



## UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

### Opera and nineteenth-century nation-building : the (re)sounding voice of nationalism

Lajosi, K.K.

**Publication date**  
2008

[Link to publication](#)

#### **Citation for published version (APA):**

Lajosi, K. K. (2008). *Opera and nineteenth-century nation-building : the (re)sounding voice of nationalism*.

#### **General rights**

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

#### **Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

# Chapter One

## Nations as Imagined and Imagining Communities

**“A community of interest is assuredly a powerful bond between men. Do interests, however, suffice to make a nation? I do not think so. Community of interest brings about trade agreements, but nationality has a sentimental side to it; it is both soul and body at once; a *Zollverein* is not a *patrie*.” (Ernest Renan)<sup>31</sup>**

### I. What is in a name? – The complexities of nationalism

Nations and nationalism is a prevailing and proliferating topic not only in the different academic studies in a wide range of disciplines, but also a recurrent issue of the daily press and media. The origins of nationalism are usually traced back to the French Revolution and to its Europe-wide political and social consequences. However, the history of nationalism goes much further back in history. Moreover, nationalism did not cease with the advent of post-modernism and globalisation: witness the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia in the last two decades, and other ongoing conflicts where nationalism still acts as a strong driving force. Nationalism is, therefore, more than just an academic concept or a myth that prevailed in the past. On the contrary, it is an everyday reality that still painfully affects the lives of many people all over the world.

Nationalism is the hydra of history: when we think it has vanished, it pops up in another time or place. It is a many-faceted complex phenomenon with political, economic, social, cultural and religious extensions. Its manifestations vary both in time and space: European nationalism is different from the South American one, or from the post-colonial nation-building strides in India or Africa, just as the nineteenth-century European national movements differ from their twentieth-century counterparts.

In spite of all the particularities, nationalism is a worldwide phenomenon that should be studied in an inter-cultural and inter-disciplinary historical and geopolitical context. Inter-cultural, because nationalism always involves at least two antagonistic

---

<sup>31</sup>Renan, Ernest: "What is a Nation?" (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?) In. *The Nationalism Reader*, (Eds. Omar Dahbour and Micheline R. Ishay), New York: Humanity Books, 1995, 143-155.

interests competing with each other, and inter-disciplinary because it's complexity and therefore it should not be reduced to one component only. Nationalism can hardly be squeezed in universal patterns, but the construction of a general model of interpretation would be useful and feasible as long as it can account for the temporal and spatial differences.

History, or, more precisely, the historicity of the concept, should be considered a vital factor in understanding contemporary manifestations of nationalism. For example, we have to look back in history in order to understand the nature and specificity of the current problems in Kosovo, which used to be a province of Serbia but has now declared its independence. Only within this historical perspective are we able to realise the current rise of nationalism in the region. Similarly, to comprehend nineteenth-century Hungarian nationalism we should analyse first how the concept of the nation has been developed and interpreted throughout the ages in Hungarian history. We have to consider the long pre-history of Hungary within the Habsburg Empire and its relation to the neighbouring countries. Of course this does not mean that a diachronic account must precede every case study, or that it is impossible to focus only on one aspect of nationalism. Nevertheless, scholarly investigations must be aware of the historicity of the nation concept.

I shall examine in this study the interrelationship between opera and the development of nineteenth-century national consciousness as it relates to two East-Central European cultures: Hungary and Romania. I shall argue that cultural practices and cultural memory had a crucial role not only in actively influencing the nineteenth-century nationalist movements, but also in shaping and preserving certain forms of national consciousness. In one form or another, ethnic and national group identities have been constantly present in Europe, even though they have not always found their political materialisation.

However, this ethnic or national identity and its discursive construction show a wide range of varieties. The historical repository of symbols for creating and accentuating national identity has been constantly changing. For example, nineteenth-century national consciousness differs from the nationalism of the seventeenth-century. Nevertheless, there are recurring elements, whose context-bound historicity has to be analysed in order to gain an insight in the general nature of nationalism. By arguing that nationalism is a recurrent historical phenomenon that assumes very different forms I have reservations about the modernist theoretical paradigm

associated with the name of Ernest Gellner, according to which nationalism is an epiphenomenon of modern social developments. Instead, I shall focus on the controversial quality of nationalism, on its different media, and how the media shaped the nature of nationalist ideologies, as well as on the variations and similarities of its diverse patterns.

I shall first present a theoretical context for the methodological approach to nationalism, and I shall follow this with concrete case studies that focus on the particularities in the development of the Hungarian and Romanian national consciousness in the Habsburg Empire, and their nineteenth-century relation to the theatre and opera as medium. Opera as a form of public sphere in Jürgen Habermas's sense contributed not only to the spreading of the national idea all over Europe, but, as a medium, it also co-determined its quality and its particular manifestations. Nineteenth-century music, opera and theatre became most productive media for cultural recycling. After exploring the patterns and dynamism of this cultural recycling the last chapter of the thesis is going to sketch a general theoretical model of nationalism and to argue that culture – interpreted as a dynamic process rather than an entity – played a vital role in creating, mobilising and maintaining national consciousness.

