

# Civilization and originality: perceptions of history and national specificity in nineteenth-century Hungarian political discourse

BALÁZS TRENCSENYI

Although the evolution of modern Hungarian national ideology from previous configurations of identification is marked by dramatic ruptures, the early modern frameworks of identity had a considerable impact on the outlook of modern national projects, both in terms of territorial imagery, codes of otherness and representations of the collective self. It is commonly assumed that the most influential construction of identity in the early modern period was the so-called *Hungarus*-consciousness (based on a purportedly supra-ethnic and legalistic vision of political nationhood), identifying Hungarianness with the community of noblemen. The picture gets, however, more complicated if one recalls that besides this seemingly 'color-blind' conception of political nationhood another aspect of nationhood was also present (no matter how submerged at some point), stressing common ethnic origins, perceiving nationality along the lines of genealogical myths and the normative memory of past glories, and occasionally even identifying it with the linguistic community<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The present essay draws on parts of my forthcoming book, *The Terror of History. Visions of National Character in Interwar Eastern Europe*.

<sup>2</sup> On the early modern national consciousness in Hungary, the most original ideas were outlined by Jenő Szűcs in his collection of essays. See his *Nemzet és történelem* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1974). This work is also available in German translation: *Nation und Geschichte* (Köln: Böhlau, 1981). See also, *Antike Rezeption und Nationale Identität in der Renaissance in besondere in Deutschland und in Ungarn*,

The variegated intellectual lineage of early modern political *nationes* was further complicated by the duality encoded in the emerging ‘nationalist’ discourse at the beginning of the nineteenth century: i.e. the fusion of the somewhat contradictory ideological projects of the Enlightenment and the emerging Romantic aesthetic and political doctrines<sup>3</sup>. It would be too simplistic to grasp this duality in terms of the binary opposition of universalism and particularism. If one turns to the most interesting cases, like Herder, for example, who stands with one foot in the Enlightenment and with the other in the sentimentalist *Sturm und Drang* discourse which we might describe as the precursor of Romanticism, one can see that the universalistic and the particularistic elements could coexist in a cult of authenticity. The overlapping of these canons calls our attention to the ideological complexity of the modern national discourses emerging in the first half of the nineteenth century in East Central Europe<sup>4</sup>. The elements of ethnic and supra-ethnic identity, the ambiguity of universalism and particularism all came to play their part in the emerging ‘liberal nationalism’ of the nineteenth century – these encoded contradictions made the tradition viable, structurally open to appropriation from different perspectives, but the very same heterogeneity made the new national discourse especially explosive. The emerging constructions of Hungarian ‘national character’ are indicative of these ambiguities. On the whole, the use of the concept of ‘national character’ or ‘national customs’ at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries witnessed the symbolic negotiation over the limits of the national community and also the interplay of the idea of nationhood with the new vision of historical progress. It is indicative that, from the very beginning of its use, ‘national character’ appeared in the context of something rooted in history, in need to be protected against corruption. Symptomatically, already at this early point the cultivation of national character was linked with the program of linguistic Magyarization. This appears in the program of the first Hungarian-language cultural periodical *Uránia* (1794-95), edited by József Kármán and Gáspár Pajor, as well as in Kármán’s key work, the essay *A’ Nemzet Tsinosodása* (The refinement of the nation)<sup>5</sup>.

From the turn of the nineteenth century onwards, the influence of Herder became especially tangible all over Eastern Europe, contributing to the emergence of

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ed. Tibor Klaniczay (Budapest: Balassi, 1993); Katalin Péter, “A haza és a nemzet az ország három részre szakadt állapota idején”, in *Papok és nemesek* (Budapest: Ráday Gyűjtemény, 1995), 211-233. For a broader introduction to the history of political ideas in the early modern period in Hungary, see László Kontler and Balázs Trencsényi: “Hungary”, in., *Religion, Law and Philosophy: European Political Thought, 1450-1700*, eds. Glenn Burgess, Howell Lloyd (New Haven: Yale UP, 2008), 176-207.

3 On the problem of continuity see, most recently, Ambrus Miskolczi, *A felvilágosodás és a liberalizmus között* (Budapest: Lucidus, 2007).

4 Endre Bojtár, “Az ember feljő.” *A felvilágosodás és a romantika a közép- és kelet-európai irodalmakban* (Budapest: Magvető, 1986).

5 József Kármán, *A nemzet csinosodása* (Budapest: Magvető, 1981). Originally published: 1795, in vol. III of the magazine *Uránia*.

a discourse of national specificity<sup>6</sup>. The most important features of the discussion on national specificity in the Hungarian context were, on the one hand, the shift from customs to language in defining the nation; on the other hand, the problem of the relationship of cultural import and local production in creating a national culture. An early example, witnessing this link, can be found in the invectives of the journal editor István Kultsár (1760-1828)<sup>7</sup>, protagonist of the campaign for a Hungarian national theatre in the first decade of the nineteenth century. Significantly, ‘national character’ became a keyword in his argument for building ‘national institutions’: “Only that country can be happy and great where the inhabitants possess a national character”. As this assertion needed to be explained in view of the multiethnic character of the Hungarian *patria*, Kultsár did not hesitate to link nationhood, language, and mores and also loyalty to the fatherland and the King:

The Hungarian nation in this fatherland is the first according to its right, number, and the cultivation of its language. Even more so, if we look at the properties of its heart. Benevolent, full-hearted, faithful, straightforward, brave, constant<sup>8</sup>.

In his *Encouragement (Buzdítás)* dating from 1815, once again in favor of setting up a permanent national theatre, Kultsár admonished his compatriots to cultivate these “national traits”, inserting his call for national self-cultivation into a stadial model of history – contrasting the archaic martial virtue of the ancestors to “national culture”, the focus of modern national character. Polishing national culture is conditioned by the cultivation of the vernacular language. In order to reach this aim, Kultsár also called for the collection and systematization of folklore: “in every nation they collect diligently the national songs, because from them it is easy to understand the culture of the time, and the character of the nation”<sup>9</sup> and he also theorized on the national peculiarity of the Hungarians on the basis of their “national dances”<sup>10</sup>. It is not hard to identify the intellectual inspiration of these suggestions in the Austrian patriotic project of Joseph von Hormayr, who engaged in collecting and publishing the folklore traditions of the peoples living in the Monarchy<sup>11</sup>.

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6 Recently, the emergence of “national literature” has been in the focus of interest of a number of Hungarian literary historians, who otherwise subscribe to rather divergent theoretical and methodological premises. See Péter Dávidházi, *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése (Toldy Ferenc és a magyar irodalomtörténet)* (Budapest: Akadémiai-Universitas, 2004); Pál S.Varga, *A nemzeti költészet csarnokai* (Budapest: Balassi, 2005); Mihály Szajbély, *A nemzeti narratíva szerepe a magyar irodalmi kánon alakulásában Világos után* (Budapest: Universitas, 2005).

7 On Kultsár’s life and works see János Markos, *Kultsár István, 1760-1828* (Pannonhalma: Pannonhalmi füzetek, 1940).

8 In *Hazai és külföldi tudósítások*, 1809/2., 6; quoted by Markos, *Kultsár István*, 39.

9 In *Hasznos multságok*, 1817/3., 21; quoted by Markos, *Kultsár István*, 54.

10 See his articles in *Hasznos multságok* on “Hungarian national dance” (from 1817 and 1823).

11 István Fenyő, “Ábránd a nemzet családéletéről”, in *Nemzet, nép, irodalom* (Budapest: Magvető, 1973) especially 129ff.

The local context of the intensification of the debate on national culture was the question of the reform of the national language, where the traditionalists often referred to the national tradition to reject the neologisms of the other camp. The broader scholarly context was the problem of creative *genius* that became a crucial issue of aesthetic theory in the late-eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, focusing on the figures of Homer, Ossian and Milton, who expressed the spirit of their 'nation' through epic poetry. The problem of originality, national language and national character thus became increasingly interrelated, which is testified by a large number of articles from the period, such as the Piarist Emil Buczy's (1782-1839) essay in *Erdélyi Muzéum* (*A' görög genie kifejlődése okának sejdítése*, from 1817) where he argued for the native tradition, and referred to the "national character" of the Greeks<sup>12</sup> as a model to emulate. In the debate on originality vs. imitation, the historian magnate József Teleki used Herderian arguments to argue for the "national framework" of language reform, while the "orthologist" (i.e. anti-neologist) discourse of originality – which marked the most prestigious scholarly review of the period, *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* [Scientific collection] (its protagonists being the above-mentioned István Kultsár, the prominent art collector and historian Miklós Jankovich, and the university professor István Horvát) – drew on the Herderian conception of the "ages of nations", constructing "national culture" as the normative principle of continuity while criticizing the "heedless" reformism based on neologism and import.

In the period between 1817 and 1822 *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* published a considerable number of articles on national culture, heritage and character. These texts were marked by an overall conservative tone, at the same time the authors sought to address the up-to-date topics of scholarly debate, which often challenged this conservative position. One of the core questions, inherited from the Enlightenment, was the relationship of environmental factors and inherent character traits. The very "Preface" to the first issue of the journal<sup>13</sup>, entitled "On national culture in general" contained a lengthy argument about the impact of climate on physiognomy, morality, work and character. Warm climate gave birth to temperamental people, characterized by inconstancy and mostly conservative political options. In contrast, men living under cold climate tended to be peaceful and tolerant, and were characterized by an aptitude to learn. Finally, moderate climate engendered brave peoples, whose life was marked by permanent change, and whose best representatives sought to control this change by moral constancy, a typical example of which is "Roman virtue". The article sought nevertheless to relativize the climatic theory, rejecting both Hume's skepticism and Montesquieu's determinism, focusing on "civil society" (*polgári társaság*)

12 Fenyő, "Az eredetiség-program kialakulása és kritikái értelmezése 1817-1822 között", in Fenyő, *Nemzet, nép, irodalom*, 41-115. See also Lajos Csetri's study on Buczy: "Adalékok Döbrentei Erdélyi Muzéumának irodalomszemléletéhez. (Buczy Emil tanulmányairól)", in *Amathus* vol. I. (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2007) 161-178.

