

EARLY SLOVAK-HUNGARIAN DEBATES ABOUT THE MORAVIAN PRISTINE STATES. INTELLECTUAL AND EMOTIONAL MOTIVES IN FORMING NATIONAL HABITS¹

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Abstract: KOLLAI, István. *Early Slovak-Hungarian debates about the Moravian pristine states. Intellectual and emotional motives in forming national habits.* Present paper attempts to scrutinize the 18th-century interpretational debates between the Slovak and Hungarian proto-nationalist circles and persons about the Great Moravian past and about the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition. The article does not intend to introduce the contradicting historical narratives in detail, or analyse the righteousness of stances in light of later research results, but to focus on a special dimension of these disputes: i.e. how emotional and intellectual motives could play a role in the evolvement (elongation and deepening) of identity debates. Saying in other words: how participants of disputes were driven by a truth-seeking intellectual motive and a truth-sensitive emotional motive. The conceptual framework of the research is that beside clear interest-motives (including personal or collective interests, as struggle for prestige or position), the feeling of being hurt by “untrue” statements could also bolster personal identification processes and inter-ethnic boundary-making processes. The paper’s general contribution to identity studies and conflict studies is that – beside interest-based motives, like struggle for power and (personal or collective) domination – emotional and cognitive motives are also relevant in nation-building, while their strong interrelatedness seems to be also evident. Methodologically, the early Slovak-Hungarian debates on Great Moravia, Svatopluk or on the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition – despite the scarcity of sources – seems to be a suitable research terrain due to the lack of institutionalized structures of nationalization; hence, bottom-up identification and boundary-making processes might be easier to detect than in later ages.

Keywords: *Mihály (Michal, Michaelis) Bencsik, Ján Baltazár Magin, Samuel Timon, Juraj Papánek, Juraj Sklenár, István (Stephanus) Katona, Matej Bel, emotions, intellect*

Present paper attempts to scrutinize the 18th-century disputes between the Slovak and Hungarian proto-nationalist ideas, from which modern Slovak and Hungarian national identity grows out. The aim of this review is not to enhance our knowledge about this age from the aspect of political or ideational history, but to explore the role of “value rationality” (Weber, 1968) in the emergence of “national habits” and cleavages between them. Value rationality can be defined as rationality driven not solely by clear means-end interests, but by emotionality and intellectuality as well, out of the narrow sense of means-end rationality. Hence, the aim of this article can be formulated as revealing the role of “truth-seeking” intellectuality and “truth-sensitive” emotionality in early

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Slovak-Hungarian boundary making processes, along the intellectual – but emotionally heated – debates about the so-called Great Moravian past and Cyrillo-Methodian tradition. The 18th-century Hungarian-Slovak identity debates – submerging deeply in the contested interpretations of Moravian pristine state of Carpathian Slavs – seem to offer ideal circumstances for analysing these different motives of national habit and their possible self-reinforcing interrelatedness, because these disputes took place in a rather closed environment, within a well-defined milieu – among the literati and ecclesiastical intellectuals – where standing for an own truth was fuelled neither by some crystallized political or economic elite interests (Hungarian political elites were practically neutral towards these debates in the beginning) nor by some crystallized mass interests (e.g. since literacy was not widespread, and religious debates attracted more attention). This kind of proto-nationalist sentiment within closed circles of participants offers special research conditions for microhistorical research (Eustache 2012).

The investigation consists of two case studies. First, the so-called Bencsik-Magin debate is supposed to elucidate how emotional and intellectual motives enforced or triggered more and more actors to take stance in the debated questions. In this case, we can speak about the elongation of national cleavages along emotional and intellectual motives. Secondly, the so-called Katona-Sklenár debate (and its antecedents) is supposed to elucidate, how emotional and intellectual motives are able not just to lengthen these cleavages but widen them, creating the perception of large cultural distance where “own truth” – explanatory power of narratives – cannot be formulated without questioning or undermining the other’s narrative. Finally, after these two case studies, concluding section tries to summarize and conceptualize how intellect and emotion may contribute to the institutionalization of national habits and how this conceptual explanation can be embedded into nationalism studies.

