

JUDIT PÁL

‘The Struggle of Colours’: Flags as National Symbols in Transylvania in 1848¹

The Flag as a Symbol

The anthropologist Orvar Löfgren in an analysis of nationalism as a cultural phenomenon chose an advertising slogan as a motto for one of his studies: ‘Sweden, Sweden, the country of flagpoles. ... Never has there been such a demand for flagpoles as now, because we need something to gather around, we need traditions and hopes for the future. That is why we need flags, flagpoles, and celebrations.’² One of the most common political symbols is the flag. The slogan above summarizes very well why we need symbols. They express a fundamental human need, being a means to strengthen communication and group cohesion, and, as such, they contribute to the preservation of a group’s identity and stability.

‘A symbol has public meanings that can be communicated. These meanings are rooted in the culture and traditions of the society, and are shaped according to the degree of unity and differentiation of that society.’³ So-called ‘condensation symbols’ recreate the intensive spiritual atmos-

1 The research for this study was supported by CNCS–UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0081.

2 Orvar Löfgren, ‘Gondolatok a nemzeti érzés kulturális szerveződéséről’, in Tamás Hofer and Péter Niedermüller, eds, *Nemzeti kultúrák antropológiai nézetben* (Budapest, 1988), 145.

3 Rozann Rothman, ‘Politikai szimbolizmus’, in Márton Szabó, Balázs Kiss, and Zsolt Boda, eds, *Szövegváltozatok a politikára: Nyelv, szimbólum, retorika, diskurzus* (Budapest, 2000), 133–4 [Eng. orig., ‘Political Symbolism’, in Samuel L. Long, ed., *The Handbook of Political Behavior*, i–v (New York, 1981), ii. 285–328].

phere of the locus with which we associate the respective symbol, and they influence people's value systems: 'They condense into one symbolic event, sign, or act patriotic pride, anxieties, remembrances of past glories or humiliations, promises of future greatness: some one of these or all of them'.⁴ Flags and symbols are able to express identification, arouse enthusiasm, and mobilize. In the nineteenth century, political mobilization happened through religion or nationalism. Symbols are paramount to mass mobilization. They generate identifications transgressing the boundaries of individual existence.

High profile historical events like the 1848 Revolution, which mobilize large masses in a very short period of time and with the help of new political symbols, provide fertile ground for research. The process of mobilization is especially exciting when it occurs in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional region such as Transylvania, where a fierce struggle took place at the level of symbols and ideologies in 1848–49 as well. Clearly, the functioning of national symbols is most interesting when 'they take part in the shape of real momentums within the cataclysm of conflict'.⁵ What follows is an analysis of the appearance, diffusion, and use of flags as national symbols among various ethnic groups of Transylvania during the Revolution of 1848, and related symbolic conflicts.

Modern nations are simultaneously political and cultural formations. National culture can be perceived as a code- and knowledge-community; it can encompass traditions, associations, and behaviour patterns with which each member of a community is familiar:⁶ 'The stratum of the diverse ensemble of national significations that can assert the greatest influence consists of *national symbols*, which awaken archetypal models in the members of the national community from the obscurity of the community's past'.⁷ The symbols of the nation-state were created to symbolize the nation, both to its own members and to members of other nations. The best-known visual national symbols are the coat of arms and the flag, 'which hint at ancient

4 Murray J. Edelman, *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (2nd edn, Urbana, IL, 1985), 6.

5 György Csepeli, *Nemzet által homályosan* (Budapest, 1992), 81.

6 Lőfgren, 'Gondolatok a nemzeti érzés kulturális szerveződéséről', 173.

7 Csepeli, *Nemzet által homályosan*, 56.

communitarian attachments with the help of iconic and analogical codes. Due to their visibility, these symbols provide a solid base for the national identification of places and situations.⁸ The flag has a strong community-building function. It generally appears as a national symbol, an identifier, and the symbol of independence. It plays roles in authoritarian regimes, where it is meant to rally the masses around the party and the regime, as well as in democracies, where it is the symbol of patriotism and unity, as is the case of the so-called 'flag patriotism' of Sweden or the United States.⁹

As a recently created symbol of social cohesion, the flag belongs to the category of 'invented traditions'. Eric Hobsbawm characterizes the difference between old and new traditions in the following manner: 'The former were specific and strongly binding social practices, the latter tended to be quite unspecific and vague as to the nature of the values, rights, and obligations of the group membership they inculcate: "patriotism", "loyalty", "duty", "playing the game", "the school spirit" and the like.'¹⁰

The flag became such a successful symbol precisely due to its undetermined character which allowed it to be invested with a multitude of individual and collective meanings. In nineteenth-century national movements, the flag was also the symbol of national unity, accepted by large masses because the details of what it meant remained obscured. Such obscure details included how the 'imagined community' should look, as well as its social and political organization in a future nation-state. Thus, the flag increasingly embodied the demands and expectations of the community,

8 Ibid. 79.

9 For the authoritarian regimes, see Sabine Behrenbeck, *Der Kult um die toten Helden: Nationalsozialistische Mythen, Riten und Symbole 1923 bis 1945* (Vierow bei Greifswald, 1996), 60. On Sweden, see Löfgren, 'Gondolatok a nemzeti érzés kulturális szerveződéséről', 168–71. There are also differences between the flag patriotism of Sweden and the US. While in the US the flag is an integrating symbol, in Sweden its use is restricted to the Swedish ethnic community, and its public use has developed as a response to immigration.

10 Eric Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 1983), 10.

and partly satisfied them in an imaginary way.¹¹ A mid-nineteenth-century author accurately described the emotions linked to the flag, how people sacrifice their lives for it, and how the national colours exerted magical powers:

This flag mirrors the feelings and desires of the nation in every moment of the social life, it is used in every national endeavour and during every holiday, and inspires the troops to commit heroic acts ... The ideal of love of the homeland is connected to it; and people are capable of doing anything for an ideal. On the other hand, in peacetime, it expresses the existence of the state, the rule of the nation, independence from other peoples almost always conveying the feeling of liberty.¹²

To become a political symbol, the flag needs to be accepted by the political community. The appearance and use of the flag in Hungary and Transylvania is a relatively recent phenomenon. In fact, it can be linked only to the 1848 Revolution. What Raoul Girardet wrote about the French flag, which became the focal point of the national religion in the aftermath of the French Revolution, is also true here:

At this crucial moment in the history of the national idea, it is as if the nation required a visual representation, a tangible insigne of identity and recognition. Whether consciously or unconsciously, a new communal cult, linked to yet transcending the vagaries of the moment, had come into being, and like all cults it insisted on its own rituals and images.¹³

11 Manfred Hettling and Paul Nolte, eds, *Bürgerliche Feste: Symbolische Formen politischen Handelns im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1993), 25.

12 Ede Ivánfi, *A magyar birodalom címerei és színei*, i–ii (Budapest, 1873), ii. 27.

13 Raoul Girardet, 'The Three Colors: Neither White nor Red', in Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, iii: *Symbols* (New York, 1996), 9. The French flag started its career very early, playing a central role in celebrations as early as 1791.

