

## Minority Culture

*Péter Pál Tóth***CREATIVITY  
AND STRESS AMONG HUNGARINAS LIVING  
AS NATIONAL MINORITIES**

According to János Selye's widely-known definition, stress is "the unity of obsolescence processes concomitant with life" which is not necessarily a pathological change since the human body is always exposed to wear and tear even under normal conditions, and in certain respect "stress might have even a curing effect" (1). In Selye's opinion, while one group of changes brought about by stress is unambiguously harmful, the other helps the human organism to resist stress itself. These two major groups, or even the whole of the stress-generated changes, are termed by him as a general adaptation syndrome which develops in stages: from (1) alarm reaction, through (2) resistance, and up to (3) the state of exhaustion. To counterbalance stress, various systems seek to keep the human organism sound and functioning in a healthy way. Selye calls this state homeostasis.

At this point, we pose the question of whether Selye's stress theory, which was originally related to the physiological processes of the individual, can be applied to the fields of societal life.

In our opinion – without identifying society with the living organism and without relating societal functioning and "phenomena of life" to processes going on in the living organism – stress, i.e., a wide range of heavily burdening effects, both physical and psychological, may influence and determine human life in micro- and macro-communities just as well as in the cases of cells, organisms or individuals. Analogically, then, stress theory may be adopted to understanding social processes as well as the activities Hungarians living as national minorities

The following part of this paper aims to examine the question of whether a community of individuals, males and females of various ages and educational levels living in national minority status, such as Hungarian minorities who have been living for over seventy years in countries of a different historical, past and present, may be relieved from the effect of stress. To answer this question is the more difficult since in those countries where Hungarians form a major national minority group, the majority nation or rather the official policy which represents that majority is not

---

## Minority Culture

interested in revealing the actual situation; thus, conducting a comparative empirical investigation is not possible. Moreover, the officially published data on national minorities are inaccurate and not easy of access.

The situation is made even more difficult by the fact that the relationship between creativity and stress among national minorities, including Hungarians, has not yet been scrutinized. Thus, with only the available data and a secondary analysis of data published so far, the best we can produce for now is an attempt to formulate a working hypothesis which might be applied to Hungarians living as national minorities in the neighbouring countries. Before treating this question, however, the process of becoming a national minority should be dealt with briefly.

Of the highly ramified and complex problems involved in this process, only those connected with the actual formation or genesis of national minorities will be examined here. I wish to make it clear from the beginning that however natural the existence of a national minority may seem, no form of that life may be regarded as natural or normal since the minority is always under shadow of the threat, open or latent, that is inherent in the minority life. It is an inevitable consequence that both the majority and the minority strive to ease or eliminate this unnatural state. There are several ways to put an end to this conflict, and these can be reduced to two basic forms. In the majority's view, assimilating a national minority is, theoretically, the best possible solution, while the minority, quite naturally, looks upon their own independence as the only answer. The particular types of transition which may be possible in regard to these two strategies, as well as methods by which or the extent to which such transitional strategies can be realized effectively, all depend on the intricate system of external and internal power relations.

The character of national minority life is determined essentially by the process through which it became a national minority. Three basic types of this process may be identified: national minorities generated by (1) organic development, (2) inorganic development, and (3) the diaspora. Within each type, of course, several sub-types may be found but these will not be dealt with here.

The first or organic type of becoming a national minority is connected with the historical process of the formation of national states such as, for example, France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and the Netherlands. In these countries, the organic type of development occurred among their Basque, Briton, Catalanian, Flemish, Friulian, Frisian, Gallegian, Sorbian, etc., ethnic groups. And naturally, prior to 1918, the same process

---

## Minority Culture

was taking place in the case of national minorities who had been living in the territory of the one-time (or "historical") Hungary. In the case of the inorganic type of development, a certain nation or part of it become a national minority as a consequence of a political decision or annexation of that minority's native country or part thereof by another nation. The result of such an aggression may possibly be legitimized by power-policy decisions (pacts, peace, forced unification, and the like).

