

# Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary

## and Rival Versions of National Identity

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Tamás Hofer 1991: Construction of the 'Folk Cultural Heritage' in Hungary and Rival Versions of National Identity. – *Ethnologia Europaea* 21: 145–170.

This study analyzes the process by which Hungarian national culture has been constructed and changed in the last century, by focusing on one set of national symbols: the 'folk cultural heritage'. Competing groups of the elite developed more or less different, rival notions of 'Hungarianness'. In accord with these changing notions, different representations and interpretations of the folk culture emerged. To demonstrate that relationship, the author presents three dilemmas, contradictions of Hungarian self-perception and shows how diverse positions in the political-ideological debates were reflected in rival identity-constructs and rival symbolic strategies.

The relation between state and nation was a sensitive question in Hungary, dramatized by abrupt changes of the country's territory and political regime. National membership 'imagined' on the basis of language and culture or on the basis of citizenship resulted in different symbolic economies. Another divide separated modernists and traditionalists – their debates often referred to a richly elaborated symbolism of East and West, to an 'eastern' and to a 'western' image of the folk traditions. Finally, the study surveys the cultural programmes of competing elites, succeeding and replacing each other, the strategies of the 19th century lesser nobility, the 'historic middle class', the upward mobile urban bourgeoisie, the populist intellectuals of the inter-war period, the communists, and their diverse opponents. Ethnographers and folklorists, as professional constructors and interpreters of the 'folk cultural heritage' appear in this picture sometimes in the ideological mainstream, sometimes in opposition or as supporting actors in marginal positions. Professional institutions have a considerable stability or inertia, which gives them some independence from political currents. Nevertheless, the author argues, the history of 'national ethnography' gains in plasticity and depth when placed into the complex process of national identity-construction and reconstruction.

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The elements of peasant culture play a crucial role in the cultural self-identification and the national symbolism of East European (East Central European) peoples. Some anthropologists see in this fact one of the special features of East European nationalisms (Cole 1985, Niedermüller 1989).

The symbolic utilization of the 'peasant cultural heritage' is far from being uniform in Eastern Europe. There are remarkable differences among the countries in the relative

weight assigned to the folk traditions. In countries that have had a continuous statehood since the Middle Ages, where the leading force of the national awakening was the nobility and the aristocracy (as in Hungary, Poland), the national significance of folk culture was relatively small; in other countries where liberation and unification have taken place more recently and where the national awakening was led by new elites emerging from the peasantry (as in Bulgaria, Serbia), the national im-

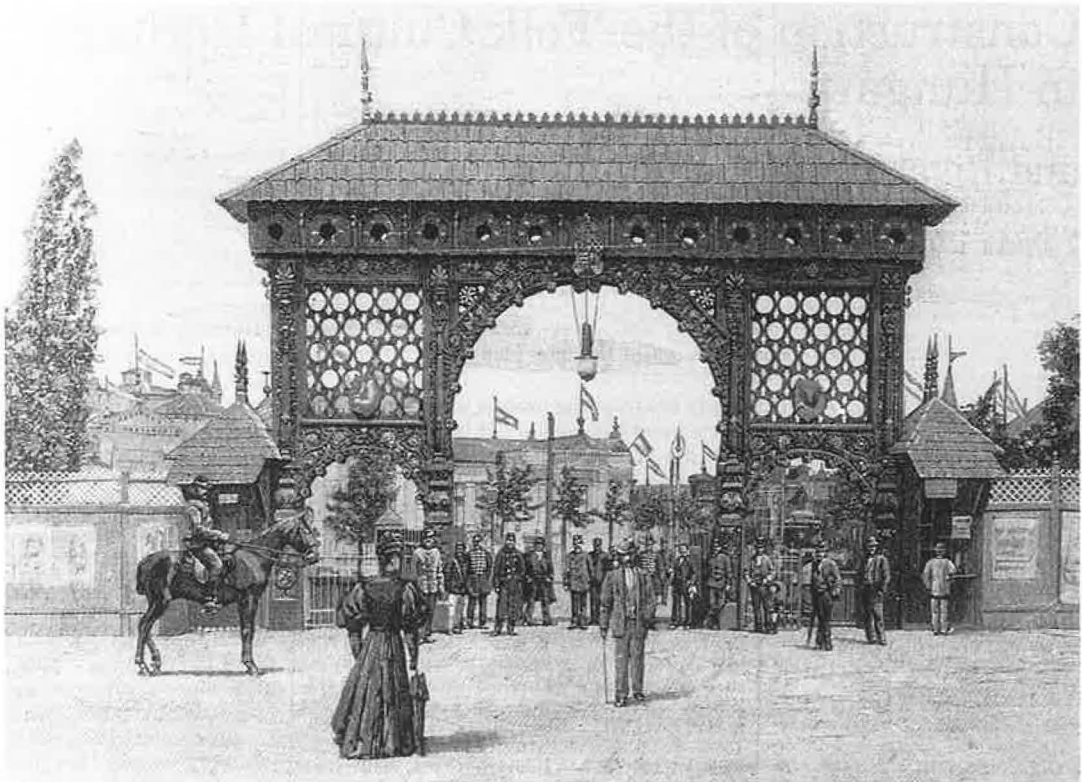


Fig. 1. Gate No. 3 of the Millennial Exhibition, Budapest 1896. (Vasárnapi Újság 1896.725). The national exhibition celebrated the 1000th anniversary of the Hungarian Conquest. Besides the replicas of historical buildings and historical exhibitions it included an 'Ethnographic Village' as well, which presented the rural cultures of different ethnic groups of the country. But first of all, the exhibition documented the accomplishments of modernization and industrial-technical development in Hungary. The architecture of the exhibition followed the pattern of contemporary international fairs, without any national accent. The gate presented was an exception. It is an enlarged representation of the village gates of the Székelys, a Hungarian ethnic group in Eastern Transylvania. The Székelys had been free peasant border guards since the Middle Ages and according to their well-known myth of origin (scientifically refuted by that time), their ancestors were nomadic warriors of Attila, King of the Huns. Through the legendary past of the Székelys the gate referred to Hungarian prehistory. On the other hand, it was an early example of the public, symbolic utilization of rural architecture. — (The next few pictures were also made in 1896 and they are also linked to the national enthusiasm accompanying the Millennial Exhibition.)

portance of peasant traditions was considerably greater (cf. Sugar 1969, Hofer 1980). In addition, there were great differences among the countries in their images of folk culture. The construction of a 'folk heritage' demanded selectivity, and the selections were shaped everywhere by national interests, by ethnocentric notions of the national past and of the national future. Cultural differences from unfriendly neighbours were stressed, as were similarities to friends. The range of peasant cultural traits was so wide that subsequent generations, political regimes, and art-move-

ments could easily create new images of the folk, according to their taste.

The construction of the 'folk cultural heritage' demanded the continuous effort of several generations. In the traditional view of other strata, peasants were uncouth, unpolished and subservient. Peasant culture had no symbolic importance, indeed, it was 'invisible' for other social strata (and for the peasants themselves). But in the 18th-19th centuries 'popular' components of cultural systems were discovered all around Europe (Burke, 1976). The rapid spread of Rousseau's and Herder's

ideas across the continent might suggest a unified European intellectual movement. However, a closer inspection reveals important regional differences. West Europeans were interested in rustic aesthetic forms and in primitivism, while in Eastern Europe (and in Germany) movements of national awakening, dissatisfied with the cosmopolitan elite-culture of the period, turned to folk traditions in a



Fig. 2. A Hungarian girl dressed as a Slovakian peasant girl of Árva county, at the fancy dress ball of the Kárpát Association of Transylvania, Kolozsvár, 1896. It is an example of multiethnic state-nationalism, which made identification with the non-Hungarian groups, the wearing of their garments suitable for the expression of the Hungarian patriotism. (Cfr. the next picture. After Halasy 1989.)

tural personality. In the East, a peculiar interplay developed between the surviving, in some cases florescent local peasant traditions and the rapidly evolving national cultures. The national culture was attempting to create cultural homogenization, a transformation of 'peasants into Frenchmen' (and others into Hungarians, Romanians etc., cf. Weber 1976, Gellner 1983), while at the same time to dissolve the regional peasant cultures. In this process, certain peasant regions acquired nation-wide fame as representatives of the nation's old, traditional cultural personality. Their songs, dances, costumes, ornaments, torn out of their original social and cultural context, were incorporated into the 'popular' version of the new homogenized national culture and thus found nation-wide acceptance. Poets, composers, artists sought inspiration among peasants for the creation of new national art styles. 'Populist' works of art and literature were integrated into the national cultural heritage and carried with themselves references to folk traditions. Through all these processes, the elements of and references to the imagined homogeneous 'heritage of folk culture' thickened into a sub-system of the national culture. Today its range of effect extends 'vertically' from the high arts, and scientific essays to habits and routines of everyday life; 'ethnic food', folk elements in popular music, architecture, clothing, and ornamental decoration.