## **II. Theoretical paradigms in the study of nationhood**

Ernest Renan (1823-1892) gave one of the best-known and widely used definitions of the nation in *What is a nation?* (Qu'est-ce qu'une nation?), a lecture delivered at the Sorbonne in 1882. Renan's introduction emphasises the complexity of the nation concepts and its many (mis)interpretations. After giving an overview of the many types and kinds of identity (tribal, religious, linguistic, ethnic, etc.) found among the various human groups in the world, Renan traces the historical development of the modern nations from the disintegration of the Roman and the Carolingian Empires until his own days, claiming that France, England, Germany and Russia are going to be the decisive powers in Europe, though neither of them could become absolutely dominant over the rest. In the second part of his paper Renan convincingly points out that neither ethnographic research on language or religion nor geography can be considered proper grounds for identifying what a nation is. In the third section he attempts to give a definition:

“A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future. It presupposes a past; it is summarised, however, in the present by a tangible fact, namely, consent, the clearly expressed desire to continue a common life. A nation's existence is, if you will pardon the metaphor, a daily plebiscite, just as an individual's existence is a perpetual affirmation of life. That, I know full well, is less metaphysical than divine right and less brutal than so-called historical right. According to the ideas that I am outlining to you, a nation has no more right than a king does to say to a province: 'You belong to me, I am seizing you.' A province, as far as I am concerned, is its inhabitants; if anyone has the right to be consulted in such an affair, it is the inhabitant. A nation never has any real interest in annexing or holding on to a country against its will. The wish of nations is, all in all, the sole legitimate criterion, the one to which one must always return.”<sup>32</sup>

This definition concentrates on social legacy instead of political claims or a natural law. Renan bequeaths the right of deciding the existence or extinction of a nation to the people, who carry the common “moral consciousness” of a nation. He has a visionary foresight in believing that a “European confederation” will very probably replace the nations.” However, nations would not completely disappear:

“Through their various and often opposed powers, nations participate in the common work of civilisation; each sounds a note in the great concert of humanity, which, after all, is the highest ideal reality that we are capable of attaining.”<sup>33</sup>

Renan’s attractive, wise, scholarly and visionary approach to the problem of nationhood cannot, however, account for ethnic conflicts, ethnic cleansing or such complicated situations, when people belonging to different nationality live within the territory of a single state that is striving for national uniformity and is willing to accomplish this through radically violent (or less-violent but nevertheless socially and culturally destructive) means. Ideal cohabitation, in which all the inhabitants have a common will as to which nation should rule a region are rare indeed.

Renan was a major inspiration for the scholars of nationhood in the twentieth century. However controversial, his ideas were regarded as a point of departure for all the major schools in the field of nation studies. Anthony D. Smith labels the three

---

<sup>32</sup> Renan, 150.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

most significant approaches to the problem of nationalism as *modernist*, *primordialist* and *perrenialist*.<sup>34</sup>

The modernists group can further be divided into two subcategories: the first one departs from the economic bases of modern society to explain the ubiquity of nations. According to this view, ever since the sixteenth century certain “core” states have been able to exploit the initial advantages of early market capitalism and a strong administrative apparatus, at the expense of the periphery and semi-periphery. Later their own boundaries “at home”, the core states were exploiting over several centuries ethnic hinterlands and peripheral communities, and such an exploitation increased with the rapid growth of economic intercourse generated by industrialisation. No wonder, then, that we are witnessing today protest movements by the Scot the Welsh, the Corsican, the Basque, the Catalan and other communities. The second group of modernists tends to include a political dimension in its analysis. Its general opinion is that ethnic and national units afford a perfect ground for the worldwide elite to struggle for wealth, power and prestige. According to this view, ethnicity is merely instrumental. It has really nothing to do with those cultural issues that its spokesmen raise.

Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm and Benedict Anderson are the three of most prominent representatives of the modernists. Gellner was an ardent supporter of the view that nation and nationalism are recent developments of the modern growth-oriented society. Pre-modern societies were divided by strict cultural lines into food-producing masses and elites, which had no contact or common ideology. It was only in the beginning of modern industrialisation that the state needed a general ideology to mobilise a greater percentage of its population in order to function.