As mentioned above, the early Hungarian-Slovak disputes over interpretation of the Moravian past have already been researched to a considerable extent by both Slovak and Hungarian historians (among others Baník 1936, Tibenský 1965, Pillingová 2013, Ábrahám 2007, Kiss 2020). Thus, the following overview does not seek to expand the body of knowledge on political or academic history, but to highlight the moments where emotional and intellectual motives might play a role in crystallization of national identities and their boundaries.

Elongation of Slovak-Hungarian national cleavage along emotional and intellectual motives

First, the elongation of cultural cleavage between the forming Hungarian and Slovak national habit can be elucidated by the case when a one-page section within the book of Mihály Bencsik (in Slovak: *Michal Bencsik*, in Latin: *Michaelis Bencsik*) prompted four authors to take stance and respond with a substantial reaction (Bencsik 1722). Bencsik was a doctor of jurisprudence, respected as one of the founders of Hungarian criminal law. He was also a councillor of the city of Trnava (Pauler 1878). Bencsik elaborated the subject of Hungarian public law in his publication, permeated by the so-called “historical right”. In his view, the source of the privileges of the nobility was “always found in virtue, as being just according to natural and national laws, which gives an honour to virtue” (Pauler 1878, 46). The book is not a mere compendium of laws but an attempt to explain the spirit behind codified acts, drawing on the riches of historical, political and ethnographic knowledge about the country at the time. In less than a page, which is relatively short compared to the volume of the entire book, the author shares a brief view on the town of Trenčín. He claimed that local Slavs were conquered by the Hungarians when coming to the Carpathian Basin, and their lands were formally taken over from them, hence, their right to participate in the

life of the state (i.e. in the governance of the city of Trenčín) could be questioned on this basis. The law scholar refers to the defeat of Svatopluk (*Svatheplugh*) by the Hungarians (Bencsik 1722, 151-152), as recorded by several medieval sources in Hungary (for an overview of medieval references on Svatopluk, see Homza, 2013). In addition, he mentions the beer-drinking habit of the Trenčín people as a sign of their inferiority, or that the Slavs are referred as “guests” in a law of King Coloman, which was supposed to prove the foreign or “sidelined” status of the Slavic inhabitants of Hungarian Kingdom, including Slovaks.

Perhaps Bencsik did not realise how significant responses he would provoke with this rather oblique but offending statement. It is well known in the history of Hungarian-Slovak relations that Ján Baltázár Magin (1681-1735), a Slovak Catholic priest, responded with a major work in Latin, known for short as the *Apologia* (Magin 2002). The main question of *Apologia* is this: “[If] the present generation of Slovaks... recognizes the same royal right along with the Germans and Hungarians who live with us, obeys and abides by the same laws, lives in the same freedom, defends their property by the same right, uses the same fire and the same water, breathes the same air: By what right does a stranger [prosyletus] among the Slovaks of Trnava dare so recklessly vilify the Slovak people?” (Magin 2002, 110.)

While appealing to “natural right” of existing ethnic communities to participate in state governance because of their sheer existence and numerousness, Magin accepts the feudal framework of “historical rights” that Bencsik identifies as relevant, meaning that past actions can give rise to present rights. Hence, he argues in favour of the historical rights of Slovaks by deploying an enormous amount of historical sources. The legend of Svatopluk – selling his land for a horse – is perceived by Magin as a symbolic and peaceful acceptance of the Hungarians, for which Svatopluk deserves praise, even if he was subsequently disappointed by the Hungarians, who attacked him and took his kingdom. Meanwhile, he doubts the legend because the Czech, Moravian and Polish sources do not mention it. Afterward, Magin launched many vitriolic and personal offences on Bencsik, provides e.g. a transcription of a humiliating mocking poem about the Hungarian author (Magin 2002, 127-134). This style of mockery poems was typically used to insult the other nation at the time; in any case, it certainly did not bring the authors or the minds of their readership closer together.

