

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS HUNGARIAN? CONCEPTS IN HISTORY, HISTORY IN THE CONCEPTS

We need concepts to relate history. We know that the content of a concept is constant only within a particular theoretical scheme, where it appears as an intellectually mandatory norm. In contrast, it is obvious that in the telling of history, the content of some categories of concepts changes. And, to complicate matters, often the change does not replace the previous content of the concept, but rather allows it to become multi-layered.

Thus history becomes embedded in concepts used in historical analysis, whereas the use of the concept itself becomes part of the historical process.

Three concepts are of prime importance in this work: nation, the nation-religion, and symbolic politics. To be more precise, since I analyze those manifestations of symbolic politics which are related to the manifestations of what I call nation-religion, the concept of nation is not relevant in its entirety, so it is not necessary to give a comprehensive definition of it. We must, however, analyze the contextualized meaning of nation.

In our approach the nation means identity. I am well aware that there may be differences of opinion regarding the content of the term identity; there are those who think in terms of a particular language, those who think in terms of background or nationality, and even some who think in terms of religious identity. This is not so relevant for the time being, because the concept of identity at the abstract level includes all of the above.¹

If we assume that nation is identity, then we can certainly assert that this category had not always existed. Feudal Europe thought of itself primarily as a community of estates intent on safe-guarding the general value of Christianity. Identity was provided by the divergent legal status, the presence or lack of privilege, the commonality was provided by the religious culture. Therefore the Middle Ages were the triumphal march not of the vernaculars, but of Latin. The marriage strategies of the ruling houses gave no consideration to the “nationalist principle,” and the same may be said of European aristocracy in general.² This kind of universalism was seriously challenged by the Protestant Reformation, for the schism within Western Christendom created almost irreconcilable identities. Yet the national dimension was far from dominant as yet, it remained without significance relative to the differences in religion. Nevertheless, feudal universalism had suffered its first setback, and it could not be mended or covered up by any religious peace.

The agony of universalism began with a process with roots in the eighteenth century. This was the tendency to contest the priority of the estates and of religion, two processes along parallel lines, although there were differences in pace: namely, the process of secularization and the development of national consciousness.³ The nation became a primary identity in this process, as did the ethnic background as a category embodying national identity. I am referring to those who carry a new identity, compared to the identity of religion and the feudal identity centered on privilege, as an ethnic identity. An ethnic group is made up of those individuals who profess the same national identity. They are the only ones subject to symbolic politics, and they are the ones who form a new, different community. This community may be along political, cultural, linguistic, emotional, economic lines—nor is it necessary for all these factors to be present. All that is needed is for individuals to think of themselves as part of a community and identify themselves with that community. Whether they think of the evolution of the nation as “organic” or “artificial” is irrelevant. What matters is identification.

National identity, however—and this is basic from my perspective—brings about both secularized and sacred tenets. By seculariza-

tion I mean going beyond the religious and beyond the society of estates, for that is the sociological essence of the new community. The process does not negate religious divisions, only their relative importance. National identity, by definition, is not called upon to decide religious disagreements, but generates a new and powerful identity which overcomes religious divisions and divisions based on the feudal system. Those factors have not disappeared, but they no longer account for primary identification, they become secondary or tertiary. Often the participants themselves had no understanding of the process, as we can see from the Catholic Church which fought a rearguard action in the nineteenth century, in vain, against secularizing tendencies; the same applies to the educational system in Europe, and it took the elites of that system a long time to realize that the role of Latin had changed.

In order to achieve all this, the nation as identity had to be sacrosanct and above everything that had preceded it. The feeling and image of being “above” could only be created by making the value of the nation transcendental, one might even say sacred. It does not matter, at this point, why this process took place, we are merely noting the fact. The nation could be criticized, but only in a positive way, accompanied by the desire to improve it. Identification with the nation became so powerful that it allowed human sacrifice. Dying for the nation was now held in high esteem. The process of becoming sacred could only take place within forms of cultural anthropology that had been established by traditional religious worldviews over the centuries.