For the systematization and scientific interpretation of 'folk' traditions in Central and Eastern Europe, 'national ethnography' (cf. Kroeber 1959:399) and folklore were invented. Research became institutionalized in the last decades of the 19th century. Museums and university departments, ethnographic societies and journals were founded. The first general descriptions of East European peasant cultures came out in the same period. These decades are characterized by Eric Hobsbawm (1983) as the age of 'mass-production of tradition' in Europe. The activities of national ethnographers can be considered as a codification (or, as an attempt to codifications) of folk traditions, for the use of entire national societies. In the study of this subject, the author is an 'insider' in two senses:



Fig. 3. Hungarian girl in a Hungarian folk costume of Kalotaszeg, from the neighborhood of Kolozsvár, at the fancy dress ball of the Kárpát Association of Transylvania, Kolozsvár (Cluj), 1896.

as a Hungarian, and as an ethnographer who, through employment by the state, is involved in 'constructing' this sector of national ideology (Hofer 1968, 1980). On the side of the small number of folklore scholars and museum-people, however, a host of enthusiastic amateurs, artists, politicians and lay movements were engaged in the construction of the 'national folk culture'. The result of these manifold activities were diverse images and interpretations of the folk tradition, connected to various group in-

terests and to various conceptualizations of the nation's past and future, vocation and character.

Thus, the 'folk cultural heritage' is a particular domain of the Hungarian national culture, a specific set of symbols expressing 'Hungarianness'.<sup>1</sup> Philip Schlesinger reminds us, however, that "National cultures are not simple repositories of shared symbols to which the entire population stands in identical relation. Rather, they are to be approached as sites of contestation in which competition over definitions takes place" (1987:251). In the following, I am going to examine how this contestation between rival national projects, national self-definitions took place in the limited field of 'folk cultural symbolism'. I don't intend to delineate a history of ideological debates in the interpretation of 'folk heritage' in Hungary. I am more interested in processes of symbolization, so to say, in the working mechanisms of a national culture: how alternative meanings are created and discarded, how the repertoire of cultural traits (in this case folk songs, rural architectural forms, costumes, legends and tales and interpretations attached to them) are utilized to express and to convey rival concepts of national identity. How diverse images of the 'folk heritage' are designed to support alternative conceptualizations of the 'national essence'.

In the following I am going to present three themes, three problem-areas of Hungarian self-identification which were the subject of heated debates as case-studies, I would like to demonstrate the role of 'folk symbols' in the articulation of rival national identity models.

The basic, general question behind this enterprise is: what is the relation between national culture and national identity. Eventually, we might include also the concept of 'nationalism'. Neither of them is unequivocally defined, not even the boundary-line among them clearly traced. I assume, that there are historically conditioned structural differences among national cultures and national identities. Therefore, I think, it is meaningful to pose the question, whether the Hungarian material shows some specific East-Central European or Hungarian traits, or not.





Figs. 4–5. Mrs Szilágyi and Mr Arányi in the main roles of the musical comedy 'The Scamp of the Village', Budapest, 1896 (*Vasárnapi Újság* 1896:239). 'The Scamp of the Village' was a popular piece of the folk-operetta genre, which was adapted and staged in the Opera in 1896. The folk-operetta presented imaginary Hungarian peasants, who acted according to the contemporary (urban) notions of 'Hungarian national character', based mostly on romantic ideals of the gentry. In contrast to the reality of the villages, the peasants of folk-operettas spent much time with revelry and merry-making, were emotional and boisterous, they were capable of excessive, fatal gestures in defence of their honour and if they were in love. The gestures of revels and drinking can be seen in the staging of the two actors as well. This emotional, 'warm', 'Oriental' image of the peasant influenced the ideas of urban layers about the rural people, but it reacted upon the 'real' rural people as well, who, for example, included the songs of folk-operettas (on tragic, sentimental love, on self-destructive despair, on female faithlessness, etc.) into their own repertoire of songs. The gestures of folk-operettas contributed to the emergence of a distorted, romantic image of Hungarians who were emotional, 'rowdy and drinking', embodying (some) gentry values.

### Imagining a national community: ambiguities among ethnic group, country and state

In the last decades of the nineteenth century, Hungarians could choose at least between three models of their national community. Differences among them were sometimes drama-

tized by debates of the parliament and by cabinet crisis – in the everyday life, however, the contradictions could remain more or less hidden.

If, following Benedict Anderson (1983), we consider the nation an "imagined community," we think in fact of a program, a utopia, but one that is real: it creates consensus among mil-



Figs. 6–7. Amateur peasant actors in the roles of 'The Scamp of the Village', Kiskunhalas, 1896 (Vasárnapi Újság 1896:72). The reception of folk-operettas in peasant communities partly took place by the activities of amateur theatrical groups. Real rural people on a stage, in front of a peasant audience, played the emotional, rowdy peasants invented by urban writers, as representations of the national character. In 1896, amateur peasant actors were still a novelty, the paper emphasized that: "*Peasants acted in the role of the Hungarian peasant*". It also added that the peasants, as contrasted to the urban, professional actors were in their behaviour "simple, natural", they showed "pride and dignity". – The amateur performances of folk-operettas fitted into the yearly sequence of customs in villages and agro-towns all over the country during the following decades. The girl for instance, who was asked by the bachelor in the main role to act with him as the main actress, could take this as a proposal of marriage.

lions; many thousands are willing to die for it. On the other hand, although the political organizers, the committed, the enthusiasts may "imagine" the community, a large part of the potential membership is only partly, or perhaps not at all mobilized. The boundary of the nation is also imaginary and it is possible that other political organizers picture the same members in different "imagined communities." Some people may feel parallel loyalty to several "imagined, national communities" without thinking that they must choose, or even that they *could* choose – until the advent of a historical situation that brings such peaceful parallelism to an end.

The "imagined communities" differ concern-

ing the ground on which their sense of solidarity is built. Around the turn of the century, the sense of affinity of European national societies was based either on a common ethnicity and origin, or on a common language and culture, or on citizenship. Syncretic combinations were also known. Which criterion of national identity gained particular emphasis in a given historical situation depended on the existing constellation of social structure, power and politics. Nevertheless, once established, the model of nationhood later exerted a deep influence on perceptions of social reality. It influenced which social facts could get a national interpretation and could thereby orient, in divergent ways, the behaviour of members of the nation.



Welosurm Antal festék

Fig. 8. The inhabitants of the southern Hungarian villages, of Visonta and Csokonya, as performers of the 'The Scamp of the Village'. They played on a stage located near to the Millennial Exhibition, on May 19, 1896 (Vasárnapi Újság 1896:376). The inhabitants of the two villages hired a whole train and came as a group to the capital to see the exhibition. Their amateur actors performed 'The Scamp of the Village' in their own local garments, talking in their own dialect. The performance was an extraordinary success, the professional actors playing folk-operettas, the Minister of Trade, etc. were also present in the audience.

Where the common origins and ethnic unity and common culture of the culturally constructed nation was stressed, ethnic differences were emphasized not only externally but also internally, toward internal ethnic minorities. In the name of a collective "common fate" it was possible to cover up internal social differences and make oppositional views seem disloyal to the nation. This is a model of "nation-as-culture." Where citizenship is the criterion of nationhood, the symbolic role of the state and of the 'fatherland' (in a geographic sense) is great. In such national communities ethnic intolerance is less likely, the difference in interests between classes is perceived to be the greatest source of tensions, and internal politics have priority. This is a model of 'state-nation' (cf. Lepsius 1982). These different models of nationhood lead to divergent ways of

managing potential national symbols; they lead to different symbolic economies. They also create the possibility for rival political groups and classes to evoke opposing models of the nation. Indeed, the degree of importance or unimportance of patriotism or nationalist feeling in various societies depends on the model of nation adopted. Where nationality is determined existentially, as in England or France, a person can be an unpatriotic Englishman or Frenchman and this does not endanger his status as English or French. However, Hobsbawm (1983:280) argues that in the United States and Germany, where membership in the nation is determined on cultural grounds, persons can be "un-American" or "vaterlandslos" if they do not identify with the national values.

Today it is well known, and a commonplace of history books, that in the Austro-Hungarian



Fig. 9. Thán, Mór: *The Court of Attila* (detail), 1870. When the Hungarians on horseback appeared in Europe in the 9th century, they were compared to barbarian Hun warriors of Attila by some Western chroniclers. The Hungarians may also have had some knowledge about relationship with the Huns, brought along from the East. These ideas (about Hun-Hungarian kinship) surviving since the Middle Ages were already refuted by scientific research in the 19th century. Despite this fact the Hun legends were rather popular among the Hungarians. When the Hungarians were complaining for not having any archaic epic of their own, they imagined that there must have been some minstrels, poets and epic cycles on the deeds of nomad chieftains in Attila's Court. Mór Thán's picture is a sort of vision of the missing Hungarian Classical Archaic Age in Attila's Court, where philosophers, minstrels and the envoys of the neighbouring empires (Rome, Byzantium) were gathering.

