

Chapter 1

Introduction: Regions, Identities, and Remote Borderlands

I went up to him and took his hand telling him to come with me for I wanted to ask something important. Friendly, he followed me almost dancing. After a few steps I placed my hand on his shoulder, looked deeply in his eyes and said, "Your soul is very pure now, tell me: why are we on this earth?" The black man's face froze for a moment, then he began to laugh. He said, "Strange, strange, very strange." Again he froze, stared at me and replied, "We are on this earth so we will be at home somewhere."

—Á. Tamási, *Ábel Amerikában*, 638

Territorial disputes, border skirmishes, and increasing local ethnonational violence have been with us ever since the Berlin Wall was chiseled away. Since 1989, contested terrains have become key elements in redesigning the new Central and Eastern Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, as scholars have increasingly noted, contemporary Europe is "characterized by the emergence of new forms of nationalism and regionalism."¹ This is in fact the primary aim in this study: to locate the origin and forms of contestation and representation of territoriality in the processes of national identity formation and the recreation of national consciousness among Hungarians. The negotiation of national identities, however, is not a recent nor a specific East European form of nationalism. Such contestations began in Western Europe in the 1970s, and their forms and results are discussed in many excellent studies.²

In the East Bloc, it took more than forty years after World War II for the procrustean vulgar variety of Marxism–Leninism to accept the fact that ethnicity is alive and well and that nationality groups must be allowed to thrive if the state is to survive. As usual, this revelation came too late for the totalitarian regimes that tried to solve minority issues by expulsion, forced assimilation, and terror. The Leviathan communist state tried in vain to abolish pre–World War II institutions, such as ethnic churches, parties, and printing, when in their places they re-erected similar institutions to promote state ideology. The problem was not in the institutions themselves but in what the institutions represented. In Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Romania, the dormant ethnic rivalry between Turks and Bulgars, Serbs, Croats and Albanians, Hungarians, Germans, and Romanians facilitated the collapse of the much-hated regimes. With these regimes gone, hostilities escalated in Kosovo, Transylvania, Armenia, Georgia, the Baltic Republics, and Central Asia and in a matter of days made headlines in local as well as international newspapers. The year 1989 signaled an unprecedented resurgence of national movements, the creation of new nation-states, and the revitalization of territorial conflicts. While some nations were recreated anew (Czechs, Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, Serbs), others also redefined themselves (Poles, Hungarians, Romanians). Many ethnic groups found their newly invented, reinvigorated sense of identities (Gypsies, Lippovans, Jews), while new nation-states were also born on the ashes of the burned-out Soviet Empire, as illustrated by the Macedonian, the Moldova and the Sakha-Yakutia. As we learned from the gruesome images—among others the Baltic, Balkan, Chechen–Ingus, and Nagorno–Karabakh conflicts—these new forms of politics were not created in a peaceful fashion such as the German unification, the Czech–Slovak separation, or the creation of Slovenia. The dispute over the region (as well as its name and cultural heritage) of Macedonia between the states of Bulgaria, Greece, and the current Republic of Macedonia is one of the most sensationalized international cases.³

Such conflicts illustrate that many regions are continually contested and that their borders remain problematic as “Europe is currently undergoing a virtual orgy of self-construction.”⁴ One of the reasons for this is the centrality of territoriality, borders, and boundaries in theories of national identity. To know this, and especially to understand its nuances and cultural variations as well as its significance to various national conflicts, is more important today than ever before, as both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) are embarking upon expansion into Eastern Europe.

The concept of national space and territory has been central to national consciousness and the creation of nation-states in this part of

Europe. That this is becoming more and more of an agenda in the transnational European policies of the European Union, European Parliament, and Council of Europe has been clear for some time. This has especially been the case since the Vienna Declaration in 1993 and the meeting in Fribourg in 1995, where a new language policy for the European Union was promulgated based on regionality and transborder cooperation among European states. In particular, in the European Union itself, a shift could be detected in using “regions,” “territorial” and “non-territorial minorities,” “cultural identity,” and “cultural community” as the new buzzwords instead of the familiar concepts of ethnicity, minority, and nationality.⁵ This changeover has, it must be argued, been made not because of the goodwill of Western leaders and politicians but, more importantly, because of necessity. The 1989 collapse of the bipolar world resulted in enormous population movements from east to west. In particular, refugees from poverty-stricken parts of Eastern Europe and war-torn Balkan regions made their way to the west. They were not, however, greeted with cheers. On the contrary, they were the victims of racism, prejudice, interethnic violence, and distorted multicultural policies.⁶

What facilitated these movements, and what were the preconditions that led to regional and border conflicts and national hostilities? As anthropological studies have shown, an acknowledgment of the political nature of regional identities, especially the significance of border regions and cultures, is more important now than ever before in answering these questions. In this sense, sound analyses and anthropologically informed data of how groups and regions are coping with the economic and political transformations of states and nations may add to our understanding of local-level conflicts. For not only in history but the present-day realities of those contesting their identities from the borders and peripheries must be investigated if we want to fully understand the intricacies of how individuals and groups cope with the major transformations of Europe.⁷

In this context, to analyze the contests over Transylvania—the land beyond the forest, for this is what the Latin “*Trans-Sylvania*” entails—is of paramount importance. This is especially true for both anthropologists and East European specialists, for it provides a way to understand how national movements in their East and Central European settings have privileged the question of national and state borders, and moreover how such national identity movements have affected European and global national movements and politics. The contested region known as Transylvania (*Siebenbürgen* in German, *Ardeal* in Romanian, *Erdély* in Hungarian), in the northern part of the Republic of Romania, has seen far more subdued hostilities recently, in comparison to its bloodier past.

This discussion on Transylvania highlights the ways in which small states dispute borders and question the territorial integrity of their neighbors. This study is an anthropological analysis describing Transylvania as a politically sensitized region and the way in which two nations and states contest its meaning, belonging, and history. Hungarian and Romanian intellectual perspectives in the twentieth century are analyzed for the effect that they have had on the negotiation and contestation of Transylvania. This region is viewed here as a political frontier land, shaping twentieth-century national identities in the construction of both Hungarian and Romanian national identities. Specific political and cultural movements are analyzed that have influenced Transylvania—its history, its boundaries, and populations living on its territory.

