

(1995) NATIONAL CHARACTER AND NATIONAL
IN Banac, F. & K. Verdery (eds) IDEOLOGY IN INTERWAR EUROPE

pp 65-81
The "Hungarian Soul" and
the "Historic Layers of
National Heritage":
Conceptualizations of the
Hungarian Folk Culture,
1880-1944

TAMÁS HOFER

A fairly coherent picture of the "native" peasant culture was elaborated in East Central European countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, following the earlier "discovery" of folk poetry, of folk rituals, and of peasant costumes. It was during that later period that ethnography as a branch of science became institutionalized; museums, learned societies, periodicals, and university chairs were established; and the elaboration of comprehensive images of "folk culture" was started.

"Folk culture" came at the most opportune time for ideologists, in a period of rising nationalism. It offered a fresh source of ethnic and national symbols and a new screen on which various ideas about the origin, "essence," character, and historic mission of the nation could be projected. There was no need to prove the antiquity and authenticity of folk traditions: public opinion and researchers were convinced that the peasantry carried the genuine old elements of the nation's ancestral culture; that the folk culture mirrored the national identity. The public expected the ethnographers to put together, piece by piece, and through strenuous research work, a scientific image of the national character, but we might look at the ethnographers' work from another angle. Guided by their own concepts about the nation's identity and the "heritage of folk culture," they verified these notions through a selective recording of cultural facts.

By emphasizing certain traits of folk culture and leaving others in the shadow, similarities and linkages with other nations and allies could be expressed. Under the spell of pan-Slavism, for instance, Slavic peoples were enthusiastically seeking common and ancient Slavic traits. Differences between folk cultures could also serve ideological aims. For instance, the Hungarians of those days wanted to be different from the Austrians, first and foremost. The different path and level of social and cultural development offered abundant proof, and scientific modelling even enhanced the objective differences. The Austrians used the concept of popular culture.¹ In the image of folk art a central place was allocated to the provincial art of Catholic religiosity, to votive pictures and objects of pilgrimages, to such works of learned artisans as pieces of furniture decorated with Baroque ornaments made for well-to-do villagers. This model assumed a lively flow of culture between cities and villages, between the cultural elite and the common urban and rural people. Folk culture was seen as a simplified, vulgarized, popular version of elite culture.

On the other hand Hungarians and other East European peoples used the model and myth of an ancient, autochthonous peasant culture. According to this model it was the peasantry that had preserved the traditions of the ancestral culture of the entire ethnic group, while the elites, the city-dwellers, and the aristocracy had broken away from the old ethnic culture by following foreign patterns and becoming cosmopolitan.² They devoted much attention to the *ősfoglalkozások*, such ancestral occupations as fishing and animal husbandry, and were seeking archaic traits of their nomadic ancestors.³ In folk art, priority was given to the carvings of shepherds, and the embroidery of peasant women over the more sophisticated work of urban craftsmen.⁴ The study of popular religiosity was completely missing from Hungarian ethnography and folklore right up to the 1940s, because of the view that it had developed under the influ-

1. Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978).

2. Tamás Hofer, "The Perception of Tradition in European Ethnology," *Journal of Folklore Research* 21 (1984), pp. 133-47.

3. Michael Sozan, *The History of Hungarian Ethnography* (Washington, 1977), pp. 154-60.

4. Tamás Hofer, "Stilperioden der ungarischen Volkskunst," *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* 29 (1975), pp. 325-38.

ence of the churches and hence it was not an autochthonous peasant tradition.

Both models had their historical reality and explanation in the center-periphery relations of the modern age. On the periphery, the ruling classes imitated cultural forms and patterns of behavior developed in the center. As a consequence, the gap between the elites and the rural peasant segment of these societies—which at best were only partially affected by changing fashions stemming from the center—became deeper and deeper. As a result of the peasants' isolation and exclusion from the tight network of cultural transmission established in core areas of the continent—in France or in England, for instance, where the existence of a great number of small cities and the peasants' involvement in market and cultural relations brought them into contact with other segments of the society—the peasant traditions in the eastern parts of Europe show a much greater originality.⁵