13 "A Nemzeti Culturáról közönségesen", *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* (1817/1): 13-42.

as the basis of national culture, and consequently stressing that the influence of governments could overwrite climatic factors and what is more climate itself was subject to change. In addition to climatic factors, the article also listed a series of geographical determinants such as living in the mountain, the valley, the forest, or on the plain and also meticulously catalogued other aspects shaping the national character such as nutrition, customs, or even garment.

At the same time, inherent factors were also considered to be important by the contributors of the journal. Drawing on the German Romantic understanding of community, the article “On Nationality” contrasted nation as an organic entity to people as inorganic (*orgántalan*) substance, i.e. shaped by external effects<sup>14</sup>. The organic force is the “National-Geist” present from the origins of the nation, and thus the national character is mainly conditioned by those forces which were in vigor when the nation was formed and it emerges as a normative regulatory principle keeping together the national community. The German Romantic influence is also visible in the essay “Some patriotic informative words on the soul and character of the Hungarians”<sup>15</sup>, which envisioned an organic pattern of development for the nation, rejecting the French revolutionary jumps and asserting that “national soul” was the key factor in securing this evolutionary course of development and serving as an instrument against revolutionary chaos. Turning to the specific Hungarian traits, the article sought to locate the original root of national character in the times of moving from Asia and connect it with the spirit of modern times. The key features identified were bravery, virtue, love of rulers, loyalty, moderation, and respect of law. This initial predisposition was further developed by the reforms of St. Stephen introducing Christian and monarchic elements. The corruption of the national character was due to the challenge to this original harmony, in the form of limiting the rights of the ruler. The danger to national virtue came mainly from unhealthy foreign influences and from the “seeming patriotism” masking particular interests, and thus leading to factionalism. The regeneration of the national community in this scheme was possible only with the help of Austria. In general, however, the Hungarian nation was considered to have preserved the most important constitutive traits of her archaic virtue, being a friend of legitimacy, rejecting the revolutionary spirit, and marked by a strong patriarchal element in her national life.

In contrast to this straightforward use of national characterological *topoi* as a basis of pro-Habsburg political propaganda, other authors positioned themselves in a more ideologically neutral way. András Thaisz (1789-1840), who in 1819 became the new editor of *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* and turned it into a more liberal direction in cooperation with the reshuffled advisory board headed by the reformist aristocrat József Teleki, questioned the scientific value

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14 “A Nemzetiségről”, *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* (1817/5): 57-61.

15 “Némely hazafíúi emlékeztető szavak a Magyarok lelke és characteré felől”, *Tudományos Gyűjtemény* (1822/6): 30-56.

of general statements about national specificity. Eventually, he asserted that such statements about a nation's character are only good for joking and not for scientific work<sup>16</sup>. He also admitted, however, that mere induction was a dubious tool for describing the national character as every difference generated new categories. In order to demonstrate the potentials of a more scientific approach, Thaisz referred to the standards of contemporary *Staatswissenschaften*, like Anton W. Gustermann's *Die Verfassung des Königreiches Ungarn* (1811). Steeped in this Late Enlightenment scholarly paradigm, Thaisz referred to the problems of defining the nation in view of the governing elite or in view of the common people, and also evoked the classical eighteenth-century polemic concept of "private patriots". Instead of sweeping generalizations and anecdotic details, he called for a synthetic study of national language, literature, geography, and history as a way to "map" the national character. He also rejected the idea of a timeless *National-Geist* infusing the national history from its very beginning, and stressed rather the ruptures, contrasting old Hungarian anarchy and violent behavior to modern friendliness and civility. In line with this enlightened vision of social and moral evolution he described "real patriotism" in terms of educating the nation by comparing it to the more developed nations and in another essay from 1820 he even contrasted self-centered "nationalism" (using the neologism *nacionalizmus*) to the more benign "patriotism".

It is characteristic that Thaisz came from the northern-Hungarian urban elite with mixed Hungarian, Slovak and German ethnic and cultural background, representing perhaps the last generation of *Hungarus* intellectuals in a period when the process of nationalization became increasingly based on ethno-cultural references. As a matter of fact, bringing together civic and ethno-cultural aspects of nationhood posed a serious challenge to all the authors of the Hungarian Reform Age. The discussions of Hungarian 'national character' often witnessed these dilemmas of the incipient process of modern nation-building. While, in general, the focus of nationality was shifting from 'customs' towards 'language', in the peculiar situation of having to forge a national community from a population where less than fifty percent was ethnically Hungarian, and where the Hungarian vernacular was far from being dominant, the conceptual and theoretical ambiguities quickly came to the fore.

Johannes (János) Csaplovics (1780-1847), who had mostly Slovak ancestors and who can thus be considered an exemplary case of 'Hungarus-consciousness', published a pioneering description of the country, *Gemälde von Ungern*<sup>17</sup> in 1829. The book, based on a previous publication from 1822 in *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*, witnesses a historical moment which was still largely untouched by the romantic atmosphere of 'national revival'. It depicts Hungary in terms of

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16 András Thaisz, "Közönséges Észrevételek a' Nemzeti Charakternek megítélésére különösen pedig a' magyar Nemzetről hozott némelly ítéletekre", *Tudományos Gyűjtemény*, (1819/9): 32-55.

17 Johannes Csaplovics, *Gemälde von Ungern* (Pest: Hartleben, 1829).

a mind-boggling ethnic, cultural and geographical multiplicity (stressing that “Hungary is Europe in small”). Avoiding the conceptual distinction of ‘ethnie’ and nation, it allows for the existence of many nations in the same fatherland. Describing his *patria*, Csaplovics was at pains to reject the accusation of barbarism, while accepting a specific cultural otherness, accentuating for instance the patriarchalism of Hungarian life. He constructed this otherness in terms of Herderian references – admitting that the *Volkscharakter* of European nations was gradually dissolving and therefore there was a pressing need to study them. At the same time, he rejected Herder’s infamous prophecy about the Hungarians as a nation bound to extinction.

Rather than a Herderian construction of ‘national authenticity’, the basis of Csaplovics’ description of Hungary was the Late Enlightenment genre of *Statistik* (especially the work of Márton Schwartzner, a pupil of Schlözer), meaning a complex science of government, mapping the human and natural resources of a given territory. He contrasted his project of *Statistische Ethnographie* to political history (*Staatsgeschichte*), pointing out the limited nature of historical works describing only high politics. Instead, he suggested that the physical, moral and socio-cultural state of the population needed to be taken into account. As one of the key markers defining the nation, he referred to language, but he immediately qualified this assertion by admitting the possibility of language changes. Drawing on the Enlightenment tradition of deciphering cultural and political diversity, he turned to the climatic model to characterize the inhabitants of Hungary, using the North-South divide even within the country to explain the specificities of the different nations.

According to Csaplovics, the character of Magyars is derived from the generally warm climate, generating vivid fantasy, which results in such level of exaltation that they often start talking to themselves. At the same time, they are marked by a lack of curiosity, friendliness, hospitality, and fieriness. This set of character-traits is then compared to the other nationalities: for instance, in comparison, the Slovaks tend to be somewhat less courageous, the Germans even less so, while the Jews are at the bottom of the list, as they “do not have any courage whatsoever”. Csaplovics takes into account other, less apparent, aspects as well, making comparative schemes of the prevalence of drinking, fighting or criminality in the respective communities. On the whole, his discourse of national character was that of the late Enlightenment. Rather than projecting a scheme of national revival as a reaction to the Germanization enforced by Enlightened Absolutism, he considers the population of Hungary as subject to a civilizing process which started with the benign rule of Joseph II, marked by reforms and general progress. Significantly, he did not have much to say about his own decade, which was marked by the intensification of national sentiment, eventually challenging his conception of supra-ethnic patriotism.

Gradually transcending the horizons of pluralistic ethnographical and statistical descriptions of the country, in the 1820s national specificity became

a key issue of intellectual discussion, formulated in an aesthetic register chiefly in the debate concerning imitation and/or originality of literary works. While the 'popular tradition' was in its rhetorical focus, in the 1810s the conservative discourse of the 'orthologists' did not identify the 'national' with the peasantry. As the issue of the peasantry became gradually incorporated by the liberals into the debate on national specificity, and thus acquired a direct socio-political relevance, the debate on national character had increasingly powerful repercussions in the entire emerging public sphere from the mid-1820s onwards. The paradoxical aspect of this development was that by activating an ethno-cultural system of references, the more inclusive social discourse seeking to integrate the peasantry also implied a more exclusivist turn towards defining Hungarianness in terms of linguistic and cultural homogeneity, undermining the possibility of multiple identification characteristic of the 'Hungarus-mentality'.

The move towards a cultural redefinition of the nation was tentatively made by Ferenc Kölcsey (1790–1838), poet, literary critic, and liberal politician, who was also one of the main participants of the controversy over the use of neologisms in the Hungarian language back in the 1810s, defending the main ideologue of the modernists, Kazinczy, against the traditionalist camp. While starting as a classicist and follower of the aesthetic principles of the Late Enlightenment, in the late-1810s he came to formulate a project of creating a "national literature" inspired by romantic aesthetic ideas, though also retaining a plethora of elements from the Enlightenment and the classicist literary tradition. The transformation of Kölcsey's poetic style and aesthetic views is usually taken to be the key document of the complex process of transition from Classicism to Romanticism. In his *Letters from Lasztóc* (1817), in which he drew on the romantic reinterpretation of Greek culture, especially by Friedrich Schlegel, Kölcsey formulated a program of poetic originality linking the problem of the organic quality of culture with the process of creation.

The most important issue of the 'revivalist' movement was the construction of a framework of cultural institutions and the creation of a 'national canon.' In the romantic vision mediated by such works as Joseph Görres' *Mythengeschichte der Asiatischen Welt*, Friedrich Schlegel's *Geschichte der alten und neuen Literatur* and the writings of Jakob Grimm, every nation was encouraged to recover its mythical pre-history in order to develop its own peculiar ("eigentümlich") literature and national culture. In the programmatic "National traditions" (1826) Kölcsey set out to identify the 'usable' elements from the Hungarian collective cultural memory and 'national' history, which might be possibly employed for building such a canon. The writers seeking to shape the national discourse had to come to terms with the fact that Hungarians evidently had no epic traditions comparable to Homer, the recently 'discovered' Ossian, or even the South-Slav epic poems which attracted widespread attention from the 1790s onwards. The lack of ancient poetry prompted poets like Mihály Vörösmarty (1800-1855) to write literary

epics on subjects of Hungarian prehistory, while others went so far as to try to fake such an epic tradition, with limited success.