Drawing upon recently completed research involving Hungarian communities in Transylvania and among elites in Hungary, I trace the fluid, much-contested boundaries by which ethnic and national identities have been both internally generated and externally manipulated and contested. Transylvania often has been referred to in nationalist discourse as a faraway, remote territory functioning as a national frontier. In particular, it has been viewed by both nations as a quintessential cultural zone in the politics of their national geographies. Thus, in this book, my primary objective is to raise questions and stimulate discussion about nation-state formation and the way in which territorial disputes take shape in the political contestations of national identities.

SPATIAL BOUNDARIES

Twentieth-century borders were always problematical to East European states. To legitimate the state borders following World War II, and to uphold the agreements of Potsdam and Yalta, Joseph Stalin defined “nation” as a historically formed stable community possessing not only a common language, economic life, and shared culture, but the right to self-determination and a common territory.⁸ East European borders were decided after 1918 and then again in 1945, a date that sanctioned them by both Moscow and the Western powers. Some politicians as well as scholars took them for granted; others were more skeptical. In fact, in the 1960s and 1970s, most ethnographic and anthropological literature in East and Central Europe focused on the question of the symbolic boundaries to national language and culture as specific and left border questions untouched.

In retrospect, it is easy to argue that native scholars were slow in realizing that the Stalinist nationality and territoriality project had been

flawed since its inception. Nations are far from being stable communities, and their right to self-determination was impeached constantly during state socialism. Viewing the adulatory creation of the common Soviet, Yugoslav, and Czechoslovak nations, it can be stated with certainty that Marxist-Leninist theories did not work in practice either.⁹ As Ronaldo Munck has pointed out, in Marxist scholarship, it was Nicos Poulantzas who warned that the territory and the national question are one and the same. In his words: “The modern nations, the national state, and the bourgeoisie are all constituted on, and have their mutual relations determined by, one and the same terrain.”¹⁰ Poulantzas’ reminder notwithstanding, the territorial issue has remained a nonentity for state planners and for many anthropologists—both native and Western—working in East and Central Europe.

In contrast to the Stalinist foundations of the “existing state socialist” societies, Western scholars celebrated Frederik Barth’s *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* as a central concept for ethnicity. This has been a rather odd development, for even though Barth couched his study within the notion of “boundary,” his study is not about boundary or border conflicts in the political sense. To be fair to Barth, however, it must be stressed that ideas of space and in specific boundaries are implicitly embedded in the Barthian notion of cultural boundary, but not the cultural organization of space into borders or border zones that serve as politically sensitive arenas, both undermining and reinforcing identities. Barth, in fact, argues that “The boundaries to which we must give our attention are of course social boundaries, though they may have territorial counterparts.” He continues, “Ethnic groups are not merely or necessarily based on the occupation of exclusive territories.”¹¹ Yet there is only a fine line separating Barth’s view from Anthony Smith’s, the latter arguing for the juxtaposition of ethnicity and nationality by recalling the inherent territorial problems of both.¹²

For better or for worse, however, the Barthian framework of ethnicity was certainly a less political and sensitive way to deal with the problems of ethnic and minority groups and majority state-supported nationalism. This was at least the case during state socialism in the Soviet Bloc, especially in those countries in which scholars, while trying to refine the Stalinist model, increasingly began to rely on the Barthian framework.¹³ Similarly, by the early 1980s, several contradictory ideas emerged to counter such symbolized boundary maintenance theory, emphasizing a new vista for theories of nation and nationality: the community’s will to become a nation. Connected to the name of Benedict Anderson, this is the much-celebrated notion that nations are imagined communities, a theory that I do not want to rekindle here. Rather, it should be emphasized that as the

national elites imagine their nation, they also are at work to create a system of representation for the geographical and spatial location of both culture and nation.

Of course the argument that the state and the nation—two historical systems that, when successfully united, make up the nation-state of desired leaders—are in an incessant and a dialectical relationship over territory, both real and symbolic, is not a twentieth-century idea. For as Max Weber argued long ago, the state is a compulsory organization with a territorial basis. Ethnic communities, precursors of nations, as Anthony Smith informs us, also are territorial, both in the sense of the imagined and the real national space. For Smith, “Territory is relevant to ethnicity, therefore, not because it is actually possessed, nor even for its ‘objective’ characteristics of climate, terrain, and location, though they influence ethnic conceptions, but because of an alleged and felt symbiosis between a certain piece of earth and ‘its’ community.”¹⁴ Smith ventures into suggesting that, for ethnic communities, their (real or imaginary) homelands are based on three special aspects: “sacred centers, commemorative association, and external recognition.”¹⁵ Through excellent analyses, anthropologists have shown that, indeed, sacred sites, commemorations, and legitimation make up much of the nationalistic fervor throughout the world.¹⁶

Similarly to Weber and Smith, others have argued that “traditional” borders are such because they fulfill “both functions of dividing and connecting.”¹⁷ The nation-state encloses a virtual and self-contained space, which being sovereign it should not, but in reality it is always transcended. As the historian Heesterman suggests, “The modern boundary is by far more risky and explosive” than historical ones.¹⁸ Or, as the anthropologist Renato Rosaldo argues, the modern nation-state boundary is “always in motion, not frozen for inspection.”¹⁹ Thus the question of territory is even more explosive when this nation-state is a small European one. A small state by definition is based largely on the lack of economic self-sufficiency, internal markets, and economic and cultural developmental momentum.²⁰ But as Eisenstadt remarks, the problem of small states exists not only in strictly economic but, equally important, in the cultural sphere as well. In his words:

In the educational sphere, small countries are under cross-pressures which may endanger their self-identity and make it necessary for them to emphasize their own tradition, history and internal problems, as opposed to sharing the more universal traditions of the large societies. In the cultural sphere, one of the problems of small countries is how to absorb cul-

tural “floods” (in terms of quantity) from prestigious international culture and still maintain their own identity and obtain international recognition.²¹

These small European states—Eisenstadt names among them Holland, Switzerland, Belgium, Finland, Czechoslovakia, and Austria as well as Hungary and Romania and the small states created after the breakup of Yugoslavia—must also fight a center-periphery relationship with the more advanced, larger states. During the time of state socialism, the countries of the former East Bloc also were in this dependent relationship with the Soviet Union. Yet Eisenstadt’s argument is important here for other reasons as well. One is that, besides the question of state boundary, nationality in East-Central Europe had special aspects of territorialism (i.e., the making of sacrosanct, rigid national territories). Moreover, these states have had to fight their bracketing “as a small state” with the continual onslaught of foreign ideas, consumer goods, and military or economic exploitation. All of these things, as Eisenstadt suggests, have had enormous repercussions on the country’s elites and their cultural mentality that determined the way in which identity was pursued relentlessly. Nationalistic ideas did not suddenly then spring up in the minds of the native elites but always had particular historical preconditions within which they were triggered.