Monarchy, before the First World War, the ethnic and state boundaries did not correspond. Groups with different cultures, languages, ethnicities lived side-by-side in an inextricable patch-work (Gogolak 1980, Benedict 1983: 75–79, 95–103). This situation was cut asunder by the organization of new nation states after the First World War. Knowing the consequences, the scholar looks back and searches for their antecedents: tensions between the nationalities, evidence of nationalist oppression, omens of collapse. (And these are not hard to find.) However, in looking for antecedents, the scholar fails to grasp the ways of thinking characteristic of people at that time (who were

often unsuspecting and generally felt themselves to be in safety and prosperity) and the communities they imagined themselves in. This age of Victoria, or rather, Franz Joseph (ruled 1849–1916), was characterized by optimism, by a feeling of progress and economic expansion, despite parliamentary battles, social and ethnic tensions, and aggressive policies against ethnic minorities. The voices of isolated Cassandras barely influenced public opinion. National antagonisms were not manifested in more open ways in large part because broad masses of the populace still conceived of their identities - their place in society - in terms of traditional feudal and religious cate-

gories and not ethnic-national ones. Ethnically mixed territories were formed in the centuries before nationalism, it was an ancient and given situation. Hard work was required to convince people to see it as an unnatural state of affairs. For the overwhelming majority of Hungarians and even for the masses of non-Hungarians outside of small intellectual circles, the dissolution of 'historic' Hungary after the First World War came as a surprise (see Király, Pastor, Sanders eds. 1982).

At the turn of the century, the loyalties of a Hungarian could be directed toward three hierarchically arranged units that included each other: the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, inside

this the multi-ethnic Hungarian Kingdom, and within Hungary the community of ethnic Hungarians, who made up 54% of the country's population in 1910.

On all three levels there was active creation of national culture. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was in large measure an economically self-sufficient unit of Europe, with developed and undeveloped regions, and relatively good indexes of growth (Berend and Ranki 1987: 360–418). The many cultural features of modernization were more or less uniformly distributed in the Monarchy. For example, train stations, theatres, public buildings, customs concerning food consumption and dress, were



Fig. 10. Nagy, Sándor: Attila's Palace (1909). (*Magyar Iparművészet* 1919:23). In contrast to the painting of Thán, the picture represents a new period of Hungarian 'Attila mythology' and Orientalism. The idea of the palace was based on a report by the Byzantine envoy, Priscos, according to which Attila has a palace built of wood. The vision of the palace appeared in front of the spiritual eyes of the painter in 1903, when he was drawing the carved pillars and architectural ornaments of peasants houses in villages of Western Hungary. "I did not need too much imagination and these elements formed themselves into the city of Attila with his wooden palace." His vision was also influenced by Chinese and Japanese architectural forms. In front of the palace, there is a big gate like the one at the Millennial Exhibition (Fig. 1). The garment of Hun warriors resembles the dress of Hungarian herdsmen of the Plain in the 19th century. Linking the popular and Far Eastern motifs with ancient Hungarian history and with the Huns suggested that peasant culture retained ancient Oriental traditions and that the predecessors of Hungarians and the Huns earlier lived like the Hungarian peasants and herdsmen of a more recent past.



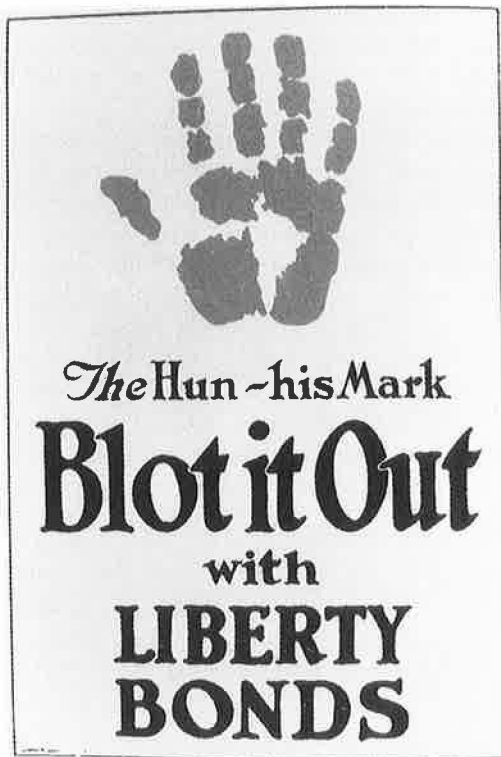


Fig. 11. J. Allent, St. John: War-Poster. England, 1914 (Kämpfer 1985:170). The English poster compares the barbarian Germans to the Huns in order to encourage the people to lend money for the war. Other British posters even presented the barbaric Hun totally divested from his humanity, snatching away an unprotected English woman. These posters indicate how the admiration of Hungarians towards Attila differed from the image of Attila in Western Europe, which retained the tradition of the medieval chronicles depicting him as a monster of partly human, partly beastly origin. Thus both the Western and the Hungarian Attila-images were based on ancient myths, but on antithetical myths.

more or less similar throughout the Monarchy. However, the Habsburg dynasty itself did not encourage solidarity. For the Hungarians, the Habsburgs were foreigners, they lived in Vienna, and Hungarians saw their national heroes as those who revolted against them (cf. Sinkó 1989a). The Habsburg defeat of the 1848–49 Hungarian Revolution, though accomplished with Russian help, was linked to Franz Joseph's name. When Austria celebrated the anniversary of his ascension to the throne, Hungarians thought of the revolution

that he had suppressed (Hanák 1988: 112–129). On the other hand, the favorite stage-musical genre of the period, the operetta, was equally popular in both halves of the Monarchy; indeed, the story of many operettas starts in Hungarian territory only to reach its happy ending in Vienna.

Within the Monarchy, Austria and Hungary were separate states, with different laws, different government, yet with a common monarch, common customs area and foreign policy. Within their own multi ethnic country, the Hungarians could imagine a 'state-nation' whose members included every citizen of Hungary equally, whether of Hungarian mother-tongue or not. And they could imagine a narrower 'nation-as-culture' of ethnic Hungarians.

The two concepts of the Hungarian nation differed greatly in terms of inclusion and exclusion. The 'state-nation' included both Hungarians and non-Hungarians. It distinguished ethnicity from nationality, and assumed that people might have double membership in traditional ethnic units (communities of language and local culture) and on a higher, broader level of political self-identification, in a nation. The ideology of this 'double identity' was elaborated from the seventeenth century onwards, mostly by Lutheran intellectuals of German and Slovak origin, in north-western Hungary. The Latin term 'Hungarus' expressed identification with the concept of multiethnic, 'transnational' Hungary and the term 'Magyar' with the community of Hungarians. The appeal of the concept 'Hungarus' faded away in the nineteenth century, nevertheless, the constitution of 1867 and a great part of the general public considered Slovaks, Romanians, Germans, Croats etc. as members of an (imagined) multi ethnic Hungarian nation (cf. Fried 1989). It was by expanding the rights of citizenship to the national minorities (as it had to be expanded to the former Hungarian serfs, too) that Hungarian liberalism tried to win over the non-Hungarians to the image of a Hungarian state-nation. However, this program was realized only inconsistently. Corporate rights for the minorities were denied. And from 1890 on, it was more and more a national-

ist, Hungarianizing policy that prevailed (Gogolak 1980).

This model of multi ethnic nation was built in large part on the concepts of 'country' and 'homeland,' as among the French, for whom the 'Hexagon' (= France) evoked the notions of 'moderation, balance, sweetness' (Chaunu, 1982:13). In Hungary the image of the homeland was closely linked to national history, striking geographic features are mentioned in the national hymn (from 1828), and it was asserted that the national coat-of-arms contains references to its mountains and rivers, although the national shield is simply the family shield of the Árpád dynasty, which died out in 1304. To the Hungarians it was said that the non-Hungarians must be accepted as brothers, because they too are the inhabitants of this homeland, its 'children.' And from the non-Hungarians it was expected that they would be pleased to be able to live in such a beautiful homeland.<sup>2</sup>

Ethnic folk cultures soon gained an important role in articulating the image of the multi-ethnic home-country. The majority of the non-Hungarian population were peasants. Their colourful costumes, rituals and celebrations were bound to specific localities, and so to say, were part of the image of the home-country's landscapes. (Ethnographic description first appeared in geographical works, several ethnographers were originally trained as geographers.) According to official state policy, the study of folklore – the discovery and display of folk culture – would allow each nationality to express its individuality, and its respected position within the state, thereby strengthening its loyalty to it. Thus, in 1887, at the initiative of Archduke Rudolf, heir to the throne, a monumental book series was inaugurated: "The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in writing and pictures." According to the archduke's introduction "The fact that the national character of each nationality has been duly and respectfully recognized by the Monarchy's scientific observers, will please the national groups" and this will lead them to "find their spiritual centre of gravity inside the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy." Similarly, an "ethnographic village" was constructed for the 1896 industrial and histor-

ical exposition celebrating the 1000th anniversary of the Hungarian conquest. The village consisted of houses characteristic of the various provinces and ethnic groups of the country. Exhibited next to the 12 Hungarian peasant houses were 12 non-Hungarian peasant houses, although the ethnographers had originally planned 19 to represent the ethnic groups (K. Csilléry 1984).<sup>3</sup> They wanted to express, with this gesture, that they considered the Hungarians and the non-Hungarian groups to be inhabitants of equal rank within the state organized by the Hungarians. By that time, however, such gestures were not sufficient: there were already demonstrations, especially among Romanians, against the exhibition celebrating the Hungarians.

