

DEVOTING KRISHNA IN A HUNGARIAN WAY: RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE HUNGARIAN BRÁHMANA MISSION

A CASE STUDY

Nóra KOCSIS

Szentháromság u. 39–41, H-6722 Szeged, Hungary
E-mail: moonbeam7hu@yahoo.com

(Received: 1 August 2005, accepted: 18 October 2005)

Abstract: The special relationship between religious and national identity is being scrutinised in the present paper. The fieldwork lasted from March 2004 to April 2005 and took place in the city of Szeged in Hungary. A Krishna devotee new religious community called the Hungarian Bráhmāna Mission was targeted as this group has a unique combination of the two types of identities. It is postulated that the close relationship between religious and national identities even in new religious groups can be interpreted as a typical phenomenon in post-communist Central European countries, which is justified by the research. The Geertzian, interpretive, hermeneutical method is used during the fieldwork.

Keywords: religious identity, national identity, new religious communities, Krishna devotees, interpretive anthropology, post-communism, Central Europe

1. INTRODUCTION

In his article “From Pilgrim to Tourist – or a Short History of Identity”¹ Zygmunt Bauman describes our age by the metaphor of the pilgrim and the tourist. He pinpoints the impossibility of establishing and maintaining a stable identity in our post-modern times: this age belongs to the tourists, who are always *on the move*, they never really make themselves at home anywhere, they keep redefining and restructuring their identity. This way of life is their choice, they are free to opt for their new destination and new identity. They are unlike the vagabonds, who are the losers of our age. The vagabonds are on the move because they have to be, they have no other alternative, their only wish is to stop somewhere and establish a solid identity, however they cannot achieve this. The vagabonds, just like the tourists are the descend-

¹ BAUMAN 1996: 18–27.

ants of the pilgrims, whom the age of modernity provided with a secure pattern of identity which they did not have to redefine again and again.²

In my opinion, Bauman's metaphors spot a very significant problem of our times: those patterns and structures of identity that were inevitable in the past have now enfeebled. New alternatives are being born to the old question: who am I? What new options are there in a post-communist country, like Hungary, where I live? The change of the political system in 1989 has brought forth the challenge of creating new patterns of collective identity. What are these possible new patterns? What are the social forces that shape them? Central European researchers, like the Polish Mach for instance, postulate that the idea of the nation has often collided with religion in our region. The ethnic groups of this region either had no sovereign nation state or they had to face the continuous treat of losing this state. In such circumstances religion and the idea of the nation as major social factors joined their forces³. Communism ended this fellowship, however after the change of system the need to create new patterns of collective identity was inescapable.

Many researchers have dealt with the reunion of the idea of the nation and religion after 1989 in our region. As Hungarian theologian, András Máté-Tóth evolves in his article "Ost-Mittel Europa: Kairos für die Theologie"⁴ the fellowship of national and religious identities is a significant contemporary phenomenon of our region. Irena Borowik mentions about in the introductory part of her book *New Religious Phenomena in Central and Eastern Europe* that the topic of religious and national identities have been appearing again and again on the scientific conferences of the region's religious phenomena. Researches have focused on cases where two different ethnic groups lived together – or near each other. The two groups followed different religions as well, in this way the connection between religious and national identities was an emblem of difference. The main churches' contribution to national identity has also been examined.⁵

After the change of system in 1989 however, many new religious communities have also appeared or reappeared after the long years of illegal existence during communism. Which way do these communities try to get inculturated into our society? Are they connected to the idea of the nation, which is an important social force in our region? While I was looking for the answers of these questions I met the followers of Indian Govinda Maharaja, who are called the Hungarian Bráhmāna Mission. I carried out fieldwork based on in depth interviews and participant observations in this small Krishna devotee community from March 2004 until May 2005. In the life of this community national identity plays an unusually significant role unlike in the two other Hungarian Krishna devotee churches. The Hungarian leader of the group, Attila Bakos invents a new combination of religious and national identity. I find this little church especially interesting because the way they establish their col-

² BAUMAN 1996: 18–27.

³ MACH 1997: 61–81.

⁴ MÁTÉ-TÓTH 2003.