BORDERS AND BORDERLANDS

Paralleling the ideas of Eisenstadt, Smith, and Heesterman, John Coakley argues cogently that based on *jus sanguinis* and *jus soli*, states always try to operate within clear-cut definitions of the physical reality of state boundaries and nationality.²² However, ethnic and national communities ingeniously may devise and accommodate ideas allowing for the possibility of crisscrossing, transcending, and subverting state borders. “People and land,” writes Coakley, “[are the] two primary stimuli of patriotism and nationalism in that they act as powerful foci of group loyalty.” Moreover, “Ethnic communities feel a strong association with a particular, so-called ‘national’ territory and use historical, pseudo-historical, or even mythical arguments to press their claims to it.”²³ When such a national territory or region lies outside of the nation-state, or might be inhabited by other groups, a powerful association with that land may be even more fundamental to national leaders. The Basque region, Northern Ireland, or the Danish Slesvig-Holstein, Kashmir, and East Timor may be considered special regions where territories and borders have been contested and arguments over them have persisted for some time now.²⁴

Coakley's argument highlights another important anthropological insight: that as states unite national groups into a legal framework of citizenry, they have at their disposal legitimate force over boundaries or traditional regions considered special by the groups holding titles to them. Therefore, ethnic and national groups may feel rather uneasy, if not outright injured, when their space is intruded upon by states or neighboring groups. A group may make territorial demands on the state, depending on its size and spatial distribution. In return, the state may react to territorial demands by either gerrymandering ethnonational boundaries or dispersing the group outside of its homeland. With regard to the troubled twentieth-century Transylvanian history, as subsequent chapters will reveal, both responses have been recorded.

What will become clear from this analysis of the Transylvanian case is that the more the state impinges upon or exploits certain territories, local groups may feel, and justifiably so, that their sovereign right has been infringed upon and their homeland raped. Another dimension of this territorial conflict is the violent actions and reactions triggered by contending groups in defense of their national homelands. These locales often are mapped with the help of historical sites (or sacred centers, as Anthony Smith has suggested), buildings, and monuments. They receive extreme importance when the "indigenous group" feels that "newcomers" occupy them. Needless to say, nations and states often receive legitimation from such territories that are themselves legitimated by state privileges. Similar to Transylvania, Ayodha, Jerusalem, Northern Ireland, and the Kuryle Islands off the coast of Japan are all sensitive territories so imbued with special meaning and disproportionate mythical status that states and nations rely upon them for their legitimation.

National homelands and territories often are bounded spaces surrounded by dangerous or highly explosive frontiers and borders. France, for instance, gave us the modernist European political symbolism concerning the state-bordered national space. France possesses borders which, according to the 1872 *Larousse's Grand Dictionnaire du XIXe Siecle*, are "all the frontiers that God's hand traced for her, those of her Celtic and Roman past, which she reconquered at the time of her revolutionary regeneration and which should at any rate include the battlefield of Tolbiac and the Tomb of Charlemagne."²⁵ This illustrates the idea of how territoriality and historical borders, no matter how much they change with time, become sacred and divine to states and nations living within their confinements. Perhaps Peter Sahlins' study concerning the borders between France and Spain illuminates best the contested nature of European boundaries in history.²⁶ Sahlins points to the key position of local identities and borderlands in making the state and the nation: "the shape and significance of the

boundary line was constructed out of local social relations in the borderland” [for] “it was the dialectic of local and national interests which produced the boundaries of national territory.”²⁷ But Sahlins goes one step further when he argues that in the making of French and Spanish national identities, the periphery played an initial key role only later appropriated by the center. States define their borders, issue regulations allowing border crossings, and utilize documents (in the form of passports and transborder permits) to sanction cross-border traffic and cooperation. Yet the more these regulations are issued, the more attempts there are to counter them. The phrases “illegal aliens,” “guest workers,” “asylum seekers,” and “refugees” used in European Union countries represent the problems of maintaining the borders of both nation-states and supranational polities.

As Sahlins argues, borders and border regions are becoming essential as nation-states are invented in the modern European world system. According to Benedict Anderson’s theory, “Communities are to be distinguished not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.”²⁸ While this may be true to a certain extent, admittedly such imagination must take place in a specified geographical locale with defined dimensions both in time and space. For nationalists this locale is contained within some specific borders that often rely on historic frontiers. For nationalists, Transylvania is one such locale that had a different history, different from the rest of Hungary (i.e., the Balkans and the former Soviet Empire to the east). In fact, this difference is transposed on the whole area enclosed by borders.

This book examines the very process in which Transylvania has been politically constructed as well as contested as a remote borderland in which different populations had been brought together by different forces of history. It illustrates the cultural manifestations of the geographical imagination by locating myths of national identity through contests between Hungarian and Romanian elites. As mentioned above, Coates correctly suggests that a bordered space is viewed by nationalist leaders and elites as strictly belonging to them, and that neighboring populations also view it with a like-mindedness. But as sociologist Florian Znaniecki argued earlier in the last century, territorial “claims are not merely economic, but moral and often religious; they are superimposed upon whatever rights of economic ownership to portions of this land may be granted to smaller groups or individual members.”²⁹ He added later that, “Thus, ‘our land,’ the ‘land of our ancestors,’ becomes for the masses of people the spatial receptacle of most, if not all, of their important values.”³⁰ This is indeed the notion that recalls the classic ideas of the German romantics, most notably Herder and Johann Fichte, who equated a nation with its language and territory. As Kedourie quotes Fichte:

The first, original, and truly national boundaries of a state are beyond doubt the internal boundaries. Those who speak the same language are joined to each other by a magnitude of invisible bonds by nature herself . . . they belong together and are by nature one and inseparable whole. From this internal boundary . . . the making of the external boundary by dwelling place results as a consequence; and in the natural view of things it is not because men dwell between certain mountains and rivers that they are a people, but, on the contrary, men dwell together . . . because they were a people already by a law of nature which is much higher.³¹