According to Hobsbawm, studies of nationalism should begin with the concept of the nation and its history, instead of trying to give a definition of “the nation” as a unit of reality. He claims that nationalism was a bottom-up social movement and the ideology of nationalism was not imposed on the people by the social and political elite. When studying nationalism it is crucial to understand the thoughts and needs of the people, who are necessary national, but not necessary nationalists:

“We cannot assume that for most people national identification - when it exists - excludes or is always or ever superior to, the remainder of the set of identifications which constitute the

---

<sup>34</sup> Smith, Anthony D.: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. Oxford, Blackwell, 1999, 13.

social being. In fact, it is always combined with identifications of another kind, even when it is felt to be superior to them. Thirdly, national identification and what it is believed to imply, can change and shift in time, even in the course of quite short periods. In my judgement this is the area of national studies in which, thinking and research are most urgently needed today.”<sup>35</sup>

Hobsbawm perceives a nation in terms of political state. A nation is a social entity only insofar as it relates to a modern territorial (political established) state, “the nation state”; otherwise, Hobsbawm argues, it is pointless to discuss nations and nationality. The scrutiny of the mechanisms leading to the formation of nation states has to precede, therefore, the study of “the nation” as a unit of reality. The study of nationalism has to pave the way for a study of the nation.

Anderson emphasises the role of the printed press and literature in the emergence of nationalism, which he claims to be a modern invention. The nation itself he regards as an *imagined community*. Anderson’s theory links the spreading of the vernacular language with the formation of national consciousness, a linkage we can also find in the field of musical practice:

“The earliest musical genres to be disseminated primarily through print were the vernacular song genres of the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. (...) Vernacular song genres differed markedly, like their languages, from country to country, in contrast with the international ‘Franco-Flemish’ idiom of sacred music. (...) During the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the word ‘chanson’ connoted an international courtly style, an aristocratic lingua franca. A French song in a fixed form might be written anywhere in Europe, by a composer of any nationality whether at home or abroad. The age of printing fathered a new style of French chanson – the one introduced by Attaignant and associated with Claudin de Sermisy – that one was actually and distinctively French in the way the frotolla was Italian and the Hofweise setting (or Tenorlied) was German. Despite the fact that Sermisy was a court musician, the songs he composed for the voracious presses of Attaignant were intended primarily as household music (and therefore bourgeois entertainment). The imagined community it served was not only a localised but also a significantly democratised community”.<sup>36</sup>

Contrary to the modernists, the primordialists claim that nations and ethnic communities are the natural units of history and integral elements of the human experience. They stress the importance of primordial ties within society, such as

---

<sup>35</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 11.

<sup>36</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 690.

language, religion, race, and territory. A socio-biological version of this argument stipulates that ethnicity is an accumulated kinship. Furthermore, socio-biologist primordialists conclude that kinship was and will remain a natural dividing line between humans just like sex or geography. Hence there is nothing special about nationalism, nor is it likely to disappear.

The primordialists maintain two things at the same time: that nations and nationalism are perennial and natural. The latter might entail the first, but not vice versa. To say that some forms of nations and nationalism always existed and possibly might exist in the future is not tantamount to regarding it natural too. In this way, a distinction can be made between *perennialists* and more *radical primordialist*.

Considering all these views, a new group of scholars drew the conclusion that the most fruitful way to approach the problem of nationalism is a kind of *synthesis* of the perennialists and modernists. Anthony D. Smith, one of the leading figures of this school, argues in *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* that we should give much more attention to the continuity of nation-like formations and nationalist sentiments. He introduces into his analysis the concept of ethnicity or *ethnie*:

“In rejecting the claims of both the modernists, who say that there is a radical break between pre-modern units and sentiments and modern nations and nationalism, and equally of the perennialists, who say that the latter are simply larger, updated versions of the pre-modern ties and sentiments, we look to the concept of the *ethnie* or ethnic community and its symbolism, to distance our analysis from the more sweeping claims on the other side. On the other hand, rejection of the modernists standpoint immediately concedes a greater measure of continuity between “traditional” and “modern”, “agrarian” and “industrial”, eras which many sociologists are prone to firmly dichotomise. Even if the brake is radical in some respects, in the sphere of culture it is not as all-encompassing and penetrative as was supposed, and this turn casts doubt on the explanatory value of concepts like “industrial society” or “capitalism” outside their economic context.”<sup>37</sup>

Ethnies in Smith’s definition are the collective *cultural units* and sentiments of previous eras to the emergence of the nation states. Smith uses for his analysis of *ethnie* the concepts of *identity, form, myth, symbol and communication codes*. Considering that my present research intends to study artistic discourses within cultural, historical and, most of the time inevitably, political framework, Smith’s

---

<sup>37</sup> Smith, Anthony D.: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*,13.



theory is in every respect a suitable starting point. Smith lays much emphasis on the myth-symbol unit, particularly on the so-called “*mythomoteur*” or constitutive myth of the ethnic policy, which actually forms the ideological body of identity:

“The ‘core’ of ethnicity, as it has been transmitted in the historical record and as it shapes individual experience, resides in this quartet of ‘myths, memories, values and symbols’ and in the characteristic forms or styles and genres of certain historical configurations of populations. (...) In other words, the special qualities and durability of *ethnie* are to be found, neither in their ecological locations, nor their class configurations, nor yet their military and political relationships, important as all these are for day-to-day experience and medium-term chances of survival of specific ethnic communities. Rather one has to look at the nature (forms and content) of their myths and symbols, their historical memories and central values, which we can summarise as the “myth-symbol” complex, at the mechanisms of their diffusion (or lack of it) through a given population, and their transmission to future generations, if one wishes to grasp the special character of ethnic identities. Because, (...) ethnicity is largely “mythic” and “symbolic” in character, and because myths, symbols, memories and values are ‘carried’ in and by forms and genres of artefacts and activities which change only very slowly, so *ethnie*, once formed, tend to be exceptionally durable”.<sup>38</sup>