⁵ BOROWIK 1997: 7–23.

lective identity throws light upon some important challenges of contemporary Hungarian society, namely the problem of national and religious identities, the growing number of new religious communities and the problem of their integration into the local social context.

In my essay, I shall first give a brief review of how my working definition of the term “identity” was formed by the current social scientific discourse, then I shall dedicate a chapter to the definition of national and religious identities in Central European context. After finishing the theoretical part of this article, I shall discuss the results of my fieldwork which involves first a brief description of the Hungarian Bráhmāna Mission, then I shall analyse Attila Bakos’ book *A Duna Evangéliuma* [The Gospel of the Danube] on national and religious identity.⁶ After the analysis I shall investigate the seven interviews I made with the members of the group. I will not cite the interviews as they would be too long for this article, I shall only discuss the analysis of the interviews.

Finally, let me mention some words about the method of my research. During my fieldwork I followed the Geertzian, hermeneutic tradition of cultural anthropology.⁷ In this way I cannot claim to possess an objective, unquestionable view of the community, all I have is an interpretation, a piece of reality conveyed by my personality. During my fieldwork and while creating the theoretical background of my essay, I tried to be conscious of my subjectivity.

2. WHAT IS IDENTITY?

If one aims to scrutinise the discourse of today’s social sciences, one can read a lot about identities and their formation. One can talk about national, religious, ethnic or personal identity, one can argue about the liquidity of identities, one can question his or her own identity, nevertheless one can construct, create (or deny) an identity and later analyse this construction. One can find a complex and far-reaching terminology of identity in today’s scientific literature. While doing my research I aspired to establish a basic ground, a root on which I can build up an essential categorisation of identities in general. I learnt that the first social science that focused its attention on identity and its formation was social psychology. During the 1960s Erik Erikson postulated a terminology according to which there are two basic structures of human identity, one that is generated by his/her own consciousness (the knowledge that despite all changes the person is identical with him(her)self) and another

⁶ BAKOS 2004.

⁷ The post-modern, hermeneutic tradition in cultural anthropology stems from authors, like Clifford Geertz, James Clifford or George E. Marcus. These anthropologists shifted the disciplinary attention to the person of the ethnographer and to the act of interpretation in anthropology. Geertz suggested that ethnographic fieldwork is similar to reading a text, in this sense the ethnographer is like an author and cannot claim to possess a scientifically objective truth, just various interpretations. This tradition linked cultural anthropology to post-modern literary theory. See for instance: CLIFFORD–MARCUS 1998, or GEERTZ 1973: 1–30.

one that is created by the people living around him (her), by the context. The social context involves groups the individual identifies with; for instance gender, nationality, ethnicity, religious gathering or political party. Erikson labels the first kind of identity as “personal” identity while the other one as “group” identity.⁸ I basically opted for Erikson’s perspective because his terminology lingers on to cultural anthropology through sociologist Anthony Giddens. I must note however that there are some changes in the use and meaning of Erikson’s postulate in anthropology. Authors refer to *personal* or *individual* and *collective* aspects of self-definition. Personal identity depicts those choices that an individual takes by oneself without being part of a community, while collective identity refers to an individual’s choice of community.⁹ In this respect, I shall deal with certain aspects of the collective part of the self-definition.

3. RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CENTRAL EUROPE

If one aims to take a look at the widely known theories constructed of the situation in Central Europe, one finds scientists like Ernest Gellner or Anthony D. Smith. Gellner’s theory of national identity has very been very fruitful in current social theory. He postulates that national identity is not a self-evident category, nevertheless it a new form of collective identity and it was *constructed* in the 19th century. In Gellner’s opinion the old ties of collective structures enfeebled by the effects of the industrial revolution and a new form of community was born. This new form was national identity and its successors, the nation states.¹⁰

Gellner’s idea of national identity is very impressive indeed, however I find the theory of Anthony D. Smith, professor of the London School of Economics more accurate. Smith agrees with Gellner on placing the formulation of national identity and its territorial manifestations the nation states in the 19th century, however, he postulates that national identity was not a completely new creation that came into existence out of the blue, some of its elements, like ethnicity was already present in earlier historical ages.¹¹ Although Scandinavian anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen claims that Smith’s postulate is rather straightforward, I believe Smith’s idea is more complex.¹² In my interpretation Smith only evolves the possibility of continuity, he does not consider it to be necessary and true in all circumstances. Smith expresses his ideas in a very self-reflexive way, he intends to keep distance even from

⁸ ERIKSON 1968: 45.

