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

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Chapter Three

National Opera and the Recycling of Cultural Memory

"The view of the past changes according to what one wants to see in the present". (Niklas Luhmann)[91]

I. Memory and history

Memory and identity are two of the most frequently used terms in social sciences and humanities today. Because of their frequent use and ever extending meaning, they lose rhetorical power unless they are connected to a specific time and space. Although much has been written and said lately about memory, we have no "art of memory" in the sense ancient and Renaissance writers had, who thought that memory could incorporate all knowledge. From the point of view of this dissertation it is not necessary to give a general overview of all the current approaches to memory and identity. However, we shall indicate the framework within which memory and identity function as constructive elements in the national operas and nation-building in the nineteenth century.

Pierre Nora asserts:

"We speak so much of memory because there is so little of it left. (…) There are *lieux de mémoire*, sites of memory, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory. (…) What we call memory today is therefore not memory but already history."[92]

Memory – and meta-reflection on memory – has always been an important factor of European culture. In the nineteenth century, remembering played a vital role in the national movements. In most of the cases, remembering was not a natural process, but an artificially generated practice, whilst memories were the subject of political manipulation and constructive elements of ideologies. If we accept Pierre Nora's

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[91] Luhmann, Niklas, *Essays on Self Reference*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, 210.
[92] Nora, Pierre: "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire", In. *Representations*, No. 26, Spring, 1989, 7-24, 7.

point of view, than we can argue that remembering in the nineteenth-century nation-building processes had nothing to do with memories and remembering *per se*, but it was already history, a construction in the service of the future.

Benedict Anderson defined in the *Imagined Communities*[93] the new nation of our imagination as a sovereign but limited community, an essential mental construct. He emphasised the role of the printed press and literature in the emergence of nationalism, which, he claimed was a modern *invention*, and the nation itself an *imagined community*. In the construction of these imagined communities images and stereotypes played a vital role. National imagination made use both of self images and images of the *others*, usually contrasting the two in the favour of self re-presentation. These images are culturally defined, but never isolated, never sterile. They mix with other cultural images, and they influence each other beyond national and state borders. Memories, remembering and history writing played a vital role in constructing and spreading such images and creating imagined communities in the nineteenth century.

II. Historical reflections on the art of mnemonics

According to Aristotle, one needs pictorial images that are the copies (*eikon*) of the thing remembered in order to remind oneself of something. Aristotle uses two more terms when talking about mnemonic technique: *phantasia* and *phantasmata*. *Phantasia* refers to the things that appear, but they do not always have to take necessarily the form of images. *Phantasmata*, always refers to an image-like picture.[94] Earlier, Plato[95] also connected memory and imagination, suggesting that they both involve seeing mental images. That memory and imagination are related is also one of the main ideas of the first written document about the art of rhetoric, *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*. Rhetorical interest in *memoria* appears early, among the sophists, who valued its uses in the learning of common-places (stereotypes) and for improvisation.[96]

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[93] Anderson, Benedict: *Imagined Communities*, London & New York: Verso, 1991.
[94] See Aristotle: *On Memory*, London: *Duckworth*, 2004.
[95] Platon: *Philebus* 38E-39D; *Phaedo* 73D; *Timaeus* 26D.
[96] "The treasure-house of the ideas supplied by Invention, to the guardian of all the parts of rhetoric, the Memory." *Rhetorica Ad Herennium*, (trans. Harry Caplan), Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library, Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England, 1999, 205.

Simonides of Ceos, the famous ancient poet, is thought to be the first to use images when exercising the faculty of recalling things and events.[97] According to Plutarch, Simonides was the first to compare and equate the methods of painting and poetry. Horace sums up this theory in his famous phrase: *ut pictura poesis*.[98] According to Cicero:

[Simonides] "inferred that persons desiring to train this faculty must select localities and form images of the facts they wish to remember and store those images in the localities, with the result that the arrangement of the localities will preserve the order of the facts, and the images of the facts will designate the facts themselves, and we shall employ the localities and images respectively as a wax writing tablet and the letters written on it."[99]

Quintilian also used the metaphor of the wax tablet, which afterwards had a long life in rhetorical and poetical discourse. "By images I mean the aids we use to mark what we have to learn by heart; as Cicero says, we use the Sites of our wax tablet, the Symbols as our letters."[100]

Hamlet when talking to the Ghost also applies the metaphor of the "table of memory":

"Remember thee? Yea, from the table of my memory

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,

That youth and observation copied there,

And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain

Unmixed with baser matter."[101]

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[97] Simonides of Ceos (circa 556 to 468 B.C.) belongs to the presocratic age. He was one of the most admired poets in Greece. Pythagoras might still have been alive in his youth. He was thought to be the first to receive payment for his lyric poems. He is also remembered as being the first to invent the art of memory. According to a legend, after a house full of people shattered, Simonides who was at that time outside talking to somebody, when was later asked to recall who were captured under the ruins in the house, he was able to remember all the names, because he could recall the faces sitting at the dining table. He used images in order to remember the names.

[98] „Simonides called painting silent poetry and poetry painting that speaks". Plutarch: *Glory of Athens*, 3.

[99] Cicero: *De Oratore* (On the Orator) II., (trans. E. W. Sutton – H. Rackham), Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England, 1996, 467.