Unfortunately, history has produced a number of examples of the inorganic development of a national minority; here two sub-types may be clearly distinguished. The first sub-type includes peoples who were reduced to minority status by annexation, and who were granted a kind of independence in the new state formations. The situation of Tibetans in China is a case in point and the same applies to Letts, Lithuanians and Estonians in the former Soviet Union. In the second sub-type of inorganic development, only part of the given population is forced to become citizens of another state formation. There are many examples of this sub-type too. It will suffice to refer only to Hungarians living as national minorities in the neighbouring countries, and to Germans in Southern Tyrol.

The organic and inorganic processes of becoming a national minority are basically different. While the former follows naturally from social development, the latter results from the forcible subjection of the given ethnic group. This implies that development of the organic type, in connection with the formation of national states, takes a long time, while development of the inorganic type is violent and brief. The fact of violence is certainly not modified by the fact that the victorious powers consider the occupation or annexation of the given territory along with its inhabitants to be justified and legitimate nor by the fact that annexation may have been carried out by treaty. The time that actually elapses between the conquest or annexation of a given territory and the reduction of the related population to minority status is of secondary importance. This time lag is not really a decisive factor in the entire process because, in minority – majority and majority – minority relations, it is the particular genesis of becoming a minority that counts and will be borne in mind regardless of how long it took to subjugate the population. The essence of all this can be grasped only in conqueror – subject relations.

The organic and inorganic processes have one common feature: in both cases the given population becomes a national minority in its own native land. Furthermore, it is worthy of note that in the case of inorganic development the ethnic group reduced to minority status always has a

---

## Minority Culture

parent nation (except in the situation where one country annexes another country as a whole), while in the organic case it is not possible, nor is it necessary, that the given national minority have a parent nation.

Among national minorities origination or living in the diaspora, the basic motives, or more precisely, the main determinants, of the external migration may be well observed. Relying on such observations, further subtypes can be identified.

In the context of the present study, in minority – majority and majority – minority relations, *stress is regarded as being the unity of assimilation processes which accompany the minority life. The reaction of minorities to this stress may generate certain faculties which enable the minority peoples to adjust themselves continuously to the actual situation and to resist both natural trends and forced political assimilation efforts in their struggle for survival and for the recognition of their ethnic characteristics and their dignity as national minorities.* (It is also implied here that, – in addition to stress –, anomia and other deviant phenomena concomitant with the functioning of society are also regarded as belonging to the normal state of society.)

Creativity is understood here as the minority's ability to preserve, develop and improve its particular ethnic, historical, cultural, linguistic, communal and other similar traits and traditions. Otherwise, the afore-mentioned conceptual approach only formally corresponds to János Selye's definition, however, in connection with the minority status, the concepts of stress and creativity should be used along with the concepts of adaptation or acculturation used so far. The actual situation of a national minority is determined by several circumstances; in addition to legal, political, cultural and economic conditions, factors pertaining to certain fields of psychology and social psychology are also important, and against this broader conceptual background, we may have a deeper insight into the actual situation of a national minority and in its real position and role in the given society.

Stress as the unity of assimilation processes, then, accompanies and coexists with the minority life and cannot be separated from it. In contrast to all this, various analyses, above all papers welcoming the "results" of the individual official policies towards national minorities as well as report veiling the real political practice of certain countries, try to prove the acceptance of the foreign patterns, i.e., those of the conquerors, and the reception and acquiring of the majority nation's language, script, culture, customs, and so forth, to put it briefly: the complete subjugation and des-

---

## Minority Culture

olation of national minorities are represented in those writings as an unambiguously "positive" and "desirable" process in the minority life. In reality, however, since assimilation, for the minority, is ultimately tantamount to giving up both its own values and its unlikeness to the majority, on the one hand, and to receiving the particular values of another, majority, nation, on the other, neither the organic nor the inorganic (i.e., forced political) type of assimilation can be accepted by national minorities as a normal process. Undoubtedly, assimilation may really offer a richer and more perfect life to national minorities, provided they have the opportunity to preserve, even develop and fulfill, their identity so that coexistence will not cause injuries and will not cause or strengthen negative processes. (The enrichment and fullness of the minority life is still an idyllic image of a desired and much hoped-for future rather than the reality of our days.)

