

# Transylvanian Hungarians' Self-Image in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

## National Unity and Regional Specificity

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**T**HIS STUDY'S aim is to present some aspects related to the manner in which 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hungarians from Transylvania defined their self-image as compared with those inhabiting Hungary. In the context of a specific historical evolution, it is of interest to establish the place occupied by the affirmation of a regional identity in a national identity discourse that emphasises the concept of unity. We will thus point out the regional (namely Transylvanian) differences that can be identified in the analysed texts, without neglecting the general context, which was dominated by the feeling of belonging to a common national entity. We will begin by sketching the main coordinates of the general Hungarian self-image, as they represent the background of the discussions about regional characteristics.

### Hungarians' self-image in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

**A**LTHOUGH THEY had known a peculiar historical evolution as a result of Transylvania's existence as an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty, when it came to defining their ethnic identity in a modern sense, the Transylvanian Hungarians never, not for one second, questioned their belonging to the same Hungarian ethnicity or the conceptual unity derived from this reality.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, when outlining the main coordinates of the Transylvanian Hungarians' self-image, one must start with establishing the elements of the Hungarian self-image in general.

One of the first authors who tried to identify the Hungarian specific characteristics was count Széchenyi István.<sup>2</sup> Writing from the perspective of the liberal reformer, he especially emphasised the self-image's negative side. While searching for some explanations for Hungary's lagging behind Western Europe, both from an economic viewpoint and from the perspective of individual freedoms, Széchenyi pinpointed those traits of the Hungarian character that could be held responsible for the past's failures and for the pre-

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sent's shortcomings. The Hungarian's main attribute was the love of freedom,<sup>3</sup> but this fundamental trait was overshadowed by vanity, lack of order and consistency, lack of circumspection when launching into the battle for a certain cause and passionate (or ardent) character, defects for which, in Széchenyi's opinion, but also from the viewpoints expressed by other notable Hungarian thinkers (Kölcsey Ferenc, Vörösmarty Mihály, Petőfi Sándor, Kossuth Lajos), their Asian origin was to blame. Pride, haughtiness, disunion spirit, seclusion were other faults characteristic of the Hungarian.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of their origins occupies an important place in the Hungarian national mythology. In accordance with the epoch's tendencies, Hungarians searched their ancestors by going as far back as possible in history. The myth that they originated from the Huns has old roots, being based on the writings of the first chroniclers, Anonymous (12<sup>th</sup> century) and Simon of Kéza (13<sup>th</sup> century). In the 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the legend reached its apogee, being supported by Zrinyi Miklós, Csáti D. (17<sup>th</sup> century), Cserey Mihály (18<sup>th</sup> century), but also by Werbőczy's *Tripartitum* of 1514. During this period, the myth had an integrative role, due to Hungary's ethnic heterogeneity. The descendants of the Huns, even if they were not as cruel as the latter, had preserved their courage and war-like spirit and were determined to protect their country in the face of the foreign models' and languages' invasion.<sup>5</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this alleged origin found a stable place within the national mythology, although scientists brought arguments against it more and more frequently. The myth survived until late in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, being also embraced, for example, by the poet Ady Endre.<sup>6</sup>

Medieval Hungary's glory, the image of a people who founded a state, the tradition of constitutionalism, the myth of being Christianity's shield against the Turkish peril and their civilising mission are repetitive elements of the political discourse, but also of the identity one. They were meant to give substance to the historical consciousness as a constituent part of the national identity and to build a foundation for the future's expectancies. Moreover, they represented strong arguments for setting political objectives or ideals that could justify certain political actions. Thus, the territorial claims, the anti-Habsburg attitude, the policy towards the nationalities were elements of the fight for restoring the medieval kingdom of Saint Stephen I and regaining the lost prestige.

In Széchenyi's writings, as well as in those of Kölcsey Ferenc, Petőfi Sándor, Arany János or Ady Endre, one can note the presence of a sentiment of abandonment, the pronouncement of the status of „orphans of Europe,” of a people without relatives and friends and who is constantly deserted by Europe's great powers in its most dire moments. This sentiment derived from the remembrance of the tragic events from the Hungarian people's past, but it is possible that it was also connected with the unique character of the Hungarian language, which does not resemble other European languages. Somewhat in opposition to this tragic outlook, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century finitude is also present in the Hungarian identity consciousness as a feeling of self-sufficiency that transformed the tendency to isolate oneself within one's own carapace into a state of pride and inner contentment (“*extra Hungariam non est vita*”).