[100] Quintilian: *The Orator's Education*, Book V, (trans. Donald A. Russell), Harvard University Press, Loeb Classical Library Cambridge, Massachusetts – London, England, 2001, 69.

[101] Shakespeare, William: *Hamlet*, Act I, scene 5, Budapest: Matúra Klasszikusok, Ikon Kiadó, 1993, 66.

Thus memory, imagination, rhetorics, and invention are interlinked in western cultural discourse and thinking. Recalling and expressing memories both imply imagination, the process of seeing and producing images, through which remembrance is going to materialise in the present. The reality of the past is going to be graspable through the imagination of the present. In antiquity, the process of imagination and remembering developed into an "art", a discipline of acquiring the skill of remembering and representing the past.

Memory was not only a subcategory of rhetorics. It was treated also as a *techné* and became one of the major subjects taught in the Renaissance. Frances Yates describes in *The Art of Memory* the mnemotechniques that were used in various fields in Renaissance Italy. Her research is focused on the concept of the *Memory Theatre*. In the ancient treaties about mnemotechniques the art of memory involves *Memory Theatres* or *Memory Palaces* that refer to real or virtual buildings well known to the orator. When he learns a speech by heart to remember it later, he has to 'place' the different parts of the speech in this building; he can then easily recall the parts of his speech by only walking through the familiar places of the building. Usually they used a big and very well-know building like a theatre, a palace, or other public institution. Yates discovered a resemblance between the description of a *Memory Theatre* by the Renaissance English writer Robert Fludd and descriptions of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, pointing out that the use of this technique of memorisation lingered on in Western culture, and was especially used in the hermetic tradition and by freemasons.[102]

Imagination and memories were important in Baroque period too (it is enough to think of the hundreds of *memoires* and diaries written in that period); however, the *ars memoriae* began to decline. In the Enlightenment memory played a less important role, since both *heritage* and *tradition* were criticised by the intellectuals of that time. However, in Romanticism memories were again placed in the foreground of cultural and political discourses, and became the perfect tools for manipulating cultural and national identity. The primary cause of the fragility of identity is its relation to time: memory can be viewed as a temporal component of identity:

"The heart of the problem is the mobilisation of memory in the service of the quest, the appeal, the demand for identity. In what follows from this, we recognise some disturbing symptoms: too much

memory, in a certain region of the world, hence an abuse of memory; not enough memory elsewhere, hence an abuse of forgetting. It is in the problematic of identity that we have to seek the cause of the fragility of memory manipulated in this way. This is in addition to the properly cognitive frailty resulting from the proximity between memory and imagination, which finds in the latter its spur and its helper."[103]

With this short historical overview I would like to draw the attention to the link between a conscious cultivation of memory in Western culture. Men of letters have always been interested in the link between memory, art and imagination. In the nineteenth-century there is a conscious turn towards collective memory or cultural memory. History became to be seen as a narrative of the cultural memory, and as such it could be used as a tool for manipulating the cultural identity of the people. History – whether in fiction, theatre or scholarly study – enthralled the nineteenth-century European intelligentsia, and by focusing on the local past history became one of the most important factors in shaping cultural memory and thus influencing collective identity.

III. Collective memory, cultural memory, national identity

We may describe cultural memory as a way in which a group of people with a shared historical knowledge and cultural consciousness perceive the past in order to define their present identity. People have a common cultural memory as long as they see themselves as part of a collective story. Heroes, narratives, values, great leaders and rulers are essential elements of cultural memory. Cultural memory creates, shapes and preserves the spiritual cultural heritage. Sharing a common cultural memory and claiming the legacy of a common cultural heritage are the two most important factors of a cultural identity.

Memory – be it collective or personal – becomes important when one wants to define or redefine, present or re-present oneself. In the nineteenth century in East-Central Europe, the engagement with national past was triggered by the general interest in professional history writing, and by the political aspirations of sovereignty. Every newly formed nation wanted to remember and reconstruct its past and thus to

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[102] Yates, Frances: *The Art of Memory*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
[103] Ricoeur, Paul: *Memory, History, Forgetting* (trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer), Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004, 81.

create temporal and topological *lieux de memoires*. But how can past – something that happened centuries ago – be remembered by a community in the present? How can memory be transmitted? While remembering seems at first sight to be an entirely natural – and many times uncontrollable – process, collective remembering or commemoration is largely controlled, manipulated and contingent. In order to understand remembering we have to interpret and understand the intentions of the "re-producers" of memories and the motivations, and the reactions of the "consumers" of memories.

A cultural community does not remember actual facts only their shifting historical representations. A historical figure that was celebrated as a national hero, symbolising national unity in nineteenth-century cultural memory – in historiographies, poems, novels, theatre plays, public discourses – could have been perceived differently earlier. Such is the case of Mihai Viteazul (Michael the Brave) who was born in 1558 and died in 1601. In the first historiographies written in the seventeenth and eighteenth century he was mentioned as a great military leader who successfully defended the country against the Ottoman army. By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, he began to be seen as the national hero, who managed to unite the three principalities – Wallachia, Moldova and Transylvania – that constitute present day Romania. He is also the protagonist of the first Romanian national opera *Mihai Bravul în ajunul bătăliei de la Călugăreni* (1848) composed by the German Ion Andrei Wachmann (1807-1863) on Ion Heliade Rădulescu's (1802-1872) libretto. No wonder that all through the twentieth century, when the present day modern Romanian state was formed, Mihai Viteazul has been a recurrent character of the nationalist rhetoric and became a favourite hero of the Ceauşescu regime.[104]

Memory and remembering can be easily ideologised through narrative configuration.