The Hungarian researchers assumed that the traditional, ethnic, popular culture in the villages they studied was being mingled with urban, cosmopolitan, and cultural elements of more recent origin and that their task was to select and to document the original, "ethnically characteristic" elements. Béla Bartók differentiated between the concepts of "folk song" and "peasant song," considering a folk song to be everything sung by the peasants, even pieces originating from the gypsy music of urban cafés. "Peasant music in the narrower sense of the term," he wrote, "is the totality of those peasant tunes that belong to one or more uniform styles."⁶ He recorded these peasant tunes and made his selections on the basis of scholarly concepts of style that he himself had elaborated. Incidentally, the view that every people must have an autochthonous culture of their own, to be reconstructed by the researcher, was a dominant idea among the anthropologists who did fieldwork during that period, and this is why the analysis of the processes and consequences of colonization is almost completely missing from their descriptions.⁷

5. Hofer, "Perception," 137.

6. Béla Bartók, *A magyar népdal* (The Hungarian Folksong) (Budapest, 1924); published in English as *Hungarian Folk Music* (London, 1931).

7. Murray J. Leaf, *Man, Mind, and Science: A History of Anthropology* (New York, 1979), pp. 146-49; Bernard S. Cohn, "Anthropology and History in the 1980s," in Theodore K. Rabb and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *The New History* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 227-52.

RESERVE
COLLECTION

Disparate images were formed about the same folk culture. Behind the differences, we may identify different views on the "essence" of the nation, on the national character, on the nation's past and future, reflecting different group interests and influencing the selective attention of the ethnographer.

Folk culture as a historically stratified heritage

At the first plenary session of the newly established Ethnographic Society of Hungary in 1889, Antal Herrmann expounded the importance of the collection of ethnographic objects. "These objects are the relics of the domestic life of the people, to be preserved with reverence; they are the petrified witnesses of their past, like geological layers of the evolution of their cultural soil . . . that may throw a ray of light once . . . to more than one puzzle of history, because every prehistoric and historical period, every cultural transformation, every change of residence, every contact with other peoples leave their traces on the utensils of folk life."⁸ This quotation testifies to an additive concept of culture composed of elements originating from different periods that may be ordered into historical layers. The geological metaphor and the endeavors to classify cultural elements historically had been valid for a long time—Bence Szabolcsi characterized the folk song research of Bartók and Kodály as the "geology" of folk music as late as 1938, the final product of which was the isolation of an ancient layer of oriental nature from the pre-Conquest times; other layers related to European influences; and a "new style of folk song" appeared in the early nineteenth century.⁹

The stratified model of folk culture made possible the description of relationships among nations and ethnic groups. It was used in Hungarian ethnography because its political task was to articulate the peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups in a multi-ethnic state, an image of contemporary Hungary which could be accepted—as they hoped—simultaneously by Hungarians, Slovaks, Romanians, and the rest. They supported the program of a multi-lingual, multi-

8. Antal Herrmann, "Hazai néprajzi muzeum alapításáról" (Promoting a National Ethnographic Museum), *Ethnographia* 1 (1890), pp. 19–24.

9. Bence Szabolcsi, "Morgenland und Abenland in der ungarischen Volksmusik," *Ungarische Jahrbücher* 18 (1938), pp. 202–17.

national "state-nation" based on the equal rights of all citizens.¹⁰ In contrast to the rising tide of nationalism and Magyarization after the 1890s, the "official" ethnography, cultivated in the museums and scholarly associations, stood for a more liberal and tolerant "state-nationalism." Its goals were clearly expressed by Antal Herrmann, a Transylvanian Saxon, secretary-general of the newly established Ethnographic Society: "in the advanced stage of culture—that is, in the process of modernization—various peoples of definite individuality may unite into a single nation . . . and by a multiplicity of contacts and mutual influences a certain ethnological and ethnographic unity may develop" as a consequence of the common geographical framework and common historical past.¹¹ The state administration believed that the recognition and presentation of the different folk traditions might serve the political integration of the state. It was in this sense that the crown-prince Archduke Rudolph could write in the Introduction to the monumental series entitled *The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in Writing and Pictures* (*Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia Írásban és Képpen* 1887) that the various ethnic groups of the realm "would be presumably pleasantly affected" by their expert description and it would induce them "to seek their intellectual focus in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy." In his German-language Hungarian ethnological periodical launched in 1887, Herrmann expressed the idea with the image of the peoples living in the territory of the Hungarian state "constituting a huge, green crown of a tree distinctly separate in the forest of peoples" and "ethnologically interwoven" as a result of mutual influences. The metaphor was a rather forced one, as the crown of the tree in this case was composed of trees of different roots and trunks. "The breath of centuries is blowing through this crown in innumerable myths and traditions and . . . a rich, real folklore is heard from the branches in many voices."¹²

This approach demanded a relativization of ethnic differences.