It also follows from what has been stated above that in the case of Hungarians living a national minorities in Austria, in the Slovak Republic, in the Ukraine and in Romania and Yugoslavia, creativity and stress with all their implications are essentially determined by the manner in which the Hungarians originally became national minorities and were forced to remain in that status after World War II (2). After the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1918, the emerging new states – with the aid of the Entente Powers – annexed territories inhabited not only by peoples belonging to their own respective ethnic units but also by Hungarians, who accounted for a considerable if not higher percentage of the populations (3). The occupying powers considered such annexations to be justified by the peace treaties with which the great powers concluded World War I – and which were contrary to the declared principles of those powers – and thus these regions along with their populations have remained in the possession of the occupying countries (4). In consequence of the will of the victorious powers of World War I and World War II, which powers ignored their own interests in the long run, and due to the greed of Hungary's neighbours, Hungarians in large numbers were reduced to minority status practically in an instant. According to what has been said above, this is a typically inorganic form of becoming a national minority. the results of these decisions, which are clearly connected with the formation of the so-called successor states and with the related interests of the Entente Powers, are clearly shown in the table below:

## Minority Culture

Changes in Hungary's area and population resulting  
from the Trianon Peace Treaty (1920)

Country (to which territories were attached)	Area of attached territory (sq.km)	Number of total population	Of which: Hungarians
Czechoslovakia	63 004	3,567 575	1 072 000
Romania	102 181	5,236 305	1,664 000
Serbo-Croatian-Slo- venian Kingdom	21 031	1,519 013	459 000
Austria	4 026	292 588	26 000
<b>Total</b>	<b>190,242</b>	<b>10,615.481</b>	<b>3,221.000</b>

Hungarians living as national minorities became citizens and at the same time "minorities" of another, newly created state formation as a result of power-policy decisions rather than of the organic development of a former situation. Accordingly, the concept of *Hungarians living as national minorities* does not express either the process of how they became a national minority or their then existing and present status; therefore, they should rather be described as *part of the Hungarian nation that became citizens of foreign states*. This definition seems to be more adequate even if certain countries, referring to, e.g., historical, ethnic rights or the interest of achieving economic and strategic goals, will not accept it (5).

The process of becoming a national minority, in the Hungarian case as well as in others, has up to now determined the relation of the majority people to Hungarians, and conversely, that of Hungarians to the majorities. However, the content of this relationship is determined not so much by a policy towards nationalities, which pays due attention to the dignity of national traits and through this to the mutual enrichment of values, as by a struggle for creating a homogeneous national state. Subject to this objective, the official policies of the discussed countries, expressing the majority interests and often even falsifying historical facts, have continuously restricted and are still restricting the opportunities of the Hungarian populations annexed to their respective countries and impede the cultivation of the Hungarian culture, traditions, consciousness, vernacular, and so forth (6).

In their attempts to assimilate national minorities, the majority nations tend to regard Hungarians, who are numerically very significant even now, as a major obstacle in the way of achieving this end. This inevitably

---

## Minority Culture

gave rise to the adverse policies towards national minorities that the neighbouring countries have conducted over the past seven decades. On this account, Hungary's neighbours, whatever their socio-political system, have sought to change the ethnic composition of territories annexed to them and to assimilate Hungarians forcibly. This attempt at assimilation resulted in a stress situation exceeding the normal for minority Hungarians. Consequently, in the Hungarian case, as well as with other national minorities, a one-sided or deformed assimilation processes may be found. Under the circumstances, then, national minorities struggle, above all, to survive and to prevent the most determined, politically oriented attempts to forcibly assimilate them with the majority.