The Creation of National Flags

The history of flags extends well into the past. In the Middle Ages flags were used as heraldic symbols. The rules of heraldry developed in the course of the Crusades.¹⁴ The banners with coats of arms served a practical purpose then. Later, flags became indispensable to armies, while guilds and corporations also had their own flags. The multifaceted symbolic role of flags is also conveyed by the fact that during the time of the Principality of Transylvania (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), the flag expressed the sovereignty of the Sultan over Transylvania. The Sultan sent a flag to the investiture ceremony of the prince, along with a diploma and other items. This flag symbolized the prince's allegiance to the Sultan. It is interesting to note that the first tricoloured flag – resembling the later red-white-green Hungarian tricolour, though not arranged in the same way since the colours were doubled – was a gift of the Sultan to the Transylvanian Prince Sigismund (Zsigmond) Báthory in 1601.¹⁵ In the Middle Ages, the flag of the king was also the flag of the kingdom, and it was displayed during the coronation procession. Ten flags were on display at the coronation ceremony of the King of Hungary, Matthias II, the brother of the Holy Roman Emperor Rudolf II, in 1608. They were meant to symbolize the territories over which Hungary formulated symbolic claims.¹⁶ Nevertheless, the 'Hungarian colours' were established only in the 'Reform Age' (as it is called in Hungarian historiography, 1830–1848), when they became accepted and widespread. Green – the colour of the triple mound – was added to the red and white and was found in the coat of arms as early as the

14 Alfred Znamierowski, *Zászló-enciklopédia: Nemzetek, országok és népek zászlóinak és lobogóinak legteljesebb kézikönyve* (Budapest, 2000), 14.

15 Bernát L. Kumorovitz, 'A magyar zászló és nemzeti színek múltja', *Hadtörténelmi közlemények*, new ser., 1/3–4 (1954), 40. See also Zoltán Horváth, *A zászlók kialakulása és fejlődése a kezdetektől napjainkig* (Budapest, 1995), 21.

16 'Auch 10 Fahnen Ungern zu Ross / Durch welche dann andeutet was / Die Zahl 10 Länderlein / Zu Ungern zugehören sein ...'; Kumorovitz, 'A magyar zászló', 42.

sixteenth century.¹⁷ However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, red and white still counted as the Hungarian colours, with which green was only sometimes used.¹⁸ The French revolution played a major role in the dissemination of the flag as a national symbol, and it is not accidental that most flags were given three colours on the model of the French tricolour.¹⁹ The Hungarian national flag was established in 1848, when it was set by law. It is edifying that the law declared that the:

national colour and the coat of arms of the country are ‘reinstated in their ancient rights’. Invented traditions always emphasize their supposedly ancient character, their connectedness to the nation’s past. Otherwise, it is interesting to note that Croatian deputies were in opposition to the law during its debate in parliament. When a Croatian deputy suggested that Croatia should also be able to use its national colours, many protested that this would damage national integrity and, as the representative of Máramaros [Maramureş] County argued, ‘the colours not only express nationality in the ethnic sense, but they also represent political nationality’.²⁰

This helped bring to the surface one of the basic antagonisms that largely contributed to the outbreak of armed conflict in 1848, namely whether the flag represented the state or the nation. And which nation did it represent: the Hungarian political nation, the Hungarian cultural nation, or Hungarian ethnicity?

17 Zsolt Horváth, ‘Magyarország állami és nemzeti szimbólumai’, in Attila Harkai et al., eds, *Állami és nemzeti szimbólumok az Európai Unióban* (Budapest, 2005), 200.

18 ‘Die ungarische Reichsfarbe, wie gewöhnlich aus den Reichswappen entlehnt, ist roth und silber, und manchmal wegen des dreifachen Hügels auch mit grün gemischt’. Martin Schwartner, *Statistik des Königreichs Ungarn*, ii (Pest, 1809), 59–60.

19 The Dutch flag was the first modern flag, dating from the end of the sixteenth century. It consisted of simple strips instead of heraldry motifs and was a tricolour. The Dutch tricolour inspired the Russian flag, and the other Slavic nations took over the colours of the latter. Znamierowski, *Zászló-enciklopédia*, 116–19. See also Hobsbawm, ‘Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe 1870–1914’, in *The Invention of Tradition*, 266–7.

20 Attila Pandula, ‘Zászlók és lobogók 1848–1849-ben’, in György Csihák, ed., *A honfoglalás és az 1848–1849-es magyarországi polgári forradalom és szabadságharc évfordulójára: A tizenharmadik magyar őstörténeti találkozó és a hetedik magyar történelmi iskola előadásai és iratai, Tapolca, 1998* (Budapest, 2001), 176–86.

The Romanian red-yellow-blue tricolour also started to be used during the 1848 Revolution in Wallachia.²¹ Allegedly, Romanian students from Paris were the first to use the blue-gold-red flag with which they welcomed the French provisional government at the end of February 1848. According to one of the April issues of the Transylvanian Romanian newspaper *Gazeta de Transilvania*, this was how they expressed their desire to unite with the other Romanian provinces. The tricolour was officially accepted by a decree of the revolutionary government in Bucharest, issued on 14/26 June 1848. On 13/25 July the decree was amended with a description of the arrangement of the colours.

Transylvania before 1848

In the Middle Ages Transylvania was part of the Hungarian Kingdom. After the dismemberment of the Kingdom in the aftermath of the Battle of Mohács (1526), the Transylvanian Principality, comprising Transylvania in its narrow sense and the eastern regions of Hungary (Partium), was established under Turkish suzerainty. At the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century a new change occurred in the life of the region: the Habsburgs pushed the Ottomans back to the Balkans, and in the aftermath of the so-called wars of liberation they annexed the Transylvanian Principality to their empire. Although Transylvania was integrated by right of the Habsburgs' possession of the Hungarian Crown, the territorial unity of the medieval Kingdom of Hungary was not re-established. Instead, Transylvania became part of the Habsburg Empire, first as a distinct principality and later as a grand principality. Several factors contributed to this solution, including the particularism of the Transylvanian estates as well as the interests of the Habsburg Monarchy.

21 Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, ed., *Tricolorul României: Simbol al unității, integrității și suveranității naționale* (Bucharest, 1995), 63–8.

The *Diploma Leopoldinum*, issued by Emperor Leopold I in 1690, served as the basic law of the province until 1848. It assured the autonomy of Transylvania's internal government, and the system of three political nations and four accepted religions. Accordingly, the elite of the three privileged groups shared power – that is, the Hungarian aristocracy as well as Saxon and Szekler elites. This also meant a complex network of territorial autonomies, which represented a hindrance to the administration. The Hungarian aristocracy held administrative and judicial powers in the counties; the Szekler nobles ruled the Szeklerland; while the Saxon elite administered the so-called Königsboden (the Royal Domain; Hun. Királyföld). Some of these administrative units formed an entangled network all across Transylvania. There is disagreement between Hungarian and Romanian historiographies on demographic history. However, they both agree that the Romanian population was the majority in the province by the eighteenth century. The Romanian elite had been assimilated to the Hungarian nobility in the Middle Ages. Although certain regions, such as Fogaras (Făgăraș), Kővár (Chioar), and Máramaros (Maramureș), had greater numbers of Romanian-speaking noblemen, while Romanian peasants living in the Königsboden were free, the majority of Romanians were serfs. Thus, Transylvanian Romanians, lacking in a political elite, existed in Transylvania in a truncated society.

As for religion, the Principality of Transylvania was, relatively speaking, a land of tolerance. This tolerance had many limits if viewed from our perspective; at the time, however, the province's situation was unique, and had been set by particular domestic and foreign policies. In addition to the four accepted religious denominations (Catholic, Calvinist, Lutheran, and Unitarian), the Orthodox Church was tolerated. The Habsburgs favoured the Catholics, but due to opposition from the Transylvanian Protestant elite, the policies of the Counter-Reformation were not as successful here as in the western provinces of the Habsburg Empire or in Hungary. To break the domination of the Protestant elite, at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth century, the Habsburg leadership offered the hitherto marginalized Orthodox Church the possibility of a religious union with Catholicism, but this fostering of the Greek Catholic Church had only limited success. During the eighteenth century, however, the

Romanian Greek Catholic elite played a leading role in the national movement of Transylvanian Romanians.

