

Taylor, Mary N.: Movement of People: Hungarian Folk Dance, Populism and Citizenship.

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BOOK REVIEW

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In 2021, a year before the 50th anniversary of the birth of the peculiar social phenomenon known as the *táncház* (dance house) movement, the monograph *Movement of People*, written by an anthropologist from the United States, was published with the stated aim of explaining the social aspects of an Eastern European folk dance-based associative practice to a broader international audience. With respect to its formation in the 1970s, the *táncház* movement has been recognized by many scholars as cultural opposition, or as a kind of counterculture-building practice among the youth of socialist Hungary, deeply embedded as it was in the context of the Eastern Bloc's political economy. Other standard works have attempted to uncover the antecedents of the *táncház* in previous folk movements dating back to earlier periods of Hungarian history. Going beyond narrow temporal and spatial contexts, Mary N. Taylor provides analytical frameworks that enable the reader to understand this social movement in the *longue durée* (see p. 3), from its forerunners to the recent struggles of heritage regimes in a global context. Moreover, this substantial work invites us to rethink the role of the *táncház* movement in the processes of the formation of the modern state and the creation of its citizens.

The ambiguous title of this book refers both to the collective, disciplined physical practice of the *táncház*-goers, as well as to the social practice of "civic cultivation." In this work, the *táncház* is examined as belonging to the kind of folk movements that valorize folk practices by promoting them as the foundations of civic cultivation and citizenship. However, in Taylor's analysis,

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the cultivation of modern citizens is inextricably bound up with the formation of modern nation-states. This explains the author's insistence on demonstrating the position of folk movements (especially that of the *táncház*) among the various competing civil society-building projects throughout the different political eras in the twentieth century. In order to present an accurate historical perspective, Taylor operates with large-scale sources when dealing with historical processes. Beyond the literature already published on this topic, Taylor also analyzed archive material. Furthermore, as part of her extensive fieldwork, she conducted interviews with prominent figures and former participants in the *táncház* movement. The quotations from these interviews contribute multivocality to her text.

At this point, it should be emphasized that the volume is more than a historical overview of a particular folk movement and its political and economic contexts. Taylor suggests that the *táncház* events, by providing frameworks for associative life, represented an arena for transformative and constituting practices. To understand this intersubjective dynamic, she conducted fieldwork in Hungary and in Transylvania (Romania) in the context of several shorter visits and one year-long period during which she lived permanently among revivalists in the 2000s. This fieldwork experience, collected during visits to *táncház* events and summer camps, represented a robust anthropological approach, besides giving the author an historical perspective. Methodologically, participant observation was a key element in understanding the identity-building, and even the political personhood-constructing mechanism of the *táncház*, which operates through an intersubjective physical practice among the practitioners. Brief but essential presentations of Taylor's own impressions and experiences are organically integrated into the text: excerpts from her fieldnotes, evoking particular situations and interactions at *táncház* events, reveal significant details about the phenomenon under investigation and the research process itself. By examining the historical processes and analyzing recent empirical material, Taylor aims to answer the following question: How did the *táncház* produce and reproduce "(...) particular constellations of collective memory about Hungarianness that cultivate the senses and inform the political personhood of *táncház* participants." (ibid.)

In this brief review, I provide a focused insight into the content of the volume, emphasizing the key concepts and terms essential in following the author's argumentation. An introduction presenting the theoretical framework of the volume is followed by Chapter One, which covers the period of the consolidation of nation-states in Eastern Europe at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Hungarian state formation project consisted of two cohesive processes: national awakening accompanied by the creation of a national culture, and social transformation, the latter being the transition from feudalism to capitalism. Citizenship was built on the idea of a common national language, and folklore texts served as important resources in its cultivation. In a broader sense, the ethnographic material collected in this era served as the basis for the construction of national symbols and played a crucial role in the production of national identity. In relation to the initial successes of Hungarian ethnography, another notable assertion is made here: Since the material was collected in the territory of Hungary before 1920, it represents the folk culture of historical, so-called Greater Hungary. Taylor argues that this factor would prove determinative in terms of how later waves of folk revivals have (re)produced Hungarianness.

In Chapter Two, the author introduces *civic cultivation*, which is one of the key terms in her analysis, allowing her to examine the competing concepts of citizenship in the interwar period. Interpreting civic cultivation as a social project that raises people into citizens by means of education, this term refers to a process of social transformation. Among various, even



overlapping cultivation strategies, “folk national cultivation” (*nép-nemzeti művelődés*) claimed a leading role for “folk” as a social group and its culture in the building of national culture. Beyond the claim of cultural emancipation through the valorization of folk practices and cultural knowledge, the *népi* movement stressed the concrete socioeconomic concept of improving the conditions of landless and poor peasants via the redistribution of land. The ethico-aesthetic and political projects of the *népi* movement that emerged in the Horthy era provided patterns inherited by later generations following the Second World War.