Historians of ideas are correct in asserting that the roots of secularization must be sought in the French and English Enlightenment, but the secular identity of nation did not remain the private business of philosophers. It could build on cultural forms that were already in existence, and these forms pertained to the religious worldview. As always, the new derived from the old; in this case, the national identity superseded the religious, and liquidated or absorbed identification with the estates, but retained the basic, sacred rituals. Alongside religious prayers we have the combination of text and music in the national anthem, which becomes a sacred item with which one identifies (in praying, as in listening to or singing the anthem, the body must assume culturally mandated positions). Everywhere national colors replaced the banners representing dynasty or church.⁴ Everywhere, belonging to

this nation rather than to another becomes a value in itself. As a result of making sacred the process of becoming a nation and hence the reassessing the past, the “national hero,” the figure of the national savior, made his appearance, as did the figure of the traitor, the Judas of the nation. Thus, instead of one savior and one traitor, we have a plethora of saviors and traitors. The nation and the corresponding ethnic group places history into a new narrative, assigns a new function to the past, forms a teleology for the future.

The nation becomes a sort of secular deity; let us refer to it as the nation-god, whereas the whole of the structure of secular religions may itself be called nation-religion. As in the case of all religions, some believers may be more fanatic, others more moderate, there may even be those who deny the nation-god—the “national atheists”; there may even be different tendencies or denominations. This does not alter the fact that, with the help of the concept “nation-religion” it becomes possible to understand and explain a variety of apparently disparate phenomena.

The world broken down into particularities, that is, the nation-religions, brought about a general tension, as well as a general opportunity. The tension consisted of the fact that, in lieu of conflicts based on religious identity, we now have to face the insoluble reality of the conflicts between nation-religions. This was unavoidable, since drawing boundary lines was essential for any kind of identity. Identity paired with the sacred—nation-religion—created a dogmatic narrative space for the new phenomenon. The heroes of this new narrative of history, now installed or enthroned, usually became heroes in the process of defending, sometimes expanding, their own nation-religion; they became heroes *vis-à-vis* someone. The opponent was generally another nation, where another hero was selected on the basis of the same logic. World War I, with its own set of heroes and traitors, was a good indication of how far this process could go, and the peace treaties concluding the war also indicated the network of tensions created by the so-called national solution built atop the dynastic ruins.

The opportunity, related to the circumstances brought about by the new type of tension, was that after the universalism of the Middle Ages we may yet establish, upon the demise of the nation-religions, a new type of universalism. The experiment was called socialism or commu-

nism (as discussed in the chapter on the Jews). The structure was just as sacred as the nation-religion, but its intention, its symbolism, was international, to the point where it considered the whole of humanity as its “ethnic” background, transcending Christian civilization. And, of course, we must not forget, that there were repeated attempts to harmonize the nation-religion and universalism—for instance, the League of Nations after World War I, the United Nations in the aftermath World War II, or even the European Union.

I feel it is necessary to mention all this to underline that the terminology of nation-religion is much more fertile than the loaded term “nationalism.” While the expression nationalism refers mainly to the theory and application of the Realpolitik of national goals, the nation-religion is capable of comprehending the world of symbolic politics, making it possible to reexamine and reconcile known phenomena.

With the nation-religion, modern national identity created opportunities for the manifestation of sacred content in a secularized world, following but transforming at the same time the original religious model. The outcome, the history thus formed, the creation and use of cults, is what I refer to as symbolic politics.⁵ Thus symbolic politics is not direct power politics in the traditional sense, although its use may serve the ends of power politics, either by reinforcing the actual power structure or by creating a spiritual power, an alternative history, in contrast to the power structure of the establishment. Symbolic politics are not simply vested interest-politics, they are not the expression of a particular social group or an economic lobby, although they may legitimize vested interests. Symbolic politics are not specialized politics, such as one may encounter within the activities of specialized departments of the government—although such activities may find a spiritual content, a morality in symbolic politics.

To rephrase the concept: symbolic politics is the application of the nation-religion, a secular application of religious practices.⁶ From another perspective: symbolic politics is the expression of the existence of a national deity, the combination of the contents and models which express (more or less) the identity of the nation as an imagined consensus. Symbolic politics is identity politics in operation.

This structural complex of concepts is based on the nation as the source of identity. This national identity is secular, yet sacred, creating

the national deity and the nation-religion which reflect and articulate the abstract identity. The nation-religion creates a symbolic political space and practice. This book is designed to present and explain this within a concrete context; the subject is not the problem of national identity in general, that is merely the prerequisite.

As mentioned at the top of this chapter, national identity itself is a changing category. In order to explain the symbolic political dimension of the Hungarian nation-religion, we cannot bypass a historical outline.