As Kölcsey formulated the problem:

Nations boasting of their long past tend to reach back right to the creation of the world with their traditions, and they recount their stories, albeit in a fabulous form, from the times of their origin. Should we then conclude that a nation that is unable to do so is a quite recent branch of some more ancient tribe from which it separated, so slight in number as to be unworthy of attention, and then, growing ignorant, came to remember nothing about its separation? Or that a nation without tradition has wasted away its time in a spiritless fashion, without any great feats, and thus had no memories to pass on to its descendants?<sup>18</sup>.

Kölcsey's response to this challenge was to propose a literary canon that should serve to educate the "national public". Drawing on Herderian inspiration, "National traditions" reiterated the organic theory of national development, comparing the archaic peoples to children and the more civilized ones to adult persons. The young nations are more open to irrational impulses, and this 'animistic' mindset, deeply affected by every extraordinary event, produces the national mythologies. Successful national cultures, like the classical Greek one, evolved organically from these archaic roots, assimilating the foreign influences step by step, so that they could retain the essence of their own tradition. Gradually they became more rational, and their reaching back to a mythical past became a conscious self-reflection. Other cultures, however, like ancient Rome, assimilated an excess of sophisticated foreign influences and never managed to establish their own autonomous cultural climate.

Measured by this vision of organic development, Hungarian culture suffered from serious inadequacies due to the fact that the public memory has almost completely erased references to the heroic age:

Christianity, politics and science have brought our Hungarians closer to their European neighbors in diverse ways; on the other hand, their own state constitution, language, customs and mutual animosities have held them back in diverse ways. It is thus that they have adapted many European features, while at the same time they preserved many non-European ones. But the latter were much more conspicuous only fifty years ago than they are now; and the more they incline towards decay, the more painfully conscious we become of the absence of a writer who could have portrayed our ancestors in their simple and original greatness<sup>19</sup>.

This does not mean that the past glories were completely missing, as there are indirect proofs of the ancient virtue of Hungarians, but the historical hurricanes

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18 Ferenc Kölcsey, "Nemzeti hagyományok". I used Dávid Oláh's translation in *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe (1775-1945): Texts and Commentaries*, vol. II: National Romanticism, eds. Balázs Trencsényi and Michal Kopeček (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), 121.

19 Kölcsey, "Nemzeti hagyományok", 122.

sweeping the country in the past thousand years and the fateful rejection of the pre-Christian cultural heritage in the Middle Ages erased their memory. In order to create a replacement for the national mythology, Kölcsey revisited the Hungarian literary tradition, inquiring whether it could serve as a symbolic framework for the envisaged national awakening. In the last section of the essay, he turns to Hungarian literature from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century, deploring the inorganic dominance of Latin over the vernacular, which was also linked to his counter-position of the authenticity of Homer and Ossian to the “corruption” of Virgil.

In this construction, ‘national culture’ and ‘national character’ are not completely overlapping with ‘popular culture’. It is clear that Kölcsey had strong reservations. Speaking of the folksongs he asserted:

In some of them we encounter, even if only for a few lines, genuine sentiments, a certain light and carefree flight and an attractive alternation from one subject to the other; but it is also undeniable that their most vulgar characteristic is the empty and inappropriate fabrication of rhymes, which causes the most incongruous ideas to be strung together and to form a ridiculous disarray, in which better-matched ideas are occasionally intermingled<sup>20</sup>.

His aim was rather to create a national high culture while drawing on popular inspiration, as the repertory of the national tradition. But he was conscious that the irreversible progress would eventually sweep away the authentic folk culture – the question was whether the Hungarians could create a modern but national high culture, or would lose their national individuality altogether. In his vision, the success depended on the creation of a new national literature, an aesthetic sphere where national history and character could be internalized by the population, providing them with a framework of identification:

Happy is the poet who can allure us to such pleasant illusions, and from whose world no cold interests, unpleasant conflicts or feelings of strangeness can thrust our fancy back! In his works a real poetic realm would be created in which a refined nation would find its homeland; in his works the glorious heroic past and the present, the sentiments of humanity and patriotism could all embrace; while we, constantly held in check by remembrance and compulsion, would be saved from the peril posed by an incessant progress pressing further and further forward – the peril of gradually losing our original features and our bosoms becoming unable to take fire any more<sup>21</sup>.

Consequently, the idea of ‘national character’ (which he also described in terms of national “sentimentalism of character” – “karakterei szentimentalizmus”) fulfils two functions in Kölcsey’s writing: on the one hand it is a product of the past, a result of historical development, on the other hand it is a regulative idea, to be expressed by the authors who are theorizing on national culture and to be followed by poets and writers

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<sup>20</sup> Kölcsey, “Nemzeti hagyományok”, 122.

<sup>21</sup> Kölcsey, “Nemzeti hagyományok”, 123.

who seek to create a national high culture. While the specification (sentimentalism) did not have a lasting influence, the overall impact of Kölcsey's construction was remarkable. Even though this essay was permeated by an almost self-destructive attitude towards the national community lacking 'national traditions', by elaborating a new vision of the national functions of art, Kölcsey's essay turned out to be the most important statement of cultural nation-building in Hungary, and in many ways it determined the ensuing discussions on the 'national character'<sup>22</sup>.

This program of 'originality' became a veritable master-narrative of the Hungarian public sphere in the 1830s. We can find similar claims in virtually every sphere of figurative arts or literature, and the concept of national character came to play a pivotal role in these rhetoric appeals. These debates on originality can be integrated into the framework of the 'regimes of historicity' co-existing and often competing in Hungarian (and European) culture at the time. There are basically four representations of history used in the period of 'national revival': the Christian conception of the teleological movement of humanity; the secular vision of technological-intellectual progress popularized by the last generation of the French Enlightenment (like Condorcet); the accumulative progress of civility characteristic mainly of the British versions of the Enlightenment; and the prescriptive-historicist vision (in a way, the radicalization of the accumulationist discourse, criticizing – from a conservative perspective – the 'polished' culture propagated by the Scottish tradition).

There is, however, a common trait in all these traditions: they all depicted an immanent march of Humanity towards higher levels of existence (the question was rather about the pace and the direction than the very existence of this movement). This immanent vision of human progress posed a fundamental challenge to the intellectuals speculating on the destiny of their respective nation. If the progress of Humanity unfolded anyhow, the individual nations faced a pressing alternative: they either catch up with the pace of the march, and turn from objects into subjects of History, or, if they fail to fashion their particularity along the lines of universality, they have to disappear, melting into the moulds of more promising versions of cultural and political individuality. As the principal figure of the Hungarian Reform Age, István Széchenyi (1791-1860), puts it:

If time was not progressing, and consequently the present was not followed by a tomorrow, and the man of today by the future, then probably the most sober way would be to remain in what is old, without endangering what we presently possess by our hasty grasps towards the new. But the fall of times urges us, and the present day will be quickly thrown into the sea of the past, as the present generation will also be buried under a coming age<sup>23</sup>.

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22 See Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, "Framing Texts as the Representation of National Character: From Enlightenment Universalism to Romantic Nationalism", in *National Heritage, National Canon* ed. Mihály Szegedy-Maszák (Budapest: Collegium Budapest, 2001), 107-120.

23 István Széchenyi, *Hunnia* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1985), 59-60.

The challenge of modernity is formulated in terms of a question of existence: the inability of catching up means the “death of the nation”, and precisely this danger of extinction is perceived as an ultimate source of regeneration. The task of the thinker speculating about the destiny of his nation is to make his audience conscious of this danger of existence, and furthermore, to analyze his community in view of its potentials of rebirth. While he was speculating about national character in his diary already in the 1810s<sup>24</sup>, Széchenyi’s nation-building program was explicated most coherently in his *Hunnia* (1835, published in 1858). In his vision, the most immediate danger is the ‘division’ of the national community. On the cultural/political level this means the growing abyss between those who “were educated abroad” (the magnates) and those who “had grown up in Hungary” (the country gentry). Hungarian public culture thus contains inorganic fragments of the Western hemisphere thrown out of their context, mixed up with the self-centered backwardness of the local tradition. But this cleavage is only the sign of a deeper division: the nation does not possess the set of heroic/medieval/natural values any more, but it has not yet become a ‘civic’ community. The real danger is thus the unbridgeable division between past and future – being torn between *nature* and *culture*. The Hungarian nation is “still rough, but not strong any more, self-confident, but not powerful”. From this it is obvious that, in Széchenyi’s mind, the road to national recovery is through the process of “polishing” the manners of the community: civilization “conquers in due time even the most tyrannical power”, the task is to create the specifically Hungarian forms of civilization, otherwise social progress will effect “a deadly blow on our originality and peculiarity”.

While Kölcsey tentatively located the potential of revival in the canon of ‘national literature’, Széchenyi focused on establishing a ‘national sociability’ which could be the basis of integrating the achievements of Western European civilization without decomposing the nation. Civilization spreads through civility, i.e. the refinement of social interaction – therefore the success of the reform program depends on the emergence of a Hungarian civic culture of sociability (hence Széchenyi’s immense efforts to found the institutional framework of social interaction, like the Casino or the horse races, or his diatribe against the Latin language). Furthermore, this perspective engenders another crucial conflict: since “catching up with the march of civilization” is a matter of pressing urgency (it is “now or never”), the question of the cohesion of culture becomes of vital importance.

The push for a unitary civic culture has another side as well: only the elimination of divisions paves the way for the service of the common good. The interaction of the citizens, the transparency of the public sphere (which is the result of a shared pattern of civic culture, a common language) was at the root of

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<sup>24</sup> Széchenyi discusses the problem of national character in his diary note from April 1819 on the basis of John Chetwoode Eustace’s *A Classical Tour through Italy in 1802*. See Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, “A Nemzeti hagyományok időszerűsége”, *Valóság*, 42 (1999), 6, 31-43.

the social/political agenda of the Reformist generation, i.e. the “unification of interests”. However, in Széchenyi’s mind, this program of ‘unitary civic culture’ does not entail the forceful elimination of the cultural peculiarities marking the non-Magyar ethnic communities of the country. “Polishing” is a long process, the progress of civilization does not and should not lead to immediate assimilation. He believed in organic change and detested the “ridiculous haughtiness and impossible arrogance”<sup>25</sup> of those “who spread or believe to spread the Hungarian language and Hungarianness”. The meaning of human progress is a movement towards liberty, so those measures which indirectly lead to restraining liberty (like forced abandonment of customs) go fundamentally against the normativity of history. The need for a unitary political culture is a crucial exigency, but it can only be formed by communication, as a result of common interests and mutual gains<sup>26</sup>.

