) *The East European Revolution*, New York: Praeger; and Sugar, Peter (1994/1969) “Nationalism in Eastern Europe,” in *Nationalism*, John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds), pp. 171–177, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

3 These numbers were correct as of December 2011. Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky (2012) *Štatistická ročenka 2012*. Bratislava: Veda.

4 *Ibid.* Demographic records of 2011 also indicate that 7.3% of population selected “other and not declared.”

5 Krivý, Vladimír (2006) “Dominantné kolektívne identity na súčasnom Slov-

The relation between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority is often influenced by the state relationship between Slovakia and Hungary. In 2006, a video clip that a Slovak uploaded onto YouTube caused serious problems among the publics of both countries because it contained nationalistic images and the burning of a Hungarian flag.<sup>6</sup> Then various Hungarian video clips of the burning of Slovak flags have also appeared on the internet.<sup>7</sup> It is difficult to determine whether this kind of hostility arose as a result of the contact between the two communities in southern Slovakia. Even worse, both states argued about the Hungarian minority in the second half of the 2000s. In 2009, the Hungarian government protested against a reformed Slovak language law that restricted the minority's language rights, and Slovak nationalists interrupted the Hungarian president's visit to a Slovak border city for the unveiling of a statue for the Hungarian minority.<sup>8</sup>

This paper is concerned with the ethnic issues relating to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, examining it, in particular, from the Slovak perspective. We already have many studies on the Hungarian minority, but it has been difficult to see things from all sides, even if such a position is logical. The reason for this is the problem of ethnic identity or nationalism; every author has his/her own position on the subject. Although objective studies usually need to include both sides' perspectives, this paper concentrates on the Slovak perspective to reveal the structure of the ethnic problem and how it is perceived in Slovak studies. For this approach, it is useful to examine the various ethnographic studies on the Slovaks and the Hungarian minority. Consequently, this study is structured into

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ensku,” in *Svet mnohých, My a Oni: Kolektívne identity na súčasnom Slovensku*, Vladimír Krivý and Oľga Danglová, pp. 9–104, Bratislava: Centrum excelentnosti SAV. See, p. 69.

6 See, “Budapešť pobútilo pálenie vlajky”. *SME* August 9, 2006, p. 3.

7 Jablonický, Viliam (2009) “The Danger of Extremist Videofilms and Views on Internet Pages and Computer Games,” in *Insight into Slovak-Magyar Relations*, Jan Durul'a (ed.), pp. 60–67, Bratislava: Slovak committee of Slavists.

8 Okamoto, Mari (2010) “Kokugo no Sokushin ka, Syousugengo no hogo ka?” [The State Language to Be Promoted or Minority Rights Protected?], *Osaka-daigaku Sekai Gengo Kenkyu Center Ronshu* [Journal of the Research Institute for World Language] 4:119–132.

three sections and a conclusion. The first section explains the details of the political problems around the Hungarian minority. The second examines the Slovak historical experience as the basis for Slovak nationalism, and the third considers the nature of the ethnic hostility in light of the micro-level reality revealed by ethnographic research.

## I. The Problem of the Hungarian Minority in Slovakia

The break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993 saw Slovak independence for the first time, with the exception of the short-lived Slovak Republic of 1939–1945. The first Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Vladimír Mečiar, implemented nationalistic policies in support of an ideal Slovak nation state. His political attitude gained the support of Slovak nationalists, but the Hungarian minority complained about it because of the increasing exclusion of ethnic minorities from society. The desire for an ideal nation state rose strongly at the beginning of Slovak independence, and this political tendency continued from 1993 to 1998. In this period, one nationalistic party, the Slovak National Party (the *Slovenská národná strana* or SNS), joined the ruling coalition. It was the first phase of the emergence of Slovak antagonism against the Hungarian minority.