The Bencsik-Magin controversy three hundred years ago marked a qualitative change as no sophisticated ideological debate between Hungarians and Slovaks had ever been known before (Tibenský 1965, Pillingová 2013). Moreover, this did not turn out to be some kind of historical interlude, but similar duels, theses and antitheses, happened in the 18th century. How scribes from an intellectual workshop, mainly Jesuits, who had previously worked together for propagation of their religion, became – as a result of debates around them – the spokesmen for their own vernacular, can be illustrated by the life of one of Bencsik’s Jesuit companions, the historian Samuel Timon (1675 – 1736) (in Slovak: *Šamuel Timon*, in Hungarian: *Sámuel Timon*). He was registered as “Slavus” at the Trenčín grammar school in 1685 (Marsina 1995, 34). Yet, for a long time, his origin or his attachment to Slovak language did not leave any trace on his work, see e.g. the detailed description of the cities of Hungary (Timon 1702), published at the beginning of his career. But in the second edition, issued in 1734, Timon made considerable changes and added new parts to the original text, expounding in detail the so-called contractual theory between Hungarians and Slovaks. According to it, the Hungarians “formed an alliance with the Slavs, who inhabited the regions of the Morava, Vah, Nitra and other rivers as far as the Tisa, and conferred the plains of Hungary along the Danube river for their use...”. He presented the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition as the heritage of the Slovaks, but portrayed Svatopluk and the Moravian rulers as external conquerors, against whom the Hungarians allied with the Slovaks (Tibenský 1995, 98).

The alteration in Timon's historical interest and historical explanation between 1702 and 1734 may reveal how, in the course of a lifetime, the question of "pristine states" and national origin became increasingly important. It is perhaps possible to reconstruct the milestones of a process, though not like a snapshot, the emergence of a Slovak proto-nationalist perspective within patriotic (i.e. pro-Hungarian) historiography. He might have been also triggered by Bencsik's offending views, which he refused, and realised that his Slovak origin was somehow precious for himself to protect. It can be reconstructed from the sources that Timon knew Bencsik. According to an anecdote, he allegedly told Bencsik to "go to the devil with such fairy tales" about the biblical origin of the Hungarians (Tibenský 1995). By contrast, Samuel Timon was told by his fellow monks, at least according to later recollections, that he could even prove that Jupiter was of Slovak ethnicity (Katona 1786, 58). Even if this was not exactly the case, and it is only an anecdote coloured by hindsight, it indicates a conflictual, heated atmosphere between the scholars of the time.

Beside Magin and Timon, Bencsik's attack on the Slovaks of Trenčín was also reflected by Matej Bel (in Latin: *Matthias Bel*; in Hungarian: *Mátyás Bél*). In his description on the Trenčín county, he describes the town of Trenčín as inhabited mostly by Slovaks (*Sclavi*), where descendants of Czechs and Moravians can also be found, but he also stresses the importance of respecting the rights of Hungarians. Bel mentions Bencsik by name: as he says, the true facts show that Bencsik was unjustly and vainly trying to shame the Trenčín people regarding their past and their customs (Ratkoš 1977, Bél 2021).

In addition to Magin, Timon and Bel, there was a fourth work addressed to Bencsik. This eventually remained in manuscript, but was prepared for printing. Its author is unknown; the wording is less scholarly and more concise than Magin's *Apologia*, but more personal and coarse. Its content was reported by the historian Ján Tibenský, who found it among the inheritance of István Kaprinai (in Slovak: *Štefan Kaprinai*, in Latin: *Stephanus Kaprinai*), a Jesuit scholar (Tibenský 1965, 91-95).