For Fichte and other idealists, and not only those of the Romantic period, each nation is endowed with “natural frontiers” given to them by law, God, and nature. But as we know, there are no “natural” boundaries or frontiers *per se*. For Kedourie, for instance, “Natural frontiers do not exist, neither in the topographical sense . . . nor in the linguistic. . . . Frontiers are established by power, and maintained by the constant known readiness to defend them by arms.”³² Mayall argues similarly: “It is quite obvious that while some frontiers—for example, mountain ranges, deserts, lakes, the sea surrounding islands, and so—may seem more plausible than others, particularly if they have persisted for a long time, none is natural: they are political and cultural, usually established by conquest and maintained by occupation.”³³

With these in mind, I propose here that in order to understand the conflict over Transylvania between two neighboring states, we should understand how elite perceptions of the homeland are formed, contested, and negotiated in an international political arena. How topographical features and interpretations of the past serve nationalist elites—“professors of linguistics and collectors of folklore,” as Kedourie puts it³⁴—to legitimize claims for a certain terrain with clearly marked borders will be analyzed with specific reference to Transylvania. Despite the fact that historic borders are sometimes difficult to prove, nationalists initiate gruesome geopolitics, which then may turn to brutal state policies deciding territorial questions. Territorial nationalism of this kind is extremely dangerous, for it “is internally unifying and externally divisive over space.”³⁵

Systematic nationalistic drives for a region may take irredentist and secessionist forms but other attempts also are known. Mass population exchanges and the expulsion of groups, the dreaded word of “ethnic cleansing,” which still rings very close from the war in former Yugoslavia, and the troubled relationship between twentieth-century Hungary and Romania provide ample examples for these, a topic discussed in detail in later chapters. Aside from these, the other extremist nationalist “solu-

tions” include genocide and the economic subordination of a people by relegating them to the periphery of the labor market and denying them basic civil and political rights.³⁶

EUROPEAN BORDERLANDS AND IDENTITIES

In order to grasp the full meaning of nationalist contestations over Transylvania, the notion of borders and border areas must be problematized accordingly. Borders, as Ken Coates remarks in his study of border differences between Canada and the United States, are true “political artifacts” with “considerable historical and contemporary impact.”³⁷ The study of border cultures then is of utmost importance for the social sciences:

It should reveal, first and foremost, the risk of assuming the inevitability of national boundaries and the dangers of rooting one’s studies in national settings, rather than in the evolving historical/geographical contexts out of which modern societies evolved. Further, such examination illustrates the importance of considering the manner in which the modern state created, imposed, maintained, and empowered boundaries, not just by establishing border crossings and implementing custom duties but also in creating and sustaining a sense of national distinctiveness. . . . It is in the borderlands, where country rubs against country, where citizens have regular contact with a different way of governing and living, that one finds the true test of nationalism and nationhood. The study of borderland cultures, both in their historical development and contemporary manifestations, demonstrates that nations do matter and will, in all likelihood, continue to matter well into the future.³⁸

Similar to Coates, anthropologists have shown that European nationalistic movements often have involved disputes over territories, populations, and the realignments of borders, as well as the creation of new border cultures.³⁹ Loring Danforth, for instance, reveals the ways in which the making of Macedonian identity has had significant transnational connections to Macedonian diasporas in Western Europe, Australia, and Canada.⁴⁰ From these multicultural metropolitan diaspora communities have sprung strong identity mechanisms influencing the eventual outcome of the Balkan-Macedonian nation-state, its identity, structure and meaning.⁴¹ What the Transylvanian case study demonstrates is how complex the borders have been in Eastern Europe. This region has, throughout the past centuries, been viewed—as

well as invented ethnocentrically through both political geography and cultural cartography, as Larry Wolf puts it⁴²—as the easternmost border of “Western civilization.” As such, it has been designated as a border terrain between Europe and Asia, sensitized and contested by both scholars and politicians. A recent definition states, for instance, the external boundaries of Eastern Europe as “. . . the lands between the linguistic frontier of the German- and Italian-speaking peoples on the west and the political boundaries of the former Soviet Union on the east. The north-south parameters are the Baltic and Mediterranean seas.”⁴³ Such definite topographical closures have been constructed in ways similar to their histories as a whole through political negotiation, often with the assistance of literary fabulous facts, mythopoeic themes, and barbarian tribes. When viewed from the historical-political angle, the borders of Eastern, or East-Central Europe, have been redesigned by wars, economic boom-and-bust cycles, interethnic violence, literary fiction, and shifting international power relations. It is not without justification then that many earlier scholars referred to this region as exhibiting an extraordinary number of upheavals, wars, and, in general, “un-European” qualities. For the British H. G. Wanklyn, writing at the turn of the twentieth century, this region was “the eastern marchland (borderland) between Russia and Germany.”⁴⁴ Following World War I, Viscount Rothermere—aide to the British prime minister at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919—uttered that it was “Europe’s powder magazine.”⁴⁵ When analyzing the first half of the twentieth century, a Hungarian historian called it “a crisis zone.”⁴⁶ Anthropologist John Cole, discussing the economic development and ethnic processes of the region, referred to it as “an ethnic shatter zone.”⁴⁷

These definitions have as their precursor the geopolitical notion that the eastern part of the former Holy Roman Empire and then the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy were relegated to the periphery and referred to as a border region between the more developed West and the technologically less advanced East. This idea was firmly embedded in the humanities and social sciences, where Eastern Europe’s regions received privileged geopolitical connotations of a Latinized, Westernized, and developed part and the epithet Central Europe, in contrast to the backward, orthodox Muslim East.⁴⁸ In this scholarly and political contestation, both history and economic development processes have been powerfully connected to the creation of Eastern Europe as a remote, peripheral region. Dudley Seers has put this rather bluntly:

As within the Western European system, broadly, the further a country is from Germany, the worse the social conditions of an East European country. . . . Hungary and Poland can be considered intermediate between core and periphery. . . . Bul-

garia and Romania are more clearly peripheral in economic structure, income levels, and social conditions, as well as more dependent on imported technology.⁴⁹

Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs, relying considerably on his perceptions of similar economic history and uneven technological development, concurs, insisting that between the democratic, Catholic/Protestant, and economically advanced West and the backward, orthodox, and feudal East lies a central region of Europe that was always behind and (in vain) has attempted to catch up with the West. Keeping in line with nationalist historiography, for Szűcs this central region exhibits features that identify it with its easternmost neighbors. The intelligentsia of the region's various countries have continually tried to modernize and liberalize, but in their eagerness, they were perennially caught between outside forces midway through their halfhearted attempts and were thrown even further back into stagnation and nationalist intrigues. One of the most important features of this backwardness was, as the argument goes, the absence of a strong middle class, such as in Germany or Austria.⁵⁰ In Szűcs' writings, the major characteristics of this backwardness also included an economy marginalized in the global market, an authoritarian state with a huge bureaucratic machinery, and increasing social atomism of the population at large. Religious and ethnic conflicts were two additional factors that contributed to the backwardness region theory. On the one hand, Catholicism and Protestantism in opposition to orthodoxy and the use of a Latin and not a Cyrillic alphabet were seen as important dividing lines between East and Central Europe. On the other hand, an all-important ethnonational politics—helping the establishment of nineteenth-century nation-states—had been the hallmark of the specific Eastern Europeanness.⁵¹

Whether these labels befit a region in which millions were dislocated and borders rearranged several times in the past hundred years and in which ethnic conflicts and nationality tensions continue to mount needs to be addressed on an individual basis with specific reference to each nationality conflict. In this book, my aim is to discuss the development of the contestable mechanisms and ideology of making Transylvania a special backward and faraway region, a process in which these labels occur quite often by all sides concerned.

HISTORICAL TRANSYLVANIA AS BORDERLAND

As we have seen above, Transylvania as a faraway locale has had its share in its own Orientalizing project. To be sure, this region occupied the

imagination of writers, statesmen, and generals since at least the early Middle Ages, when tribal kings, religious leaders, and local warlords tried to master it. While historical facts often have been obfuscated or relegated to national mythologies, it is easy to see why this multiethnic mountainous terrain invited various historical populations. Since Roman times, the provinces of Pannonia and Dacia “remained border regions to the end, known as the least civilized provinces.”⁵² While most of the early populations disappeared, the notion that this part of Eastern Europe was a border zone was imprinted in the collective national memory. When Hungarians settled the Carpathian Basin (a geographical reference discussed later) in the tenth century, they had a considerable military superiority and advantage. This worked well against emerging state powers whose empires bordered this region, most notably the Kievan Rus to the north and east and the Byzantine Empire to the south.⁵³

Obviously then the reasons the Carpathian or Danube Basin region was looked at as a border region were numerous, but two stand out. One had to do with geography, the other with the competing states as well as their national elites, who were keen in defining its extent. British historian Carlyle MacCartney, when writing about the early medieval history or the region (in a sense providing support for the later theory of Anthony Smith), suggested that the Middle Danube Basin forms a “natural unity” and “one harmonious whole.”⁵⁴ Viewing the political history of this region, it becomes obvious that two powerful empires exerted considerable pressures on the state and border formations within this region: the Austrian House of Habsburgs and the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Thus Transylvania experienced a form of special vassalage by its different associations with often hostile polities. After a considerably long attachment to the Hungarian kingdom, the Ottoman intrusion into the East European region carved out separate states and redivided the whole area. As a consequence, Transylvanian nobles, described as the Union of Three Nations (Magyars, Szeklers, and Saxons), tried to hold on to their privileged positions within their estates, but they managed to do so with considerable infighting and intrigues.

After defeating the Ottoman Empire at the Battle of Buda in 1686, Transylvania was encircled by what was known for two centuries as the Austrian military frontier. To maintain control over this large swath of terrain—the southern areas of the former Hungarian kingdom, Croatia, Slavonia, and Banat, and the southern part of Transylvania to the north to Bukovina—Austria established military frontier districts to defend its borders. This special border zone existed in the Austro-Hungarian Empire until the mid-nineteenth century, when the military districts were abolished. Following World War I and the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian

Monarchy, the region Transylvania was incorporated into the newly formed Romanian state, and aside from the brief period between 1940 and 1944, it has remained there.

However, Transylvania for the Hungarian intellectuals, is not simply an empty historical space but a “cradle of Hungarian civilization.” By virtue of its distance from the center, this cultural zone has been viewed as an ancestral terrain encircling the historic national space. To them, this terrain stopped something and began something else; its regions and topographical features have been identified with national history, the extent of speech communities, specific folklore complexes, and a “nationally” recognizable way of life. In East-Central European national myth makings, the faraway region as the birthplace, or at least the cauldron, of national culture is a common view of national elites. In the Slovak nationalist culturology, the image of the Highland Tatra Mountain shepherd is such a quintessential trope, as Slovak ethnographer Krekovicova argues cogently.⁵⁵ Similarly, for Polish nationalist history, the region known as the Kresy, a huge historic region now partly in Lithuania, Belarus, and the Ukraine, is “the cradle of civilization in Poland.”⁵⁶

In Hungarian nationalist discussion, this type of reasoning is linked to the notion that Transylvania has been and continues to be the real eastern border of Hungarian culture. Somewhat comparable to the American Wild West frontier, in the minds of nationalist intellectuals, the real borders between Hungary and Romania are not the present state borders between these two states but, on the contrary, lie at the farthest reaches of the physical (and often imaginary) Transylvania. Actually, regions bordering Transylvania on the east—Moldavia, the Ukraine, and Oltenia—are viewed by Hungarian intellectuals as separating and ultimately connecting Hungary to the orthodox, Slavic, and Balkan lands. In opposition to these borders, the central and western parts of Hungary—mainly the Austrian Burgerland on the Leitha River zone—have been far less important culturally and politically for Hungarian history. Similarly, the northern province—parts of present-day Slovakia—while slightly different, is closer to Transylvania, but not as significant and not as sensitive for Hungarian national consciousness.

Transylvania, the epicenter of the frontier land—ironically both for Romanians and Hungarians with its melting pot of cultures and slightly sadistic, if exotic, history—has managed throughout the past to reinvigorate the intellectuals (often living in the centers) in their superiority but successfully resist homogenizing influences and pressures. Stuart Hall makes the point that the recovery of the past constitutes an essential “resources of resistance” for all groups that have been marginalized and misrepresented by the dominant regimes.⁵⁷ Similarly, as Michael Taussig

observes with reference to the mixing of the Third and First World divides, “The border has dissolved and expanded to cover the lands it once separated such that all the land is borderland.”⁵⁸ This borderland then is the frame of reference within which Transylvania has received its qualities as a quintessential, remote area in nationalist cartography. Even when Hungarian intellectuals and politicians discuss the possibility of joining the European Union, the borders of Hungary refer to those of the Hungarian nation, a concept that includes, in their minds, rightfully, Hungarians living in Romania and thus Transylvania as a whole.

