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## **Patrice M. Dabrowski: The Carpathians. Discovering the Highlands of Poland and Ukraine**

Ithaca/London (Northern Illinois University Press/Cornell University Press) 2021, 270 S., 13 Abb. und 5 Karten, \$ 34.95

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A few years ago, Jakub Mikanowski penned a piece for *Harper's Magazine* about the annual festival of tribes in the Hungarian steppe. The centerpiece of the multi-day event was the reenactment of an equestrian battle from the tenth century, when the descendants of Atilla the Hun defeated their Frankish counterparts. The government-backed festival is not only about the descendants of the famous conqueror of the Middle Ages, but also about the distant connection with dozens of other tribes scattered across Central Asia. The event's main aim was to enlighten guests about the long, warrior-like past of the Great Hungarian nation. Attendees were to »discover« their fraternal bond with communities spanning all the way to Mongolia. Similar attempts by Polish and Ukrainian actors took place in modern history in the mountainous regions of Galicia, as Patrice Dabrowski reveals in her book on the cultural life of the Carpathians in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Separated into three large sections, Dabrowski's book shows how small groups of intellectuals – usually from the lowland – became infatuated with the »discovery« of peoples in the Tatras, the Eastern Carpathians, and the Bieszczady. Roughly chronological, Dabrowski's account introduces the reader to the major figures, organizations, and alpine clubs that got infected with the idea of popularizing the highlands (or, the Carpathians) in the lowlands (i.e., Kraków and Warsaw);

at the same time, they introduced highlanders to modernity in the form of new transport, tourist industries, and nationalist thought. In the Tatras, for which Zakopane stood as a gateway, Dabrowski documents how Tytus Chalubiński – a doctor from Russian-occupied Warsaw – began to promote the region as, on the one hand, a primordial landscape untouched by modern civilization and hence reinvigorating for urbanite lowlanders used to pollution and city-life; and on the other hand, a region which, if nurtured correctly, was destined to become a part of the Polish nation. More than that, she argues, the Górale – that is, the distinctive mountainous populations living in modern-day regions of southeast Poland and southwest Ukraine – were to become a paramount symbol of what Polishness was. The Tatras – located in the Austro-Hungarian empire which was by the end of the nineteenth century comparatively more liberal than its German and Russian counterparts – were to become a paradise where Poles could »discover« what it meant to be Polish. Dabrowski successfully reveals how the »periphery« was brought to the »center«, first by means of successful advertisement through literature, art, and alpine societies, and later through technological advancement. In all regions the author deals with, the introduction of railroads either transformed (or failed to transform) hitherto tiny villages into spa towns and health resorts.

This sounds like a typical story of industrialization the reader might be familiar with. Dabrowski is cognizant that the development of the regions did not aim to invite mass unorganized tourism to virgin forests but was the initiative of academic enthusiasts who wanted to bring the otherwise prohibitive mountain ranges closer to the public. The actors in the book wanted to encourage healthy and active adventure, but also preserve the people and the environment of the mountains. Of course, what »development« meant depended on the various actors, and should be understood in their time and place. Here it should be noted that, while Dabrowski undoubtedly searched for more local voices, this reader was frequently missing the agency of individual peasants. While there are local enthusiasts, the actors in Dabrowski's work are usually people of what we would call »the elite«. But her studies are otherwise well-researched, extensive, and yet accessible to readers from all backgrounds.

The second section of her work focuses on the Eastern Carpathians, which (in contrast to the Tatras around Zakopane) were inhabited by people of multiple ethnicities, languages, and religions, and were hence more contested in the eyes of both Polish and Ukrainian nationalists. At the center of debates surrounding the region was the status of the Hutsuls. The Hutsuls spoke a language which was neither Polish nor Ukrainian (at least not yet), and in contrast to the Górale (who were more reserved towards outsiders), the Hutsuls felt at ease with utilizing the attention focused on them by nationalists of different stripe. Hence, while Zakopane and its surroundings were projected in the »center« as quintessentially Polish, the Hutsuls were considered by activists and enthusiast as a culturally distinct pop-

ulation which was to be nourished and preserved. That is to say, depending on the interlocutors, the Hutsuls could become Ukrainian or Polish, but needed to be preserved as a unique population, in contrast to the Górale, who were meant to act as prototypically Polish. Ukrainian lowlanders claimed the Hutsuls to be clearly part of their camp, while Polish actors – some of whom came from the region – pursued a policy of cautious preservation, encouraging Hutsuls to maintain their own unique culture, according to the philosophy that if you cannot make them Polish, at least ensure that they do not become Ukrainian patriots. Perhaps this strategy worked, as Dabrowski highlights, since the Hutsuls did not participate in the uprisings of 1930 when Ukrainian lowlanders revolted against the Polish state.