10. M. Rainer Lepsius, "Nation und Nationalismus in Deutschland," in Heinrich August Winkler, ed., "Nationalismus in der Welt von heute," *Zeitschrift für historische Sozialwissenschaft* 8 (1982), pp. 12–27.

11. Antal Herrmann, "Jelentés az 1889. bécsi anthropologiai kongresszusról" (Report of the Anthropological Congress in Vienna, 1889), *Ethnographia* 1 (1890), p. 159.

12. Antal Herrmann, "Als Vorwort," *Ethnologische Mitteilungen aus Ungarn* 1 (1887), pp. 1–2.

Hungarian ethnographers, and some Romanian, Slovakian, and other researchers working with them in the Ethnographic Society, considered themselves as students of "Völkerkunde" and not of "Volkskunde." They located the cultures of the Carpathian basin within a general evolutionary image of human cultural history. The Ethnographic Museum of Budapest presented tribal societies, the archaic civilizations outside Europe, and the culture of Hungarian, Romanian, Slovakian, and other peasants in a joint exhibition. This was sharply different from the usual practice of the time, which placed the objects of compatriot peasants, perceived as documents of national identity, into a separate museum or linked them to the historical and archaeological collections from the nation's past, whereas the people outside Europe were frequently associated with the natural history collections. In 1906 Zsigmond Bátky compiled a manual on how to establish new ethnographic collections in Hungarian provincial museums: "Culture . . . is not linked to individual peoples but it spreads over other peoples from certain radiating points, and the peoples are only temporary carriers of different phases of human culture."¹³ This view shows intellectual courage in the acceptance of a modern anthropological culture-concept and its application to the author's own national culture at a time when nationalist trends had become dominant in Hungarian life.

The apparently unbiased scientific, evolutionary approach could be used to support nationalism. Social Darwinism presupposed a struggle for life and a natural selection among nations and ethnic groups as well, and qualified the struggle among nations almost as a necessity.¹⁴

Folk Culture as the Objectification of the Soul of the Nation

This model deduced the continuity and integrity of folk culture from an unchanging, or scarcely changing, spirit of the people, or from a concept of "language" as the determinant of the way of

13. Zsigmond Bátky, *Útmutató néprajzi múzeumok szervezésére* (Guide to the Organization of Ethnographic Museums) (Budapest, 1906), p. 5.

14. G. Béla Németh, "Léthare és nemzetiség" (Struggle for Life and Nationality) in *Hosszmetszetek és keresztmetszetek* (Longitudinal and Cross Sections) (Budapest, 1987), pp. 466–72; Doris Byer, "'Nation' and 'Evolution'—Aspekte einer 'politischen Anthropologie' in Austromarxismus," in Hubert Ch. Ehalt, ed., *Zwischen Natur und Kultur* (Vienna, 1985), pp. 285–312.

thinking and patterns of behavior. The source of this approach was in German idealism. "Hegel's assertion that the universal spirit constitutes the culture of a nation stands within a specific tradition not shared widely in England or in the United States. . . . The spirit, he said, forms the culture, and culture forms the nation."¹⁵ Moritz Lazarus and Heymann Steinthal, the founders of the *Zeitschrift für Völkerpsychologie und Sprachwissenschaft* in 1860, expounded the relationship between language and the spirit of the people by postulating that the system of mythology, religion, cult, and law were based on language. Their periodical was transformed into the *Zeitschrift für Volkskunde* in 1890, and continues to be the central periodical of German ethnography.¹⁶

Theories based on the spirit of the folk or on their language related the popular culture to an extra-historical, unchanging, or little changing, foundation. In 1906 a Hungarian art critic wrote that "however strange it may sound, one gets the germs of national fine arts also in national language." "The archaic language of the race (that is, the nation) gives the something that essentially guides the thinking of the race. . . . Music has developed directly from language. This musical tradition may modify the perception and even the sense of the objective world."¹⁷

As contrasted to the stratification model, which recognizes newer and newer geological layers, the concept based on the soul of the folk or on the theory of the "complete language" considered every alien influence as pollution. It set the objective of preserving the purity of the soul of the folk, for the authenticity of the popular spirit was proved by its ancient past. Thus the Hungarian folk spirit almost always appeared as an "oriental," "Asian" one.