The symbolic utilization of ethnic folk cultures was not limited, however, to official state representation. Among intellectuals, urban people folk songs, folk dances, costumes, ornamental objects became generally known attributes of non-Hungarian ethnic groups. At "folklore balls" or at costumed photography sessions, Hungarian women dressed not only in Hungarian folk dress, but also put on Romanian, Slovak, and Transylvanian Saxon costumes, to express their patriotism. The most famous actress and singer of the late nineteenth century, Lujza Blaha, who was called the "nation's nightingale," won one of her greatest successes in front of a Hungarian audience in Budapest, dressed in Slovak peasant costume, in a folk operetta called the "Slovak girl" (Fried 1989:159). Many folk plays and operettas in Budapest featured Slovak folk songs, Romanian dances, Serbian and Croatian costumes – often earlier in Budapest than on the Serbian or Croatian stage. The most popular writers of the period (Mór Jókai, Kálmán Mikszáth) presented Slovak, Romanian, German and Jewish characters in a sympathetic light. And in the first wave of commercial interest in folk art, Croatian, Slovak and Romanian embroidery and weavings were as much in demand as Hungarian objects.

The Hungarians' limited and condescending enthusiasm for ethnic folk art had no greater impact on intellectuals of the nationalities – in face of the unsolved problems of political au-

tonomy, and national education. In the reality, the creation of a multi ethnic 'folk cultural heritage' for Hungary was a double-edged process: it meant also a creation of 'ethnic cultural heritages' for Slovaks, Romanians, Ukrainians, which could be used by them to justify demands for autonomy or even secession. In 1895 – that is, one year before a Slovak house had been shown in the 'ethnographic village' in Budapest among other peasant houses of Hungary – another Slovak house was on display in Prague, at the big Czecho-Slovak exhibition, which now (in retrospect) seems to be a prefiguration of the Czecho-Slovak Republic.

The discipline of ethnography, which was starting to be institutionalized around the turn of the century, also served the multi ethnic model of nationhood. In Central and Eastern Europe, 'national ethnographies' (cf. Kroeber 1959:399) were usually driven in a nationalist and ethnocentric direction. Critics have shown this to be particularly true in the case of German *Volkskunde* (Bausinger 1982, Stein 1987). The Hungarians were restrained from crude and direct ethnocentrism by the fact that the Slovaks, the Germans and the Romanians and others had to be presented as members of the same greater multi ethnic unit, 'children' of the same 'homeland' as themselves. The Hungarian scholars considered themselves practitioners of *Völkerkunde* and not *Volkskunde*; they went regularly to the conferences of the anthropologists and ethnologists; it was E. B. Tylor and R. Virchow whom they invited to Hungary. Both the ethnographers' equal interest for ethnic minorities and their sober, critical attitude towards Hungarian myths of ethnic superiority was in accord with the model of the 'state-nation' which stressed civic rights, constitutional government. On the other hand, in nations based on 'imagined' common descent and ethnicity, there was a danger that the glorification of the ethnic prehistory and national excellence goes into irrational domains.

In his handbook of Hungarian ethnography, published in 1906, Zsigmond Bátky wrote: "culture ... is not tied to particular peoples; rather it spreads from certain radiant points to other groups, and ethnic groups are only the

temporary carriers of certain phases of human culture" (Bátky 1906:5). This point of view is the radical opposite of the "folk soul" notion, as of the idea of an ancient, continuous, ethnic culture. And it was this universal, evolutionary theory of culture history that was expressed in the program of the Budapest Ethnographic Museum. The museum was simultaneously the museum of "world peoples" and of "Hungary's folk life." It presented the history of civilization from the point at which humans emerged, and incorporated the peoples of the Carpathian basin into this story, giving equal exhibition space to Hungarian and non-Hungarian groups. According to the museum's director, the collections from outside Europe provided an "international mirror" for the folk culture of Hungary, so that one could avoid the "kind of illusionistic folklore that is doubly dangerous for small nations" (Semayer 1904:332).<sup>4</sup> In keeping with the interests of evolutionary theory, particular attention was directed at the simple and archaic objects and technologies of everyday life, those that indicated a connection with earlier epochs of human history. In the simple instruments of peasant subsistence many parallels emerged among Hungarian objects, those of neighbouring nationalities, and archaeological evidence.

On the basis of this ethnically 'open' scientific view, the Hungarian Ethnographic Society (founded 1889) created separate sections for the study of Romanian, Serbian, German, Slovak, etc. folk culture. And in these sections, significant Romanian, Slovak, Carpathian-Ukrainian, etc. researchers joined in the work of the Society. These included, for instance, Atanazie Marienescu and Samuel Czambel, the first considered a forefather by Romanian folklorists, the second by Slovaks. The Hungarian scholar Béla Bartók went so far (in 1912) as to take materials he had collected among Romanians in Transylvania and give them to the Romanian Academy of Sciences in Bucharest for publication.

These ethnographers and folklorists were public officials, employees of state institutes. (Marienescu was a high ranking judge.) Nevertheless, one cannot say that their point of view was 'official' or that they represented the views

of the 'state.' The establishment of the Ethnographic Museum and many provincial museums, the work of the Ethnographic Society and many other societies, show that along with the developing state apparatus, scholarly institutes also developed on the basis of the 'imagined' multi ethnic state. This starting point, at once critical of ethnic mythologies and willing to adopt the concepts and methods of an international *Völkerkunde*, had a positive effect on the later development of national ethnography as a scholarly discipline (see for instance opinions from Austria and Germany: Schmidt 1960: 10–11, Jacobeit 1965; they see an advantage on the Hungarian side in comparison to 'Volksgeist' and 'cultural history', approaches prevalent in the German speaking lands). A further consequence was that in Hungary, 'scientific' or scholarly folklore separated itself sharply from that "nationalist, romantic and mythologizing" folklore, which was mostly the work of amateurs, artists and politicians, and often took a decidedly anti scholarly stance.

This was possible because, in addition to the liberal notion of a multi ethnic nation-state, there existed another, an "ethnic Hungarian" concept of nation as well, one which became more and more powerful in politics after 1890. This concept 'imagined' only the Hungarians as members of the nation, the other nationality groups were excluded. This ethnic notion of the nation was linked to an image of folk culture that assumed an ancient Hungarian 'essence,' or 'folk soul,' historically unchanging (or hardly changing), one that could not mix with other folk cultures, one which had to be guarded and kept pure. (In contrast, the vision of folk culture linked to the multiethnic model of the nation assumed that 'cultural traits' are arranged like geological strata, deposited on each other in different epochs and various influences, including relationships with neighbouring ethnic groups.) The nationalist, ethnic model of folk culture gained a significant role in folk art research at the turn of the century. The activists of this movement – artists and teachers of drawing – rejected scholarly analysis and comparison, emphasizing instead the importance of entering into the spirit of the

works through personal experience. On the basis of the supposedly 'ancient' 'eastern' folk art heritage of the Hungarians, they wanted to create a style of fine art, hoping thereby to strengthen the Hungarians in opposition to the other nationalities (cf. Hofer 1984).

The relationship between state, nation and ethnic group changed radically after the First World War and the Treaty of Trianon (1920). While the surrounding states celebrated the justified unification of related ethnic populations, Hungary experienced a national catastrophe. 67 percent of the territory of the Hungarian state was annexed to its neighbours, along with 33.5 percent of the ethnically Hungarian inhabitants, that is 3,424,000 people (Király, Pastor, Sanders 1982). The illusions of a multi ethnic nation-state disappeared, along with its dual loyalties. The Hungarian ethnic group, the Hungarian "nation-as-culture," once again was not congruent with the state. But now this was because one third of those with Hungarian as their mother tongue lived outside of the borders, as minorities in other states. The new image of national culture evoked a lost unity that included these populations.