Further Smith maintains that

“Demographic changes within the territory are less important than cultural ones. There may be an influx of new populations as a ruling minority, but the vital factor is a radical discontinuity in the ‘myth-symbol’ complex and *mythomoteur* of the majority population, such as occurred during the Islamization of Egypt after Arab conquest.”<sup>39</sup>

Durkheim<sup>40</sup> had already introduced the term ‘collective conscience’ referring to the shared moral values and emotional life in a society. Durkheim’s standpoint closely anticipates that of Smith’s, because it is halfway between the modernists’ and perennialists’ view, and is suitable for capturing the subtle relationship between the *ethnie* and modern nations, respectively nationalism. Aviel Roshwald’s recent book *The Endurance of Nationalism* maintains a very similar view by contending that nationalism existed in antiquity, especially among Greeks and Jews, and these forms

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> See Durkheim, Emile: *The Division of Labour in Society* (trans. G. Simpson). New York, Free Press of Glencoe and London: Collier-Macmillan. 1967, 277-78, or Durkheim, Emile: *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (trans. J.Swain) London, Allen & Unwin, 1915.

of nationalism were not simply antecedents of their modern variants, but instead they can be seen as “paradigms that helped shape modern constructions of national identity”<sup>41</sup>. Through numerous case-studies and examples, using a comparative and synthetic method, Roshwald convincingly presents nationalism as a perennial phenomenon, whose special forms should be studied in a deep diachronic context, because only in this way can we understand the tension between undeniable historic change and the sense of a nation’s uniqueness and its persistent claim for continuity and tradition. This tension between change and longevity is responsible, according to Roshwald, for the endurance of nationalism.

There are other typological distinctions between the different manifestations of nationalism as well. The most frequently used dichotomies are “Eastern European” vs. “Western European”, “civic” vs. “ethnic”, and “expansionist” vs. “emancipatory” nationalism. These categorisations are very much politically and socially oriented, but all of them are basically rooted in the modernist view. The role of culture in shaping national consciousness is treated only marginally in them.

Nevertheless, the study of nationalism seems to have taken recently a “cultural turn”. Thus, for instance, Joep Leerssen proposes a cultural approach to the nation in *National Thought in Europe*. He argues that in order to understand the dynamism of European nineteenth-century national movements we should focus on what happened in the cultural arena of that time, when the “cultivation of culture” played a central role in shaping the national consciousness of the people. The quest for national roots, the enthusiastic search for finding – and in many cases inventing – a national tradition that fits the contemporary view of the nation, the urge for collecting folk songs and folk art in general, the ardent endeavour to record national histories, the impetus to write the grammars of national languages, histories of literature or music were all vital means in constructing modern national identities, which could be harmonised with the political aims of constructing nation states. Leerssen introduces therefore a cultural theory of nation-building that

“traces nationalism as something that emanates from the way people view and describe the world – in other words, as a cultural phenomenon, taking shape in the constant back-and-forth between material and political developments on the one hand, and intellectual and poetical reflection and articulation on the other.”<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>41</sup> Roshwald, Aviel: *The Endurance of Nationalism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 2.

<sup>42</sup> Leerssen, Joep: *National Thought in Europe*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006, 14.

While Smith sought to locate nationalism in ethnic origins, Leerssen – as one of the founding fathers of the academic discipline of Imagology/Image studies – recommends the study of the traditions of *ethnotypes*, which are stereotypes of how we identify or view the others as opposed to ourselves. On this bases he wants “to complement the existing, primarily politically-oriented body of research, by an approach that thematises the constant interweaving of intellectual and discursive developments with social and political ones.”<sup>43</sup>

My aim is also to study nationalism as a dynamic process that is created by the interaction of cultural, social and political factors. Largely drawing on Leerssen’s theories about national stereotypes and cultural dynamism, I go beyond both the modernist and the radical primordialist nation concepts, and approach nationalism as an enduring social and cultural practice not always necessarily directly linked to official policy making. Following the ideas of Smith and Roshwald, I agree that the ideas of nation and nationalism can actually be traced from antiquity and are therefore not entirely products of modernism. Nevertheless, the national idea took different shapes and forms throughout history. Not all the ethnic groups that are known as nations today did or could become nations simultaneously. It would be an error to try to formulate a general pattern for all the existing nations, since each of them had a different history and was shaped in a different context. Whether an ethnic community inhabiting a certain territory or a group of people becomes a nation or not, depends on several parameters, mostly on the international, geopolitical, and ideological factors. It would be inadequate to study a nation’s history in isolation, because such an approach could collapse into the repetition of national ideologies. Nationalism should rather be examined in an intercultural and international historical context that allows us to trace the dynamism of the nation idea.