⁹ See for instance in the book of anthropologist Gordon MATHEWS (2000: 11).

¹⁰ GELLNER 1997: 5–36.

¹¹ SMITH 1991.

¹² ERIKSEN 1993: 107: “Some writers have argued that nationalism and national communities can have roots in earlier ethnic communities or *ethnies* (A. D. Smith, 1986) but it would be misleading to claim that there is an unbroken continuity from the pre-modern communities or ‘cultures’ to the national ones.”

his own theories and he emphasises the complex nature of the phenomena he scrutinises, which, I believe, saves him from any sort of simplification.

According to Smith, national identity consists of five factors: 1. an historic territory or homeland, 2. common myths and historical memories, 3. common, mass public culture, 4. common legal rights and duties for all members and 5. common economy with territorial mobility for all members. I used these categories in the analysis of Attila Bakos' book and in interpreting the interviews.¹³

Smith and Gellner agree on two issues: they both indicate that the construction of national identity in Central Europe differs from that of Western Europe and they mention that in Central European region national identity was often supported by religion.¹⁴ How did this phenomenon develop after the change of system? Slovenian religious studies scholar Mitja Velikonja establishes five dimensions in his article 'Religion and Church as forming agents of national mythologies in Post-Communist Societies'¹⁵ to analyse the relationship between national and religious identities in contemporary Central Europe. Although Velikonja's essay lacks the sort of complexity and self-reflexivity that I admire in Smith's writing, the five dimensions Velikonja postulates were important contributors to my own analytical categories. Let me cite Velikonja's dimensions: 1. stating that the nation is chosen by God, 2. proving why the dominant church/religion is the best for the nation, 3. creating myths about new and old religious and political leaders, 4. demonising the enemies of the church/nation and 5. condemning the previous "dark" political regime.¹⁶

After reviewing the theoretical background of my research, let me introduce the five categories I evolved as the basis of my analysis. My categories rely heavily on Smith's and Velikonja's dimensions, yet they involve elements that are independent from the two authors. Let me introduce them: 1. ethnic (being the chosen nation), 2. mythological-historical (being the chosen nation, naming the enemies and condemning the previous political era), 3. linguistic (being the chosen nation), 4. theological (re-interpreting religious doctrines) and 5. geographical. I used these categories in interpreting Attila Bakos' book and in analysing the in-depth interviews.

4. COLLECTIVE IDENTITY IN KALI-YUGA: RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE HUNGARIAN BRÁHMANA MISSION

Before I start discussing the empirical part of my essay, let me give a brief description of the Hungarian Bráhmāna Mission which involves the short history of Krishna consciousness in Hungary. As this religious group has not been in the scope

¹³ SMITH 1991: 43–49.

¹⁴ GELLNER 1997: 36, 57, 75–78; SMITH 1991: 61–62, 80, 12–13.

¹⁵ VELIKONJA 1998: 183–193.

¹⁶ VELIKONJA 1998: 183–193.

of scientific attention, I found no published scientific literature about them. The source of the information I gathered are my informants, which means that the data I rely on might carry my informants' subjective opinion. The Hungarian leader of the group is Attila Bakos, who used to be the follower of Abhay Narayan Maharaja. Narayan Maharaja was an ISKCON (International Society for Krishna Consciousness, fund by A. C. Bhaktivendanta Swami Prabhupada) member and he was responsible for spreading Krishna Consciousness behind the "iron curtain", in the Central and Eastern European region during the 1970s. However, a couple of years after Prabhupada's death, in the early 1980s, Narayan broke his ties with ISKCON.¹⁷ So did most Hungarian Krishna devotees, as their most important spiritual master was Abhay Narayan. Attila Bakos joined Abhay Narayan in the 1980s. It must be noted that Narayan Maharaja was a Swedish, but originally Hungarian spiritual leader and he was interested in the connection between ancient Hungarian history and Krishna worship, which led him to reinterpret Hungary's official history. This line of interpretation was later succeeded to Attila Bakos. Narayan Maharaja died suddenly in 1993, however, short before his death there was a conflict between him and Attila Bakos.¹⁸ As the spiritual master died and there was a breach that may not have been settled, Attila Bakos joined another Indian spiritual leader Govinda Maharaja in 1994. He began to establish his community after that. According to my informants, there are about 30 "serious" devotees and hundreds of "interested" people throughout the country.¹⁹ Most members are young intellectuals (between the age of 25 to 30). The group became an official church in early 2004.

