The essence of the problem of Transylvania in the soul of every Hungarian is, and always will be, the question whether it conforms to the human idea of justice to allot the house of a host to the family of newcomers whom he has suffered as guests against his will and from no sense of hospitality.¹

The unique feature of Transylvania is that it has been for centuries a country of two nations ².

There are many themes in political geography which are interesting subjects of study. Among these are boundary disputes, territorial conflicts, irredentism, culture conflict in shared space, governance of space, and the problem of minorities. Few, if any of these themes, however, occur in a vacuum, and where one is present other issues may well arise. Where there is a boundary dispute there will often occur irredentist feelings, culture conflicts, problems of governance, and questions of minorities. The unifying aspect of these various themes lies in the geography of the place in which they occur, the concept of the nation and the state.³ This is the nature of political geography. Political geography seeks to identify social cohesion, or the lack thereof, and the relationship between state and nation, using the aforementioned themes. To isolate one theme while ignoring other aspects of a problem would be nearly impossible, and not wholly productive.

Space, in the form of shared space, disputed space, or ungovern-
able space becomes the unifying element of political geography. To examine these themes an area should be defined where these problems exist, and the roots of the conflicts, that may be present, identified.\(^4\) Transylvania is such a place, a dark, brooding region of Europe which illicits feelings of fear and excitement. It is a place haunted by its history and culture, one of conflict and change as the rule rather than the exception. If the Balkan states are considered the "powder keg" of Europe, then Transylvania might well be considered Europe's dark heart, a microcosm of the cultural conflicts, the fears, and the hatreds which have engulfed Europe for centuries. This paper examines some of the major facets of Transylvanian history up to the conclusion of World War I with an eye towards the themes of political geography and a focus on the issue of culture conflict in shared space.

1. GEOGRAPHY AND HISTORY

Geographically, Transylvania is part of southeastern Europe, that includes Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Bulgaria. Historically, Transylvania has been "... that part of Europe lying between the Carpathian chain and the Apuseni Mountains,"\(^5\) bordering on the historic kingdoms of Wallachia and Moldavia. Thus, Transylvania is surrounded by mountains on almost all sides, with an "opening" towards the Hungarian Plain. Transylvania is an area rich in resources, though these resources have not been exploited to their fullest extent.\(^6\) In Transylvania, "... deep notched by rivers, the people live in farms and villages on the narrow valley floors and on flat topped ridges and spurs where pasture abounds."\(^7\) The geography of Transylvania is highlighted by mountain chains, which in the past formed a barrier to invasion and conquest, and the valleys, which form the basis for life in Transylvania.

The history of Transylvania is an obscure and tortured one, and is still a source of contention between the various claimants to the land. The major factor throughout the history of the region is the existence of four distinct "nations" or ethnic groups: the Szekels, the Magyars, the Saxons, and the Vlachs (Romanians).\(^8\) Historically, the Magyars, the Szekels, and the Saxons, though vastly outnumbered by the Romanians, were the elite: the landowners, doctors, lawyers, and merchants, whereas the Romanian majority was looked upon and treated as serfs, slaves, and peasants.\(^9\) It is the conflict between these four groups, and especially between the Magyars and Romanians, which has greatly dictated the history and conflicts of Transylvania. Herein lies the roots of culture conflict and irredentism, manifested in many ways, including policies designed to wipe clean the cultural heritage of a people, cultural ostracism, and outright armed conflict.

There is serious dispute as to the history of Transylvania, and this dispute arises from the ethnic groups involved and their nationalistic claims.\(^10\) The Romanians assert that they descended from the ancient Romans by way of the Roman col-
... of Dacia and the later conquest of the area by the Emperor Trajan (ca. 106 AD). This Roman descent is not well established in written records, though Romanians cling to it doggedly. Another point of history claimed by the Romanians is that after the Romans left Transylvania and the invasion of the Huns began (ca. 274) there was no outmigration of Romanian Vlachs. They believe that "the great bulk of the population of towns, tradesmen, the direct descendents of the Romanized natives, Dacians, and of the veterans, remained under the Goths." This claim has also been disputed.