When constructing the national identity discourse, the Hungarian intellectuals have pursued the specific goals: defining the national patrimony and consolidating a national consciousness, nourishing the national pride and cultivating patriotism, lashing

some defects that explained the past's failures, providing a foundation for interethnic relations, justifying certain political actions.

## Transylvanian specificity

**I**N DUALIST Hungary, the political discourse expressed two basic conceptions of the nation: that of the Hungarian majority, which supported linguistic nationalism and had set the unitary Hungarian national state as a final aim, and that of the minorities, who conceived the Hungarian state only from the perspective of a political nation within which the various nationalities would preserve their national identity, remaining united by the consciousness of belonging to the same political entity.

The idea of the political nation has its roots in the medieval concept of "hungarus," used for expressing a collective identity based on the quality of being a subject of the Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>7</sup> The new political realities established as a result of the defeat of Mohács contributed to the accentuation of the regional specificities. Transylvania's existence as a separate political entity in the form of an autonomous principality under Ottoman suzerainty lasted approximately a century and a half and facilitated the outlining of a "Transylvanism of the principality." Towards the end of this period, Cserei Mihály, a Transylvanian nobleman who participated in the anti-Habsburg battles alongside both the kuruc forces and those comprising labanc, expressed a well-defined regional identity: "Learn, my sweet motherland, Transylvania, how to befriend, how to ally yourself from now on with those from Hungary, because Transylvania's deterioration and ruin has always come from Hungary; those people from Hungary, inconstant, idle, haughty, ambitious, needy, good-for-nothing people, predatory, have always restored themselves from the fortunes of the Transylvanian inhabitants, who are good economical [persons] and thrifty."<sup>8</sup> Beyond the evident resentments, generated by the conflict's upshot (namely recognising the Austrian rule through the Peace of Szatmár of 1711, signed by a part of the Hungarian nobility), and which should be made responsible for the characterizations' vehemence, it is obvious that the author refers to two distinct identities. As a matter of fact, Francis II Rákóczi, the commander of the insurgent Hungarians during the civil war of 1704–1711, emphasises in his memoirs written while in exile, a certain reticence towards the Hungarian nobility from Transylvania, which he accuses of an excessively suspicious attitude, identifying the need for subordinating to a commander who pursued the accumulation of dictatorial powers as these nobles' main fear. Reciprocal distrust was thus the fundamental trait of the relations between the prince and the Transylvanians.<sup>9</sup>

Although the political separation led to the consolidation of a specific regional identity, it did not generate, as Benkő Loránd has shown, a significant rupture in what regards the Hungarian language's evolution. The linguistic separation did not occur, on the one side, because a popular consciousness of unity existed amongst the epoch's scholars and the linguistic component represented an important part of it. On the other hand, the Reformation, through the accent placed upon using the mother tongue at all levels of denominational life, contributed to a unitary evolution of the language.

The Reformed Hungarians from Transylvania thus accepted their belonging to the more general Hungarian Protestantism from a linguistic perspective also. The Counter-Reformation, through the importance given by Pázmány Péter to the idea of a united Hungarian community, did not represent a hindrance in the way of a unitary linguistic evolution either. And the manifesto-programme of the Hungarian Linguistic Society of Transylvania, an institution founded at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and which proclaimed the care for preventing the Hungarian language spoken in Transylvania from estranging itself from the one used in Hungary to be one of its chief objectives, demonstrates the profound character of the consciousness of linguistic unity.<sup>10</sup>