In Széchenyi’s understanding the ‘historical chance’ of the Hungarian nation is its peculiar tradition of constitutionalism and this potentiality of liberty constitutes the core of the offer towards the non-Magyar population: their acceptance of the Hungarian public sphere would secure the advantages of constitutional existence for them. This offer was to become the most crucial element of the whole tradition of liberal nationalism in the Reform Age: however, the contradictions inherent in Széchenyi’s conception would gradually surface.

On the one hand, Széchenyi did not question the right of the nationalities to their own cultural individuality: the three measures he proposed are the replacement of Latin by Hungarian as the language of the public administration, full liberty in the use of language and religion for the nationalities, and the common task of refining customs and advancing the cultural level of the country. He cautioned against the “exaggerated fervor” of Magyarization, and claimed that the national agitation among the non-Magyar communities is mainly the consequence of the misplaced arrogance on the Magyarizers’ part. On a conceptual level, he also accepted the existence of “Croat, Serbian, Romanian, German, etc”. nations (“the angel of nationality smiled on them as well”), thus the “offer” of Hunnia is not elimination but incorporation.

While Széchenyi accepted the existence of national plurality within the country, he proposed the extension of the Hungarian constitution to all citizens of the realm, which also entailed turning the public culture of the country into Hungarian. With the abandonment of Latin, Hungarian language would become the medium of interaction in the public sphere. In a sense, Hungarianness would retain its dual function underpinning both the ethnic and the political community. The institutional framework of the realm would unite the different nationalities without fusing their individuality: “let us unite in our public relations, one body

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25 Széchenyi, *Hunnia*, 50.

26 On Széchenyi’s political ideas see George Bányi, *Stephen Széchenyi and the Awakening of Hungarian Nationalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968).

one soul, for our common country, and common ruler”<sup>27</sup>. This means a sharp separation of public and private spheres, without the move – so characteristic of the next generation of liberal nationalists – of identifying the sphere of nationality exclusively with the public sphere. In Széchenyi’s mind, the private sphere has its part in national existence as well (since nationhood itself is the product of civilization, while the progress of civility is a transformation characterizing our public and private selves alike). The Magyar character of “Hunnia” is thus a matter of de facto proportions of power: the Magyars hold the greatest estates, they make up the relatively largest community, they have a splendid past, a national fervor, and most importantly, “we are alone”, i.e. contrary to the other communities which all have their kin-states outside of the realm of Saint Stephen, the destiny of the Magyars is fatally intertwined with the future of Hungarian statehood.

Széchenyi asserted that this Hungarian primacy within the realm is compatible with the universal norms of natural right, equity, and justice. This primacy does not exclusively rely on historical grounds, it is not only the consequence of the past (i.e. conquest) but it is based on the promises of the future – the invitation of the whole population of the country to constitutional liberties (in a way, this is the message of his assertion that “Hungary does not belong to the past, but to the future”). In this sense, for Széchenyi national tradition and civil liberties ultimately overlapped. He pointed out that Hungarians were backward in civilization but had a crucial asset, their ancient constitution, which contained the potential of recovery. This recovery was conditioned by self-knowledge: coming to terms with the national past and with the present corruption as well. In this sense, while he was mostly under the influence of the British stadial vision of progress, his conception can also be linked to the German idealist philosophies of history, where development was identified with the progress in self-understanding, leading through self-negation towards a new synthesis of reaching transcendental self-awareness.

In the 1840s, the question of the grasp and pace of the nation-building process increasingly became a major division between the different branches of the Hungarian liberal camp. Perceiving the nobility to be the bearer of the national specificity (historically and in view of the development of civility, as well), Széchenyi was suspicious of the plebeian-egalitarian thrust of the new generation of liberal nationalists, claiming that their inconsiderate project might ultimately lead to the destruction of the Hungarian nation. He became the proponent of an organicist reformism, accusing the more radical liberal nationalists around Kossuth of a counter-productive push for assimilating the non-Magyar population. As the radical discourse of Kossuth gained popularity in the early-1840s, Széchenyi tried to re-conquer the conceptual framework of nationalism<sup>28</sup>. He identified “patriotism” with “patience, moderation, tact”

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27 Széchenyi, *Hunnia*, 67.

28 István Széchenyi, *A' kelet népe* (Pozsony: Wigand, 1841).

and tried to deduce his more moderate program from the very factor (i.e. the irreversibility of time: “the time, once gone by, cannot be resurrected. What we missed today, we cannot conquer tomorrow”<sup>29</sup>), which featured as the strongest legitimating argument of radical action. While Széchenyi subscribed to the vision of the unfolding potentialities of the Hungarian nation (“the people of the East”), gradually realizing its special Oriental character traits in the Western world, he asserted that neither assimilation nor the democratization of society should be precipitated. In contrast, his critics (such as Lajos Kossuth or József Eötvös) emphasized that the sweeping spirit of the age, represented by public opinion rather than by the individual genius of Széchenyi, demanded such reforms.

The *topoi* of the debate about ‘Magyarization’ are mirrored by the ethnographical projects of the period. Csaplovics’s above-mentioned multi-ethnic vision is in stark contrast to the volume *Hungary and its peoples*, containing a huge number of regional character sketches, by Imre Vahot (1820-1879; his mother was the niece of Lajos Kossuth) seventeen years later, in the midst of the national revival movement<sup>30</sup>. In the heart of Vahot’s depiction of the *patria* one finds the intertwining of language and national character to such an extent that he even chose to narrate the national history in terms of the march of vernacularism, criticizing the “mistaken policies of kings” in the Middle Ages for the neglect of the Hungarian mother tongue. The book was also heavily loaded with references to the political and cultural superiority of the Hungarians over the other nationalities of the country, stressing the dominance of Hungarians both in the nobility and the peasantry. At the same time, Vahot’s depiction of Hungarian character-traits, taken from Elek Fényes’s contemporary work of statistical description, does not differ radically from Csaplovics’s vision: most of all, the Hungarians are haughty, self-centered, serious, sincere, magnanimous, energetic, friendly, heroic, bragging, conceited, hospitable, and not very economic-minded. There is, however, an important new element: while Csaplovics described the Hungarians, as well as the other nations of the common *patria*, as being in need of civilization, Vahot fuses the stadial theory of civility adapted to the Hungarian context by Széchenyi (whom he describes as the “teacher of national character”) with the praise of rural pre-modernity, describing the Hungarians as close to nature. Here, once again, the quest for national specificity overlaps with the intention to establish the Hungarians’ primacy among the other nationalities, stressing that even the pre-modern aspects of their life singles them out as natural leaders of the country. The Hungarians’ pastoral occupations are “fitting the free man”, while the other nationalities are characterized by “pure naturalism”, not having modern character-traits (the Romanians, for instance, are described as

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29 Gróf Széchenyi István írói és hírlapi vitája Kossuth Lajossal, ed. Gyula Vizsota (Budapest: Magyar Történeti Társulat, 1927), 51.

30 Imre Vahot, *Magyarföld és népei* (Budapest: ÁKV, 1984), reprint of the edition of 1846 (Pest: Biemel, 1846).

“benevolent”, “smart”, but also “lazy”, “superstitious, and “base”), thus it is clear that they are objects rather than subjects of the nation-building process.

The disintegration of the multi-ethnic *Hungarus* discourse can be seen from Vahot’s polysemic use of the notion “Hungarian”. When he states that the “Hungarians, except for the Jews, are Christians” he obviously referred to the citizens of Hungary; at the same time, in another context, Hungarians are identified only with the speakers of Hungarian language. The nation-building project of the 1840s was eventually trying to reintegrate the two aspects, describing the nationalities as materials for nation-building. It is along these lines that Vahot was excessively praiseful of the Magyarization of Upper-Hungarian cities, rejecting the “Slavic dream” about a “universal empire” and pointing out that they are gradually assimilating to the Hungarians in linguistic terms as well. The drive of assimilation is somewhat qualified in the case of the emancipation of Jews – while he praises the “enlightened spirit” of “progressive Hungarians” for promoting the emancipation, he also formulates some reservations, warning his compatriots not to haste, until the Hungarian society becomes economically stronger, as the “Jews are like leeches”.

A more sophisticated version of theorizing Hungarianness in the Reform Age was offered by Jácint Rónay (1814-1889) in his work *Jellemisme* (Characterology) which can be considered the first attempt at devising a socio-psychological typology of the Hungarians<sup>31</sup>. The author, a Benedictine teacher from Győr, had a remarkable itinerary: he studied psychology, participated in the revolution of 1848-1849, emigrated, became one of the first Hungarian followers of Darwin, and after 1867 served as the tutor of Crown-Prince Rudolf. Characteristically for the mid-nineteenth century European trends, Rónay was wavering between an analytic and a normative definition of character – at some point he was even claiming that only “virtuous men have character”. Furthermore, it is important to stress that ‘national’ character was just one of the directions of his inquiries – in the second part of the book, he also added a characterology of gender. Similar to most of the eighteenth-century theories of human psyche, Rónay derived the main factors of human character from climatic and social determination. He made reference to Polybius and Montesquieu, claiming that moderate temperature is the best, but he was also stressing that climate was not the only factor. In line with his historical definition, he asserted that the formation of a national tradition was linked to natural conditions (such as food, drink, external threats, etc.), while the key to nationality was national language. Consequently, he suggested that especially phonetics, which connected the physical and spiritual aspects, had to be studied thoroughly in order to map the national character.