It is customary to claim that the long centuries of barbarian invasion destroyed the continuity of the original Roman element. But such an assertion rests upon dangerous theories of racial purity . . . All that can be safely affirmed is that a population in which a strong pre-Roman native element was transferred was submerged by a series of fresh invasions until the original admixture created under Roman rule found itself driven to the remoter mountainous regions.

Thus, there was a dispersion of the Romanian stock, though the Latin roots of the language and the cultural components of the Romanian people persisted.

Into this region came the Magyars and the Szekels, two closely related tribes of Huns, in the closing years of the ninth century. The Magyars established themselves on the plains of the Danube River and rapidly expanded their territory into the sparsely settled region of Transylvania. Early in the eleventh century the Magyars had established effective control over the area. As to the claims by the Romanians of occupying the land at the time of the Magyar influx, " . . . all that can be said with confidence is that in the ninth century, no Vlach states or independent Vlach tribes or communities were in existence." During the period of Magyar movement and consolidation, the Romanians began migrating to Transylvania in gradually increasing numbers, leaving the mountains and the bordering areas of Moldavia and Wallachia.

The question concerning Transylvania's past is rooted in these two movements: were the Romanians present in large numbers in Transylvania at the time of the Magyar movement into the area, or did the Romanians immigrate during the period of, and following the time of, the Magyar occupation? The historical claims on Transylvania by both the Romanians and the Magyars lie in a blurred and unresolved history, and it is this lack of historical clarity that has led to most of Transylvania's problems. As to the third major ethnic group in Transylvania, the Saxons, " . . . there is no serious dispute. They were invited by the Hungarian kings . . . between the years 1141–1222 to migrate from Flanders and the lower Rhine; and royal charters were issued to them giving them the right to occupy lands and manage their own affairs." The Saxons are the only major ethnic group in Transylvania whose origin is not open to dispute.
The culture conflict between these ethnic groups is also highlighted by other differences, including language and religion. The Magyars speak Magyar, a Slavic language, the Romanians speak a form of neo-Latin, and the Saxons speak German.19 There are also major religious differences. The Magyars are for the most part Roman Catholics, the Romanians are Greek Orthodox or Uniates, a mixture of Catholicism and Orthodoxy, and the Saxons are Protestants. 20 These distinct differences in history, language, and religion, compounded by the advanced nature of the Magyars vis à vis the Romanians, troubled Transylvania in the past, leading to culture conflict, irredentism, and harsh policies of acculturation and assimilation.21 In the elements of religion, language, culture, and history lies the root of the conflict in Transylvania. Given these elements, Transylvanian history has been one of volatile change, union and separation, and bloodshed.

To summarize Transylvania’s history, given the actors on the stage, is difficult. A major disruption of Transylvanian life occurred during the Mongol invasion under Ghengis Khan in 1241, which severely disrupted Magyar and Saxon cultural growth.22 During the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries, Transylvania was ruled as an autonomous principality by the Hungarian Magyars while Wallachia and Moldavia functioned as autonomous states with “voivods,” or leaders, ruling various fiefdoms.23 One of the petty rulers of Wallachia was Vlad the Impaler, also known as Dracula. This was also a time in Transylvania of Magyar, Saxon, and Szekel domination as the “Three Nations,” a union designed specifically to prevent the rapidly increasing number of Romanians from disrupting the structure of domination by these three ethnic groups.24 The end of this period of consolidation of these states came with the onslaught of the Ottoman Turks and the ultimate subjugation of the Balkan Peninsula.