Tendencies in Slovak hostility toward the Hungarian minority can be distinguished into three phases. In the first phase, the new Slovak constitution and corresponding laws on ethnic minorities caused discontent among the Hungarian minority. Even the Preamble of the Slovak constitution, which begins, “We, the Slovak nation ...,” is enough to identify ethnic minorities as second-class citizens. The Slovak constitution ensures educational and cultural rights for the Hungarian minority, but newly adopted laws were unfavorable to the minority in practice. A new language law established in 1995 declared that Slovak was the sole national language.<sup>9</sup>

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9 Irmanová, Eva (2005) *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku: a její místo v zahraniční politice slovenska a maďarska po roce 1989*. Nové Město nad Metejí: Albis international. See pp. 254–264. Also see Nagayo, Susumu (2005) “Slovakia,” in *Oushusyokoku no Gengoho: Oushutougou to Tagengosyugi* [Language Laws in Europe: European Integration and pluralism], Kenjiro Shibuya (ed.), pp. 351–641, Tokyo: Sangensya.

Western European countries criticized the attitude of the Slovak government, not only because of the political mistrust in Mečiar but also because their policies seemed to be against protection for the Hungarian minority. Slovak politicians needed to appear “European” because the country was a candidate for membership of the European Union and this had to obey European norms, including protection of minority rights.<sup>10</sup> Slovak politicians even objected to such European criticism, however, arguing that the Hungarian minority’s environment was more favorable than that of other minorities elsewhere in Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Table 1: Opinions about Hungarians’ ethnic coexistence with Slovaks and their independence from Slovakia

\*Research period: from December 1991 to February 1992

|  | Cultural autonomy | Territorial autonomy | Border change | The status quo | No idea | Other |
|--|-------------------|----------------------|---------------|----------------|---------|-------|
| Slovaks who live in homogeneous localities   | 23.60             | 4.49                 | 2.25          | 29.21          | 25.84   | 12.36 |
| Slovaks who live in heterogeneous localities | 22.67             | 4.00                 | 1.33          | 38.67          | 25.33   | 8.00  |
| Hungarians                                   | 13.48             | 47.19                | 22.47         | 2.25           | 4.49    | 10.11 |

Source: Šutaj, Štefan (1992) “Problémy slovensko-maďarských vzťahov po II svetovej vojne,” in *Slovensko - maďarské vzťahy v 20. storočí*. Peter Zelenák (ed.), pp. 66–72, Bratislava: Historicky ústav SAV, Slovak Academic Press. (pp. 68–69)

The Slovak cabinet was constituted by almost all ethnic Slovak politicians at the time. There were obvious differences of opinion regarding tolerance of minority rights between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Slovaks. This was caused not only the by political situation after independence in 1993, but also by accumulated absence of communication before independence. Table 1 shows that ethnic Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians

10 Tesser, Lynn M. (2003) “The Geopolitics of Tolerance: Minority Rights under EU Expansion in East-Central Europe,” *East European Politics and Societies* 17(3):483–532. See p. 518.

11 Harlig, Jeffery (1997) “National Consolidation vs European Integration: The Language Issue in Slovakia,” *Security Dialogue* 28(4):479–491. See p. 488.

had different opinions about the Hungarian minority's political status in Slovakia. Many Slovaks wanted the maintenance of the status quo or only to allow Hungarians their cultural autonomy. By contrast, the Hungarian minority tended to want territorial autonomy much more than cultural autonomy. Consequently, nationalistic Slovak policies after independence generated the Hungarian minority's suspicions about Slovaks. At almost the same time, as Rosová and Bútorová point out, the Hungarian minority had an image of Slovaks as "nationalists."<sup>12</sup> For the reason given above, it is possible to say the Hungarian minority began to be anxious about the rise of Slovak nationalism even before independence.

The second phase in the emergence of antagonism against the Hungarian minority started around 2001. In this phase, the antagonism was not stronger than before, yet it was enough for the Hungarian minority to be disappointed by Dzurinda's new government, which was eager to become a member of the European Union and had started to decentralize political power after the downfall of Mečiar in 1998. In the process, the Slovak government established higher territorial units (*vyšší územný celok*, or VUC) as autonomous territorial bodies in 2001. The Hungarian minority was distributed to three or more different VUCs, although the Party of Hungarian Coalition (*Strana maďarská koalícia*, or SMK) demanded the setting up of a Komárno VUC in which ethnic Hungarians would comprise more than half of the population.<sup>13</sup> The territory of VUC was not adjusted, even though the SMK succeeded in becoming a member of the ruling coalition in 1998–2002 and 2002–2006.