The Hungarian Case—The Historical Range

The evolution of the Hungarian nation-religion goes back to the beginnings of the nineteenth century; and it became a mass emotional reality with the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–49.

The new type of secular religion had two “rivals” of unequal strength and of different sociological backgrounds. One was a national mythology based on pagan elements, the other on Christian elements.

The identity expressing itself in pagan symbolism could claim to be “genuinely” Hungarian, but it was relegated into the background over the centuries.⁷ The symbolic totem animal, the bird that never had a physical existence, the “turul,” lived in the memory of the people, but it never received a validity from the community. The myths which played a role in the concept “Hungarian” mostly referred to descent from the Huns, to the legend of the miraculous stag, or regarded Hunor and Magor as scions of one family. The political expression of the pagan creed, Koppány and Vazul, had pronounced anti-Christian features, hence could not be incorporated into the Christian worldview. Although the myth regarding ethnic origins endorsed noble privilege, pagan identity was in sharp contrast to the framework of the Christian-feudal concept which legalized privilege. National identity tied to pagan background survived only in part⁸ and, from the turn of the twentieth century until our own days, it became the special concept of the national identity of the extreme right.⁹

The other, Christian, framework of identity exercised hegemonic domination in its political articulation; it even managed to absorb some of the pagan elements. Among the family tree of ancestors we find

Noah and Japhet along with Hunor and Magor, or Attila and Árpád, who led the Hungarians settling the homeland.¹⁰ This identity, which may be described as traditional, had elements of the process of Christian consecration. The Holy Crown, which expressed the community of the king and of the nobility, the Virgin Mary who functioned as a matron saint of the Hungarians, and the central figure of the Christian identity, the founding father Saint Stephen and the relic, his right arm, all of these situated the Hungarian within the Christian framework of concepts. Thus the content and mission of the term Hungarian is Christianity itself, or the defense of Christianity. János Hunyadi and Miklós Zrínyi, the one who defended the castle of Szigetvár against the Ottoman Turks, are all part of this identity, and the pertinent language was Latin.

Obviously, Christianity as Hungarian identity entailed several problems. First of all, since it was a religion with universalist pretensions, it went beyond the Hungarians.¹¹ The Virgin Mary was also the matron saint of two of the neighboring nations (not to mention others): the Poles and the Ukrainians, who felt she was their special protector. Hunyadi was claimed by the Romanians, Zrínyi by the Croatians, as much as by the Hungarians. The cult of saints was not unequivocally endorsed by the population which had gone through the Reformation and Counterreformation. Only a minute fraction of the population could understand Latin. The overwhelming majority of the population of the country had nothing to do with the holiness of the crown. In spite of all this the right-wing Hungarian national identity—to this day—continues to use many of these ingredients, including the cult of the Holy Crown, embedded into its creed.

The various weaknesses of the competing national identities left plenty of space for the formation of a national identity that catered to many, that was secular, even if with an ecclesiastic background. Cultural national consciousness may transcend the religious, and the primary expression of cultural national consciousness is language. The language reform movement at the turn of the nineteenth century turned Hungarian into a viable language, appropriate to be selected as an official language, along with Latin, in 1840, and the sole official language of the state from 1844 on.¹² (The Finno-Ugric origins of the Hungarian language was not scientifically accepted until the 1890s and there are some, even nowadays, who subscribe to the theory that Hungarian is of

Sumerian origins.) The linguistic movement was fostered by the establishment of the Academy of Science in 1825, and the grammar books written in the 1830s.¹³

Language as the primary framework of the cultural concept of the nation became part of the modern Hungarian identity and became a mode of expression of the secular religion. Hungarian national consciousness developed several other features during its evolution. For one thing, it was meant to replace the *natio hungarica* of the Middle Ages, the community of the privileged in the feudal system. In the first half of the nineteenth century the Hungarian nobility constituted about 5 percent of the population, a ratio comparable only to the Polish or Spanish nobility in Europe. In spite of this relatively large fraction, the nobility remained a closed society. Modern Hungarian national consciousness meant to eliminate or transform this class, and could achieve this if the nation could be formulated by identity and culture, rather than by the narrow community of privilege. Thus the creation of the nation was inevitably accompanied by the spread of political rights. By the standards of the age, liberalism was called upon to make this possible; it was the ideal of freedom which gave strength, nourishment and social energy to this new type of creation of the nation.¹⁴

Modern Hungarian national consciousness became a consciousness of freedom, as formulated by the popular song of the revolution of 1848–49: “Long live Hungarian freedom, long live the homeland!”

