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John C. Swanson. *Tangible Belonging: Negotiating Germanness in Twentieth-Century Hungary.* Pitt Russian East European Series. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017. 464 pp. $34.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-8229-6429-2.

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Commissioned by David Harrisville (University of Wisconsin-Madison)

John C. Swanson has written a fantastic book. Acting as both ethnographer and historian, Swanson studied the shifting meaning of "being German" in Hungary from the eighteenth century until today. This is neither about becoming national nor about national indifference. Instead, Swanson narrates how disparate groups of people in Hungary "thought German," how that notion varied with time and space, and how tangible versions of that idea—direct connections to dialect, dress, habits, place, and religion—were forced to compete with more abstract notions of belonging to ethnic or national groups. Tangible belonging fared better than we might imagine. Swanson demonstrates that it not only trumped other forms of identification among many rural German speakers in Hungary before World War I but also persisted well into the twentieth century. Indeed, if the rise of abstract forms of ethnic or national belonging and the hegemonic power of modern nation-states unsettled it greatly, they never eliminated it completely.

Swanson's insights help us understand the actions of German speakers and their neighbors in a variety of historical situations. His focus is on villages near the city of Pécs, in an area known as Swabian Turkey. These were not the first German-speaking migrants enticed by local rulers to settle in Hungary. So-called Saxons and Zipsers came earlier, settling in Transylvania and Upper Hungary, and they were part of a much bigger pattern of migration. By the outset of the eighteenth century, some forty-two million people could be counted as "Germans" in East Central Europe. German speakers, in fact, became "the largest ethnolinguistic group in the region," and as the empires broke up and new nation-states emerged after World War I, Germans, along with Jews, became "one of the two largest minorities in Eastern Europe" (p. xii). In Hungary in 1930, 83 percent of those German speakers still lived in villages, most were agricultural workers, and two-thirds of them lived in communities that were still majority German.

Most German speakers who arrived in Swabian Turkey were Catholic, a smaller number Protestant. Local rulers cleared the way for their settlement, pushing out other groups who occupied lands after the Ottomans left following the 1699 Treaty of Karlowitz, and accommodating the new arrivals in other ways. "Landlords, as well as the Vienna Court," Swanson explains, "made attractive overtures: free land, building supplies, tax relief, and even some religious tolerance, offered specifically to German speakers" (p. 24). Motivated primarily by economics, these rulers

wanted productive, stable populations loyal to God and local lords. They sought out Germans because they regarded them as inherently loyal, with a calculating, hardworking, frugal, and provident character.

While there was more variance among the arrivals than those stereotypes might imply, Swanson argues that they all were "extremely pious individuals. Religion was a major marker in their identity," and that remained consistent across generations (pp. 25-26). Moreover, none of them retained extensive contact with their places of origin. Consequently, rural German-speaking villagers knew very little about their ancestors' origins by the late nineteenth century. Their children only began learning about them during the 1920s and 1930s, as ethnographers, historians, and linguists began studying the various dialects of the German speakers in Central and Eastern Europe and attempted to link Swabian villages to specific regions in Germany.

The first significant shift toward a conceptual integration of German speakers came with the Ausgleich of 1867, which established the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. It increased the presence of the Hungarian state at local levels. The state increasingly tried to dictate what "Hungarian" meant. That, in turn, led to standardization efforts that caused tensions in multilingual communities. Indeed, it was largely those efforts that forced many German speakers to think beyond the local while rethinking what it meant to be German. That process, however, was neither rapid nor all-powerful. Villages retained great autonomy, and villagers continued to exchange their children with other families to ensure multilingualism. Local schools remained under local authority, and their communities remained animated by the "numerous dialects and diverse customs" brought by the original settlers (p. 26).

Yet in the decades leading up to World War I, "ideas supporting a sense of Hungarian-German unity crept into Swabians' everyday lives" (p. 45). Organizations such as the Bauerbund approached German speakers in Hungary as a united group and offered them economic benefits as its members. The Hungarian state increasingly identified pro-German activity as anti-Hungarian. It exerted more influence on local education, and as it began using language to identify and count people, such abstract notions of belonging "developed into a new form of competition to the sense of Germandom centered solely in the villages" (p. 45). That did not drive all German speakers together. Many recognized the advantages of speaking Magyar. Since it was tied to the state, it was tied to upward mobility—much more so than either standard German or one of the German dialects (p. 53). Consequently, economics as much as identity politics drove many peasants' choices regarding affiliation and belonging, and not all German speakers chose what the Bauerbund and similar organizations had to offer.