THE REMOTE REGION

As we have seen so far, intellectuals and politicians have always theorized about the borders of the nation, often in contradistinction with those of state borders. In Europe in general and Transylvania in particular, such discourse has privileged the periphery, described often as a borderland or a border zone, but still as a faraway locale. In fact, Transylvania has been described by many travelers as Europe’s Shangri-la. It is viewed not only as a self-contained border culture but is elevated to a special terrain that could best be understood by the phrase suggested by Edwin Ardener, as a “remote area.”⁵⁹ This notion has much to offer scholars of contemporary national identity and borderland cultures. In a sense, Ardener may be considered a predecessor of those in anthropology who study state and national borders or who conduct regional studies. His idea allows us to reinvigorate discussions about regionality and national conflicts over terrains and offers a chance to situate Transylvania, the remote region, at the center of Hungarian nationalist discourse.⁶⁰ It is instructive to reveal how Hungarian nationalist imagination carved up geography according to a hierarchy of regional dialects. As opposed to the Great Plains of Hungary—which itself also has the image of the national prairie (the *puszta*)—the eastern part of the former Hungarian kingdom is Transylvania, a region that equally belongs to that well-nigh border zone of access to difference. This region exists far from the center, where most of the nationalist politics takes form and shape—in our case, either Budapest or Bucharest—and in the minds of nationalists is a pure and true national geospace.

Ardener discusses the problem of identity, both majority and minority, and social space as they interact through the notion of remote areas. For him, “Distance lends enhancement, if not enchantment, to the anthropological vision.”⁶¹ Certainly in the case of contested Transylvania, this enchantment has been true for scholars and politicians alike, a point

that will become obvious in subsequent chapters. Ardener, however, departs from the familiar center/periphery discussion and devises a scheme in which remoteness involves both “imaginary” and “real” localities. At the same time, “The actual geography is not the overriding feature—it is obviously necessary that ‘remoteness’ has a position in topographical space, but it is defined within a topological space whose features are expressed in a cultural vocabulary.”⁶² Ardener identifies several paradoxical features of such areas: the presence of strangers; the generation of innovations and novelties; the presence of the ruins of the past and rubbish; constant contacts with the outside world; the influence of incomers; and labor market segmentation and microeconomic pluralism. Thus Ardener seems to be right on target when he writes that, “Remoteness is a specification, and a perception, from elsewhere, from an outside standpoint; but from inside the people have their own perceptions . . . a counterspecification of the dominant, or defining space, working in the opposite direction.”⁶³ In contrast to the center, this double specification of remote areas also creates an “event—richness.” However brief and cursory this interpretation, Ardener’s idea of the remote area ingeniously juxtaposes the political and scholarly impulses concerning regionality, identity, and the contestation over faraway border zones.

In order to celebrate one’s past as unique or to reject it as outright alien, history has been manipulated and contested by nationalist elites to justify territorial integrity and gains. In this history the involved parties needed a place to locate events and characters within, and nothing served this better than the remote border zone. For the nationalist minds, this place is even imbued with a heightened sense of symbolism, for it is connected to the formation of the nation and the turning points of that history, for as Ardener suggests, “Remote areas are full of ruins of the past.” In this “archaic” locale, nationalists need a population or groups of coalescing ethnics whose mission is to carry on a culture deemed sacred by the elite. The past then is inextricably interwoven with everyday life there than outside of its boundaries. If these boundaries seem elusive and at times roughly drawn and shifting, for the nationalist, this is a point where he or she can find justification in utilizing historically sore points. This suits a nationalist well, for a “. . . nationalist is not strictly confined by any particular ethnic criteria. He is concerned about establishing his nation’s credentials, not about formulating universally valid principles for the legitimization of a nation.”⁶⁴ Writing at the end of World War II, George Orwell correctly suggested that, “In nationalist thought there are facts which are both true and untrue, known and unknown.”⁶⁵ All this, naturally, leads to Orwell’s unique notion that three characteristics define nationalist thought: obsession, instability, and indifference to reality.⁶⁶ To

create a nation, one has to imagine its national land, thus all three characteristics may be required in order to be successful in establishing a nation's credentials to claiming a certain territory. In fact, we may see all of these elements, not only in the Transylvanian dispute but in the post-1990 former Soviet Bloc, a region experiencing border disputes and contestations of territory.⁶⁷

The center of national territory prides itself on being the sole defender of this locale it helped refashion, but the faraway frontier region must suffer all of the privations and mistreatment for its privileged role as a culture carrier and history maker. This romantic geopolitics is stipulated on the following contradictions: (1) The center must reassure its leading position renewed from time to time over the frontier; (2) The peripheral zone, in contrast, must remain as such, a remote frontier in a state of suspension, like a spider limited by its ability to weave its net, by its fragility, minuteness, and disadvantageousness. National historiographies, as well as nationalized sciences of folklore, ethnography, and linguistics, the subject of later chapters, may be suspected for their roles in ideologizing as well as idolizing the image of the faraway border area. As it is textualized in nationalist controversies, life in this region is fraught with immense cultural and political upheavals; crises ebb and flow across it, affecting various inhabitants. The regions' populations face challenges adapting to the pressures of friendly and hostile groups. As a direct result, they need to manage their daily affairs in close proximity to foreigners, guests, or tourists. As Ardener sees it, those in remote areas must constantly be in contact with strangers and incomers. For example, this may be one of the reasons such regions, at one time or another, exhibit violent and extreme behavior against both intruders and their own populations. At the same time, peaceful existence is also required by the inhabitants for their survival. Yet in nationalist historiography, the center always feels that the national borderland is under attack by invading foreigners. When the center is attacked, the margins are appointed as the carriers—in fact, the saviors—of the tradition by preserving it for future generations.