The three 'political nations' were not nations or ethnicities in the modern sense of the word, but estate-based *nationes*, whose ethnicizing process started in the premodern period.²² The end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth century also represented a turning point for the Saxons. They characterized themselves in a petition they sent to the Emperor at the end of the seventeenth century in the following manner: *ein so vill Jahr her Untertruckht und leidendes Handtvoll teutscher Blut*. The *Ministerialkonferenz* in turn recommended the fulfilment of their petition with the following justification: *weille das Teutsche Geblüet doch Jederzeit mehrers der Teutschen als Hungarischen Nation zugethan*.²³ By the end of the eighteenth century, the following self-portrait had become accepted among the Saxon intelligentsia: *Wir sind Sachsen, ein redliches, biederes, Deutsches Volk!* Or, as the author further claimed: *Die Siebenbürger Sachsen sind Deutsche. Ihre Sprache, Sitte und Gebräuche lassen daran nicht Zweifel. Sie selbst heißen sich in der gemeinen Volkssprache Deutsche, ihre Sprache, die Deutsche Sprache*.²⁴

From a social point of view, the population of the Königsboden was the most homogenous. The Saxons as well as the Romanians living there were free. The Saxons' literacy level was the highest in Transylvania. After the Reformation, the Lutheran Church counted as the Saxons' national church, and even Romanians living in the Königsboden had to contribute to its maintenance. The self-governing body of the Saxons, the *Universitas Saxorum*, had an immense wealth. The administrative language in the Königsboden was German. Furthermore, the Saxons – backed by Habsburg leadership – enjoyed a great deal of autonomy, and played an important role in the political leadership of the province. At the end of the eighteenth

22 Harald Roth, *Hermannstadt: Kleine Geschichte einer Stadt in Siebenbürgen* (Cologne, 2006), 112–13.

23 Zsolt Trócsányi, *Habsburg-politika és Habsburg-kormányzat Erdélyben 1690–1740* (Budapest, 1988), 133.

24 Jakob Müller, *Vorbericht* (1790), quoted in Annamária Biró, 'Magyar-német eredetvita Erdélyben', PhD dissertation, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj, 2009, 51–2.

century, however, Transylvania witnessed an upsurge in estate nationalism (feudal nationalism).²⁵ Moreover, the Hungarian-Saxon debate on the language to be used in administration (the so-called language battle) became embittered in the two decades prior to 1848 (the 'Reform Age'). The Saxons were worried not only by the hegemonic ambitions of the Hungarians, but also by the strengthening of the Romanians' position. The fact that Romanians formed the majority of the population in the Königsboden did not initially cause problems. But as new liberal principles spread, there was an increasing sense of endangerment; furthermore, the demand for a preservation of conservative values, fortified by traditional privileges, gained greater ground among the Saxon elite.

The same sense of endangerment had a decisive influence on the mentality of Transylvanian Hungarian liberals. Miklós Wesselényi, their most prominent representative, feared both pan-Slavic movements and the increasing self-awareness of the Romanian majority. Fears of this sort were widespread among the Hungarian liberal elite at large. Hungarian liberals, while advocating the extension of rights, estimated that this could also mean the end of the Hungarian hegemony, given that the majority of the population of both Transylvania and Hungary was comprised of non-Hungarians. For a while, a significant part of the Hungarian elite nourished the illusion that the nationalities would be willing to Magyarize themselves in exchange for political rights. Wesselényi, considering the backwardness of Transylvania, believed provincial powers were insufficient for reform, and this is why he advocated the union of Transylvania with Hungary. He connected union with the liberation of serfs and the expansion of rights, perceiving these measures to be key factors in winning the support of nationalities, especially Romanians. In his opinion, union would bring the more developed relations and laws to Transylvania and, not least, would strengthen the Hungarian nationality. As the Hungarian poet and

25 The turning point was the end of the reign of Emperor Joseph II. The conflicts between Hungarians and Saxons that surfaced during the Transylvanian Diet from 1790–91 also resulted in a pamphlet war between them. The debate on the privileges mostly took place at a symbolic level, and the question of the origin of the Transylvanian nation came into focus.

politician Kölcsey famously put it, 'the government wants an *urbarium* for its own sake, while Wesselényi and many others want an *urbarium* in order to forge a nation.'²⁶ This intertwining of social reforms and nationalist ideals quickly became one of the fundamental features of the thought of Hungarian liberals in the Reform Age.

Hungarian national development had been double-faced since the beginning. On the one hand, Hungarian nationalists wanted to integrate into the Hungarian political nation every inhabitant having political rights and living on the country's territory, and on the other, they defined the nation as a linguistic-cultural community, due to the lack of Hungary's independence and its fragmentation. Later, this constituted the source of many conflicts. Claims made by the Hungarian political nation in the Reform Age provoked strong reactions from the elites of the other nationalities, and in 1848 this was one of the reasons why conflict escalated into a full-blown civil war between Hungarians on one side, and Serbs, Croats, and Romanians on the other.

Here one should mention Transylvania's third political nation, the Szeklers. If before the reign of Emperor Joseph II the Szeklers understood the term 'nation' exclusively in the sense of feudal nation, beginning with his reign the textual context determined what they meant by nation.²⁷ The Language Decree issued by Joseph II acted as a catalyst for the formation of a novel, national identity. The defence of 'our sweet Hungarian-born language' tightened the Szeklers' community of interests with the Hungarian nobility. As cultural-linguistic similarities grew in significance, the Szeklers integrated into the Hungarian cultural nation. In the Reform Age, the interests and claims of the Szekler and Hungarian elites practically coincided, and the idea of the union became increasingly popular in the Szeklerland.

At the end of the eighteenth century, the feudal framework of Transylvania started to be challenged from another direction as well. In

26 Ferenc Kölcsey's diary entry of 11 January 1833, quoted in Ambrus Miskolczy, 'Erdély a reformkorban (1830–1848)', in Zoltán Szász, ed., *Erdély története*, iii: 1830-tól napjainkig (Béla Köpeczi, gen. ed.) (Budapest, 1986), 1269.

27 See: Gusztáv Mihály Hermann, *Náció és nemzet: Székely rendi nacionalizmus és magyar nemzettudat 1848-ig* (Csíkszereda, 2003).

1791, Transylvanian Romanians wrote a petition called *Supplex Libellus Valachorum* in which they demanded, using historical and demographic arguments, their recognition as a fourth nation, with similar rights for Greek Catholics as for Roman Catholics and the use of the Romanian language in administrative units with a majority of Romanians. This document represented the official appearance of the Romanian national question in Transylvanian political life, but the estates did not know how to handle this, then, or later. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, the representatives of the so-called 'Transylvanian School', comprised of Romanian Greek Catholic intelligentsia, formulated their national foundation myth:²⁸ they idealized the Roman origin of the Romanians to support their demands for recognition as the fourth nation in Transylvania. In the Reform Age, language became the basis of national identity for Transylvanian Romanians, and was surrounded by a genuinely mystical aura in the years before 1848.²⁹

The autumn of 1848 found Transylvania burdened with social, national, and religious tensions. Apart from demands to liberate the serfs, a key issue was the handling of the national question. The 'liberty, equality, brotherhood' dilemma was made even more difficult by the province's particular circumstances. Political rights did not satisfy the Saxons and Romanians; they wanted collective recognition of their nationality, and also requested a formal guarantee of their national survival. The Hungarians and Saxons, however, were aware that they could not preserve their old privileges, but both these privileged groups made efforts to save as much dominance as possible. Hungarians thought that the union of Transylvania with Hungary would guarantee this, and in the spring of 1848, they invested all their efforts to this end. The Romanians and Saxons opposed union with Hungary, but the latter also took into consideration the possibility of a compromise, and so were prepared to accept the union on certain terms. But the Romanians used all available means to fight against union. The clash between liberalism and nationalism made its presence felt strongly among the Romanians too,

28 Lucian Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (Bucharest, 1997), 83–91.

29 Sorin Mitu, *Geneza identității naționale la românii ardeleni* (Bucharest, 1997), 336–7.

and it is telling that at the Romanian national assembly at Balázsfalva (Blaj), which took place in May 1848, the prevailing position was that of Simion Bărnuțiu, instead of the moderate Gheorghe Barițiu. Bărnuțiu painted an almost apocalyptic vision at the assembly. According to Bărnuțiu a fight to the death for Transylvania was going on between the Romanians and Hungarians. The Hungarians wanted to further subjugate the Romanians, and seize Transylvania forever. And now they wanted to fool the Romanians with the promise of liberty, and rob them of their nationhood, language, and land: 'Let us not sit down at the table of Hungarian freedom, because all its dishes are poisonous! Let us not sell our country and language, because once we lose them, we will never recover them.'³⁰

In May 1848, the Transylvanian Diet convened in its old form and enacted the union of Transylvania with Hungary, much to the joy of Hungarians and Szeklers, and much to the dejection of Romanians. Consequently, there was a rift between Hungarians (including the Szeklers) on one side, and Romanians and Saxons on the other. This conflict would have a long-lasting negative impact on relations between the nationalities of Transylvania. From 1848 onward Transylvanians considered themselves primarily Romanians, Hungarians, or Germans, and only secondarily, or even thirdly, Transylvanians.