Here we may discuss Hungarian orientalism briefly. The West and East have been symbols of a number of different cultural alternatives for every East European people: the West has represented modernization, the "center" to be caught up with, whereas the East has

15. George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses* (New York, 1975), p. 214.

16. Ingeborg Weber-Kellerman, *Deutsche Volkskunde zwischen Germanistik und Sozialwissenschaften* (Stuttgart, 1969), pp. 37–38.

17. Tamás Hofer, "A népi kultúra jelentésváltozásai a századfordulón" (Variations of the Concept "Folk Culture" Around the Turn of the Century), *Valóság* 31 (December, 1988), pp. 42–48; Deszö Malonyay, *A fiatalok* (The Young Generation—Essays on Five Painters) (Budapest, 1906), p. 26.

stood for the traditional values, for identity to be preserved against this cosmopolitan Western influence.¹⁸ In addition, the Hungarians kept in mind their nomad ancestors who had come from the East, and on this basis sometimes they classified themselves among the Asian peoples. They applied the paradigmatic concept of Asia as it was developed in European "Orientalism," disregarding the fact that this concept also contained the cruelty of Oriental societies, their inability to develop, and their indissoluble alienness.¹⁹ From the Middle Ages onwards, the Hungarian nobility proudly regarded themselves as the descendants of Oriental nomad ancestors who had conquered the country. This consciousness had not so much an ethnic as a class connotation: the conquest of the country entitled them to possess the land and to resist even the king if he did not rule constitutionally. The origin of the peasants was unclarified, they were "lifted into" this nation of Oriental origin definitively only during the Reform Age from 1825 to 1848. At any rate the Oriental image, projected upon peasant culture, had noble traits. Hungarian folk art was described in a London English-language publication in 1911 by Aladár Kriesch-Körösfői, a painter: "The Hungarians were nomads, a race of warrior horsemen . . . They are fond of ostentation and dignified of bearing. . . . 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."²⁰

The evolutionary-minded ethnographers were seeking Asiatic relics among the simplest, most archaic elements of the peasant culture; further, they went to the linguistically related Siberian tribes to study their primitive fishing and hunting ways of life.²¹ In contrast, the amateur authors, painters and poets were seeking manifestations of the "Oriental love of pomp" in the late, colorful popular costumes and folk art of the nineteenth century, and they quoted parallels from princely treasure troves and from the courtly art of Asia.²²

18. Michael Herzfeld, *Anthropology Through the Looking-Glass: Critical Ethnography in the Margins of Europe* (Cambridge, Eng., 1987).

19. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York, 1979).

20. Aladár Kriesch-Körösfői, "Hungarian Peasant Art," in Charles Holme, ed., *The Peasant Art in Austria and Hungary* (London, 1911), pp. 31–33.

21. Sozan, *Hungarian Ethnography*.

22. Hofer, "A népi kultúra."

Perhaps the official cultural policy shifted towards the support of the nationalist model of "folk spirit" with the publication of the richly illustrated, officially sponsored series of "The Art of the Hungarian People" by Dezső Malonyay in 1907. Malonyay rejected the comparative and historical study of folk art and the scientific approach to it. He advocated the understanding of folk art emotionally, through direct experience, through immersion in folk life. According to him folk art manifested a special style, a special constitution. Malonyay did not speak about the origin of this spiritual constitution, but his enthusiastic critics, including the eminent art philosopher, Lajos Fülep, were convinced that in folk art the Asiatic spirit of Hungarians manifested itself. "The cradle of this style was rocked somewhere in Asia, and today it represents Asia honestly, with great strength and health in Europe."²³