Nationalist history notwithstanding, all populations living in Transylvania have been midwives to its growth, culture, and history, and even their native tongues are littered with foreign expressions. Their cuisine, music, clothing, dance, and buildings, almost by law, also exhibit this nearness, assimilation, and borrowings. For populations in the remote region, this coexistence, whether wanted or not, is an everyday reality. Transplanted to the intellectual world of the center, such cultural eccentricities are framed by scholars, ethnographers, and historians as exoticism into the national ideology and identity aimed at preserving the archaic, remote nature of the faraway territory. For national scholars, as Marc

Augé points out, this is “not tied to geographic distance or even to ethnic belonging: ethnologists studying Europe at first took for objects surviving customs, traditions, and human milieux (peasants, artisans) that were imbued for them with a kind of internal exoticism.”⁶⁸

As we have seen above, the center glorifies such remoteness and backwardness, for unlike the center, the remote area is imagined as representing “lawlessness.” With that, as Edwin Ardener suggests, such regions are in a state of constant event richness. In fact, there exists a different sort of legality: its polychrome, ethnic makeup has bred “noble savages” in the portrayal of sunburned peasants such as the Kalotaszeg or the Csángós for the Hungarians or the Maramures villagers for Romanians, as we will see later. But people living in remote regions should not be thought of as only hybrids, or of having no definite sense of nationality, or even that they are helpless denizens of faraway settlements. On the contrary, what Donna Flynn describes for the multicultural Nigerian borderland is true for Transylvania as well. Residents of such border regions “recognize that it is precisely because they belong to separate nations that they can manipulate and negotiate the border to their mutual advantage. . . . Being the ‘border’ implies separation as well as unification, exclusion as well as inclusion, independence as well as interdependence.”⁶⁹ This is just one of the contradictions that characterizes border cultures. Perhaps another important one is the question concerning ethnonational identity, emanating from the country’s ruling elite, which may or may not find friendly reception at the margins. There the question of belonging is never simple or unidirectional but multiple and contradictory at the same time, oscillating between allegiance to the state, region, nation, and ethnicity:

The center celebrates the region’s remoteness to and oneness with its superior position: when the cultures of the periphery celebrate, they mostly cry out their “nearness” to and distinction with each other . . . the spirit of life at the borders is predicated upon interaction and true cross-culturality; sharing, borrowing and assimilating are not quite adequate words to describe this cultural amalgam. This cross-pollenization, in fact, may just be the postmodernist nightmare.⁷⁰

Border regions are not simply imagined by national elites but are created and recreated as the border region itself grows and contracts under the weight of political forces, a notion that owes much to the analysis of French–Spanish borderlands by Peter Sahlins, mentioned earlier. The real Transylvania has given rise to many Transylvanias. They have been manufactured out of native experiences, stories, and a variety of representations.

It seems true, as Aldous Huxley wrote sometime ago—which should be remembered when Benedict Anderson is hailed—that, Nations are to a very large extent invented by their poets and novelists. For Hungarians and Romanians alike, Transylvania has been invented many times over by various writers, artists, politicians, and scholars.

As indicated by ethnographers, folklorists, linguists, and writers, Transylvania's regional eccentric culture patterns function as markers or warning posts that something else is different there. Remote regions not only close in and keep out—as we have seen above—they produce their own logic of their own sense of “being there.” Such regions are not really empty, dark, or impenetrable, characteristics that are at times exacerbated by the writers' fancy at the center. To paraphrase Edwin Ardener, remote areas are full of ruins of the past and “pots,” and maybe these facilitate their constant contact with the outside world. It will suffice to recall how Transylvania was catapulted to international fame with its folk art or the Dracula myth of the British Bram Stoker, so familiar to Westerners.⁷¹ In fact, border regions are full of (inter)actions, entanglements, and ambivalence, as they represent thresholds of cultures that never end but lead to newer forms of life. As viewed by the contending sides, borders are necessary in fashioning national traditions, for they reveal that dichotomies and hard core facts are rarely justified. To paraphrase Aldous Huxley, who put it in another context, and one that well characterizes one's entrance into such regions, to travel is to realize that everyone was wrong. But more than that, to cross into the frontier is to realize how much we have wronged. How much we have to transcend our own boundaries. That is why the number of travelers, often anthropologists, and strangers are lurking in these regions.⁷²

How is this remote region best described? Transylvania in the nationalist imagination is sullen, neat, and uncontaminated, the *true* nature where people live more natural lives than those living outside of it. This wholeness is seen to be the characteristic pattern of life there, distinguishing it from the cosmopolitan, isolated, individualistic, and commercialized existence in the center. As it will become obvious in subsequent chapters, for most writers Transylvania conjures up images of animals, forests, mountains, and fields of grassland where herds of sheep, cows, goats, and buffaloes make their harmonious peace with humans.⁷³ Transylvania exhibits wilderness, quasirationality, and preponderant folk beliefs where the daily round of life has been defined by nature, the seasons, and the animals. As Ardener argues, “Remote areas offer images of unbridled pessimism or utopian optimism, of change and decay, in their memorial.”

How is Transylvania connected to the center? Transylvania, to be sure, is remote as imagined by nationalist elites, but not always so as experi-

enced by visitors and local citizens alike. There are, of course, natural things—bridges and roads through which one can enter the real zone. For Transylvania, this Western transition is the Parts (Partium in the nineteenth century) and the Királyhágó Pass, the latter being a military post in former times. More importantly, however, there are living links of family relations (as said by Hungarians, every third family in Hungary counts relatives in Transylvania). This may be an overgeneralization, even though the past seventy years experienced a massive population influx from Romania into Hungary, yet what this statement really points to is the powerful emotional tie with which Hungarians continue to view Transylvania, and its Hungarian population living there. Romanian elites have been equally vocal about the location of their ancestral land: “The territory on which Romanian people was born lies within two fundamental coordinates: the Carpathians and the Danube. The Carpathian Mountains traverse the Romanian territory building inside it the Transylvanian stronghold, the central region of the country, its nucleus.”⁷⁴ More recently, another Romanian historian connected territory to nationality: “It has been too easily overlooked, also, that today’s Transylvania is not an ethnical mosaic as some people think, that the Union of 1918 was a legitimate act, and that Romanians now represent about 75 percent of the population. . . . Why should Transylvania belong to Romania? The answer is simple: Transylvania belongs to Romania because the Romanians represent the absolute majority of the population and they expressed collectively their wish to live in Romania.”⁷⁵

