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East European Politics and Societies 2009; 23; 266

DOI: 10.1177/0888325409333056

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From Iron Curtain to Golden Curtain

Remaking Identity in the European Union Borderlands

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The village of Kisszelmenc, a historically Magyar settlement at the edge of southwestern Ukraine, has been separated by an international border from its sister village of Nagyszelmenc, now in Slovakia, since just after World War II. A recent project to reconnect the two villages sought to support Magyar identity in the region through the reunification of village families. The opening of a border crossing project instead drove economic changes that resulted in the Ukrainianization and the Slovakization of Kisszelmenc. This article shows how the reconfiguration of economic relations stemming from changes in political institutions can generate unexpected shifts in the enactment of ethno-cultural identity on a given territory.

Keywords: *Ukraine; Hungary; Slovakia; identity; economy; Szelmenc*

In the first decade of post-communism, nationalist movements in Central and Eastern Europe focused their attention primarily on the transformation of political institutions such as citizenship regimes, language policies, and other instruments of nation building. In an instance of what Brubaker and Cooper have described as categories of analysis mirroring categories of practice, research on nationalism in the region likewise focused on the destruction, design, and development of political institutions as central to the reconfiguration of ethnic and national identities.¹

What this body of work emphasized far less was the role of economic change in nation building projects.² This article shows how shifts in political institutions can

Author's Note: The author wishes to thank the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, who bear no responsibility for the views expressed here, for research support. Thanks are due as well to colleagues in the Department of Government at Harvard University and the Politics Department at Princeton University for valuable comments and suggestions. The author likewise is grateful to those who participated in the research for or refinement of the argument presented here: André Simonyi, Eric Allina-Pisano, Mark Beissinger, Timothy Colton, Zsuzsa Csergo, Jennifer Dickinson, Sabine Dullin, Dmitry Gorenburg, Atul Kohli, Robert Magocsi, William Meyers, Timothy Pachirat, Cédrik Simonyi, Sarah Simonyi, Svitlana Slava, Sherrill Stroschein, Deborah Yashar, students at the Department of Economics at Uzhhorod State University, the staff of the Berehove public library, and the friends in Kisszelmenc whom I cannot mention here by name.

create new economic incentives that disrupt and redirect the development of territorialized ethnic identity. In other words, economic changes that are a byproduct of political reform may, by design or by accident, transform the enactment of ethno-linguistic identity in a given place and time.

Border regimes provide one institutional context in which this process may be observed. In the context of the EU borderlands, people living just outside the EU, its eastern boundary increasingly experience state intrusions—in the forms of newly militarized territorial zones, expanded requirements for identification, and intensified regulation of movement westward, even as regulation of movement eastward is relaxed. Those intrusions and transformations influence more than the liberty of individuals: they also can prompt fundamental shifts in the organization of economic and social life. And through the reconfiguration of economic relations, the practice of ethno-linguistic identity also may change.

Kisszelmenc, a predominantly Magyar rural settlement of about 200 people at the southwestern edge of Ukraine, provides an illustration of this process and is the setting in which the argument of this article unfolds. Kisszelmenc consists of a single street that ends with a barbed wire fence. Just beyond that barrier, across the Ukraine-Slovakia border, lies its sister village of Nagyszelmenc and the European Union.³ When the Soviet army completed its westward push for territory after World War II, soldiers erected the fence that now separates Kisszelmenc, known in Ukrainian as Mali Selmentsi, from Nagyszelmenc. As on *Stacheldraht-Sonntag*, “barbed wire Sunday” in postwar Berlin, the fence went up without warning. Villagers recount how those visiting relatives at the other end of the street on that day were not permitted to return home, and kinship groups were split by the village boundary. For sixty years there was no border crossing for scores of miles, and villagers referred to the boundary as “the last barbed wire fence in Europe.” When the Soviet Union fell, the border between the two villages remained. As the European Union expanded to include new member states to the east, surveillance on the border between Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc was reinforced.

A decade after the fall of state socialism in Eastern Europe, Hungarian organizations in multiple states mobilized to open a border crossing between Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc. The goal of the movement was to reunify two Magyar rural populations divided by an international border. This reunification would not formally challenge the current boundaries of sovereign states, but it would offer villagers the opportunity to realize the simple dream articulated by an African-American member of the U.S. Congress: that “eventually we will stroll hand in hand from one end of Szelmenec to the other.”⁴ The border opening was meant not only to redress the grievances of specific individuals who had been involuntarily separated from family members but also to remedy what was widely perceived as a historical wrong: the division of the nation in the village.⁵

Movement activists succeeded in persuading the European Union and the governments of Ukraine and Slovakia to support their cause, and at the end of 2005

a pedestrian border crossing between Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc was opened. However, while residents of Slovakia now may freely enter Kisszelmenc, those in Ukraine must obtain external passports and undergo lengthy and expensive bureaucratic procedures to visit their kin on the EU side of the street.⁶ This is an unthinkable luxury for most villagers in Kisszelmenc. While the apparatus of the repressive Soviet state has long fallen away, the border has been remilitarized and what villagers call a “golden curtain” has come to replace the iron one. As one villager described the current predicament: “You’d have to sell your cow to buy a passport.”⁷

The creation of a “window to Europe” generated a reorganization of space and a transformation of political economy on the Ukrainian side of the boundary. Those changes in rural political economy, rather than reuniting Magyar populations on the two sides of the border, instead contributed to the marginalization of the Magyar cultural space in Kisszelmenc. The border opening ultimately created economic incentives that drove some Magyar villagers away from Kisszelmenc; encouraged other Magyars in Kisszelmenc to adopt the linguistic practices of the two titular nationalities, Slovak and Ukrainian; and prompted Ukrainians, Slovaks, and Roma to visit and settle in what had once been a primarily Magyar village.

This article traces the causal chains that link institutional change, economic incentives, and identity transformation.⁸ It proceeds in four stages: first, it describes the research methods and evidence used to advance the claims presented here; second, it provides an account of the transnational project to reunify Magyar populations in the Ukraine-Slovakia borderlands; third, it shows how surveillance at the border crossing produced zones of confinement in and around the village, profoundly reshaping local economic incentives linked to agriculture, trade, and rural–urban transportation infrastructure; and fourth, it shows how these new economic incentives transformed the ethno-linguistic landscape of the village. It concludes by reflecting on the implications of the restructuring of economy and identity in Kisszelmenc for border regions more generally.

Research Methods

The evidence presented here is based on ethnographic and interview research in Kisszelmenc and other borderland villages in Zakarpattia, the region of southwestern Ukraine where Kisszelmenc is located, between 2004 and 2008. Local press reports from Ukrainian, Hungarian, and Russian-language newspapers, as well as data obtained from the regional state statistical office supplement ethnographic and interview texts. Extensive work with historical documents in the regional state archives provides context for my interpretation of contemporary sources.

Evidence from 2004 is drawn from forty-three structured and open-ended interviews conducted by the author in Kisszelmenc and in neighboring villages in May of that

year, in the first weeks after Slovakia joined the European Union.⁹ The additional settlements in question included a border village located a few kilometers from Kisszelmenc, a village on the road to the city of Užhorod, and a Roma settlement on the edge of the latter village. Interviews with individual respondents lasted between twenty minutes and five hours and took place in three languages: Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Russian.¹⁰ Fieldwork in the village during the summer of 2007 and 2008 consisted of a series of visits and conversations with residents of and visitors to Kisszelmenc—in several cases, people interviewed by the author in 2004. Observations in Kisszelmenc are complemented by observations drawn from participant observation fieldwork conducted at every border crossing point between Ukraine and Slovakia and Ukraine and Hungary, as well as several border crossings between Ukraine and Romania, in the summer of 2008.