With his work Malonyay wished to strengthen the position of Hungarians in the Carpathian basin. "We should remember that our independent national individuality is endangered also by the fact that here several different peoples have been squeezed into one state. And such a closeness does not promote the strengthening of the national character. . . . We are exposed to mutual influence, and the purity of the national character suffers from it."²⁴ He refrained from any hurtful remarks against the non-Hungarians, but he wanted to enhance the "national force of resistance" and "cultural authority" of the Hungarians, and to renew fine arts on the basis of folk art. A young architect asserted that "one should live among this people so that we may be able to bring into our conscious art everything that is unconsciously, instinctively Hungarian. . . . I am surrounded by the Turanian breath, I inhale its ancient pagan fragrance into my soul, so that it should permeate me, enrich my inspiration and fantasy."²⁵

23. Lajos Fülep, "A magyar nép művészete" (The Art of the Hungarian People). *A Hét*, May 5, 1907, in *A művészet forradalmától a nagy forradalomig. Cikkek, tanulmányok* (From the Revolution in Art to the Great Revolution: Articles, Essays) (Budapest, 1974), pp. 193–97.

24. Dezső Malonyay, *A magyar nép művészete I. Kalotaszeg* (The Art of the Hungarian People, Vol. I: The Region Kalotaszeg) (Budapest, 1907), p. 9.

25. Ákos Moravánszky, "Nemzeti és népies törekvések a két világháború közötti magyar építészetben" (National and Populist Trends in the Hungarian Architecture of the Interwar Period), *Magyar Építőművészet* 2 (1983), pp. 20–22.

The Conservative Middle Class and its Image of Folk Culture in the 1930s

In these quotations one can sense the nationalism and great-power illusions of Hungary at the turn of the century. The First World War brought defeat and the Trianon peace treaty, placing 67 percent of the territory and 33.5 percent of the ethnic Hungarian population under the rule of the neighboring states, and this reality had blown away these illusions. Art teacher József Huszka was one of the chief advocates of the Asiatic interpretation of folk art, and his long-delayed work received a devastating criticism when it was published in 1930.

Instead of the ethnography of a multinational state, the ethnography of the Hungarian ethnic group, living now within the framework of several states, came to the fore. A critical approach in ethnography became dominant and refuted the alleged antiquity of folk traditions by relying on historical sources, pointing out that the colorful folk costumes evolved only in the nineteenth century, and the extensive shepherding, classified formerly as nomadic, evolved only in the sixteenth century, after the destruction of the small medieval villages by the Turkish wars. Instead of the "Oriental" traits, the new research emphasized such European cultural influences as Western Christianity, Protestantism, the effect of European historical styles upon Hungarian folk art, and the like. The Oriental elements had differentiated Hungarians from the Austrians; now these historical layers distinguished the Hungarian folk culture from its Eastern and Southeastern neighbors.

This realistic, moderately ethnocentric attitude was in accord with the political views of the conservative intelligentsia, made up of civil servants, white-collar workers, and professionals, which was separate from the "historical middle class" of gentry and aristocratic origin by behavior and attitudes.²⁶

Professional ethnographic research had retained the comparative method and the geologically stratified cultural model of the earlier period, and its historical approach was strengthened by the study of written sources in archives. The four-volume, extensive handbook of Hungarian folk culture was prepared on this basis and pub-

26. Ferenc Glatz, *Nemzeti kultúra—kulturált nemzet, 1867–1987* (National Culture—Civilized Nation, 1867–1987) (Budapest, 1988); József Huszka, *A magyar turáni ornamentika története* (History of the Hungarian-Turanian Ornamentation) (Budapest, 1930).

lished between 1933 and 1937. The opening sentence of the work was that "Hungarian ethnography is a science serving our national self-knowledge." Separate volumes were devoted to "material" and "spiritual" culture, but the planned volume on the institutions of peasant society was not published. The reconstructed image of "traditional culture" was described instead of the life and thinking of contemporary peasants, and thus elements related to the influence of modernization, urbanization, the state, schools, and churches were left out.²⁷

Károly Viski wrote the Introduction, wherein he stated that the authors considered traditional culture to be a system where "each element is linked to the other just as in a branching coral reef. Its elements are at first sight insignificant. . . . Not only the supporting pillar of traditions can be recognized within the structure, but the active force of its creative capacity, also its ability to assimilate foreign substances drifting towards it from outside." Thus it had been an open, changing system. Its capacity to integrate foreign elements disappeared only in the last few decades. Ultimately the image of a peasant culture, similar to the Central European neighbors, had unfolded with relatively few and isolated traces suggesting the Oriental origin.