While the section on the Tatras leads up to the outbreak of World War I (and the lack of treatment of any of the regions during the War is an unfortunate omission), the second section of Dabrowski's book leads the reader up to the end of World War II. The development of the Eastern Carpathians was by and large similar to the Tatras, but happening roughly a decade later. The Czarnohorska branch of the Tatra Society was established after the fascination with Zakopane had already begun; trains arrived in the Prut Valley long after lowlanders were taking short trips to the Tatras; and exhibitions or traveling Hutsul theaters usually built on ground-work already in place in other highland regions. Additionally, while the Tatras were used as a canvas to project Polishness in an age when there was no Poland, the Eastern Carpathians after World War I were used to imagine a Poland of regions, similar to the philosophy of Piłsudski who envisioned a Poland of civic patriotism, and not of ethnic homogeneity. However,

the successful interwar project of integrating the Hutsul region into Poland came to an abrupt end after the Soviet Union invaded the region in 1939.

The final section of the book explores the Bieszczady, which became the symbol of Polish alpinism after the loss of most of the Carpathians after World War II. In contrast to her discussion of developments in the early twentieth century, here Dabrowski explains how the nationality question was inhumanely but rapidly solved: various highland minorities were either exterminated by the Nazis during the occupation or (after 1945) were forced to migrate to Soviet Ukraine or newly-established Western Poland. This was not only in parallel with other expulsions across Poland and Europe during this time period, it was also in response to the presence of Ukrainian guerilla fighters who refused to accept the new order after World War II. Following the removal of villages and inhabitants, the Bieszczady returned to nature, and socialist planners – as elsewhere in the Eastern bloc – saw their opportunity to use the space as a laboratory of both large-scale industrialization and planned tourism. This was done through the creation of new dams and industrial projects, as well as tourist resorts dedicated to hard laborers. There were still rugged backpackers – some more experienced than others – and soon after the region was ›cleansed‹ of its native minorities, students and other alpine enthusiasts began to discover this ›mountain Eden‹. As was the case with the Eastern Carpathians, discussions quickly focused on the degree to which the Bieszczady should be utilized for its resources and ›modernized‹ or preserved and left untouched. Additionally, to what degree should the (remaining) locals be consulted? By the 1970s, the Bieszczady re-

gion was becoming a typical alpine tourist region similar to Tirol, the Great Mountains (Krkonoše), or the Swiss Alps, and the state also moved to preserve swaths of the area to manage growth. There were interesting hiccups, however, such as when the country's leadership decided to build a luxurious private preserve strictly restricted for party big-wigs. Not only did the communist leadership confiscate land from owners, it also systematically pursued name changes to erase names that sounded un-Polish, despite local criticism that the regime was obliterating the multi-ethnic heritage which used to be a hallmark of the region.

There are some drawbacks to the otherwise fascinating story of lowlanders' curiosity about the Carpathians. The title suggests that this is a story of the Polish and Ukrainian discovery of the mountains: however, even though the author has done a superb job of occasionally adding Ukrainian actors (and archival sources), it is by-and-large a Polish story. Given what the author indicates as a large Jewish population in Carpathian settlements, there are few Jewish actors in the book (when Jews are mentioned in literature or travelogues, they are almost universally considered ›foreign‹ entities in the alpine regions). While *The Carpathians* would be a different book if it included all modern countries of the region, it is difficult for audiences of Central Europe to accept that Romanians, Slovaks, Czechs, or Hungarians did not have a very similar infatuation (as recent work of Bianca Hoenig on Poland and Slovakia has shown). To give but two examples: the Slovak coat of arms and national anthem focus explicitly on the Tatras. At the Hungarian folk festival mentioned at the beginning of this review, the headline music group to perform was the popular nationalist metal band, Kár-



pátia, that sang of the tragedy of the lost Hungarian mountain ranges. Additionally, given that the first two sections of the book are set in the late nineteenth century, and given the nature of the native population, it seems equally remarkable that there is no discussion of pan-Slavism. In general, the voices of the locals are almost always filtered through the lenses of individuals with an agenda. The author introduces local voices, when possible, but I believe the fact that much of the population was illiterate makes it difficult to reconstruct local agency.

Dabrowski's work is well-known to any scholar on Polish studies, and her recognition is deserved. Dabrowski's writing style is academically rigorous yet accessible: she is able to relate complex topics to a general audience. Each of the three sections of her book could stand alone, although the book in its entirety is much more enlightening due to its comparative nature. While the history of Zakopane might be well known to many familiar with the region, the discussion of Polish-Jewish relations in the region will be unfamiliar, as will much of the history of the Eastern Carpathians (certainly in English). Dabrowski also introduces new information about familiar personalities from the Polish intelligentsia, convincingly arguing that the »discovery« of the region is a hallmark of Polish history. The lowlanders' infatuation with the highlands was in large part due to the virtual absence of alpine landscapes north of Kraków, and Dabrowski argues that this infatuation is one which has been fostered for more than 150 years. The book comes not only at a perfect time given the world's attention to the region, but is also engagingly written by an author whose knowledge of the region is first class.

*Mark Keck-Szajbel (Frankfurt/Oder)*