Because movement between village and city is a critical component of rural political economy, some of the participant observation research for this article was conducted in transit. The interpretations presented here are informed by scores of interactions on local buses linking Kisszelmenc and other borderlands villages in Ukraine to urban markets, on longer-distance buses linking towns, at rural bus stops, and along rural byways traversed by the author on bicycle.

Participant observation research and structured and open-ended interviews, rather than surveys, were chosen due to practical limitations on data collection in Kisszelmenc. Current political and economic conditions, as well as recent historical experience, make enumeration of accurate survey data in the village difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. A series of disappointing encounters with outsiders has given residents reason to be reticent about sharing information about their village with strangers. Despite the village's seeming isolation, international traffic in Kisszelmenc has been constant. During World War II, both German and Soviet troops passed through the village, in some cases requisitioning homes to shelter soldiers.¹¹ Around the turn of the millennium, busloads of German tourists disembarked in the village to view "the last barbed wire fence in Europe," and refugees from further east made Kisszelmenc their final transit point as they slipped under the barbed wire and crossed into Slovakia. And since the opening of the border crossing in the village, Kisszelmenc has played host to throngs of shoppers from the European Union.

The Project of National Reunification: A *Kettézárt Falu*

Advocates of opening a border crossing between Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc did not articulate irredentist narratives as such, for the villages in question were separated both from one another and from the territory of the current Hungarian state. However, their discourse did suggest a project of national reunification on a miniature scale, in which ethnic minorities would be reconnected through a break in the boundary separating Ukraine and Slovakia.

Organizations involved in the movement to reconnect Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc drew on multiple frames to advance their cause, emphasizing human rights and the unjust legacies of a totalitarian past. Pan-Magyar solidarity was central to the movement, and the idea of national reunification was the driving force in the narratives used to call attention to the situation. Csergo writes, “Although European norms and security arrangements have made irredentist conquest virtually impossible, linguistic territoriality can drive kin-states to take an interest in the fate of their ‘external kin,’ designing policies to reproduce a common cultural ‘nationhood’ across borders.”¹² In the case of Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc, not only kin-states as such but also their coethnics in a third country, the United States, participated in creating such a policy.

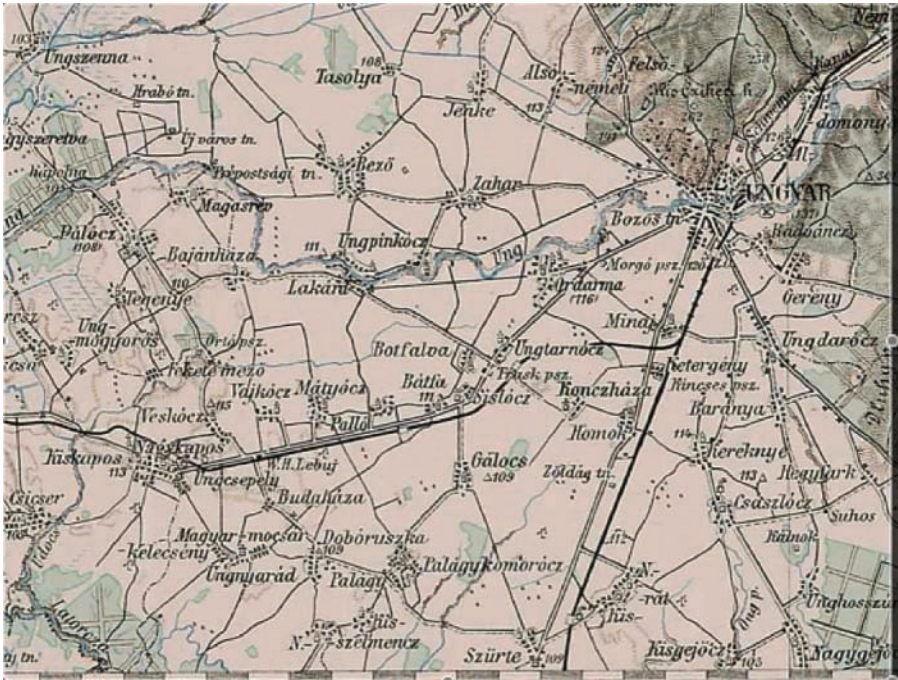
The actors involved were thus primarily people from outside the Ukraine–Slovakia border region who, through their campaigns, advanced a particular vision of Magyar identity. Their use of symbolic politics emphasized norms that conceptualized the international border as an historical wrong,¹³ not only because the fence divided kinship groups and the local population had not been consulted when the border was constructed, but also because the border bifurcated what they described as a single Magyar village, a formerly administratively continuous space.¹⁴

While the separation of family members is an uncontested fact, the importance accorded to the division of the nation in the village varied according to the identity and political viewpoint. The trope of the single divided village, which appeared repeatedly in Hungarian- and English-language media coverage after 2000 and was later adopted by Ukrainian language sources, suggested a particular interpretation of the national past in this borderland.¹⁵ Participants in the border opening movement tended to emphasize the trope of a single, divided village, speaking of “Szelmenc” rather than referring individually to the two villages in question, as some Magyar residents of Kisszelmenc tended to do.¹⁶

The reason why residents of the borderlands should make such a distinction is likely rooted in the historical development of the area. While it may be the case, as in William Miles’s study of Hausaland, that “the colonial partition, though external in origin, has become an internalized, commonplace reality for millions of borderline villagers,”¹⁷ the identity of these villages as discrete settlements precedes Soviet rule.

In the early twentieth century, the two settlements had shared two churches and a graveyard. However, for centuries before the international border separated them, Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc had appeared in state administrative records as distinct villages. For example, the first Hungarian census, taken in 1715 in the wake of the Ottoman Empire’s exit from the region, enumerates property for Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc separately.¹⁸ A 1910 map of Austria-Hungary (See Figure 1) likewise depicts two discrete villages, suggesting an historical trajectory of spatial convergence as the villages grew toward one another, rather like late-nineteenth-century Buda and Pest.¹⁹

Figure 1
Excerpt From *A Monarchia III. Katonai Felmérése*. Environs of Uzhhorod
(Ungvár), 1910-1914



Note: Kis- and Nagyszelmenc (z) are in lower center.

While the border dividing Kiszszelmenc and Nagyszszelmenc happened to be an artifact of post-World War II Soviet state-building, the outrage it represented was arguably closely tied to discontent regarding another set of postwar border decisions—those that followed the first World War, with the 1920 Treaty of Versailles.²⁰ That treaty had left Kiszszelmenc and Nagyszszelmenc, together with hundreds of other historically Magyar settlements, outside the boundaries of the state of Hungary.²¹

Despite claims that “the villagers are not asking to be reunited under the same flag, just to be able to walk through the fence to the other side of the village,”²² the narrative articulated by Hungarian activists outside of the borderland conceptualized territory in nationalist terms, as properly inscribed by ethno-linguistic identity.²³ Seen from the vantage point of Budapest or Washington, the problem was the division of the Hungarian nation in the village.²⁴ The solution would be the reunification of Magyar populations on the two sides of the Ukraine-Slovakia border.