Viski and the authors were trying to use an ethnological, anthropological concept of culture that still had to be justified. "Our peasants mostly appeared in their holiday best in front of the public, just as they had been presented by our poets and artists. Instead, science exposes such hitherto less known depths and values of their life that. . . are full of work, sweat, sacrifice, and suffering, hence they mean the life of the nation." Here the presentation of the tools and techniques of agriculture, the processes of food production, and the like are being justified against the still general normative understanding of culture among the wider public. Instead of an ethnocentric-national interpretation of culture, only looking for the ethnic specificities, the Hungarian authors moved their book towards an objective-scientific interpretation of culture.

They saw their duty as giving realistic historical information to the Hungarian reader and promoting the incorporation of the peas-

27. *A mágyarság néprajza* (Ethnology of the Hungarians), 4 vols. (Budapest, 1933–37).

ant cultural tradition into national culture. According to them the knowledge of peasant culture "enriches the national self-knowledge and self-consciousness of our entire society. . . . it strengthens the desire and will to remain and become even more Hungarian. It is particularly the ethnographic heritage, besides our language, that is suited to link the universality of Hungarians together in time and space as a living power," the only allusion to unity with Hungarians living beyond the political frontiers to be found in the volumes, which avoided all forms of irredentist propaganda.

This manual differs from the contemporary German ones both in content and in orientation. The Germans usually concentrated on folklore and folk art and wanted to document the operation of folk spirit. On the other hand, this Hungarian handbook is close to certain North and East European ethnographic syntheses which explored the historical stratification of the peasant cultures, and the historical contacts of peoples, within an evolutionistic, ethnological-comparative framework.

The Vision of Folk Culture in "Agrarian Populism"

At the turn of the century the enthusiasm towards folk art and culture had no relationship with the movements launched for the improvement of the peasantry. When in 1907, for instance, Lajos Fülep was meditating on how a national art could be created from the folk art explored by Malonyay, he saw realistically that folk art was a "completed style" and if a learned artist utilized some of its elements the outcome could only be a "reflected art." He also dreamed about the possibility of "a man coming. . . whose whole individuality is created for telling his message in the language of this style," but he did not think of the possibility of training peasant youth brought up in folk culture to become artists.²⁸

From the 1920s onward the situation changed with the appearance of a new intellectual populist movement. The cause of the peasant culture and the cause of the peasants, as an underprivileged, basic stratum of the national society, were connected. The national value attributed to the peasant culture was used as an argument to justify the claim of young intellectuals coming from the peasantry, the

28. Fülep, *A magyar nép művészete*, p. 196.

"populist intelligentsia," to a greater role in the nation's life. Broad reform programs were developed to improve the situation of the peasantry and to create a new national consensus based on peasant values and institutions. Hungarian populism was essentially a movement of intellectuals and literary men, and it could never accomplish the political organization and mobilization of the peasantry. Hungary was not represented in the "Green International" in the late 1920s, and it had no autonomous and strong peasant party.²⁹

The populist movements inclined towards a "mild racial discrimination: the good common people are of different ancestry from the bad Establishment. Sometimes this belief is mythical or nearly so."³⁰ This argument was used by the populists in Hungary against those of gentry origin, and mostly against the bourgeoisie, the assimilated members of the middle class of German and Jewish origin. The "populist intelligentsia" was suffering from "status incongruence" and was struggling for political influence against the establishment. On the eve of World War II and during its first years these disputes became particularly polarized, partly between the "urban" and the "populist" camps, and partly between the conservative government and the extreme political opposition of rightists and leftists.³¹

Folk culture again got into a strong political force-field and its mythicization had also begun. As contrasted to the scientific folk culture interpretation of the conservative establishment, the populist camp elaborated images of popular culture based again on the soul of the folk and on the structure of the language, emphasizing eternal traits and Orientalism. These images usually rejected the acquired and accumulated cultural values of the European history of the Hungarians and advocated isolation from Europe. It was even stated that the very adoption of Western Christianity had been a mistake.³² The politically highly sensitive, many-sided, and cultivated László Németh stated that the leadership had been taken over by writers and politicians, often of mixed origin, who thought along

29. Ghița Ionescu, "Eastern Europe," in Ghița Ionescu and Ernest Gellner, eds., *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics* (London, 1969), p. 121.