In this part of my paper I shall focus on the results of my fieldwork. First I shall give a brief analysis of Attila Bakos' book *A Duna Evangéliuma* [The Gospel of the Danube], then I shall analyse the seven interviews that I made with the members of the group. During my fieldwork I focused on individual interpretations, such as Attila Bakos' and my informants' and from these individual interpretations did I postulate a collective view of the group as a whole.

Let me turn to the interpretation of Attila Bakos' book. Before starting my analysis according to the five categories I established, let me make some general remarks of *A Duna Evangéliuma* [The Gospel of the Danube]. The book was published in 2004 by the publishing Ltd of the community. It consists of more than 500

¹⁷ Informant R. explained that Narayan Maharaja objected to the highly formal nature of ISKCON and he emphasised the importance of spirituality instead of the many formal rules. I must add, however, that the importance of spirituality instead of strict formal rules is a very significant aspect of the Mission's self-definition, in this respect my informant's opinion may have a legitimising aspect.

¹⁸ Informant S. who has been a Krishna devotee since the early 1980s and has been a good friend of Attila Bakos told me that the conflict broke out because of publishing a book written by Attila Bakos. The book was meant to be published by Narayan Maharaja, however Bakos turned to another person in the end. It is interesting to note that informant R. who is younger than S. and was not a member when the breach took place told me that Attila Bakos and Narayan Maharaja did not agree on many "practical issues" because they were both very firm characters.

¹⁹ Although the number of believers in this group is very small, thus the community does not play an important role in shaping the spiritual map of Hungary, I believe their combination of religious and national identity is specifically Central European.

pages and deals with a wide range of topics: beyond religious, historical or mythological themes, it focuses on astrology, mathematics, physics, archaeology and contemporary politics. The style of the work is somewhat like a mixture of an essay and a novel, the author often refers to various Hungarian and foreign scientists (historians, archaeologists, physicians), however, he barely cites accurately from the works, most often he only mentions a name or a certain work or he simply talks about science in general. Folk tales, legends, religious holy scripts (the Bible, the Bhagavad-Gita, the Vedas) or the Mahabharata and the Ramayana and esoteric Christian scripts are often referred to in the book. I must note that I cannot claim to possess an objective truth of the book, the analysis is limited by my subjectivity.

In my opinion the argumentation of the author is rather dichotomic. He uses lot of oppositions, where one thing is referred to as valuable, while its opposition means a threat, a danger to this value. Bakos uses oppositions like the Hungarian nation/Judeo-Christian Western Europe and the United States, religion/“dogmatic” Christian church, religion/“materialist” scientific paradigms, religion/atheism and materialism or national identity/communism.²⁰

In the light of this general introduction, let me turn to interpretation of the book on the basis of my analytical categories. The first category I labelled as ethnic, which indicates that the nation is chosen by God. Attila Bakos states that there is continuity between Hungarian, Hun and Sumerian ethnicity. He argues for the special, chosen nature of this ethnic continuity. He postulates that the first authentic revelation by God was given to the Sumerians. All the other religious traditions, including the Hindu, or the Jewish, are descendants of that original revelation. According to the author the Old Testament is only a derivation of this ancient revelation ‘stolen’ from the Sumerians by the Semitic tribes. It is interesting to mention that Bakos uses that certain dichotomic rhetoric here which is often present in the book. He emphasises the speciality of the Sumerian (Hungarian) ethnic group by mentioning the negative aspects of the other ethnic group. The adjectives attributed to the Sumerians are the following: innocent, pure, has a close relationship with God, while the Semitic tribes are described as aggressive, envy and too ambitious.²¹