As for the methodological aspects of studying characters, Rónay suggested that different individuals had different traits, so characterizing a community

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31 Jácint Rónay, “Jellemisme” (originally published in 1847) in *Nemzetkarakterológiai*, ed. György Hunyady (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), 51-224.

could only be a generalization. In line with his democratic political agenda, he suggested that the typical national character-traits could be found in the “common people” and the “middle-class” and not in the aristocracy, which was exposed to ethnic and cultural intermingling. His understanding of character was overwhelmingly historical: as he claimed, the main gain of analyzing character was that it helped us infer the present from the past and the future from the present<sup>32</sup>. He thus inserted his characterological discourse into an evolutionary vision: as humankind is exposed to progress, national character is also necessarily exposed to change. Every nation has “ages” – in its childhood it is in need of education, marked by the flow of imagination and consequently a poetic culture, thus the expression of its character can be found in songs, music, poetry. The second phase is that of adolescence, marked by passions, characterized by a gradually emerging sense of collectivity. Rónay qualified this statement with the claim that not every people could reach this level, i.e. progress was only a possibility but not a necessity. Characteristically, he did not extend his simile of human ages to describe decline in terms of old age and kept to the logic of the evolutionary theory envisioning permanent progress.

In order to construct the characterology of Hungarians, Rónay went back to the description of the Byzantine emperor Leo the Wise (r. 886-912), whose observations on the mores of ancient Hungarians were among the first to survive. Quoting Leo, Rónay stressed the trait of bravery and military discipline. It is important to note that this source was to make a long career in the tradition of Hungarian national characterology, becoming a key reference in Gyula Szekfű’s “What is the Hungarian?” project in the late-1930s. Rónay pointed out the existence of certain oriental traits still present in the Hungarian folk character – attested by their folksongs and their organization of space. Rejecting Schlözer’s accusation of barbarism, he stressed that this archaism was extremely important in view of the survival of the nation. However, modern Hungarians were exposed to the danger of heedless imitation, which could lead to the elimination of national character. Here the normative aspect of Rónay’s definition of character becomes important: losing the national character implies not only transformation, but loss of morality altogether, and eventually the dissolution of the nation. One of the main aspects of this danger was the abandonment of national language – here Rónay addressed his criticism especially to the nobility. At the same time, he did not reject cultural import altogether: accepting the precondition of belatedness of Hungary in comparison with the West<sup>33</sup>, he asserted the need for imitation, stressing that every culture at the beginning of its progress is based on imitating the more advanced ones.

Echoing Széchenyi’s analysis, Rónay described the specific situation of the Hungarians as being in an abyss, torn between heroic past and future progress.

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32 Rónay, “Jellemisme”, in *Nemzetkarakterológiák*, ed. Hunyady 51.

33 Rónay, “Jellemisme”, in *Nemzetkarakterológiák*, ed. Hunyady, 119-120.

The present-day Hungarians are characterized by the lack of self-knowledge, busy importing foreign goods and ideas, but also marked by a profound distrust of foreigners, cultivating the memory of their heroic past while plunging into permanent internal strife. Following Széchenyi's program of national introspection, the task of the reformers is to register the continuity between the features of the ancient Hungarians and the envisioned modern institutions, thus converting the archaic virtues into modern civilizing values. National past should be a source of pride – but the new Hungary to be built must integrate the achievements of modernity. Rónay insisted on the Hungarians being a new nation, who had not yet reached fully-fledged nationhood. He remained nevertheless optimistic, considering the “national revival” of the 1830-1840s as a success story, a sign of reaching adolescence. The aim of this revival in his reading was creating a new society where the bourgeoisie could play the key role. He was not worried of the ethnic otherness of the Hungarian urban class: he considered them aliens but possible to assimilate. In contrast, with all his sympathies, he did not consider the peasantry as the normative basis of the new nation-building: he stressed repeatedly that they were still marked by “oriental” authoritarianism. At the same time, the integration of the peasantry into the national community was supported by ‘characterological’ arguments as well: Rónay was busy pointing out the fragments of constitutional existence in the rural world – going so far as to describe the outlaws of the Bakony hills as ardent followers of a code of honor, which allegedly attested the ancient constitutionalism of the Hungarians.

On a different conceptual level, the same debate on the perspectives of nation-building gave birth to the first attempts to create a ‘national philosophy’, i.e. a philosophical system rooted in the Hungarian national character<sup>34</sup>. This project came to tackle the same issues that we can find in the works of Széchenyi, such as the intertwining of the idea of civic nation with the discussion of the ethno-cultural heritage, a projection of a normative past and the *topos* of belatedness, references to the *Volksgeist*/national spirit and the assertion of a universalistic aspiration. The general trend of these philosophical experiments was to define Hungarian spirit as being situated in-between the available options – hence the keyword of “Hungarian harmonistics”, implying a new synthesis between the various Western high cultures, not rejecting the import of ideas but deriving originality from the unique combination of these elements. The complex interplay of the universalistic drive of philosophy and the aim to nationalize it is the most important message of the works of the ex-officer and political thinker, Gusztáv Szontagh (1793-1858), who was the first one to be elected to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in his capacity of a philosopher. His *Propylaea*

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<sup>34</sup> The recurrent theme of “national philosophy” in Hungarian philosophical thought has been recently studied by László Percz, see his *Nemzet, filozófia, “nemzeti filozófia”* (Budapest: Argumentum, 2008).

to *Hungarian philosophy*<sup>35</sup> aimed at establishing a Hungarian philosophical tradition, bringing together the progress of national philosophy with the phases of the development of Hungarian nationhood. Szontagh was especially fascinated by Scottish philosophy, which he praised also on account of its practical orientation and for being the creation of a small nation. The Hungarian predicament was necessarily imitation and compilation, but the final aim was to devise a national philosophy, albeit not in view of its object, but its spirit and presentation. In Szontagh's understanding, the main mental trait of the Hungarians, namely being characterized by a balanced disposition between sentiment and reason, also facilitated the creation of a philosophical system balancing between the different Western traditions. In a sense, one can read all his speculations on national philosophy as a counter-project to the most obvious trajectory of the one-sided cultural reliance on German sources, mainly Hegelianism.

The political context of his second major work, *Propylaea to social philosophy with regard to the situation of our country*<sup>36</sup> was the debate around Széchenyi's essay *Kelet népe* (The people of the East). One of the central notions of the debate was progress<sup>37</sup>, as the main issue of controversy was the 'meaning' of Hungarian historical destiny in view of the clash of the more evolutionary and radical visions of modernization and nation-building. Entering the debate, Szontagh also turned to the problem of philosophy of history<sup>38</sup>. In order to establish the historical mission of a nation, the most important aspect to consider was its culture. Along these lines, Szontagh stressed that history of culture was superior to political history, while the irradiation of national spirit could be best analyzed with regard to national literature. National progress was following the ages of the individual. However, cultural creativity could somehow transcend the actual level of civilization: cultivated individuals could exist even in uncultivated communities, forming part of the intelligentsia of the nation, and thus representing the humankind of a coming era. In contrast, the common people in an uncultivated society are usually sticking to old mores and customs, ruled by authority. Szontagh contrasted this to the life-style of the citizen, the grown-up member of the nation, who assumes responsibility for his own deeds. The emergence of citizenship is rooted in progress: but Szontagh did not fail to point out that progress presupposed peaceful development, not revolution. Progress was not so much political rather civilizatory: the heralds of progress

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35 Gusztáv Szontagh, *Propylaeumok a magyar philosophiához* (Buda: Magyar Királyi Egyetem, 1839).

36 Gusztáv Szontagh, *Propylaeumok a társasági philosophiához tekintettel hazánk viszonyaira* (Buda: Eggenberger, 1843).

37 János Varga – in his *A Hungarian Quo Vadis. Political Trends and Theories of the Early 1840s* (Budapest: Akadémiai, 1993) – characterizes the entire political discourse of the Reform Age as an attempt at bringing progress and the national imperative together.

38 Szontagh, *Propylaeumok a társasági philosophiához tekintettel hazánk viszonyaira*, 24ff

in a rustic age were the cultivated nations, while in uncultivated nations the cultivated individuals. This evolutionary vision, which might well be considered a secularized eschatology, was a precondition of social and political action: one needs to believe that there is a generic progress towards perfection<sup>39</sup>, since rejecting this vision makes self-sacrifice meaningless.

From this modernist-evolutionist perspective, his final word in the debate on the speed and direction of national progress was conciliatory: progress is unavoidable, “difference and debate is only about how and in what way, and especially over quicker or slower progress”<sup>40</sup>. Faithful to his moderate stance and belief in self-regulating processes of civilization, Szontagh opted for a middle way, balancing between preserving the privileges and the revolutionary system, and stressed the need of organic reforms.

The Revolution of 1848 and the ensuing War of Independence meant a turn in the discourse of nationhood as well. If before 1848 the questions of nation-building and the nationalities were mostly of theoretical nature, the conflicts and the ensuing civil war made the Hungarian political elite painfully aware of the importance of the nationality question. After the fall of banners, some of the profoundest minds of the generation (like Zsigmond Kemény and József Eötvös) started the reconsideration of the events, agreeing that a crucial error of the revolutionary leadership was the insufficient handling of the nationality problem.

The Transylvanian aristocrat and writer Zsigmond Kemény (1814-1875) was a supporter of the liberal movement in the 1840s, developing a reformist program converging with that of the ‘Centralists’ around József Eötvös, who believed in setting up a strong executive to overcome the “feudal” power structures of the county administration, thus offering an alternative to Kossuth’s project who considered these bodies as the last bastions of self-government and a potential basis of democratization. Though Kemény served the revolutionary government until the very end, he grew increasingly disenchanted as the revolution radicalized, blaming Kossuth for abandoning the more organic style of reform and for subordinating the common good to his personal dictatorial aspirations. After the collapse of the revolution Kemény’s was among the first critical voices to be heard in the midst of collective trauma and Austrian reprisals. Kemény positioned himself in a very precarious way. While he harshly criticized the revolutionary leadership, he also opposed the aristocratic ‘old-conservative’ political platform, which tried to resume politics as if the Revolution of 1848 had not taken place. Against both directions, Kemény sought to defend the liberal reforms and considered the formation of a modern ‘bourgeois society’ crucial for the survival of the nation. He maintained some hope of the modernizing potential of the ‘neo-absolutist’ government of Vienna, which was partially drawn from politicians (for example, Alexander Bach) who had a liberal political past.

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39 Szontagh, *Propylaeumok a társasági filosofiához tekintettel hazánk viszonyaira*, 36.