30. Peter Wiles, "A Syndrome, Not a Doctrine," in Ionescu and Gellner, *Populism*, pp. 166-79.

31. Gyula Juhász, *Uralkodó eszmék Magyarországon, 1939-1944* (Dominant Ideas in Hungary, 1939-1944) (Budapest, 1983).

32. Juhász, *Uralkodó eszmék*, pp. 29-30.

foreign, Western lines. These "thin (that is, diluted) Hungarians" have replaced the full-blooded "deep Hungarians" who have been squeezed into a minority but who represented the real Hungarian thinking of the past centuries.³³ This emphasis on the national character and national interests served also in the defense of independence against the growing menace of Nazi Germany and against the danger of Bolshevism. The politically multicolored populist movement was generally characterized by the quest for a "third road," rejecting association with Germany as well as the Communist model, and trying to find a Hungarian democratic solution between the two with a popular-front policy. At the 1943 conference of the democratic intellectuals held at Szárszó, László Németh characterized the "third road" by a metaphor, saying that if there were a Dutch and an English party in New Guinea, the third road would be represented by such a political movement as would say: "New Guinea for the Papuans!"

Sándor Karácsony, professor of the philosophy of education, elaborated a theory of Hungarian thinking based on the principle of "juxtaposing" or "coordinativeness" as opposed to Indo-European subordinativeness. From the principle of "juxtaposing," Karácsony drew inferences about the Hungarian system of classification, political thinking, preferences in social relations, and the like. He criticized the Hungarian educational system, saying that it imposed alien schemes of thinking on the Hungarian youth. In Karácsony's view, democratic political objectives and peaceful relations with neighboring peoples could also be justified, and progressive leftist intellectuals sympathized with those views. On the basis of his interpretation, however, folk culture was again placed upon depth-psychological, mythical foundations.

Sándor Karácsony's ideas led Gábor Lükő to draw a forceful, unified vision of Hungarian folk culture. Lükő was a well-trained ethnographer and folklorist who studied at the Budapest and Bucharest universities. In his book, he delineated the Hungarian perceptions of space and time, functioning deeply in the subconscious and manifested in the folk culture, and he also explored the hidden symbol-system of folk poetry and folk art.³⁴ He had given up the method of

33. László Németh, *Kisebbségben* (In Minority) (Budapest, 1939).

34. Gábor Lükő, *A magyar lélek formái* (Forms of the Hungarian Soul) (Budapest, 1942); reprinted in 1987 in Pécs with a new Afterword.

scientific comparison and was looking for typological equivalences to prove the basically Oriental nature of the Hungarian folk culture. He referred to Asiatic parallels drawn from Japan and China, proving a fundamental difference between the Hungarian and the Indo-European mentality. In 1942 this interpretation was regarded as anti-German and anti-Nazi, though two great Indo-Germanic peoples, the Anglo-Saxons and the Russians, were fighting against Hitler. In his passages on cultural history, Lükő tried to minimize or even wipe out the significance of any cultural influence mediated by the Hungarian nobility and urban burghers, by schools and churches. Any influence coming from the elites in the past was regarded as a sort of pollution, an implantation of alien traits into the authentic folk culture. This attitude was shared by other "peasant-fundamentalists" in the populist camp. These views rejecting the European cultural contacts were qualified by the humanist poet Mihály Babits as the "theory of cutting back." "Everything should be cut off, so that only the ancient, holy trunk should remain, the original, wild, archaic trunk without ornaments, like a rugged and superstitious idol." "We should shut ourselves up in our own smallness, we should preserve the special ancient colors and primitive tastes as purely as possible. Not only the gods keep us in evidence, but folklore as well."³⁵

The conservative circles proposed their own image of folk culture against the mythical interpretations of the populists and extremists. With the participation of several departments, an Institute of Hungarian Studies was established at Budapest University. The Institute organized an annual series of lectures to expound their views on various issues of Hungarian history and national culture. The series of lectures organized in 1940–41 under the title "Lord and peasant in the totality of Hungarian life" emphasized the constant interrelationship and bilateral contacts linking the peasants and non-peasants in literature, in liturgy and popular religion, in the relationship of folk music and composed music, and also in social mobility. They argued that the "folk culture" constantly changed, growing richer, and that it could be understood only within the cultural system of the entire nation— thoughts parallel to Kroeber's famous comment