After the Second World War, the boundaries drawn at Trianon remained unchanged. With the exception of a relatively limited amount of forced resettlement, the inter ethnic relations also remained as before. After the communists gained power in 1948–9 a major change occurred: the official ideology considered the "nationality question" to be a non-existent issue between brotherly socialist states. The Hungarians living as minorities in neighbouring states disappeared from educational materials and from official cultural life. The official 'imagined community' included only those citizens living within the country's boundaries. Solidarity with the Hungarian minorities became a part of the suppressed, oppositional stratum of social consciousness, along with the dissatisfaction felt about giving up national autonomy and human rights. This gave folklore, folk music, folk dance a new symbolic role. For example, in the 1970s Hungarian folk culture from Transylvania became a way of expressing democratic and national opposition to the Hun-

garian Communist regime (besides expressing solidarity with Hungarian Transylvanians).

## Between east and west

National cultures stake out the place of a nation among other nations, that is to say, their place in the world. For the Hungarians this task was not easy. The theory of language families supplied the Slavs, the Germans and even the Celtic Welsh with populous sibling nations and/or glorious pasts. But for the Hungarians, the Finno-Ugric linguistic relationship did not provide much support in the 18th and 19th centuries. (The passionate enthusiasm for the distant Finns emerged only at the turn of the century.) The Hungarians were also divided in religion – next to the numerical majority of Catholics, it was exactly in the working out of the national ideas that the Calvinist intelligentsia played an important part (cf. Sinkó 1989a). Thus religion could not have the kind of unifying role that Catholicism has had in Poland, Austria or Croatia, or that the Greek church has played among the Bulgarians or Serbs. There was little chance for regional solidarity, as in Scandinavia. Despite the common Monarchy, the Hungarians saw the Austrians as unfriendly aliens, and looked with suspicion on the other neighbour states because of their possible relation to Hungary's ethnic minorities. Therefore, in the first half of the 19th century, while the Slavs and Germans were flooded with the waves of brotherliness, the Hungarians felt alone and abandoned. In 1828 Vörösmarty expressed it this way:

Néz nyugatra, borús szemmel néz vissza keletre.  
A magyar, elszakadott testvértelen ága nemének;  
A könyörű eget, a földet vizsgálja hiába.

He looks towards the west, he looks wistfully back to the east,  
The Magyar, detached and forsaken branch of his race;  
Scrutinizing in vain the merciful heaven and the earth. (Ortutay 1965:265)

This feeling of being alone was richly elaborated in conceptions of history and was often paired with a vision of “national death” – other, younger nations would take the place of the

Hungarians, the Hungarian nation would disappear. These negative visions of the future were patterned, in part, on the Polish case, their defeated battles of liberation, the divisions of Poland.

In any case, it is noteworthy that in Vörösmarty's image, the Hungarian's ‘wistful look’ is cast west and then east. These two directions symbolized the many dilemmas and alternatives in terms of which Hungarians imagined their situation, their national character and their historical destiny.

The opposition between East and West symbolized the opposition of centre and periphery during the process of modernization. In many Hungarian writings, West meant “Europe”: the economically and socially developed centre, which was both the desired goal, the model to follow, and also, that superior, foreign influence against which the national culture, the national character had to be protected. At the opposite pole from Europe stood Hungary, or rather those eastern and southeastern peoples who were considered even more peripheral, more backward. In despair, Hungarian writers complained that the country was being pushed further east, that it was being “balkanized.” At the beginning of the 20th century, Endre Ady, the highly influential and politically sensitive poet characterized his country as a ferry that shuttles back and forth between a western, “European” shore, and a backward, antidemocratic and anti-liberal eastern shore. In 1907 he was of the opinion that the country was just in the midst of going to the eastern bank, but that a part of it – the avant garde artists, the democracy-minded politicians – was breaking away, and staying on the western shore (quoted in: Helyünk Európában 1986 I: 45–47).

On the other hand, it was the East that symbolized the ancient origins of the Hungarians, the land from which their ancestors had arrived at the end of the ninth century. When invoked thus, the East – and Asia in general – came to mean that mythical, ancient homeland to which the Hungarians could retreat when disillusioned with the West; it meant the place from which they could draw their own characteristic, eastern identity. Those features that, on the scale of modernization, would have to be



recognized as signs of backwardness, could in these terms be understood as ancient virtues (Király 1982 I: 233–321).

If we compare the images of national character linked to the “East” and “West” (which, on

the basis of the literature of the time, I have summarized below), it becomes clear that the positive features are by no means all in the “East”.

West	East
“Europeans” rational cold individualistic  modernization bourgeois virtues: work ethic discipline thrift industriousness	“Hungarians” (and Asians) emotional warm communal  traditionalism (backwardness) aristocratic, gentry virtues: love of pomp pride; dignity ability to create a state military bravery; recklessness “national faults” lack of perseverance incapable of collaboration irresponsible

The “eastern” traits express, for the most part, the ideals (and self-criticism) of the nobility. The native Hungarian nobility had considered itself of eastern origin since the Middle Ages; this was above all, a matter of their consciousness as a class. The nobles enjoyed rights over non-nobles, and a measure of independence from the king: for instance they had the right to select the king and to resist his unlawful actions. These privileges were due to the aristocracy exactly on the basis of their claim to be the legal successors of the conquerors who established the homeland, the ancient warriors who founded the state. Eastern features were extended to the peasants only later, when the modern national movement hoisted even the peasants into the image of national unity. Naturally, the “western” traits could also not be rejected en masse, since the goal was modernization, bourgeois transformation and capitalist development. In the debates of the 19th century the question was either: how can the eastern traits be retained, protected and further developed; or how can we eliminate them altogether.

Thus, within Hungary, “West and East” became the kind of symbolic opposition with which virtually every social and cultural differ-

ences could be expressed and symbolized: Catholic/Protestant, city/country, Western Hungary (largely Catholic)/Eastern Hungary (largely Protestant), etc. This many-layered symbolism was later activated in newly emerging social, political and cultural issues. At the beginning of this century the bourgeois avant-garde named their new literary journal *Nyugat* (West), while somewhat later the agrarian populists named their journal *Kelet Népe* (People of the East). Clearly, quite a heterogeneous set of features and traits came together on each side of the East/West opposition, as the table on p. 160 illustrates. But it was the East that embodied the attitude of dissent, opposition and national independence. The West stood in Habsburg times, for loyalty to the dynasty, for Christian conservatism, but also for those oppositional groups that represented universalistic ideologies: bourgeois radicals, avant-garde artists, ‘urban’ reformers, Marxists.

This image of ‘easterness’ contributed to forming the relations of Hungarians to foreigners, and the images that foreigners held about Hungarians. When the Hungarians worked out their modern national identity, they wanted most of all to be different from the Austrians. If the Austrians idealized the Al-

pine peaks, then the Hungarians chose the flatness of the Great Hungarian Plain as their "national landscape". It was often assumed that the Hungarians could behave only in ways opposite to the Austrians, even in small matters. The first Austrian folk song collection was published in Budapest in 1819 (Tschischka und Schottky 1819). In these songs from the region of Vienna, the editors discovered the peasants' 'light hearted happiness, their exultation and joy of life.' Hungarian folk songs had not yet been investigated by anyone at that date, but Hungarian critics immediately declared that the characteristics of Hungarian songs were exactly their melancholy, seriousness and dignity (Fenyő 1976: 148–151).

In the 18th century the source of pride for Hungarians was still that they were an ancient state, part of a Christian Europe that they had

defended against the Ottoman Turks in the 16th and 17th centuries. The orientalism of the aristocracy did not conflict with this: After all, the pagan tribal chief, Árpád, was the forefather of canonized kings, a 'dynasty of saints.' Later, the idea of a "Christian Europe" lost much of its force, and this secularization contributed to the increasing importance of identifying with the east. The elaboration of the eastern image owed much to the Protestant intelligentsia which, although numerically in the minority, had nevertheless developed a strong group consciousness (see Sinkó, 1989a). They constructed an image of Hungarian history in which the Christian Middle Ages and St. Stephen's Christian state were no more than a detour. Their version of national history linked the pagan, tribal Hungarians with the Reformation. It was the Reformation, they ar-

West	East
<i>Up to 19th century:</i> clergy aristocrats of foreign origin	native nobility
<i>Social strata:</i> (turn-of-the-century, 1930s) urban dwellers (middle class, intellectuals, assimilated Germans and Jews proletarians)	descendants of nobility (‘historic middle class’) peasants (populist intellectuals) <sup>5</sup>
<i>Horizontal division:</i> Catholics People west of Danube	Calvinists People east of River Tisza, Transylvania
<i>Historical Heroes:</i> <sup>6</sup> St. Stephen (established the Christian state) Labancok  Széchenyi urban writers bourgeois radicalism	Árpád (tribal chief, conquered the homeland) Kurucok Princes of Transylvania Kossuth populist writers agrarian populism
<i>Elements of folk culture:</i> agriculture hand crafts village organization Roman Catholic folk religiosity music in European tonality ‘soft folk art’	‘ancestral’ occupations: pastoralism, fishing blood-relations, kinship system shamanism, Protestant folk religiosity pentatonic music ‘hard folk art’ <sup>7</sup>

gued, that restored and once again foregrounded national characteristics, in opposition to universal Catholic ideology. And this national heritage continued in the wars of independence against Catholic Habsburg rulers, in the struggles of the Protestant Principality of Transylvania, and finally in the 1848–49 War of Independence.