The movement narrative emphasized the separation of Magyar populations as the reason why Soviet soldiers had constructed the international border between Nagyszelmenc and Kisszelmenc. However, at least two other narratives circulated in Kisszelmenc after the fall of communism but before the divided village narrative had been absorbed into village discourse.²⁵ These narratives frame the event in terms of an interaction between geopolitical strategies and local politics.²⁶ One explanation held that an individual who owed substantial debts to the local bank influenced the decision, making sure that he and the bank ended up on different sides of the border.²⁷ Another revolved around two of the poorest people in the village, who had been landless and “of communist beliefs.” According to this narrative, they helped the border to be established where it currently stands in order to lay claim to forest land that belonged to their relatives at the other end of the village, in what is now Slovakia. In this account, such a division proved particularly problematic for residents on the Ukrainian side, who since then have had no forest readily accessible to them.²⁸ As one villager pointed out, “It didn’t work out the way they wanted.”²⁹

Why did this movement gain momentum only a decade after the fall of state socialism in Europe? The political context in this part of Europe around the turn of the millennium provided fertile ground for new mobilization around national questions. The project to open the border crossing that would link Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc had its likely origins in 2000, with the publication in Hungary of a book titled *A kettézárt falu* (The Bifurcated Village).³⁰ Subsequently, a motion for a resolution was presented at the parliamentary assembly of the Council of Europe, calling for a mini border crossing between Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc.³¹

The book was published at a time of EU membership negotiations for Hungary and the millenary celebrations of the founding of the Hungarian state, which saw a flourishing of state-supported films and other media celebrating Hungarian national ideas.³² The following year, Hungary introduced the first version of its Status Law, which provided educational, health care, and other benefits to ethnic Hungarians in certain neighboring countries.³³ While the law arguably was intended to encourage ethnic Hungarians abroad to stay in their home countries when Hungary joined the European Union,³⁴ its extension of rights and regulations to populations of neighboring countries was broadly perceived in Europe as an attempt to catalyze cultural reunification of Magyars, even as, until its revisions in 2003, it seemed to infringe on other nations’ sovereignty.³⁵

Amid a renaissance in Hungarian nationalist ideas, the tragedy of the families of Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc thus became a focal point for Magyars within and beyond Hungary. The Hungarian imaginary located national identity in the remote periphery: as László Kürti writes of Transylvania, the “remote region . . . in the nationalist imagination is sullen, neat, and uncontaminated, the *true* nature where people live more natural lives than those living outside of it.”³⁶

It was in this context, in an instance of what Rogers Brubaker has called the “transborder nationalisms of external national homelands,”³⁷ that the American

Hungarian Federation and the Center for Hungarian American Congressional Relations lobbied the U.S. Congress.³⁸ Those organizations brought the mayors of Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc to Washington to testify before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus to the Stalinist-era human rights violations caused by the existence of the barrier.³⁹ The Caucus also addressed letters directly to the Prime Minister of Slovakia and the President of Ukraine, asking them to consider opening a border crossing between Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc. Powerful local figures in and around Kisszelmenc, in anticipation of a possible resolution and subsequent rise in property values, hurried to privatize and, in some cases, appropriate land adjacent to the border.⁴⁰

Strictly speaking, the movement to open a border crossing was not, in Tarrow's terms, a project of transnational mobilization:⁴¹ in contrast to other initiatives linking Hungarian organizations abroad and activists in Hungary with Magyar populations in Ukraine, the border crossing project was only loosely rooted in villagers' concerns, and it did not directly involve most residents of Kisszelmenc.⁴² As a newspaper serving the U.S. diplomatic community reported, "For a long time, many residents of Velke Slemence [Nagyszelmenc] and Solonci [Kisszelmenc] weren't aware of the diplomacy and lobbying being conducted on their behalf in Washington. In fact, they only learned of it . . . when Nagy of CHACR visited the village and informed the residents of the developments in Washington."⁴³ In Kisszelmenc, only the mayor, József Ilar, whose creativity in financial and political dealings has received wide recognition in the village, actively participated in the campaign to open a border crossing. Beyond the mayor's office, despite an expressed interest in having a look at what was on the other side of the boundary, villagers of Kisszelmenc articulated skepticism about the prospect of opening a border crossing.⁴⁴

The symbolic value of the project from the standpoint of residents of Kisszelmenc may be best appreciated in light of efforts that were *not* made on their behalf. Infrastructural improvements that could have at least partially reunited families were slow in coming: as late as 2003, communications infrastructure in the village permitted only one household at a time to make a telephone call to outside Kisszelmenc.⁴⁵ At the height of the movement, residents of Kisszelmenc overwhelmingly were more interested in addressing immediate concerns that affected basic standards of living, such as repairing the road and running natural gas lines to their houses, than they were with opening a border crossing to Nagyszelmenc.

Thus, even as activists outside Ukraine mobilized to reunify Kisszelmenc and Nagyszelmenc, villagers on the Ukrainian side were ambivalent about the prospect: the narrative of historical wrong outside the village was far stronger than that within it. One villager commented, "If they open the border, it'll be chaos. It'll be another Iran [*sic*]."⁴⁶ During negotiations, some villagers worried that Kisszelmenc might be turned into "another Chop"—the town with the nearest legal border crossing, which one villager compared to Tijuana. When asked whether life would be easier if the border were opened, a third villager replied,

On the one hand, yes. And on the other, no. Because the garbage . . . our children play in the road without any problem. They play soccer. It's just that if there's a border crossing here—I don't have to tell you what goes on in Chop, where I crossed into Hungary for probably fourteen years—right now it's pretty [here], a single village, but it'll become a complete garbage bin. Of course if somewhere important people help so that it's done properly. . . . There's nothing here, no toilet. You know, first of all it'll be unpleasant for us, and secondly people will say, "Well, they opened the border." But that's all in the future. Whatever they come up with. . . . So far, no one knows anything about what will happen.⁴⁷

Some villagers further worried that a crossing point within or near the village would lead to profiteering and would not help that part of the village population which still has relatives in Nagyszelmenc: "We went to the village council, they wrote down who had relatives there. . . . Half the people in the village are the kind who bought [houses], they have no relatives at all. If they open the border—ha!"⁴⁸ For some villagers, the material challenges of life in Kisszelmenc, brought about in large part by the village's territorial location, made the prospect of altering the geography of the village seem a risky proposition indeed.

The Reconfiguration of Space and Political Economy

Once Hungarian organizations in the United States succeeded in brokering a deal between the governments of Slovakia and Ukraine, the border crossing was opened. In December 2005, the character of Kisszelmenc began to change. If before "this was the end of the world," after the opening the village became crowded with visitors, and residents witnessed the passage of thousands through their village street. Those visitors, who arrive primarily to shop in the scores of kiosks and shops that have sprung up within a few dozen meters of the border, bring commerce to the village and create an initial impression if not of a bustling city, then of a busy international crossroads.

The border crossing led to a transformation of physical space in and around Kisszelmenc. That transformation, while opening a passage from Europe, confined residents to smaller and smaller areas within the village. The border crossing transformed the landscape, reconfiguring rural livelihoods. Rather than reunifying ethnic communities, the border crossing made of Kisszelmenc yet another example of what Kate Brown describes as the "transition from ancestral land to commodified space."⁴⁹ It imposed new limitations on agrarian livelihoods, caused an explosion of trade within the village, and created a demand for improved transportation links with the nearby, predominantly ethnically Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod. Each of those changes—in surveillance, trade, and transportation—had specific implications for ethno-linguistic identity in Kisszelmenc.

As elsewhere along the border between EU member states and states to the east, the political economy of the border at the edge of twenty-first century *Festung Europa* thus produces reverberations beyond the outer walls of the fortress.⁵⁰ The hardened external border in Kisszelmenc required new tools of surveillance, tools that had not been used under Soviet rule.⁵¹ The new surveillance regimes generated consequences that reached into the space beyond the watchtowers, barbed wire, cameras, police dogs, and mirrors to shape local rural economies.

In large part, the residents of Kisszelmenc, like people residing elsewhere along the eastern borders of EU countries, constitute a community of people who are consumers of products and ideas that travel but who cannot, for reasons for citizenship and money, themselves cross borders.⁵² Kisszelmenc partakes in a broader paradox of border regions on the edge of the European Union: as Europe approaches, it becomes ever harder to reach.⁵³ Although some young people in Kisszelmenc possess an external passport, most do not possess the resources necessary either for obtaining one. The majority of residents of Kisszelmenc are not able to use the border crossing:

A passport is expensive. Look, about half of the young people leave the village and have an international passport. But none of the old people do at all, because it costs 1,000 UAH to get a passport in three months. Older people don't have enough money to do that just for the purpose of going over and having a look.⁵⁴

Beyond the direct cost of obtaining documentation, travel is required to obtain a passport and necessary supporting papers, making the costs of crossing the border high indeed for many rural households.⁵⁵ Because the majority of native residents of Kisszelmenc have been compelled by force of circumstance to remain on the Ukrainian side of the border, they experience the border crossing not as a passageway to another world, but as a force that has changed the lives they had before the border opening.