Such dichotomy can be noticed in Bakos’ idea of Jesus Christ’s ethnic identity. The author claims that Jesus was not of Jewish origin, because of the mentioned ‘negative’ characteristics, he states that Jesus was a Pártus descendant. In his interpretation the Pártus ethnic group was the descendant of the ancient Sumerians (Hungarians).²²

It is noteworthy that the author considers Buddha and Krishna as well to be of Hungarian origin. He claims for instance that Krishna was a Hun leader in India.²³

The book’s sixth, last chapter called ‘The National Character’ also emphasises the speciality of Hungarians. Bakos explains the Hungarian nation’s special task in

²⁰ BAKOS 2004: 293, 440–442, 495–501.

²¹ BAKOS 2004: 60, 119.

²² BAKOS 2004: 480–481.

²³ BAKOS 2004: 284, 365, 425.

this part of the book. He states that the Hungarians are the nation of God's son and their most important task is to become the transcendental children of God. This special skill or knowledge is the gift of the Hungarian nation.²⁴

Let me turn to the mythological-historical category. I labelled this category as such, because I believe the special reinterpretation of history cannot be divided here from myth-building. With this category I partly refer to the author's long discussions of the Hungarian ethnic group's migration in India, Asia and in the Carpathian Basin, and partly to the author's references to certain events of the later national history. The dichotomy of Bakos' argumentation is most expressive in his views of the 'traditional' historical paradigms, which he labels as the enemies of the Hungarian nation. He considers these paradigms to be materialistic and 'have no empathy'. The author appreciates however the works of historians who do not achieve much scholarly reputation, like Heirbert Illig. With the help of Illig's idea of the 'invented middle-ages' Bakos attempts to prove his postulate of the Hun-Hungarian continuity. While arguing for this theory, the author reveals another 'enemy' of the Hungarian nation, the Judeo-Christian Western Europe that tries to hide the 'truth' about the greatness of the Hungarians. The author often refers to events of previous historical eras, especially to the end of World War I, when the Treaty of Trianon took place and parts of Hungary's territory were given to the neighbouring countries. Bakos stresses the conscious negative role of Western Europe and Hungary's neighbours in this matter. In my view, this argumentation can add to the special nature of the Hungarian nation.²⁵

The author often mentions about communism as the last historical epoch before the change in 1989. He describes this age as materialistic and suppressing national identity.²⁶

Let me turn to the third dimension, which I labelled as linguistic. The third chapter of the book which is called 'Our Ancient Tantric Linguistic Memories' provides a good example to analyse this aspect. There are, however, many other examples as well in the work, as Bakos intends to prove this theory of ethnic or historical continuity by exploring linguistic similarities. These proofs involve Sumerian and Egyptian mythologies as well as Hindu religious elements and the interpretation of Indian geographical names. In the third chapter the author explains that humanity's first religion was the ancient tantra, which is a fertility cult with a goddess in its centre. This ancient religion gave birth to the other, more patriarchal cults, which complimented the first, feminine tradition. As the author supposes that the Hungarian nation gave religion to the world, he intends to reconstruct and prove his claim by analysing the Hungarian language. He explores for instance that the name of Lake Balaton stems from the name of ancient Egyptian god Bal. In this respect, the national language plays an important part in legitimising ethnical speciality.²⁷

²⁴ BAKOS 2004: 449.

²⁵ BAKOS 2004: 333–375, 293, 304, 300.

²⁶ BAKOS 2004: 495–504.

²⁷ BAKOS 2004: 200, 216, 219.