### **III. Ethnos, Natio, Polis**

The ancient Greeks had already used specific words to distinguish between themselves and the “others”, who had different religion, spoke different language or lived in another cultural or social organisational system. The *polis* (city-state ruled by its body of citizens) and the *ethnos* (a tribal or cantonal state form) were two socio-

---

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 17.

political organisations that have been erroneously confused with each other in popular discourse. Polis and ethnos denote two completely different things, and were by no means synonyms in ancient Greece. They cannot be considered as the direct conceptual forerunners of either the European nations or modern democracies. However, the Renaissance has introduced an enthusiastic intellectual and historical quest and naïve admiration for the Greek political forms. The eighteenth and nineteenth-century esteem for the Greeks, especially in Germany, went hand in hand with the development of modern nationalism. One of the most eye-catching similarities between the ancient and the modern nation concepts is that they both consider culture as a determining factor: people sharing the same culture belong to the same political organisation. Anyone not belonging to the urban political organisation was considered outsider or *barbarian*, regardless of his Greek or non-Greek origins. On this cultural, and thus not biological, ground the Greeks discriminated against the Macedonians. It was not birth or race, but culture that actually proved to be crucial for these social organisations.<sup>44</sup>

The word *ethnos* is not easy to define in neither of the modern languages.

“The Greek term covers a variety of usages: we hear of *ethnos etairōn*, a band of comrades, or *ethnos laōn*, a host of men, in Iliad; of *ethnos Achaiōn* or *Lukiōn*, the tribe of Achaeans or Lycians, also in Homer, along with *kluta ethnea nekrōn*, glorious hosts of corpses/the dead, in the Odyssey; of *ethnea melissōn* or *ornithōn*, a swarm of bees or flock of birds, again in Iliad; *ethnos anerōn* or *gunikōn*, the race of men or women, in Pindar; and *to Mēdikon ethnos*, the Median people or nation, in Herodotus, as well as the Attic orators. We also find the term used of a particular caste or tribe, as the caste of heralds (*ethnos kērukikōn*) in Plato, or of sex, as *to thēlu ethnos*, women in Xenophon. Finally, the word came to be applied to Gentiles (*ta ethniē*) by the New Testament writers and Church Fathers, that is, all national groups except Christian and Jews”.<sup>45</sup>

All these usages refer to a specific group of beings living or acting together in some kind of context or historical period, but not necessarily belonging to the same race or tribe. As we notice, the Greeks did not make a distinction between tribes or nations, bands or races; Herodotus suggests, for example, “that such “tribes” (*genos*) are sub-

---

<sup>44</sup> See Weber, Max: “The Patrician City in the Middle Ages and in Antiquity”, In. *Economy and Society*, (Eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich), New York: Bedminster: 1968, 1285-1290, and also “The Origin of Modern Capitalism”, In. Weber, Max: *General Economic History*, (Trans. Frank H. Knight), New Brunswick NJ: Transaction, (1981), 1995, 321.

divisions of an *ethnos* (Though he uses *genos* to signify a people or a nation or race, or even a breed of animals). (...) But the term *genos* appears to have been reserved for kinship-based groups more than *ethnos*".<sup>46</sup> Hence we can claim that the term *ethnos* was from the beginning more likely to be reserved for cultural rather than biological kinship.<sup>47</sup> Usually a distinction is made between *politikos* and *ethnos* (also *idiotes*, *barbaros*). *Politikos* referred to those men who left their homes and entered a public polis fraught with *pragmata* ('the contingencies of unsettled circumstances'), the latter those still bound to nature, to blood relations and folkways.

Romans used the term *civitas* (more or less equivalent to polis in Greek) to refer to Roman life; they also introduced expressions that designated conquered civilisations: *gentes* and especially *tribes* denoting certain socio-political units, territories with human and animal populations, or groups sharing a common "birth" and biological kinship links, or a combination of these elements. It is important that this Latin word, *nation*, was synonymous with *race* up to the end of the eighteenth century in France. The redefinition of *nation* after the French revolution excluded the reference to biological kinship. However, this transformation was not complete, since the verb "to naturalise" was used in administrative vocabulary to name the process of acquiring French nationality. In order to indicate the lack of common biological (or cultural) kinship links between his subjects, Napoleon insisted that "the French do not have a nationality". Until 1823 the word *nationality* was not mentioned in the Dictionary of French Academy in its modern meaning. In 1826 the French scholar George Vacher de Lapouge (geographer, social anthropologist) recommended, in his work *Les selection sociales* the use of the term *etné* (or *ethnie*) to differentiate the socio-cultural character of a group from its biological nature; a biologically determined group was called a *race*.