Kazinczy Ferenc (1759-1831), the most distinguished personality of the movement for the language's renewal, a genuine coordinator of the Hungarian cultural life during the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century through his activity as a publicist, but especially through his vast correspondence with the epoch's intellectuals, left a stylised description of his visits to Transylvania. Impressed by the hospitality and by the culturally dignified attitude of the local Hungarian nobility, Kazinczy spoke only appreciative words about the Transylvanian Hungarians' patriotism and education. The most eloquent proof of the Transylvanians' devotion towards the Hungarian spirit was the use of the Hungarian language both during social events and in everyday life, especially as the Hungarian aristocracy tended to speak German or French to the detriment of the mother tongue, which, as a result, found itself in a rudimentary stage: "From the moment I entered Transylvania, I did not hear anyone speaking another language than the Hungarian one, but an individual from Hungary addressed himself to me in German here also; and my friends assure me that I will be able to maintain my affirmation also when I will leave Transylvania. I have wandered throughout Transylvania and I am compelled to confess that my friends were right: with the exception of the Saxon land, no one spoke to me in a foreign language, but, on the contrary, those born on foreign land spoke Hungarian. I must confess that, in two-three places from Transylvania, people were surprised that I, a Hungarian from Hungary, speak Hungarian as well as they do, and a young functionary even told me this as a compliment."<sup>11</sup> Kazinczy expresses here a commonplace with a long career within the Hungarian identity imaginary: in Transylvania, the Hungarian specificity was preserved in its purest variant, the Transylvanian Hungarians are "the most Hungarian" of all Hungarians.

In addition to the respect towards the mother tongue, Kazinczy appreciated the hospitality and the open and direct nature of the Hungarian nobility from Transylvania. The portrait sketched by Kazinczy Ferenc is an eminently positive one, but we can also detect the author's intention of criticising, through comparison, the society to which he belonged, namely the nobility from Hungary. Writing from the perspective of the Enlightened scholar convinced of the crucial role played by the mother tongue in the development of the Hungarian culture and in its spread throughout the masses, Kazinczy identified the high nobility's tendency to use foreign languages as one of the causes of the rudimentary state in which the Hungarian language found itself. Likewise, respecting the strict and at times ridiculous etiquette is perceived as a "foreign" influence that had the baneful consequence of perverting the Hungarian "specificity." Thus, the Transylvanians' direct and open character, their spontaneity, frankness and simplicity, as

well as the predilection for using the Hungarian language become precious traits, and accentuating their worth was meant to condemn their lack amongst the members of Hungary's high society. In the general context of the paradigm shift recorded at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the traits that were once labelled as signs of a lower level of education became components of a new value system. Kazinczy shows that the Transylvanians' attachment towards the Hungarian language or the negligence displayed with regard to rigid etiquette do not express backwardness or ignorance. The Transylvanian high society values education and admires the arts, but knows how to cultivate all these without sacrificing the Hungarian specificity. Therefore, the contemptuous condescension with which the aristocracy from Hungary treats the Transylvanians has no objective justification. Thus, Kazinczy Ferenc's portrait of the Transylvanians attests a basic trait of ethnic characterisations: the manner in which a community describes the Other speaks volumes about the very community that emits the image.

Kazinczy describes the Transylvanians by combining the general image that circulated in the period's Hungarian society with the experience gained as a result of a direct contact. But his appreciations are undoubtedly passed through the prism of his own convictions and are phrased so that they would serve his foremost purposes. His characterisation refers mainly to the Hungarian high society of Transylvania, amidst which he had the opportunity to spend a certain period of time, but he does not hesitate to put forth opinions about the Transylvanian Hungarian peasant. The latter's portrait is not presented by comparison with that of the peasant from Hungary, but, in accordance with Transylvania's specific social realities, the Hungarian peasant is compared to the Romanian one, as the two live alongside one another. The Hungarian peasant is clearly superior to the Romanian one: "The village [Feleac] is inhabited by Wallachians, and this is the only cause of the poverty from here. The people who does not know any other joy than its palinka<sup>12</sup> and has no idea about the spiritual needs will not advance even over hundreds of years. Let's make its fate happier, let's give it schools, let's give it priests and things will work here also. Until all these will happen, even if the Wallachian from Feleac sells his products at the market place with a high price, he leaves all his gain at the first tavern, especially as he is also burdened by fasts . . . But alongside such a splendid estate, a village so poor! The cause must be the fact that it is inhabited by Wallachians. I have no clear knowledge about the corvée in Transylvania; but this dire poverty is not a consequence of the treatment applied to peasants. The peasant of Băgăra<sup>13</sup> also performs corvée, and yet his house is filled with all sorts of furniture, the diligent housewife has entire stacks of blankets, made by her own, her daughters' and her aunts' hands; and in the Hungarian householder's yard four beautiful calves graze."<sup>14</sup> The Hungarian peasant is hardworking and leads a decent life, unlike the uneducated, lazy and alcoholic Romanian, towards which the Hungarians, as owners of the political power in Transylvania, have the moral obligation of civilising them. Kazinczy's appreciations were in accordance with the manner in which Romanians were generally represented in the Hungarian culture,<sup>15</sup> but also responded to the necessities of the discourse meant to justify the political power.