The Ottoman Turks conquered almost all of Hungary and the Balkans, and ruled Transylvania as an autonomous principality for nearly two hundred years between 1526 to 1699.25 Transylvania retained a degree of independence due to its mountainous borders, the difficulty of the terrain, and the fierceness of their fight against the Turks.26 During this time Transylvania became, owing to its independence, the local champion of the Reformation, a movement greatly affecting the Magyar and Saxon population but leaving the Romanians virtually untouched.27 In 1564 Transylvania recognized freedom of religion, a fact which so impressed William Penn that he sought to name his colony in the New World Transylvania.28 Ottoman rule did not last forever, and under pressure from the Austrian Hapsburgs Transylvania was ceded to Hungary in 1699, and completely incorporated into Hungary in 1713 as part of the Hapsburg realm, where Transylvania remained until 1848.29 In 1848, after more than a hundred years under Austrian rule, the Hungarian Magyars rose in revolt, a revolt which was eventually crushed. This revolt brought out an-
other aspect of the hatred between the ethnic groups of Transylvania: the Romanians opposed the Magyars, choosing to side with Austria in hopes of gaining favor with the Hapsburgs, and in Transylvania many Magyars were murdered by Romanians bitter over their lowly status in society. After the Revolution of 1848 Transylvania was separated from Hungary and declared an Austrian Crown Land, though no change in the second-class status of the Romanians occurred. In 1863 the union between Austria and Transylvania was made complete, though this union lasted only until 1867, when a compromise between Hungary and Austria united the Dual Monarchy, granted a degree of independence to Hungary, and returned Transylvania to Hungary. Transylvania remained an integral part of Hungary until the end of the First World War. During this conflict, Romania fought on the side of the Allies. Following the war, Transylvania was granted to Romania in reward for its war effort and because . . . two and a half million Romanians of Transylvania wished to join their kinsmen on the eastern side of the mountains and form an independent state. This incorporation, including over a million Magyars, became the modern state of Romania.

2. CULTURE CONFLICT AND MAGYARIZATION

In this brief history of Transylvania can be seen the conflict between the various ethnic groups in Transylvania, as well as the relationships with neighboring powers. Underlying this history are cultural processes relating to minority rule and minority rights, cultural conflict, irredentism, and assimilation. The Magyars, though a minority in Transylvania, were perceived as a superior ethnic group, as were the Saxons and Szekels, and in their formation of the "Three Nations" conspired to exclude the rapidly growing Romanian population from society. The Romanian majority was generally regarded as serfs. Laws were passed by the Magyar nobility that permanently tied the serfs to the land and forced them to labor for the landlords who were generally of Magyar stock. In the early 1500's decrees were issued by the Magyar rulers in Hungary that "... serfs no longer had the right to leave one state for another. . . . They were bound to the soil and became 'perpetual serfs' from father to son." Draconian measures such as these varied in severity over the years, but the Romanians were not recognized as a "Fourth Nation" until 1863 in a hollow declaration by the Austrians, and did not receive full political rights until the conclusion of World War I with the incorporation of Transylvania into Romania.

However, there was an effort by the Magyars to assimilate the Romanians into society in the late 1800's, though not as an ethnic group, but as a Magyarized people. The processes involved in this cultural assimilation were grouped under the Hungarian policy of "Magyarization." Magyarization was directed towards the Romanians in Transylvania, and its most blatant manifestation was in the educational system, and
The centres of Magyarisation kept pace with the process of importing a fanatic ally Magyar instruction and outlook to the vast majority of the rising generation, and of putting every obstacle in the way of any corresponding educational expansion among the non-Magyars. 37.

This policy took root because of the numerical advantage of the Romanians and the fears by the Magyars of this advantage:

According to the official census returns of 1910 . . . there were 2,830,040 Romanians (in Transylvania) and only 1,664,286 Hungarians. . . . The effects of this policy (Magyarization) were not slow in showing themselves: a large section of the urban population of other mother-tongues was Magyarised. 38.