I marked the fourth dimension as theological. With this dimension I intend to refer to a certain principle and rhetoric that is present in the other dimensions as well, giving them a new sense of meaning. How does this happen? The book is haunted by various Sanskrit religious goals and expressions. Let me explain this by the author's interpretation of Jesus Christ. Bakos' concept is that Jesus Christ was a yogi. He refers to the lack of information provided by the Bible concerning Jesus' life between the age of 12 and 30, when he began his teaching. Bakos postulates that at the time Jesus was in India and was initiated into many mystical teachings and practises, which he took use of later during the three years of his preaching. Bakos claims that he learnt to control his body and his mind and showed mystical skills, *siddhis*, in Sanskrit. Bakos mentions two examples to legitimise his claims. The first one is when Jesus was walking on water. Bakos labels it as a perfect example of Jesus' yogic skills; he could control his body. The other one is Jesus' death on the cross. Bakos postulates that he did not actually die but he took perfect control of his body, so that everybody thought him dead. Only a well-skilled, initiated yogi can do so. In this sense, there was no resurrection, because Jesus, the perfect yogi, did not die.²⁸

There is another significant aspect in the theological dimension. It is Jesus' role as a saviour. Bakos argues that, contrary to Catholic teachings, Jesus did not save the whole world, he only set an example for people how to save themselves. Individual work versus a collective saviour is also characteristic of the Hindu line of thinking and modern esoteric thought. In this dimension traditional Christian teachings and the Roman Catholic Church are the opposites of the mentioned religious goals, who consciously kept secret the original truth.²⁹

The fifth dimension, which I called geographical will play an important role in the analysis of the interviews. In the case of the book, this dimension is incorporated in the other four categories. It is noteworthy however, that Hungary's current geographical area, the Carpathian Basin is a significant location in the first appearance of the ancient tantric religion according to the author.³⁰

To sum up my analysis, I can conclude that two of Smith's dimensions are notable in Attila Bakos' work: reinterpreting national myths and common memories (history) and the importance of the country's geographical location. From Velikonja's classification, the speciality of the nation, demonising the enemies of the nation and condemning the previous historical era are present in the book. Although Velikonja's categories were primarily established for traditional churches, many parts of them fit to the ideas of Attila Bakos. This seems to suggest that the combination of national and religious identity in the Hungarian Brāhmaṇa Mission is a typical post-communist phenomenon. So far I have scrutinised the local leader's theories on the basis of the book he wrote. What do the other members think about the topic? Do they have the same opinion as their *sikṣa guru*³¹ or are their views more diverse?

²⁸ BAKOS 2004: 486, 479.

²⁹ BAKOS 2004: 367.

³⁰ BAKOS 2004: 195–305.

³¹ *sikṣa guru*: local leader.

Before I turn to the analysis of the interviews, let me make some remarks upon the circumstances in which the conversations took place. I made altogether seven interviews with seven members of the group whom I met for the first time at the time of the interview. In this sense, I could not apply the method of the in-depth interview at the right period of my research. This happened because the community's programs are of concentric nature, which means that there are public lectures and so called 'private programs'. Private programs can only be visited by those who are 'seriously interested' in the community. As I experienced, being seriously interested means that one attends several public lectures and expresses his/her interest to the lecturer or one needs to be a close friend of a member. As I had no previous connection with the community, I started visiting public lectures, but unfortunately these lectures proved to be no good sources of making connections. At the same time I began making the interviews. I met that bhakta³² first who gave the public lectures at the time in Szeged. He was also the local leader of the group in the area of Szeged. I got to know him by one of my friends who is also a researcher, however, his field of interest is different from mine. After the first interview, the local leader of the group became my key informant and helped me to organise the other interviews. He was also the one I could always turn to if I had questions, however, the first time I was invited to one of the private programs was more than a year after I began doing my fieldwork. At the time I had to finish my research, so I could not include my experiences in my study.

The interviews usually took place in my informants' flats, or in my apartment or in a restaurant. I noticed that my interviewees were a little embarrassed during the interview because that was the first time they saw me. I tried to solve this problem by transforming the interview into a semi-structured conversation where I sometimes let my informants lead the discussion and I sometimes answered their questions as well. I felt like trying to find out what is happening in a closed room by looking through many keyholes. I believe these circumstances were important to note because of signifying my position as a researcher during my fieldwork in the group and mentioning the details that contribute to the Geertzian subjectivity of the interpretation I constructed on the basis of the interviews.