A few decades later, Jósika Miklós (1794-1865), a Romantic prosaist, described in the same manner the Hungarian high society of Transylvania, this time from the standpoint

of a Transylvanian proud of his origins: “How can it be that, despite the benevolent nicknames and jokes, one can as easily and as fast become fond of today’s Transylvanians as of those from the old days? That because, in general, Transylvanians are open, amongst them many genuine gentlemen exist, people are better educated and better brought up than many others. Besides, there is nothing scornful in the nicknames, there is nothing malicious in the jokes, everything is amusement and high spirits . . . Also, we must not forget that rare are the places where you find so many beautiful and amiable women as in Transylvania, and the women from the more cultured society receive a very good and careful education. They are few there those [women] who do not know at least three languages and besides this, they also enjoy artistic instruction. As a matter of fact, the beautiful girls from Transylvania, especially after the revolution, are much sought-after by the moneyed gentlemen from Hungary, who in the old days regarded them with contempt.”<sup>16</sup>

The description provided by Jósika Miklós does not emphasise the linguistic aspects any more (this problem was no longer of present interest and the author did not have any preoccupations in this domain). But one can also sense a reproach towards the “traditional” accents of superiority that the nobility from Hungary displayed in its relations with the Transylvanians. Jósika writes his memoirs towards the end of his life, far away from his birthplace, and therefore the nostalgia, as well as the bright colours in which the Transylvanian society of his childhood is presented are perfectly understandable. Jósika’s Transylvanian is open and jovial, inclined towards jokes and pranks, but within the limits of common sense, educated and well-bred. But in this case also, the comparison with the Hungarian from Hungary is meant to accentuate the Transylvanian’s qualities. By describing life in the Hungarian steppe, in the context of evoking a failed marriage, Jósika offers an unflattering portrait of the Hungarian landowner: “I endured especially the company of men with difficulty. The permanent cursing, the demijohn always full with wine, the excessive smoking of a poor-quality tobacco, the spitting, the boorishness, in a word, all those things in which there is nothing bad, especially no ill intentions exist, but which, for the man who is even the least bit cultured and accustomed to politeness are a true torture.”<sup>17</sup> Jósika’s harsh critique must be placed within the context of the frustration felt by the intellectual who is forced to live amidst a society with a different education level and value system, in an environment that was dissimilar from his previous experience. If the Transylvanian’s hospitality is imbued with moderation, the landowner from the steppe is gross and haughty, being characterised by the clichés attributed to the nobility in general.

By analysing the Transylvanian Hungarian’s self-image in relation to the image of the Hungarian from Hungary we notice the existence of a reciprocal tendency to define oneself through comparison. The Transylvanian and the “Magyar” use distinct identity patterns and their dissemination emphasises the significant differences. Nevertheless, the Transylvanian cannot perceive the Hungarian from Hungary as a “foreigner” in the strict sense of the word. The consciousness of unity, beyond the political conflicts generating distrust and rancour, remained present even during the period of political separation and received new meanings concomitantly with nationalism’s emergence as a dominant ideology. Simultaneously with defining a national identity and consolidating a collective consciousness welded on the basis of a national mythology that sought in

history the landmarks of a lost greatness, a political programme in which restoring national unity and gaining the independence occupied prominent places also appeared. For many of the promoters of the nationalist political discourse, Transylvania's union with Hungary became a historically justified objective, one which, in the new ideological climate, received a natural character.

However, in the context of the polemic regarding the "union" between Transylvania and Hungary that surrounded the 1848-1849 revolution, the differences between the two countries were pointed out in the most conspicuous manner. Although the public opinion from both countries was, in general, favourable to the union,<sup>18</sup> contesters also existed. From the Hungarian side, the main counterargument was Transylvania's backwardness, which would have represented a millstone around the neck of a Hungary that was firmly heading towards a modernity understood as the Occidental model. The Transylvanian voices that disputed this option were concerned that the loss of independence and the transformation into a simple province would have diminished not only the region's political status, but also its economic welfare and its specific identity.