However, for such nationalist intellectuals living in the center, whether in Bucharest or Budapest, their ancestral land is under construction and continually receding: by the 1950s and 1960s it became more industrialized and cosmopolitan than agrarian and rural. The nationalist elites have expressed concern over the past decades about the region being overrun by modernization and urbanization, about the socialist reorganization model, and about their fear that Transylvania has become the overtly exploited garden! For writers of the center, the frontier of Transylvania represents true archaic lore and skills, not a wasteland but an unconquerable, unassimilable region inhabited by survivors resisting progress and forced reforms. In Canaan, heroes can be—and will be—killed but never conquered or forgotten. It is visualized often in the character of a sturdy peasant who loves its contradictions, vicissitudes, and hardships. His universal skepticism—both toward other populations and the state—is displayed by the main character Ábel in Áron Tamási’s trilogy.⁷⁶ Ábel, a disembodied voice, plays a trickster, but he is in reality a true trickster who has to cross many borders. Interestingly, as the motto of this chapter indicates, Ábel receives the true message: “We are on this earth so we will

be at home somewhere” (strangely, not from a fellow émigré Hungarian but from an African American, himself also an outcast)—that he has to return home. What this really means is obvious:

It is true: I have to go home at once, so I can be at home somewhere on this world. You are right: there is no other purpose in life than to know everything possible, as much it is possible. To know all the colors and corners, to people we should forgive, the groups fighting with each other; and after we achieved all that, we return where we can be at home.⁷⁷

To Ábel, as to Tamási, that home was the Hargita Mountains, the easternmost border of Transylvania.

Similar Transylvanian-Hungarian experiences have been recapitulated colorfully in literary narratives that connect the nation with its home territory. Other classic Transylvanian novelists (Nyrő, Tamási, Horváth, Katona Szabó, and Berde, earlier in this century, or Sütő, Kányádi, and Lászlóffy recently)⁷⁸ imagine Transylvania not only out of sheer nostalgia and fantasy, have experienced it firsthand. Their books are not only about the search for the self, they are, at the same time, also about the clash of cultures. Their literary contestation foregrounds Hungarian Transylvania as a territory in which actors, events, and actions reveal the significance of birthplace as Tamási’s culture hero, Ábel, aptly remarks. Clearly, in the literary imagination, Transylvania is a remote place of many cultures and ethnic and religious groups, but for the writers and their heroes, is first and foremost a region very close to the heart, the birthplace of Hungarian culture. Just how this imagination is created, contested, and negotiated will be the topic of the following chapters.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

This book is based on a theoretical and an ethnographical understanding of the interconnectedness of nationality processes and territoriality. By providing such a theoretical backdrop for remaking East-Central European ethnic and national identities, it attempts to steer the discussion from nonterritorial models of nationality and identity studies. The Transylvanian case illustrates that territories and border cultures, often perceived by national elites as remote peripheries, have much to offer to anthropological analyses of states, nations, and identities. It reveals the fundamental ways in which nations and states engage in contesting, redefining, and negotiating their identities and by so doing influences

others' as well. What follows then are chapters detailing specific instances and means by which two states and nations have battled over a region common to both for much of the history of their statehood. By looking at the scholarly and political entanglements, we witness the emergence of various issues, debates, and arguments that have shaped different understandings of the contested region under discussion.

In Chapter 2, Transylvania's history is discussed with specific reference to nationalistic drives to gain scholarly supremacy over this terrain. Historical Transylvania serves as a backdrop to analyze how statesmen, national leaders, cultural workers, and groups living there as well as outside of it have been influenced by these forces and how they have reshaped the region in return. From conflicts, often with bloody results, to scholarly quagmires, from international intrigues to border transfers, Transylvania has been placed in the center of national and global political maneuvers.

In Chapter 3, my personal fieldwork experiences are added by highlighting important insights to the remaking of Hungarian national consciousness since the mid-1980s. Through a comparison of Hungarian communities in Hungary and in the Transylvanian part of Romania, I discuss my anthropological understandings of studying nationalist processes and how an ethnographic imagination of Transylvania has been centrally located in this nationalist discourse.

Chapter 4 shifts its perspective by focusing on an important contestable mechanism provided to the Hungarian elites: populism. It suggests ways in which, despite neighborly relations, Hungarian elites were able to produce and utilize ethnographic and literary images to create a population (that of Hungarians in Transylvania) as the trustees of Hungarian culture and identity. Eventually this literary and political populism served the country's elites in subverting the communist state's agenda to create communist men and women and instead reawaken Hungarian national identity.

Chapter 5 demonstrates how Transylvanian ethnic and minority issues became a central theme in both Hungary's and Romania's attempts to create their communist selves after World War II. Relying on the fashionable socialist and internationalist slogans of the time, various Transylvanian populations were appropriated by both Hungarians and Romanians as they strove to prove their supremacy over that terrain. Such a communist nation making notwithstanding, however, transnational forces also were evoked; the Hungarian diaspora in North America assisted in creating an image of the Hungarian nation living in the Carpathian Basin, and at the same time, it refashioned the Romanian state known for its brutal suppression of minorities and anti-Hungarian policies.

As Chapter 6 demonstrates, a specific youth subculture emerged which had an enormous impact on the way in which Hungarian identity resurfaced during state socialism in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet despite state repression, the region and its peoples survived, providing ample food for thought for scholars and politicians to ponder regarding their (mis) understanding of terrains, identities, and conflicts. In this chapter, the troubled relationship between the Hungarian and Romanian states is described, with specific reference to the question of Hungarians in Transylvania and the Hungarian elite in Hungary. This analysis is especially important, for it reveals how both managed to refashion their noncommunist identities and democratic image in the wake of the death agony of the two state's regimes.

However, it soon became clear that "a return to Europe" (to which many statesmen, among them, Vaclav Havel, have referred), following the period 1989–1990, cannot be achieved overnight, a topic treated in detail in Chapter 7. Such a contestation of ethnonational identities has brought the territorial and border issues into the forefront of transnational and global politics. With the dismantling of the communist borders—following the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Bloc—new, and heretofore unknown, borders were created both internally and externally. As states collapsed (Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia), and the European Union expanded, new borders were erected as the result of the Maastricht and Schengen treaties. In Chapter 8, I conclude by suggesting that the creation of new states and nations and the redefinition of borders are fundamentally interconnected. This chapter reveals an anthropological understanding of how Transylvania has managed to carve out its central role in creating new Hungarian and Romanian identities, and moreover that such analyses will facilitate a better comprehension for the importance of contested regionality and nationality in the New Europe in the beginning of the third millennium.