The Outbreak of the Revolution and the Use of Flags

In 1848, Transylvania also witnessed changes in the use and symbolism of flags. It is interesting to know how the various nationalities living in Transylvania chose their national colours. Before 1848, all three *nationes* in Transylvania – Hungarians, Szeklers, and Saxons – had their own seal, while the Principality (later, Grand Principality) had a coat of arms, which

30 Quoted in Ákos Egyed, *Erdély 1848. évi utolsó rendi országgyűlése* (Marosvásárhely, 2001), 49.

symbolized the three feudal nations. However, the year 1848 shattered feudal frameworks, and the feudal nations were replaced by nations/nationalities in a modern sense, who felt the need to represent their nationality by creating a new system of symbols. The primary endeavour of ethnic groups is to express themselves as social groups and gain recognition as such. Representation allowed for the visualization of traditions and the re-creation of the community's past. Tradition is the main stabilizer of group culture, while its preservation is the guarantee for the functioning of the ethnic identity.³¹

The break with old symbols was necessary for several reasons. Modern Transylvanian nationalities were not simply the continuation of medieval feudal nations. At this stage, national organization was not only about the inclusion of the masses within the ranks of the 'bastions of the constitution', but also about reorganization on a greater scale. The greatest change was the vesting of Romanians, who had hitherto merely been tolerated, with civil rights. The Saxons were least affected by the abolition of feudal rights and the liberation of serfs because most of them had been free people and, as such, long-standing members of the Saxon *natio*. However, by 1848, the Saxons were outnumbered by the Romanians in the Königsboden, and in the argumentation for the preservation of Saxon 'national wealth', they intertwined feudal-historical rights with civic rights in a clever fashion. Moreover, the siren voice of the great German 'mother nation' had by now reached the Carpathians. The Saxons sent a delegation to the national assembly in Frankfurt, and hastened to stress their dual attachment to the German mother nation, on the one hand, and to the Transylvanian *Vaterland* on the other.

As for the Hungarians, the transition seems to have been less problematic, since in their case the political elite assured continuity. More interesting is the case of the Szeklers who, at that point, 'officially' became part

31 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York, 1991). Quoted in Gyöngyi Bindorffer, *Identitás kettős kötésben: Etnikai identitás és kulturális reprezentáció a dunabogdányi svábok körében* (Budapest, 1996), 17.

of the Hungarian nation, as the result of a long historical process.³² This also became apparent in the symbolic realm, since they chose to adopt the Hungarian national colours, instead of using their own colours and symbols.

Transylvanian Hungarians had the easiest task in choosing their national symbols, first of all a flag and national colours, since they were ready-made: they had been previously known, and spread with lightning speed on the arrival of the news of the revolution in Pest. Surely it is significant how and why Hungarians immediately took over and adopted premade national symbols, including the flag, for the Hungarian national colours had only recently become popular in wider circles.³³

There is data from the Reform Age in Transylvania on the use of the flag and colours as a means for mobilization, such as in the case of the *Védegylet* (Protective Association) movement.³⁴ The author of a memoir records his surprise when, as a young man starting his career as a public functionary in 1846, he witnessed how one of the gubernial secretaries 'wearing on his chest the insignia of the *Védegylet* and a cockade in the national colours, went from office to office to urge the young men to join the movement in the interest of Hungarian industry'.³⁵ His surprise was not only provoked by the fact that a gubernial secretary was campaigning in favour of the *Védegylet*, but also by the use of the cockade, which still counted as a peculiarity at the time. Obviously, the fashion of wearing

32 According to Hermann, the Szeklers played an active role in the crystallization of the modern Hungarian nation from the very start. See: Hermann, *Náció és nemzet*, 299. See also: Judit Pál, 'Regionalbewusstsein und nationale Identität in Siebenbürgen um 1867: Die Szekler zwischen Eigenständigkeit und Magyarentum', *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 32/1 (2009), 14–19.

33 For the time being, they had only become popular within the higher circles of Transylvanian Hungarians (and Szeklers) and the relatively narrow stratum of the intelligentsia, but due to the lack of sources, there is very little information on pre-1848 knowledge of the national colours.

34 This association, created in 1844 and led by Lajos Kossuth, aimed at the defence of domestic industry.

35 Károly Bisztray, *A régi Erdély: Bisztray Károly negyvennyolcas honvédtiszt emlékirata*, ed. Gyula Bisztray (Budapest, 1948), 291.

cockades had come from Hungary, whence the *Védegylet* movement had come as well. In Hungary, the use of national colours was by then common.

The news of the revolution in Pest came to Kolozsvár (Cluj) on 20 March 1848. The city was in a state of great excitement, and youth painted slogans on walls. In a speech delivered on 21 March, Governor Count József Teleki emphasized the appearance of the national colours.³⁶ The then young Pál Gyulai, who later became a famous literary critic, witnessed the events from the start: ‘Young people stopped in front of the city hall waving a banner on which they had written “Union”. More people started to gather ... [and] union cockades – the colours of the Hungarian homeland – were distributed, long live the union, freedom of the press, etc., was shouted.’³⁷ Students bearing the Hungarian flag barged into the meeting of the city council as well, singing the so-called union song, which also contained the flag motif: ‘Here is the flag in our hands, waved by one desire: A united homeland.’³⁸

While in Kolozsvár, Count Lajos Gyulai, who was a member of the Hungarian liberal opposition, wrote with irony in his diary entry of 22 March: ‘The *pecsovic*s³⁹ were gripped by fear and did not really show their faces, except those who did put on the Hungarian cockade. Two shopkeepers distributed ribbons for free. Many more rolls of ribbon were fetched and cut into pieces at the marketplace, and our ladies distributed them everywhere.’⁴⁰

36 ‘Ich kann noch den Umstand nicht unberührt laßen, daß diese Deputation eine grosse Anzahl von Leuten der verschiedensten Stände mit Bändern von den ungarischen Farben im Knopfloch, begleitet, daß jedoch die Ruhe und Ordnung in der Stadt nicht im mindesten gestört wurde.’ Governor József Teleki to Chancellor Sámuel Jósika, 21 March 1848. Ștefan Pascu and Victor Chereșteșiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849 din Transilvania*, i: 2 martie – 12 aprilie 1848 (Bucharest, 1977), 44 no. 27.

37 Pál Gyulai to Károly Szász, 21 March 1848, in *Gyulai Pál levelezése 1843-tól 1867-ig*, ed. Sándor Somogyi (Budapest, 1961), 36–7.

38 Benedek Jancsó, *Erdély története* (Cluj, 1931), 240.

39 This was a nickname for members of the government party.

40 Lajos Gyulai, *Gyulai Lajos naplói a forradalom és szabadságharc korából 1848. március 5. – 1849. június 22.*, ed. János András, Elek Csetri, and Ambrus Miskolczy, i–ii (Budapest, 2003), ii. 17.