That change took several forms. First, border crossing required additional space for construction and new tools of surveillance, and these changes spelled the decline of smallholder agriculture—the former livelihood of most residents of Kisszelmenc. After the fall of Soviet power but prior to the opening of the border crossing, the border had consisted of a barbed wire fence, a no-man's land, and a nearby watchtower (see Figure 2).

With the border crossing, despite the fact that it would be mainly citizens of Slovakia who would make the journey, the entire apparatus of state surveillance was built on the Ukrainian side: trailers for customs and border officials' offices, counters for those crossing the border to fill out forms and present their documents, large signs, trash bins, mirrors, cameras, and long lines of people.

The new border crossing and the surveillance around it reconfigured space in the village in a way that constrained some villagers' access to pasture and gardens and their ability to make a living on the land. Furthermore, the presence of the border opening and cross-border traffic from the west dramatically increased the cost of certain agricultural inputs, raised the labor cost of guarding crops, and produced incentives to leave the land to sell manufactured goods from China to visitors from Slovakia.

Figure 2
View From Kisszelmenc Prior to the Opening of the
Border Crossing, May 2004.



Author photo. The man in the photo is washing his car.

Border surveillance came to mean constant harassment for villagers who for decades had cut hay and cultivated vegetables along the boundary. This represented a sea change from earlier in the post-socialist period: before Slovakia's accession to the European Union, the small number of soldiers responsible for guarding the area around Kisszelmenc had known villagers by their faces and their routines, and villagers could go about their tasks undisturbed.⁵⁶ In 2004, villagers who cut hay at night—sometimes the only time available after days consumed by livestock husbandry, cultivation of household plots, or employment in the formal economy—described being frightened by soldiers who approached them, demanding to inspect their documents and to know what they were doing. One villager recounted a situation encountered by her son, who had gone to a nearby creek to fish:

It wasn't long ago. It was on Sunday, after lunch, when we send the cows out to pasture. I wanted to rest a bit. But then a car pulled up and my son called. He needed me to deliver his passport, because he'd been arrested by soldiers. It was so unexpected. I didn't know where his passport was. I went outside, and an army officer—I don't

remember of what rank, but he was the commander of the border post—was standing there. They thought my son wanted to cross the border. . . . It's worse than after the war. I had to go to the border post and fill out paperwork. You know how it is here. It was alright in the end, but now we need documents to go out in the field. We have land near the border, and we have to go and cut hay. "Black" people come here, but they don't detain outsiders, only our own.⁵⁷

With the opening of the border crossing and greater military and police presence, villagers found their access to garden plots even further limited by constant surveillance of the immediately surrounding area. The vegetable gardens of village households are located immediately adjacent to the border, and so in addition to the presence of soldiers, residents contend with visitors who sometimes trample crops and leave garbage in fields.

The opening of the border crossing prompted a transformation not only of state surveillance but also of land ownership regimes, further enclosing the commons and placing additional pressure on agricultural livelihoods. Concurrently with the movement to open the border crossing, one local official involved in the campaign embarked on a project of "privatization," appropriating garden plots along the border and threatening to expand his own holdings to block paths used by villagers' cows on their way to pasture.⁵⁸

A second type of spatial confinement developed within the village in response to the border opening. If border surveillance limited agricultural space on the perimeter of the village, the extraordinary influx of day visitors, traders, and others from Slovakia reconfigured space in the interior. In an attempt to safeguard a measure of privacy and security once the border crossing had opened, rural people enclosed formerly open spaces beside and behind homes in Kisszelmenc in high metal fencing. The yard surrounding what used to be the only village store is fenced and locked, and any space that leads to a courtyard has likewise been placed under lock and key. Village spaces in Kisszelmenc have been gated, isolating villagers in their homes and enclosing open areas that once offered opportunities for communication among households.

The small byways where villagers were formerly free to travel by foot, in a donkey cart, or by car are now clogged with pedestrians and vehicle traffic, driving residents of the village into smaller spaces within which they may freely move. The increased regulation that discourages movement along the border, combined with the practical reasons to avoid movement along the single village street, create a division in space: visitors to Kisszelmenc pass in linear movements away from and toward the border, while villagers attempt to carve private spaces in the ever closer interstices.

In her work on the political economy of the Russia-Ukraine border, Tatiana Zhurzhenko emphasizes the simultaneity of dual, seemingly contradictory processes: border construction, through the hardening of physical barriers, tariff and surveillance

regimes, and other mechanisms of control over people and goods; and border deconstruction, through cross-border cooperation and the development of regional economic integration programs.⁵⁹

Both processes were at work along the Ukraine–Slovakia border in the period following Slovakia’s accession to the European Union and the opening of the border crossing in Kisszelmenc. However, in practice, the softening Zhurzhenko describes applies only to one side of the Ukraine–Slovakia border. While the hardening of the eastern border of the European Union resulted in constraints on movement for citizens of Ukraine, including Magyars meant to benefit from the border opening, the border simultaneously softened for people coming from Slovakia through the border crossing in the village.

As a result of this softening, the single street of Kisszelmenc became crowded with commerce upon the opening of the border crossing, with dozens of kiosks positioned in front of people’s homes. Upon entering Ukraine the first store that visitors encounter is housed within a building located on the territory of the border crossing point, and each subsequent step brings visitors to another kiosk or shop.⁶⁰ Shops and kiosks carry candy, alcohol, cigarettes, gardening supplies, and hunting and sports equipment as well as a variety of consumer goods such as umbrellas and children’s bicycles. Despite the fact that Kisszelmenc is on Ukrainian territory, prices are given in Slovakian *koruna*, the primary currency in use in the kiosks in Kisszelmenc at the time of writing.⁶¹

Village residents largely do not have resources to open own kiosks, so they rent the space in front of their homes to people from Uzhhorod and elsewhere who do. Many of the kiosks are reputed to belong to officials of the Uzhhorod district administration, customs officials, the district tax inspectorate, and the local police.⁶²

The dense eruption of kiosks and stores in Kisszelmenc is primarily a product of the incentives for transnational petty trade that different price regimes in Ukraine and in the European Union generate. At border crossing points between Ukraine and Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, stores carrying goods that are cheaper in Ukraine sell to day traders who return to their home countries in the European Union to resell those goods. Because of the opportunity for cross-border trade, Ukrainian border towns have given rise in recent years to shops selling cheap but necessary commodities such as washing powder and mineral water.⁶³

In southwestern Ukraine, rural and urban populations alike increasingly depend upon transnational arbitrage capitalism for their livelihoods. However, in the eyes of villagers on the Ukrainian side, small-scale arbitrage capitalism in this particular case seems to benefit primarily the hundreds of visitors who enter daily from Slovakia, crossing the border to buy goods in Ukraine and returning home to resell them at a higher price,⁶⁴ and the owners of kiosks, many of whom are not themselves village residents.⁶⁵ Some villagers express unambiguous appreciation of the commerce that the border crossing has brought; for others, the confinement produced by trade and surveillance is accompanied by a frustration that others should be the primary beneficiaries of a border crossing that has introduced complications into their own lives.

Even as the border opening generated zones of confinement in and around the village, it also opened avenues outward, creating new byways between Magyar village and Ukrainian city. A third consequence of the opening of the border crossing in Kisszelmenc, and of the opportunities for trade that the border crossing station created, was the repair and repaving of the road between the city of Uzhhorod and the string of villages along the Ukraine–Slovakia border where Kisszelmenc is located.