40 Szontagh *Propylaeumok a társasági filosofiához tekintettel hazánk viszonyaira*, 72.

Along these lines, Kemény's political essays as well as his historical novels, written in the 1850s, were meant to actively 'shape the public' and reconsider the basic tenets of the Hungarian national discourse, using a normative vision of 'Hungarianness' as one of the main *topoi* of his argumentation. The pamphlets *After the revolution* (1850) and *One more word after the revolution* (1851) are usually considered the most characteristic representations of the conservative possibilities of Hungarian 'political romanticism.' With a sweeping rhetoric of collective self-criticism, Kemény called the nation to repentance after the "excesses" of the revolution and envisioned a model of cooperation with the Viennese administration which would allow Hungarian society to recover what it had lost during the upheavals.

Evoking Hungarian national character and the discourse of 'national self-knowledge' is one of the key aspects of Kemény's argument in *After the revolution*<sup>41</sup>. Showing how the nation faces the threat of disappearance, he calls on all political camps of the country to exercise self-restraint and at the same time to come to terms with the realities of defeat. Turning rhetorically to the Austrian authorities, he asserts that relaxation of military controls would not lead to a new revolt, as the character of the Hungarians does not contain any propensity for waging guerrilla warfare after a lost struggle. Turning to his compatriots, he warned them against "day-dreaming", that is, hoping to resume the revolutionary fight. Furthermore, he argues that national regeneration should be based on collective remembrance and the reconsideration of the national past. While the aims of the author might have been conditioned more by the need of finding a *modus vivendi* with the Habsburg administration, the essay turned out to be a paradigmatic text of cultural and political self-positioning. It had an enormous impact and inspired many later works, among them Gyula Szekfű's *The three generations* and László Németh's essays in the interwar period.

Besides Kemény's paradigmatic pamphlets, in the context of the traumatic experience of the lost fight, a number of other projects came to the fore, often using references to the national character as veiled political allusions. One can observe this in the essay by the Transylvanian philosopher and ethnographer, János Erdélyi (1814-1868), entitled *The present* (1851). Referring to the recent traumatic events, Erdélyi asserted that in the past lost battles had positive impact on the nation, implying that the lessons drawn from the defeat of the revolutionary struggle might also be turned to the benefit of the nation<sup>42</sup>. Similar to Kemény, Erdélyi sought to reconsider the national discourse in view of the new situation. He stressed that the main treasure of Hungarians was their nationality. This did not imply motionlessness but entailed permanent adaptation to the external conditions. When describing Hungarian popular

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41 Zsigmond Kemény, "A forradalom után" (1850), in *Válogatott művei* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1982), 185-373.

42 János Erdélyi, "A jelen" (1851), in *Válogatott művei* (Budapest: Szépirodalmi, 1986), 719-749.

character, he stressed the democratic aspects, obviously passing a – not even too much veiled – political message.

Not surprisingly, the problem of nationalities, as he put it, “the existence of many different peoples in Árpád’s homeland”, was at the core of Erdélyi’s inquiries as well. His concept of nation carried the same ambiguity as that of the Reform Age. On the one hand he declared that the basis of nationality is language, going as far as theorizing the national peculiarity of different nations on the basis of their greetings – presuming that the way different nations say “how do you do?” expresses their national soul. This linguistic understanding of nationhood prompted him to define national literature as the core of nationality, thus resuming the discourse of Kőlcsey, stating that literature – the presence of the past and of the future – raises nationality to the spiritual sphere. At the same time, Erdélyi was tried to separate his concept of nationhood from an ethnic understanding, stressing that although nationality was based on the belief of common blood, but it was legitimized by tradition and history.

Erdélyi’s essay on the *Present state of philosophy in our country* from 1856<sup>43</sup> was an attempt at finding a conceptual balance between the imperatives of the specific national community and universalism, in a critical dialogue with the writings on ‘national philosophy’ from the Reform Age, especially those by Szontagh. Erdélyi stressed that the principle of nationality was getting gradually weaker in poetry, religion and philosophy, as the highest level of human activity is by default also the least national. At the same time the archaic culture of the people is the basis of any further progress, that is why the question of national philosophy is not completely irrelevant.

On a conceptual level, this essay also reflected the dialogue between the Hungarian tradition of political nationhood and the imperative of reshaping the national discourse in view of an ethno-cultural tradition. In Erdélyi’s vision, nation was constituted by land, climate, history, state-forms and age-old customs. All these factors contributed to the formation of a specific character by which individuals could define themselves. While this list contained both natural and historical aspects, Erdélyi opted for a historicist understanding of nationality. His reference to national character was a way to define the nation historically, in obvious polemic with the ethno-cultural understanding professed by the Slovak, Romanian, Serbian, etc. national movements in the country, challenging the Hungarian nation-building project. Eventually nation is defined by tradition and the principal constitutive factor is not ethnic provenience but “national consciousness”.

The aim of philosophical reflection in Erdélyi’s understanding was bringing national specificity to the level of the universal: polishing, but preserving what is specific. Hungarian character thus had its own historicity and basic essentiality – continuing some of the archaic traits but also shaped by European interaction.

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43 Erdélyi, “A hazai bölcsészet jelene” (1856), in *Válogatott művei*, 775-825.

The past is a regulative idea where the individual and the community can constantly return – “if the nation does not feel its past, it loses its present”. Criticizing “civil history” (i.e. political history) for failing to show the basic traits of national soul, he formulated the program of collecting folk-songs, proverbs etc. in order to facilitate this process of self-reflection, which made him the most important Hungarian folklorist of the nineteenth century. While national past is a major element of collective identity-formation, as the “self-knowing spirit” turns to the past, Erdélyi rejected Szontagh’s position about the nationalization of philosophy and stressed that the structures of human thinking are universal. There is no place for a national school of thinking – as the solar system is not Polish just because Copernicus was the first one to discover it.

Representing another direction of reshaping the national discourse, the works of József Eötvös in the 1850s sought to redirect the Hungarian national project after the trauma of the lost revolution. Most importantly, he stressed that the Imperial and the Hungarian levels were inseparably intertwined. He sought to harmonize the principles of nationality and liberty on a theoretical level as well: in his opinion “historical nationhood” needed to be preserved but, at the same time, he wanted to give concessions to the nationalities living in the country, which were not “historical nations” in his understanding but had some sort of cultural individuality. Eötvös argued for an establishment based on the liberal principles of individual freedom. He stressed the analogy of nationality with denominational identity, and claimed to propose a solution which could secure the liberties, not of the corporate groups (which might be extremely oppressive of their members), but of every particular member of the community.

This proposal, elaborated by Eötvös in the context of the negotiations with the leadership of the non-Magyar national movements, especially the Serbians and Romanians, was probably the intellectually most sophisticated conception of resolving the nationality question in Hungary to be formulated in the entire nineteenth century. Nevertheless, there were some problems with this proposal – not so much with what he actually said, rather with what he was silent about. It was vital for him to avoid the debate about the existence of more than one nation in Hungary. He thought that this ideological question is only the surface, and the real issue lay deeper. The reason for his repudiation of thinking in terms of the plurality of nations in the same framework was obviously his strong commitment to the mainstream national liberal conception asserting that nationhood is ultimately identical with the aspiration to statehood. Had he accepted the existence of nations within the realm, he would have had to accept the potential collapse of the Hungarian state. Instead, he sought to define the Hungarian nation in purely political terms, thus separating Hungarianness from the ethno-cultural aspects. As the subsequent development of the debate on nationalities has shown, this fragile compromise proposed by Eötvös could only be maintained if both of the sides

were willing to leave this 'ultimate' ideological question unpronounced. When the issue of 'political' nationhood came back to fore in 1867 the chances of maintaining this potential compromise vanished immediately.

There was, however, yet another option inherent in the liberal discourse, which was perhaps theoretically less sophisticated, but which sought to solve the problem of nationhood in a more realistic way by accepting the 'nationhood' of the non-Magyar population as well. Its most important proponent, Lajos Mocsáry (1826-1916) started from a strongly Romantic perspective and represented the gradually diminishing tolerant version of the Romantic liberal nationalism related to the anti-Compromise tradition in the Hungarian political culture. Arguably, Mocsáry's belief in the peaceful co-existence of different nations in the same political framework might have been connected to the fact that he 'missed' the entire revolutionary period in Hungary (curing his illness in Germany) and thus he was probably more capable of distancing himself from the darker aspects of nationalism than most of his contemporaries.

Significantly, in his early writings, he entered into a fierce debate with Eötvös. Most of all, Mocsáry attacked Eötvös for misrepresenting the nature of national sentiment, arguing that it was a profound mistake to perceive nationalism as a craving for domination. Contrary to the mainstream liberal vision of the mid-century, shared by Eötvös as well, the post-Herderian conception of nationhood professed by Mocsáry was not state-centric and although it championed a fervent nationalist creed (asserting that nationality was the supreme normative focus – something Eötvös emphatically rejected), this nationalism was built on the conviction that peace and prosperous co-existence was not only compatible with, but in fact made up the core of sincere nationalism. Nation is the community of people who are of the same origins, who speak the same language, who consider themselves to be of the same kin. Therefore in the territory of Hungary Mocsáry accepted the existence of more than one nation and he explicitly spoke about Slovak, Serb, Croat and Romanian "nations"<sup>44</sup>.

Rather than an aspiration to domination, nationality implied a universalistic creed: "every part has to aim at the fulfillment of the common mission of mankind in its own way". It was from a 'culturalist' perspective that Mocsáry claimed that "Nation" and "Country" should converge, as the mixing of different populations tended to be a source of weakness (he cited the decline of the Greco-Roman civilization as an illustration of this argument). In the case of mixed populations, one of the national communities has to emerge as the natural leader of the country, but this cannot mean a push for assimilation, since forced assimilation is deeply immoral, taking the most important human property (cultural heritage) from the citizens<sup>45</sup>.

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44 Lajos Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1987), 42. Originally published in 1858.

45 Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség*, 55.

Furthermore, Mocsáry placed an “even more generous” and more altruistic state of mind over nationalism, that of *patriotism* – an allegiance not only to our own national-cultural community, but to the country in general (involving different national groups). Mocsáry argued for the development and institutional advancement of this kind of patriotism, and he tried to formulate his political proposals in the 1850s from this perspective. The “country” should be neutral, “it should not become the partisan of any of the nations”<sup>46</sup>. According to Mocsáry the real problem was that, during the preceding decades, national feeling was over-emphasized to the detriment of this patriotic state of mind. But these two allegiances are not contradictory (he blamed Eötvös for counter-posing too strongly these two attitudes) at all: in the Hungarian case it is obvious that the national and patriotic interests converge, but Mocsáry goes further and tries to prove that even in the case of the other nations living in Hungary their national loyalty could be harmonized with Hungarian patriotism.