A few days later, Gyulai wrote disappointedly that he wanted to go to the countryside, because he had 'become tired of the revolution in Kolozsvár, which consists of nothing more than national banners and ribbons, as well as a little disturbance now and again.'⁴¹ When he finally left, he travelled in a coach decorated with a flag.⁴²

If we are to believe the account of Gheorghe Barițiu – one of the leading figures of the Romanian national movement, who later wrote a history of the age – there was a certain amount of confusion among the Hungarians living in the countryside as to which colours they were supposed to hoist on the news of the outbreak of the revolution. At the time, around two hundred youngsters were doing their internship at the Royal Table in Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureș), seat of the highest court in Transylvania. The twelve-point programme (the revolutionary demands) from Pest was distributed among them, but they started to wear the cockades only on the following day because, Barițiu claims, they did not know what the colours of Hungary and Transylvania were. Thus, the cockades were prepared by women only the following day, when the students took to the streets holding flags and shouting the slogan 'liberty, equality, brotherhood'.⁴³ Avram Iancu, the future organizer and leader of the Romanians' armed struggle, was also one of the apprentices at the Royal Table. In his letter of 25 March, Iancu only mentioned that young people wore tricoloured cockades on their chests and hats.⁴⁴

In Marosvásárhely, a printer's aide described these days in his diary in the following manner: 'A few days after 15 March, flags were hoisted all across the city as a sign of joy in the proclamation of liberty, equality of rights, and brotherhood, the news of which had reached us from

41 Ibid. 21.

42 Ibid. 24.

43 George Barițiu, *Parti alese din Istori'a Transilvaniei pre doue sute de ani din urma*, ii (Sibiu, 1890), 41.

44 Avram Iancu's letter of 25 March 1848, in Pascu and Chereșteșiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849*, i. 104 no. 67.

Budapest only then.⁴⁵ There were similar instances all across Hungary and Transylvania. In Transylvanian cities,⁴⁶ the first tangible sign of the news of the outbreak of the revolution was the appearance of flags and cockades. Generally, news of the revolution spread to smaller communities through the legal interns and students who made up the low-rank functionaries of the Gubernium or the Royal Table.⁴⁷ For example, in Csíkszereda (Miercurea Ciuc), the twelve-point programme and cockades were distributed by a clerk from the Royal Table.⁴⁸

In the beginning, there was more uncertainty regarding national symbols among Romanians and Saxons. The appearance of Hungarian national symbols provided a challenge for the Romanian and Saxon elite. According to the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, symbolic conflict is one of the modes of competition for symbolic capital. Conflicts over symbols are part of the competition for power, wealth, prestige, legitimization, and other sources of political power. The symbolic conflict is a zero-sum game, in which the ratio of symbolic capital matters, and not its quantity. One group can acquire gains only at the expense of others. A British anthropologist, Simon Harrison, makes a distinction between four types of symbolic contests, each being simultaneously a strategy for the distribution of symbolic capital.⁴⁹ One of the types is a competition for innovation. The nineteenth century was the age of competitive inventiveness, and innovations (such as the flag) appeared during an increasingly sharp conflict for national prestige and power. ‘Innovation contests are essentially “schizmogonic” processes of competitive differentiation,’ says Harrison. For the substantiation of a distinct identity, a seceding group must create a separate symbolic *repre-*

45 Sándor Imreh, *Visszaemlékezés az 1848–49. évi szabadságharcra Erdélyben* (Budapest, 2003), 31–2.

46 Hungarians, Armenians, and Germans (Saxons) formed the majority population in the Transylvanian urban areas, with the exception of those in the Königsboden, where Saxons formed the majority population.

47 Functionaries came from the ranks of the three *nationes*, but most of them were Hungarians and Szeklers.

48 Pandula, ‘Zászlók és lobogók 1848–1849-ben’, 178.

49 Simon Harrison, ‘Four Types of Symbolic Conflict’, *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 1/2 (June 1995), 255–72.

sentational set which expresses its identity.⁵⁰ Evidently, Romanians were in a disadvantageous position. They had to move fast and create their own national symbols within the increasingly bitter competition taking place in the spring of 1848.

By the spring of 1848 – following the example of the Hungarians and Saxons – the Romanians also had widely adopted the wearing of cockades, ribbons, etc., but had not yet established their national colours:⁵¹ they used the white-blue, blue-yellow, and red-white-blue colour combinations.⁵² By then, they were emphasizing their belonging to the 'fourth nation'. On 10 April 1848, Petru Dobra, the future prefect, wrote from Zalatna (Zlatna) that he could not take part in the county general meeting, which was set to take place four days later in Déva (Deva), but that he would send over a few cockades:

In case they somehow differ from those that you have seen it is because we accept the union [of Transylvania and Hungary] only on the condition that we can preserve our nationhood. The green-white-red colours are Hungarian; blue and white are the colours of the Romanian nation. We, the Romanian youth here, wear them. I hope they will be accepted there as well. In case there is opposition, it will be better to refrain from wearing them at all. Besides, they are only an external sign.⁵³

The distinctive cockade symbolically designated Romanians as a separate political factor. At the beginning of April, one of the clerks of the state manor from Zalatna said about Abrudbánya (Abrud) and its environs that the Romanians 'wore the cockade in the Romanian *blue and white national colours* as a distinctive sign, instead of the Hungarian national colours,' and held meetings together with emissaries from Zalatna and Körösbánya (Baia

50 Ibid. 261.

51 This uncertainty was also caused by the fact that the Romanians, as a non-dominant ethnic group, were much less organized and their elite was less numerous and weaker than the Hungarian and Saxon ones, because they lacked political traditions and models to follow.

52 To the question when and what kind of colour combination they used and why, one cannot provide a clear answer due to the lack of sources.

53 Petru Dobra to his fellow citizens of Zalatna (Zlatna), 10 April 1848, in Pascu and Chereșteșiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849*, i. 408 no. 250.

de Criş) every day, during which they ‘[sang] Romanian songs with a rebellious content’. Moreover, according to the functionary, they had already set the date of the Romanian rebellion.⁵⁴ The chief judge of the city of Brassó (Braşov, Kronstadt) informed the governor that several Romanians wore the red-white ribbon in their button-holes.⁵⁵ The situation was tense. At the end of March, General Puchner, the military chief commander of Transylvania, feared that the cockades were the signs of opposition to the Emperor and harbingers of the Romanians’ open rebellion.

How were these symbols spread amongst the Romanians, and how had they come to a consensus regarding the national colours? Studies of nationalism have long sought for answers to the questions of who the builders of the national culture were and how they created national public opinion and communication networks, and through which institutions they spread knowledge and symbols considered national. Anthony D. Smith makes a distinction between lateral and vertical ethnic communities. He underlined that the driving force behind the transformation of the subjected vertical ethnic community was the stratum of national educating intelligentsia, which is connected to the elaboration of the new communitarian self-definitions and aims.⁵⁶ The most vital task is that of the intelligentsia: to rediscover the community and make it real. Miroslav Hroch created a typology of the nation-building process of non-dominant ethnic communities. Hroch distinguishes between three stages within national movements. During the middle stage, actors try to win over as many strata as possible to the national cause, and to awaken national awareness in them, until the national movement transforms into a mass movement. This mass movement characterizes the final stage of nation-building.⁵⁷ Although Hroch’s theory

54 Ibid. i. 335 no. 210.

55 Aurelia Bunea, ‘Steagul poporului român din Transilvania în revoluția din anii 1848–1849’, in *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie din Cluj*, 12 (1969), 39–41.

56 Anthony D. Smith, ‘A nemzetek eredete’, in Zoltán Kántor, ed., *Nacionalizmuselméletek (szöveggyűjtemény)* (Budapest, 2004), 220 [Eng. orig., ‘The Origins of Nations’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 12/3 (1989), 340–67].