As for the ethnic and historical-mythological dimensions: many of my informants aimed to re-interpret Hungary's official history. They questioned the Finno-Ugrian theory of origin and claimed that the Hungarian nation is connected to the Indian culture. They postulated for instance that Krishna was a Hun (Hungarian) ruler. They also stated that in ancient Hungarian society religion was a very significant factor and that being Hungarian today means that one has the duty to keep this spiritual heritage and spread religion to the people. Some informants remarked on the wars of national independence in the past few centuries postulating that the goals people fought at those times are the highest religious values. For these values they named love and self-sacrifice.

³² bhakta: devotee.

The linguistic dimension was not mentioned during the interviews.

In the geographical dimension my informants claimed that Hungary is a “bridge” between east and west. Some said that Hungary is a very good place to realise one’s spiritual goals because we are neither too rich, neither too poor to lead a spiritual life. Another informant mentioned that Hungary has the characteristics of the west (energy, vigour) and the east (introversion, meditation) which makes this country the perfect place for spiritual life.

In the theological dimension the idea of reincarnation becomes significant. Many of my informants claimed that their present life as a Hungarian person is not the first. They told me that they had many previous incarnations as Hungarians and they played important roles in the life of the nation. They also mentioned that they can best fulfil their spiritual needs as being part of the Hungarian nation.

To sum up the experiences of my journey in the devotees’ micro-cosmos, I can claim that the relationship between religious and national identity has become more diverse. Some of my informants stressed that national identity was not important to them, while others mentioned that overestimating the role of national identity can even be dangerous. These factors were not referred to in Attila Bakos’ work. I did not find the kind of strong dichotomy in the interviews either that I mentioned about in the case of Attila Bakos. Ancient Semitic tribes and traditional Christian churches were not seen as enemies in the interviews, while the United States, communism and globalisation were shown in a negative light. The mythological, theological and geographical dimensions were the most significant ones, while the linguistic and ethnic dimensions seemed to be of less importance. Finally, I must confess that although I sought to be as objective and as analytical in my research as I could, my role as a researcher forced me into a certain position, which had its subjective aspects, therefore the results of my fieldwork should be considered as interpretations in the Geertzian sense.

5. SOME FINAL REMARKS

On returning to the metaphor I started with, I may form a question like this: how do my informants and their local leader Attila Bakos become pilgrims in the world of tourists? How do they construct their religious and national identity and how do they combine these two? What kind of remarks could a young researcher like me conclude from all these?

While analysing the book of Attila Bakos, I established five dimensions on the basis of Anthony D. Smith’s and Mitja Velikonja’s categories. Many of my dimensions coincided with Velikonja’s typology which seems to justify my preliminary hypothesis according to which the combination of religious and national identity reflected by Attila Bakos’s work is a typical post-communist Central-Eastern European phenomenon. This claim might be noteworthy because former researches in the theme were carried out in the traditional churches of this area, while my results refer to a new religious community. Although it is true that this community is rather small

and does not have a major effect in Hungary's spiritual market, the study of this group depicts a typical phenomenon of contemporary Central Europe: the combination of religious and national identity and the emergence of new religious communities.

When I turned to analyse the interviews, my ideas about the co-existence of national and religious identities in the group had been modified. The devotees' opinion of the subject were more diverse than that of Attila Bakos. It can be postulated however that to some extent both types of identities were present in my informants' self-definitions. For some members they are more important, for others they are less significant.

Finally, let me make some remarks on the sharp dichotomy revealed in Attila Bakos' book, which was not present in the interviews with the devotees. Bakos sees an enemy in the ancient Semitic tribes, in the traditional Christian churches, in Western Europe, in the paradigms of social sciences and communism. If the creation of enemies involves people of other ethnic or religious groups, it may turn to be a dangerous form of nationalism – as one of my informants referred to it. As Velikonja mentions this phenomenon may be considered as a typical Central European phenomenon.³³ In further research, it might be useful to compare the fusion of religious and national identity in the Hungarian Bráhmána Mission with that of other old and new religious communities. It would be worthwhile to involve new religious groups of other Central European countries in the investigation too.

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³³ VELIKONJA 1998: 183–193.

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