German speakers had even more reasons to rethink what it meant to be German after World War I. Counted together, they became the largest minority in the new Hungary—about 7 percent of the total population. That quantified presence increased prewar tensions around language and belonging, and the contests about belonging were increasingly tied to resources. Moreover, increased mobility fed discussions and debates. Village communities became less isolated as modern transport and markets placed them into ever-greater contact with other populations, many of which had their own notions of what it meant to be German. Local German-language newspapers mattered a great deal, but so too did trips to marketplaces and pilgrimage sites, interactions with soldiers, and new reading associations and lending libraries.

As a result of numerous new forms of interaction, "being German in Hungary could no longer exist in isolation from ideas brought from Germany" (p. 108). Yet those ideas were often as strange to villagers in Hungary as the high Ger-

man in which they were communicated. In much of Swabian Turkey, for example, people continued to be distinguishable by their dialect and dress during the transformations in markets and mobility. Priests who spoke high German continued to find it difficult to communicate with their congregations and to earn their trust. "In many ways," Swanson explains, "standard German was just as new to rural Swabians as Magyar" (p. 153). Moreover, many villagers did not see their language as the essential marker of their identity. Many more thought first in terms of class, location, and vocation, and for those interested in upper mobility, Magyar continued to offer them more opportunities than either high German or local dialects.

The pressure to choose between languages, and thus between more sharply designated notions of German and Hungarian, increased with the Nazis' rise to power and the outbreak of World War II. As Swanson reminds us, the Nazis' "main purpose was to convince all German speakers of their place in the Volk and of the National Socialists' foremost position within that group" (p. 208). Thus as their organizations spread across Central and Eastern Europe, rural Germans increasingly felt compelled "to accept membership either in Germany's Germandom, which the new Hungarian-German leadership also began to favor, or in a Hungariandom that some defined in opposition to any form of Germanness" (p. 227). Once the war began, many German speakers were drawn into the German military. Others fled into the Hungarian military. Divisions deepened and increased. Initially, German-speaking Jews were safe from persecution because of bilaterial agreements between the states. Hungarian efforts to gain a separate peace, however, upset those agreements. The subsequent German invasion in March 1944 was quickly followed by massive deportations, and "the Jews of Swabian Turkey," counted for generations among the Germans there, "were rounded up and sent to their deaths in early July 1944" (p. 295).

Soon afterward, some 50,000 Hungarian Germans fled toward the Reich. A similar number were deported as laborers to Russia. Another 220,000 were expelled from Hungary and sent to either East or West Germany after 1945. A similar number remained, but their lives were drastically changed. "People moved away from being German; they tried at least in the years following 1945, to escape their ethnicity as well as their language." Consequently, much as in the United States following World War I and many other countries during and after World War II, "if a sense of 'being German' still existed, it went underground" (p. 330).

Two generations passed before open discussions of what it meant to be German-Hungarian returned to Hungary. They became more common after 1990. But here, as in many other places where language and ethnic identity became negative markers, there was a key problem. One can pursue cultural and linguistic revitalization but none can escape the fact that the "new Swabian image is, to a large extent, tied to the language, which cannot be the ever-fading dialects of the now older generation. German—acquired as a second language—will (and to some extent already has) become the new abstract marker of the German minority in Hungary" (p. 343). So, even if Germanness returns to being an openly recognized marker of belonging in Hungary, it will never regain its tangible character of the past.

This is an important book that can be read in many ways. It is a model analysis of belonging in local communities, and a clear contribution to our knowledge of Hungarian history and the history of German speakers in Central and Eastern Europe. The transition at the heart of Swanson's narrative, however, is one that affected many German speakers in similar ways in other parts of the world. It is hard not to notice, for example, similarities in Swanson's tale with the histories of rural German speakers in southern Brazil or even in the midwestern United States. It remains to be

seen if the modes of belonging Germans took to places like Latin America or the United States were as "tangible" as those in Swanson's story, but there is good reason to believe that this would have been the case in many isolated, rural communities.

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