As we can see, the debate over the Moravian past made new and new actors sensible about the question of national identity, making them angry, enthusiastic or devoted, and even hurt in their individual or social prestige by the narratives perceived as hostile or untrue. Eventually it triggered them to recognise and formulate their own attachment to particular "ethnies", as Anthony D. Smith (1985) calls the ideational cores of modern national identities. Hence, the cleavage had been lengthened between Slovaks and Hungarians not only along material interests, but along intellectual and emotional motives.

The deepening of the Slovak-Hungarian national cleavage along emotional and intellectual motives

Beside elongation, deepening of national cleavages can be regarded as the other mode of institutionalization of national habits and their boundaries. It means that not just more and more persons are motivated to formulate and declare their own attachment toward an "ethnie", but the feeling of cultural distance can be also larger: persons out of "own" national boundaries might be already perceived as strangers, or even enemies, confessing something controversial to the own "ethnie". The next case study attempts to reveal this tendency of deepening, through analysing the so-called Katona-Sklenár debate, whose denomination is similarly misleading like the Bencsik-Magin debate: the entangled stream of dispute attracted others as well, like Juraj Papánek, or Stephanus Salagijs (in Slovak: *Štefan Salagijs*, in Hungarian: *István Szalágijs* or *Szalágijs*). His name is not so well-known within national historiographies, since this author's work was not devoted to argue either for Slovak or Hungarian "ethnies", but it was intended to be a comprehensive history

of Roman Catholicism in the early medieval Carpathian Basin, arguing for the historical presence of Rome against Byzantium (Pillingová 2013). In this work, the Hungarian ecclesiastical scholar became gradually but deeply involved – despite his own declared intention – in Hungarian-Slovak(-Croatian-Czech) debates about national origins, about pristine states and about the question of antiquity of nations. He was among the first to state that the Slavs were likely to arrive in the Carpathian Basin from the north in the sixth century, and that Quadians living here before were of Germanic origin. The earliest natives of Pannonia were, according to him, “*neither Slavs nor Greeks, and especially not Croats, but Celts*” (Salagius 1777, 160). In fact, he did not intent to tread upon Slavic ethnic consciousness, writing, for example, of Svatopluk as the glorious king who brought Slovaks to prosperity. Yet, Salagius caused serious tensions in Slovak, Czech and Croatian circles which was reported in his second book, with astonishment and, one might say, a little apology; but he kept his scholarly conclusions. He insisted on the 6th-century appearance of Danubian Slavs, finding no scientific counterarguments in the criticisms of his first volume. Nevertheless, he became all the more aware of some emotions and perceived interests which he damaged by the treatment of his subject. “*I can only wish that the Slovaks would not spread their glory by spreading a mist of fables; there remains a memory of the old Moravians so extensive and glorious from which real glory may flow. [...] I can only hope to find forgiveness for our Slovaks when I present to them all the glories of the Moravian Church.*” (Salagius 1783, 436-438.) Besides, he takes the liberty of calling the legend of the white horse merely as an untrue fable (*fabula de alba equa*).

Salagius is an excellent example of how much impact historiography – provided its “historical truths” were well-argued – can have on present prestige, and how historiographers were enforced to be labelled as Slovaks, Hungarians, Czechs, Croats, etc. (Niederhauser, 1984). With his professionalization and his ecclesial devotedness, Salagius might have been judged as controversial and suspicious, if seen from the perspective of various national habits. His Slovak-conscious readers “belittled” the historical antiquity he attached to Slavs within the Carpathian Basin, while the Hungarian response accused Salagius of being permissive towards the Slovaks; critical voices from the Czech and Croat circles impugned his conclusion about the small geographical extension of the Moravian state, which constrained the heritage of late Moravian culture to the Slovak-populated territory (for an overview of this controversies, see Tibenský 1965, Pillingová 2013.)