Magyarization was expressed in many ways, including in schools and in the press, and led to frustration and anger among the Romanians of Transylvania who had been promised equal status as a “Fourth Nation.” 39. The major weapon of Magyarization was the schools educational structure, where by law in 1879, the Magyar language was made compulsory in all primary schools. Another weapon was harassment of the non-Magyar press. This was exemplified by hidden clauses forbidding incitement of class conflict, or conflict between “nations,” and fining newspaper owners or imprisoning editors and writers critical of Magyar policies. These efforts were largely unsuccessful because Romanian children refused to learn Magyar and newspaper harassment led to a contempt for the law.

It was in this setting, of Magyarization and oppression of the Romanians, that World War I occurred. Anti-Magyar feelings among the Romanians crested, and came to a head in the first World War, when the Romanians grasped the chance to incorporate Transylvania into Romania:

It was only after the first World War, in which the Romanian Army made its contribution of blood and sacrifice, that the normal solution of the Transylvanian question was reached. . . . The Allies had recognized Romania’s rights to those territories within the Austro-Hungarian Monarch inhabited by Romanians. 40.

Thus, for the first time in its history, Transylvania became a part of Romania, a country which was comprised, for the most part, of the old feudal kingdoms of Moldavia and Wallachia.

Many questions arise from this history. One of the major issues revolves around the nature of the Romanian occupation to which Bethlen’s quote at the beginning of this paper is addressed. There are other questions, though that arise from the actions of the Magyars. Every effort was made, through culture, religion, language, and education to either exclude or “Magyarize” the Romanian population. This conscious effort to bar the Romanian majority
from the benefits of society served to increase the conflict between these two cultures. Would the outcome of the “Transylvanian question” been different had the Hungarian Magyars made an effort to allow the Romanians a voice in the society of Transylvania? Would Transylvania be Hungarian today had the ruling Magyar minority made the Romanians welcome in their land? Or would the Romanians always have sought a union with the Romanians of Moldavia and Wallachia?

3. THE DARK HEART OF EUROPE

The effects of culture conflict in Transylvania are painfully obvious. Irredentism was always a problem, with peasant revolts sporadically occurring among the Romanians against the Magyar and Saxon nobles. The use of education and language to subjugate a people was insidious, but in the case of the Romanians appeared only to incite them to further resistance of the Magyars. And the “normal solution” of the “Transylvanian question” is an example of two painful facts: one is that in solving a boundary or territorial dispute, one country, Romania, wins and the other, Hungary, loses; also, in drawing lines in a treaty it is often impossible to arrive at a clear delineation due to the distribution of opposing ethnic or culture groups over space. The Magyar minority now incorporated into Romanian Transylvania is the powerless group finding itself forced into “Romanization.” It is a turn of the tables, but possibly an inevitable one. To a great extent the Transylvanian Magyars, with their policies of ex-clusion towards the Romanians, dictated the irredentism and keen hatred towards the Magyars.

Transylvania is trapped in ethnic hatreds dating back nearly one thousand years. The enormity of this culture conflict is striking in both severity and longevity. The themes of political geography recur throughout the long, tortured history of this dark heart of Europe. The treaty awarding Transylvania to Romania was an attempt to solve a complex problem in as rational a manner as possible. Yet this solution to the culture conflict of Transylvania is no solution, only a transfer of sovereignty. As Isaiah Bowman concluded in 1921:

This arrangement (the new boundary) to an equal or greater extent deranges the commercial life of Hungary, and it is hard to believe that the boundary will permanently remain in its present position. Highly intelligent Magyars are here (Transylvania) placed in great numbers under the rule of a people of a lower culture. Irredentism will surely follow . . .

This problem has not disappeared, nor will it disappear. Culture conflict in Transylvania is an old story, and regimes have come and gone. Only the conflict between the Magyars and Romanians has endured. The past is “. . . the living hope of . . . the (now) oppressed Magyars.” In this brooding region of Europe, oppression, culture conflict, territorial conflicts, and violent irredentism are nothing new, and to
assume that Transylvania is and forever shall remain Romanian is to deny the history of Transylvania: in Transylvania, change is the rule rather than the exception.

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