The distinguished Hungarian historian Jenő Szűcs analysed in *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása* (The formation of Hungarian National Consciousness) the problem of *natio* and *ethnie* based mainly in medieval Europe, with special regard to the *gentile* consciousness of barbaric ethnic groups, which he thinks was vital in shaping Hungarian national awareness. After scrutinising several early medieval

---

<sup>45</sup> Smith, Anthony D.: *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, 21

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Jeremy McInerney writes in *The Folds of Parnassos. Land and Ethnicity in Ancient Phokis*. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999): We must interpret "ethnos as an open and changeable structure, and ethnicity as an elective affiliation rather than a simple matter of blood inheritance". (p. 28)

records, Szűcs comes to the conclusion that the concept of *natio Hungarorum* as it appears in the European chronicles since 1280 cannot be translated either with the medieval word *gentile* or with the nineteenth-century concept of the *nation*. The Magyars that settled in Pannonia around 1200 were no longer *gentiles* in the original sense of the word, but they also weren't *nation* as yet either. Szűcs argues that it is unhistorical and false to draw a direct line between the gentile consciousness and the modern nation and nationalism. He points out that the German or English "national" consciousness was being born exactly against the separatist gentile ethnic groups, and was based on the integration and over-bridging of the differences.

According to Szűcs, there is an obvious connection between the medieval "national" consciousness and gentile awareness, but this shouldn't be mixed up with the nineteenth-century nationalism. Ancient Germanic tribes can be regarded as "gentile" units because they were characterised by in-group-consciousness or Wir-Bewußtsein, which in some respect can be regarded a sort of "political" attitude or consciousness. In this respect the gentile consciousness of the late antiquity and early medieval times can be derived from the Germanic ethnic groups' (*gentes*, Großstämme, Völkerschaften) migration in Europe.<sup>48</sup>

Although "gentile consciousness" is regarded as specifically German, it is possible to use it in a broader sense. According to Szűcs, in the late antiquity and early Middle Ages other European ethnic groups, for example the Slavs, had similar group identity as the Germanic people. Hence it is possible to use the term "gentile" in order to refer to early Hungarian history, too. Szűcs also points out that describing Hungary the medieval *gestas* applied, next to the word *gentes*, such terms as *lex (mos, consuetudo) gentis*, *libertatio gentis (Hungariae)*, *defensio (tuitio) patriae* to depict social formations in Pannonia during 6-10 AD.

Thus we might draw the conclusion that the Magyars, who were an important factor around 1200 on the map of Europe, were characterised by both the medieval nationhood – in the sense that their nation concept united more tribes, regardless to biological kinship – and by gentile consciousness, a cultural residue of their former nomad period. The Magyars could not have become in the eleventh and twelfth centuries one of the most significant nations of early medieval Europe, had they been characterised only by gentile consciousness. They had to share the same forms of

---

<sup>48</sup> Szűcs Jenő: *A magyar nemzeti tudat kialakulása*, Budapest: Osiris, 1997, 18.

identity as all the other nations of that time. This means that in the case of Hungarian nation formation it is proper to talk simultaneously about a “gentile identity” as well as about early “national consciousness”. When we study the later Hungarian national consciousness, we have to consider both of the aforementioned cultural, political and social identity structures.

Szűcs mentions that in *De Civitate Dei XIX. 17*. St. Augustine talks about the celestial city by referring to the *gens* who have a special *lingua* and have their own *mores* and *leges institute*. Therefore, Szűcs assumes, these characteristics were applicable to all the *gentiles* who were distinguishable in the time of Augustinus from the *Imperium Romanum*. This may suggest that the old structures of the Roman Empire were getting replaced by a new (Germanic) consciousness characterised by a strong ethnic, cultural and social in-group awareness that opposed both the ‘cosmopolitanism’ of the Romans and the ‘universal’ consciousness of Christianity.<sup>49</sup> It is also important to note that talking about the pride of the Germanic tribes Tacitus mentions in *Germania* the *vera et antique nomina* (the ‘reality’ and ‘antiquity’ of the group’s name) of the *ethnos* as one of their most significant attributes.<sup>50</sup> So it is obvious, Szűcs concludes, that the roots of the modern national consciousness may be traced back to the gentile awareness of the Germanic tribes.

To sum it up: *ethnos* in antiquity primarily referred to common birth and kinship, but quite often it also signified a community based on some common cultural, political ground. *Polis* meant first of all a political unit; *gentes* referred mainly to Germanic tribes in late antiquity and early medieval times, but the word acquired later other meanings as well. In medieval times *gentiles* – who were considered to have a very strong Wir-Bewußtsein or in-group-consciousness, what can be regarded as a political attitude – and *ethnos* were usually used in more or less the same sense. The first nations in medieval times were formed against the threatening separatist tendencies of the gentiles however, these nations were also characterised by a strong Wir-Bewußtsein. Magyars in early medieval era were characterised simultaneously by gentile consciousness and by the medieval “national consciousness”. In the nineteenth century, each ethnic group of East-Central Europe tried to prove that it was the direct descendant of a medieval nation. Each tried to

---

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 62.

emphasise that the principle of *ethnie* was a central constituent of its nation, while in fact they were more close resemblance of the *polis*.