"Imposed memory is armed with history that is itself "authorised", the official history, the history publicly learned and celebrated. A trained memory is in fact, on the institutional plane an instructed memory. (…) To this forced memorisation are added the customary commemorations. A formidable pact is concluded in this way between remembrance, memorisation, and commemoration."[105]

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[104] For a detailed analysis see Chapter Eight and for a quick overview of the alterations of Mihai Vitazul's perception in Romanian cultural memory see Appendix 3.
[105] Ricoeur, 85.

Though it seems that remembering and recycling cultural memories is a natural process, most of the time it is actually influenced and manipulated by external factors. Remembering rarely "just happens". Often it runs on a political and ideological level, so that certain memories become more important than others.

Collective memory is not homogeneous. Memory might differ among the various social subgroups (e.g. women, men, between the different religious groups). Let us call this *ingroup memory*. These groups might remember different things and can have divergent accounts of the past. Another differentiation can be made between so-called official or *controlled memories* supported by the dominant authorities and non-official, folk like or *uncontrolled memories*, which disseminate and circulate more freely among the people. We could also approach the problem from a Foucauldian perspective and call these categories *dominant* and *subversive memories*. For example, if a state-supported history of a country is meant to legitimate a government and officially spread on every cultural level, foremost in education, subversive histories may circulate among the public orally or in "samizdat" and "grassroots" publications. These two types of memories often mix. The dominant memory can be so strong that it infiltrates all the layers of the collective memory; or, vice versa, subversive memory – following a social, political and cultural revolution – can overwrite the earlier, official remembrance.

Another division of cultural memory and remembering might be described as *vertical* and *horizontal*, memories, according to their route and mode of dissemination in society. Vertical memories refer to memory transfer among a certain social group, while horizontal memories denote the diffusion of memories between the different social classes from high to low and vice versa. However, the circulation is never exclusively vertical or horizontal; different epochs are characterised by the preponderance of one or the other. For instance while remembering was in the seventeenth and eighteenth century predominantly horizontal, in the nineteenth century, with the restructuring of the society and the high appreciation of folklore, mostly vertical. Thus folk songs, rural settings and folk epic appeared on the operatic stages that before were dominated by Gods, kings or aristocrats. The memory of the Hungarian anti-Habsburg *kuruc* movement led by Ferenc Rákóczy II (1676-1735)

could be an example:[106] the remembrance of the *kuruc* revolt was officially suppressed by the Habsburg authorities, but its memory had been preserved for centuries in countless folk songs, legends or literary works and counterfeits. Yet, in the nineteenth century, in spite of the so-called dominant memories and the horizontal remembering of the previous century, the *kuruc* movement and the Rákóczy-songs could become focal elements of a collective memory. It was symbolising the fight for independence under the Habsburg rule, because this issue was again crucial for the nineteenth-century Hungarian public.

Cultural memories are transmitted both in time and space. Studying cultural memory one should consider its *temporal aspect*, denoting the time span in which memories have been passed from one generation to the other, and its *topographic aspect*, referring to the spatial territories where these memories were circulating. A memory that seems to be ages old and typical for a specific cultural community, can actually be just newly created – for example for political reason – and can be borrowed from another cultural community. Nineteenth-century nationalism often manipulated both the temporal and the topographic aspects of cultural memory, which could result in serious debates. Such was the case of the so-called *Vadrózsa-pör*[107] (the quarrel of the wild roses), a debate about the originality of national ballads in Transylvania involving a series of pamphlets written by Hungarian and Romanian intellectuals in the 1860s, triggered by the publication of a volume of folk ballads by the Hungarian collector János Kriza (1811-1875).[108]

Memories were unearthed and remembered, or, if there were none, they were created and forged. Memories are not homogeneous, but can be divided along power relations into dominant and subversive memories, or into controlled and uncontrolled memories. Memories can be characterised alongside their distribution by topological and temporal factors, or based on the direction of their transmission into vertical and horizontal memories. The question arises whether we can construct a general pattern of remembrance. Can we describe the circulation of memories with one universal

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[106] The word *kuruc* denoted that part of Hungarian nobility, soldiers and peasants, who were against the Habsburg rule in Hungary. Hungarian linguists cannot agree about the etymology of the word. Some maintain that it comes from the latin "crux" (crusaders), some suggest that it originates from the word *kuroc, kurus* and meant *rebel* or *thief*. Later the kuruc movements and uprisings were also supported by other nationalities living on the territory of Hungary. The antonym of *kuruc* was *labanc*, which always referred to the Habsburgs and Austrians in general.

[107] Magyar Néprajzi Lexikon, vol. 5, (Ed. Ortutay Gyula), Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1982.