Kemény Dénes (1803-1849), an important Transylvanian political figure, leader of the liberal opposition from the Diet in the pre-1848 period, expressed his opinions regarding the union in a work entitled *Honegység* (*The motherland's unity*) written in 1846 and published posthumously. Being an ardent advocate of Transylvania's union with Hungary, Kemény attempted to combat the arguments of the sceptics from both countries. To the Transylvanians who feared the loss of independence, the author showed that it could not be lost, as it actually never really existed: from its separation from Hungary Transylvania only benefited from autonomy. Moreover, not even in the principality's most flourishing periods was real liberty guaranteed by its own government and Transylvania's population was not spared neither from the Turks' and the Tartars' robberies, nor from the princes' tyranny. As an autonomous province of the Habsburg Empire, Transylvania did not possess the geographical position, the economic power, the number of inhabitants or, finally, the political consensus necessary for imposing its will. The only opportunity that the Transylvanian political men had to efficiently represent the Hungarian nation's interests was to renounce the separate government and join the much more consistent and effective political force from Hungary. The union would not mean staining the memory of the ancestors who sacrificed themselves for Transylvania's independence, because the present's realities imposed this political subordination as the most propitious manner to ensure the country's welfare, and this even the more so as the new authority would not be a foreign one. Actually, belonging to the same Hungarian nation represented the supreme argument: "Only this I want to note: it is not about becoming a province or a colony of Hungary, but about pronouncing ourselves children of the same mother, brothers, and about finding ways in which to confess our related interests and obligations and fight for them. Hungary must not receive us at her bosom as [it did] the vagrant Swabians, because we have, with God's will, our own land under our feet, but to embrace us as brothers and we should do the same."<sup>19</sup>

At Kemény, the consciousness of belonging to a common nation appears as the final argument that could be invoked regardless of the context. It is a reason addressed to affectivity, but, when constructing his plea in favour of the union, the author prefers

to emphasise the objective aspects, the concrete political realities. Beyond the sentiment of brotherhood derived from the common nationality, the union must take place because the political, economic and geostrategic imperatives dictate it.

The union's contesters from Hungary complained about Transylvania's backwardness and, in order to counteract this affirmation, Kemény resorted to an ample comparison between "the two Hungarian motherlands." The commoners' cultural level in Transylvania was not lower than in Hungary. This statement was valid especially for the inhabitants of the Saxon and Szekler lands, who represented about a third of the total population, were good handicraftsmen and, many of them, landowners and the literacy rate amongst them was relatively high. As for the towns, those from Transylvania were exact replicas of the Hungarian ones, the only difference being the luxury and vain parade that were more accentuated in Hungary's biggest urban agglomerations, a fact that did not necessarily constitute an advantage. Transylvanian towns had a perhaps more constitutional internal organisation, but nevertheless they were not exempt from bureaucracy's faults. However, the ethnic structure of the towns from Transylvania represented an incontestable advantage, because all the towns from the Hungarian and Szekler lands, except a few small ones situated in the plain, were truly Hungarian, in the sense that they were devoted to the Hungarian language and spirit. The nobleman from Hungary had a stronger self-consciousness and was more energetic, but, in the same time, he was more boastful and impulsive. The Transylvanian nobleman's civic spirit was not as well developed as that of his counterparts from Hungary, a fact that could be explained by the merely formal existence of constitutionalism in Transylvania. On the other hand, here one did not find those loud and rude outbursts that sometimes characterise the public gatherings from Hungary. Moreover, in Transylvania the noble thief was much less often encountered and, in addition to all this, the entire Transylvanian population was far more temperate in its excesses than in Hungary. The author admitted that the middle stratum of the nobility from Hungary had a much more progressive political view than the Transylvanian one. But the upper layer of the Transylvanian nobility, which corresponded to the high aristocracy from Hungary, was, in general, more open to the idea of equality in what regards constitutional rights.<sup>20</sup>