The image of themselves as of “East” helped the Hungarians to see the Austrian achievements of bourgeois culture and civilization not as higher stage of development, but as the manifestation of a divergent mentality or frame of mind. But the identification of Hungarians with the East came at a most opportune moment for the Austrians as well. Their 1867 Compromise with the Hungarians, coincided with the collapse of their ambitions for a German Empire. It was not easy for them to symbolically formulate the nature of their equal partnership with the Hungarians, since they had previously held the Hungarians to be backward, disloyal rebels. It fit neatly into these disdainful images of Hungary, that the Hungarians imagined themselves to be Asians, which to the Austrians could only mean inferiority. For example, in the population reports of the Monarchy’s Statistical Office, those ethnic groups believed to be of European origin – the Germans, Czechs, Slovenes, Italians, Romanians etc. – were listed separately from the Asians: Hungarians, Armenians, Gypsies and Jews (Czoernig 1855). Given the ethnic stereotypes of the period, this grouping was by no means complimentary to the Hungarians.

Thus, while the Hungarians were industriously working on the modernization, the westernization of their country, they were simultaneously elaborating for themselves an imaginary, mythical, Asian “back country.” In addition to their own Hungarian traditions, this Asian identity drew heavily on the “orientalism” of Western Europe, the conceptualization of Europe as paradigmatically opposed to the Other, the foreigner (Said 1979). In everyday life, this orientation to the orient was hardly evident in Hungary. Around the turn of the century, a few poets, writers and artists made excursions into this “Eastern back coun-

try.” Typologically, at least, they considered all of Asia as their relatives. (This broad concept of the ‘East’, of ‘Asia’ was influenced by Hippolyte Taine’s theory of the decisive role of geographical milieu.) Architects did not hesitate to employ Indian, Chinese, and Japanese motifs in their search for a “Hungarian national style.” And, paradoxically, it was the colonial architecture of the British in India that provided inspiration for the remarkably inventive architect Ödön Lechner (Moravánszky 1983, Head 1986: 91–94). The captivation of the Hungarians with their own Asian identity was greeted by Austrians and by other European peoples as a kind of amusing exoticism (Sinkó 1989b). The conceptual system of orientalism, however, included also the inferiority of Asian peoples, their cruelty, and the inability of their social structures to modernize. And it is on these grounds that the “Asian” identity of the Hungarians would later become materials for effective propaganda *against* Hungary during the First World War and in the subsequent peace conferences.

When the image of peasant culture started to emerge at the end of the 19th century, scholars started to elaborate the “myth of ancient peasant culture,” understandably searching for an eastern legacy in peasant culture. The question was: what kind of legacy? The nationalists (the party of the petty noblemen, of the ‘historic middle class’) wanted to see mounted warriors in the past, organizers of nomadic empires, which ruled over subservient agriculturalists and city dwellers. This image was in a high degree the wishful, idealized, traditional representation of the nobleman. The positivist scholars, allies of liberal politicians, were fighting against the myths of Hungarian supremacy, which could and did distort the perception of political reality. The first big debate was fought about the Finno-Ugric or Turkic affiliation of the Hungarian language. For the nationalist, the Finno-Ugric kinsmen were too simple and modest, “stinking of fish” – they wanted to have nomadic Turk warriors as ancestors and relatives. In the sober, disillusioned atmosphere after the defeated War of Independence, however, the Finno-Ugric realists won a crushing victory over the ‘Turkic party’.

The professional ethnographers, standing within a tradition of 'state-nation' and ethnic pluralism, thought in terms of evolutionary processes and the historical stratification of cultural elements. They looked for the eastern legacy in the lowest of the historical strata, among the oldest, most primitive elements. With the goal of finding parallels to the simplest and oldest cultural elements at home, they led expeditions to Siberia, to study the hunting and fishing tribes whose languages are related to Hungarian, and to Central Asia to study nomadic peoples. Above this most ancient eastern stratum, they established the existence of peasant lifeways related to the cultures and societies of neighbouring central and Eastern European peasants. In his ethnographic handbook, Zsigmond Bátky (1906) placed side by side, in the same typological series, the simple tools and everyday objects used by Hungarians, Slovak, Romanian and other peasants, for instance fire-irons or lading cups carved out of wood. At the same time, it was also Bátky who pointed out that the folk art – the embroidery, the ornamentation of painted furniture – of Hungarian and Slovak peasants differs from Romanian, Ukrainian, Serbian and Balkan folk art because the former were deeply influenced by European historical styles such as that of the Renaissance and the Baroque, while the latter were not. Thus, these ethnographers were striving to work out an "eastern-central-European" peasant type, one that could be differentiated both from Central European and from Eastern European peasant culture.

Just as Hungarian nationalism gained ground against ethnic pluralism and liberalism at the end of the 19th century, so the influence of orientalism grew as well, especially among artists and in the writings of amateurs. They started with the assumption of an eastern "folk soul," and "Asian love of pomp." It was thus precisely the later, 19th century forms of peasant culture, those that developed as a response to modernization – colourful clothing, richly elaborated wedding rituals and other village festivals – that were turned into supposed proofs of Asian or eastern identity (Hofer and Fél 1979, Hofer 1988). Next to these late prod-

ucts of peasant art these amateur ethnographers placed Middle Eastern and Asian treasures, Persian, Indian, Chinese court relics, proposing them as parallels. Aladár Körösfői-Kriesch was one of those painters who tried, at the beginning of this century to create a national artistic style in part out of folk art and in part out of eastern mythos. In his study of folk art, published in London, he wrote: "we still find communities among whom a harvest festival, or a wedding feast, with all its ceremony ... and the brilliant yet solemn array of its participants, carries us back in thought to some Oriental fairyland of long, long ago" (1911:31). He emphasized the nomadic origins of Hungarians, their ability to organize a state, and the fact, as he put it, that they are a race "born to rule."

Although each has undergone changes, these two ways of interpreting folk art are still observable today. After national tragedies or crises there is often a stronger demand to see Hungary's situation in Europe in a realistic light. It was in such a spirit that the handbook *Magyarság Néprajza* Vol. I–IV (Ethnography of Hungarians, 1933–1937) was written, after the Treaty of Trianon closing the First World War. But on the eve of the Second World War, and during the war itself, the mythical, eastern interpretation of folk culture again gained ground. Indeed, it was considered by patriotic politicians as a way of strengthening national resistance to the oppressive influence of Nazi Germany and the danger of war. The 'official' ethnography, taught at universities in Hungary and represented in the work of museums, insists on a more or less realistic, scientific interpretation. As a result, theories about eastern, mythical links retain even today a certain tone of political opposition (and an anti-intellectual, anti-scientific flavour).

### Competition between classes and groups for the national legacy

According to the ideal model – this is approximately what Löfgren outlines for Sweden – the bourgeoisie is victorious, it wins political, economic power and, in order to legitimate itself,

it constructs a "national culture heritage," an image of national history. The bourgeoisie then disseminates this to the entire country, along with their own values and conduct as a model – only to find that the next generation considers national symbols and sentiments superfluous and outmoded, and tries instead to place national consensus on rational, universal human grounds (Löfgren 1986, 1989).

The Hungarian case demonstrates that besides this ideal, more heterogeneous and composite solutions are also possible. In early 19th century Hungary, the leaders of the movement for bourgeois transformation were the enlightened middle nobility. They were the leaders of the 1848–9 revolution and War of Independence. Thus, aristocratic values were built into the revolutionary program and into the plans for bourgeois transformation. In any case, the largest part of the reforms were carried out by the Austrians who defeated the War of Independence. The division of the Hungarian elite – and indeed of the entire society – has been suggested by later scholars such as Ferenc Erdei and Péter Hanák through the metaphor of "two pyramids standing next to each other" (Hanák 1972). That is, bourgeois transformation did not destroy the ancient feudal hierarchy which consisted of the great landowning aristocracy, a populous middle gentry that later took an important role in state administration, and the peasantry at the bottom. Beside and outside this "pyramid" there developed a separate, new, bourgeois-capitalist hierarchy, made up in part of ethnically foreign and assimilated immigrant groups (Germans, Jews). In this "pyramid" the large capitalists were on top, under them the urban bourgeoisie and the petite bourgeoisie, with the industrial workers at the bottom.