The problems of the Hungarian minority do not relate just to minority politics but also to regional inequality in Slovakia.<sup>14</sup> After the end of

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12 Rosová, Tatiana and Zora Bútorová (1992) "Slováci a Maďari na Slovensku v zrkadle výskumu," in *Slovensko - maďarské vzťahy v 20. storočí*, Peter Zelenák (ed.), pp. 19–25, Bratislava: Historicky ústav SAV, Slovak Academic Press. See p. 24.

13 Bitušiková, Alexandra (2002) "Slovakia: An Anthropological Perspective on Regional Reform," *Regional and Federal Studies: An International Journal* 12(2):41–64. See pp. 50–53.

14 Smith, Adrian (2000) "Ethnicity, Economic Polarization and Regional Inequality in Southern Slovakia," *Growth and Change* 31:151–178. See pp. 162–164.

socialism, a high rate of average per capita GDP had grown up in regions where industrial activities had been concentrated and public transportation invested in during socialism, because they had a greater chance of foreign direct investment. By contrast, in southern Slovakia, where the Hungarian minority lived, agricultural production was more important, traditionally. Even worse, the imported market economy caused depression in the inefficient Slovak agricultural sector. As a result, many Hungarian minorities lived with serious economic depression and suffered from higher rates of unemployment.

In addition, the Hungarian minority had an educational problem. Generally, the educational level of the Hungarian minority was lower than that of Slovaks, and the ratio of the Hungarian minority in higher education was also lower.<sup>15</sup> One of the reasons for this was the disadvantage caused by linguistic differences, but it is also possible that a lower interest in higher education contributed to the lower ratio in higher education.<sup>16</sup> Even though many minority students entered Hungarian elementary school, they had little chance of getting a higher education through the Hungarian language.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, the Hungarian minority faced more obstacles to higher education than Slovaks, the exceptions being only those with excellent Slovak and those able to go to university or college in Hungary.

After Slovakia joined the EU in 2004, Hungarian minority began to find an alternative to living in southern Slovakia, namely, short-term labor migration beyond its borders. Some factories in northern Hungary began to recruit ethnic Hungarians as short-term workers from Slovakia thanks to the coordination of rules on working conditions and job recruitment among EU member states.<sup>18</sup> The building of institutions for labor

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15 Gabzdilová, Soňa (1993) “Problémy výuky Slovenského jazyka na školách s Maďarským výučovacím jazykom po roku 1948,” in *Národnosti na Slovensku*, Eudovít Haraksim (ed.), pp. 100–106, Bratislava: VEDA. See pp. 101–102.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Végh, Ladislav (1977) “Z výskumov maďarskej a ukrajinskej národnostnej kultúry na Slovensku,” in *Kultúrny život obyvateľov Slovenska*, Teodor Ollik and Jarmila Veřka (eds.), pp. 159–184, Bratislava: Výskumý ústav kultúry. See p. 167.

18 The details are in these articles: “Cezhraničnej spolupráci pomôže Pakt za-

mobility also expanded to other kinds of work. Regional integration brought chances of economic improvement for Hungarian minorities and the possibility of strengthening connections with Hungary across the border.

The third phase of the emergence of antagonism began in 2006, when the SNS rejoined the government after the elections. The reformed language law of 2009 was the greatest concern in this period. The discussion was focused on the obligation to translate public materials from the minority language to Slovak language even in the minority's community, and the priority given to Slovak over the minority language.<sup>19</sup> The Hungarian minority opposed the law, especially for those living in the Hungarian community, and they blamed the EU parliament.<sup>20</sup> In addition to the problems with the country's minority policy, confrontations often arose in public, for example in politicians' debates, fighting among soccer fans, and the kind of nationalistic videos mentioned in the introduction.