[108] The quarrel over the origins of the ballad *Kőműves Kelemen* led to famous *Vadrózsa*-trial between the Hungarian and Romanian literary historians.

model or system? Or, on the contrary, does every age have its specific way of remembering and commemorating the past? If memory is constantly changing, how is it possible that certain units of memory (a name of a hero, a significant battle or other political event, etc.) is nevertheless remembered, is passed on from generation to generation, and can evoke strong emotions (like nationalist sentiments) centuries after centuries? It is not the task of this dissertation to give elaborate answers to all these questions. However, they cannot be completely dismissed when talking about the relation of nationalism and culture in nineteenth-century Europe. Nationalism consciously used and shaped collective memories, and the restructuring of memories inherited from previous centuries became more significant than ever before.

IV. Recycling Cultural Memory

The "art of nineteenth-century cultural memory" managed to create collective identities, in which the people could recognise themselves as a nation. How and with what means could this be achieved? Was it entirely orchestrated by the state or the dominant political class, or, on the contrary, was it something spontaneous, a grassroots type of remembering? What memories were recycled? How and through what means did the recycling take place? In order to answer these questions I am going to analyse some nineteenth-century operas that were regarded as *national operas*, in order to show that in the nineteenth century opera and music were media through which memories could be transferred and circulated effectively. Opera, as a multimedia art form, had both the means and the popularity among the public to function as an efficient copier and carrier of cultural memory. According to Ann Rigney

"Once cultural memory is seen as something dynamic, as a result of recursive acts of remembrance, rather than as something like an unchanging and pre-given inheritance, then the way is opened to thinking about what could be called 'memory transfer'."[109]

Following this line of thought we shall focus on memory transfer as *cultural recycling*. Cultural recycling can be regarded as an act of appropriation, adaptation,

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[109] Rigney, Ann: "Plenitude, Scarcity and Cultural Memory", In. *Journal of European Studies*, 35/1, 11-28, 25.

translation, intertextuality or parody[110]. In the nineteenth century, all these forms were used as poetic principles. Adaptation and appropriation were the two most preponderant modes of recycling in the theatre and opera. The libretti were based on already widely known literary works. Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Schiller, and Shakespeare inspired opera composers and librettists. These dramas romanticised, fictionalised and distorted the past, but they significantly influenced the historical consciousness of the people.

On the musical level, history appeared only later on the operatic stage. Although exotic and folk tunes had already been used for the musical representation of *couleur locale* to depict a remote land or an alien milieu (Mozart: *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, Borodin: *Prince Igor* the Polovtsian dances), the conscious use of archaism by embodying historical music in the operatic score was quite rare, and was mostly practised in the second half of the nineteenth century (e.g. references to Bach and allusions to Lortzing in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger*). When nineteenth-century composers rediscovered earlier music, they came to explore history and the historicity of music itself, and used it in contemporary works as a conscious poetic principle. While eighteenth-century public distinguished between music that was up-to-date or out of fashion, the historicity of music became an important criteria of for the nineteenth-century audience.

Dances, musical motives, stories of well-known heroes, famous events of the past were "reanimated", reworked and recirculated in order to make claim on a common past narrative. However, in spite of the nineteenth-century ideology that a nation was organic and authentic, both the recycled material and the mode of recycling were international or rather, supranational, and entangled. For example the source material for the libretto of Ferenc Erkel's (1810-1893) national opera *Bánk bán* (1867) was József Katona's (1791-1830) play *Bánk bán* (1820), *the* Hungarian national drama, nevertheless, fifteen percent of it consists of quotations from other, mainly German literary works.

Erkel also recycled *verbunkos* tunes, reminiscent of the style of the famous *Rákóczy-nóta* (Rákóczy song), (**Example 1**) which was popularised by the Rákóczy March in the first act of Hector Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust*. (CD-Musical example) But why and how did the Rákóczy-march and *verbunkos* music become to

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[110] Hutcheon, Linda: *A Theory of Parody*, New York: Methuen, 1985.

be regarded as par excellence Hungarian? In order to answer this question pure musicological research is not enough. Only an interdisciplinary investigation might throw some light on the relationship of *verbunkos* and Hungarian national identity. Berlioz orchestrated this piece in 1845, when he was giving a series of concerts in Pest, and as he recalls in his *Mémoires* he achieved a huge success with it among the Hungarian public. However, Berlioz also mentions that the idea to play the Rákóczy March for a Hungarian public was suggested to him by his Viennese friends and that it was Ferenc Erkel (1810-1893), the conductor of the National Theatre in Pest, who gave Berlioz the musical score of the Rákóczy March. The Rákóczy March had therefore already been widely known in Hungary and in the neighbouring Vienna; it stirred up national feelings in the public prior to the revolution of 1848. Why did this piece become so significant in nineteenth-century Europe?

The first written trace of the basic motif of the Rákóczy March appeared in a Slovakian text of the *Vietorisz-Kodex* (1680), a book containing different dance music scores. There it was titled "Oláh tánc" (Walachian/Romanian dance). A few years later it was copied without text into the *Szirmai-Keczerschen Handschrift* in northern Hungary, and it also appeared in the *Handschrift von Appony* (Oponice) (1730). Its final version, which later became to be known as *Rákóczy-nóta* (Rákóczy-song), dates from 1780 and appeared with a Hungarian text.[111] This song became widely played in Hungary during and after the Rákóczy *kuruc* uprising and the following war of independence against the House of the Habsburgs between 1706-1711.