Owing to the fact that the particular local effects of socialism as it existed in Hungary's individual neighbour countries were different, the practice of assimilation, one-sided or asymmetric, and other factors have varied markedly from one country to another up to now; within this, there have also been certain distinct periods in each country. Hence it follows that in the case of Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries (as well as with other national minorities), a deformed assimilation process can be found. Such cases are called "A"-type stress since they involve not only a stress interpreted as the unity of assimilation processes accompanying the minority life but also its variants; namely, the creativity of a minority, which serves to counterbalance stress, i.e., to preserve ethnic traits, encounters serious difficulties. Consequently, "A"-type stress is regarded as being the unit of assimilation processes going on among national minorities that originated from the inorganic development, including a faculty which enables the minority peoples to preserve their own ethnicity and to resist forced assimilation efforts by the majorities. This also includes their ability to adjust themselves continuously and necessarily to natural trends and to the adverse policies towards national minorities which ignore the dignity of ethnic traits.

Over the past seven and half decades, historical events in the discussed countries have shown that the political regimes, which succeeded and often conflicted with one another, have not exercised any self-constraint in using every applicable means to eliminate the Hungarian minorities. In this regard, one needs only to remember such facts as the citizenship-less state of Hungarians in Yugoslavia after 1918, subsequent massacres (in Romania, in the Soviet Union and in Yugoslavia), the lack of citizenship of Hungarian in Czechoslovakia between 1944 and 1947, detention camps for Hungarians (in Romania, the Soviet Union

---

## Minority Culture

and Yugoslavia), the forcible resettlement of Hungarians in other countries or the expulsion of Hungarians from their native land to Hungary, not to mention many other restrictions and curtailments, all considered as "legal" (7).

The situation of Hungarians living in Austria, the Slovak Republic, the Ukraine, Romania and Yugoslavia has been particularly influenced by the fact that they have had to adjust themselves continuously not only to a foreign power structure but also to the widely different language, culture, customs, traditions, etc. of the majority nation. In addition, they have always had to face those prejudices which the former minority peoples, with or without foundation, have invariably held against them.

An important landmark in the life of Hungarians living as national minorities was the period 1944–1945 when Soviet-type Bolshevik take-overs occurred in all the above countries except Austria. In their formative periods, these Bolshevik-type state powers, while coining slogans about the elimination of class oppression and social defenselessness, also promised to put an end to the subjugation and ruination of the national minorities. They made these peoples believe that the proletarian dictatorship along with Marxist ideology and political practice based thereon would deny and reject any kind of discrimination against national minorities (and they firmly maintained these pretensions until the regimes themselves collapsed). They also put forth that their minority policies would guarantee not only the mere survival of national minorities but also the manifold development and unfolding of the minority values. In this context, according to the official wording, it was only natural that national minorities would have full rights in every aspect of life. However, the bald fact is that these countries, in contrast to declared principles, took advantage of an unprecedented opportunity to eliminate the national minorities.

It can also be pointed out that when the political interest so desired, processes contrary to the official political objectives also took place; these were temporary, however, and could be termed as the method of "letting off steam". Beyond doubt, there were periods when national minorities, Hungarians and others, had a "breathing space". This was not to mean that legal measures afflicting the national minorities had been abrogated or that a former, more favorable situation had been restored. Namely, when the main motives for this kind of relaxation ceased, the adverse policy towards nationalities would be resumed along with further curtailments.