#### **IV. The perennial nature of nationalism**

I aim to take a mediating position between the modernist and primordialist theories and wish to emphasise both the constructedness of the national consciousness and the longevity of certain patterns and modes of reproduction of the national identity. The study concentrates exclusively on Europe and focuses mainly on the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Central European developments and manifestations of nationalism. The comparative perspective allows for a more meticulous assessment of the issue of nationhood and offers a larger space for considering similarities and differences between the various forms of nationalism. This leads to the re-evaluation of some of the existing academic paradigms and can provide plausible evidences against a uniform approach to the nation and national consciousness.

However, while scrutinising the peculiarities of nineteenth-century nation-building movements, I argue that not every national form can be discussed within one single model or narrative. The modernity of some nations should not obliterate the fact that there were other historical-political entities that defined themselves as nations and developed certain forms and patterns of national consciousness that were recursively transferred, re-mediated, renewed and re-circulated throughout the ages long before the nineteenth-century. Therefore I would reject with critical reverence the modernist theories that deny the longevity of nationalism, nevertheless, emphasising their achievements in developing a critical academic language and mode of thinking about the field of nationalism. I seek to point out with the help of case studies the highly controversial nature of national ideologies and to analyse the tangled nature of the dissemination and cultivation of the national thought in Hungary and Romania. At the end of the historical and thematic investigations of the different forms of nationalism, the dissertation endeavours to sketch a theoretical model based on system theory, which might contribute to the understanding of the dynamism and diversity of nationalism.



## V. Nationalism and Art Music

Nationalist politics had multifarious impact on arts, while the arts directly affected the spread and growth of nationalism on the social and political scene. However, to see the function of the arts merely as nationalistic propaganda would be a reductionist approach to the problem. I regard art not only as a representation of nationalism but also as an active agent in shaping, transmitting and re-mediating national consciousness. According to Joep Leerssen:

“The history of literary history (...) in most cases it has been studied by literary scholars as a derivative epiphenomenon accompanying literary practice: as a sort of meta-literary history. The underlying assumption in most cases appears to be that ontological primacy rests with Literature (with capital L) as a spontaneous, self-perpetuating and largely self-governing artistic practice; that alongside this Literary practice, an accretion of meta-literary commentary, criticism and reflection accumulates as a derivative epiphenomenon. (...) The time has perhaps come to release the practice of literary history-writing from its dependence on Literary practice and to re-contextualise it. Some of the contexts in which the historical praxis of literary history-writing could be fruitfully studied include: the development and professionalisation of general history-writing, the emergence of cultural history, the academic establishment and professionalisation of the human sciences, the changing role of the academies and universities in the nineteenth-century nation-state, and the nineteenth-century penchant for canonising, monumentalising and commemorating the national past.”<sup>51</sup>

When analysing the various nineteenth-century musical practices, we encounter exactly the problems that Leerssen mentions. Music relates to the discourses about music – criticism, music theory, music history, and music aesthetics – as literature relates to literary criticism. Musicological treatises about music, the newly born nineteenth-century music criticism and especially thinking about music and its appearance in public discourse (newspapers, literary works, etc.) have been treated as epiphenomena of music writing and making. However, more and more musicologists have come to realise that discourse about music can affect the way people perceive musical pieces and it can also influence compositional techniques. Music was never practiced in a vacuum, thus it should be treated as a complex cultural phenomenon. Contrary to nineteenth-century music histories when art was

---

<sup>51</sup> Leerssen, Joep: Introduction: Writing National Literary Histories in the Nineteenth Century. In: *Nation Building and Writing Literary History*. Amsterdam – Atlanta: GA, Rodopi, 1999, x-xi.

considered as evidence for feeding national pride, most of the contemporary musicologists agree that the “national” element in music (thus national style) is not only a musical fact, but also a historical discursive creation. A musical motif becomes national by being repeatedly associated with a certain nation or ethnic group. These associations always involve cultural, political and social factors. Only by analysing the mechanism and dynamism of their interplay in a certain historical context is the interpretation of national styles and national music possible.

John Neubauer in *The Emancipation of Music from Language* argues that in order to understand how and why people in a certain age thought about music in a particular way, we have to embed the discourse about music in its social and cultural context. Furthermore he points out that the verbalisation of music – the way it has been written about music – has had an impact both on the process of composition and reception. “Ideas on music serve as a lifeline between music and the larger artistic, social and intellectual concerns on practice but often its very foundation and its interpreter to the community at large.”<sup>52</sup>

Even the most mathematical minded musicologists would agree that music is more than scattered notes printed on a piece of paper and that a musical piece is only partially identical with the score. Instead, it relates to it as a signified to its signifier. One of the most famous definitions of music comes from the nineteenth-century music critic Eduard Hanslick (1825-1904), who argued in *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (1854) that “the content of music is tonally moving forms”. This renowned sentence of Hanslick has become the trump card of the advocates of “pure music”. But does this definition contradict a more contextual and culturally oriented approach to music? Does it exclude the possibility that in order to interpret and understand music we have to consider other aspects as well? And, most of all, should we not interpret Hanslick’s own stipulation in its own ideological cultural-historical context? As I will argue in the following sections, it is only a contextual analysis, or at least an awareness of contextuality, that could account for any creation or perception of music.