35. Mihály Babits, "Pajzs és dárdával" (With Shield and Spear), *Nyugat* 7 (1939), quoted in Juhász, *Uralkodó eszmék*, pp. 29, 85.

on peasant society being a "part society" and peasant culture being a "part culture."³⁶

Democratic progressives stressed that membership of the nation "is not a matter of body and blood, but of soul and moral decision," and this was the basis of the movements organized for "teaching" the elements of folk culture throughout society in order to strengthen its Hungarianness, to promote the integration of the nation.³⁷ Zoltán Kodály defined folk music as the "musical mother tongue of the nation" and organized an effective movement for incorporating folk music into primary school education. István Györffy, Professor of Ethnography at the University of Budapest, elaborated a comprehensive program for introducing peasant traditions in garments, in the interior decoration of homes, in music, dance, and even in legislation.³⁸

With the appearance of the "populists" the label "urban" was attached to the bourgeoisie of cosmopolitan culture and partially of Jewish origin, politically an opposition group. Its members sympathized with universalistic intellectual currents, supported avant-garde art, and provided the early leaders of the trade union and labor movement.³⁹ It is remarkable that Bartók, and even Kodály, could unfold their activities as composers using folk music with the support of these urban-bourgeois, partly Jewish, circles. Bartók's *Cantata Profana*, written on a Romanian *colinda* motif, around which a curious "intellectual" myth was built in Hungary, may be an example of how the artist can express the anxieties of the modern age with musical innovations drawing from folk traditions.⁴⁰

36. Alfred L. Kroeber, *Anthropology* (New York, 1948), p. 284.

37. István Györffy, *A néphagyomány és a nemzeti művelődés* (Folk Traditions and the National Culture) (Budapest, 1939), p. 7.

38. Ibid.; Kálmán Kulcsár, "A popularis modernizáció problémája. A magyar népi mozgalom a harmincas-negyvenes években" (The Problem of the Populist Conception of Modernization: The Hungarian Populist Movement in the 1930s and 1940s), *Társadalomkutatás* 1 (1988), pp. 5-17.

39. Viktor Karady, "Zsidó identitás és asszimiláció Magyarországon. Marjonecz László interjúja K.V.-ral a magyar-zsidó társadalomtörténet kutatásának kérdéséről. I. rész" (Jewish Identity and Assimilation in Hungary: L. Marjonecz's Interview with V.K. About Problems of Hungarian-Jewish Social History, Part I), *Mozgó Világ* 8 (1988), pp. 26-49.

40. Tibor Tallián, *Cantata profana—az átmenet mítosza* (The Cantata Profana of Bartók—The Myth of the Transition) (Budapest, 1983).

Some Closing Remarks

People living outside Eastern Europe may be surprised to see how political movements and social classes used different models of peasant culture to fight against each other and for power and hegemony.

István Bibó, writing in 1946 about the "poverty of the East-European small states" said that "in these countries 'culture' has been a factor of enormous political significance; however, this does not mean so much the flowering of culture but rather its politicization. As these countries did not 'exist' in the Western European sense of unbroken historical continuity, it became the task of the national intelligentsia to discover and nurse the distinctive and separate linguistic, popular individualism of the new or reborn nation and to justify what was really true, namely that these new popular frameworks . . . were more deeply rooted and more alive than the locally existing dynastic state frameworks."⁴¹ George L. Mosse in Germany noted that "it must be also remembered, that cultural experience was a political reality in Central Europe. . . . At times when parliamentary government does not seem to be working well, men are apt to return to the idea of culture as a totality which encompasses politics."⁴² A special significance could be attributed to folk culture within culture as "national consciousness had grown up alongside the ideal of popular sovereignty."⁴³

All of this may help to explain why in Hungary even today some youth groups cultivate the traditions of popular culture, instrumental music, songs, and dances almost as a "secular religion," thus expressing their adherence to the nation believed by them to be of a higher order than the state:

41. István Bibó, "A kelet-európai kisállamok nyomorúsága" (The Poverty of East European Small States of 1946) in *Valogatott tanulmányok* (Collected Essays) (Budapest, 1986), II, 223.

42. Mosse, *Nationalization*, p. 215.

43. Ibid., p. 2.