## II. Historical transformation of ethnic composition from the nation state period

The purpose of this section is to explain Slovaks' understanding about ethnic Hungarians' historical progress from majority status to minority in order to consider the background of Slovak nationalism and antagonism against the Hungarian minority.

The present territory of Slovakia was a part of another country for 900 years. The major Slovak cities were multi-cultural or multi-ethnic under Hungarian rule. At the beginning of the 20th century, Bratislava, the present Slovak capital, was the home to Germans, Hungarians, Slo-

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menstnanosti," *Sociálna politika a zamenstnanosť* 2005(5):8, and "Cezhraničná spolupráca v okrese Dunajská Streda, Veľký Krtíš, Čadca a Stará Ľubovňa," *Sociálna politika a zamenstnanosť* 2005(8):5–8.

19 Okamoto, Mari (2010) "Kokugo no Sokushin ka, Syousugengo no hogo ka?" [The State Language to Be Promoted or Minority Rights Protected?], *Osaka-daigaku Sekai Gengo Kenkyu Center Ronshu* [Journal of the Research Institute for World Language] 4:119–132. See p. 123.

20 *Ibid.* See p. 121.



vaks, Czechs, Roma, and Jews. Even if there were conflicts in their everyday life, the majority of inhabitants could at least communicate in German, Hungarian, and Slovak and managed to live with this ethnic diversity.<sup>21</sup> After the independence of Czechoslovakia, Czechs and Slovaks became the majority, and Hungarians became a minority. Ethnic Hungarians' cultural and political rights were limited in Czechoslovakia, but there was still Hungarian elementary and secondary education, as well as cultural activities and papers.<sup>22</sup>

Table 2 shows the demography of Bratislava from the late period of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy to the birth of Czechoslovakia. According to this table, the percentages of ethnic composition changed dynamically over these 40 years. In particular, the Slovak population increased and the Hungarian population decreased rapidly between 1910 and 1920. One reason for this change might be that many intellectual Hungarians, such as public employees and teachers, lost their jobs and went back to Hungarian territory after the independence of Czechoslovakia in 1918. However, there is another reason for this radical change. In this survey, respondents usually defined their ethnic identity on the basis of their first language. Consequently, it was possible to change one's ethnic identity for economic and political reasons. In the late period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Hungarian language had been important for people's careers, and ethnic Slovak parents could bring up their children as "Hungarian" because the Hungarian language was necessary for higher education and better job opportunities.<sup>23</sup> Those included in the Hungarian statistic might thus have changed their identity back to Slovak after

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21 Salner, Peter (1990) "Bratislavské premeny v čase," in *Taká bola Bratislava*, Peter Salner (ed.), pp. 11–35, Bratislava: Veda. See pp. 10–12.

22 Simon, Attila (2011) "Czechoslovakia: Slovakia," in *Minority Hungarian Communities in the Twentieth Century*, Nándor Bárdi, Csilla Fedinec, and László Sarka (eds), pp. 202–207, New York: Columbia University Press. See p. 204.

23 It is still open to question whether ordinary people shared a clear national consciousness of being Slovak before the birth of Czechoslovakia. For example, in the west Slovak village of Kostolište, many people living there at the end of the 19th century and start of the 20th wrote their nationality as "Hungarian" and "Czech" in migration records.

independence.<sup>24</sup>

Table 2: Ethnic composition in Bratislava (%)

|      | Slovaks | Germans | Hungarians | Ruthenians | Jews | Total population |
|------|---------|---------|------------|------------|------|------------------|
| 1880 | 15.67   | 65.57   | 15.66      | 0.01       | —    | 48,006           |
| 1890 | 16.62   | 59.92   | 19.9       | 0.03       | —    | 52,411           |
| 1900 | 26.27   | 50.41   | 30.52      | 0.03       | —    | 61,537           |
| 1910 | 14.92   | 41.92   | 40.53      | 0.01       | —    | 78,223           |
| 1921 | 42.27   | 29.49   | 23.66      | 0.05       | 4.29 | 93,189           |
| 2001 | 91.39   | 0.28    | 3.84       | 0.11       | —    | 428,672          |