---

## Minority Culture

Adding to all this were, among others, the following factors:

- 1) Despite experience gained in the interwar periods, the Great Powers that emerged victorious from World War II *relegated the cause of national minorities to the jurisdiction of the individual countries*. With this they put an end to even the minimum level of legal protection of national minorities which formerly had been provided for in one form or another within the framework of the League of Nations.
- 2) Squaring its practice with Bolshevik principles, a state power is intolerant of any unlikeness; this follows precisely from the homogenizing ideology which determines the state's policy; thus, countries under the state socialist social system were opposed to national minorities from the outset. The nationalization of land, commerce and industry deprived the national minorities, along with the majorities, of their material independence, while the struggle against clericalism reduced the believers, Catholic or Calvinist Hungarians, to the state of "enemies of the people's democracy". Urban development and the location of industry were used to change the ethnic composition of Hungarian-inhabited regions. It can be observed that the totalitarian state power, ignoring human rights, was taking advantage, to the fullest possible extent, of the defenseless situation of national minorities who had been deprived of their autonomy as well as of their various associations, institutions and minor communities (8).
- 3) In countries living under the state socialist social system, the central political power possessed all the means to put its Party-determined policy into practice and to implement it in minority relations.
- 4) A Bolshevik-type state power was developed in Hungary too. As a result, the state not only failed for a long time to support Hungarians living in the neighboring countries but even contributed to worsening the situation of Hungarians living as national minorities since the state, either consciously or unconsciously, in conformity with the true nature of the ruling socio-political system and ideology, tended to abandon the Hungarian minorities and even to prohibit any concern about them (9). After 1956, the scope of free action of the Hungarian political leadership was narrowed down by the fact that on November 4, 1956, the Yugoslavian leaders had "invited" Imre Nagy and his staff to the Yugoslavian Embassy in Budapest, and subsequently the Romanian leaders rendered similar "friendly" services to János Kádár's government.

---

## Minority Culture

- 5) In interpreting the official political attitude, whether Hungarian, Czechoslovakian or Romanian, to be taken into account is the direct or indirect effect which was to be produced by these countries to comply with the Soviet expectations; namely, furthering the uniformity of the Soviet Bloc.

As it appears from the afore-mentioned five points, *political practice related to national minorities, which endangers the very existence of Hungarian minorities, can be identified in practically all – legal, political, religious, economic, cultural, scientific and other – spheres of the minority life.* This can be seen in such acts as falsifying history, preventing the cultivation of national consciousness, curtailing the minorities' economic activities, stepping down university education, limiting the use of the mother tongue and the free exercise of religion, closing down or curtailing institutions, restricting relations with the parent country, and so forth.

The situation of Hungarian minorities, as different from that of the majorities, is determined essentially by the genesis of their becoming a minority, and their assimilation is characterized by what has been defined above as "A"-type stress. In pursuance of the nature of the "A"-type stress, it should be said that the majority tends to regard the Hungarian minority (along with other national minorities) not simply as a minority but as a foreign body which endangers the essence and territorial integrity of the given country. Therefore, to the majority mind, their minority-related tasks included not only social, legal, educational, cultural, political and similar issues but also had internal security implications, and were dealt with accordingly. All this is related to the reducing or closing down of the institutions of national minorities, to hindering their self-organization, as well as to policies affecting every field of the minority life.

Although these facts are all widely known, national minorities are nonetheless prevented by well-founded and constant fears and by the conditioning of the majority practice from revealing and making known their *actual* situation. (However, to tell the truth, it should be added that they have not had any opportunity to speak out until recently, and the objective description of their plight even now encounters insurmountable difficulties.) This situation permits the disclosure of a "short-reality" only, and all that is truly important about the aspects of "landscape and soul", or, otherwise worded, about the aspect of Hungarian minorities, has remained hidden behind the utterable and namable things (10).