In 2004, the road to Kisszelmenc from Uzhhorod had been, in places, so potholed and in poor repair that some taxi drivers from Uzhhorod refused to make the trip. Post-socialist deterioration of infrastructure affected transportation links as well as the roads themselves. If in the 1990s, the bus from Uzhhorod to Kisszelmenc ran every two hours, by 2004 a bus made the trip only three times a day, at dawn, midday, and midafternoon. Then, a daily commute on the bus consumed between 10 and 30 percent of the monthly income of villagers who work in the city.⁶⁶

With the opening of the border crossing, and once the road had been made more suitable for large vehicle travel, *marshrutki*—the private fixed-route buses ubiquitous in post-Soviet urban areas—appeared in response to demand for transportation to and from the border. Those who now use the buses, which run roughly every hour or two between Kisszelmenc and Uzhhorod, include not only petty traders from Slovakia and tourists from across Europe but also villagers traveling to the city to work or to sell agricultural produce and city people visiting relatives in the countryside. The gradient of economic opportunity generated a flow of visitors but not long-term investors, and the net effect was, somewhat paradoxically, to reorient Magyar villagers away from their ethnic brethren in Slovakia and toward the predominantly Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod. Renewed and improved transportation links both eased access to Kisszelmenc for entrepreneurs based in Uzhhorod and strengthened commercial and other links between villagers and the city.

As the border crossing produced village zones of confinement and fostered urban–rural links, it did so in ways that affected different generations in Kisszelmenc differently. For the young, the border is the only meaningful impediment to movement beyond the village, and it is likely that they experience the loss of common spaces effaced by the border crossing—livestock paths, hayfields, and village benches—somewhat less acutely than their older relatives and neighbors. The old, the infirm, and the poor, however, remain trapped in Kisszelmenc, unable to walk down the street to see their relatives in Slovakia but equally unlikely to be able to take on the task of traveling northeastward to the city. Even though transportation from Kisszelmenc is now available, arrival in Uzhhorod brings a set of challenges that some older village residents describe as overwhelming. The bus terminus is on a busy street adjoining a market, near a dizzying number of buses and shops but nonetheless relatively far from other commercial parts of town.

Older villagers' sense of confinement is highlighted—and the belief that the border crossing has benefited only outsiders is reinforced—by a continuing crying

need within Kisszelmenc. Despite the small shops that sprouted like mushrooms after rain in the wake of the creation of the border crossing, not a single pharmacy kiosk has yet been opened, and villagers with basic nursing training (required for girls in secondary school during the last years of Soviet rule) must attend to the health of their elderly neighbors.⁶⁷

Ethno-linguistic Change

The border opening—both the security apparatus that accompanied it and the spatial reorganization it prompted—reshaped not only the political economy of the village world on its eastern side but also, through that economic reconfiguration, the ethno-linguistic landscape of the Kisszelmenc. In a multilingual borderland, language is fundamental to doing business; the border crossing transformed the local economy, leading to new ethno-linguistic differentiation in economic incentives.

The enclosure of land and access to pasture, while offering opportunities for engaging in petty trade, pushed residents of Kisszelmenc to participate less and less in Magyar work communities revolving around agriculture and instead to seek out commercial relations with Slovaks and Ukrainians. In Brubaker's terms, the border opening produced incentives that contributed to a progressively "incomplete encapsulation of the Hungarian world."⁶⁸ The project to reunite ethnic brethren separated by the territorial machinations of a foreign power in the mid-twentieth century thus produced not a firmer consolidation of Magyar identity in the borderlands, but instead its gradual reconfiguration.

Identity is a contested notion—not only for political communities but also for social scientists. The thorny matter of what we mean by "identity" and how it might be defined in ways that permit comparative analysis has been challenged and partially disaggregated by scholars who have questioned its utility as an analytical category.⁶⁹ Social scientists focusing on the meaning of identity have conceptualized it primarily in terms of attachment, particularly insofar as attachment may produce political mobilization. However, such approaches do not necessarily capture important ways in which social identities may be meaningful to people in their everyday lives.⁷⁰ The slipperiness of "identity" as an ontological category and its elusiveness as a social phenomenon thus require an alternative approach.

This article applies an epistemological framework suggested by, on the one hand, Wittgenstein's philosophy of language and, on the other, Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in particle physics. The essential idea in both cases is the same: that the *act* of speech, or of movement, itself defines or constitutes the thing under consideration.⁷¹ The focus is thus on observable actions that constitute and are in turn constituted by social identities. This article conceptualizes ethno-linguistic identity in an analogous fashion: as constituted by actions, without which it would not exist as such.⁷² Here,

identity is not a category of being but of practice: actions people perform in their everyday lives—often for practical reasons—which give meaning to or are given meaning by social identification.⁷³ Identity is not something people possess; it is something they do. Thus, the ways in which the villagers of Kisszelmenc *use* the Hungarian language, for example, gives meaning to what we call “identity.”⁷⁴

Changes in the ethno-linguistic landscape of Kisszelmenc following the opening of the border crossing may be observed both in demographic shifts and in changes in villagers’ choice of language. Most of these changes came about as a direct consequence of the border opening. Others represent the indirect effects of post-socialist economic and social policy more generally.

Prior to the opening of the border crossing in the village, about 65 percent of the two hundred people living in Kisszelmenc identified as Magyar, ethnically and linguistically.⁷⁵ At that time, about 10 percent of Kisszelmenc was ethnically Ukrainian, with smaller Slovak and Russian minorities.⁷⁶ The immediate environs of Kisszelmenc were and are similarly multiethnic, with Hungarian majorities in some neighboring villages. Most employees of the local council spoke only Hungarian, and ethnically Ukrainian employees likewise communicated in Hungarian.⁷⁷ A Hungarian flag flies next to its Ukrainian counterpart on the outside of the village council building,⁷⁸ and several long established and linguistically Hungarian Roma settlements line the edges of neighboring villages.⁷⁹

The economic changes prompted by the border opening led to a number of demographic shifts.⁸⁰ Since the transformation of the border regime, in response to the opportunities offered by the border opening, increasing numbers of ethnic Ukrainians and other Slavs have moved to Kisszelmenc.⁸¹ The village has seen a gradual but persistent rise in Ukrainian-speaking residents who move from Uzhhorod, purchase houses in Kisszelmenc, and open businesses there, hoping to take advantage of the border traffic through petty trade. In particular, longtime residents of Kisszelmenc frequently note that Russian-speaking Roma have moved into the village since the opening of the border crossing. New residents replace Magyar households whose older members have died and whose younger members have followed economic opportunities to nearby cities and to Hungary.

Magyar out-migration from Kisszelmenc shifted in character after the opening of the border. There already had been substantial demographic change in the village before the change in border regime: Kisszelmenc lost one-fifth of its permanent population between 1989 and 2001, while the nearest neighboring villages lost between 7 and 10 percent of their populations.⁸² However, prior to the end of 2005, many Magyars who left the village did so temporarily, seeking education or work in Hungary and preserving their ties to Kisszelmenc. Their family members would remain in the village, and those who had moved away often would return to Kisszelmenc on holidays. Out-migration associated with the border opening, on the other hand, was often motivated by rising prices in the village. Those who now leave do so more permanently, selling family homes and moving to the city.

While population replacement in response to new economic incentives played a role in transforming the ethno-linguistic landscape of Kisszelmenc, language practices among those who inhabit and visit the village also shifted directly in response to the opening of the border crossing. The political economy of Kisszelmenc open to the west privileges not only Slovak speakers able to communicate with traders, but also Ukrainian speakers. They may be better able to navigate the bureaucratic thickets through which one passes in order to obtain fire inspectorate certificates and a myriad of other documents necessary for opening a business.