As a result of this, the concept of “Hungarian” centered on origins and played a key role, while the term *natio hungarica* was relegated to the background. This was no longer the criterion for the nation, since the liberal approach challenged its significance, yet it did not disappear completely, it was merely “overwritten.”

The “overwriting” manifested itself almost immediately and the structural element of the nation-religion were forming. Between the 1820s and 1840s the text-music combination evolved, to constitute what must have become the point of reference of the new community. Two items of poetry seem to have filled this function, more exactly, two poems were set to music, making them the song of the nation-religion. One was the “Anthem” [Himnusz] by Ferenc Kölcsey,¹⁵ written in 1823, set to music by Ferenc Erkel in 1844. The other was the poem of Mihály-

ly Vörösmarty entitled “Appeal” [Szózat], written in 1835 or 1836, set to music by Beni Egresy in 1839, unsuccessfully at first, but more successfully in 1843. Both works may be described as “national prayers,” albeit since the end of the nineteenth century only the “Himnusz” is officially regarded as a prayer or anthem. The “Himnusz” is literally a prayer, since it addresses God directly.

The demand for a national flag arose in the same period, on the model of church banners. The radical revolutionaries of 1848 combined the crimson and silver, or red and white colors of the House of Árpád, with the green, since they visualized a national flag on the model of the one from the French Revolution, as having three colors. The national colors were enacted by Act XXI of 1848, describing them, in historicized terms, as restoring these colors to their “ancient rights.”¹⁶ Of course, there were no such ancient rights; it was merely a new old veneer to endow it with the power of the sacred. At any rate, the red-white-green as an object of national identification was intertwined with the revolution of 1848.¹⁷ The three colors have symbolic meaning as well. Red is power, white is loyalty, green is the expression of hope. The transition is clearly indicated by the fact that, quite often, the church banners were converted to the national colors; a number of banners have been preserved on which the red and the green were embroidered on top of the white cloth showing the Madonna and child.

Thus 1848 brought about direct contact between God and the nation, explicitly asserting the word of the nationalized God. The programmatic poem of the Revolution was composed by Sándor Petőfi, under the title “Nemzeti dal” [National Song]. The refrain states:

By the God of the Hungarians
 We swear,
 We swear that captives
 We’ll no longer be!

The Madonna is no longer in this picture. And another essential elements of the traditional national identity fell by the wayside in the midst of the revolutionary fervor: in its declaration of independence from 1849 the Holy Crown was removed from the national emblem, for the political future was viewed in terms of a republic.¹⁸

The formation of the new national consciousness became genderized almost from the start. From the 1820s the artists, mainly of Austrian background, increasingly depict Hungary as a woman, under either the name Pannonia or Hungaria. And if the homeland is a woman, then it is the task of the nation to protect her. According to the way of thinking of the age, this implies that the “nation” is a masculine figure, identified with a male.¹⁹

The secular world of the nation-god creates its own holy days, the birthday of the nation. There was room for an alternative, but there was no alternative to tying the day to the earthly manifestation of the nation-god, i.e. the Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–49. The selection of a specific date presented alternatives which, in turn, depended on which side came out victorious. In case of Hungarian victory, the Declaration of Independence, issued in 1849, would have to be the birthday of the nation, but since defeat ensued, the date that imposed itself was March 15, when the tricolor was adopted and the revolution broke out. The picture is nuanced only by the fact that, while society opted for March 15, in 1898 the Hungarian state within the Habsburg monarchy designated April 11, 1848, when the laws transforming the state were sanctified as the day of celebration.

The altar of the nation-god was erected only in the 1890s, and was not completed until the 1920s. The role of the national altar was filled, in Budapest, by the Heroes’ Square. The history of that memorial continued even after World War II when the Habsburgs were removed from the pantheon of statues representing the glory and greatness of the nation.

The nation-religion cannot exist without its own hero. But who would be that hero, that savior, the father of the nation? Of course, once again there was a field of competitors.