This Hungarian revolt was known everywhere in Europe and it was regarded as a war against Habsburg absolutism. Hungarians were associated with the idea of freedom fighters even from the sixteenth century, when Hungary became the Western border of the expanding Ottoman Empire. The association of the Hungarians with military practices had already been embedded in the European cultural memory. No wonder that in the upheaval of the revolution of 1848 – another war of independence against the Habsburg rule – the Rákóczy theme became again popular not only in music, but also in literature and fine arts. Witness the many dramas, novels, poems and paintings inspired by the Rákóczy uprising.

The image of the Hungarians as soldiers and the significant position of the Rákóczy uprising in European cultural and historical memory as well as the

cultivation of this memory in various European works of arts from all over in Europe.[112] Many magyar *huszárs* (Hungarian soldiers) of noble origin emigrated to France after the Habsburgs oppressed the Rákóczy revolution. These *huszár*s – in French *hussard*s – were quite popular in the circles of the anti-Habsburg French court and aristocracy. The French literati idealised the Hungarian *huszár*: for example Montesquieu created a highly idealised image of the Hungarian nobility, emphasising their striving for freedom and independence.[113] This image had been recycled in the French literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The *huszár* became a popular figure of theatres plays and novel. One of the first records of such a character on the French stage is in the play by Ronchon de Chabannes entitled *Heureusement* (1762). In the nineteenth century the *huszár*s appear more frequently in the theatre especially in operettas and vaudevilles.[114] Stendhal in the *La chartreuse de Parme* (1839) and Balzac in *Le Lys dans la vallée* (1835) also use the figure of the *huszár*. The French Romantic artists and travel literature writers sympathised with the Hungarian revolution of independence, and they often mention the *huszár*s as a symbol of freedom. Auguste de Gerando gave one of the most suggestive descriptions about the ornamented dress and the chivalrous nature of the *huszár*s stressing the exotic oriental origins of the magyars.[115] In the French cultural memory the Magyar *huszár*s represented the joyful hero, who gained mythical properties during the ages. No wonder then why Berlioz included the passage of the Hungarian Plains in his *Faust Symphony*.

As it is, it floats in mid-air would explain the status of the *verbunkos* music and the reputation of the Rákóczy song. But why was this *verbunkos* music, a mixture of Magyar, Slovak, Serbian and Romanian cultural influences, identified as a Hungarian style? Music history needs again cultural history as companion in order answer this question. Hungary was in that time the second biggest country ruled by

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[111] Szabolcsi, Bence: "Die Handschrift von Appony (Oponice)", In. *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*, 1964, 4.

[112] In 1707 in Paris the first French biography of Rákóczy is published. In 1711 in Leipzig a history of the Rákóczy war entitled "Wahrhafte curieuse Beschreibung von dem mit 1701-1711 gewährten neunjährigen Rebellionskrieg in Ungarn". Rákóczy himself wrote a history of the revolution, "Histoire des Revolutions de Hongrie" that was published in 1739 in The Hague. (Asztalos Miklós: *II. Rákóczi Ferenc és kora*, Budapest: Dante, II. book, II. part, III. chapter.)

[113] Köpeczi Béla: Montesquieu és a magyar feudalizmus. In: Köpeczi Béla: *Magyarok és franciák*, Budapest, 1985. 319-336.

[114] Hankiss János: *Lumière de Hongrie*, Budapest, 1935. 67.

[115] Auguste de Gerando "La Transylvanie et ses habitants" quoted by Rubin Péter: Francia barátunk, Auguste de Gerando (1819-1849). Budapest, 1982. 57-58.

the Habsburgs. However, the inhabitants of Hungary were of multiethnic origin: Magyars, Slovaks, Serbs, Croatians, Romanians and Germans constituted the population, among which the largest group were the Magyars. In the eighteenth century cultural-political identity was bound to the land and not to the culture of a specific ethnic group. It is this *Hungarus* identity that begins to slowly disintegrate by the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the former patriotism – the loyalty to one's country – is replaced by nationalism – a form of cultural identity defined by "national" values.

The Magyars, since they were the largest group living on the territory of Hungary, tried to shape their separate *Hungarian* identity and to distinguish themselves both from the German speaking population and from the other ethnicities. In the nineteenth century art was regarded as evidence of "national excellence" everywhere in Europe and it became an ideology, which could feed national pride. Music became one of the most important tools of this ideology. Magyar – a word used as synonym for Hungarian – national consciousness was seen as a direct and organic continuation of the *Ungaresca* or *Hungarus* identity. Even though the *Hungarus* concept disintegrated by the mid-nineteenth century, the new *nationalist ideology* merged with the *older terminology* thus creating the sense of national continuity and authenticity.

Verbunkos music was identified with Hungary and Hungarian style because this music had been played on the territory of Hungary for at least two centuries and its early versions were mentioned in German collections as *Ungaresca*s or Hungarian dances. However, the concept of *Ungaresca* denoted in the eighteenth century something different as the Magyar (or Hungarian) concept of the nineteenth century. The semantic shift was in disjunction with the actual cultural reality. This is how the *Ungaresca* style, later known as *verbunkos* music, became to be viewed as Magyar-Hungarian national music par excellence.