Sources: Hromádka, Ján (1933). *Zemepis okresu Bratislavskeho a Malackeho*. Bratislava: Knihútlačiareň J. Pocisk a spol (pp. 78, 80); demographic data for 2001 from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.<sup>25</sup>

The census on ethnic composition is still carried out to deal with the issue of ethnic identity; the Hungarian minority now constitutes around 10% of the population of Slovakia (Table 3). The population exchange between Hungarians and Slovaks was agreed by both governments after World War II. It was one reason for the reduction of the ethnic Hungarian population. In addition, various kinds of “Slovakization” promoted gradual ethnic assimilation. The Hungarian minority’s rights to education and cultural activity were still protected, but their access to higher education decreased gradually.<sup>26</sup>

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24 Nagayo, Susumu (1998) “Slovakia: Syominzoku no hazama de” [Slovakia: Among the nations], in *Touou no minzoku to bunka* [Nations and cultures in Eastern Europe], Shingo Minamizuka (ed.), pp. 102–138, Tokyo: Sairyusha. See pp. 115–116.

25 Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (<http://portal.statistics.sk/showdoc.do?docid=4>)

26 Popély, Árpád (2011) “Czechoslovakia,” in *Minority Hungarian Communities in the Twentieth Century*, Nándor Bárdi, Csilla Fedinec, and László Sarka (eds), pp. 403–407, New York: Columbia University Press. See p. 407.

Table 3: Change in population size of the Hungarian minority from 1910 to 2001 in the present territory of Slovakia

| Year                 | 1910    | 1921    | 1930    | 1950    | 1961    | 1970    | 1991    | 2001    | 2011    |
|----------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Hungarian Population | 884,309 | 650,567 | 592,337 | 354,532 | 518,782 | 552,006 | 567,296 | 519,775 | 458,384 |
| Percentage           | 30.29   | 21.68   | 17.79   | 10.3    | 12.43   | 12.17   | 10.76   | 9.66    | 8.48    |

Sources: Liszka, József (2003). *Národopis Maďarov na Slovensku*. Komárno: Fórum institute (p. 117); demographic data for 2001 and 2011 from the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.<sup>27</sup>

Formerly multi-ethnic places have been disappearing from Slovakia as a result of the process of building the ideal nation state. Part of the emotional background worth highlighting is Slovak antagonism to the Magyarization that occurred under the Hungarian monarchy and Slovaks' deep-seated and earnest desire for their own country. However, it had been impossible to promote "Slovakization" until now because Slovaks had already had the experience of living alongside and among different ethnic groups for a long time, and such experiences must be respected in European minority policy.

Present ethnic relations between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority is not so severe that ethnic warfare is breaking out, but prejudice, aversion, and misunderstanding between different ethnic groups still exists everywhere. Even claims for an expansion of cultural rights by the Hungarian minority are unacceptable to Slovak nationalists. While the SMK participated in the ruling coalition, the national budget for the cultural activities of minorities (especially Hungarians and Roma) increased.<sup>28</sup> While the Hungarian minority believes it only natural that cultural activity give equal status to minority cultures, such a view generates hostility from nationalistic Slovaks. Some Slovaks also find it difficult to accept that bilingualism is required not just of the Hungarian minority but

<sup>27</sup> Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky (2004) *Štatistická ročenka 2004*, Bratislava: Veda; and Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky (2012) *Štatistická ročenka 2012*, Bratislava: Veda.

<sup>28</sup> Kollár, Martin and Zuzana Mrvová (eds) (2003) *Národná správa o kultúrnej politike Slovenskej republiky: Správa európskych expertov*. Bratislava: Ministerstvo kultúry Slovenskej republiky. See p. 87 and p. 341.

also of Slovaks in cities with large ethnic Hungarian populations. Mono-lingual Slovaks tend to find it difficult to fit in and get a job in such cities.<sup>29</sup> They may complain about experiencing disadvantage in their own country, and so some Slovaks interpret nationalistic policies as simply the “correction” of pro-minority policies in order to build the Slovak nation. Feelings of inequality among ethnic groups have never been understood logically; naïve emotions often inflame ethnic conflict.