In Kemény's characterisation of the Transylvanian society as compared to that of Hungary, the balance is slightly inclined against the "Magyars," the author intending to invalidate the idea of Transylvania's inferiority. Even if the Hungarians from Hungary have certain pluses (especially concerning the civic spirit's development), the defects that the Transylvanian society managed to overpass are constantly brought into discussion. However, the most significant quality of the Transylvanian Hungarian nobility remains its untouched devotion towards "the Hungarian spirit." The Transylvanian nobility is "much, much more Hungarian than the aristocracy from Hungary. A great landowner at whose court the Hungarian language is not the privileged one barely exists in Transylvania. In Hungary, in many noble homes Hungarian is learned like in Transylvania the German language. In Transylvania's capital, the language in which one communicates in general is Hungarian. In Budapest, although the Hungarian language's precedence is acknowledged, not exactly unanimously, the literary language, with its actual power to express values and feelings and with its unique flexibility, does not yet satisfy the audience accustomed to French or German and does not succeed in removing the necessity of ideas



expressed in foreign words; it is not yet able to express affection in the bosom of the family, in the homes' intimate atmosphere." And this reality can be perceived, through the prism of the epoch's tendency to capitalise on national devotion, as a regrettable, but indubitable reminiscence of the past century.<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, acknowledging equality in the rights guaranteed by the constitution, an attitude so widespread in Transylvania, was not the fruit of the new ideologies that imposed themselves with a feverish aggressiveness at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was one of history's legacies and it stemmed from the old legislative regulations. And the specific evolution of the religious legislation in Transylvania led to the clergy's deprivation of any political rights and thus the Transylvanian peasants did not pay a tithe to the priests in addition to that owed to the landowner. But Kemény does not detail these aspects, considering that he had already fully attained his goal and had demonstrated that Transylvania cannot be regarded as inferior to Hungary in what concerns the level of the spiritual values' spreading.<sup>22</sup>

Even if it appeared only after the author's death, Kemény Dénes's study, written with obvious political purposes, is a plea in favour of Transylvania's union with Hungary, but expresses with sufficient clarity a well-contoured and proudly affirmed regional identity. His Transylvaniam is nevertheless subordinated to the idea of belonging to the same unique Hungarian nation. "The two Hungarian motherlands" must unite first and foremost because the political and economic interests of both parties impose it, this being the argument addressed to critical reason. The common nationality is the factor that, according to the epoch's spirit, acts at the affective level and confers the sentiment of naturalness to a political action.

In the reciprocal images of the Transylvanian Hungarians and those from Hungary one often senses the confrontation of egos and Kemény Dénes does not contradict this pattern. He chose to respond to the voices from Hungary that view the Transylvanians as inferior and did it by accentuating the latter's qualities in contraposition to the defects of the "Magyars." The union and the political subordination implied by it were not the equivalent of admitting the Transylvanians' cultural inferiority, as their main disadvantage was related to quantitative aspects (the country's limited territory, the small number of inhabitants).

Kőváry László (1819-1907), a Transylvanian historian and statistician, presented the events of 1848-1849 from the perspective of the direct participant. Therefore, the work entitled *Istoria Ardealului la 1848-49 (Transylvania's history at 1848-49)*, which appeared in 1861, contains, here and there, accents characteristic of memoirs. While describing the episode of the proclamation of the union by the Diet of 29 May 1848 at Cluj, the author catches the general enthusiasm of the participants and the moment's solemnity. In the days prior to the Diet, the Hungarians had a single great reason for gladness: "That within its bosom no different parties existed. The Conservatives have disappeared and the people supported its nation. Transylvania was never so united for a cause: it resembled the travellers of a steamboat that found itself drifting, who were all preoccupied with attaining the same goal. All dressed in the National Guard's blue coats. That is how Cluj woke early in the morning of 29 May, as for a big national holiday. An immense number of people gathered . . . Everyone's gazes aimed at the Saxon deputies. But on their faces there was no longer opposition. And a moment that cannot be described

followed. Thousands of hats, thousands of feminine handkerchiefs were lifted into the air in unison... Thousands of hands were clapping... Thousands of mouths were shouting: Union! Union! The union was proclaimed!!! From pain, everything transformed into a boundless joy."<sup>23</sup> Every participant, including the author who was present at the Diet as a press correspondent, was seized by the moment's euphoria. Kőváry no longer speaks about "the two Hungarian motherlands," but about "the Hungarian motherland broken in two," thus suggesting a historical justification for the union.