Shifts in language practices may be observed in both written and spoken texts. In 2004, there was little presence of the written word in Kisszelmenc outside of people's homes. The name of the general store, the small sign on the barbed wire fence announcing the state border, and a few other words were the only texts visible in the village. Just a few years later, nearly every village house within a few hundred meters of the border was adorned with signs in Ukrainian and Slovak (Figure 3). In 2008, two or three signs outside of village kiosks advertised goods in Hungarian; all remaining texts visible to visitors were in a Slavic language.

For now, the use of Hungarian appears largely to have retreated into space reserved for conversations among residents of Kisszelmenc and their family and friends. By the summer of 2008, nearly all those working in village kiosks first addressed potential clients in Slovak, and village residents spoke of Slovaks from the European Union crossing the border daily to work in Kisszelmenc shops. Queries in Ukrainian were met with responses in Ukrainian, but not all kiosk or store workers were able or willing to answer queries in Hungarian.⁸³ Along the street in Kisszelmenc, visitors who do not know one another address each other in Slovak when they wish to know the time, when the bus will arrive, whether there are more stores further down the road, and so forth.

Furthermore, despite the growth in Hungarian schools in the region since the fall of state socialism, and despite the support provided by the Hungarian Status Law for Hungarian-language primary education in Ukraine, the language of play in Kisszelmenc has changed. In 2004, nearly all children's conversations overheard by the author were in Hungarian; during the author's visits in 2008, children playing in Kisszelmenc spoke predominantly Ukrainian. As one Magyar villager put it when introducing his adolescent son inside his home, "He's a Ukrainian."⁸⁴ This shift cannot be solely attributed to the border opening, as there has been relatively greater nationalization of the school system and media in Ukraine since 2004. However, in the case of Kisszelmenc, the language of play is especially telling, as Magyar parents in the village tend to send their children to the local Hungarian-language school.

The decline in public use of Hungarian is partly a result of the reconfiguration of space and economic relations in Kisszelmenc: the construction of kiosks transformed not only village space but also its modes of communication. For example, roadside benches formerly occupied some of the spaces now devoted to the sale of children's toys. Those benches were places not only for resting and watching goings on in the

Figure 3
Kiosk in Kisszelmenc, July 2008.



Note: Author photo. Signs are in Ukrainian and Slovak.

village but also for exchanging news. The growth of trade in the village changed that for many residents of Kisszelmenc. Informal dialogue now takes place in hidden or semiprivate commercial spaces—the back rooms of village stores, the garden of the pizza restaurant—or inside homes, with invited guests.

The changing presence of the Hungarian language in public space may also be due in large part to the visitors from Slovakia. Many of these are Hungarian speakers, but they live in a state that to date has been significantly less tolerant of minorities and minority languages than Ukraine. Some Magyar villagers interpret the reluctance of visiting Magyar Slovaks to speak Hungarian publicly in Kisszelmenc as a conditioned response to the prejudice that Hungarian speakers encounter in Slovakia. From the vantage point of Kisszelmenc, Magyar Slovaks are the minority bearers of a majority language that is making incursions into a neighboring sovereign territory. Whatever the reason for the language choice of Magyar citizens of Slovakia while they are in Ukraine, the practice of speaking Slovak contributes to the development

of a local environment in which the Hungarian language assumes a second or third class status—a fact that is unlikely to be lost on the children of Kisszelmenc.

Conclusion

In a short period of time, transnational mobilization in the name of Magyar reunification inadvertently managed to accomplish what nearly a half-century of Soviet rule and over a decade of Ukrainian statehood had not: the transformation of a previously ethnically and linguistically Magyar village into a place in which a Slavic language is heard with increasing frequency. Furthermore, that same mobilization led to a situation in which village spaces are now saturated by signs of commerce in Slovak, a language that is neither indigenous to the village nor proper to the state that currently rules it. In other words, in Kisszelmenc, the transformation of space and political economy as a consequence of the border opening produced not ethno-linguistic reunification on a particular territory but the local marginalization of Magyar cultural space.

It was neither socialism nor post-socialism but rather an EU border regime that most diluted the Magyar identity of this borderland village—a village that had once for a brief moment, in the tragedy of its separation from its sister village, been a central player in a Hungarian national imaginary. Here, it was not the political instruments of a repressive state, but instead market forces articulated through political institutions meant to protect a minority population that left vulnerable the ethno-linguistic identity of that very population.

The border opening in Kisszelmenc, though intended to address the division of an ethno-linguistic community instead addresses a subsidiary economic problem in the domestic politics of new EU member states. The Kisszelmenc border crossing provides an important source of income for day traders from the European Union, easing economic pressure on the rural population in Slovakia and provides a mechanism to control rising popular discontent within new member states regarding EU prices and policies. Given the relatively higher unemployment levels and lower levels of infrastructural development in new EU member states, opportunities for transborder arbitrage capitalism provide an important pressure valve at the eastern edge of the European Union. Some of the costs of that relief, however, are borne by the population just outside of the EU border.

Kisszelmenc is not alone as a border village that acts as an outlet for internal EU pressures. As the European Union has expanded eastward, international agreements have allowed special border crossings in areas where ethnic communities are separated by post-World War II borders. Such crossing points, like that in Kisszelmenc, are meant to allow the partial reunification of ethnic linguistic communities. The movement to reunite Magyar families thus has echoes in other projects along EU outer borders, such as the July 2008 opening of a pedestrian crossing between Solotvyno, Ukraine, and Sighet, Romania. There, only a few

weeks after the border opening, the array and extent of goods for sale and the crowds waiting to enter Ukraine to purchase them resembled those in Kisszelmenc.⁸⁵

If the border crossing in Kisszelmenc was conceived as a way to repair ethnic ties damaged by legacies of the Stalinist past, the results it produced for the Magyar residents of Kisszelmenc and their self-appointed advocates abroad were unexpected. The project generated a set of economic incentives that privileged the interests of people outside of Kisszelmenc, transforming the public ethno-linguistic face of the village: the permeability of the border from the west produced labor and capital flows that compartmentalize and confine public spaces that were formerly the site of Magyar economic and cultural reproduction.⁸⁶

As the practice of Magyar identity fades away in parts of Kisszelmenc, Slovak and Ukrainian identities are replacing it. This has occurred without express effort on the part of the Slovak or Ukrainian governments. The tools of border surveillance, combined with the market forces unleashed by the border crossing, have led to simultaneous de facto Slovak territorial incursion and extension of Ukrainian identity into a corner of the country that neither the Soviet nor the Ukrainian state had ever been successful in taming.

As the softening of internal borders and harmonization of domestic policy have brought about a degree of denationalization within EU member states, EU eastward expansion, with its attending technologies of border control and economic inequalities, has driven processes of nationalization in its outer borderlands. In other words, the denationalization that is believed to result from accession to the European Union has birthed an unacknowledged twin.⁸⁷ In the Ukraine–Slovakia borderlands, with the help of an international institution, the market was able to go where national states were not. As Brubaker et al. write of Cluj, another Magyar town on post-Trianon territory, “It is an irony of history, in a region rich in such ironies, that the nationalization of the poly-ethnic, polyglot, polyreligious borderland region . . . continues even as theorists of postnationalism and transnationalism celebrate the demise of the nation-state.”⁸⁸

In Kisszelmenc, a project meant to support ethnic reunification might have been expected to provide a bulwark against processes of post-socialist titular nation building in Ukraine. Instead, the approach of a cosmopolitan, multicultural European Union officially protective of minorities prompted processes of ethno-linguistic nationalization in its shadow.⁸⁹ That such a reality could come to pass arguably exposes further tensions in the EU democratizing project,⁹⁰ in which national minorities just beyond EU borders may find themselves increasingly vulnerable as Europe approaches.

Notes

1. Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, “Beyond ‘Identity,’” *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 4-6.

2. Notable exceptions to this general tendency include work on instrumental approaches to identity, such as David Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

3. In 2004, the population of Kisszelmenc was 210. The population of Nagyszelmenc, just across the border, was 620. "A szelmenciek ügye az amerikai kongresszus előtt," *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*, 22 April 2004, 2.