As much as Salagius hoped to win the acceptance of Slavic scholars, his main claims, which delimited the Moravian culture in time and space, were refuted even by the Slovaks. First, Juraj Papánek (2018) claimed that Slavs had already occupied their present territories in ancient times and had a bishop in Nitra as early as 396. He attributes the collapse of Svatopluk’s empire to simultaneous invasions of different armies, only one of which was Hungarian, and thus considers the myths about the conquest of the Hungarians to be exaggerated. Papánek was far from the scientific standard of the time, and his work can be regarded more as fabulously exaggerated Baroque Slavism than as a work of critical historiography. In 1784, there appeared another response to Salagius’s writing, a more elaborate, purposeful, and vitriolic book than Papánek’s: it was Juraj Sklenár’s work on the “oldest expansion of the Great Moravian Empire” (Szklenar 1784). In the first decades of his career, Sklenár felt no urge to engage in debates on ethnicities or nations. His Slovak origin was not evident in his earlier writings: he wrote occasional poems and odes, and books on the natural curiosities of Hungary, and when he did deal with historical topics, he only tried to compile a genealogy of the Batthyány family that patronised him. In 1784, however, Sklenár entered into a dispute with Salagius. He argued that the centre of the state of Svatopluk was somewhere near Belgrade, which the Hungarians had in fact conquered in alliance with the Slovaks. Sklenár thus denied the Svatoplukian origin of the Slovaks. (Szklenar 1784, 96.) In his writing, he ironized several statements of Salagius, and invested much energy to destroy the Hungarian author’s credibility (Szklenar 1784, 94-104). Later, he even more openly accused

Salagius of wanting to bring the Slovaks and Croats into disrepute and disgrace (Szklenar 1788). In addition, the Slovak writer questioned the credibility of Anonymus, and called the work of Katona – an active and respected Hungarian historian of the time, who wrote his own history of Hungary using Anonymus as a source – a mistake (Szklenar, 1784, 125-126, 211-212). This latter prompted Katona, who had not dealt with the history of Slavs and Slovaks explicitly until then, to write a book as a critical and ironic response in 1786. In reply, Sklenár published a new book in 1788, also using a sharp tone, full of sarcastic and serious statements; to which Katona published a response in the same year and the following year...

The Sklenár-Katona debate is described by Tibenský as an “academic polemic with a strong nationalist inclination”. He tries to ridicule his opponent in every detail, for example by saying that Katona’s language is a kind of “Hussar Latin”, and advises students not to learn Latin from such a teacher. Sklenár justifies his own style by saying that who would not laugh at someone who prides himself on using his pen against the power of the Slavs? Finally, he makes an open accusation that every page of Katona’s book is imbued with strange arrogance towards foreign nations and hatred of the Slavs (Szklenar 1788, XVIII, XXXII.). The heated debate ended in 1789 when Sklenár fell ill and died.

As we could see above, early boundary-making debates cannot be separated from collective interests – since they tackled the possible position of own groups within a generally acknowledged prestige hierarchy, having an effect on collective “bargaining power” and on attractiveness of forming national groups – but they are fuelled by intellect and emotion, too, when someone felt that some “truth” is attacked. This truth-seeking cognitive motive and truth-sensitive emotionality is strongly interrelated in the debates on the Moravian pristine states; this strong interaction of emotion and intellect is referred to in the literature by the terms ‘hot cognition’ or ‘cogmotion’ (Plamper 2015; Styne et al. 2020). The conflict-amplifying effect of historicization cannot be underestimated. For many people who had no direct contact with the other linguistic group, and had no well-established attitude towards them, may well have begun to perceive the existence of this “other” group through writings that cast doubt on Hungarian historiography or mock “official” Hungarian historiography. Thus, when Juraj Sklenár applied to the Local Council in 1788 for the post of headmaster of the Gymnazium in Pressburg (Bratislava), he was turned down by Baron Gábor Prónay, who mentioned that his debates with his learned opponent revealed that he was not characterised by the loving peace and integrity (Vyvijalová 1970). It seems that Baron Prónay’s tough stance was not necessarily influenced by his experience with Slovaks, but by his reading of a Slovak narrative that he perceived as hostile. Another seeming manifestation of escalation of inter-ethnic conflicts is the letter sent by a Hungarian reader to Katona, quoted accurately (with the original Hungarian wording) by the Hungarian historian in his Latin book (Katona 1788, 4), as follows: “*The whole book [of Juraj Sklenár] is so full of words mocking, desecrating and disparaging the reputation of others that we were ashamed to read it. Among his many belittling words, he also mockingly exclaims that the book of the scribe of King Béla is a mere poem. Therefore, those who have not read the book written by You against Sklenar, but will read this pestiferous one, they will hate the volumes written about the history of the Hungarians, moreover will make other hate them. Hence, such a noxious vapour must therefore be stifled, and the teeth of such foxes must be knocked out, so that others may learn to speak as humans.*”