But the practical implementation of the union brought to the surface, as Kőváry shows, Transylvania's particularities, those fundamental differences that transformed the administrative integration into a difficult process. "The statesmen knew Hungary, they also knew Transylvania's history until the moment of the separation: but the three centuries of a separate existence have leavened us in an entirely different shape and they did not take note of this. Hungary continued its reforms, but Transylvania resembled the Augean stables, because it was not the building that supported itself, but the residues accumulated over the centuries maintained the edifice." Amongst Transylvania's peculiarities, Kőváry mentioned the three privileged nations and the four recognised religions. Each of the privileged nations had its own social stratification and administrative organisation; therefore centralisation and a uniform territorial organisation were extremely problematic and the Hungarian revolutionary government's commissioners were not aware of these realities and did not possess the necessary diplomatic tact in order to smooth over the animosities.<sup>24</sup>

The defeat suffered by the Hungarians in 1849 led to the postponing of the union, which eventually occurred in the context of peaceful negotiations between the Hungarians and the imperial court, negotiations that gave birth to Dualist Hungary on the basis of the claims formulated in 1848. The Diet of Cluj voted in favour of Transylvania's union with Hungary in November 1865, before the Dualist agreement came into force. The return of the subject of the union in the Transylvanian public discourse took place concomitantly with the end of the neo-absolutist period established after the defeat of the revolution and with the censorship's relaxation in the ensuing liberal era. Actually, Kemény Dénes's work and the history of the revolution written by Kőváry were published during this period.

The administrative unification transformed Transylvania into a province of the Hungarian state, dependent upon the Budapest central power. Over the course of the Dualist period, the Transylvanian Hungarian society voiced its discontentment with the policies adopted by the central government, accusing the latter of negligence towards the specific economic interests and of being unreceptive to the affirmation of a culture with a local colouring. K. Lengyel Zsolt speaks about the contouring of a proto-Transylvanism characteristic of the Dualism, which accentuated regional particularities, without coming into conflict with the meta-idea of a Hungarian state or with the principle of the Hungarian nation's spiritual supremacy.<sup>25</sup> The main promoter of this current was Kós Károly, who expressed his opinions on this matter in the periodical *Kalotaszeg* (1912): "We will demonstrate . . . that Transylvania only from a political viewpoint does not exist. But, from geographical, historical, even juridical viewpoints and, what is the most important, in the public consciousness, it exists and will exist until the public opinion from Hungary and particularly from Budapest will not modify its perception of us. And if that public opinion remains unchanged, then the consciousness of a distinct Transylvanism will live within us forever."<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusions

WHILE DEFINING the collective self, the Transylvanian Hungarians of the 19<sup>th</sup> century did not question the fact that they belonged to the same Hungarian nation as the Hungarians from Hungary, but constantly emphasised the specific differences. The comparison with the latter represents a constituent element of the process of building the self-image. However, the Transylvanism thus contoured is not an identity discourse per se, but remains subordinated to the idea of a Hungarian state and of a unique Hungarian nation.

The differences pointed out both by the Hungarians from Transylvania and by those from Hungary are explained by emphasising the disparate historical evolution, the social structure peculiar to Transylvania, the peripheral status of the “Magyars.” All these elements caused the emergence of some particularities perceived especially by those from Hungary as expressions of backwardness in what regards culture, civic spirit, political vision. On the other hand, the Transylvanian Hungarians accentuated their status of devoted preservers of the Hungarian specificity. In their opinion, all these factors that have determined the distinct characteristics were not detrimental to the “Hungarian spirit,” but, on the contrary, prevented its perverting through a constant resistance in the face of the foreign models’ and languages’ influence.

Transylvania’s union with Hungary, proclaimed in 1848, but actually accomplished in 1867, was supported with fervour by the public opinion from both countries. Nevertheless, the political subordination towards Budapest was difficult for the Transylvanians, who felt that their economic interests were being neglected and who manifested their discontentment with the centre’s lack of tolerance towards the cultural affirmation of local specificities. Thus, during the Dualist period a particular type of regionalism was expressed, a regionalism from which, in the political-juridical context established at Trianon, the Transylvanism of the interwar period and of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will develop.