History makes a *patria* out of Hungary for more than only one nation, creating a community that becomes the real basis of coexistence: “the Slavs of our country are closer to us than any of our philologically established linguistic relatives”. In this list of ‘centripetal’ factors, Mocsáry recapitulates one of the crucial elements of the Reform Age discourse, i.e. claiming that the only country which provided “constitutional existence” to the Slavs was in fact Hungary. It is a thousand years that they have been inhabiting and possessing this land together, tilled its soil together and shared each other’s sufferings and joys:

Is it possible to show a single feat that can be said to have been achieved by Hungarians or by Slavs alone; hasn’t everything been done by joint efforts? The troops that fought so valiantly against the Turks, the Tartars and so many other adversaries have always included Hungarians, Slovaks, Croatians, Serbs, Germans and Romanians as well, and many a Hungarian warlord has led Slavic troops to glory, just as Croatian and Serb commanders have achieved similar victories with Hungarian troops. And haven’t they all served a common cause, with a common glory and lesser or greater success, and haven’t they all regarded each other as brave sons of the same homeland, as valiant champions of the same cause?<sup>47</sup>

While the liberal nationalists of the 1840s were offering constitutionalism in exchange for assimilation, Mocsáry turns the constitutionalist tradition into a guarantee of the preservation of Slavic national existence. In this argument the concept of national character becomes a symbolic framework, constituted by history, over-writing ethnic differences:

But in more recent times, when the struggles for liberty are no longer about abstruse denominational questions but more practical issues, where have the Slavs tasted the

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46 Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség*, 65.

47 Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség*, 126. I used Dávid Oláh’s translation in Trencsényi and Kopeček, eds., *Discourses of Collective Identity in Central and Southeast Europe*, vol. II, 357.

sweet, albeit sometimes deceptive fruits of the spirit of freedom and reform other than in Hungary? The other Slavs as yet knew nothing at all about these concepts when they were already becoming the subject of public reflection and public debates here, with an elevating and ennobling effect on their character that is still discernible now that the questions themselves have long been swept aside from the forum of debate. Only here did the Slavs have an opportunity for this more elevated, nobler spiritual preoccupation.<sup>48</sup>

Even though Mocsáry had a predilection for a more culture-centric understanding of nationhood, eventually the historical basis of collective identity is reintroduced into his scheme through the re-conceptualization of patriotism (“the shared history of our homeland”) in contrast to the ethno-linguistic arguments:

Let scholars and linguists put us into separate columns, let them classify us into separate language families and say that our real kinsmen are wandering somewhere on the plateaux of Asia and shivering around the Arctic Sea, and that the Turks with whom we lived in such a pleasant fraternal harmony for centuries are in fact our dear kinsmen: we shall still reckon our Slavic compatriots to be more closely related to us. Even though we are classed as a separate group of people linguistically, we shall still hold dearer this long-standing proximity, friendship, compaternity and the intertwined branches of quasi-kinship than that other distant kinship that goes back to Adam and Eve<sup>49</sup>.

In this sense, while Mocsáry’s agenda was markedly different from the historicist nationalism supporting the unitary Hungarian political nation against the ethno-cultural discourse of the nationalities, he willy-nilly reverted to history as the main factor of defining the national community. Historical memory is the principal marker of national character, over-writing the ethno-cultural ingredients, which means that his symbolic acceptance of national plurality within a multi-national patria is implicitly relativized, although his position was still far from that of the assimilatory nationalists:

It is unthinkable that our Slavic relatives could ever forget all these historical memories and extinguish from their bosom the sentiments that they evoke. And as soon as they take a historical point of view, they are ours. Yet without history there is no nationality; without it there may be an enthusiastic zeal for a language, there may be a temporary sense of irritation towards one or other race, but this is no genuine national sentiment but just an artificial movement labeled with some name, which can never be permanent and enduring<sup>50</sup>.

On the whole, although Mocsáry exchanged a number of symbolic gestures especially with the Romanian national movement<sup>51</sup>, his attempts to harmonize

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48 Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség*, 131, in *Discourses of Collective Identity*, 360.

49 Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség*, 127-128, in *Discourses of Collective Identity*, 358.

50 Mocsáry, *Nemzetiség*, 128, in *Discourses of Collective Identity*, 358.

51 In 1888 Mocsáry, who by then abandoned the Independence Party, was elected in Caranșebeș

some sort of historical patriotism and ethno-cultural plurality turned out to be gradually marginalized. Eventually his ideas became rejected both by the mainstream of the Magyar political elite and the national movements of Romanians, Slovaks, Serbs and Ruthenians. This marginalization was mostly due to the reconfiguration of the national discourse on both “sides”. On the part of the titular nation, the 1860s, and especially the period after the Compromise of 1867, brought a new development, namely the ‘canonization’ of Hungarian national identity based on the fusion of political and ethno-cultural factors. On the part of the elites of the other nationalities the liberal ideological framework became less and less attractive as a basis of finding a mutually acceptable solution and the emerging new ‘national intelligentsias’ were shifting to a more uncompromising position creating their own mixture of ethno-culturalist and historical arguments, which questioned the possibility of any supra-ethnic arrangement.

The fusion of historical and ethno-cultural aspects had both inclusive and exclusive implications. In the essay by the Transylvanian historian, Károly Szabó (1824-1890), *On Hungarian national pride* (1865), written at the end of the period of ‘passive resistance’ and in the context of the anticipation of some sort of consolidation, the core of Hungarian national character is defined in terms of its unique capability of resistance to external catastrophes<sup>52</sup>. Szabó stressed that this trait is “common to all members of the nation”, “from the aristocrat down to the apprentice”. Nationhood is defined in ethno-linguistic terms: as Szabó points out, language is “the root of national pride” attested also by such notions as ‘magyaráz’ (‘to explain’ – coming from the Magyar ethnonym). This stress on the language does not lead to a conflicting vision of ethnic otherness. In Szabó’s opinion, eventually going back to the Herderian vision, the existence of Hungarian spirit, “ingrained in the child’s mind” does not hinder the harmonic co-existence with others: self-esteem and esteem of others are mutually conditioning each other. Reflecting the Transylvanian background of the author, which was a region marked by centuries-old traditions of religious tolerance but also of a violent clash of national movements in 1848-49, his example of peaceful co-existence are the Transylvanian Saxons, who had been able to retain their own constitutional structure and cultural individuality within a political system dominated by the Hungarians.

This characterological sketch sought to underpin a project of ‘national revival’, resuming the political aims of the Reform Age of the 1830-1840s as it were, in the new context of the relaxation of pressure coming from Vienna. Subscribing to the interpretation elaborated by the most prominent liberal

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(Karánsebes), a preponderantly Romanian electoral district in the Banat. In 1892, however, he withdrew from parliamentary politics.

52 Károly Szabó, “A magyar nemzeti büszkeségről” (1865), in *Kisebb történelmi munkái* (Budapest: Ráth Mór, 1873), vol. I, 285-298.

historian of the Reform Age, Mihály Horváth, Szabó contrasted the revival of the 1830s to the previous epoch of national alienation marked by “conservatism” and “laziness”, lack of vernacular culture (Latinism), and retreat from public affairs. The growth of national consciousness, and the concomitant progress of civilization were based on the revived image of national past. This means the organic connection between modernity and antiquity: the nation has to learn history to cultivate its pride and thus to attain new heights of self-realization. This ‘normative past’ is fusing ethnically and historically constituted aspects: Szabó thus links language, ancient customs, laws and national costume as fundamental markers of nationality. Typical for the liberal nationalist generation of the mid-nineteenth century, however, this cultivation of national tradition is not defined in an exclusivist manner, as the author also stressed the need “to learn what is useful” from other nations.

The linking of civilization and national traditions prepared the road for the symbolic and conceptual conflation of the Hungarian ethno-cultural identity with the state ideology, in the context of the increasingly obvious failure in integrating the bulk of the nationalities. The experience of national division became rationalized in view of a discourse of civilizational supremacy fashionable worldwide in these decades of liberal imperialism, albeit in this case the subject of this *mission civilisatrice* became the internal other.

The most grandiose scheme of Hungarian liberal imperialism was devised by the historian and diplomat, Béni Kállay (1839-1903). He was also the mastermind of Austro-Hungarian administration in Bosnia-Herzegovina after the occupation in 1878, serving as its governor between 1882 and 1903. Beyond his political involvement, Kállay authored a history of Serbia, and in his youth also translated J. S. Mill’s *On Liberty*, publishing it with a theoretical preface that is among the most sophisticated theoretical statements of Hungarian liberalism in the second half of the nineteenth century. Kállay’s programmatic essay, *Hungary on the border of East and West*<sup>53</sup> published after he assumed his task in Sarajevo, might be read as the synthesis of the underlying assumptions of the Hungarian ‘geopolitical’ project in Southeast Europe, devising a sweeping symbolic geographical tableau and also reassessing the previous tradition of ‘national philosophy’, defining the national mission in terms of a spiritual synthesis.

Kállay based his argument on a geographical narrative contrasting the “Orient” and the “Occident”, describing the Baltic Sea, the Carpathians, the Lower Danube, and the Adriatic Sea as the borderline between these two worlds, although stressing the permanent interplay of the two zones and defining the European East and the Levant as some sort of buffer zone. The principal feature of the Orient is the duality of a cultivated minority and the uncultivated masses – leading to an autocratic form of government, which is based on the rule of one tribe over all the others, with the dynasty as its personification. As it is attested

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53 Béni Kállay, *Magyarország Kelet és Nyugat határán* (Budapest: MTA Könyvkiadó Vállalata, 1883).

by the history of Hellenistic states, the subjected peoples did not become citizens – instead Alexander the Great and his successors adopted the oriental structures. In general, Greek civilization cannot be considered to be the spiritual basis of the West, as culture remained in the hand of the elite, while the masses were kept in subjection. In the oriental political frameworks, the powerful individual always over-rules the collective solidarity and therefore nothing restrains oppression, leaving no chance for individual liberty to develop. This is also exemplified by the oppression of women. Liberty can only be based on mutual self-restraint, while in the Orient the stronger enforces his power and the weaker forcibly retreats, thus democracy, even if it emerges, is easily transformed into tyranny. The despotic power of the minority explains the lack of patriotism in the East, which is a feeling based on shared rights and responsibilities, integrating the state as a legal and national unity. The Orient is thus marked by the lack of an integrated political structure and consequently the failure to form a united political nation.