It is obvious from this threatening message how cognitive-emotional motives fuelled participants further: what if the message of the “other” hits the mark? What if they are believed more and more? This fear is well-detectable throughout the disputes described above. It is also clearly expressed in the foreword to the book by Ján Baltazár Magin, addressed to the lord-lieutenant of the county of Trenčín: “*we were overwhelmed with fear lest you, most learned Lord-Lieutenant, and your most noble and respected wife ... should be frightened by us, or become*

unfriendly to us, or eventually should be utterly alienated from us, if you believe the lying speech deeply in your hearts.” More calmly, but similarly, Papánek speaks of himself as a man who only drifted into the field of historiography in order to defend Slovaks against tales and fables about them (*de Slavis fabulose scribentibus*). “*I never thought that in the following pages I would write about the events that happened to the Slovak nation in the previous centuries.*” (Papánek 2018, 397.) And, as we have seen from the Hungarian reader’s letter quoted above, the Hungarian reader in Bratislava who followed the Sklenár-Katona debate also feared the spread of slander and fiction. He also feared that only the “Slavic reading” of the history of the Carpathian Basin would reach the outside world.

As we can see, a primary intellectual motive during these debates was to articulate the own groups as more antique, successful and morally superior in the past. This intellectual motive was embedded in the historicizing *Zeitgeist* of the 18th century, replacing biblical explanations with historical ones. Interestingly, as we could see in Magin’s argumentation, there was a demonstrable attempt on the Slovak side to shift the cognitive framework of the prestige fights from “historical rights” to the “natural right” of nations arising from the numerousness of language speakers. This was not unprecedented, since some authors, like Peter Révay in his book published in 1659, attributed the “greatest glory” (*linguarum gloria*) to Latin and Slavic languages (de Rewa 1659, 146-147) because Slavic speakers can be understood in great parts of Europe and even Asia. But during the 18th-century prestige debates, the question of “historical truth” finally became a dominant intellectual motive, and the Slovak discourse was forced to respond to it. Hence, the Slovak side eventually built up its own historicist argument, institutionalizing the Great Moravian narrative and the Cyrillo-Methodian legacy as Slovak historical heritage. Later, this intellectual motive was not weakened, but further institutionalized, e.g. by the Slovak transcription of the above-cited Latin works (Fándly 1793).

An interesting Slovak source also gives us an insight into how the historicizing argumentation may have been felt to be exaggerated even by some Slovaks. In the first novel published in Slovak, the author Jozef Ignác Bajza delivers a rather sceptical monologue on Slovak historical narratives. According to it, there are hardly any written sources on early medieval Slavs, so that those interested in the past must seek their way through “the dark fog”, leading to unrealistic biblical and antique origins. “*The date when the Slovaks arrived here is very uncertain*”, says Bajza, striking a note completely unknown in the combatant and self-assertive Latin historiography of the time. In particular, Bajza questions the usefulness of the ancient and medieval sources on which Magin, Papánek and Sklenár so persistently tried to rely, because, he argued, the names of peoples had been used with overlapping contents, meaning that a single name could include several peoples and language groups at the same time (Bajza 1970, 222-224). And yet, when Bajza refers particularly to Papánek’s book, he speaks appreciatively of it. He mentions it as a “praiseworthy” work whose author “*did what he could, and even more than others*”.