To sum up, it may be established that the deformed assimilation process which corresponds to the "A"-type stress among Hungarian minorities has

advanced to a considerable extent. To wit, the majority people expect the Hungarian minority to break off its relations with and ties to the parent nation; in other words, they wish and demand the denial of all that is connected with the preservation of the Hungarian identity. To describe what all this has called forth among Hungarians living as national minorities in the Serbian Republic of Yugoslavia, a few key-words from Sándor Hódi's above-cited study will suffice: rootlessness, weakening instinct for life, desolation, assuming false identity, continuous threat, imitation of existence, idle expectation, lack of defence, subjection, impoverishment, deprivation, fright, disintegration of community cohesion, identity crisis, lack of sound intellectual and mental bearing (*Haltung*), anxiety, homelessness, escape, uncertainty, lack of ethnic consciousness, remorse, infantilization, dropping out, dispersion, suspicion, hopelessness, indifference, lack of perspective, self-abasement, hypocrisy (11).

What this "A"-typical stress means in practice and how well these concepts describe the situation of Hungarian national minorities can be characterized by some demographic data related to the Hungarian minority living in the Serbian Republic of Yugoslavia. Namely, in the Voivodship where the overwhelming majority of Hungarians living in the Serbian Republic can be found, the number of Hungarian births was 9,500 in 1950; this number had dropped to 7,091 in 1960, to 4,915 in 1970, and to 3,815 in 1989. While the birthrate has steadily decreased, mortality has increased: the number of deaths was 4,897 in 1960, 5,509 in 1970, 6,225 in 1980, and 6,193 in 1988. Various process, which intensify one another, brought about the following changes in the number of population. According to statistical figures for 1948, the number of Hungarian inhabitants in the Voivodship was 428,750; this number had fallen to 423,866 by 1971 and to 385,356 by 1981. Presently, this number is estimated at about 350,000. Thus, over the past forty years, the number of Hungarians living in the Serbian Republic has decreased by almost 80,000 persons (12).

### Notes and references

- (1) Selye, János: *Életünk és a stress* (Our life and the stress) Budapest, 1965. pp. 21.
- (2) Nagy, Zsuzsa L.: *Peacemaking after World War I: The Western Democracies and the Hungarian Question*. pp. 33–48.; Kovrig, Bennett: *Peacemaking after World War II. The End of the Myth of National Self-Determination*. See: pp. 69–85, in *Hungarians: Divided Nation*. Ed. Stephen Borsody. New Haven, 1988.
- (3) See: *Magyarország története* (The History of Hungary) vol. 8. Budapest, 1976. pp. 349–387.

---

Minority Culture

- (4) Popély, Gyula: A felvidéki sorsforduló (Change of Fortune in Northern Hungary). In: Regio, 2, pp. 90–99.  
Popély, Gyula: Nappogyakozás (A csehszlovákiai magyarság a népszámlálások tükrében 1918–1945). (Decrease of a People. Hungarians in Czechoslovakia as Reflected by Censuses). Regio ed. (Budapest, 1991.)
- (5) Czechoslovakia is an exception in this respect since in 1990, President Havel, followed by others, spoke of Hungarians now living in Czechoslovakia as part of the Hungarian nation annexed to Czechoslovakia
- (6) See: Hetven év – a romániai magyarság története (Seventy Years – the History of Hungarians in Romania). Budapest, Institute for Hungarian Studies. p. 160. – Janics, Kálmán: A hontalanság évei. (Years of Homelessness) Berne, 1980. p. 322.
- (7) Boldizsár, Iván: Megbűnhődte már e nép ... (This nation has already atoned ...). Budapest, 1946. pp. 53–661, 662–676.
- (8) Tóth, Pál Péter: Esélyeink (Our Chances). In: Tekintet. 8, 1989. pp. 76–84.
- (9) Tóth, Pál Péter: Magyarok kisebbségben (Hungarians in Minority). In: INFO Társadalomtudomány 10, 1989. p. 25.
- (10) Hódi, Sándor. Táj és lélek (Landscape and Soul). In: Új Symposium. 9, 1989. p. 3.
- (11) Hódi, Sándor: op.cil.
- (12) Mirnics, Károly: Az asszimiláció hatása a természetes népmozgalomra (Kézirat) (The effect of assimilation on the natural population changes). Manuscript to be published in Regio, 3, 1991)