### III. Slovak perspectives in multi-ethnic locations

In previous sections, we attempted to examine the ethnic problem using a macro-level approach, but things can be seen differently using a micro-level approach. There are not enough of such ethnographic studies in the Slovak language, however, because Slovak ethnologists traditionally tend to focus on Slovak culture. Despite the few resources, the results are very interesting. According to Rosavá and Butoravá’s survey, carried out in 1990–1991, both Slovaks and the Hungarian minority displayed tolerance, especially in heterogeneous communities.<sup>30</sup> Their survey indicated that almost half of those who live in places where ethnic Hungarians comprise more than 50% of the population tend to evaluate the Slovak–Hungarian relationship as “good,” in contrast to just 17% of inhabitants in Slovak-only areas. Moreover, almost half of the inhabitants in Slovak-only areas tend to evaluate the relationship as “will never be good” in contrast to 21% of those who live in areas where ethnic Hungarians make up more than 50% of the population.

Heterogeneous communities, in which Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians live together, are usually located in southern Slovakia but they are not typical communities even there, because there are also many ethnic Slovak municipalities and ethnic Hungarian municipalities. It is difficult to analyze the characteristics of the community in southern Slovakia be-

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29 Paul, Ellen L. (2003) “Perception vs. Reality: Slovak Views of the Hungarian Minority in Slovakia,” *Nationalist Papers*, 31(4):487–493. See p. 490.

30 Rosová, Tatiana and Zora Butoravá (1992) “Slováci a Maďari na Slovensku v zrkadle výskumu,” in *Slovensko - maďarské vzťahy v 20. storočí*, Peter Zelenák (ed.), pp. 19–25, Bratislava: Historicky ústav SAV, Slovak Academic Press. See p. 25.

cause every community has a different ethnic composition and a different history of ethnic relationships.

Some ethnographic studies have revealed something about experiences and ways of living together in these heterogeneous communities, however. For example, in one heterogeneous southern Slovak village, before the socialist period, religious and social class were more important for inhabitants than ethnic identification.<sup>31</sup> In the case of this village, Hungarian Catholics lived there first, and then, Slovak Protestant peasants colonized it at the end of the 18th century. The two communities managed to cooperate with each other in everyday life as farmers and equally distributed the public positions of the village according to religion.

Until the First Republic of Czechoslovakia, Slovak children did not even have the chance of going to a Slovak elementary school in any village in which ethnic Hungarians comprised the majority. In such villages, Slovaks had to learn and speak Hungarian: “Hungarians occupied here in 1938. Everyone had to speak Hungarian in public office, school ... everywhere. But I did not run away from here, because I went to a Hungarian school, so I did not have any problems.”<sup>32</sup> This quotation comes from an elderly Slovak man, quoted in another ethnography, who had lived in an almost entirely ethnic Hungarian village. To put it in context, southern Slovakia was ceded to Hungary by the Vienna Arbitration, in line with the break-up Czechoslovakia determined by the Munich Agreement of 1938. Slovaks who lived in the ceded territory usually remember the cession as a painful experience; many Slovaks fled beyond the new Slovakia–Hungary border at that time.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, inhabitants emphasized in the ethnography that Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians were never on bad

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31 Škovierová, Zita and Marta Sigmundová (1981) “Sociálne vzťahy v etnicky zmiešanom dedinskom spoločenstve,” in *Teoretické a praktické problémy národopisného výskumu Mažarskej národnosti v Československo*, Ján Botík and Margita Méřzová (eds), pp. 115–121, Bratislava: Veda.

32 Lukáčsová, Margeréta and Zuzana Kusá (1995) “Interpretácia súčasného slovensko – maďarského súžitia a rodinná pamäť,” *Sociológia* 27:373–384. See p. 376.