In contrast, the West – rooted principally in Roman political culture – is characterized by constitutional development, with the plebeian element step-by-step becoming part of the political system. This process catalyzed the emergence of a contractual relationship among the citizens, symbolized by the notion of *res publica*, aiming at the common good. Therefore, individual liberty was not weakening, but exactly strengthening the state. The main aspects of the Western world are thus the emergence of uniform legal systems, a state integrating the different classes and ethnicities, the emancipation of women and eventually the formation of a political nation, based not on ‘tribal’ allegiance but on identifying with institutions. This form of statehood is coupled by the existence of “society”, developing self-conscious aims, forming a powerful public opinion (in contrast to the East, where “public opinion” simply does not exist), marked by the permanent clash of different ideas, which eventually leads to a rational compromise. Based on this social dynamism, Western democracy is sustained by the efforts of the citizens to reach equality of legal status and extend their civil liberties.

In Kállay’s vision, Hungary was exactly in-between the Orient and the Occident. The Hungarians were originally Easterners who became very early transformed by Western influence. Thus, adopting Christianity and establishing a Western-style *regnum*, King Stephen successfully broke up the tribal structures of nationality and led his country to political integration with the West. Rather than envisioning some sort of primeval democracy, Kállay asserted that the “feudal” Middle Ages witnessed a development towards parliamentarism and extension of the political community which, however, was broken by the fatal Battle of Mohács (1526) and the ensuing disintegration of the unitary monarchy under the Ottoman pressure. Nevertheless, culturally Hungarians still participated in Occidental culture – especially by adopting the various trends of the Renaissance and the Reformation.

However, due mainly to the lasting social and political misery, the Hungarian national character remained in-between the Oriental and the Occidental types.

Among its principal traits one can find the resistance against influences from outside, less assiduousness, the desire of innovation but lack of systematic work, and an inclination to speculation without yielding results. Similarly, in Kállay's understanding the famous "Hungarian tolerance" towards the nationalities was also a transitory case, as the Hungarians did not impose the oppressive ethnic separation typical of the East, but were also unable to create a united political nation as it was the rule in the West. Nevertheless, the imperfect, but existing Hungarian political nation was a genuinely Western formation and held the promise of further development towards a more encompassing civic nation. Along these lines, Kállay saw the essence of the Hungarian cultural and political mission in "mediation" – for him even the two parts of the Hungarian crown symbolize this duality, one being of Western and the other of Byzantine origin. Capable of understanding the Eastern way of thinking but eventually being part of the West, Hungarians are destined to transfer Western ideas and institutions to the Southeast-European zone, and also explain the local specificities of this region to the Westerners<sup>54</sup>.

Kállay's understanding of the national mission was in many ways representative of the generally optimistic political and cultural atmosphere of the first two decades after the *Ausgleich*. His very radical conceptual distinction between nationality based on ethnic and cultural markers and political nationhood, although it represented the spirit of the Nationality Law of 1868, was becoming increasingly atypical, as most of the participants of the public sphere kept conflating the ethno-cultural and the political-institutional aspects. Thus, in different scientific and rhetoric registers, one finds various attempts to fuse the ethnic and historical definitions of the national community, and especially to re-define the ethnic (in the contemporary usage, "racial") character of the nation in terms of its *mission civilisatrice*, extolling its capacity of assimilating the ethnic others throughout the centuries. This discourse reached its climax in the last generation of liberal nationalists dominating the scene from the 1880s to the turn of the century. Often stemming from assimilated families, having ascended into the state bureaucracy, they exemplified the power and plausibility of the assimilatory offer (e.g. Győző Concha had Italian ancestors, Gusztáv Beksics came from Serbian background, while Béla Grünwald and Jenő Rákosi were assimilated Germans). The protagonists of this generation were all steeped into the positivist scientific canon, seeking to bring together personal liberty and organic social development. The most important modification on the liberalism of the previous generation proposed by these authors was the extolling of state intervention. They considered that an organic process of social modernization was only possible if the state fulfilled its regulatory functions as they did not consider the society sufficiently mature to initiate the reforms. The reforms and

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<sup>54</sup> It is remarkable in this context that Kállay's main efforts in Sarajevo were exactly aiming at the creation of a Bosnian "political nation", overwriting the ethnic and denominational differences.

projects for social and political integration could only come from an enlightened bureaucratic elite, in possession of scientific knowledge and a developed national consciousness, with the population envisioned as a rather formless mass to be “educated” and integrated into the national community.

In a way, this program was based on the master-narrative of Hungarian liberalism originated in the Reform Age, focusing on the “extension of rights” and the “elevating of the people into the nation”. What made this discourse, however, radically different was that in the 1830s this project did not have a quasi-nation-state infrastructure available to actually undertake the task of turning the people into a nation in the sense of ‘fabricating Hungarians’ – it was envisioned more in terms of extension of privileges to the population, which was supposed to catalyze a national identification. In the heyday of ‘neo-liberals’ in the 1880-90s, the proliferation of non-Hungarian ethno-cultural identities in general came to be considered a hindrance to modernization, which in the vision of these theoreticians was conditioned by cultural and social homogeneity. The references to national character amply present in the writings of these authors were thus used to underpin the project of ‘national engineering’. A classic statement of this sort is the prominent historian and political scientist Győző Concha’s (1846-1933) commemorative oration on the anniversary of the “Arad martyrs” of 1849<sup>55</sup>. Concha’s overall message was that the “Hungarian race” (defined in terms of a fusion of ethnic and historical markers) proved to be capable of expanding civilization in the region throughout the 1000 years of the existence of the Hungarian state due to its extraordinary qualities of political organization and cultural creativity. In contrast, the other nationalities of the country are characterized as basically benevolent but somewhat retarded “children” (the Romanians of Transylvania, for instance, are described as having a “primitive character”<sup>56</sup>) in need of guidance as they are culturally and politically insufficient to form an autonomous polity. In this logic, the rule of the “Hungarian race” is legitimized with regard to universal human progress – the progressive features of the Hungarian liberal government, rooted in the progressive character of the Hungarian national project as such, make the suppression of ‘separatism’ and the forceful extension of nationality acceptable in front of the judgment of world history.

The attempts at redefining liberalism in line with a more straightforwardly homogenizing agenda, however, were not able to forestall the increasingly obvious drift between the liberal ideological tenets and the nationalist rhetoric and practices. There are basically two phases of this separation: until the turn of the century the co-existence of the Hungarian ‘imperialist’ and

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55 Győző Concha, “A magyar faj hegemoniája” (1890), in *A konzervatív és a liberális elv* (Piliscsaba: Attraktor, 2005) 100-110; the “Arad martyrs” were generals of the Hungarian revolutionary army executed by the Austrian authorities after the surrender of the Hungarian troops in October 1849.

56 Concha, “A magyar faj hegemoniája”, in Concha, *A konzervatív és a liberális elv*, 107.

the liberal elements were at least subjectively feasible. The 1890s saw the immense propaganda-campaign of a liberal project of assimilation, together with the nationalistic turn of the anti-Habsburg Independence Party. There is, however, a further shift as well: as Miklós Szabó documented it, the turn of the century brought a new kind of anti-liberal nationalism to fore<sup>57</sup>. While conservatism was anti-national for quite a long time before, this new trend of protectionist anti-liberalism began to forge a somewhat xenophobic version of the nationalist canon, drawing on the European examples of emerging anti-liberal mass mobilization (anti-Semitism, agrarianism, Christian Socialism). In turn, we see the contrary process as well: the formation of a neo-liberal canon which was defined precisely as anti-nationalistic and which considered the 'national' gentry to be the cause of all evils<sup>58</sup>.

This development also signaled the end of the construction of 'political nationhood' and the emergence of a new vision of competing – and incompatible – ethno-cultural projects. While it already had strong signs at the turn of the century, this ideological framework, fusing the agenda of nation-state building with ethno-cultural homogenization, became central after the lost World War I and the ensuing territorial losses. Never completely abandoning the vision of restoring the supra-ethnic state, the Hungarian political elite thus entered an irresolvable dilemma, on the one hand shifting away from the idea of political nation towards and ethnic definition, but at the same time keeping the illusion of the viability of the Greater Hungarian project, defining the Hungarians as the natural leaders in the multi-ethnic Danubian region.

While the Hungarian national discourse after 1918 thus came to be wedged between an increasingly ethno-culturalist understanding and the 'historical' multi-ethnic imaginary framework, most of the other nation-building projects of the region (Romanian, Czechoslovak and/or Slovak, Yugoslav and/or Serbian and Croatian) had a trajectory towards the opposite direction: being rooted in a more ethnic understanding of the nation, they were experimenting with redefining themselves in terms of an assimilatory model. Needless to say, all these projects were torn by internal contradictions, leading eventually to the abandonment of the principle of civic equality in the name of the urgent task of national homogenization to prevent the impending dissolution of the nation-state. The clash of the Hungarian nation-building project with other similar endeavors in the region, which was originally catalyzed by the "non-contemporaneous

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57 Miklós Szabó, *Az újkonzervativizmus és a jobboldali radikalizmus története (1867-1918)* (Budapest: Új Mandátum, 2003).

58 On the *fin-de-siècle* political discourses in Hungary see Zoltán Horváth, *Die Jahrhundertwende in Ungarn. Geschichte der zweiten Reformgeneration (1896–1914)* (Budapest: Corvina, 1966); Béla Németh G., *Létharc és nemzetiség* (Budapest: Magvető, 1976); György Litván, *Magyar gondolat - szabad gondolat: Nacionalizmus és progresszió a századeleji Magyarországon* (Budapest: Magvető, 1978); Péter Hanák, *The Garden and the Workshop: Essays on the Cultural History of Vienna and Budapest* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1998).

contemporaneity” of these projects and the concomitant failure to devise a discursive technique of accommodation, thus led to a lasting conflict and a self-perpetuating dream-world of national ‘homogeneity’ on all sides, still poisoning the coexistence of titular nations and ethnic minorities (the few which survived the twentieth century) in East Central Europe.