4. "Remélem, hogy előbb-utóbb a kézben fogunk átsétálni Szelmenccel egyik oldáláról a másikra." Congresswoman Diane Watson, quoted in "Szelmenccel ügy lett Washingtonban. A csatlakozás elválaszt és összeköt," *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*, 24 April 2004.

5. The phrase belongs to Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848-1914* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

6. For details regarding the lengthy procedures required even under the new visa facilitation regime, see "Prigranichnyie pravila dlia Ukrainy i Slovakii vstupili v silu," *LIGA BiznesInform*, 29 September 2008, www.liga.net (accessed 4 November 2008); "Maloe pogranichnoe dvizhenie so Slovakiei mozheto okazat'sia blefom," 26 September 2008, <http://www.ua-reporter.com/novosti/38609> (accessed 4 November 2008); Uhoda mizh Ukrainoiu ta Slovats'koiu Respublikoiu pro mistsevyi prykordonnyi rukh, approved by Ukrainian Presidential Decree N 697/2008, 6 August 2008. Also see Elsbeth Guild and Didier Bigo, "Le visa Schengen: expression d'une stratégie de 'police' à distance," *Culture et Conflits* 49:1 (2003): 22-37.

7. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 26 May 2004. It should be noted that this is a dramatic statement indeed: a cow is a village household's primary value-producing possession.

8. For a recent study that persuasively uses causal chains as an explanatory strategy, see Keith Darden and Anna Grzymała-Busse, "The Great Divide: Literacy, Nationalism, and the Communist Collapse," *World Politics* 59 (October 2006): 83-115.

9. The author conducted forty-three formal interviews, with both individuals and groups of two to four villagers. This research is part of a larger project on surveillance, nation building, and political economy along this border from 1938 to the present.

10. In 2004, during the early stage of the author's study of Hungarian, an interpreter was used for interviews and portions of interviews conducted in Hungarian. In those cases, respondents' answers were translated from Hungarian into Russian and Ukrainian. Subsequent conversations in Hungarian were conducted without an interpreter, though such conversations tended to include some code-switching.

11. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 24 May 2004.

12. Zsuzsa Csergo, *Talk of the Nation: Language and Conflict in Romania and Slovakia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007), 19.

13. On norms in transborder politics, see Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, *Activists beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998).

14. "Szelmenccel nem volt népszavazás! Reagálások egy salgótarjáni levélre," *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*, 13 May 2004. It may be worth noting that few modern states have consulted with local populations in drawing their external borders.

15. "Na finishi roku maemo shche odni vorota v Ievropu. V IeS cherez Mali Selmentsi vidteper mozhna distatysia pishky abo na velosypedi," *Novyny Zakarpattia*, 24 December 2005, 1.

16. My understanding of village speech practices is based on scores of conversations with residents of Kisszelmenc during visits over a period of four years as well as overheard exchanges among villagers and visitors to Kisszelmenc.

17. William F. S. Miles, *Hausaland Divided: Colonialism and Independence in Nigeria and Niger* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 19.

18. Az 1715. évi országos összeírás. A Magyar Országos Levéltár adatbázisai. 78-10-116 and 78-10-118, <http://www.arcanum.hu/mol/> (accessed 2 November 2008).

19. See Robert Nemes, *The Once and Future Budapest* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005).

20. The treaty is most commonly referred to in Hungarian cultural space as Trianon. In a review essay of the work of László Kontler, Paul Lendvai, and Miklós Molnár, Daniel M. Pennell writes, "While Trianon certainly did leave 3 million Magyars outside the new Hungary, that most of them resided in homogenous communities lying immediately along the borders of neighboring states is arguable at best"

(500). Relative ethno-linguistic homogeneity can indeed be observed in the case of some Hungarian villages surrounding Kisszelmenc on the Ukrainian side of the border, though that homogeneity arguably was produced in the years surrounding World War II. See Pennell, "The Hungarian Idea at the Millennial Crossroads," *East European Politics and Societies* 19:3 (2005): 494-505.

21. More recent decisions, such as the administrative division of Slovakia under Mečiar in such a way that reduced the political clout of Magyar populations, also form part of the context of the politics of nationality in this movement. See Stephen Deets and Sherrill Stroschein, "Dilemmas of Autonomy and Liberal Pluralism: Examples Involving Hungarians in Central Europe," *Nations and Nationalism* 11:2 (April 2005): 285-305.

22. Sandor Nagy, president of the Center for Hungarian American Congressional Relations, quoted in Carolyn Chapman, "Slovak Ambassador Lobbies for Divided Village," *Washington Diplomat*, July 2004.

23. See Philipp Ther and Ana Siljak, *Redrawing Nations: Ethnic Cleansing in East-central Europe, 1944-1948* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

24. The Soviet Union had not always pursued a strategy of strict division in its border regions. The early 1930s saw the Soviet Union's abandonment of the Piedmont principle, in which it had encouraged cross-border ties between irredenta populations for the purpose of destabilizing neighboring states. See Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).

25. In 2004, villagers reported that copies of *A kettézárt falu* had been widely distributed in Kisszelmenc.

26. Archival sources published in V. V. Mar'ina, *Zakarpatskaia Ukraina (Podkarpatskaia Rus') v politike Benesha i Stalina 1939-1945 gg.* (Moscow: Novyi khronograph, 2003), shed some light on state narratives at the time. Also see Mykhailo Boldizhar and Oleksandr Hrin, *Zakarpats'ka Ukraina: Derzhavno-pravovyi status i dial'nist' (kinets' 1944 r. - pochatok 1946 r.)* (Uzhhorod: Polychka Karpats'h kraiu, 1999).

27. Oral testimony (OT), Kisszelmenc, 24 May 2004. OT refers to statements made to me or in my presence outside the context of a formal interview.

28. Interview, Palad' Komarivtsi (Palágykomorócz), 25 May 2004.

29. OT, Kisszelmenc, 26 May 2004.

30. Miklós Zelei, *A kettézárt falu* (Budapest, Hungary: Ister Kiadó, 2000).

31. "Abolishing the last piece of Iron Curtain in Central Europe," Doc. 9363, Motion for a resolution, 5 February 2002.

32. Agnes Rajacic, "Populist Construction of the Past and Future: Emotional Campaigning in Hungary between 2002 and 2006," *East European Politics and Societies* 21:4 (2007): 643.

33. See, for example, Osamu Ieda et al., eds. *Beyond Sovereignty: From Status Law to Transnational Citizenship?* (Sapporo, Japan: Slavic Research Center of Hokkaido University, 2006); and Deets and Stroschein, "Dilemmas of Autonomy."

34. Stephen Deets, "The Hungarian Status Law and the Specter of Neo-medievalism in Europe," *Ethnopolitics* 7:2-3 (2008): 204, 206.

35. *Ibid.*

36. László Kürti, *The Remote Borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian Imagination* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 20.

37. Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 109.

38. The American Hungarian Foundation's founding mission concerns redress of territorial grievances that followed the end of World War I and the Treaty of Versailles (Trianon). See http://www.americanhungarianfederation.org/news_szelmenc.htm. Under a section devoted to Szelmenc, the Web site notes, "3/11/2005—A Huge Victory! Szelmenc border crossing to open!"

39. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 21 May 2004. "Szelmenc ügy lett Washingtonban. A csatlakozás elvázalt és összeköt," *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*, 24 April 2004; "Szelmenc: amerikai meghallgatás után. A továbblépés már a két országon múlik," 27 April 2004, 1. "Fordulat a kisszelmenci határátkelő ügyében?" *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*, 11 March 2004, 1, 3.

40. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 18 May 2004.