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## Notes

1. As an identity ideology, Transylvanism was defined only during the interwar period, in the political-juridical conditions established through the Treaty of Trianon. See Zsolt K. Lengyel, *A kompromisszum keresése: Tanulmányok a 20. századi transzszilvanizmus korai történetéhez* (Csíkszereda: Pro-Print., 2007); Gábor Egry, *Az erdélyiség „szineváltozása.” Kísérlet az Erdélyi Párt ideológiájának és identitáspolitikájának elemzésére 1940–1944* (Budapest: Napvilág, 2008).
2. Ernő Gáll, *Tegnap és mai önismeret: Esszék, tanulmányok* (Bucharest: Kriterion, 1975), 32–48.
3. István Széchenyi, *A Kelet népe* (Budapest: Közgazdasági és Jogi Könyvkiadó, 1985), 9–14. For Széchenyi’s conception about freedom, see Elek Csetri, “Az ifjú Széchenyi szabadságfelfogása,” *Erdélyi Múzeum* 54, 1–4 (1992): 1–13. For the manner in which Széchenyi’s ideas were received in Transylvania, see Samu Benkő, “Széchenyi eszméinek és cselekedeteinek korabeli erdélyi fogadtatása,” *Erdélyi Múzeum* 54, 1–4 (1992): 24–36.
4. Béla Köpeczi, *Nemzetképkutatás és a XIX. századi román irodalom magyarságképe* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1995), 16–23.

5. Leszek Hensel, "Mitul sarmat și mitul scit: O încercare de comparație," in *Mituri și simboluri politice în Europa Centrală*, ed. Chantal Delsol, Michel Maslowski, Joanna Nowicki (Chișinău: Cartier, 2003), 46–55.
6. Ibid.
7. See András F. Balogh, "Az erdélyi szász magyarsággép kialakulása," *Erdélyi Múzeum* 55, 3–4 (1993): 50–59.
8. Apud George Barițiu, *Fărpi alese din istoria Transilvaniei: Pe două sute de ani în urmă*, vol. 1 (Sibiu: Krafft, 1889), 242–243.
9. Ferenc Rákóczi, "Emlékiratok: Levél az örök igazsághoz," in *Oka ezen írásnak: XVIII. századi erdélyi emlékiratok*, ed. Katalin Luffy (Kolozsvár: Komp-Press, 2006), 43–47.
10. Loránd Benkő, "Ezeréves küzdelem a magyar nyelvért," *Erdélyi Múzeum* 58, 1–2 (1996): 59–64.
11. Ferenc Kazinczy, *Erdélyi levelek* (Budapest: Aigner Lajos, 1880), 75–76.
12. Plum brandy (translator's note).
13. Bogártelke, Cluj county.
14. Kazinczy, *Levelek*, 90–91, 98–99.
15. See Melinda Mitu, *Problema românească reflectată în cultura maghiară din prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea* (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2000).
16. Miklós Jósika, *Emlékirat* (Budapest: Magyar Helikon, 1977), 44.
17. Ibid., 319–320.
18. Béla Mester, "Nemzet, nemzetiség, nép és nyelv a magyar alkotmányos állodalomban," in *Kisebbség és liberalizmus: A kisebbségi vagy nemzetiségi kérdés a magyar liberális gondolati hagyományban*, ed. Attila M. Demeter (Kolozsvár: Pro Philosophia, 2008), 23–58.
19. Dénes Kemény, *Honeygység* (Kolozsvár: Kemény Gábor, 1861), 37–38.
20. Ibid., 48–49.
21. Ibid., 50.
22. Ibid., 50–51.
23. László Kóváry, *Erdély története 1848-1849-ben* (Pest: Emich, 1861), 35–45.
24. Ibid., 65–72.
25. Lengyel, *A kompromisszum keresése*, 41–45.
26. Ibid., 52.

### Abstract

#### Transylvanian Hungarians' Self-Image in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. National Unity and Regional Specificity

The present study details a number of aspects related to the manner in which 19<sup>th</sup>-century Transylvanian Hungarians defined their self-image in comparison with the Hungarians from Hungary. Therefore, the article attempts to determine the place held by the affirmation of a regional identity within a national identity discourse that emphasised the concept of unity. The differences with a regional, Transylvanian, character identifiable in the analysed texts are pointed out, without neglecting the general context, which was dominated by the sentiment of belonging to a common national entity. The study's conclusions show that the Transylvanian Hungarians developed a specific identity image even from the Dualist period, an image that prefigured interwar Transylvaniam.

### Keywords

national identity, regional identity, self-image, Hungarians from Transylvania, 19<sup>th</sup> century