33 Interview data with a Slovak man (born in 1922) in a Slovak village in southern Slovakia.(25 May 2004).

terms in this village.<sup>34</sup>

Not all Slovaks who live alongside the Hungarian minority in heterogeneous areas have tolerant attitudes, however. Some vacillate between nationalism and tolerance. Slovak sociologist Frič analyzed their varying attitudes in their everyday lives; he noticed that discourses about relations between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority are influenced by a number of “myths” among inhabitants in southern Slovakia.<sup>35</sup> He has identified three myths in the area. The first myth is that of ordinary people being manipulated and politicians bringing ethnic problems to the area. In the second myth, people regard politicians as divorced from actual life in southern Slovakia. Nationalism and ethnic identity are not the most important problems in this area at a time of economic crisis, according to this view. The third myth, shared more widely among the Slovak inhabitants, is that Slovaks and the Hungarian minority live together on good terms. They believe that ethnic problems do not exist in south Slovakia, only in other parts of Slovakia. These myths contradict each other, but they all share the common view that the root of the problem comes from outside. Frič’s study leads us to the hypothesis that ordinary inhabitants in Slovakia separate the issue of interethnic relations in their everyday life from nationalistic political action in order to live here peacefully.

While Hungarians have already lived for three generations as a minority, the heterogeneous communities have changed their dominant form of communication. Whereas older Slovaks were more bilingual than older ethnic Hungarians a few decades ago, younger ethnic Hungarians are more bilingual than younger Slovaks are now, and there are few among the Hungarian minority who are monolingual.<sup>36</sup> Even those who are monolingual and who have to bring a Slovak speaker with them when

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34 Lukácsová, Margeréta and Zuzana Kusá (1995) “Interpretácia súčasného slovensko – maďarského súžitia a rodinná pamäť,” *Sociológia* 27:373–384. See p. 379.

35 Frič, Pavol (1993) “Mýty a realita júžného Slovenska,” in *Súčasnosť mýtov a mýty súčasnosti*, Rene Bilík (ed.), pp. 50–54, Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press.

36 Šoucová, Dana (1994) “Názory na problémy Slovákov a Maďarov žijúcich v národnostne zmiešaných oblastiach júžného Slovenska vo výskume verejnej mienkym” *Sociológia* 26:496–500. See p. 498.

visiting the doctor or for other important appointments, recognize the importance of the Slovak language for their children. The Hungarian minority has strived to adapt to the Slovak language. Reality for the Hungarian minority has changed radically in the last 100 years.

## **Conclusion**

This paper discussed the ethnic problem relating to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia from the Slovak perspective. The Slovak case is not rare; it is shared by all ruled ethnic groups that gain independence so that the former majority becomes the minority in the new, independent state. It is difficult for some in the new majority to be tolerant of their former rulers. However, collective national memories and actual lives as they are lived in a heterogeneous region can be very different. Inhabitants manage to avoid ethnic politics in their heterogeneous communities in order to keep the peace. The Hungarian minority has strived to adopt the Slovak language while also keeping its own language and demanding the protection of its cultural rights. From the Slovak perspective, ethnic problems are not local problems but belong to the political sphere.

There are some limitations to this paper. First, the ethnographic research in heterogeneous communities was carried out mainly in the 1990s, so it was not influenced by the effects of joining the EU. New opportunities provided for the Hungarian minority by neighboring Hungary could bring changes to the community. The Hungarian minority has its state of origin, that is, Hungary, inside the EU, unlike Roma and Ruthenians, for example. It may therefore be possible that the situation is changing in Slovakia. Second, the reality of peaceful community life is revealed not just by interview data but also by looking at actual interactions between communities in their everyday lives. We realize that arguments in the media, political discussions, and personal accounts are not the whole story; there are differences between what people say and what they do. We need to research this area in more depth and detail. Even if inhabitants in multi-ethnic communities say there is no ethnic conflict or tension, it may be that they do not want to admit to it because they are afraid of ethnic conflict appearing in their territory. Such is the reality of multi-ethnic regions.