It may be inferred that Bajza, speaking to his own audience in their own vernacular language, allows for far more scepticism towards historical truths than any contemporary Slovak author who, entering the international arena of linguistic prestige battles, addressed the world at large in Latin. Bajza’s monologue can elucidate that these Latin volumes were not only about historiography, but also about prestige fights, and in this respect, according to Bajza, Papánek did what he could.

Conclusion

This research paper does not intend to investigate the Moravian past of the Carpathian area or to assess validity of historical interpretations, but to analyse the process itself, how historical

argumentations, “historical truths” as intellectually-formed but emotionally-driven motives could (and can) fuel national habits, and their boundary-making processes. Our starting point is that, in addition to interests, two other motives can be distinguished in the formation of attitudes of belonging to a nation: emotional and intellectual motives. This conceptual framework of the paper is, in fact, not without precedent in nationalism studies, but has been somewhat sidelined. The quasi-mainstream modernist-instrumental concepts regard means-ends rationality (material elite interests or collective capitalist interests) the primary motive behind modern nationalism (Hobsbawm 1983; Gellner 1983; Benedict 1991). In this approach, nation-building does not have a character that goes beyond or runs counter to the interests of the parties concerned in general. Some other alternative or critical strands put more emphasis on value-rationality: the so-called primordialist school suggests that an emotional connection, a sense of belonging, can develop between people who look alike or speak similar language; or the ethnosymbolist school emphasises the role of historical knowledge and intellectual abilities to interpret historical events so as to create communities of a common national “knowledge system” (Smith 1985). These references do not mean that this paper argues in favour of primacy of emotional and intellectual motives. Rather, it attempts to demonstrate their mere presence and interrelatedness, similarly to those integrative theories which incorporate all earlier results of nationalism studies, emphasising their interconnectedness (Calhoun, 2007; Özkirimli, 2010). According to them, history is a tangled, swirling stream, a diverse interweaving of intellectual currents, behavioural attitudes and ways of speaking, where material interest-seeking and utility-maximization is constrained by bounded rationality, i.e. by the framing of what interest means. This does not imply that self-interest or collective interest cannot be researched, but it does warn against generalisations and easy comparisons (Burson, 2013).

Conceptually, however, the study seeks at one point to move beyond theories of the “entanglement” of history and suggests that among the many interactions there may be situations in which these interactions reinforce each other in a single direction. It is when materializable interests, stereotypical emotions – strong patriotism, fears or hatred towards others – and a deeply-felt truth confirms each other’s relevance and validity, bolstering the coherence of a group identity while deepening inter-group cleavages. In these conflict situations, latent sense of cultural distance (as an emotional motive) may be amplified by the clash of interests, reinforced further with interpreting others’ argumentations as unjust, untrue, false. And as we could see in the case of Stephanus Salagius, malign intentions are not necessary for a conflict to arise: simply the evolving ingroup favouritism can create a sense of “fraternalistic relative deprivation” or exclusion in others (Runciman 1966, Halevy, Bornstein, Sagiv 2008).

The small-group nature of early Slovak-Hungarian debates with premature, fluid “knowledge systems” may make these circumstances suitable for revealing emotional and intellectual motives that are difficult to detect within already well-institutionalized mass societies. There are, of course, many emotional attitudes that can be detected in modern mass societies, and indeed the rhetoric of mass societies is often dominated by a kind of “national emotion”. Yet, the emotional world of these modern societies and all their behavioural attitudes (i.e. their habits) can easily be said to be ultimately animated by well-institutionalized norms, customs, rules. But in the 18th century, there is still no significant trace of either nationalising elites or modern nation-building structures, so the interpretational conflicts about Great Moravia, Cyrillo-Methodian tradition and the historical role of Svatopluk may offer an opportunity to reveal something of the motives for national identity and nationalism outside of instrumentalized interests.

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