57 Miroslav Hroch, *Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe: A Comparison of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations* (Cambridge, 1985), *passim*.

has been criticized for being overly simplistic, if one accepts his schema for the sake of the elegance of simplicity, then the 1848 Revolution represents, in the case of the Romanians, the beginning of the transition between the middle and later stages mentioned above.

Between late March and mid-May, Romanians living in various parts of Transylvania kept in touch by means of letters, proclamations, and the newspaper *Gazeta de Transilvania*. Students played a special role here; those studying at Balázsfalva (Blaj), Kolozsvár (Cluj), Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), and Brassó (Braşov) went home during the spring break and mobilized the people.⁵⁸ Vasile Moldovan, the future prefect who was then a student at Balázsfalva, got Romanians living in the Maros (Mureş) region to participate in the national assembly at Balázsfalva. He and his colleagues wanted to lead the people by carrying a flag, but they did not know whether Romanians had set national colours. Therefore, they created a white flag on which they wrote in blue: 'May 1848. Peace! Liberty!' In his memoirs, Moldovan described how he and his fellows went to Marosvásárhely with a bashful feeling, bought the fabric for the flag, and embroidered the text on it.⁵⁹

Romanians at the national assembly at Balázsfalva (Blaj) still used the red-white-blue national flag, which was anachronistically depicted as red-yellow-blue in later representations of the event. Before the assembly, Romanian leaders had met in Nagyszeben (Sibiu, Hermannstadt) to decide on the national colours and flag. We know from the memoirs of one of the participants that the colours were based on the Romanian folk costume. Allegedly, Ioan Puşcariu suggested the use of red, yellow, and blue, the colours of Transylvania (more precisely, of its coat of arms), but his proposal was rejected on the grounds that the colours of Transylvania were already

58 This also played a role in the case of the Hungarians and Szeklers. At the beginning of April, it was reported that all the students of the local Reformed Protestant College went home 'carrying tricolour flags': 'Here, the tricolour is hoisted on churches, the town hall, the casino, and the county hall'. Lord-Lieutenant Miklós Bánffy to Gubernial Councillor János Bornemisza, Nagyenyed, 3 April 1848, in Pascu and Chereşteşiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849*, i. 272 no. 176.

59 Ibid.

represented by the golden flag tassels. A great flag made before the event – which the new Orthodox bishop Andrei Şaguna had blessed and on which the words ‘Liberty, equality, and brotherhood’ were embroidered – was waved by Puşcariu from the tower of the cathedral in Balázsfalva.⁶⁰ On the pole, there was a black-yellow ribbon symbolizing allegiance to the Habsburgs. Below, the imperial black-yellow flag was hoisted, while the door of the cathedral was adorned with the pictures of Emperor Ferdinand and the Roman Emperor Trajan, who symbolized the Roman origins of the Romanians. Upon the news of the arrival in Balázsfalva of forty young Hungarians bearing their national flag to support union with Hungary, the Romanians set up guards. As recorded in the minutes of the meeting, participants at the national assembly swore allegiance to the imperial black-yellow and Romanian national (blue-white-red) flags.⁶¹

After the national assembly, Romanians were surprised to find out that they were accused of demonstrating with a Russian flag.⁶² Moreover, after the assembly at Balázsfalva, certain leading figures from the Hungarian liberal camp sent a report to the Hungarian government in which they claimed that ‘the obvious desire to secede, not only from the homeland, but also from the Empire’ manifested itself in the fact that, apart from one Austrian flag, countless Russian flags were present.⁶³ A press polemic erupted on this issue, especially in *Ellenőr*, a Hungarian paper from Kolozsvár. George Bariţiu, one of the Romanian leaders, visited several Hungarian politicians, but Wesselényi received him with irritation, reproaching him for his lack of patriotism, and accusing the bishop Şaguna of treason because he had allegedly brought a Russian flag from Karlowitz. Wesselényi’s reaction came from fears of the Russian Empire and pan-Slavism, which were widespread among Hungarian politicians and the Hungarian public at large at the time. According to Bariţiu, the Romanian leaders did not even know what the Russian flag looked like, and it did not occur to anybody to look for

60 The red-white-blue colours were horizontally arranged on the flag.

61 Bunea, ‘Steagul poporului român din Transilvania’, 43–5.

62 Ioan cavalier de Puşcariu, *Notiţe despre întâmplările contemporane* (1913), 19.

63 Bunea, ‘Steagul poporului român din Transilvania’, 47.

it.⁶⁴ A little later – likely as a result of this – Romanians in Transylvania started to use the blue-yellow colours. Transylvanian Romanians started to use the red-yellow-blue tricolour only in the dualist period, after 1867.

In the beginning there was great confusion among the Saxons as well. Several cockades were in circulation: the imperial black-yellow one, the Hungarian tricolour, and the Saxon 'national' blue and red colours. However, in May, only the black-yellow imperial colours remained – the rest disappeared.⁶⁵ This initial confusion reflects divisions among the Saxons, and the Saxon elite's search for a position and its vacillation among the preservation of privileges, allegiance to the Emperor, and reaching an agreement with the Hungarians. It also reflects questions of identity. Who were they, actually – Saxons, Imperial Austrians, or Germans?⁶⁶

National colours suddenly appeared, spread, and became widely used in the spring of 1848. The various flags became an integral part of urban landscapes and symbolized the new circumstances. Almost all memoir writers stress the novelty of the situation. It is interesting how ordinary people perceived the transformation of the world around them. One of the Romanian servants of the writer Baron Miklós Jósika went from Hunyad (Hunedoara) County to Kolozsvár at the beginning of March. About the servant, Jósika wrote: 'from Déva on, he could see three-colour banners everywhere. I asked him what he had seen, and he answered – I saw celebration everywhere.'⁶⁷ To the question of what people were celebrating, the servant replied that they celebrated the Germans' banishment of the Emperor, who could never again stand in the way of the serfs' well-being.

64 Ibid. 48–9.

65 Barițiu, *Parti alese din Istori'a Transilvaniei*, 48.

66 In 1848, Austria meant at least three geographic and political entities. The formation process of the German-Austrian identity started during the reign of Joseph II, but it was limited to the German-speaking citizens. As to flags and colours, the red-white-red colours became official for the first time in 1786 as the navy flag. However, until 1918, the official state flag was yellow-black, which were also the colours of the Holy Roman Empire. Ernst Bruckmüller, *Nation Österreich: Kulturelles Bewußtsein und gesellschaftlich-politische Prozesse* (2nd rev. edn, Vienna, 1996), 102–3.

67 Letter of Miklós Jósika to Miklós Wesselényi, Szurduk (Surdac), 29 March 1848, in Pascu and Chereșteșiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849*, i. 188 no. 119.

Here the former serf shattered the myth of the good Emperor in keeping with his master's political preferences.

'The Struggle of Colours'

A campaign to obliterate the black-yellow imperial colours soon began. Pest set the example in this respect as well; there, flags and cockades appeared as early as 15 March, and all imperial symbols were removed at almost the same time. 'The double-headed eagles were removed from the façades of all royal offices and replaced with the national coat of arms. The three national colours were painted over the black-yellow colours.'⁶⁸ On 21 March, the general assembly of Pest County issued a decision on 'the replacement of the Austrian colours and imperial symbols, which had hitherto degraded and mocked the independence and nationality of the country, with the national colours and coat of arms.'⁶⁹

Another type of symbolic conflict is the so-called 'expansionary contest' in which one group attempts to replace the identity symbols of its competitors with its own symbols. The real stake of this contest is the safeguarding of people's political commitments.⁷⁰ Homogeneity is the prerequisite of a united political allegiance, whereas diversity – especially under tense circumstances – seems dangerous. Thus, the national flag did not only symbolize liberty, nationhood, and civil rights, but also served as a threat to other nations. This is how Romanians and Saxons perceived the Hungarian flags that appeared at the diet held in Kolozsvár (Cluj) in May 1848. One of the Hungarian participants wrote: 'public morale is aptly characterized by the following inscription on the national flags: "Union

68 *Életképek*, 17 March, in Ferenc Bay, ed., *1848–49 a korabeli napilapok tükrében* (Budapest, 1943), 19.