What is music after all? How and where can we locate it? Every epoch and every society has its own concept of music. The norms guiding musical creation and perception vary from age to age and from country to country. Why is traditional Chinese music different from the tunes of the Balkan? Why did Bach compose a very

different music than Mussorgsky or Berlioz? Solely score reading or mastering the technical challenges of an instrument do not help when it comes to answer these questions. Lest we regard music as written in a vacuum, we should pay attention to its cultural, historical, social and even political context.

In everyday popular discourse music is regarded as something belonging to an a-political vacuum of human sensibility, nevertheless, music has always been playing an important role in shaping identity. Just as nowadays the hip-hop, rap, pop or rock music is an icon for expressing and creating a certain social and political identity, music was in the nineteenth century a marker of national identity.

The entry on nationalism in *The New Grove Dictionary on Music and Musicians* stipulates:

“Nationalism should not be equated with the possession or display of distinguishing national characteristics – or not, at any rate, until certain questions are asked and least provisionally answered. The most important ones are first, who is doing the distinguishing? and second, to what end? (...) Music has always exhibited local or national traits (often more apparent to outsiders than to those exhibiting them). Nor is musical nationalism invariably a matter of exhibiting or valuing stylistic peculiarities. Nationality is a condition; nationalism is an attitude.”<sup>53</sup>

One of the purposes of my study is to explore and interpret the aforementioned “condition” and “attitude”. But in order to account for their development and nineteenth-century manifestation we have to analyse those cultural and social practices that have led to such condition and created or reinforced such an attitude.

Cultural studies discovered music as an object worth of investigation from the beginning of their foundation as an academic discipline. However, they often limit the range of their inquiry to the different contemporary popular music styles such as pop, rock, punk, rap, hip-hop, techno or other genres. Classical music is, with the exception of the record industry, usually beyond its scope. Cultural Studies had a huge impact on literary history by pushing literary scholars to reconsider their methods of thinking about the literary canon, but it had a lesser influence in musicology.

---

<sup>52</sup> Neubauer, John: *The Emancipation of Music from Language. Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth Century Aesthetics*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1986, 4.

Music history meant either a sequence of chronologically juxtaposed musical works of art, or a narrative of succession of some outstanding composers. But why exactly did they prefer certain works and specific composers? Why do we regard today Mozart a greater artist than Salieri, though the latter was just as highly appreciated and popular in the eighteenth century as the “wunderkind”? Why did posterity almost forget Bach, and why was he rediscovered in the nineteenth century? Why was eighteenth-century Western music infatuated with exotic tunes and why had this influence been absent in earlier periods? Why was the language of opera libretti Italian and French before the nineteenth century, and why did the situation change by the 1840s when suddenly dozens of works written in local vernacular appeared on the European operatic stages? We can answer these questions by examining closely the relationship of music to its cultural, historical, ideological and social background. Only by analysing the dynamic interplay between all these factors can we account for the form and content of classical music.

However, nowadays music and cultural studies seem to merge in the cross-disciplinary works of some outstanding musicologists as Carolyn Abbate, Susan McClary, the ethnomusicologist Philip Bohlman, Lawrence Kramer or Richard Taruskin, to name only a few. Issues known from cultural studies such as feminist approaches, post-colonial theories or discourse analysis have become more numerous in musicological journals. Indeed, cultural musicology has become an established academic discipline next to ethnomusicology, psycho-musicology or sociology of music. Nevertheless, there is still much work to be done, and cultural-historical issues continue to challenge both old and new musicology.

My study focuses on the idea of *national music*, a concept coined in the nineteenth century. National music, indeed, music in general, cannot be separated from its discursive component – the way people verbalised their musical perception – or from its social-historical context. Since the history of musical compositions is part of cultural history, it is legitimate to approach national music as a *sound site* of the nineteenth-century culture. The term *site*, borrowed from Peter Brooker’s *Glossary of Cultural Theory*,<sup>54</sup> refers to a cultural and social formation that is created and defined by the interaction of meanings, especially those influencing relations of power.

---

<sup>53</sup> *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, (Ed. Stanley Sadie), London: Macmillan, 2001, vol. 17, 689.

<sup>54</sup> Brooker, Peter: *A Glossary of Cultural Theory*, New York: Hodder Arnold, 2003, 234.

I hope to show that music, and especially opera, functioned in the nineteenth-century as effective media for nationalism. They not only represented but also actively shaped political ideology. By focusing on the cultural and social practices related to music and musical theatre, I wish to contribute to the reconsideration of nineteenth-century European nationalism and to the theoretical approach to the problem of nationhood in general.