International cultural memories involve national stereotypes that linger on and are revived from time to time as representations of that national culture though the represented nation rejects this image. Such is the case of identifying Hungarian music with "Gypsy" music. How persistent and how controversial such memories are can be illustrated with a recent upheaval in the Hungarian media about a photo of a Roma family sitting and smiling at the photographer while picnicking in a park somewhere in a Belgian city. The photo was the illustration of a street poster (**Image 2**) that

advertised a concert with works of two Hungarian composers, Béla Bartók (1881-1945) and György Ligeti (1923-2006), performed by the Belgian State Orchestra. Following the publication of the poster, a series of protest started in the Hungarian media against this representation of Hungarian music.[116] But why indeed does the Roma family represent Hungarian music? In order to be able to answer this question we have to go one century back in time. Ferenc Liszt (1811-1886), the renowned musician of Hungarian origin, was the first to argue in his book *Des Bohémiens et de leur musique en Hongrie* published in 1859 in Paris (**Image 3**) that Hungarian music is strongly linked to Gypsy culture. According to Liszt, Hungarian music was carried and performed in Europe by the Gypsies, and Hungarian music profited enormously from the Gypsy's inventiveness and virtuosity. Liszt's opinion reflects a nineteenth-century infatuation with the exotic, but it is based on the undeniable historical fact that the Gypsy musicians born in Hungary became famous and were appreciated by the European public. One of the best-known of these Gypsy musicians was János Bihari (1764-1827), the pioneer of the *verbunkos* style. Hungarian music was associated with the Gypsies in European cultural consciousness already in the eighteenth century. Witness the visual representation of Hungarian music and musicians in numerous drawings, painting, and lithographs. (**Image 4**, **Image 5**) However, contrary to Liszt's warm words about and appreciation of the Gypsies, there was also another, much more negative, discursive construction of the relation between the Gypsies and Hungarian music. The originally German Samuel Friedrich Stock, notary in Nagyszeben (Sibiu or Hermannstadt) tried to degrade Hungarian music in his Transylvanian music history, *Geschichte der Musik in Siebenbürgen* (published in 1814 in the *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung*), in order to emphasise Transylvania's German musical culture: "It is not by chance that for centuries Hungarians were famous for their horses and swords, and not for their culture. Music was detested among Hungarians, and it became the property of the Gypsies."[117] After discussing and expressing his appreciation for the role of the Germans in Transylvania's musical culture, Stock asserts that, contrary to German music, the Hungarian one is played by the "lowest of the lowest, by the trash of society", the Gypsies.[118] Even though this

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[116] See for example two representative Hungarian articles about this issue: [Internet] Available at: http://www.fn.hu/zene/20080221/brusszelbol_romaknak_latszunk [Accessed on: 25-02-2008]; http://www.nol.hu/cikk/482869 .
[117] Stock, Samuel Friedrich (1929)? *Erdélyország zenéjének története*, In. Muzsika 3, 1929, 50.
[118] Ibid.

writing is imbued with the nationalistic upheaval of the nineteenth century it is still surprising that Stock should paint such a negative picture of the Gypsies and Hungarian musicians, while Europe was charmed the violin playing of Bihari.

The poster of the Belgian State Orchestra is recycling the image of Hungarian music as Gypsy music, which has been for at least two centuries part of Europe's cultural memory. Ironically, exactly Bartók and Ligeti, these two Transylvanian born composers, were the ones, who deliberately distanced themselves from the *verbunkos* and looked beyond nineteenth-century national images of Hungarian music in their search for musical material. Bartók revised Liszt's ideas about Hungarian music, and pointed out with the support of numerous ethnomusicological references that real Hungarian peasant music is much different from the kind of *verbunkos* that entered in European and Hungarian cultural memory as the Hungarian music *par excellence* [119]. Ligeti, who in many respects continued Bartók, was one of the most remarkable Hungarian Jewish musicians of the twentieth century. He was a great explorer of electronic texture and complex mechanical rhythms, explain a style that is radically different from the *verbunkos* performed by the Gypsies, even in our own days. The poster of the Belgian State orchestra is the worst possible visual representation of Bartók's and Ligeti's music, though the idea behind it is comprehensible through the perspective of recycling cultural memory.

Pondering the problems of national literary histories, René Wellek and Austin Warren were puzzled by the following questions:

"Is it the mere fact of political independence? Is it the national consciousness of the authors themselves? Is it the use of national subject matter and 'local color'? Or is it the rise of a definite national literary style?"[120]

When thinking about music history one encounters the same set of questions. Wellek and Warren arrive at the following conclusion:

"Only when we have reached decisions on these problems shall we be able to write histories of national literature which are not simply geographical or linguistic categories, shall we be able to analyse the

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[119] Bartók, Béla: *Hungarian Folk Music*, (Trans. M.D. Calvocoressi), London: Oxford University Press, 1931.
[120] Wellek, René and Warren, Austin: *Theory of Literature*, New York: A Harvest Book, Harcourt, Brace and Company, (1942), 1956, 41.

exact way in which each national literature enters into European tradition. Universal and national literatures implicate each other."[121]

This last statement is especially true for music. Music is less tied to national boundaries than literature, which is linguistically defined. Nevertheless, music can create and establish national memories. It is not the use of the 16-measure binary section form motif in itself that makes a piece of music Hungarian, but rather its historicity and its place in cultural memory.