69 Pandula, 'Zászlók és lobogók 1848–1849-ben', 177.

70 Harrison, 'Four Types of Symbolic Conflict', 263–5.

or death!”⁷¹ As a result of the menacing atmosphere, the Greek Catholic bishop Lemény and the deputy from Nagyszeben (Sibiu, Hermannstadt), Konrad Schmidt, went through the streets holding the Hungarian flag in their hands to reassure Hungarians that Romanians and Saxons had joined them. The flag played an important role during the celebrations that followed the enactment of the union. After the crowd escorted the Governor General home, it stopped in front of the city hall, from the balcony of which a deputy from Pest handed a flag to the city of Kolozsvár.

In areas primarily inhabited by Romanians, the appearance of Romanian national symbols frightened the Hungarians. The chief judge from Abrudbánya (Abrud) reported on the meetings from his area and that, in the town, the Orthodox and Greek Catholic teachers, students, and ‘more intelligent youngsters’ wore ‘exclusively the blue and white ribbon’, which made ‘the Hungarian area of the town very frightened.’⁷² It was not by chance that in May a printer’s aid from Transylvania wrote that the Croats and Serbs in Hungary had hoisted ‘the flag of rebellion.’⁷³

Where national colours did not cause fear, their divisive power baffled contemporaries. Count Lajos Gyulai wrote of one of his lovers: ‘Despite her Saxon origin, Hinna does not show repulsion towards the Hungarian tricolour ... [But] one Saxon lady ... tied a national ribbon around the tail of her poodle out of mockery, so great was her hatred of the Hungarians.’⁷⁴

Thus the struggle of colours broke out between Hungarians and Saxons as well. The bone of contention was union with Hungary. The Saxon elite, based in Nagyszeben, used every means to protest against unionist plans. On 30 March, Count Olivér Bethlen organized a banquet in honour of the union, and the young noblemen planned a torch procession. In response, Saxon citizens, waving black-yellow flags, demonstrated against union in

71 Bisztray, *A régi Erdély*, 297.

72 Károly Nagy, Chief Judge of Abrudbánya to the Governor, 6 April, in Pascu and Chereșteșiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849*, i. 312 no. 202.

73 Imreh, *Visszaemlékezés*, 37.

74 Gyulai, *Naplói*, 19.

front of Bethlen's house.⁷⁵ A few days later, the governor announced that the union had been decided upon. The Saxons perceived this as another provocation. That evening there was a demonstration at the theatre where the imperial anthem was sung before and after the performance, the black-yellow flag was waved, and anti-unionist slogans were shouted.⁷⁶ A first lieutenant named Walstein distributed black-yellow cockades, brought from Vienna, among the citizens of Nagyszeben, and the following day the imperial flag was hoisted on the town hall.⁷⁷ In Brassó, however, as a sign of acceptance of the union of Transylvania with Hungary, Saxon citizens placed a red-yellow flag of the *Universitas Saxorum* on the town hall on which they had pinned a red-white-green ribbon.⁷⁸ According to the local Saxon newspaper, the *Siebenbürger Wochenblatt*, this was more telling than any other act.⁷⁹ When the Saxon civil guard was created, their basic rule stipulated that their flag was white, bearing on one side the national coat of arms and the inscription *Ad retinendam Coronam*,⁸⁰ and on the other, the coat of arms of the respective seat and the inscription *Für Fürst, Recht und Vaterland* (For the Sovereign, the Law, and the Fatherland).⁸¹

75 Carl Göllner, 'Revolutionsjahre 1848–1849', in Carl Göllner, ed., *Die Siebenbürger Sachsen in den Jahren 1848–1918* (Cologne, 1988), 6.

76 Hans Schenk, 'Am Vorabend der Union. Ein Schreiben aus Hermannstadt an die Frankfurter Nationalvertretung 1848', *Zeitschrift für Siebenbürgische Landeskunde*, 20/1 (1997), 22.

77 Göllner, 'Revolutionsjahre 1848–1849', 7. According to other sources, he was a lieutenant-colonel.

78 For instance, in Vukovar in March, on the news of the revolution in Pest, people marched holding Hungarian and Slav (red-white-blue) flags, while the adepts of the union, bore red-white-green-blue ones. Pandula, 'Zászlók és lobogók 1848–1849-ben', 179.

79 *Siebenbürger Wochenblatt* (20 April 1848), 185. Quoted in Bunea, 'Steagul poporului român din Transilvania', 38–9.

80 One of the important elements of premodern and modern Saxon identity was the fact that they had been brought to the country by the Hungarian kings in order to 'defend the crown'.

81 'Vorschrift zur verfassungsmäßigen Einrichtung der Bürgerwehr im Mittel der Sächsischen Nation', in Pascu and Chereșteșiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849*, i. 219 no. 139.

The civil guard in Medgyes (Mediaş, Mediasch) had been created earlier, and favoured different colours. The local Romanian protopope complained about the attitude of the local Saxons towards Romanians, and noted that members of the Saxon civil guard wore a certain cockade on their clothes: 'the red-white-blue, and not green.'⁸² The flag of the national guard from Szászrégen (Reghin, Sächsisch-Regen) contained the coat of arms of Transylvania on one side, while the other side was black-red-yellow.⁸³

The appearance of German colours signalled that the Saxons had become increasingly disappointed with the Habsburgs after the enactment of the union, and had come closer to Germany.⁸⁴ This tendency only strengthened later, during the dualist period. They tried to find support against the union with Hungary in Germany, at the Frankfurt Parliament. Saxon intellectuals elaborated the theory of double attachment, as expressed in one of the petitions that Stefan Ludwig Roth sent to the Frankfurt Parliament in the name of the Siebenbürgisch-Deutscher Jugendbund. The basic idea of the text is that the Saxons are a German outpost in the east, and despite geographical separation from the motherland, the Saxon press, universities, journeymen, memories, and future hopes 'are linked to Germany and live through Germany.'⁸⁵ However, in spite of disappointment in the Habsburgs, the Saxons had to take a stand, and by the beginning of October they were virtually united in their support for the Monarchy.

The differences in flags symbolized political disunity among the nationalities. The nationality question overshadowed all the other questions. As the famous Saxon historian Friedrich Teutsch wrote: 'the nationality question was decisive, and in the case of the Saxons, the issue that

82 The letter of the protopope Ștefan Moldovan to the Bishop, Medgyes (Mediaş, Mediasch), 7 April 1848, in Pascu and Chereșteșiu, eds, *Revoluția de la 1848–1849*, i. 333 no. 209.