This model was not, however, completely accurate. As rather many in the feudal hierarchy switched to careers in the 'modern pyramid,' on all its levels, and successful capitalists took over aristocratic manners, the two "pyramids" came closer together. The "two pyramid model" also simplifies the situation excessively. Besides the "feudal wing," and the "bourgeois capitalist wing," it is important to recognize other differences, especially in the so called 'middle

class,' based on origins, ethnic background and culture. For Jews, the opportunities for social mobility offered by 19th century Hungary were unmatched elsewhere in Europe. By the beginning of this century a significant stratum of Jewish capitalist entrepreneurs and intellectuals had taken shape. They did not simply assimilate to the Hungarian "historical elite" but rather became a culture-creating center themselves, to which Hungarians, Germans and other groups assimilated (Karády 1988). Further, among others, Katalin Sinkó has shown that, within the "historical elite" there were significant differences between Catholics and Protestants. Indeed, we can speak of "Catholic" and "Reformed" cultures (Sinkó 1989a). Ferenc Glatz writes that, between the two world wars, within the middle class, the increasing number of state (and private) employees and state functionaries who lived off of their salaries, differed culturally from those groups that owned land and maintained the traditions of the "historical elite" (Glatz 1987).

The relation and movements of these groups, located at different distances from the centres of power, cannot be described simply in terms of dominance and resistance. Often enough, compromises were worked out; fleeting alliances characterized them. For example, until the First World War, Jewish entry into the elite was regulated by a tacit 'assimilation contract' according to which Jews relinquished the possibility of positions in state administration and the military, in return for opportunities to organize banking and industrial enterprise as well as to conquer certain free professions. As one result, Jews made up 61.5% of Budapest's lawyers and 58.8% of doctors at the time of the First World War (Kovács 1988).

The 'production' of national culture was, after all, taking place not only within the centre of power of the historical elite, but also outside of this sphere, in other elite groups located more or less close to this center of power and forming sub-centres of their own. Among these groups, various forms of temporary or more durable symbiosis emerged (cf. Eisenstadt et al. 1987).

In the case of Hungary, by the middle of the 19th century a specific "cast of characters" has



developed from among various social groups and classes, and the 'players' adopted particular characteristic attitudes (versions of identity-models). This "cast of characters" remained in place for a long time, and became established as the stable structure of national alternatives, despite the fact that in the meanwhile other players also stepped on the stage, and the larger society was changed by drastic external interference, military defeat, territorial changes, and revolutions. Thus, Hungarian national consciousness, national identity and national culture could best be described as a polyphonic musical score.

The creation of the image of folk culture was also "polyphonic." Various social groups used different images of folk culture to legitimize themselves or to strengthen their political position. And once constructed, the different 'voices' in the polyphony did not disappear, even though in subsequent years the groups themselves may have been restructured. New social forces, stepping on the stage for the first time, often reached back to make use of old images and conceptions. I would like to demonstrate this with several examples.

One conception of folk culture was that of the 19th century nobility. The reform movement that preceded the 1848 Revolution had already discovered folk poetry, had made the new peasant dance (the *csárdás*) fashionable, as well as folk songs in the new style. These were performed by gypsy musicians as often at urban coffeehouses as at peasant weddings. By the end of the century, the populist literary trend had been trivialized. Nevertheless, folk poetry, gypsy music and the merry-making that accompanied it expressed the image of folk culture held by the "historic middle class."

The upwardly mobile bourgeois wing rejected this superficial, 'patronizing' attitude to peasant culture. From this criticism arose the scientific study of peasant culture. There were many assimilated Germans among the first contributors to ethnography; after the turn of the century scholars of Jewish origin also participated. Avant-garde artists arriving home from London and Paris formulated the idea that in architecture and fine arts a new national style should be created through a new

consciousness of the 'temperament' expressed in folk art (Sármány 1977). It was in this context that Zoltán Kodály's and Bartók's discovery of folk music began. Instead of then fashionable "gypsy music" they found an archaic, ancient style and made it a source of musical material for their compositions. Béla Balázs, the friend and librettist of Kodály and Bartók, was of Jewish origin and aspired to be a great Hungarian poet. He said he felt that "the Tisza River flows through my soul." For him, turning to the ancient strata of folk culture was a way of overstepping the "historical elite" while identifying with Hungarians (Pataky 1988).

In the period of disillusionment following the First World War, the four volume *Magyarság Néprajza* (Ethnography of Hungarians) expressed the image of folk culture held by the staid, conservative stratum of officials and state functionaries. Hungarians lived with the painful awareness that their ethnic group had been torn apart by the Treaty of Trianon. The four volume work outlined a coherent, unified Hungarian folk culture without containing a single word against the neighbouring states. The question of east and west also received a realistic solution at that time. What emerged as more important than any symbolic opposition to Austria, and more important than any romantic 'easterness,' was the attempt to show the country's very real European features as a contrast to some neighbouring states.

Even at the start of the Second World War, about half of Hungary's population was engaged in agriculture. The 'peasant question' (land-reform, modernization of peasant farming) was certainly a vital issue. And for this very reason it is surprising that the movements which burned with enthusiasm for peasant traditions and folk art cared little about the social problems of the peasant, and did not defend the peasantry in politics. This changed only at the end of the 1920s, with the emergence of the "populist movement". Kálmán Kulcsár has characterized this movement as a variant of "agrarian populism" or "populist modernization." It was a movement of intellectuals. These intellectuals, suffering from status inconsistency, demanded that opportuni-

ties for advancement be created for intellectuals newly emerging from peasant origins. They also pressed for the land reform that would provide a solution to the peasantry's social problems. They wished to regenerate national culture on the basis of peasant traditions. But their program was contradictory, because, "the regeneration of society required the transformation of the very peasant society" they defended (Kulcsár 1988). The populist have re-drawn the image of peasant culture again. Writers, like Gyula Illyés, published alarming reports about the poor, defenseless life-conditions of peasants and of hired men on large estates. Against the background of poverty and social problems, moral and human values of peasantry were stressed; folk art was interpreted as the expression of a communal social organization.

The populist movement and the question of folk culture soon became part of the new field of force created by a fascist Germany and the increasing danger of war. For the sake of preserving national consciousness and independence, in the interests of a 'spiritual national defense,' in some groups of intellectuals, the myths of ancient origins were revived, and a kind of anti-Europeanism emerged. In the given political situation this had a confessed anti-German edge, but in its character it sometimes resembled the racial, national mythology of Hitler's Germany (Juhász 1983).

After the Second World War, and after the Communists took power (1948–9), an ideological battle was initiated against the old nationalism, that is against the populist course, as well as against bourgeois culture. Following a Soviet model, attempts were made to create a mass culture with socialist content, one that would gain a national identity partly through the use of traits from peasant traditions. They chose the attractive, easily appreciated, entertaining elements. In the sphere of folk music this brought them close to the taste for gypsy music of the old noble-historical elite. The singing of folk songs, the performance of folk dances became a regular part of political meetings. By 1952 there were as many as 3000 folk dance groups, organized in factories and offices, that learned simplified folk dances meant

to be performed on stage, at political meetings and festivities. Such 'political populism' was finally discredited in 1956 (Vitányi 1981).

In contrast to such 'soft,' politicized, and entertaining folk art, the appreciation of the archaic forms of folk culture could be used to express an "alternative way of thinking." This gave momentum to the folk dance and instrumental folk music movement which has been developed spontaneously by young people since the 1970s.

In folk music, different historic styles and ways of performance became symbols of different 'national identity models' since the inter-war period.<sup>8</sup> The youth of the 1970s managed to discover for himself a new musical material, the archaic instrumental music of peasant villagers (not of the gypsies) in Central-Transylvania and other regions, mostly neglected by Bartók and Kodály. Linked to this movement, however, one may occasionally observe the return of ancient mythological interpretations of folk art – this time (1988) they are opposed to a certain Soviet influence and therefore emerge as a defense of demands for democracy and independence.

## Concluding remarks

In the early 19th century, movements of national awakening professed that the essence of nationhood is an original, ancestral culture. In national ideologies and feelings since that time, an overvaluation of cultural matters can be observed in Eastern Europe. (The cult of the folk heritage is a manifestation of this.)