Operas were a cluster of memories, multiplying them every time they were performed. The libretti of these operas were usually based on well known – most of the time "national" – stories, but they narrated them according to present parameters, and they used those musical patterns that had already been canonised and therefore recognised as national. National operas usually contained some kind of dramatic moment when *recognition* took place. This was most of the time connected to somebody's realisation that his or her identity had been erroneously interpreted or misrepresented in the past, and that this will have to be rectified in the future. The dramatic moment of recognition was linked to the poetic representation of the act of national awakening. When examining the nationalist discourses Ernest Gellner notes:

"Probably the most commonly used word in the nationalist vocabulary is: *awakening*. (…) The root of the word is the same as that which occurs in 'the Buddha', but of course what is at issue here is national, not spiritual awakening."[122]

Recognition is always cultural and temporal. What and how does one recognise? It is strongly linked to identity whether we have to recognise (i.e. identify) something or we want others to recognise us. In order to recognise something we have to have a notion of the thing or to have seen/heard it before. Recognition involves memory. Paul Ricoeur argued in *The Course of Recognition* that we have to separate the *idem* identity (same as itself) and the *ipse* identity (changing identity). The *ipse* identity is always grounded in the historical condition.[123] Ricoeur introduces a third kind: narrative identity, which places the *idem* and *ipse* identity in dialectic relation.

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[121] Ibid. 41.
[122] Gellner, Ernest: *Nationalism*, London: Phoenix, 1997, 8.
[123] Ricoeur, Paul: *The Course of Recognition* (trans. David Pellauer), Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2005, 101.

Narrative identity also involves another dialectic: identity confronted by otherness. Identity in this sense has two sides: a private and a public one. According to Ricoeur:

"It is worth noting that ideologies of power undertake, all too successfully, unfortunately, to manipulate these fragile identities through symbolic mediations of action, and principally thanks to the resources for variation offered by the work of narrative configuration, given that it is always possible to narrate differently. These resources of reconfiguration then become resources for manipulation. The temptation regarding identity that lies in the withdrawal of *ipse*-identity to *idem*-identity thrives on this slippery slope."[124]

Nineteenth-century nationalism, as expressed in public discourse and in the arts, was promoting this shift from *ipse*-identity to a consciousness of *idem*-identity. The first music histories and literary representations of national music can be approached with an analysis of *narrative identity*, which is an interplay of the *ipse* and *idem* identities. This interplay was used – unconsciously and consciously – to conceptualise national music and to influence its reception by the national and European audience (see Chapter Four). As Ricoeur writes:

"To recognise as an act expresses a pretension, a claim, to exercise an intellectual mastery over this field of meanings, of significant assertions. At the opposite end of this trajectory, the demand for recognition expresses an expectation that can be satisfied only by mutual recognition, where this mutual recognition either remains an unfulfilled dream or requires procedures and institutions that elevate recognition to the political plane."[125]

Private identity becomes restrained by collective identity. For example, in Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* (1836) Ivan Susanin's daughter cannot marry until the new tsar of Russia is not elected. Public duties are always ranked higher than private family life. Private identity is defined and imagined as part of a collective identity. An important component of collective identity is the nation's topological imagination, which is usually connected to the settling of a nation.

These places of settling were re-presented in nineteenth-century national works of art. The representation of the Hungarian plain, the *Magyar puszta* or *Alföld* appeared, for instance, in numerous theatre plays, poems, novels and paintings. National operas were mostly placed in rural or mythical scenery: Weber's *Der*

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[124] Ibid. 104.

Freischütz (1821) is located in the mythic world of the German forests, Smetana's *The Bartered Bride* (1870) takes place in a Bohemian village, whereas the plot of *Libuse* (1881), which narrates the foundation of Czech nation, unfolds in the half rural, half mythical Czech landscape. The action of Glinka's *A Life for the Tsar* is also centered in a small Russian village somewhere near Moscow, just as Stanisław Moniuszko's *Halka* (1847) is placed in the traditional Polish countryside. Temporal imagination, having the same history, being part of a collective story of the nation was also a crucial element of national operas. Opera had the potential of effectively recycling and combining these images of cultural memory, therefore becoming a "memory theatres" of the nation. Frances Yates pointed out when analysing the art of memory that certain well-known public buildings, so-called theatres of memory, were used to remember and recall the parts of a speech. Nineteenth-century national operas were artistic constructions intended to become such "theatres of memory"; in their every element they were able to re-awaken, re-circle and re-present for the audience national narratives.