83 Pandula, 'Zászlók és lobogók 1848–1849-ben', 182.

84 The process was complex and some of its premises were present earlier.

85 The letter closes with the following phrase: 'Wir wollen sein und bleiben, was wir immer gewesen sind, ein ehrlich deutsches Volk und auch ehrliche treue Bürger desjenigen Staates, dem wir angehören. Eines verträgt sich sehr gut mit dem Andern: ja, Eins ist uns nur möglich bei dem Andern.' Quoted in Konrad Gündisch, *Siebenbürger Sachsen* (Munich, 1998), 134–5.

came to the fore in every debate on the union was what was to be done to secure the future of the Saxon nation.⁸⁶

In an ethnic context, national symbols often come into conflict. The war of representations – flags, anthems, and place names that Arnold van Gennep dubs the external elements of a nation – often coincides with a struggle for control of an area.⁸⁷ Thus, flags were also expressions of the symbolic space of the nation. This is borne out by a remark made by Károly Bisztray, a young clerk at the Gubernium and a future *Honvéd* officer, who travelled from Kolozsvár to Fogaras (Făgăraș, Fogarasch) in the summer of 1848:

This trip became noteworthy due to the fact that in every town that we went through, there was a different flag hoisted on the towers. In the towns of Torda [Turda], Felvinc [Vințul de Sus], Nagyenyed [Aiud], Tövis [Teiuș], and Gyulafehérvár [Alba Iulia, Karlsburg], national three-colour flags were waving in the wind. In Szászsebes [Sebeș, Mühlbach], Szerdahely [Miercurea Sibiului, Reussmarkt], Nagypold [Apoldu de Sus, Gross-Polden], Kereszténysziget [Cristian, Grossau], and Nagyszeben [Sibiu, Hermannstadt] there were red-white German national flags, at Felek [Feleac] there were Saxon and Romanian, i.e. blue-yellow flags. In Nagyszeben and on the fortress and military buildings in Gyulafehérvár, there were yellow-black imperial flags. The flags of nationalities and the Empire appeared to me as a sign of protest against the Union, filling me with anger and great sadness. But the Union was solemnly enacted by the Diet and received the King's sanction, thus, it undoubtedly became universally binding. The sheer magnitude of opposition angered me. The Saxons, whom our kings had welcomed to our homeland and awarded huge estates and extensive privileges, the Romanians, who were liberated from serfdom by the magnanimity of the Hungarians: Are they showing their gratitude for the goodwill they received by demonstrating against a binding law? What does this horrible ingratitude deserve? Moreover, the hoisting of the yellow-black flag seemed outright dubious to me.⁸⁸

The turning of nationalities against one another was even more visible in multi-ethnic regions. In Fogaras, the tricoloured national flag was hoisted only on the Catholic and Calvinist churches, while the red-white

86 Friedrich Teutsch, *Die Siebenbürger Sachsen in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart* (Sibiu, 1924), 209.

87 Zoltán Fejős, 'Kollektív emlékezet és az etnikai identitás megszerkesztése', in László Diószegi, ed., *Magyarágkutatás 1995–96* (Budapest, 1996), 135.

88 Bisztray, *A régi Erdély*, 297.

flag was hoisted on the Lutheran church, the Romanian yellow-blue flag on the Greek Catholic church, and the imperial black-yellow flag on the highest north-western tower of the Apafi castle. The acting bishop opposed the hoisting of the Romanian flag on the tower of the Greek Catholic church, and claimed:

'But we are in Hungary!' Bisztray challenged the Lutheran pastor for allowing the German flag to fly from his church, and the pastor justified his action by claiming that a delegation from Nagyszeben had hoisted it. Bisztray also asked Sámuel Kis, the fortress commander, what the flag on the fortress tower signified. The commander replied that he had raised it on orders from the royal-imperial chief military command in Nagyszeben, as an indication that the Army and fortress garrison 'remained loyal to the oath that they pledged to the flag.'⁸⁹

Each flag hoisted corresponded to a political discourse. The young Hungarian rightfully noted that the Romanian and Austrian, as well as the German flags, 'each represented a sign of protest against the Union'. This was truly the case, just as the flag hoisted on the fortress represented the loyalty of the army to the emperor. As the Hungarians wanted to express their identity, Romanians and Saxons, who felt threatened by this new identity, wanted to do the same.

Conclusions

Symbolic conflicts may appear in the form of valuation contests. In this case:

the issue at stake is the ranking of symbols of the competing groups' identities; their ranking, that is to say, according to some criterion of worth such as prestige, legitimacy or sacredness. ... Finally, valuation contests pervade all that one normally thinks of as political theatre; that is, political factionalism manifested in expressive events such as parades, marches, rallies and demonstrations.⁹⁰

89 Ibid. 301–2.

90 Harrison, 'Four Types of Symbolic Conflict', 256 and 257.

A valuation contest of this sort was going on in Transylvania in 1848–49. It is telling that in this period that witnessed an explosive creation of national symbols, nobody came up with the idea of a common Transylvanian flag. Moreover, on 30 March, when the traditionally Hungarian-dominated Transylvanian Diet convened to enact the union, the Transylvanian flag was symbolically taken down and replaced with a Hungarian flag brought from Pest.⁹¹

The nationalities in Transylvania searched for new identities by turning against one another. The diversity of flags reflected the fragmentation of Transylvanian identity. The Hungarians saw the solution in union with Hungary, and this is why they adopted Hungarian national symbols. In a response, however, Romanians and Saxons did not present the symbols of a common Transylvania, but instead either the imperial colours, as a symbol of their allegiance to the emperor, or their own national colours, as an expression of national identity.⁹² Anthropologists have indicated that within ethnically divided societies the nationalization of objects, places, and symbols by one ethnicity triggers a similar response from the other. Rival historicizing discourses and national rites become part of the nation-building process.⁹³

91 Trócsányi, *Habsburg-politika és Habsburg-kormányzat Erdélyben*, 536.

92 From this perspective, it is interesting to mention the ongoing research on Austrian identity and national symbols. Also in this case, the differentiation between the German national and 'Austrian' imperial identity became increasingly notable during the nineteenth century. The former was symbolized by the black-red-gold colours, while the latter was symbolized by the black-yellow colours (*schwarz-gelb*). Besides, Austrian symbols increasingly lost ground in comparison with the German ones. There was an attempt at strengthening the idea that imperial consciousness ranked higher than national consciousness among diplomats, functionaries, and members of the army. Ernst Bruckmüller, 'Österreichbegriff und Österreichbewußtsein in franzisko-josephinischen Epoche', in Richard G. Plaschka, Gerald Stourzh, and Jan Paul Niederkorn, eds, *Was heißt Österreich? Inhalt und Umfang des Österreichbegriffs vom 10. Jahrhundert bis heute* (Vienna, 1995), 274–6.

93 In recent years Margit Feischmidt has analysed several similar symbolic conflicts between the Hungarians and Romanians. Feischmidt, 'Szimbolikus konfliktusok és párhuzamos nemzetépítés: Az erdélyi nemzeti rítusokról és diskurzusokról a kolozsvári Mátyás-szobor körüli 1992-es konfliktus példáján', in András A. Gergely, ed., *A nemzet*

Culture creates an internal identity on the one hand, and foments external differences on the other. Increased internal unity strengthens external boundaries, since nothing unites groups more tightly than delineation from a hostile environment. The creation of a so-called restrictive structure is directed against the culture perceived as dominant (that of the majority in the case of minorities), and this in turn enables the transformation of culture into a cult.⁹⁴ 1848 was a particular turning point in the history of Transylvanian nationalities. The sudden crumbling of old frameworks provoked a convulsion. In this context there was a greater need for symbols and rites: 'The religious momentum of identity strengthened by dissociation lies in the claim for distinctiveness of the collective consciousness: it wants to encompass *everybody* and *everything*. Every other difference fades in the light of the *unique* decisive distinction.'⁹⁵ But in this case distinctiveness also generated counter-reactions, and a struggle which started at the symbolic level degenerated into a bloody civil war by the autumn of 1848.

antropológiája (Hofer Tamás köszöntése) (Budapest, 2002), 112–25. For the history from the perspective of an anthropologist, see Feischmidt, 'Az 1848-as forradalmak százötven éves évfordulója Magyarországon és a magyar kisebbségek körében', in *Ünnep – hét-köznap – emlékezet. Társadalom- és kultúrtörténet határmezsgyéjén. A Hajnal István Kör – Társadalomtörténeti Egyesület konferenciája, Szécsény, 2000. augusztus 24–26* (Salgótarján, 2002), 290–305.

94 See: Jan Assmann, *A kulturális emlékezet: Írás, emlékezés és politikai identitás a korai magaskultúrákban* (Budapest, 1999), 150–4 [Ger. orig., *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992)].

95 Ibid. 154.