In the following chapter (Chapter Three), Taylor examines the complex context of the politics of socialist cultivation in which the *táncház* movement was able to emerge. The most important statements in this chapter are organized around the phenomenon of “houses of culture,” institutions that were regarded as the cornerstones of the project of socialist mass education. Despite their official recognition as tools for the building of socialism, cultural houses also provided a space for voluntary activities, since they served as public venues for associational life, including amateur artistic and leisure-time activities. The role of voluntarism in generating and maintaining a restricted but existing civil society in everyday socialist life cannot be overestimated.

Chapter Four focuses on the formation and institutionalization of the *táncház* movement from the 1970s, a process that the author identifies as the “*táncház* revolution.” Its revolutionary character was derived from the approach to folk dance adopted by the early *táncház* revivalists — choreographers, ethnographers, dancers, and musicians. The *táncház* revival involved the (re) thinking of dance within its social context as a social event. As a social form it was transferred from the Transylvanian village of Szék (Sic, Romania) into the new urban context of the Hungarian capital. Taylor describes how key features of the movement were its growing emphasis on the participatory aspect, as the passive role of the audience was superseded at *táncház* events, and its focus on particular rural localities as sites of authenticity. As a result, a new wave of village tourism emerged, since *táncház* practitioners were keen to explore rural settlements in Hungary and Transylvania in their quest for the locus of the so-called pure source.

From this point in the volume, Taylor concentrates on an analysis of the *táncház* movement, which she recognizes as a shared *framework of sense*, using the term coined by Alberto Melucci. In Chapter Five, she demonstrates how associative *táncház* events operate as socializing events, at which *táncház*-goers produce, share, and learn ideas about Hungarianness. Participants interiorize a particular set of concepts about nation and citizenship through specific spatiotemporal forms and material practices that are precisely explained in this section. These include forms of dance and music, etiquette, including gender roles, and place-based ethno-tourism. The process is based on the paradigm of “folk dance as mother tongue,” embodied in the so-called *táncház* method, a specific way of learning and practicing folk dances and music. Taylor draws the reader’s attention to how, in a similar way to language, which played a key role in the process of national awakening, the concept of folk dance as “mother tongue” became a crucial manifestation of Hungarianness among *táncház* practitioners. Referring to one of her earlier statements, according to which the waves of revival have maintained a certain perception of the nation by relying on the image of the folk culture of historical or Greater Hungary, the author emphasizes Transylvania’s central status on the cognitive map of *táncház*-goers, who recognize it as the “geographical placeholder for an imagined past” (see p. 174).

In the following chapter (Chapter Six), the author widens the analysis to the political and economic contexts of the above-mentioned processes of self-cultivation. Taylor assumes that the *táncház* framework of sense was repeatedly rendered visible in moments of collective public



action in the political sphere. Such *moments of danger* (see Walter Benjamin) make the collective memory relevant and set the community of sense in motion. According to the author, by analyzing moments of danger it becomes possible to demonstrate the relationship between the framework of sense, collective memory, and politics. Taylor examines the shifts in political and economic contexts from the 1956 Revolution until her own fieldwork. In this particular period, she provides a detailed analysis of two moments of danger: the protests in Transylvania in 1988, and the period of political polarization between 2004 and 2005.

With respect to the transformation of cultural politics in the postsocialist states of Eastern Europe, the strengthening realm of culture talk is salient. The cultural turn, a global process that emerged as a result of the reduction of the state's functions and spheres of responsibility in neoliberal capitalism, has resulted in the instrumentalization of culture by its handling as a resource for the accumulation of capital. Chapter Seven outlines the effects of the cultural turn following the political transformation in Hungary, focusing on the contradictory practice of heritagization, which has become a dominant discourse worldwide since the 1970s in relation to cultural phenomena. In this chapter, Taylor argues that heritagization is "(...) both a sign of and a cultivator of the centrality of culture talk and its political and economic functions today" (see pp. 214–215). While heritage is promoted on the basis of enhancing universal values, heritagization may also lead to a differentiation between groups of people through the quest for uniqueness on various scales. The author here explains how the logic of heritage operates in the *táncház* movement and how heritagization (re)produces particular places associated with Hungarianness on various scales, from particular localities to the national cultural arena and the Hungarian state.

In her conclusion, Taylor revisits the key concepts and terms that she introduced at the beginning of the volume as the critical theoretical framework for the analysis. Aspects of civic cultivation and the formation of nation-states are re-examined in the recent contexts of neoliberal governance, the postsocialist moment, and decolonial claims.

The volume is an extraordinary work that successfully combines the historical perspective with the emic approach of anthropology. The theoretical frameworks selected and used by the author are interwoven coherently throughout the text. Supplemented with Taylor's own field experiences, they provide a firm foundation for her argumentation.

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