Jan Assmann writes that every culture develops *connective structures* both on social and temporal levels. These *connective structures* bound individuals together, because they create a common symbolic range of meaning that enhances collective consciousness. Individuals can also denote and verbalise their identity with the personal pronoun *we*, because each member is connected to the other via the *connective structures* of collective knowledge and collective self-imagination/self-identification, which are based, on one hand, on commonly accepted shared rules and values, and, on the other, on common memories. Assmann claims that *repetition* – or rather *recursion* – is the basis of every *connective structure*. The concept of the *canon* denotes the principle that strengthens the temporal and material regularity and uniformity of the *connective structures* of a certain period and culture. By developing the culture and practice of remembering, societies form and perpetuate their self-definition and self-identity through centuries.[126] The recursive nature of these *connective structures* is underpinned and guaranteed by the recycling of memories, which – whether in history books, novels, theatre plays, art, press, or opera – communicate similar, but not identical, images of a cultural community. However,

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[125] Ibid. 19.

[126] Assmann, Jan: *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, München: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1992, 16, 18.

these images are always symbolic, constructed and reconstructed, never naturally given. Theatre and opera in particular proved to be a perfect medium for communicating ideas and images of collective identity in nineteenth-century Europe.

One could ask, why opera had such an important role in nineteenth-century cultural nationalism. One possible answer is that because as a multimedia art form it has a great impact on the cognitive and emotional capacities of the audience. Another answer might be the function of the sound, which is a constitutive part of the opera.

"Sight isolates, sound incorporates. Whereas sight situates the observer outside what he views, at a distance, sound pours into the hearer. Vision dissects, as Merleau-Ponty has observed. Vision comes to a human being from one direction at a time: to look at a room or landscape, I must move my eyes around from one part to another. When I hear, however, I gather sound simultaneously from every direction at once: I am at the centre of my auditory world, which envelopes me, establishing me at a kind of core of sensation and existence. (…) You can immerse yourself in hearing, in sound. There is no way to immerse yourself similarly in sight. By contrast with vision, the dissecting sense, sound is thus a unifying sense. A typical visual ideal is clarity and distinctness, a taking apart. (…) The auditory ideal, by contrast, is harmony, a putting together."[127]

The location of the opera, the theatre, is also suitable for generating and strengthening feelings of communion.

"There is no collective noun or concept for readers corresponding to "audience". The collective 'readership' – this magazine has a readership of two million – is a far-gone abstraction. To think of readers as a united group, we have to fall back on calling them an 'audience', as though they were in fact listeners."[128]

Remembering was not only a personal, Bergsonian experience, but also a socially-constructed present-oriented collective creation, as Halbwachs describes collective memory. In East-Central Europe, the singing of national operas in vernacular added extra strength to the feeling of collectivity. Watching an opera, members of the audience did recognised themselves as *We* rather than *I*. While earlier operas about aristocrats and their adventures were presented to aristocrats in an aristocratic theatre, the protagonist of the operas in the nineteenth century were the *people* or a ruler fighting for his *people*. The audience was also the *people* regardless

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[127] Ong, Walter J.: *Orality and Literacy*, London and New York: Methuen, 1982, 72.
[128] Ibid. 74.

to what social strata they belonged, because they all thought of themselves and recognised themselves as being members of a collectivity called nation.

Aristotle argues in his *Poetics* argues that in tragedy the auditory nature of the verbal text and the visual realisation of the play jointly help the listeners to experience pleasure. Another kind of pleasure is implied by the nature of tragedy as imitation, since imitation involves recognition, which is pleasurable. When we are watching a tragedy we must engage in a similar process of recognition and understanding. Another important characteristic of tragedy is *katharsis* that could be translated as purification. Aristotle claims that music is a perfect vehicle to achieve katharsis. In *Politics* he states: "Music is capable of making the character of the soul be of a certain sort".[129]

Opera has all the characteristics of the tragedy. It involves music, text and visual elements that together invoke *katharsis* and the pleasure of recognition. Spectators recognised in the opera themselves or an idea with what they were already familiar as individuals belonging to a cultural, national community. They were not only and not primarily an *I* but a *We*. The chorus in the nineteenth-century opera also changed its function, as we shall see in Chapter Nine: while in the earlier operas the chorus resonated the feelings and thoughts of individuals and was only a conventional structural element, in the nineteenth century it became the representation of the *people*. It was not only a passive *voice*, but had an active function in the opera both on the textual level of the story and on musical level just like in the early ancient Greek tragedies until the time of Aeschylus. The chorus functioned both as actor and spectator, not only as commentator of the play. Thus the audience of the opera could easily recognise itself in the chorus and identify with it.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, operas were presented mostly in the theatres of royal aristocratic courts, but in the nineteenth century public opera houses were built all over Europe. They could admit a much larger and a socially much more diverse audience. While earlier only a very narrow strata of society had the privilege to attend opera performances, in the nineteenth century opera houses opened basically to everybody who could afford to pay for the ticket. Not only aristocrats, but also middle-class and lower middle-class citizens were sitting in the audience. Earlier maybe they could have never met or have the chance to sit together

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[129] Aristotle: *Politics*, 1340a 14-b17.

in a room, but in the theatre this was possible, which also gave a sense of community and collectivity. The stories presented to them invoked cultural, historical memories that were already familiar to every educated – and not so educated – person in the audience. As the next Chapter is going to argue, people remembered and recognised units of the cultural memory, as being "national", because these ideas "were in the air", they were circulating in the daily press, in pamphlets and the public sphere in general. Opera as an element of the emerging public sphere, had a significant role in the recycling and dissemination of such topoi.