One of the factors that affected the formation of the nation was fear, and fear was likewise one of its results. Fear as an inspirational force was manifested in the fact that some feared that, unless the Hungarian became a European nation, it would be left out of the mainstream of civilization and will become impoverished forever. There were some who feared that the social structure based on estates no longer provides sufficient protection from absolutism. There were those who feared that the *natio hungarica* would not provide protection against potential or actual peasant discontent, its rigid self-preservation may provoke bloody conflict, and thus became receptive to a new con-

cept of political community. From our point of view it does not matter which of these fears was justified. Whatever the motive, these fears pointed in the same direction: the nation, national consciousness must be created. But as soon as the idea was conceived a new fear arose: the Hungarian as a nation may easily sink in the sea of the surrounding Slavic and German nations. The vision of the death of the nation emerged at the same time,²⁰ for if division by estates remained without the nationalism, then both the estates and the country may come to a miserable end. If, on the other hand, the nation was successfully engendered, then the other nations would predominate and destroy the Hungarian. Germanization and the Pan-Slav endeavors supported by Russia, the “Colossus of the North,” appeared as sources of equal danger.

In any case, it seemed the nation as a cultural concept and the nation as a community may be able to repress these fears, even if the limits to national identification soon became apparent. Nation identification did not know what to make of those who felt that their cultural identity was more important than the values of freedom, applicable to all. To put it simply: for some of the nationalities this Hungarian national identity was unacceptable, for they were interested in forming their own identity. Incidentally, it must be admitted that liberal Hungarian nationalism did not repress initiatives along those lines. Liberal Hungarian national consciousness made it possible for the German-speaking urban population to become magyarized, without resorting to any compulsion, and it had an open mind regarding the possible assimilation of the Jewish population as well. What is more, it offered the Jews personal equality at first, followed by religious equality, and the Jews could ask for nothing better. Those who wished to cure fear with freedom, and those wishing to escape their second-class position thus met midway, even if the process was not always smooth. The Jews learnt Hungarian fast, whereas the Hungarians could thus add to their own numbers.²¹

Of course, for Hungarian national identity, as in all cases of identification, there was always the image of the projected enemy. The enemy was primarily on the outside. It was the Germanizing and assimilating power of the Habsburgs, as well as the nationalities striving for their own identity, that represented danger. All this led to war against the Habsburgs and against some of the nationalities in 1848–49. We might as well refer to the latter as civil war, but it should be noted that the armed clash was not against all

ethnic groups and certainly not against other Hungarians, showing that freedom was able to mitigate the dangers of national and social conflict.

The image of the enemy did not vanish after the Compromise of 1867, but it became politically fragmented. Those who saw the image of the enemy, as being represented by the Habsburgs as well as the nationalities, were adamantly opposed to the Compromise and were cold to the liberation movements mounted by the ethnic groups. Those who favored the Compromise with the Habsburgs increasingly saw the main danger coming from the ethnic groups alone. Finally there was also a democratic national consciousness, intent on turning the ethnic groups into allies, precisely in order to be rid of the Habsburgs. (For example, Lajos Kossuth's project for a constitution and his project of a Danubian confederation.)

The changes in tone indicated that there was some transformation in the area of national identity, but nothing indicated that the image of the internal enemy had become dominant. To the contrary! The Hungarian identity, precisely because of the fear of the assumed power of the enemy, became more concentrated. For instance, for all practical purposes there no longer was a sense of regional identification. Such identification may have survived as an expression of diversity (e.g. the case of the Palóc), but Hungarian identity was not a complex of regional identities, but rather a united, unified base.²²

National consciousness, which assumed a position of power in 1867, tried to shape a construct which would provide for the nationalities the status of citizen, or even citizen, in the manner of the French Revolution. As the establishment described it: there are several nations or nationalities living in Hungary, but all are part of the Hungarian political nation. This meant simply that rights were granted without regard to ethnic or national background—the principle of equality of rights cannot discriminate. Although the assertion was true, it did not enable the nationalities to articulate their politics within the governance practice of Hungary, as part of the Habsburg empire. Consequently, there was no pressure regarding the formation of identity, either from the Hungarian or from the other side. Thus the “single political nation” principle remained a fiction, and it diminished the intrinsic value of citizen-consciousness for a long time to come.

In the meantime, there was a Hungarian nation-state, of limited

application, and a Hungarian identity, that was complete. The limitation on the nation-state was imposed by the Habsburg monarch.

A kind of national consciousness, as elicited by the projection of an internal enemy, appeared in the 1870s²³ when political anti-Semitism became embodied in a party. This national consciousness intended to endorse limitation of freedom as part of national consciousness and to present Christianity as the exclusive element of the concept "Hungarian." It found in the Jew enemy number one, while disavowing the principle of equality of rights as part of Hungarian identity.