In a 1946 study entitled "The misery of the small, Eastern European states," István Bibó described as part of this misery the fact that, due to the inadequacy of the political institutions in these states, or because the operations of their institutions are hindered, the social and political questions of nationhood are transposed into the cultural sphere, which is good neither for politics nor for culture. Because these nations lack "unbroken historical continuity, in the Western European sense," it falls to the intellectuals to justify "national individuality" in the area of language and culture (Bibó 1986 II:223). Naturally, it is true that

culture is one of the spheres in which politics is manifested in all societies. But the over-use of culture as a "replacement for politics" is also emphasized in the case of Germany by Georg L. Mosse. That is why Hegel's notion of "nation-as-culture," which sounds foreign in England or the United States, could be so successfully elaborated in this region. "The spirit, he [Hegel] said, forms the culture, and culture forms the nation" (Mosse 1975:214). This conception gained a certain historical support from the fact that in many cases the construction of modern nation-states in this region started with the development of national culture (Sugar 1969, Niederhauser 1981) – and when parliamentary systems of government encounter difficulties, "men are apt to return to the idea of culture as a totality which encompasses politics" (Mosse 1975:215).

At first glance, it is in contradiction to the overvaluation of national cultures that they are, nevertheless, incomplete. According to the ideal 'model,' the construction of national cultures can be described with terms like hegemony and integration; and the process itself is linked to successful economic modernization and to the bourgeois-democratic transformation of the political system. Hungary, and presumably other East European countries too, don't comply with this model. Neither economic and political modernization, nor cultural integration was accomplished. Modernization in Hungary remained incomplete, the country never reached the point of 'take off,' the bourgeois transformation of the political and social system was only partially realized. I assume that the construction of national culture also remained incomplete. In Hungary, a victorious bourgeoisie was never able to seize cultural hegemony. The elite and the 'middle class' were divided between a 'historic' and 'feudal' wing and a more modern and urban 'bourgeois' wing, and there were at least two, eventually more, centres of acculturation-assimilation in them. In the case of Hungary and in the case of other East European states, the 'incompleteness' of the national culture was *not* a transitory stage. Rather, I suppose, we have here a special and relatively stable type of national culture, different from forms appearing

further west, which deserves the attention of social scientists.

Several observers have noticed that East Europeans are characterized by a dichotomized, 'split up' national identity. Herzfeld writes about the Greeks that their "identity is caught between two extreme poles," between the West (Europe, the European perception of the classic heritage) and the East (the traditions of everyday life, carrying Balkanic and Turkish traits). "Some Greeks claim a European identity that other Greeks claim they have either never attained or desired. Greeks thus live out the tension between similarity and difference, or inclusion and exclusion" (Herzfeld 1987:18, 111). A similar duality can be found among other people too. The poles are usually linked to East and West. The Hungarians, as I tried to show, sometimes identified themselves as descendants of oriental nomads, as a "People of the East" – sometimes as the easternmost representatives of western Christianity and European civilization. The east-west dichotomization is not simply a choice between two sets of images and symbols – both poles are connected to diverse conceptualizations of the national character and the nation's vocation. The two positions have a slight resemblance to 'epochalism' and 'essentialism' in the Third World (the Westerners being closer to epochalism cf. Geertz 1973: 243–249), but it is more correct to speak about 'parallel traditionalisms' since both groups base their national argumentation on tradition, but stress different traits, and both have their own programs of modernization. (Recently, Hungarian 'Easterners' were usually close to the political program of 'agrarian populism'.)

This deep and pervasive structural duality introduces a kind of ambiguity into the national identity, a kind of split-up consciousness. Rather than signaling pathology, however, one may risk the proposition that this duality may have an adaptive value. The alternative set of heroes, symbols, and view points is on reserve. It can be brought forth easily in the event of recurrent changes in political regime, or of such changes of political course as are taking place right now in Hungary. Both (or more) sets may be simultaneously in the conscious-

ness and emotions of the citizen, as they do not exclude each other, though there may be fierce disputes about favouring, or pushing into the background either of them in public political and cultural life.

What is the social background of this dichotomization and how old is it? We don't find a one-to-one correspondence between social groups in the elite, political parties and the sets of symbols. There have been conservatives with a 'Westerner,' as well as with an 'Easterner' ideology. The worship of heroes and the cult of specific cultural traditions has often seemed fixed on one side, only to be taken over by the rival camp. Bartók, who originally found an audience and patrons on the urban, Western bourgeois wing and was still branded a decadent Westerner in the Stalin years, emerged later as an idol of the agrarian populists and as a sort of consummation of the archaic (eastern) folk heritage. The duality of the symbolic language of nationality is not directly related to any basic structural dichotomy of Hungarian society. Rather, I suggest, it is a representation of the cultural (and social, political) ambiguities inherent in a peripheral position in a larger (regional, continental) system, and in this sense its roots can be traced much deeper into history than the beginnings of modern national development.

## Notes

The first variant of this paper was presented at the Swedish-Hungarian workshop "National culture as process" in Budapest, May 1988 and it carries the imprint of this stimulating cooperative and comparative Swedish-Hungarian venture, on the Swedish side led by Orvar Löfgren. Its Hungarian background is a multidisciplinary cooperation, led by the author, of "The role of peasant traditions in the Hungarian national culture" and subsidised in the frame of the government's "Hungarian studies" project. A Hungarian version of this article was published in the journal *JANUS*, Vol. VII (1989), p. 59-75. The text published here was prepared for the Rutgers Center for Historical Analysis, in the frame of the project "Construction of identities as historical process", under the leadership of John R. Gillis. The author wishes to thank for many stimulating comments from various audiences who heard one or other variant of this essay. The Hungarian text was

translated by Susan Gal, I acknowledge her help with gratitude.

1. Concerning the concept of 'national culture' I am relying, first of all, on the studies of Orvar Löfgren (1986, 1989) and on the work of Ernest Gellner (1983) and Benedict Anderson (1983). Concerning the vague concept of 'national identity', I refer to the critical survey of Philip Schlesinger (1987). "Nationalism" points to a special difficulty in cross-cultural communication in matters related to 'nationhood'. "Up till a few years ago research on national identity was to a great extent focused on the ideology and politics of nationalism, often within a framework of exposing nationalism as a type of false consciousness" – says Löfgren (1987:7). A new type of national pride was developed on the basis of *not* being nationalistic against other societies which were supposed to be nationalistic. Nationalism, and with it national identity were considered sometimes without further qualification as something retrograde, negative and dangerous, and only characteristic of 'others'.
2. This enthusiasm for a beautiful countryside, filled with places carrying historical memories was to have grave political consequences. As István Bibó (1986) pointed out, in East-Central Europe it was not only the fact that various national groups settled amongst each other that made the creation of just boundaries difficult, indeed impossible. It was rather the fact that each group thought not in terms of territory but in terms of historical landmarks, hallowed cities and homelands so sacred in their entirety that negotiation about them could not be allowed.
3. At that time, similar open-air folklore exhibits were used for similar political purposes, as material symbolizations of 'imagined communities', in other countries as well. In 1867, on the occasion of the Panslav Congress in Moscow, and in order to demonstrate the brotherhood of Slavic peoples, the ethnographic exhibit showed every single Slav ethnic group, including the Slovaks, Ruthenians and Croatians of Hungary. (According to my knowledge, this was the first "ethnographic village".)
4. As it is well known, the large anthropological museums purporting to present the development of humanity, generally omit materials pertaining to their *own* nation. This is the case for the Parisian Musée de l'Homme, as well as the large natural history museums of Washington, New York, London and Berlin.
5. This refers to those young people of peasant background who embarked on intellectual careers within the framework of the literary/political "populist" movement of the 1920s.
6. "Labancok" were those Austrians and Hungarians who fought on the side of the Habsburgs in the battles of independence of the 17th and 18th centuries. "Kurucok" were those Hungarian re-

bels who fought against the Habsburgs in these battles. The Principality of Transylvania paid taxes to the Ottoman Turks in the 16th and 17th centuries, but at the same time preserved and protected the continuity of Hungarian culture, political institutions, etc. It also ensured freedom of religion, or rather battled the Habsburg Empire on several occasions, in behalf of Protestantism. Kossuth was the leader of the 1848–9 War of Independence. Széchenyi was a reformer of Hungarian economic and cultural life in the 1820–40s, who became the representative of reform in opposition to the revolutionary program of the War of Independence.

7. This terminology comes from the folk culture movement of the 1970s and 1980s. "Soft folk art" refers in general to products of a peasantry already moving towards bourgeois ways, their pleasant, appealing and entertaining popular music as well as material art. "Hard folk art" refers in general to the archaic elements of folk art, those that fit into constraints and had communal characteristics (cf. Vitányi 1981: 15–16).
8. There are striking illustrations for this 'national sensitivity' concerning folk music. In 1981, for instance, a heated debate broke out on different musical interpretations and instrumental accompaniment of folk songs in radio programs. Only 'native' intellectuals knew that behind the aesthetic discussion, in reality, the former official Stalinist concept of nation collided with the agrarian populist interpretation of national identity, as it was understood by the erstwhile Peasant Party. Among the so called alternative or opposition groups, active in Hungary today (1988) the 'agrarian populists' seek their legitimization partly by advocating a more authentic (as they claim) image of folk traditions and their more substantial utilization in education and cultural life.

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