41. Sidney Tarrow, *The New Transnational Activism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

42. For discussions of transborder Magyar ties from a variety of perspectives, see "Az Unió határán kívül, de az EU segítségével. Ukrán-Magyar Területfejlesztési Iroda Ungváron," *Kárpáti Igaz Szó*, 13 July 2004; and "Ukrains'ko-slovats'ki vidnosny . . ." (including a section titled "A uhors'ko-ukrains'ki proekty obhovoryly"), *Novyny Zakarpattia*, 5 April 2003, 1. A nearly complete list of Magyar associations in this region of Ukraine, many of whom have direct ties to Hungary, can be found in "Zaiava lideriv national'no-kul'turnykh tovarystv oblasti," *Novyny Zakarpattia*, 3 August 2004.

43. Chapman, "Slovak Ambassador."

44. A similar hesitance can be found in narratives of villagers on the Georgia–Turkey border. Mathijs Pelkmans, *Defending the Border: Identity, Religion, and Modernity in the Republic of Georgia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

45. Vasil' Zubach, "Solontsi divliat'sia v Ievropu," *Den'*, 26 July 2003.

46. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 18 May 2004.

47. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 19 May 2004.

48. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 21 May 2004.

49. Kate Brown, "Gridded Lives: Why Kazakhstan and Montana Are Nearly the Same Place," *American Historical Review* 106:1 (February 2001): 27.

50. Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Politics of Border Making and (Cross-)border Identities," *Eurozine*, 14 January 2005.

51. Peter Andreas, *Border Games: Policing the U.S.-Mexico Divide* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000); and Timothy Snyder, "The Wall around the West," *Eurozine*, 6 January 2005, 1-7.

52. Snyder, "The Wall around the West."

53. Karolina Szmagańska-Follis, "Repossession: Notes on Restoration and Redemption in Ukraine's Western Borderland," *Cultural Anthropology* 23:2 (2008): 344.

54. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 19 May 2004.

55. Guild and Bigo, "Le visa Schengen."

56. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 19 May 2004.

57. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 29 May 2004.

58. The same official was reported, in a newspaper article circulating among villagers in summer 2008, to be collecting 60 UAH per day from each of the seventy kiosks in Kisszelmenc for garbage collection—a service that consists of a Roma man with a cart drawn by a single horse, who makes the rounds each morning. Field notes, Kisszelmenc, 9 July 2008; OT, Kisszelmenc, 20 July 2008; and copy of article by E. Baturina, "Reportazh s pogranychogo perelaza," newspaper title not given.

59. Tatiana Zhurzhenko, "Cross-border Cooperation and Transformation of Regional Identities in the Ukrainian-Russian Borderlands: Toward a Euroregion 'Slobozhanshchyna'? Part 1," *Nationalities Papers* 32:1 (March 2004): 207-32.

60. The shops are concentrated near the border; the two or three stores just a ten-minute walk away from the border, around the bend but still well within village territory, struggle to attract customers.

61. When Slovakia enters the euro zone in 2009, currency and prices in Kisszelmenc are likely to reflect that change.

62. Russian-language article circulating in the village. Baturina, "Reportazh s pogranychogo perelaza." The notion that customs officials and others are engaged in the trade that border crossings attract is widespread in the region. Participant observation research conducted at other border crossings between

Ukraine and EU countries for two months in 2008 suggests that officials are involved in some way in a great deal of cross-border exchange.

63. It is worth noting the historical irony in the fact that Ukraine would seem to have become a regional center for laundry detergent distribution; during the Soviet period, this was one of the items in perpetually short supply.

64. Juraj Buzalka and Vladimír Benč have found that petty trade is virtually the sole reason for border crossing in Kisszelmenc. "EU Border Monitoring: Slovak-Ukrainian Border Vyšné Nemecké/Uzhgorod and Veľké Slemence/Mali Selmenci," Research Center of the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, Bratislava and Prešov, Slovakia, November 2007, 9.

65. When I asked a friend in the village if there was one thing about which she thought everyone in Kisszelmenc could agree, she and her husband responded simultaneously: that the border crossing is benefiting only Slovaks. OT, Kisszelmenc, 20 July 2008.

66. Calculated based on the cost of bus fare (1.5 UAH) and the national average monthly salary at the time.

67. OT, Kisszelmenc, August 2007.

68. Rogers Brubaker, Margit Feischmidt, Jon Fox, and Liana Grancea, *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 370.

69. Rawi Abdelal, Yoshiko M. Herrera, Alastair Iain Johnstone, and Rose McDermott, "Identity as a Variable," *Perspectives on Politics* 4 (2006): 695-711; Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity.'"

70. See, for example, Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity*.

71. Nietzsche provides a powerful additional metaphor for this approach in a brief discussion of lightning, which in his exposition has no being apart from what it does. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967).

72. This conceptualization of identity is distinct from the notion of identity as performance, in which individuals may, for example, perform ethnic affiliation through the use of stereotypes about ethnic others.

73. This approach to identity has been used in contexts outside of the post-communist world. See Thomas Spear and Richard Waller, eds., *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1993).

74. This approach is related, though not identical, to Sidney Tarrow's conceptualization of transnationalism as relational rather than cognitive. Tarrow, *New Transnational Activism*.

75. *Naselelnia Zakarpats'koi oblasti. Statystychnyi zbirnyk* (Uzhhorod: Derzhavnyi komitet statystyky, Zakarpats'ke oblasne upravlinnia, 2003), 55.

76. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 21 May 2004. Ethnic designations listed here correspond to the terms used by villagers.

77. Interview, Palad' komarivtsi (Palágykomorócz), 25 May 2004.

78. This display has a visual (if not semiotic) parallel in Uzhhorod, where the flag of the European Union flies alongside the *zhovto-blakytnyi* Ukrainian flag in front of the regional state administration building.

79. The residents of these settlements described themselves in 2004 as "Hungarian" as well as "Gypsy." OT, Roma settlement, Palad' komarivtsi (Palágykomorócz), 25 May 2004.

80. There has been no formal census since that time; official statistics regarding the number of residents and their ethnic identity do not exist. The account of demographic change presented here is based on ethnographic data, including conversations with Magyar and non-Magyar villagers, press materials, and exchanges with other foreign and local scholars working in the border region.

81. In 2004, rumors that the border crossing would soon be opened in the village led to an expectation that property values would increase dramatically, and a scramble for village land followed. One villager noted that the cost of neighboring houses had increased from €3,000 in 2000 to €10,000 to €30,000 by May 2004. Interview, Kisszelmenc, 29 May 2004. By 2008, those prices had more than doubled, and more former residents of Kisszelmenc had left the village for the city.

82. *Naselelnia Zakarpats'koi oblasti. Statystychnyi zbirnyk* (Uzhhorod, Ukraine: Derzhavnyi komitet statystyky, Zakarpats'ke oblasne upravlinnia 2003), 54-55.

83. By queries, I am referring to questions typically posed by visitors, such as, "Where may I buy some cigarettes?"

84. OT, Kisszelmenec, 20 July 2008. The word used, *ukraïnets*, refers to ethnicity, not citizenship. It is worth noting that the speaking switched into Ukrainian to say this.

85. Field notes, 19 July 2008.

86. On links between identity and associational space, see Deborah Yashar, *Contesting Citizenship in Latin America: The Rise of Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

87. For an analysis linking denationalization to immigration from Eastern Europe, see Irina Culic, "Eluding Exit and Entry Controls: Romanian and Moldovan Immigrants in the European Union," *East European Politics and Society* 22:1 (2008): 145-70.

88. Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity*, 373.

89. For a discussion of membership conditionality with respect to minorities in a nearby border region, see Peter Vermeersch, "A Minority at the Border: EU Enlargement and the Ukrainian Minority in Poland," *East European Politics and Societies* 21:3 (2007): 475-502.

90. Kirsti Raik, "EU Accession of Central and Eastern European Countries: Democracy and Integration as Conflicting Logics," *East European Politics and Societies* 18:4 (2004): 567-94.

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