This political party dissolved soon, yet the new national identity was here to stay. The establishment insisted on the "original" concept of national identity, for the Hungarian ethnic group was in a minority in its own country; the "mutilation" of national consciousness was not in its interest. Nevertheless, the mutilated interpretation of the nation was already in existence.²⁴

At the turn of the twentieth century Hungarians, largely as a result of the assimilation process due to liberal Hungarian consciousness, became the majority in the country. This fact, coupled with the problems arising from the incapacity of the establishment to effect social reforms, strengthened the national consciousness interested in finding internal enemies, as did the appearance of various forms of sociopolitical radicalism. The latter placed emphasis on social or political identity rather than the national one. Partly as a result of the dialectical relations with sociopolitical radicalism, the limiting form of national consciousness kept devising additional criteria for excluding persons from the concept Hungarian. The original, or traditional, national consciousness appeared increasingly vapid, for it lacked the capacity that seemed most in demand at the turn of the century, the projection of an internal enemy.

For a short while the Great War infused new life into traditional national consciousness—after all, the population was mobilized to fight an external enemy. The end of the war, however, and the desire to avoid the consequences of the defeat preferred the social radical concept of Hungarian or, when this proved insufficient, the concept of internationalism based on class.

It was not possible, however, to avoid the consequences of defeat, and this fact determined the content of Hungarian national conscious-

ness. Hungarians became the overwhelming majority in rump Hungary since Hungarian nationalism had suffered catastrophic defeat, having lost two-thirds of the territory of historic Hungary, while one-third of those professing to be Hungarian ended up under the jurisdiction of another state. Thus some of the traditional enemies had come out on top; the Habsburgs were around no longer, but the nationalities had achieved unparalleled victory.²⁵

Moreover, there was the shock administered by the government created by the democratic revolution of 1918, and the Soviet Republic of 1919. It was a shock to the Hungarian political elite that some of those who came to power were the very persons they had declared unfit to lead the nation. It turned out that persons other than those who had always governed were now able to govern the country, that there was an alternative power stratum in the social sense. The power elite of the two revolutions, especially the Communist one, was recruited in part from the Jewish intelligentsia (as we shall see). Their removal and stigmatization became a basic interest of all those who felt, on the basis of various historical rights, that they and they alone had the right to lead the country.

The lessons were drawn by the counterrevolutionaries who came to power; at any rate, they were given the opportunity to lift their own national consciousness to the level of state politics. In their interpretation it was the liberal and overly permissive policies that brought about the catastrophe, hence the Hungarian national consciousness based on freedom was to blame for the defeat. They reached back to the notion of the restricted form of national consciousness, which offered a great advantage: it presented an internal enemy against which they had a good chance to "win." It never occurred to them that it was precisely the liberal national consciousness that made it possible for Hungary to survive, and they simply refused to face the fact that no kind of Hungarian national consciousness could guarantee the survival of an historic Hungary; by ignoring these facts they could avoid all autocriticism.

Between the world wars, choosing among the multifaceted Hungarian nationalisms, the establishment continued to think and act in the direction of a restricted form of national consciousness.²⁶ The ideas it advocated or stood for simply picked up the trend that came into existence in the 1870s; moreover, it was made clear almost immediately

that to be Hungarian was incompatible with equal rights, with indivisible civil rights. Legalized discrimination along religious lines was initiated, and the primary targets were the Jews. It is undeniable, however, that at least until the end of the 1930s, the regime did not allow the realization of a national concept based on "race"; it professed merely cultural exclusion that could be understood in terms of religion, or reduced to its religious aspect, and even backtracked somewhat in this regard during the period of the so-called "consolidation" of the 1920s.²⁷

Thus we are talking about the achievement of political hegemony by the Hungarian concept of nation. Of course, at the level of society that concept also assumed other, divergent forms, including the nineteenth century concept of a nation with its cultural, civil rights content. Socially speaking, there was no homogenous concept of national identity but Hungary, since the country was now independent, could resort to the state's power of control with regard to other feelings of identity. Thus it makes sense to give special emphasis to the category of "official" identity, which manifests itself not only in state rituals, in political messages, but even in legislation.

The narrowing sense of identity based on culture was increasingly replaced in the 1930s by one based on ethnicity, on so-called "race." This definition of identity no longer needed Christianity, for the notion of race was tied to the ancient pagan heritage, which could only be distorted by the advent of Christianity.

With the triumph of National Socialism in Germany in 1933 the Hungarian national consciousness defined in terms of Christianity gradually lost ground, to be replaced by an identification based on "race," in which the opportunity to benefit from rights was determined on the basis of birth, of background. By the late 1930s it was quite clear: the so-called Jewish laws deprived persons of their rights on the basis of "race."²⁸

This concept of the nation led to terrible consequences. Many who claimed to be Hungarian fled the country, whereas those who remained were deprived of rights, subjected to persecution and often exterminated. Of course, those who insisted on retaining the nineteenth century national identity were inclined to intervene and save the life of those who were now persecuted as a consequence of their loss of rights.²⁹

As mentioned, the Peace Treaty of Trianon which formally ended the war in the case of Hungary altered the content of the country, inas-

much as about one-third of those claiming to be Hungarian were stranded in neighboring countries. Until the Great War, no matter the content of the term Hungarian, it was understood within the jurisdiction of historic Hungary, which covered the place of residence of practically everyone, except for a fragment, the Csángó, who lived in Moldavia on Romanian territory. After the war not every Hungarian was a citizen of Hungary, and we now have the concept and reality of the Hungarian as a nationality, living in minority status. The concept of the nation was now divided into the nation in the cultural sense and the nation in the political, administrative sense.

When the system of peace treaties signed at Versailles and the Paris suburbs was dismantled, the territory of Hungary increased ephemerally; but at the end of World War II, since Hungary found itself once again on the losing side, the Paris Peace Conference of 1947 gave the country its present-day borders. Thus the Hungarian became the dominant nation within Hungary while assuming the status of a minority in neighboring lands.

After World War II official Hungarian national consciousness was increasingly defined by the Communist system which became total by 1948, more precisely, by its Stalinist variant. As we know, Communism defined itself in terms international consciousness, but what is less well known was that it resorted to strong nationalist rhetoric at the same time. In a sense, Communism became a new form of nationalism.

The concept of Hungarian was redefined by Communism. The system accepted the restriction of rights, but the enemy was projected not along racial, but rather along class lines. The former "ruling classes" were left on the outside, as were the individuals who collaborated with them. A significant portion of the population soon found itself outside of the national polity. Some were deported, often by the very individuals who had served the previous regime, and more than once the ones deported were the same who had been outcast a few years earlier. Many, having a premonition of the future, escaped from the country to avoid repression, deprivation of rights, prison—thus increasing the fraction of Hungarians living on the outside.

Communism excluded large numbers not only from the national polity; it attempted to carry out selection within the national culture. In the 1930s and 1940s the achievements of certain creative individu-

als were excluded from national culture because of their background, now the same was achieved in the 1950s on the basis of political “class.” Certain books were banned, or never published.

The revolution of 1956 indicated that Hungarian society preferred the broadest concept of Hungarian, without restrictions, to the mutilated one, no matter on what grounds.³⁰ Once again over one hundred thousand departed from the country, fearing that she or he could no longer live in the country as a Hungarian.

The revamped Communist regime, unlike what obtained in other countries of the Communist bloc, became vested in something that was no longer the Stalinist variant, but rather a mitigated variety of dictatorship. Thus the interpretation of “Hungarian” based on exclusion along social class basis gradually lost ground, although its passing could not be taken for granted. It is obvious that by the 1980s national self-expression was given increasing opportunities to manifest itself culturally. Political self-expression, however, was always restricted by the regime. To lift those restrictions it was necessary to change the regime, which is what happened in 1989–90, as in other parts of the Soviet sphere.

Hungary today is a constitutional, democratic state. It follows, of course, that, in the social sense or the sense of history of identity, the various forms of national consciousness that have come about historically are still with us and manifest themselves freely in the symbolic political world. The democratic system professes the broadest interpretation of the concept Hungarian, free of all discrimination; but the answer to the question, “what is Hungarian?” includes answers inherited from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the language and use of concepts the word “Hungarian” designates the national content. History has been built into the concept, while the mutations of the concept have shaped history. In other words, when we use the term Hungarian the context imposed on us should be clear in our own mind. We must be aware what meaning of the term was preferred in what period of history. And, of course, we must realize that nothing can ever disappear; it may be there below the surface, it may have a different connotation, but it stays with us forever.